
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Building enabled communities in Singapore

19th International Conference on Integrated Care, San Sebastian, 01-03 April 2019

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Introduction: This paper compiled the best practices in building enabled communities by six not-for-profit organisations for the elderly which were geographically distributed throughout the country. Results from face-to-face in-depth interviews with these organisations were generalised and presented in a five-pillar framework.

Findings & highlights of five-pillar framework: The five pillars, within a circle, represent the continual review and improvement process since communities are continually evolving. Each pillar represents a key checkpoint: a sense of purpose, building bridges, "3M your assets", programmes to empower, and review.

First "A sense of purpose" sharpens the organisation's focus that it is a part of the community, and signals its willingness to evolve its purpose and mission to complement the community's changing profile. In the long-term, the organisation should be the top-of-mind and go-to partner for community-dwelling seniors and other enterprises in the neighbourhood. One of the organisations created a community kitchen in a common space to bring stay-alone seniors together for meals, bonding and learning. The shared space drew participation because employees embraced the organisational vision and mission.

"Building bridges" establishes platforms for trust-building to develop and describes how a new entrant in the community can establish itself with residents and other institutional members of the community. The third pillar, "3M your assets", recognises the strengths of the community itself to self-support by mapping, mining and mobilising for capabilities and capacities amongst community-dwelling seniors and community partners. The fourth pillar of "programmes that empower" deliberately cedes the control of programme development to the community to engage the capabilities and capacities in the community in programme design. Example, staff facilitators of an organisation scouted and recruited community-dwelling seniors to co-create and independently conduct weekly morning exercises for other seniors.

"Review" is the final pillar of the framework and refers to the monitoring and reviewing of programmes for impact. One of the five organisations monitored the number of community-dwelling seniors recruited to support disadvantaged seniors. Another organisation proposed measuring the number of previously sedentary seniors wearing sports trainers when they come to the centre. Moreover, the organisation documented stories about the transformation of socially isolated seniors through peer support and propagated them at different platforms across stakeholder groups.

Discussion & lessons learnt: From information gathered, organisations have had to re-align functions and re-define roles in the building of enabled communities. The operating model for enabled communities was decentralised, dis-intermediated and democratised. These organisations also regarded community-dwelling seniors as co-designers in an enabled community. The interview respondents further underscored the value of internal communications.

By documenting the key steps to an alternative sustainable strategy to community building, our goal is to encourage a community of learning amongst more like-minded organisations to develop more communities characterised by resilience, resolve and resourcefulness.

Keywords: enabled communities; community-dwelling seniors; decentralised
