

Music social prescriptions for people living with dementia

A guide for Link Workers on how to include music when supporting people living with dementia, and their carers.



“Music is a remarkably powerful resource to help those living with dementia. It is known to help improve people’s quality of life; can reduce agitation, anxiety and depression; and improve communication skills and autobiographical memory. It can also play a huge role in prevention of illness, by maintaining wellbeing, and improving general cognition and attention.

This toolkit contains some really helpful and practical advice for social prescribing link workers, and others, to use. By incorporating music-based activities into how we care for, and support, a person living with dementia, we can really help improve their quality of life.”

Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard
Chair, National Academy for Social Prescribing

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Introduction

We have produced this guide to explain how you can assess music needs and create music-based social prescriptions for people living with dementia.

Included within the next few pages are details about the benefits of music for health and wellbeing for people living with dementia. We explain how Link Workers, family and friends can be actively involved in making this happen.

The authors of this guide are Music for Dementia, a national campaign to make music available for everyone living with dementia that is led and funded by the Utley Foundation, a family charitable trust.

The guide is supported by the Dementia Choices Action Alliance (DCAN).

“Music brings joy and meaning to so many of us, including people who are living with dementia. It has the power to enable people living with dementia to express themselves beyond words and deepen connections with others. This guide will provide a valuable resource for social prescribing link workers to start conversations with people about how music could be part of their lives, and how they can support them and enable families and carers to get involved.”

Nicola Gitsham, Head of Social Prescribing, NHS England and NHS Improvement

“Alzheimer’s Society supports singing for the brain as we know that music can be a really important part of the life of a person living with dementia. Singing can improve brain activity, wellbeing and mood and everyone who attends Singing for the Brain tells us sessions improve their life in some way. It’s also something that family and friends can share with the person they are caring for.”

Kate Lee, CEO Alzheimer’s Society

The benefits of music for people living with dementia

Music is a universal experience that people living with dementia can enjoy and experience at any time and throughout their journey with dementia. It can also be a specific activity or a bespoke intervention to meet particular needs:



We use 'music-based activities' in this guide to describe the wide variety of music on offer which includes many types of activities such as singing or listening to music in the home, developing a playlist of favourite songs or music, watching musicals, singing in a physical or virtual choir or group, singing and dancing or walking to music, singing along with a musician, and specialist music therapy.

A personalised care and support plan that includes music delivers better care for people living with dementia by:

- **Enabling people living with dementia to be 'seen as the person they are'** beyond their condition
- **Improving mental wellbeing and reducing anxiety** when undergoing tests and before a formal diagnosis has been made
- **Engaging people positively across the spectrum of severity** from diagnosis to end of life care, as the ability to appreciate, respond to and participate in music making remains intact when other skills and abilities have declined
- **Alleviating symptoms** associated with dementia such as agitation, apathy and anxiety
- **Providing a channel for communication** when speech is no longer possible or available
- **Re-energising people** living with dementia as they experience and enjoy music from their past
- **Actively connecting people** living with dementia with carers and their loved ones 'in the here and now' through sharing and enjoying music and musical experiences together
- **Enabling people living with dementia to contribute to others' wellbeing** through singing and playing a musical instrument.

Music is not just a nicety within a person's care plan and has a useful role to play in prevention, diagnosis and care – see Appendix B for evidence infographic..

<p>PREVENTION</p> <p>Playing a musical instrument can act as a protective factor against dementia.</p>	<p>DIAGNOSIS</p> <p>Singing in a choir or group can help to process a diagnosis of dementia.</p>	<p>CARE</p> <p>Music therapy can improve quality of life and has been shown to reduce agitation, anxiety and depression.</p>
<p>What else can music do?</p> <p>Some music-based activities can improve general cognition and attention.</p>	<p>What else can music do?</p> <p>Some music-based activities can improve autobiographical memory - recalling past events to help with being in the here and now.</p>	<p>What else can music do?</p> <p>Music therapy can significantly improve communication skills, including fluency, and understanding and using words.</p>

Music-based activities can have wider benefits too, such as:

- **Improving the quality of professional care** experienced by people living with dementia
- **Reducing the associated pressures** of caring on families and unpaid carers
- **Reducing unnecessary care costs** through, for example, reducing the need to use anti-psychotic drugs.

“Usually, Malcolm is a people’s person but unfortunately isolation has caused low moods and he can appear quite lost sometimes.

I use music when I notice he is getting agitated. For example after watching the news we put Andre Rieu on and he is up singing and dancing every time.”

Diana, 75 is the main carer for her husband Malcolm, 77

“During isolation I’ve been keeping myself busy by composing songs and playing the guitar in my home. In the absence of friends and family, I have found being able to make music a great help.”

