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## Project Silverlight: Community based and participant-led initiatives to increase civic engagement among older adults

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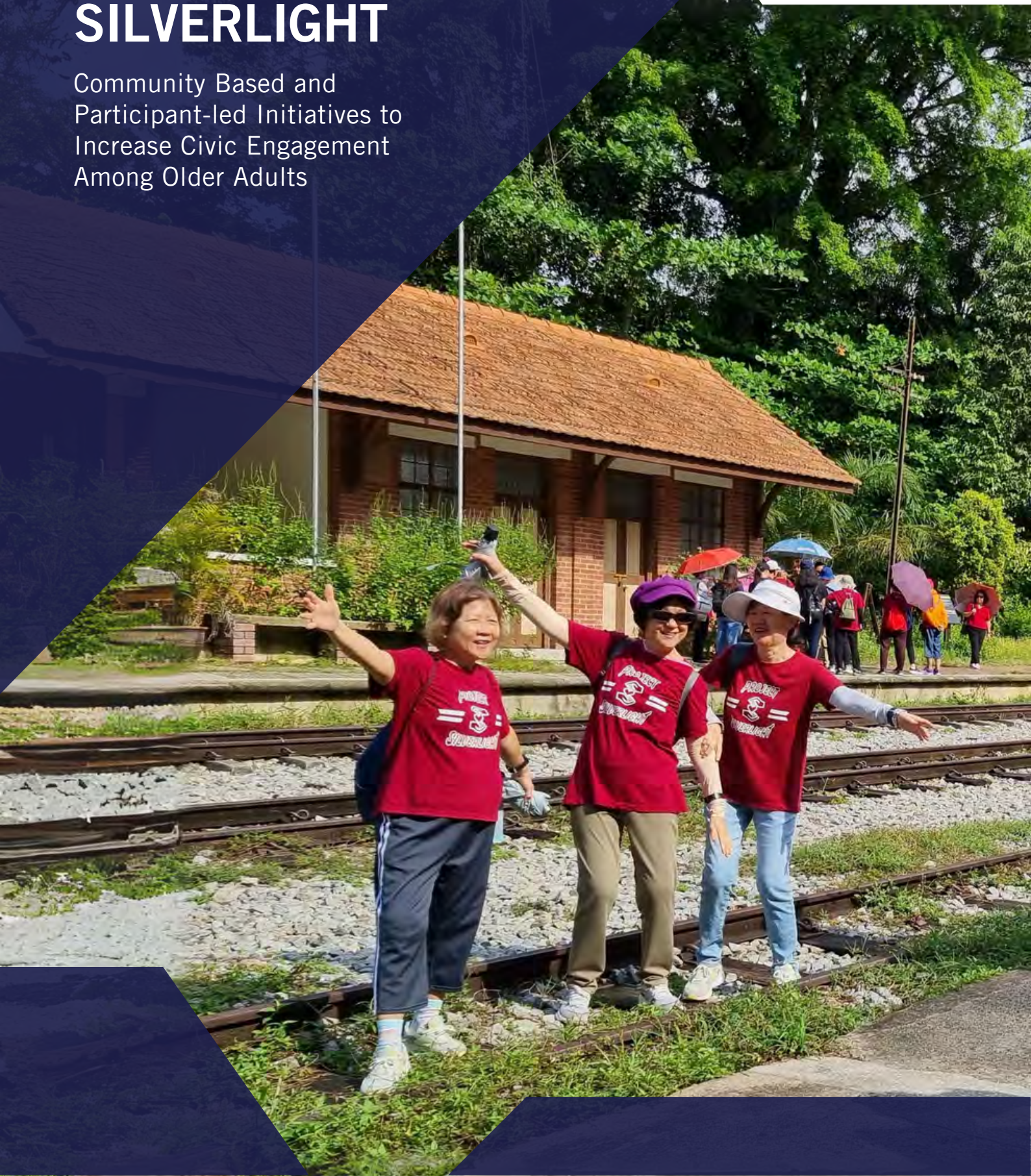
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# PROJECT SILVERLIGHT

Community Based and  
Participant-led Initiatives to  
Increase Civic Engagement  
Among Older Adults





## Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	3
STUDY DESIGN .....	4
INTERVENTION.....	6
Preparation .....	6
Student Volunteers .....	6
Activities.....	8
FINDINGS.....	11
Participant Demographics.....	11
Qualitative Findings .....	13
Quantitative Findings.....	26
KEY CHALLENGES .....	31
RECOMMENDATIONS .....	34
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION .....	36
REFERENCES.....	38
ANNEX.....	41

## INTRODUCTION

Project Silverlight was conceptualised as an intervention that aimed to redefine social engagement and participation of older adults in the community through promoting social agency among older adults in Singapore. This is rooted in and supported by our centre's research that suggests that increasing older adults' participation in social activities can have positive and lasting effects on social and mental well-being (M. Tan et al., 2021, 2023). Thus, the Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA) embarked on a year-long pilot intervention, Project Silverlight, to enable older adults to organise themselves and curate their own social agenda. This entails discussions among themselves about social programmes that they would like to be involved in and through these programmes, help to organically expand their social networks within their neighbourhood.

A key partner that we worked with was the SMU Centre for Social Responsibility (C4SR). We tapped on their vast network to identify En Community Services Society (ECSS) as a community partner and relied on C4SR to coordinate the involvement of SMU undergraduates in this study. The intergenerational element is a key feature of this study, as past research has suggested potential positive effects of intergenerational programmes on well-being (Martins et al., 2019). Our students were involved in the capacity of co-facilitators, organising and attending activities with the seniors, and making friends with each other along the way. Not only did the seniors' perceptions of young adults improve as a result of the intergenerational interactions, we also found that students benefitted and learnt from these interactions.

Thus, Project Silverlight encapsulates our vision for a super-aged Singapore, where older adults are both drivers and beneficiaries of ground-up civic engagement initiatives that are geared towards active ageing, and young adults can likewise step up to be involved in active ageing efforts as co-facilitators, such as in Active Ageing Centres (AAC) within the community, creating a vibrant, cohesive, and inclusive society with strong intergenerational ties and social cohesion.

To get a glimpse of the highlights of Project Silverlight, you may view the video at this [link](#) or scan the QR code below.



## STUDY DESIGN

The project was implemented in three main phases, (1) pre-pilot focus group discussions and survey, (2) pilot intervention, and (3) post-pilot focus group discussions and survey.

### *Pre-pilot focus group discussions*

The pre-pilot phase commenced with a series of focus group discussions (FGD) with 20 seniors residing in a Tampines North housing estate. These participants were recruited with the assistance of our community partner, ECSS, in December 2021. The FGDs were conducted in January and February 2022.

The research team sought to build rapport with this group of seniors and gain insights into their views and lived experiences with regard to staying active, participating in community activities, and interacting with younger generations. The majority of FGDs were conducted physically and some virtually (on Zoom), with the sessions conducted in English and/or Mandarin. The seniors were grouped into five groups of between three to five seniors, and each group participated in two sessions of focus group discussions.

### *Pre-pilot survey*

In June 2022, a total of 45 control group respondents and 46 intervention group respondents respectively completed the pre-pilot survey. The control group respondents were recruited via the Singapore Life Panel® (SLP), where invitations were sent to 55 respondents who had been participating in the monthly surveys regularly for the past 12 months and who resided in Tampines, of which 45 respondents completed the survey.

The intervention group respondents were recruited via word-of-mouth of the initial 21 participants recruited through ECSS. We encouraged the initial participants to tap on their social networks and invite their spouses, siblings, friends, or neighbours to join the intervention group, thereby recruiting an additional 25 participants, bringing the number of participants to 46. One respondent dropped out of the intervention group after completing the pre-pilot survey and before the start of the intervention phase, leaving us with 45 respondents each for the control and intervention group.

To capture a set of baseline data, we collected demographic information and fielded modules on housing, employment and income, subjective well-being, meaning and affective well-being, social engagement, health, depression, social well-being, social networks, optimism and mastery, and perceptions towards youth. Participants were given the option to complete the online survey independently, or with the students and staff's assistance in-person.

### *Pilot intervention*

To incorporate a holistic construct of older adult well-being, pilot initiatives were organised along the following five broad themes to promote various aspects of well-being: rediscovering Singapore, lifelong learning, physical activities, arts and culture, and volunteering. These initiative themes were finetuned following a qualitative analysis of the pre-pilot FGDs.

The intervention involved planning and discussion sessions with the seniors on potential activities, as well as the execution of the planned activities. A total of 19 activities were organised during the intervention phase. After each activity, participants completed post-event feedback forms. More details on the intervention phase can be found in the next section.

### *Post-pilot survey*

In June 2023, a total of 45 control group respondents and 45 intervention group respondents completed the post-pilot survey. To measure the impact of the intervention, we re-collected demographic information and re-fielded modules from the pre-pilot survey along with additional questions about their experience participating in the project. As with the pre-pilot survey, participants were given the option to complete the online survey independently, or with the students and staff's assistance in-person.

### *Post-pilot focus group discussions*

To conclude the pilot project as well as collect a final round of qualitative feedback from the participants, we conducted three focus group discussions with a total of 19 participants, with each group having six to seven participants. Two of the FGDs were conducted physically and one was conducted virtually (on Zoom), with the sessions conducted in English and/or Mandarin. Participants were asked to share about their experience participating in the programme, the feasibility of the participants self-facilitating and leading ground-up community initiatives, as well as their experience with the intergenerational interactions during the programme.

## INTERVENTION

### Preparation

In preparation for the pilot project, we made efforts to connect with the participants through kick-off meetings and WhatsApp group chats. This occurred in the pre-intervention phase, concurrently with the pre-pilot FGDs and survey.

#### *Kick-off meetings*

Together with our community partner, ECSS, we organised a Zoom meeting with the initial 21 intervention group participants to introduce our project, the team, and the student leaders in January 2022. Here, we also briefed them about the pre-pilot focus group sessions. Following the conclusion of the pre-pilot FGDs, we arranged for a physical meeting with the initial 21 intervention group participants at the temporary Tampines North Community Centre (TNCC) in May 2022.

We proposed five themes of activities that were derived from the FGDs on activities that the seniors were interested in: (1) Lifelong learning, (2) Rediscovering Singapore, (3) Arts and culture, (4) Physical activity, and (5) Volunteering. From these five themes, the participants were given the choice to vote for their top two themes of interest, and the votes were collated to determine the top two popular themes. The purpose of narrowing down to the top two popular themes was to facilitate focused discussions among the seniors regarding possible activities that they may be interested in. The top two popular themes for the first round of activities were determined to be “Lifelong learning” and “Rediscovering Singapore”.

#### *Creation of WhatsApp group chat*

Following the recruitment of a final number of 45 seniors for the intervention group, we created a WhatsApp group chat with all the participants, with some assistance from our community partner, ECSS. Additionally, we created five small group chats according to the five small groups that these 45 seniors were assigned to by ECSS. The main WhatsApp group chat was used as the channel through which we disseminated information to the participants and to ensure that everyone received the same information about activities or events.

A point to note for the WhatsApp group chats is that due to the diversity of the group where some seniors preferred to converse in Mandarin while some others preferred English, we had to ensure that all information that was published in the group chat was published in both languages, so that the information is accessible to all participants.

