

## **Project Title**

Therapy Through Work for Persons with Young Onset and Early Stage Dementia

## **Project Lead and Members**

Project lead: Dian Karnina

Project members: Sion Teng, Chen Yongjie, Gay Shi Fang, Claire Poh, Fiona Chua, Timothy Lim, Marcus Lim, Ng Wei Xuan, Tay Su Yin

## **Organisation(s) Involved**

Apex Harmony Lodge

## **Project Period**

Start date: July 2018

Completed date: Ongoing

## **Aims**

The project aims to provide therapeutic employment for persons with young onset and early stage dementia, while providing naturalized respite and coping strategies for their caregivers. At the same time, the project was aimed to create dementia-respectful work communities.

## **Background**

This program focuses on individuals with young onset dementia (diagnosed before the age of 65) and those who are at an early stage of dementia (regardless of age). Upon being diagnosed with dementia, many individuals are forced to give up their regular activities, and even terminated from their employment, leading to a loss of livelihood, as well as shrinking social network. The disengagement from meaningful routines typically leads to a more rapid progression of the disease, at their personal as well as their loved ones' expense. As dementia progresses, the caregiving needs grow and evolve, often beyond the capacity of the caregivers, resulting in stress experienced by the household members.

The TTW YES program aims at meeting the occupation needs of people with dementia through therapeutic and supported employment, while keeping them actively integrated in the society. By providing various work opportunities, the program aims at meeting different clients' needs, skills, and preferences, while providing them with some nominal earning. Work is facilitated by dementia-trained coaches, and is adapted optimally to each individual's level of ability, balancing the right level of challenge and mastery. Through completing the work tasks, one's cognitive abilities are stimulated and their functional abilities maintained.

## Methods

The TTW YES program currently practices supported group employment with guidance and facilitation by dementia-trained AHL staff and volunteers. In a group of 3 – 6, our clients work together for at least 3 hours once or twice a week, forming a regular group of colleagues and work routine.

## Results

By end of 2019, 16 clients were assessed at two intervals, before and after at least 6 months of participating in the program. Out of those with completed assessments, we have seen significant improvement in the self-reported health perception (EQ-5D) as well as quality of life scores (SQOL); the median post- test ranks were statistically significantly higher than the median pre-test ranks.

- Median of self-reported health perception score has increased from 75 at pre-rest to 87.5 at post-test.
- Median of quality of life score has increased from 140 at pre-test to 169 at post-test.

Changes in cognition, mood, as well as caregivers' burden level were not significant.

Median of quality of life score has increased from 140 at pre-test to 169 at post-test.

The ability to perform activities of daily living however continued to decline for most of the participants.

## Lessons Learnt

The program shows that a holistic approach in engagement for people with dementia -one that addresses various aspects of wellbeing (including developmental, emotional, social) - is crucial, as dementia not only affects one's cognition, but also other faculties.

Age and ability-appropriateness of activities are crucial; modifications and adjustments need to be constantly considered and implemented as they affect the clients' interest and participation. This is because dementia affects a diverse group of individuals with differing abilities and symptoms that progress and change with time. Hence, the facilitators' alertness, regular reviews & assessments must be in place in order for the program owner to respond to the needs of the clients appropriately.

There is also an ongoing learning of understanding the changing demographics of people with dementia. The younger people with dementia might have different life experiences and exposure shaping their view and preferences of work. We have learned that this also translates to their preferences and view about the tasks/ activities available within the program.

Lastly, intervening early and getting clients to participate in the programme early when prior to experiencing significant impairment is crucial to enhance the experience and optimize the benefits of the programme.

## Conclusion

See poster appended/ below

## Additional Information

Winner of the AIC Community Care Excellence Awards (CCEA) 2020, Client Experience Improvement category

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShTBO\\_sAkGo&ab\\_channel=AICSingapore](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShTBO_sAkGo&ab_channel=AICSingapore)

**Project Category**

Care Redesign

**Keywords**

Care Redesign, Dementia, Community Care, Apex Harmony, Young Onset Dementia,  
Early-Stage Dementia, Work Therapy Programme, Inclusive Workforce

**Name and Email of Project Contact Person(s)**

Name: Ng Wei Xuan

Email: [weixuan.ng@apexharmony.org.sg](mailto:weixuan.ng@apexharmony.org.sg)

