CREATING MEANING FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA THROUGH NATURE:
EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF BIRD TALES

by Jennifer Dibert

Meaningful programming for people living with dementia is becoming an increasingly important topic as we prepare for a population that is older than ever before, for the risk of having Alzheimer’s disease or related dementia increases with age. Designing programs for people with dementia that incorporate multisensory stimulation and take into consideration psychosocial factors is critical in providing meaningful programs for this unique population. Bird Tales is a new, innovative multisensory program that aims to connect people living with dementia to nature and to encourage social interaction. This report presents a process evaluation of the program implemented as an intergenerational program. The findings highlight three main themes: (1) The Bird Tales program guide is helpful, but needs improvement; (2) Building relationships with the local community improves interaction and breaks down stereotypes about dementia; and (3) There is room for growth to program conceptualization.
CREATING MEANING FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA THROUGH NATURE:

EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF BIRD TALES

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# Table of Contents

Background ....................................................................................................................... 1
  Statement of the Problem .............................................................................................. 1
  Literature Review ........................................................................................................... 3
  Introduction to Bird Tales ............................................................................................. 11

Bird Tales Implementation ............................................................................................... 13

Research Methods ........................................................................................................... 16
  Research Objectives ...................................................................................................... 16
  Research Design ............................................................................................................ 17
  Participants ..................................................................................................................... 18
  Data Collection ............................................................................................................. 19
      PDSA Model .............................................................................................................. 19
      Leader Feedback ........................................................................................................ 19
      Resident Feedback ..................................................................................................... 20
      Volunteer Feedback ................................................................................................... 21
      Overall Evaluation ..................................................................................................... 21

Data Analysis .................................................................................................................. 21
  PDSA Model ................................................................................................................ 21
  Descriptive Statistics ................................................................................................... 23
  Validity .......................................................................................................................... 23

Findings ............................................................................................................................ 24
  Objective 1 .................................................................................................................... 24
      Strengths of the Bird Tales Program ........................................................................ 24
      Improvements Made to the Bird Tales Program ....................................................... 31
      Resources Needed for the Bird Tales Program ......................................................... 34
      Barriers to Delivering the Bird Tales Program ......................................................... 35
  Objective 2 .................................................................................................................... 37
      Resident Response to the Bird Tales Program .......................................................... 37
      Volunteer Response to the Bird Tales Program ....................................................... 39

Conclusions ....................................................................................................................... 41

Lessons Learned .............................................................................................................. 42
  Bird Tales Program Guide ............................................................................................. 42
  Community Relationships and Meaningful Interactions .............................................. 43
Let it Grow, Let it Grow, Let it Grow ...................................................................................... 43
Limitations .............................................................................................................................. 44
Future Directions .................................................................................................................... 45
References ............................................................................................................................. 46
Appendix .................................................................................................................................. 51
Exhibit 1. Bird Card Example ................................................................................................. 51
Exhibit 2. Activity Lesson Example ....................................................................................... 52
Table 2. Attendance .................................................................................................................. 53
Table 3. Attendance Frequencies 1 ........................................................................................ 53
Table 4. Attendance Frequencies 2 ........................................................................................ 53
Exhibit 3. Bird Tales Process ................................................................................................... 54
Exhibit 4. Resident Feedback Form ......................................................................................... 55
Exhibit 5. Volunteer Feedback Form ....................................................................................... 56
Exhibit 6. Program Evaluation Forms ..................................................................................... 57
Table 5. Resident Feedback Summary .................................................................................... 58
Table 6. Volunteer Feedback Summary ................................................................................... 58
Table 7. Overall Evaluation Summary .................................................................................... 59
Figure 3. Overall Evaluation Summary .................................................................................. 60
Exhibit 7. Volunteer Feedback Quotes .................................................................................... 61
Exhibit 8. Program Evaluation Quotes .................................................................................... 63
Exhibit 9. Bird Tales Experience Reflection ............................................................................. 64
**List of Tables**

Table 1. Benefits from Spending Time in Nature

Table 2. Attendance

Table 3. Attendance Frequencies 1

Table 4. Attendance Frequencies 2

Table 5. Resident Feedback Summary

Table 6. Volunteer Feedback Summary

Table 7. Overall Evaluation Summary
List of Figures

Figure 1: PDSA Model .................................................................................................................. 20
Figure 2: PDSA Model Cycle 1 .................................................................................................. 22
Figure 3: Overall Evaluation Summary ....................................................................................... 60
List of Exhibits

Exhibit 1. Bird Card Example .......................................................... 51
Exhibit 2. Activity Lesson Example .................................................. 52
Exhibit 3. Bird Tales Process ............................................................... 54
Exhibit 4. Resident Feedback Form ...................................................... 55
Exhibit 5. Volunteer Feedback Form .................................................... 56
Exhibit 6. Program Evaluation Forms .................................................. 57
Exhibit 7. Volunteer Feedback Quotes .................................................. 61
Exhibit 8. Program Evaluation Quotes .................................................. 63
Exhibit 9. Bird Tales Experience Reflection .......................................... 64
This work is in memory of:

My grandpa, John Dibert, who supported me unconditionally up until his last breath and beyond.

He was kind, graceful, humble, gentle – the true definition of love.

He taught me how to walk the walk, opposed to talking the talk.

I am forever grateful for his influence on my everyday life, especially today.

This one’s for you, old man; may we forever be connected through birdsong.
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Background

Statement of the Problem

The United States (U.S.) is confronted with the same critical issue as the rest of the world: population aging (United Nations, 2013). Aging is a global phenomenon and taking place in almost every country due to decreasing mortality and declining fertility rates (United Nations, 2013). Globally, the number those aged 60 years or over “is expected to more than double from 841 million people in 2013 to more than 2 billion in 2050” (United Nations, p. xii). In 2015, 14.7% of the population in the U.S. was aged 65 or older and by 2030 this number is expected to increase to 20% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). When people become older, the likelihood of developing dementia increases (Alzheimer’s Association, 2014). In the U.S. only 4% of those living with Alzheimer’s disease are under 65 years old. In addition to growing older, we are starting to see the older population itself aging; the share of those aged 80 years or over is projected to grow more than three times the present by 2050 (United Nations, 2013). Looking towards the future, we must plan for this growing segment of older adults living with dementia. (Alzheimer’s Association, 2014). This planning will specifically include designing and implementing programs that are meaningful and engaging for people living with dementia.

In light of the increasing growth of people living with dementia, researchers have started to look at different interventions to enhance the well-being of those living with dementia (Alzheimer’s Association, 2014). Several of these interventions, such as music therapy, aromatherapy, creating memory boxes, and sensory activities, have proved effective for people living with dementia (Forrester et al., 2014; Vink, Bruinsma, & Scholten, 2013; Woods et al., 2012). These therapies have a commonality—to improve the quality of life for those living with dementia. In addition, these therapies often reduced the need for psychotropic medications (James et al., 2008). The behavioral and psychological symptoms that people with dementia exhibit are more often than not managed by medicine, however interventions that emphasize emotional and physical well-being could produce more effective management of such behaviors (Bossen, 2010).

As people age, their ability to interact with the outdoors can become challenging, specifically in nursing homes. Some older adults deal with mobility issues that create barriers to outdoor activities or simply spending time outdoors (Sabat, 2005). These common barriers become even more prohibitive for people living in nursing homes, who rely greatly on staff,
family, and friends to mitigate basic activities of daily living (ADLs). For those with memory impairment, such as Alzheimer’s disease or other related dementia, opportunities for engagement with the outdoors is compounded with the aforementioned barriers, creating little to no opportunity for outdoor interaction. Nature-based interventions have a lot in common with the aforementioned researched interventions and future research needs to look into the benefits for people living with dementia.

