

## Cooking session brings together participants and people with disabilities

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UPDATED APR 16, 2019, 04:06 PM



Let's Chat & Cook! is part of the "See The True Me" campaign, now in its third year, which promotes an inclusive society. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

SINGAPORE - An aroma of spices wafts through the kitchen as Ms Kagda Sakina Abbasbhai teaches a class of 15 participants how to cook cheesy chilli chicken.

The 64-year-old is adept in the kitchen, cheerfully and skilfully slicing up the ingredients as she instructs the class, uninhibited by her wheelchair.

The bustling session held at the OUE Social Kitchen on Saturday (April 13) was more than just a cooking class.

Organised by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) in partnership with OUE Social Kitchen, Let's Chat & Cook! was a cooking and learning experience aimed at facilitating interactions with people with disabilities.

The two-hour session was part of the "See The True Me" campaign, now in its third year, which promotes an inclusive society.

"I cook every day at home so I thought it would be nice to be a part of this and share my love for cooking with others," says Ms Sakina, who adds that she hopes the class will help to debunk the myth that persons with disabilities are unable to cook.

Ms Sakina, who has been using a wheelchair since the 1980s after she was stricken with polio, co-led the session with OUE Social Kitchen's in-house chef Elsie Loh.

Chef Loh showed the class how to put together a refreshing pasta salad before Ms Sakina took over and taught the class how to make a spicy dish of cheesy chilli chicken and a sweet rose lassi drink.

Ms Sakina has been cooking since she was 15. The former production operator at an electronic company, who is not working now, occasionally conducts cooking classes at Kampong Ubi Community Centre. She is an inclusion ambassador from the Disabled People's Association. She is not married and lives with her mother and sister. She cooks for her family regularly.

Two other inclusion ambassadors from the Disabled People's Association, Madam Rosie Wong and Madam Halipa Ahmad, were also at Saturday's session.

Madam Halipa, 57, a housewife, has severe thoracolumbar scoliosis which causes breathing difficulties when she overexerts herself.

Madam Wong, 70, who is blind, shared how she cooks using assistive devices that "talk" to her through audio prompts, such as an induction cooker, kitchen scale and timer. The grandmother works as a masseuse.

Madam Halipa said she hopes that participants in Saturday's cooking class and other See The True Me initiatives will be able to better understand people with disabilities.

The former administrative assistant is an active volunteer at the **Bedok Youth Society for the Disabled**, community clubs and residents' committees.

"I hope people can be more accepting of those with disabilities. See our talent and celebrate our abilities," she said.

Social media analyst Cathlin Anabella, 27, who attended the class with her boyfriend, advertising manager Paolo Alvarez, 28, said it opened her eyes to what people with disabilities can do.

"When you don't get to meet with people with disabilities, there might be some misconceptions about what they are capable of. But seeing them cook with us and use technology to adapt, I realised that they can also do what we can do," she added.

**Correction note:** This article has been updated to say that Ms Kagda Sakina Abbasbhai, Madam Rosie Wong and Madam Halipa Ahmad are inclusion ambassadors from the Disabled People's Association. We are sorry for the error.