

IN PRACTICE

# In Practice

## Music for life: a Spanish project for improving quality of life and prevention of dementia through music participation

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The improvement in social conditions and advances in healthcare in the Western world has dramatically increased life expectancy. The fact that a high percentage of the Spanish population is older creates a new situation in which resources are increasing for older people thus, developing a diversity of initiatives aimed at improving the lives of older people both in the present and in the future.<sup>1,2</sup>

There is a growing research evidence in diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and cerebral stroke that engaging with music produces a series of neural connections that do not occur in other activities or with the simple act of listening to music or song. While there is published evidence of music therapy in specific clinical populations, few have rigorously analysed the potential of community singing in quality-of-life community group singing which has a significant effect on quality of life related to mental health, anxiety, and depression.<sup>3</sup> The activities that are offered by Music for Life (MfL) are supported by these theoretical framework.

MfL is based on the hypothesis that singing in a choir can help prevent or delay neurodegenerative diseases. The project is based on active musical engagement, for adults and the elderly, for the prevention of dementia and as a generator of well-being. l'Alcalatén de l'Alcora in Spain, is

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an association of retirees and pensioners, who participate in the MfL project, with various musical activities. The project includes composition, improvisation, body percussion, and involves performances and concerts. The MfL project, which takes place in a small municipality, started from the idea of a choir of older people. This



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chorus that carried out its work passively, and according to them, increasingly unmotivated, became enthusiastic when they were asked to participate in a research project. The research is aimed at testing a new methodology linked to music training and education, using the body and voice as the main tools. The work is based on the examples taken from activities on polyrhythms, the interpretation of songs



with Orff,<sup>4</sup> musical instruments, emphasizing the choral ensemble and the corporal expression and musical pedagogy of Jaques-Dalcroze.<sup>5</sup> There is evidence of music related to the quality of life of the elderly, although the practice of active music increases these benefits, and therefore, we rely on this type of use of music.

In addition, rhythmic activity allows the integration of oral awareness, with rhythm being the main element of music, which helps in the development of all aspects related to movement, coordination, and the psychomotor scheme that allows greater awareness of the body.

It has not been possible to carry out all the measurements that were

proposed at the beginning; however, considering the follow-up regarding the memory of the songs and the corporal expression, translated into movements of coordination and laterality, it can be said that all have improved, in different proportions, gradually increasing your improvement. Given the results obtained, we plan to influence more on psychomotor skills, without neglecting the role work of the songs. We believe that we have responded to the first two objectives that we set ourselves. We plan to programme new activities with greater connections, musical, psychomotor, and open them also taking into account the neural processes. We will continue working in this line, but with modifications and adaptations both in the data collection process and in the implementation of activities.

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