
MusicWorks Program

Evaluation

Prepared for FriendshipWorks

Katherine M. Richman, PhD, MS, RN

Caitlin Coyle, PhD

**The Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging
(CSDRA) Gerontology Institute
University of Massachusetts Boston**

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Introduction

MusicWorks is a program whose purpose is to bring the joy of music, free of charge, to residents of Boston affordable senior housing buildings, through interactive music groups and music-themed activities. The primary goals of the program, reinforced by the Surgeon General's warning about the health impacts of social isolation (OSG, 2023), are to reduce isolation and promote community. The program also aims to promote physical health, through activities like dancing and Zumba, to bring forth memories, and to support cognition. MusicWorks was initiated in 2018 by FriendshipWorks, an independent nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, in partnership with Goddard House Community Initiatives. In 2023, MusicWorks was active in 15 senior buildings in the City of Boston, serving nearly 700 older adults annually (per 2023 records). Many MusicWorks participants are Black or Hispanic, and a significant proportion are monolingual Spanish speakers. The program serves a multilingual, multicultural population, including speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese, Russian, Haitian Creole, Albanian, and other languages as well.

FriendshipWorks was founded in 1984 to serve vulnerable older adults in Greater Boston. FriendshipWorks' programming aims to reduce elders' social isolation, enrich their quality of life, and maintain their dignity. The organization's core values and guiding principles are "Connectedness, Joy & Comfort, Mutuality, Curiosity, Trust, Empathy, and Collaboration." Janet Seckel-Cerrotti, the founding Executive Director, has been a leader at FriendshipWorks since its inception 40 years ago. She recently announced her retirement in March of 2025.

Founding MusicWorks funder and thought-partner since 2018, Goddard House Community Initiatives (GHCI) has funded MusicWorks since it began. GHCI is an innovative social enterprise with a vision to reduce social isolation and enhance well-being among under resourced older adults in Greater Boston. GHCI achieves this through professionally taught creative aging programs that foster self-expression and new friendships. GHCI is part of Goddard House, the oldest elder care organization in Massachusetts and the second oldest in the country. GHCI extends the organization's mission beyond its campus in Brookline, Massachusetts, and into Greater Boston.

FriendshipWorks currently sponsors five programs, including MusicWorks. MusicWorks is unique in that it is staffed by professional musicians and exclusively serves the residents of senior apartment buildings in Boston, nearly all of which are home to residents receiving means-based housing subsidies. Safiya Leslie is MusicWorks' Music Manager. A full-time employee, she is assisted by approximately 15 other musicians, linguistically and culturally

diverse, who are paid a stipend for each group. Julie Burkley, FriendshipWorks' Director of Programs, oversees the program. In most of the buildings served, the groups meet biweekly. Of the seven buildings included in this evaluation, groups currently meet biweekly at Back of the Hill (BOTH), Council Tower, Holgate Apartments, Julia Martin House, and Spencer

3

House/Cooper House, monthly at *Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción* (IBA), and three times per month at Nate Smith House.

MusicWorks was evaluated in 2019 by researchers at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston)'s Gerontology Institute (Nadash & Anziani, 2020). In 2024, FriendshipWorks commissioned different researchers at the Gerontology Institute to complete an updated evaluation. The purposes of the present evaluation are twofold. *The first purpose is to learn more about the program's influence, especially in fostering connections among residents. The second purpose is to guide the program's expansion, helping its leaders to discern whether to prioritize breadth or depth of attendance and participation*—in other words, whether to maximize outreach to building residents or to prioritize community building among frequent participants. Specifically, the researchers have been asked to address the following questions:

- What impact is MusicWorks having on residents who attend more frequently vs. less frequently?
- What do residents feel are the most important elements that make them participate in MusicWorks? Is there anything they think would increase their participation or that of their neighbors?
- For those who have only attended a couple of MusicWorks groups (≤ 3 times/yr), why haven't they attended more often? What have been the barriers/reasons? What would make them increase their participation?

Methods

Staff from UMass Boston's Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging¹ were commissioned by FriendshipWorks to conduct an evaluation of the MusicWorks program. Given the research questions guiding the project, it was determined that qualitative methods would be most appropriate to understand motivations to participate, perceived benefits of participation, and exploring ways to encourage additional participation.

