

Music therapy engages seniors physically, emotionally

BY DEE STRAUSS

GREEN HOUSE LIVING FOR SHERIDAN

SHERIDAN — A song comes on the radio, instantly triggering a memory that takes you to another time and place.

“Smell is the strongest trigger for memories but music is the second strongest trigger,” said Andy Edmundson of Possibilities Music Therapy Service of Sheridan. “A song can elicit memories of your first kiss or your wedding. It’s really quite powerful.”

One music career segued to another for Edmundson. The band teacher for junior and senior high school programs in Sheridan, Edmundson was in the midst of a satisfying career in the late 1990s when his father became ill and went into hospice. That hospice experience was his initiation to the power of music therapy and Edmundson was intrigued. However, leaving the high school music program was a difficult decision.

“It was a huge risk — I was leaving a teaching position I was very comfortable with and the community was tremendously supportive,” Edmundson said.

He returned to Appalachian State in Boone, North Carolina, where he had received his undergraduate and master’s degrees, to pursue a two-year equivalency program in music therapy.

As defined by the American Music Therapy Association, music therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individual therapeutic goals. Music therapists work alongside physical and occupational therapists with patients of all ages from infants to adults in mental health, hospitals, hospice,



Above: Ruth Benson beats the drum as Andy Edmundson leads a group of elders in a song during music therapy Friday at Green House Living for Sheridan.
Right: Music therapist Andy Edmundson leads a group of elders in a song Friday at Green House Living for Sheridan.

schools, skilled nursing facilities and even prisons. Following an internship at Memorial Sloan-Kettering

Cancer Center in New York City, Edmundson joined Calvary Hospital in the Bronx, New York, where he worked from 2002 to 2013. Calvary Hospital provided end-of-life care to cancer patients, most of whom lived just three weeks after they were admitted.

“I saw patients physically at their worst, but mentally at their best,” he explained.

Edmundson felt called back to Sheridan and started Possibilities in January 2014. He noted that Wyoming has only five board-certified music therapists.

His mission is to serve individuals of all ages, enhancing cognitive, physical, social and emotional levels while maintaining dignity and independence. He provides some one-to-one therapy but mostly leads music therapy groups.

At Green House Living for Sheridan, a skilled nursing facility, Edmundson works with small groups of elders in each of the cottages. At first glance, a music therapy program might appear as if it is simply musical entertainment with Edmundson



providing the guitar music, but it’s so much more than that.

“He’s delightful,” said Ann Landon, an elder in Green House’s Whitney Cottage, about Edmundson. “He enjoys it so much that you can’t help but join in.”

Landon noted that Edmundson often designs a

program around a time of year.

“That’s reality orientation,” Edmundson explained, adding that it might look like elders are just waving flags that Edmundson has distributed, but it is range of motion exercise.


Edmundson said he also uses hand-held musical instruments to enhance fine motor skills.

The benefits of music

therapy are many. Studies show it reduces loneliness, promotes reminiscing and well-being while reducing cortisol levels and increasing endorphins.

“Andy has a passion for enriching the lives of our elders through his music therapy,” Green House activity director Julie Norris said. “It is exciting to watch the faces of our elders light up as they play their instruments.”

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SENIOR HAPPENINGS

- Shopping Sheridan Days for Tongue River Valley residents are available every first and third Thursday of each month. Trips include visits to Albertson’s or Walmart. We can shop for you, with you or leave you on your own. Take advantage of this great way to get your shopping done. Call ahead to reserve your spot at 655-9419, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The shopping bus will leave Dayton at 12:30 p.m., pick up riders in Ranchester at 12:45 p.m. and return to Ranchester at 3:45 p.m., and to Dayton at 4 p.m. The cost is \$8 for a round-trip ride.
- Burgers and Bluegrass will be featured Oct. 17 from 7-9 p.m. The suggested contribution is \$2 for burgers or join the jam for free!
- Third Thursday Writers will have a reading at 12:30 p.m. Oct. 19.
- A greeting card making class with instructor Heidi Roesler is set for Oct. 21 from 12:30-3:30 p.m. The deadline to register is Oct. 18.