Why we need music in care homes

Helping people with dementia to express themselves

The number of people living with dementia in the UK is rising. There are 850,000 people living with the condition and by 2025, the number is expected to be more than one million.

The signs and symptoms of dementia, such as confusion and anxiety, are especially prevalent in care homes, where 70% of residents have dementia or severe memory loss.

The aim of music therapy is to regulate residents’ emotions through music. Music can activate neurones in more regions of the brain than any other sensory input, and, despite deterioration of cognitive functioning, people with dementia can appreciate and make music until the condition is in its late stages.

During music therapy sessions, trained therapists with master’s degrees in music therapy interact with residents through joint music making and exchanging verbal, facial, vocal and bodily expressions.

Therapists observe each patient, assess his or her mood and play music to match it. Therapists can adjust the rhythm, volume or tempo of the music to help alter the patient’s behaviour and expressions. This process can have direct and sometimes immediate effects.

**Verbal interventions**

When verbal intervention starts to fail and residents become agitated or despondent, music therapy can help residents engage with the world around them.

It can also communicate to carers the underlying causes of signs and symptoms of agitation, which could be as simple as a TV being too loud, a room being too hot or being spoken to in the wrong tone.

However, only 1 in 1,000 people living with dementia has access to this vital treatment, and the charity MHA is seeking to raise awareness of music therapy and funds to hire more therapists.