As previously mentioned, the MusicWorks program currently operates at 15 housing sites across Boston. A sample of sites was chosen for this evaluation ($n=7$). Buildings were chosen based on the consistency of their program operations (e.g., meets regularly, has had some consistency with housing staff involvement) as well as to include some Spanish-speaking sites and English-speaking sites.

Resident services coordinators are key to the successful facilitation of MusicWorks programming in terms of keeping schedules and encouraging participation among residents. Therefore, resident services coordinators from five out of the seven participating sites were

completed. As well, focus groups at each of the participating sites were conducted with current MusicWorks participants (see Table 1 for details). Focus groups were conducted immediately following a MusicWorks program. Food was provided and focus group participants were offered a gift card for their participation in the focus group. In two cases, participants elected to speak individually with members of the research team. As a result, data from these conversations is integrated with data from the focus groups. The focus group and key informant protocols were finalized collaboratively by CSDRA and FriendshipWorks. Attendance records maintained by FriendshipWorks were reviewed and tabulated to assemble rates of participation over the past 12 months.

Table 1: Qualitative Data Collection		
	English Spanish	
Focus Groups	5	4
Key Informant Interviews with RSCs*	6	0

Note: Staff from 5 out of the 7 participating sites were available for interviews.

The research was classified as exempt by the UMass Boston Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following best practices, all participants provided informed consent to participate and for the conversation to be audio recording (with the exception of one key staff informant). All audio recordings were transcribed; notes from the sessions were recorded by a member of the research team. The recordings, transcripts, and field notes were stored securely on the UMass Boston OneDrive and will be deleted at the conclusion of the evaluation.

Sample

A total of 93 residents, across the seven buildings, plus four family members or friends of residents, participated in a focus group. Forty-eight of the residents were Spanish-speaking and 41 English-speaking; one was fully bilingual. Two were monolingual speakers of other languages; due to the communication barrier, they were unable to participate actively in the focus group. Tallies per building are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Focus group participation, by site and participants' languages

	English	Spanish	Other	Total
Back of the Hill	8	3	1	12

Council Tower	18			18
Holgate (2 groups)	6			6

5

IBA		17	1	18
Julia Martin House	1	11		12
Nate Smith House		10		10
Spencer/Cooper	10	11	2	21
TOTAL	43	52		97

Table 3 shows race and ethnic identities of focus group participants. It is important to note that race and ethnicity are not characteristics currently captured by the MusicWorks program. In this evaluation, participants were asked to report this information verbally during the focus group. As shown in Table 3, much of the data on these features is missing.

Table 3: Race and Hispanic Ethnicity ^a					
	Black	White	Asian	Other	Hispanic Non Hispanic
Back of the Hill	8	0	0	0 3	9
Council Tower	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A N/A	N/A
Holgate	1	N/A	N/A	N/A 1	N/A
IBA	1	0	1	16 17	1
Julia Martin House	1	0	0	0 9	1
Nate Smith House	5	0	0	0 10	0

Spencer/Cooper	10	0	0	0 10	0
TOTAL	26	0	1	16 50	11

^a Totals do not add up to 97 due to participants identifying as members of multiple racial or ethnic groups, not disclosing their race or ethnicity. or not responding for another reason.

Many residents chose not to disclose this information. As well, some participants identified with multiple racial or ethnic categories. Notwithstanding the incomplete data, MusicWorks programs in the sample sites appear to serve a population that is predominantly Black or Hispanic. According to FriendshipWorks' Music Manager, this is true of the program's clientele overall; Black participants are primarily African American or Caribbean, while most Hispanic participants are Caribbean or Central/South American. She adds that diversity

6

varies neighborhood to neighborhood, and that the program also serves Caucasian participants (Russian, American, Italian, Irish, and Armenian), as well as some Cape Verdean, Native American, and Haitian participants.

