

A leg up for those who need it

The Government recently unveiled a battery of measures to ease the financial pain for recession-scarred Singaporeans. Radha Basu and Gwendolyn Ng sum up the key schemes and the groups being helped.

FOR THE RETRENCHED

Better prospects with 90% subsidised training

IN MARCH last year, when the economy was still humming, Madam Alice Lye, 55, lost her job when the factory she had worked in for more than a decade relocated overseas.

Unemployed and with only an O-level certificate, she drifted from interview to interview for eight months, with no success.

Then after an interview at a job fair, she was selected to take part in a course on the basics of building and property management to train staff for vacancies in the property sector.

She was offered that elusive job even before the 3½-week course was over and now works in property maintenance at Changi Airport, where she supervises the cleanliness of toilets.

Her course cost \$3,185 but 90 per cent was subsidised by the Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience (Spur), a \$600 million scheme to train workers. Her employer paid the rest.

"My husband is a retiree and my earlier job paid only \$980 per month," said the mother of three grown-up children. "There is no way I could have afforded the course without government help."

Today, she earns a four-figure salary. "I don't want to depend on my children, so the training was very useful. It helped me get the job."

WHAT'S NEW IN THE BUDGET

■ Spur helps not only jobless workers, but also those employed at companies which wish to make use of the downturn to upgrade their skills.

The scheme will pay for: up to 90 per cent of the course fees and up to 90 per cent of a worker's salary but this is capped at \$6.80 an hour.

The low-skilled will be paid \$4 for every hour they are trained, and the higher-skilled, up to \$1,000 a month.

■ Workers also have more than 800 courses to opt for – significantly up from 150 last year.

Madam Lye got a better job at Changi with the help of training sponsored by Spur.
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CHEW SENG KIM

