

Facilitating Well-Being Through Music for Older People with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT. This study examines the importance of music in facilitating well-being for older people who have special needs and discusses how music can contribute to well-being and quality of life. The data derive from qualitative interviews with a sample of older Australians aged 60 years and above who live in rural and urban settings. The findings reveal music can provide many people with ways of feeling competent, feeling less isolated, connecting with other people, and helping in the maintenance of a greater sense of good health. Music facilitates meaning in people's lives and is associated with a person's emotions and life experiences and allows them to engage in imaginative play and escape. The results reveal how music promotes quality of life for individuals living alone and also those who have responsibility in caring for others. doi:10.1300/J027v25n03_04 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Music is part of our every day living. It is prominent in advertising, films, on radio and television, used at sporting events, heard in waiting rooms, while using the telephone and at service stations. It is used ex-

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tensively in church liturgies including all rites of passage such as baptisms, weddings and funerals (Storr 1992). Music has always been associated with romance and courtship and is still important in promoting connection at social gatherings. For many people music is more than a passion in life, it is a way of living. It elicits cognitive, physical and emotional responses from people of all ages (Bright 1995), and as Tame (1984: 14) states:

Whenever we are within audible range of music, its influence is playing upon us constantly, such as speeding or slowing, regularising or irregularising our heartbeat, relaxing or jarring the nerves, affecting the blood pressure, the digestion and the rate of respiration. Its effect upon the emotions and desires of [people] is believed to be vast, and the extent of its influence over even the purely intellectual, mental processes is only beginning to be suspected by researchers.

Music is often used as a therapeutic tool in reducing stress and anxiety, depression, helplessness and low self-esteem, and according to the literature can enhance immune functioning (Aldridge 1996; Ragneskog, Kihlgren, Karlsson, and Norberg 1996). Music has been found to elicit physiological and psychological responses (McCraty, Atkinson, Watkins 1996; Tomatis 1991) and to evoke imagery and associations (Harvey 1995). It is increasingly being used to alter the perception of chronic pain (Schorr 1993), and has been shown to facilitate communication for people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias by providing a connection to the past and present (Koger, Chapin and Brotons 1999; Brotons, Koger and Pickett-Cooper 1997). Studies have also found that music helps people engage in social activities (Davis 1999), form friendships and social networks (Blacking 1995), to feel accepted, valued and needed (Kahn 2001), and facilitates lifelong learning (Harju 1998).

Music can be a medium through which a person can express oneself, evoke mood enhancement, mood change and spiritual awareness (Sloboda 1991, 1999; Sloboda and O'Neill 2001). It can also be a way some people come to know and make sense of the society in which they live (DeNora 2000). Music allows a person to create an internal, individual virtual world (Blacking 1995). That is, music provides people with another reality of time and an opportunity to create a new sense of order and harmony in their lives (Storr 1992). For this reason, music can

be understood as a transformer and metaphor in people's lives that makes a significant contribution to quality of life.

In a study of dementia, patients living in residential care, Ragneskog, Kihlgren, Karlsson and Norberg (1996) found that the playing of soothing music during meal times helped settle some of the restless patients, and in one case, a patient fed herself more than usual. The playing of music had the effect of helping the patients feel more relaxed and eat more calmly. Music can thus be a pleasant and nonthreatening way of modifying behaviour and assisting people in their daily routines such as bathing, dressing, eating or exercise. For example, frail older people in residential care can find music to be a good stimulant to get them motivated and involved in exercise because it is more enjoyable when accompanied by music (Johnson, Otto and Clair, 2001).

Music can be especially important for people who live with developmental disabilities (Schalkwijk, 1994). Through the use of music therapy, these people can receive specialised treatment by people trained in psychotherapeutic care. Music can provide people with ways of treating psychological disorders and to live a life with dignity. It can also facilitate ways for people to be more involved in leisure activities and feel socially integrated within the society in which they live (Davis, 1999). Through the use of repetition in song, musical games and pictures, people with short-term memory difficulties can enhance their ability for retaining information (Schalkwijk, 1994).

