

# Review of Live Music in Nursing Homes

Evaluation of the Creative Ireland Live Music in  
Nursing Homes Scheme undertaken by M-CO

December 2024



# Contents

Introduction .....	3
The Evaluation .....	6
Summary of Findings .....	8
Methodology .....	11
Analysis & Findings .....	15
Anticipation and Engagement .....	17
Nostalgia and Reminiscing .....	20
Rapport and Connection .....	21
Social Inclusion and Accessibility .....	23
Positive Atmosphere .....	24
Sense of Wellbeing.....	26
Conclusions.....	31

## INTRODUCTION

The Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme as part of the Creativity in Older Age scheme was introduced by Creative Ireland and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in response to the social isolation experienced by older people during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The primary aims of the scheme were to support positive ageing and wellbeing and tackle social isolation. In 2023 the Department of Health co-funded the programme, and the scheme is now in its fifth year. The purpose of this evaluation is to inform future policy development.

### 1.1.1. Context

Creative Ireland is an all-of-government culture and wellbeing programme, and it is their ambition to inspire and transform people, places and communities through creativity<sup>1</sup>. The Creative Ireland Health & Wellbeing pillar aims to embed creative activities that promote positive health and wellbeing by helping people to connect socially, enhancing their self-esteem and resilience, enabling recovery and empowering them to manage their own health and wellbeing through their lives<sup>2</sup>.

This ambition is based on a growing body of research, both national and international, that demonstrates the health benefits of creative engagement across the life course<sup>3</sup>. The implementation of this research into practice is reflected in the national Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025<sup>4</sup>, the HSE Social Prescribing Framework<sup>5</sup> and addressed in the Creative Ireland programme objectives<sup>6</sup>, which seeks to partner and collaborate with government departments and initiatives that are working towards improving better health outcomes through creative endeavours.

Music, as an artform, is widely understood to benefit persons in healthcare settings<sup>7</sup>. In particular, it provides older people with creative engagement opportunities, even where there is limited physical or

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/about/>

<sup>2</sup> Creative Ireland Health and Wellbeing in the Community Local Authority Funding 2024-2025

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2023-8280-48052-71230>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/441c8-healthy-ireland-strategic-action-plan-2021-2025/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/mental-health-and-wellbeing/hse-social-prescribing-framework.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/creative-pillars/?category=creativity-health-wellbeing#posts>

<sup>7</sup> Boyce M, Bungay H, Munn-Giddings C, Wilson C. The impact of the arts in healthcare on patients and service users: A critical review. *Health Soc Care Community*. 2018 Jul;26(4):458-473. doi: 10.1111/hsc.12502. Epub 2017 Sep 20. PMID: 28940775.

mental capacity<sup>89</sup>. A recent TILDA report on Creative Activity in the Ageing Population noted that, “*Older adults reporting the highest levels of involvement in creative activities reported the highest quality of life, and scored lowest on loneliness, depression, worry and stress measurements*”<sup>10</sup>.

The Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme was born out of necessary creative requirement in the context of significant social restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic and as such, has evolved following the lifting of mandates, and through the expansion of funding made available from Creative Ireland and the Department of Health. The aim of the scheme is to Support positive ageing; Engage with issues surrounding social isolation; and Provide creative engagement opportunities for older people in residential healthcare facilities.

A report published on the ‘Orchestras in Healthcare Programme’ in the UK found that “*increasing value [being] placed on this activity by those in the healthcare sector*”, as a reflection of the total allocation of funds made available to orchestras by NHS or NHS-affiliated charities<sup>11</sup>.

A 2022 evaluation of live music performances in nursing homes conducted by Music & Health Ireland found significant benefits to residents, staff and musicians in their programming of music in nursing homes. Several recommendations on the importance of person-centred, collaborative, varied, inclusive and sustained live music programming in care settings were described<sup>12</sup>.

---

*“By avoiding the structure of a traditional performance, we prevent leaving anyone behind, making the experience truly participatory and empowering for the residents.” [Musician]*

---

---

<sup>8</sup> Derbyshire, et al.. (2019). “From Bingo to Bartok”: Creative and Innovative Approaches to involving older people with Orchestras. Leeds: Orchestras Live; London: City of London Sinfonia. [URL] <https://www.orchestraslive.org.uk/news/bingo-to-bartok/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://musicandhealthireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Synthesis-Report-Understanding-the-Potential-of-Clinical-Creative-Partnerships-to-Improve-Dementia-Care.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [https://tilda.tcd.ie/publications/reports/pdf/Report\\_CreativeActivity\\_OlderPopulation.pdf](https://tilda.tcd.ie/publications/reports/pdf/Report_CreativeActivity_OlderPopulation.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.artsandhealth.ie/assets/uploads/2024/02/OrchestrasInHealthcare2023.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Galvin, M & Howard, E.,(2022) An Evaluation of Music in Health Workshops Delivered by Music & Health Ireland.

## LIVE MUSIC IN NURSING HOME SCHEME – IN NUMBERS



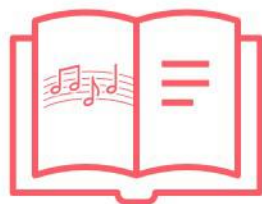
**€1.37M**  
Funding allocated



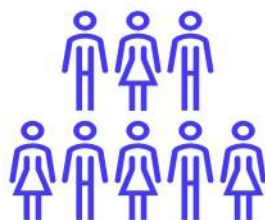
**28**  
Local Authorities Engaged



**30**  
Musical Collaborations



**61**  
Music Programmes Designed



**30,000**  
People Engaged  
with Performers

## The Evaluation

### Purpose & Scope of Evaluation

This evaluation of the Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme was undertaken in 2024 by M-CO at the request of Creative Ireland. Its purpose is to inform future policy development of Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM) and the Department of Health (DoH). Based on the stated objectives and the minimum requirements, the evaluation of the Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme focused on the follow criteria:

