

Over 1,000 students at NTU receive aid from uni's relief package

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When computer science undergraduate Ooi Jun Sheng's parents' incomes took a hit because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the 26-year-old student at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) worked part-time to help ease the financial burden.

After his father's working hours and salary as a warehouse assistant were reduced and his mother lost her job as a sales assistant, Mr Ooi worked part-time at NTU's merchandise store and helped out with his friend's online floral boutique.

But his financial strain has eased somewhat, thanks to NTU's Covid-19 relief package, which has seen more than 1,000 students receiving financial aid totalling \$1.5 million, the university announced yesterday.

The package was first launched in April to provide immediate help to students facing serious financial challenges due to the pandemic.

The typical assistance package offered to students ranged between \$500 and \$3,000, depending on the needs of the student, said NTU.

One of the initiatives to fund the package was the NTU Priorities Fund, which was also launched in April. It was seeded and launched with a personal gift of \$100,000 from NTU president Subra Suresh and his wife Mary.

The fund has since attracted 1,300 other donors who have pledged about \$1.5 million in total.

Of the more than 1,000 students who got support from the relief package, 400 did so through the fund.

Recipients of the fund will pledge to "pay it forward" within two years of graduation and return the interest-free cash assistance to the university, making it an evergreen fund.

Professor Suresh said: "As a beneficiary of a philanthropic scheme, without which I would not have pursued postgraduate education in the United States, I believe strongly in paying it forward. With the NTU Priorities Fund, our hope is to not only alleviate the financial burden of our students, but also inspire our beneficiaries to pay it forward, which is the true spirit of this fund."

Other tertiary institutions, such as the National University of Singapore (NUS), have launched similar funds.

The NUS Students Solidarity Fund was launched in April with an initial sum of \$220,000 raised from alumni benefactors. About 700 of NUS' neediest students received a one-time grant of \$400 in cash.

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