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Implementing
Intergenerational
Befriending Programmes
in the Community:
More than Just
Putting the Young
and Old Together

Ad Maulod, Wong Yunjie, Sasha Rouse

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Implementing Intergenerational Befriending Programmes In the Community: More than Just Putting the Young and Old Together

Ad Maulod, Wong Yunjie, Sasha Rouse

Executive Summary:

This brief presents critical findings from an evaluation of a pilot intergenerational befriending programme in Singapore designed to mitigate social isolation and loneliness among older persons by fostering enriching interactions with younger persons. The evaluation study, referenced in this brief, attempts to address the overarching problem of increasing social isolation among older persons in Singapore, testing the hypothesis that intergenerational engagement could enhance social connectivity and reduce generational disparities.

Utilising a qualitative approach, the evaluation spanned two years (2019-2021), involving in-depth interviews with participants, observations of interactions, and reflective journaling by younger participants. The participant pool included 14 older persons (OPs) (aged 60 to 93) and 18 younger persons (YPs) (aged 18 to 32) from Simei and Bedok areas. Thematic analysis was employed to distil insights from the data, focusing on participants' perceptions, experiences, and the programme's impact on intergenerational understanding and ageism.

Key Findings:

The evaluation of the intergenerational befriending programme uncovered a complex landscape of challenges that stood in the way of its intended outcomes of mitigating social isolation and fostering mutual understanding across generations. Despite initial optimism from participants about the prospects of bridging generational divides, the programme encountered significant barriers that impeded the formation of meaningful and sustained relationships between OPs and YPs. These challenges highlight the nuanced dynamics of intergenerational engagement and underscore the necessity for a more supportive and informed framework to facilitate meaningful intergenerational connections:

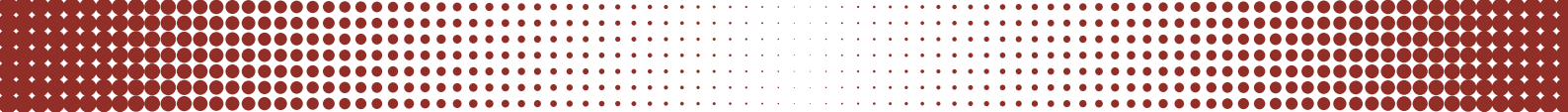
- **Communication Barriers:** Fundamental differences in language proficiency, technological literacy, and personal interests created a chasm between OPs and YPs, making it difficult for them to engage in meaningful conversations. Many OPs were reticent to share their experiences or advice, fearing that their perspectives would be perceived as outdated or irrelevant by their younger counterparts.
- **Health and Mobility Concerns:** A significant oversight was the lack of consideration for OPs' health and mobility limitations in the planning and execution of programme activities. YPs, often unaware of these challenges, proposed activities that were not always feasible or enjoyable for OPs, further deepening their sense of isolation and embarrassment.
- **Mismatched Expectations and Ambiguities:** A clear disconnect emerged between OPs' expectations for functional assistance and YPs' perceptions of their roles within the programme. This misalignment, compounded by a lack of clear communication regarding the programme's goals and participant roles, led to dissatisfaction among both groups.
- **Persistent Generational Gap and Ageism:** Contrary to the programme's aspirations to narrow the generational divide, OPs reported that the gap persisted, if not widened, due to unbridgeable differences in values, life experiences, and entrenched societal ageism. This gap challenged the programme's mission to foster intergenerational solidarity and understanding.

Recommendations:

In light of the challenges listed above, this brief proposes a series of actionable recommendations to enhance the structure, delivery, and impact of future initiatives to foster meaningful intergenerational relationships and ensure that both older persons (OPs) and younger persons (YPs) can engage in mutually beneficial and enriching experiences. By addressing the core issues of communication barriers, mismatched expectations, and the need for more inclusive activities, these recommendations are aimed at making intergenerational befriending programmes a more effective vehicle for bridging the generational divide:

- **Implement an Asset-Based Approach:** Moving away from the traditional benefactor-beneficiary model, this approach advocates for a paradigm shift towards recognizing and leveraging the inherent strengths, skills, and experiences of both OPs and YPs. By fostering an environment of mutual learning and respect, this strategy aims to dismantle preconceived notions and encourage genuine, reciprocal exchanges between generations.

- **Clarify Programme Goals and Participant Roles:** To mitigate confusion and align expectations, it is crucial to establish clear, comprehensive guidelines that outline the objectives of the programme and the roles of participants. Providing detailed training and support will empower OPs and YPs to navigate their relationships more effectively, fostering a sense of purpose and direction within the befriending framework.
- **Design Inclusive and Accessible Activities:** Recognizing the diverse capabilities and interests of OPs, it is essential to curate a broad spectrum of activities that are both engaging and accommodating. Activities should not only be tailored to the physical and cognitive abilities of OPs but also aim to promote generativity and a positive self-image, enriching the experience for all involved.
- **Address Communication and Commitment Challenges:** To bridge the communication gap, targeted support and resources should be provided to help participants overcome language and technological barriers. Additionally, introducing flexible scheduling options will enable YPs to balance their commitments more effectively, ensuring that both OPs and YPs can participate fully and meaningfully in the programme.
- **Support from Programme Coordinators:** Programme coordinators play a pivotal role in navigating the nuanced relationships surrounding intergenerational befriending programmes. Given that OPs may have complex needs, and YPs may have varied commitments, programme coordinators are not just facilitators, but also function as a supporting figure who can significantly influence the programme's success. To maximise the effectiveness of intergenerational befriending, programme coordinators should adopt a multi-faceted approach:
 - o ***Clearly define engagement terms and programme expectations*** to all participants prior to the start of befriending activities by articulating the scope, objectives and expectations of the programme. Programme coordinators should ensure that all participants understand what is or is not included within their role as a befriender, as well as the programme's scope.
 - o ***Recognise emotional dynamics at play and offer ongoing emotional support*** to all participants in the form of regular check-ins, providing a safe space for participants to address concerns, and offering guidance on navigating intergenerational relationships, especially when facing challenges in communication or when confronting sensitive topics.
 - o ***Provide training to increase participants' capacity to navigate relationships***, with training topics focused on effective communication, cultural competency, and understanding generational differences.
 - o Be well-informed about community resources and social services (such as healthcare services or requesting for financial support) to ***facilitate referrals*** when the participants' needs extend beyond the scope of the befriending programme.
 - o Be ***proactive in identifying and addressing any conflict or issues*** that arise during the programme. This includes offering solutions to conflicts and mediating misunderstandings. Programme coordinators must also ensure that they are easily accessible to participants for troubleshooting. A proactive approach to conflict resolution can prevent minor issues from escalating and can help sustain engagement over the programme's duration.



The findings highlight the need for strategic improvements in the design and implementation of intergenerational befriending programmes. Policymakers and social service providers may find the insights and recommendations useful for the improvement and implementation of existing or future initiatives. Further research is needed to explore innovative methods for intergenerational engagement, aimed at effectively bridging the generational divide and combating social isolation among older adults. Implementing these recommendations will not only enrich the intergenerational befriending experience but also foster a more inclusive, empathetic, and cohesive society.

Table of Contents

1	<i>Introduction</i>	8
1.1	Intergenerational Practice and Generativity as Interventions for Healthy Ageing	8
1.2	Current Landscape of Intergenerational Befriending Practice in Singapore	10
2	<i>Research Methods</i>	12
2.1	Participant Recruitment	12
2.2	Recruitment Challenges	12
2.3	Data Collection	13
2.4	Data analysis	13
3	<i>Profile of Participants</i>	14
3.1	Older Participants (OPs)	14
3.2	Younger Participants (YPs)	15
3.3	Generation Gap between Younger and Older Participants	15
4	<i>Concerns and Needs of Older and Younger Participants</i>	16
4.1	Older Participants' (OPs) Concerns and Needs	16
4.1.1	Financial insecurity	16
4.1.2	Health and functional limitations	16
4.1.3	Psychosocial stressors	17
4.1.4	Ageism	18
4.2	Younger Participants' (YPs) Concerns and Needs	19
4.2.1	Concerns with social pressures and work/school-related stress	19
4.2.2	Concerns with managing relationship dynamics	19
4.2.3	Concerns with having safe space and getting reliable and trusted support in social engagements	20
5	<i>Participants' Perception and Experience of Intergenerational Befriending</i>	21
5.1	Perceptions of the Other Generation (Pre-programme)	21
5.2	Decision to Enrol and Programme Expectations (Pre-programme)	21
5.3	Perceived Risks and Benefits of Intergenerational Befriending (Pre-programme)	22
5.3.1	Befriending Youths	22
5.3.2	Befriending Older Persons	22
5.4	Reported Benefits of Intergenerational Befriending (Post-Programme)	23
5.5	Perceived Challenges to Intergenerational Befriending (Post-Programme)	25
5.5.1	Communication Barriers in Intergenerational Engagement	25
5.5.2	Understanding and Supporting Older Persons with Health and Mobility Limitations	27
5.5.3	Managing Differing Expectations and Ambiguous Boundaries of Care and Friendship	27
5.6	Disappointment and Dissatisfaction with Intergenerational Befriending Programme	31
6	<i>Translating Participants' Experience into an Asset-Based Intergenerational Befriending Programme Design</i>	33
7	<i>Conclusion</i>	37
	<i>Appendix</i>	38

<i>References</i>	43
<i>Publisher</i>	45
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	46
 Figure 1. Languages spoken by older persons (OPs)	14
Figure 2. OPs' contact with family members	15
 Table 1. List of some current and proposed intergenerational programmes in Singapore as of January 2024	38
Table 2. Participant's eligibility criteria (both programme and evaluation study)	41
Table 3. Demographic profile of Older Participants	41
Table 4. Demographic profile of Young Participants	42

1 Introduction

Singapore is projected to become a *super-aged* nation by 2026, with increasing numbers of older persons living alone. In the 2023 National Day Rally Speech (PMO, 2023), social isolation and loneliness have been identified as major risks among older persons, requiring inter-ministerial collaboration to address the problem. In the 2023 *Action Plan for Successful Ageing* (MOH, 2023), “connectedness” has emerged as one of the key priorities for policy and practice aimed at strengthening intergenerational bonds, combating ageism and narrowing generational gaps. In the meantime, a diversification of programmes offered at Active Ageing Centres, other initiatives such as Age Well SG, and the Silver Generation Volunteer Programme are being implemented to engage seniors and increase intergenerational contact within the community.

Social isolation and loneliness are strongly associated with decline in physical and mental wellbeing, cognitive capacity, and life expectancy among older persons (Lara et al., 2019; Penninkilampi et al., 2018; Siette et al., 2020). At the same time, identifying and addressing issues of social isolation and loneliness is complex. While older persons living alone may be at risk of loneliness and social isolation, studies have also shown that older persons could feel socially disconnected even if they are living with others (Barrenetxea et al., 2022). When needs for social connection are not met, loneliness – described as the feeling of emptiness and rejection due to discrepancies between actual and desired relationships – can manifest (van Tilburg & de Jong Gierveld, 2023).

