

Saffron Hall - Together in Sound

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Together in Sound is a partnership project providing music therapy groups for people living with dementia and their companions, run by Saffron Hall Trust in Saffron Walden, Essex, and the Cambridge Institute for Music Therapy Research at Anglia Ruskin University.

Context

Saffron Hall is an award-winning 740-seat performance space built in the grounds of Saffron Walden County High School. Funded by a local philanthropic donor, the space is both the main school hall and is recognised as a world class concert venue with strong connections to the local community. Saffron Walden town has a symphony orchestra and a Choral Society, and the hall is widely used by these local organisations as well as hosting a world class professional concert programme.

Saffron Hall ©2024 Saffron Hall



The Hall's artistic programme is delivered by Saffron Hall Trust, a charity with objectives that are focused on benefit for the local community. In addition to the concert programme, Saffron Hall Trust delivers a wide range of schools and Community projects using its relationships with artistic practitioners as a springboard for all the work that it does within and for the community.

Saffron Hall Trust receives no regular statutory funding. A strong membership scheme supports its work along with ticket sales, and other Philanthropic donations and Trusts and Foundation grants. It is a self-sustaining model intimately bound to the local community. This connection is reflected in the objectives of Together in Sound, addressing a prevalent need for aging populations both in the local community and more widely. Saffron Hall Trust is a unique and successful model; truly rooted in the community in which it's based, on the site of a secondary school with links with the other schools.

SHT/STU Collaboration

Shortly after Saffron Hall (SHT) opened, it was approached by the Local Dementia Action Alliance, with a request that SHT explore the potential for using music to support those living with dementia in the community. Following a short pilot project in 2017 with musicians from Wigmore Hall, SHT's collaboration with the Cambridge Institute for Music Therapy Research (CIMTR), part of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) developed, and provided the opportunity to bring in registered music therapists to create and pilot Together in Sound. The collaboration was driven on the Anglia Ruskin side by Professor Helen Odell Miller OBE, Director of CIMTR, and by music therapist and PhD candidate Claire Molyneux. Part of Dr Molyneux's inquiry focused on collaboration and music therapy within community contexts. As such, from the start of the partnership research was embedded in Together in Sound with a focus on collaboration and consultation through regular feedback, evaluation, and focus groups with participants. During her research period, Dr Molyneux frequently presented on the project at internal CIMTR events and more widely in national and international music therapy conferences. Later, collaborative academic journal articles about the programme were published, co-authored by Molyneux, Odell Miller, Thomas Hardy from Saffron Hall Trust, trainee music therapists, and a participant (amongst others).

For Anglia Ruskin University, the programme provides placement opportunities for Master's in Music Therapy trainees. Visiting musicians with a connection to Saffron Hall also join sessions, providing an opportunity to learn and share music therapy practice and principles with other musicians – for whom working in socially engaged settings is often a large part of their practice.

Dr Molyneux's time and supervision was offered by CIMTR as in-kind funding and the other programme costs (admin, venue, musicians, and other overheads) were supported through Saffron Hall's funding model.

*Saffron Hall Concert ©2024
Saffron Hall*



Together in Sound has run continuously since its establishment in 2017, with delivery moving online between March 2020 and Autumn 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the later part of 2021, Dr Molyneux stepped away from the core delivery of the sessions. The well-established partnership and clearly articulated principles behind Together in Sound ensured there was continuity, both for the partnership and for participants, when her successor Dr Claire Flower became the lead music therapist on the project. This basis also provided a solid foundation for the project and research around it to continue to evolve.

The project in detail

Together in Sound runs in 10-week blocks, with three terms a year. Every Friday there are three groups held, in the morning, midday and afternoon. Applications and expressions of interest are invited throughout the year on a rolling basis, on the caveat that the programme is a structured intervention that requires attendance aligned with full blocks of sessions. Before the start of each term, applicants are invited to a taster session where they can meet the music therapists and can get a little experience of the programme. Every applicant and their carer are then consulted about their specific circumstances and the groups are formatted carefully to ensure the best possible fit for each couple. The programme operates on a working principle that existing members can continue to attend without reapplying. Due to the progressive nature of dementia, group membership changes over time.

Each session is preceded by half an hour of informal chatting, refreshments and welcoming, facilitated by a community of Saffron Hall volunteers who do not engage in the music therapy session. Following this, participants engage in an hour-long session with a music therapist which involves shared, inclusive experiences of music making aimed to encompass the fullest range of ways in which participants engage in music. This involves singing, playing instruments and improvising, moving to music, songwriting, listening and more. Research into the effects of music on dementia has demonstrated that familiar music and songs can elicit autobiographical memories.¹ The sessions also focus on discussion within the groups, triggered perhaps by a song. Within the sessions everybody's musical voice is valid, and this is an integral part of the programme, which focuses on collaboration. Songwriting is also done collaboratively, with an emphasis on the creative process. In addition, the sessions involve movement, as research demonstrates it can improve fine motor skills for those living with dementia.

