



Silver Memories works its sound benefits

A new finance model helps to bring golden oldies to aged-care residents

MATTHEW WESTWOOD



Arts organisations are finding some clever ways to make government grants go further.

The Australian Ballet School in Melbourne, for example, recently opened its much-needed student residence, a home away from home for talented school-age dancers. The school received a federal grant of \$1 million, from which it leveraged a further \$7m in donations.

Another example of innovative funding is supporting a Brisbane-based service for senior music lovers. The Silver Memories radio station plays golden oldies for people in residential aged care.

The service was started by classical broadcaster 4MBS FM and has received funding from a new finance model, the Arts Business Innovation Fund. The fund is supported jointly by the Queensland government and the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation, and provides a combination grant and loan up to \$100,000. The capacity-building finance will help 4MBS roll out its Silver Memories satellite service to 20 aged-care homes.

Gary Thorpe, the enterprising manager at 4MBS, was inspired to start Silver Memories almost a decade ago when an elderly neighbour was moving into an

aged-care home. The playlist at 4MBS is mostly classical music, but Thorpe saw the opportunity to start a special nostalgia service for isolated older people.

Silver Memories plays old-time music from the 1920s to the 50s: Bing Crosby, Doris Day, Peter Dawson and other recording stars of yesteryear.

But the nostalgia playlist not only makes for pleasant listening; researchers are studying the effect of specially chosen music and how it may help reduce some symptoms of dementia, such as anxiety and agitation.

An early evaluation of Silver Memories, conducted by the Australasian Centre on Ageing at the

University of Queensland, found that it improved the quality of life of aged-care residents (average age 79.9 years) and appeared to help improve depression. Carers reported that the music had a calming effect on some patients with dementia.

Next to human kindness, music is a balm that can be especially comforting for people in pain or distress. What music lovers have long recognised by intuition is increasingly backed by research that shows evidence of music's benefits to health.

Thorpe reports that music therapy has been used with patients suffering from cancer, stroke, Parkinson's, dementia and related conditions. One theory about its effectiveness has to do with musical receptiveness remaining active in the brain.

Silver Memories appears to be especially effective in the "sundowning" hours between 4pm and 7pm. Catherine Travers, research manager at the University of Queensland school of nursing,

says the condition describes the agitation and distress that some dementia patients experience in the late afternoon and evening.

Experience suggests that playing a patient's preferred music can help improve their mood and reduce agitation. Indeed, Silver Memories has adopted a special playlist for the sundowning hours, with music whose calming tempo matches the heart rate of about 60 beats per minute.

At first Silver Memories was broadcast on the 4MBS subcarrier frequency that required specially modified radios, and was then available as an audio stream.

In late 2014, 4MBS started offering Silver Memories as a satellite service so the station could be received reliably across Australia, especially in regional areas.

Homes such as Zion Lutheran Aged Care in Brisbane pay a subscription to receive the service of about \$1500 to \$2000 a year, based on the number of residents.

About 60 homes are tuning in via satellite and Thorpe wants to increase that number to 200, which would allow a reduction in subscription fees. The service costs about \$250,000 a year to run.

The Music Broadcasting Society of Queensland is a not-for-profit organisation and raises about \$1m a year to support all its activities, including 4MBS. Membership subscriptions and on-air sponsorships were reliable income streams in the past but that is no longer the case: the station's diverse fundraising activities include an annual concert festival

and a classical music cruise. Silver Memories is forecast to become its fastest growing income stream.

This is where the ABIF finance comes in. The fund is earmarked



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for business development of small, not-for-profit arts organisations, devised by Foresters Community Finance, Positive Solutions, QUT Creative Enterprise Australia, Arts Queensland and the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation.

The ABIF finance, comprising a \$50,000 grant and a \$50,000 interest-free loan, repayable across three years, will help 4MBS roll out Silver Memories to 20 regional locations in Queensland.

The loan is from the corpus of the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation (valued at \$84m last financial year) and does not affect the foundation's grants program. But possible changes to the guidelines for private ancillary funds such as

the TFFF could have an impact on arts and other not-for-profit bodies. The federal government has proposed changing the required annual distribution of these funds from 5 per cent of net assets to the Reserve Bank target cash rate (presently 2 per cent). It potentially means reduced grants for fund beneficiaries including arts organisations. Submissions on the proposed changes close on Friday.

The early success of Silver Memories is being noticed. Travers says UQ will begin a 12-month study of the service this year to gauge its effectiveness with dementia patients. Silver Memories was recently a finalist in the International Dementia Awards in Britain, and Thorpe will present a session about the service at the World Science Festival in Brisbane next month.

"It's getting a lot of attention now from government and philanthropic bodies," Thorpe says. "I am pleased that we are getting that level of awareness happening." No less gratifying is the response Thorpe has had from patients and their carers. One man described the comfort Silver Memories had given his wife, telling Thorpe: "I have my wife back, and I have my life back."

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GLENN HUNT

4MBS manager Gary Thorpe visits Brisbane's Zion Lutheran Aged Care facility, where residents are able to enjoy hits of yesteryear on Silver Memories