In Singapore and abroad, intergenerational befriending programmes have been gaining traction as a means to intervene on older person’s social isolation (Breck et al., 2018; Bryer & Owens, 2019; Hoang et al., 2021; Yeh et al., 2022). Intergenerational practices draw younger and older persons together in collaborative activities and interactions to foster cross-generational understanding and mutual respect (Canedo-Garcia et al., 2017). In addition, intergenerational interactions can facilitate and promote older person’s generativity – an interest to guide and develop younger generations (Canedo-Garcia et al., 2017; Peters et al., 2021).

This research brief is based on a qualitative evaluation of a pilot intergenerational befriending programme conducted in Singapore between 2019–2020. The programme was targeted at older persons who self-reported as being socially isolated or lonely, and youths who expressed interest in befriending older persons. The objective of this brief is to distil valuable insights gained from our evaluation research. We will focus on (i) exploring older and younger participants’ perceptions about ageing followed by (ii) needs and expectations of older and younger participants with regards to the programme and (iii) the benefits and challenges they experienced through intergenerational interactions. Participants’ insights may inform possible recommendations for the future design of intergenerational befriending programmes in Singapore.

1.1 Intergenerational Practice and Generativity as Interventions for Healthy Ageing

In the literature, positive cross-generational engagement between younger and older individuals contributes to positive health and social outcomes for both young and old. Positive interactions with youth befrienders have been found to improve older persons’ overall quality of life and mental wellbeing (Kamei et al., 2011) while generative mentorship relations with older persons improved sense of connectedness, self-worth and mental wellbeing among youths, minimizing at-risk behaviours (e.g., substance abuse, eating disorders, truancy, delinquent activities) and anxiety (Park, 2015).

Intergenerational practice refers to intentional activities, programmes, or approaches that bring together people from different age groups to promote positive interactions, understanding, and mutual support in their communities. The goal is to facilitate meaningful relationships and exchanges between individuals of different generations, foster a sense of connection, shared experience, and mutual benefit. Intergenerational practice can take place in various community-based arrangements, including between families, schools, and organizations, but it goes beyond simply putting younger and older generations together.

Key components of intergenerational practice include (Bressler et al., 2005):

1. **Communication:** Encouraging open and respectful communication between different age groups to share experiences, perspectives, and knowledge.
2. **Learning:** Creating opportunities for learning and skill-sharing across generations. This can involve formal education, mentorship programs, or informal knowledge exchange.
3. **Collaboration:** Encouraging collaboration on projects or activities that involve people from different age groups working together towards common goals.
4. **Reciprocity:** Promoting a sense of reciprocity where both younger and older individuals contribute to and benefit from the interaction. This can help break down stereotypes and foster a sense of mutual support.
5. **Breaking Stereotypes:** Challenging stereotypes and misconceptions about different age groups; fostering a more inclusive and understanding society.
6. **Community Building:** Bringing together people of all ages to address needs of the community; promoting social cohesion and a sense of belonging.
7. **Well-being:** Recognizing and addressing the well-being of individuals across the lifespan, acknowledging the potential benefits of social connections and support networks.

Countries experiencing a rapidly ageing population like Singapore have been looking to intergenerational practice as a way to address a generational divide, promote social cohesion, and enrich the lives of individuals across different age groups. In Singapore, the generational divide has in recent years been observed and addressed by different parties in various public outlets (Elangovan, 2023; Koh & Lim, 2023; Zhuo, 2020). Rapid technological advancements and vast transformations in Singapore's economy, urban environment, healthcare, education system and language policies since post-independence have meant that older persons (aged 60 and above) and younger persons (aged between 18 and 40) have had vastly different lived experiences (Maulod et al., 2023). The generational divide is especially pronounced when one considers how young and old interface with digital informational technology at starkly contrasting levels. Older persons, at best 'digital immigrants' if they have adopted or adapted to digital technologies later in life, are generally found to have low digital literacy. In contrast, younger generations are considered 'digital natives', having utilised and integrated digital technologies into their lives from an early age (Hoang et al., 2021).

Where such generational gaps exist, it is less likely that older persons interact with the young. In their study on generativity amongst older Singaporeans, Maulod et al. (2023) highlights ‘generative ambivalence’ among older persons who have mixed feelings about guiding and developing younger generations due to their perceived inadequacies in education, digital literacy and other relevant skills. An inability to engage in generativity in contemporary society is a concern given that it is a crucial dimension to the older person’s life developmental stage and thus successful ageing (Erikson, 1986; Villar and Serrat, 2014). In the field of intergenerational relationships, studies have established how generativity functions as a conduit between generations, bridging the complementary developmental stages of older individuals with those younger (Hofer et al., 2008). Yet, applications of generativity as a means to bridge generational gaps remain underexplored (Villar & Serrat, 2014). The family, community and workplace are potential sites for generativity in Singapore but are hampered by the lack of inter-generational mixing (age-segregation) and divisive negative perceptions about younger or older people (age-prejudice).

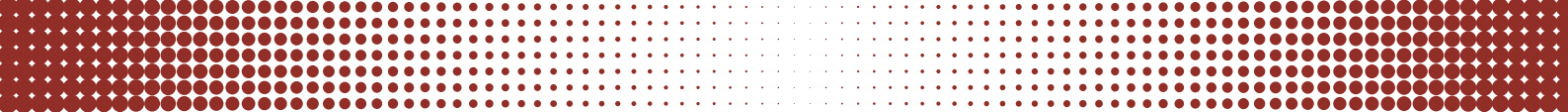
Older persons and youths may develop mutual understanding and appreciation for each other, confront and reframe age-related prejudice through intergenerational practice (DeVore et al., 2016; Hatton-Yeo & Batty, 2011). Thus, this research brief contributes to existing and ongoing efforts to foster intergenerational cohesion and healthy ageing through understanding current perceptions (or misconceptions) older and younger Singaporeans have towards each other and relating it back to what different generations need from each other to thrive interdependently in a more cohesive social ecosystem.

1.2 Current Landscape of Intergenerational Befriending Practice in Singapore

A brief scan of intergenerational befriending programmes in the local landscape showed different types of intergenerational befriending support targeted at the following groups of older persons: (i) community-dwelling seniors, (ii) community-dwelling seniors identified as at-risk of social isolation and/or requiring support in Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)/ Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) and (iii) older persons residing in nursing homes.

The nature of the befriending activity depends on the needs of targeted seniors in the programme. For example, younger persons engaged to help seniors identified as vulnerable and at-risk (Group ii) will provide more functional and custodial befriending support such as assisting with errands, housekeeping, social outings/ excursions and medical escort (e.g., *KampungKakis*). In contrast, youths partnered with community-dwelling seniors who are relatively active and more independent (Group i) engage in activities such as teaching older persons the use of smartphones or social media apps (e.g., *Intergenerational Learning Programme by Council for Third Age*). For older persons residing in nursing homes (Group iii), youth befrienders provide psychosocial support by visiting residents and participating in physical and social activities organized by or with the nursing home. Examples of current intergenerational befriending programmes have been listed in Table 1 (see Appendix).

In Singapore, most of the existing intergenerational practices are tethered to formal, structured programmes led by different institutions. Mostly, younger persons are mobilised to befriend and offer support to older persons, with some guidance from community-based programme coordinators. For example, at the national level, some of the intergenerational befriending practices encompass a joint-partnership between social service agencies (SSAs), nursing homes and educational institutions through the “Values-in-Action” (VIA) programme as part of the “Key Student Development Experience” component to local school’s curriculum. The common practice for these intergenerational befriending



programmes is fundamentally rooted in an ‘older persons-in-need’ framework, which involves training youths or younger volunteers to ‘help’ at-risk seniors. While there are a few programmes that tap on the generativity of older persons as mentors to at-risk youths or children, the practice continues to adhere to a benefactor (young volunteers)–beneficiary (vulnerable older persons) model.

Further, many intergenerational befriending programmes appear to target socially isolated older persons. By specifically reaching out to socially isolated older persons — who by definition have voluntarily withdrawn from social engagement and any activities that engender them, organizations may have missed out on key determinants that shape older persons’ social withdrawal. A qualitative study on loneliness conducted by the Centre of Ageing Research & Education (CARE) found that older persons elect to withdraw from social engagements or activities where they perceive themselves to be less valued or not needed. Participants we interviewed highlighted experiences of ageism in social interactions, including being perceived as ‘needy’, ‘dependent’ or a burden to society, as contributing to their experiences of feeling lonely. To avoid dealing with such negative interactions, some older Singaporeans resort to self-withdrawal, even rejecting social care or support as a form of self-preservation.

In the literature, newer models of intergenerational practice advocate and emphasize principles of reciprocity and collaboration where *both* younger and older persons contribute to and benefit from interacting with each other. In Singapore however, intergenerational programmes that cultivate reciprocal and collaborative young-old dynamics through ‘asset-based’ models, i.e., taking stock of and drawing on capacities of *both* younger and older befriending participants for mutually beneficial activities, are less common and limited. Yet it is only through building collaborative and reciprocal relationships between younger and older persons that intergenerational cohesion can be strengthened. Older persons can then meaningfully contribute to the well-being and development of the younger generation, fulfilling their generative capacities.

2 Research Methods

Research to evaluate the outcomes of a pilot intergenerational befriending programme implemented in Simei and Bedok took place between April 2019 to April 2021. Recruitment for this programme was done in two batches, over a period of four months (Simei) and three months (Bedok) respectively, with partnership and support from two SSAs operating in those areas. To be eligible for this study, participants needed to be enrolled in the pilot intergenerational befriending programme. A total of 14 older persons (ages 60 to 93) and 18 youths (ages 18 to 32) participated in our research study.

2.1 Participant Recruitment

Older persons were recruited through convenience sampling strategies such as street-intercept and door-knocking in two residential neighbourhoods at Bedok and Simei. Simei and Bedok were selected as these areas fell within the programme implementers' service boundaries. Youths were recruited via programme flyers distributed through the partner-SSAs' networks (e.g. churches), social media platforms (e.g., Instagram and Facebook), institutions of higher learning (IHLs) and the Youth Executive Committee (via People's Association). Both older and younger participants were also purposively sampled to account for a diversity of representation in age, ethnicity and sex.

Table 2 (see Appendix) highlights the eligibility criteria used for both the programme and our study. As the objective of the pilot programme was to alleviate loneliness and social isolation via intergenerational befriending sessions, prospective older participants needed to self-report as being 'sometimes' or 'mostly' lonely (i.e., UCLA 3-item Loneliness Scale) and/or living alone. While we recognized that older persons with restricted mobility and cognitively impaired are at higher risk of social isolation and loneliness, the study required them to have cognitive function, and are mobile or semi-ambulant (able to move in the external environment with or without assistive devices) to participate in both the programme and our research activities.

