

Social Activities in Late Life

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The whole philosophy of SAGE is to keep our senior citizens healthy, active and happy through meaningful activities. SAGE activities rest on five pillars. They are:

- a) SAGE Helpline and Counselling Service Centre
- b) Employment Service Centre
- c) SAGE Centre for the Study of Ageing (CENSA)
- d) Life-Long Learning Centre (LLL Centre)
- e) Recreational and Cultural Activities' Centre

Before going in detail about the work of our various centres, I shall first describe the concept behind SAGE. In late life, there is a need for leisure, educational and back-to-work programmes to enable our senior citizens to make productive and fruitful use of the increased amount of leisure which they have on their hands. Senior citizens have to remain active in order to retain function, maintain independence and self-direction.

Research indicates that individuals who characteristically maintain extensive social contacts, engage in regular and vigorous physical activities and who pursue emotionally and intellectually stimulating activities are those who age most successfully.

After health and finances, the third most significant problem among the elderly is how to utilise the increased amount of leisure time. There is a need for leisure education and leisure programmes for the elderly.

Sage helpline and counselling service centre

The SAGE Helpline and Counselling Centre is unique in Singapore as it is the only helpline and counselling service devoted solely to alleviating the problems of the elderly.

The number of helpline calls received by the centre for the year April 1997 to March 1998 was 4,034. The presenting problems were: psychological 10.8%, relationship 19.0%, material 5.1%, social 44.8%, health 8.2% and general enquiries 20.4%.

The number of clients needing face-to-face counselling for the year April 1997 to March 1998 was 321. The problems were psychological 28.6%, relationship 57.3%, material 46.1%, social 2.4%, health 30.1%, others 6.3% and abuse 1.0%.

Volunteerism in late life

SAGE Counselling Centre has a recruitment

training, re-motivation and retention of older volunteers program. It seeks to make volunteerism part and parcel of an ageing lifestyle.

Volunteerism is to be regarded as an antidote of loneliness and as a means of instilling a sense of usefulness and self-respect. It may also serve to compensate for the sources of formal learning and social integration.

The elderly is a unique repository of cultural experiences, the transmission of which enhances the well-being of all generations. We need to combat stereotypes that the elderly are unfit or obsolete on the basis of their age. Such attitudes may hinder proper utilisation of a resource we can ill afford to lose. The challenge in the field of volunteerism parallels that in the employment sector and it consists in convincing program administrators that older persons can learn new skills as readily as younger persons and that any loss in their productive performance may be due to age rather than intelligence, motivation or personal aspirations.

Employment service centre

In 1994, SAGE was appointed as a co-ordinator to provide employment services to senior citizens at a meeting chaired by MCD and attended by representatives from MOL and PA. Since then, SAGE has been performing this function.

The next three decades will be characterised by two significant trends worldwide. They are the global ageing population and the major advances in technology which will continue to transform the educational process and workplace. Our nation will encounter these problems sooner rather than later compared to other countries because we have one of the fastest ageing population and are a leading adopter of advance technology.

Singapore has a very limited manpower pool and full employment. If these trends continue, the pressure for us to remain competitive will increase if the ageing population, who are also expected to live longer, retire and become a burden to the younger population.

The special needs of this job placement scheme for our senior citizens which are required to be addressed include:

- Helping the elderly to adjust to post-retirement and re-employment by advising them to set reasonable expectations for themselves, making

them aware of employer's concerns and presenting the various avenues available to them to remain economically active (such as entrepreneurship, part-time employment, job-sharing, etc);

- Promote volunteering among the elderly in volunteer welfare organisations;
- Educating the employers of the various schemes in place to make the elderly more competitive (compared with the younger work force) and in the management of the elderly such as job training, suitability of assignments and motivation;
- Reassure employers by making them aware of the safety net available in counselling for the elderly;
- Promoting schemes (such as job sharing etc) which are mutually attractive to both the employer and employee;
- Allaying fears that employers have, on the increased medical cost of employing the elderly;
- Advertise jobs suitable for the elderly that are placed by the companies;
- Advertise special skills groups (organised by the elderly themselves) available to companies;
- Promote continuing education, retraining and motivation;
- Provide social support groups for mutual self-help among the elderly;
- Provide counselling in cases of distress and advising the elderly on their rights in case of abuse.

Finally, increasing the economically active life span of the elderly and organising them to help themselves will result in their overall well-being (emotional, mental and physical) and thus lead to a lowering of overall healthcare costs. The economic contribution and its subsequent multiplier effect may then serve to increase the GDP of our nation provide every elderly, even as they live longer, with the opportunity to grow old gracefully and make Singapore the best home for both the elderly and the young alike.

SAGE centre for the study of ageing (CENSA)

CENSA continues to play a useful role in our society by its public education programme. As we are a society with a very short history, our population as a whole has not experienced the problems of an ageing population, and therefore, does not understand the issues relating to ageism and understanding the ageing process. There is prejudice against the elderly. There is a cohort and generational effect that must be sensitively handled through cross-cultural learning.

Concerted and well co-ordinated effort on public education is required to cushion the effects of inter-generational gap and a good understanding of the ageing process and its attending problems. Many informative and interesting talks had been organised by CENSA since its inception. CENSA helps SAGE to design programmes by providing research data.