Paul Hitchmough, 67, who has Alzheimer’s Disease and lives alone in Liverpool

Music Social Prescriptions

Social prescribing is not a new idea, and schemes have been running in different areas of the country for a number of years. But now there are more social prescribing link workers than ever before.

This is because the NHS has [made a commitment](#) to ensure that all areas of England have access to a link worker. This is part of a commitment that care will be personalised around the needs and experience of each individual

Your role as a Link Worker is invaluable in **building trusting relationships** with the people you visit. The time you spend listening carefully to **what matters to people** and what motivates them is crucial in creating a shared plan.

We believe that being **connected to music-based activities** is one kind of social prescription that will help to **improve the quality of life** for people living with dementia. Your expertise in helping people to connect with their community and signposting them to activities is key to this.

There are many areas in someone's life where music might have played an important role, their love of **sport**, their **faith** or spiritual life, their **work**, their **relationships** with family and friends.

During your conversations you can ask questions about the person's **interests and taste in music** to help create a music social prescription. This approach ensures that their **general wellbeing** is included alongside any medical and social care.



Low cost



The cost of providing music-based activities within a care plan can be low or negligible so this should not be a barrier to including music, as appropriate, as an eligible need.

Care workers supporting people in their own homes or providing care in a residential care setting may be able to provide some of the music-based activities identified in the care plan at negligible cost and in a very short amount of time such as tuning in the radio to a favourite radio station, playing a favourite musical DVD, or putting a pre-recorded playlist of favourite music on the CD player or smart speaker.

A shared experience



Ultimately, music is a tool to enhance relationships and quality of life. In whichever music activities are included in someone's social prescription, it is vital that the music isn't something that is done to the person, rather it is something that is about being with and experienced together to support relationships and enhance quality of life.

Examples of prompts you could use to develop a music social prescription

What

- What music do you enjoy most and why?
- What kind of music do you dislike and why?
- What sort of music ‘gets you going’ and what helps you feel relaxed?
- What sort of music brings back memories for you and why?
- What kind of music or musicians do you like to listen to and why?
- What ‘music era or decade’ do you most identify with and why?
- What songs from your childhood and your youth did you like?
- What songs remind you of a favourite holiday, a special event or a place?
- What sort of music activities did you used to do that you would like to do again?
- What kind of music activities have you never tried but would like to?

When

- When throughout the day do you like listening to music?
- What kinds of music do you like at different times of the day?
- Do you like to have your favourite music playing gently in the background where you are living?
- Do you like to have silence at times in your day? If so, when?

How

- How important is music to you and why?
- How do you like experiencing music – listening, singing, playing?
- Would you like to learn how to play an instrument?
- Do you like dancing, moving or exercising to music?
- Do you like singing along with others as part of a choir or group?
- Do you like going to live music performances?
- Do you like watching musical films or TV shows with theme tunes and do you have any favourites?
- How do you like listening to music – on the radio, using CDs on a CD player, through headphones and a smart phone, attending live concerts?
- Who do you like to experience music with? Family, friends?
- Do you like to experience music as part of worship or spiritual reflection?

Conducting a conversation about music

Below are some suggestions about how you might conduct a conversation about music to see if it would interest and support them:

Having more than one conversation



- The conversation about a person's music preferences could take place over more than one occasion and over a period of time.
- The conversation might happen after the relationship between you and the person has developed through informal visits and chats about music beforehand.

Keeping a record



- The music preferences and the benefits achieved through a music social prescription for a person living with dementia will change over time so the early record of music interests and preferences you write may be useful to refer to at later stages in the person's 'dementia journey'.
- You will routinely keep a record of what is said and what happens during the meetings and conversations. This record should include any music preferences and outcomes identified and initial ideas about how they might be achieved. Appendix C is template record sheet that you could adapt for use during the process.

Using non-verbal prompts



- It may be appropriate to use alternative approaches to gain an understanding of an individual's musical preferences. Examples include observing their response to different types of music you play to them, or watching their behaviour in a group musical activity such as singing together.

Involving paid and unpaid carers



- You could ask family members and friends, or carers working for residential care and domiciliary care providers to have some preliminary conversations about music in the life of the person before you discuss and develop a music social prescription.

Looking out for 'red flags'



- Watch out for 'red flag' songs or music that might trigger unpleasant or unwanted feelings or memories.
- There are some rare forms of dementia that may make listening and processing music difficult. You should also take into account any existing medical conditions, such as hearing loss.

Playlist for Life has a variety of resources to help people develop a collection of songs – a 'soundtrack of your life' – including conversation starters and prompts about musical memories, how to access music tracks online, and creating a music journal.

