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Headline: 320 children of offenders and ex-offenders awarded \$100,000 in bursaries

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# Bursaries for 320 children of current and former offenders

Each student gets up to \$500; 2,000 have benefited since 2011

**Vanessa Liu**

Things were looking grim for Dani earlier this year when his teacher told him he might not be able to make it to secondary school next year as he scored less than 20 out of 100 in maths, his weakest subject. Mum Sara had contemplated sending 12-year-old Dani (not his real name) for tuition but was deterred by the costs. "The tuition fees were quite expensive - I didn't have the means," said Madam Sara, who works as a boutique manager and has been raising her four sons single-handedly since her husband was incarcerated in 2016. She applied to enrol her son in a sponsored tuition scheme under the Fairy Godparent Programme run by Iscos ReGen Fund, the charity arm of the Industrial and Services Co-Operative Society (Iscos).

Dani sat his Primary School Leaving Examination earlier this year, passed maths and was accepted into the Normal (Academic) stream at Woodlands Secondary School. He is one of 320 primary, secondary and tertiary students who received the Iscos Bursary Award yesterday. The value of the awards ranges from \$200 to \$500, depending on the educational level. Since the award's inception in 2011, more than \$600,000 has been given to around 2,000 children whose parents are incarcerated or who are former offenders.

The award is one of the initiatives launched under the Fairy Godparent Programme - which include enrichment workshops, home improvement projects and sponsorships. A pilot programme was also rolled out in July to offer after-school enrichment activities to students keen to pursue interests such as music, dance or sports. The programme will be extended to more students next year.

Ms Sun Xueling, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs and National Development, said at the award ceremony at the HDB Hub auditorium in Toa Payoh: "These initiatives are anchored in the belief that every young person should have the opportunity and means to realise his or her fullest potential, regardless of his or her circumstances."

She added that the award recognises the resilience of pupils like Dani, who have overcome challenges and done well in their studies.

Mr Lim Hock Leng, managing director of Sheng Siong Group, which has supported the award since last year's edition, said he was struck by what he heard and saw during a visit to Changi Prison last year. "There was a case where three generations - the grandpa, the father and the son - were incarcerated in the same prison," he said. "We're trying to get to the root of these social problems, and I think education is key here."

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Text:

**320 children of offenders and ex-offenders awarded \$100,000 in bursaries**



Madam Sara and her 12-year-old son Dani (not their real names), who is one of 320 primary, secondary and tertiary students who received the Industrial & Services Co-Operative Society (ISCOS) Bursary Award. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

By Vanessa Liu

SINGAPORE - Things were looking grim for Dani earlier this year when his teacher told him that he might not be able to make it to secondary school next year as he only scored 20 per cent in maths, his weakest subject.

Mum Sara had contemplated sending 12-year-old Dani (not their real names) to tuition but was deterred by the costs.

"The tuition fees were quite expensive - I didn't have the means," said Madam Sara, who works as a boutique manager and has been raising her four sons single-handed since her husband was incarcerated in 2016.

Mdm Sara applied to enrol her son in a sponsored tuition scheme under the Fairy Godparent Programme run by ISCOS ReGen Fund, the charity arm of Industrial & Services Co-Operative Society (ISCOS).

Dani sat his Primary School Leaving Examination earlier this year, passed Mathematics and was accepted into the Normal (Academic) Stream at Woodlands Secondary School.

He is one of 320 primary, secondary and tertiary students who received the ISCOS Bursary Award on Saturday (Dec 21). The value of the awards ranged from \$200 to \$500, depending on the educational level.

Since its inception in 2011, more than \$600,000 has been awarded to around 2,000 children whose parents are incarcerated or who are ex-offenders.

The award is one of a handful of initiatives launched under the Fairy Godparent Programme - including enrichment workshops, home improvement projects and sponsorships - to help these families get back up on their feet.

A pilot programme was rolled out in July to offer after-school enrichment activities to students keen to pursue interests such as music, dance or sports. The programme will be extended to more students next year.

ISCOS executive director Doris Ng said the initiative was set up after studying similar programmes in Iceland.

"It seems like when the students (in those programmes) also pursued other areas of their interest ... it helped them psychologically, socially and emotionally - and that in turn helped them in their academic pursuits."

She acknowledged that schools offer co-curricular activities, but students might not always have access to a particular activity that is of interest to them, such as aquatic sports.

Ms Sun Xueling, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Home Affairs and National Development, told the award ceremony at the HDB Hub auditorium in Toa Payoh: "These initiatives (of the Fairy Godparent Programme) are anchored in the belief that every young person should have the opportunity and means to realise his or her fullest potential, regardless of his or her circumstances."

She added that more than academic performance, the award recognises the resilience of students like Dani who have overcome challenges and done well in their studies.

Mr Lim Hock Leng, managing director of Sheng Siong Group, which has supported the award since last year's edition, said he decided to get involved after he was struck by what he heard and saw during a visit to Changi Prison last year.

"There was a case where three generations - the grandpa, the father and the son - were incarcerated in the same prison," he noted.

"We're trying to get to the root of these social problems, and I think education is key here."

Ms Sun told the award recipients that she hoped that recognising their achievements will motivate them to do better: "As for the rest of us, may the achievements of these students also encourage us to persevere in our pursuits."



"More importantly, hopefully this inspires us to give back to our communities and uplift each other, so that every person can realise their full potential."