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

This paper describes an empirical study of the personal meaning and importance of music in the lives of older people living independently in the community, who come from various backgrounds in terms of educational experiences, and have different levels of musical understanding. All the informants identified themselves as having a high sense of well-being which was facilitated by their engagement in music activities even though many of them lived with day to day chronic illnesses such as heart problems, frailty, and arthritis. The aim of the research was to uncover the diversity of the experience and meaning of music in the lives of older people. It was for this reason that the researcher purposely did not ask informants about their particular preference of musical style. This was to avoid any perception of prejudice or bias of the researcher from the informants.

The initial data collection was from two focus group discussions that identified the primary themes for in-depth interviews. The first was a “heterogeneous” group of two men and five women of varied backgrounds, affiliations and exposure to music; the second involved a “homogeneous” group of eight older people who as amateur musicians were actively involved in making music. Following the two focus group discussions, 38 in-depth interviews were conducted, 19 with men and 19 with women (and only four interviews with people from the focus groups). All the informants were 60 years and above with the oldest informant 98 years old. The level of musical expertise of the informants included some with no musical skills or knowledge who engaged with music mostly through listening (14 informants), some with musical training who were amateur musicians (12 informants), some who had been professional musicians, and in a few cases some people who were still teaching (12 informants).

Twenty informants were drawn from the major Australian cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Newcastle and from rural and coastal towns, such as Armidale and Coffs Harbour, and 18 lived in rural communities. All the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the informants and transcribed for analysis. In the analysis of the data pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the informants. The in-depth interviews were informal, open discussions that centred on the meaning and importance of music in the informant’s life, and all were conducted in the informants’ homes. There were open-ended questions on the perceived benefits of being engaged in music making or listening. The conceptual framework that guided the themes and the analysis is that the *self* is an agent that uses symbols to define his or her experiences. It is for this reason that the study used a qualitative approach to explore the diversity of meanings and function of music for older people living in an independent context. Following DeNora (1999), this study frames engagement with music as symbols that people use to give meaning to experiences and emotions.

During the interviews specific musical genres were not discussed, nor were the informants asked to identify their preferred forms or styles. This was purposely done to minimise the researchers’ interpretation bias and to maximise the depth of the informants’ responses. It soon became clear that most of those who were most passionate about music in their life were engaged with its “classical” or “serious” forms. It is also interesting to note that many informants said that they enjoyed their retirement because they were now able “to find time to indulge,” including spending more time on music activities.

The analysis was a process of “thematic discovery” from the transcribed in-depth interviews using the methodological principles of open and axial coding described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Recurring relevant themes were identified by repeated examination and cross-checking of the codes identified for the individual transcripts and in the collective data set. There were four rounds of interviews. During the second and later rounds, the interviews were centred on the themes, issues or ideas that had emerged from the already analysed data. For example, participants spoke of well-being and music as “connection” aspects of their lives. As the interviews progressed, the researcher sought clarification on this connection and how people gave meaning to well-being and health. The coding categories were validated by several of the participants towards the latter stages of data analysis.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The data showed that music had meaning and importance in many of the informants’ lives. The identified themes included well-being, connection, independence and spirituality. While music for some people was a source of entertainment, for others it functioned as a way of sharing and connecting in their lives, linking life events, promoting personal well-being and managing time. For many people, music was important in helping to maintain a sense of continuity and normalcy for people who relied on care from their partners. These grounded themes are now discussed showing how music created meaning in the lives of the informants.

Music as Therapy

Many of the informants spoke of how they used music as a form of *self-therapy* when they were feeling stressed, tired or even as part of their daily health routine. Music was seen as a way of lifting energy levels, reducing tiredness and tension, and in some cases to help with their recuperation after illness or surgery. Mildred at the age of 98 years played the piano every day and stated that it was music that provided meaning to her life. For her, music could rejuvenate her when feeling tired, lonely or down.

If I felt a little bit tired even, I can revive myself with the piano. I feel the day hasn’t been completed unless I do a little bit each day. Music gives you something to live for now, you see.

For Pam, music helped her to endure pain, for example, when visiting the dentist. Similarly for Eileen, music helped in the distraction from pain and discomfort while undergoing eye surgery. Elizabeth spoke about music as being a therapeutic facilitator that helps her to feel better when she was ill or suffering from pain. By listening to music Elizabeth described herself as undertaking a “self-healing” therapy.