Life-Long Learning Centre (LLL Centre) leading to U3A in association with the Singapore Association for Continuing Education (SACE)

Continuing education is an important social activity not only in late life but all stages in life. Successful ageing is more than escaping dependency and institutional care. It is about continuing personal growth and development.

To realise the vision of Singapore as a learning nation, senior citizens should be encouraged to be life-long learners.

Senior citizens can contribute much if they regard themselves as a rich source of energy, experience and wisdom capable of attaining self-realisation and carrying, if they wish, important community responsibilities.

Continued mental activity may offset the risk of developing Alzheimers' disease. For isolated, lonely and under-confident senior citizens, there is the therapeutic effect of mental stimulation. The importance of providing appropriate learning opportunities to older people should be recognised in a life-long learning for all and its value in helping to sustain their self-esteem, healthy living, independence and continued activity.

It is useful for the senior citizens to receive instructions on the following:

1. Instructions about normal physical change of later life and identification of adaptive strategies to facilitate adjustment;
2. Instructions on social changes such as those brought about by the death or illness of the spouse;
3. Instructions on economic changes resulting from retirement.

Classes

The following classes are organised by SAGE:

- Art class
- Beijing opera
- Handicraft patchwork class
- Chinese calligraphy
- Elementary English conversational class
- Japanese conversational class
- Cantonese opera

Participation in our calligraphy, painting, singing and opera classes allow our SAGE members to express themselves. These are usually undertaken for their enjoyment as well as to allow the person to seek out and develop unrecognised talents. This is an example of continuing education in its broadest sense.

Recreation and cultural activities centre

These activities provide the cultural ballast in our multi-racial society and they help to promote and retain our cultural values. Our challenge is to mobilise senior citizens to tap on their cultural experiences and impart these to the younger generation.

A leisure programme can help to fill the void after retirement, caused by the loss of previous roles thus contributing to better physical and mental health. It will enhance the feeling of self-worth,

self-esteem and competence, contribute to human growth and development and personal fulfilment, provide rest, relaxation and direction in life.

Leisure in the form of contemplation and quiet reflection facilitates one's life review. This enables the older person to achieve a sense of integration, meaning and perspective. The social and recreational activities carried on in SAGE are:

- Table tennis
- Choir singing
- Folk dancing
- Karaoke
- Taiji exercises
- Social ballroom dancing
- Chinese orchestra

Though leisure activities, employment or volunteerism can give meaning to life, we must not overlook the potential importance of mundane activities such as personal care, housekeeping, cooking, shopping, tinkering and puttering. In late life, these activities reflect the continued ability to be

independent in the face of ageing, whereas earlier, the ability to do them was taken for granted.

It cannot be assumed that an elderly sitting quietly alone in contemplation is not benefiting his physical and mental health. It depends on what he is thinking about. If he meditates on philosophical questions like "birth, sickness, old age and death", he may arrive at individual answers to these spiritual questions. The increase in his inner strength will help him overcome the vicissitudes in late life. Reading for pleasure may appear to be a passive activity, but for the reader, it can be a meaningful and exciting activity.

CONCLUSION

In late life, there is a loss of formal roles. Loss of formal roles excludes the aged from meaningful participation in many areas of social life. However, new informal roles can provide meaningful substitutes to those losses. In spite of this, personal identity can be maintained via participation in satisfying informal roles.



LIFE SCIENCES GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS

Formed in 1961, the EDB has played an integral role in Singapore's economic development from an under-developed country with high unemployment and inflation in the 1960s to become a leading advanced developing country in the 1990s. Today, over 5,000 leading MNCs have made Singapore their Asian home. Many have expanded and diversified the spectrum of their activities here to include not only manufacturing, but also marketing, international procurement, R&D, technical support and other services.

The Glaxo Wellcome-EDB Scholarship Programme was established in 1990 with a S\$50 million contribution by Glaxo Wellcome (GW). The GW-EDB scholarship is the largest of EDB's scholarship programmes. To date there are 223 GW-EDB scholars.

The Glaxo Wellcome-EDB Scholarship programme is now enhanced to include the new Life Sciences Graduate Scholarship. We are offering 2 scholarships for medical doctors who aspire towards future careers as leaders in the challenging Life Sciences industry in Singapore. Successful candidates will be sent to top-notch universities in North America in 1999 to pursue relevant Master's degrees in a biological science discipline.

We are looking for bright, enthusiastic and dynamic individuals who should preferably be Singaporeans or Permanent Residents below 30 years of age. Applicants should hold a basic medical degree or postgraduate medical qualification from recognised institutions.

The scholarship award includes living allowances, tuition fees, return airfare, thesis, book and warm clothing allowances. Successful candidates will be required to sign a bond. The duration of the bond will be between 3 to 4 years, depending on the length of the program.

For electronic application, please visit the website at <http://scholars.sedb.com.sg> Hard copy application forms are obtainable from **Economic Development Board, 250 North Bridge Road, #24-00 Raffles City Tower, Singapore 179101** by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope (23 x 16 cm). Applications must be accompanied by relevant academic transcripts, testimonials and references. The closing date for submission is **30 November 1998**. Interested applicants should also apply to the relevant institutions to seek enrolment for the academic year 1999.