The literature on nature indicates that being outdoors can have a positive effect on people’s health, well-being, and quality of life (Bossen, 2010). The healing power of nature is hardly a new concept; in the 19th century, Florence Nightingale came to the conclusion that sunshine and fresh air expedited the recovery process of men infirmed in the Crimean War. Likewise, Native American tribes have looked to healers for centuries, believing that nature can heal (Bossen, 2010). Nature-based interventions for people living with dementia are cutting edge and innovative, but researchers are just starting explore the potential. For example, a study on outdoor activities by Connell, Sanford, and Lewis (2007) that evaluated sleep and agitation among people with dementia found that their intervention group had a significant increase in maximum sleep duration, a decrease in verbal agitation, and a decrease in physical agitation (Bossen, 2010). These preliminary studies on the benefits of connecting people with dementia to nature are promising and they need further exploration.

The majority of evidence-based data that exists in the literature focuses on providing people living with dementia multisensory engagement. There are multiple reasons for implementing multisensory activities; programs that utilize multisensory stimulation have been found to reduce behavior problems, improve communication, improve functional performance, and increase residents’ attentiveness (Cruz, Marques, Barbosa, Figueiredo, & Sousa, 2011; van Weert, et al., 2006). Although studies have demonstrated that the environment is a critical component to the quality of life and well-being of people living with dementia (Kolanowski, & Whall, 2000), none have explored the intersection of multisensory and nature related programs. In addition to the social, physical, psychological, and emotional environment, the experience of nature can also be important for people living with dementia and has long been neglected in the literature (Duggan, Blackman, Martyr, & Van Schaik, 2008).

Combining the benefits of nature-based interventions and multisensory stimulation, Bird Tales is a multisensory intervention for those living with dementia that connects them to nature
and encourages social interaction (Griffin & Elkins, 2013). This program intersects the aforementioned ideas: nature-based interventions and multisensory stimulation. Bird Tales was developed collaboratively by the Audubon Society and Dementia Care Consultants to fulfill the need of people living with dementia to engage with the outdoors (Griffin & Elkins, 2013). It is a program led by a trained facilitator with the assistance of staff and volunteers. Engagement with the program comes in a variety of forms that might include hugging or petting, talking or listening to, or holding bird models. The program has two general goals: (1) to allow people living with dementia interaction with the outdoors and (2) to provide a mechanism for social interaction among people living with dementia (Griffin & Elkins, 2013). In light of the potential benefits this program has to offer, the program is expected to grow nationally.

The purpose of this research is to implement a multisensory program intended to connect people living with dementia to nature; and to document the logistics, inputs, and outputs of the process. Before the impact of this particular nature-based program can evaluated, several questions need addressed concerning program implementation. These questions arose last summer while I was trying to work with residents using the Bird Tales program guide and Audubon models. Although the program guide clearly outlines the basics of the program, it lacks critical details necessary to implement the program in group settings, lending better to a one on one format. For example, the existing program guide does not include a structured format for implementing the program or provide an outline of the process. This report summarizes results from a process evaluation of implementing Bird Tales in a nursing home; results show how the program can be packaged and improved as a volunteer-supported, nature-based intervention for people living with dementia. The information gathered for this study will be helpful in building a stronger program guide and will provide a foundation for future research.

**Literature Review**

In 2012, an estimated 35.6 million people were living with dementia worldwide (World Health Organization, 2012). Currently, in the United States, as many as 6.8 million people have Alzheimer’s disease or another form of dementia (National Institutes of Health, 2013). Approximately half of those living with dementia are in nursing homes (AHCA, 2013). Dementia has the potential to rob people of relational and social roles, and is a significant problem in our society, specifically in regards to providing appropriate care and meaningful opportunities for social interaction (Innes, 2002). Kontos (2005) argues that a person’s sense of
self is intrinsically connected to relationships and social interaction, which indicates that social isolation can ultimately lead to a loss of personal identity. By promoting the inclusion of people living with dementia in meaningful activities and social relationships, a positive impact will incur in communities and people with dementia will experience a higher level of well-being (Sanders & Morano, 2008).

Behavioral problems are common for people living with dementia and managing them impacts the person’s quality of life (Perkins, 2012). These behaviors are often referred to as behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD), an umbrella term defined as the “symptoms of disturbed perception, thought content, mood or behavior that frequently occur in patients with dementia” (International Psychogeriatric Association, 2012, p. 1.5). Behavioral symptoms may include yelling out, pacing, wandering, resisting care, overdressing, disrobing inappropriately, sleep disturbances, inappropriate sexual behavior, hitting and scratching (International Psychogeriatric Association, 2012). Psychological symptoms may include depression, psychosis, hallucinations, and delusions (International Psychogeriatric Association, 2012). Approximately 67% to 78% of those living in the nursing home population have dementia and 76% display BPSD; the 76% are often described as agitated, aggressive, and disruptive (International Psychogeriatric Association, 2012).

Managing BPSD is becoming increasingly important as the older population grows and the number of those living with dementia rises. According to the International Psychogeriatric Association (2012), if these symptoms aren’t managed they can contribute to premature institutionalization, an increased cost of care, heightened stress to nursing staff and caregivers, and ultimately, a decreased quality of life for the resident (p. 1.8). There are two main methods to manage BPSD: pharmacological versus nonpharmacological approaches (International Psychogeriatric Association, 2012). Generally, experts agree that nonpharmacological approaches, such as caregiver education and multisensory stimulation, should be attempted first and if they aren’t successful after various attempts, medication should be considered (International Psychogeriatric Association, 2012).

Multisensory stimulation is common nonpharmacological approach to managing BPSD (Madhusoodanan, Shah, Brenner, & Gupta, 2007). The purpose of multisensory stimulation is to provide appropriate and pleasurable experiences through the stimulation of senses (olfaction, tact, vision, hearing, and taste) without complex reasoning (Baker, et al., 2003; Bowlby, 1992).
Through stimulating the senses in a format that can be understood by people with dementia, they will respond appropriately to their surroundings and communicate with others (Baillon, van Diepen, & Prettyman, 2002; Bowlby, 1992). Multisensory stimulation has been found to reduce behavior problems, improve communication, improve functional performance, and increase residents’ attentiveness (Cruz, et al., 2011; van Weert, et al., 2006).

Multisensory stimulation, sometimes referred to as snoezelen, is an approach that aims to stimulate senses through unpatterned visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile stimuli (Baker et al., 2003). People living with dementia are at risk of sensory deprivation for several reasons. Namely, they are older and are likely to have loss or reduction of their senses (Baker et al., 2003). Another component for those living with dementia are neuronal losses, which can lead to impaired processing of stimuli making normal stimulation confusing (Baker et al., 2003). Other factors that may cause sensory deprivation for people living with dementia is under stimulation or overstimulation. For example, long hospital stays for people living with dementia have been shown to be unstimulating, resulting in deprivation (Baker et al., 2003). Research suggests that people in final stages of dementia may receive over or inappropriate stimulation, such as doors slamming, patients screaming, and call lights dinging, resulting in deprivation (Baker et al., 2003). In many nursing homes, meaningful sensual touch is limited, environments lack sensory stimulating assets, and meals are planned. These forms of under stimulation as a result of routinized care patterns are typically accompanied by activities such as reminiscence, board games, and trivia, which may be too difficult for their cognitive abilities (Baker et al., 2003).

In 2009, Kong, Evans and Guevara conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis concerning nonpharmacological approaches for reducing agitation in people living with dementia. For the review they used 14 studies covering seven different types of interventions: sensory, social contact, activities, environment modifications, caregiver training, combination therapy, and behavioral therapy (Kong, Evans, & Guevara, 2009). The results of the review reveal that only sensory approaches had efficacy in reducing agitation; these included aromatherapy, thermal bath, calming music, and hand massage (Kong, Evans, & Guevara, 2009).

In addition, people living with dementia also experience declines in functioning that can effect well-being, physical ability, and social inclusion (Sanders & Morano, 2008). These functional declines negatively impact memory and cognition, language, behavior, motivation, and judgment (Sanders & Morano, 2008). Common changes associated with a diagnosis of
dementia include an increased need for assistance with activities of daily living (ADL’s) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADL’s), differences in mood and/or personality expression, and psychological and/or behavioral disturbances (Sabat, 2005). As a result of these shifts in functioning, those living with dementia often face challenges to their sense of self, right to self-determination, and perceived capabilities (Kontos, 2005; Sabat, 2005; Sanders & Morano, 2008). To counter these effects, self-expression must be encouraged and opportunities for meaningful relationships and purposeful exchanges must be made available.

