

Grace Note Singers

The Gift of Music at Life's Passage

Imagine that an Elder is at the end-of-life and surrounding her bedside are 4-6 people tenderly singing songs that are meaningful to her. Their voices are creating an environment that is providing peace and tranquility for her and the care partners who are with her at that time. They are honoring this Elder who stands at the threshold of her next life passage. They are a part of Grace Notes Singers in Rhode Island and their mission is to “use their voices to create a peaceful environment while holding those present with love and support.”

The care partner team at Elmhurst Extended Care in Providence, Rhode Island has made a very natural connection with Jodi Glass and the Grace Note Singers. Their choir members are another way that Elmhurst honors each Elder's end-of-life experience through the Celebration of Life program. For Grace Note Singers, this is their first ongoing relationship with a long-term care community, and surely won't be their last. They come in every other week, and through the guidance of nurse care partners, identify who they will visit and sing to. Their purpose is to sing meaningful songs at the Elder's bedside; not provide entertainment. Others are welcome to join in the song if they are so moved.

Jodi Glass is an audiologist with a strong background in music. She grew up going to Broadway musicals in New York. It has been a life passion to start up choruses based on needs in her community. At a time in her life when several family members were passing, she learned about Threshold Choir, a movement started by Kate Munger. Jodi discovered that “to be greeted and passed on by music is the best gift ever.” She, and another choir member Michelle, agree that music is a wonderful way to communicate. Music is a way to open the door to talking about issues that are often difficult to discuss, such as a person's end-of-life experience.

Grace Note Singers has grown to about 50 members in its first year. The members range in age from 40 to 80 years old. They have new people joining the choir all the time. The full choir meets monthly to practice their repertoire of songs and smaller groups meet in people's homes at other times during the month. There is a music committee that acquires and teaches the musical pieces to the choir. They rehearse songs from different spiritual and religious beliefs as well as more secular songs. They choose music based on what is meaningful to the individuals that request their services. There is an online singing request form at their website.

As they are reaching out to let people know about the choir, they find that people are reticent to talk about end-of-life in a pleasant way. Choir members feel it is a gift and a blessing to be with people at their end-of-life. Jodi and Michelle both recognize that the holistic approach of The Eden Alternative, practiced at Elmhurst Extended Care, aligns with what the Grace Note Singers provide. “Treating” people with music is very natural and fits with Principle Seven. Each new experience for the choir members only feeds their desire to touch more people's lives.

What is your story about the power of music to facilitate the life passage of an Elder?