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## A sitter to help the old folk By Wong Sher Maine

Private home-care services for the elderly are growing and they are a boon to caregivers – for a fee, reports **Wong Sher Maine**.

**M**s Lim Li Juan is a professional granny helper. Armed with an arsenal of brooms, nail-clippers and a dose of good humour, Ms Lim makes her living helping people look after their elderly parents.

The company she started with two others in March this year, Lusumu Home Carers, offers everything from cleaning houses to bathing and escorting elderly people to the doctor.

“Our objectives is to let those who are caring for elderly people take a breather,” said Ms Lim 31, whose company even sells gift certificates so caregivers can get a surprise break.

At an average cost of \$30 an hour, her services do not come cheap.

But business has picked up and the company is earning about \$2,000 a month.

In the past, it was mainly elderly people who were poor or living alone who qualified for home help from voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) such as TOUCH Community Services.

Now, companies are setting up shop to capitalise on what they see as a growing need in home care, taking the load off caregivers.

Mr Raymond Lai, 40, the operations manager of a similar company, called We Care 4U Family Services, said: “VWOs were providing services for lower-income groups, but what about those who are neither here nor there?”

The new companies also provide services islandwide, whereas VWOs are restricted to certain zones.

For instance, TOUCH Community Services, one of the largest VWO elderly care providers, serves lower-income clients around the Toa Payoh, Bendemeer, Geylang Bahru, Whampoa and Bishan areas.

Said Ms Lim: “Those from VWOs may not be able to spend long periods of time with the elderly, but because ours is a private company, I can do so.”

For housewife Susan Tan, 65, what she likes about Ms Lim's services is that she gets along with Mrs Tan's 90-year-old father-in-law, who has dementia.

Said Mrs Tan: "He gets along quite well with Li Juan. They chat and sometimes, she plays games with him to keep him occupied."

Although Mrs Tan also employs a maid, the maid does not speak Hokkien.

Since Mrs Tan first heard about Lusumu two months ago, she has been getting Ms Lim to visit her River Valley home at least once a week.

Changing about \$60 per session, Ms Lim helps Mrs Tan's father-in-law by checking on his urine catheter and helping him manage light exercises.

Ms Cristal Chong, a programme manager at TOUCH Community Services, said that maids may not have the skills needed to look after an elderly person.

Retiree Choon Yoon Heng, 73, who lives alone in a Telok Blangah one-room flat, has forged a special friendship with Ms Katherine Lim, 47, a caregiver from We Care 4U.

Although Ms Lim's job is primarily to take Mr Choon – who lost his right leg in a motorcycle accident – for hospital visits, she also helps translate what the doctor says, keeps track of Mr Choon's medication and buys him fruit.

Said Mr Choon, on "Ah Kat": "I would not be able to do without her help."

Mr Lai believes there is potentially a far greater demand for home-care services.

"It is in its infancy, because many Singaporeans still think they should rely on their families to take care of them. But in future, with an ageing population, many more may need home care from third parties," he said.

**Log on to <http://www.caregivers.org.sg> or call 1800-352-1622 for more information on home-care providers.**