

MEDIA RELEASE

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Dementia Singapore's Tough Nut: The Art of Letting Go Supports Caregivers While Raising Public Awareness of Dementia Through Personal Stories

Grounded in an expressive arts therapy process, this initiative explores the complex realities of caregiving for persons with dementia through a dramatic and structured format that audiences can meaningfully engage with. It marks a first for the leading social service agency specialising in dementia care

[Singapore, 7 June 2026] Conceived as a platform for addressing difficult, often unspoken conversations through the arts—particularly experiences that are hard to articulate, hold, or resolve through words alone—*Tough Nut* is a series of public presentations offering the wider community a rare insight into the complexities of caring for persons with dementia.

Tough Nut: The Art of Letting Go is the first in the series, presented as a theatre performance at Temasek Shophouse (Tembusu Canopy, Level 3) on 7 June 2026. Seats for the free event were fully redeemed weeks in advance.

The theme of “letting go” was chosen because it consistently emerged in caregivers’ experiences — not as a single act, but as an ongoing, complex process. It includes letting go of expectations, control, roles, and, at times, aspects of one’s identity.

The choice of drama as the medium was also intentional. Drama creates space for embodied expression, relationships, and shared storytelling, allowing experiences that are difficult to articulate in words to be expressed and explored in ways that audiences can also connect with.

Rachel Lim, project lead and expressive arts therapist with Dementia Singapore, said: “Not everything we carry can be said straight away. This work creates space for both words and other forms of expression, so caregivers can explore their experiences in ways that feel true to them.” She added that this approach works because expressive arts therapy is grounded in psychotherapy, offering an integrative way to support and work through caregivers’ experiences.

The performance is the culmination of a three-month-long therapy process which began by creating a psychologically safe space for caregivers to explore their experiences without the pressure to perform or produce an outcome. This allowed the artistic work to emerge naturally from real, lived experiences rather than constructed narratives.

Suffice it to say, this is not conventional theatre. There are no professional actors — only caregivers sharing their lived experiences through movement, imagery, and reflection. To bring the work to stage effectively, Dementia Singapore enlisted celebrated local applied drama practitioner and educator Michael Cheng, who has spent the past five months supporting the devising, structure, and staging of the performance.

Cheng is no stranger to community theatre, and has initiated, led, and facilitated his fair share of socially engaged arts projects exploring themes such as heritage, integration, intergenerational communication, active ageing, social support, and domestic abuse.

The key strengths of *Tough Nut: The Art of Letting Go* lie in its ability to honour the caregiving experience as deeply human, beyond just functional narratives. This, in turn, helps the public gain a better understanding through authentic, embodied experiences that encourage reflection, connection and conversation.

Bryan Tan, CEO, Dementia Singapore added: “Caring for a loved one with dementia is uniquely challenging and can often feel isolating. Programmes like this encourage participants to connect more meaningfully with other caregivers, fostering a sense of solidarity and shared understanding. For some, there is also comfort in knowing that their experiences may help others better understand the realities of caregiving. We want everyone affected by dementia to know that, on the journey of caring for a loved one living with dementia, you will never walk alone.”

This process was instrumental in helping one of the participants, Lo Wai Mun, come to terms with the anxieties she experienced after her father was diagnosed in 2012. “Being aware of my hidden emotions and thoughts is scary,” Lo shared. She added that learning to accept her fears enabled her to move forward and better understand her father’s needs and concerns, while also considering those of her mother, siblings, and herself. “It allowed me to take time and space to be honest about my own concerns and fears,” she said, “and to let go of worrying about how others might think or feel about me.”

In A Nutshell

Tough Nut is grounded in psychotherapy and offers an integrative approach to working with caregivers’ experiences. Conversation-based psychotherapy remains central to supporting emotional understanding and processing. Expressive arts therapy builds on this foundation by incorporating multiple forms of expression — including movement, imagery, sound, metaphor, and dialogue — into the therapeutic process.

Drama helps bring these personal explorations into a shared space where participants can connect with one another. As part of the expressive arts process, it brings together movement, emotions, imagination, and storytelling to encourage perspective-taking and shared understanding, while still staying grounded in therapy.

The live performance is not part of the therapy itself — it takes place afterwards, as an extension of the process. The therapy phase is intentionally kept separate and protected, providing caregivers with a safe space to explore their experiences freely. Only after this foundation has been established is the idea of a public performance introduced, and participation is entirely voluntary.

For caregivers who choose to take part, the performance phase can be meaningful in several ways. It gives them a chance to revisit what they have explored and begin to shape it into something they can hold and understand more clearly. Participants often shift from being solely in a caregiving role to having ownership over how their experiences are expressed and understood. Sharing in a supportive and intentional setting allows participants’ experiences to be seen and acknowledged, which can feel validating.

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About Dementia Singapore

Dementia Singapore was formed in 1990 as Alzheimer's Disease Association to better serve Singapore's growing dementia community, increase awareness about dementia, and reduce the stigma surrounding the condition. As Singapore's leading Social Service Agency in specialised dementia care, Dementia Singapore aims to advocate for the needs of people living with dementia and their families; and empower the community through capability-building, knowledge, and consultancy; as well as deliver quality person-centred care innovations. For more information, visit www.dementia.org.sg.

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