

## **Project Title**

Wholistic Care for Persons Living with Dementia and their Caregivers

## **Project Lead and Members**

Project lead: Anne Lee

Project members: Kelvin Lee, Kristie Wong, Eric Kwan

## **Organisation(s) Involved**

St Lukes Hospital

## **Healthcare Family Group(s) Involved in this Project**

Allied Health, Healthcare Administration

## **Applicable Specialty or Discipline**

Social Work, Care and Integration

## **Project Period**

Start date: April 2022

Completed date: December 2023

## **Aims**

1. To enable PLWDs to remain in the community for as long as possible and empower their caregivers to continue to provide support, the management of their safety and behavioural issues were key concerns.
2. In line with the National Mental Health and Well-being Strategy launched in October 2023, SLH COMIT aims to improve awareness and accessibility to services to advance Singapore's mental health ecosystem where PLWDs can "seek help without stigma and are readily supported for their recovery".

## **Background**

SLH responded to the growing need of Persons Living with Dementia (PLWDs) and their caregivers with specialist inpatient care in 2007 and has extended care by establishing an allied health-led, multi-disciplinary team providing wholistic home-based services for clients with mental health issues, including dementia, and their caregivers. The team carries out community management of dementia, suspected dementia and mental health conditions through assessment and diagnosis, intervention, care coordination and service linkages. Caregivers are supported through education, psychosocial support and linkages to community services. With these in place, the project enables PLWDs to remain in the community for as long as possible.

Since April 2022, SLH's Community Integration Team (COMIT) has served 636 clients and 611 caregivers, averting hospital admissions for dementia-related behavioural issues and bringing relief and cost savings to individuals and families and to Singapore's healthcare system.

## **Methods**

See poster appended/below

## **Results**

See poster appended/below

## **Conclusion**

See poster appended/below

## **Project Category**

Care Continuum

Intermediate and Long Term Care & Community Care, Social Care

Workforce Transformation

Informal Workforce Transformation, Caregiver

**Keywords**

People Living with Dementia, Caregiver, Community Care

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# Wholistic Care for Persons Living with Dementia (PLWD) and their Caregivers

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St Luke's Hospital

## Introduction

SLH responded to the growing need of Persons Living with Dementia (PLWDs) and their caregivers with specialist inpatient care in 2007 and has extended care by establishing an allied health-led, multi-disciplinary team providing wholistic home-based services for clients with mental health issues, including dementia, and their caregivers. The team carries out community management of dementia, suspected dementia and mental health conditions through assessment and diagnosis, intervention, care coordination and service linkages. Caregivers are supported through education, psychosocial support and linkages to community services. With these in place, the project enables PLWDs to remain in the community for as long as possible.

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## Goal/Objective

- To enable PLWDs to remain in the community for as long as possible and empower their caregivers to continue to provide support, the management of their safety and behavioral issues were key concerns.
- In line with the National Mental Health and Well-being Strategy launched in October 2023, SLH COMIT aims to improve awareness and accessibility to services to advance Singapore's mental health ecosystem where PLWDs can "seek help without stigma and are readily supported for their recovery".

## Assessment of Problem and Analysis of its Causes

The ageing population of Singapore and the number of individuals requiring intervention and support in the community for dementia has been increasing. SLH COMIT has been working closely with primary care, tertiary care, and community care providers to improve these individuals' quality of life and support them and their caregivers in ageing well in the community.

By 2030, one in four will be 65 years and above, up from one in six currently<sup>1</sup>. Currently, about 92,000 people are thought to be living with dementia in Singapore. This number is projected to increase to 152,000 by 2030<sup>2</sup>. In addition, 74 per cent of caregivers of PLWDs said in a poll that they were overwhelmed by their responsibilities. Many PLWDs also feel they are treated as less competent than others, and there is inadequate support for them to live in the community<sup>3</sup>.