Activity programs for people with dementia can act as a means of retraining human abilities and function, help maintain a connection with the environment, and encourage social interaction (Cohen-Mansfield, Thein, Dakheel-Ali, &, 2010; Kolanowski, Buettner, Litaker, & Yu, 2006). Phinney, Chaudhury, and O’Connor define meaningful activities as those that provide enjoyment and pleasure, connection and belonging, and autonomy and identity (2007). Meaningful activities focus on past roles, interests, and routines, address psychological needs, and reinforce a sense of identity and belonging (Hamer & Orrell, 2008). According to a study by Hamer and Orrell, family, social, and musical activities often lead to meaningful experiences for people living with dementia (2008). Prior research suggests that involvement in meaningful activities for people with dementia (1) can have a positive effect on quality of life; (2) is related to increased levels of relaxation and enjoyment; (3) lowers the frequency of behavior problems; (4) increases alertness; and (5) improves functional ability (Buettner, 1999; Cohen-Mansfield, et al., 2010; Harmer & Orrell, 2008; Riley, Alm, & Newell, 2009).

The idea of “meaningful” activities for people living with dementia is not a new concept, however researchers have a hard time describing the concept or providing a definition. In 2007, Phinney, Chaudhury, and O’Connor conducted a research study using multiple interviews and observations to better understand what activities those living with dementia find meaningful through. Study participants were involved in a wide range of activities including leisure pastimes, household chores, work related endeavors, and social involvements (Phinney, Chaudhury, & O’Connor, 2007). The participants found the activities meaningful in three ways: (1) they experienced feelings of pleasure and enjoyment; (2) they felt a sense of connection and belonging; and (3) they retained a sense of autonomy and personal identity (Phinney, Chaudhury, & O’Connor, 2007). Their main finding was that people with dementia consider being active and doing as much as they can the driving force in their lives.
Healthy older adults reflect similar sentiments when it comes to activities. A grounded-theory study on healthy aging by Bryant, Corbett, and Kutner analyzed how older people conceptualize their health and what contributes to it (2001). In this study 22 people were interviewed on questions that ranged from health, well-being, activities, relationships, social support, control, etc. (Bryant, Corbett, & Kutner, 2001). To these older adults without dementia, their idea of health meant going and doing something meaningful, which was comprised of four components: (1) doing something they considered worthwhile; (2) participating in activities that allowed them to focus on their abilities, not their challenges; (3) having ample social support and connections; and (4) personal attitudinal characteristics or remaining optimistic (Bryant, Corbett, & Kutner, 2001). These two studies illuminate that the onset of dementia doesn’t appear to dramatically change how people perceive the significance of activities or the will to seek meaning in everyday life.

In the past decade, researchers have become particularly interested in the arts and dementia, specifically whether interventions impact well-being, provide opportunity for self-expression, and create meaning (Basting, 2006). According to Basting, the arts refer to anything that can elicit creative expression which extends beyond painting and costumes, and includes poetry, storytelling, gardening/outdoors, cooking, fiber arts, pottery, and dance (2006). Meaningful activities that incorporate one of the above forms of art enhances well-being and gives people living with dementia tools that enable them to express themselves (Basting, 2006). An example of this is illuminated in a study by Kinney and Rentz that compared the well-being of people with dementia as they participated in a creative arts program and non-creative arts program. The results demonstrated that people living with dementia had significantly higher levels of interest, sustained attention, pleasure, self-esteem, and normalcy during the creative arts program (p. 226),” compared with the levels demonstrated during non-creative programs. Programs that focus on the arts as a medium do not require traditional avenues of communication; for example, you don’t need factual memory or rational language to write a poem (Basting, 2006). Arts programming is meaningful, as it allows for people with dementia to communicate, connecting them to others around them such as caregivers and loved ones, but also allows for them to connect to the greater world again.

Environment is a critical component to the quality of life and well-being for people living with dementia (Kolanowski, & Whall, 2000). In addition to the social, physical, psychological,
and emotional environment, the experience of nature can also be important. Nature is part of our physical world and according to Wilson, all people have a connection to natural things (1984). Edward Wilson (1984) coined the term biophilia to personify the innate interconnectedness humans have with nature; he describes it as an essential or basic experience that connects us to all other organisms. This interconnectedness creates a mind-body connection that reacts to nature, eliciting a physiological, psychological, and/or emotional process when exposed to natural things (Wilson, 1984).

The benefits from spending time in nature have been studied by several disciplines, such as biology, cognitive science, developmental psychology, ecology, education, environmental psychology, evolutionary psychology, landscape architecture, medical, political science, psychiatry, psychology, public health, social psychology, social work, sociology, and urban planning (Mitten, 2009). In 2009, Mitten summarized the benefits of spending time in nature based on research from numerous disciplines and sorted them into four categories: physical, psychological, spiritual, and societal. Table 1 summarizes what researchers have discovered on the benefits of spending time in nature.

Research has indicated that there are several benefits to spending time in nature. For example, it benefits calcium uptake, promotes healing, reduces pain, increases life expectancy, provides opportunities for exercise, lowers systolic blood pressure, and lowers blood pressure. Simply being outside is good for our physical health (Mitten, 2009). Likewise, research indicates that simply being outside is good for our mental health. For example, being outside can be restorative, reduce stress, improve mood, reduce depression, reduce anger and anxiety, enhance feelings of pleasure, increase feelings of empowerment, and mitigate the impact of dementia (Mitten, 2009). Spending time outdoors also benefits the spiritual side of us, sparking creativity, encouraging reflection, and increases a sense of wonder. Another benefit from nature involves the societal impact; nature can be a cost effective health promotion, among other benefits (Mitten, 2009).

The researched benefits on spending time outside cover several different populations, however many are pertinent to those living with dementia. Specifically, the psychological benefits appear to mitigate several BPSD—anger and anxiety, depression, mood, agitation. Building on these benefits, Roger Ulrich pioneered his psycho-evolutionary theory in the 1980s, which postulates that attaining the capability for restorative responses to natural settings gave
Table 1. Benefits from Spending Time in Nature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Benefits</th>
<th>Psychological Benefits</th>
<th>Spiritual Benefits</th>
<th>Societal Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunlight</td>
<td>Restorative</td>
<td>Give children a sense of peace, oneness with the world</td>
<td>Cuts crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin D (lowers blood pressure, decreases risk of colon, prostate, and pancreatic cancers)</td>
<td>Stress reduction</td>
<td>Sparks creativity and imagination</td>
<td>Strengthens family relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases calcium uptake</td>
<td>Attention restoration</td>
<td>Inspires connections with the wider world</td>
<td>Decreases domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better diet (kids who garden eat more vegetables)</td>
<td>Improves mood states</td>
<td>Increases a sense of wonder</td>
<td>Strengthens neighborhood ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immune system strengthening (kids who play outside have stronger immune systems)</td>
<td>Reduces depression</td>
<td>Encourages reflection</td>
<td>Assists new immigrants cope with transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes healing</td>
<td>Reduces anger and anxiety</td>
<td>Quiets the mind</td>
<td>Cost effective health promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduces pain</td>
<td>Enhances feelings of pleasure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental economics – increases preference for environmental quality over other goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreases the effects of jet lag</td>
<td>Increases mental acuity (kids who grow plants scored 12% higher on academic tests)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increases environmental activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases life expectancy</td>
<td>Reduces mental fatigue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increases park planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides opportunities for exercise</td>
<td>Improve problem solving ability and concentration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Preserves biodiversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreases BMI</td>
<td>Improves body image for women</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stimulates social interactions among children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowers systolic blood pressure</td>
<td>Reduces the impact of stress</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduces avoidable disease risk factors</td>
<td>Increases feelings of empowerment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduces cancer risk</td>
<td>Encourages nurturing characteristics</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduces osteoporosis risk</td>
<td>Decreases risk of seasonal affective disorder (SAD)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mitigate impact of dementia, including Alzheimer’s</td>
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</table>

Survival-related advantages to early humans (1983). This theory proposes that initial responses to nature is preconscious and followed by a rapid onset of positive affect to the natural environment (Ulrich, 1983). For people living with dementia, this theory has two major implications: (1) exposure to nature elicits responses that occur without recognition or conscious awareness, allowing them to understand and appreciate the outdoors without cognitive considerations and (2) exposure to nature arouses rapid positive emotional changes that may alleviate the problems caused by confusion, agitation, or boredom (Ulrich, 1983). These implications are represented in the very few studies that look at the impact of nature programming for people living with dementia. Relevant studies have demonstrated that promoting outdoor experiences for people with dementia and planning activities about nature
results in is a decrease of negative emotions, increase in attention span, and a positive change in activity levels (Berto, 2007; Kaplan, 2001; Rappe, & Topo, 2007).

