

Silver Memories: Implementation and Evaluation

Brief Report

Silver Memories

Silver Memories is a unique 24 hour a day radio service that has been developed by 4MBS Classic FM, a Brisbane community radio station and has been designed to address the needs of socially and emotionally isolated older Australians including those living in Residential Care facilities. Silver Memories broadcasts music, serials and other programs relevant to the period when they grew up – the 1920s to the 1950s. A key goal of Silver Memories is to improve the quality of life and well-being of older people who are socially or emotionally isolated by providing a sense of companionship to listeners through its friendly style. Silver Memories is operated by experienced 4MBS broadcasters who are assisted by a large number of volunteers and can be received via the internet (www.4mbsclassicfm.com.au) or alternately, by a small custom built radio receiver tuned to the Silver Memories frequency. The radios were designed with the older listener in mind and are operated by a simple on/off switch. Silver Memories first aired as a pilot program in April 2008.

The Evaluation

The impact of Silver Memories upon listeners' quality of life and well-being was formally evaluated by researchers from The University of Queensland. The evaluation also aimed to ascertain the views of older listeners regarding the content and format of the program with a view to improving its quality and appeal. Both community dwelling socially isolated older people as well as residents of Residential Aged Care (RAC) facilities were invited to participate in a three month evaluation of Silver Memories. Flyers advertising Silver Memories were widely distributed through community groups (e.g. Home and Community Care Services) and social organisations, and advertisements were placed in local community newsletters inviting people to participate. Individual RAC facilities, respite services and community organisations were also approached directly to invite participation from their residents/members.

In total, 114 participants completed the evaluation including 68 community dwelling participants and 46 RAC residents from 14 separate facilities (31 lived in low-care RAC facilities and 15 in high-care RAC facilities), as well as 15 staff members and 9 carers of participants. All participants were asked to listen to Silver Memories for at least one hour

a day for three months and were provided with a radio receiver, free of charge, throughout the three month trial. Participants were also asked to keep a daily listening diary and completed questionnaires regarding their quality of life and well-being before and following the three month trial as well as providing information regarding their health and social circumstances and their opinion of the program. To obtain feedback regarding the quality and appeal of the program's content and format, participants were also asked the following questions at the follow-up interview:

- How enjoyable did you find Silver Memories?
(responses ranged from 1 - not at all enjoyable to 5 - extremely enjoyable)
- How would you rate the friendliness of Silver Memories?
(responses ranged from 1 - not at all friendly to 5 - extremely friendly)
- How would you rate the quality of Silver Memories overall?
(responses ranged from 1 - extremely poor to 5 - excellent)
- Is Silver Memories something you look forward to?
(responses ranged from 1 - not at all to 5 - greatly)

Finally, participants were also invited to provide comments regarding the program quality and content including program preferences and suggestions for improvement at the conclusion of the three month trial.

Carers and staff of RACs were also interviewed to obtain their perspectives regarding the impact of Silver Memories upon the behaviour and well-being of participants as well as their opinions regarding the quality and suitability of the programming content. They were asked the following questions (questions were tailored to the respondent) at the follow-up interview:

- How would you rate the quality of Silver Memories overall? (responses ranged from 1 - extremely poor to 5 - excellent)
- Do residents/your relative look forward to Silver Memories? (responses ranged from 1 - not at all to 5 - greatly)
- How would you rate the friendliness of Silver Memories? (responses ranged from 1 - not at all friendly to 5 - extremely friendly)
- To what extent do you think Silver Memories positively influenced the morale and well-being of the residents at your facility/ your relative (responses ranged from 1 - not at all to 5 - enormously)
- To what extent did Silver Memories have a positive influence on the behaviour of residents/your relative (e.g. assist with relaxation, reduce agitation) (responses ranged from 1 - not at all to 5 - enormously)
- To what extent has Silver Memories been a useful addition to the programs already offered at this RAC facility/ activities your relative engages in (responses ranged from 1 - not at all helpful to 5 - extremely helpful)

Findings – Participants

The average age of participants was 79.9 years and more females (81) than males (33) participated. Participants had an average of 2.6 chronic health conditions, approximately one-third were visually impaired and 14 (12.6%) were bed or wheelchair bound.

In spite of some difficulties with the reception (signal dropping out, static, interference) in the initial months of Silver Memories going to air (subsequently resolved), the results of the evaluation were very positive. The results showed that listening to Silver Memories resulted in a significant improvement in participants' quality of life after controlling for changes in health status and social circumstances throughout the same period. A trend towards an improvement in depression scores was also observed. There was no change on a measure of loneliness, however, this may have been due to the question lacking sensitivity. Qualitative data shows that the vast majority of participants benefited in some way from the program. Staff of RAC facilities reported that Silver Memories had a calming effect on some patients with dementia. Typical comments in relation to Silver Memories include:

'I never feel lonely with Silver Memories'

'I looked forward to it each day'

'Before Silver Memories I was depressed, lonely and bored to tears.'

'Everyone has commented on how it has made such a difference in my life, I have improved with it.'

