

# Music project hits the right note



Art Beyond Belief's pilot project to take music into Upton hospital, Slough, has completed its six month term. It was originally designed to achieve two purposes; to bring music as a benefit both in health improvement and quality of life to patients and staff, and 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 started on December 6th 2005 and has run uninterrupted until June 1st 2006. There were operational problems at the hospital due to ward restructuring which prevented us from starting earlier, but when we were able to start it was with the knowledge that such

problems were (almost) at an end. 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 indicated that we might expect to reach around 110 people including

*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!"*

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 length of 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 a staff shift change takes place during the music sessions, has meant that the original figure of 110 previously mentioned is in reality nearer to 350 people (over the six months) 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 gained momentum, just fizzled



“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”

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 by 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, pictures on the wall, and flowers



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."

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."

purely medical one. It has led me to think that patients with Parkinson's 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 the project has been 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



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

Senior Physiotherapist Catherine Bray said "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

experimentation with music is now an important and valuable part of the medical tool kit of enlightened professionals is an accepted fact, and patients are eager to participate. At a discussion session with nursing staff from all the participating



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

"it has been a planned project, properly managed by Art Beyond Belief, and financially supported by The Trusthouse Charitable Trust, and The Arts Council." - Pamela Mahomed Hossen.

wards, Frank was expecting a bit of 'negative feedback', but such has been the good relationship built up, that the only problems seem to have been those that have come up in the course of the sessions, and been dealt with on the spot. Music at too high a volume, for instance, when phones were busy. "But we asked you to play more quietly, and you did". It seems that team work has enabled the music to evolve into a natural element, an indigenous sound on the wards. The same discussion also produced an affirmation from the staff concerning the power of music to calm, inspire and generally promote harmony on the wards. "We play recorded music much more than we used to, when you're not here," said one nurse to Frank, "even those patients with advanced dementia seem to join in 'in their own way' - by mouthing the words of the songs



or beating time with hands or feet" said another nurse. An observation echoed by Alistair Bamford's final report which comments: "they may become isolated within the musical experience, perhaps mouthing or singing words, or there may be in-between responses (conscious or otherwise) such as foot-tapping or clapping rhythms. For those remembering words the primary connection seems to be directly with the musician himself, and the memories he has given rise to."

Frank himself describes his first experience playing in Upton as challenging; coming from a tradition of playing in clubs and pubs, he says "I found it quite challenging coming into the hospital because



there were differing degrees of engagement with the patients...and so I needed not to worry about the lack of response I just needed to go out and play, which is something that I do naturally anyway". But playing at Upton has changed his life. Clearly he loves his music, loves performing, simply singing-out. Over the six months of this project he has built a relationship with the staff, and with the patients too, although they do tend to come and go. But not all at the same time, and that period of overlap is a precious thing for Frank because it keeps a thread, a continuous link, as patients will tend to look forward to the music sessions and talk to new arrivals about them.

As previously mentioned, Pamela Mahomed Hossen comments that "patient conversation after a music session is much better than it was before (the music came to the hospital)". But Frank makes a point of asking after patients, especially at the Day Hospital, where he has a devoted fan club now. Most patients are given a six week series of appointments, and then discharged, with a new examination three to six months later. "I'm recording a CD, so that I can give them a copy", says Frank, and his degree of engagement is obvious. "I have grown to love this work. I have a good feeling when I perform well, but playing here is more than a good feeling - it's a privilege".

For Art Beyond Belief too, the project has produced something

*Margaret King one of the very few dissenters who did not appreciate Frank's choice of music. "It may have been lovely to some people, but it wasn't to me" she mused. She added that she could have moved away but chose not to. "I was glad when it was finished to be truthful and honest. Something more gentle is needed in the early afternoon".*

that is more than the sum of its parts. Says David Sparrow, who first approached the hospital with the idea, "Our objective when Art Beyond Belief was first founded at the beginning of 2005 was to bring people of different beliefs together, and to work together on inspiring projects. But belief means different things to different people and we soon discovered that there was work for us with people who had lost their belief in themselves, or who found that nobody believed in them. So it was that our 'compassionate arts' projects started, and taking music into the geriatric wards was a good start. We believed in the project, the hospital believed in the project, and the funders believed in it too. Both Cinnamon Coe from the Trusthouse Charitable Trust, and Mary Shek at the Arts Council have been extremely supportive in what was our first music venture. Pamela Mahomed Hossen has always made us feel that we are part of a team, not outsiders, and that level of support is priceless. We had trouble with a musician pulling out at the last minute, so that when Frank joined us the project was already set to go. That he was unfazed by what lay ahead is a mark of his creativity and professionalism".

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