

LINKages Society 'MusicLINKS Program'

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MusicLINKS is an intergenerational approach to increase socialization, engagement and quality for life for seniors and adults in order to mitigate the effects of dementia.

The desired impact of the MusicLINKS program for people affected by dementia was three-fold:

- A. To improve the quality of life for people affected by dementia, through regular and stimulating interactions with student volunteers, and through listening to preferred music which they had chosen.
- B. To stimulate memory access through the use of familiar songs, and to teach new skills of using an iPod (where appropriate).
- C. To build understanding, compassion, care, and leadership skills in the youth supporting the seniors.

During the course of the school year programming, we were able to witness the friendships which formed, and the smiles which would appear on the seniors' faces when they heard their favourite songs. Students talked to the seniors about their music, creating interaction and memory stimulating activities for the seniors.

Seniors were observed clapping and singing along to their songs, and some even danced. Though seniors sometimes had difficulty communicating through speech, they were often able to remember the words to the songs they had chosen.

The student volunteers involved in the program were observed to grow in their understanding of dementia, and also in their ability to provide compassionate and appropriate support to their senior friends.

OBJECTIVES & IMPLEMENTATION

The objective of the MusicLINKS program was to increase opportunities for people with dementia to engage and connect through the medium of music, leveraging the technical knowledge of the digital generation, and creating friendships between the generations.

- Care centres were chosen which demonstrated an understanding and support of the value of music in engaging with adults with dementia. Schools were chosen on the students' willingness to learn about dementia, and to commit to supporting their seniors throughout the duration of the program.
- Educational training sessions were provided to students, increasing their knowledge of dementia and how to support, and ongoing connection occurred with care centre staff to ensure the continued support of the program.
- The programming took place solely in care centre settings due to the mobility and care needs of the senior patients with dementia.
- The resources utilized were student and teacher volunteer hours for programming and training, physical materials including iPod and headphones, iTunes cards, and tablets to research music. Several interview, interaction, and activity guides were developed. Training of qualified staff and

program support was required and completed.

Seniors were able to actively participate in the implementation project to the best of their individual ability, depending if they were experiencing early, mid, or progressive dementia. The music appeared (anecdotally) to stimulate seniors and improve their ability to interact with their student friends. Seniors who were verbally able to communicate picked their own music, and some learned how to operate the iPods on their own. Other seniors required help putting on headphones, and starting the music, but listened calmly and smiled and swayed while their music was playing. It was observed that the more coherent seniors seemed to prefer interacting with their student volunteer friends about music, rather than strictly listening to music. One senior was not able to communicate, so her husband picked her playlist, which she seemed to enjoy.

IMPACT FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

The research indicates that both seniors and youth were positively impacted by the project. The youth reported a positive change in how they viewed the seniors in the project and both seniors and youth reported an increase in positive communication while developing the playlist on their devices. Based on the documentary "Alive Inside" we learned that music can stimulate memory recall and this was observed with many of the seniors partaking in the project. Many seniors shared memories that surfaced while listening to certain songs. Alive inside YouTube Clip of Henry
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hlm0Qd4mP-I>