

Project Solaris 7-37

Chee Le Yang 4A1 (05)

Li Jin 4A1 (20)

Loh Kai Yuan 4A1 (23)

Jin Weixuan 4P3 (06)

Joshua Koh 4P3 (07)

Single Year Project

1.1 Area of Concern

A study conducted by the National University of Singapore has revealed that those who live alone have a 70 percent higher risk of dying prematurely as compared to the elderly who live with others (May 5, 2017), *The Straits Times*. Not only does isolation result in early death, it can lead to a series of health issues such as tumour risk, depression, increase risk of dementia and inflammation. This implies the urgent need of getting elderlies, especially those who are living in solitude, to socialise in order for them to enjoy their old age. As the number of elderlies living alone increases, more problems are generated. Elderlies living alone are unable to maintain close relationships with their children as in most cases, their children only pay occasional visits. In a recent survey, “1 in 10 of the 700 respondents spend 6 hour or fewer with their immediately families a week.” (Published 19 May, 2016) *Today Singapore*. The unsatisfactory relationships between children and their elderly parents will cause seniors to become isolated and depressed. Those caught in poor relationships tend to “develop and maintain poor perception of self, find life less satisfying and often lack the motivation to change.” (Hanson & Carpenter, 1994). Measures and incentives to get the elderlies to socialise were put in place. However, they will not be of any use if the key ingredient, the elderlies’ willingness to participate in these type of programmes, is absent. As such, the aim of our project is not simply to add on to such existing programmes, but rather to convince the elderly to be more participative and make them open up to the idea of interaction.

To tackle this issue, many senior activity centres (SACs) have been set up around Singapore. However, they are only able to cater to the elderly who are willing to participate in their activities. Sunlove SAC is one of such centres. It provides about 40 social and recreational programmes for elderly residents, and through such activities, aim to allow the elderly to lead more meaningful social lives. However, after visiting the SAC, we noticed that not many elderly residents who lived around the area come down to participate in their activities, like Bingo and Karaoke. As such, we conducted a few house visits to some elderly residents, and found that some of the reasons why they do not participate in centre activities are that they do not feel the need to do so, routine

activities at the centre become boring after a while, or that they have other commitments to attend to. As a result, the elderly often lacked social skills and awareness due to the lack of social interaction, causing them to be lonely and isolated.

1.2 Challenges Identified

Throughout the project, we faced several challenges and limitations to what we can do for the elderly residents. Initially, we observed that the residents were not receptive and open towards the activities from the trial run. The elderly residents felt that the activities in the centre are limited, and they wanted more engaging activities such as outings. However, after consulting the centre staff, our initial plan to conduct an outing to places of interest like the Singapore Botanic Gardens was cancelled due to the fact that many of the elderly have health issues. Additionally, our plans were postponed many times as the centre could not get enough residents who are free to participate in the activities. Moreover, the schedules that we had clashed with some of the events in the centre. As such, we had to compromise and find alternative dates that were not ideal, like during the month of Ramadan, where many of our Malay residents were not able to participate in our activities.

1.3 Underlying Problem

Given that many of the elderly at Sunlove Home Neighbourhood Link are not participating in activities that are held at the centre, how might we get them to come down more often, so that they are able to maintain their social skills, cognitive abilities, and memory in order to live a healthy lifestyle by staying mentally active?

1.4 Plan of Action

Our plan of action is presented in the table on the next page, which also indicates the date of each completed action. We started by conducting a needs analysis to identify the issues faced by Sunlove SAC and the elderly residents living around the Chai Chee area through interviews and house visits. We then regularly visited and fostered relationships with around 10 residents who are not participative in centre activities. Over the period from June to August, we organised various activities, ranging from mentally stimulating games to creative handicraft for them to participate, in hopes that they will be incentivised to come down to the centre more often. We then concluded our event and gathered feedback so that we know how to improve.

Dates	Actions	Objectives
March - April	Liaising and communicating with Sunlove Home	Identify problems that the centre might have
	Conduct house visits to elderly residents	Understand the issues that elderly residents living in the area have
May	Establish relationship with 10 residents who do not usually go down to the centre	Institute reliability based on a fixed sample size
	Conduct a trial run of the activities that we plan to implement	Observe how the residents will respond to the activities and make amendments and improvements

June - July	Introduce the residents to three different games over 6 sessions to compete against each other	Offer the residents a way to stimulate their memory and cognitive minds
	Organise incentivised mini competitions for the residents	Get residents to socialise with one another, improving their social and communication skills, and getting them to be more enthusiastic about the activities
	Monitor impact of the activities on the residents	Measure sustainability of our project
August	Conduct 2 handicraft sessions	Stimulate the residents' creative minds
	Gather feedback from residents	Measure impact of our project

2.1 Accomplishments

We successfully taught the elderly how to play several cognitively challenging games through incentives, and we saw an increase in the frequency that they went down to the centre to participate in their activities. 80% of the residents started going down to the centre on a regular basis after attending our sessions. We also observed that they were playing the games whenever they go down to the centre by their own accord. Some of the elderly also convinced other seniors at the centre to join in the activities. According

to the centre staff, they have been more socially active ever since, engaging in meaningful conversation with the other regulars at the centre instead of staying at home. Over the 2 handicraft sessions, the elderly also reacted significantly better at improvising, and they seem more comfortable with executing their creative ideas. In conclusion, these residents have been more active mentally and socially, and they are able to express their creativity. Through our project, we hope that the outreach of senior activity centres like Sunlove Home can be maximised, so that more elderly residents can participate in events in SACs and sustain a mentally and socially active and healthy lifestyle.

2.2 Reflections

We have learnt a lot about the lives of elderly residents who are not well-off, and the challenges that they face, such as health issues and isolation. While talking to the elderly, we have learnt to be patient, as they are not able to catch on to what we are saying sometimes. Through interacting with them, our perceptions of the elderly have also changed drastically. Initially, we thought that the elderly would not be able to grasp on to the concepts that we introduce them to. However, when we introduced them to abstract ideas in the games, they were able to grasp on to the concepts very quickly, and play the games well. There was even a Malay resident who managed to play Chinese Chess in less than an hour after we introduced it to him, despite language barriers and unfamiliar characters. This proved to us that the elderly were in fact extremely capable in understanding foreign concepts. In hindsight, we should not have made such presumptions about the elderly as those assumptions affected the events that we planned for them, when they could have been engaged with more challenging activities. However, the feedback from the elderly is still positive, and most of them felt that the activities that we organised were sufficient.

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