

4-14-2017

Reconnecting Veiled Minds Through Music: A Volunteer Experience Evaluation

Shelby N. Gird
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects>



Part of the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#), and the [Music Commons](#)

ScholarWorks Citation

Gird, Shelby N., "Reconnecting Veiled Minds Through Music: A Volunteer Experience Evaluation" (2017).
Honors Projects. 649.

<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects/649>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research and Creative Practice at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Shelby Gird

HNR 499 Senior Project

Music & Memory Volunteer Experience Evaluation: SWOT Analysis

Implementing the Music & Memory program at the Allendale Nursing & Rehabilitation Community was an overall rewarding and insightful experience to be a part of. I am fortunate that I got to take part in such a wonderful initiative for my honors senior project. I learned a lot about the volunteer process throughout my time working on this project that can be used for future volunteer experiences. There were both strengths that should be maintained in the Music & Memory volunteer process, as well as some weaknesses that could be adjusted to strengthen the experience for the volunteers. This program has a lot of potential for growth and to help a lot of people living with dementia. It is my hope that this potential will overcome any possible threats or challenges that are faced throughout this endeavor.

I was very pleased to see that even though certain aspects of coordinating the volunteers was difficult at times, there were a lot of strengths present throughout. Firstly, when looking at the Likert scale I used (0-5, 0 being poor and 5 being excellent) in the survey that I distributed to the volunteers after their last shifts, no one answered less than a 3 on any of the questions. There were the most amount of “5” rankings (20), followed by 3’s (7), then 4’s (6). This is one of the indicators of this volunteer experience being a success. Another strength I noticed is that for the question on my survey that asked if they would use the knowledge they gained in their volunteer experience into their future lives or careers, 100% of the volunteers said they would. This is a major strength as it shows their experiences have been useful for them and add meaning to their lives, personally and professionally. Some other strengths as indicated by the volunteers in the written part of the survey are that they were able to connect with the residents on a personal level

and spend time with them one-on-one, and they found the dementia friends training to be enjoyable and helpful. I also received a lot of great comments from the surveys, both praising and critical, that are crucial in planning future volunteer processes. My survey in itself was also a strength in this project, as it provided me with great feedback to utilize. Furthermore, the fact that I was able to train 14 volunteers is a great strength, as it gave me experience in taking on a leadership role, as well as it got the word out about Music & Memory to more GVSU students besides those in the nursing program. Nicole, the activities director at Allendale Nursing & Rehab, was also a huge strength and help to me throughout this whole process. She and I met face-to-face and emailed quite frequently, keeping in close contact with each other and keeping each other updated with any changes. She helped me work out some of the kinks that arose with the volunteers, and was always willing to do her part to fix them. Nicole was an excellent resource to use in implementing Music & Memory in the nursing home. All of these strengths contributed to this project being as great as it was, and I am very proud of them and how this initiative turned out.

Although there were several strong points present in this project, there were some weaknesses that need to be addressed as well. Probably the biggest weakness of this process was that out of the 14 volunteers trained, only five ended up actually volunteering. I think this is due to the training session held being before spring break, so after spring break happened a lot of people forgot about it and/or lost interest. Also, this is an extremely busy time in the semester for GVSU students, so a lot of volunteers probably were unable to commit to putting aside volunteer time. Another weakness was trying to schedule a training date for the volunteers. It was very hard to cater to everyone's schedules, as they were all different. Because of this, not all the volunteers were able to come to the training session. Instead, I provided them with the

information that was given out at the session. We also had an issue with the staff at the Allendale Nursing home. There were two volunteers who were told they couldn't volunteer at the time that they arrived and that they needed to be trained. This happened twice when they attempted to go volunteer. There was a little bit of confusion from the staff as to why we were there sometimes and what we were doing, and didn't know where the iPods and other supplies were. This resulted in some of the staff being unable to help the volunteers when they asked for assistance. Better communication with the staff about the times that volunteers would be there in addition to that they received training and were okayed by Nicole would've been helpful in that situation. General information about the Music & Memory program and how it is being implemented at Allendale nursing would've been useful as well. Furthermore, I had a difficult time receiving survey responses from the volunteers at first. About a week went by after I sent them out and I hadn't gotten any responses. At this time I emailed everyone individually and asked Carolyn to remind her sorority members to complete them, and this helped. In the survey, some other ideas were voiced about areas for improvement. This included providing adequate seating for the volunteers so they didn't have to squat for extended periods of time when listening to music with the residents, and simulating what an actual volunteer session would look like at the volunteer training to make them feel more comfortable and know what to expect. These obstacles weren't always easy to deal with; however, we can now learn from them and take them into consideration moving forward.

With the Music & Memory program being such a proven success, this initiative has great potential and opportunity to spread to other areas throughout Michigan, and hopefully even other parts of the country! Using non-pharmacological interventions instead of resorting to using medications in those with dementia has proven to increase the quality of life for this population,

as they don't have to deal with increased financial burdens and side effects that come with drugs. Music stimulates several parts of the brain, and has been proven to literally bring people's minds back to life. This is a very powerful message that has potential to influence a lot of people. The documentary "Alive Inside" is a great resource to use when getting the message of the impacts of Music & Memory across to volunteers and what it can do for dementia patients. With educating GVSU students about the program, especially nursing students, there is opportunity for it to be easily spread to several different hospitals/institutions and geographical areas as students graduate and begin their careers. Another aspect that helps this program make such an opportunity for growth is the increasing number of people with dementia. Unfortunately, the number of people with dementia is rising, meaning almost everyone is affected by dementia, if not personally through a family member or friend. This makes people more passionate about the cause and influences them to volunteer with Music & Memory in order to help their loved one in their time of need. All of these factors contribute significantly to the opportunities that are available for the Music & Memory program, and the willingness and number of volunteers involved to grow.

Lastly, there are some threats that go along with volunteers in the Music & Memory program. There is somewhat of a stigma associated with those with dementia and that they are very difficult to talk to/interact with. This may deter people from wanting to volunteer as they are intimidated and don't know how to talk to dementia patients. Another obstacle that could arise is convincing health institutions to stray away from pharmacological interventions and switch to trying music instead. A lot of places may be leery with this and think medications are the best choice of action to improve quality of life and slow down the progression of the disease for dementia patients. Changing this mindset I think will be one of the biggest challenges/threats

in carrying out this initiative, as healthcare is so focused on medications. Money is another issue involved. Although ultimately less than drugs, money needs to be raised for institutions to enter the music & memory community/seminars, as well as buy the iPods, headphones, and music for the residents to use. Although these threats are a possible issue in moving forward with Music & Memory volunteering, they are important to take note of so we can be aware of and prepared for what we may face.

Although there were some struggles along the way and there are future potential problems that may arise, I think that the opportunities available and strengths of the volunteer process with the Music & Memory program triumph. Conducting this process at Allendale Nursing & Rehab has been a major learning experience for me, providing me with amazing feedback on what I did well and what I could've improved upon. I thoroughly enjoyed working with the volunteers and the staff at Allendale Nursing & Rehab overall, and am so glad I was able to take part of such a rewarding experience for my honors senior project.