When recruiting youth participants, we initially capped the upper age limit at 25 years old with the hope of recruiting tertiary students. We had assumed that working youths would not be able to commit to the programme and research activities. However, in the earlier phases of recruitment, we found that the majority of individuals who responded to the recruitment flyers were above 35 years old. We therefore adjusted the upper age limit to 35, given that a 35-year-old individual still falls within Singapore's demographic definition of "youth".

We had difficulties recruiting youths living in the same area as older participants (i.e., Simei and Bedok). Hence, we included willingness to travel to the Eastern region of Singapore as an eligibility criteria.

2.2 Recruitment Challenges

The programme had initially targeted 20 older persons (OPs) and 40 younger persons (YPs). A ratio of 2 YPs for every OP was decided due to anticipated difficulties in recruiting OPs, and to ensure that at least 1 YP can engage in befriending visits without disruption due to busy school/work schedule. Recruitment of OPs was challenging due to the lack of programme staff who could converse in mandarin/local dialects spoken by the majority of OPs. Furthermore, the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) prevented programme organisers from approaching residents or clients who have been identified by service providers as 'socially isolated' without prior consent. The programme managed to recruit

4 older participants in the first recruitment round (Batch 1), but only one was actively participating in befriending activities; the rest became uncontactable. There was high attrition for both older and younger participants. Older participants withdrew due to a mismatch in expectations and health issues, while some younger participants withdrew due to the long wait to be assigned an OP partner.

Since it would not be possible to run an evaluation study with one older participant, we conducted a second recruitment for the programme (Batch 2). For batch 2, the research team worked with a Senior Activity Centre (Bedok) to identify and invite eligible seniors to participate in the befriending programme and evaluation study. In the end, across two batches and after attrition, 11 OPs and 15 YPs completed the study.

2.3 Data Collection

The study utilized a longitudinal qualitative approach over an 18-month period between April 2019 to October 2020, which is also the duration of the pilot intergenerational befriending programme. Semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with both older and younger participants **before** the commencement of the six-month befriending activities, and **after** the programme ended. The final interviews were only conducted in April 2021, due to social distancing measures during the Covid-19 pandemic. To supplement the data from IDIs, the research team conducted participant observation where we observed how older and younger participants interacted with each other and asked them about their experiences. Youths were also asked to document their experiences interacting with older persons through reflective online journaling, using Qualtrics. We collected a total of 47 journal entries from 13 youths. The older persons in our study were not asked to participate in this activity due to poor digital literacy and access. Instead, their responses related to interactions with youths were gathered from pre- and post-programme IDIs.

2.4 Data analysis

For the analysis of IDIs, three members of the research team each read one older person and youth transcript independently to complete the initial cursory coding of the entire transcript. Thereafter, the team would discuss and map interview responses to the coding framework, identify potential themes, and finalize thematic categories. The team then laid out the coding structure in NVivo 12 before transcripts were uploaded onto the software. Once transcripts were uploaded to the software, the coding structure guided the coding of all interview transcripts.

The same process was repeated to derive the coding structure for post-programme interview transcripts. Eventually, codes were grouped together to form higher-level conceptual categories which were verified and refined as the analysis proceeded. Ideas about categories, subcategories and their relationships were recorded in memos, and discussed in team meetings. Themes related to ageing perceptions of both younger and older participants, as well as needs and expectations of younger and older persons in intergenerational relationships were specifically extracted for this brief.

3 Profile of Participants

This section describes the demographic characteristics of both younger (YPs) and older participants (OPs), providing contexts to understanding their ageing perceptions as well as needs and expectations towards intergenerational interactions and relationships.

3.1 Older Participants (OPs)

Table 3 (see appendix) shows the demographic breakdown of the 14 OPs. Their age range was between 62 to 93 years old, with the majority (n=9) above 75 years old. Participants were mostly female and/or Chinese despite best efforts from both programme implementation (i.e. SSA partner) and research teams to recruit older men and ethnic minorities. In terms of marital status, a significant number were without partners (widowed, never married or divorced), while a minority (n=3) were still married.

In terms of neighbourhood estates, the sites chosen in Simei and Bedok were vastly different. Simei's housing consists of only purchased housing (i.e. 3-room HDB flats and above) whereas the site in Bedok is a public rental housing estate. Thus, OPs from Batches 1 and 2 differ in terms of their housing type, and explains the higher proportion of older participants living in rental housing (n=10). All four of Batch 1 OPs lived in purchased 3-room HDB flats, while all 10 OPs from Batch 2 lived in 1-room public rental flats (see Chapter 3). All older participants lived in the Eastern region of Singapore (Bedok and Simei).

Most older participants were Chinese and female. OPs were also predominantly monolingual (Mandarin or Malay) —only two were bilingual (Mandarin/ Hokkien and English/ Malay).

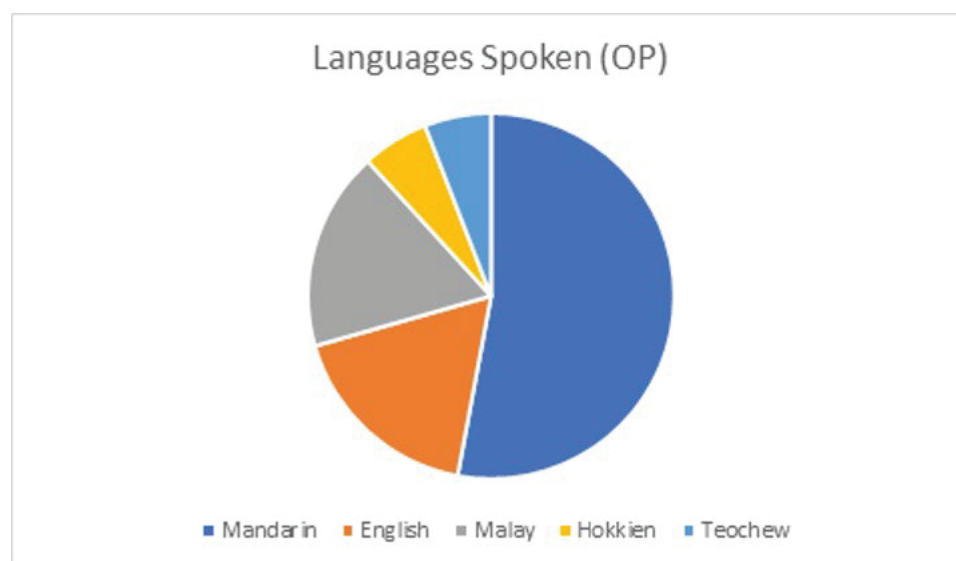


Figure 1. Languages spoken by older persons (OPs)

Aside from family support, other sources of income included personal savings and financial assistance from social service agencies. Older participants were either retired or had never been employed (e.g., homemaker). Living in public rental housing, most OPs were in precarious financial situations. They were anxious about housing and healthcare costs and had to sacrifice social participation (outings with friends etc.) to stretch their dollar.

Most older participants were/ had been married, and a higher proportion of them had been widowed for at least five years. Four were never married. The majority lived alone, while none were living with children.

93% have contact with family members	7% no contact with family members
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Figure 2. OPs' contact with family members

Family members provided emotional and financial support (e.g., monthly allowance for daily sustenance or the occasional *ang bao*) to OPs. Older participants preferred the company of and interactions with family members, close friends and members of their religious/ faith community. In terms of loneliness, most OPs' self-reported scores were within the range of "sometimes lonely" and "mostly lonely" on the 3-item loneliness scale (ULS-3 scale).

3.2 Younger Participants (YPs)

As shown in Table 4 (see appendix), 14 female and four male youth participants (YPs) took part in this study. The majority were between 20 to 24 years old, and none were married. Most had at least a Diploma and/or professional certification and were also studying part-time or full-time at local institutions of higher learning (IHLs).

50% of the YPs were working part-/full-time while the rest were still in school and were financially dependent on parents. Most did not have financial difficulties; only three expressed concerns related to financing loans for higher education. Almost all YPs lived with their families in purchased housing (one YP lived on her own), with two living with grandparents in multigenerational households. Slightly more than half of them live in the East; most YPs had to commute far to visit their OPs. Half of the YPs were bilingual (English and Mandarin/Malay/Tamil), but most could not speak Chinese dialects. The rest could only converse in English.

3.3 Generation Gap between Younger and Older Participants

Differences between younger and older participants were significant especially in terms of socio-economic backgrounds and life experiences. OPs were more socio-economically disadvantaged than YPs, with the majority subsidized under the public rental housing scheme. None of the YPs were married, most have been educated at tertiary levels and about half of the YPs are still schooling. Further, language compatibility was also a concern given that OPs were mostly monolingual in Mandarin while half of the YPs could only converse in English. In this study, socio-economic and language differences contributed largely to the generation gap between young and older participants. Thus, it is important for organizations and individuals who are implementing intergenerational befriending programmes to understand the demographic profiles of their younger and older participants and design activities or programmes that can bridge/narrow the generational divide rather than exacerbate it.

4 Concerns and Needs of Older and Younger Participants

In intergenerational settings, understanding the concerns of older and younger participants can help programme coordinators anticipate challenges to the befriending process and in turn, design activities and programmes that align with the needs, goals, and interests of participants across generations.

4.1 Older Participants' (OPs) Concerns and Needs

Older participants (OPs) expressed concerns we categorized into four key themes: financial insecurity; health and functional limitations; psychosocial stressors and ageism. Based on our evaluation findings, these concerns informed OPs' expectations towards the programme. This meant that their willingness to partake in the intergenerational activities depended on the degree to which the programme was sensitive to their concerns and can help address them.

4.1.1 Financial insecurity

The OPs in our study experienced financial insecurity, as work was no longer an option for most of them due to their age and poor health. Most were dependent on their limited savings, children, spouses, and financial assistance for daily subsistence. However, cash transfers from children were not always consistent and OPs hesitated to ask for money to avoid being perceived as a burden, causing strain to the relationship. OPs who were receiving financial aid expressed anxieties about aid renewal and being subjected to repeated means testing processes for each renewal cycle.

Having limited finances disincentivised OPs from engaging in social activities that gave them pleasure, for example: going out and having a meal with friends. Participation in intergenerational befriending programmes are free or at no-cost to participants, but OPs mentioned "unseen" hospitality costs such as purchasing snacks or drinks for youth befrienders during home visits or having social meals with befrienders at outings. While these gestures are not expected or programme mandated, OPs viewed such gestures as necessary and important to their sense of self-worth and dignity. Therefore, intergenerational programme coordinators need to be attentive to financial limitations that may hinder full participation in social activities and be sensitive to older persons' unspoken needs for self-respect and dignity.

