



PRESS RELEASE

SURVEY SHOWS SENIORS KEEN TO TAKE ON COURSES, PREFER PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING

Findings indicate areas in which private and community education providers need to plug learning gap to better cater for Singapore's ageing population

Singapore, 3 February 2010 – Forget about slowing down as one approaches retirement, older Singaporeans are on the hunt for new skills and new sources of knowledge, even more so than before.

A survey commissioned by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), together with SIM University (UniSIM), aimed at surfacing the learning needs and patterns of older Singaporeans, has found that more than half of them are keen on taking up courses.

About 52% of those surveyed say they are keen on learning, and for a variety of reasons - from keeping their minds active and staying connected with the world to being able to better engage with their children and grandchildren. Encouragingly, a fifth of the respondents had either participated or planned to participate in career and non-career related training courses.

The study was conducted by sociologist Tan Ern Ser, Associate Professor with the sociology department of the National University of Singapore, and focused on the learning needs of those aged 40 to 74, covering three key segments – the late-baby boomers (40 to 54 years old), early baby boomers (55 to 64 years old) and current seniors - 65 to 74 years old.

“This study will help in indicating how to best keep seniors mentally agile, socially engaged, physically active, and vocationally relevant, thereby contributing towards making their post-retirement years truly golden” said A/P Tan.



“Learning can reduce social isolation amongst seniors by increasing their interactions with others in a social network. It also keeps their mind active and helps them stay current. In addition, we also want to encourage our seniors to engage in life-long learning to help them stay employable. To do this, we need to enhance the opportunities for them to do so. For private and community education providers, this survey is a good base for them to review their course offerings and tweak them to better cater to our seniors.”

The survey pointed to current learning gaps that educational institutions need to bridge in order to best cater to the segment, and its findings can point to the type of refinements that need to be made to the education offerings available in the market now, as well as their desired formats for learning among older Singaporeans.

Also, seniors are far from homogeneous in their preferences, and hence there is a need to customise courses both in terms of contents as well as teaching methods, pointed out A/P Tan.

In addition to convenience, accessibility, affordability and practical content, older seniors, for example, are also most comfortable learning from peers, a method of learning that has at least two advantages - peer teachers serve as role models and an inspiration to peer learners, even as they themselves benefit from sharing knowledge and being socially engaged. Hands-on learning also ranked highly.

Already, some institutions, like YAH! College and the Age Management and Enrichment Pte Ltd (AME Pte Ltd), funded by C3A to run lifelong learning courses, are adopting these approaches. YAH! College conducts courses which include experiential and interactive activities in subjects as wide as Gerontology, Information Technology and Community Participation.

RSVP Singapore’s Cyberguide Programme, which aims at getting seniors involved with Infocomm and staying relevant in an e-economy, uses peer learning - the courses, which include Basic Computer and Internet, e-Transactions and Internet Security, are conducted by seniors for seniors.

It is an approach that has gone down well with its students.



Ms Teresa Chin, who participates in the Cyberguide Programme, said: "I find that learning IT courses from seniors like myself is a good thing as they understand our physical and mental limitations and as such are more patient and understanding. They can take any form of IT related questions directed to them, help us enlarge wordings for better reading, are more compassionate and accommodating."

Where do they go?

Community avenues such as the Wellness Programme, Community Centres and VWOs such as RSVP Singapore, as well as private schools such as UniSIM, are the top destinations for seniors looking to up their skills.

Since opening in 2005, the YAH! College has put more than 1,000 seniors through its courses. It has also grown the number of courses offered annually by more than 60% this year, bringing the total number of courses conducted to 18.

C3A, on its part, will continue to encourage more partners to offer lifelong learning opportunities for seniors as part of their active ageing efforts.

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About Council for Third Age (C3A)

Set up in May 2007, Council for Third Age is an independent body that promotes active ageing, so that seniors can achieve a better quality of life in all the six dimensions of wellness – social, intellectual, physical, vocational, emotional and spiritual. The Council plays a leadership role in driving the thrust towards creating an active ageing culture in Singapore, and partners businesses and community organisations to develop products and services that fulfill the aspirations and interests of seniors.