#### *Project Timeline*





In this pilot, we also collaborated with the SMU Centre for Social Responsibility (C4SR) to involve two groups of SMU students as part of their community service. The first batch comprised of two student leaders and 10 members, while the second batch comprised of two student leaders and eight members. Two to three students were assigned to each of the five groups of participants. The students assisted with the FGDs, communicating and facilitating discussion with the seniors in their groups, and engaging with the seniors on the outings.

Along the way, we developed some brief guidelines for the students with regard to their communication with the seniors in their small groups (see Annex A). For example, we realised that some students would forget to send their messages in both English and Mandarin such that both English- and Mandarin-speakers could be kept informed, or that some students had a tendency not to acknowledge messages from the seniors in the WhatsApp group chats. Thus, we felt it necessary to remind the students from time to time on common courtesy in interacting with the seniors.

The first batch of 12 students completed their service in September 2022, of which seven of them chose to continue with the project as student assistants. During this period, we worked with C4SR to ensure there was a smooth handover from the first batch of students to the second batch of students, who joined us in February 2023. The retention of some of the students from the first batch proved to be crucial in ensuring there was a sense of continuity for the students involved, and for the seniors who had become acquainted with them, as they slowly adapted and got to know the second batch of students as well.

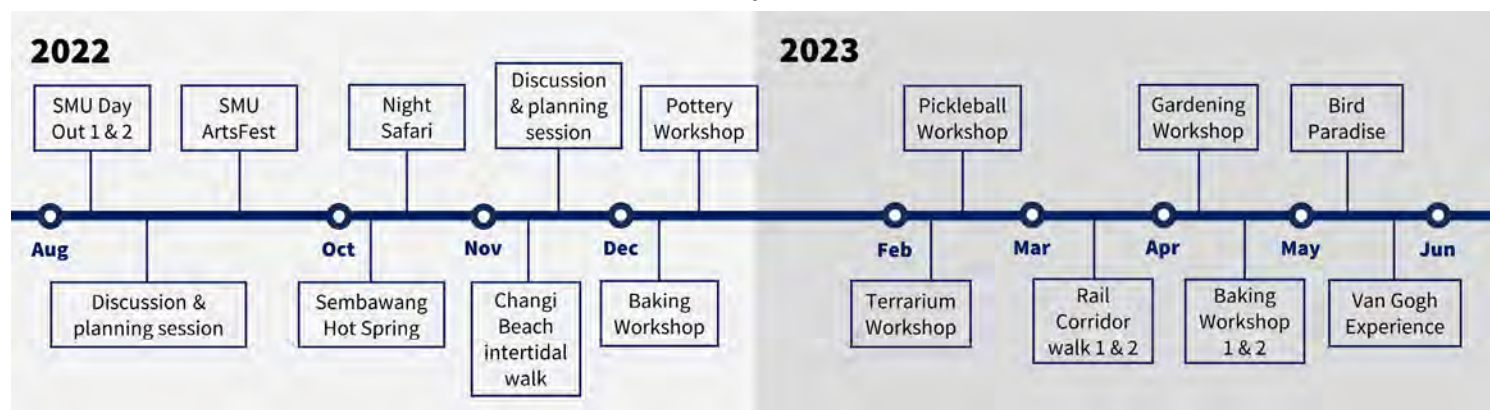
## Activities

### Summary and timeline of events

From August 2022 to May 2023, a total of 19 activities were organised:

No.	Activity	Theme	Date
1	SMU Day out + National Gallery + Discussion & planning	Arts & Culture; Planning	2/8/2022
2	SMU Day out + Discussion & planning	Planning	10/8/2022
3	Discussion & Planning session @ TNCC	Planning	15/8/2022
4	SMU ArtsFest Concert	Arts & Culture	24/8/2022
5	Sembawang Hot Spring	Rediscovering Singapore	18/10/2022
6	Night Safari	Rediscovering Singapore	21/10/2022
7	Changi Beach Intertidal Walk	Rediscovering Singapore	23/11/2022
8	Discussion & Planning session @ TNCC	Planning	24/11/2022
9	Baking Workshop	Lifelong Learning	13/12/2022
10	Pottery Workshop	Lifelong Learning	29/12/2022
11	Terrarium Workshop	Lifelong Learning	23/2/2023
12	Pickleball Workshop	Physical Activity	27/2/2023
13	Rail Corridor Guided Walk [1]	Rediscovering Singapore	21/3/2023
14	Rail Corridor Guided Walk [2]	Rediscovering Singapore	30/3/2023
15	Gardening Workshop	Lifelong Learning	11/4/2023
16	Hokkaido Cupcake Baking Workshop	Lifelong Learning	26/4/2023
17	Hong Kong Flaky Egg Tart Baking Workshop	Lifelong Learning	27/4/2023
18	Bird Paradise	Rediscovering Singapore	19/5/2023
19	Van Gogh Experience	Arts & Culture	30/5/2023

### Timeline of Activities



Of the five themes identified initially, the participants were more inclined towards activities that involved rediscovering Singapore, lifelong learning, arts and culture, and physical activity, while not so much for volunteering. This is possibly due to various reasons such as higher barriers to organising volunteering activities that may involve external organisations and beneficiaries, as well as how volunteering may be less appealing compared to other fun activities. For this group, they particularly enjoyed rediscovering Singapore and going on outings around Singapore.

We also note that the activities were planned and organised around the participants' availabilities. Thus, there was a lull period in the intervention phase during the month of January to the first three weeks of February where we did not conduct any activities, as participants were busy with Chinese New Year preparations and celebrations.

### *Planning and discussion sessions*

To facilitate discussions and contributions from the participants, we periodically held a few planning and discussion sessions for them to brainstorm on possible activities that they were interested in, with the five activity themes serving as a guide. After gathering and compiling the various ideas and suggestions, we would then vote on the feasible activities to decide which activities we would go ahead with. Further, these sessions were also when we would seek the input of the participants in terms of preference for the day and timing of the specific activities, any comments or contributions based on their knowledge or past experiences of these activities, as well as any concerns they may have in considering their participation in the activities.

For most of the outdoor activities, except those with classroom capacity constraints, we encouraged the participants to bring along their spouses, siblings, and/or friends, as an organic way of expanding the group's social networks.

### *Key events*

This section highlights the key events that took place during the intervention phase.

#### SMU Day Out & discussion session

To kick-start the activities, we organised an outing at SMU to invite the participants and introduce them to our campus, as well as get to know them and facilitate their discussion of potential activities to organise. The SMU Day Out was organised across two separate days to accommodate the varying schedules of the participants and to ensure that as many participants as possible could attend on either day.

#### Pickleball workshop

The Pickleball workshop was suggested and organised by one of our participants who actively coaches racquet sports. He was keen to introduce Pickleball, a sport that has recently gained popularity, to the other participants, none of whom had tried the sport before.

#### Night Safari

The Night Safari outing was one of the activities that the participants particularly enjoyed as some of them pointed out that the Community Centres (CC) typically do not organise night tours. Thus, it was a rare opportunity for the participants to participate in a night tour, some of whom have not been to the Night Safari before or had not been in many years.

### Changi Beach intertidal walk

The Changi Beach intertidal walk was another unique activity suggested by our participants. One of our participants even reminisced the past when he was young and would hang out with his friends at Changi Beach for barbecues.

### Baking workshop

A total of three baking workshops were organised: Kueh Bangkit, Hokkaido Cupcake, and Hong Kong Flaky Egg Tart. Some of the participants particularly enjoyed the workshops as it provided the opportunity for them learn to bake new things which would otherwise be difficult for them to learn on their own. Additionally, these workshops that were held indoors were suitable for those with mobility limitations.

### Van Gogh Experience

Finally, another key event was the Van Gogh Experience, which was a limited time exhibition featuring an immersive, digital art experience. This was suggested by some of the participants who heard about the exhibition and were keen to see this new experience.

### *Feedback Forms*

In order to solicit feedback from the participants after each activity and to provide a platform for them to privately jot down their feedback, we provided a physical feedback form after each activity for participants to rate their satisfaction with the activity, the students, and their involvement. This helped us to gauge the satisfaction of the participants and take into account any areas of improvement. The feedback form can be found in Annex B.

Additionally, we also solicited verbal feedback from the participants informally to get a sensing of their sentiments. Over time, some participants who were more outspoken also often voluntarily came to us with their feedback and suggestions.



## FINDINGS

### Participant Demographics

Table 1 below displays the demographic characteristics of the 45 participants in the control group and the other 45 participants in the intervention group. The mean age of the participants was 66.27 and 68.49 for the control and intervention group respectively, as of June 2022.

The control group had a fairly equal proportion of males (48.89%) and females (51.11%), while the intervention group was more than three quarters females (77.78%) and less than a quarter of males (22.22%). The reason for the unequal proportion of males and females in the intervention group was due to the fact that the initial participants were recruited through ECSS, and were majority women, as most of them were already participating in activities organised by ECSS. This is consistent with observations from Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWO) where older women have been found to be more likely than men to participate in formal social activities in the community in Singapore (Lau, 2023). This point was also raised in some of our FGDs with the participants, where they shared that men were generally less receptive to participating in community activities for various reasons.

For race, as the intervention group participants we recruited were all Chinese, we only recruited Chinese respondents for the control group to match the race of both groups. Marital status was mostly similar for both groups, with the majority (approximately 70%) of participants in both groups married, and the remaining 30% single, widowed, divorced or separated.

For housing type, all respondents in the control group lived in public housing, with 17.78% in 1 to 3 room HDBs, and 82.22% in 4 to 5 room HDBs. On the other hand, 13.95% of respondents in the intervention group lived in 1 to 3 room HDBs, 76.74% in 4 to 5 room HDBs, and 9.30% in private housing.

For highest education level, the control group had a greater proportion (over 75%) of respondents with at least secondary education, compared to the intervention group, which had less than 50% of the respondents with secondary education or higher.

For employment status, the control group had at least 40% of the respondents who were working full-time, part-time, or self-employed, compared to less than 20% of the respondents in the intervention group. The intervention group had a greater proportion of respondents who were retired, with over half of them who indicated that they were retired, whereas only a third of respondents in the control group were retired. This is possibly due to the fact that the intervention group had a higher mean age compared to the control group, and thus had fewer working respondents and more retired respondents. Additionally, the participants in the intervention group were pre-selected from a community organisation where respondents were participating in some activities. Naturally, they are more likely to be those who were retired and not working, and thus have more free time to participate in such activities.

For living arrangement, majority of respondents in the control (86.67%) and intervention (93.33%) group were living with others.

*Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the control and intervention group.*

Demographic group	Control Group (N=45)		Intervention Group (N=45)	
	n/mean	%/SD	n/mean	%/SD
Age	66.27	5.28	68.49	4.97
Gender				
Male	22	48.89	10	22.22
Female	23	51.11	35	77.78
Race				
Chinese	45	100.00	45	100.00
Malay	0	0.00	0	0.00
Indian	0	0.00	0	0.00
Other	0	0.00	0	0.00
Marital Status				
Married	31	68.89	33	73.33
Single	6	13.33	4	8.89
Widowed	6	13.33	5	11.11
Divorced/separated	2	4.44	3	6.67
Housing Type				
HDB 1-3 room	8	17.78	6	13.95
HDB 4-5 room or bigger	37	82.22	33	76.74
Private apartment/property	0	0.00	4	9.30
Education Level				
Primary/no education	12	26.67	25	55.56
Secondary education	23	51.11	13	28.89
Post-secondary w/o university	7	15.56	5	11.11
Post-secondary with university	3	6.67	2	4.44
Employment Status				
Working full-time	12	26.67	0	0.00
Working part-time/self-employed	7	15.56	8	17.78
Unemployed	2	4.44	1	2.22
Retired	15	33.33	26	57.78
Homemaker/others	9	20.00	10	22.22
Living Arrangement				
Living alone	6	13.33	3	6.67
Living with others	39	86.67	42	93.33

## Qualitative Findings

### *Pre-pilot focus group discussions (FGDs)*

The FGDs provided an avenue for us to get to know the participants better and offered a glimpse into their daily lives, lived experiences, interests and hobbies. The participants highlighted the restrictions to social interactions and activities brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in greater challenges to staying active. They also shared with us how they stayed active socially, mentally, and physically in pre-pandemic times, and what they wished to do more of in the future as they adapt to living with an endemic COVID-19. Lastly, the seniors also shared some of their difficulties in engaging their neighbours and bonding with younger people such as their children and grandchildren.

The findings from the FGDs were instrumental in ROSA's process of finetuning the pilot intervention. The research team readapted and broadened the initiative themes (rediscovering Singapore, lifelong learning, physical activities, arts & culture, and volunteering) to better appeal to and benefit the seniors and integrated more meaningful opportunities for intergenerational engagement between the seniors and student volunteers.

The above discussions were distilled into three main themes: participants' recognition of the importance of staying active and their desire to do so, the lack of opportunities for intergenerational interactions, and the challenges of staying active during COVID-19. These three themes are further expounded upon below. All names used in this section are pseudonyms.

### *Importance of Staying Active*

The 20 seniors who participated in the pre-pilot FGDs stayed active through various activities and hobbies, such as physical exercise, art and music, and social activities. Many of them recognised and emphasised the importance of staying active, both physically and mentally, when talking about the various activities that they engaged in.

The most common physical activity mentioned was walking. Many of the participants made the effort to go walking around their neighbourhoods several times a week. Some other activities mentioned were swimming, golf, rhythm ball, Zumba, and jogging.

“觉得运动也是很重要，要去走路啊，散散步这些，做轻微的运动。当然不是跳，跑这种就不可能。不过，最好是要照顾好自己的身体，要不然有什么病痛之类，什么大毛病的时候，你要孩子照顾你，那时候就麻烦了。” (Linda, 74-year-old woman)

*(Translation: “I feel that exercise is also very important, we should go on walks and do light exercises. Of course, not running or jumping, these are not possible. Most importantly, we need to take care of our own body, if not, in the event of sickness or any severe illness, you need your children to take care of you, and that would be very troublesome.”)*

Some participants were cognizant of the challenges of leaving the house to exercise, especially with other entertainment available. Some were also actively encouraged by family members to stay physically active.

Choon Hoe: 不过，你一把时间放在电视剧上 *hor*，你就不会走出去了。

*(Translation: Once you spend your time on television series, you won't go out anymore.)*

Wendy: 一直追，一直追，追到 *gong gong*<sup>1</sup> 了。

*(Translation: Keep chasing, keep chasing, chase until blur already.)*

Choon Hoe: 现在老人全部都追这个了，他不会走出去外面。

*(Translation: Now all the seniors also chase this one, they won't go out.)*

Wendy: That's why 不好啦，我女儿就是不喜欢。她每次鼓励我要出去走走。她说等下你 *senile* 我就搞不定了哦... 最好你是不要 *senile*。

*(Translation: That's why it's not good, my daughter doesn't like it. She always encourages me to go out for a walk. She said if you become senile, I won't be able to handle it... it's best if you don't become senile.)*

To stay mentally and cognitively sharp, some participants engaged in social activities such as Rummikub<sup>2</sup> with their friends or siblings. According to our participants, this was one of the games that was introduced by the Community Club (CC), where they made a few sets of the game available for seniors to play. Another participant also shared that she would play Sudoku<sup>3</sup> to keep her mind active.

Wendy: 有时候我们就，my sisters *lah*。我们喜欢 play 哪个 Rummikub 啦。我们就有时候，她来我们家 play，我们就 play 这个 Rummikub。Rummikub 也是要用头脑想的。

*(Translation: Sometimes, my sisters and I, we like to play Rummikub. Sometimes she will come to our house to play, and we will play Rummikub. You need to use your brain to think for Rummikub.)*

Janice: 有一点点像 Mahjong 这样啦。不然头没有力。That one is to make your mind think *lah*, so you won't suffer from dementia.

*(Translation: It's a bit like Mahjong, if not your brain will lose its function. That one is to make your mind think lah, so you won't suffer from dementia.)*

Some participants also actively learnt new things to engage their minds, through various platforms such as online talks, taking SkillsFuture courses, or even watching YouTube. From learning about investments and new languages to cooking new dishes and learning musical instruments, these participants intentionally and actively sought out opportunities to learn new skills and gain new knowledge.

“So when I give myself piano, I told you just now, a couple more years *ah*, until I play very fluently, I'll probably learn violin... Two things I'm very concerned – physical go downhill or mental go downhill. You tick out these two right: physically, try to be active, mentally, don't let it be retarded, do something. So tick out these two, you'll be fine.” (Richard, 69-year-old man)

Thus, it was apparent that this particular group of seniors were very much aware of the risks of mental and physical declines in older age and made efforts to engage themselves both mentally and physically, so as to preserve their cognition and functional ability. This discussion helped shed some

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<sup>1</sup> Singlish for blur, derived from a Hokkien word.

<sup>2</sup> Rummikub is a tile-based game for 2 to 4 players, combining elements of the card game rummy and mahjong.

<sup>3</sup> Sudoku is a logic-based, combinatorial number-placement puzzle.



light on possible motivating factors for seniors' participation in social activities and provided some direction for us in curating the intervention activities later on.

### Lack of Intergenerational Interactions

Most of the seniors who participated in the pre-pilot FGDs did not have regular interactions with younger people other than their children or grandchildren. Instead, they would often hang out with peers and fellow seniors. Some of the reasons the participants gave were their children being too busy with work, that young people do not want to hang out with older folks, and young people are always on their gadgets.

For those who recounted their experiences on interacting with younger people, some shared positive experiences of helpful and polite young people. In particular, many of them talked about their interactions with their children or grandchildren in the context of them being savvy with technology and helping the seniors with technology. Some also shared their amazement at how young people, even young children, were able to learn and harness the use of technology so quickly.

“有时候孙子来，他有在这边的时候，我有一些好像手机的问题不明白，他弄一下就通了。好像那天，我先生的 iPad，他看 YouTube 一直在旋转，好像他要找 YouTube 里面的内容来看，他一直这样旋转，不让他看。几次他就停下迟一点看才有。后来我的孙女来的时候跟她讲应该要这样按，它就出来了，可以看了，没有这个问题。所以小孩子，他们六年级，小孩子的脑比较聪明，他们学东西比我们快。” (Bee Lan, 74-year-old woman)

*(Translation: “Sometimes when my grandchildren come, when I have some problems with my handphone that I don’t understand, they will solve the problem quickly. Like the other day, my husband was watching YouTube on his iPad and it kept loading, so he was not able to view the content he wanted. A few times, he was able to view the content after waiting for a while. After that, when my granddaughter came over, she helped us to press something and we could see the content without any issues. Young children, they are Primary 6, but they are smarter and learn things faster than us.”)*

“I think all the youngsters are very savvy and very versatile in a lot of things. When they learn something, it’s very fast, whether computer, all this. They already from young, they have already started using it and they know it. So not only that, a lot of things they from YouTube, they learn, and then a short while only, they can paint well, they can cook well, everything. I see my daughter... I thought I’m good at cooking, better than her... but in the end, she turned out to be better than me. So I’m surprised, how come I never teach her, but she knows so much more than me?” (Bee Leng, 64-year-old woman)

On the other hand, there were some who shared more negative experiences interacting with younger people. Many talked about the different mindsets of the younger generations, their disinterest in interacting with elders, and other traits such as being impatient, careless, and not receptive to elders’ well-meaning advice.

“As for my son, my own children, I mean they are big already, they have their own life. So he is not married, but he, you know, probably will only meet us up once or twice a month for dinner... Other than that, I suppose they don’t want us to every time nag at them... I don’t know, now the

generation is very different. Youngsters that kind of thing, I just feel that they want their freedom, they want their own life, they don't want to be nagged at. So as a parent, we just make sure that they are fine... Because even if we give them advice, they might not like to hear, you know? They already have a mind of their own... So they have their own thinking, so maybe our way of thinking is a bit different from theirs..." (May, 64-year-old woman)

“我的女儿现在生了她的儿子 *hor*，我好像，你要跟他们讲，好像他们... 跟我们以前养他们不一样的了。她有说她的朋友是这样，她也跟着这样。她没有说，听妈妈讲的。是这样的，现在是朋友跟朋友 *hor*，很好讲话的了。” (Linda, 74-year-old woman)

*(Translation: "My daughter gave birth to her son already, like, you want to tell them, like... She said her friend does things this way, so she also follows that way. She doesn't listen to her mother's advice. It's like that, nowadays they follow their friends' advice and they get along very well.")*

The views and experiences that the participants shared of their interactions with people of younger generations, both positive and negative, gave us a glimpse into the perceptions and mindsets of older adults towards younger generations, and can help us better understand the intergenerational gaps that can be bridged and the potential means of doing so.

### Challenges of staying active during COVID-19

As the FGDs were conducted in January and February 2022, it was during the period when COVID-19 restrictions were still in place. Thus, another key theme that emerged from the FGDs was the challenges participants faced in participating in activities and socialising due to the fear of COVID-19 infections.

One of the apparent impacts of COVID-19 on the participants was that the group activities and leisure activities that they used to engage in were unfortunately put to a halt, either due to the restrictions on group sizes or the potential health risks that these activities pose. One such example was swimming, where one of our participant shared that she stopped going swimming with her sisters due to news and concerns of the COVID-19 virus spreading through water bodies, and her children's concerns with her contracting the virus and infecting her grandchildren when she took care of them.

“跟我姐妹他们去 [游泳]。最近没有，最近... 最近他是说那个，等一下水有什么，因为游泳没有戴口罩这些嘛，又怕有... 因为我有时要看孙嘛，有时啊，他说不要去游泳比较好，这样。” (Linda, 74-year-old woman)

*(Translation: "I go with my sisters (to swim). Recently we have not gone, recently... recently they said something, the virus might spread through the water, because you don't wear a mask when you swim, scared of... because sometimes I need to look after my grandchildren, so sometimes they say it's better not to go swimming, like that.")*

Other than not being able to participate in activities like before, some participants also could not visit and meet their family and friends as often as before. Nonetheless, some coped by learning how to use video calls to stay in touch despite not being able to physically meet.

