

# LINKages - Music2LINK

## Final Report

### Executive Summary

Music2LINK was a collaborative project exploring the impact of focused music and art-based programming (involving youth) on seniors living with dementia in two care centre sites in Calgary. The project was based on research illuminating the positive impact that music has on people living with dementia's ability to orient to the present moment and interact with family, friends, and care centre staff.

The project focused on intergenerational involvement utilizing pre-trained junior high students to attend collaborative bi-weekly programming with their senior friends living with dementia. Despite the interruptions and changes required by the COVID -19 pandemic, the Music2LINK project was implemented in an adapted form which yielded valuable take-forward learning:

- Musical sing-alongs followed by art activities engaged and lifted the moods of people living with dementia (rated as "double thumbs up!").
- People living with dementia interact with youth more enthusiastically than with adult facilitators; they really seem to enjoy the energy of the youth.
- Virtual facilitated programming on a small computer does not appear engaging for people living with dementia.
- Connecting with other care partners (even virtually) to share stories and ideas was rated as helpful and supportive by participating care partners.
- Biography guides (question prompts about earlier life) appear to be a promising way for family members to engage a loved one with dementia in conversation.
- Music and more abstract art projects can easily be incorporated into other programming or daily life, making them a promising intervention for care centres and care partners alike.

### Objectives/Implementation

There were 6 main objectives of the Music2LINK program:

1. To provide meaningful opportunities for people living with dementia (PLWD) in all stages of the disease to improve quality of life, through music, art, and engagement with youth.
2. To engage PLWD and their care partners in program design and decision making.
3. To build dementia knowledge and caring/interaction capacity in youth participants through training and support.
4. To foster the next generation of dementia-aware decision makers.
5. To provide support and education/interaction tools to care partners and families through monthly care partner nights.
6. To expand provincial capacity by sharing what is learned through the project with existing and developing RuralLINK chapters in Alberta along with the provincial Community-based Innovations in Dementia Care (CIDC) Community of Practice.



The process and approach utilized involved a collaborative process and person-centred approach to provide participants with as much choice as possible and focusing on relationships. Without dedicated and creative care centre and school partners, the program would not have launched! The project team worked together with care centres and care partners to ensure that the program was an enjoyable experience for participants.

Prior to the pandemic, programs were hosted in long term care centre environments with rooms with long tables so that youth pairs and their senior partner living with dementia could meet, interact, and complete their sing-along and art projects together. The rooms were nice and warm, quiet, and separated from the bustle of the care centres main operations. Student participants arrived by bus (pre-pandemic) and utilized regular stringent procedures for sanitizing before entering the care centre setting.

During the pandemic, in-person programming ceased, and support shifted to supporting care partners with local resources, activity ideas, and through participating in virtual conversation cafes to share challenges and learning amongst a group of peers.

## Impact

The University of Calgary worked with LINKages to ensure that evaluation processes were appropriate and thorough. Prior to the pandemic, participants were asked to rate each song and activity with either "thumbs up" or "thumbs down." Participants were asked to choose songs that they would like to hear for the next session's sing-along.

Care centre staff, students, and care partners were asked for their observations regarding the senior's apparent mood, participation, engagement with the student, and engagement with the activity. Students and care partners were asked to self-rate their comfort, confidence, and skill level when supporting and interacting with a person living with dementia pre and post program.

The pandemic limited the response to the post-survey for in-person sessions held prior to March 11, 2020. Anecdotal evidence and observations were used to evaluate the program for this period. 18 seniors completed 2 sessions each of Music2LINK programming plus one Care Partner night prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, rating the music and activities as "thumbs up." 36 students completed pre-surveys, with the average rating of "knowledge of how dementia impacts the life of a senior" rated as "not at all." 11 of the 36 students provided email responses to post-survey requests, rating their improvement in comfort in interacting with a person with dementia and knowledge of dementia and its impacts after in person sessions as "quite a bit", with one "yes, definitely." 6 care centre staff provided anecdotal feedback based on observations. 4 care partners attempted virtual programming with their loved one with dementia but provided feedback that it was not feasible and should not continue. The second virtual care partner event was held as a conversation cafe with a faith-based group in Cochrane. The event was attended by 6 families who rated the event positively as listed below.

### Results:

- Observations of care centre staff indicated that participating in a sing-along of well-known songs appeared to not only brighten the mood of seniors living with dementia, but helped them to become more present, alert, and participate in intergenerational art programming.

- Students reported an increased confidence and understanding of dementia and how to interact with and support a person living with dementia because of both educational training and experiential interactions.
- Students themselves are a strong engagement factor for seniors living with dementia. Seniors responded immediately and positively to students and wanted to engage while adults and care partners had less impact.
- Distributed activities which were based on storytelling of past events were rated as most helpful by care partners to engage their loved one living with dementia during the pandemic.
- Care partners rated the care partner events positively after the single session, stating that they learned valuable skills about how to have positive interactions with their loved ones living with dementia, which in turn reduced their stress.
- Care partners also rated the virtual conversation cafes positively as they provided a chance to learn about the disease, to share their challenges and successes, and to receive support and understanding from other families in the group.
- Information about dementia and local resources to support families experiencing dementia (The Alzheimer's Society) were also rated as helpful.
- Activities developed to engage people living with dementia are transferable and easily incorporated into other types of programming.

Feedback received on some strategies used indicated they were not effective.

- Having background music playing during programs was not effective.
- Virtual programming (attempted during the pandemic) was not appropriate and not engaging for people living with dementia and rated as frustrating by care partners.
- Having care centres serve as a bridging communicator with care partners was not effective.