



Music is the golden thread of care

Putting music on the social prescribing menu for people living with dementia

9 November 2018, London UK: Grace Meadows, Programme Director of The Utley Foundation's Music for Dementia campaign to make music available for everyone living with dementia by 2020, strongly supports the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock's vision to make music available for people living with dementia through social prescribing, and says music is the golden thread of care.

"Well executed social prescribing, which builds on and makes better use of what is already available, will be welcomed by the music, health and social care sectors who are crying out for music for dementia to be recognised at every level", says Meadows. "[The Secretary of State](#) has made it clear that person-centred care is what is needed, and music enables this because each and every one of us has a relationship and connection with music. For someone living with dementia, music can be the lifeline, the connector that stops them being locked away in a lonely and isolated world of dementia.'

Music brings a wealth of possibilities into how society supports and cares for people living with dementia. Music has the ability to enliven, invigorate and stimulate and offers a powerful resource to the health and care sectors in supporting how care is provided. Music can enrich and enhance care, affording opportunities to create meaningful shared moments, connections and bring joy back into the lives of those living with dementia and all those who care for them. Currently, the health and care sectors are facing extraordinary levels of demands and pressures, as we find ourselves living longer, but not necessarily aging well. This can cause our workforces to become exhausted and close to burnout, physically and mentally, impacting on the quality of care delivered. This is where music has a fundamental role to play in transforming care.

The Department of Health and Social Care's recommendation that GPs prescribe personal playlists along with other forms of musical activities to reduce the symptoms of dementia, such as agitation, apathy and psychological distress comes from compelling evidence. There may be as many as 320,000 people with dementia in residential settings who do not have access to meaningful arts provision¹. It is thought that around 566,700 people with dementia live in the community and it is not currently known how many of these people are able to access music-based interventions.² Now is the time to take meaningful action to spread the benefits of music throughout our communities in the UK.

[The Utley Foundation](#), in partnership with the ILC-UK produced the Commission on Dementia in Music, '[What would life be without a song or dance, what are we?](#)' which was launched in the House of Lords in January of this year. The campaign is directly responding to the recommendations outlined through the formation of national taskforce made up of practitioners, experts, academics, leaders, researchers and most importantly people living with dementia from across the UK to make music available for all people living with dementia.

The understanding of how music effects not only the brain, but our memory, physiology and psychology continues to be developed through a dynamic and growing evidence base led by leading international experts here in the UK. As highlighted by the Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock, the evidence is compelling; music helps to reduce agitation, tension, depression and anxiety. Music can bring a person back into the here and now, enabling them to connect with loved ones and their world around them. It supports people living with dementia to reconnect with themselves, their identity and creativity. It can enable and

empower, and supports people living with dementia to be contributors to their communities and not just recipients of care.

Sarah Metcalfe, CEO of UK charity [Playlist For Life](#) says, “A personal playlist can improve the quality of life of someone living with dementia and help them to reconnect with loved ones. And making a playlist is a great way to get to know someone better – everyone should give it a go!”

Music, in its many forms; recorded, live, participatory, interactive, therapeutic, has the power to transform lives through enhancing and enriching care. Executive Director of [LiveMusicNow](#), Evan Dawson says, ‘The potential benefits of music to individuals and society are significant, underpinned by a clear and respected evidence base. However, music and the arts are not a panacea. For them to be effective and sustained requires investment in training and support. People benefit the most when they are included in the creative process as active participants, using appropriate techniques – this requires informed choices to be made.’”

Meadows says, “What we want to achieve with this campaign is that every person living with dementia has access to music, a menu of music choices, from personal playlists, performances, interactive participatory music sessions, concerts, to music therapy. The beauty and strength of music is in its diversity and adaptability. By putting music at the heart of the social prescribing menu for people living with dementia, we can use it to enhance and enrich person-centred care.”

Music may be dropping off the school curriculum, but it is making a powerful impression on how we can support and care for those living with dementia.

ENDS