“COVID-19 就好像两个人... 几个人不可以来... 孩子全部不可以来, 不可以 meet, 也不可以出去。可是我们的孩子会买东西来给我们, 叫我们不要乱乱出去。” (Eileen, 68-year-old woman)

*(Translation: “COVID-19 is like two people... a few people cannot come... the children all cannot come, cannot meet, cannot go out also. But our children will buy things for us, and ask us not to go out for no reason.”)*

“我两个儿子都搬出去住, 结婚了。剩下我和我太太两个人住一个房。有时我要去他那边, 他有时, 我孩子会带我孙子过来。现在疫情就比较少了一点。不过不要紧, 现在有视频嘛。所以晚上七八点, 我的儿子有空, 就叫两个孙在那边跳啊, 玩啊。” (Francis, 72-year-old man)

*(Translation: “Both my sons have moved out after they married, so only my wife and I stay together at home. Sometimes I will go over to their place, sometimes they will bring my grandchildren over. Because of COVID, we meet less frequently, but it’s okay because we have videocall now. So around 7, 8 o’clock at night, when my son is free, we will videocall and my grandchildren will be jumping and playing around.”)*

Neighbourhood interactions were also greatly reduced as group activities were no longer possible, while others who may not have frequently interacted with their neighbours even prior to COVID-19 felt that any opportunity for interaction was further taken away as people were now increasingly cautious of getting infected from interactions with others.

“我们这边楼下那个花园有时候, 没有 COVID 之前我们还有这样, 我们每次一般去楼下, 一人煮一点, 还是买, then 一起在楼下的花园。RC<sup>4</sup> 的啦, 我们组办, 一起咯, 就有这样。现在没有了, 现在 COVID 就没有。” (Eileen, 68-year-old woman)

*(Translation: “Sometimes the park at our block downstairs, before COVID we would, we would usually go downstairs, everyone cooks a little bit or buys some food, then gather downstairs at the park. It’s organised by the RC, we organise it together, like that. Now because of COVID, it doesn’t happen anymore.”)*

“How to interact with neighbour or whatever... Now with the COVID, everybody so scared, don’t know what germs you are carrying... Before COVID they are busy working, never see their face, all closed door, except my door is always open.” (Linda, 74-year-old woman)

Many participants expressed their hopes for group activities to resume after COVID-19 eased, such as those organised by the CCs. While some were more open and embraced virtual activities, the majority of the participants still preferred in-person activities and looked forward to when they will be able to participate in various activities and resume their pre-COVID lives.

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<sup>4</sup> Residents’ Committee (RC) promote neighbourliness, racial harmony, and community cohesiveness amongst residents within their respective RC zones in Housing and Development Board estates.

### *Post-pilot focus group discussions (FGDs)*

The second set of focus groups provided a platform for participants to share their overall sentiments about taking part in the pilot programme for the past year, their thoughts about organising community-based social activities in the future, and their views on how the programme influenced their perceptions of younger generations.

Three key themes emerged from the post-pilot FGDs. Firstly, participants expressed a greater sense of agency and inclusion through curating their own social activities. Secondly, there was rich discussion on the barriers to and enablers for sustaining a participant-led model of social engagement. Finally, the focus groups highlighted the need to increase opportunities for intergenerational engagement to cultivate social relationships within and across generations.

### *Greater agency and inclusion*

As a whole, participants appreciated the opportunity to curate a set of social activities that directly resonated with themselves and their peers. This is in contrast to the existing model of social engagement in community settings, whereby the People's Association (PA) and its network hold considerable influence over the range of available programmes offered in CCs and neighbourhoods across Singapore.

Many participants expressed keen awareness of the agency accorded to them through this programme, reflected in the accounts by May (64-year-old woman) and Janice (74-year-old woman) below:

“But for me, I feel we were given a choice, right? We have many suggestions of the places or the type of activities we wanted, and we were given a choice. We are not forced to go to that particular place if we feel not comfortable.” (May, 64-year-old woman)

“这些活动就是我们自己选的。如果去别的地方就要跟着他们，好像联络所主办什么去哪里我们就跟随着它们的节目。可是这边的节目是我们自己选我们喜欢去的地方。” (Janice, 74-year-old woman)

*(Translation: “The activities here are chosen by us. If we went to another place, we would have to follow them, for example, if the CC organises anything, we just follow their programme. But over here, we chose the activities and the places that we like.”)*

In addition to a greater sense of agency, participants also appreciated the sense of inclusion from having their availabilities, mobility, and preferences in activities considered during the planning process. Geok Yun (72-year-old woman) appreciated the flexible timings, which was crucial to ensuring a high participation rate of seniors. Similarly, Janice (74-year-old woman) elaborated that the convenience of the transportation was a motivator for herself and her brother to participate in the activities.

“你们给我们的时间啊，我们都觉得是 flexible 的，而且每次去都是一车满满的。那个时间对我们来讲是很重要的... 他们讲说 CC，CC 都是 weekend 的，好像有一些 family day，他们出去。我都很少参加这种，我是不会去的... 我觉得你们这个啊，你会问我们有几个日期，



flexible for all 啦。不是说你可以，我不能，所以就觉得人去的差不多了。而且，去的地方也不一样... 你们带我们去，而且是非常有 meaningful 的。” (Geok Yun, 72-year-old woman)  
(Translation: “The timings that you gave us, we think that it’s flexible, and every time when we go out, the bus is full. Timing is very important to us... They were talking about the CC, the CC activities are always on weekends, for example, some will have family day, they go out. I rarely attend these activities, I won’t go... I think that for your project, you will ask us for a few dates, flexible for all lah. It’s not the case where some people are unable to make it and not many people can attend. Also, the places we go to are unique... you bring us there, and it is very meaningful.”)

“过去的一年，很高兴让你们带我们出去，因为我们很少出去 then 而且又碰到三年的 COVID，更加没有出去。Then 而且你给我们这个机会 hor 到这边来，就是靠近我们的家来 pick 我们 up，你们的 bus 来载我们去那个地方。如果我们自己去呢，我们就不会有机会去啦。因为我们也不懂，而且又没有伴... 而且不只是如此，我弟弟 hor，他，我有带我弟弟来。我弟弟他七十岁 leh，他也是很少出门的。他也是一个很孤独的一个人啦，自己一个人一直在家 then 我还可以带他来。” (Janice, 74-year-old woman)  
(Translation: “In the past year, we’re very happy that you brought us out, since we rarely go out, even more so because of the three-year long COVID. Furthermore, you gave us this opportunity where the bus comes near our home to pick us up and fetch us to the place. If we were to go ourselves, we won’t have the opportunity to go, because we don’t know how and we don’t have companions... not only so, I brought my younger brother along. He’s 70 already, and he rarely goes out. He is a loner and is often alone at home, and I was able to bring him here.”)

It was evident that, among our participants, being able to curate social activities based on their personal interests, availabilities, as well as the accessibility of participation, were key elements that set our programme apart from ones offered by CCs.

To cap off the first key theme, the post-intervention FGDs rendered visible the importance of empowering older adults with a greater sense of agency and inclusion, and in a more grounded sense, enabling them to make more personalised choices about the types of social activities that not only interest them but also cultivate meaningful social connections.

### Barriers to organising social activities

The focus groups then delved into rich discussion on the social roles that participants would be willing to take on in their communities beyond the pilot programme. Participants were asked if they would be able to organise social activities for themselves and their peers, and many expressed qualms about serving as leaders due to various barriers and challenges. There was a strong preference for assisting in organising social activities for their peers rather than leading them.

According to Janice, a 74-year-old woman, it is relatively easier to plan social activities for her family rather than for those outside of her intimate social circle. One challenge inherent in driving a community-based social initiative is soliciting and accommodating for the interests and preferences of a diverse group of non-kin ties.

Janice: 不是我们主持活动，是我们自己家人就主持活动，跟外面就是太多人，比较麻烦。  
(Translation: *It is not about us being able to plan activities, it's us planning for our own family members. Planning activities for outsiders is more troublesome.*)

Moderator: 为什么麻烦 *leh*?

(Translation: *Why is it troublesome?*)

Janice: Because 我们自己人比较容易... set 一个 timing。如果叫别人，你要你自己的时间，他要他自己的时间，很难配合啦。

(Translation: *It's easier with our own people... set a timing. If we involve other people, each will have their own timing which makes it hard to coordinate.*)

Since the core group of participants was already well-acquainted through weekly ukulele lessons at ECSS prior to joining Project Silverlight, there was a sense of familiarity among participants that is not as common in activities organised by CCs. This sentiment was reflected by Francis below:

“在社区参加的，很多人都不认识。有些人又怕这个，怕那个。是在我们这边，我们在一起，很多最少也有三四年认识，最多是五六年，有些七八年都有，很久了。所以大家都明白，很认识，有些一点朋友，他们就拉过来。所以比较容易接受。” (Francis, 72-year-old man)

(Translation: *“When we participate in activities organised by the community, there are many people we're not familiar with. Some people are scared of this and that. But over here, we have been together, most of us know each other for at least three, four years, some five, six years, and some even seven, eight years, we've known each other for very long. That's why everyone understands and knows one another, and some would even invite their friends along. That's why it's easier to accept.”*)

Another barrier to leading social initiatives by and for older adults is the “heavy responsibility” and large time and energy investments necessary for preparing activities for a diverse, unfamiliar group. These considerations coupled with a more introverted personality makes community leadership a stressful and challenging venture for some participants like May:

“Being an organizer, there's heavy responsibility... you need to have a lot of time to get preparation, to source out whatever that is needed to find out information. I believe this all take time, so there must be a commitment, in order to start off being an organizer. It's not easy. So for me, I do not know. Actually, have no idea how to go along on this area. I mean within our friends, we are easy, because, you know... but now we are facing a whole group of people which I don't know, and then talking about neighbours, I really do not know. Probably I am not those that really is so sociable, like Michelle, you know, she can talk to anybody, anyone, you know. For me, I'm a, I should say I'm a bit introvert.” (May, 64-year-old woman)

Furthermore, even when older adults become leaders or facilitators of social activities in their communities by personal choice or circumstance (e.g., voted on by their peers or senior leaders), issues of leadership legitimacy may surface, leading to possible discord within the group. Comments by Francis and Janice highlight the tensions that may arise between leaders and other members:

“我也想这样。如果可以的话，我要做。我刚才有没有讲过吗，你的领导能力可以吗？你会安排工作吗？这个两种 leh. 第三种，人家怀疑是不是你自己喜欢吃的东西，你才叫那个东西。” (Francis, 72-year-old man)

*(Translation: “I would love to. If it’s possible, I want to organize activities. But as I mentioned previously, people would question your leadership abilities and your ability to delegate, these two. The third question people may ask is whether you’re ordering the food only because it’s your favourite dish (i.e., whether you only consider your own self-interests).”)*

“我讲一句话，就是领导能力。如果人家怀疑，就很多东西怀疑。除非那个是我们的 class，认识很久了。比如 Richard 主持，很多人 support 他。” (Janice, 74-year-old woman)

*(Translation: “Let me say something. The key is your ability to lead. If people doubt, they will doubt a lot of things. Unless the person is from our class, where we know them very well. Take Richard for example, if Richard’s the one hosting, a lot of people will support him.”)*

To mitigate the aforementioned barriers to a participant-led, community-based model of social engagement, one poignant suggestion made by Richard (69-year-old man) is to employ a “mediator” to balance the needs and preferences of a social group:

“When we have a group like this, having different kinds of ideas, consensus is the main culprit. We can go on discussing from morning till noon and nothing substantial will come out of it. So, there must be some outsiders like SMU, like Wen Si, all these around, “let’s put to vote”. The meeting was very good, put to vote. So, number one is consensus. This is the problem when we say, leave it to us. Not that we cannot agree, but it’s difficult to be a group. Number two, we have to have a mediator. Sometimes, in the spur of the moment, we may say something that is very, rather unkind. “What you think, what, you physically very strong can do?” I mean, some words come out like that... Then we have a mediator come in. “No, no, no, we’re not talking about this. We’re talking about what you think as a group should do.” So, a mediator is important from the outside. This is my thinking. Yes, from the ground up, it’s good. Ideas from ground is good, but you may face this kind of problem.” (Richard, 69-year-old man)

In addition to the above points, some other common aspects that the seniors anticipate needing support in include the provision of a gathering venue, financial assistance, and guidance throughout the planning process.

