By MIRANDA YEO

MS REGINA Chong was taken aback when she stepped into a rental flat 15 years ago on a house visit with Kim Seng Community Centre volunteers.

Furnished to the bare minimum with a bed, table and chair, the one-room flat was home to an old woman.

There were blood stains on the wall next to the woman’s bed; sleeping on a bedbug-infested mattress had caused numerous tiny open wounds on her body.

“After I cleaned her house, she grabbed my hand and thanked me. At that moment, I realised the happiness you get from volunteering cannot be measured by monetary gains,” said Ms Chong, 34, an assistant vice-president in a bank.

The chairman of the Kim Seng Community Centre Youth Executive Committee is one of eight recipients of the Individual Youth Awards given out every two years by the People’s Association Youth Movement (PAYM), which aims to encourage youth volunteerism.

She also clinched the Excellent Youth Award, given to only one award winner, for her efforts in establishing sustainable help programmes for young and elderly people in Kim Seng.

Introduced in 1984, the biennial awards recognise outstanding youth grassroots leaders between the ages of 12 and 35 who have made a positive difference in their community.

Thirty-one awards were given out at the award ceremony yesterday.

Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean, who was the guest of honour, said the PA was a good platform for young people to “put their energies to constructive purposes”.

The purpose of the awards, he said, was to “recognise the good things that have been done, and to inspire others to follow suit”.

He also announced the new PA Youth Leaders Scholarship, part of the PA’s efforts to attract and retain talented youth leaders who are passionate about community and social development.

Both local and overseas undergraduate scholarships will be offered to 10 A-level or diploma graduates.

Application for the Mid-Term Undergraduate Scholarship will open from July to August. Application for the Undergraduate Scholarship will open in February next year and close two weeks after the release of the A-level results.

Details will be publicised in The Straits Times’ Recruit Scholars’ Choice in July.

This announcement follows the PA-UniSIM Master of Community Leadership and Social Development programme that was introduced earlier this year.