

LEE LI MING
PROGRAMME IN
AGEING URBANISM

Nee Soon South Dementia- Friendly Community

Dementia-Friendly
Neighbourhoods¹

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Dementia is on the rise in Singapore. Based on a 2015 study by the Institute of Mental Health, today, close to 85,000 Singaporeans have dementia and this number is expected to exceed 100,000 by 2030. Among the older population, an estimated 1 in 10 Singaporeans aged 60 and older has dementia; the number increases to 5 in 10 among those aged 85 and above. More alarming is that 3 in 4 persons with dementia feel rejection and loneliness while 56% of the general public rate themselves low in dementia knowledge according to a national survey on dementia by the Singapore Management University and Alzheimer's Disease Association released in April 2019.

As the number of persons with dementia rises in tandem with an ageing population, the national financial burden is expected to burgeon. Medical treatment (medication and caregiving services) for dementia is estimated to have cost Singaporean society S\$2.8 billion in 2015. By 2030, this cost could triple to S\$6.5 billion (Woo et al., 2017).

¹ This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

Currently, there is no known cure for dementia (See Box 1).

Box 1: Definition of Dementia

Dementia is a health condition that is not part of the natural process of ageing. It is marked by the loss of memory functions, deterioration in adaptive functioning from a higher level of functioning, and the presence of at least one additional sign of major cognitive deficit. Dementia can affect all adults but is more prevalent among those aged 65 and above.

Types of Dementia include:

- Alzheimer's Disease
- Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease
- Frontotemporal Dementia
- Huntington's Disease
- Korsakoff Syndrome
- Lewy Body Dementia
- Mixed Dementia
- Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus
- Posterior Cortical Atrophy
- Parkinson's Disease
- Vascular Dementia.

The most common types of dementia include Alzheimer's disease and vascular (post-stroke) dementia.

Source: World Health Organization. (2019). Dementia Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/dementia>. Accessed 24 July 2019; Alzheimer's Association (2019). Types of Dementia. Retrieved from <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia/types-of-dementia>. Accessed 12 September 2019.

Treatment for dementia only serves to delay the deterioration of symptoms and is likely to last the person's entire lifetime. However, the latest research suggests potential promise for a community-based approach for dementia prevention. A longitudinal study of 1,203 adults in Stockholm, Sweden, has found that poor or limited social network increases the risk of dementia by 60% (Fratiglioni et al., 2000). The findings suggest that aside from considering physical and mental health of individuals, aspects of social health are equally, if not more important for dementia prevention. This webpost note introduces the concept and rationale of Dementia-friendly Community (DFC) in Singapore. It illustrates the range of DFC initiatives, using Nee Soon South constituency as a pioneering case study.

What is a Dementia-Friendly Community²?

The World Health Organisation and Alzheimer's Disease International have conceptualised Dementia-Friendly Community (DFC) as an approach to normalising dementia in society. Its defining attributes include empowerment, self-confidence, social acceptance, participation and understanding of dementia even though context and circumstance may differ. There is, however, no standard definition or a single model for

² We thank AIC for their valuable inputs and for providing information on Nee Soon South DFC.

creating a dementia-friendly community.

Singapore's Approach to Being Dementia-Friendly

The Dementia-Friendly Singapore (DFSG) is an initiative led by the Ministry of Health (MOH), and the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC, in partnership with key stakeholders to raise awareness of dementia and empower individuals, organisations and businesses to better support persons with dementia and their caregivers. Under this national initiative, DFCs have been set up since 2015. These are neighbourhoods where measures are put in place to ensure the safety, ease of navigation, respect and love for persons with dementia, and where the general public is aware of and understands dementia so that persons with dementia and their families feel included, involved and supported to continue living well in the community.

The DFCs are set up based on the 3Es framework namely Engage, Empower and Enable:

- A. Engage communities so that they are aware of dementia signs and symptoms
- B. Empower persons with dementia and their caregivers with support services and resources
- C. Enable persons with dementia and their caregivers with technology and infrastructure to live well at home and as independently as possible

With these, we aim to facilitate early identification of dementia so that persons with dementia can be linked to resources and support, promote preventive and active ageing activities to reduce the risk of dementia and lastly, provide care and support for persons with dementia and their caregiver to continue to live in the community.