Thus, it may be possible to sustain and scale a participant-led model of social engagement if older adults can partner with existing organisations in their communities, such as the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), that can provide mediation, structure, and resources. To this end, the ROSA team reached out to AIC as they were actively recruiting volunteers for its Active Ageing Centres (AAC), to link up five of our participants who expressed interest in continuing to serve as changemakers in their community.

Despite our participants’ general reluctance to taking on formal leadership roles in community-based social initiatives, this did not preclude their desire to participate in and contribute to their current activities and future ones in other meaningful ways. The findings from the post-intervention FGDs preliminarily suggest that there is a continuum of social participation ranging from those with a

propensity to lead and organise, on the one hand, to those who are content with simply attending planned events and activities on the other hand. Nevertheless, a diverse set of social roles is important to driving and sustaining social initiatives like Project Silverlight.

### Promoting opportunities for intergenerational engagement

Finally, the focus groups were instrumental in garnering participants' inputs on their experiences interacting with student volunteers over the course of the programme, as well as their aspirations for intergenerational engagement going forward. The participants were generally satisfied with the care and assistance they received from the student volunteers, and in turn warmly appraised the students' efforts to keep them safe, humour them, and resolve technology-related issues. This is reflected in Choon Hoe's observations about the students' contributions to the programme:

“我从一年以内我看到 SMU 的这些学生，每一个都很照顾。一眼看过去有多关心，一眼看爱心... 我站在那边看的时候，觉得这些学生做得很好。比联络所带队或者互相照顾，他们还做不到，这些学生全部都做到了。” (Choon Hoe, 64-year-old woman)

*(Translation: “From what I’ve observed during this one year, I can see that the SMU students have taken good care of us. From a glance, you can tell how caring and loving they are... Having observed that, I feel that the students did very well, compared to the community centre or looking after one another, they could not do it, but the students could.”)*

Some participants appreciated the opportunity to connect with the students and felt that conversations were fresh and provided new perspectives. One such opportunity arose for Swee Hwa during one of the activities when it rained, and a student shared her umbrella with her. In addition, Siew Hong appreciated that activities were conducted in smaller groups where possible, fostering more meaningful interactions between younger and older generations within the programme:

“During this period, I find that 学生跟 senior 是 the relationship is very good lah, you know. 没有分，分什么... 讲话他们也 okay。我记得我那时 go for the railway walk，一个学生跟我一起走，这样我们也是谈得很好啊。我们 share 一把雨伞，真的很好。到第二次见到她，就感情比较好啦。” (Swee Hwa, 69-year-old woman)

*(Translation: “During this period, I find that the students and seniors, the relationship is very good, you know. There is no divide... they are able to chat with us too. I remember when I went for the railway walk, one student walked with me and we chatted and got along well. We shared an umbrella, it was very good. The second time when I met her, our relationship had developed.”)*

“因为小组的话啊，我们跟年轻人啊，本来就是有一个代购。然后你借着这小组，它们也可以敞开来和我们交谈。那我们都觉得... 哎哟，这些很可爱的小朋友... 也可以跟他交谈，是不是？” (Siew Hong, 70-year-old woman)

*(Translation: “Because with the small groups, we usually already have a generational gap with the young people. But with the smaller groups, they are able to open up and chat with us.... So we feel... Aiyo, these little ones are so adorable... and we are able to chat, isn’t it?”)*



Echoing the pre-pilot FGDs, participants reiterated that intergenerational gaps persist and opportunities for intergenerational interactions remain infrequent and inconsistent. Considering this, participants gave insightful suggestions on promoting more meaningful interactions with younger generations, as illustrated by comments from Suzy:

“Why not instead 那个学生带我们出去玩的对吗, why not 我个人的 suggestion lah, why not 我们跟多一点学生做互动。Maybe 有一个机会跟学生们一起做互动, 找一个 venue 一起做运动 or whatever 游戏啊 instead of go out lah。找一个 venue maybe 在你们的 SMU 大的地方做一个交流, 做一个活动。Maybe 他带动我们跳舞也好, whatever 也好, 做一个活动... maybe 有一节目啊 National Day or Christmas Day or Chinese New Year... maybe 我们来一个 gathering, 做一个活动 instead of 出去... 跟他们有多一点的互动 instead of 一两个小时出去, get what I mean? 培养感情。Something like that lah. Maybe 我们可以比较年轻活力一点嘛。” (Suzy, 57-year-old woman)

*(Translation: “Why not instead of the students bringing us out to play, I suggest that we have more interactions with the students. Maybe provide an opportunity to interact with the students, find a venue to exercise or play whatever games instead of going out. Find a spacious venue like SMU where we can interact and do an activity together. Maybe they can lead us in dancing, anything is good, do an activity... maybe during one of the festivities like National Day, Christmas, or Chinese New Year... maybe we can have a gathering to do an activity instead of going out... have more interactions with them instead of spending one two hours outside, to nurture relationships. Something like that. Maybe we can feel younger and more energised.”)*

The above comments suggest that older adults can proactively create opportunities to engage with younger generations through various social activities that resonate with them most. This enhanced approach to intergenerational engagement would reduce a reliance on younger generations to initiate and organise activities, and instead position older adults as true drivers and curators of social engagement initiatives.

In sum, the post-intervention FGDs held space for participants to reflect on their experiences taking on roles of changemakers and thought leaders rather than mere passive consumers and recipients of social initiatives.

#### *Other observations*

During the intervention phase, we also noticed a few participants who rose as leaders among the participants in the intervention group. These participants were capable, outspoken, and well-liked by the other participants in the group. They were able to command the respect of their peers, and thus were influential in group discussions and decision making. Among them were Michelle, a 56-year-old woman, who is also our youngest participant, as well as Richard, a 69-year-old man.

Both of them were very active in their community and/or social circles and have had experience organising activities and volunteering with various community groups. They were often described as capable among their peers and were often the names mentioned in regard to potential leaders for participant-led community initiatives.

Throughout the project and at various activities, Michelle was cheerful and energetic, and visibly lifted the mood of the group at various points in time. During the planning sessions, she would provide

various creative ideas and suggestions for potential activities, owing to her experiences volunteering with community groups and organising activities for older adults. Along the way, she also naturally took on various unofficial roles such as photographing the participants during the activities and assisting with attendance taking.

Similarly, Richard was well-seasoned in planning activities and gatherings for his different groups of friends. He got along well with the other participants and was often found cracking jokes with them, and even with us during the FGDs. Towards the end of the project, some were keen to express their appreciation to the ROSA staff and student volunteers for their care and support over the year and invited us for a meal. Richard was a key figure in organising this lunch and was the one who searched for a suitable lunch place, collating the attendance of the seniors, as well as managing the finances.

Thus, this illustrates the potential that selected seniors may have in leading their peers, and the need to identify them, as well as encourage and support them to take on these roles.

### *Students' reflections*

While this intervention focuses on seniors as the beneficiaries, we recognised that the intergenerational interactions between the seniors and students also benefited the students. While some of them were more reserved or inhibited in their initial interactions due to the presence of a generational gap or language barrier, upon reflecting on their journey in the project, some shared meaningful takeaways and lessons they gleaned.

“This project takes on a very fresh and interesting angle of empowering the seniors, providing them with the resources they need to aid them in decision-making and planning of activities. I am extremely heartened to see the smiles on the faces of the seniors after a day of activities and to know that our actions, although small, have made their day or even helped them to broaden their social circle.” (Shu May, student from 1<sup>st</sup> batch)

“I honestly learnt a lot, most importantly to be a better person. Because of the feedback I've heard from the seniors, especially their impressions on younger adults, I feel ashamed on behalf of the others who made them feel this way and also bad on my part that I may also contributed to these impressions. It actually motivated me to prove them wrong in a way that makes them think more positively of us and that we are not all like that.” (Beverley, student from 2<sup>nd</sup> batch)

Moreover, a few even shared how this experience changed their perceptions of older adults, as they recognised certain misconceptions they had of older adults and their tendency to infantilise the seniors.

“Initially, I had the expectations to impart various knowledge to the seniors, for example, teach them more about planning of activities and technology. But over time, I grew to realise that most of the seniors actually just enjoy hanging out and talking to us. In fact, I feel that there were more times where I actually learnt more from the seniors instead of me being the one sharing my knowledge.” (Xin Wei, student from 2<sup>nd</sup> batch)

“My biggest takeaway from participating as a student volunteer in this project is not to treat seniors as ‘kids’. I think a lot of the time, we often treat seniors like kids when in fact they actually had already experienced and know a lot more than us. We need to be cautious and keep this mental note when volunteering in related causes. We need to be respectful and know how to keep boundaries.” (Wan Jun, student from 2<sup>nd</sup> batch)

Some of them poignantly shared about their interactions with the seniors, and how the opportunity to interact with these seniors through the project has helped them with relating to seniors in their personal lives as well.

“I think that the younger generation should realise that, you know, they should spend more time with people of different age groups, so that they can learn more from them. I got to experience a lot, you know, they got to share with me their experiences, like what they did in the past, I think it’s very knowledgeable and informative.” (Jian Chang, student from 1<sup>st</sup> batch)

“I feel that my experience as a student volunteer has helped me with conversation topics with elderly at home, such as my grandparents.” (Marcus, student from 2<sup>nd</sup> batch)

Overall, we received very heartening and positive feedback from the students on how their perceptions of older adults changed, their positive shared experiences with the seniors, and greater openness to interacting with seniors. Thus, the benefits of intergenerational programmes appear to extend beyond the seniors, who are often considered the main beneficiaries, to the young adults involved as well, and at the same time serves as a first step towards bridging generational gaps in the community and society.

## Quantitative Findings

### *Post-intervention sentiments*

Overall, the participants displayed positive sentiments towards their participation in this pilot project. An overwhelming majority of the participants were satisfied with the activities, where 41 out of 42 of the responses (97.61%) were either slightly, moderately, or very satisfied (Figure 1). Likewise, majority of the participants were satisfied with the student helpers, where 42 out of 43 of the responses (97.67%) were either moderately or very satisfied (Figure 2).

This is consistent with the qualitative findings from the focus group discussions, where the participants repeatedly expressed their gratitude and positive experience participating in this pilot project.

