

B SHARP: AN ARTS ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

2017-2018 Research Summary

Jennifer E. Cross, India Luxton, Deana Davalos | November 1, 2018

Dementia reinforces the interdependence of human life and highlights the fact that no one can flourish in isolation.

Historically, political attention, scientific efforts, and research funding remained focused on identifying biomedical solutions, such as pharmaceutical treatments, to dementia. However, recent research suggests that non-pharmacological interventions (exercise, socially-based activities, etc.) have been found to delay the progression of dementia by up to **two years**. The B Sharp program is an example of a non-pharmacological community-based music intervention that improves the cognitive and social well-being of individuals with dementia and their care partners. Cognitive and qualitative results illustrate a number of positive changes for individuals who participate in the program; including improved alertness, overall engagement, and mood.

About the B Sharp Program

B Sharp was launched in 2015 and each year provides the opportunity for 30 pairs to attend five Fort Collins Symphony Masterworks concerts. Pairs were given seasons tickets, invited to pre- and post-concert receptions, and were able to socialize with others concert goers. The study explored a number of factors, including the impact of the music on the cognitive ability of participants with dementia, the social connections between the care partner and each other, interactions between the person with dementia and their care partner, as well as the degree to which study participants feel supported by the community.

Research Methods

In order to assess the impact of participation on memory, mood, and attention, participants with dementia were given one of two cognitive tests before and after concerts, as well as the Geriatric Depression Scale and a mood assessment. The first cognitive test, called RBANS, is a neuropsychological test that assesses current cognitive functioning, improvement, and/or decline. The second, Alzheimer's Quick Test, measures perception speed and overall cognitive speed. To assess social connection of care partners, researchers administered surveys, performed social network mapping, and conducted post-concert phone calls, in-depth interviews, and focus groups.

Program Partners

alzheimer's association®
colorado chapter



Program Donors

Thank you to the donors who supported the program and research:

Banner Health, Kaiser Permanente, Rotary Club of Loveland, Sage Benefit Advisors, International Neuroscience Network Foundation, Community Foundation of Northern Colorado, and Individual Community Members

To donate, please contact:

Mary Kopco, Executive Director, Fort Collins Symphony,
mkopco@fcsymphony.org 970.482.4823

For inquiries about the research, please contact:

Jeni Cross, PhD, Associate Professor of Sociology, Colorado State University, jeni.cross@colostate.edu, 970.491.0483

Research Results

The cognitive function (mood, memory, and attention) of participants improved.

Participants consistently share that attending the concerts is something they look forward to as a couple and that for the participants with dementia, they are more alert and energized before and after the concerts. Each year, we hear surprising stories from care givers who see their loved ones moving more easily and enthusiastically before and after the concerts.

Community-based music programs offers engagement for participants.

Human beings need positive relationships and engagement to thrive. As dementia progresses, people find themselves with fewer opportunities for true engagement. Musical performances allow audience members to listen collectively, to be fully engaged in the experience, and to bond with each other. Care partners expressed the importance of engagement both during and after concert performances.

Attending the concerts allowed for care partners to meaningfully connect with their loved ones in familiar ways.

As people lose their memory, they lose their ability to relate to people and communicate in meaningful ways. Through attending the B Sharp concerts, care partners were able to feel connected to their loved one in a familiar and meaningful way, allowing them to remember and reconnect to past memories and experiences. One care partner saw participating in the program as a “completion of father-son” time that was lost in his teenage years due to living in separate homes. For others, the concerts are a return to familiar activities and a break from the caregiving role.

Care partners appreciated the opportunity to forge new social connections.

The diagnosis of dementia changes both the care partner’s relationship with their loved one, as well as their relationships with friends, colleagues, and family. Through participating in the program, care partners were able to interact socially with others in a similar position and share experiences in a normal social setting. Across interviews, care partners remarked that attending the reception helped reduce feelings of social isolation and increased their feelings of community connectedness.

Care partners welcomed an evening of relaxation, re-connection, and recognition.

Those with dementia are commonly supported by informal care partners such as spouses, other family members, friends, or neighbors. Caring for an individual with dementia is often associated with physical, psychological, emotional, financial, and social burdens. However, attending community based interventions can reduce feelings of social isolation and provide care partners with an opportunity for respite and connection.

*“I was blown away because my husband enjoyed it so much and didn’t need to use his walker for assistance on his way out of the building. He just walked right out! The music energized him. His voice carries more life in it... I absolutely think he remembers the concert longer than other events and things we do. He can remember when the concert was and knows when concerts will be. That is something that is engrained in his mind. **These concerts are very fundamental and foundational for him.**”*

*“The great thing about it is we’ve always attended symphony concerts anyways and we listen to a lot of classical music together, that and jazz. And so, it’s something normal that we’ve always done together and so **when we go to a concert like that it’s kind of a return to more normal times.** It’s great. It brings out the adult in both of us and puts aside a dependency for a while.”*

*“It’s just getting out and being in a different place and **being able to just relax and enjoy what’s going on around me.** And visiting with different people, because we meet different people every month that we’re there, and that’s always nice. And knowing I don’t have to be focusing on anything else, we’re just going to set there and we’re gonna enjoy it. I guess that’s my unwind time.”*