In 2008, a study by Duggan et al. revealed that the experience of being in nature was important for well-being and a sense of normalcy for people living with dementia. In the Study, 22 people with early to moderate dementia and their caregivers were interviewed about use of the outdoor environment. They asked questions about level of activity, reasons for going outdoors, and difficulties encountered in accessing the outdoors (Duggan et al., 2008). Their analysis demonstrated that people included in the study value the outdoor environment for reasons such as exercise, fresh air, emotional well-being, the opportunities to interact with others, and appreciation of beauty. They also found that the impact of being denied access to the outdoors was manifested with feelings of depression. In conclusion, the study advocated that activities related with the outdoors may be a likely measure in extending quality of life, decrease the period of extensive services needed, and should be considered in future planning (Duggan et al., 2008).

Nature can be used to restore attention and recover from stress (Berto, 2007; Rappe & Topo, 2007). In 2007, Berto conducted a study to see whether older adults found natural environments or built environments more restorative. The study did not look at older adults with dementia, but research suggests that onset of dementia does not dramatically change preferences (Bryant, Corbett, & Kutner, 2007; Phinney, Chaudhury, & O’Connor, 2007). Participants were chosen from three different living spaces: older adults living in a place for older people located in a green area, living in a place for older people located in an urban area, and living in their own homes. They were asked to rate the restorative value of 10 pictures of environments, which spanned from natural to manmade and covered different environmental categories. Ultimately, all three of the groups evaluated the natural environments as more restorative than the man-made ones (Berto, 2007).

Based on relevant research, nature appears to be a promising nonpharmacological approach to managing BPSD. Several studies have looked at sensory gardens and horticulture activities for people with dementia, which combines both sensory elements and nature as one intervention. In 2014, Gonzalez and Kirkevold conducted a review of the literature on sensory gardens and horticulture activities for people with dementia to gain an understanding of their benefits. Sixteen studies were included in the review, ranging from case studies, survey,
intervention studies with pretest/post-test design, and randomized control studies (Gonzalez and Kirkevold, 2014). The results of this review reported that findings mainly focused on issues related to behavior, affect and well-being; they were generally mutually supportive of the nature intervention, however, there were some contradictory findings (Gonzalez and Kirkevold, 2014). Additionally, sleep patterns, well-being and functional level seem to improve in response to the intervention (Gonzalez and Kirkevold, 2014). Although there is some support that nature-based sensory interventions may improve well-being, affect, and sleep disruptions, further evidence is necessary to understand the benefits of this nonpharmacological approach.

Bird Tales is a new program that takes into consideration the type of activities people with dementia need, i.e. sensory stimulation, and the natural environment. This therapeutic program uses multisensory stimulation and the natural outdoor world of birds to help people living with dementia interact with their environment and share meaningful experiences with others. Bird Tales is unique because it embodies multisensory stimulation and nature, is accessible to all residents (i.e. can be done indoors or outdoors), can be implemented as a group activity or as a one-on-one activity, and relies on a commonality, bird watching and the outdoors, that everyone can relate to (Rappe & Topo, 2007). The possible impacts of Bird Tales as an intervention for people living with dementia are promising and this research will serve as a foundation to better understand how Bird Tales should be improved and implemented for people living with dementia in nursing homes.

**Introduction to Bird Tales**

The Bird Tales program was founded in 2012 through a partnership between the National Audubon Society and skilled dementia care providers from TransCon Corporation. Dementia care expert, Randy Griffin, R.N., M.S., NHC came up with the program concept on a snowy day while observing a pair of cardinals eat at a feeder. As she watched the male defend his food source and gently feed his mate, she was overwhelmed by the realization that people with dementia could benefit from what she observed—the power of nature. Randy took initiative and contacted the local Audubon Center, where she came into contact with Ken Elkins, Audubon Educator and here the story of Bird Tales begins.

Bird Tales is a therapeutic program that incorporates sensory stimulation and the outdoor world of birds to connect people with dementia to nature through activities that examine local birds (Griffin and Elkins, 2013). The multisensory approach provides an avenue for people
living with dementia to participate at their own level and the materials used during each session brings the birds to the person’s lap. Each session is designed to be about 30-45 minutes long to support the attention span of the residents involved (Griffin and Elkins, 2013). Ideally, groups should consist of no more than 10 residents at a time to promote resident engagement and allow the leader of the program to share each bird with each resident individually. The program is also versatile and can be implemented as a one to one program (Griffin and Elkins, 2013).

There are various materials that can and should be used during Bird Tales sessions, such as feathers, large posters, or outdoor materials, but the most common are bird models, bird cards, and activity lessons (Griffin and Elkins, 2013). Bird models are small stuffed Audubon plush birds that fit perfectly into a person’s palm and play the authentic bird call associated with the specific bird. Each bird model has a respective bird card that has a picture of the bird in its natural habitat on one side and provides look, listen, and feel elements about the bird on the other (to see an example of a bird card see Exhibit 1 in the Appendix). Activity lessons are also used to help facilitate the session (to see an example of an activity lesson, see Exhibit 2 in the Appendix); activities focus on a specific topic about birds, such as song birds, backyard birds, nesting, feeding, etc., and help the program leader to navigate the session through the topic and present the material in a way that is appealing and engaging for people living with dementia. Each lesson presents scientifically accurate facts about birds and wildlife, possible venues for the activity (i.e. indoors or outdoors), a list of materials needed, an introduction to the topic, and a sample script (Griffin and Elkins, 2013).

Bird Tales can help create a sense of normalcy through bringing nature to the lives of people living with dementia who can no longer go outside or don’t get outside enough to enjoy it (Griffin and Elkins, 2013). It also presents an opportunity for programming that can involve staff, family and friends, outside groups, and intergenerational programs, broadening the span of people who interact with the residents. The flexible nature of Bird Tales allows program leaders to fit the program to the person. For example, it is easy to adjust the exploration of each bird based on a person’s ability to see and hear (Griffin and Elkins, 2013). More importantly, knowing a person’s life story can help leaders find a specific bird to trigger memories of past times. Emiline is perfect example of how leaders enable residents to connect with nature based on their life experiences:
When introduced to a new program participant, Emiline, the recreation staff pointed out that this petite yet feisty woman had spent her life working with horses. With that little bit of knowledge, I dug through the collection of bird models to let Emiline hold the barn swallow, a bird that can be found in practically every horse barn. Her sight was limited, but we helped her “see” the bird by feeling its long, pointy wings and its unique fork-shaped tail. We played the song of the bird multiple times, and when asked if she remembers hearing that sound she replied with a simple, “Yes, I do” (Griffin and Elkins, 2013).

The goal of Bird Tales is to embrace nature and all that it has to offer residents, families, visitors, and staff (Griffin and Elkins, 2013). This program allows everyone to share in the simple pleasures of life, brings people together to learn from each other, creates space for people living with dementia to express their individuality, and reminds us all that everyone has something to offer, regardless of where they are in life.