*Figure 1. Participants' satisfaction with the activities.*

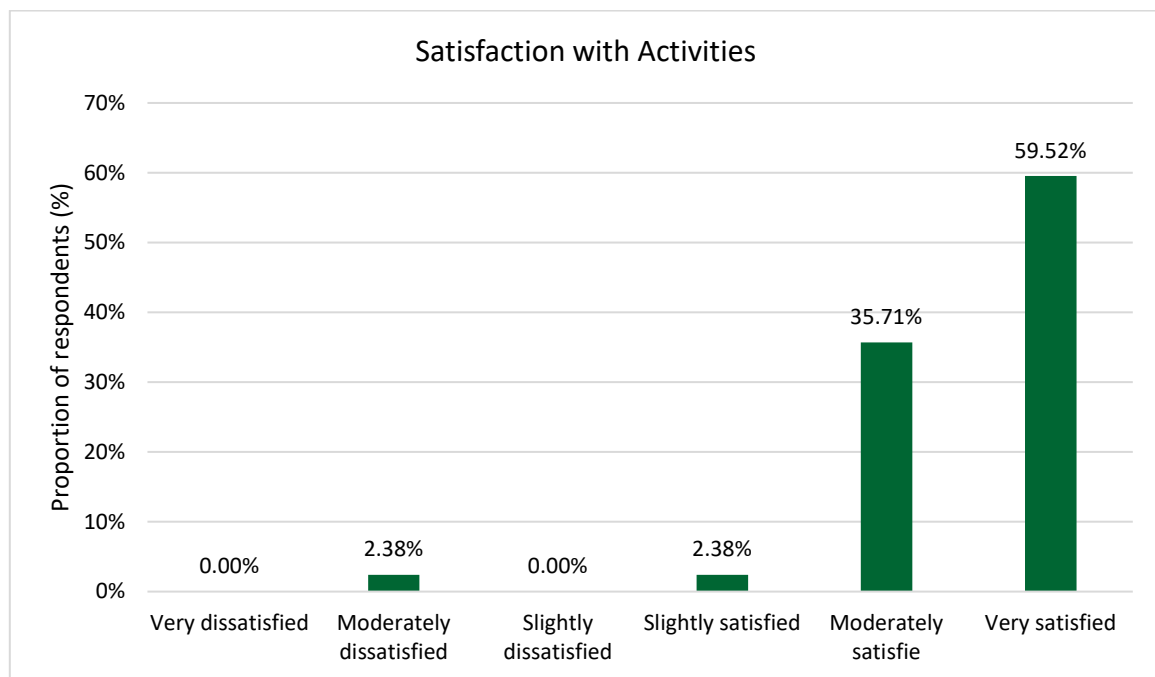
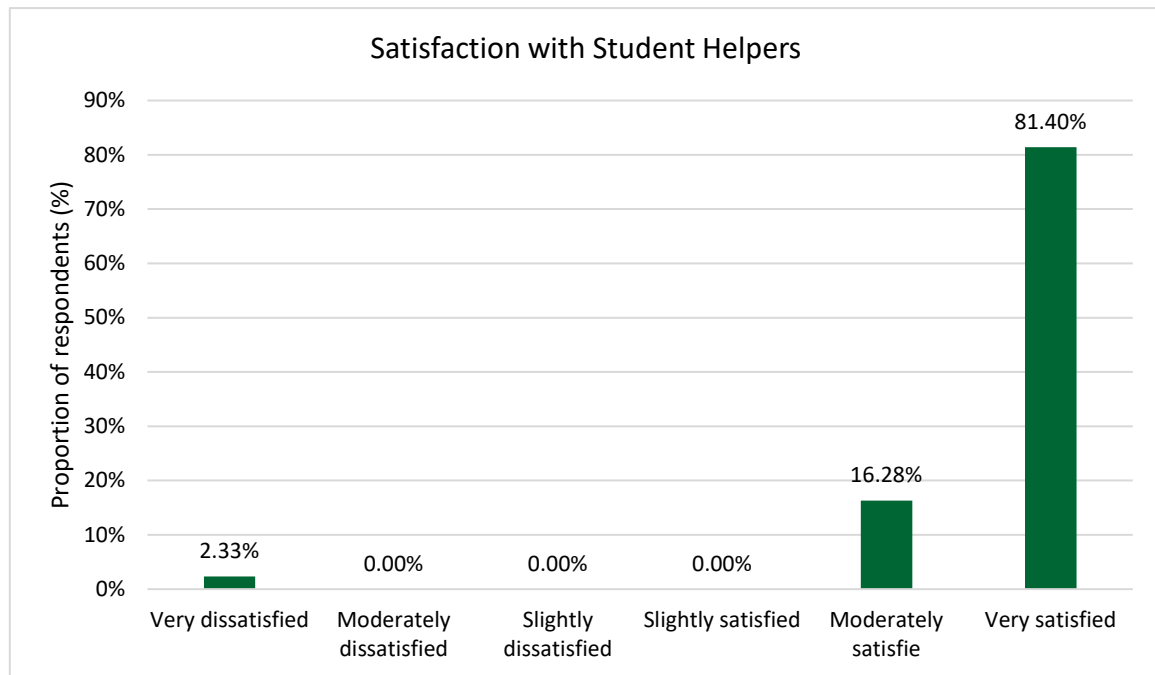


Figure 2. Participants' satisfaction with the student helpers.

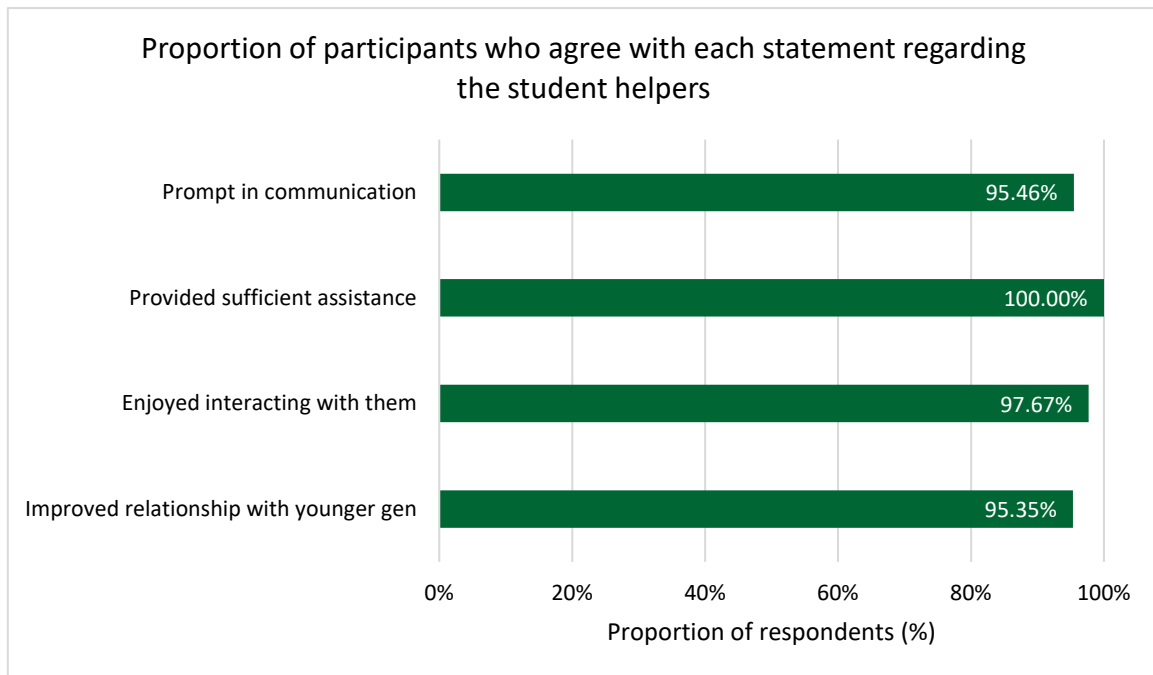


Additionally, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with four statements regarding the student helpers: 'The student helpers were prompt in their communication', 'The student helpers provided sufficient assistance in the planning process', 'I enjoyed interacting with the student helpers', and 'My interactions with the student helpers have improved my relationship with the younger generation'.

Most, if not all, participants were satisfied with the abovementioned four statements. All participants agreed or strongly agreed that the student helpers provided sufficient assistance, 42 out of 44 (95.46%) of participants agreed that the student helpers were prompt in their communication, 42 out of 43 (97.67%) of participants agreed that they enjoyed interacting with the student helpers, and 41 out of 43 (95.35%) of participants agreed that their interactions with the student helpers improved their relationship with the younger generation (Figure 3).

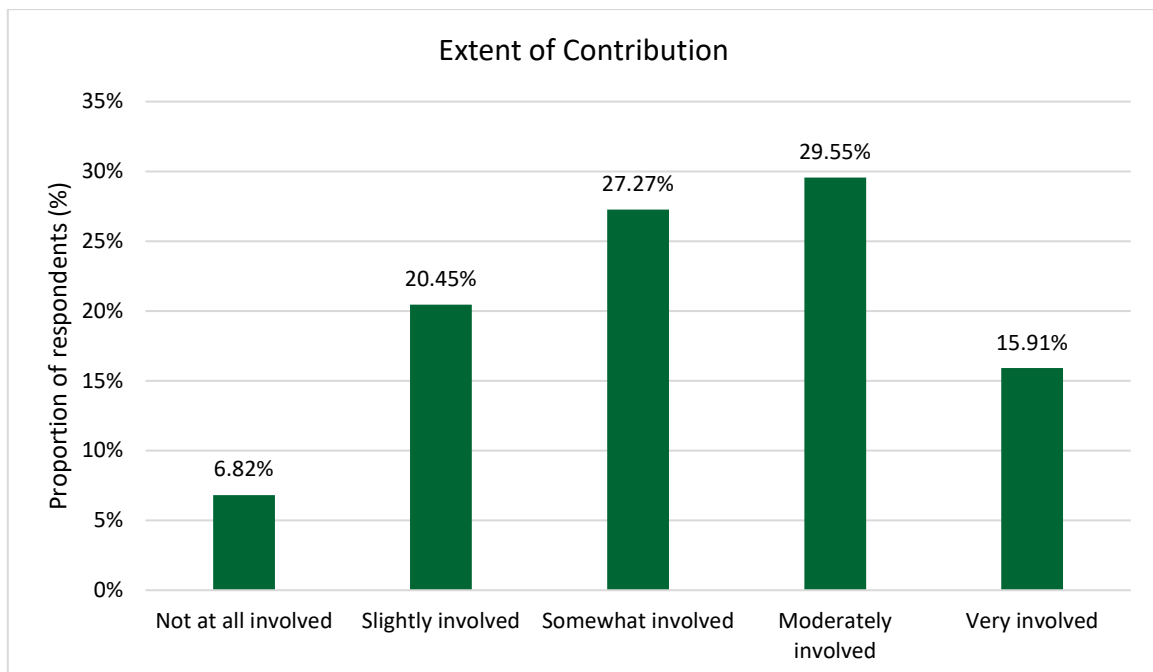


Figure 3. Proportion of participants who agree with each statement regarding the student helpers.



In terms of involvement in the project, out of the 44 participants, 32 (72.73%) of them felt somewhat, moderately, or very involved in contributing to the organisation of various activities (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Participants' self-rated extent of contribution to the organisation of activities.



Overall, the post-intervention sentiments that we received from our participants were positive.