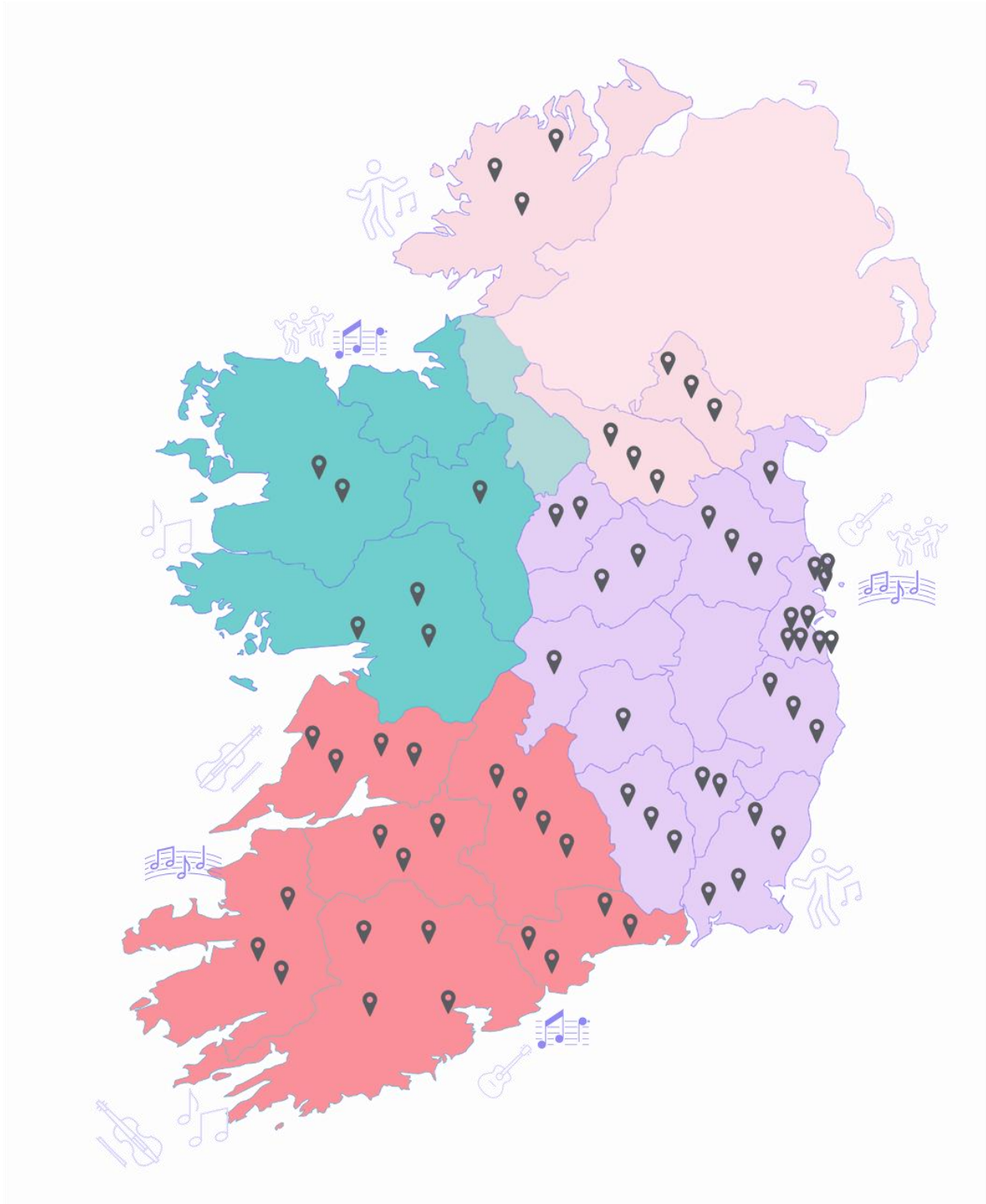
- To what extent has the scheme been delivering against the objectives?
  - a. Support positive ageing;
  - b. Engage with issues surrounding social isolation;
  - c. Provide creative engagement opportunities for older people in residential healthcare facilities.
- Do the varied processes of collaboration and delivery have any bearing on the outcomes for older people?
- Does the type of music experience impact on outcomes for older people?
- Is the scheme successful in delivering outcomes and are some models/approaches within the scheme more successful than others in delivering different outcomes?

Using a mixed methods approach to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data enabled us to adequately respond to the aim of the evaluation objectives and the following strategies were employed throughout the review:

- Discussions with participants and observation during live performances
- Interviews with key stakeholders
- Surveys with Nursing homes, staff and participating musicians
- Engagement with relatives of patients



Geographic Location of Live Music in Nursing Homes Programmes [2020-2024]



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

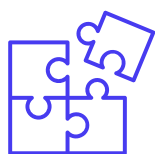


The **innovative approach** taken to the design and delivery Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme, initially developed as a response to COVID-19 restrictions, sparked meaningful cultural change. The scheme encouraged experimentation and adaptation, with a shared sense of purpose among staff and musicians as partners. The expertise of the artists played a crucial role in shaping the program to meet the unique needs of residents based on artistic reflections. Implementation of the scheme through Local Authorities allowed for regional programming that resonated with residents.

---

*I think going by all my experience so far, it's a vital component in their lives because I see people so bad with dementia who barely move raise their hands and try to sway to the music [Musician]*

---



The **collaborative model** has been pivotal to the scheme's success, with staff and musicians highlighting the benefits of building trust, particularly during the Covid period. Collaboration at all stages, from conception to delivery, was key, with staff playing a critical role in preparing for the events, as well as in identifying follow-up also emphasised, with musicians adapting performances for those with special needs, and staff and family members playing a critical role to address extra needs.

---

*It was social inclusion to the fullest [Nursing Home Staff]*

---



The evaluation of the Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme highlights how the program positively impacts residents' physical, social, and mental health, directly contributing towards a **positive ageing culture**. The inclusive programming, which integrates familiar musical preferences and local events, fosters anticipation, engagement, and socialisation. The success of these sessions is driven by skilled musicians who tailor the music experience to the diverse needs of residents, using a person-centred approach that enhances mood, promotes connection, and supports residents' overall wellbeing by affirming their interests and fostering a positive atmosphere.



There were three main **Lessons Learned** from the evaluation

**Event Coordination:** The frequency, size and flexibility around event settings were noted as key considerations for future scheme design. Hosting smaller events, more often, and with some regularity both within and outside of the Nursing Home setting for residents was described as an essential evolution for the scheme.

**Programming Considerations:** Diversity and variety in the live music programming to include a wider range of disciplines and activities such as movement or art, alongside live music is believed to enhance the experience, creating a positive ageing experience for residents. Similarly, extending the audience to include community care service users, family and other stakeholders (i.e. local musicians) would reduce social isolation.

**Staffing Needs:** Benefits to staff morale and social cohesion in residential care settings can be realised only if staff buy-in and engagement is encouraged and facilitated (i.e. practical support) throughout the planning and hosting process. A lack of structured support and training for musicians was noted, which is essential for delivering quality sessions that prioritises resident engagement. Addressing both of these issues will create a bridge between the arts and health, increasing the positive impact for all stakeholders.



*“We’d never have the same chat if it wasn’t for this.” [Resident]*

*“I saw firsthand the joy radiating from residents during and following these music sessions. the memories the music evoked of different times in their lives.” [Nursing Home Staff]*

---

# METHODOLOGY



A series of consultations with stakeholders involved in the scheme were conducted during the Summer of 2024. This process included site visits, interviews and the roll out of a survey to three cohorts (musicians, nursing homes, local authorities). A total of 56 individual survey responses were collected, three site visits, and five interviews with subject matter experts. From the audience figures reported in the survey, there were an average of 34 residents in attendance across a median number of four sessions per residential facility at the live music sessions.

### 1.1.2. Participants

Code	Explanation
LA	Local Authority
NH	Nursing Home
M	Musician
LAC	Local Authority Coordinator
SV	Site Visit Observation
R	Resident
SM	Staff Member
SMEs	Subject Matter Experts

### 1.1.3. Data Collection

#### Surveys

Surveys were designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from three cohorts – Nursing Homes, Local Authorities, and Musicians. The evaluation team completed a draft of the survey questions, which were reviewed by the client to ensure the best quality responses could be collected from the target groups. The surveys were circulated and remained open for three weeks. A total of 56 responses were collected on the Survey Monkey platform. The data generated was imported as CVS files and qualitative analysis undertaken.

#### *Local Authorities*

Engagement with Local Authorities (LAs) was facilitated by Creative Ireland who circulated an invitation to participate in the evaluation.

#### *Nursing Homes*

Through local authorities, our team engaged with Nursing Homes to respond to a survey designed to gather as much meaningful data as possible. Key contact personnel in both the local authorities and the care homes were asked to complete a survey which seeks to break down key variables, indicating the success and impact of the scheme. Working with the key contacts within the Local Authorities (usually the healthy ageing coordinator), we were able to socialise the survey intended for Nursing Homes

### *Musicians*

In the same way we identified stakeholders within participating Nursing Homes, via our key contacts in Local Authorities, musicians who took part in the scheme were contacted by the LAs directly, in accordance with GDPR. A distinct survey was created for the musicians and performers engaged in the scheme to understand, from their perspective, how well the initiative delivered on its objectives and the ways in which their involvement could be improved upon or developed further.

### **Site Visits and Interviews**

#### *Subject Matter Experts*

A series of five short telephone interviews were conducted with expert stakeholders from a geriatric health, creative and nursing home provision perspective. A semi-structured interview guide was developed by the evaluation team to inform 1:1 phone interviews with five SMEs. This guide provided touchpoints for the interviewer to incorporate into the natural flow of the conversation and reflected the stated objectives of the scheme and evaluation as noted in Section 1 of this report.

#### *Nursing Homes (Residents, Family Members, Musicians, Staff)*

Our team worked with Creative Ireland team to identify the schedule of planned sessions throughout the course of the evaluation process. We then worked directly with Local Authorities to arrange site visits on dates where live music sessions were scheduled.