**Bird Tales Implementation**

Bird Tales was implemented on Wednesday evenings and Saturday afternoons over the course of 11 weeks, resulting in 13 sessions. As the program is a nature-based intervention, it is preferable to have the program during daytime hours. Due to scheduling constraints, we elected to hold the program on Wednesday evenings at 6:30 PM after dinner service; to allow some time for outdoor exploration, Bird Tales sessions were scheduled every other Saturday at 2:00 PM during the weeks of program implementation. We did run into some further scheduling conflicts throughout the 11 weeks (i.e. every second Wednesday of the month they have a group performance for the residents) and had to cancel some a few sessions. In total, 23 residents participated in the program. Tables 2-4 in the Appendix present an overview of resident attendance during program implementation.

For this study Bird Tales was implemented as an intergenerational volunteer-based program. In the program guide, one of the possible outcomes of the program is improved interaction. Based on my experience working with people living with dementia, I have learned that they need more time to process information; by having several volunteers assisting with the program, I hoped to decrease the participant to volunteer ratio thus maximizing the opportunity for residents to interact and build relationships with volunteers. Another way a low participant-assistant ratio could have been established is through the help of staff members from the nursing
home. The power of intergenerational programs have been explored and reveal that people living with dementia show positive affect and behaviors when engaged in intergenerational programming (Jarrot & Bruno, 2003; Ward, Kamp, Newman, 1996). In addition, studies suggest that there are several benefits for volunteers, as well. In a 2013 study, researchers examined the attitudes of students enrolled in an intergenerational service-learning project for people with dementia (Yamashita, Kinney, & Lokon, 2013). Using pretest/posttest surveys and reviewing student reflections, they found that after the service-learning experience students: (1) had attitude changes towards people with dementia, from worried and anxious to grateful and caring; (2) formed genuine friendships with the residents; (3) had a more positive insight on aging; and (4) learned valuable life lessons from the residents (Yamashita, Kinney, & Lokon, 2013). In general, the students reported deriving sincere satisfaction from their experiences.

In this project, Bird Tales sessions lasted approximately 45 minutes, supported 8-12 residents, and was broken up into two distinct parts: group work and activity lesson. In addition to volunteers, there was a program leader which was my role during implementation. Before every session, I set three square dining tables to accommodate four residents and two volunteers. The tables were staggered to allow for better maneuverability of those wheelchair bound. Each setting consisted of a plastic name-badge holder, name-badge, pen, marker, and feedback form that was turned over to eliminate distractions. In the center of each table there were two bird cards and matching bird models. Although this ended up being a normal set-up design, there were variations. For example, one week the residents engaged in feeder-making which called for very different set-up materials (i.e. seed, sunbutter, pinecones, and plates). I also set up a prep table that consisted of bird cards matched with respective bird models, an attendance sheet, a bird list (the number and name affiliated with each bird model), a process sheet (see Appendix Exhibit 3), the activity lesson, and a name-badge making station. Every week I sent out a reminder email to the volunteers that included the activity lesson for the upcoming session two days before we were scheduled to meet. Before the start of the program, we met collectively to review the activity lesson, make name-badges, address any concerns the volunteers may have, and discuss issues observed during previous sessions. During this time, I also provided volunteers with additional material (if applicable) that would be helpful during group work. Once this form of “housekeeping” was taken care of, we started gathering residents for the program and greeted those who had already joined us at tables.
At the start of each program, two volunteers assisted me in gathering residents while the others remained in location the program was set to take place to greet the residents. These volunteers assisting in gathering participants had prior experience working at the nursing home and knew the residents well. The volunteers who stayed behind were instructed to introduce themselves to the residents and join them at their table; once seated, they helped residents make name-badges and were expected to not leave their table for the remainder of the program. Ideally, each volunteer was paired with two residents to work with during the program, but there were instances during the 11 weeks where volunteers worked with only one resident or more than two residents.

After residents were greeted, they were encouraged to explore the bird models on the table. I attempted to provide a mix at each group (i.e. songbird and bird of prey, native and non-native bird) to allow the residents choice. If residents wanted a different bird, volunteers raised their hand and I brought over two more choices for them to explore. Once the resident selected a bird that interested them, volunteers encouraged their bird exploration through using the bird cards and focusing on “look, listen, and feel” elements of the birds; each bird card had descriptions about looking, listening and feeling the bird models on the back to better equip volunteers to discuss each specific bird. My role as leader during this part of the program was to deliver bird models and cards to each group when they were ready to move on. Additionally, I observed interactions at the different groups and helped coach the volunteers when they were struggling, and intervened when I felt volunteers needed additional support.

Group work lasted about 25 minutes and was followed by a transition into activity lesson. In order to transition, we had to reposition some residents to make sure they all had a clear view of the prep station, which was my “base” during the activity lesson. Once all of the residents were repositioned, I started the activity. Lessons were written to focus on a specific topic about birds, i.e. songbirds, provide facts, and prompt a discussion. During this part of the session, volunteers were encouraged to pay attention to the needs of the residents they worked with during group work. For example, if they noticed a resident was having difficulty hearing me or someone else speaking, they would echo what was said. They also shared comments residents contributed with the entire group to encourage storytelling, added their own insights when the discussion needed helped along, and alerted me when residents had needs that could only be taken care of by staff at the nursing home.
After the lesson, I thanked everyone for coming and informed residents that we would be back next week with another exciting bird lesson. Volunteers helped residents complete feedback forms and were encouraged to let the residents fill out the form as independently as possible, but were coached to help them read the questions and response categories aloud and assist in marking the form if residents needed assistance. If residents were unable or did not want to complete the form, volunteers respected their decision and wrote the residents name on the sheet and left the rest blank. This helped me to check attendance each week. Once forms were completed, volunteers assisted residents back to their rooms or desired destination. I personally thanked every resident for coming and contributing to our program, and reiterated that we looked forward to seeing them next week before volunteers escorted them back to their desired destination. Before leaving, all volunteers filled out feedback forms.

Once residents were settled and volunteers had completed their forms, I started cleaning and packing up. This involved re-setting the room as I found it and putting away program materials. Promptly after clean up, I entered the data from the day’s program.

Research Methods

Research Objectives

There is an increasing body of research that provides support for the positive effect that nature has on people of all ages. To capitalize on this idea and improve the lives of people living with dementia, Bird Tales was introduced as a vehicle to nurture this innate relationship. Bird Tales not only enables people with dementia to experience nature, even if it is from a chair inside, but also draws on the benefits of the multisensory aspects of such interactions. Studies have found that multisensory stimulation reduces behavior problems, improves communication, improves functional performance, and increases attentiveness among those living with dementia. The purpose of this project was to describe the process of implementing Bird Tales in a nursing home so that it can be replicated, standardized, and eventually evaluated for impact. Specifically, this project will address the following:

1) Objective 1: How should the Bird Tales program be implemented in nursing homes?
   a) What are the strengths of the Bird Tales program?
   b) What improvements were made to the Bird Tales program?
   c) What resources are needed to implement the Bird Tales program?
   d) What are the barriers to successful program delivery?
i. In order to implement the Bird Tales program, what modifications are necessary to the program guide?

2) Objective 2: How do residents and volunteers respond to the Bird Tales program?
   a) Did residents enjoy the Bird Tales program?
   b) Did the Bird Tales program encourage social interaction among residents?
   c) Did the Bird Tales participants feel connected to nature?
   d) Did volunteers enjoy the Bird Tales program?

**Research Design**

The topic under exploration is best addressed using a program evaluation lens. As defined by Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick (1997), program evaluation is the process of “identification, clarification, and application of defensible criteria to determine an evaluation object’s value, quality, utility, effectiveness, or significance in relation to those criteria (p. 5).” According to this definition, there are two categories of evaluation—formative and summative. This study is a formative evaluation designed to gather data that can be used to improve the existing program, determine future steps in its implementation, and shed light on some outputs (Worthen et al., 1997). Utilizing program evaluation will allow for data collection that informs decision making as well as making decisions regarding the value of the program to participants.