## Perceptions of youth

One of the key findings from our surveys was the significant improvement in perceptions of youth in the intervention group. Respondents were given a list of 15 descriptors such as “friendly”, “rude”, “tech savvy”, “lazy”, and so on, and were asked to rate the extent to which they felt the descriptors were representative of today’s young adults, aged 18 to 25. This question was adapted from two questioned fielded by Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2014) in their study on people’s perception of young people.

Negative descriptors were reverse coded, and the 15 descriptors were summed up to form a score for respondents’ perceptions of youth, where a higher score indicates a more positive perception.

*Table 2. Youth perception scores of the control and intervention group across two time periods.*

	Youth perception score (out of 90)	
	June 2022	June 2023
Control group	53.73	53.36
Intervention group	57.70	60.86

Using paired t-tests, we compared the mean youth perception scores of the two groups above to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-intervention (June 2022) scores and post-intervention (June 2023) scores. For the control group, there was no significant difference in youth perception scores between both time periods ( $p > 0.05$ ), while for the intervention group, the post-intervention score was found to be significantly higher than the pre-intervention score ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Additionally, respondents were asked to rate their feelings towards young adults aged 18 to 25 using a feeling thermometer, where ratings between 50 to 100 degrees imply warm and favourable feelings, while ratings between 0 to 50 degrees imply cold and unfavourable feelings, and ratings of 50 degrees imply neither warm nor cold. This question was also adapted from the aforementioned study by Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2014).

*Table 3. Youth perception thermometer scores of the control and intervention group across two time periods.*

	Youth perception thermometer score (out of 10)	
	June 2022	June 2023
Control group	6.40	6.22
Intervention group	6.70	7.13

Using paired t-tests, we compared the mean youth perception thermometer scores of the two groups above to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-intervention (June 2022) scores and post-intervention (June 2023) scores. For the control group, there was no significant difference in youth perception thermometer scores between both time periods ( $p > 0.05$ ), while for the intervention group, the post-intervention score was found to be significantly higher than the pre-intervention score ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Overall, there was a significant improvement in older adults’ perceptions of youth in the intervention group, whereby their perceptions of youth improved and they thought of them more positively, and felt more favourable and warmer towards youth post-intervention.

### Overall well-being

One of the key indicators that we were concerned with was the respondents' well-being, including their overall well-being, mental well-being, and social well-being scores.

*Table 4. Well-being scores of the control and intervention group across two time periods.*

	Control group		Intervention group	
	June 2022	June 2023	June 2022	June 2023
Overall life satisfaction score (out of 5)	3.58	3.67	4.11	4.09
Mental well-being score (out of 60)	47.64	48.64	49.18	47.87
Social well-being score (out of 90)	62.51	62.07	68.00	67.40
Actualisation (out of 15)	13.16	13.33	14.78	14.44
Acceptance (out of 15)	12.58	12.36	13.78	14.38
Coherence (out of 15)	11.76	11.69	11.77	12.16
Contribution (out of 15)	12.58	12.49	13.00	13.14
Integration (out of 15)	12.44	12.20	14.27	13.36

Using paired t-tests, we compared the mean well-being scores above to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-intervention (June 2022) scores and post-intervention (June 2023) scores for both the control and intervention group. No significant difference in well-being scores were found for both groups ( $p > 0.05$  for all tests).

A possible explanation for this is the fact that the intervention group already had a higher level of overall well-being (mean=4.11) compared to the control group (mean=3.58) at the baseline. This is possibly due to the fact that about half of them were already active in the community through which they were recruited, thereby having a greater likelihood of already being socially engaged and involved and having greater overall well-being.

Nonetheless, their overall well-being remained high at 4.09 out of 5 after the intervention.

Additionally, another reason for the absence of any significant differences in well-being scores between groups could be due to the small sample size for both the control and intervention group, and the short time period of the intervention of slightly under a year.

## KEY CHALLENGES

In this section, we highlight some of the key challenges that we encountered in this project, which serve as important points of consideration for future iterations of this model of senior engagement.

### *Language*

One of the main challenges faced was accommodating the different language proficiencies and preferences of the group. While some of the participants were effectively bilingual in both English and Mandarin, the majority were proficient in only Mandarin, while a minority were proficient in English only. As such, the project was limited to activities that could be delivered in both English and Mandarin to ensure that every participant could engage in the event fully without being left out.

However, vendors were not always well-equipped to deliver their programmes in both languages effectively. For instance, vendors would veer towards delivering the activity mainly in Mandarin, with short summaries in English. Vendors were also sometimes unable to deliver on the agreed-upon bilingual programme at the last minute. For instance, at the Van Gogh immersive exhibition, despite their assurance that bilingual guides would be available to explain the artwork to the participants, there were only English-speaking guides on the day itself.

Some methods which were employed to help participants who were less proficient in the other language was to split participants, helpers, and instructors into groups according to their respective preferred language where possible or pair a student volunteer with the participant to translate the contents of the program to them.

While such instances may have hindered the participants from getting the most out of the activity, it also proved to be an important opportunity for interaction and bonding between the student volunteers and the participants. However, it may not always be practical to rely on student volunteers or other participants to translate the activity contents to the participants (as it may result in mistranslation or participants not getting the full experience they signed up for) and the frustration at not being able to understand the language may put participants in the minority language group off from engaging in future activities.

### *Scheduling*

An important aspect of this intervention to ensure seniors had agency involved giving them the opportunity to discuss potential activities and concerns, as well as suggest suitable days and timings according to their availability. This became a challenge due to the different preferences and commitments of the different participants.

To ensure as many participants were able to join in the activities, schedules were decided based on a majority vote. However, as some participants were either still working part-time or had caregiving commitments to family members, they were often unable to make it for the activities. While the team tried to accommodate as many schedules as possible by running multiple sessions of the popular activities at different dates or times, this was only possible if there was a large enough group to form a second session of the same activity. For instance, with the large amount of interest in the Railway Corridor Guided Walk, we were able to run 2 sessions on different weeks to accommodate more participants.

Additionally, we tried to plan the activities on different days of the week and different timings, where possible, so that those with fixed commitments (e.g., part-time work every Monday morning or caregiving duties every Friday) would not miss all the events. We had activities that were in the morning, afternoon, and night, though most were in the morning to afternoon to accommodate the majority of participants who preferred those timings.

Despite our efforts, there were a few participants who were consistently unable to make it and often lamented their inability to join in on the exciting activities.

Moreover, one salient point of feedback we received from the seniors was how activities that are currently being run in the community often did not fit their schedules. As everyone may have different schedules and commitments, it will always pose a significant challenge in engaging participants. Thus, as seniors' schedules and availabilities are one of the key considerations for their social participation, it is crucial that senior engagements take on a flexible format to fit their schedules, as well as consider the possibility of running multiple sessions as mentioned above.

### *Complex Survey Questions*

Another challenge encountered during the project involved the pre- and post-intervention survey questions. Although the questions were professionally translated to accommodate different language proficiencies, there were several questions that participants found challenging to understand, particularly those related to more abstract concepts such as optimism and personal mastery. When faced with such survey questions, these participants resorted to guesswork or chose the most neutral option available (e.g., the "Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" option). Some even asked the student volunteers assisting them with the survey to make choices on their behalf.

Although the student volunteers tried to further explain these questions to the participants, their attempts were not always successful, and participants were observed to fall back on simply agreeing with the question or selecting the most neutral answer, which may impact the reliability of the survey data.

### *Hearing Issues*

Another notable challenge was ensuring that instructions and briefings were heard by the participants. This point was brought up by one of the participants in the post-FGDs as an area of improvement and consideration for future activities. The participant shared that there were several instances where participants who were slightly hard of hearing were unable to hear the students and staff during briefings, and this impacted their enjoyment of the activities. In such instances, they resorted to asking their peers or simply following the other participants without alerting the staff or students that they had missed what was being said.

This discovery underscored the importance of clear communication in engaging with older adults to ensure that they are genuinely engaged and informed. Thus, for future activities, extra consideration should be given to avoid such situations. Feedback on the delivery of briefings can be solicited either verbally or through the feedback form (see Annex B) given after every activity to improve the overall experience of the participants.



### *Mobility Challenges*

Finally, the differing physical capabilities of the participants posed a challenge in the planning and execution of the activities during the intervention phase of the project. Some participants faced more mobility limitations and were not able to walk as long distances as others. This became an additional consideration in planning and executing the activities, and led us to consider providing two-way transportation, the proximity of the bus drop-off, and duration of the event spent on their feet when deciding whether the activity could be feasible or not. For instance, although many of the participants expressed strong interest in visiting Pulau Ubin, we were unable to approve the proposal as the amount of walking involved would be too much for the less mobile participants.

Additionally, we needed to assess whether the activities were too physically strenuous for certain participants and how we could cater to the differing physical capabilities of the group. Planning the activities thus required a delicate balance in ensuring everyone felt sufficiently engaged. For example, for the Railway Corridor Guided Walk, we had to discern which segment of the corridor would suit both the more and less mobile participants of the group. Contingency plans in the event a participant could not make it to the end point was also necessary, as well as ensuring there were possible resting points with benches in case required.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In Singapore, the government makes concerted effort to foster and facilitate community engagement, through a host of community partners such as Active Ageing Centres (AAC), Community Centres (CC), and other Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWO). Many of these groups actively reach out to older adults in the community through befriending programmes, organising activities and outings. As such, our recommendations seek not to replace nor compete with existing community resources, but rather, to complement and leverage existing networks. We have also included a checklist (see Annex C) for third party organisations who are looking to implement a similar programme with recommended items in place to improve seniors' experience in such programmes.

Our recommendations are four-fold:

1. Redesign senior engagement at community partners, such as AACs

Existing networks such as the Agency for Integrated Care's (AIC) AACs, of which there are over a hundred island-wide, can be conduits for more innovative members to step in and to provide peer-to-peer support. We propose that Project Silverlight's model of positioning seniors as drivers and active contributors of community initiatives can be implemented through leveraging such existing networks. In January 2023, the government unveiled the 2023 Successful Ageing Plan which included plans to expand the network of AACs to improve outreach to older adults (J. Tan, 2023). While these centres are excellent at targeting the mass audience and provide volunteering opportunities for seniors, only a small proportion of older adults play such roles.

Thus, we recommend that these centres encourage and provide the opportunities and platforms for seniors who visit the AACs to see themselves as valued members of the community with unique life skills and abilities to contribute to activities in the community. The AACs can highlight and emphasise the meaning and value in their role as active contributors, even in post-retirement.

As mentioned by our participants in the FGDs, a neutral third-party organiser can command greater credibility and authority in the organisation of activities and decision-making involved. This would prevent any unnecessary disputes or distrust between participants when organising activities. The person-in-charge at each AAC can serve as the neutral third-party organiser and provide them with the resources to support them as active collaborators.

2. Strengthen youth engagement through partnerships with schools and students near AACs

One of the key aspects of the project and model that led to its success was the involvement and engagement of student volunteers. This provided the seniors with the opportunity to interact with young people, and it resulted in an evident improvement in the seniors' perceptions of youth. Previous research has also shown that involvement of older adults in intergenerational programs led to them 'feeling young' and an improved sense of well-being (Reisig & Fees, 2007).

Thus, we recommend that AACs partner nearby schools to recruit and train a committed group of student volunteers who can provide support to the older adults and co-facilitate activities. Partner schools with student volunteering programmes would be crucial in establishing a sustainable stream of student volunteers who can commit for a medium term to assist staff members who may be in charge of such programmes.

