

Teaching the young that charity begins at home

By Susan Yeo
HCA Hospice Care Volunteer

I like talking. I like volunteering for causes I feel strongly for. That's why being a facilitator with HCA Hospice Care's Young Caregiver (yCG) Programme is perfect for me.

The yCG Programme is a student outreach programme. It addresses the increasing elderly population in Singapore by targeting the youth: raising their awareness of the elderly, inculcating values, and stressing the benefits of building relationships with them.

How is this related to hospice? HCA Hospice Care believes that many of the youths of today are the caregivers of tomorrow. By attempting to realign these children's perspectives, we hope to lay foundations for strong family ties, to make it possible for care to happen in the home.

We facilitators deliver the yCG workshops at primary, secondary, and tertiary schools. During these workshops, I explain to students how important it is to spend time with the elderly in their lives, and to support those with life-limiting illnesses.

I start them thinking on what they can do to show care for those around them. I remind them it's important to live life to the fullest – that anything can happen to anyone, anytime, anywhere. I even guide them through the stages of grief.

When I was first introduced to the programme, it was love at first sight. The topic matter is very close to my heart, as I had been my grandmother's caregiver

before she passed away. My own daughter, Michelle, was diagnosed with cancer when she was two.

I share these experiences with my students, and you should see the look on their faces when they hear about my own story! That's when I see them sit up straight, stop doing their homework under the desk and begin to take me seriously.

I enjoy sharing my journey with these students, and helping to raise awareness on hospice, life-limiting illnesses, and eldercare. I find this sharing incredibly therapeutic and fulfilling. My daughter Michelle also has Downs Syndrome, so I can even raise their awareness on children with special needs while sharing my caregiving experiences – helping me reach yet another of my personal goals.

Some people ask me, "Susan, how can you bear to talk about the same thing for seven years?"

I tell them how it's different every time. I don't just talk to these students. I learn from them constantly, and bring these lessons back to hone my own skills in public speaking, in parenting, and in caregiving.

I've also learned that the most gratifying moments may not even happen during the sessions. These moments affirm to me how meaningful and fulfilling our programme is – seeing how many of the students change their negative attitudes to positive attitudes after the workshops.

To me, HCA's Young Caregiver Programme goes beyond eldercare. We

facilitators want these students to understand that they may not always be able to see their loved ones. We want to equip them, yes, with caregiving skills, but more importantly, with empathy.

To us, yCG isn't just about caregiving. It's about moral values – an all-rounded character building exercise that I am honoured to deliver for so many students.

Join Susan and HCA Hospice Care's team of yCG Facilitators in teaching the young to show care for their elders and to appreciate life! Schools interested in having the yCG Programme for their students are also welcome to contact us. Please email ycg@hcahospicecare.org.sg for more information.



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