Table 4 shows MusicWorks participation rates of the focus group participants, by participating site. Spencer/Cooper Houses had the highest average MusicWorks group participation, with focus group participants attending 64% of all MusicWorks groups offered over the previous fiscal year. Holgate had the next-highest average MusicWorks program participation, with focus group participants attending more than half of the total number of programs for the year (58%); Back of the Hill participants attended an average of 42% of MusicWorks groups offered over the year. Of note is that at Holgate Apartments every focus group participant had attended at least one MusicWorks session in FY24, while at Back of the Hill and Spencer/Cooper, only two participants at each site had not attended that year. Taken together, these findings signal that these well-attended groups draw regular attendance from the same people and that turnover of participants is low.

Participants at IBA attended an average of 39% of all the MusicWorks groups offered in FY24; only two focus group participants had not attended any groups that year. At Julia Martin House, focus group participants attended about one-third of all MusicWorks groups over the course of the year; only one focus group participant had not attended any. At Council Tower, participants reported the lowest average number of programs attended for FY24--24%. As well, seven focus group participants at Council Tower had not attended any groups in FY24. Although a special event in the building the day of the group may have drawn in new attendees, these figures suggest that this site is still establishing a regular set of participants.

Table 4: Average MusicWorks Attendance of Focus Group Participants, FY24 ^a

	# of FG participants Total # of MW	sessions FY24 Average number of FY24 sessions	attended (per participant) Average % of FY24	sessions attended (per participant)
BOTH	12	30	12.58	41.9 (Range: 0 - 90.0)
Council Tower	18	17	4.11	24.1 (Range: 0 - 77.7)
Holgate	6	30	17.50	58.3 (Range: 26.7 - 90.0)
IBA	18	10	3.94	39.4 (Range: 0 - 70.0)

7

Julia Martin House	12	18	6.33	33.3 (Range: 0 - 83.3)
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Spencer/Cooper 21 31 19.76 63.7 (Range: 0 – 93.5) **Note:** Attendance data unavailable for

Nate Smith House.

Study Findings by Theme

Benefits of Frequent Participation

Participants are very satisfied with MusicWorks' programming; quite simply, they enjoy it. Nearly every focus group participant claimed to attend MusicWorks either frequently or as often as possible. Nevertheless, in almost every case, the most vocal focus group participants were also among the most frequent MusicWorks participants.

First and foremost, participants find joy in the music itself. They appreciate the musicians' talent and their versatility in performing songs from a range of genres and in participants' languages. They also love the musicians' personalities and their enthusiasm; they are unanimous in their praise. They feel the musicians are genuinely kind and caring people. In addition, they appreciate the fun that they have at MusicWorks, most of all when activities like Bingo or Zumba are included. While less frequent participants appear to enjoy more passive activities, for example, listening to background music as they read or play dominoes, core participants prize active participation. Zumba, in particular, is wildly popular at Nate Smith House, where it is the only MusicWorks activity scheduled, three times per month. Even so, residents and staff alike at that building would like to see a monthly music session

added to the schedule. When first introduced to MusicWorks, participants experienced the program as a welcome change in routine, a new activity that brought joy, fun and excitement into their lives. For example, one participant said,

"Since we love music, it enlightened our spirit, so we were not surprised about how fun it was. Now that we are here, we are more comfortable." FGPSp

RSCs witnessed their residents' excitement:

"The residents that do come, they love it. They can't wait for it, you know; they're like, 'Get ready to be there at two o'clock. So it works. It works. And it keeps them out of the house and socializing.'" SI

"They would talk about it all week or all the next week, up until MusicWorks came." SI

Residents who participate regularly in MusicWorks are people who are open to connection and embodiment of music as a shared experience.

"I love music. I come when I can. I enjoy the music." FGPEng

8

"They get me to sing with them; I be acting a crazy fool sometimes...because the music that they bring is so good, the way that they present it is cool, the atmosphere is really cool...They let us sing along; they kind of hype us up, when they say something in between the songs, just that added touch: 'Oh, N. is feeling it now!' It helps us to really loosen up and be involved." FGPEng

Asked what they like best about MusicWorks, participants answered,

"Music, Zumba. Because it gives us so much joy, we get along so well, and this brings us back to life." FGPSp

"The games that we play, sometimes we're having such a good time, we'll go over an hour, which is really good. And then just to be introduced to new music that people haven't heard before...or from someone else's culture." FGPEng

The people, creation of community, and the relationship with musicians and staff keep people coming back, again and again. For existing groups, depth of connection is being reached.

