

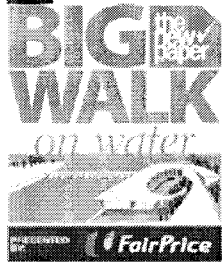


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Resilient S'poreans

He buys food, takes them for checkups, and even helped fulfil dying man's last wish

He's 73, but spends his time looking after neighbours

Resilience is the new buzzword after the Budget measures were unveiled last week. In the second of a three-part series, we look at a resilient man who, despite his age and lack of resources, is always willing to lend a hand to others

By Genevieve Jiang

January 29, 2009

HE HAS no family and survives on public assistance.

Yet Mr Yip Siew Cheong, 73, goes the distance for his sick and elderly neighbours, buying them food every day, and taking them to the doctor when they fall ill.

When a neighbour was hospitalised for more than a month early last year, Mr Yip visited him every day.

And when his 78-year-old neighbour's condition took a turn for the worse, it was Mr Yip who fulfilled his dying wish - to see his girlfriend for the last time.

Mr Yip, who had never met his neighbour's girlfriend, went looking for the hairdresser, believed to be in her late 40s, at a salon in Chinatown, to convince her to visit the dying man.

Said Mr Yip: 'It was a bit awkward as I was a complete stranger to her.

'But he was already dying, and I couldn't ignore his last wish. He had not seen his girlfriend since he was hospitalised, as she had gone back to Malaysia and didn't know of his condition.'

Luckily, the girlfriend agreed and visited the neighbour, Mr Mun Kok Sun, who had been suffering from kidney problems and cancer.

After his death, Mr Yip, together with other volunteers from the Lions Befrienders and another welfare group, ended up performing the last rites for Mr Mun.

Mr Yip has had to grapple with death and loss during his past four years as a volunteer helping the elderly.

It has made him more determined to do what he can for the old and lonely. This despite Mr Yip not being able to work, and surviving on welfare.

Said Mr Yip, who never married: 'I understand what it's like to be old and alone. It can get very lonely if there is no one to talk to and care for you.

'As neighbours, we should all help one another. You don't know when you're the one who will fall sick and needing the care of others.'

That is why the door of Mr Yip's rented one-room flat in Bukit Merah View is always open in the daytime, for elderly neighbours to pop in whenever they need a listening ear or helping hand.

Mr Yip, who has lived there for the past eight years, can no longer work because of his age, and survives on financial aid of \$330 every month.

In his younger days, he was a construction worker and retired in his 50s. He then worked as a part-time cleaner at a hotel until he was 65.

He has been living on his savings and welfare since.

These days, he spends his days making sure his elderly neighbours, especially those who are sick, get their meals regularly.

He goes the distance to deliver food to those who have trouble walking. He also accompanies them to their medical appointments, whether it's at the nearby polyclinic or at



HELPING HAND: Mr Yip Siew Cheong (far left) helped care for Mr Ho Kai Hung when the latter was sick a few years ago. **TNP PICTURE:** JONATHAN CHOO



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hospitals.

Said Madam Doh Qui Chen, 64, a seamstress and a fellow volunteer: 'Once, one of his neighbours casually mentioned that she didn't like to eat the steamed pork buns at the nearby coffee shop and preferred those at the Tiong Bahru market.

'He made a trip, six bus-stops away, just to buy her those buns for her lunch.'

And last year, when an 83-year-old neighbour was sick with a tumour in her back, and had to be in and out of hospital throughout the year, Mr Yip was the one who visited her regularly at the Singapore General Hospital.

Said Madam Doh: 'While in hospital, the woman said she had a craving for the soup noodles that were sold at the Bukit Merah View market. Mr Yip made the trip from hospital to Bukit Merah View, and back, just to get her those noodles.'

The woman died two weeks ago.

Again, it was kind-hearted neighbours like Mr Yip and Madam Doh who saw to her funeral.

Mr Yip's routine these days is simple.

He starts the day with a walk around the neighbourhood before making his rounds to four elderly, sick residents living nearby.

He takes down their lunch orders, buys their favourite food at the nearby food centre, and delivers it to their doorstep.

He also helps them with light chores like cleaning and washing, and does their grocery-shopping.

Said Mr Yip: 'These are the ones who need extra help moving around so I make sure I check on them every day.'

One of them is Mr Ho Kai Hung, 72, who has severe asthma, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Said Mr Ho: 'Once, a few years ago, I needed to go for my regular checkup but I felt too weak and breathless to walk to the nearby clinic. Mr Yip could have just called someone else to help, but he walked to the clinic to get a wheelchair, and then returned and wheeled me to the clinic personally.

'He truly is an extraordinary friend.'

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