

Volunteer programme looking for seniors to help others age well

Zhaki Abdullah

A new initiative aims to get more seniors involved as volunteers at active ageing centres islandwide.

More than 2,400 will be recruited and trained in areas like befriending seniors, or organising and facilitating activities at centres near their homes or workplaces, under the Silver Guardians programme by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung described the initiative as the fourth prong of Age Well SG, a national programme that encourages seniors to live healthy and actively in the community.

Being able to contribute to society can give people a sense of purpose and self-worth, said Mr Ong.

"Through volunteerism, seniors can continue to make a meaningful impact on the lives of people around them, and remain active, healthy and socially connected," he said during the launch of the initiative on April 5 at the Presbyterian Community Services' Esther Active Ageing Centre.

Mr Ong added that the Silver Guardians will complement the existing Silver Generation Ambassadors, volunteers recruited to engage elderly people in their homes and communities and connect them to relevant government schemes. It is also run by AIC, the agency tasked with coordinating care for seniors.

While focused on senior volunteers, the Silver Guardians programme is open to all aged 18 and above.

Between April and December 2023, AIC conducted a pilot programme of the Silver Guardian initiative, to understand the support required by active ageing centres (AACs) and how volunteers can best contribute.

Under the pilot programme, 200 volunteers were dispatched to 12 centres, where they facilitated activities such as communal cooking, and reached out to seniors living nearby to connect them with the centre.

"Through the pilot, AACs were able to resource more interesting activities for seniors. Many of the volunteers were seniors themselves who found joy in sharing their interests with others and spending their time purposefully," said AIC in a media release.

The pilot programme showed that volunteers benefit greatly, perhaps even more than the beneficiaries themselves, said Mr Ong.

For example, those who facilitated exercise programmes themselves became fitter and healthier, he said.

Volunteers can choose volunteer opportunities based on their own



Health Minister Ong Ye Kung and Agency for Integrated Care chief executive Dinesh Vasu Dash singing with Estherita, a band consisting of seniors, at the Presbyterian Community Services' Esther Active Ageing Centre on April 5. "Through volunteerism, seniors can continue to make a meaningful impact on the lives of people around them," Mr Ong said. ST PHOTO: AZMI ATHIR

Volunteers can learn specialised skills

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skills and interests, but also have the option of being trained in specialised skills such as community befriending and designing active ageing programmes. Learning institutes appointed by AIC will provide training.

AIC will also try to match Silver Guardians to active ageing centres near their homes or workplaces, to make volunteering more accessible, said Mr Ong.

As at March 2024, there were 157 active ageing centres islandwide, a number that is expected to grow to 220 by 2025. Singapore is set to become a super-aged society by 2026, when 21 per cent of the population will be above the age of 65.

Mr Ong added that the agency is exploring a national-level Silver Guardian Awards to recognise exemplary and active volunteers.

AIC chief executive officer Dinesh Vasu Dash said the Silver Guardian programme would sup-

port active ageing centres in their work, adding that volunteerism can help seniors age well in the community.

"It becomes even more powerful if seniors join us to contribute to fellow seniors. Not only will they create a meaningful impact on the lives of those around them, they can also find fulfilment and expand their social connections," he said.

One senior volunteer is Mr Mohd Salleh Bidin, 72, who volunteers at

the Sarah Active Ageing Centre in Bukit Merah.

The former musician – who accompanies other seniors to medical appointments as part of his volunteer work – said volunteering has been a meaningful way to spend his free time in his golden years.

Those interested in volunteering as a Silver Guardian can visit www.aic.sg/silver-guardian

azhaki@sph.com.sg