



CASE STUDY

Singapore | Dementia-Friendly Communities

Not All Who Wander Are Lost

Living with dementia should not mean being confined to one's home. In Singapore's Dementia-Friendly Communities, residents, service providers and businesses form a support network that persons with dementia can trust, enabling them to go about their daily activities confidently in their neighbourhoods.

The Challenge

A city's quick metabolism, characterised by rapidly changing urban landscapes and lifestyles, is particularly challenging, disorienting and alienating for persons with dementia. The condition affects the brain and its ability to function, leading to symptoms such as memory failure, personality changes and a reduced ability to perform daily tasks such as navigating one's way.

Like many other cities, Singapore is ageing rapidly and will be home to over 900,000 seniors by 2030. Currently, about 1 in 10 persons aged 60 years and older has dementia. As age is a risk factor when it comes to dementia, the number of persons with dementia is expected to increase as Singapore's population ages.

Dementia day care centres and caregiver support programmes are already situated within neighbourhoods to provide relevant healthcare and social support. However, dementia patients, many of whom are living independently, still avoid leaving their homes for various reasons, the main one being fear. This fear could stem from the possibility of getting lost, not trusting those around to help or having trouble navigating traffic.

With a projected increase in persons with dementia and a focus on ageing-in-place, there lies much potential for Singapore to create environments where persons with dementia can feel safe, understood and included by their neighbours.



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The incidence of dementia is rising and cities can be particularly disorienting for persons with dementia.





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The Solution

The Dementia-Friendly Singapore initiative was launched to raise awareness of dementia and empower individuals and businesses to better support persons with dementia and their caregivers. Under this initiative started by the Ministry of Health and the Agency for Integrated Care, several mature neighbourhoods were selected as Dementia-Friendly Communities (DFCs).

Measures were introduced so that residents are more aware of dementia, businesses and service staff are more respectful and helpful towards those in need, physical environments are safer and easier to navigate, and educational resources on dementia are readily available.

As a first step, volunteers and staff were deployed for outreach efforts to raise awareness of dementia. They approached

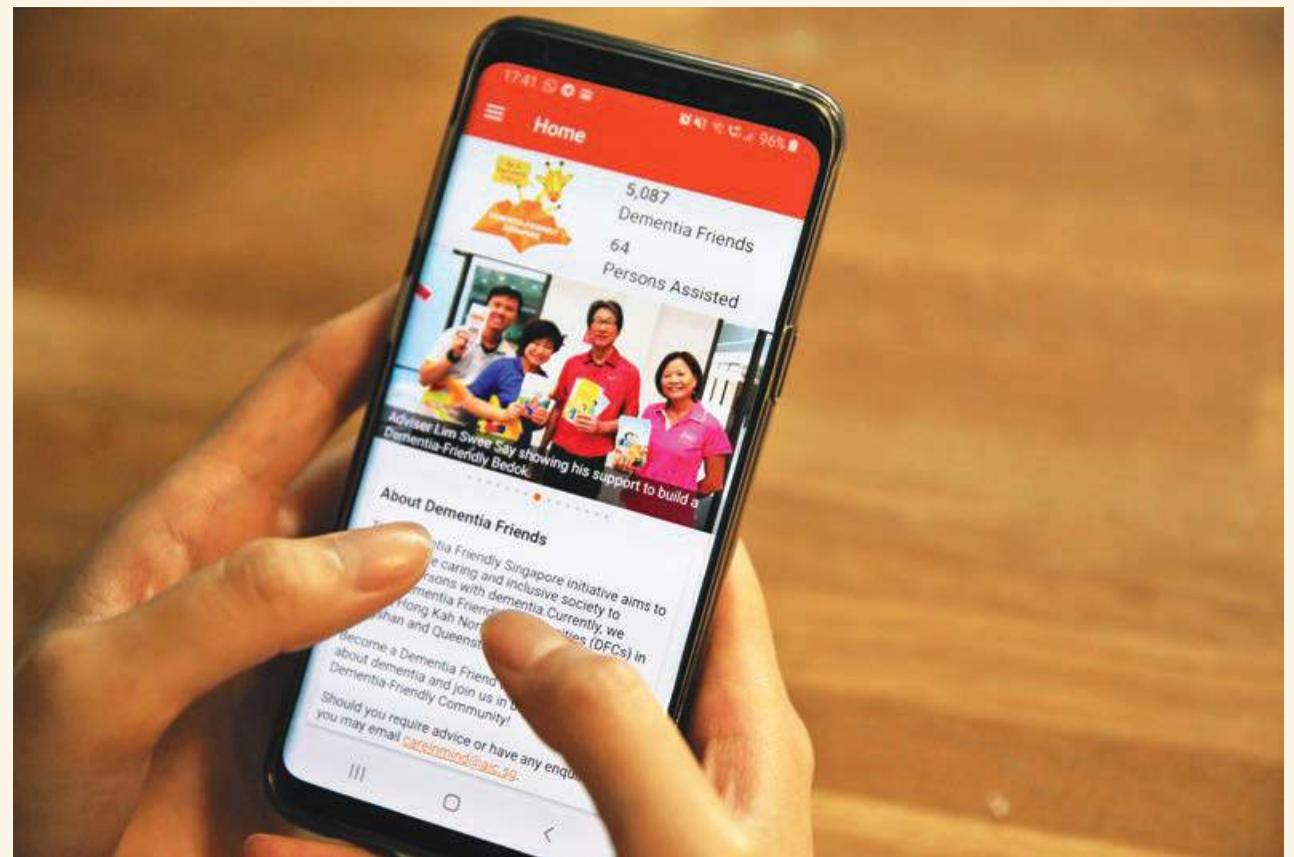
Multiple Go-To Points have been established as safe return points for persons with dementia.

