



PPI IGNITE
NETWORK

IMPACT CASE STUDY

2

Who will we tell? Dementia care advocacy and education through song

Who was involved?

- An interdisciplinary, music therapy-led research team at UL, a PPI Ignite Network Lead Site
- PPI contributors, Alzheimer's Society of Ireland
- One song writer

Summary

This research demonstrates how music can help those living with dementia, their family caregivers, and healthcare professionals. Professor Hilary Moss and her team created high-quality, research-based artistic projects that enable people living with dementia to communicate their experience, and to directly educate healthcare professionals about living with dementia.

This arts-based project led to the creation of a telehealth music therapy service for people living with dementia and their family carers, especially socially isolated individuals living in rural areas. It enabled equity of access to services that were traditionally only offered in person and created a community of family carers who met online for support through music.

This novel telehealth programme also created new employment opportunities for musicians

and healthcare professionals.

Our work

Moss's team developed guidance for music professionals, offering appropriate music interventions for people with dementia. They investigated how music interventions can help people living with dementia cope with the illness and caring responsibilities. They created high-quality, research-based artistic projects that illuminated perspectives on the illness inaccessible to traditional research.

The team worked with a team of music therapists, clinicians, and stakeholders to develop telehealth music therapy interventions. Team member Dr Lisa Kelly formed a team of PPI participants and telehealth music therapy projects, devising an advisory visual map that guides music professionals and a person with dementia to choose appropriate interventions to address the needs of the person with dementia.

The team demonstrated that:

- Music therapy for people living with dementia [is successful online](#) and in person
- Music therapists and [doctors can effectively deliver telehealth music therapy to people with dementia and family carers](#)

- Original songs written by family carers and people with dementia can powerfully explain [the experience of living with dementia](#).

Our impact

[This research into music and music therapy, had multiple benefits](#) for people living with dementia, their family carers, students in training, and the public. In Ireland, no one else produced work like it. Because of it, people living with dementia actively engaged in music making, which is evidenced to prevent cognitive decline and enable communication in late stages of the illness. This included people living in remote locations, for whom such therapy was previously unavailable.

Guidance for professionals

As part of her PhD research, Dr Sophie Lee led a new singing group for 12 people living with dementia and their carers in Rua Red Arts Centre, Dublin. She published the only Irish (and one of few international) singing group protocols for working with older people in the community, which offers professionals internationally a guide to providing high quality music groups for people living with dementia in community settings. This was piloted with at least fifty participants before being [published](#).

Development and piloting of a telehealth music therapy service

It led to the creation of a telehealth music therapy service for people living with dementia (approximately eight people) and their family carers (approximately 20 carers). These individuals live in remote areas and socially isolated communities and had not been able to access music therapy before. The online music therapy service [enabled them to engage remotely, with great success](#).

Community education

The research spurred the creation of public education programmes. Professor Moss co-ordinated public, live-streamed education events about the help that music can bring at home. These events were aimed at various

groups including people living with dementia, musicians, health service staff, and the public. They were attended by over 300 people.

A co-created song

The research resulted in the writing of a song by people with dementia and their family carers. In March 2023, supported by professional song writers and Irish World Academy of Music and Dance (IWAMD) students, the song was performed publicly at an international hybrid seminar at UL. The performance was facilitated by esteemed songwriter Carl Corcoran and music therapist Dr Lisa Kelly. [A recording of it is now available online](#). The original composition is regularly used as a tool for education and advocacy for people living with dementia, including by the Alzheimer's Society, and as a teaching tool in undergraduate and postgraduate music therapy programmes at UL.

[Evaluation of the song-writing PPI process](#) indicated that people with dementia and their carers found this an empowering experience. The process highlighted the importance of collaboration, respect and listening, and above all gave them a space to communicate a message of hope.

Inspiring additional music-based initiatives

In addition, this research resulted in new collaborative relationship between the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland and UL Music Therapy, with multiple research projects for older people with dementia resulting from this partnership.

Employment generation

Finally, the research led to the creation of jobs for two musicians and three music therapists working with people living with dementia. This is especially important as musicians employment can be precarious, and the arts are often undervalued by health and social care facilities despite being evidenced to support wellbeing and quality of life for people living with dementia.



Gerry Paley, Nuala Paley, Carmel Geoghegan, Helen Rochford Brennan, Helena Quaid and Kevin Quaid, PPI contributors, Alzheimer's Society, performing *Who will we tell?* the co-created song, at an international hybrid seminar

“I don't know whether it was that the singing sort of lightened your mood or whether it was just seeing my Dad just enjoying what he was doing and talking to other people.”

Family member of an older person involved in a singing intervention

“Mindful Music Therapy sessions [for family carers] were a huge uplift to me & I am very grateful; they certainly helped me & gave me time & a perspective on what has turned out to be a difficult journey. They were, at times, a lifeline.”

Bob, PPI contributor involved in therapy group for family carers of people with dementia

THE IRISH TIMES

Your Wellness

Community choirs: 'It has been a revelation to me – a weight off my shoulders'

Joining a choir can bring feelings of 'inclusiveness and pride ... it's also a great opportunity to meet new people and make new friends'



A feature article in The Irish Times on the benefits of community choirs for people with dementia (Sept 2023)

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