I hope that there is enough music in my brain to carry me through. If I'm at the dentist or the podiatrist that hurts, I think about music and I can endure. I mean it's not bad pain, but it's discomfort. It helps me in those situations too. (*Pam*)

. . . this eye operation, it was done under a local anaesthetic, and I was sort of singing songs and so on to myself, inwardly, because it was more painful than it should have been. (*Eileen*)

Music cheers me up if I'm sad or feeling unwell . . . I'm a pretty healthy lady, but if I'm sick or I've busted my toe or done something where there's like a sense of deep pain or a chronic pain, my reaction usually is to use music because I'm into self healing techniques and prayer. But to use a favourite sort of chord or to use some majestic sort of combination of musical notes that inspires me, and that does induce well feeling. So of course in effect, it's self applied music therapy. (*Elizabeth*)

Music can be used to provide an emotional lift and to complement people's quiet thoughts and meditation. For Jane, the choice of music was important because it could revive her and give her an emotional lift, whereas for Maureen, the choice of music was a reflection of her mood. Frank purposefully chose music so that it both calmed and distracted him from worry and stress.

I'll choose what I want to hear. That's usually Chamber music of some sort or other. I think I'd probably need some emotional sort of um . . . help probably. It's the only way I can put it. And the music does that for me because it's emotional type of music. I think it brings me to life again. I think I use it as a life-saver, you know! (*Jane*)

I think my choice of the music reflects my mood, so if I'm in a non-mood, you know neither up nor down, or just ordinary, then I'll have a look and see what I feel like. (*Maureen*)

If I'm distracted or busy or worried about things, it does have a calming influence on me. It'll take my mind off the more practical and down to earth worries of everyday living. It takes me out of myself. Music also fills a void and a need in my life. (*Frank*)

Music reflected how Bob felt at times and he used music as an accompaniment to his experience of emotions and feelings. He also used music to lift his morale and accompany the activity that he might be engaged in at the time, such as working at the computer or walking down the street. Listening to music could also complement how Bob thinks, and as such, influenced and stimulated his thoughts and ideas. For Bob, music was invigorating and energising. He specifically selected music that was robust to give him a boost of energy. Music was about feelings, pleasure, emotions, and finding beauty in life. It is the listening and thinking about music that provided Bob with a joy of living and a tangible experience of beauty in his life. He explains as follows:

I like music in the background. I usually like music that's fairly robust, vigorous. . . . So music does have that emotional effect and just getting immense pleasure just out of listening I think to beautiful music . . . it does add that one extra dimension to life because without music, I would find it extremely hard to be excited about a lot of things. Music does help to give that spurt and that energy to all of my undertakings.

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the data was the use of music by the informants as a therapeutic medium to alleviate stress. Robert, for example, said "Music has a calming effect on me, releases your tension. It's like a massage, a mental massage, if you like." While music was a psychological need for some people in their life, for others it was directly associated with the positive physical aspects of playing music. For example, singing with breath control, playing the organ to keep the fingers, feet and mind agile, or playing the piano or violin to maintain technique and the benefits extended beyond the physical ability and technical agility required to play a musical instrument.

Playing the piano is wonderful because (1) I'm not very good, and (2) I've got arthritis in the hands. So that's another thing that music gives back to me is keeping my fingers reasonably free of arthritis. . . . and of course it's such an all absorbing thing. It takes up so much of my time.

For Morton, “music is a most important part of my life, daily, all the time” and he believed that singing was “the barometer of his vitality. If you were feeling crook you didn’t sing too well, but if you started to sing then you’d feel better.” Playing an instrument was viewed as contributing towards a positive outlook on life and even a way of “warding off” the ageing process. For James, music kept his mind stimulated, which he felt was especially important as he grew old and experienced decreasing physical ability:

And I do think it keeps the mind active. I think I’ve seen a couple of my former colleagues who retired about the same time. When I meet them, I hate to say it, but they haven’t got much to offer now. I mean they . . . almost their minds have gone into a state of vegetation. I think it’s very important ’cos people have to be aware if they are getting older they can’t do some of the things they might have been able to do when they were younger—certainly from the physical sense. Therefore I think they ought to make up for that loss of physical ability by keeping the mind as active as possible.

Many of the informants found that music had a positive effect on their psychological state and brought beneficial change. One informant stated, “If there is lots of noise and chaos around me, I just long to hear music.” Some informants described music as alleviating depression, loneliness and general tiredness. Others spoke of the intense physical joy and pleasure when listening to or making music. As Margot stated: “It’s the *Valium* of my life. It can change my whole day when I feel pushed, rushed or tired.”

