

# NTUC working to help cleaners upgrade skills

**Letter from Ong Ye Kung**  
*Assistant Secretary-General, NTUC  
and Director, Worker Centric*

IN THE letter by Ms Jessie Chong (TODAY, Oct 19), she highlighted the plight of her father as a cleaner. Mr Arthur Lim (TODAY, Oct 21) wrote about the unreasonable “fines” imposed on cleaners by their employers.

The National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) sympathises with the plight of workers who are subject to unsatisfactory employment terms and conditions by their employers. That is why we have been working with Government agencies and industry partners to upgrade skills of workers and enhance mechanisation of work to improve their productivity and wages.

In the case of cleaners, we have done the following:

First, under the Job Re-creation Programme, we mobilised employers to adopt better equipment and methods for cleaning. We also helped cleaners to undergo training.

As a result, thousands of cleaners saw their pay increase by as much as 20 to 30 per cent with higher productivity.

Second, we worked with the National Environment Agency to introduce an accreditation scheme for cleaning companies.

Under the scheme, major service buyers from public and private sectors, such as the Ministry of Education, the JTC Corporation and City Developments Limited, will procure services only from accredited cleaning companies that train their workers, use proper equipment and implement good human resource practices.

Third, we encourage service buyers to adopt best-sourcing rather than cheap-sourcing by placing more emphasis on quality rather than just price.

So far, 4,200 cleaners have benefited under the Best

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Sourcing Initiative. To illustrate, many local cleaners for PAP Town Councils saw their productivity and pay increase by as much as 20 per cent.

Fourth, we work with the Workforce Development Agency to implement a skill framework for the cleaning industry, known as Workforce Skills Qualification for Environment Cleaning. With the framework, workers can upgrade skills and follow a progression path in a more systematic manner.

Finally, we are helping workers to be aware of their rights under the Employment Act, and upgrade skills for better career alternatives.

Besides creating greater awareness among the workers through the Unit for Contract and Casual Workers, the Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) of the NTUC has been conducting job fairs with cleaning companies to provide better terms of employment.

Over the last three years, we have placed 875 cleaners, earning typically \$1,000 per month.

We would like to invite Ms Jessie Chong’s father to e2i. Our employability coaches will be able to advise him on job and skills upgrading opportunities, and introduce him to other more responsible employers.