

S'pore's first dementia-friendly coffee shop

Stallholders trained as 'dementia friends' to recognise and help people with the condition

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Since Friday, a bustling coffee shop in the heart of Bishan has displayed large decals showing life-sized photographs of delicious hawker food on every table big and small. And if you sit down and read the accompanying text in English and Chinese, it tells you that someone who has dementia might not be able to see coin denominations correctly; think they have been served the wrong food; or ask for the wrong condiments, such as ketchup for half-boiled eggs.

Fifteen stallholders at Kim San Leng Food Centre at Block 511, Bishan Street 13, have also been trained as "dementia friends" to recognise and help possible dementia sufferers in what is being billed as Singapore's first dementia-friendly coffee shop.

They are also given a checklist to display in their stalls. It explains what to look out for, and contains advice to be polite and to let suspected dementia sufferers take their time instead of growing impatient.

This is the work of the Forget Us Not (FUN) initiative run by local philanthropic organisation Lien Foundation.

Mr Hoon Thing Leong, group chief executive of Kim San Leng and chairman of the Bishan Merchants' Association, said he immediately agreed to the proposal because his Bishan coffee shop has high footfall and the scheme would benefit many elderly people.

MP for Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC Chong Kee Hiong said the coffee shop is a good place to raise awareness as the tenants are long-term operators who know regular patrons and can alert family members if they notice any behaviour changes.

Admin and marketing executive Elaine Tan, 57, whose mother was diagnosed with dementia in 1994 and died in 2005, welcomed the initiative at Kim San Leng coffee shop.

"Dementia is a very scary condition," she said, recalling her mother's visits to coffee shops



At Kim San Leng Food Centre at Block 511, Bishan Street 13, some stallholders are given a dementia checklist. The list explains what to look out for, and advises stallholders to be polite and to let suspected dementia sufferers take their time instead of growing impatient. PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO



This decal explains that someone with dementia might not be able to see coin denominations correctly.

1 in 10

Proportion of people in Singapore above the age of 60 with dementia.

40k

Approximate number of people here with dementia.

where she would keep dropping her food and spilling drinks, drawing looks of disgust from other patrons.

One of the new "dementia friends" at the Kim San Leng coffee shop is Ms Eunice Seah, 32, owner of Yu Kee House of Braised Duck, which has an outlet there.

She has a regular customer who has dementia, whom she helps to keep an eye on. She prevents her from roaming too far and waits for the family maid to pick her up.

But some feel there is room for improvement in the messaging.

Supply chain manager Susan Tan,

43, who lives nearby, said of the decals: "It looks like they are promoting chicken rice instead of telling people about dementia."

Several other patrons told The Sunday Times that they had not noticed the dementia messages, as the majority of the text was quite small.

Since its launch early last year, FUN has trained almost 18,800 "dementia friends" from 86 businesses, government agencies, schools, places of worship and voluntary groups, including those from the finance and transport sectors.

In fact, the coffee shop is part of a

larger effort by Bishan East-Thomson constituency's effort to create a dementia-friendly community.

The constituency has joined FUN and is planning other outreach initiatives such as school talks, training, celebrity roadshows and even an art contest for students, and aims to train 3,000 "dementia friends" within a year.

Lien Foundation chief executive Lee Poh Wah noted that Japan, which started the dementia-friendly concept 12 years ago, already has 8.8 million dementia friends, which is 20 times more

than Singapore per capita.

According to Singapore's Institute of Mental Health, one in 10 people above 60 years of age here suffers from dementia, and it affects about 40,000 people.

The country is gearing towards building more dementia-friendly towns in addition to existing ones in Yishun, Hong Kah North and MacPherson. In his Budget speech, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said such efforts will cost \$160 million over five years.

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