Sharing and Connection

The social aspect of sharing music with others was a recurrent theme. For many older people, music provided important opportunities for socialising and continued to be a way of meeting and interacting with others. The following quotes provide insights into the ways music facilitated social connections. In the case of Bob, music brought people together to sing and perform and for Owen, music was important at social gatherings where people could participate in singing around the piano. Bob when reflecting on good times, regretted that the frequency of such social occasions had declined.

I think [our] age group represents [remembers] a time in which we enjoyed music brought about by people associating with one another, visiting and enjoying singing at the piano and bringing it all together and at various times performing to individuals on their behalf and contributing to a large extent towards our way of life, and we notice very much how a situation like that has changed, and it's rather a shame in many ways. (*Bob*)

Owen similarly reminisced, "What we don't have now that I can recall when we were much younger, was singing around the piano at night time, you know, at parties and so forth, where somebody would play the piano and there'd be about 20 people. They were good times." Many other informants' experiences of music were linked with the concept of "connection." This was largely because the joy and pleasure of music was intensified when shared with others. Through sharing music with others, many of the informants were able to communicate with love ones who suffered from dementia without having to use language and conversation. As Noreen said: "You don't need to discuss it, it's just there; but you realise you are sharing it because no words are needed, but just the emotion of it." Elizabeth made similar points, for her friendships and experience of music with others was about sharing emotions:

The social aspect of music is very important to me and I think that's because a thing of joy should be shared and therefore the pleasure does seem to become intensified when a group of people hear a performance . . . so that it's very important for my well-being to share my joy of music with other people. It is part of our nature I think to share joy, share emotions. So music has I think an increasingly important part to play as people get older for that reason. . . . It's very difficult to catch the subtleties in a conversation. That also has because I'm sure there are lots of other things you wish to talk about, but the effect of sound basically on the human soul and on the human brain does trigger off emotions.

Through music the informants had been able to develop friendships. For Donald and Julie, music was a way of being introduced and finding common ground when meeting new people. Donald felt that many of his friends arose through a connection with music: his view was that "music makes friends, you make friends through music. Had it not been for music I probably wouldn't have made many friends at all." For Julie,

engaging in musical activities was an important way of meeting new people and forming close personal bonds. She recounted:

I did travel around Europe by myself and, yes, the international language is true . . . you'd be in a train with a group of Italians or French or whoever you know inevitable question comes when they hear you speak English to the conductor or something, 'Where are you from, what are you doing?' And the minute you said you had anything to do with music then the smiles are there: people find a common ground and they want to chat and in that way, yes, that's a social thing.

Music and Well-Being

The informants described the ways in which music played an important role in promoting a sense of well-being. They explained that this involved balancing the intellectual, emotional and spiritual facets of their lives. Don summed up many of the expressions well: "I believe, as human beings, we are made up bodily, mentally and spiritually, and music comes into your whole being and if you happen to be down, which is not very often, it uplifts you, but music flows and brings something extra into you, and I think that all helps in your general well-being." Marian spoke of how music made her competent to carry out routine daily tasks.

If I have some difficult tasks to do and I hear (say on the radio) the right music, I do better, I'm more efficient, I work better. I think more clearly, I feel healthy. If I'm down or feeling tired, or my bones are aching and I play some nice music recordings, I feel better. I feel fitter, I feel more competent.

Donald spoke of the contribution of music to his experience of well-being when he stated that music has always had a strong influence on his emotions and senses: "Regarding your life, your quality of life, it is something which has so much a strong influence on you, especially on your senses, on your emotions, and that's how it's been all my life. Music has been not only my love, but it's been a great influence in my life." Music also had a strong emotional and intellectual influence on Jane's daily sense of well-being:

I just feel that part of my life is missing [if there is no music]. It's just there all the time. It's something that I enjoy so much. I think

it's stimulus, emotional, sometimes exciting which I think it's something you listen to and it can be an intellectual exercise if you want it to be, but I don't like that part of it. I've been to concerts and people say, "Oh dear, the violins weren't all in tune," or something like that, and I don't go into it like that at all. To me, it's an overall experience, picture, however you like to put it. The informants spoke of music as providing a sense of "inner happiness," "inner contentment," "inner satisfaction" and "inner peace."

