

Music Heals for Tompkins Seniors: Report of Outcomes 2015-2016

June 2016

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Introduction:

Musicians for World Harmony's (MWH) mission is "to use the healing power of music to reawaken humanity in the hearts of displaced and distressed peoples affected by war and disease in an effort to promote peace, understanding, and harmony." Our work spans international and domestic audiences, serving children, families and individuals including seniors.

With the 65+ population growing, many more people face challenges of aging including social issues that contribute to health problems and physical decline such as isolation, loneliness, and depression. Music has been proven to reach parts of peoples' minds that help combat these issues and contribute to a more robust life.

Starting in 2014, MWH director Samite Mulondo has toured with Dr. Bill Thomas and other speakers and performers to share the significant impacts that music makes. The 2014 documentary *Alive Inside* featured Samite and this work.

Senior centers have long striven to build common areas, computer rooms, libraries and group activities into their

Participating Sites:

Ellis Hollow Apartments

- East Hill, Ithaca

McGraw House

- Downtown
Ithaca

Juniper Manor

- Trumansburg

offerings. Still, most have little or no funding to pay for supportive programming or entertainment that encourages sociability, particularly those that serve low-income seniors. To reach seniors locally, where MWH is headquartered, we sought funds to partner with senior housing providers to offer musical programs and a method to begin to quantify the effects for older people in a quasi-formally way. We are very grateful to the Tompkins Charitable Gift Fund, which made the programs and this evaluation possible.

Summary of findings:

The project's goal is to promote sociability, positive mood, and memory among the participants.

A total of 66 seniors and five apartment staff attended the three performances between December 2015 and April 2016. Of these, 44 seniors (about two-thirds) and all of the staff completed a brief, optional one-page survey at the end of the session. Three out of five apartment staff members, one from each building, weighed in on impressions a month after the program. MWH also sought input from staff in each of the buildings who attended that day, at the end of the program, and again a month afterward to determine any potential lasting impressions or effects of the program. MWH measured:

- perceptions of change in mood from before the program to afterward
- whether the activities stimulated any memories for the participants
- from the apartment staff, whether any positive changes in sociability among the tenants occurred or were sustained 3 to 4 weeks later
- general observations about the program and feedback



*McGraw House,
January 8, 2016*

Summary of findings:

70%

of seniors gave responses indicating an improvement in mood.

59%

of seniors experienced memories during the program.

80%

of apartment building staff noted positive changes in mood during the program.

60%

of apartment building staff observed and noted memories among seniors.

33%

of apartment building staff noted a change in sociability and felt it was sustained a month later.

100%

of respondents, seniors and apartment staff said they would like to have the program come back.

100%

of all respondents, seniors and apartment staff, felt the experience would be beneficial for others.



*Performance at
Juniper Manor on
4/18/26 – also
attended by 3rd
through 6th
graders from
Namaste
Montessori
School*

Impact on Mood:

70% of seniors reported an improvement in mood following the Music Heals program.

The survey was distributed directly at the end of the performance to any attending senior who wanted to complete one. It asked two questions related to mood:

**Before the performance today, how were you feeling?
How do you feel right now?**

Many of the respondents commented on a feeling that was negative **before the performance**, but some comments were positive or neutral. Some examples:

Negative examples: Tired, Frustrated, tight, stressed, Reluctant to leave my apartment, sad, a bit “down”, down in the dumps, I had bad news from my doctor, “yeesh”, and low, bored.

Neutral examples: OK, so-so, average, neutral, indifferent

Positive examples: good, fine, happy and good, interested, curious

All of the comments on feeling after the performance were positive. Some examples:

Happy, Better, elated, happy and open, uplifted, great, happier and hopeful, fine, calm and energized, up, very good, elated, joyful, happy I came, delighted, refreshed, much improved, rejuvenated, even better, blessed, wonderful, mellow.

Responses and ratings per building site were:

	<u>EH</u>	<u>McG</u>	<u>JM</u>	<u>Total</u>
Total Responses:	14	23	7	44
Before perf feeling -	8	9	0	17
Before perf feeling +	3	6	2	11
before perf feeling neut	2	6	3	11
before perf feeling no resp		0	2	2
How feel now -	0	0	0	0
how feel now +	12	22	7	41
how feel now neut	0	0	0	0
# improve in mood	10	15	6	31
% improve in mood	83%	68%	86%	70%

Also, 4 out of 5 of the apartment staff members reported that they observed positive changes in mood in the residents during the performance and how they could tell:

“Smiling, singing and laughing.”

“Especially when he came back to the back row playing the thumb instrument.”

“People appeared to open up and join in more.”

“They started to enjoy the performer.”

Impact on Memories

59% of seniors reported experiencing memories during the Music Heals program.