There are 4 key action areas: Awareness Building & Education; Go-To Points; Technology; and Infrastructure. Individuals and community play a significant role in dementia awareness, e.g. they can sign up as Dementia Friends, volunteer as befrienders, to support persons with dementia, learn how to spot dementia signs or symptoms and how to communicate effectively with persons with dementia (See Box 2).

Box 2: ABCD Signs and Symptoms for Dementia

The ABCD framework serves as a quick and easy guideline to remember to assist individuals to recognise signs and symptoms of persons with dementia.

Activities - Person has difficulty performing daily activities, e.g. wearing clothes, cooking

Behavioural Changes - Person exhibits signs of social withdrawal, sudden loss of interest in activities, sporadic changes in mood or personality.

Cognitive Decline - Person displays forgetfulness, problems with language and inability to make simple decisions or calculations.

Disorientation – Person shows signs of disorientation to time and/or space, such as mistaking dusk for dawn, getting spaces and places wrong, etc.

Source: Singapore Silver Pages. (n.a). Dementia-Friendly Singapore. Retrieved from <https://www.silverpages.sg/care-services/Dementia-Friendly%20Singapore>. Accessed 12 September 2019.

Local businesses and public spaces are important contributors to the creation of safe and accessible neighbourhood spaces and infrastructure by adopting design features to encourage safe navigation of persons with cognitive impairments such as dementia. Some examples are barrier-free design, clear colour contrast in signages, and appropriate lighting to facilitate ease of mobility and prevent disorientation for persons with dementia, marking key locations with familiar icons.

Go-To Points are made available and accessible for individuals and caregivers to pick up resources and seek support for service linkage. If a person with dementia lost his way home, the Go-To Points can provide support to help him find his way home.

DFCs also look at collaborating with community partners to provide early identification, conduct preventive

activities and explore initiatives to support caregivers, befriend seniors and providing care and support for persons with dementia.

Technology offers opportunities to augment services and empower individuals. An example is the Dementia Friends mobile application. Launched in Oct 2018, it provides an online platform for collaborative mapping and sharing of information and resources on dementia and caregiving. The network of Dementia Friends has proven helpful for family members to locate their missing loved ones with dementia (See Box 3).

Box 3: Dementia Friends Mobile App Case Example

It was around 10 p.m. when 54-year-old Mr Anthony Lim spotted an older lady looking disorientated and lost at the void deck of his housing block. He remembered seeing the same lady at the same spot three hours ago when returning home from work. Concerned, he approached her to offer help. The lady replied that she lived on the 18th floor of the block but could not remember her unit number. Anthony vaguely recalled seeing a posted notification of the same lady reported missing on the 'Dementia Friends app' a few hours earlier. While the pair proceeded to check several units on the 18th floor, Anthony contacted the family through the app. He was soon contacted by the older lady's family and directed to the right address located on the 11th floor. After less

than 10 hours of being lost, the older lady was reunited with her family.

This story accentuates the importance of communities in supporting persons with dementia and their families.

Source: Council for Third Age. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.c3a.org.sg/index.php/articles/app-helps-families-find-lost-seniors-dementia>. Accessed 2 November 2022.

The goal is to engage individuals and communities to raise awareness and provide support networks, empower the persons with dementia and caregivers with resources and support services, and enable them with technology and infrastructure to age in the community. There are presently 8 DFCs and more are planned. The next section discusses one of these DFCs.

Nee Soon South DFC Initiatives

“With a rapidly ageing society, the number of persons with dementia is expected to increase. In Nee Soon South alone, we estimate there will be about 1,000 seniors with dementia. We have to prepare our communities to better support them and their families. Even if they have dementia, seniors can continue to live at home and continue with daily routines such as going to the market and meeting their friends. With a supportive community and services available for persons with dementia, they and their caregivers will have greater peace of mind,” – Er. Dr. Lee Bee Wah, Advisor of Nee Soon South Constituency³

³ Lien Foundation and Khoo Teck Puat Hospital. (2017). Dementia Care Forum. Singapore. Retrieved from: http://nstc.org.sg/uploads/files/Nee%20Soon%20Link_Issue%2017.pdf. Accessed 3 October 2019.

