

Project Sukacita: Adapting to a New Age

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gain broader exposure and share their values with partners and beneficiaries. We are also participants in the Tanoto Foundation's BEACON programme – Be Empowered and Active to Contribute to the Nation – which aims to develop the next generation of leaders in Singapore who can meaningfully contribute to their communities.

Conceptualising the projects

Sukacita 2022

Each year, the participating scholars have to come up with a concept for their project. In 2022, with the challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic slowly beginning to recede, we chose to focus on digital literacy and health awareness.

The social landscape in Singapore had changed greatly over the COVID-19 years. With the pandemic finally approaching its end, we wanted to help improve seniors' quality of life, placing particular emphasis on their health and well-being. With this in mind, we felt it would be useful to provide practical advice on healthcare apps and help build awareness of particular health issues.

The health awareness programme involved educating seniors on health conditions they were particularly susceptible to – such as the “three highs” and dementia – and sharing updates on lifestyle changes that could help mitigate these issues. The seniors also received education on fall prevention, which is important considering that one in three individuals aged 65 years and older living in the community experiences a fall, often leading to injury-related fatalities.

We also distributed 450 activity booklets on digital literacy and health awareness to other seniors within the community. The idea was to extend the project's positive impact to a wider senior population. By emphasising health awareness and digital literacy,

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Introducing Project Sukacita 2022 and 2023

In 2022, Jayden, Shemin and a group of more than 20 Tanoto Scholars met senior citizens at Bedok Bougainvillea Residents' Committee (RC) to share valuable healthcare insights about dealing with diabetes, dementia and falls. We also taught them how to use healthcare apps such as the Health Promotion Board's Healthy 365 app (which offers health tips, games and rewards) and HealthHub (Singapore's first one-stop online health information and records portal).

In the 2023 project, Cylvn and another group of scholars held two workshops, one at Fengshan Community Club and one at Bedok Bunga Merah RC, which discussed preventive care topics such as the “three highs” (diabetes mellitus, hypertension and hyperlipidaemia). During one-on-one interactive sessions with the local residents, we shared insights on the benefits of the Healthier SG programme, appointment bookings and screening programmes, each of which makes health services more accessible for the elderly.

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Set up in 2012, Project Sukacita is an annual initiative led and coordinated by scholarship recipients of the Tanoto Foundation, an independent philanthropic organisation. The project is the Tanoto Foundation's flagship annual community service programme and is designed to help uplift underprivileged communities in Singapore. The three of us, Jayden, Shemin and Cylvn, are Tanoto Scholars and Singapore medical students who co-organised and participated in Project Sukacita.

Tanoto Scholars are mainly drawn from the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and Singapore Management University. Through volunteering, Tanoto Scholars hone their leadership skills,





we aimed to empower seniors with the necessary knowledge and tools to take charge of their well-being and lead fulfilling lives.

Sukacita 2023

For the 2023 project, we wanted to focus on seniors who might fall through the gaps of the healthcare system and present late with chronic disease complications. These could be seniors who were more socially isolated or needy, and we made efforts to reach out to them through the community centre. These could also be seniors with poor insight and awareness of disease and who might avoid the Western healthcare systems, perhaps due to misconceptions. We thus also sought to dispel such misconceptions by inviting a practising physician to share with the seniors.

We held interactive workshops with three components: (1) educating seniors about the “three highs” and their complications, (2) leading the seniors in age-appropriate resistance exercises and stretching, and (3) encouraging the seniors to sign up for the Screen for Life programme by sharing updates on its ease and affordability.

Much of the load on our healthcare system comes from patients presenting with common chronic metabolic diseases such as the “three highs”. Many of these people are also seniors aged 65 and above. If we can encourage early control or even prevention of these diseases, it would be of great benefit to our seniors and also reduce the strain on public healthcare resources.

Overcoming challenges

In devising these programmes, we also had to come up with solutions to the challenges the programmes might face. In 2022, one specific challenge was how to effectively engage seniors in health and digital literacy.

We addressed this challenge by customising our teaching methods to accommodate the seniors’ distinct needs. Our health literacy session was structured for clarity, avoiding medical jargon in favour of straightforward language. This approach involved breaking down information into easily comprehensible portions, enabling seniors to grasp essential health concepts more effectively.

We also recognised that many seniors were not very familiar with technology. In order to address this gap, our scholars conducted live demonstrations of app usage, offering the seniors a visual and interactive guide that helped make the digital landscape more familiar and less intimidating. To ensure the quality of the overall experience, we conducted a volunteer training session for our scholars beforehand.

Participating Tanoto Scholars also had to consider ways in which Project Sukacita could be improved. It is our hope that in subsequent iterations, we can engage more groups who fall within the more vulnerable demographics, such as the socially isolated and needy seniors. While efforts were made to engage these groups, there was also an inherent self-selection bias, that seniors with already good health would be the ones attending our workshops.

We hope Project Sukacita can inspire others to recognise that preventive health among the older adult population is hugely important. Whether it is with our own patients, family members or friends, it is always good to take the opportunity to provide suggestions about health-related behaviours, bearing in mind to avoid being too prescriptive.

Looking forward, we organisers of the 2022 and 2023 programmes are unanimous about the value of Project Sukacita. It was an enriching

experience and we hope we have given participating seniors the necessary fundamentals for healthcare in the digital era. Our projects certainly invigorated our fellow scholars with newfound passion and enthusiasm for serving. We will continue to look for more areas in which we can give back to the communities that brought us up. ♦

About Tanoto Foundation

Sukanto Tanoto and Tinah Bingei Tanoto founded the Tanoto Foundation, an independent philanthropic organisation, on the conviction that every person should have the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. Tanoto Foundation programmes are based on the core belief that quality education accelerates equal opportunity. We use the transformative power of education to help people reach their full potential and improve their lives. Tanoto Foundation aims to make a difference in three areas: improving learning environments, developing future leaders, and advancing medical research and sciences.

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Legend

1. Health talk at Bedok Bunga Merah RC – group photo with senior residents 2023
2. Health talk at Fengshan Community Club – promoting active ageing 2023
3. Health talk at Bedok Bunga Merah RC – small group discussion with senior residents 2023
4. Jayden with senior resident at Bedok Bougainvillea RC 2022