

The Inter-Mountain

Music helping Elkins Rehabilitation & Care Center patients

ELKINS – The Elkins Rehabilitation and Care Center is optimistic about a relatively new program, Music and Memory, implemented at the facility that has some patients singing a new tune.

Music and Memory is a non-profit organization that strives to bring personalized music into the lives of the elderly, or those who are not mentally or physically strong, through digital music technology.

ERCC was the first facility in the state to be designated as an official Music and Memory facility. Two other facilities, one in Fairmont and one in Wheeling, have since started using the program.

Linda Zimmer, an expressive arts therapist at ERCC, works with patients through many creative avenues including the Music and Memory Program.

“What I realize is that working with people, particularly with dementia, is that music is a way that I can reach people when I can’t reach them any other way,” Zimmer said. “Music is one of the things that remains with us, and it touches memories and feelings.”

The Music and Memory program provides iPods that can be programmed to fit each of the patients’ specific music interests.

“Usually, things that are important to us when we are 13 or 14, that stays with us forever,” Zimmer said.

The facility also works to create playlists for patients and also allows them to have dual connections so that they can share with other residents.

“We’re really excited about it because as an expressive arts therapist, I use music a lot; we sing, we have instruments, and we also do art and drama,” Zimmer said.

Zimmer added there are times when patients’ medications can be adjusted in response to the success of the music during anxious times or at other points throughout the day.

“It really is a useful tool at times in the day when people might be having an anxious time,” Zimmer said.

ERCC has been working with this program for approximately one year. The facility hopes to reach out to people in the community who may want to assist with the technical aspect of the program by working with the iPods.

Zimmer said the facility provided half of the money to purchase the iPods to be used for the Music and Memory Program and the other half of the funding was provided by a donor.

“We are looking towards having people who want to get involved,” Zimmer said. “If people have used iPods or want to donate a gift card, that’s something that people can do to be involved.”

The facility currently has approximately 25-30 iPods that are being used as part of a pilot program. Eventually, ERCC hopes to expand this and offer iPods to everyone in the facility.

“This is something that works so beautifully. We never really lose our creative ability,” Zimmer said, “Our ability to access our emotions and our creativity just stays with us forever.”