Several initiatives have been implemented to transform Nee Soon South into a DFC. Building a DFC is, however, a collaborative effort and various actors are involved. In Nee Soon South, the advisor and grassroots leaders play a key role in championing active ageing activities and dementia-friendly initiatives to create a supportive and enabling community for persons with dementia and their caregivers. A strong network of community partners, social service agencies (GoodLife!@Yishun by Montfort Care), healthcare agencies (such as Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, St Luke's Eldercare), businesses and faith-based agencies have been linked up to facilitate coordinated care and support for persons with dementia and their caregivers.

“With everyone chipping in, we hope Yishun will be a place where persons with dementia feel included, respected and valued. Here, they can get around safely and continue to participate meaningfully in their usual routines because members of their community, be it a favourite neighbour, shopkeeper or local policeman, can understand and assist them. Having such community support is a boost for persons with dementia and their families. It can help persons with dementia age in place and continue to stay plugged into society,” – A/Prof Philip Yap, Director of Khoo Teck Puat Hospital's Geriatric Centre⁴

⁴ Lien Foundation and Khoo Teck Puat Hospital. (2016). Forget Us Not Press Release. Singapore. Retrieved from: <http://www.lienfoundation.org/sites/default/files/>

Dementia Awareness Outreach

Together with the grassroots leaders, AIC and Social Service Agency, GoodLife!@Yishun by Montfort Care, over 5,000 residents including students and merchants have been reached out to. The primary aim is to raise awareness of dementia within the community. Activities include dementia awareness talks, workshops, merchant walks, door-to-door outreach, networking sessions, posters at lift lobbies.

Go-To-Points

Residents can also easily access Go-To Points in the neighbourhood to receive information and resources on dementia. Since the first Go-To Point was set up in Sept 2017, there are now thirteen go-to-points in Nee Soon South, e.g. at Nee Soon South Community Club, senior activity centres, wellness centres, residents' committee centres.

Preventive Healthcare

Preventive healthcare is key to keeping individuals healthy and reducing the risk of having dementia. It encompasses several aspects including promotion of a healthy lifestyle and early identification of dementia. To date, some 600 older residents have completed memory screening. In addition, screening of functional abilities (oral, hearing and vision) has been extended to 511 residents.

Forget%20Us%20Not%20Press%20Release%20Final%20Combined_0.pdf. Accessed 3 October 2019.

GoodLife!@Yishun is collaborating with the Health Promotion Board to promote healthy eating, cooking and food labelling for older adults and their caregivers. GoodLife!@Yishun is also looking towards implementing preventive activities under its Healthy Ageing Promotion Programme for You (HAPPY) on a weekly basis.

Caregiver Support Network

In view of caregiver burden, the Caregiver Support Network operated by GoodLife!@Yishun is a priority initiative. The network organises various activities such as aromatherapy, group outings, shopping trips and lifestyle talks for caregivers. An example is the Happy De-Kopitiam (Malay word for 'coffee shop'). Designed to provide respite for caregivers, it engages persons with dementia in a friendly coffee shop setting. Operating on a weekly basis, the coffee shop provides an opportunity for caregivers to get some rest and interact with others. To date, the Caregiver Support Network has extended its service to more than 70 caregivers.

Conclusion

As DFC continues to develop in Singapore, it is of utmost importance that existing DFCs are evaluated to find out if they embody the defining attributes of DFC. The present goal is for the DFC to distinguish itself from the non-DFC in terms of community awareness and understanding, early

identification of dementia so that persons with dementia can be connected to resources and support, development of preventive and active ageing activities to reduce the risk of dementia, and provision of care and support for persons with dementia and their caregivers. The ultimate goal is to educate the general public on dementia, increase accessibility to dementia support and services, and enable persons with dementia and their families to seek support and continue to live well and long at home and in the community. The vision is for the entire Singapore, not part, to become dementia-friendly.

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