The M-CO team visited three different nursing homes in Wexford, Kilkenny and Dublin, to engage directly with residents during musical performances to secure a visual and verbal assessment of the scheme in action. Given the advanced age of patients and potential health challenges it was felt that a direct discussion on the day of the visit would be the best approach to get patient feedback. This also allowed for some discussions with staff and musicians. During these visits, we took notes on the environment, atmosphere and nature of the performance.

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Number of engagements</b>
Local Authorities	9 Survey Responses Received
Nursing Homes	18 Survey Responses Received
Musicians	29 Survey Responses Received
Subject Matter Experts	5 telephone interviews conducted
Site Visits	3 site visits conducted

*“Absolutely brilliant. It’s been a long time since I’ve been to any music, but after today I hope it won’t be a long time coming around again!” [Resident]*

*“I’m shy but it doesn’t matter. I can get a big high note (singing along) and I don’t know where it comes from!”  
[Resident]*



---

# ANALYSIS & FINDINGS



### 1.1.4. Analysis

Owing to the total number of responses to the survey, the evaluation team undertook qualitative thematic analysis, as the sample size was not big enough to allow for quantitative analysis. However, the quantitative data collective does provide a snapshot of information about the respondents across groupings (Local Authorities, Nursing Homes and Musicians). The evaluation team undertook a thematic analysis of the qualitative data generated from the survey, interviews, residents and SMEs.

#### 1.1.4.1. Interviews

The interview with SMEs were reviewed with the identified themes (1.1.6.3) in mind. The core approach to analysing these interview transcripts was to identify the viewpoints of experts on the appropriateness and effectiveness of a scheme, such as this, in delivering on the stated objectives. We reviewed the transcripts to identify key points that responded to these objectives.

#### 1.1.4.2. Site Visits

As noted in Section 1.1.5 above, site visits included capturing observations of the performance, as well as informal discussions with residents, family members and staff. The notes from these sessions were captured by two different members of the evaluation team, however, the analysis was undertaken by a single member of the team to ensure consistency of interpretation. The notes were reviewed using the thematic codes identified during the survey analysis.

#### 1.1.4.3. Surveys

As noted above, the surveys included both quantitative and qualitative questions. In response to the closed questions, we analysed what was reported against benefits and efficacy of the scheme, in terms of the stated objectives, coordination, and collaboration. The sample size was too small to be able to quote percentages as the margins of error would be too large.

Where qualitative data was collected, the team extracted the long-form data from the survey platform, and into a CSV format, that was reviewed by one member of the team to ensure consistency of interpretation. This step was followed by tagging of the data points, to anonymise the data. Following a second review, themes were identified using a Grounded Theory approach, and first-stage coding was completed. On third review, these codes were used to capture segments of the responses and sub-themes were identified.

The findings of this evaluation are noted in the following section of this report and have been identified using a Grounded Theory approach which, “*involves discovering theory from data*”<sup>13</sup>. The findings have been organised under these themes and sub-themes, with narrative description of their occurrence and relevance to the topic of the evaluation, with supporting quotes from participants.

---

<sup>13</sup> Qualitative, Multimethod, and Mixed Methods Research Peggy M. Delmas, Rachel L. Giles, in International Encyclopedia of Education(Fourth Edition), 2023

### 1.1.5. Key Themes

There were six core themes identified in the qualitative data collected from participants. They were specifically related to the impact of scheme, outside of the usual activities and offering in residential care settings. A table of these themes, their descriptions, and how these support in delivering on the stated objectives, are noted below

There are several sub-themes noted within the body of the text under each theme which reveal key experiences that are of significance to participants. Framing the discussion around these core experiences allows for a clear and meaningful description of the findings.

<b>Anticipation and Engagement</b>	Participants reported different types of engagement activities prior to, during, and after the sessions. There were many reports of positive anticipation in advance of the sessions. This theme contributes to all three of the stated objectives.
<b>Nostalgia and Reminiscing</b>	The subject of memory, nostalgic programming, and residents reminiscing over music, poems, and times gone by was cited regularly throughout the responses. This theme contributes to all three of the stated objectives.
<b>Rapport and Connection</b>	The establishment of relationships between different stakeholders engaged in the scheme, and the subsequent sense of connection, was regularly noted in the data. This theme addresses social isolation and positive ageing.
<b>Social Inclusion and Accessibility</b>	Programme design and engagement approaches during the sessions that promotes social inclusion and facilitates accessibility for those with additional needs or reduced capacity were cited many times. This theme contributes to all three of the stated objectives.
<b>Positive Atmosphere</b>	The creation and promotion of a positive atmosphere for residents and staff, joy and mood-lifting energy as a result of the sessions held was common in the responses to this evaluation. This theme speaks to how the scheme supports positive ageing.
<b>Sense of Wellbeing</b>	The impacts noted by residents, staff, and family members to their overall sense of wellbeing was evidenced in the findings. This theme speaks to how the scheme supports positive ageing.

### ANTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

This theme addresses the way live music in nursing homes facilitates active engagement between residents and other participants, leading to a positive sense of anticipation around the sessions. It is

broken down into **three sub-themes**, which capture the specific way the theme addresses social isolation, provides creative opportunities, and in turn, fosters a culture of positive ageing.

### **Occasion & Social Opportunities**

The structured nature of the event schedule meant residents anticipated the sessions with enthusiasm as they would with any special occasion, *“A huge amount of excitement around specialist guests”* [SM2] which broke the monotony of daily routines, noted by one SME as significantly influential to the atmosphere in residential facilities, *“Including outside influences in a residential facility changes the tenor of the day”* [SK]. The performances were celebrated as joyful occasions – a real highlight to be shared with loved ones, *“It’s so good to have something on and to chat about with my family”*[R7].

Preparing for these events, *“Some dressed up for our performance and some venues combined it with afternoon tea, heightening the sense of conviviality”* which contributed to a sense of connection with the community in which they are part of, *“Anticipation of future events, access to live music of excellent quality - allowed participants to feel part of the wider world and reducing social isolation.”* [LA4]. Staff engagement and buy-in to events as part of this scheme elevated the participant experience.

---

*We all get through the week looking forward to something - usually a night out or meeting with friends. It is no different for our residents the anticipation of the event, dressing up, joy of song, stories, memories of younger days - no medicine could do that for them. [Nursing Home Staff]*

---

The social connection observed at the sessions had a lasting impact on the relationships between residents and those caring for them, *“We observed how people’s faces would light up as they engaged with the performances, which contributed to a positive shared experience among staff, families, and residents. The immersive and engaging nature of the shows reduced social isolation and strengthened relationships within the care settings”* [M4].

The musicians’ efforts to connect with residents through familiar songs and accessible, participatory performances, *“One man got his harmonica out which was a real treat”* [M19] resulted in mutual enjoyment, reinforcing the bond between performers and participants, *“The singalong was great, as the musician took requests, and this was great for the older person. There was a connection there- mutual friends or neighbours”* [LA9]. In this way, this broke down social barriers leading to greater cohesion.

### **Participation**

In planning for these sessions, most of the Local Authorities and Nursing Homes represented in this evaluation stated that a participatory style of engagement was a key feature of the programming, *“our musicians all encourage storytelling, singing along and residents”* [LA2].

Involving residents in the way the sessions are run, *“The music visit is a shared inclusive interaction as opposed to a performance by musicians to a passive listening audience”* [M15] promoted active participation, *“Staff remarked that there was an increase in numbers of clients coming into the centre on the day of the music workshop”* [M20] therefore increasing engagement on the day, *“We often enter a*

*setting with the residents assembling. The room is quiet, hardly any chat or sound. when we leave most people are much brighter, smiling and chatting amongst themselves” [M16].*

While some residents were primarily observational during the sessions, many actively participated by singing along and dancing, highlighting the importance of interactive elements in programming, “Residents who normally sleep or can show signs of agitation and restlessness were singing to every song” [NH7]. Interaction between musicians, staff, residents, and their families, sets the scheme a part, “every, single resident was engaged, unlike other activities” [SM1].