'The loneliness has gone, the boredom has gone, all I enjoy is lovely music.'

"It is good that it is going at all times as you wake up at all hours."

'I think it is lovely'

'I love the music'

'I have enjoyed every minute of it'

Results of this evaluation also indicate that Silver Memories had a high degree of acceptability with listeners, with a majority of participants rating Silver Memories as 'very' (47.4%) or 'extremely' (25.4%) enjoyable, very' (57.8%) or 'extremely' (16.5%) friendly, of 'above average' (39.4%) or excellent' (28.4%) quality and was something they looked forward to 'very' (30.3%) much or 'greatly' (27.5%) (see Table 1). This was in spite of some participants indicating they disliked the heavy classical or chamber music and would prefer greater variety. It seems that Silver Memories fills a gap by playing music that is not available elsewhere and an overwhelming majority of participants (92.6%) indicated they plan to continue listening to Silver Memories and would also recommend it to others (96.3%).

Table 1: Participant responses to Silver Memory evaluation questions

Response / Question	Not At All (%)	A Little/ Mildly (%)	Moderately (%)	Very (%)	Extremely/ Greatly (%)
How enjoyable did you find <i>Silver Memories</i> ?	1 (0.9)	2 (1.8)	23 (21.2)	54 (49.5)	29 (26.6)
Is <i>Silver Memories</i> something you look forward to?	8 (7.3)	8 (7.3)	30 (27.5)	33 (30.3)	30 (27.5)
How would you rate the friendliness of <i>Silver Memories</i> ?	0	1 (0.9)	27 (24.8)	63 (57.8)	18 (16.5)
	Extremely Poor	Poor	Average	Above Average	Excellent
How would you rate the quality of <i>Silver Memories</i> overall?	0	1 (0.9)	34 (31.2)	43 (39.4)	31 (28.4)

Findings – Carers and Care Staff

All carers and care staff who completed the evaluation had listened to Silver Memories, at least once-twice a week, throughout the three month trial and the results indicate that Silver Memories also had a high degree of acceptability with these groups. The majority of carers and care staff rated Silver Memories as ‘very’ (66.7%) or ‘extremely’ friendly (22%, 20% respectively), and of ‘above average’ (22.2, 46.7% respectively) or ‘excellent’ quality (44.4%, 26.7% respectively). Most thought the program positively influenced participants’ well-being and morale ‘very’ much (33.3%, 26.7% respectively) or ‘greatly’ (44.4%, 60% respectively) and that it positively influenced their behaviour ‘very much’ (33.3%, 40% respectively) or ‘greatly’ (33.3%, 40% respectively) while over one-third of care staff thought participants looked forward to listening to Silver Memories ‘very much’ while a similar percent of carers (37.5%) thought that participants looked forward to listening ‘greatly’ (see Table 1). It seems that Silver Memories fills a gap by playing music that is not available elsewhere and 100% of carers and care staff indicated they would recommend Silver Memories to others.

Future Directions

The results of this evaluation suggest that Silver Memories is a potentially powerful intervention that may improve the quality of life of some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Clear advantages of the program include its low cost and flexibility.

Table 2: Care staff and Carer responses to Silver Memory evaluation questions

Response / Question	Not At All (%)	A Little/ Mildly (%)	Moderately (%)	Very (%)	Extremely/ Greatly (%)
How would you rate the quality of <i>Silver Memories</i> ? Care staff Carer	0 0	0 0	2 (13.3) 1 (11.1)	10 (66.7) 6 (66.7)	3 (20.0) 2 (22.2)
To what extent did <i>Silver Memories</i> positively influence the morale and well-being of residents? Care staff Carer	0 1 (11.1)	0 1 (11.1)	2 (13.3) 0	4 (26.7) 3 (33.3)	9 (60.0) 4 (44.4)
To what extent did <i>Silver Memories</i> have a positive influence on the behaviour of residents? Care Staff Carer	1 (6.7) 2 (22.2)	0 0	2 (13.3) 1 (11.1)	6 (40.0) 3 (33.3)	6 (40.0) 3 (33.3)
Do residents look forward to listening to <i>Silver Memories</i> ? Care Staff Carer	2 (14.3) 1 (12.5)	1 (7.1) 1 (12.5)	4 (28.6) 3 (37.5)	5 (35.7) 0	2 (14.3) 3 (37.5)
To what extent do you think <i>Silver Memories</i> is a useful addition to the programs offered? Care Staff Carer	0 1 (11.1)	0 1 (11.1)	3 (20.0) 1 (11.1)	5 (33.3) 4 (44.4)	7 (46.7) 2 (22.2)
	Extremely Poor	Poor	Average	Above Average	Excellent
How would you rate the quality of <i>Silver Memories</i> overall? Care Staff Carer	0 0	1 (6.7) 0	3 (20.0) 3 (33.3)	7 (46.7) 2 (22.2)	4 (26.7) 4 (44.4)

Dr Catherine Travers

Australasian Centre on Ageing
The University of Queensland
St Lucia QLD 4072
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