

Video Transcript: A Tale of Two Veterans

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Penny and Lorna came to this group and the goals of this small group is, it includes improving cognitive function, reality orientation, sensory and environmental stimulation, and improving social interaction. When you meld all of those concepts into an experience with these musicians, what can I say? All of the lights go on. All the buttons are pushed, everything is working, and the body and the mind are alive in a situation like that. It's excellent. So that's I think why we like them in a therapeutic group.

One veteran is what they call end stage dementia. He is mostly bedridden because he is at the end stage of his life. He doesn't talk anymore. He is at that sensory level, and he has all sorts of problems too with vision. He doesn't see as clearly, and he doesn't hear as clearly. We took him out of his bed, we put him in a very comfy chair. He was awake but maybe a bit irritated because it was an adjustment and we put—turned him on his good side (he's got a good eye), and all of a sudden he sees something new. And then he starts hearing the music—and he was close enough to hear it. All of a sudden we do have a guy that's not falling asleep, that's not eyes going all over the place, that's moaning or sitting there with tense muscles. And you're looking at not a person that normally talks, you're looking at a person—how can they respond at this extremely disabled level? Well what you get is you've got a guy who relaxes, he starts watching the person, he doesn't fall asleep, and his facial muscles relax.

So this recreation therapist—therapy assistant—wrote these notes about him. 'Veteran attended a group this afternoon. Two members of the Pittsburgh Symphony performed both classical and Celtic pieces in an attempt to raise the veteran's awareness of the upcoming Saint Patrick's Day celebration, as well as the beginning of spring time. The veteran was also invited to remember and share anything that was uplifting to him while in dire circumstances. This veteran was very attentive during the group. His eyes were focused on the performers. The veteran appeared to be really enjoying the activity.' You're in a bed, you're at the end of your life, you need to have quality of life. You need to have something that is—you need to have beauty, and that's what they had for him that day. And it was—it was wonderful, it was powerful.

Second guy—second guy's at the other end. He's just moderately kind of cognitively impaired. But he's an intrusive little old craggy guy that I love to bits, and he'll talk and interrupt and do everything. And we're trying to get him to be more social, more attentive to other people, what's going on in his environment, being a little bit better aware. So, this is what I have about him, 'Veteran participated in group and discussion,' and this is what I wrote—this is my notes, 'a group listening and discussion with special seasonal live music provided by members of the Pittsburgh Symphony, special Irish soda bread. (We had other stuff there, so it was more like a sensory with soda bread, too.) Soda bread was served as well. Veteran was very attentive and appropriate. He occasionally leaves groups early because he wants to go smoke, but he stayed the entire time. He did verbalize quite a bit—he still has his problems—but a great decrease from other times when he would monopolize the conversation. He was observed to have made improvement in his social skills. So that's a good thing—you've got a guy who has a nicotine urge [saying] 'well, this is a fun group but I gotta go smoke' or else, I have to interrupt the group. He didn't—he was more socially engaged, and he didn't leave. He was invested in that group, and that was a good goal.