Engage more with seniors, amid Covid-19: Social service agencies

Concern as SOS figures show 154 suicides among those ten year, a 26% hike from 2019

Volunteers Wong Kim Hoe (left), a retiree and Chan Kwai Ling, a student, at a volunteer-run food bank in Jurong West Street 91 on Tuesday (Oct 13). PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

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Former hawker Yuen Tian Yong, 84, has been living alone in his rental flat in Jalan Kukoh, off Ulu Sembawang Road, since his wife died from respiratory complications in April.

His three children - who have all moved out - visit him monthly, but the Covid-19 pandemic has limited the amount of time he can spend with them and with his friends.

Social service agencies and befriending services said The Straits Times that they are worried about the elderly like Mr Yuen during the pandemic.

This is especially after suicide prevention centre Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) recorded 154 suicides among seniors aged 60 and above, a 26% hike from 2019 and the highest number since 1991.

SOS chief executive Gasper Tan said in the statement, that the pandemic has made the elderly even more likely to face social isolation and loneliness, and the elderly in community adapting to changes as well as prolonged periods of loneliness may be devastating.

The National Council of Social Service (NCSS) said it has increased funding to volunteer-led groups for capacity of its 24-hour crisis hotline service.

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