

Music for wellbeing

Lost Chord UK has run music sessions for people with dementia for over 20 years. Jessica Hubbard joined events in Sheffield and Newark to see music create joy.

Quick read

Lost Chord UK has been using music to improve the lives of people with dementia for more than 20 years.

The charity delivers around 95 choirs, singalongs, virtual and one-to-one sessions, and music workshops every month.

Dancing, singing and song writing can engage people who otherwise struggle to take part in activities or lose interest.

Describing the impact of her day service's first session, Tracy Hutchinson says, 'We were so spellbound that none of us left our seats.'

Lost Chord UK runs music sessions for people with memory loss and dementia. The charity has expanded from working in 11 residential homes in Rotherham to having 'satellite' schemes across England and Wales.

It aims to improve the lives of people with dementia through the transformative effects of music.

Clare Langan, CEO and flautist, says, 'The sessions, be they in a care home, community setting, a workshop or a bedside one-to-one, are truly amazing.'

'In every session the lives of attendees, including residents, clients, carers, relatives, volunteers or musicians, are improved for the better.'

'It is a thing of such beauty – having a 70-year old gentleman say to me, "Clare, I am 70 and have never done anything musical my entire life and now I have dementia I have written a song... and performed it!" It's amazing.'

Bringing back joy

Apathy – losing interest in things – is a common symptom of dementia. Lost Chord UK uses music to help bring back joy and meaning for people living with the condition.

A community choir at Sheffield's Quaker Meeting House, funded by the Power of Music Fund, is just one example. It runs twice monthly with musician and composer Luke Carver Goss.

'Originally we were only going into care homes but post-pandemic we've broadened out into choirs, singalong groups and workshops, which are great to be part of,' Luke says.

During a session in April, the choir did warm-up exercises before singing both some familiar songs and action songs. They then wrote an instant song together.

'Our job is to go in and make life just that little bit better for people,' Luke says.

'Having worked here for 20 years, I know that the vast majority of people participating in music are going to leave feeling happier. It's not rocket science.'

Fortnightly treat

June Salt heard about the choir while listening to BBC Radio Sheffield. She's now a regular and travels to the sessions by bus, with volunteers phoning to remind her on the day.

June recently treated the choir to a solo of Elvis's Can't Help Falling in Love.

'I'd love to tell you how important this group is to me and spread the news about it,' June tells me. 'This is my third visit and I've been looking forward to coming.'

Volunteer Coordinator Anne-Marie Wilcock joined the session with her father, Edwin.

'The musical gene skipped a generation,' says Anne-Marie, 'My dad sings, my nan used to play the piano and I used to practise on her piano before I got my own.'

'My brother and my mum aren't particularly musical but while me and Dad are here, Mum's having an hour to herself in the city centre.'



Clare Langan

Find out more about
Lost Chord UK at
www.lost-chord.org.uk or
call **0300 131 7889**.

For The activities handbook:
Supporting someone
with dementia to stay
active and involved,
visit [alzheimers.org.uk/
activitieshandbook](http://alzheimers.org.uk/activitieshandbook) or call
0300 303 5933.



Time together

Long-time friends Bertha and Esther are also members. Bertha has Alzheimer's and is unable to speak.

'I've known Bertha for so many years and it's really upsetting to see her like this,' Esther says.

'Even if she doesn't really speak or sing, sometimes she opens her eyes. We've been coming here for so many years. It's special we can share this time together.'

During the session, Esther shared a Spanish song with the group. Bertha is from Chile so including Spanish lyrics helps to make the group inclusive and meaningful.

Lisa, who helps to care for Bertha, said, 'Bertha's got no speech, but she can respond to music of all sorts. Bertha's always loved singing and music so I've prioritised the choir as a means of connecting with people.'

Lisa describes the sessions as a lifeline. She believes they help families, carers and friends of people with dementia to maintain relationships with them that aren't only based on caring.

Spellbound

In nearby Nottinghamshire, Tracy Hutchinson, says Lost

Chord brought a 'new lease of life' to Newark and Sherwood day services.

'It all started with one gentleman, Roger,' explains Tracy, a day service leader. 'We were struggling to engage him in activities, and he was disturbing other residents.'

'But when Clare came down and started playing the flute, Roger – who was virtually "nonverbal" – was clapping and saying, "Oh isn't this excellent."'

'We were so spellbound that none of us left our seats. The room was soon filled with people.'

Without Roger, Tracy says the sessions might not have happened. They have gone on to benefit other service users like Bob, who usually struggles to engage in activities but happily joins in with the music.

'Staff now use music with Bob all the time – different music for different support such as lunchtime, relaxing and movement.'

'I'm so desperate to bring music to this building as therapy. But not therapy for illness, therapy for people's wellbeing.'

See [alzheimers.org.uk/
singingforthebrain](http://alzheimers.org.uk/singingforthebrain) or call
0333 150 3456 to find a
local Singing for the Brain
group or to start your own.