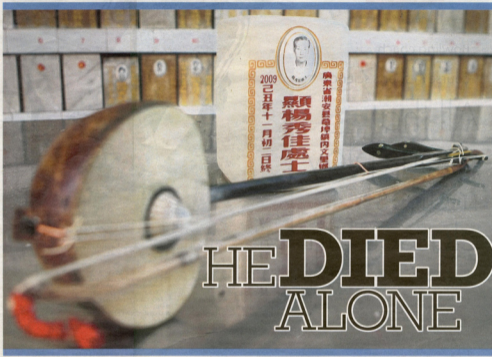


*"(Mr Yeo) spent many years accompanying the dead as they went on their last journey. It was a pity that he died alone."*

— Mr Chua Hang Seng, an employee at the Cheng Hong Siang Yng temple



# HE DIED ALONE

## Help us reach out to them

To help the elderly who are living alone, The New Paper has partnered the Lions Befrienders Service Association and Ngee Ann Polytechnic in Project Helping Hands.

Mr Teh Thien Yew, the general manager of Singapore's *Küsterer Altsenioren*, said: "We are very confident to know that Singaporeans do care for the elderly and we will support this project wholeheartedly.

"This is a good way for all of us to demonstrate that in our society, no one should go through the last phase of life alone, forgotten and uncared for."

### THE PROJECT

**DESIGN**  
It involves installing wireless motion sensors in the apartments of senior citizens living alone.

The system tracks the resident's movements and sends an SMS to a caregiver or volunteer if it detects unusually long motionless periods — for example, if the resident stops moving due to an injury or illness. This technology, known as the NP's Elderly Monitoring System, was developed by the staff and students of Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Lions Befrienders has identified 1,200 needy elderly Singaporeans living in one-room flats as potential beneficiaries.

### IMPLEMENTATION

To get the hardware portion of the project up and running, at least \$1 million is needed by the end of the year — \$1,000 for every home.

Equally important is the hardware. Volunteers are needed to adapt seniors living on their own.



**END OF THE MUSIC:**  
Left: Mr Chua Hang Seng, who organized Mr Yeo Siew Kia's funeral. (Below, left) Mr Yeo's instrument, the yekela, next to the urn containing his ashes.

PICTURES: BENJAMIN SEITON

## Elderly temple musician's dead body went unnoticed for days

REPORT: GAN LING KAI  
ganl@sp.com.sg

**T**ELL the very end, Mr Yeo Siew Kia brought comfort to the families of the deceased.

At least twice a month, the 81-year-old would play the yekela — a traditional stringed instrument fashioned out of a coconut shell — as funeral rites were chanted by volunteers from the Cheng Hong Siang Yng temple.

Sadly, when it was his time to go, it was without friends by his side.

He died alone in his one-room flat at Block 4, Beach Road, last year.

His partially decomposed body was discovered on Dec 17 by temple staff who, ironically, had gone looking for him when he failed to turn up for two funerals.

It was a Thursday when Mr Yeo was found lying on his side outside the bathroom clad only in his underwear, recalled Mr Chua Hang Seng, 62, an employee at Cheng Hong Siang Yng.

### Bled from his head

"He probably fell after a shower. He bled from his head, which had already turned black (from decomposition). His neighbours told me he was last seen alive on Monday."

Mr Chua added in Mandarin: "Mr Yeo spent many years accompanying the dead as they went on their last journey. It was a pity that he died alone."

Could Mr Yeo's death have been prevented? Could help have come to him earlier if there was a warning system that could have alerted somebody?

The New Paper believes so, which is why we have launched a project which involves installing wireless motion sensors in the apartments of senior citizens living alone. (See report below.)

Perhaps Mr Yeo himself knew how it would all end. He had prepared for his own funeral, said Mr Chua.

Two years ago, Mr Yeo, a bachelor, asked the temple to handle his funeral.

The temple's management agreed. The spare set of horse keys he had entrusted to Mr Chua came in handy when the latter went looking for him after his no-show at the two funerals.