I really like the people here and the music sharing experience. The staff are so kind and happy. We also really like the instruments and moving with the music. We also love when the staff brings the dog and when the dog says 'hello'—everything." FGPSp

Residents and RSCs have high praise for the musicians, beginning with Safiya:

"The residents loved Safiya; they adored her. She's a great personality. She meshed very well with the residents...They'd call all their friends, like, 'Ohh, Safiya's here. Safiya's here.'" SI

"Basically, I love your program and I love Safiya and Tariq; they're great kids. They're nice people, they're great people, and they're caring people. And you can tell that. When they come here, they give us their all." FGPEng

"Just their aura, their demeanor, the way they show their talent, just their behavior, it

incorporates their personalities; you know, because they're giving; music is something we can always relate to and we receive, but it's the giving part of it that enraptures them. And they are free with that. They are so much into giving." FGPEng

"The residents' favorite is a male that comes, that plays a saxophone. I'm not sure what his name is, but they love him and he interacts so well with them. Like, he's always posing for pictures with them, with the saxophone; it's amazing. He has a very, very good personality." SI

In every building we visited, residents are acutely aware that MusicWorks' continuation there is never guaranteed. Despite reassurance that MusicWorks is not planning to withdraw from their building, residents were visibly apprehensive when asked what they would do if MusicWorks didn't exist. These residents perceive MusicWorks as essential to their well being.

"It would be miserable here." FGPEng

9

"I would stay in my apartment isolated." FGPSp

"My anxiety would increase." FGPSp

"For us this would be extremely sad. We would lack happiness and laughs. We would feel depressed." FGPSp

"It is very important to us." FGPSp

MusicWorks Fosters Community Connections Among Frequent Participants. The most frequent attendees are devoted to the program. Most focus group contributors were long time building residents. Asked how MusicWorks participants are different from non participants, one RSC observed:

"For starters, it's always the same group of people. It's always the same seven to nine residents that come that are very addicted to the music group, and they love it. They know each other from a very long time, they've been residents here from a very long time, so they've had a relationship for a very long time. (SI)"

Many residents who are actively involved in MusicWorks are also actively involved in the wider community of their building; according to one RSC, most frequent attendees in that building are extroverts or are on the resident task force.

At some buildings (BOTH, Council Tower, Nate Smith House), all of the focus group participants said that they had not met anyone new at MusicWorks. On the other hand, a minority of participants at Spencer House/Cooper House and at Holgate Apartments reported meeting some new people at MusicWorks, and, most strikingly, every resident at IBA reported having met all the others at MusicWorks. Over time, the "regulars" have formed tight and mutually supportive communities. In one building (BOTH) with a rapidly changing demographic makeup, the core participants expressed a desire for MusicWorks to accommodate the newcomers, with translators and with music in their languages and cultures. At the same time, they feel protective of MusicWorks as a remaining cultural space of their own.

Human contact, individual and in-person, facilitates MusicWorks attendance. Furthermore, personal interaction promotes well-being, reduces social isolation, and facilitates the growth of community. *“We put our hands together; we engage one another” (FGPEng)*. Creation of community within MusicWorks programs appears to be powerful, for example, residents articulate its spiritual meaning to them.

Many frequent attendees appreciate MusicWorks as an opportunity to get out of their apartments, dress up, and socialize. They look forward to the groups with anticipation. They feel attendance is important to their physical, emotional and even their spiritual health. Active and engaged participation appears to be key to these salubrious effects.

10

Frequent Attendance Fosters Spiritual, Social, Emotional, and Physical Well-Being

The combination of music, movement, and feelings of community strikes a spiritual chord for many regular participants of MusicWorks. Focus group participants shared that music and movement lift their spirits in the face of loss; this is apparent at BOTH and also at Julia Martin House, where multiple losses— pandemic deaths, RSC turnover, and Julia Martin’s recent passing – have led to a cycle of collective grief and isolation.

