

Music therapy strikes a chord in Oak Bay

Music Therapist Julie Bomhof leads a hand chime choir to the tune of Beautiful Dreamer at the Kiwanis Pavilion on Cedar Hill Road.

By Staff Writer – Victoria News

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Music is often referred to as a universal [language, and one person who has seen this first hand is Kiwanis Pavilion music therapist Julie Bomhof.](#)

At the Pavilion, Bomhof primarily works with residents who have been diagnosed with dementia.

Though she works with many of them week after week, they often don't remember her.

"I work with a resident who is bed or wheelchair bound," she said. "At times her eyes light up with recognition when I come in. She may not know my name or me, but recalls previous music experiences with me."

The resident shows a connection with Bomhof through eye contact, a smile or a gentle touch of her hands.

"After singing with another resident, I caught out of the corner of my eye, she had brought her hands together in a gesture of applause. This was a valuable moment of a socially cognitive response," Bomhof said.

Bomhof began working at the Kiwanis Pavilion while she was in the fifth year of earning her bachelor of music therapy, and was hired as the music therapist right after she graduated.

"I spent half of my 20s volunteering overseas," Bomhof said. "I am passionate about helping others. I have always loved music and have seen the ability that music has to reach past the surface to the heart of a person. Music therapy is a combination of two of my passions: counselling and creating music."

Bomhof's volunteering days came to an end when she was 27, and a friend's mom told her she would be a good music therapist.

She'd never heard of the profession before and after some research into what would be required, it seemed the career was a perfect fit for her.

“It was during my internship that I decided on music therapy and the geriatric population. I haven’t regretted a single day. I love my job and can’t imagine doing anything else.”

In her work at the Kiwanis Pavilion, Bomhof works with residents at various stages of dementia, which dictates the approach she takes with her therapy.

For those who still have high cognitive function, she runs a hand chime choir called the Blue Bells.

“The residents engage in creating a melody by watching for direction and individually playing a hand chime, which encourages muscle strength and gives a sense of accomplishment, along with social interaction,” said Bomhof. “For someone with dementia, memory fades and cognitive function decreases. Soon they do not recognize faces of loved ones and are confused and upset about why they are not living at home.”

One thing Bomhof has seen is although memories fade at different rates for different patients, long term memory lasts longer than short term memory.

Familiar songs from a patient’s past have the power to transport them back to the time they heard it.

“For that short period of time the music has restored a part of their memory. The lyrics return and are sung, the emotions and memories are expressed,” she said.

Bomhof also works with residents who are in the later stages of dementia, who have lost the ability to communicate with words.

“Non-verbal cues are important, such as a foot or hand tapping with the rhythm of the music, eye contact, a smile and the gesture of applause,” she said. “These are also expressions of music memories and communication. Music can still reach past the disease and create a social interaction.”

The Kiwanis Pavilion is a care home run by the 35 members of the Oak Bay Kiwanis club, it includes 122 complex-care beds.

In addition to the other projects the group runs, such as the Tea Room at Willow’s Beach and two other homes for seniors.

As a fundraiser for the music therapy program at the Pavilion, the Oak Bay Kiwanis is hosting an event at the Uplands Golf Club on April 20. The group hopes to raise a total of \$100,000 for the Oak Bay Kiwanis Pavilion Foundation.

Did you know?

Tickets for the gala dinner and silent auction are \$80 and are available on Sundays from 9 a.m. to noon at the Willows Beach Tea Room, at the **Kiwanis Pavilion** at 3034 Cedar Hill Road or by calling Jan at 250-592-1570 or go to kiwanisclubofoakbay.com