

# Winging It

Female babyboomers are flocking to WINGS, a non-profit centre that aims to teach women how to live more fulfilling lives. MICHELLE BONG prepares for lift off.

In his speech themed “Living a Long and Happy Life” at a Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports event in March this year, Minister for the Prime Minister’s Office Lim Boon Heng challenged his audience to “be committed to a long and happy life” and for families and communities to “provide the social care and bonds that make life worth living”.

As a young non-profit centre, Women’s Initiative for Ageing Successfully (WINGS) certainly shares Lim’s conviction. Catering to women aged 40 and beyond, the organisation provides a range of activities, services and programmes aimed at promoting education in the areas of health, wealth and happiness.

The only non-profit education, referral and counselling centre of its kind, WINGS was launched in June 2006 as an initiative of the Singapore Council of Women’s Organisation and the Tsao Foundation; the latter is a not-for-profit organisation founded by Mrs Tsao Ng Yu Shun to foster a society for all ages that supports active ageing and values the contributions of older people. WINGS became autonomous last December and is formally registered as Society for WINGS, a charity with IPC status.

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It operates from an office at Junction 8’s Office Tower, helmed by centre manager Selina Gan, one of six staff members. Bolstered by a 12 member-strong board of women including lawyers, homemakers, a financial professional and movers and



Keeping the mind alert and the fingers nimble, members of WINGS’ handicraft group try their hand at weaving.

shakers in the people sector,

WINGS services over 3,500 members from all walks of life, encouraging participation in a wide range of activities for the mind, body and soul.

Members can either pay an annual membership of \$10 or a lifetime membership of \$100. Privileges include access to health screening, vaccination packages at the National University Hospital, special rates for the use of the Singapore Heart Foundation’s gym and discounts at various food and beverage outlets.

Among its many aims, WINGS endeavours to educate members on preventive health management techniques, financial safety, basic computer skills and the importance of healthy self-esteem. In addition, counselling services spanning various areas such as human emotions and legal rights, talks and workshops on relationships and contributing to society and the community are offered.

At the same time, members are also given the opportunity to cultivate closer social ties with each other via interest groups (handicrafts or bridge), support groups (menopause, homemakers, and mothers) and exercise classes (tai chi, bellydancing, Chair Yoga).

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living longer (by 2030, one in five residents will be more than 65 years old), how women are likely to outlive men and how they will have to deal with extended periods of widowhood.

WINGS has been warmly received by the community. Gan says that she expects membership to grow from strength to strength because “there is a continuous need

for the services we provide, and we get new members every month, with 107 in April alone.” To date, WINGS has 389 volunteers who can sign up online to offer their help and expertise in areas like administration, IT and events coordination.

President of WINGS’ Board Dr Kanwaljit Soin – an orthopaedic surgeon in private practice as well as a wife, mother and grandmother – is a shining example of what the organisation espouses. The 66-year-old puts in time for WINGS-related activities whenever required: she chairs board meetings, attends sub-committee meetings, pops into WINGS’ office two or three times a week, gives talks and even facilitates Chair Yoga classes, after undergoing six weeks of training to do so.

“If you want to do something in life, you just find the time to do it,” she says. “There is so much to do, and the staff are already working themselves to the bone. Being the chairperson, I have to be especially hands-on!”

And when it comes to ageing, Dr Soin’s personal philosophy is one of gratitude. She explains: “To be able to live to an old age is to be lucky. People can’t want to live a long life and yet not want to grow old. Personally, I am happy to grow old, keep as healthy as I can, and live the WINGS mission: to live with health, security and dignity.” ☆