Process evaluation allows for rich understanding of the relationship between program elements and outcomes and is used to monitor and document program implementation (Saunders, Evans, & Joshi, 2005). Evaluation research is often focused on impact or outcome evaluation; organizations do not necessarily place priority on understanding why a program was successful, only that it was. From a research standpoint, the “why” of program success is important as it allows for discovery and program refinement, ultimately leading to the best practice for consumer consumption. As Bird Tales has not previously been evaluated in the nursing home, I decided it would be the best place to start.

Specifically, this study is a process evaluation that utilizes a method of continuous quality improvement that employs the “Plan, Do, Study, Act” (PDSA) cycle. The PDSA framework was developed W. Edwards Deming and is a systematic series of steps to grain valuable knowledge for the continual improvement of a product or process (Deming, 2000). In PDSA there are four phases: (1) define objectives and plan changes to try to meet those objectives, (2) carry out the plan, (3) study the results in a relatively brief time period; and (4) standardize the change,
incorporating continuous monitoring in order to sustain the improvement (Deming, 2000). The cycle begins with the Plan step, which involves identifying a goal or purpose and putting a plan into action. These activities are followed by the Do step, in which the plan is set into action (i.e. implementing a program or making a product). Next there is the Study step, where outcomes are monitored to test the plan for signs of progress and success or identify problems and areas for improvement. The final step, Act, closes the cycle and information gained is used to adjust the goal, change methods, or reformulate ideas all together. The four steps are then repeated over and over to monitor continuous improvement of the programs process (Deming, 2000).

**Participants**

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board at Miami University, one facility was purposively selected as the site to implement the program for this study. I selected a facility that met the needs of my study (i.e. nursing home, has residents living with dementia) that was close to the local campus. Of the two facilities, I selected the one closest to the local campus to decrease transportation issues for volunteers. The program was implemented at a 55-bed skilled nursing home located just over a mile away from Miami University. Those receiving care at this nursing home are for the most part Medicaid recipients (approximately 95%) or short-term rehab patients. Full-time residents are predominately white (20:1) females (5:1), and although there is some variation in age, the majority are 60 years and older.

Volunteers were recruited for this study through contacting students who had been involved in another intergenerational program for people with dementia. They were contacted through email and encouraged to spread the opportunity to others who may have interested in the program. I also reached out to fellow students studying gerontology to recruit volunteers. Other volunteers were recruited by word of mouth or through promotion at monthly gerontology club meetings. Volunteers weren’t trained specifically to assist those participating in the Bird Tales program, however they all went through a four and a half hour training that covered the basics of dementia, communicating with people who have dementia, and person-centered care philosophies. Each week there were different volunteers assisting with the program. All volunteers had prior experience working one to one with people living with dementia and were students at Miami University.

Before program implementation, family caregivers of potential participants were contacted by letter. In the letter, the research was described and accompanying it was a consent
form. The consent form asked permission for their loved one to participate, be observed and photographed, or recorded during the program. In addition to consent from family caregivers, residents were asked for their assent before participation in the program and every session it was made clear that their participation was completely voluntary. We encouraged any resident who was interested to join us for Bird Tales, even if we didn’t have consent for them. In instances where residents participated and didn’t have written consent, we didn’t collect any data. A total of eight residents attended Bird Tales without consent from family caregivers. Most of these residents only attended once or twice and were short-term residents or new residents to the facility. Four residents were permanent residents and attended a Bird Tales session that involved feeder making.

**Data Collection**

Prior to program implementation, I had no formal hypotheses on what the data would reveal; my research was guided by informed speculation about what parts of the program needed to be refined, making this project inductive (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). In this project I engaged in participant observation to implement and evaluate the process of Bird Tales. After each session, I used quality improvement principles and the PDSA paradigm to rethink the program design and make changes. I recorded all feedback data collected in an excel spreadsheet and typed my field notes in MSWord.

**PDSA Model**

The PDSA framework was used to inform data collection (see Figure 1 for an example of the PDSA cycle as used in this project). We used the first day of implementation as a baseline to understand what improvements needed and inform the first PDSA cycle. After the first session, cycle one started and after the second session, cycle one ran into cycle two (i.e. preparing for the next cycle during the third session). There was a new cycle each week and change occurred very rapidly. We started with the goal of improving the process of Bird Tales and implemented the program. To study the outcomes, each session feedback was collected in three different ways: from the residents, volunteers, and myself. This feedback was used to improve the process of implementing Bird Tales.

**Leader Feedback**

Directly following each session I recorded extensive notes about the program to document the experiences observed and learned. These observations included how people
behaved and reacted to certain things, what was said in conversation, where people were positioned in relationship to one another, physical gestures, subjective responses to what was observed, and all other details and observations necessary to tell a comprehensive story (Creswell, 2012). In addition to weekly entries following Bird Tales, I documented my thoughts about encouraging community involvement, future steps for sustaining the program, and managerial tasks completed to make the program possible. I also recorded memos to reflect my personal thoughts and opinions as a mechanism to check and avoid researcher bias.

**Resident Feedback**

Resident feedback forms were completed at the end of each Bird Tales session. These were used to gauge the resident response to the program, the second research objective. If residents were unable to fill out the form themselves, the volunteers helped them through the questions and indicated their responses for them. This form aimed to capture how the residents
felt about the program. Examples of questions asked include: “How much did you enjoy today’s bird class?” “Did you feel connected to nature?” “Do you think your time was well spent?” (see Exhibit 4 in the Appendix to view the full form).

**Volunteer Feedback**
Volunteer feedback forms were also completed at the end of each Bird Tales session. This feedback was directly used to inform what changes needed to be made for the next session and gauge the volunteer and resident response to the program, the second research objective. Each volunteer who participated in the session recorded their responses and comments to that day’s program. For the closed-ended questions, volunteers were asked questions such as: “Did you personally enjoy today’s activity?” “How appropriate was the activity lesson for the participants?” “How much enjoyment do you think [the resident] got from the activity?” The following are examples of open-ended questions: “Did you notice any reactions to the program (positive or negative) expressed by the participants?” “What went well during the session?” “What didn’t go well during the session?” (see Exhibit 5 in the Appendix to view the full form). The responses and comments provided by volunteers were critical in re-designing the program and making improvements during the 11 weeks.

**Overall Evaluation**
Lastly, volunteers were asked to complete a program evaluation at the end of the project. These responses report on general reactions to their experiences and were helpful in gauging how well the volunteers enjoyed the program, how well they thought the residents enjoyed the program, and provided insight on how to plan for the future. This feedback was helpful to continually improve the program as I prepared to implement it the following semester at additional facilities. Examples of questions included: “Overall, how well did the residents respond to the Bird Tales activities?” “Overall, to what extent did Bird Tales encourage residents’ self-expression?” “Overall, to what extent did Bird Tales encourage residents’ social interaction?” (see Exhibit 6 in the Appendix to view the full form). Volunteers were also asked what they have learned through this experience in this form.

**Data Analysis**

**PDSA Model**
The PDSA model was used to analyze the data to answer research objective one. For the first session, I followed the recommendations in the program guide and set up the program in one of the facilities lounges that overlooked the courtyard. There was a table in the lounge that I
used to sort out the bird models and bird cards. After the session concluded, I debriefed with the volunteers. We discussed what worked well and what didn’t work well during the program, and brainstormed ways to improve certain pieces for the next session. This was the baseline for our first PDSA cycle (week 2). The biggest challenges our first week according to the feedback gathered was seating for volunteers—they had nowhere to sit and crouched down most of the program—and overcrowding of residents in the small space, which ultimately made the room too loud. We decided to utilize folding chairs the facility kept in a storage room the following session to alleviate seating problems for volunteers and planned to change the location of the program to reduce overcrowding (see Figure 2 for an example of the PDSA cycle as used in this project).

After getting through the first session, feedback forms were filled out every week by volunteers and residents. Starting the second session of Bird Tales (cycle 1), volunteers and

**Figure 2. PDSA Cycle 1**

- **PLAN**
  - Implement Bird Tales and improve:
    1. volunteer seating,
    2. overcrowding of residents

- **DO**
  - Implement program in different location, use fold out chairs, and record feedback

- **ACT**
  - Use feedback to improve spacial concerns

- **STUDY**
  - Compare feedback from baseline (week one)
resident completed feedback forms directly following the program. These, along with field notes I took throughout the period of implementation, were used the remaining weeks to inform planning for the next PDSA cycle.