An essential part of the Music Heals program is the invitation to share the experience, particularly with stories.

Samite Mulondo drew upon his rich background of stories, folklore from Uganda, and experiences in his life, sharing them in between his songs, often as an explanation of where individual songs got their origin or what he was experiencing at the time he wrote them. To varying degrees in each setting, he invited the seniors to share a song they knew or a story from their lives. After the program, the survey asked whether the program brought up any memories and if yes, what they remembered. A sample of their responses:

- Not memories but grateful to have been here
- Singing with my grandmother
- Spending time outside as a child
- My childhood and how fortunate we were
- My experiences with refugee populations
- Being an infant in World War II – bombing and healing
- Friends
- Role of music in my family and childhood
- Grassroots!
- How every once in a while, something really nice happens.

Memory experiences varied by building:

	<u>EH</u>	<u>McG</u>	<u>JM</u>	<u>Total</u>
Total Responses:	14	23	7	44
Memories? Yes	12	11	3	26
Memories yes %	86%	48%	43%	59%
Memories no			2	
Memories no resp.			2	

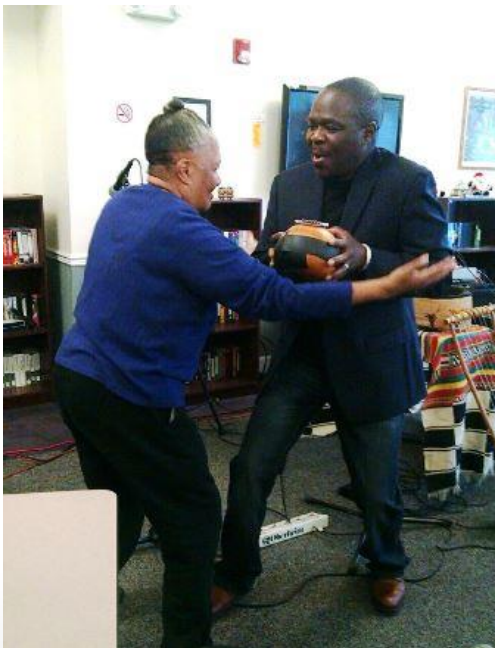
Impact on Sociability:

Only apartment building staff was surveyed on this question, and only at the later time, approximately one month after the program. While five staff people in total observed the programs, only three completed this follow-up survey. Of the three, only one, the site manager at Ellis Hollow Apartments noted this impact. One staff from another location answered the question "unsure" and the third site answered it "no."

33% of apartment building staff noted a positive change in sociability among residents and felt that it was still observable a month later.

In the time following each performance, residents were observed interacting quite frequently – individually with the performer and MWH staff, as well as one another. For example, at Ellis Hollow, one attendee approached Samite afterward, and they sang a couple of lines from a Bob Dylan song together that the man had remembered. After that, another resident and the man chatted for quite a while about what Dylan CD's each had and compared notes on favorite songs. Some residents lingered a while, while others went off to their apartments fairly quickly after things ended.

For future evaluations, we will likely add this question to the survey immediately following the performance, to better determine any immediate sociability vs. sustained terms.



*Ellis Hollow
Apartments, January
2015: Most
performances have
people singing and
clapping. Sometimes
they dance!*

Other Comments:

Quite significantly, every person who completed an evaluation – seniors and staff alike – noted that they thought the program would benefit other groups of people, and all wanted to see it again.

One property manager, who attended at Juniper Manor, was very interested in bringing the program to other sites for seniors that his nonprofit, INHS/BHTC, manages in the region. These sites present a variety of sizes, populations, and mix of rural and urban settings, which could provide interesting observable differences.

Some additional comments received from residents and staff:

"Thank you for a beautiful experience."

"It was very powerful for our residents!"

"Please come back!"

"The stories were wonderful! He is so talented!"

"Totally unexpected!"

"Very interesting. Keep up the good work! The world needs more."

"Keep this program going!"

"Thank you so much for sharing your beautiful music, my soul has been enriched. Please come back soon!"

Conclusion:

This was not a scientific evaluation, and other variables in each performance could have influenced the variety of responses. For example, many of the Ellis Hollow Apartments seniors were familiar with Samite from previous shows, while at Juniper Manor no people had prior experience with his performances or knew of MWH. The sample size is also quite limited. However, the observed benefits of this program show, to some degree, the benefits of music in a group setting to the lives of the aging. They provide tangible, local experiences to illustrate work that is being studied more and more widely throughout the U.S. and the world, and will help MWH in planning future programming to meet the goals described at the beginning of this report.

Musicians for World Harmony is deeply grateful to the Tompkins Charitable Gift Fund for the grant that made this series possible for the 66 seniors in our area who participated!