

Keep well with a positive attitude towards ageing

Nothing is impossible if you don't let age hold you back, says active 79-year-old

Joyce Teo

Ageing is not just about positive thinking. "It's about having a positive attitude towards ageing," said Daisy Chee, 79, a former secretary.

She was always single and when she retired at 60 to spend more time doing what she likes, she bought a country club membership, unlike some others, who may sell theirs to use the cash for retirement. "I also love fishing and could go anytime, instead of having to take leave to do it," said Ms Chee, who has chartered a boat with her friends to go on fishing trips.

Since retiring, she has volunteered at a hospital, been a photographer, joined several societies, and tried a whole range of activities, including swimming.

Most recently, she volunteered at the Council for Third Age's Kopi and Toast programme, a mentoring scheme for new or recent reti-

rees that started in late 2013.

The "Kopi" part of the scheme refers to the one who is enjoying retired life. He will help the "Toast", which refers to the person who has just retired and is at a loss about what to do.

Ms Chee introduced her mentee to photography, and helped her to buy a camera since she did not have a hobby.

Proponents of positive ageing encourage people to be fully engaged in life as people grow old.

Said Ms Chee: "Ageing is all in the mind. I tell people to be positive. Lots of people say they cannot do this or that. But I learnt how to use the computer only after I retired."

Of course, one has to prepare for retirement, she said. She started saving the day she started working, at 19. She also invested in equities and profited from a property sale in the 1990s.

She is also a self-professed health nut who enjoys cooking

healthy meals for herself. "Wealth cannot make you happy if your health is not good," she said.

Indeed, studies have shown that physical health and social resources have direct effects on positive aspects of subjective well-being, said Associate Professor Reshma Merchant, head and senior consultant at the general medicine division of the National University Hospital. She said: "Many factors associated with ageing successfully are within our control and modifiable from early 40s and beyond."

These include social engagement, regular exercise, a nutritious diet, adaptive coping skills and early detection and treatment of chronic diseases such as diabetes, she added.

Ms Soh Swee Ping, chief executive of active ageing agency Council for Third Age, said: "There will be physical deterioration as we age but it doesn't mean that you cannot be the person you used to be."

Ms Chee said the key is not to limit yourself. "Don't let age hold you back. Nothing is impossible."

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Support and empower seniors even as they grow older

While many seniors are engaged actively in society, some will need help as they become frail, said Associate Professor Corinne Ghoh, co-director of The Next Age Institute at the National University of Singapore's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

She said: "The challenge lies in how families and older people can be better supported and empowered in the caregiving journey, so that the older person can continue to age in a familial environment, and not lose his sense of autonomy and self-esteem."

Denying seniors the opportunities to participate in day-to-day activities and lead active lives will damage their well-being. The challenge is for providers of eldercare services to adopt a caregiving approach that will empower the seniors, she said.

Ageing well with help from the young

Project pairing students with older learners proves a hit in push towards successful ageing



Joyce Teo

As Singapore ages, the older folk may lose touch with the younger generation. The opposite holds true too, giving rise to misconceptions of each other.

But these are often dispelled at courses organised by the Council for Third Age's (C3A) Intergenerational Learning Programme (ILP).

Here, students from primary and secondary schools, polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education teach senior citizens various subjects like information technology, social media and photography.

Over 6,000 seniors and students have taken part in the programme, which started in 2011.

It has been so successful that C3A plans to expand it over the next few years, said Ms Soh Swee Ping, chief executive of the active ageing agency. It is also holding an inaugural conference on positive ageing next month, and has developed a toolkit for seniors to help them discover their interests.

It will launch 500 such kits at the conference, said Ms Soh.

These plans come as the Government is ramping up plans to get people to age well, amid an ageing population and rising life expectancy.

Last month, it announced a \$3 billion plan to help Singaporeans age confidently and lead active lives.

More details will be released next year. By 2030, it is estimated that 900,000 people, or one-fifth of the population here, will be over 65.

More research on ageing issues will also be done to make successful ageing a reality for more people.

At The Next Age Institute, a pilot study on care pathways has taken off, and an interim report of the findings is expected around the end of next year.

The study will provide insights into care arrangements for older people as they transit from hospital to community or home care, said Associate Professor Corinne Ghoh, co-director of the institute at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

The institute, jointly set up by NUS and Washington University in St Louis in the United States in February, has been contributing to the discussions and new knowledge on active and successful ageing.

In November, it will co-organise a symposium that will facilitate discussion on active ageing.

At C3A, there is a rising demand for the ILP, said Ms Soh.

Seniors are quick to sign up for these courses, in which they may learn how to talk on Skype, use Facebook or do public speaking, she said. They also get to interact with the youth and vice versa.

Said Ms Soh: "The youth may

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Madam Angeline Leong, 62, taking a free basic computer skills course at Chongfu School under the Council for Third Age's Intergenerational Learning Programme, where senior citizens get to interact with the younger generation as they learn how to talk on Skype, use Facebook or learn other skills. ST PHOTO: ALICIA CHAN



Over 6,000 seniors and students have taken part in the Intergenerational Learning Programme which started in 2011. It has been so successful that the Council for Third Age plans to expand it over the next few years. ST PHOTO: ALICIA CHAN

Closing the generation gap

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think that the seniors are clumsy, stupid, have butterfingers or can't learn.

"But at the end of the six to eight sessions, they may find that the seniors are not scary.

"This translates to them interacting more with their grandparents at home."

The seniors benefit, too, as they may also have certain preconceptions of young people, said Ms Soh.

She said C3A can work with more partners and schools to expand the programme.

The ILP could also evolve so that senior folk become the teachers.

"They can teach dialects or customs. It doesn't matter, as what we want to achieve is the bonding," says Ms Soh.

Associate Professor Reshma

Merchant, who heads the general medicine division at National University Hospital, said the inter-generational gap is getting wider and "empathy towards the elderly may decline if this trend continues".

Co-locating eldercare and childcare facilities in new Housing Board developments to maximise opportunities for intergenerational interaction is an excellent idea, she said.

"Most elderly people feel much more valued when surrounded by young kids and, in return, the young ones will learn about culture and tradition," she added.

Ms Soh said that to age well, seniors also need to embrace ageing.

The third age is a phase where people may look at life in a more meaningful way. It can start at 50 or even 60 but, typically, people from 50 may begin to view life different-

ly, whereas those who are younger could be focusing on financial stability, she added.

C3A hopes to get people to view ageing positively at its inaugural positive ageing conference.

Ms Soh said: "Even when we say active ageing, people tend to associate it with the physical aspect.

"But it also includes the spiritual, financial and intellectual aspect."

The toolkit that C3A is set to launch will allow seniors to assess which of these dimensions they are lacking in.

Ms Soh said: "There will be a score, which will give a sense of where you are, so that you know what to do next.

"For example, if your intellectual score is low, you can read a book or go for a course."

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