

THE STRAITS TIMES



Friends, family and fellow servicemen see off 3SG Gavin Chan at military funeral



Man flies in from India, queues 13hrs for iPhone 8



8 Buildings that have transformed Singapore's edgeprop

Recommended by

Causes

Fresh purpose to wedding blooms



Ms Livia Chng at the Singapore Botanic Gardens. The 29-year-old last year set up Refresh Flowers, a social initiative that turns flowers used in weddings into bouquets for patients undergoing palliative care. It currently works with Assisi and HCA hospices and St Andrew's Community Hospital, which has a palliative care ward. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

🕒 PUBLISHED SEP 21, 2017, 5:00 AM SGT

In fast-paced Singapore, there are those in need - and those who go out of their way to meet those needs. This is the latest in a series on noteworthy causes that The Straits Times is spotlighting.



Clara Chong (mailto:chongcjy@sph.com.sg)

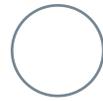
Laid out all around the Island ballroom in Shangri-La Hotel were vibrant flowers - hydrangeas, blush roses and mini spray roses - all for the wedding of Ms Dawn Wong and Mr Neo Yaosheng last year.

But within a day, these exquisite flowers would have been thrown away - if not for Ms Livia Chng.

Having attended numerous weddings and seen many beautiful flowers go to waste, Ms Chng, who works in the banking industry, decided to see if she could give these blooms a new lease of life.

Repurposing flowers for the elderly is not a novel idea and has been done in Western countries. Having a penchant for things handcrafted, Ms Chng decided to implement a similar ground-up initiative. She founded Refresh Flowers last year - a social initiative serving to repurpose donated wedding flowers for patients in palliative care.

ADVERTISING



Replay



Learn more



(From left) A hospice patient with his choice of a bouquet that includes a red rose that he gave to his wife; a ribbon flower basket for a patient in a paediatric palliative care ward; donated wedding flowers repurposed into petite bouquets; and some of the flowers at Ms Dawn Wong's wedding last year at Shangri-La Hotel, before they were donated to Refresh Flowers. PHOTOS: REFRESH FLOWERS, KELVIN KOH FROM LIGHTEDPIXELS PHOTOGRAPHY

The 29-year-old, who grew up watching her mother arrange flowers, said: "After the wedding ceremony, the flowers go to waste. Repurposing them gives them some form of continuity, to bring forward the joy of a marriage union."

Ms Wong and her husband were supportive. She said: "We hoped to be able to contribute a little something to light up the faces of people in the last days of their lives."

SWEET GESTURE

It was a pleasant surprise, I was so happy. I hang the bouquet at my door and would look at it every day.

ASSISI HOSPICE PATIENT ROSAMOND GRACE RUFUS, 90, on receiving a bouquet from Refresh Flowers.

”

Leading a group of three volunteers, she ran the session in partnership with Assisi Hospice the next day to arrange the donated flowers into petite bouquets. They made a total of 50 petite bouquets - 10 for nurses, the rest for patients.

Refresh Flowers now holds such events once every two months.

As the initiative gained more publicity, the number of volunteers grew. There are now around six to eight volunteers per session.

Ms Chng works with three Singapore Hospice Council member organisations and transports the flowers herself. Expenses are minimal because the flowers are all donated. The volunteers sometimes chip in with ribbons or baskets to beautify the bouquets.

Asked why she decided to focus on patients receiving palliative care, Ms Chng said: "The basis for hospice care is essentially comfort care as most of these patients have less than six months to live.

"Some of these patients may not have many visitors. Being present with them brings some comfort in their final days. Flowers can also help trigger memories of the good times, especially for those patients with dementia."

For Mrs Rosamond Grace Rufus, 90, it was the first time the Assisi Hospice patient had received flowers from a stranger. She said: "It was a pleasant surprise, I was so happy. I hang the bouquet at my door and would look at it every day."

Some three months ago, Refresh Flowers set up a flower booth in conjunction with a family fair at HCA Hospice Care. Patients were able to dress up, put on make-up, and take photos with the flowers as well as with their family.

Dr Chong Poh Heng, 51, the medical director of the hospice, said: "It is a beautiful concept - giving flowers a second lease of life and bringing such joy and hope to the patients. Even the men wanted the bouquets."

First-time volunteer He Jihong, who is in her 40s, said: "I was very touched. It does not take much for a healthy person to bring beautiful things to the sick, but we need to be willing to do so."

Cancer patient Gloria Chuah, 66, said: "When I first came in, one of the girls handed me a bouquet of flowers. It was a very nice surprise."

Ms Chng is looking into holding another event next month and hopes to partner other organisations. Besides looking into improving the logistics of transferring the flowers, she hopes to be able to get a steady stream of volunteers such as the elderly who have retired or youth church groups.