

RUMAH KITA(OUR HOME)

INSIGHTS FROM A COMMUNITY ARTS ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

2022

Organised by: Lions Befrienders
In Collaboration with: SEED Collective
Part of: Silver Arts
Supported by: National Arts Council

Overview

About the Project

With the overarching theme of 'home', participants were invited to draw on their individual narratives and share their lived experiences. They were invited to try a variety of activities, such as 2D collage creations with personal images, geometric origami and playback theatre performance. There were also guided tours to the Singapore City Gallery where it showcases Singapore's dramatic transformation over the past 50 years. This not only expanded the meaning of 'home' from an individual level to the community level, it also motivated the seniors to progress along with the society's transformation.

Rumah Kita Arts Journey is a creative arts programme curated by the SEED Collective. A group of seniors who attended Lions Befrienders' Active Ageing Centre (AAC) @ Clementi 420A were engaged with a series of interconnected arts activities over 3 months from Sep 2022 to Dec 2022.

SEED Collective is a multi-disciplinary art collective comprising of art therapist-artist Karen Koh and applied drama practitioner and educator Michael Cheng. The programme was co-developed and co-facilitated by the two artists with a focus on visual arts and applied drama.



Guided tours to Singapore City Gallery @ URA

Allowing participants to interact with one another prior to the art sessions and learn about Singapore through over 50 interactive and immersive exhibits.



2D collage creations

While creating the collage, seniors were encouraged to share their thoughts on what 'home' means to them.



Geometric Origami

After folding the origami, seniors penned down their thoughts on what makes a home ideal. This enables seniors to reflect on what matters to them and what they treasure about their home.



Playback Theatre

Actors and actresses enacted seniors' personal stories for seniors to reminisce on their past self and share those memories with others. As a group, seniors deeply heard one another's lived experiences, such as Bukit Ho Swee fire, hardships of growing up, and how these influenced the current lifestyle and choices.

Project Objectives

The arts programme aims to promote seniors' well-being through participation in arts engagement activities, and to build and strengthen relationships among seniors from varied backgrounds.

Participants

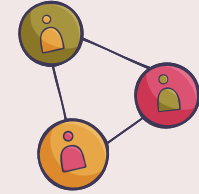
29 community-dwelling seniors, aged between 65 and 88 years old, participated in the programme. The participants comprised of 86% female and 14% male. 69% lived in purchased flats, while 31% lived in rental flats. 10% of the participants were from minority races (i.e., Malay, Indian, and Caucasian).

Participants expressed that they have gained new experiences through this programme:

"I am able to express love and share ideas with those around me. I feel happier after this programme, and I am proud that I have learnt something new."

- Participant, Mdm F

Prior to and at the end of the programme, LB interviewed 6 participants to gain a nuanced and deeper understanding on participants' experience with the programme and with art.



INSIGHTS FROM PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

The interviews revealed several insights in relation to participants' perception of arts, experience with arts and social engagement before and after the programme.

PERCEPTIONS OF ARTS

Before the programme, the participants had varied perceptions of the arts. When asked what they thought the arts is about, some responded that it is about beautiful creations while others shared that due to their working class backgrounds, they saw arts as a leisure activity for the privileged and had no time or opportunity in the past to participate in it.

Through the programme, some participants had a renewed perception and understanding of art. They have begun to interpret art as a form of personal expression and recognise art as having value for everyone regardless of their backgrounds.

"In the past I think that arts is a waste of time, the society also thinks that pursuing arts will not earn money to sustain daily living. After attending this programme, I realise that arts can cultivate and broaden one's mind (陶冶性情)."

Participant L

EXPERIENCE WITH ARTS

The levels of experience with arts differed across the participants, with two first-time art participants. While participants looked forward to the programme, they felt apprehensive as they thought they lacked "talent" in art and were sceptical about their abilities in doing craftwork.

During the programme, the artists offered a nurturing space for participants to actively ideate, create and reflect upon their artwork. They also supported the participants by helping them overcome personal doubts and challenges, such as not knowing how to conceptualise the notion of 'home' as a physical art piece. **The programme provided scaffolding for participants to build confidence in approaching new tasks and inspired them to be more open to new experiences.**

"I am more confident in myself now, even though I am 80 years old, I still managed to learn about art."

Participant C

A participant's 2D collage creation with found images and personal photos

MEANINGFUL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT WITH FELLOW PARTICIPANTS

Most participants have known each other prior the programme. During the programme, participants shared life stories and personal photographs and objects. These helped them to learn about each others' feelings, personalities and aspirations in relation to home. **The programme also provided opportunities for sharing and interactions and foster friendships between participants.**

"In the past I only greet the other participants. Now, I will have conversations with them. I learnt about their different personalities - some are friendly and some are reserved."

Participant T





Showcase of artworks outside LB Active Ageing entre @ Clementi 420A. Each box is filled with seniors' personal found objects that represent their notion of 'home'.



Participants are further engaged with the artists in completing their artworks with personal found objects as their representations of 'home'.

REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Address anxieties and misconceptions around art

It emerged through the interviews that some participants felt ambivalent about art even though they looked forward to participating in the programme. Their ambivalence seem to stem from anxieties around their performance in artmaking. Even outside of this programme, we often hear anxieties surrounding participation in art activities that sound like: "I'm not good at drawing", "I'm not very creative" or "I'm not talented in art". Addressing these anxieties and misconceptions early on can allow participants to resolve their doubts and reap more enjoyment from the experience.

Emphasise on the process while maximising agency

Due to the self-perceived lack of "talent" in art, some participants may feel limited in their abilities to accomplish the new tasks at hand. It will be helpful to offer agency and reinforcement along the way, encouraging them to explore and try, so that they grow in confidence and enjoy the process. In this programme, participants felt enabled by the gentle guidance of the artists, who held space for individuality and creativity to flow freely, rather than take over the ideation and creation for the participants.

Create opportunities for social connections with intentionality

One of the programme's intended outcomes was to build and strengthen relationships among seniors. Hence the programme activities were designed to create ample opportunities for seniors to interact, share and be heard. While most programmes for older adults do facilitate social interactions, greater intentionality in forging interpersonal connections can allow participants to get to know one another on a deeper level. After all, the quality of relationships (rather than mere quantity of relationships) is key to promoting socio-emotional well-being in older adults.