It was observed at one live music session that the participatory nature of the session created momentum in the room - *Singalongs start as familiar music is played – musicians encouraging participants to lead songs by playing the music without singing lyrics. Residents concentrate on finding the words, encouraged by others who remember. Movement starts among residents (clapping, tapping etc) as the staff members begin dancing with each other, adding to animated response of residents and applause increases [SV3].*

---

*“Music groups are great for socialising because they can begin as purely passive appreciation and afford people opportunities to interact as the group “warms up”. It helps create a share space that can make it easier for people to connect with each other” [Musician]*

---

### **Cognitive Stimulation**

Engaging with music helped stimulate memory and emotional responses, “As a healthcare musician, I observed residents becoming more socially engaged, emotionally uplifted, and cognitively stimulated through our music sessions” [M14] even among those with dementia, providing opportunities for creative engagement for those with limited physical or cognitive abilities, “A lady who hadn’t spoken or moved a muscle almost, in a number of years, once raised her hand in the air as we sang like she was holding a cigarette lighter up at a concert” [M27].

These performances were designed to engage residents in song, storytelling and movement, regardless of their limitations, “I was able to slow down my performance and really engage with and appreciate the sensory needs of some of these older residents” [M7]. In this way, live music, delivered by skilled professionals offers older people access to their wider community, allows their care givers to understand previously hidden aspects of them which, “unlocks a spark within them, and we have seen many instances where residents have sung even when staff have said that they’ve never even heard them speak before” [M16]. In this way, as supported by the evidence noted by one SME interviewed for this evaluation, “cognitive stimulation through social connection delays decline” [SK].

Overall, the anticipation and engagement around live music events was facilitated by accessible and collaborative programming which cultivated active participation and community connections through shared creative experiences, addressing social isolation. Furthermore, live music serves as a powerful tool for cognitive stimulation, even among those living with impairments, ultimately contributing to a culture of positive aging and improved well-being. This theme emphasises the transformative impact of live music care settings.

## NOSTALGIA AND REMINISCING

The majority of Local Authorities and Nursing Homes who participated in this evaluation stated that they purposefully selected very familiar music when designing programmes with musicians which created *“connection and conversation as well as music and singing along. Song sheets were shared and could be used again by the centre”* [M19]. This theme will be discussed under **three sub-themes**, to describe how the whole topic addresses the core objectives of the scheme.

### Memory Activation and Reminiscence

Music serves as a powerful trigger for memories, helping residents recall personal histories, stories, and significant life events, leading to shared reminiscing *“They were very interested in the stories behind the songs”* [NH8]. Encouraging residents to share their own songs and stories enhances engagement, making the sessions lively and interactive, while also fostering a sense of ownership and agency, *“It brings back great memories of when I danced socially. It brings great life to the place and really gives you a buzz. Joining in the singing comes naturally, even if you can’t sing a note like myself”* [R1].

The integration of storytelling with music enriched the experience, as residents share their own narratives while reflecting on the songs, reinforcing bonds and communal memories, *“We play songs that they’ll remember, and that will remind them of times in their lives where music connected them to a person or a place or a time. We actively seek out stories about their lives that help bring them to a place of remembrance, and togetherness with other residents”* [M10]. Skilled musicians are critical to this integrative approach to performance.

### Emotional Engagement

Music evokes a wide range of emotions, allowing residents to experience both happy moments and reflective connections to their past, *“I have lost count of times when a song connects with them and the head lifts and a smile, a hand taps along, or they begin to sing”* [M11]. The music sessions are noted for their therapeutic benefits, helping those with dementia or Alzheimer's recall lyrics and engage in conversations, thus improving their ability to connect with themselves and others, *“Staff and families often highlight these responses to us. Family comments like “I couldn’t believe it - that was mam as I remember her in her prime - you brought her back through the music”. ”* [M15].

---

*“As songwriters we try to write songs using some of the phrases and stories they tell us so we can go back and sing the songs and they can really connect with it and they love it. It’s all good humoured and lots of laughing and sometimes tears that I would say are good tears because music always stirs emotion especially in the elderly”* [Musician]

---

### Connection to Local Heritage

The use of local songs, like "She Moves Through the Fair," and notable musicians, *“All the musicians were local as well, so they really connected with the residents”* [LA9] fostered a sense of familiarity and



community, enhancing residents' connections to their cultural roots and, *“celebrated people’s heritage”* [M4]. In addition, regional and local event planning in alignment with the musical programming for the scheme, such the Fleadh Ceol, encouraged greater levels of positive ageing across the community, connecting families and day-service users, reducing isolation and increasing social cohesion, *“Engaging in conversations with residents about music they listened to, and rediscovering forgotten regional songs has been truly amazing”* [M9].

In summary, nostalgia and reminiscing was noted as a significant experience for participants because it facilitates meaningful connections through memory recall and as such, programming familiar music for residents needs to remain a key consideration in future of this scheme. This theme demonstrates how a tailored repertoire creates an encouraging environment for residents to share personal histories, enhancing joyful moments of connection and fostering a sense of ownership over personal identities, which is particularly beneficial for those with cognitive impairments. Additionally, incorporating local songs and musicians deepens residents' connections to their cultural heritage, promoting community ties and reducing social isolation. Overall, this theme highlights how considered programming, delivered by skilled musicians, serves as a powerful tool for emotional engagement and social cohesion, enriching the lives of residents, staff and musicians, and directly addressing all three of the stated objectives of the scheme.

## RAPPORT AND CONNECTION

The consistent presence of familiar musicians (by programming multiple engagements, or famous performers) helped to establish familiarity and trust, leading to more effective sessions and enriching interactions that give space to residents' life stories. These tailored, interactive performances fostered a sense of community among residents, staff, and families, encouraging active participation and meaningful self-expression. There are **three sub-themes** against which the findings can be outlined in terms of their impact against the scheme objectives.

### Relationship Building

The long-term residency of musicians fostered deeper connections with residents, through regular opportunities to build rapport, which is beneficial for residents' emotional and social well-being, *“Regular music sessions provided a sense of purpose and routine. The consistent presence of the same teams of musicians has helped maintain the quality of sessions, providing stability and comfort for residents. Healthcare staff have noted the musicians' familiarity with residents as a key factor in overcoming challenges and ensuring effective sessions”* [M9].

Nurturing the relationship between residents, staff and the musicians played a central role in the longer-term benefits of the scheme, *“it allows us to communicate with them through music and song in a way that week on week maximises the effectiveness of what we’re trying to do”* [M11]. In particular, the building of confidence among residents, between sessions, allowing them to express their thoughts, feelings, and memories, *“Participants may not have any visitors or family that they can connect with so having an open space where people share stories, songs and laughter connects us all. This is vital to those who don't have regular times to connect with others”* [M28].

### Tailored Experiences for Self-Expression

The outcome of sustained engagement and relationship-building between residents and musicians reflected a people-centered approach, *“We transformed ‘Our Parlour’ into their parlour through*

*repertoire we discovered people loved. The return visits ensured that social connections were continually nurtured, helping to build a supportive community. This encouraged active participation and provided meaningful engagement for residents, ensuring each care setting received a tailored experience that resonated with its residents” [M4]. This can only be achieved through regular scheduling.*

The Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme prioritises residents’ voices and stories, empowering them to share their experiences and participate in the creative process, which is vital for their emotional health through self-expression. In turn, this provides the musicians with the opportunity to learn and build their repertoire to the taste and preferences of the audience, *“In preparing for the follow up session I would listen to what they requested / suggested and researched the songs then for the next session, bringing new material each week to add to the repertoire.” [M19].*

---

*“It is about their music, not ours, their expression, their voice, facilitated and supported by us” [Musician]*

---

### **Artistic Growth**

Musicians expressed their personal growth through the collaborative nature of these engagements and the opportunity to create music that reflects residents' lives, *“Performing as part of this scheme has been an enriching experience that has allowed me to grow as a musician in several meaningful ways. It’s a privilege to support residents in the moment, where they lead the song and we, as musicians, become the accompaniment” [M9].* Many musicians noted the skills required to navigate these diverse settings, *“For this it is as much about sharing musical space as our personal artistic expression, so it's a dialogue between what we and the group have to offer each other” [M29].*

Several described the way in which residents’ love for the music, *“breathed life into the repertoire for me to see it still appreciated” [M11]* which pushed them to develop their artistic practice to expand, *“their range of music and song, their ability to deliver a shared musical encounter, to place music in an appropriate and sensitive way, to communicate with residents and make room for their voices, to hear their stories and to write a piece of music and song in response to that experience” [M15].*

Similarly, the skills required to be able to meet the varied and evolving needs of residents eager to participate were extensive, from accompaniment to songwriting, *“Even without an instrument the residents sing along, and we will sing harmonies with them - a satisfying and creative output” [M11].* In this way, the musicians provide more meaningful opportunities for creative endeavours that address issues of social isolation and increase positive ageing among residents.