3. Provide a platform for regular communication and feedback with seniors

One key aspect of engaging the seniors and creating a sense of involvement and agency is through ensuring that their opinions, thoughts, and suggestions are heard and adopted where suitable. As noted previously, one area of improvement in community-based service delivery in Singapore is the need for more feedback and communication with older adults to better understand how to best support their active ageing (Nanda et al., 2022).

The WhatsApp chat group, post-activity feedback forms, and regular communication with the seniors proved to be helpful in soliciting feedback and opinions from seniors. Where possible, we implemented the necessary changes to improve their overall experience. One such example was a participant's suggestion to add a drop-off point at the MRT station, on top of the initial drop-off point near TNCC. This proved to be helpful as we noticed that about half of the participants would get off at the MRT station as it was more convenient for them to travel home from there. Thus, we recommend having various channels, both formal and informal, to ensure that seniors have the opportunity to express their views, thereby improving their perceptions of involvement and value-adding.

4. Provide training opportunities for seniors who are keen to learn and contribute

As mentioned earlier in our qualitative findings from our post-intervention FGDs, some seniors were keen to contribute and support community activities but were hesitant due to their perceived lack of skills or confidence. Additionally, some even suggested a system of “on-the-job-training” or a “buddy system” to partner with a younger person for them to learn the various skills involved in organising activities, especially in improving their competency in using technology.

Moreover, one participant even mentioned the need to empower older adults of various age groups to take up learning opportunities, and to encourage them to be proactive instead of passive participants. This would help them to build their confidence and belief that “they can do it”. Indeed, we should strive to dispel the notion that one's capabilities or value to society is determined on the grounds of one's age and should instead empower older adults to be changemakers in their communities.

This would provide an opportunity to develop a system of training older adults who are keen to contribute more, thereby increasing the pool of seniors who are active contributors to the community. This would potentially make community programmes more sustainable and extensive as various groups of seniors are trained to organise activities with minimal support from organisations. Including younger people such as students in the training system will also enhance intergenerational ties and interactions, an aspect of society that is vital as we anticipate a super-aged society.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Project Silverlight aimed to enhance social engagement with older adults by empowering them to curate initiatives for both them and their peers. Based on our findings, it is evident that the participants derived great satisfaction from the agency they had in curating their activities. Being able to have their schedules considered when planning activities, the novelty of the activities suggested, and the accessibility to participating are some of the key areas of the project that fostered a sense of ownership and inclusion in the participants when curating the initiatives.

While no significant change in the participants' overall well-being was observed, participants showed a significant improvement in their perceptions of youth, which is likely attributed to the interactions between participants and the student volunteers across the project. This aligns with the contact theory that prolonged interpersonal contact between groups of different ages can lead to positive attitude changes towards one another (Allport, 1954), which has also been demonstrated in other intergenerational programs (Martins et al., 2019; Whiteland, 2013). By engaging student volunteers to assist with the project, it opened the doors to opportunities for connections and conversations between younger and older generations to generate affective ties.

Furthermore, the project led to enhancements in participants' social networks. Participants remarked on getting acquainted with neighbours from the project and have gone on to develop their new connections outside of the project's activities. Most noteworthy were two participants who began sharing breakfast together regularly at the nearby coffee shop after getting acquainted through the project and after realising that they were neighbours.

While this model of community-based participant-led social engagement can be replicated in other townships, a key challenge is recruiting and engaging older adults who are more socially isolated or living alone. As the participants involved in this project were already involved in community activities through ECSS and had higher levels of well-being (compared to the control group), the recruitment approach employed in this model may not be as effective in engaging socially isolated older adults. Instead, engaging socially isolated older adults may need a more targeted approach that warrants further research. For instance, many participants in Project Silverlight were recruited via existing social networks and by word-of-mouth, but such methods may not reach socially isolated older adults.

Furthermore, participants were generally keener to participate in activities with their friends and were more open to working together with friends to organise activities together, as revealed in our post-intervention FGDs. Thus, it may pose an additional challenge for isolated seniors to integrate with seniors who may already be well-connected, and other strategies may have to be developed to encourage and facilitate the inclusion of new seniors in existing social groupings. Further research can also look into factors such as gender differences in social isolation, as older men in Singapore have been found to be less participative in community activities than older women (Lau, 2023).

In conclusion, as the population of older adults continues to rise over the next few years (Chin, 2022), it is becoming increasingly important to ensure there are sufficient avenues of meaningful social engagement with older adults. Project Silverlight marks the beginning of a step towards a new way of engaging older adults as drivers of community initiatives rather than as passive consumers. In addition to empowering older adults to curate their experience, Project Silverlight also provides an opportunity for seniors and students to interact and form meaningful relationships with one another. It is through such interactions that a culture of mutual support and respect can be cultivated between generations as a step towards changing negative perceptions of ageing (Chung & Kim, 2021) and young people.

Looking ahead, we envision that the findings and insights gleaned from this pilot study will provide the relevant industries and stakeholders with a better understanding of the benefits and challenges of developing and implementing social initiatives by and for older adults.



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## **ANNEX A**

### **Guidelines for communication with seniors**

#### WhatsApp Chats

1. All messages/announcements to be disseminated in both Mandarin and English.
2. Do reply and acknowledge all messages from seniors.
3. Do reply to their messages/questions ASAP, within 6 hours at most.

#### Registering for Events

1. ROSA staff will disseminate event details in the main WhatsApp group chat and inform seniors to sign-up in their small groups with the student assistants (SAs).
2. SAs to send a message in their respective WhatsApp group chats to ask seniors to register their interest by deadline given.
3. 1 day before deadline, SAs to follow-up with seniors if no response.
4. On the day of deadline, SAs to confirm and send the list of confirmed participants to the group.
  - a. E.g., "These are the people who have registered for Event X, Date & Time: Person 1, Person 2, Person 3, Person 4, Person 5."
  - b. SAs to update by end of day if any changes.
5. SAs to update excel for group attendance, and project leader to collate a compiled attendance list.
6. In the event that seniors make any changes to their attendance:
  - a. If they are not able to make it, update the excel & ROSA staff
  - b. If they are able to make it, let them know we will see if there are available slots

#### Other FAQs

1. Bringing outside friends for activities
  - Seniors may ask if they are able to bring their friends (not part of the project) for the event. This would depend on the event (whether it's individually ticketed etc.) but if there are available additional slots, we welcome friends to join! Do confirm with ROSA staff first before responding to seniors.
2. Leaving the activity early
  - Seniors may be interested in joining the event but need to be home by a certain time before the end of the activity. Please let them know they are welcome to join the event and leave whenever they need to but will need to take their own transportation back home.
3. Going by own transportation
  - Seniors may ask if they can come for the activity themselves or leave directly from the activity (i.e., not following the chartered bus). Please let them know they are welcome to do so, and just to inform you so that we can take that into account for headcount.
4. Late confirmation of activity
  - Seniors may be interested in joining the event but can only confirm at a later date (after the deadline). Please let them know that they can let you know at a later date (and you should check with them nearer the date). Do indicate on the Excel sheet as "Yes, KIV."

## ANNEX B

### Post-event Feedback Form

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating in the **[activity name]**!

We would now like to ask you a few questions about the session and get your feedback on how sessions moving forward can be improved.

Q1. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements by circling the corresponding number.

STATEMENTS	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable
a. I enjoyed participating in the activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	99
b. I enjoyed organising the activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	99
c. I felt involved throughout the planning process of this activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	99
d. I am satisfied with how the activity turned out	1	2	3	4	5	6	99
e. I am satisfied with the help students provided in organising this activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	99

Q2. Do you have any comments or suggestions on improving the activity?

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感谢您参加 [活动名称]!

我们现在想问您一些关于活动的问题，并获取有关如何改进往后活动的反馈。

Q1. 请圈出您对以下陈述的同意度。

说法	强烈同意	同意	有些同意	有些不同意	不同意	强烈不同意	不适用
a. 我喜欢参加这项活动	1	2	3	4	5	6	99
b. 我喜欢组织这项活动	1	2	3	4	5	6	99
c. 在这项活动的整个规划过程中，我都感到参与其中	1	2	3	4	5	6	99
d. 我对活动的结果感到满意	1	2	3	4	5	6	99
e. 我对学生在组织这项活动中提供的帮助感到满意	1	2	3	4	5	6	99

Q2. 你对这项活动有其他意见或建议吗?

## ANNEX C

### Events checklist for third party organisations to improve seniors' experience

Pre-activity	
<i>Item</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
1. Ensure sufficient funds and determine minimum number of participants required	To narrow down the type of activities feasible
2. Conduct preliminary research and contact vendors to find out more about suggested activities	To determine the feasibility of suggested activities
3. Create a WhatsApp chat group for all participants	To disseminate information centrally
4. Create several WhatsApp chat groups according to participant grouping	To provide participants with platforms to communicate and discuss with each other and students
5. Provide physical spaces for discussions	To facilitate the discussion and planning of activities together
6. Conduct pre-recce of activity	To familiarise on the proposed activity to better advise participants on risks and logistics required
7. Conduct risk evaluation for any physical or outdoor activity	To ensure safety of participants
8. Engage bus services for transportation	To provide 2-way transportation for the participants from a central pick-up and drop-off location
9. Brief seniors and student volunteers	To brief and familiarise seniors and student volunteers on the activity schedule, venue, and contingency plans
During Activity	
<i>Item</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
1. Assign a student helper/senior leader to each small group	To provide participants with a point-of-contact and to have someone in-charge to take care of the group
2. Issue name stickers to everyone involved (recommended for indoor activities as seniors may be more self-conscious of the name tag for outdoor activities)	To facilitate getting to know each other and remembering each other's names

3. Take attendance	To keep track of the participants' attendance and no-shows
4. Ensure all instructions are given in participants' preferred languages	To ensure all participants are well-informed of any instructions
5. Ensure sufficient toilet points, rest points, and water points	To ensure participants are well taken care of and sufficiently hydrated at any point in time
6. Offer photo taking services	To provide participants with some photos to remember the activity by
<b>Post-activity</b>	
<i>Item</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
1. Feedback forms	To consolidate feedback and suggestions for further improvement of future activities
2. Dissemination of thank you message and group photos taken during activity	To thank participants for their contribution and encourage other participants who could not make it to attend the next activity
3. Debrief student volunteers	To collate student volunteer feedback and facilitate reflection
4. Update tracking sheet for attendance	To track participant attendance and keep track of profile of participants to obtain a better understanding of the outreach of the programme and impact on community residents

### ***About the Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA)***

ROSA is a multidisciplinary research centre based in SMU. It was established with an MOE Tier 3 social sciences research grant, as well as the generous support of The Ngee Ann Kongsi. Research at ROSA seeks to define and measure a holistic construct of well-being and to identify the factors that impact Singaporeans' well-being as they progress through the later phases of life. Through close collaboration with government and other partner agencies, ROSA also aims to translate research insights into policy innovations that advance the well-being of older adults holistically and promote successful ageing in Singapore. ROSA brings together a diverse team of leading international and local researchers in ageing and age-related issues from various disciplines. Through empirical evidence derived from a longitudinal methodological approach, the multidisciplinary and multi-institutional research team advances propositions that promote successful ageing in Singapore.

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