

March 1, 2005

Fearful, unsure jobseekers get hand-holding

CDC shows them how to get to potential workplace while bussing them to interview

By Li Xueying

MISS Dawn Ng stood at the front of the bus, a loud-hailer in hand.

Addressing the 25 people seated before her, she noted: 'To the left is Clarke Quay MRT station. On your right, the bus stop.'

The 24-year-old is not a tour guide but an officer with the South East Community Development Council.

She was escorting nervous jobseekers to their interviews at the Gallery Hotel in a new experiment that aims to ensure that if they get the job, they can find their own way to work.

This Jan 27 excursion is part of a pilot programme that the CDC started earlier this year to tackle a common problem: job applicants failing to turn up for interviews.

In Parliament yesterday, South East CDC Mayor Matthias Yao explained that the reason for the no-shows is not a lack of motivation, but fear and lack of confidence.

'Some workers just don't know how to get to the place of work if they have never been there before... They don't know where to change buses, which bus stop to get down at. The thought of not being able to find the location... is so daunting to some that they don't even give it a try.'

The one trip so far - to the Gallery Hotel - has yielded positive results. Of 25 applicants vying for 14 jobs ranging from housekeeping to security, five were offered work.

This is an improvement on previous figures, where just 5 to 10 per cent of applicants bothered to even turn up for interviews.

Mr Yao cited the pilot project, called the Bus-In Recruitment Exercise, as an example of how the new ComCare Fund can be used to create self-reliance among the needy by instilling basic survival skills, instead of just dishing out cash.

The fund for poor families, children and the elderly, was unveiled by the Government in January. To help these groups, said Mr Yao, 'we must understand their fears and constraints and give them the knowledge and resources to overcome them'.

In that spirit, the jobseekers' service was designed so that two officers escort jobseekers to the workplace, travelling along a public bus route from the CDC office in Eunos.

Along the way, they point out the MRT stations and bus stops to applicants - who range from O-level holders in their 20s to those without formal education in their 50s.

Mr Yao acknowledged that such hand-holding begged the question of whether that was too much spoon-feeding in a competitive job market.

But he does not think so, saying it is a 'necessary part of building self-reliance and self-confidence' among jobseekers stuck in a psychological rut.

A similar trip is being planned for this month to a production firm with more than 10 openings, said South East CDC manager Vijaya Sarunga.