

# #CanOneLah! teaches seniors digital skills

IRSHATH MOHAMED

Madam Santhamarai, a 63-year-old retired nurse and factory worker, never thought it would become necessary for her to communicate through digital platforms.

That is why she did not make an effort to learn about the basics of using Whatsapp when her son Rishiikanthan Vijayakumar, 25, attempted to teach her to make video calls and send voice notes a few years ago.

However, when the Covid-19 circuit breaker was implemented last year, Mdm Santhamarai realised why it is important to understand modern communications technology.

She could not visit her three older children and her grandchildren and video calls to them were not possible because she did not know how to operate a smartphone.

She had to depend on her youngest son Rishii to return home after his internship and help her connect with her loved ones.

This predicament got Rishii thinking about again trying to teach his mother the importance of modern communication technology.

"She is home alone all day. If she knew how to make video calls or send voice notes over whatsapp, she could at least spend time with her grandchildren virtually," he said.

Rishii, who is doing his final year Communication Studies at Nanyang Technological University's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, also had to come up with a project idea at that time.

He decided to link the two. He discussed his mother's struggle with his three group mates - Grace Lee Jia En, 23, Lee Jia Qian Febby, 24, and Wee Ann, 23 - and together they came up with the idea of launching a digital literacy campaign for seniors.

There were many national level digital literacy campaigns aimed at seniors. But the four felt there were several pockets of seniors who still did not know how to use technology.

The group surveyed 118 seniors across the island through the senior activity centres (SACs) and learnt that those from low-income families were lagging behind because they had low education and were not well-versed with reading or writing.

Rishii and his mates then decided to embark on an inclusive digital literacy campaign, which they named #CanOneLah!, with the aim of teaching seniors basic online communication skills through pictorial handouts.

"Our pitch that they could use the skills to connect with their family members resonated well," said Rishii.

"The social-support angle gave them the emotional motivation to learn. Our idea was to give them something that would benefit them."

The NTU undergraduates have reached out to more than 100 seniors and regularly conduct classes and workshops for them. Their initiative is supported by the NTU Welfare Service Club.

"The SACs have been opening their doors for us to meet the seniors," said Rishii. Each workshop entails three



Rishiikanthan Vijayakumar (third from left) and a volunteer (left) teaching seniors digital skills.  
PHOTO: CANONELAH! TEAM

lessons.

"The first one teaches basic phone functions. The second focuses on whatsapp chats, adding contacts and sending voice notes. The third involves the use of Zoom and a little bit of YouTube."

"CanLearnLah!" workshops have been held at four SACs and roadshows at two.

The NTU students ensure that the campaign materials are not text heavy and are available in all four official languages. They also employ audio-visual elements.

"My three group mates are Chinese. So they took care of the Chinese version," said Rishii. "I translated the materials into Tamil and we engaged a friend for the Malay translation."

The guidebook, titled "How Ah?", went through a prototype test done on Rishii's mum. "I would often show my mum the various collaterals," he said.

"She was not only the inspiration behind this project. I also ensured that I kept her in the heart of everything I did.

"I knew that if I did that, it would resonate well with the rest of the seniors."

Rishii is glad that many seniors have now started embracing technology through their campaign.

His mother makes video calls to her grandchildren and watches dramas on her smartphone.

The opportunity to serve the community at large has made the undergraduates determined not to let the campaign die once their final-year project is over.

They plan to hand over the campaign to the SACs or the NTU Welfare Service Club.

"We would like it to be sustainable in the long run. We have started to think of possible strategies," said Rishii. "We also plan to come up with an extended curriculum."

Seniors from online scams are some of the areas we would want to enhance this campaign content with."

The group has already made videos titled "Really Meh?" to debunk myths about the use of smartphones.

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- Rishiikanthan Vijayakumar, with his mother Santhamarai (above)

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