In summary, by regularly engaging a core group of skilled musicians, this scheme facilitates deeper relationships and meaningful interactions, enhancing the emotional and social well-being of residents and fosters community-building. In prioritising the voices of residents, the community of residents, staff, musicians and family members learn a great deal about each other, directly contributing to the personal growth of both residents and musicians, which is a core aspect of positive ageing. Overall, the collaborative nature of these musical engagements nurtures relationships which, in turn, combats social isolation, enhancing the quality of life for residents.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY

All respondents involved in the scheme evaluation spoke to a person-centred approach, “*where residents lead the experience*” [M10] which enabled the performances to reach residents across a broad spectrum of abilities and interests, “*It was an inclusive initiative for the residents. It did not matter what ability they have or what level of dementia they may be experiencing. The music and songs reached each of them in a very unique way it brought the majority of the residents together*” [NH7]. This position was shared by the SMEs interviewed, and in one example, they noted, “*Music activates parts of the brain, that has therapeutic benefits, relaxation and joy, in the right context*” [RN].

There are **two sub-themes** within this topic that illustrate how the scheme addresses social isolation, opportunities for creative engagement, and contribute to positive ageing.

### Community Integration

The initiative promotes socialisation among residents, with their families, and staff, fostering a sense of community, breaking down barriers to integration, “*The musical performances allowed people from all backgrounds to experience a moment of transcendence from the ordinary day to day worries*” [LA5] and as such provided a bridge between persons. As noted in section on Nostalgia and Reminiscing, the incorporation of local music and cultural elements personalised the experience by celebrating the residents' heritage, making it more relatable, “*Our residents were in Fleadh mode and felt included in local celebrations*” [NH15]. However, the limitation of hosting all sessions within the residential care setting was noted, “*Bringing residents out to music events, not always hosting in the facility, by making public spaces more accessible (modelling the Autism-friendly initiatives, as an example)*” [SK].

---

*“One of our residents held the hands of the singer and forgot she couldn’t walk and asked if she could get up and dance” [Nursing Home Staff]*

---

This accessibility issue for older persons was raised by all stakeholders who took part in this evaluation, “*We have an ageing population here, and there are people not living in residential care, who would really benefit. Also, of interest would be to host music in alternate settings and not just for older people, such as special education*” [LA2]. Several respondents noted that the publicity and marketing of these events could be used as a tool to create a more inclusive narrative around residential care settings, which in turn would invite greater numbers to attend, including family members, “*Include social media to promote and make social events out of the programming for areas*” [SK].

### Meeting People Where They Are

Opportunities for residents of all capabilities to participate—whether through singing, playing instruments, or sharing stories—was shown to ignite a part of their memory or abilities that were previously unknown to staff and other residents, “*I found this programme effective in promoting inclusion and decreasing isolation as residents who did not generally attend group sessions or activities, were among the most regular weekly attendees of the programme. I believe this to be because of the opportunity this programme provided them to express themselves through music and to make music in a safe, non-judgemental and inclusive environment*” [M12].

Music brings people together, which is particularly meaningful for those with limited cognitive or physical abilities, who may otherwise have reduced access to performances or musical expression, *“One service user at the Irish Wheelchair association stated that it was the highlight of the year, and he got to play his piano with the performers included him in the performance”* [LA3]. Ensuring the requisite skills, preparation, and time to enable this level of meaningful interaction has significant positive impacts on residents in terms of offering authentic creative opportunities with them.

In some cases, family members attended the live music sessions, bringing another dimension to the experience for residents and staff, *“All four generations of one family were at the event today”* [SM2]. Continuing to improve and evolve the programming to be as inclusive to family members as possible (such as scheduling etc) will go further to address social isolation for the residents.

The focus on individual needs and preferences ensured that residents felt valued, increasing the impact of the scheme on positive ageing. Having an open and flexible environment facilitated this needs-orientated approach, as was observed at a site visit, once the session began, more and more residents filtered into the social spaces, where they felt welcomed to participate or observe.

In some cases, greater efforts were made to quite literally meet people where they were, *“We visited those residents’ rooms that were unable to go to the main sitting room. We engaged at eye level with those in wheelchairs. They were part of our performance and sang and danced with us”* [M16]. This level of encouragement and bridging my musicians requires the appropriate training for. This is a key learning from this pilot scheme, if maximum levels of inclusion are to be achieved.

---

*“ The agency these simple acts provide brings immense joy to the participants, especially in a place where individual agency is hard to achieve. They also have the opportunity to sing solo, play percussion, clap and sing along. All brilliant and accessible ways to engage with music.”* [Musician]

---

In summary, this live music in nursing homes scheme employs a person-centered approach which allows residents to lead their creative experiences. Efforts to meet residents where they are, whether in communal spaces or their rooms, effectively reaches individuals of varying abilities, ensuring that everyone can participate meaningfully in the musical experiences. The scheme creates opportunities for creative engagement relevant to residents' cultural heritage, encouraging socialisation among residents, staff, and families. Ultimately, the initiative enhances the quality of life for residents by providing inclusive and accessible creative opportunities that promote positive ageing.

## POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE

This theme is broken into **two sub-themes** which reflect the impact of the live music in nursing home scheme on the atmosphere for residents living in residential care facilities.

### Joy and Optimism

The music sessions were anticipated with great excitement, creating a hopeful sense of. This gave residents a positive focus on which to look forward, fostering a sense of optimism around a meaningful activity, *“By creating a sense of occasion and involving residents in the development of the shows, the*

*project fostered a positive atmosphere, contributing to the overall engagement” [M4]. This optimism contributed towards a sense of joy among the staff and the residents, that lasted well beyond the individual sessions, “It created a nice atmosphere in the nursing home” [NH14].*

The musical sessions were observed across three site visits as joyous occasions, that took place in lively and uplifting environments - *Energy of anticipation in the room, great chat and rapport between residents, and with staff [SV3] - that created positive energy, “the atmosphere was electric” [NH1]. There was a shared sense of joy between residents, staff, and musicians at the co-creation of a positive atmosphere, “It has been a very fulfilling experience. Some of the sessions leave an afterglow, and I feel they have been definitive examples of how effective this work can be when given optimal conditions” [M22], that had a direct, beneficial impact, “The patients and staff showed obvious signs of an uplifting mood after each session” [NH18].*

In the ways outlined above, the positive atmosphere generated by the scheme feeds into a larger shift towards positive ageing environment in the facilities engaged in the programme.

### **Escapism**

Musical performances provide a temporary escape from daily worries and loneliness, allowing residents to experience joy and connection, *“I can easily say that every visit when we leave, we know in our hearts that we have left an extremely positive feeling in the room” [M15]. The performances consistently lead to visible improvements in mood and energy levels, providing a euphoric feeling for many residents, “The buzz it gives you when you could be a bit down” [R3]. In addition, many musicians spoke to the entry into another world at the sessions, and the learning and engagement that took place during their performances added to their sense of artistic fulfilment, “Our music is so appreciated. It’s the only time I feel my music performance has had such an impact on people. It’s the most fulfilling and rewarding work” [M16].*

As noted above, providing creative opportunities for meaningful escapism for those impacted by social, cognitive and physical impairments is an important aspect of building a positive ageing culture in residential care facilities in Ireland.

