We’ll Meet Again:

Music in Dementia Care

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore how musicking (a term denoting any music related activity, see Small 1998, p. 9) could be used locally to support people with dementia and their caregivers in a sustainable manner. The data for the study came primarily from a group known as “Song Birds”, a community-based volunteer music group working with people with dementia and their caregivers in the south of England.

Participant observation was combined with interviews and an extensive ethnographic study of the music and care world surrounding the group. The data was explored using a grounded theory approach investigating three time phases, “preparation for the events”, “during the events” and “in-between and after the events”. The main findings related to the lay crafting of the events and the emergence of pathways between “music and care nodes” in a local, social network.

The preparatory physical and social crafting of Song Birds events created a transitional time and place that guided the participants from everyday life into their collective musicking. This crafting was essential to the success of the musicking and produced inclusive activities that considered the different capabilities of all participants. As a result of these carefully crafted events, dementia identities were temporarily displaced and relationships were transformed. The musical repertoire was an important resource in this crafting and evolved according to the participants’ changing situations.

The positive musical benefits and affordances (see DeNora 2000) from such weekly events could be transferred into participants’ everyday lives through multiple music and care groups and the pathways that connected those groups which constituted a “music and care world”. Such musically fostered networks helped generate a virtuous cycle that maintained the music group as a sustainable activity. As dementia care was a long-term
activity, such sustainability was important to the on-going community support for people affected by dementia. Community musicking thus allowed people affected by dementia, their relatives and friends to remain together.
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**Accompanying materials**
CD with examples of activities from “Song Birds”. See appendix 11 for further information.

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