

CULTURE, KOPI AND KUEH



SPECIALLY-CURATED MUSEUM EXPERIENCES FOR THE ELDERLY

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01. A session at Ling Kwang Home for Senior Citizens where participants were introduced to Peranakan culture using items such as the kebaya and batik tops from TPM's handling collection, 2015. Courtesy of Agency for Integrated Care.

02. A participant holding up her self-designed fan, 2015.

Starting the *Culture, Kopi and Kueh* pilot programme was an almost serendipitous process. Over the past two years, the Peranakan Museum (TPM) has received an increasing number of requests for guided tours from persons with disability, schools for children with special needs, nursing homes and other eldercare facilities. The last group is a reflection of Singapore's changing population demographics and global trends that is only going to get larger with time.

Facing the need to provide an enjoyable museum experience for these mostly first-time visitors, we started reading and attending courses to better understand their needs. We also joined several online forums by museums overseas to learn how they had developed programmes which address community health, well-being

and health promotion. Taking part in guided tours and gathering feedback from our docents and visiting groups also contributed to the preparatory work for the project.

In the beginning, it was difficult adapting the information from overseas museums to meet Singapore's needs. One particular issue was that many of the elderly and their caregivers found it daunting to visit museums because of literacy issues. In addition, caregivers who were foreigners were unfamiliar with local traditions and culture.

However, the project really came together when last year TPM invited Ms Wendy Gallagher, a very experienced Arts and Health coordinator from the University of Manchester and the Whitworth Art Gallery, to conduct a public talk about her experiences in developing



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museum programmes for the elderly. The Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) got wind of the public talk, contacted Wendy, and the rest, as they say, is history.

AIC had been seeking to collaborate with a museum to co-develop programmes that would be able to meaningfully engage the elderly living in community care facilities, such as nursing homes and senior care centres. With their aim so closely aligned with TPM's, a partnership was born. As part of the collaboration, AIC helped to identify the pilot nursing home site, manage the project, and provide research and evaluation support. After three months of intense planning with AIC, the pilot programme was finally delivered.

Culture, Kopi and Kueh began on July 6, 2015 and ran for 12 weeks (comprising two cycles, each lasting six weeks). It included 30 residents and five staff from the Rehabilitation and Nursing departments of Ling

Kwang Home for Senior Citizens. The staff lead from the Home was an Occupational Therapist.

The objectives of *Culture, Kopi and Kueh* were for seniors to:

- Enhance social skills through conversations inspired by objects from the museum;
- Express their creativity and imagination through art-making activities; and
- Access opportunities to increase self-confidence through acquiring and fostering new skills and interactions.

While evaluation of the programme is currently underway, initial results show that the majority of participants enjoyed their sessions and would participate again, given the opportunity. One of them said: "I enjoyed the activity and I liked all the activities that were done... because everything is new to me." In addition, they also spoke about the sessions helping them



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03. The bag-making activity was the most popular activity for participants in both cycles. Each selected their favourite Peranakan motif and colours to decorate their very own cloth bags, 2015.

04. Participants sharing their knowledge about wedding rituals as part of their visit to the Wedding Procession gallery, 2015.

05. A nursing home staff discussing a Peranakan participant's memories about traditional Peranakan weddings, 2015. Courtesy of Agency for Integrated Care.



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cultivate better social connections with others. One shared: "Our relationship became better and [we had] more things to discuss," while another said: "[The programme] help[ed] me become friendly."

Staff, too, enjoyed the programme, with some citing that it helped them foster a better relationship with their residents and peers. "I was able to understand more of their capabilities," shared one. Another staff member added: "[The programme] built a stronger bond with the residents and also helped me boost my confidence in the way I assist them." Summarising, one staff member said: "Going to TPM is an avenue for residents to connect with the community and relive the past through activities related to the museum."

In this pilot, we learned about patience and the joy of small victories. These seniors are vastly different from the students and adult visitors we have encountered in the museum. In the first cycle, we encountered a participant who had suffered from a stroke and was too shy to speak because she was conscious of her slurred speech. By the second session, she gamely raised her hand and provided her

view on the difference between a *kamcheng* (a covered jar that was used to contain water and food) and a *chupu* (a bowl with a lid used to serve soup). The joy on her face in that spark of newly regained self-confidence will forever be etched on our minds.

In the second cycle, there was an elderly participant with dementia. Throughout the sessions, he hardly responded and we wondered if he took in anything we said. However, in the final session, just as he was being wheeled onto the bus to return to the nursing home, he suddenly said: "Thank you for everything." That was the best affirmation for the programme.

All in all, although the nursing home residents needed more time to understand and respond, their rich life experiences and personal stories frequently added to our joyful discussions. They recounted days of working in the old kitchens pounding chilli, correcting my chilli-pounding skills as we playfully gave a demonstration. A few nonyas in the group shared about their experiences of growing up in a Peranakan household. There was so much to learn from them about life and these stories flowed as

06. A visit to the Kitchen gallery provided opportunities for participants to exchange stories and cooking secrets with each other, 2015. Courtesy of Agency for Integrated Care.

if time stood still and the residents were young again.

From this experience, we believe museums can make a positive difference in the quality of people's lives, especially to these largely underserved audience segments. We would love to receive suggestions and feedback as we continue to refine and develop programmes. There is always more to be done and collective efforts can make a bigger impact.

This programme is among the top 20 best practices received internationally for inclusion in the ICOM-CECA Best Practice 2016. Our special thanks to the management, staff and residents of our pilot nursing home site – Ling Kwang Home for Senior Citizens, for helping make this pilot programme possible.