---

*To walk into a room and sing for those who gave so much over their lives feels like a thank you for your work. To get them joining in and singing songs for them, hearing their stories and seeing their faces light up is endearing and humbling and it warms my heart [Musician]*

---

The theme of a positive atmosphere in the live music in nursing home music scheme is characterised by two key sub-themes: joy and optimism, and escapism. Live music sessions generated excitement and anticipation among residents, fostering a hopeful and engaging environment that uplifted both residents and staff, lasting well beyond the sessions. Additionally, the musical performances provided residents with a temporary escape from daily worries, enhancing their mood and energy levels while fostering connection to self and others. Overall, the initiative significantly contributed to a positive ageing culture in residential care facilities, highlighting the profound impact of music on the emotional well-being of residents.

## SENSE OF WELLBEING

Overall, the music program was viewed as essential for enhancing the well-being of residents, addressing various aspects of their lives, including mental, emotional, and social health. This theme will be discussed using the **two sub-themes** noted below, highlighting the ways in which these aspects contributed to the overarching scheme objectives.

### Mood

Participants experienced noticeable and observed improvements in mental and emotional well-being following a music session, *“Music allowed the residents to connect with something beautiful. They found a sense of wellness and peace”* [NH14] which contributed to a greater sense of well-being. The sessions resulted in visible joy, relaxation, and emotional uplift, indicating a strong sense of resonance among residents who participated, *“The feelgood factor for them is indescribable. Look on their faces says it all”* [NH12].

### Confidence Building

Residents who actively participated in the sessions, showcased the empowering effect of music as a means of self-expression, *“Greater social inclusion, increased confidence and improved mood”* [M15]. Both residents and musicians found the experience fulfilling. Musicians noted the profound impact of their performances, highlighting the deep connection and engagement with participants, *“the benefit of this approach is our activity with the residents is very well received and staff tell us as much virtually after every visit, that the impact on the residents and in the setting in general is huge after we’ve visited and is more impactful than any other outside activities”* [M11]. In this way, this shared creative endeavour builds social and individual connections that reduce social isolation and contribute to a culture of positive ageing.

In sum, active engagement in the music sessions empowered residents, fostering greater social inclusion, confidence, and self-expression. Both residents and musicians found the experiences fulfilling, highlighting the deep connections formed through shared creativity, which in turn reduced social isolation and contributed to a culture of positive ageing within the facilities.

### 1.1.6. Subject Matter Expert Interview Findings

Interviews were conducted with five Subject Matter Experts who are working in the field of music, geriatrics, and nursing home provision. One of these individuals was directly involved in the scheme, with the remaining four providing useful insights related to the scheme design and relevant contextual factors. The findings are discussed under the three stated scheme objectives.

#### Positive ageing

Overall, the SMEs agreed that the scheme supports positive aging by promoting engagement, connection, and well-being through accessible music and social events, *“Even those with profound disabilities can be engaged by”* [SK]. In this way, the atmosphere of joy and hope generated from these music programmes in residential facilities encourages active participation and fosters a positive ageing environment, *“Growing older doesn’t mean individuals cease to exist”* [KD].



The impact of the scheme on positive aging emphasised by the SMEs was centred on reframing the experience of growing older by maintaining engagement as a way to help delay cognitive decline, promote physical health through dance, and by reigniting residents' interests in music and social events as a way to connect with other residents, musicians, and staff, which enhances care outcomes, *"Creating a space for joy, fun, and imagination to take place."* [RN].

### **Creative engagement**

Overall, the SMEs expressed their belief that the creative engagement opportunities made possible by this scheme cultivate a joyful, purposeful, and enriching environment for older people living in residential facilities, enhancing their quality of life and promoting holistic well-being.

These outcomes can be categorised into three areas: Human-centric approach, active participation model, and building confidence through curiosity.

By employing a human-centric approach, the experts stressed that a greater number of residents, with diverse backgrounds and abilities, can engage. This in turn, allows for greater autonomy and choice in music selection, and avoids ageist setlists. Music provides an outlet for residents to express themselves creatively and so offering appropriately tailored music encourages creative expression, *"Music can enrich people's experiences in Nursing Homes* [RN].

Active participation is facilitated by bringing outside influences into the residential facility, such as musicians, which changes the tenor of the usual daily routine, creating a more vibrant and dynamic environment. In turn, the design of these programmes is highly participatory, inviting residents to be both audience members and participants, fostering a sense of inclusion and engagement in musical activities.

Finally, it is through this active participation noted by many of the SMEs, that piques curiosity among residents, increasing engagement and leads to confidence-building. Live music provides new opportunities for residents to engage with dormant skills and talents that may have been overlooked or forgotten, creating a stronger sense of personal identity in a group setting, *"music does something other things can't, brining skills to the fore again for residents"* [SK].

### **Social Isolation**

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) believe that the Live Music in Nursing Homes scheme addresses social isolation by creating a vibrant social environment that actively fosters connections, and increases opportunities for movement (dance), creating a *"culture of movement"* [SK] that enhances the quality of life for nursing home residents.

The live music sessions are held in communal areas, rather than in sleeping zones, which, according to the feedback provided by the SMEs interviewed for this evaluation, is a critical factor in fostering greater levels of interaction. This continues beyond the sessions to build a more dynamic and supportive environment. Live performance events also bring people together from the community surrounding nursing home residents, *"it widens the community around those in nursing homes, which can often become much smaller"* [KD] helping to alleviate the isolating effects of moving into a care facility in

combination with an individual’s reduced social and or physical capacity.

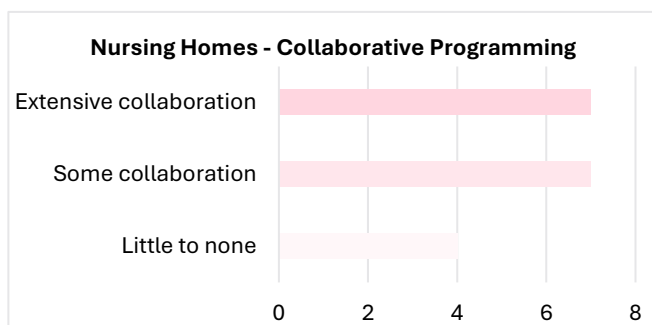
It was noted that the atmosphere that live music creates promotes warmth and congeniality among residents. In this way, residents are more open to, “*Being seen and having their voice heard through music*” [RN] which can enhance their sense of personal identity, “*Tapping into forgotten self within a person*” [RN] creating opportunities for meaningful connection with their peers, and therefore reduces isolation.

Overall, the interviews with five Subject Matter Experts in music, geriatrics, and nursing home provision revealed that the live music in nursing home scheme significantly supports positive aging by **promoting engagement and connection, boosting resident well-being**, including those with profound disabilities. In particular, they emphasised how the scheme can **reframe the experience of ageing**, encouraging active participation and helping to **delay cognitive decline** while reigniting interests. SMEs highlighted the **person-centric approach** in terms of the **accessible and inclusive** creative engagement opportunities that helped with **confidence-building, cultivating a vibrant environment** enhancing residents' **quality of life**. Additionally, they noted how the scheme effectively addresses social isolation by creating a **lively communal atmosphere that fosters connections** among residents and with the surrounding community.

### 1.1.7. Future Programme Considerations

#### Nursing Homes

Feedback about collaboration on the project was overwhelmingly positive, “*the programme was well coordinated at a higher level*” [NH4]. While the extent of collaborative programming reported by Nursing Home respondents varied, participants noted that the coordination of events, including planning, scheduling, and facilitating resident participation, is largely well-managed and clear.



It was stressed in the survey responses from Nursing Home representatives that regular communication between staff, musicians, and local authorities is key to successful collaborations, particularly in advance of hosting the sessions, “*It would be great to meet artists even on Zoom a week or two before performance*” [NH15].