“Some of us have had people that we know that we lost this year, and one thing about this group--Safiya, even if you don't ask her to play something that would soothe you, is something about the song that lifts us up.” FGPEng

Participants at Spencer House/Cooper House, both English- and Spanish-speaking, compared MusicWorks to a prayer group. In fact, some participants in that group, having bonded at MusicWorks, organized a literal prayer group. A resident key informant at another building compared her MusicWorks participation to singing in her childhood church choir.

“I love music! Period...I love music; music to me is like a prayer.” FGPEng

In another building, focus group participants compared their “joy” at MusicWorks to the uplift of a church service. In that building, the community that formed in the program, as already noted, was inspired to organize actual prayer and Bible study groups.

Most respondents agreed that frequent attendance at MusicWorks improves residents’ quality of life. First and foremost, the music, movement, and socialization promote mental health.

“Instead of being in front of the TV, being here is so great for me. I love football, but I leave watching football to come here. Football will always be here but this program won’t, so I always choose this. I think it is important to have fun, and you need to distract your mind, since your life depends on your mind.” FGPSp

“It has helped my mental health because they give us therapy, and the dances we do here give me motivation. There are a lot of exercises that help me with my cognitive health, because we do a lot of brain exercises. It is also fun and that maintains my health.” FGPSp

“I like music. It soothes your mind. When you’re going through things, it stimulates your mind.” FGPEng

Especially for residents who participate in Zumba, or who dance during music groups, improved physical health is a second health benefit:

“The music and Zumba [give] your body strength. Especially if you have pain in your legs, it gives you so much strength and it helps your body.” FGPSp

11

A resident in another building observed that dancing at MusicWorks gets people out of their chairs and thus improves their health. An RSC commented that Zumba is active, gives the residents energy, and helps their balance; even residents in wheelchairs participate. Another RSC, from the same buildings, concurred:

“A lot of them used to tell me, ‘My headache goes away.’ ‘My body ache went away.’ So, I had a lot of those comments from them.” SI

Facilitators of Frequent Participation

Food, Raffles, and Gifts Encourage Attendance

Food insecurity is a constant challenge for many building residents, and MusicWorks participants are no exception. Many are, as one RSC put it, “food-motivated.” Participants and RSCs agree unanimously on the importance of refreshments in increasing attendance. In some buildings, MusicWorks is scheduled during the coffee hour. At Holgate Apartments, one key informant observed MusicWorks participants persuading other residents to come, and then to stay, with the promise of food; another observed that it was helpful to schedule MusicWorks during Boston Police Department community officers’ visits, when the officers came with an ice cream truck.

A variety of foods are preferred, and MusicWorks staff are praised for providing meals that participants want and request. At BOTH, pizza and other finger foods (for example, chicken fingers, crackers, and cookies) are popular. A key informant mentioned Slade’s chicken as one favorite offering at Holgate; the informant praised MusicWorks’ staff for providing a variety of the foods requested by participants. At Spencer and Cooper Houses, focus group participants approved of the scheduling during coffee hours, explaining that the coffee and food are draws. The English speakers there said that they enjoy home-cooked food, particularly soul food; they like the current offerings.

Soup, served at BOTH, was singled out by an RSC as a rare unpopular offering. The soup portions are well-wrapped and portable; however, soup is difficult for elders with impaired fine motor control, or with poor near vision, to consume without spilling. Affected residents may be reluctant to eat it in front of their neighbors.

Food is more than an incentive to attend. The anthropologist Daniel Stein (2022) has argued that rituals lie along a spectrum of strength; not all are formal and rigidly structured. From an anthropological perspective, MusicWorks sessions qualify as “weak rituals”: they involve

community participation, with designated leaders, and an informal code of acceptable behavior. "Ritual," as Margaret Visser (1991) has written, "is an expression of solidarity," and sharing food, in socially prescribed ways, establishes and defines a group (p. 23). In other words, food and table manners matter to group cohesion. The most salient of these table

12

manners, from the point of view of MusicWorks participants, is to take food away only if one has stayed for the group.

