

# Music project hits the right note



Art Beyond Belief's Pilot project to take music into Upton hospital, Slough, has been running successfully for three months now. It was originally designed to achieve two purposes; it was to bring music as a benefit both in health improvement, and quality of life to patients and staff, and it was to develop a multimedia toolkit for the reporting of such projects. The project was to be professionally monitored by the Sidney De Haan Research Centre at Canterbury Christ Church University, and thus evaluate the value of the musical activity, and the suitability of the multimedia for project evaluation. The Project was late starting due principally to the serious illness of a member of the research team, who I am pleased to say is now well on the road to recovery after a series of operations to remove a brain tumour. There were operational problems at the Hospital too, due

to ward restructuring, but we were able to start at the beginning of December last year. The musician, Frank Doherty plays guitar and fiddle, and both sings and plays a variety of music from Irish jigs to Fats Waller numbers, the words of which many of the patients seem to know. Upton is essentially a geriatric hospital, with stroke victims and dementia patients along with ladies and gentlemen being assessed for residential care, or awaiting residential care placement. The dementia ranges from slight to severe, with a number of patients suffering Alzheimer's Disease, again with a difference of severity.

Originally, the plan was to take the music to three wards per week; to Avon and Trent wards every week, and to Kennet or Severn every other week (making three wards every week). Estimated numbers before the start of the project

*Frank Doherty with members of the Day Hospital at Upton. It was after hearing Frank play in other wards that the Staff said "Us too!"*

indicated that we might expect to reach around 110 people including staff, over the six month period. In January Severn and Kennet were merged, so that there was no alternating ward. By the end of the first month, the reports from ward staff indicated that they considered the music-session time of one and one half hours to be too great, as patients would be hard pressed to continue the attention span beyond one hour. At the same time, the Day Hospital staff were asking for the musician to come into their ward. "They felt they were missing out on a good thing" says Upton's Modern Matron Pamela Mahomed Hossen. It was quickly agreed to take the music into the Day Hospital and trim back the sessions in the other wards in line with staff

recommendations. The music was an instant hit with patients and staff alike, and all have commented positively on the sessions. This, combined with the fact that the music sessions take place during staff shift changes has meant that the original figure of 110 previously mentioned is probably more like 200 people, including visitors, who have been so enthusiastic about the programme.

“We have wanted to undertake a project like this for some time” says Pamela Mahomed Hossen, “bringing in activities from outside, to give a sense of community. It’s an idea we’ve had buzzing around for a while, but in the past we’ve had projects that started but never



“Shall we dance?” Irish jigs are popular with patients and staff alike.

Alistair Bamford from the Sidney De Haan Research Centre (below)



Modern Matron Pamela Mahomed Hossen. “We have wanted to undertake a project like this for some time, it’s been brilliant”

gained momentum, just fizzled out. This one really has gained momentum, it’s been brilliant and I think the reason for this has been that it has been a planned project, properly managed by Art Beyond Belief, and financially supported by The Trusthouse Charitable Trust, and The Arts Council. I would love to keep this project running permanently, as it’s already inspiring staff to come up with new ideas, and I can see the difference in the patients. The quality of conversation is considerably better at the end of



Frank’s sessions, compared to what it was like before. The Day Hospital actually asked for this music, and once it was in, the physiotherapists were asking for more of Frank’s time in order to experiment with music for Parkinson’s victims and other areas. Sadly, we’ve had to say “No” because of cost constraints, but as this is a pilot, we are hopeful that we can turn it into a long term project with the ability to experiment with the occupational therapy strand”.

It’s not just the staff who find the idea of live music interesting; Says Harold Powell, who comes to Upton Day Hospital every Tuesday

“This is a great social advance. I come here to get my medical condition sorted out, and find I can now look forward to the social experience at the same time. I live alone, so when i come here, and listen to the music, I appreciate every bit of it.”

The first visit from the Sidney De Haan Centre, was with Alistair Bamford, on the first of February. Commenting on the obvious age of the building he says “Clearly it’s been around for a long time, serving its community. But when you step inside there are smiles from the receptionists, sparkling clean floors, fresh white paint,



Harold Aubrey Powell, a patient at the Day Hospital. "This is a great social advance. - I just love it"

"Walking patients with the parallel bars is definitely different when the music is playing."

could benefit from an anticipatory musician. They have problems initiating their gait, and with the rhythm and fluency of their gait. You couldn't do it with recorded music, but with live music... I would love to try it."

There is no doubt that at the half way stage the project is a runaway success, with patient involvement, and patient quality of life clearly improved. The effect on the staff is also noticeable, with the Occupational Therapy staff clearly excited by the idea of a follow-up project that could give their patients a real quantifiable boost. The idea that experimentation with music is now an important and

pictures on the wall, and flowers in the wards. It felt like a good place, and then to go out into the wards and see a good response from the staff, lots of smiles, lots of chat, blood pressure being taken, and pills handed out; and then to have Frank playing, it seemed right. 'Ordinary', but in a very profound way.' Commenting on the music, he said "There was real participation with tapping feet, mouthing words, and the staff seemed to appreciate the atmosphere - lots of smiles, lots of asides and jokes. Frank's playing seemed, again, 'right' - to fill the acoustic space."



Senior Physiotherapist Catherine Bray "It really is very interesting."

Senior Physiotherapist Catherine Bray said that " It really is very interesting. Walking patients with the parallel bars is definitely different when the music is playing. It makes for a social interaction rather than a purely medical one. It has led me to think that patients with Parkinson's

valueable part of the medical tool kit of enlightened professionals is an accepted fact, and patients are eager to participate.

The project is running to budget, and is expected to remain so.



Left - The logo was designed to give equal importance to the principal organisations involved in the project.

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