



**‘My soul rises  
with joy’:  
The impact  
of Singing for  
the Brain**



**Alzheimer's  
Society**

Together we are help & hope  
for everyone living with dementia

## Background and Methods

In February 2023 the Alzheimer's Society's Evaluation and Impact team was commissioned by the Associate Director of Services to undertake an evaluation of the Singing for the Brain service. The Singing for the Brain service specification states that Singing for the Brain is primarily a service for people with a diagnosis of dementia, but they may also be supported to attend by carers, friends and/or family members. First established in 2003, Singing for the Brain is designed around the principles of music therapy and sessions are planned to incorporate social interaction, peer support and engagement and active participation and aims to help people with dementia feel part of society. Specifically, the service is designed to help people with dementia to feel part of society where they have a right to acceptance, artistic expression and social stimulation. Singing for the Brain has a standardised format for delivery that is followed by the group leaders. It aims to combine social interaction, peer engagement and active participation to improve quality of life, wellbeing and confidence, and reduce isolation.

To undertake an evaluation of Singing for the Brain, data was drawn from multiple delivery sites and different people involved in Singing for the Brain using a range of data collection methods. With Singing for the Brain operating across the three nations it was important to ensure that the data collected was representative of the three nations, therefore all methods of data collection were conducted in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. To understand the impact of Singing for the Brain, data was collected through:

- Surveys with 153 staff and volunteers involved in the delivery of Singing for the Brain
- Surveys with 204 people affected by dementia who access Singing for the Brain
- In depth interviews with 9 people affected by dementia who access Singing for the Brain
- Observations of 9 Singing for the Brain session, with a total of 144 people affected by dementia in attendance



# Overview of Findings

The Singing for the Brain service aims to enhance the lives of individuals living with dementia by providing opportunities for meaningful participation, reducing social isolation, boosting wellbeing and confidence, and improving communication. This comprehensive evaluation reveals that Singing for the Brain effectively achieves these objectives while uncovering additional outcomes not initially outlined in the service specification. Furthermore, it highlights that Singing for the Brain delivers benefits not only to people living with dementia but also to their carers, challenging the notion that carers are merely accompanying those with dementia to Singing for the Brain sessions.

The evaluation found Singing for the Brain to achieve four overarching areas of impact, and within these themes unique outcomes emerged for people with dementia and for carers. The table below provides an overview of the impact and outcomes people benefit from by accessing Singing for the Brain.

Impact	Outcomes for People with Dementia	Outcomes for Carers
<b>Wellbeing</b>	Reducing anxiety and increasing happiness and confidence before, during and after a session. Promoting acceptance of dementia. Providing a sense of identity and purpose.	Reduced stress about caring role and increased relaxation. Feelings of happiness to see the person they care for engaging with the session, and confidence that the sessions are beneficial to the person they care for.
<b>Social Connections</b>	Where a person's diagnosis has reduced opportunities for social interactions, Singing for the Brain increases these opportunities. Connecting with others who have a shared experience.	Peer support and information sharing with other carers. Strengthened relationship with the person they care for.
<b>Daily Life</b>	Benefits to long-term memory recall through reminiscence. Positive change in verbal fluency and word-recall. Increased energy levels and alertness. Benefits to mobility and motor skills.	Better able to cope with caring role due to the positive effect Singing for the Brain has on some of the symptoms of those they care for. Teaching strategies to use outside of Singing for the Brain to improve daily life and their caring role.
<b>Choice and Control</b>	Able to inform session content. Able to adapt aspects of the session to meet individual needs.	

# Impact for People with Dementia

## Wellbeing

The qualitative data revealed that attending Singing for the Brain has a significant benefit to people with dementia's mood by relieving feelings of stress and anxiety and inciting feelings of happiness, confidence and motivation. This outcome is not only achieved for the duration of the session, but also extends to before the session when people are looking forward to going and is sustained for a period of time after the session.

**"I leave all my stress at the door on entering, and on leaving I feel like I'm walking on air. I can go home and face living alone and cope with all my problems and it seems to prepare me for all aspects of dementia and helps me to recharge my batteries towards the next week facing me in all directions with life and dementia and all its problems." - Person living with dementia.**

Singing for the Brain further supports the wellbeing of people with dementia by promoting acceptance of dementia through creating a dementia-inclusive environment and highlighting what people with dementia can do, rather than focussing on any difficulties they experience.

**"Singing for the Brain encourages me to focus on what I can do rather than what I cannot, and to feel good about all the lovely helpful people we have in our lives due to my diagnosis." - Person living with**

A key contributing factor towards the positive effects on wellbeing is that Singing for the Brain gives people with dementia and sense of identity, purpose and achievement which subsequently promotes self-confidence and positive feelings.

