



Students who developed the BlockBox project gave out kits containing emergency contacts, simple exercise equipment, healthy snacks and recipes, postcards and art materials to seniors at Yuhua Senior Activity Centre. PHOTO: BLOCKBOX

New initiative pairs volunteers with seniors discharged from hospital

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Seniors who have been discharged from hospital and live alone can now keep track of medications, diet and health appointments with the help of a new app and doctors from the National University Hospital (NUH).

Called the Silver Buddy initiative, it pairs seniors with volunteers to tap the Buddy Aide app for their caregiving needs.

The app has features like medication instructions, information on follow-up appointments and therapy reminders.

The Silver Buddy initiative and Buddy Aide app were winners of an inaugural challenge launched in July last year by the Ministry of Health's Office for Healthcare Transformation and the National Council of Social Service.

The schemes are part of the Design4Impact platform that brings together participants from different backgrounds, including educational institutions and the healthcare sector, to create and test solutions for Singaporeans' health and social needs amid Covid-19.

This year's challenge was launched yesterday and focuses on the mental health concerns of seniors, caregivers and youth.

Minister for National Development Desmond Lee, in an address at the virtual launch, said mental and social issues needed to be tackled together to better support vulnerable families.

"The solutions don't just lie with the Government. In fact, community partners have a significant role in integrating social health service delivery," he said.

"With their expertise in various areas, and their extensive local networks, they can help us to better identify where the needs and gaps really are on the ground, and meet these needs more quickly."

An open call for participation was made in August, with individuals allowed to register by themselves or in groups. Close to 300 individuals registered this year.

Over the next few months, participants will come up with solutions to mental health and well-being concerns before pitching their ideas to organisers in December. Winners will then get to pilot their solutions in the community.

The Silver Buddy initiative is expected to be piloted with patients at a geriatric ward at NUH early next year.

Volunteer buddies will be introduced to seniors living close to them before the seniors are discharged from the hospital. The buddies would receive instruc-

tions from the medical team.

Dr Lim Zhiying, who is involved in the project, said the team was committed to establishing a smooth transition for the patient from hospital back to home with the assistance of their buddies.

Another winning project last year was BlockBox, developed by a group of students from the National University of Singapore and Yale University.

They created a community space at Yuhua Senior Activity Centre from January to March this year with health progress boards and personalised display boards for photos and artworks by participating seniors.

They paired 32 seniors who have hypertension with youth volunteers and helped them note what they ate, how much they exercised, and their weight and blood pressure measurements.

The students gave out monthly kits containing emergency contacts, simple exercise equipment, healthy snacks and recipes, postcards and art materials.

More than 80 per cent of the residents in the pilot saw an improvement in blood pressure.

The group hopes to expand its project to other Housing Board estates in the future.

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