

TAKING HEART

SP Group donates S\$700,000 to St Andrews Autism Centre

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UTILITIES company SP Group donated S\$700,000 to St Andrews Autism Centre (SAAC), presented through Community Chest. The funds will be used for supported employment programmes for young people with moderate autism.

The move is expected to benefit more than 400 youths and their caregivers, said SP Group and SAAC on Tuesday (Mar 25).

The pilot programme, called Dignity of Work, provides struc-

tured employment pathways for individuals with autism aged 18 and above. The first cohort of 12 trainees, who require substantial daily support, will be trained in a structured and supportive environment tailored to their learning needs.

Trainees will receive a full-year sponsorship to be employed in the food and beverage industry – particularly in baking.

They have the potential to eventually gain permanent supported employment as assistant bakers, either within SAAC's partner bakeries or in other baking establish-

ments across Singapore.

The selected trainees are currently being assessed, and SAAC will work with vendor partners – which have not yet been revealed – in the industry.

Hands-on training

Bernard Chew, chief executive of SAAC, said: "The (programme) provides hands-on training in baking and kitchen operations for the selected trainees. Trainees will work in the production kitchen under structured shifts. Ongoing job coaching will ensure that they receive personalised support to per-

form their job roles successfully."

Under Dignity of Work, there will be a job-coach-to-trainee ratio of 1:6. Work tasks – such as food preparation and packaging – will be simplified, while structured routines and visual cues will be utilised to help the trainees carry out their tasks.

Chew said: "(SAAC takes) a person-centred approach in our programmes, where we try to understand the unique challenges faced by persons with autism, and accommodate their needs appropriately."

Part of the funding went to-

wards upgrading SAAC's three kitchen spaces at its Siglap campus, which will be utilised for Dignity of Work. These spaces have been refurbished to provide a more supportive and conducive learning environment for the trainees.

"The upgraded space includes clear workstations, visual cues and structured routines for meal preparation and clean-up. Essential equipment and safety modifications enhance accessibility and safety, allowing beneficiaries to develop life skills with greater independence," he added.

The practical skills that trainees pick up will also help them be more independent.

Chew noted that simple tasks such as meal preparation and cleaning up foster independence and allow them to help out at home.

Stanley Huang, group chief executive officer, SP Group said: "For children and youths with autism, our goal is to help them to be self-sustaining by uncovering their abilities and to foster independence into adulthood. This benefits not just the children and youths, but also their caregivers."