



Photo credit: @mrhellofai

Caregiving for Dementia

An Interview with Munah Bagharib

You wear multiple hats as an actress, host, youtuber and social media influencer. What inspires you most?

People and my connections with them inspire a lot of my work. They influence my energy and heart and I love working with people to learn from them and people who push me to think outside the box. To feel inspired to be bolder! :)

One key challenge in the ageing population is the rise of dementia cases. Could you share with us your role as a Dementia Singapore Ambassador, and what you think are the key challenges faced by dementia patients in Singapore?

Dementia Singapore is a big part of my caregiving journey because I turn to them for information, resources and inspiration. What I hope I can do is to always bring awareness to what dementia is and how we can be a dementia-friendly society.

To me, some of the broader challenges faced by a person with dementia is the stigma of what dementia is – it's not just about forgetting. There is so much more to what a person with dementia goes through mentally, physically and emotionally.

Another challenge is also a society that might not fully understand what a person with dementia needs. However, I think we are moving so fast into building one that is more inclusive and more aware of what dementia is.

I have noticed more and more that many people are aware of what dementia is and how to help a person with dementia. And it means so much to me when that happens.

I feel like our community then becomes a safe space where a person with dementia can be accepted and given assistance when needed. :)

We understand that your mum was diagnosed with dementia in 2017, and you have been a primary caretaker alongside your brother and father. Based on your experience, what kind of support should we give to caregivers of individuals with dementia? What do you think are the roles that family, the state, and the larger society can play?

For me, having a community makes a big difference because then as caregivers, we know we are not alone in this journey.

My community started with my brother and father. To me, the role of family is to make the person with dementia (your loved one) feel safe. Over the years, we learned that my mother's happiness is top priority. And finding activities that stimulate her mind and interest is most important. She used to be a piano teacher and she still holds on to that, so that is beautiful. She also enjoys company a lot and ensuring she knows we are right here with her is so important.

With regards to the state and the larger society, these are our extended communities. :) There are so many organisations and help groups (like Dementia Singapore and Brahms Centre, to name a few) that act as extended arms when an individual needs support. And they provide support in so many ways – for education, for moral support and of course, for the person with dementia.

It also helps me to speak to people with similar experiences because you get to share stories and lessons with one another and I feel like we are all in this journey together.

Given the prevalence of dementia, what advice would you share with individuals who may find themselves or their loved ones diagnosed with dementia?

Be patient, listen to your loved one's needs and don't be so hard on yourself. Everything is a learning process and things can change very quickly. For me, when things get difficult or confusing, it helps to speak to your community and also speak to myself even! It helps to understand that I am also learning as we go along and remind myself that my top priority is to keep my mother happy & safe.

Things aren't going to be smooth sailing but how you navigate through the journey is the most crucial part. So be kind and take care of yourself too. Only then, you can maintain a stable mind to keep going. :) We're all stronger than we think we are. And we are never alone. So reach out when you need to!



Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers with regard to dementia in Singapore?

Dementia is so prevalent in our society. Early detection is also key because even though it's something that cannot be cured. We can slow down the progression and that makes a big difference. :)