

IMPLEMENTING A MUSICAL MEMORY CAFÉ

HOW-TO GUIDE FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

INSPIRED BY THE ABCD PILOT PROJECT
SPIRIT RIVER, ALBERTA

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The Rural Development Network (RDN) sincerely acknowledges that our physical office is located on the Traditional Territories of Treaty 6 and home to Métis Nation Region 4.

From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people that call this land home and who have gathered on these lands for centuries.

We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility to improving relationships between nations and to improve our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

We are all Treaty People.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*For more information about the ABCD project, please contact:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

The Rural Development Network (RDN) collaborates with rural communities across Canada to identify and bring focus to rural issues, build local capacity, and find innovative, rural-based solutions to unique issues. A key aspect of that work is to support rural communities in the implementation of the proposed solutions by providing capacity. RDN's initiatives include:

- addressing rural homelessness;
- building affordable housing;
- addressing substance misuse;
- age-friendly rural communities;
- rural immigration;
- rural access to services including transportation, broadband, and justice;
- agri-food initiatives; and
- rural revitalization.

ABOUT ABCD INITIATIVE

In 2021, RDN developed the Awareness Builds Connection in Dementia Friendly Communities (ABCD) initiative. This project aims to support rural communities in Alberta to become more dementia-inclusive and dementia-friendly. An environmental scan was carried out to determine the best practices, challenges, and lessons regarding dementia-inclusive initiatives. Through learning from examples in existing programming, the ABCD team improved their understanding of effective dementia-inclusive programs and created a catalogue based on their findings, selecting initiatives adaptable to rural settings.

Through a call for interest, five rural communities were chosen to pilot the project, those being Taber, Sturgeon County, Spirit River, Strathmore and Drumheller. Spirit River's initiative will be the focus of this guide.

ABOUT CENTRAL PEACE HEALTH COMPLEX (CPHC) RESIDENT-FAMILY COUNCIL

The Central Peace Health Complex Resident/Family Council is made up of the residents, their families and significant friends and staff members of the Central Peace Health Complex. The Resident/Family Council was formed to give the residents and members of all the families a time and place to meet with each other and facility staff to ask questions, give

general input, help plan events, and volunteer. Families, residents and staff use the opportunity to get to know each other, leading to a comfortable group that can reach out to each other creating an overall air of comfort and “hominess”.

LIVING WITH DEMENTIA IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Additional challenges exist for people living with dementia and their caregivers in rural communities. These challenges are unique from the experiences of those living in an urban setting. Rural-specific challenges include the lack of transportation, difficulties accessing support and care services, failure of proper diagnoses, and privacy concerns.

Like everyone, people living with dementia and their care partners want to feel like a valued part of their community. However, in rural communities, dementia-related resources providing education, diagnosis and support can be scarce, directly impacting:

- early diagnosis;
- access to diagnosis;
- community education and understanding of dementia; and
- support for care in the home/community when living with and supporting someone with dementia.

PURPOSE OF HOW-TO-GUIDE

Informed by research and the experiences of the ABCD pilot community in Spirit River, this guide has been developed to support rural communities that are looking to improve the lives of those living with dementia by becoming more dementia-friendly. Understanding that each community is unique with its own strengths and perspectives, this guide is meant to be flexible and adaptable based on community needs and resources available.



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INTRODUCTION

THE TOWN OF SPIRIT RIVER

Spirit River is a town located in northwestern Alberta, approximately an hour-long drive away from Grande Prairie, and considered one of the oldest towns in the Central Peace Region (Town of Spirit River, 2015). The population of Spirit River as of 2021 was estimated to be around 849 people, with 295 residents being 60+ in age (Townfolio, 2023). Central Peace Region is located on Treaty 8 territory, the ancestral and traditional territory of the Cree, Beaver, and Dene people, and Region 6 of the Métis Nation of Alberta. The Spirit River History Book Committee (1989) shares “The name Spirit River is the translation of the Cree Indian name Chepi Sepe which means Ghost River” (p. 3).

MUSICAL MEMORY CAFÉ

Summary

The CPHC Resident/Family Council opted to combine a Memory Café initiative with the Java Care Memory Music Program. Memory Cafés typically utilize existing social spaces to cater activities and experiences to be accessible for those living with dementia and their care partners/givers. Cafés are “social gathering places where those impacted by dementia can get out socially, share memories and experiences, and make new friendships and support groups” (The Brenda Strafford Foundation, 2022, para 1). The CPHC Resident/Family Council used a portion of their funding from RDN’s ABCD project to purchase the Java Memory Care Program created by Dr. Kristine Theurer, a program designed to enhance relationship building through emotional connections to lessen social isolation (Java Group Programs, 2022). The Java Memory Care Program (2022) is a form of music therapy, designed specifically for people living with dementia by using songs, singalongs, instruments, and readings, to encourage discussions and connections between people. The program comes with a variety of materials, including guides and manuals to teach staff how to run the program, and musical devices such as wind chimes and CDs with singable songs.

Highlights

CPHC residents who have been participating in the Musical Memory Café have shared positive feedback. One resident was very appreciative, sharing that she felt so loved and had never experienced anything like the program before. Another resident, while initially declining to attend the program,

was convinced to do so by a peer and enjoyed herself. Residents are reaching out to other residents beyond the program itself. One resident, who usually only connected with staff, now seeks out other residents and is building friendships. This program has provided space for residents to share their feelings, an opportunity they normally would not have had. Residents are feeling safe with one another and becoming more vulnerable with sharing emotions. A simple handshake with another resident has at times sparked a whole conversation.

“

Life is the pits sometimes. But when I know there is someone in the pits with me it feels better.

