Developing a greater understanding of relationship building and communication needs of people living with dementia, using music making workshops.

Following the workshop, there is a reflective debrief hour where staff from the project, together with the musicians, the Project Facilitator and the Staff Dementia Practitioner (SDP) reflect on their learning of the residents/clients through their experience of listening, observing and joining in with them.

What we wanted to achieve
- To offer music improvisation workshops to people living with dementia.
- To enable staff to enhance and develop their understanding of the emotional needs of people living with dementia as part of a person-centred approach to dementia care.
- To use the experiences of the project to understand communication and relationship building in different contexts and to develop the learning from this with staff.
- To enhance staff understanding of the individual residents/client in the group and to take the learning outcomes forward through their own practices and also with a ‘buddy’ colleague, working to ensure that what we do and how we do it, centres around promoting meaningful lives. This aligns with organisational strategy.
- To offer staff the experience and the benefits of reflective practice - understanding that reflection can become a catalyst of change.

Background
Music for Life (MFL) was founded 20 years ago in 1993 by Linda Rose. Now managed by Wigmore Hall, Music for Life has worked in partnership with a range of organisations, the most long standing of which is Jewish Care.

The project activity centres around eight weekly music making workshops involving people living with dementia and depending on which setting has been chosen for the particular project, this will either be a care home or a day care facility. During the workshops, three professional and skilfully trained musicians, five care staff, and usually (but not always) eight people living with dementia, interact through improvised music-making, using instruments and voices.
What we did
- Care setting is identified. We rotate three projects per annum over our estate of care homes and day care centres for people living with dementia.
- The introductory meeting sets the scene around staff commitment and introduces the project format and aims. Staff are encouraged to start thinking about which residents/clients they would like to propose for participation and which staff members would like to take part.
- A second meeting, the set up meeting introduces the staff team of five to the lead musician. The lead musician will give staff a ‘taste’ of how the improvisation works and a discussion will take place to shortlist eight residents/clients (plus two reserves) to participate in the project.
- Following on from this preparation, the eight weekly workshops will then take place. These are each divided into three hourly sessions. Musicians have the opportunity to practice the opening and closing piece and discuss how they will manage the session reflecting on information, observations and interactions from the previous week. The second hour is devoted to the interactive music making which takes place with staff and residents sitting in a circle and is led by the lead musician who sets up a selection of musical instruments in the centre of the circle. Each week, the SDP, at least two members of staff (on a rotated basis) and the project co-ordinator will remain outside the circle in order to record their observations, focusing on staff interaction, clients’ and musicians engagement and the overall learning potential. The final hour, after resident/clients have left space, is a reflective debrief session.
- The SDP will also help staff develop a buddy system: staff participating in the project, buddy with staff not on the project and will exchange learning from the project with them that will feed into the reflective learning sessions. This enables learning from the session to become embedded.

What we achieved
- That residents/clients, staff and musicians participating as part of the group, are given an opportunity to communicate through music, gesture and voice, forming bonds and connections as equal contributors and recipients in an environment that is palpably rewarding for all.
- That the good practices of our staff are validated and that staff contribution is valued and appreciated. This has led to staff feeling more confident and empowered to act on their understanding of residents’ preferences/behaviours.
- Learning is maximised through experiential and reflective practices and the buddy relationship.

“...dignity and training for dementia care are key in how we work as a team”
Care staff participant

“The overarching aims of our organisational strategy, is to promote meaningful lives in all that we do. This Music for Life project provided us with an excellent way to work to our strategic aims and lay foundations upon which we continue to build”
Debbie Fox, Vice Chair, Jewish Care
What we learnt

- We consider that MFL gives musicians and staff an opportunity to share and experience the world from the perspectives of people living with dementia. We believe this has a positive impact on how we engage, respond and communicate with those who are living with dementia. As to how this is impact is quantified, may emerge through a newly commissioned research project currently being undertaken in conjunction with Wigmore Hall, Jewish Care and UCL.

- We have learned from the way in which the musicians prioritise the preparation of the environment and the building of the relationships with participants, is what enables the music to happen, which in turn enables a richness of communication. The way in which staff have learned to mirror this in ways of working, has re-enforced that if staff give time to establishing relationships, everything else will become much easier.

- MFL has supported the organisation to challenge beliefs that people living with dementia are ‘lost to us’. Instead, it has given us numerous examples of the communication pathways and relationship building that can take place with people living with dementia.

- Our aim for the project has shifted over the years from its beginnings as a project designed to enhance experiences for people living with dementia to one that is as much as providing for this, as it is for offering opportunities for staff development as well as encouraging creative, meaningful care practices. It is a project that is valued for doing all of this.

- The direction of travel for the project is that the learning from it, must be understood, maximised and shared. The ways on which we are planning to do this, include:
  - Developing the buddy system to be effective and accessible to all staff/volunteers
  - Tying in ownership/accountability for recording the learning e.g. through integrating learning outcomes into care plans
  - Sharing/role modelling the best of MFL experiences across our care settings so that each setting becomes well prepared to receive the project when it arrives and to take ownership for embedding the learning.
  - Making sure that the staff group for the project and buddy relationships are not confined just to care staff. Other staff (e.g. from hotel services/cleaning have as much to experience, share and learn from the project to promote their development and working practices.
  - Working with researchers and the Wigmore Hall in scoping the research/evaluation project so as to ascertain some measurable impact findings.

“I really saw how she responded to the music; in a way I thought she couldn’t anymore”

Care staff participant
Skills for Care continue to produce various resources that can help those involved in dementia care, from formal qualifications to related guidance and information. We have listed a few of these below.

**Guide to qualifications and standards in adult social care**

We have worked with the sector to develop nationally recognised qualifications in Activity Provisions and Dementia. Learn more about both from our guide to qualifications.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/qualifications

**Workforce Development Fund**

Adult social care organisations in England may be able to reclaim some of the cost of qualifications through this funding opportunity. This can help employers to develop your colleagues further.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/wdf

**Dementia resources**

In recent years, Skills for Care have developed various resources aimed at supporting those working in dementia care. From qualifications to guidance, further information is available from the Dementia section of our website.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/dementia

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