Keeping to his word, Mr Chua organized Mr Yeo's funeral — an afternoon affair — with \$2,000 donated by temple devotees.

Mr Yeo's ashes are now kept in the temple. Mr Chua managed to contact Mr Yeo's only known relative — Mr Yeo Liang-hong, a distant nephew — to tell him about the death.

Mr Yeo Liang-hong told The New Paper in a phone interview: "My uncle preferred to keep to himself. Most of the time, he would reject our invitations when we asked him over for meals during festivals."

"We visited him about once every two years," Liang-hong said. "He was an ordinary man, a volunteer at the service association."

In the two months before his death, Miss Tan Wam Lin, 35, Miss Lim Yew Ling, 25, and Mr Anthony Teo, 24, visited Mr Yeo a few times.

"He hardly chatted with his neighbours because he felt it was a waste of time," said Miss Tan, an insurance underwriter.

The volunteers described Mr Yeo as an independent man who kept his flat clean and neat.

Mr Yeo, a real estate agent, said: "We were shocked at his death because he was generally healthy. He did limp a little after a bad fall last year."

Miss Lim, a sales executive, said: "He told us he was a cookie — the type that you read about in history textbooks — carrying sacks of rice."

Miss Lim had met Mr Yeo at the temple. He was a musician, but she wasn't surprised.

"Many senior citizens are very talented, and they all have a story to tell," she said.

She spends three hours each week visiting the homes of 10 elderly persons.

- Project Helping Hands
- Your full name
- NRIC number
- Address
- Contact number

Corporate donors should also indicate their company's name (as registered with ACRU) and their business registration number.

Donations can also be made by cash at the Lions Befrienders' office during office hours (8am-6pm) on weekdays.

All donations are tax-exempt.

### HOW TO VOLUNTEER

To sign up as a volunteer, please call 1800-375 8600 or visit [www.lionsbefrienders.org.sg](http://www.lionsbefrienders.org.sg)

All funds raised for the project will be handed and disbursed by Lions Befrienders.

## STREET TALK

### More than just a name

COMMENT: GAN LING KAI  
ganl@sp.com.sg

To profile the late Mr Yeo Siew Kia, my colleague Benjamin Seaton and I spent weeks and in the streets to piece together details of his life.

We interviewed a dozen elderly persons who were his neighbours. We spoke to the police and volunteers from voluntary welfare organisation Lions Befrienders. We combed through the news archives for clues.

The research led us to Mr Chua Hang Seng, 62, an employee at Cheng Hong Siang Yng temple. He discovered the body of Mr Yeo in December.

From him, we managed to piece together a profile of Mr Yeo, something we are glad to have done.

Because Mr Yeo Siew Kia is more than just a name.

He wasn't just a person who had died. He was a person who had few friends. He was a person who had a gift in music. He was a person who had lived for 81 years.

### A glimpse into their lives

Our articles for this series on Project Helping Hands seek to offer a glimpse into the life stories of such elderly persons — and go a step further.

It is not just the dead that we try to remember. It is also those who are alive whom we seek to help.

In The New Paper on Sunday over the next few weeks, we will feature the life experiences of several elderly persons who had or have been living alone.

Read how undertaker Roland Tay had to collect the remains of Mr Chong Tay Kooing, a 85-year-old who had died alone at home in July, because the China-born Mr Chong had no kin in Singapore to do that for him.

Get to understand how Miss Sim Siak Buan, an 85-year-old wheelchair-bound woman, manages to hoist herself onto the toilet bowl every day to have a shower.

Meet Mr Wong Hong Fook, 68, who has turned his one-room rental flat in Beach Road into a workshop, repairing rusty parts of vehicles just to make ends meet.

These are real people who are living alone, and they need your help. You can make a difference in their lives by making a donation or becoming a volunteer.

When my editor spoke to me in August about doing this project, I was determined to be part of it because I know the job is neither that big nor that small.

But nothing is lighter than the love you can offer.