In addition to food, raffles and small gifts are prized by MusicWorks participants; for these lower-income elders, rewards are important motivators. Raffles with gift cards as prizes, according to key informants, are popular at BOTH and at IBA. At Nate Smith and Julia Martin Houses, according to FriendshipWorks' Director of Programs, MusicWorks provides raffle prizes. During her time at MusicWorks, a former Zumba leader donated additional raffle prizes so that every participant could win something. A key informant believed that these raffle prizes (\$10 gift certificates) boosted participation.

Ensuring that residents have adequate notice of MusicWorks' scheduled visits to the building, and reminding them on the day of each visit, is the RSCs' most vital contribution to the program. They take this responsibility seriously, designing (or planning to design) flyers, activity calendars, postcard-size schedules, and the like; some auto-translate the text of flyers into the residents' multiple languages. The RSCs also remind residents they see in the common areas, and some phone, knock on apartment doors, or escort residents to MusicWorks as they arrive home from adult daycare. As one proactive RSC explained, "*That's my job*"(SI1). Some participants initially came to the program as new residents who had seen the flyers.

Personal Outreach Encourages Frequent Attendance

The RSCs are key to encouraging attendance at MusicWorks groups by less frequent participants. All of the RSCs interviewed make efforts to encourage attendance. Some manage multiple buildings; some are fairly new in their positions; all are time-constrained. They agree that they would gladly post and disseminate flyers in the building if MusicWorks would provide them. While written notices are essential, there is no substitute for personal outreach. The presence of an involved and committed RSC is necessary for MusicWorks to succeed in a given building. It is no coincidence that some residents come to MusicWorks specifically to speak with, and sometimes to sit with, the RSC. The long-term RSCs interviewed for this evaluation were every bit as enthusiastic as the core resident participants about the program, the musicians, and the joy they bring.

Building staff encourage new or isolated residents to come to MusicWorks in order to meet their neighbors; once they have been introduced, they know each other and often will begin to socialize. Many building residents, usually isolative in their apartments, can at least occasionally be persuaded to attend. Usually, these residents sit apart and enjoy the music, or, if the RSC is present, interact with him or her.

Across buildings, frequent participants actively remind one another of upcoming MusicWorks sessions. This shared community outreach ensures that all remember; in the focus groups, almost no resident spoke of memory issues or a need to rely on the RSCs to

remind them. The lone exception was a resident whose memory was affected by a medical issue.

Printed flyers and other general invitations, while necessary and helpful, are not substitutes for personal outreach. Participants were introduced to MusicWorks through their new neighbors, by building staff, by MusicWorks staff, and, in at least one case, by a social worker. A former RSC recalled:

“Some of the residents would be really excited about it. And they wanted them to keep coming so they would tell their neighbors and stuff. It was really great.” “A lot of the residents in my buildings, they’re very to themselves, they like to just hang in their apartments, but every once in a while, we would get them to come out and it would be great.” SI

Some residents, as newcomers, had heard the music, investigated its source, and stayed to participate.

Barriers to Frequent Participation

The RSCs identified *forgetfulness of the MusicWorks schedule* as a perpetual barrier to attendance. To address this issue, they may put up flyers in the elevators and throughout the buildings, slip flyers under apartment doors, distribute monthly activity calendars, rely on residents to remind their neighbors, and contact residents individually. Getting the word out, and ensuring that residents remember, is an ongoing challenge. Interestingly, only one focus group participant reported needing to be reminded. By and large, these are core MusicWorks attendees, therefore it is possible that they had developed a routine. It is also possible that they are cognitively healthier than their neighbors and more likely to remember to attend.

Not infrequently, residents have *scheduling conflicts*, with adult day care attendance, medical appointments, church activities, family time, or jobs. As one resident put it, *“What it boils down to: people here are living the lives that they want to live”* (FGPEng). Another said, *“I don’t get to come as often as most. But during the summer months I try to come when MusicWorks is here, because at other times I’m not home, so I don’t get to always enjoy when they come...Everybody always has good things to say about it...it’s fun!...I have a part-time job, so I’m not able to participate on [that day of the week]”* (FGPEng). A third resident explained, *“I come when I can, but I have other meetings on [day of the week] at the same time. So whenever, I’m going to try to find another way to enable those...I enjoy it, I really do”* (FGPEng).

