

Beyond Borders

By Kathy Neo Shi En

Ms Yang Geok Foong has long accepted her own death.

Or at least that's what the young director of Elderly Services, Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA), claims when asked how she came to be involved in the kind of social work which inevitably involves the painful witnessing of the passing away of old people whom she and her staff have cared for and spent time with. Ms Yang manages three projects for the AWWA Elderly Services, namely the Community Home for Senior Citizens, the Seniors Activity Centre, and the Rehabilitation & Day Care Centre.

"You have to learn to deal with your own death, before you can accept the deaths of others as a natural part of life," says Ms Yang. She even jokes about the morbid issue with her very supportive family, indicating that she would like a purple coffin when she dies.

Ms Yang is a recipient of the Central Singapore CDC's Social Service Scholarship Scheme (SSSS), which aims to provide social workers currently working in the Central Singapore District with the opportunity to upgrade themselves, thereby improving social service standards within the district. Nominated and endorsed by her employer, Ms Yang is currently being sponsored by the SSSS for a Masters course in Health Science (Gerontology) at the Singapore Institute of Management.

Though undertaking the course reduces the amount of time she spends with her family, Ms Yang feels that the course has broadened her understanding of elder care and has opened her mind to possibilities, such as, for example, organizing horse-riding activities for certified-fit elderly.

"We should not discriminate against the elderly simply because they are old," she asserts. "As far as possible, an elderly person should be treated like a normal person." I was also amazed to learn of a spa-and facial room at the Elderly Services centre designed specially for the elderly.

Ms Yang feels satisfied when the elderly manifest their happiness and adopt a forward-looking mindset. Being respected by them and working with a supportive boss also motivates her. One difficulty she faces, though, is the recruitment of social workers with the right attitude to continue in the demanding job.



"Fresh social workers must be aware of their own initial biases and then change their mindset. Being open to learning new things will also help in sustaining their interest. They also need close supervision by a senior in the early years."