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Caregivers' welfare no laughing matter

By Vivi Zainol

IT IS unusual to see a group of about 30 caregivers clapping their hands and shouting 'hoo-hoo, ha-ha' in chorus.



SUPPORT AND RELIEF: Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon (right), who officiated at the launch of Caregivers' Week, treats Madam Choy Chew Gip to some poh piah that she made. -- CAROLINE CHIA

But it was part of the laughter therapy session at the launch of the second Caregivers' Week yesterday. The session was organised as a stress-relieving exercise by Touch Caregivers Centre.

Touch Community Services' executive director Eugene Seow said the week is a time to honour the 'invisible workforce', and dubbed them 'The Incredibles', after cartoon characters with amazing powers.

He said: 'Caregiving can be tough especially if you're confined at home 24 hours a day. Caregivers should recognise that they, too, need some relief. If they look after themselves well, they'll be in better stead to care for their dependents.'

In a 2004 survey conducted by Touch on more than 80 caregivers, 42 per cent found caregiving 'highly stressful', rating emotional aspects, financial obligations and lifestyle change as the biggest causes of strain.

About 68 per cent felt caregiving was 'confining' and about 33 per cent are also looking after more than one dependent.

In less than 20 years, one in five Singaporeans will be old.

This is why the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports will continue to work with the National Council of Social Service and Touch 'to provide caregivers with the necessary support', said the Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, who officiated at the launch.

Madam Choy Chew Gip, 76, who is blind, cares for her 80-year-old husband who has dementia. She beats stress by listening to Hokkien and Cantonese oldies on her Walkman, exercising, and chatting with friends.

To encourage caregivers to take time out for themselves, Touch printed 5,000 self-care flip charts on healthy living.

These will be distributed at voluntary welfare organisations, hospitals, community development councils and libraries.

For information on activities for caregivers during the week, call 1800-352-1622 or visit www.caregivers.org.sg