

S'poreans come together to build apps for caregivers, isolated seniors

As Singapore turns 60, it is also a time to celebrate the care that Singaporeans show for one another, connecting and contributing ideas towards a better society.

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Product manager Joshua Gei, 28, knows first-hand the panic and stress people face when a family member falls gravely ill.

After a major stroke left his 88-year-old grandfather bed-bound about five years ago, the family was thrust into a maze of unfamiliar caregiving responsibilities.

There was so much to do and figure out, and information on care services and subsidies was scattered across different websites, said Mr Gei.

Recognising this gap, he and four teammates – tech professionals and a student – created CareCompass, a free app to help caregivers of dementia patients find the information they need.

The idea was born in 2024 at the Build for Good Hackathon, organised by Open Government Products (OGP), a tech team in the Government that builds technology for public good.

The hackathon was organised by OGP in partnership with the Singapore Government Partnerships Office (SGPO), which was set up to strengthen the Government's partnerships and engagements with Singaporeans.

CareCompass was one of five winning teams from the 2024 Hackathon that were given the chance to be part of the Build for Good Accelerator programme to develop, pilot and launch their solutions with \$20,000 in funding provided by OGP.

With CareCompass, users can tap information on care services, maid agencies, subsidies and support systems.

Users can find the nearest centre that provides daycare for seniors near their homes by keying in their postal code. Search results will show the subsidies at each centre, and users can post reviews of the centre.

The app, which went live in November, aims to ease the burden on caregivers, especially those who are just beginning their journey.

One unique feature of the 2024 hackathon is that SGPO facilitated consultations between participants



Mr Joshua Gei (far left) and Mr Isaiah Tan (second from left) are part of the team behind CareCompass, a free app to help caregivers of dementia patients find the information they need. It will soon include another function from an app called Heartbeat, which is the product of another team that includes Mr Royce Hoe (second from right) and Mr Chen Zhihan (far right).
PHOTO: SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS OFFICE



Property agent Elsa Yeo, her husband Epon Ng and their son Edus all volunteer as Silver Generation Ambassadors – visiting seniors in their homes to check on their health and encourage them to stay healthy and active.
ST PHOTO: TARYN NG

and subject-matter experts across the Government to help teams better understand and tackle the issues they aimed to solve.

The team behind CareCompass consulted staff from the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) and social service agencies like Dementia Singapore, and met about 30 caregivers to help them refine and improve their app.

Mr Isaiah Tan, a 36-year-old graphic designer who is part of the team, said: "Users said our app saved them a lot of time when it comes to looking for information."

Those interested can find out more at mycarecompass.sg

CareCompass will soon include another function from an app called Heartbeat to monitor the well-being of seniors who live alone.

The Heartbeat app – to be launched in end-May or June – is the product of another team of tech professionals at the 2024 hackathon. They were given \$5,000 from the Build for Good Starter Fund that supports teams keen to continue pursuing their solutions for public good.

All seniors have to do is to check in via the Heartbeat app every day to let their caregiver know they are okay. The caregiver is alerted through a WhatsApp message if the senior fails to do so.

Seniors indicate if they are feeling "OK", "happy" or "sad" when they check in, and their caregiver is alerted if they tap on the "sad" button over a few days in a row.

Data scientist Chen Zhihan, 40, who is part of the Heartbeat team, has first-hand experience of the challenges of being a primary caregiver. His mother, who has Parkin-

son's disease and dementia, is unable to walk after a fall, and his father became very ill after a heart attack, although he is now better.

"I want to use my technology skills for public good," he said. His teammate Royce Hoe, a 30-year-old senior software engineer, said he was sad to learn from AIC about the problem of seniors who die alone, and his team wanted to tackle this issue.

The Heartbeat team is working with Braddell Heights grassroots organisations, the People's Association and active ageing centres to

get seniors and their caregivers to use the app.

WHEN VOLUNTEERING IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

For property agent Elsa Yeo, 49, and her family, volunteering has become a way to help where they can.

Ms Yeo, her husband Epon Ng, 49, and their only child Edus, 19, all volunteer as Silver Generation Ambassadors – visiting seniors in their homes to check on their health and encourage them to stay healthy and active.

They help to connect the elderly with government agencies and schemes that they require.

The Silver Generation Ambassador is an initiative of the Silver Generation Office, the outreach arm of AIC. There are now more than 7,000 such ambassadors.

It started about two years ago when Ms Yeo heard from a friend about the work of such ambassadors.

"I want to volunteer as I have free time and flexibility in my job," she said. "I have also worked part-time as a clinic assistant for many years, so I'm quite familiar with health-care matters."

She usually volunteers one or two days a week, adding that many seniors have taught her valuable life lessons.

She recounted how a big-hearted man in his 70s, who lives alone in a rental flat and uses a wheelchair, would use his income from his job to cook for or share food with neighbours.

She also met a cleaner who would rush home to prepare lunch for his frail wife. The senior's love, dedication and resilience touched her deeply.

She added: "Many of the seniors are simple and content, and I feel I should also be more contented with what I already have. And some of them are very positive, even if they are going through difficulties (in life)."

Mr Epon Ng said he was inspired by his wife's recounting of the seniors she met, and decided to join her as a volunteer as he is currently taking a "career break".

"I'm able-bodied, yet I spent my time after work watching TV or swiping away on my phone," added Mr Ng, who used to be in the IT industry. "I feel I can make better use of my time."

The Silver Generation Ambassadors usually go about in pairs, and he would pair up with his wife. He usually volunteers once a week.

Their giving spirit has rubbed off on their son, who was already volunteering with the Serangoon Youth Network to plan activities for youth.

Mr Edus Ng, a Nanyang Polytechnic student, has finished five training sessions to be a Silver Generation Ambassador, and hopes to start volunteering in May.

He has put his new-found knowledge to use. A senior who needed help to navigate digital platforms approached him, after she spotted him in a Silver Generation Ambassador T-shirt at a foodcourt.

He pointed her to the nearest library, where the SG Digital Office's digital ambassadors help seniors pick up skills like making online payments and using social media.

"Seeing my parents do such meaningful work, I thought, 'why not?'" he said.

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