



# Memory Disco™ Case Study

## ABOUT OUR PARTNER

Heinzerling Community is a comprehensive residential care organization serving individuals with profound developmental disabilities across three facilities in Columbus, Ohio: Heinzerling Developmental Center, Heinzerling Memorial Foundation, and Community Homes.

With 67 years of experience providing person-centered care, Heinzerling Community partners with organizations that enhance residents' quality of life through innovative programming and evidence-based interventions.



In partnership with The Ohio State University Extension office, Heinzerling Community collaborated with Day By Day Project through pilot programming funded by The Columbus Foundation to explore new approaches to music-based engagement for their unique resident population.

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## THE CHALLENGE

Heinzerling Community sought to develop evidence-based music curriculum and activities specifically designed for the developmental disability population—programming that could be implemented in any setting for individuals with developmental disabilities, both locally and nationally.

While Memory Disco™ had proven successful with individuals experiencing dementia, adapting this silent disco technology for residents with profound developmental disabilities presented unique challenges around personalization, sensory engagement, equipment adaptation, and measuring outcomes across varied communication abilities and mobility levels.



## THE SOLUTION

Memory Disco™ provides residents and staff with proprietary Bluetooth headphones connected to a single receiver, allowing groups to listen simultaneously to the same music from streaming services.

Offered weekly, the program creates a unique environment where staff engage residents through silent head-bouncing, hand-clapping, finger-clicking, and facial expressions that convey joy and excitement—transforming music into a new language for emotional connection and communication.

At Heinzerling Developmental Center, Occupational Therapy collaborates with teachers to run sessions that promote movement, engagement, and social interaction. Residents work on posture, body awareness, relaxation, and range of motion while staff provide lightweight maracas to help them sync with musical rhythms.

The program incorporates personalized playlists based on resident and staff input, with softer music encouraging calmness and focus while upbeat rhythms inspire dancing and active participation.

“ Staff participation has played a crucial role. When staff joined in by dancing or assisting with instruments, residents responded more positively. These sessions foster social connections between residents and staff, creating a shared, joyful experience that supports physical and emotional well-being ”

— **KATHY TUTT**, M.S., ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AND FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES EDUCATOR, OSU EXTENSION

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## THE RESULTS

The pilot program revealed transformative impacts on both resident engagement and staff confidence. Resident responses varied from calm curiosity to joyful movement, with typically withdrawn individuals smiling, vocalizing, and staying awake longer during sessions. The stimulating environment helped more socially isolated residents open up and connect with others through shared musical experiences.



Staff participation proved crucial to program success. When staff joined in by dancing or assisting with instruments, residents responded more positively, creating shared joyful experiences that supported both physical and emotional well-being. Personalized playlists proved especially effective at reaching residents across different engagement levels, while the program provided new opportunities for residents to become active participants rather than passive recipients of activities.