These participants shared that resident’s express excitement and interest in future sessions, and not knowing when the next scheduled event would take place caused disappointment. This reflecting the importance of consistency and engagement in programming in making it an integral part of regular activities.

#### Musicians

The musicians who took part in this evaluation acknowledged the organisation and support provided, which enables them to focus on delivering high-quality performances, “[*they*] took so much time and care setting up the project and communicating with us and the staff across the care settings to ensure it

ran successfully” [M4]. Working closely with nursing home staff, residents, and local authorities at the planning stage, was noted as key to identifying the needs of residents, allowing for tailored programming and impactful performances.

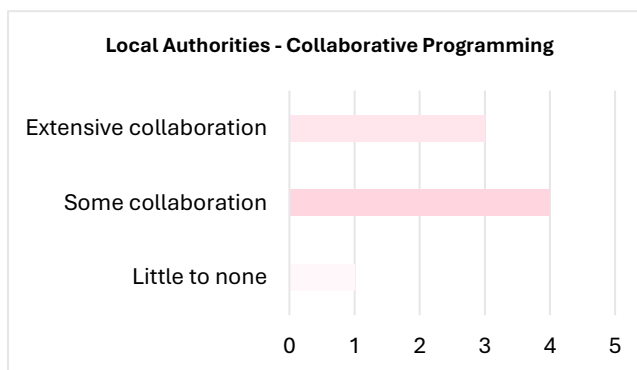
However, many noted not that knowing when funding would be allocated, why or how certain programmes were selected over others limited their ability to plan long-term collaborations with nursing homes and local authorities. This presented a challenge to their ongoing engagement, to which, some proposed, *“Post engagement review is carried out to see how we can further improve so that the project can adapt to changing needs”* [M13]. In addition, the majority (25/29) of musicians requested that further specialist training be provided as part of the scheme, with one respondent stating, *“I have already undertaken training on providing music in nursing homes and I feel that it's vitally important in this practice.”* [M12]

What is noted as significantly beneficial is creating a sense of familiarity between musicians and residents, facilitated by long-term programming, *“The consistent presence of the same teams of musicians has helped maintain the quality of sessions, providing stability and comfort for residents. Healthcare staff have noted the musicians' familiarity with residents as a key factor in overcoming challenges and ensuring effective sessions”* [M9].

### Local Authorities

Respondents from participating Local Authorities noted that their role in connecting musicians with nursing homes ensured that a partnership based on meaningful engagement could be realised, *“It just really needs to be done in an efficient 'we come to you way' where the collaboration is a proper partnership”* [LA7]. It was stressed that longer-term planning mechanisms are required to respond to the sense of disappointment among residents when, *“[they] became an audience. However, they went back to their rooms afterwards and did not know when the session would happen again”* [LA7]. This is also an important consideration for musician in respect of their capacity. In terms of the programming approach, the Local Authorities who participated in the survey reported a largely collaborative way of working with Nursing Homes

They shared that while collaboration is often logistical, there's a desire for deeper partnerships that leverage resources and skills to design more innovation in programming, with nursing homes open to new ideas and types of performances, *“capacity building program and collaboration program to increase the variety and quality of live music options for Nursing Home activity coordinators to engage locally”* [LA7].



### Subject Matter Experts

Overall, the SMEs emphasised a collaborative, flexible approach to music programming that prioritises resident engagement, staff support, and community integration, *“because choice and autonomy is a key aspect of positive ageing”* [SK].

They stressed that greater efforts are made to address the inclusion for older people in society by bringing residents to public music events, instead of hosting in facilities that are often not equipped with appropriate social spaces, *“access remains the biggest issue”* [TG]. As parts of these efforts, proactive stakeholder engagement was noted as a critical factor in positive ageing. The inclusion of residents in collaboration with local authorities and musicians at the planning stage was outlined as a way to engage in meaningful consultation to understand community needs, heritage and preference.

In terms of the broader management of the scheme, the individuals who took part in this portion of the evaluation acknowledged the wider context of operating a scheme such as this in a unique and dynamic environment. Supporting the coordinators and musicians, in the planning, training and procedural requirements associated with delivering a scheme like this would foster a greater sense of accountability and reduce workload on nursing home staff, *“Having a support link for accessibility to a health setting is key for, set up, introduction and knowledge of area”* [RN].

Finally, it was noted that due consideration be given to existing initiatives and working relationships between musicians and nursing homes, in order not to overshadow the organic relationships that have been established outside of this scheme, *“Variety is key”* [SK]. Therefore, moving away from the “Arts in/for Health” model to the “Arts and Health” approach that emphasises shared leadership and integrations with current music programmes in these settings.

In summary, while most feedback regarding the coordination of the scheme was positive, participants stressed the importance of predictable, regular scheduling to resident and musicians. Musicians appreciated the organizational support, though they expressed concerns about funding clarity and the need for specialist training relevant to performing in a healthcare setting. Local authorities underscored the significance of efficient partnerships and the desire for innovative programming. SMEs called for a flexible approach prioritizing resident involvement and accessibility to public events. Overall, participants expressed that future programming should focus on respecting the existing relationships that have been built and enhancing the music experiences for residents.

---

*“We have to be careful when building relationships with residents and nursing homes – if you build something and then take it away it can be damaging”*

*[Subject Matter Expert]*

---

## Conclusions

At the outset of this evaluation, our team were tasked with understanding the Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme in terms of its delivery against the **stated objectives** and how processes of **collaboration, delivery and programming** impact the outcomes experienced by older people engaged in the scheme in residential facilities. To do this, we draw on the findings detailed in the previous section. Following this, a sub-section on overall impacts and lessons learned will be outlined.

---

*“This project provides a creative pathway of engagement with music, history, sense of self and others and while celebrating through music” [Musician].*

---

### 1.1.8. Evaluation Aims

#### A. Support positive ageing

The HSE define positive ageing as, “a holistic individual, community and ‘whole-of-government’ approach to changing attitudes towards ageing”<sup>14</sup>. It includes the full complement of health and wellbeing determinants as outlined in the National Positive Ageing Strategy, including “positive physical, social and mental state. It requires that basic needs are met, that individuals have a sense of purpose and feel able to achieve goals that are important to them and that they can participate in society and live lives that they value”<sup>15</sup>.

The findings included in this evaluation report on the live music in nursing homes scheme clearly demonstrate the ways in which resident’s physical, social, and mental state was positively impacted.

Primarily, the inclusive and accessible process of programming ensure familiarity of repertoire, musical preference, and regional events are integrated into the live sessions, leading to greater anticipation, engagement and socialisation surrounding the events, providing all residents with the opportunity to engage in a creative activity that holds value for them.

The success of the live sessions could not be achieved without the highly skilled musicians involved. Their nuanced understanding of all aspects of music programming and delivery in the context of residential care facilities, brings residents with different levels of capacity together to enjoy a fully participatory musical experience. This person-centred approach affirms the value of resident’s interests, contributing to their sense of self, enhancing mood, their ability to connect, which fosters a positive atmosphere, contributing to residents’ emotional, social and physical wellbeing.

#### B. Engage with issues surrounding social isolation

The key themes within the findings of this evaluation on Anticipation and Engagement, Rapport and Connection, Social Inclusion and Accessibility, Nostalgia and Reminiscing respond directly to how the

---

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/positive-ageing/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/11714/d859109de8984a50b9f2ae2c1f325456.pdf>

scheme effectively engaged with issues of social isolation by creating a vibrant social environment that encourages connections among residents, musicians, staff and family members. Holding sessions in communal areas, the program enhances interaction and builds a supportive atmosphere that extends beyond the music events. The initiative also brings in community members, widening social circles and alleviating the isolating effects of nursing home life. The skilled performers promote warmth and engagement, meeting people where they are in terms of capacity, allowing residents to express themselves and connect meaningfully with peers as a result. Through participatory elements, residents are encouraged to join in and celebrate their cultural heritage, which reinforces personal identity and cultivates a sense of community, ultimately reducing feelings of isolation.