Music in care homes

Some care homes offer residents the opportunity of participating in singing for the brain or music and movement groups, listening to visiting musicians live, receiving music therapy or playing percussion or other instruments as an integral part of their care offer.

When a person living with dementia moves into a care setting, any musical preferences captured in their strengths-based assessment, or social prescribing plan, would be extremely beneficial to pass on to the care home to inform their new care plan. As well as benefiting the individual, it will help to demonstrate to care settings the potential of using music for residents to enhance quality of life for as many of them as possible.

Music in social work care plans

We are encouraging Social Workers to identify music as an area for discussion during their formal strengths-based assessment of a person with social care needs. Using similar key prompts and questions, they will identify the extent to which music has been and still is an important part of the person's life, and in what way it could be a part of the individual's care plan.

Ways of incorporating music-based activities in a care plan for people living with dementia include:

- Tuning in to radio shows such as m4d Radio or BBC Memory Radio that play music and shows from previous eras
- Listening to music on the radio, CD/record player, TV, smart speaker, or smartphone
- Finding and playing favourite songs by streaming on a smartphone, tablet or computer
- Watching favourite musical films on DVDs or through a streaming service such as Netflix
- Creating a playlist of favourite songs and music
- Playing or learning to play a musical instrument
- Joining a 'singing for the brain' group (run by Alzheimer's Society)
- Joining a local choir
- Receiving specialist support from a music therapist

"Although I'm new to my role, spanning 12 GP surgeries in North Northumberland, previous experience of successfully using music in care is coming into play already. Presently, my help is geared towards practical advice. I understand the power of music, recognising it as a great relaxer and I am suggesting patients create playlists as well as signposting them to virtual Singing for the Brain sessions by Alzheimer's Society.

Looking ahead, I've been talking to a local theatre group about the possibilities of setting up local face-to-face singing sessions and hopefully I will be helping to co-ordinate different logistical aspects, including transport."

Janette Casson, GP Link Worker for Social Prescribing (Dementia)

Family and friends supporting the social prescription

As part of their preliminary discussions mentioned on page 8, family and friends can help identify and provide the music-based activities that a person might enjoy. Music can also play an important role in supporting any carer's health and wellbeing.

The [Musical Guide](#) suggests a number of ways to start the conversation, including:

- Stay in touch on the phone and ask what sort of music-based activities the person would like to take part in
- Have a virtual 'sing along' or listen to music together over the phone or on a tablet or computer
- Make a playlist and give it to them as present
- Talk to the paid carer supporting them or living with them about how to make possible listening to music or taking part in music-based activities
- Support the person to attend music-based activities in the community
- Support any grandchildren to talk to them about their favourite music and produce a playlist for them.

Phil's Story

"My mum always enjoyed the old music hall songs so as kids we all learnt the words and the tunes to songs like 'Daisy Daisy', 'Pack up your troubles' and 'Burlington Bertie'. Mum's dementia eventually meant she had to move into residential care and on my regular visits to see her we used to go for walks around the home and gardens chatting and singing these old songs together.

She couldn't say who I was, but she enjoyed my visits and we really connected as we sang together and held hands as we walked.

The amazing thing was she managed to remember the songs even though the words and the tunes got a bit hazy towards the end.

The change in the way she sang those songs over the four years also helped me to grasp the effect the dementia was having on her. And they are now the strongest memory I have of the precious time we shared together before she died."

"Music evokes emotion and emotion can bring memory. Music brings back the feeling of life when nothing else can."

Dr Oliver Sacks

Appendix A

Linking with local opportunities for music-based activities

The Music for Dementia [Musical Map](#) has information about the location of different types of music-based activities that are available across the country. Below are three examples of community activities

In practical terms you could refer the person to a Social Worker for a music care strengths-based assessment that could inform the development of their care plan.

June and Eddie's Story

"Before my eyes, Eddie started disappearing. But when music therapy came into his life, his world lit up again.

In the music, Eddie found himself again and the drummer in Eddie shone through.

We are so grateful to the therapy because in these moments of music Eddie was transformed, and I would get my husband back."

(Case study provided by Nordoff Robbins)

Fiona's Story

"Well, the playlist for life is a massive success. I put almost 70 songs onto it (so that's over 3 hours), and Mum and Dad listened to the whole lot this morning.

Apparently, Dad could remember loads of the words, and could name the singers – sometimes when Mum couldn't! Mum said it was quite an emotional experience for her seeing Dad so normal. It's amazing what a powerful trigger this has turned out to be.