The project is explicitly for both participants living with dementia and their companions with positive impacts being reported by both. Dementia is viewed as a community concern and the weaving of past experiences and memories with new and novel musical experiences can help to create new

¹ Janata, Petr, Stefan T. Tomic, and Sonja K. Rakowski., 2007. Characterisation of music-evoked autobiographical memories, *Memory*, 15(8), pp.845-860. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701734593> Baird, Anee, Olivia Brancatisano, Rebecca Gelding, and William Forde Thompson., 2020. Music evoked autobiographical memories in people with behavioural variant frontotemporal dementia, *Memory*, 28(3), pp. 323-336, DOI: 10.1080/09658211.2020.1713379

bonds with others and strengthen existing bonds between participants. The groups are seen as providing valuable support for companions with increased opportunities for friendship and creativity for all participants.

*Together in Sound session,
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The weekly group sessions operate as closed clinical interventions which respect the confidentiality of the participants. At the end of the ten-week block the groups have a sharing event, where friends, family and stakeholders join a facilitated session. The whole group and guests sing together, and engage in improvisations to give a taste of what has been happening in the group spaces. Saffron Hall has invited local primary schools and school choirs along to these sharing events, so that they might work on one of the same songs that participants have developed in their sessions.

Whilst Saffron Hall manages the operational aspects of the programme such as membership, the volunteers and their training, the venue and the guests, the music therapy content is delivered by the music therapists and CIMTR. However, both parties work very closely together on all aspects of the programme and have an effective strategic partnership that is fully collaborative and looking towards the next strategic iteration of Together in Sound; how will it be funded, what research questions will it address?



*Together in Sound Sharing
Session ©2024 Sara Platt*

Evaluation

Saffron Hall and CIMTR have collected numerous qualitative case studies and feedback from participants who advocate for the positive effects of Together in Sound on their lives and relationships. There is also lots of reflective practice embedded in the way music therapists work. However, the challenge remains in finding meaningful, measurable evaluation metrics for a programme working with people who are living with a degenerative condition. With a view to engaging with clinical commissioners and other potential partners, Saffron Hall are looking to test the hypothesis that the programme is reducing demand on primary care networks, enabling people to live independently for longer and improving the quality of life.

Qualitative evidence clearly shows that participants' social bonds are extended and strengthened through making music together. Participants report using music more outside the home both for listening and to structure activities of daily living. The groups lead to increased conversations about dementia which reduces isolation. More research is needed to clearly identify the impact on participants outside of the sessions? What do participants take away from the project, what is the impact on their lives at home and their daily routines?

The collaboration with CIMTR allows Together in Sound to reflect on these areas in a robust way. Indeed, Molyneux’s doctoral thesis addresses this area of evaluation because it could impact how other arts projects across the sector are evaluated. As Thomas Hardy reflected, ‘it’s really exciting to have the academic partner there and to think about how that might move the arts sector practice forward.’

Together in Sound also has a positive impact on people who are caring for someone living with dementia, which offers different opportunities for evaluation across different objectives, such as social isolation and mental health.

Legacy of the project

The Together in Sound programme is linked with participants’ clinical care pathways as much as possible. Over the last few years, the Saffron Hall Learning and Participation team have made an active effort to build links with social prescribing link workers, memory clinics and dementia nurses in Saffron Walden and Essex, and an increasing number of referrals now come through these pathways. Current efforts are directed towards understanding how the impacts of the programme might be fed back to the primary care providers, as the social prescribing infrastructure continues to develop.

Together in Sound Session
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The Together in Sound model is now being rolled out and tested in other locations. Following a 'Theory of Change' process, CIMTR and SHT drew up a 'Purposes and Principles' document which outlines the overarching purpose and principles of Together in Sound. This highlights principles of partnership, participation, collaboration, and music making alongside specific principles of the music therapy approach that has been developed. This document is an essential element to the growth of this model to other locations. It provides a foundation from which the question: 'how can the principles of the programme translate easily to other situations?' be addressed. How can they maintain the essence of the project whilst working with new partners? In 2022/23 a pilot satellite programme was delivered in Braintree, in partnership with Braintree District Museum. The CIMTR and Saffron Hall Trust partnership are now scoping sustainable ways in which to develop the project in new Districts. The long-standing, successful partnership with CIMTR is an excellent foundation for extending this innovative and life-changing model to different locations.

Additional information:

Saffron Hall: <https://www.saffronhall.com>

Cambridge Institute
for Music Therapy Research at Anglia Ruskin University: <https://www.aru.ac.uk/cambridge-institute-for-music-therapy-research>

Together in Sound Saffron Walden - Saffron Hall : <https://www.saffronhall.com/take-part/together-in-sound-saffron-walden>

Together in Sound - ARU : <https://www.aru.ac.uk/cambridge-institute-for-music-therapy-research/our-research/older-people-dementia-and-stroke/together-in-sound>

Journal articles:

Report: Together in Sound <https://approaches.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Approaches-FirstView-r20201219-molyneux.pdf>

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