

Case studies: How have culture and creativity been supporting people in health, care and other institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Project: Music Cares

Organisation: Orchestra of the Swan

Region: West Midlands

Designed for: Care homes



Photo: Diane Clark

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Introduction

Orchestra of the Swan is a professional Chamber Orchestra providing concerts and engagement opportunities for children and young people and adults living with dementia and their carers. We have been delivering our Music Cares programmes since 2014 and have visited care homes across the West Midlands region.

Since lockdown in March 2020, we have ‘repurposed’ physical music sessions, that we would normally deliver in Care Home and Cafes into a series of ‘personalised’ Youtube playlists. These ‘playlists’ were created by OOTS musicians in their own homes and were shared privately to partner care homes. Lists were added to over several weeks which enables players to maintain connection with our communities and even accept musical requests for the following weeks’ tracks. Following this approach, we broadened out our project to provide music videos for any who visited our website, then we delivered live Zoom music sessions to care homes and members of the public that signed up and finally we are presently in the final stages of developing 5x45-minute themed and interactive videos entitled ‘Musical Shares’ which encourage everyone to join in with musical activity and share conversations, wherever they may be accessing the video – in their own home, residential home, phone, tablet - wherever. These have been developed with people living with dementia in mind but are suitable for other community activity. Each video is subtitled and supported by ‘Sound Bite’ Guidance Notes that let people know how to get the most out of using this resource by providing background context for pieces, ideas for activities and conversation starters about the music and lyrics if people would like to sing along.

Funders

The Linbury Trust and National Lottery Community Fund

Partners

No formal partnerships although we will be working with stakeholders to disseminate our work.

Who is it for?

People living with dementia in care homes and in the community – those people who usually attend dementia cafés but now cannot and even those who are not hooked into any supporting service. We also hope to support carers and provide useful and meaningful activity that carers and the cared for can enjoy together, sharing precious moments.

Are these people you have worked with before, or new participants?

Both

How many people took/are taking part?

20 musicians, approx. 250 via the playlists and ZOOM sessions. General videos have been viewed on our website over 500 times

Where is it happening?

Mostly in the Midlands but as a result of this project we have been contacted by people in the South West! We will be launching our videos nationally in the autumn and will be asking for some postcode information so we can track the reach of this project.

For how long has it been happening?

We had to adapt all physical delivery to virtual so it began in March but is now forming a key part of our L&P programmes and we are working on this area still, as outlined above.

What were/are the main outputs?

We are expecting the production of 5 videos shortly

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Combatting isolation, keeping connected with our communities, to bring fun and enjoyment at this time and a sense of sharing. Providing support for carers and meaningful, mentally uplifting work for our players too who have equally been finding the lockdown tough.

Have you adapted existing work to make this happen? If so, how?

We have put all of our dementia workshops online! Issuing new online safety guidance for players and participants, providing additional support and training for players where needed.

Does your work support people who identify with one or more of the protected characteristics¹?

The projects are aimed at people living with dementia and their carers who, in general are older people.

Evaluation & Feedback

We collect responses via online surveys and questionnaires – qualitative and quantitative data. We also speak with our participants and have good relationship with project partners so always ask directly for feedback too.

¹Protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation (Equalities Act 2010).

What is your own impression of how it has worked? What have been the challenges and successes for you?

It seems to have worked well. A very steep learning curve that needed to be addressed very quickly to ensure we could keep delivering activity. This work will now form a key part of our programming going forward.

Are you reaching more people/fewer people/different people?

Some different people due to the nature of the technology, but the numbers are surprisingly good – even though I do think some people are suffering with technology overload – myself included! I think the fact that the next series of videos will be shared via our networks nationally, the reach could be much wider and we will therefore reach a different audience – also hoping that care providers/activity co-ordinators look to utilise our work in their own sessions.

What new skills have you or your colleagues had to develop to deliver this work?

Communicating music over zoom when you cannot have that initial reaction conversation without taking everyone off mute! It can feel a little stilted when you are used to having ‘banter’ with the groups. Timings, latency and delay in tech for performing together etc. Getting to grips with new software and online safety requirements.

What would you say has made this project possible?

Our funders have been very generous in adapting to the change in our activity from physical to virtual – they have all been very supportive. Players too have been very enthusiastic, keen to learn and very keen to work.

What would have made it easier?

Time and a bit of notice – but none of us had that!

Further information

www.orchestraoftheswan.org

<https://orchestraoftheswan.org/music-for-dementia/>; more are to follow when the Musical Shares videos are launched