A total of 12 students received bursaries worth $2,500 each at the NUS Business School Alumni Association (NUSBSAA) Bursary Award Ceremony 2010, held in a function room in the new Mochtar Riady Building on 22 October. This is the third year that these bursaries have been given out, bringing the total number of recipients thus far to 35.

The bursary fund was started in 2007, with close to 70 donors putting in $300,000. The government matched the funds dollar-for-dollar, effectively bringing the total amount up to $600,000. This money was invested, and the interest is used to fund the annual bursary awards. The principle sum is untouched. In essence, the donation would fund bursaries in perpetuity.

In his opening address, Professor Teo Chung Piaw, Acting Deputy Dean of the NUS Business School, himself a recipient of bursaries and scholarships that helped fund his education, thanked the donors for their generosity. He told them, “You have touched the lives of 35 students so far. These 35 students will go on in their lives to touch possibly 350 students, who will in turn touch 3,500. They will learn from your demonstrated examples and continue to help others.”

Prof Teo spoke of the new donor wall set up on the first level of the Mochtar Riady Building. In appreciation to many generous donors, their names have been engraved on this donor wall.

Mr Yeo Keng Joon, fund-raising chair for this bursary fund, told dinner guests this was his first fund-raising activity. Since he has started working on it in 2007, things started working out very well for his family financially. He summed it up by saying, “The more you give, the more you get. More importantly, the more you give, the more you get to give.”

One bursary awardee, Koh Yan Fang, a third year student specialising in Finance and Marketing, represented the recipients in expressing their gratitude. Yan Fang comes from a family of five. Her father, a fishmonger, is the sole breadwinner. She thanked the donors saying the bursary “removed financial barriers that used to be obstacles” to her education. Her goal is to secure a stable job in future to reduce the financial burden on her father.
Yan Fang urged recipients not to view their financial woes as problems, “but instead see how we can turn these problems into opportunities that lead us to a more meaningful life”. Yan Fang herself saved money, gave tuition and received a bursary award last year so that she could participate in an international student exchange programme in Hong Kong. The experience gave her a greater appreciation of life and a foreign culture, and she urged other recipients to seize such opportunities should they come their way.

Another recipient, Choo Jun Yu, a second year student, was similarly grateful. Jun Yu’s father passed away when he was 13. Jun Yu said he would certainly give back into education when he has the means. For now, Jun Yu is involved in a community project to help build a school for children in Laos. He will be taking a trip there in December to participate in the completion of the school building. He chose to work on this project because “it reminds us of how precious an opportunity our education is”.

Shakifur Rahman Chowdhury, a past recipient of the bursary award in 2009, shared with dinner guests about how the bursary helped him. Shakifur is a Bangladeshi national who received a scholarship from Bangladesh to study in Singapore. Even with the scholarship, he had to work part time to make ends meet. The bursary last year eased his financial burdens and helped him to achieve one of his best semesters in NUS.

When asked why he chose to donate to this cause, one donor who chose to remain anonymous said, “Very simply, I was from the School. It wasn’t difficult to say yes, especially if you’ve already made donations to other causes, why not your own school? It’s a straightforward need here, to help someone get through school.”

His beneficiary, Irene Soh Tien Bee, a first year student, had to take up a bank loan to finance her school fees. She also had to work part time to support herself. This bursary will allow her to focus on her studies. When asked if she would become a donor herself in future, Irene said, “If I’m able to, why not?” Her donor quipped, “You will be able to! All of us are able to!”

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