"Watch TV at home is better. Don't need to spend money. Right? We are dependent on daughter's little money, so we have to be thrifty. Don't spend it on this, on that. It's tough, you know? I have a husband in nursing home, one month \$500." — OP19

4.1.2 Health and functional limitations

OPs in our study generally expressed a desire to be independent, strong, and healthy so they can continue being involved in the care of their loved ones and contribute actively to their communities. However, most described declining health and functional status – perceived as natural processes of ageing. Common health limitations included experiences of pain, difficulties sitting and standing for long and mobility. This extended to fears of falling, getting fatigued easily, and a lack of strength and energy to pursue activities. Their poor health conditions affected their moods and energy levels making it a struggle to engage in social activities. OPs interviewed described not wanting to burden or disappoint youth befrienders with their health limitations, in addition to not having the confidence that younger people (YPs) are experienced enough to manage their health and mobility needs.

Drawing from this context, intergenerational befriending programme managers need to ensure that befrienders are equipped with the knowledge/ skills to assist their OP partners and to plan activities that are suited to partners' capacities and considers their limitations.

The youths wanted me to go and out but I said don't know... My foot hurts, inconvenient to move about. Because both my feet hurt. Sometimes need to walk long distances...cannot walk. Like they wanted to bring me out to walk. I told them I did not want. My leg was painful, and I did not want to leave the house. — OP03

4.1.3 Psychosocial stressors

Psychosocial stressors were described in terms of loneliness, depression, and everyday struggles. The majority of OPs experienced chronic loneliness, which was attributed to the following factors: lack of meaningful, reliable and consistent social interactions with other people, chronic health conditions and functional limitations that hindered them from engaging in social activities, a lack of self-care and respite from intensive caregiving duties, and/or not having anyone to turn to because friends have relocated or passed on.

OPs viewed ageing as a lonely experience due to a dearth of adequate emotional support from families, and for some, it is also exacerbated by them living alone. Those with children wish for more social visits from family members— dissatisfied by the existing frequency of visits. Some mentioned how family members tended to dismiss or trivialise their issues, causing them to retreat and keeping their 'troubles' to themselves. Most OPs recounted that they would rather seek assistance from SSAs where they were less likely to face rejection than from their children who seemed occupied with their own problems.

"When I am alone and have no one to accompany me and talk to me, and when there is no one at home, I have to sit alone, I will certainly feel lonely. When I have to sit at home alone all day, it is really stuffy and lonely. When I am alone at home, I feel very bored, but there is no one whom I can share my troubles with. I just feel that being alone at home every day is lonely, and there is also no one that would come to find you to ask you out."
— OP03

Everyone has their own problems. I understand that. I don't want to add into their problems if I were to live with them as they have to look after my well-being. It's not that they never think of me, they do but I'm afraid that they are unwilling to take care of me too. If I stay alone and I seek financial assistance... I can use that money. I don't have to ask my children for money to pay my bills unless I have to." — OP06

OPs described daily stressors attributable to financial anxieties related to healthcare costs and daily expenses. They were also stressed about being increasingly dependent on loved ones as their Activities of Daily Living (ADL) needs intensified. Those who were living alone or caring for ailing spouses worried constantly about who they could rely on for assistance if and when their health deteriorated. Caregivers' burden was also prevalent among OPs who were primary caregivers, while OPs who were receiving care were stressed about being a burden and placing additional strains onto their children.

Some OPs shared that their desire to retreat into self-isolation to cope with stress or social rejection has contributed to their depressive moods. They described their depressive symptoms as feeling overwhelmed by negative thoughts which mostly occurred when they have spent too much time “being cooped up alone at home”; or is unable to “control emotions” or have “nothing to do to occupy the mind”. OPs’ daily routines were predominantly at home, and usually solitary – such as watching TV, listening to the radio, doing housework/chores, praying and napping. Home was rarely a social place since OPs hardly received visitors.

Most OP participants saw the intergenerational befriending programme as a means to break out of current routines, loneliness and isolation. OPs expressed interest in making new friends, having someone to talk to, having activities to look forward to, and having someone with whom they can occupy their time, so they won’t feel bored or alone. They also wanted to try out new activities because “watching TV every day is boring”, or they felt they had “nothing else to do.” A few even expressed being curious about youths, and/or like being around younger people.

4.1.4 Ageism

OPs highlighted experiences with ageism at work and in public settings. They cited instances where prospective employers were explicit about not hiring older persons above 70 years of age, rather than basing their hiring preferences on experience, capacity and ability. This also extended to daily interactions in the larger community where OPs felt a general lack of respect from members of the public such as youths refusing to give up their seats to older persons in public transportation.

Furthermore, OPs commented on how they have been perceived by others as ‘old’ and therefore limited in their abilities, despite themselves feeling otherwise:

“The only thing that stops me are my legs due to operation. If not, I’ll do volunteering at the mosque after work. Sometimes when I wanted to do this and that, they said no need. I really have intentions to do it.” — OP21

“Sometimes people will say ‘You so old already don’t push the elderly already... Let the young people do it.’ I told them, if I can still do it I will do. We also want to help.” — OP16

The internalization of ageism (i.e. perception of age as a limitation), further exacerbated by poor health and limited functional capacities, reinforced OPs’ negative ageing perception. The OPs in our study perceived their contributions to society as limited, including having nothing to offer to younger people due to their poor health and low education. Some expressed that they are just “waiting to die” to justify their lack of optimism or enthusiasm in engaging in new activities or around new people. Slightly less than half of the OPs described themselves in self-deprecating terms such as “poor”, “useless”, “dirty”, “lazy”, “stupid” or “slow” – indicating low self-esteem and self-worth among some of the OP.

4.2 Younger Participants' (YPs) Concerns and Needs

Unlike the older persons, income anxieties were not as prevalent among youth participants. Most YPs were either working and earning an income or were financially dependent on their parents. YPs described having close relationships with their parents and other family members. Some expressed concerns about being able to provide good care to their parents in their old age. Additionally, the majority of the YPs did not feel lonely. Those who were lonely cited unfulfilling emotional and physical connection with their loved ones as reason.

4.2.1 Concerns with social pressures and work/school-related stress

The predominant source of stress for some of the YPs were related to work and/or school. Stress about exam preparation and performance, keeping up with studies and coping with overwhelming school loads were major concerns. They expressed anxieties about meeting both their own and parents' expectations to get good grades and a good job. Some mentioned feeling pressured when being compared to relatives and siblings, while others fear disappointing their parents.

For working YPs, there were concerns about being able to work with colleagues, doubts about work performance, feeling unaccomplished as well as uncertainties about career progression and employment opportunities in the future. We noted that performance anxiety was not as prevalent among YPs who were still studying.

Overall, YPs expressed needs for good role models or mentors who can provide advice, motivation and support.

4.2.2 Concerns with managing relationship dynamics

Slightly more than half of the YPs described having close relationships with their family members while the other half mentioned their experiences of family conflict/strain. Conversations about negative encounters with older family members tend to be about difficulties in caring for and coping their deteriorating health conditions, receiving disparaging comments about their body image and social pressures to get married, intrusion or loss of personal space at home, and lack of emotional support and understanding. These encounters contributed to limited interactions with older family members as a coping mechanism to avoid conflict.

Aside, a few also mentioned stressors in their romantic relationships because of uncertainties about the future and unresolved emotional traumas. They expressed a desire to learn from older people about developing healthy relationships.

YPs experience with older family members suggest the underlying reasons why younger people express difficulties interacting with older persons and may hesitate to reach out to the latter. Social stressors are not unique to a specific generation and an intergenerational befriending programme could be a potential platform in which older and younger members can learn more from each others' perspectives, develop empathy and understand how to relate to each other better.

4.2.3 Concerns with having safe space and getting reliable and trusted support in social engagements.

More than half of the YPs described having difficulties reaching out to others for support. Reasons cited included discomfort in sharing their thoughts and emotions, past experiences of being dismissed and trivialised, feeling that their issues were petty compared to other peoples' struggles, wanting to be perceived as independent, and not wanting to burden others. YPs' hesitation in seeking support is similar to the issues that older persons have about reaching out to others.

5 Participants' Perception and Experience of Intergenerational Befriending

5.1 Perceptions of the Other Generation (Pre-programme)

Older and younger participants were asked, prior to the programme, to describe their thoughts/perceptions about (i) their own generation and of the other (younger or older) generation. This section describes positive and negative aspects each generation had of themselves and of the other. Both OPs and YPs acknowledged that youths are more educated and had better opportunities compared to older persons. Positive aspects were associated with personal attributes and life outlook. OPs described youths as independent, ambitious, tech-savvy and resourceful, while YPs described older persons as hardworking, honest, helpful, prudent, resilient and respectful. Positive traits such as compassionate and caring were highlighted across both generations.

In terms of negative aspects, OPs associated their generation with deficits in terms of cognition ("forgetful"; "slow"), education ("not smart") and interpersonal attributes ("busybody"; "gossipy"). YPs associated ageing with deficits in terms of health and functional status (i.e., frail, less fit), disposition (i.e., grumpy, stubborn, resistant to change) and outlook in life (i.e., negative, old-fashioned, simple thinking, entitled). Both YPs and OPs perceived youths to be pampered and entitled, but OPs spoke more extensively about youths lacking in social decorum (i.e., no manners, no respect, unsympathetic).

OPs had assumed that young people would view them as boring, not adaptable, not engaging, pitiful, naggy and not enjoyable to be around. These perceptions led OPs to believe that it is difficult to interact or engage youths due to the following factors:

- Youths may not be able to empathise with their age-related, health or social issues.
- Lack of common topics to talk about due to different life stages and backgrounds.
- Completely different worldview resulting in conflict of understanding.
- Youths may look down on them due to their poor health conditions and low socio-economic status.

YPs, on the other hand, felt judged by older persons for being disrespectful, immature, impatient, lazy, naïve, wasteful and having poor communication skills. Although both generations expressed challenges in communicating with the other generation, YPs were more hopeful about finding common ground to connect with older persons. OPs, on the other hand, appeared more fixed in their belief that it is not possible to connect with younger persons.

5.2 Decision to Enrol and Programme Expectations (Pre-programme)

Despite their concerns about interacting with younger people, there were a variety of reasons triggering OPs' decision to enrol in the programme. The majority wanted to try out new activities because "watching TV every day is boring", they had "nothing else to do", while a few were curious about youths and felt that a befriending programme provided them the opportunity to interact with younger people.

In comparison, YPs wanted to try out volunteering and saw the befriending programme as a way to contribute to the community, understand the needs of older persons and gain knowledge about older persons' life experiences. A few YPs were asked to join by programme coordinators or by friends who were already enrolled.

Both OPs and YPs had similar expectations of the programme. OPs expressed interest in making new friends, having someone to talk to, having activities to look forward to, and having someone with whom they can occupy their time so they won't feel bored or alone. Similarly, YPs wanted the experience of befriending older persons and in doing so, hoped that their friendship would help older persons feel less lonely and improve their quality of life. They also hoped to gain knowledge and perspectives about life and living from interacting with older persons.