RSC turnover and vacant positions lower the overall mood of a building, hamper the dissemination of activity schedules, and severely curtail personal outreach to isolative residents. According to the former RSC in a building where Zumba is offered, residents who don’t move become antisocial; they sit in their apartments, watching negative news on television, as their aches and pains increase and they become *“all bitter and nervous”* (SI). In

another building, a resident had an even more pithy observation: *“They’re grinchies. They’re*

set in their ways and they don't want to come" (FGPEng). The departure of a long-time RSC, a year earlier, still cast an obvious pall on the atmosphere at Julia Martin House. The upbeat resident service manager (RSM) who succeeded the RSC is not a replacement for that beloved staff member. When we visited, residents were passing around a flyer in the community room; from a distance, I recognized the RSM's template. On closer inspection, I saw that the flyer advertised Zumba at Nate Smith House.

Language barriers hamper participation, especially by residents who speak neither English nor Spanish. A few individual speakers of other languages do attend all or part of MusicWorks sessions. Several participants praised Safiya, in particular, for reaching out to non-English speakers by including songs in their languages and from their cultures. Nevertheless, these individuals, who often come alone, are unable to fully participate, or even to speak with anyone else in the group.

At Back of the Hill, a multilingual and multicultural building with a rapidly increasing Spanish-speaking population, the language barrier is an especially pressing issue. MusicWorks currently serves mainly English speakers there, and a need exists for a Spanish speaking musician or, at least, for a translator. Building staff at the property identified greater linguistic and cultural inclusiveness as the only aspect of MusicWorks that needs improvement.

MusicWorks participants genuinely want the program to be more accessible to the diverse national communities in their buildings; they would welcome new arrivals, in part because participants are vital to MusicWorks' continued presence in the building. At the same time, especially contending with a rapidly changing demographic makeup, they do not want their own community to be swallowed up:

"...if it's opened up for a lot of different nationalities to come in, we will be overwhelmed with them as opposed to us. I don't think it will be the same vibe..." FGPEng

In the same building, the RSC advocates for greater inclusion of non-English speaking and culturally diverse residents:

"I think the only thing that is missing is the language barrier...But they do a great job, overall...if they could improve that, it will be perfect for all the residents, to include everyone...They could bring more culture in other languages. It will be so much better." SI

Many residents are **reluctant to attend large groups**. There are multiple reasons that residents who do not participate regularly in MusicWorks avoid joining the group settings.

15

"A lot of people aren't really interested in participating in large group activities with a lot of the other residents, you know, there may be interpersonal stuff going on in the building, certain people don't want to interact with other people." SI

Interpersonal conflicts, the intimidation of not knowing anyone, language barriers, and fear of illness each can play a role in discouraging participation. BOTH and Julia Martin House

both suffered heavy losses during the pandemic, and some BOTH residents continue to mask and self-isolate.

In addition, if passersby aren't drawn to the type of music or activity, they may not be motivated to participate in future sessions. For example, one participant at Julia Martin House asked for yoga. A participant at Back of the Hill also suggested that segments of quiet instrumental music might attract new residents to participate in at least part of each biweekly group. This participant stressed that some residents are physically unable to tolerate loud music.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We found that MusicWorks remains highly effective in achieving its goals of reducing social isolation and fostering community. The musical talent of Safiya and her colleagues, and at least as importantly, their warmth, consistency, and commitment, bring joy, fun, and connection into the lives of the elders who participate in the program. Committed RSCs, too, who spread notice of upcoming groups and go the extra mile to draw out isolated residents, are crucial to MusicWorks' success. Important, too, are the efforts of core participants who remind and encourage their friends and neighbors to attend.

