

AL-ABRAR MOSQUE SPIRITUAL REFUGE ON A BUSTLING STREET B9

COMMUNITY

Serving up joy and dignity to the elderly

Lunch-treat initiative by Dignity Kitchen draws firms, people into helping seniors from care centres

Rahimah Rashith

They belted out lines from Hokkien hit songs of yesteryear into a microphone in a practised way.

Other elderly participants followed suit from their seats at a food-court-style dining area, looking at the lyrics displayed on a wall-mounted television screen. The rest sang from memory.

As the song mellowed to an end, the crowd of 80 seniors erupted into rapturous applause.

"I was afraid at first because I cannot recognise the words, so (I sang it) based on my memory," said Madam Foo Ng Moi, 89, a finalist of the karaoke competition and a senior from St Luke's Eldercare centre in Telok Blangah.

"But I like to sing, so I am happy when I come here," she added.

The karaoke session, hosted at Dignity Kitchen at Serangoon Avenue 3 last month, was the result of a harmonious medley of people coming together to give back to the community.

It was part of Lunch Treat for the Elderly, a programme that Dignity Kitchen started in 2010 where elderly visitors from care centres or institutions are served a free lunch every weekday.

The programme may also include a sightseeing tour.

Dignity Kitchen is a hawker training school for people with disabilities, and the disadvantaged. The students put their training to good use at the foodcourt that is open to the public.

Organisations and individuals are welcome to sponsor the lunch treats.

Last month, the visit by seniors from St Luke's Eldercare was sponsored by info-communications company TeleChoice.

"Usually, two out of five of these sessions each week would be sponsored by businesses that want to do some good for the community," said Dignity Kitchen founder Koh Seng Choon, 57.

TeleChoice sponsored a series of lunch sessions for the seniors from St Luke's Eldercare this year, following a meaningful first experience with Dignity Kitchen last year, as part of the company's corporate social responsibility initiative.

Said Mr Vincent Lim, president of TeleChoice: "I find this a bit more meaningful. Rather than go for a



run or do a walk for charity where there is no interaction with the beneficiaries, our staff are involved in interacting with the elderly."

During the lunch session last month, staff volunteers from TeleChoice served the seniors a buffet spread of nasi lemak, tahu goreng and Chinese rojak, all prepared by the hawkers of Dignity Kitchen. They sang along at the karaoke session too.

TeleChoice has also raised \$11,000 this year for Dignity Kitch-

en, half of which came from staff donations and the other half matched by the company.

The karaoke session is the most popular activity among the seniors, including Madam Ho Kin Lin, 77. She spent an hour having breakfast and dolling herself up for the karaoke competition last month.

"I enjoy entertaining people with my songs," she said.

Commenting on the lunch treat programme, TeleChoice's Mr Lim said: "This initiative helps a wide

spectrum of people. You have the underprivileged, disabled hawkers who get to work (at their stalls) and, at the same time, they are catering to the elderly."

For Madam Foo, who visits Dignity Kitchen three to four times a year, it is always a joy visiting the place. "I am happy when I come here," she said.

"I get to play bingo games, sing songs, and make some friends."

Madam Ho singing at the karaoke competition held last month at Dignity Kitchen, a hawker training school for people with disabilities, and the disadvantaged.
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