I know music is often cited as something that can really get through to people with dementia, but I'll admit I'm very surprised at how well it worked given that Dad has never been especially interested. It's given them both a very happy day."

(Case Study: Playlist for life)

Moyra and John's Story

"The online sessions have been a lifeline not just for John but for me. They are a landmark in what are very long weeks. I think it's really important for our general wellbeing. It's also a whole new experience and the engagement with the computer is important for John. It's really good to see everybody, to connect and make the music together."

(Case study: Together in Sound)

Appendix B

Evidence Infographic

Music and dementia – the facts



Dementia numbers are rising...

There are approximately
885,000

people with dementia in the UK.

x2 By 2040 this figure is predicted to almost **double to 1.6 million.**

209,600 people will develop dementia this year, that's
1 every 3 minutes



There are nearly **700,000** unpaid carers for people with dementia.

70% of people in care homes have dementia or severe memory problems.

There are over **42,000** people under 65 with dementia in the UK.

25,000+ People from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in the UK are affected.

Living well with music:

Music helps **improve** overall health and wellbeing – lowers stress-related hormones, maintains cognitive health, encourages social and communication skills, and physical health through movement.

Music can help to

reduce

heart rate, blood pressure and anxiety.



Music can **trigger** the brain to release chemicals such as endorphins that distract the body from pain.

Singing is good for you. Residents who took part in a music therapy choir more than **doubled** their quality of life scores whilst **halving** their depressive symptoms.

The magic of music:

4 key areas are

improved ↑↑↑

by music based interventions for people living with dementia: general attention, cognition, memory, speech and communication skills.



The costs:

Dementia **costs** the UK

£34.7bn

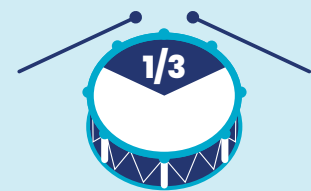
every year. The health and social care costs of dementia are more than those of cancer and chronic heart disease combined.



Two thirds of the cost of dementia is paid for by people living with dementia and their families, through unpaid care and care home fees.

Unpaid carers save the UK economy **£13.9bn** a year by supporting someone with dementia.

Playing a musical instrument in older adulthood may help to **reduce** the risk of developing dementia by more than a **third**.



Music works:

Music therapy has been shown to be the **best** type of therapy for **reducing** the behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia.

Music therapy **reduces** agitation and need for medication in

67% of people with dementia.

Through regular singing, depression levels can be **reduced** by

40% in care settings.

Singing in residential care homes can **halve** anxiety.

The ability to process, respond to and engage with music remains **intact** however severe the dementia.



The numbers:

For every **£1 invested** in the Silver Lining music and dementia project, the social **ROI was £1.93**, a

93% increase

Music therapy is the **most cost effective** way to alleviate agitation in care homes. Up to

35 times less expensive

when compared with many other therapies and interventions.



“When delivered effectively, music gives carers and loved ones an avenue through which to sustain relationships and share experiences and can help to minimise the often-upsetting symptoms of dementia such as agitation, anxiety and depression. Moreover, it can help to improve a person’s wellbeing and quality of life.”

Co-Chair of All Party Parliamentary Group on dementia, Baroness Greengross

Appendix C

Template for recording music needs and comments for care plans

Use and adapt this template to be a routine part of your strengths-based assessment for developing a care plan

Prompt on music	Response of person	Comment by social worker / link worker / other
Tell me about you and music		
How important is music to you and why?		
What kind of music do you enjoy most and why?		
What kind of music do you dislike and why?		
What sort of music 'gets you going' and why?		
What sort of music helps you feel relaxed and why?		
What sort of music bring back memories for you and why?		
What kind of music and musicians do you like to listen to and why?		
What 'music era or decade' do you most identify with e.g. the 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, 00s, 10s and why?		
What sort of music activities did you used to do that you would like to do again?		
What kind of music activities have you never tried but would like to?		

When throughout the day do you like listening to music?		
What kinds of music do you like at different times of the day?		
Do you like to have your favourite music playing gently in the background where you are living?		
Do you like to have silence throughout your day? If so, when?		
How do you like experiencing music – listening, singing, playing?		
Would you like to learn an instrument?		
Do you like dancing, moving or exercising to music?		
Do you like singing along with others as part of a choir or group?		
Do you like going to live music performances?		
Do you like watching musical films and do you have any favourites?		
How do you like listening to music – via the radio, using CDs on a CD player, through headphones and a smart phone/ device, attending live performances?		
Who do you like to experience music with?		
Anything else about you and music?		

Any feedback on using this template and conducting strengths-based music assessments would be much appreciated. Please email info@musicfordementia.org.uk