

**GETTING TO KNOW YOUR GRANDPARENTS**

# Bonding across the generational divide

*The Silver Yarn Project wants to encourage the younger generation to develop closer ties with their seniors*

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**SINGAPORE** – For years, she was fascinated by the collection of clocks her grandfather had accumulated at home, but “never had the inclination” to ask him about them.

This was until she took part in The Silver Yarn Project, a youth movement aimed at getting young people to communicate with their seniors.

She broached the topic and “it was like a spark that lit up my grandfather’s face”, writes 22-year-old Nicole Ye on her entry for the campaign.

“To my amazement, my grandfather proudly declared that he built all the clocks with his own hands!”

She learnt how he picked up the skill — by spying on clock repairmen at Sungei Road — and the passion he has for his creations.

“I feel like I’m getting to know an entirely new side of my grandfather,” she said.

By encouraging young people to speak to their seniors and share their stories, The Silver Yarn Project — conducted online and offline — wants to encourage the younger generation to develop closer bonds with their seniors.

The campaign was created by four youths — Miss Regina Koh, Miss Sarah Wan, Mr Alan Choong and Mr Nicholas Teo.

It started out as a final-year project when they were students at Nanyang Technological University, but the four now want to keep it going even though they have graduated.

Sharing their experiences, the team say the language barrier is a common reason youth cite for not speaking to their grandparents.

“Nowadays, youths don’t speak dialects but not many of our grandparents speak English,” says Ms Wan, 23.

“I believe the generation gap does exist, but it’s not something that can’t be overcome. And it shouldn’t be used as an excuse to have just a hi-and-bye relationship with your grandparents, because there are so many things you can discover by just asking your parents to be your interpreter,” she stresses.

This January, they launched the #SilverYarn Instagram Contest, where youths submitted photos of their grandparents and their stories of days gone by.

About 230 entries were received and the photos were later compiled into an exhibition.

At Temasek Polytechnic, one of the schools where the team held an exhibition, “(the school) actually held its own



PHOTO: XABRYNA KEK

competition, and the school librarians went around asking students what they loved about their own grandparents”, recounts Miss Wan fondly.

They also held four school roadshows at Nanyang Technological University, the National University of Singapore, Singapore Management University and Republic Polytechnic, which drew about 1,200 participants.

Sponsorship was hard to come by, but the team managed to find some “enthusiastic and helpful” sponsors, says Mr Choong, 25.

They worked closely with the People’s Association Active Ageing Council and private sponsors, such as UOB Kay Hian and the Nanyang Confucian Association. The campaign also received a grant from The National Youth Council.

To get more youths involved, the team focused on online engagement — The Silver Yarn Project has since garnered about 600 likes on Facebook, which translates to about 200,000 people reached — and drummed up support during their roadshows at the universities.

“When we went to the universities, a lot of students said they didn’t know anything about their grandparents,” recalls Mr Choong.

“But when prodded, they recalled

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**Ms Sarah Wan**  
 ONE OF THE  
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 SILVER YARN PROJECT

some details ... Many of them thanked us after the events for reminding them of how little time they have spent with their grandparents. That was most heart-warming for us.”

Of the written stories received during a university roadshow, one described how a grandmother chased Japanese soldiers away with a broom during World War II, and another told of a grandfather rowing a sampan from Malaysia to Singapore.

Some students could not recall stories in detail, but they wrote about memories of their grandparents’ good food, which was a common theme.

“When youths understand more about their grandparents, we hope they’ll realise that they are people who have lived with such tenacity and vigour, and that the elderly ... are people who have gone through many difficulties,” says Miss Wan.

The four are now looking to get more schools involved with the project and want to hold an Instagram competition annually.

“Even though this started as an idea for a final-year project, it has certainly grown into something that has the potential to inspire greater positive change in our society,” says Ms Koh.

The project reminds us of the im-

**\* THREE THINGS THEY HOPE TO CHANGE IN S’PORE**

**Sarah Wan**

- “I want to see youths spend less time doing their own stuff. Nowadays, the younger generation can be quite self-centred ... but a lot of them are missing out on their families.”

**Alan Choong**

- “I would like to see more people stepping up to make change: Caring more for the elderly or the environment, or being more involved in the community. In this day and age, it’s really possible to make change.”

**Regina Koh**

- “We need a more gracious Singaporean society, not just towards the elderly, but also among fellow Singaporeans. Small acts of kindness may seem insignificant, but when you see everyone taking part, it gives you a good feeling about Singapore.”

portance of the elderly and the lessons they can teach us, she adds.

Urging fellow youth to spend more time with their seniors, Ms Koh, whose grandfather died during the course of the project, adds: “(My grandfather’s death) reminded me that grandparents won’t be around forever and you have a finite amount of time to spend with them.”