**"I look forward to attending. I like being in a group with a shared purpose." - Person living with dementia.**

## Social Connections

For people with dementia Singing for the Brain provides increased opportunities for social interactions and a chance to make new friends, which is particularly valuable when a dementia diagnosis has meant that a

**"I like to talk to as many people as I can because it makes us all feel connected. I feel like we are all among friends." - Person living with dementia.**

person's opportunities to socialise have diminished or socialising with others has become more difficult as a result of dementia. People with dementia also reported feeling a benefit to socialising with other people with dementia and with similar experiences to themselves, and that it is easier to connect with people at Singing for the Brain due to a shared understanding of dementia.

**"Without Singing for the Brain I would be on my own, wouldn't be with people who understand and going through similar things." - Person living with dementia.**



## Daily Life

People who attend Singing for the Brain reported that sessions have a beneficial effect on the memory of people with dementia; reminiscence is encouraged by the session, the familiar songs sung throughout the sessions sparked long-term memories and the enjoyable and routine sessions becomes memorable.

**“Different songs have brought back memories of my past that I can talk to other people in the group about.” - Person living with dementia.**

People also attributed Singing for the Brain to a positive change in the verbal fluency and word-recall of people with dementia, as well as being more talkative than they are usually following Singing for the Brain.

**“I don’t have trouble singing words like I do with normal talking.” - Person living with dementia.**

Many also reported that Singing for the Brain contributes towards increased energy levels and alertness in people with dementia.

**“My husband would be withdrawn and likely to sleep because of lack of stimulation. He comes to life as the singing begins” - Carer of a person living with dementia.**

There is also some evidence that Singing for the Brain, particularly the physical warm-up activities, are beneficial to people’s mobility and motor skills.

**During the physical warm-up activity, a person with dementia asked her carer to support her to stand up from her wheelchair. As the warm-up progressed, she gradually let go of the arm of the person she was with who was steadying her and participated in the actions while standing independently and with a big smile on her face. - From an observation of a Singing for the Brain session.**



# Impact for Carers

## Wellbeing

Not only does Singing for the Brain improve wellbeing for people with dementia, exploration of the qualitative data also identified a meaningful effect on the wellbeing of carers who attend Singing for the Brain. For carers, improved wellbeing was largely associated with feeling more relaxed and less stressed; this is partly due to the session itself, but carers also reference how the support of staff and volunteers at Singing for the Brain provides them with time they can be themselves instead of being a carer.

**“I find myself much more relaxed at the end of a session. My stress levels diminished and happy to cope with the rest of the day. The peace of mind it delivers is hard to measure.” - Carer of a person living with dementia.**

Many carers also explained that Singing for the Brain lifts their mood because they are able to see the person they care for doing things they find more difficult since their diagnosis of dementia, and also engaging with an activity which carers confidently feel is benefiting the person with dementia.

**“Sometimes after a hard night/morning I can just glance across at mum and see her being mum briefly singing away and it gives me the strength to keep going.” - Carer of a person living with dementia.**

## Social Connections

For carers, the primary benefit of the increased opportunities for social interaction provided by Singing for the Brain is the peer support gained from interacting with other carers. Peer support included sharing practical advice and information, but also meant gaining a sense of togetherness and reduced feelings of isolation due to a shared understanding of the experience of caring for someone with dementia.

**“The chance to chat and exchange worries and ideas is so wonderful, the friends we have made at these sessions are absolutely great and one doesn’t feel so alone.” - Carer of a person living with**

Singing for the Brain not only connects carers with other carers, but also strengthens the relationship between carers and the person they care for. Many carers expressed that Singing for the Brain helps them feel more connected to the person they attend with because it provides an opportunity to enjoy a shared leisure activity when much of their time together outside of Singing for the Brain involves task-based activities. Carers also talked about how Singing for the Brain alleviates the difficulties of communicating with a person with dementia, because connecting is not reliant on the person with dementia’s verbal communication skills.

**“It is lovely to spend time with my mum when we can enjoy some quality time together without worrying about anything else and switching off enjoying the moment.” - Carer of a person living with dementia.**

## Daily Life

The effect Singing for the Brain has on the daily life and symptoms of people with dementia stretches beyond the individual and has a broader impact on their carers due to a short-term alleviation of some symptoms and behaviours which can make a person's caring role more difficult.

**“Because [my wife’s] had such a good time at Singing for the Brain, on the way home you know the rest of the day is going to be good. We’ll get home and she’s relaxed for the rest of the day, colouring and listening to music, and it just means I have a relaxed day as well knowing that she’s calmer.” - Carer of a person living with dementia.**

Carers also shared how Singing for the Brain has provided them with tools that make their daily life and caring responsibilities easier, using music and singing to encourage the person they care for with daily activities.

