

# 當植物殺手遇上園藝治療 「蒲寓」創辦人以植物撫慰長者心靈 Plant Killer Meets Horticultural Therapy, Founder of PuYU Soothes Seniors with Plants

Mindful Green - Horticultural  
Therapy Services - Zoe Chan

撰文 阿緒



陳詠欣（Zoe）從盆栽中取出植物，再把它轉移到玻璃碗中，接著她把不同的小動物、卡通人物的裝飾點綴在翠綠的葉子旁邊——這個看似簡單的步驟，卻能撫慰長者難以宣之於口的情緒。Zoe與兩位志同道合的伙伴在2017年創立社會企業「蒲寓園藝治療服務有限公司」，讓長者藉著種植找到生活上的寄託，「有些長者年輕時有耕種的經驗，有些以往有種植，所以這正能發揮長者的長處；加上他們有耐性打理，同時有時間，園藝治療在他們身上很有效用。」Zoe說。

Zoe took the plant out of the pot. She gently placed it in a glass bowl and decorated it with miniature animals and cartoon figures. These steps seem simple, but they help soothe the indescribable sentiments that the elderly bury deep in their hearts. Zoe and two like-minded partners established social enterprise "PuYU Horticultural Therapy Services Limited" in 2017, which helps seniors find purpose and energy through horticulture. Zoe said, "Some of the elderly have farming experience and some used to grow plants, so this is great for bringing out what they are good at. What's more, seniors are usually patient and have time to take care of plants. Horticultural therapy works well for them."

打理植物的過程中，人們同時在紓解煩惱——種植不單止能發揮長者的長處，亦是Zoe在困難中繼續走下去的動力，「我其實是『植物殺手』，但看到我這樣種它也不會死，那麼我也可以繼續堅持下去。」

初次跟Zoe見面，她的語態總是溫婉，說起話來不緩不急，總能讓人靜下心來細意傾聽；然而，擔任園藝治療師之前，Zoe卻因銀行工作而經常疲於奔命，焦躁不安。七年前，她決意停下來休息，巧合下接觸到園藝治療課程，就決定投入全新的行業發展。「我一直很想發展善終服務，當親人過世後，他們的植物能留給家人繼續打理，整件事是很有意義的。」Zoe道。

個讓Young－Old服務Old－Old

園藝治療是一種輔助治療專業，服務對象由實際接觸和運用園藝材料來美化植物或盆栽，達至預定的治療目標，例如紓解壓力、復健心靈、認知訓練等。Zoe觀察到報讀園藝治療課程的同學大部分均是現職社工，有些則是退休的照顧者，「他們有不少要照顧年約八、九十歲的父母，希望學多一種治療的方法。」可是，好像Zoe般以園藝治療作興趣來上課的實屬少數。「其實園藝治療的行頭很窄，不少都是由社工兼任，所以我就想不如跟這班「Young-Old」組成園藝治療師小組來服務長者 (Old-Old)。」

園藝治療師同是「植物殺手」

完成三年園藝治療課程及實習後，Zoe成立社企「蒲寓」，組織了一班已年屆50至65歲的園藝治療師，聯繫社福機構提供服務。Zoe補充，他們在設計課程的時候，會針對不同的對象來安排課程內容，例如認知障礙症的長者容易分心，他們刻意於課堂上加插多一點細節，讓他們參與多一點；治療師亦會善用不同特性的植物，如香草，或不同形式的活動為長者提供感官刺激，「在實習的時候，我們已有機會接觸不同的長者，所以會按著他們的需要和習慣來計劃課程。」

有些認知障礙症長者在種植的過程中，能夠從植物的香氣憶起往事，如臭草氣味讓他們想起小時候吃到的綠豆沙的回憶，有些又會想到兒時同學家旁的果樹，「有位婆婆初時覺得自己做不到，但之後她做得最快，又會跟老公一起做。」

Zoe看著長者在過程中獲得信心，或是想起以往的開心回憶，這是讓她最為滿足的地方，「我真的覺得長者很厲害，他們打理得很有心機，種得很美。」Zoe眯起眼睛笑著說。跟長者相比，她笑言自己是「植物殺手」，「我種到很容易乾死，又生存不到，生命力十分強的植物才可以在我家生存。」Zoe笑說。

Looking after plants can relieve stress. Horticulture not only helps the elderly fulfil themselves, but it is also the motivation for Zoe to keep going in the face of adversity. “I am actually a “plant killer”. But when plants manage to survive under my care, I know I can keep going.”

My first impression of Zoe was that she spoke gently and slowly in a manner which makes people slow down and listen. But before becoming a horticultural therapist, Zoe lived a hectic life working in a bank and constantly felt anxious. Seven years ago, she decided to take a break. She came across horticultural therapy courses and aspired to take up a new career. “I have always wanted to set up hospice services. When a beloved one passes away, their plants can be pass on to their family. It is meaningful,” Zoe remarked.

Let the “Young-Old” Serve the “Old-Old”

Horticultural therapy is a kind of alternative therapy. It helps with stress relief, mental rehabilitation, and cognitive training through decorating potted plants with gardening materials. Zoe noticed that most of the classmates enrolled in horticultural therapy courses were serving social workers and retired caregivers. “A lot of them had to take care of parents who were 80 or 90 years old. They wanted to learn an additional therapeutic approach.” Zoe was one of the few who took horticultural therapy courses as a hobby. “It is a small field. Most of the therapists are also full-time social workers. So, I thought maybe I could form a horticultural therapist group with these ‘young-old’ to serve the ‘old-old’.”