# Therapy through Work (TTW) for Young Onset and Early Stage (YES) Dementia



[Apex Harmony Lodge]

Dian Karnina, Sion Teng, Chen Yongjie, Gay Shi Fang, Claire Poh, Fiona Chua, Timothy Lim, Marcus Lim, Wei Xuan Ng, Su Yin Tay



## What is the project about and why do we need to work on this?

This program focuses on individuals with young onset dementia (diagnosed before the age of 65) and those who are at an early stage of dementia (regardless of age). Currently, there are an estimated 40,000 persons living with dementia in Singapore, and this number is expected to double by 2030.

In Singapore, especially to the Pioneer Generation, occupation is intrinsic to an individual. Unfortunately, many YES Persons with Dementia (PwD) are denied jobs despite still being able.



## Project Goal

TTW works with employers to provide naturalised work opportunities for persons with young onset and early stage dementia (PYES), aimed at fulfilling their identity and occupational needs. The program also aims to reduce caregiver burden and provide naturalised respite. It is hoped that functioning of PYES can be maintained by cognition, physical and social stimulation through naturalised work.



## What solutions have been implemented?

Referral partners will conduct initial screening to identify potential patients to join the program. The Apex Harmony Lodge team will further assess the suitability of these potential clients during onboarding that includes

- Cognitive (MMSE), mood (GDS), quality of life (SQOL), and wellbeing assessment (EQ-5D)
- Caregiver assessment (ZBI-4)
- Jobsite orientation (1 visit)
- Job trials (3 sessions)
- Physiotherapy assessment (when needed)
- A participation agreement will be signed by the caregiver once the on boarding process is completed

The TTW YES program currently practises supported group employment with guidance and facilitation by dementia-trained Apex Harmony Lodge (AHL) staff and volunteers.

In a group of 3 – 6, our clients work together for at least 3 hours once or twice a week, forming a regular group of colleagues and work routine.

There are multiple worksites in different locations in Singapore, and clients may choose to go to more than 1 worksite if they are found to be suitable. The existing available opportunities are:

- Food preparation at Flour Power, Hougang
- Hydroponic farming at Comcrop, Woodlands
- Laundry folding at Orchid Laundry, Tuas



Throughout the participation in the program, our facilitators record individual session notes for each client to monitor their progress in the work program from time to time. The initial assessments with clients and caregivers are also repeated every 6 months to observe the impact of the program. These regular check points allow clients' progress and development to be mutually discussed by Apex Harmony Lodge and the caregivers, as well as support and resources to be shared as and when needed.



## Result

By end of 2019, 16 clients were assessed at two intervals, before and after at least 6 months of participating in the program. Out of those with completed assessments, we have seen significant improvement in the self-reported health perception (EQ-5D) as well as quality of life scores (SQOL); the median post- test ranks were statistically significantly higher than the median pre-test ranks.

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### A WORD FROM OUR CAREGIVERS...

For someone who has been working all these while, to suddenly take away the work, that loss, you see. But once you give them at least some work... I think that helps.

He did tell the doctor that he wanted to work.

He says "today I am going to work". There is a purpose doing certain things

He's more alert, no longer... lazy, everything also not interested. Now he *initiates*. It's like back in the old days, not as good, but at least the *motivation* level is higher.

He is taking the mood stabilizer... I start to cut down together with the doctors. I can sense that: he is much more *stable*.

He has more *initiative*. He will help out in the kitchen... He is very proud of his food hygiene certificates.

Easier to *communicate*... more *positive*. I realized during this period of time when he started working... I see the difference.

Yes, yes (sending PwD to TTW) gives me more time. At least sometimes morning I can do something that I want to do.

Specifically for YES PwD that are still able, unlike other programs. PwD enjoys the *social environment* as there are younger folks around.



The psychological needs and quality of life for the clients improved. Their sense of working identity was restored and the clients find joy in life and relationships. Caregivers were also able to take breaks from their caregiving duties.



## Next Steps

While AHL has seen desirable impacts on both PwD and their caregivers, TTW is only feasible with the help of external funding. Through partnership, we hope to open more job opportunities for future clients, making the program more sustainable through economies of scale.