Although the attendance records indicate that the focus groups included a mix of frequent, infrequent, and new participants, the core MusicWorks participants were, unsurprisingly, the most active focus group participants. The focus group and interview responses suggest that frequent participants benefit most from MusicWorks' programming. Not only does the program make a deep and meaningful difference in their lives, they in turn are the best ambassadors to draw new participants into the fold. Certainly, some infrequent participants and non-participants would also benefit from regular participation. Some of these residents, however, are already connected to communities outside the building; they are not isolated, and that is precisely why they do not attend MusicWorks. Others are housebound and physically unable to attend. In addition, policies (like unmonitored access to provided snacks, or shifting language or cultural focus of programming), intended to encourage participation may instead become sources of division in the building community. We conclude that existing programs are achieving the goal of deep and meaningful connections and an artistic, almost spiritual, outlet for residents. Thus, we suggest that MusicWorks focus on ways of replicating the existing opportunities such that more residents have access to these deep and meaningful connections. This could, for example, look like adding programs

16

to existing buildings to attract residents that are not currently participating in MusicWorks by offering a variety of music genres or program schedules OR expanding to other buildings where MusicWorks is not yet in practice.

It's clear that the depth achieved by his program is what drives its impact on the lives of participants. We don't suggest altering the size or frequency of existing programs; but rather broadening access to the same type of experience. For all these reasons, we recommend that MusicWorks' leadership prioritize maintaining the the aspects of the

current program model that focus on creating spaces for people to connect deeply and regularly with themselves, the music, and one another. Working to increase the number of people who experience this deep connection is the proposed future goal of MusicWorks. Based on the results of this mixed-methods evaluation of seven MusicWorks program sites, we offer the following recommendations.

Attract more participants to existing programs, by focusing on personalized outreach efforts:

- One suggestion is to provide the RSCs or residents' councils with flyers or calendars to post or distribute. Although the RSCs plan to design and print their own flyers or calendars, with frequent turnover and heavy responsibilities, it does not always happen in a timely fashion. If they had these materials in hand, they would make good use of them. Paid resident leaders could also distribute them quickly and efficiently.
- Because MusicWorks is an anchor of stability in buildings with unstable staffing, we recommend that reducing or pulling programming in these buildings be a last resort. Resident ambassadors can be effective in disseminating schedules, reaching out to their neighbors, and reminding them to attend; they are happy to oblige but require—and, if at all possible, should receive--remuneration.
- Make food a more central component of the program. Consider pairing food with the music type on a regular basis, or featuring food from local establishments on the flyers.
- Maintain regular schedules within buildings such that the MusicWork programs remains a fixture of the building community and residents can feel comfortable “dropping in”.
- Explicitly mention that participants do not have to actively engage in the programs to be welcome. For example, encourage people to attend as members of the “audience” to be entertained. Offering more passive opportunities could draw different individuals to join.
- Implementing a membership form for all participants could improve the amount of information documented about participants (e.g., age, race, gender, ethnicity, languages spoken) and also encourage communication among participants between sessions. Movement toward being a free “member” of MusicWorks could also contribute to the sense of community being fostered.

Create different opportunities to engage residents with varying musical tastes and social appetites:

- Consider hiring additional program staff who can be regular fixtures of programming; priority should be given to those fluent in Spanish.
- Offer raffles or prizes to participants who bring a friend who has never been to

MusicWorks before.

- Pilot-test
- Another suggestion is to offer sessions, particularly at BOTH, that include segments of softer music, compared to the loud and vibrant music currently being offered. For example, the first 30 minutes is focused one type of music and the second half is focused on movement and louder varieties of music. This variety of musical genre may draw in newer, less outgoing, residents.
- Two additional suggestions for future programming came from residents. The first suggestion is to coordinate field trips for senior housing residents; some are effectively housebound in their buildings, wish to go on music-oriented group outings, and have no opportunities to do so. The other suggestion is to establish a version of MusicWorks that brings volunteer musicians to residents who cannot leave their apartments.

In conclusion, our evaluation finds that MusicWorks is effective, that the program most benefits residents who attend frequently, and that inclusion of multilingual and multicultural guest musicians would promote inclusion and could expand attendance and participation. Those who do attend frequently are effusive in their praise and appreciation of MusicWorks' impact on their well-being, their sense of belonging, and their quality of life.

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18

Appendix

Appendix: Coding of Respondents	
Category	Code

Focus Group – program participant -- English	FGPEng
Focus Group – program participant -- Spanish	FGPSp
Individual Interview – staff informant (English)	SI