

Fiona Pritchard MSc. G.G.S.M on her role as Music and Arts Partner across 21 care homes in the south of England

I work as the Music and Arts partner for Colten Care Ltd, a private care home company in the South of England. In this unique role, I work in all twenty-one homes with my focus in their five dementia communities. The role is varied, and I feel it still evolving, led by the response of residents and new opportunities that arise.

I am professional musician, I trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and am a member of the National Alliance of Musicians in Healthcare. I have also completed an MSc in Dementia Studies at the University of Bradford that has enhanced my understanding of dementia and influenced and guided my work significantly.

The role has three main elements.

- To spend time with residents in a one-one capacity offering them a live music-based experience and the opportunity to engage in this with me, however they prefer or are able.
- To promote and lead participatory music and arts-based activities within homes for small and larger groups, that may have an art, dance, poetry, choral or instrumental focus.
- To develop new relationships with local communities and facilitate collaborations between our homes and schools, churches, museums, community centres, concert halls and professional arts organisations.



Colten Care created my role to raise awareness of the creative arts and promote the use of arts interventions in all their homes. The move towards social prescribing is already in progress however, this will predominantly focus on group

interventions in the community, and it is important for people with dementia living in care to have access to creative arts in their environment and this should not be compromised by their location.



Each of the people I visit in a one - one capacity is unable or unwilling to leave their room to engage in a social situation. This may be because they are characteristically shy, overwhelmed by a communal environment or physically unable to initiate interactions themselves. I identify

residents through observation and interaction, or the clinical staff and activity teams may suggest an arts intervention if a person has responded to music or art in the past or if other interactions have not encouraged a positive response.

I document changes in participants during every visit noting positive, negative, common and isolated responses. I also document responses using an observation tool that evaluates whether a live music or arts experience is motivating for the resident and the change in level of engagement resulting from this.

Music is a common language and enables shared appreciation and enjoyment of the moment and because it is non-verbal, it is accessible for people at every stage of their dementia. Music also helps maintain person's identity and a connection to their life events as although it can be a pleasant noise, familiar music can awaken a memory of a life story event and stimulate a positive response. Aware of the power of these musical preferences I always try and find out some autobiographical information either through informal conversations or by looking at the care plan. This means I can create a different, personal and hopefully meaningful experience for each resident I spend time with.

Group music sessions reach out to any number of residents simultaneously who engage and interact in a variety of ways from passive listening with subtle toe or finger tapping to bold risk taking by playing a large drum or spontaneous dancing.

Using different instruments and props we can create music and movements that reflect the rhythm, texture, timbre and style of the music.

Following the success of the BBC documentary *Our Dementia Choir*, residents, relatives and staff have been eager to start singing groups and I have been able to support the establishment of six care home choirs. I lead two dementia choirs and Linden Voices based in the New Forest in September as part of BBC Music week, have been invited to perform at the open weekend of a local museum, perform on the roof top garden with the local infant school choir and plan to surprise the community with a secret pop up choir event on the Quay.

Inviting the community into our homes to share in creative experiences and enabling our residents to be an active part of the community is an important part of life in a Colten Care Home. This may be hosting a tea dance, going to the theatre or inviting musicians from our local orchestra The Bournemouth Symphony into our homes to perform. This opportunity to experience the arts and cultural activities together, in the moment, can increase socialization and feelings of inclusion that is so important for people with dementia.