

Singing Across Generations:

Cultivating Understanding and Connection

Project Summary — Three Year Grant — Lancaster Legacy Foundation



YEAR ONE IMPACT REPORT

October 2025 - September 2026

Project Statement

MCCL singers will connect with residents at Landis Homes, one part of Landis Communities, through shared singing experiences that foster well-being, empathy, and belonging. Under the guidance of a music therapist, Elisa Chodan MCCL staff, and the Director of Dementia-Friendly Experience, Teffie Landmann Landis Communities Lumina staff, singers in grades 2 – 12 will engage with aging individuals, some living with dementia, through shared choir rehearsals and seasonal events like caroling and hymn sings. High school singers may opt into a music therapy intensive, observing music therapy with residents, participating in joint singing experiences, and processing their own mental health in dedicated youth-only spaces, promoting emotional regulation and peer support. Residents will join in hymn sings and “Sing for the Moment” rehearsals with youth, reinforcing identity, connection, and joy. This project seeks to affirm the healing potential of music while equipping young singers with a deeper understanding of mental health – both their own and others’ – through collaborative experience, reflection, and education.

Overview Year One

The first year of *Singing Across Generations* demonstrated the profound potential of intergenerational music-making to foster connection, empathy, emotional well-being, and shared joy between MCCL singers and Landis Homes residents. Through structured dementia-friendly training, collaborative singing experiences, and a music therapy discovery track for high school students, the program cultivated meaningful relationships and measurable emotional impact for both youth and older adults.

112 singers in 2nd through 12th grade participated in trainings and local tour day.

76 residents participated in local tour days.

7 singers joined 65 residents and their caregivers in “Sing for the Moment” choir.

7 high school singers and 3 residents participated in the “Music Therapy Discovery Experience” in the hospice setting.



Program Implementation

Pre-Assessment Data

Across all three choirs (grades 2 - 12), pre-assessment data from 112 singers revealed the following themes which provided a baseline for understanding singers perceptions.

- Warmth & Affection (45+ mentions): Youth entered, listing positive associations such as kind, nice, gentle, honesty, and happy.
- Physical/Cognitive Slowing (34+ mentions): Many associated aging with tiredness or forgetfulness. Elementary singer shared the most unfiltered anxiety regarding physical decline using words such as: sick, sad, or queasy.
- Mobility & Medical Needs (20+ mentions): Youth were aware of physical barriers such as wheelchairs.
- Intellectual Value (20+ mentions): Older adults were seen as wise and full of stories. High school singers responded with the most emotional nuance using words such as: experience, wisdom.

Dementia-Friendly Training for All Choirs

Across four sessions (November 2025, February 2026, April 2026, September 2026) led by Landis Homes Dementia-Friendly Care staff and MCCL's board-certified music therapist, singers learned:

- How the brain changes with aging and dementia.
- How visual perception shifts and how to greet someone experiencing vision loss.
- How to introduce themselves and engage in supportive conversation with individuals experiencing cognitive change.

These sessions equipped singers with practical tools for compassionate interaction and set the foundation for successful intergenerational engagement.



In addition, all 2nd–12th grade singers watched a series of videos explaining music therapy, session structure, and applications across various populations. Assigned as part of their weekly choir homework, these videos supplemented their hands-on work with MCCL music therapist and Landis Homes dementia care staff.

Carol Choir Christmas Caroling (December 2025)

Twenty-one singers (grades 2-5) along with their parents visited Landis Homes for caroling in small groups. Singers interacted warmly with residents, supported by MCCL staff, parents, and Landis Homes staff. The event concluded with refreshments and informal connection.



Carol Choir Christmas Caroling Mood Data

Grades 2 & 3:

70% maintained or improved their mood.

Grades 4 & 5:

91% maintained or improved their mood.

Older youth used new emotional vocabulary such as “appreciated,” “confident,” and “thankful.”

Residents:

96% maintained or improved their mood.

43% reported “Excellent” post-singing, the highest rating.

Many residents shifted multiple levels toward the highest mood response.

Local Tour Days (April 2026)

Each choir visited Landis Homes for a short performance followed by thirty minutes of guided intergenerational singing and conversation connected to the songs. Conversations ranged from sharing about pets, to places they find peaceful, to sharing wisdom about life and faith. These sessions created space for shared musical joy, reminiscence, and relational connection.



Local Tour Day Mood Data

Youth (112 total):

83% improved their mood

15% stayed the same

Residents (76 total):

92% improved their mood

8% stayed the same

These results demonstrate consistent emotional uplift across all ages.

Local Tour Day Qualitative Post Data

Youth

Across choirs, singers noted:

- Increased **connection** with residents and **real conversations**
- **Reduced performance pressure and a sense of relaxation and freedom** when singing *with* residents
- **More smiles, energy, and enthusiasm** from residents during shared songs
- Surprise at the **richness of residents' life stories**
- **Sense of joy and vibrancy** from residents and an eagerness to interact.