**“Since going to Singing for the Brain, we have been singing lots of different songs at home. We play games with the songs and use singing when getting dressed, walking, being in the car etc.” - Carer of a person living with dementia.**

## Choice and Control

The evaluation found that Singing for the Brain enables people to have choice and control over the support they access, and have the ability to tailor this to suit their individual needs and preferences. This is the only theme in which no difference in outcomes was observed between people with dementia and their carers. The below case story, based on an observation of a Singing for the Brain session, illustrates this theme.

During the initial 30 minutes of informal socialising time before the start of the session, the volunteers handed round booklets for people to look through at their leisure while catching up with other attendees over a cup of tea. The booklet consisted of lists of song titles which were separated by genre, each person was encouraged to select a song and these selections then made up the song list for the session resulting in a session curated by those who attend. This activity not only gave people a choice, but also enabled people to express themselves and have their voice heard as it instigated conversations between service users about why they had chosen certain songs.

The session began with a physical warm up made of up some movement to music, face massage and breathing activities. Throughout the warmup, the leader demonstrated alternative ways actions could be done depending on what people felt comfortable doing and also reiterated that people were free to join in as much or as little as they wished to – giving people the freedom to choose. People felt comfortable to engage in a way that suited them with some standing up to participate while others remained seated, and some people using the alternative actions demonstrated by the leader.

With each new song, the leader shared with the group who had selected the next song – strengthening the message that people's choices are listened to – which was always met with a big smile from the person who chose the song. As the session came to an end, the leader thanked everyone for their input and encouraged them to think about songs they would like to be included next time.

## Impact for Staff & Volunteers

Many staff and volunteers wrote or spoke movingly about the impact of Singing for the Brain on attendees to their sessions during the data gathering phase of this evaluation. They frequently highlighted how proud they were of the service and how proud they were of their own contribution to a programme that achieves such valuable and demonstratable impact on its participants. Many spoke of their own elevated mood and a renewed sense of contentment and purpose that they derive directly from their own participation in Singing for the Brain sessions.

“I witness the sheer JOY we bring to people’s lives. Our services provide much needed respite together with opportunities for social engagement, access to information and purposeful activity. When people think of Alzheimer’s Society, they think of Singing for the Brain, and I am very proud of that.” - Singing for the Brain leader.



## Impact for Alzheimer’s Society

Beyond its direct impact on participants and staff and volunteers, Singing for the Brain can serve as a powerful tool for raising awareness about dementia. It has been utilised in national and local awareness campaigns and has the potential to challenge common misconceptions and contribute to a more dementia-inclusive society through increased understanding. Furthermore, the prominence of Singing for the Brain in awareness-raising efforts may elevate the profile of Alzheimer’s Society and subsequently serve as a platform for fundraising efforts.

After performing in a local shopping centre as part of an awareness raising campaign, one Singing for the Brain group said the public feedback was that people **“couldn’t believe that people with dementia were having fun and laughing”**; the Singing for the Brain leader felt this helped raise awareness about dementia locally and dispelled some myths about dementia. Another Singing for the Brain leader spoke about a Christmas performance their group had organised and felt this promoted a better understanding of dementia and **“made people realise that people with dementia are still people”**.



## The Future Impact of Singing for the Brain

At the time of this report (2024) there are currently 161 Singing for the Brain groups delivered by Alzheimer's Society supporting over 5000 people affected by dementia, as well as an additional 104 Singing for the Brain groups led by Alzheimer's Society's trained Singing for the Brain delivery partners. With an estimated [982,000 people living with dementia in the UK](#), and with that number expected to rise to 1.4 million by 2040, Singing for the Brain can play a powerful role in making one the UK's biggest killers less frightening, giving help to everyone living with dementia today, and hope for the future.

The evaluation identified a number of key developments that will increase the reach and impact of Singing for the Brain, which Alzheimer's Society will be working towards in the next year. These developments include:

- Providing more opportunities for peer support, shared learning and collaboration between key staff, session leaders and volunteers involved in the delivery of Singing for the Brain.
- Expanding the virtual Singing for the Brain offer to enable people to access Singing for the Brain, and benefit from its impact, at a time and place that best suits them.
- Adapting Singing for the Brain services to achieve impact for underserved communities.

“Singing for the Brain is therapeutic for me. It lifts my mood. I love it, love it, love it – I hope it never ends. I never want to go home because it makes me so happy. “ - Person living with dementia.



Together we are help & hope for everyone living with dementia