

INITIATIVE PART OF UNIVERSITY'S ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

NUS scheme to apply research know-how to community issues

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SINGAPORE – A group of seven engineering students has embarked on a quest to design a wheelchair that is affordable, user-friendly and low-maintenance, in one of three projects under a new National University of Singapore (NUS) initiative to use its research and academic strengths to address problems in the community.

Called NUS CARES (Community Advancement with Research and Education Synergies), the initiative is part of celebrations for the university's 110th anniversary.

Ms Felicia Tay, 20, one of the seven students in the wheelchair project, said they are looking at increasing the comfort and reducing the cost of motorised wheelchairs. The idea came



from seeing the physically impaired grappling with manoeuvring non-motorised wheelchairs.

Using Kampong Glam as a test bed and in partnership with the Central Singapore Community Development

NUS students distributing provisions to residents in Taman Jurong.

PHOTO: DON WONG

Council, Ms Tay, a second-year mechanical engineering student, said they are conducting research and data gathering, and will visit wheelchair users next week.

The students will be led by Associate Professor Loh Ai Poh and staff from the NUS Engineering Design and Innovation Centre.

The second project announced by NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan is improving a health-screening programme that started in Taman Jurong, where NUS' anniversary celebrations kicked off yesterday, with the ward's Member of Parliament Tharman Shanmugaratnam as guest of honour.

Taman Jurong was where a neighbourhood health-service programme by NUS students started in 2008. The students provide free health screening for residents of rental flats and fol-

low up with those who have chronic diseases such as hypertension.

The initiative has grown to cover other neighbourhoods, including Bukit Merah, Eunos Crescent and Marine Terrace. It screened 740 residents last year and followed up with 261 of them, said first-year medical student Jonathan Han, 19.

Through the programme, the proportion that controlled their blood pressure well rose from 42 to 79 per cent. Taking the health-screening programme a step further under NUS CARES, students will now measure its social impact so as to improve it.

The third project is a partnership between NUS and the National University Health System to reduce frequent readmissions to the National University Hospital.

NUS CARES will expose students to real-life issues that different segments of the community face and enable them to study these issues in depth, said Prof Tan.

Mr Tharman told reporters: "Each of these individual projects, added up, means something to Singapore. It is about building community, building a future in which we really share in one another's situations."