Donald said that it is "something from outside that you absorb and it gives you, through your senses, aural and emotional . . . it does something to the chemistry of the body which gives you a feeling of peace and happiness." For informants to have a sense of well-being and happiness, they did not always need audio stimuli and could rely on internal hearing. Inner hearing is when one is attentive to music that one hears in the mind. It has already been mentioned that Bob enjoyed walking down the street and listening internally to music that occupied his attention. Bev provided another example of the importance of internal hearing:

Music has always been important in my life and I must have it. I listen to it every day and every night. If I can't listen to it, I can still hear it in my head. For instance, I can hear and sing all of *Tosca* in my mind without having to hear it.

Time, Reality and Escape

Many informants used music to provide structure in their daily lives. June listened to music on the radio during the morning and on compact discs in the afternoon. Six informants played the piano regularly, and five spent much of their time listening to, preparing and presenting community radio programmes. Frank enjoyed preparing concert and radio programmes, and like four others made music with friends. Bob listened to music and presented community classes. Many others said that playing recordings and listening to music as an accompaniment to daily activities made them more enjoyable.

Another reason why many of the informants were attracted to and enjoyed music was that it provided "imaginative play," fantasy and escape from everyday living. Directly or through its thought associations, music allowed them to become lost in thought and to escape reality and time. Several informants recounted that they used music to assist in pain management, to avoid loneliness, or just to be lost in abstract thought.

For instance, Pam and Phil found that listening or playing music took their minds off their physical conditions. Pam's comment was that, "I guess it takes my mind off the physical circumstances and I can go into the state where I'm listening and thinking about music"; while Phil said, "Because I think that if you're involved in playing or even listening to music, you're not thinking about your personal worries or ailments. It takes away that if you like." For Peter too, music stimulated imaginative thought and fantasy, and can have intense emotional effect as described through Wagner's dramatic and often unresolved musical lines:

Music has a very powerful imaginative potential. I was listening to the *Lohengrin* of Wagner . . . it makes me feel physically ill, and it's a very interesting question of why that is so. . . . I think it has to do with the fact that it arouses within one—because of the extreme dramaticism, lack of resolution and so forth—it arouses within one all sorts of sub-conscious awareness that normally don't come up to the surface at all. And I think the lack of resolution in particular is a disturbing thing because it reminds one that life itself is full of unresolved situations. . . . I'm not particularly fond of Wagner's music but . . . it has these very powerful effects on the imagination. Even if one were not to know the story behind it, the sheer force and power of the various motives and the way Wagner treats them, it can't help but call up normally buried aspects of the imagination.

Patricia was also drawn to music's abstract qualities and how it could be used as an escape. She said, "Bach's music, for instance, attracts me tremendously because of its sort of mathematical precision and the polyphony and so on, and I guess I like that because it's the clear line and this is a bit like 18th century architecture in a way." For James, music provided an escape into a world devoid of social injustice and violence: "As a person in my sixties, and I'm a sensitive person, I am extremely upset that there's so much violence—that I suppose has always gone on and I have not had time to notice it—now I have but at least in the arts you can escape from the evils of society as much as possible."

Caring for People with Special Needs

Music has an important role for many older people not only in terms of their own ongoing well-being, but also for the people they care for. Several informants spoke of how music helped facilitate a window of communication or normalcy when a person's memory was fading or the use of speech to convey needs and emotions was difficult. Music could

stimulate engagement and motivate people to participate in activities whether it be singing, exercise or the sharing of a memory.

Six of the informants identified themselves as either caregivers or as someone who had previously had a primary caregiving role for another person such as a partner or elderly parent. It was in this context that these informants spoke of the importance of music for the people for whom they cared. For many older people the use of music is crucial for communication with people who may no longer be able to use speech. Music can facilitate a connection to the past and the present. These associations stimulated by music may be of times past, places or people and may also evoke associations with emotions, visual images, or other sensory information. These can include flavours, odours, textures, temperatures etc. The use of nostalgic music can also stimulates the person into a shared reality with the carers (Clair, 1996). Ways of facilitating this stimulation can include the singing of a song, listening to music, or getting the person to dance. The meaning evoked centres around the memories of the emotional context of the times past. It is interesting to note that many people (including those who suffer from memory loss and/or dementia) may remember the words of songs more accurately than other forms of communication such as stories or poems (Bonny, 1997; Bright, 1997).

