

The importance of ethnically inclusive music

September 21, 2022



The theme for this year's **World Alzheimer's Month** is #KnowDementia #KnowAlzheimers. At Music for Dementia, this got us thinking about not just what people know about the power of music for those with dementia, but also what do people know about using ethnically inclusive music to really ensure that the use of music in dementia care is truly personalised, particularly for those from ethnic communities.

For World Alzheimer's Month in 2020, we highlighted that the stigma attached to dementia across a number of cultures means BAME dementia communities are not actively seeking support, meaning that thousands of people are living with the condition without the appropriate support. The five main South Asian languages (Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Gujarati and Bangla) don't have a word for dementia, and this creates a difficulty when you try to have a conversation about dementia.

Many services providing music for those living with dementia are striving to ensure that the music they are using truly and authentically reflects the communities that they are working with in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way, but this can be challenging if this is not an area of practice you are familiar with.

We're delighted to be shining a spotlight on the work of [Shared Harmonies](#), a community interest company that uses singing to help improve health and wellbeing for those living with dementia and other long-term conditions. [Shared Harmonies](#) received a grant from our Paul and Nick Harvey Fund in 2021 to develop the musical diversity of their singing for dementia offer.

They wanted to widen the demographic of people they work with and explore musical repertoire that went beyond the "Vera Lynn" perceptions of music for those living with dementia in order to better connect with people from different ethnic groups living with dementia.

Working with [So Many Beauties](#), an organisation that specialises in working with ethnically diverse communities, they set about learning how music and dementia practitioners and services can enhance their offer to ensure that they are providing a truly ethnically inclusive musical offer.

Through the many conversations they had, some of the barriers that came up for people to access appropriate cultural music offers and for practitioners in providing those services, included the stigma of a dementia diagnosis, attitudes towards singing and music in different ethnic groups, as well as using music more generally in relation to dementia care. Tied into this were cultural assumptions, a sense of mistrust and feelings of racial discrimination. These are significant barriers and challenges, but [Shared Harmonies](#) also learnt about how these can be worked with and overcome through a change of approach in practice.

This includes:

- Taking time to know communities and understand their needs
- Co-creating services with community members, community and faith leaders

- Allowing people to bring relatives with them but also allowing space for family carers to have respite
- Using visual information, with appropriate representation – not just white people
- Using culturally appropriate language and diagnostic tests
- Having translation available
- Providing transportation

These are valuable learnings and insights that [Shared Harmonies](#) is keen to promote and what better way to do this than to put it into practice. As part of this project, they have created a Song Book and Practitioner Guide on developing ethnically inclusive music and dementia practice which will be launched on Monday 10th October at an online event, which is free to attend for those who are keen to develop their work in this area. The event will include guest speakers, panel discussions and practical demonstrations. **More details can be found [here](#).**

We're delighted to see this work developing. Congratulations to [Shared Harmonies](#) and [So Many Beauties](#) on this collaboration.

Truly personalised musical offers for those living with dementia reflect the whole person. To do this in a truly meaningful way, it means tapping into the breadth and richness of the many, many styles and genres of music that reflect the whole dementia community in the UK and the many associated cultures and musical sound worlds.

Source: <https://musicfordementia.org.uk/news-and-media/blog/2022/09/sharedharmonies/>