



Participants shaping a bear out of small towels at the opening of the FaithActs x Ibasho Margaret Drive Centre on March 30. For a start, the centre will run three activities – upcycling craft workshops, digital clinics to help seniors use technology and a cafe where they can conduct cooking workshops and share snacks. It will add more activities as more ideas are generated. ST PHOTOS: GAVIN FOO

Seniors take active role in planning and leading activities here



Senior Minister of State for National Development Tan Kiat How speaking with residents at the centre's launch. He said Ibasho aims to provide a safe and comfortable space where people of all ages and backgrounds can interact as a community.

Pilot project at new centre in Queenstown helps seniors to lead healthier, more productive lives

Thian Wen Li

As a young girl, Madam Wendy Lim enjoyed crafting and sewing.

The hobby took a back seat as she grew older, but she rekindled her passion for craft a few years ago after her in-laws, whom she was caring for, died.

The 76-year-old former public relations officer now hopes to conduct craft workshops at a new active ageing centre in Margaret Drive

that opened on March 30.

At the FaithActs x Ibasho Margaret Drive Centre – a tie-up between social service agency FaithActs and non-profit organisation Ibasho – seniors will take an active role in planning and leading activities, rather than just being participants.

Ibasho means “a place where you can feel at home, being oneself” in Japanese. The organisation aims to create places where seniors can lead or find opportunities to contribute to their community.

Ibasho's first project began in 2012 in Japan, after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011.

This is the first Ibasho project in Singapore. Supported by the Health District @ Queenstown, the pilot programme supports residents to lead healthier and more productive lives.

Queenstown is one of Singapore's oldest towns, and more than 20 per cent of residents there are aged 65 and above.

The concept of Ibasho was introduced to Queenstown through a four-part workshop conducted between May and November in 2022.

Ibasho founder Emi Kiyota said Ibasho is about having a mindset shift about older people as individ-

AGEING GRACEFULLY

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MR TAN KIAT HOW,

Senior Minister of State for National Development, speaking at the launch of the FaithActs x Ibasho Margaret Drive Centre.

uals who can contribute to and lead activities for community building. Ibasho's projects have been introduced in Japan, the Philippines and Nepal.

At most centres for older people, seniors are usually the recipients of activities, Associate Professor Kiyota said. But with Ibasho, they can plan activities and find ways to contribute to the community.

With demographic shifts, the current way of caring for older people in traditional centres is not sustainable, said Prof Kiyota.

Instead, she hopes healthy older residents who want to find meaningful things to do can help staff at centres and reduce the burden on society.

The Margaret Drive centre's launch comes at a time when Singapore, with one of the world's fastest-ageing populations, grapples with ageism and increasing loneliness among seniors. Studies have shown that loneliness has detrimental effects on physical and mental health, contributes to chronic conditions and reduces the overall quality of life.

Prof Kiyota, who is also deputy executive director of the National University of Singapore's Centre for Population Health, said older people have resources to share.

“I really hope this place is going to open up that conversation. So when you see older persons, the first thing is not to ask what I can do for you. Maybe we can ask what you would like to do with us,” she added.

The centre, which can accommodate about 50 to 80 participants, aims to create a place for older residents to help one another and allow more interactions between the young and old.

FaithActs executive director Shirley Ng said that in the two weeks before the centre's launch, 120 older residents from Queenstown signed up to be participants.

The centre hopes to reach out to 500 seniors for the initial launch.

There are three levels of involvement – planning as part of the core committee, leading activities, or participating. For a start, the centre will run three activities – upcycling craft workshops, digital clinics to help seniors use technology, and a cafe where seniors can conduct cooking workshops and share snacks. It will add more activities as more ideas are generated.

The core committee, which was formed at the end of 2022, is made up of 24 members aged 19 to 86, with an even split between older and younger individuals.

The youngest member, 19-year-old polytechnic student Rai Shayaan Ahmed Kharal, has been helping out in the past year to organise a digital clinic, where he taught seniors to use smartphones. He said he has learnt from seniors to approach life positively and calmly.

Senior Minister of State for National Development Tan Kiat How said during the centre's launch that Ibasho aims to provide a safe and comfortable space where people of all ages and backgrounds can interact as a community.

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Madam Lim, who is part of the core committee at the new centre, has found joy not only in helping others, but also in teaching her friends and neighbours to recycle their clothing through alterations and upcycling, through the centre's outreach efforts and at FaithActs' senior activity centre in Dover.

“I managed to teach them to do something which, later on, they can do themselves. They won't have to ask me,” she said.

As a core committee member, she is directly involved in the planning and design of the new centre in Margaret Drive, while also conducting craft workshops.

“I met a lot of friends (through the committee) and I'm very happy to share my skills,” she added.

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