



Ms Angeline Tan, 64, in a game of mahjong with NUS student R Shalini Sai Kamaladarshini, 20, and two others during the project showcase at Queenstown Secondary School on April 5. She said spending time with young people from both schools makes her feel younger and helps dispel myths of ageism. ST PHOTOS: HENG YI-HSIN

A game of mahjong between young and old to fight ageism

It is among creative ways of promoting intergenerational bonding under NUS project

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As Ms Angeline Tan, 64, engages in a game of mahjong with students, her fellow seniors are helping the younger ones to beat the more seasoned players with prompts such as “You should get rid of all these tiles first” and “Keep this one”.

Ms Tan, a retired traffic controller, said spending time with the young people from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Queenstown Secondary School makes her feel younger and helps dispel myths of ageism.

“When we teach them the rules of mahjong, we help to keep their minds sharp. They also get to see that communicating with the elderly is not that difficult.”

She is one of 24 older residents from two active ageing centres (AACs) in Queenstown – Faith-Acts AAC and Esther AAC – who are involved in an NUS project with these students.

In a bid to mitigate ageism, since January, 32 students from the university’s Residential College 4 (RC4) have been designing creative approaches to encourage senior citizens in Queenstown and young people to bond.

The project is part of two courses started by Dr Lynette Tan Yuen Ling, director of studies at RC4.

Thirty-five students from Queenstown Secondary School were also roped in.

These courses expose participants to key concepts in service learning, and aim to foster connections between young people and seniors. The aim is for undergraduates to use their creativity to come up with appropriate and sustainable intergenerational bonding activities.



NUS student Teo Cavan, 22, showing Ms Lim Lye Lin, 78, how the quiz game Kahoot! is played during the project showcase. The project is part of two courses started by Dr Lynette Tan Yuen Ling from NUS’ Residential College 4. Thirty-five students from Queenstown Secondary School were also roped in.

CRITICAL LEVER

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DR LYNETTE TAN YUEN LING, director of studies at NUS’ Residential College 4, on ageism being the main hurdle to healthy longevity.

At a project showcase in Queenstown Secondary School on April 5, the students and seniors presented ideas such as chair Zumba, going on food hunts and having seniors teach younger people their treasured recipes through cooking sessions and creating a book.

After attending a talk by Profes-

or John Eu-Li Wong, who chairs Health District @ Queenstown, an initiative to support residents in leading healthier and more productive lives, Dr Tan said she realised the main hurdle to healthy longevity is ageism.

“You could be in good health. But if people treat you like you’re old and exclude you from everything, your health just goes downhill. So, one of the critical levers to stop ageism is intergenerational bonding,” said Dr Tan, noting that students in residential colleges have the potential to do well in this area.

“At RC4 and all residential colleges, students have a lot of tacit knowledge and experience in creating activities for bonding. They are experts at this because residential colleges are all about community.”

Both courses are nestled within the larger aims of Health District @ Queenstown, which is helmed by NUS, the National University Health System and the Housing Board.

Queenstown is one of Singapore’s oldest towns – more than 20 per cent of its residents are aged 65 and above.

The courses are conducted over 12 three-hour sessions in one semester, with the NUS students

meeting the secondary school students and seniors regularly to come up with bonding activities.

Dr Tan said programmes like these are important for healthy longevity and bridging the generation gap, as most AACs do not offer opportunities for intergenerational bonding. She added that as these courses will be conducted only over one semester every year, future students can assess the ideas put forth by their seniors, and think of ways to improve.

Second-year NUS undergraduate R Shalini Sai Kamaladarshini, 20, is part of the team that came up with the idea of getting young people to play traditional games like mahjong with seniors.

The business analytics student said the activity encourages young people to continue the legacy of such traditional games. She added that through this experience, she found the seniors to be more open-minded than she had expected, as they were willing to learn how to use online applications like Kahoot! from the students.

“It’s about finding the sweet spot, where it’s something that both these different generations enjoy doing together,” she noted.

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