A Horticultural Therapist but also a “Plant Killer”

After completing the three-year horticultural therapy courses and internships, Zoe established a social enterprise call “PuYU”, gathering horticultural therapists aged between 50 to 65 to provide services for different social welfare organisations. Zoe emphasised that their classes are tailor-made, as they design the content based on the uniqueness and needs of the participants. For example, seniors with dementia are easily distracted, so classes for them would include more details to encourage participation. Therapists would also make good use of plants with different characteristics, such as vanilla, or different forms of activities in order to stimulate the five senses of elderly. “During practice, we had the opportunity to meet with different seniors and design courses to fit their needs and habits.”

Some seniors with dementia would recall memories after smelling the scent of certain plants. For example, the smell of common rue reminded them of having mung bean sweet soup when they were young. Some were reminded of the fruit trees next to their childhood classmate’s home. “A granny used to think that she couldn’t do it. But then, she became the first one to complete the task in the class and invited her husband to join the class together.”

It is very satisfying for Zoe to witness the elderly gaining confidence and recalling happy memories. “They are amazing. They put a lot



## 一門永遠的課題：跟伙伴磨合、溝通

種植的學問涵蓋廣泛，由施肥的種類、季節、澆水的份量等，其他園藝治療師均有多年種植經驗，而Zoe則是半途出家；然而，近年她找到擅長的位置，主責「蒲寓」的管理及營銷工作，「我們至今已跟70多間社福機構合作，說真的，成績相當不錯，接下來我希望擴展「蒲寓」，由提供園藝治療到跟商業機構合作。」



縱然成立「蒲寓」至今，Zoe遇到的困難也不少，但參加Good Seed的確為「蒲寓」奠下堅實的基礎，「沒有Good Seed則沒有『蒲寓』。」Zoe爽快地回答。她解釋，因為要完成Good Seed訂下的計劃內容，讓他們有機會在首年接觸60多間長者服務機構，並服務約500多位長者。「這些機構在首次免費使用我們服務後，亦有再找我們報價，成為我們現在主要的客源。」Zoe說。

由銀行工作轉職成為園藝治療師，及後發展成社企，乍聽之下發展相當順利。然而，Zoe緩緩吐出一句：「困難相當多。」她形容，跟伙伴的理念、步伐及發展方向，雙方均需要多一點時間磨合，「我相信很多社企都會面對這些困難，當業務發展至一定時間，就會有不同想法。」縱然這種差異讓Zoe壓力倍增，但她深明理性溝通才是出路，「大家要互相尊重，將想法理性說出來才有方法解決。」Zoe說。

## 植物：一些不起眼的啟示

Zoe提到工作及生活上遇到的挫折時，不禁眼眶紅了起來。當園藝治療師經歷人生低潮，身旁的植物往往能給予她一些啟發。「我很喜歡一種叫『落地生根』的多肉植物，它的生命力很強，只需要一些棉花，一些水就生長到，我很喜歡它的堅

韌和生命力；還有家中的太陽花，本來看似已經很乾，像枯死似的；那時候，生活上遇到一些不如意的事，有天看到太陽花竟然再次生長了起來，真的覺得很神奇——植物好像很不起眼，但它就在你身邊，給予你一些新的力量，讓你沒這麼容易放棄。」

of effort into taking care of the plants, and the plants turn out beautifully.” Zoe smiled, her eyes crinkling. Zoe joked that compared to the elderly, she herself is a “plant killer”. “Very few of the plants that I grow survive. They tend to dry up and die. I can only grow tough plants that can survive in a rough environment,” Zoe laughed.

## Communication and Adjustment: The Eternal Subject

Horticulture covers a wide range of knowledge, from types of fertilisers, to seasonal changes and watering rules. While other horticultural therapists have years of experience in the field, Zoe joined the field half-way through. Recently, she found a role suitable for her at “PuYU”; she is now responsible for management and marketing. “We have cooperated with more than 70 social welfare organisations in two years, which is not bad at all. I would love to expand “PuYU” from providing horticultural therapy to working with commercial organisations.”

Despite the difficulties Zoe has encountered since setting up “PuYU”, participating in the Good Seed program consolidated the foundation of the company. “There would be no “PuYU” without Good Seed,” Zoe replied readily. She explained that through achieving the project goals set by Good Seed, they managed to get in touch with more than 60 elderly care centres in the first year and served over 500 seniors. Zoe added, “These organisations came back to us after the free trial and became a major source of customers.”

From working in a bank to becoming a horticultural therapist and establishing a social enterprise, Zoe’s career path may sound smooth. “It was actually really difficult,” Zoe confessed. She revealed that it took some time for the team to settle the differences in ideas, pace and vision. “I believe many social enterprises face similar obstacles. After a business has been running for a certain time, there is bound to be different voices and ideas.” Despite the pressure due to differences among teammates, Zoe is convinced that rational communication is the solution. She pointed out, “Mutual respect is key. You have got to communicate rationally to solve problems.”

## Inconspicuous Lessons that Plants Teach Us

Zoe’s eyes welled up when she talked about the setbacks at work and in life. When horticultural therapists go through a bad time in their life, the plants around them are often a source of inspiration. “I like a type of succulent plant called the ‘life plant’. It’s a very tough plant. All it needs to grow is some cotton and water. I am impressed by its perseverance and toughness. Another one is the gerbera at my home. At one point, it looked dried up and about to die; at that time, my life was rough as well. But one day, the gerbera started growing again. It was amazing. Plants might seem inconspicuous but they are right beside you, giving you the energy and strength to keep going.”