

Research Summary 2016

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In the United States, 5.4 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease, and 65,000 of those live in Colorado. This number is estimated to more than triple by 2050.

A healthy community is an inclusive community. Northern Colorado is committed to learning how to engage and create meaningful interactions for those living with dementia. This means reaching out to people with dementia and their caregivers to encourage them to take part in community events—to consciously include rather than just passively accept. The B Sharp program is an example of a community effort that required collaboration, communication, and a commitment to creating a dementia-friendly community.

About the B Sharp Program

B Sharp was launched in 2015 and provided 30 people with dementia and their primary caregiver the opportunity to attend five Fort Collins Symphony Masterworks concerts during the 2015-16 season. The study explored a number of factors, including the impact of the music on the cognitive ability of participants with dementia, the social connections between the caregiver and person with dementia, and the degree to which study participants feel supported by the community.

This study aimed to engage people with dementia and their caregivers in an immersive community musical experience that was hoped would provide therapeutic benefit. In this program, participants were given season tickets, enjoyed public music, attended receptions with fellow community members, and shared support in a “normal” social setting.

Attending dementia friendly community events like B Sharp helped caregivers feel connected to their loved one, other caregivers, and enjoy a night out.

Research Methods

In order to assess the impact of participation on memory, mood, and attention, participants with dementia were given a cognitive test before and after concerts, as well as the Geriatric Depression Scale and a mood assessment. This cognitive test, called RBANS, is a brief neuropsychological test that assesses current cognitive functioning, improvement, and/or decline. To assess social connection of caregivers, researchers administered surveys, performed social network mapping, and conducted post-concert phone calls, in-depth interviews, and focus groups.

Program Partners



Program Donors

Thank you to the donors who supported the program and research:

Banner Health **Fort Collins Symphony**
Kaiser Permanente **Individual Community Members**
Home State Bank

To donate, please contact:

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Research Results

The cognitive function (mood, memory, and attention) of participants improved.

Caregivers identified a number of positive changes in their loved ones after participating in the program including improved alertness, engagement, and mood in comparison to other activities done together.

Most importantly, there was a significant difference between the pre- and –post intervention RBANS assessment for the 10 participants who completed both assessments ($p=.010$). This suggests that overall cognition **IMPROVED** over the course of the 9 month B Sharp intervention. For a disease associated with progressive cognitive decline, this margin of improvement is exciting. More research will need to be conducted to fully understand the impact of attending musical performance on memory- but our preliminary results are hopeful.

Interactions between caregiver and loved one held increased meaning and connection.

As people lose their memory, they lose their ability to relate to others and communicate in meaningful ways. Through attending the B Sharp concerts, caregivers were able to feel connected to their loved one in a familiar and meaningful way, allowing them to remember the person they fell in love with and reconnect to past memories and experiences. Additionally, the concerts resurfaced old memories and allowed new memories to be formed. The concerts became a point of conversation prior to attendance, immediately after, and for some, continue to be so. Many participants remarked that they turned the concert into a “date night”. It was something to look forward to and it gave both caregivers and the person with dementia an opportunity to get dressed up and socialize within the broader Fort Collins community.

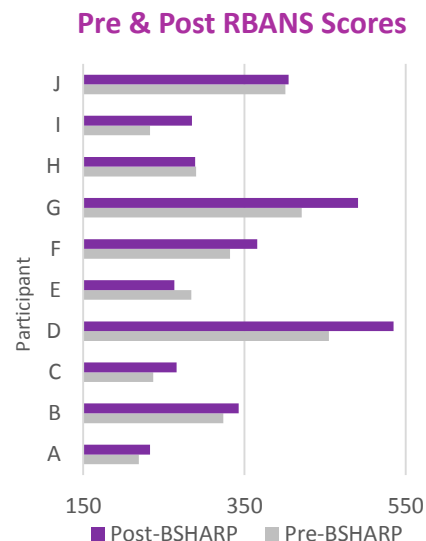
Caregivers shared meaningful interactions with other caregivers.

The diagnosis of dementia changes both the caregiver’s relationship with their loved one, as well as their relationships with friends, colleagues, and family. As a result, caregivers can become isolated in their role as their loved one progresses through dementia. Receptions before and after the concerts provided an opportunity for caregivers to socialize in a “normal” setting. Interacting with others in a similar situation made them feel less isolated and more connected to community. The receptions created a space where caregivers could:

- share experiences, resources, knowledge, and meet others in a similar situation
- feel a sense of normalcy
- build a friendship group and
- feel accepted and supported.

Participants felt an increased sense of community and acceptance.

Many of the caregivers remarked about the sense of community they felt after participating in the program. At each concert, B Sharp was mentioned in the maestro talk as well as in the printed program. Many felt that this brought awareness to Alzheimer’s and dementias, and illustrated that those with such diseases are able to still participate in social activities. Caregivers also felt supported by the broader Fort Collins community due to the program being locally funded.



“We did a lot of hand holding and smiling during and after the performance. We made eye contact throughout the entire performance and it was like soul traveling.”

“I think we (caregivers) help each other be stronger. Other people sympathize, but nobody really understands until you get with other people that are living it. We have the bond of having a loved one with this horrible disease.”

“The value of programs like B Sharp is that gives you a reason to want to get out that day. It’s something special, something to look forward to. The community awareness was also a big thing I think that the program did. I think it made us feel like people noticed and cared about us.”