Participant, Musical Memory Café

”

“

Java is a way for us to connect and find out how's life for us. I like it because we get to know each other in a different way than usual.

Participant, Musical Memory Café

”

Why was this initiative chosen for the community?

Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, many people suffered due to social isolation. These effects were particularly harsh for senior populations, especially for those living with dementia and their families and caregivers, already experiencing a loss of connectivity to others. Pandemic-related impacts and outcomes further complicated interactions at the CPHC leading to shortened or reduced visitations. Acknowledging this, CPHC was drawn to the idea of combining a memory café with the Java Memory Care program to reverse this trend by providing musical opportunities to stimulate singing and conversations with peers and care partners in hopes of providing meaningful and enjoyable experiences to enhance relationships, further delay the onset of dementia, and destigmatize the negative perceptions associated with dementia.

Goals of Musical Memory Café

The program aims to enhance the quality of life for the senior population in Spirit River and surrounding municipalities, utilizing the communal aspect of Memory Cafés combined with the music and framework of the Java Memory Program. The program not only incorporates music but also the communal aspect of sharing food and drink together, along with the relational aspects of supporting each other emotionally and physically. By implementing the Java Care Memory Music Program, the CPHC's desire was to alleviate the growing need for connections in the COVID era, which can be especially helpful in a care center environment where staff and residents connections are crucial. Additionally, the program gives the staff and family volunteers the tools to cultivate meaningful, emotional engagement and enhance resident-to-resident interactions.

MUSICAL MEMORY CAFÉ: STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

In 2022, the Central Peace Health Complex (CPHC) Resident-Family Council submitted an application requesting funding from the Rural Development Network's ABCD initiative for their combined Memory Café and Java Memory Music program. The CPHC Resident-Family Council was successful in receiving the \$5000 seed funding and the planning for their Musical Memory Café began in April 2022.

STEP 1: DEVELOPMENT OF BUDGET, WORK PLAN, AND TIMELINE

Budget Considerations

The majority of the Musical Memory Café budget was utilized to purchase the Java Care Memory Program which was \$3,500 (plus taxes and shipping). As the program progressed, facilitators observed that hearing was a barrier for some residents and purchased pocket talkers which made a real difference in engagement as participants were more alert and seemed to have more lucid moments. Due to the limited space available in the Central Peace Health Complex to host the Musical Memory Café, it was run out of a common area which can be distracting. Therefore, the CPHC Resident-Family Council is also looking to purchase a screen wall divider to reduce distractions.

Work Plan/Timeline

Upon receiving funding, the CPHC Resident-Family Council purchased the Java Musical Memory Care program. After receiving the program materials, initial training for the staff took place over the following two weeks. Staff determined the best way to facilitate the Memory Café within the confines of the facility spaces, this included protocols specifically made during and for the pandemic, which the Java Care Memory Program guides take into account. The program ran immediately after all of the preparations were finished. Evaluations occurred monthly at the start of program implementation and then periodically over a few months. The Central Peace Health Complex Musical Memory Café sessions continued to take place weekly over the span of 52 weeks.

STEP 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

Recruitment/Training of Staff and Volunteers

No recruitment was necessary for this program, as the CPHC had existing staff members overseeing its implementation. As mentioned in the Work

Plan section, training for staff would happen over the span of two weeks after receiving the Memory Care Program. Dr. Kristine Theurer, president of the Java Group Programs, provided a training session to one of CPHC's recreation therapy aides who continued to facilitate the program for its duration.

Communications

The Musical Memory Café initiative was communicated to the residents of CPHC by staff and also through word of mouth from resident to resident.

STEP 3: ACTIVITY LOGISTICS

1. Scheduling and communication of program schedule
2. Purchasing snacks and refreshments
3. Set up space for Java Musical Memory Care (chairs, tables, program materials, etc)
4. Post-session evaluation

STEP 4: MEASURING PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES

Data Collection

The Java Memory Care Program comes equipped with scale assessments designed to assess participation, emotional connection and happiness before and after each session, in addition to a three-month check-in evaluation to review the overall program.

Successes

The results from the scale assessments revealed higher scores overall after the program. Residents shared positive feedback regarding the program, one resident expressing her appreciation stating she felt so loved and had "never experienced anything like this before". Another resident, while initially declining to attend the program as she wanted to go home, attended after another resident reached out to her, and ended up enjoying herself. Residents are reaching out to other residents beyond the program itself. A resident who typically would only connect with the staff has since sought out other residents for connection and is building friendships. According to CPHC staff, the program has given participants the opportunity to share their feelings, an opportunity they normally would not have had. Residents are feeling safe with one another and becoming more vulnerable with sharing emotions. A simple handshake with another resident has at times sparked a whole conversation.

Challenges

Some of the challenges in the implementation of the initiative have been a lack of appropriate location/room. There is no room in the facility that could be designated to run the program, therefore, the program was facilitated in the living room area which can be distracting due to people talking or passing by. CPHC is looking to purchase a screen wall divider to reduce distractions. Hearing was also a barrier for some residents, however, the purchase of the pocket talker made a real difference and residents were notably more engaged and alert.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Memory Care Music Program is a year-long program, with one session for each of the 52 weeks. After that, it can be repeated or otherwise used at no additional cost, and staff can alter the program according to the needs and wants of participants. Because of this, it has an indefinite lifespan at no extra cost, and the CPHC Resident/Family Council's long-term plan is to share the program with adjacent lodges.

RESOURCES

Resources needed to facilitate a successful Memory Care Music Program, beyond purchasing the Java Memory Care Program, include a dedicated recreation therapy aide and, if possible, a quieter space to engage residents in the sessions without a lot of noise and distractions.



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