

'Inverted' hawker centre, cruise ships and schools open to the elderly among winning ideas in contest



Ms Sandra Leong, one of the three winners of a contest to come up with ideas to reimagine how the elderly can live and play in their communities, with her grandfather Mr Chua Pee Tong. ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG

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SINGAPORE - Stalls at hawker centres and wet markets are usually lined up in rows, packed between tables, chairs and food wares.

Seniors on wheelchairs or elderly persons who use walking sticks may find it difficult to manoeuvre their way around the stalls, especially when it is crowded or when the floor is wet.

What if these stalls are situated in the middle of hawker centres or wet markets instead, to form a circle or rectangle?

This is the brainchild of Ms Sandra Leong, one of the three winners of a contest to come up with ideas to reimagine how the elderly can live and play in their communities.

The contest was organised by philanthropic organisation Lien Foundation and The Straits Times. The other two involve having cruise ships with facilities for the elderly circle the island and opening up schools for older people to use and mingle with the younger generation. In total, about 150 readers sent in their ideas.

Ms Leong said of her idea: "Inverting the stalls to form an inner core means the stall owners can work more closely together and enjoy economies of scale in operations, and the outer ring can be made barrier-free with non-slip tiles for seniors to move around more easily."

The 36-year-old, who works in the social service sector, has two grandfathers in their 90s who enjoy doing the marketing. However, her family does not let them do so unless they are accompanied, lest they fall down.

She said such hawker centres and wet markets can be built in mature estates such as Queenstown, where there are a higher proportion of older people.

Another winner, Mr Ng Tze Yong, 38, suggested opening up the libraries, classrooms, gardens and sport facilities in schools to the elderly after school hours or during school holidays to maximise usage.



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"These can be spaces where the elderly are not customers or care recipients, but custodians of our children and they can serve as traffic wardens, canteen operators, crowd controllers, storytellers or teaching assistants," said Mr Ng, chief executive of local charity Equal-Ark, which rehabilitates vulnerable persons by working with therapy horses.

The third winning entry was from civil engineer Ng Kok Ann, 29, who came up with the idea of having the seniors go on board cruise ships to use facilities such as pools, gyms and libraries. These ships circle the waterways and make various pit stops, allowing them to board and alight anytime.

The contest was launched after the release of *Second Beginnings - Senior Living Redefined*, a book that features 10 ideas on how underused spaces such as empty warehouses or the spaces below MRT tracks can be creatively transformed to meet the needs of the elderly.

These ideas cover lifestyle spaces and eldercare centres, as well as alternative residential living options such as assisted living facilities.

Readers also chose their favourite of the 10 ideas.

The top three were the "Garden of Life" where a hospice is integrated with a nature park and tree nursery, a

"Wholesome Market" where seniors can enjoy food, health checks and performances in the same space and a "Healing Stadium" where a cluster of apartments for seniors are built in an old sports complex, alongside safe green spaces for exercise and onsite care services.

The winning entries were picked by The Straits Times, Lien Foundation and Colours, a local design consultancy which worked with the foundation on the book.

"To cater to the evolving needs of an ageing population, it is crucial to design our spaces, services and systems to enable our seniors to lead independent, engaged and meaningful lives," said Lien Foundation chief executive Lee Poh Wah.

"We hope this exercise will inspire government planners, architects and developers to explore and expand on the ideas."

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