

MUSIC IS PARAMOUNT TO QUALITY OF LIFE

An update from Wellbeing Manager Lynn Burling on our Music for Dementia Project

Dementia is not a specific disease but rather a general term used to describe when a person's ability to remember, think or make decisions has become impaired, which can interfere with doing everyday activities. Living with dementia can also affect relationships between partners, amongst family and with friends. It can rob a person of the connections they once felt with the people in their life and vice versa. That's why we were overjoyed to receive funding from the [Music for Dementia Paul & Nick Harvey Fund](#), to deliver a project supporting families affected by dementia and enabling them to reconnect with each other through music and reminiscence.



Leaving no stone unturned; we have been working with families on a one-to-one basis, exploring everything there is to know about their loved one who is living with dementia. Through photographs, collaging and storytelling in the first and second workshops, we have mapped out major life events, travelled to a person's place of birth, learnt about their faith, career, pastimes and favourite food, and about their family members, partners and friends. We have looked at the role music has played in their significant life events and how different genres of music are linked to the different layers of their identity. Our excavation goes deeper as we seek to understand how music might affect their feelings and mood, and help them reconnect with their memories and themselves. Gradually, we are beginning to uncover the soundtrack to their lives.

Working closely with our clients in this way has been an amazing and eye-opening experience. When afforded



the time and space to really listen, you realise you do not know people as well as you thought you did, and what you do know of them is a mere drop in the ocean! Take Niki for example who was born in Greece, the country where she met and married the love of her life. The couple left Greece and travelled by boat to the UK to start a new life and a family. We have listened to stories about Niki's children, the family holidays, the fashions she wore back in the day, and the love she felt and still feels for her husband, who also had dementia and has sadly passed away. But home is where the heart is and it's Niki's Greek heritage, and Greek culture that plays a huge part of who she is. The whole family have a strong connection to Greece and visit whenever they can, so it made sense for us to partner with a Greek musician in the third workshop.

I managed to get the details of a wonderful Greek musician called Andrea Loizou, who I have since found out represented Greece in the Eurovision song contest! Niki has a very strong faith and attends a Greek Orthodox church on a weekly basis.



So, together with Andrea, Niki has been singing her favourite Greek hymns, the Greek national anthem and songs that remind her of her wedding. Easter is a special time for Niki, and

she enjoys the Orthodox tradition of making flower garlands with other women and displaying them in the church. In the fourth workshop Andrea brought a selection of flowers and some floral foam, and she, Niki and Niki's daughter created some beautiful garlands. Andrea also bought a white handkerchief, and together with Niki they danced the Kalamatianós, a traditional Greek folkdance.



Andrea described the session as an "emotionally charged experience" and "a treasured memory for time to come". What also stood out for Andrea was how "the power of music and its positive impact on memory recall is paramount to wellbeing and quality of life". I couldn't agree more! It was wonderful to see Niki's personality and passion shine through and I'm very much looking forward to the next workshop.

In the next newsletter, I will tell you all about Mustafa and his family's time spent with a Turkish drummer and how the Ishmael's are getting on with their pianist. Stay tuned.