

# Befrienders like family to lonely elderly

Lions Befriender volunteers offer help and company

By YEN FENG

FOR almost 30 years, 90-year-old Madam Wan Ah Mun has lived alone in a flat at Block 5, Banda Street.

The block of one-room rental flats is occupied by many other senior citizens like herself — alone, on public assistance, without family.

But not without friends, thanks to the Lions Befriender Service Association (Singapore).

Twice a week, up to 10 volunteers gather in this quiet street in Chinatown to visit Madam Wan and other elderly residents.

They sit with them and ask them about their day, and run errands such as buying groceries or paying phone bills.

Occasionally, the volunteers read and translate mail for them.

The association's mission, said executive director Jennifer Yee, is to support the lonely elderly in the community, and to improve their social, psychological, emotional and physical well-being.

"They are in need of friendship and company. By engaging them, we hope to prevent early institutionalisation and help them remain in the community for as long as possible," she added.

Retiree Tommy Tang, 58, has been a volunteer with the association since 2001. "Every week, I learn so much from the stories they tell me. They've had a difficult time building their lives in Singapore. Their experiences help me keep my feet on the ground."

At Block 5, there is no trace of the rat race and no one seems to be hurrying anywhere.

Last year, two residents here died quietly in their flats, said Mr Tang. They were discovered by volunteers three days later, he said.

"Most of these elderly have no family. If we're not here to look out for them, who will?"



PHOTO: LIM WUI LIANG

NOT FRIENDLESS: Madam Wan, who is unmarried and childless, says the volunteers from the Lions Befriender association "are like the children I never had".

## 16 groups honoured for helping Lions Home

SIXTEEN organisations have been recognised for their services and contributions to the Lions Home for the Elders this year.

Groups honoured at the home's 25th anniversary fund-raising and recognition dinner yesterday included Seletar Country Club, Genki Sushi Singapore Pte Ltd and several Lions Clubs here.

Together, they raised almost \$400,000 this year, about one-tenth of the home's annual operational cost. Each year, about \$2 million comes from the Ministry of Health. The rest comes from private donations and other fund-raising events.

The home, founded by the Lions Clubs of Singapore in 1980, began as a modest shelter

offering basic nursing care, food and lodging to 18 elderly residents in Ang Mo Kio.

Over the years, it has developed into a 354-bed nursing home with two facilities, in Toa Payoh and Bedok. It also offers clinical services like a dementia wing and a physiotherapy centre. More than 90 per cent of residents are destitute or from low-income families.

### Charity facts

» **Name:** Lions Befriender Service Association (Singapore)

» **Head office:** Block 130, Bukit Merah View #01-358

» **What it does:** Currently serves more than 3,500 senior citizens. Volunteers provide companionship and help the elderly with chores and errands like filling out forms, housekeeping and preparing meals.

» **Its aim:** To improve the social, psychological, emotional and physical well-being of elderly folks who are lonely and poor, through community participation.

» **How much it needs a year:** About \$1.5 million, of which \$350,000 is raised from the public and various organisations.

» **How it raises funds:** Key charity events such as donation draws, charity golf, appeal letters to government organisations and public donations.

» **How much in the kitty:** About \$700,000

» **Manpower:** 28 employees and 1,044 registered volunteers

» **Is it online?** Yes. [www.lionsbefrienders.org.sg](http://www.lionsbefrienders.org.sg)

» **Why you should donate:** "To support the elderly in the community, many of whom are lonely," says its executive director, Ms Jennifer Yee

» **Contact:** Hotline: 1800-375-8600. E-mail: [lbsa@lionsbefrienders.org.sg](mailto:lbsa@lionsbefrienders.org.sg)

The association, started by the Lions Clubs of Singapore in 1995, serves more than 3,500 senior citizens, most of whom live in one- or two-room rental flats in areas like Henderson and Kreta Ayer.

At least once a month, activities organised by volunteers, such as morning exercises and miniature bowling, are held to encourage them to come out and mingle.

A total of 1,044 volunteers are

registered, and the association hopes more young people will come forward to help.

Anyone who would like to volunteer can call the association's hotline on 1800-375-8600.

For Madam Wan, who is unmarried and has no children, the company of volunteers has made a world of difference. "I feel safer knowing they are around, that they will come by to check up on

me from time to time," she said.

"They make sure I have food in the flat and take me to see the doctor when I feel unwell. They are like the children I never had."

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