5.3 Perceived Risks and Benefits of Intergenerational Befriending (Pre-programme)

Both OPs and YPs had similar concerns and aspirations towards intergenerational befriending. Concerns about being rejected or dismissed were shared by both generations. Additionally, participants also had similar notions of how they hoped to contribute to the lives of older or younger people, and the benefits they stood to gain from a successful friendship.

5.3.1 Befriending Youths

OPs were hesitant to make the first move to initiate conversations with youths to avoid rejection. To OPs, younger people tended to get impatient in conversations with older persons, and to get rather defensive with feedback or criticism. Hence it was thought that young people may not be willing to interact with older persons or be interested to receive advice.

At the same time, OPs recognised the benefits of friendship with youths. They cited being able to learn new things such as current affairs, hobbies and the use of simple tech gadgets. Youths could also provide practical assistance such as help with chores, carrying heavy objects, escorting them to appointments, applying for subsidies and linking up with referrals. In exchange, OPs were interested to impart their wisdom, spirituality, traditions, values, as well as pass down knowledge and skills such as cooking and handicrafts. A few were also interested in sharing their autobiography with youths. In terms of suitable activities to be done together with youths, most OPs mentioned having conversations, outings and doing simple exercises with youths. OPs mentioned that intergenerational relationships can flourish if both parties are willing to learn about each other's needs and engage each other's interest. OPs cited patience and acceptance as important virtues to forge intergenerational relationships with youths.

5.3.2 Befriending Older Persons

About 50% of YPs had daily or weekly contact with older persons (i.e., family members) while the other half seldom interacted with older persons. A few had previous experiences volunteering and befriending at nursing homes and senior activity centres. YPs mentioned possible challenges stemming from lack of previous opportunities to meet older persons, lack of common interests due to education and generational gaps, and OPs' (lack of) receptivity to interact with youths. YPs expressed worries about offending older persons with their mannerisms or differing perspectives. YPs were also concerned that friendships with older persons—particularly those who were lonely and seeking companionship—required a huge commitment that they might not be able to fulfil due to busy work and school schedules.

YPs joined the intergenerational befriending programme acknowledging the possibility of benefiting from older person's generativity. They felt that older persons could impart valuable life lessons and virtues such as gratitude, contentment and patience. Most youths wanted to learn from older persons about resilience and perseverance. In exchange, YPs hoped they could help older persons become more positive in their outlook, offer companionship through shared activities and teach them new skills. Some of the activities they would like to do with older persons included sharing meals, engaging in hobby-related activities, art and crafts, engaging conversations and taking walks or going sight-seeing together.

5.4 Reported Benefits of Intergenerational Befriending (Post-Programme)

OPs tended to describe befriending activities as gaining "someone to talk to" or "going for outings" when asked what they had gained from participating in the programme. Such benefits were most evident among the OP-YP pairs who adhered to the recommended befriending commitment of fortnightly or monthly visits. In this study, only five OPs—two from Batch 1 and three from Batch 2—received visits monthly or fortnightly. These OPs felt the most impact to their wellbeing from the programme in terms of feel happier, having a memorable time, getting assistance for buying groceries and moving around in the neighbourhood as well as knowing who to call for help/ support.

"I think it's useful la, if I'm having any troubles, I will just call him [YP partner]. But not asking for any help la, just need help in talking." — OP06

"Participating in this programme is no loss to me. Sometimes if I have things to move, they can do it, they will help. If they can't do it, they will say they can't...They pushed me to the hospital to see my wife." — OP01

At the same time, these gains were only experienced in the immediate to short-term and did not last beyond the end of the programme. During the programme, the five OPs felt supported, comfortable and pleasure in the company of younger befrienders. In this regard, the intergenerational befriending programme met some OPs' expectations in terms of making new friends, having someone to talk to and doing activities to occupy their time. However, their positive experiences with their YPs did not translate to feeling more confident interacting with younger people or further interest in participating in intergenerational programmes.

In comparison, more YPs, including those who did not adhere to the recommended befriending dosage (once every fortnight) felt that they had benefited from participating in the programme. Prior to the programme, YPs who hardly interacted with older family members felt distant from older persons and were convinced that communicating with OPs would be difficult. After completing the programme, the most significant area of change for YPs was developing greater awareness of the issues and challenges that older persons face and being more attuned to age-prejudice in their living environments. YPs also claimed that they have a better understanding of older persons' needs as well as the interest and confidence to interact with older persons. Some have also mentioned a desire to be more involved in volunteering and raising awareness about older persons and social isolation. For the YPs (n=5) who adhered to fortnightly visits, their friendship with their OP partners helped illuminate perspectives on issues they were currently facing such as loneliness, relationship issues, pressure from parents as well as stress from work/school:

It was very meaningful to me. When I was 15, we had to do volunteer activities with the elderly. Nobody provided us much guidance on how to interact with older persons. I'm 15, what would I know? From those experiences, I thought that it would be difficult for me to talk to older [people]. But from this experience, I realise that I can! They're just like any other person. You just have to have a little bit more empathy and see things from their point of view.

I didn't think that I'll be able to interact well with older persons. But through this program, I realised that actually older persons are quite cute also, they do understand our jokes.

Some of them may have mental health issues, where there seems to be barrier that they need to get over. For example, some of them resort to hoarding their belonging and it takes a lot for them to declutter. When we saw the things in OP01 disappear...the decluttering is really a sign that he was improving. I was surprised. It might be that I am putting too much credit to our visits, but I do feel he is a lot happier now.

I recall my interview with the research staff before we started the programme. I thought it was very cliché to say that we would like wise words or advice from older persons. Honestly, based on our experience with the programme, there wasn't much wise words to begin with. But you hear from a different perspective, because he lives in a time different from us. So, the stories he told us about when he was in kampong. Like growing up, the struggles that he had. I wouldn't say they were wise words or anything. But it was helping us to see things from a different perspective, from their perspective.

I was going through a lot in my personal life throughout the programme. Visiting him was something I looked forward to. For two hours, I get to leave my problems aside and focus on someone else. I like that we can make him laugh and smile just by being there, and to show him that there are people who care. He always tells us that its very nice of us to visit him. He didn't think younger people would do that. In his view, society is very harsh. Everything is about money. So, if you don't have money, people won't care about you because that's how his brother or people in his life have been like. For us to come here, to not be paid and also bring food and snacks – it restores his faith in humanity.

He taught me what true love is because honestly my parents are not like that. I feel that a lot of couples...right after they have children, what binds them together are their children. But our OP doesn't have children, yet he is still together with his wife and really does care about her. It's been 40 years...so it's like aww.

Maybe our OP was a special case? I don't know. But I'd like to think that not all older persons are grumpy. That maybe the grumpy, negative ones are the exception and that most are not like that. Our OP changed my perspective of older persons by a lot.

Visiting him has provided routine for my life. During the six months, his place was something I went for regularly. It was more regular than a lot of things in my life. It was consistent. Every two weeks I go. Visiting him, and just being able to hold conversations despite having a difficult day and being able to laugh like nothing is happening in my life...our interactions made me view myself as stronger than I expected. — YP05

To summarize, our findings reveal how the intergenerational befriending programme seem to benefit younger people more than older people, especially in terms of addressing ageist misconceptions, changing their perceptions towards ageing, gaining life perspectives and increased confidence to interact and socialize with older people. In contrast, the programme did not bear any lasting or enduring impact on OPs in terms of changing their ageing perceptions or interest in interacting with younger people.

5.5 Perceived Challenges to Intergenerational Befriending (Post-Programme)

The reasons why the programme seem to benefit YPs more than OPs can be elaborated further in terms of understanding the challenges both generations experienced in the programme. Our study identified several challenges faced by both older and younger participants with regards to intergenerational befriending. These were structured around generational differences, as well as different befriending expectations, which led to disparate boundaries of care and friendship set by both younger and older participants. Some challenges were faced by both groups of participants, while others were specific to either younger or older adults and will be indicated as such.

5.5.1 Communication Barriers in Intergenerational Engagement

In line with their pre-programme concerns, OPs were hesitant to initiate conversations with their youth partners as they were worried about not getting a positive reception. Difficulties in pursuing conversations with younger participants had more to do with not knowing what to talk about or concerns about coming across as uneducated, 'old-fashioned' or offensive. They also perceived that their younger befrienders may not be open to advice from someone less educated, hence there was a tendency to repress their thoughts or sharing advice. Most felt that they were being more accommodating to their younger befrienders' needs and feelings instead of being at ease in expressing their thoughts. In this context, most OPs felt that their needs for friendship was not met because they had to refrain from expressing their thoughts freely and/or there were no common topics of interest to be shared with younger befrienders. In contrast, YPs expressed more ease interacting with OPs even though they cited similar concerns in terms of lack of common interests, differences in values and concerns about offending

older persons with their mannerisms or different perspectives. At the same time, YPs observed that their OPs felt obliged to be polite and accommodating during their visits.

In the case of Mandarin or dialect-speaking older participants, there was an added dimension of language barriers, as they preferred to converse in dialect instead. Younger Chinese participants who could not understand or speak dialect proficiently subsequently struggled with having more in-depth and meaningful conversations. Additionally, the programme had more non-Mandarin speaking YPs than non-Mandarin speaking OPs. As a result, non-Mandarin speaking YPs struggled to be matched with OPs who spoke the same language and had to be paired up with YPs who were conversant in Mandarin, which hampered their ability and interest to participate fully in the programme and reap its benefits.

Technological barriers exacerbated existing communication barriers as well. Most OPs were illiterate and not technologically savvy. Thus, a few YPs struggled with contacting older adults who did not know how to use their phones, save their numbers, or who would not pick up calls due to threat of scams – all of which hindered the scheduling of home visits and maintaining the relationship beyond physical visits.

YPs and OPs faced communication challenges attributed to language and technological barriers, lack of common interests between younger and older participants, and negative misconceptions about the other generation. These factors contributed to less satisfying befriending encounters, described by both generations as “superficial”, “not meaningful” or “not engaging”. Some interactions were especially noted by YPs as “awkward”, “silent”, or “forced”. This experience demoralized and discouraged YPs in their intergenerational befriending efforts.

“If [the youth] feels uncomfortable, she will sit elsewhere. Then she looks at her water and does this. Then she will show her face like [she is bored]. She’s not good at making conversations lah. She’s not smart at that. There are some that are clever at making conversations, they will ask about the situation in Singapore, how’s life, this and that...”
— OP20

“I don’t know how to talk to these young people, very difficult to communicate with them. If I call and say ‘hello’ over the phone, I don’t know what to say.” — OP03

Communication challenges reflect the importance of including a learning component in intergenerational befriending programmes. Doing so may help older and younger participants understand the characteristics and needs of the different generations and how to speak to those concerns, including how to initiate and maintain conversations, pick up on nonverbal cues and emotions, and address misconceptions linked to the different generations. Additional learning topics may include guidance on the use of smart phones (for OPs) and awareness of older persons’ challenges with technology and how to navigate such situations (for YPs).