### **C. Provide creative engagement opportunities for older people**

The varied performers, inclusive creative planning, social preparations, engagement during sessions, interaction between residents, staff and families before, during, and after, highlight the extensive opportunities provided for creative engagement for older persons through this scheme.

Specific creative opportunities noted in this evaluation report are included within the Anticipation and Engagement, Nostalgia and Reminiscing, and Social Inclusion and Accessibility themes.

Crucially, by creating a truly inclusive, accessible environment for residents to participate in programming and performance, the live music sessions are tailored with their varying interests and abilities in mind. This increases levels of engagement.

Skilled musicians, with experience performing in different, challenging, environments mean a highly responsive performance style, increasing engagement opportunities for all residents, including those with significantly diminished cognitive capacity.

Highly engaged local authorities, nursing home management and staff, create a conducive environment for the live music performances to take place. Fostering a sense of occasion and celebration around the events, adding an important dimension to the culture of residential facilities.

#### *Do the varied processes of collaboration and delivery have any bearing on the outcomes for people?*

As noted above, a person-centred, highly collaborative approach to programming and performances allowed for a greater level of engagement among residents with varying levels of capacity, meaning more people experience the social (connection), physical (accomplishment) and mental (sense of self) benefits of live music. This is positive ageing in action.

In summary, while most feedback regarding the coordination of the scheme was positive, participants stressed the importance of predictable, regular scheduling to resident and musicians. Musicians appreciated the organisational support, though they expressed concerns about funding clarity and the need for specialist training relevant to performing in a healthcare setting. Local authorities underscored the significance of efficient partnerships and the desire for innovative programming. Subject Matter Experts called for a flexible approach prioritising resident involvement and accessibility to public events. Overall, participants expressed that future programming should focus on respecting the existing relationships that have been built and enhancing the music experiences for residents.

#### *Does the type of music experience impact on outcomes for people?*

Familiar music significantly impacts outcomes for older persons by enhancing emotional engagement, cognitive stimulation, and social connection. When musicians incorporate familiar songs into their

performances, it strengthens bonds between performers and residents. This participatory approach encourages residents to actively engage through singing, storytelling, and dancing, which not only positively impacts their mood but also stimulates memory and emotional responses, even among those with cognitive impairments. By triggering reminiscence and providing a platform for self-expression, familiar music creates an inviting atmosphere that promotes social cohesion and a sense of belonging, ultimately enriching the lives of residents and contributing to their overall well-being.

### 1.1.9. Impact

Of the 18 Nursing Homes that responded to the survey, the median number of performances held at those sites was 4. Audience numbers averaged out at 34 residents per performance. However, it was regularly noted that the reach extended well beyond the direct engagement at sessions, *“Nursing home Activity Coordinators can follow up on performances with related activities – such as creating artworks in response to the performance”* [GP].

There are two notable aspects of how the Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme was delivered in terms of achieving the stated objectives and realising positive impacts beyond the original scope. These are the innovative approach in the context of contextual challenge, and the collaborative model of design and delivery.

#### **Innovative approach**

- The Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme emerged as a response to COVID-19 restrictions, but necessity is the mother of invention, and it paved the way for meaningful culture change. There was an openness to experimentation and trying ‘something new’. The context of COVID-19 inspired a strong shared purpose and acceptance of a more agile, creative approach.  
*“Experience provides a mental fortitude. The COVID experience strengthened this skill set.”*  
[GP]
- The skill and experience of the artists was a key element of the scheme and will remain key in offering an experience that responds and adapts to the participants’ needs. Both staff and creative partners referenced how the programme has been adapted to meet the specific situations of the nursing homes and patients. They also highlighted how the programmes evolved based on the response of patients and the artistic reflections of the musicians. The value of a creative practice and mindset was clear in increasing and improving the impact for participants.
- The adoption of a person-centred approach, combined with skilled artists, allowed the programme to have a deeper and wider impact. Allowing the programme to evolve based on the patients’ responses resulted in a stronger connection as well as stronger social and individual impacts. Linking into local and personal musical styles, rather than a set repertoire appeared to be effective. Allowing space and time for patients to participate increased the impact and while also providing a sense of pride and purpose.

### Collaborative model

- Both staff and artistic partners mentioned that collaboration had improved the scheme and increased its impact. Significant trust in the partnership was established during Covid and the ongoing collaboration continued to be central to the impact of the scheme.
- **Involve staff across all stages of the programme:** It is important that there is good collaboration from conception to delivery and beyond for the programme to have optimal impact. The anticipation of the programme is a key noted benefit, as well as the follow on from the performances, such as establishing musical evenings or performances. The role of the staff in supporting the preparation and anticipation for the programme was highlighted, as well as their role in identifying opportunities to embed elements in the nursing home.
- **Participatory style of performing familiar music:** The programmes where there were strong levels of participation, local music or familiar songs or types of music were seen to have the strongest impact. The role of staff, and family, in supporting patients to get involved and to share the music that they love was highlighted as an important element of the scheme.
- **Inclusive & accessible:** A number of artistic partners mentioned how they had adapted their approaches to include those with special needs - slowing down or bringing performances to those outside the common rooms. Staff and families are key in helping identify and solve for the extra needs of some of the participants and sharing these learnings across programmes.

Live music, as an artform, can provide creative opportunities to those with mixed abilities in a way other creative activities cannot. The social associations live music performances have for individuals increase instances of cohesion both within the residential facility and across the community. The cognitive, physical and emotional connections live music performance provide is evidenced throughout the findings of this evaluation; often demonstrating how it facilitates individuality and personhood for those residents previously thought incapable of doing so. Live art has intrinsic value, and this is demonstrated in the varied ways it positively impacts those who have access to it.

---

*Music is a great way to include everyone even if the person only listens to the music. [Nursing Home Staff]*

---



1.1.10.Lessons Learned – Live Music in Nursing Homes Scheme

AREA	COMMENTS	STAKEHOLDERS IMPACTED
<b>Group Size &amp; Frequency</b>	Limiting the number of attendees can improve the quality of interactions and experiences for residents. Hosting smaller groups more frequently within the settings allows musicians to build trust, rapport, and then design bespoke repertoire for greater impact.	NH Staff, Musicians, Residents
<b>Funding and Frequency</b>	Clarity on funding allocation and a longer-term funding model was shared by many participants in this evaluation who felt uncertainty led to disappointment for residents, and scheduling challenges for the skilled musicians required for the scheme to run successfully.	Residents, Musicians
<b>Staff Involvement</b>	It's crucial for staff to be present during performances to assist residents when necessary, ensuring safety and support. Furthermore, benefits to staff morale, positive atmosphere and social cohesion in residential care settings can be realised only if staff buy-in and engagement is encouraged and facilitated throughout the planning and hosting process	Staff, Residents, Musicians, Nursing Homes
<b>Flexibility and Space Considerations</b>	Arrangements should be adaptable to different settings, considering room sizes and the need for wheelchair access. Seeking out opportunities to take residents outside their usual setting for performances were mentioned, as a change of environment could be beneficial.	Nursing Homes, Staff, Musicians

<b>Support and Training</b>	A lack of structured support and training for musicians in Arts & Health practices was noted, which is essential for delivering quality sessions that prioritises resident engagement.	Musicians, Residents, Local Authorities
<b>Inclusion of Broader Audience</b>	Suggestions were made to extend the program to include day care visitors and other types of residential services, such as disability services. In addition, wider promotion or events to family members and friends of those in residential care settings is believed to be of importance to fostering a positive ageing culture.	Residents, Staff
<b>Diverse Programming</b>	Suggestions included incorporating a wider range of activities, such as movement, dance, art, or exercise, alongside music to enhance the experience.	Residents, Musicians

---

# THANK YOU

**M-CO**

43 Fitzwilliam Place,  
Dublin 2,  
D02 FY81,  
Ireland.

**Contact:**

Name: Angel Cassin  
Email: [acassin@mco.ie](mailto:acassin@mco.ie)  
Office: +353 1 887 0630