



Silver Generation Ambassador Rasul Fathima Ahmad (right) with Madam Nair Lachmy Govinda Nair, who lives alone. Ms Rasul was among 17 volunteers who won an award in November to recognise their work. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

## Volunteer knocks on doors regularly to check in on seniors

In Ms Rasul Fathima Ahmad's experience, it is harder to get women to go to the active ageing centres (AACs) than men.

"An auntie was saying 'I don't want to go and join; later they gossip about me,'" said the full-time volunteer.

Ms Rasul has even seen a few women fall out with their friends at a centre after two months and then stop going altogether.

Men, on the other hand, are eager to go to the AACs to find "kakis" (buddies) to go to the coffee shop with, she said.

In the past four years or so, Ms

Rasul, 53, has been getting seniors in Fernvale and Ang Mo Kio to go to the AACs, and helping them in other ways. As a Silver Generation Ambassador, she goes knocking on doors three to six times a week to check in on seniors.

Ms Rasul was among 17 volunteers who won an award in November to recognise the work of Silver Generation Ambassadors. There are around 4,000 such volunteers now, up from 3,000 in 2022. They are engaged by the Silver Generation Office, the outreach arm of the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC). The agency began partnerships

with institutes of higher learning and other organisations in 2023 to ramp up volunteer efforts to befriend the elderly.

For seniors who are less mobile and confined to their homes, the volunteers work to keep them from becoming socially isolated.

In March, Ms Rasul met an elderly woman who could not stop coughing from water retention in her lungs, and could not move her legs, which were swollen due to chronic illness.

Ms Rasul engaged a medical escort to take the woman to her medical appointments, which she had

been missing as there was no one to take her. She also helped the woman to get financial support from government schemes.

The next time Ms Rasul saw the woman, she was back to her usual self.

Ms Rasul, who worked as a youth centre director before taking a career break due to a spine injury, even learnt Mandarin and took counselling courses to better connect with people with special needs and seniors she was volunteering with.

She has become fast friends with seniors like Madam Nair Lachmy Govinda Nair, 73, with whom she shares a common interest in crocheting.

Ms Rasul hopes more young people will volunteer. "Now with the students, it's more lively. They speak like they're talking to their grandparents," she said.

**Shermaine Ang**