individuals and businesses, taught them about common signs and symptoms of dementia, and how to communicate with persons with dementia. These individuals and organisations, from store owners to library staff and staff from public transport providers, come together to form a network of Dementia Friends. They serve as community lookouts who can spot and assist distressed persons with dementia in the neighbourhood.

01 Stickers are pasted at designated Go-To Points in DFCs.



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02 Advertisements placed on public buses to raise awareness of dementia.
03 The Dementia Friends application links caregivers to Dementia Friends.



01 Volunteers explaining to neighbourhood shop owners about the signs of dementia and how to assist persons with dementia in their community.

Within each DFC, multiple Go-To Points have been established as safe return points for persons with dementia who may be lost or found wandering. These touchpoints are shops or facilities in the neighbourhood, such as pharmacies and community centres, which are familiar to persons with dementia and their caregivers.

Members of the public can bring seniors who are lost to these Go-To Points. Staff at the centre will offer assistance, such as calming the person down, and identifying and contacting their next-of-kin.

Furthermore, Go-To Points provide educational information on dementia for the general public, and resources for caregivers. For example, staff can connect caregivers to specialised outreach teams to provide them with additional support.

Given the urgency of locating and assisting lost persons with dementia, DFCs also leverage the reach and speed of technology. The Dementia Friends mobile application provides information and resources on how to support persons with dementia, and rallies the general public to support caregivers of those with dementia. It encourages members of the public to sign up as Dementia Friends and look out for missing persons with dementia.

Caregivers can use the app to seek help when their loved ones go missing, by uploading case reports with photographs of the missing persons and their last known locations. Registered Dementia Friends then receive alerts via the app to look out for those reported to be missing.

The Outcome

Since the 2016 launch of the DFC initiative, eight DFCs and over 200 Go-To Points have been established throughout Singapore. Seven more DFCs are in the works over the next three years.

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As of May 2019, the Dementia Friends app has gathered over 5,000 community volunteers and rallied the strength of the community to reunite over 80 persons with dementia with their loved ones.

One success was made possible by Dementia Friend Anthony Lim, who was out walking his dog when he spotted an elderly lady wandering around.

He tried to help her find her son's house, but without any success. He then received an alert from the Dementia Friends app with the same elderly lady's information and was able to immediately connect with the senior's family, successfully reuniting her with her son. What could otherwise have been a distressing ordeal for the senior and her family was thus circumvented.

Dementia-friendly community networks have also helped the police to locate missing persons. In Yishun DFC, police responded to a call of an elderly lady found in a void deck but were unable to identify her. Through the grassroots network, a neighbour identified the lady and alerted her daughter.

In bringing community stakeholders together, DFCs have helped to create safer communities where persons with dementia and their caregivers can trust their community to keep an active lookout for them. This trust empowers persons with dementia to go about their everyday lives more confidently, independently and with dignity. 

01 Police officers in Yishun DFC pledging their commitment to make the neighbourhood dementia-friendly.

02 Citizen Anthony Lim was able to reconnect an elderly lady with her family using the Dementia Friends application.