

MUSIC AND ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

PRESENTER

..... and continuing out overview of what's on and where this week, we're going to move on to films. Judith is here to tell us about a documentary that is showing at the *Independent* cinema next week. Judith?

JUDITH

Yes, Robert. The documentary is called *Alive Inside* and it was made by Michael Rossalto Bennett, an alternative filmmaker from the United States. The documentary explores the positive effect that music can have on patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease. It follows the progress of a social worker called Dan Cohen and his plan to introduce music in care homes in New York where people with Alzheimer's are being looked after.

PRESENTER

How interesting. Tell us more.

JUDITH

In the documentary, we see how he visits the homes and meets some of the patients. What he does is to create a personalized playlist for the patients, which they can listen to on an MP3 player or an iPod. He finds out which songs to include by interviewing each patient's family. By creating the playlist, he hopes that the patients will be able to travel back to the time to when they heard the songs and perhaps it will even help them remember important events in their past.

PRESENTER

And does it work?

JUDITH

Well, I'm giving away some of the story here, but yes, yes it does work. Cohen's biggest success story is a man called Henry. Perhaps you've seen the clip about Henry on YouTube?

PRESENTER

No, I haven't. What is it?

JUDITH

Oh, OK. Well, Henry is special because of the astonishing transformation that happens to him when he listens to his playlist for the first time. When we first see him, he is sitting in his chair with his head down and he's barely capable of answering questions, except with a monosyllabic "yes" or "no". But when he is given his headphones, he turns into a completely different person. His eyes open wide, his face lights up, and he starts moving to the music. He can even answer questions about the song he's listening to. It's actually quite emotional watching his reaction, which is probably why millions of people have seen that video clip I mentioned.

PRESENTER

It sounds like an amazing story, Judith. But do the playlists work for everybody?

JUDITH

They seem to work for most people, yes. And they have had a much wider effect than helping only individuals. At first, Cohen was worried that the iPods might isolate the patients as each one would be listening to his or her own set. But, in fact, the playlists are encouraging them to socialize. The staff in all four of the homes he worked with in New York reported that the music was helping the residents to talk to each other more. The patients would ask each other questions about the music, and in some cases, they wanted to share the different songs.

PRESENTER

What effect has Cohen's work had on other care homes in the USA?

JUDITH

It's too early to say what will happen in care homes in the whole country, but in New York, there have definitely been some changes. One of the greatest obstacles to the plan is the cost. MP3 players are not cheap, and providing one for every patient in each nursing home would just be too expensive. But Cohen is trying to get around this problem by asking people to donate any old MP3 players or iPods which they may have lying at home at the back of a drawer.

PRESENTER

Well, this sounds like a really worthwhile project, Judith. But what about the film? Would you recommend it?

JUDITH

Yes, definitely – especially if someone in your family suffers from Alzheimer's. You'll find it a great comfort.

PRESENTER

Thanks, Judith, for your recommendation. And just to remind you of the name of that documentary, it's *Alive Inside*, and it's showing in the *Independent* cinema from Monday to Saturday next week. And now it's time to look at what's on at the theatre

TASK

Answer the questions with information from the interview.

1. What is Dan Cohen's occupation?
2. Why does Cohen create the playlists for Alzheimer's patients?
3. How does music work for the Alzheimer's patients?
4. How does Henry react when he listens to his playlist for the first time?
5. How do the patients behave when they are wearing their headphones?
6. How does Cohen want other people to help him?

Bibliography:

Christina Latham-Koenig, Clive Oxenden with Jane Hudson, English File Upper-Intermediate Workbook with Key, Oxford University Press 2014, Unit 6A Music and Emotion, s. 39

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