As such, the dementia epidemic in Singapore and the associated care needs are of concern to the healthcare staff who care for seniors in SLH<sup>4</sup>. SLH COMIT's make-up of a multi-disciplinary (MD) team of allied healthcare workers contrasts with many other community mental health teams as we leverage our hospital's strength and resources. This unique make-up enables the team to comprehensively address the complex issues PLWDs and their caregivers face in the community.

### References:

- [Asian dementia on the rise in Singapore](#)
- [Dementia care 7 in 10 say it is a daily battle...](#)
- [SMU study: PLWD](#)
- ['We should worry about the dementia epidemic.'](#)

## Strategy for Change/Intervention

Centered around the PLWD and caregiver, SLH COMIT engages internal and external stakeholders as part of a multi-disciplinary and multi-service platform that customises interventions and provides responsive care.

To respond to the increasing number of clients with mental health issues, SLH COMIT added a senior mental health nurse to train and advise the team. The mental health nurses are similarly cross-trained to support PLWD and their caregivers.

SLH COMIT can support more medically complex cases as inpatient and outpatient doctor(s) trained in Dementia / Family Medicine are available to provide their expertise.

There is also a smoother transition and continuum of care with SLH COMIT actively coordinating care through a network of community partners, including the tertiary hospitals, polyclinics, grassroots and other community services, including CREST, ASCAT and Family Service Centres. Networking with external service providers extends the support from SLH COMIT to provide greater sustainability and continuity of care to PLWD and caregivers.

## Lessons Learnt:

- Caregiver with the onset of dementia:** Singapore has a rapidly ageing population, so it will not be surprising to see more older people caring for older adults, for instance, elderly spouses or siblings caring for each other due to the challenges of getting a suitable caregiver. We must raise more dementia-trained personnel and agencies to attend to this area of need.
- An increasing issue with fewer resources:** Leveraging caregivers by providing them with the skills required, supplementing their care resources and providing respite care is probably vital to upholding their well-being. As caregivers are keen to continue their excellent work in caring for PLWDs, they are often hesitant to assume the role felt overwhelmed due to a lack of preparedness or resources in the community. We are also equipping caregivers with the necessary skills, such as utilising the CWM Toolkit and Humanity approach.
- Increased engagement with PLWD:** The key to reducing the frequency of behavioural concerns is to increase engagement with PLWDs and caregivers and identify the triggers that cause them. They can be coached with different means to avoid these triggers. For instance, PLWD gets agitated whenever CG shouts at PLWD.