5.5.2 Understanding and Supporting Older Persons with Health and Mobility Limitations

Negotiating older persons' health and mobility limitations was a significant challenge for the young and old alike. YPs shared with us their lack of awareness of their older partners' health and mobility limitations when planning for activities or outings. Owing to the lack of exposure interacting with older persons with health and mobility issues, YPs missed out on enquiring about OPs' difficulties. In addition, and on most occasions, OPs also did not communicate their limitations to avoid being perceived as a burden.

As a result, some YPs had suggested activities without consideration to the difficulties that some OPs had when getting out of their homes. In turn, OPs with mobility and health issues — such as difficulties walking and standing without feeling pain and/or fatigue — felt embarrassed and confronted by their limitations each time their younger partners suggested doing activities outside of their homes. On a few occasions, YPs noted that they only realized OPs difficulties during or after planned outings as such needs were not communicated earlier. This can cause avoidable pain and guilt on the part of both parties:

"I think during the first outing, we didn't anticipate she would have issues so we walked a lot. And then [OP] said, after I called her to check in, that everything was fine. But she had to apply ointment to her back and her legs because it was a bit painful after the outing" — YP14

YPs also struggled with making journeys out of home easy, comfortable and accessible for OPs. They had to re-evaluate what they took for granted, for example usual or common transport routes in consideration of OPs needs for assistance. In multiple instances, outside-of-home activities could not be carried out due to OP's health and mobility issues. Thus, activities were limited to conversations at OP's home.

"They say they want to bring me out, I say cannot leh. If I walk halfway, I have to sit on wheelchair. They say, if I have wheelchair, they said they can push me."
— OP01

"That's why old people do not like going out. They find it very troublesome to take public transport. Some of the participants are very old, it's very troublesome. You need to change bus and all that [sighs]." — OP16

Greater awareness of existing and potential environmental barriers, as well as health limitations, would allow YPs and OPs to plan and carry out suitable out-of-home activities. Programme facilitators can support befriending participants by raising awareness of such challenges as a learning component of intergenerational programmes.

5.5.3 Managing Differing Expectations and Ambiguous Boundaries of Care and Friendship

a. Expected befriending frequency conflicts with younger persons' capacity and availability

As conveyed in the programme scope, OPs had expected their younger befrienders to be proactive about initiating and arranging visits, and planning activities. In reality, however, some OPs expressed that their YPs had other priorities that took precedence, such as work or school activities, and visits were often scheduled and postponed or completely stopped. Several younger participants were going

through major life transitions during the programme duration. Some were graduating, starting a new job, entering university or national service; all of which compromised their ability to commit to the programme. The effect was exacerbated further by long commutes to OPs' residence:

"...work got a little bit busy. There was also a period of time where, uh, I started working again, then work got a bit busy... uh, but I always thought about [my OP] and wanted to like visit him again lah" — YP23

Furthermore, some YPs found that the OPs either forgot or confused schedules, leading to miscommunication or misunderstanding about the pre-agreed upon event. YPs had to provide regular reminders for OPs in the lead up to activities, which did not always work:

"So, after that experience right, when I know we will be meeting soon, I'll call one week in advance. Then when the date gets nearer, I'll let her know every day – three to four days before the date. But sometimes it doesn't work. The OP will say ok, but she will call me one day before, asking if I were coming that day. You need to sometimes remind her, because she will forget sometimes. She may remember the actual date, but she may forget the actual timing." — YP18

We also found that OPs were generally cognizant of and accommodating to young people's need for space and time to fulfil their self-care needs, work or study commitments:

"He said that sometimes he might not have time to come over because of exams. So, I told him then he shouldn't come. Only when he has time then he come... When he has exams then should go and study, don't come over. Then it will not be taking up his time... If he has to rush back to study, then it will be troublesome, so I told them not to come. He called me twice." — OP03

"When they start working, then cannot la. Hor? They also have to care for themselves mah. It's like that. We understand. We can't ask them not to work and come here. How can we do that?" — OP01

However, it is important to note that most OPs in the programme self-reported as being lonely and decided to enrol into the befriending programme to interact with younger people. Their expectations were mismatched with the level of engagement that YPs could offer. Some OPs felt that they were not in the position to communicate their needs for more engagement given that most OPs felt that YPs' other life priorities took precedence:

"I keep thinking maybe she busy. That is my only thought. Maybe she busy with school and work so have no time. But I don't know, cannot be that she busy 24/7 right. I sent her the picture we took when we were eating all. Yeah, after that, nothing already. That's why. It's so hard to understand. No matter how busy you are, why can't you just ask me a question asking how I am? Why can't they do that? I understand she is schooling while working. But for just one minute, why cannot?" — OP21

b. Unspoken social expectations around hosting guests

Female OPs tended to express pressure on their part to be a good host and to make their younger befrienders feel comfortable in their homes. Being a good host meant respecting one's guest, sometimes to the degree that OP's own needs can be compromised and remain unexpressed. In one example and due to a lack of privacy in her one-room rental flat, a female OP who was wheelchair-bound did not want her YP befriender to see her being undressed and assisted to go to the bathroom. She preferred to relieve herself only after her YP partner left. If she had conveyed her needs to her befriender, her discomfort could have been avoided:

"When there's guest, we must take care of them, respect them right? So, we are shy to use the toilet. We're like that, once people leave, then [OP20] will say: I want to go to the toilet." — OP20's caregiver

In another example, a female OP felt obligated to cook for her YP befrienders because she viewed them as guests, plus they had suggested cooking as an activity. At the same time, expectations about who was responsible for which task, or bear the costs for groceries were not discussed upfront leading to disappointment. The OP eventually withdrew from the programme because she felt that the befriending entailed more effort on her end, without much reciprocity from her YP befrienders:

"To be honest, now I am not working and nobody is giving me money. If have to spend ten dollars plus buying things, every week buy, I would not be able to. If you guys want me to teach you then you guys should buy the things over here to cook. Teach you guys to cook and you will eat the food. Then still ok... Still want us to cook and buy the ingredients for you guys to eat. After eating, then you guys just left without doing anything. Of course, I don't want." — OP03

On the other hand, her YP befrienders were not aware that these encounters were reasons why their OP had dropped out. In post-programme interviews, they mentioned how friendly and hospitable their OP was, and how they had a positive experience cooking with her. We noted that the YPs were not aware of the decorum expected out of them, for instance, volunteering to purchase the groceries, bringing food for OP to try or helping to clean up. They also mentioned that they had expected to bring their OP out to purchase the groceries, but she had already bought them when they arrived.

The examples above highlight the important role of programme coordinators in terms of helping younger participants be aware of social expectations and older persons needs in terms of home visits, and to be forthcoming about cost of activities including who pays for them.

c. Ambiguity around terms of befriending

Across the duration of the six-month programme, difficulties, crises situations or major life transitions can occur to any age-group, let alone vulnerable, socially isolated older persons. Due to the lack of guidance concerning the terms of befriending their OPs, YPs did not have clarity on how they should respond when their older person faced actual difficulties or crisis situations. Nor were they aware of available resources or social aid available to support their OPs. YPs felt that they had to take on the issues on their own. Some in fact overpromised by offering support and assistance to their OPs but failed to deliver, leading to OPs' disappointment. The scope of assistance required was often felt to be beyond what YPs could help with (e.g. dealing with family conflict). Yet YPs were left to feel helpless and uncertain as to what they can do to act on their concern for their older partner:

"I felt like I'm not sure how close, like how much responsibility I can take for an elderly that I would deem as a friend but might not so... like family. Our OP and his wife, they don't have any children to depend on or close relationships with other family members. That time when his wife was hospitalized and all, it made me think. What if both of them fell ill and all, how can we help, and how should we help when we don't have the resources and all? We didn't feel like we had much support in following up with the concerns we had about caring for our OP." — YP07

While programme coordinators may have reiterated that the scope of the programme is fundamentally social befriending rather than service-oriented volunteerism, YPs struggled to maintain boundaries of friendship and care especially when their older participants came with a complex set of unfulfilled needs. A significant number of OPs expected their younger befrienders to assist them with their instrumental needs such as buying groceries, running errands and medical escort. Although functional assistance was not part of the programme scope, YPs felt obliged to help their OPs to avoid being perceived negatively. This had resulted in YPs avoiding or reducing contact with their OPs when they felt overly burdened by requests for assistance.

Some YPs also reported feeling guilt for enforcing strict boundaries (e.g. scheduling activities and visiting duration) due to their lack of bandwidth/competencies to do more for their OP:

"Then every time we leave, we feel very sorry, because like we need to leave already, then the next time we meet it'll be like the next two weeks, because we also have our own school and all. So, also cannot meet too often." — YP07

At the same time, guilt can drive YPs to overcompensate. In some cases, YPs tended to make a special effort to defer to the older person, compromise own preferences and choose to keep their feelings private to avoid hurting the feelings of their older partner:

"I don't feel comfortable to tell my OP that I was very sad that she didn't want to accept my suggestions. I have to agree to her suggestions even if I don't want to because I [didn't] want to upset her. I don't want her to feel that way. I want her to really enjoy, and not do something that she doesn't want to, just because of me." — YP12

In a similar effort to accommodate older person's demands, some YPs made promises that they did not follow through with, such as buying meals, or helping with errands because they were uncomfortable rejecting requests in the moment.

5.6 Disappointment and Dissatisfaction with Intergenerational Befriending Programme

The lack of clarity about befriending scope, mismatched social and personal expectations and ambiguity about terms of befriending contributed to disappointment and dissatisfaction with the intergenerational befriending programme from both younger and older participants.

Many OPs expressed disappointment and frustration that their needs for functional support were not met. Most of the OPs may have been more familiar with befriending structure of Values-in-Action programmes typically managed by educational institutions in Singapore which includes elements of service through friendship.

Dissatisfaction towards the programme was also linked to quantity and quality of interactions and activities. A majority of OPs expressed ambivalence and/or indifference to the presence of YPs in their lives for the duration of the programme. Phone calls or visits were generally felt to be either too little or inconsistent to make a lasting impact in their lives or lead to an enduring friendship beyond the programme.

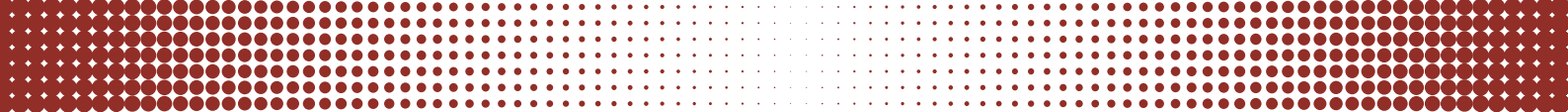
“There are lonely youths, and there are lonely old men, and old lady. If they talk and meet frequently, these old men and old lady, sometimes they will start seeing the youth like their grandchild. That sort of feeling is important. Then the youth will also think the same way: I have this old man here, who is like my grandpa. So, this is the way befriending can work. Not we meet once, twice... then how can you expect the program to work?” — OP10

In comparison, YPs were generally invested in the success of the programme’s goal of alleviating social isolation amongst older persons even amidst their busy schedules. Thus, their disappointments related to how they felt they lacked guidance and support needed to reach that goal.

