

Human Right to Personal Expression



A Slice* about Personalised Musical Moments

* Over 20 different strands of work took place between March and October 2022 as part of Rights Made Real Phase 2. Each of these strands was situated under one of 4 Human Rights. This Slice offers a slice of insight into one of those strands.

HUMAN RIGHT TO PERSONAL EXPRESSION

A Slice about Personalised Musical Moments

This opportunity involved a musician residency in two care homes by Jane Bentley*, developing personalised musical care for people experiencing later stages of dementia.

The approach adopted by Jane places an emphasis is on:

- moving around the home, including engaging with residents by walking down the corridor together
- engaging in person centred music making
- brief encounters with people, with the length of time being flexible to respond to their engagement
- the possibility of visiting people in their room.

The care home residents were active participants in creating the musical moment, this participation included residents:

- Joining in humming, singing, swaying, tapping- where Jane followed their movements, vocalisations to create something together
- Playing a percussion instruments (percussion instruments used were specifically chosen for their natural textures, and accessibility to people
- Offering suggestions for what might happen next.

The approach was therefore improvisational, responding to what was happening for the person/people who were engaging in the musical experience. There was no set plan for what would happen, so that there was flexibility to go with what emerged in the moment.

An additional component of this Opportunity was that in one of the care homes Jane worked with a staff member (herself a musician) to support them in taking forward this approach to music making. In the other home a local musician accompanied Jane during her visits on a voluntary basis so that she could also incorporate this style of musical engagement into her own practice.

*Dr Jane Bentley has over 20 years experience of working with people with dementia - and is the project leader for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's 'Reconnect' project in hospitals. She works closely with the NHS developing music in continuing care with older adults, and is a Senior Atlantic Fellow of the Global Brain Health Institute.

Creating Connections with the Right to Personal Expression and Principles from the National Care Standards

Some key elements of this opportunity connected with the right to personal expression and the National Care Standards were:

- Expanding opportunities to enjoy and participate in musical experiences beyond a 'concert' model that may not be possible or enjoyable for some people living with later stage dementia

- Valuing the person as a 'partner' in the music-making; picking up on the subtlest of cues from the person and incorporating these into how the music is created and shared
- Having a musical repertoire that crosses a range of emotion - not just upbeat. Allowing and acknowledging tears if they arise – so that all emotions are welcomed, while being attuned to the boundary between tears of emotion (often welcome) and tears of distress.
- Creating opportunities for staff to further deepen their awareness of what the resident values, through noticing their responses to engagement with musician

What we've Heard

Stories from the music residency visits to care homes:

'We went into one lady's room and she was lying in bed with her eyes closed. She is frail and near the end of life. The musician played some music and when she ended the lady quietly brought her hands together and clapped. I had never seen her do this before. The musician may not have known that this was unusual so I was able to share the impact and difference this had made to her. I felt very emotional in a good way. In another situation I was able to dance with a man and he also got quite emotional and I could be with him in that moment, witness this together and we could support each other'.

'It has been great being able to go back several times to the same care home as a musician. We have built up relationships and I have been able to really involve the residents in the music making. People choose percussion instruments to play along, while others sang. It was like we created a small band, with each person having their role and it feels like we are inviting each other to consider 'what are we going to make today together'.

'I was seeing the difference it was making- the development throughout the weeks and relay this back to staff. Jane (the musician) played a song that was meaningful for a resident whose wife had died. Staff were a little concerned that the resident would become very upset, and noticing how he responded during the song we felt we learnt something new about where he was in his grief journey, as he was emotional but not distressed listening to this song'.

'At one of the first sessions Jane was engaging with a resident and they were making circular motions together to the time of the music, there seemed to be something enjoyable for her about circular motions. We got a tongue drum and that lady now regularly plays the drum using those circular motions- we hadn't noticed before that this movement was something she seems to find enjoyable'.

1 Thing you Might Want to Do

Check-out the 'Developing Personalised Live Music in Care Homes' resource by visiting www.rightsmadereal.org.uk and click on Right to Cultural Life Resources Tab.

Something you Might want to Ask or Think more About

What stands out to you from the description and stories from this music residency?

What thoughts or ideas come up for you when reading the stories?