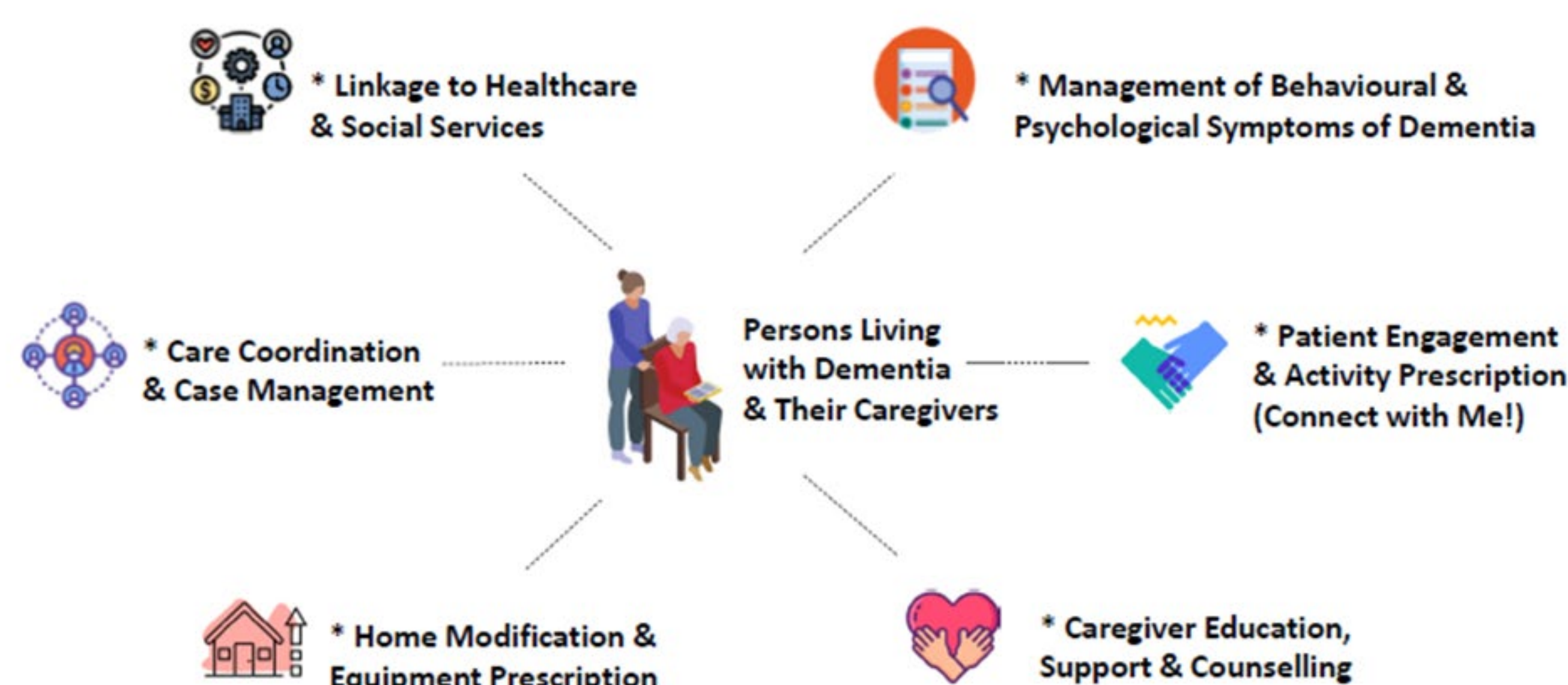
## Way Ahead:

- The team of dementia-trained staff (Doctor, MSW and OT) are certified by AIC and are deployed to teach the "Getting Dementia Ready" course to other service providers such as CREST and COMIT.
- One of our OTs has been accredited as a Humanity Trainer in Singapore and has been training staff from institutions and agencies who are keen to adopt the Humanity approach.

## Implementation of SLH COMIT Model of Care

SLH adopts a model of care (MOC) that addresses the whole person's needs in three distinct yet interconnected areas: clinical, social and pastoral. This approach to mental health and wellness provides comprehensive and connected care that enables the team to:

- Conduct mental health assessments, including dementia, for all referrals and right-siting for appropriate services.
- Establish a seamless continuum of care for clients by working closely with internal stakeholders and other mental health services, including CREST and ASCAT.
- Transition care for stabilised clients with chronic needs who require longer-term monitoring and follow-up.



## Effects of Changes

The benefits and value achieved through COMIT's multidisciplinary approach are:

- Upskilling of team's skills and trans-disciplinary approach to care.
- With this approach, the PLWDs or caregiver does not need to contact multiple parties for support.
- Caregivers are better supported and can benefit from counselling by the team, gaining a deeper understanding of how their emotions might trigger PLWDs and how resolving their issues can help enrich their walk with PLWDs