YPs pointed out that the programme lacked supporting guidelines and requirements that could help them better understand the befriending scope. Programme objectives and terms of engagement for befriending were not defined and spelt out unequivocally to YPs and OPs before or during the programme. While the objective of the programme is to depart from a more prescriptive and structured format, YPs expressed that they could have benefited more from the programme had there been clarity about their roles as befrienders vis-à-vis service volunteers engaged to provide functional support such as assisting with errands and medical escort. Some YPs who committed to regular engagements with their OPs were also dismayed to learn about differing levels of commitment among their peers. One YP felt bad for another OP she met, who expressed sadness and disappointment that their assigned YP partner had not initiated contact or made the effort to visit, despite reaching the end of programme.

YPs also expressed wanting more autonomy and flexibility in terms of scheduling because they felt that having to visit every fortnight felt “like a chore” and made them “very stressed out” about adhering to the frequency.

Difficult I think to keep strictly to once every two weeks. Because if it’s like a bonding programme right. I don’t think it should be following a fixed schedule. It’s just you free then go lah. Don’t make it a stressful thing like oh my god I have to go this Sunday. If not, I’ll get scolded by somebody that kind. It feels like a – that makes it like a job. Like I’m a social worker going to check on him. He himself isn’t even particular about it. — YP05



The success of intergenerational engagement depends on participants having clarity towards the scope of intergenerational befriending programmes, specifically in terms of the commitment and role expected out of both younger and older participant. This can be delineated by programme parameters and supported by programme coordinators. A loose programme structure that was intended to promote flexibility and autonomy in intergenerational engagement can be reinforced through active guidance from programme coordinators.

When support gaps exist, with no one guiding participants on programme expectations and boundaries of intergenerational engagement, both older and younger participants will likely struggle with (i) navigating and managing each other's different expectations of befriending, (ii) understanding complex and evolving needs and (iii) setting boundaries and terms of engagement. Our study findings demonstrate how the above factors made intergenerational befriending too much of a challenge for both younger and older participants, contributing to dissatisfaction with the programme.

6 Translating Participants' Experience into an Asset-Based Intergenerational Befriending Programme Design

As the literature suggests, and as corroborated by our study findings, building collaborative and reciprocal relationships between younger and older people can strengthen intergenerational cohesion and social inclusion. Local models of intergenerational befriending need to move away from a benefactor (younger volunteers) – beneficiary (older persons) model to an intergenerational practice framework that emphasizes personal and community empowerment. Harnessing the generational potential of both younger and older persons requires a programme framework that values the diverse capabilities and wisdom that individuals across different generations possess. Based on our evaluation findings, we recommend the use of asset-based framework to drive intergenerational practice. An asset-based framework focuses on what people can contribute to intergenerational relationships through 'gifts' rather than 'needs' (Klee et al., 2014). By recognizing what both the young and old can offer to connect and learn from each other, we are proposing a framework to enhance existing intergenerational befriending practices (IBP) in community settings:

- **Asset mapping of programme participants and community resources**
 - o Recruitment of younger and older participants residing in the same community to reduce time and energy spent commuting and to facilitate convenience for visits, meet-ups, group and community activities
 - Understand participants' backgrounds, interests, and motivations for joining the programme to facilitate asset mapping
 - Match participants and activities based on needs, existing capacities, interests and life stages
 - Information should be shared with their potential partner and used to facilitate interactions and activities planning.
 - o Identify and map out existing community networks, facilities and programmes that can support IBP in the community
- **Assess participants' needs and eligibility for an intergenerational befriending programme**
 - o Needs assessment can be conducted and utilized to identify areas of met/unmet needs among older participants to make appropriate referrals to other community partners and gauge suitability for IBP
 - Existing unmet needs, if not addressed or supported, can hinder positive intergenerational interactions
 - o Better understanding of older and younger participants' needs and capacities can be used to facilitate matching of befriending pairs/ groups and provide adequate befriending training and support.
- **Ongoing intergenerational group learning activities/ workshops to equip participants with tools and resources to facilitate befriending and understanding of different generations**
 - o Intergenerational workshop to identify possible challenges such as generation gap, language barriers, digital literacy gaps, transport and accessibility of venue, physical limitations (for e.g., vision or hearing impairment), mobility issues and how to navigate these challenges

- o Workshop should provide participants with the following:
 - Briefing on programme objectives, parameters, and what the befriender role entails. These should be thoroughly explained to participants to ensure that they have a clear understanding of how the programme runs, and what is expected of them, and how they can be supported.
 - Training on how to support and communicate with the other generation
 - Skills on how to communicate one's needs to their partners, as well as how they can seek help from programme coordinators or community partners should such needs arise, and for referrals to appropriate services and agencies
 - Include examples of intergenerational differences, how one can navigate those differences, and how the programme coordinators can support them if needed.
 - Training in cultural competency:
 - Guidance for communicating with someone from a different generation. For example, being attuned to the needs of older and younger people, the social decorum when in someone's home, or interpersonal skills in group and one-on-one settings.
 - To promote social inclusion and cultural diversity, the workshop may include an introduction to different cultural norms in Singapore, and how one can understand or navigate around those practices when matched or paired with individuals from other ethnic groups.
 - Safety protocols, escalation SOPs, and ability to identify and manage physical and health risks (e.g., falls prevention) especially during activities and home visits
 - Older persons may have chronic pains and/or mobility limitations including low standing tolerance. Equip younger persons with the proper knowledge to assist older persons with mobility issues when and if necessary, while also remaining sensitive to older persons' sense of pride and dignity.
 - The programme coordinator can also highlight ways in which befrienders can seek assistance (e.g., getting a wheelchair, hiring a suitable transport).
 - Group or paired-learning to bridge the digital literacy gap or enhance digital literacy
 - Connect with partners such as Seniors Go Digital programme to enhance older persons' digital literacy and, for those who are eligible, obtain subsidized access to smartphones and data plans
 - Introduce older persons to other ways to keep in touch with partners in-between visits, such as phone calls, messaging, or online video conferencing apps, with consideration to older persons' limitations such as functional impairment (e.g. poor hearing and eyesight)
 - Respecting older person's choice of low-tech communication and use low-tech options to maintain relations.

- **Consideration towards hidden costs of participating in IBPs**
 - o Mutual reciprocity is fundamental to building good relationships between generations, thus finances should not be a hindrance to social participation within the scope of IBPs.
 - o While programmes may entail no cost to participation, older persons may feel pressured to be a good host and compensate by providing meals for guests. For older persons from low-income backgrounds, hidden costs in terms of hosting guests may be taxing in the long run. Also, younger persons with limited finances may find it difficult to reciprocate older persons' hospitable gestures.
 - o Programme coordinators need to ensure activities do not amount to additional burdens to those with limited financial means.
- **Befriending to link older persons to existing community networks and services**
 - o Befrienders need to be trained in providing emotional support to older persons as well as have some resources to link up or refer older persons with unmet needs to agencies who can provide assistance.
- **Curate meaningful and engaging activities that promote social inclusion, generativity, confidence and positive self-image across generations**
 - o Organise activities that engage both older and younger persons, i.e. novel activities that touch on their shared interest and life experience. These activities foster intergenerational cohesion.
 - o Provide guidelines on a wide range of activities (at home and out-of-home) that cater to participants from both generations, across different functional capacities and cognitive abilities.
 - o To promote generativity and reciprocity: encourage collaboration on projects or activities that involve the different generations working together towards common goals. Activities can be facilitated by either younger or older participants, and not necessarily led by younger persons all the time.
 - o To create opportunities for knowledge exchange across generations. Activities will need to include elements in which older persons can still contribute to the youth and/or community at large in their current capacity. For younger persons, to ensure that there are opportunities to learn from and forge friendships with elders as opposed to being perceived as a service volunteer.
 - o While going outside of the home can help to reduce boredom and isolation, it is also equally, if not more important (especially concerning frail older persons) to come up with creative and interesting activities that can be conducted in the comfort of the older persons' home, for e.g., art jam, watching a short film, karaoke.
 - o Life stage matching or age appropriateness for certain activities need to be fully considered:
 - For home visits and conversations, older persons prefer younger people in their 30s to 50s who they view may have gone through life experiences they are familiar with such as working, having a family and caring for an older person. Younger people who are ≤ 30 years old were perceived as "too young" and "lacking maturity" and the generation gap was too vast to make conversations interesting, meaningful and engaging enough to learn from each other.

- Younger people under 30 years old may be more suited to participate in intergenerational community activities with older persons such as group excursions, exercise and fitness and intergenerational workshops. With increased exposure, rapport and confidence, participation in group intergenerational activities can progress to home befriending visits.
 - o Older persons may also prefer group settings for social interactions as those tend to be more lively. Group settings can also improve quality of interactions because attention can be diverted away from specific individuals, and extroverts in group settings can galvanise others to make interactions livelier. Group settings also allow interactions within and between different generations.
 - o For younger persons, group befriending relieves the pressure of carrying out befriending activities alone and without peer support. Group sessions can also promote friendships among youths and incentivise them to participate in community activities.
- **Flexibility in programming, without compromising participants' needs and capacities during befriending**
 - o Befriending frequency needs to be matched to older persons' needs and preferences and younger persons' commitment levels and capacity.
 - o Set a minimum no. of required visits per month.
 - o Tap on a network of volunteers for rotation, especially for volunteers who cannot commit to the minimum no. of visits.
 - o Set recommended visiting times that do not coincide with older persons' personal and private time (e.g., time for prayers, meals, showering and toileting).
 - o Set a recommended minimum duration for each visit.
 - o Allow for group activities with more than one older person and younger person engaging each other.
 - o Allow younger and older people to choose their befriending partners, as opposed to allocating partners. This could enable intergenerational connections borne out of personal interest.
 - o Leverage existing community events to organize group activities with other befriending dyads to build camaraderie and intergenerational cohesion.
 - **Programme support**
 - o At its base, intergenerational befriending programmes require the support of minimally a full-time Programme Coordinator (PC) situated within a community centre or active ageing centre
 - PCs should have experience and familiarity working with both older and younger persons.
 - PCs should be able to foster strong links with community partners to facilitate outreach and recruitment as well as service referrals where necessary.
 - Have regular check-ins with participants to maintain oversight on existing and anticipated challenges and provide support.
 - Facilitate the organization of group befriending activities based on participants' suggestions.

7 Conclusion

The practice of intergenerational befriending is not a simple matter of putting younger and older persons together in a programme, then expecting meaningful relationships to blossom without support from programme coordinators and the larger community.