People who suffer from dementia can often recall more of their younger years than recent events. This may be in part due to “a whole cyclical process of interconnections between beginnings and ends” given that it is our sense of hearing that is first to develop and often the last lost (Bunt, 1996:158). Clair (1996) writes of music being important to people who are suffering from dementia. She outlines how music can also be important for the spouse and other family members who struggle to cope with the early, middle and late stages of the disease.

Music can provide opportunities . . . to share something that goes beyond the fulfilment of day-to-day physical needs with the people for whom they care. Music can enhance interactions (verbal and non-verbal), trigger memories, promote feelings of closeness, and create an opportunity for emotional intimacy between caregivers and care recipients. (Clair, 1996:257)

Families of people who live with disabilities need to be helped as much as possible to find effective coping mechanisms. The experience of a disability impacts on all family members, not just the individual with the disability. Music can assist carers to find time and facilitate interaction with other people who share similar life experiences. Music

can significantly decrease stress and anxiety for the carers who often need to put their own needs last.

The use of music in some people who suffer from memory loss, dementia or Alzheimer's disease, gives a sense of intimacy and connection. This was the case with several informants who spoke of their experiences with loved ones. Music offered many people a glimmer of hope in terms of communicating and sharing memories such as the accounts by Stan, Zillah and Marion that follow.

In the case of Stan, it is an observation that he made when he was involved in sharing music with some older people in residential care. The story is moving and compelling in its portrayal of how music can create physical and psychological movement. This movement can momentarily open a window of reality that is both meaningful and special for the patient and the carer. This effect is testament to the power and potential of music providing a meaningful experience in the lives of people who are cognitively impaired.

I tell you a little story about that? There was a lady in the hospital in Tamworth who was recovering from a stroke and she was in a wheelchair, and we were having some music and some of the people were dancing, and her husband got her up—she couldn't walk—and she just stood there and he just held her and they rocked, and it was a wonderful for her. It was the first time she'd been in her husband's arms for many months and she felt wonderful about it. We all had tears in our eyes.

For Zillah, music was a very important medium for communicating with her husband, Gordon, while she was caring for him, and coping with his medical condition. As a carer for her husband over a period of six years, Zillah had used music to help calm him when he became distressed or disoriented. Music for Zillah and Gordon was associated with happier times. For example, their courting days when they enjoyed dancing. Music has also been especially important in recent years and has helped Zillah connect with Gordon when he started to lose his sense of orientation. Following Gordon's death, music continues to be important for Zillah. It helped her to deal with her emotions and was a way of maintaining a connection with her past.

Music has been important since my husband retired and became ill. I've used it as therapy for him. He had Parkinson's for six years and then dementia for two years before he died. . . . Through the

war years we danced a lot and he remembered the old tunes, and of course we shared them a lot in our later years, even if it meant dancing around the kitchen when we felt like it, you know . . . and I can listen to it now and become emotional, but, yes, it is my company now I'm on my own. It was very important to us. It helped so much in getting through each day. I mean, there were times when he'd look at me and say, "Where's my wife?" and I said, "I'm right here." And he said, "Not you, the other one." So maybe our memories are triggered first by music in relationship to memory than to other things, so music is important.

June told the story of her mother who had suffered a stroke some years ago and had not recognised any of her family for a period of four years before her death. She was not only incapacitated but, as a result of the stroke, had not spoken for two years. Like Stan's story, June tells of how her mother who had been in a non-conscious state for some time but reacted to the sounds of a band playing a well known hymn to her from years past. This story is one of several compelling accounts of the power of music and how it can affect people's senses.

For 2 years she hadn't recognised us when we went to visit. We'd just talk to her as though she did know we were there because we weren't sure if she did or didn't. And then the Salvation Army were there with their Band the week before Christmas, just not long before she passed away, and they were playing the hymns in the big Common Room, which was quite a distance from her room, and Sister said that when she went past, she heard a noise and went into the room. It was Mum singing and she sang the hymn right through, word for word. She hadn't spoken to anybody really for the best part of 4 years and yet she sang that hymn right through, which was quite amazing.