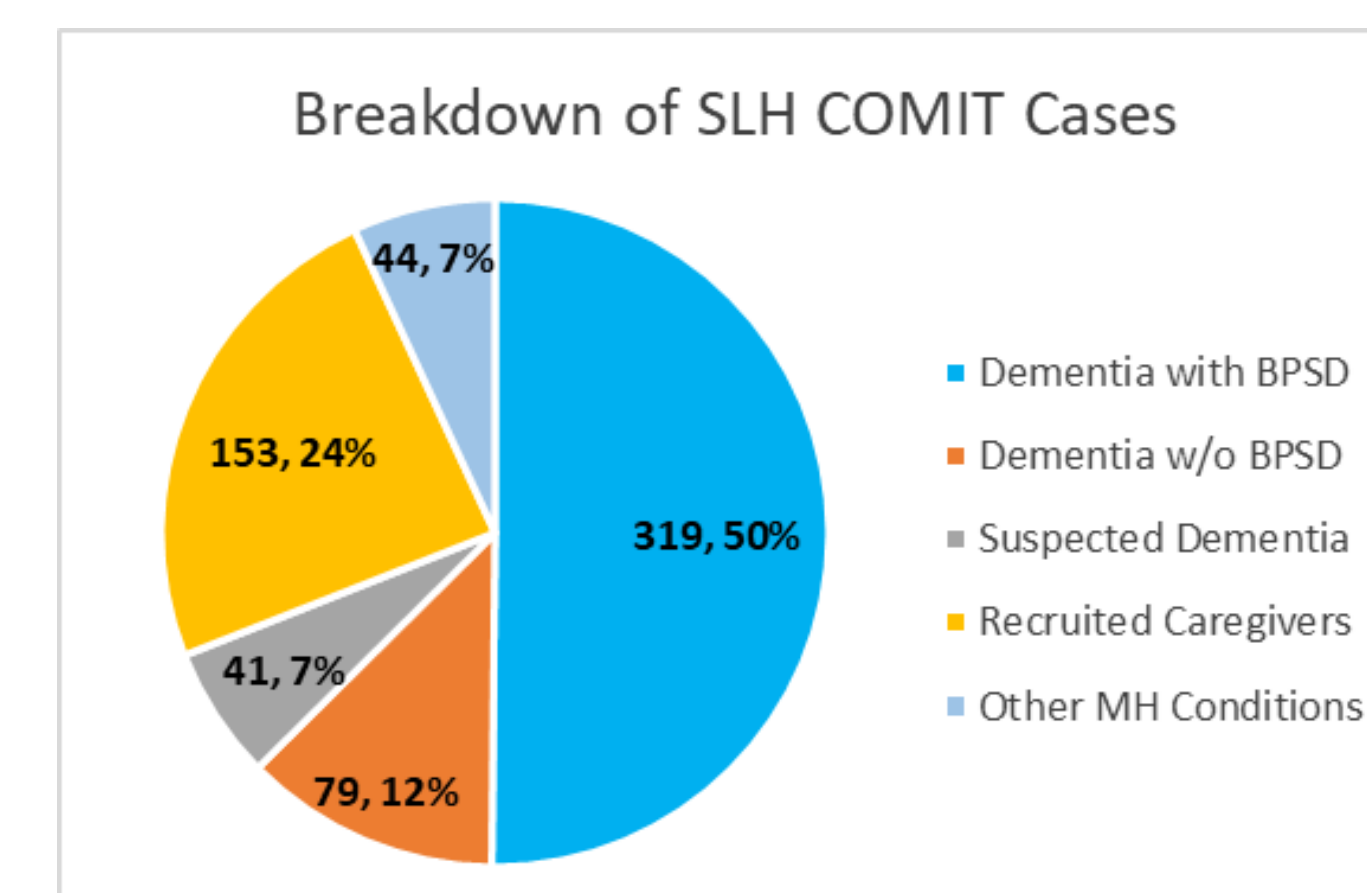


Fig 1. Type of SLH COMIT Cases

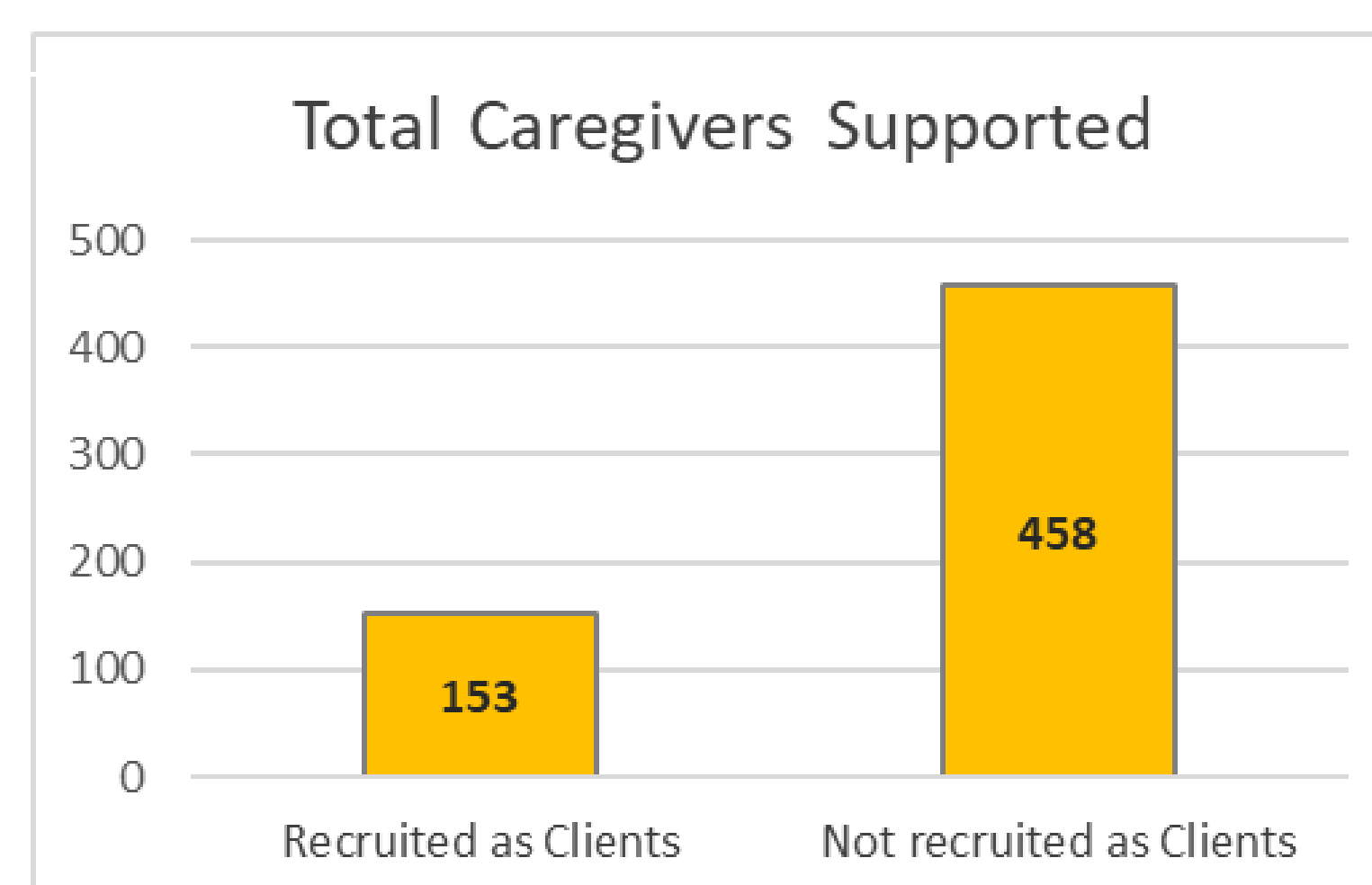


Fig 2. Caregivers Supported

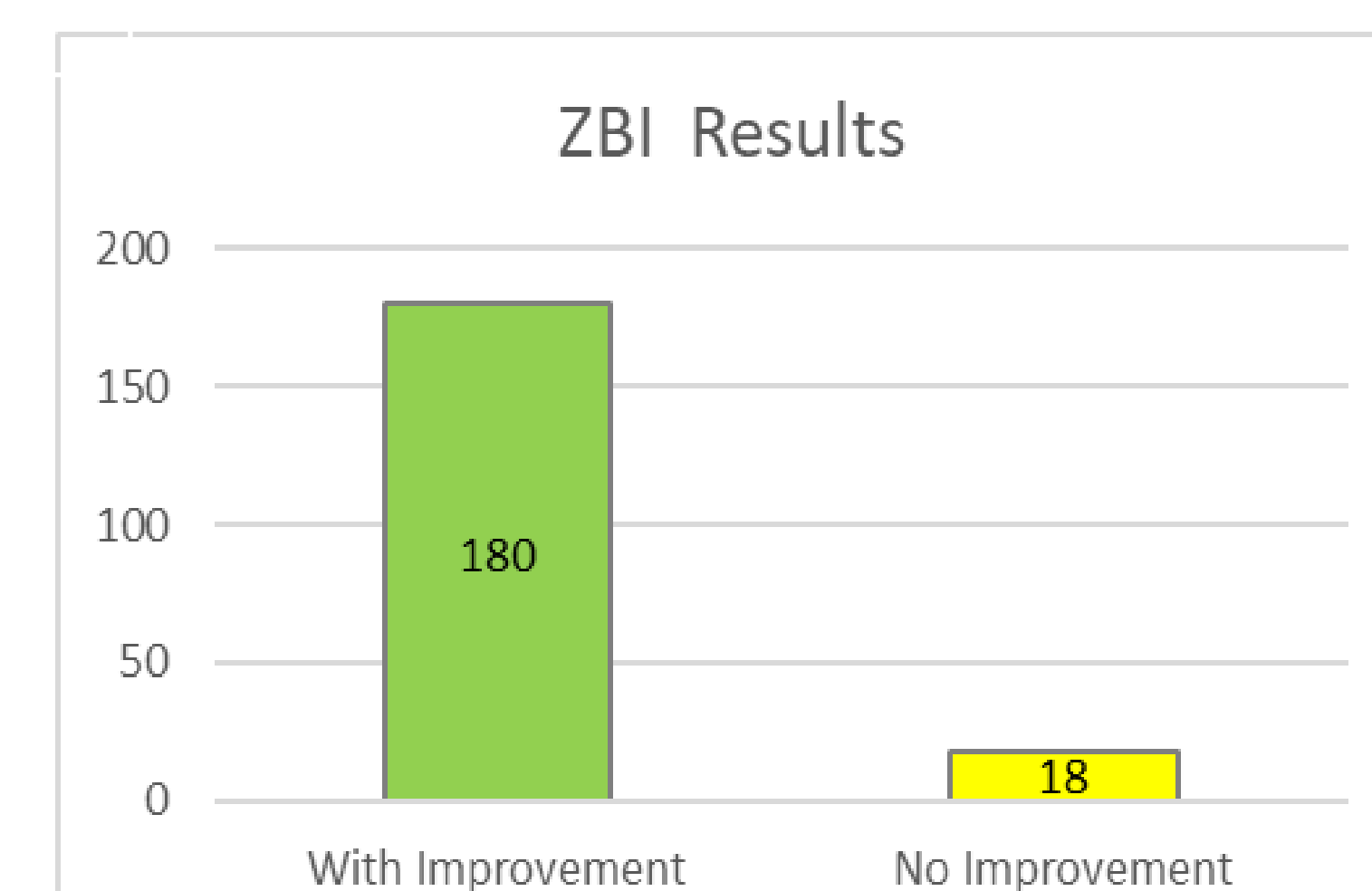


Fig 3. Zarit Burden Interview Results

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 Dec 2023:

- 62.6% of the 636 cases accepted by SLH COMIT are PLWDs.
- 153 of 611 caregivers were identified as needing additional Mental Health support and were recruited as clients.
- 90.9% (180 of 198) of caregivers showed an improvement in their ZBI scores.
- 100% of clients and caregivers were provided with education, training and/or support.
- 100% of clients were satisfied with the service (score above 4 via a 6-point Likert Scale)