Lifting our Voices for Inclusive Community Music-Making:

An Intergenerational Choir

Background

In spring 2017, a board-certified music therapist began the Creative Arts Therapy Program at WVU CED and launched an Intergenerational Choir. The Intergenerational Choir is a pilot program created to provide direct services for staff, community members and their families through the power of music. Its goals are to provide a music making experience for people of all abilities that promotes independence and self-esteem while fostering lasting relationships and improving overall quality of life; and facilitate integration for those with disabilities throughout West Virginia's diverse communities. For people with disabilities, similar community music therapy programs have found that participation in music experiences creates "a sense of engagement and affiliation" within the community and serves "as a catalyst and medium through which to develop other aspects of a person's life" (Soshensky, 2011; Gosine, 2017).

Objectives

1. Evaluate the impact of the music therapy services offered through the WVU CED's new Creative Arts Therapy Program.
2. Illustrate and discuss the connection between music and quality of life.
3. Share findings and experiences with others interested in implementing similar inclusive community music programs.

Methods

The choir was held every Tuesday afternoon starting in January 2017, ending the semester with a public performance at the Center's annual autism walk in April. Participants included Morgantown community members and WVU CED employees. As many as 14 individuals participated in the choir. At the end of the semester, participants were asked to complete a brief evaluation that consisted of eight Likert scale questions, six closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions to assess program impact on quality of life. Seven participants (**50%**) completed the evaluation. Results are shown below.

Findings

All respondents (**100%**, n=7) either strongly agreed or agreed that participating in the Intergenerational Choir:
Improved my overall mood (**71.4%** strongly agreed)
Made me happier (**71.4%** strongly agreed)
Allowed me to explore my musical self (**57.1%** strongly agreed)
Created a sense of belonging (**57.1%** strongly agreed)
Helped me form new relationships with other members (**42.9%** strongly agreed)
Made me feel confident about myself (**28.6%** strongly agreed)

Additionally, **85.7%** (n=6) reported they either strongly agreed or agreed that participating in the Intergenerational Choir made going home or back to work less stressful. Recommendations offered to improve the choir included changing the meeting time from afternoon to evening and choosing a wider variety of music to learn.

Intergenerational Choir Evaluation Survey and Results

Participating in the Intergenerational Choir	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response Given
1. Improved my overall mood	5	2	0	0	0
2. Made going home or back to work less stressful	4	2	0	0	1
3. Made me feel confident about myself	2	5	0	0	0
4. Helped me form new relationships with other members	3	4	0	0	0
5. Allowed me to explore my musical self	4	3	0	0	0
6. Created a sense of belonging	4	3	0	0	0
7. Made me happier	5	2	0	0	0
8. Gave me a sense of independence	1	5	1	0	0

Conclusions

All choir participants who completed the evaluation reported experiencing emotional improvements due to choir participation. The observable outcomes of the Intergenerational Choir shed light on the acute and long-term positive effects of community music making across the lifespan. Benefits for combining community members with CED employees may be consistent with Woods' (2004) concept of the "ripple effect", connecting participants from the music therapy program to the wider community (p. 61) to form long-lasting relationships. In our example, providing a positive experience with our staff and resources that aid in future service connections with clients, their families, and others. For those interested in a similar program, start by finding a board certified music therapist in your area at https://www.musictherapy.org/about/find/. The Intergenerational Choir at WVU CED continues this semester and will be performing a winter concert with other community choirs in the Morgantown area.

References

Gosine, J., Hawksley, D., & LeMessurier Quinn, S. (2017). Community Building Through Inclusive Music-Making. Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy, 17(1). doi:10.15845/voices.v17i1.893

Soshensky, R. (2011) Everybody Is a Star: Recording, Performing, and Community Music Therapy. Music Therapy Perspectives, 29, 23-30.

Wood, S., Verney, R., & Atkinson, J. (2004). From therapy to community: Making music in neurological rehabilitation. In M. Pavlicevic & G. Ansdell (Eds.), Community music therapy (pp. 48-62). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Katie Martin, MT-BC – Board Certified Music Therapist and Creative Arts Therapy Coordinator
West Virginia University, Center for Excellence in Disabilities

West Virginia University
CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DISABILITIES