**Descriptive Statistics**

All feedback data was entered in Microsoft Excel. To help answer research objective two, the numeric values were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics calculated for each question included mean, median, mode, standard deviation, variance, and range.

**Validity**

As with all forms of research that employ qualitative methods, generalizability cannot be attained, as it is not the purpose of this research. Through this research project, I sought to gain a narrative, descriptive, and in-depth account of what was happening. The trustworthiness of the research was established using several techniques built into my research design. First, several modes of data collection were used to tap various sources of information. This included field notes, resident feedback, volunteer feedback, leader feedback, and overall evaluations. By using multiple methods of data collection, I was able to triangulate the data sources to ensure that results were all pointing in the same direction. All data collection tools used were adapted from Basting and Killick’s guide on art and dementia care (2003).

Second, the PDSA cycle model was a strength in this project. Instead of using a trial and error approach, we were able to systematically put a plan in place each week to make changes and improvements. The model allows for customization to local conditions, improves ideas through continuous learning, and is a rigorous testing process of change (Deming, 2000). The systematic process of evaluation, first used in the car manufacturing industry, has been around since the 1930’s and has proven to be a compelling change model (Speroff & O’Connor, 2004). After making improvements using this model, I observed and asked for feedback to determine whether the change was helpful or not. If a problem persisted, another improvement was made in the following cycle until feedback from all parties were positive.

Lastly, to minimize researcher bias, I reflected on an ongoing basis to avoid omitting data and to remind myself of the research objectives. These were recorded as memos and although recorded in the same file as the field notes, they were used to keep me conscious of my personal feelings and prevent them from impeding on my data collection and analysis process.
Findings

Objective 1

One of the primary objectives of study was to learn how Bird Tales should be implemented in a nursing home. To do so, I wanted to be able to understand the following about the program: strengths, improvements needed, resources needed, and barriers encountered during implementation.

Strengths of the Bird Tales Program

Many strengths of the Bird Tales program were identified throughout this research project. The main strengths include: (1) can be implemented in various capacities; (2) combination of nature and multisensory stimulation; (3) encourages self-expression; (4) encourages social interaction; (5) ease of implementation; and (6) low start-up and sustainability costs.

(1) The biggest selling factor of Bird Tales as a program for people with dementia is that it can be done in various capacities. The program can be implemented in a group setting, a one on one setting, and both indoors and outdoors. It can also be implemented by a variety of people: nursing staff, activity staff, volunteers, family members, educators, etc. In addition, I found that Bird Tales doesn’t necessarily need to be a program for people with dementia; all persons living in a long-term care environment or even those receiving care in the local community can benefit from the program.

Implementing Bird Tales in a group is ideal, as it encourages social interaction and engagement between individuals participating in the program. However, this is not always possible; there may be too few residents interested or too few people able to implement the program. When group sessions aren’t able to be held, the program can be easily implemented one on one. This allows closer interactions between the person leading the program and the individual participating. Bird Tales in a one on one capacity can also limit distractions, if done in a quiet space such as the resident’s room. The option of using this program one on one is especially ideal for individuals who rarely engage in activities or who have severe dementia. Working in a group environment can be challenging and sometimes agitating for those with severe dementia, but also challenging for the person implementing the programing. Having the ability to work with a resident one on one and give them your undivided attention is preferable while working with those who have a hard time focusing and engaging in group settings. For
example, one resident who lived in the locked special care unit attended the program frequently. I had a really close relationship with her and was aware of her declining cognition, increased anxiety, and failing health. In the beginning I had one volunteer working with her one on one instead of having her participate in group work. Some days this worked well and she attended some of the program, but others, being in the room even with one on one support was too overwhelming and distracting for her. On these days, the volunteer opted to sit in the special care unit with her to work.

This option is also a great medium to help family members communicate with their loved ones. For example, one resident rarely attended the Bird Tales sessions, but he really enjoyed watching birds and I would often catch glimpses of him and his wife looking out his bedroom window to bird watch. For this resident, bird watching helped him communicate with his wife. After I realized this, I made sure there was a feeder in front of his window and did my best to keep it full of seed; I also left a bag of feed at the nurse’s station for his wife to access if I was behind on refilling the feeders. Although I didn’t actively observe this pair in their version of Bird Tales and they didn’t use program materials, I know they both benefited from the interaction. Every time I see this gentleman, he greets me with a smile and his favorite greeting, “Chirp, chirp.” He loves to tell me about a red bird, and calls me the bird girl.

We implemented Bird Tales during the fall and often in the evening, which meant most of our time was spent indoors. Bird Tales can be implemented both inside and out, so even if the weather isn’t preferable, residents can still enjoy the healing power of nature and birds. We were able to have two sessions outdoors and I was reminded again how important it is that the program can be done both indoors and out. Many residents declined the invitation to participate in the program when it was held outside, the biggest complaints being the temperature and insects. In addition, it was a challenge to get residents prepared to go outside—as a non-staff person, I am unable to transfer residents and neither were the volunteers. We could help with hats, coats, and sunblock, but that was all. In order to get residents outside, we had to rely on staff to get residents with mobility issues out of their beds or chairs. On both occasions, finding staff to help us was difficult and drained a lot of program time.

Implementing Bird Tales outside and watching the residents react to the fresh breeze, birdsong, and bird sightings was a true joy—just being outside for them was such an apparent treat! The residents really enjoyed counting the number of birds we saw and heard, and we used
fewer program materials. We quickly found that having the bird models and cards outside was too much stimulation. When the weather is unfavorable, it is just as easy to have the program indoors; I would argue that it is easier to implement this program indoors even though there is more preparation beforehand (tables with feedback forms, markers, pens, name badges and bird cards/models, organizing bird cards/models, attendance, volunteer forms, activity lesson handouts) because there is less help needed from staff. Overall, Bird Tales enables those implementing the program to bring the outside world of bird’s right to the residents lap. This is especially helpful when the weather isn’t suitable for outdoor outings, when residents don’t want to go outside, or when residents are no longer able to go outside.

The flexibility of this program extends beyond implementing this program in different settings. Bird Tales is designed to meet the individual needs of each resident to allow for maximum engagement, social interaction and self-expression. Involvement in the program is not dependent on cognitive abilities, which is why I argue all people living in long-term care environments can benefit from the program. Throughout the course of program implementation, we followed the same program process every week. This process was created to give volunteers an idea of the program flow, however, they were encouraged to skip steps or spend extra time on steps based on what their residents wanted.

The Bird Tales process was created to give the volunteers an understanding of what to do and provide them with expectations before the first session. Every week, the process changed because every week we learned something new. During the program, the residents were encouraged to make choices about how they wanted to spend their time. For example, there were three gentlemen who participated every week and normally sat together. They were known as the social group because you could barely get a word in edgewise between the stories they told. Volunteers working with this group were encouraged to do more listening than talking, only interjecting if there was a lag in conversation. Although the group did like to “look, listen, and feel” the models and see the pictures on the cards, they preferred to spend most of their time talking to one another. This group looked completely different from the group working at the table next to them, as no two groups were the same. Some residents like to focus entirely on one “look, listen, and feel” element of the bird model; the bird calls are always a favorite, especially among the women. Other residents like to hear or read the fun facts listed on the bird card. Having a process is helpful for guidance, but the process is ultimately determined by the
residents and overarching group. This flexibility allows for volunteers to structure the program
to meet the individual needs of the residents they are working with, ultimately making it ideal for
working with residents living with varying levels of cognition.

Throughout this project, there were several residents who attended Bird Tales who did
not have dementia. A few were there for rehabilitation, but there were three dedicated residents
who came almost every week who did not have dementia; one was an older gentleman who
enjoyed nature and the company of others, and the other two had mild developmental disabilities.
These residents demonstrated that Bird Tales is for everyone. Anyone can enjoy the healing
power of nature and birds because it is not dependent on cognition, which means those with
intact cognition enjoy it, as well. I also found it was advantageous to have those without
dementia joining us. They helped during discussion when other residents were still processing,
improving interaction during group, and taught us new things about birds. One resident also
helped me fill up the feeders on days I was absent and always reminded me when I needed seed,
providing me with details on which type I was low on. This experience led me to believe that
involving all residents promotes better outcomes for all participating; interaction is higher, the
program isn’t stigmatized, and it creates a better sense of community among those living at the
facility.

