

## UCSI STUDENTS 'BUILD BRIDGES'

Imagine this: A group of elderly folks with white hair and wrinkled skin, living in harmony together at a secure and serene commune isolated from the hustle and bustle of city life. Sounds like the ideal place to retire after years of toil and hard work? Well, “yes” and “no”. “Yes”, because it is a nice place to retire. “No”, because there are times when you will feel cut off from the world, and yearn for companionship – be it friends, family, or merely visitors.

These are precisely the sentiments of the 34 senior citizens residing at the Sri Seronok Retirement Village in Cheras.



On 26 July 2006, a group of eight students from UCSI (University College Sedaya International) showed that they cared by taking time off from studying to pay these senior citizens a visit. They brought along with them food and gifts contributed by caring individuals, but most of all, they brought with them love, joy and companionship.

Codenamed Build Bridges Instead, this community project strives to bridge the widening gap between youths and the older generation.

“This project aims at helping the young build a relationship with the senior citizens in our community. Therefore, we felt that it should not be a once-off activity but a continuous effort,” said second-year Mass Communications student, Claudine T. Egbert, who is also a scholarship holder at UCSI.

Fellow scholar and Foundation in Applied Sciences student, Pauline Chang, said, “We are hoping to organize at least one visit to Sri Seronok each semester so that more students can be exposed to the plight of these old folks.”

“Spending time with them and showing them we care is the least we can do for them. After all, they have done so much for our generation,” she added.

The students started the afternoon activities with a sing-along session with the residents, followed by three rounds of Bingo. After that, two of the students serenaded the residents with some evergreen oldies while the others became waiters and waitresses for a day serving the residents’ lunch.



Two students bringing food and gifts to a disabled resident who could not join the party

Restoran Sri Nivah, Shokudo Food Services (M) Sdn. Bhd., Cheerish Enterprise, and Sedaya Cafeteria sponsored the food and drinks for the day. All of them operate eateries at UCSI’s campus.

Diploma in Management student, Salina Aris, said it was a great experience and she hopes to spend more quality time interacting with the senior citizens soon as each of them had great stories of their experiences to share.

“The elderly are actually feeling lonely and ignored,” she added. “They just need someone to listen to them.”

"I am truly impressed with the work that this group of young people is doing. It was good to be with youths who take an interest in the lives of other people, especially us older folks," commented a 56-year old resident at Sri Seronok who only wanted to be known as Aunty Foong.

Before leaving, the students handed out goodie bags sponsored by UCSI’s Business Development Unit and Student Council.

The event ended with a touching scene. While most of the elderly folk thanked the students verbally or with a warm handshake, 80-year-old Maria Ann Chong hugged UCSI Student Council Deputy President, Sharmini Harikrishnan saying, “Please do come and visit again.” This unexpected gesture brought tears to the Mass Communications student’s eyes.

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The jovial residents posing with their gifts.