

HARNESSING THE POWER OF MUSIC

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If you don't give upstairs something to do, you lose contact. Keeping my brain functioning all the time, that's the main thing in life to me. I'm happier than I've ever been.



Sandringham Care Home in Portadown, Northern Ireland uses wireless headphones to help its elderly residents relive memories, connect with their communities and become more active by giving them a more personalised listening experience.

Sandringham is home to 63 residents across its dementia and frail & elderly nursing unit.

While residents have always been able to listen to music in group activities, some were missing out because they preferred to stay in their rooms. In early 2019, the activities team invested in a small number of wireless headphones so that residents can listen wherever they feel comfortable.

Since using the headphones, staff quickly noticed a difference in the residents.

Tracy Palmer, manager at Sandringham, explains: "The movement and enjoyment our residents got out of it was absolutely tremendous. Residents who maybe shuffled along began to dance; they were up out of their chairs, walking. Some were singing along, people who hadn't spoken very much in a long time.

And following this, the residents started engaging with each other a lot better."

After this success, the team decided to start a radio station, broadcast from Sandringham to its residents through the wireless headphones. With some helpful tips from local stations, and the support of a volunteer experienced in radio broadcast, the station was launched.



Sandringham Care Home Radio now broadcasts twice a week. Every Monday afternoon, Gospel Gems is enjoyed by the many residents that used to attend church. As well as music, the show plays live church services and mass so that those residents who wish to can still connect with an important part of their life, without being there.

On Friday afternoons, Silver Threads plays a mix of music. Everyone who is listening will get a 'shout out' and a song dedication to make them feel included in the show.

Ronald Cooke – known as 'Cookie' by staff and fellow residents – is a big fan of the radio shows. Since moving into the Sandringham Care Home's Dementia Unit, Cookie has rediscovered his faith through listening to Gospel Gems. Every Friday, he joins in the Silver Threads show, dancing along to the music and getting other residents to join in.

Cookie recently won the Resident Contribution of the Year award in the Four Seasons Care Awards 2019. This marks the special contribution he makes daily to helping others and making Sandringham Care Home a happy place to live.

For Cookie, the radio station plays an important role in keeping him and others happy and healthy.

"I enjoy the radio, it gives me things that I've never heard before," he says. "I'm listening to new things like I would in my young days. If you don't give upstairs



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The care home's personal activities team uses social media and Sandringham Care Home Radio to connect the home with families and the local community.

Sam Bright, personal activity lead, explains: "We decided to open up our radio station to the outside community, using Facebook Live to stream every show. We have regular listeners, sometimes up to 100 people listening in and we share everything on our Facebook and Twitter pages to promote what we are doing."

These external broadcasts create a link between residents and their relatives, helping them to feel involved in the day-to-day lives of their loved ones.

Helen, a resident at Sandringham, loves listening to the radio shows and her son tunes in on Facebook Live. When he visits, he chats to his mum and the staff about what he's listened to. He is also able to contribute music that his mum likes, particularly songs that are played at the church she used to attend.

There has been great demand for Sandringham Care Home Radio and the team has bought more headphones so that more residents can listen in, anywhere they choose.

"Some of our residents are at the end of life, or just don't like to be in large group activities so choose not to leave their room," says Tracy. "Using the headphones doesn't impede on them being involved and actively take part; you can walk past their rooms and hear singing or talking."

The positive impact has been significant.

"From a clinical aspect, general wellbeing has improved; appetites are better, there aren't as many residents with weight loss, it improves general mobility, and residents are wanting to get up and dance. The radio brings back stories and memories, like a wedding song or when they used to go out dancing – things that have been important to them in their lifetime.

"We learn a lot about the residents when they're engaging and able to discuss things they remember. It helps us to plan their care for the weeks and months ahead, knowing the types of activities they might like and giving us more things to talk about with them."

Tracy agrees with Cookie that the radio can simply make residents feel happy.

"When they hear their name on the radio it puts a massive smile on their face. And isn't that what's it's all about, making sure the residents are happy?"