In this brief, we have illustrated how mismatched needs/concerns, expectations and commitment in older and younger persons can manifest, if unaddressed, into conflict and further misunderstandings about the other generation within an intergenerational befriending programme. In our study, we found that the programme seems to have benefited younger persons more than their older counterparts especially in terms of addressing age-related prejudice or misconceptions, even among those who reported unsuccessful relationship-building attempts. At the same time, conversations with younger and older participants suggested a desire for sustained and meaningful engagement that entailed both generations collaborating and learning from each other beyond superficial interactions during home visits. As our findings suggest, unsuccessful attempts at intergenerational befriending stem from the perception that the relationship was one-sided and/or what was expected out of the perceived terms of engagement superseded the capacity of the other to provide. A number of things can be done to better support successful intergenerational befriending efforts.

Most saliently, intergenerational befriending efforts need to move away from the asymmetrical young person benefactor-old person beneficiary model. Programme coordinators can design a facilitated process that supports cross-generational understanding and respect by helping both YPs and OPs recognize from the start that both parties have needs to meet and skills to offer that could fill those needs. Based on our recommendation, an asset-based approach can be adopted to address age-prejudice and generation gap. Through an asset-based model, the old and young alike have equal opportunity to offer their skills or interests as assets to function as teacher/organiser/benefactor or receive as learner/participant/beneficiary. The relational dynamic cultivated between old and young in such programmes would then be a two-way generative process that promotes reciprocal and collaborative engagement and deepen solidarity between the generations.

Facilitating such a two-way generative process can be challenging when working with vulnerable older persons with complex financial, caregiving, social and/or health needs, and young people with limited bandwidth due to pressing work, school and family commitments. As such, programme coordinators working on befriending between youths and vulnerable older persons might find it useful to ensure the following:

1. Clear terms of engagements from the beginning defining what YPs/OPs should or should not do for the other party in the befriending process.
2. The YP's interest and ability to commit to a pre-set number of befriending activities over the duration of the programme;
3. The YP's/OP's ability to know and express their own needs, draw and respect boundaries with persons of the other generation through training and the guidance of programme coordinators;
4. The role of programme coordinators to provide emotional and informational support for both YPs and OPs, and refer vulnerable OPs to relevant agencies or community services where necessary.

The success and sustainability of intergenerational befriending practices necessitates that programme elements and outcomes are aligned to the needs and expectations of both generations. Questions of who benefits from intergenerational practice, how they will benefit, what is needed to ensure both generations benefit and how benefits can extend to the wider community needs to be central to the design and implementation of intergenerational practice.

Appendix

Table 1. List of some current and proposed intergenerational programmes in Singapore as of January 2024

Organisation	Programme	Duration of interaction	Objectives
Community Service (Young benefactor-Old adult beneficiary model)			
Ministry of Education – schools in partnership with community organisations	Values in Action (VIA)	1 time	Young mobilised to meet unmet needs of vulnerable older persons in the community. Schools work with community organisations to identify older persons in need of support.
Agency for Integrated Care	Youth Hope Programme	Varied – dependent on specific initiatives and goals.	Empower and support youths to start-up community-based efforts that support seniors and persons with dementia. Targeted seniors framed to be those “lacking in energy” and isolated”, and thus in need of youthful intervention to energise and enable. Billed as an intergenerational bonding programme that benefits both young (“lacking in self-esteem”) and old.
Youth Corp	Yolden (YOUTH and gOLDEN) Programme	4 months	Youth-led effort aims to enhance intergenerational bonds between older persons in nursing homes and youth volunteers. Regular visits and shared activities are organised to meet physical and psychosocial needs of older persons
Youth Corp	Engaging Youths, Empowering Older persons (EYES)	11 weeks	Befriending programme led by youths. Targets older persons identified to be at risk of socially isolated. Involves regular visits over 11 weeks before taking older person out on outings or shared activities.
Central CDC	Silver Homes	Short-term	Youth-volunteers are mobilised to assist in home-improvement works (spring cleaning, painting, pest treatment, shifting of or disposal of mattresses/bed frames) that enhance the living environment of disadvantaged

Organisation	Programme	Duration of interaction	Objectives
			older persons. Goal: improve mental and physical wellbeing of disadvantaged older persons.
Council for Third Age (C3A)	Intergenerational Learning Programme (ILP)	1-time	Young people, in partnership with community organisations or schools, offer courses that older persons can take up. The broad aim that governs the courses under ILP is that older persons get to acquire new knowledge or skills, and the young get to develop character. Courses offered relate to music, art, smartphone use, history-tours, sport and cooking.
Mentorship – Seniors impart advice to young (Old benefactor-young beneficiary)			
The Organisation of Senior Volunteers (RSVP)	Mentorship programme	Regular – older persons meet pupils at regular, appointed times.	After-school programme hosted at various primary schools in Singapore; older persons are assigned to mentor at-risk primary school children from low-income families.
Asset-based (old-young mutual beneficiaries model)			
Ministry of Education – schools like MGS	Intergenerational Learning (IGL)	One-time events	Utilises an asset-based design approach to facilitate intergenerational learning over activities or workshops involving values and skills exchange between young and old. Some activities have included senior-led art, cooking, farming and nature photography workshops; youth-led ukulele workshops; other shared activities around festive celebrations, sports and art.
Eldercare centred Intergenerational Programmes (older person-children mutual beneficiaries)			
NTUC Health Senior Day Care Centres	Intergenerational activities	Regular - Involving select daily programmes	Context: Senior Care centre and Childcare centres are co-located (e.g. at Kampong Admiralty). Involving pre-school children in activities primarily catered to seniors. Aimed to “help seniors be more engaged, raise their self-esteem”, while pre-schoolers gain affection from seniors, learn “values of respect, compassion and concern for elderly.”

Organisation	Programme	Duration of interaction	Objectives
St Joseph's Home	Intergenerational Programmes	Regular - Involving select daily activities co-organised by childcare and eldercare staff.	Context: Eldercare facilities and Childcare services are co-located at the same facility in Jurong West. Children and nursing home residents celebrate important milestones (e.g. Kindergarten graduation, gym progression), festivals together. Intergenerational curriculum means older persons are engaged to teach art, arithmetic, music, language etc to children. Children and older persons co-participate in daily activities such as music-making, games or sport.
Age Well SG/2023 Action Plan-Proposed intergenerational programmes			
Ministry of Health/Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) — situated at AACs	Silver Generation Volunteer Fund	Regular – young and old volunteers are expected to be regularly involved in support of AACs.	Funds are slated to be set aside for recruitment/development of senior and young volunteers in their community. Young and old volunteers will work together to engage older persons through activities, in close cooperation with the neighbourhood AAC. Training of these volunteers will be provided by AIC.
Ministry of Education – schools in partnership with community-based SSAs	Update to current Values in Action (VIA)	Regular – as with the RSVP programme, mentorship is likely to take place regularly at appointed timeslots.	Mobilising of older persons to offer career guidance to youths in schools in the community.
Sports SG/Ministry of Health	Active Silver Hub/Active X	One-time events	Young and old are brought together to interact through fun sporting/exercise activities. Activities are led and facilitated professionally. Young and old act as beneficiary-participants. Active X was launched on 3 Aug 2023. Will be rolled out to AACs and schools across the island.
Ground-up Intergenerational programmes (young benefactor - old person beneficiary)			
#KampongKakis	#KampongKakis	Varied – engagement would depend on the nature of the older person's need, and on both parties.	Neighbourhood buddy system that recruits and matches younger volunteers with socially isolated and frail seniors based on proximity, assistance needed and spoken language. Volunteers are then expected to connect, extend help to matched beneficiary, and potentially build neighbourly relations over time. Community partners help identify the people in need. Currently operational in Jurong West, Toa Payoh and Ang Mo Kio.

Table 2. Participant's eligibility criteria (both programme and evaluation study)

Older Persons	Youths
1. 60 years old and above	1. 18-35 years old
2. Resides in the East of Singapore	2. Willing to travel to the East of Singapore
3. Mobile or semi-ambulant	3. Willing to visit/ travel to older persons' homes
4. Living alone	4. Can respond to interviews and participate in activities independently without a guardian
5. No cognitive impairment (AMT score >7)	5. Interested to interact with older persons
6. 3-item UCLA Loneliness scale as a method to assess level of loneliness	
7. Interested to interact with youths	

Table 3. Demographic profile of Older Participants

Variables	n	%
Age group	14	
60 to 64	2	14.3
65 to 69	1	7.1
70 to 74	2	14.3
75 to 79	2	14.3
80 to 84	4	28.6
85 to 89	2	14.3
90 to 95	1	7.1
Gender	14	
Male	4	28.6
Female	10	71.4
Ethnicity	14	
Chinese	11	78.6
Malay	3	21.4
Marital Status	14	
Widowed	6	42.9
Married	3	21.4
Single	4	28.6
Divorced	1	7.1
Household Type	14	
3-room Purchased	4	28.6
1-room Rental	10	71.4
Living Arrangement	14	
Alone	10	71.4
With Spouse	2	14.3
With Sibling	1	7.1
With FDW	1	7.1
Perceived Income Adequacy	14	
Sufficient	11	78.6
Insufficient	3	21.4

Table 4. Demographic profile of Young Participants

Variables	n	%
Age group	18	
18 to 19	2	11
20 to 24	10	56
25 to 29	4	22
30 to 34	1	5.5
35 to 39	1	5.5
Gender	18	
Male	4	22
Female	14	78
Ethnicity	18	
Chinese	13	72
Malay	3	17
Indian	1	5.5
Indonesian	1	5.5
Highest Qualification	18	
Secondary	2	11
Diploma and Professional Qualification	16	89
Education Status	18	
Part-time Student	5	28
Full-time Student	7	39
Graduated	6	33
Field of Study (n=16)	18	
Psychology	6	37.5
Business and Finance	3	18.8
Occupational Therapy	2	12.5
Gerontology	1	6.25
Sociology	1	6.25
Tourism & Hospitality	2	12.5
Others	1	6.25
Employment Status	18	
Not Working	9	50
Part-time; Freelance/Intern	6	33
Full-time	3	17
Additional Income Source	18	
Family	9	50
Part-time	6	33
Full-time	3	17
Perceived Income Adequacy	18	
Sufficient	15	83
Insufficient	3	17
Living Arrangement	18	
Staying with Family	17	94
Staying Alone	1	6

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- Implement and evaluate best practices to improve health and function of older adults
- Inform policy and practice agenda on ageing

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Authors

Dr Ad Maulod

Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Ageing Research and Education, Duke-NUS Medical School

Wong Yunjie

Research Assistant, Centre for Ageing Research and Education, Duke-NUS Medical School

Sasha Rouse

Research Associate, Centre for Ageing Research and Education, Duke-NUS Medical School

For more information, please contact:

Centre for Ageing Research and Education (CARE)

Duke-NUS Medical School

8 College Road

Singapore 169857

Email: care@duke-nus.edu.sg

**Centre for Ageing Research and Education (CARE)
Duke-NUS Medical School**

8 College Road, Singapore 169857
www.duke-nus.edu.sg/care
Email: care@duke-nus.edu.sg