Residents

Residents described:

- **Joyful reminiscence** ("Great to enjoy the special songs we sang years ago")
- **Emotional warmth** ("Blessed. A little tearful and touched by the kids")
- **Deep relational connection** (often naming specific youth) with eagerness to interact

Music Therapy Discovery Experience (March–May 2026)

Seven Chamber Choir members participated in an optional three-month intensive including:

- Four “Sing for the Moment” choir rehearsals at Landis Homes Communities with residents living with dementia and their care partners.
- Two hospice music therapy sessions per singer.
- Youth-only cohort gatherings for emotional processing.
- Participation in two “Sing for the Moment” choir performances at Landis Homes Communities.

This track offered deeper exposure to dementia care, end-of-life experiences, and reflective mental-health support.

Music Therapy Discovery Experience Pre-Assessment

High School Singer Participants noted:

- nervousness about being around end-of-life and people living with dementia
- motivation to learn because of a family member living with brain changes
- anticipation of feeling connected to loved ones
- anticipation of feelings of loss due to recent experiences of death of loved one



Music Therapy Discovery Experience Post Assessment

High School Singers Participants reported:

- growth in confidence and self-awareness
- emotional lift (calm, joyful, refreshed, connected)
- healing related to personal loss
- increased interest in dementia research and comfort with the life cycle
- stronger social connection with older adults beyond the program

Singer Quotes from End-of-Year Reflections

2nd through 12th grade

The Landis Homes experience successfully bridged complex neuroscience with actionable empathy. Younger children walked away with clear behavioral steps for safe, respectful interactions, while older students grasped the underlying biological reasons for sensory and emotional changes in aging adults.

"It is good for your brain to sing. Even when an older person may have trouble remembering short term memories, they will remember the songs from childhood and this brings comfort."

-high school singer

"I learned about interacting with people with brain changes as well as tactics for helping people calm down, and just being a better supportive person."

-high school singer

"Different tips to talk to older people who may be having brain trouble or not. I learned how music affects the brain and how important it is throughout our lives. I also learned the different parts of the brain and how they react to different things like stress."

-high school singer

"I learned that the stuff that we applied to the residents, can also apply to people without brain changes."

-middle school singer

"I learned that when you say "Hi", it's important to put your hand next to your face or they won't see you said "Hi". Also, that sudden movements can be very alarming."

-middle school singer

"Sensory-motor, singing helps people feel good, helps them feel connected."

-elementary school singer

"I learned that singing helps people remember songs they knew when they were younger. Music helps people feel calm and joyful."

-elementary school singer

"I learned how to talk to them and keep a relaxed steady lower voice and to wave near your face so they can see you waving and smiling and not to be afraid."

-middle school singer

"I learned that singing brings people together. It helps people with dementia feel comforted, and can bring back some memories."

-elementary singer

Parent Quotes from End-of-Year Reflections

"My son really enjoyed the interaction with his resident at Landis Homes and **enthusiastically told me the connections he made as they talked.**"

"The Local Choir Tour Day was incredibly moving to me as a parent chaperone. **The grant-funded project and the fruits emerging—connection, overcoming fears/biases (e.g., old people are scary!), and opportunities for sharing song, wisdom, community, and presence—were powerful.** My daughter continues to talk about singing with the LH residents and how that was the favorite part of her Tour Day."

"I was inspired by the interactions the choirs had with the residents of Landis Homes. I think it is such a valuable experience for both the old and the young. **It is important for young people to learn how to think about and be curious about other people and not just wrapped up into their own world and desires.**"

"My children enjoyed the opportunity to partner with Landis Homes this semester. **They were each a little unsure going into it, but had very positive things to say after going.**"

"The concert at Landis Homes was very moving. **I loved seeing the singers interact with the older generation and hearing how that brought joy to their lives.**"

My daughter tells me that she was very impressed by the training the kids received about communicating with adults suffering from dementia, and by the quality of the interactions between the kids and the seniors. **She tells me that she regularly uses some of the communication techniques taught to the kids** when she sees patients suffering from dementia in her workplace."

"The experience gave my son a chance **to do something meaningful and important, and to enhance his perspective on the trajectory of human life.** The effects of good work ripple outwards in beautiful and unexpected ways."

"My daughter has always gravitated toward the elderly, so not only was it a joy for me to watch her, but **I was also blessed to watch all of the students meet and warm to the residents.** I'm so impressed with this program and the way that it invites students to invest their time and effort on many levels."

Conclusion and Future Vision

Year One of *Singing Across Generations* affirmed the healing and connective power of shared music-making for children, youth, and adults. Children and youth demonstrated increased empathy, confidence, and emotional awareness, while residents experienced joy, uplift, and meaningful relational engagement.

Singers applied these skills during two non-grant related summer performances at retirement communities in Indiana and Lancaster County. During these visits, singers demonstrated unprompted confidence and empathy by engaging retirement home residents in conversation, as well as in physically getting on the same level as residents. Residents responded positively, and singers showed sustained enthusiasm as they recognized the impact of these intergenerational interactions with each community they visited.



Looking ahead, MCCL aims to:

- Expand opportunities for singers to engage with residents experiencing more profound cognitive change.
- Continue cultivating intergenerational connection and improved mental health through group music making and reflection.
- Strengthen assessment processes, especially in hospice settings.
- Refine scheduling to maximize resident engagement and youth accessibility.

The first year laid a strong foundation for continued growth, deeper connection, and expanded impact in year two and beyond.