In an institutional setting it is often difficult to develop friendships or show open signs of affection towards others. For older people it is often more difficult to maintain friendships as people become more frail and less able to visit or communicate with others. This is a great loss for most people if we accept that friendship is a need and source of affection in our lives that helps provide us with happiness, strength and contentment (Bright, 1997). Music can help facilitate "friendship" by providing people with opportunities to interact and share their own life experiences. It may be as simple as dancing with another resident, part-

ner or carer or participating in a community music session by either singing or playing a musical instrument.

Five informants spoke about music as having a profound effect on other people. One instance was a woman who had severe dementia but upon hearing a song from her courting days got up out of her chair and danced with her husband who she had not communicated with for years.

CONCLUSION

The meaning of music was closely related to the participants' sense of *self* and identity, how they experienced emotions, communicated feelings and emotions to others, and ultimately used music as a medium to improve their own well-being. This study shows that music facilitates the construction of meaning in the participants' lives and is directly related to life experiences and emotional needs. Music can connect older people to others, validate memories and provide meaningful purpose to life.

Clair (1996) noted that reminiscence can help a person adapt to change, deal with stress and validate one's life. Music can be used to boost self-esteem, to evaluate quality of life and to enable a person to draw upon their own personal strengths. The informants reminded the researchers that, when they listen to particular pieces of music, they vividly recall events and experiences in life. They revealed clear examples of how music is used to link and review their life experiences and its meanings, and the importance of this gift in their life.

The findings have revealed that music can be a type of self applied therapy that some older people use to maintain "a balance" of well-being in their life. The informants spoke about how music made them feel more "whole," "in tune" and "competent." They also spoke of music providing them with a sense of "inner contentment" and "inner peace." These descriptors highlight the profound psychological impact that music had on the participants. While recognising that further research is required to identify what factors make music making or listening a positive or a negative experience, on the basis of the findings from this study, we conclude without qualification that musical activities provide *quality* time in older people's lives.

The study reaffirms a psychosocial perspective of good health and extends Sidell's (1995) findings that people can live with a disability or health related problem yet experience good health if their sense of well-being is also high. It is interesting to note that many participants

felt that music was the key to them feeling a sense of well-being and good health, regardless of their particular personal medical condition. This was despite the fact that several participants live with ailments that include heart problems, cancer and varying degrees of frailty.

Understanding how music can facilitate the improvement of well-being and quality of life for others does not need specialist training. It requires people to have a sensitivity to other people's needs and prioritising these needs when caring for older people. For example, asking people what music they like rather than imposing music which the carer or social worker might think is meaningful. A common ageist assumption is that older people like music from the turn of the century just because they are older. The only way to really know is to spend time talking with people about their life experiences and to be genuinely interested in their present needs, likes and dislikes.

Community care groups and social workers need to develop skills in initiating and administering specialised programs that include music as a focus in facilitating quality of life. The study shows that community library programs and organisations could play a greater role in contributing to the well-being of older people by assigning financial resources to purchase and maintain listening libraries and resources that are readily accessible to all.

This study demonstrates that music for many older people is more than a therapeutic or entertainment medium, and can be a facilitator in promoting well-being. For older people, it is possible to use it as a vehicle to provide continuity and meaning in their life. For health practitioners, it is an opportunity to use music to achieve a better understanding of the subjective experiences of older people. Music can also be used to connect older people to social networks and is a powerful symbol for how people choose to live their life.

The associational powers of music are directly related to the individual's assignment of meaning according to his or her own unique experiences. Blacking (1995) commented that music itself does not have extra-musical meaning unless the experience already exists in the individual's mind, and Jourdain (1997) suggested that when people bring their own life experiences into the context of the music experience, it idealises the emotions whether they be negative or positive. As a result, music reflects a person's emotional life. The results of this study confirm Juslin and Sloboda's (2001) view that the primary reason for people engaging with music is for personal experience. In closing, an informant encapsulated both this motivation and people's personal, emotional, social and aesthetic attraction to music:

It's just incredible, I find it a totally emotional experience, when it's very, very good, and something very, very beautiful, and you've got a load of people involved in this getting to that. I just think it's . . . one of the greatest experiences you can have. I think it's a very personal sort of thing though, in terms of how you feel about music. It's me! (*Jane*)

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