

Bell Choir Program

Policies and Procedures for Dementia-Informed Musical Engagement

The Bell Choir program offers a joyful, inclusive musical experience for adult day clients living with memory impairment. Designed by a facilitator with extensive experience and training in dementia care, the program integrates cognitive stimulation, social connection, and creative expression through the gentle art of ensemble bell playing.

Program Goals:

- Supporting cognitive engagement through attention, memory, and sequencing through musical participation.
- Fostering social connections through teamwork, shared purpose, and interpersonal bonds.
- Encouraging creative expression and emotional resonance through music making.

Objectives:

Through gentle facilitation and familiar melodies, participants will:

- Practice attentive listening and coordination by following visual and verbal cues to play handbells in ensemble settings.
- Prepare a repertoire of 10-12 familiar songs to share in a musical gathering with peers and/or loved ones, strengthening social ties and celebrating shared accomplishments.
- Engage in creative expression through collaborative music-making, honoring each individual's contribution to the group's sound.

Program Design and Dementia-Informed Approach

This program has been thoughtfully designed with adaptations that reflect an understanding of cognitive changes. Every element – from song selection to session structure – prioritizes dignity, engagement, and joy.

This dementia-informed approach ensures that musical participation is not only possible – but meaningful – for individuals with varying cognitive and physical abilities. To support each participant in engaging at their highest level, the following abilities (or equivalent supports) are recommended:

Participant Abilities:

- Responsive to Guidance – Able to follow simple directions from the facilitator during musical activities
- Focused Engagement – Able to maintain attention for 3–5 minutes at a time, with or without gentle prompting

- Physical Participation – Able to hold a small handbell (approximately 0.5 lbs) in one hand or press a button to produce sound
- Musical Movement – Able to raise and swing one arm or press a button to play a handbell in rhythm with the group
- Collaborative Spirit – Able to participate in a group setting, with or without redirection, and contribute to shared musical goals
- Patience and Flexibility – Able to interact with fellow participants with kindness and patience, with or without support from staff

Program Procedures and Flow

Participant Selection

We ask that the sponsoring community invite 8–10 participants to join the program, based on their interests and abilities. The facilitator will further assess each participant’s strengths and needs to tailor song choices that are familiar, enjoyable, and accessible.

Supportive Staffing

We ask that a designated staff member be present throughout each session and performance to assist with physical or cognitive needs. This may include restroom support, gentle reminders for bell playing, or other personalized prompts to help participants stay engaged.

Session Setup

We recommend that participants be seated in a semi-circle facing the facilitator, with minimal visual distractions to help maintain focus. We ask that a set of 28 diatonic handbells be provided by the sponsoring facility, along with a small table for music sheets and any unused bells. Additional bells, as needed, will be provided by the facilitator.

Facilitator Documentation

After each session, the facilitator will reflect on and document participant engagement, noting moments of connection, challenge, or joy. Any concerns or observations will be shared with the Activity Director or designated staff to support ongoing collaboration and program success.

Program Adjustments and Communication

We ask if any changes need to be made to the participant roster, or if a session/performance needs to be canceled or rescheduled, the sponsoring community please notify the facilitator as soon as possible. Timely communication allows us to make necessary adjustments to the musical plan, seating arrangement, or support strategies to ensure the continued success and comfort of all participants.

Program Commitment and Cost

To ensure continuity and meaningful musical progress, the sponsoring community agrees to a commitment of 12 sessions, scheduled in collaboration with the facilitator. The cost of the program is \$85.00 per session, billed monthly. Payments may be made to TMWC Education Services either via check or electronic payment.

A minimum of six sessions must be completed before a concert or performance can be offered, allowing participants time to build confidence, familiarity with the songs, and a sense of ensemble rhythm.

Cancellation and Rescheduling Policy

- **Notice of Cancellation:** We ask that, if cancellation is necessary, the sponsoring community inform TMWC as soon as possible by email or text message.
- **Rescheduling:** Sessions cancelled with at least 24 hours' notice may be rescheduled based on instructor availability.
- **Late Cancellations:** Sessions canceled with less than 24 hours' notice may still be billed unless due to illness or emergency.
- **Concert Planning:** Changes to performance dates should be communicated promptly to allow for musical and logistical adjustments.