(2) The literature on nature-based activities for people living with dementia has grown
the past few years and indicates that simply being outdoors can have a positive effect on people’s
health, well-being, and quality of life (Bossen, 2010). Many would argue that the experience of
being outside stands alone as a sensory experience; you can run your fingers through several
blades of grass, look at the clouds and watch the birds, smell the aroma of blooming peonies, and
hear the voices of the birds as they chirp back and forth amongst themselves. Research
suggests that the best nonpharmacological approach to managing the BPSD is to engage
individuals in multisensory stimulation (Madhusoodanan, Shah, Brenner, & Gupta, 2007). This
approach has been found to reduce behavior problems, improve communication, improve
functional performance, and increase residents’ attentiveness (Cruz, et al., 2011; van Weert, et
al., 2006).

Bird Tales takes sensory a step further by adding the bird models that residents can look
at, listen to, and feel, and adds other sensory elements. For example, one session we learned
about nests, so I packed individual sensory kits of materials birds may use to build their nests
(twigs, pebbles, pine needles, feathers, dental floss, string, cloth, paper, etc.). Another day we made bird feeders and the residents had the option of making them out of pipe cleaners or toilet paper rolls; I did have pine cones as an option, too, but they are much more difficult and were only offered to a few residents who had the fine motor skills to use them. After residents lathered up their toilet paper rolls with sunbutter, they spent time exploring the different materials (birdseed, raisins, oats, cheerios, corn, chopped nuts) we were using before choosing how they wanted to decorate their feeders. The residents who made feeders out of pipe cleaners selected different berries and cheerios and strung them onto the pipe cleaner. I argue that being outside in nature is a sensory experience, but mobility for those living in nursing homes often becomes a barrier to going outside. Bird Tales is a dynamic program because it brings nature inside through the use of multisensory stimulation. This is a huge strength and makes it unique to other nature-based activities in the literature, which commonly include gardening, sitting outside, having a conversation outside, getting fresh air, and going for a walk, because it eliminates the barriers accompanied with getting outside for people living in a nursing home.

(3) A diagnosis of dementia often leads to an increased need for assistance with ADL’s and IADL’s, differences in mood and/or personality expression, and psychological and/or behavioral disturbances (Sabat, 2005). The changes people living with dementia experience can cause challenges to their sense of self, right to self-determination, and perceived capabilities (Kontos, 2005; Sabat, 2005; Sanders & Morano, 2008). To counter these effects, research recommends that we design activities that encourage self-expression and opportunities for meaningful relationships to develop (Basting, 2006; Sabat, 2005). Meaningful activities focus on past roles, interests, and routines, address psychological needs, and reinforce a sense of identity and belonging (Hamer & Orrell, 2008); these types of activities enhance well-being and give people with dementia tools that enable them to express themselves (Basting, 2006).

Bird Tales is a meaningful activity that encourages self-expression. In 2007, Phinney, Chaudhury, and O’Connor conducted a research study to better understand what activities those living with dementia find meaningful through and found that the participants found the activities meaningful in three ways: (1) they experienced feelings of pleasure and enjoyment; (2) they felt a sense of connection and belonging; and (3) they retained a sense of autonomy and personal identity (Phinney, Chaudhury, & O’Connor, 2007). In this research project, all three of these criterions were present. Residents participating in Bird Tales responded well to the program and
both resident and volunteers provided feedback that supported resident enjoyment throughout the project (this will be further addressed in Objective 2 Findings on page 37). Many residents and volunteers expressed feeling a sense of connection or belonging during the 11 weeks. These expressions were observed and recorded by volunteers on their feedback form or described in my field notes.

Residents participating in Bird Tales also maintained their autonomy and personal identity. They were given choices throughout the program and volunteers followed their lead; when residents had difficulty making choices, volunteers were coached to simplify or narrow down the choices. For example, instead of asking a resident what their favorite bird is, they presented them with three options: Which bird do you like best? The cardinal, chickadee, or hummingbird? The program really emphasized the identity of each individual resident. For example, one resident grew up on a farm and when she was working with the barn owl bird model, she was able to make that connection and share memories from growing up on the farm with the group. Another resident who is fairly non-verbal kept an extensive garden in her earlier years, so I presented her with the hummingbird bird model. Immediately, she reacted strongly to the model with expressive eyes and a smile, and throughout the program she laughed, communicated some verbally, and interacted well with those in her group. After having a conversation with her daughter, I learned that hummingbirds were her mother’s favorite bird and she could make them eat out of the palm of her hand. Through learning life history about the residents, we were able to pair them with bird models that allowed them to best portray their personal identities.

(4) Bird Tales is a great communication tool for those looking to connect to someone living with dementia, but it is also a great tool to engage a group of people socially. We found that having a group lesson wasn’t the ideal way to encourage social interaction among residents and volunteers; people living with dementia require more time to process and react to information and having a large group discussion didn’t provide ample opportunity for them to express themselves fully. Instead, we started in small groups with approximately four residents and two volunteers working together. Volunteers were encouraged to allow the residents plenty of wait time to respond to the birds and were provided with tips to prompt interaction between the residents. For example, a volunteer would ask one resident what they thought of the model.
and turn to another resident and say, “Marge thinks he is colorful, what do you think?” This volunteer guided interaction helped residents start conversations amongst themselves.

We also noticed that residents became less guarded and more open as group work progressed; the longer the residents were in their small groups, the more likely they were to share with others. After this realization, I reshaped the flow of the program by providing more time for group and giving volunteers more tools (information pertaining to the lesson) to engage with their groups. On several occasions we didn’t have a lesson at the end and I walked around the groups, sharing information because groups were working so well together.

(5) Bird Tales can be a really easy program to implement if the leader is provided with the necessary tools. For a typical session, all you need are bird models, bird cards, name badges, markers, pens or pencils, feedback forms, and the activity lesson. I also had on hand a list of the bird models (each was marked with a number) for the volunteers to reference, an attendance sheet, the program process sheet, a handout on connecting residents with birds, and materials for volunteers to use that related to the lesson. All of these items fit in a large bag that I took to the facility each week. The bag also included some books and magazines on birds for volunteers to use with their residents if they weren’t interested in looking at the models and cards. If each Bird Tales leader was equipped with a comprehensive lesson list and bird card package, there is very little preparation each week. Providing a comprehensive lesson list and bird card package also makes the program user friendly, for it eliminates the need to know anything about birds.

(6) As we strive to improve programming for people with dementia, we must think about the cost of doing so. Bird Tales is a very inexpensive program to start-up, and maintenance costs for the program are low. In this study, I invested in 24 bird models, paid for materials to be printed, supplies for crafts, and purchased bird feeders and bird seed. My total costs of purchasing the materials and printing the materials (all printed materials that were to be reused, such as the lessons and bird cards, were laminated for ease of cleaning and durability) was $692.77. This figure is probably high for most interested in starting a Bird Tales program. The cost of printing and laminating materials alone reduce the cost significantly and most organizations have the capacity to do this work in-house. Another way to skim back on the program cost is decreasing or eliminating the number of crafts, such as making feeders and doing experiments on beaks. A lot of money was used to purchase sun butter, a peanut butter substitute; the facility I implemented Bird Tales at was a peanut butter free facility and although
sun butter is a great alternative, it is four times the cost. The only expense to maintain the program over time is buying bird seed. Most bird seed is inexpensive, but facilities could ask for donations or pair up with local organizations, such as the Audubon Society, to meet this need.

Improvements Made to the Bird Tales Program

This process evaluation allowed me to make several improvements to the program during the research project. The main improvements include: (1) standardized process, (2) community involvement, (3) improved resident to volunteer ratio, (4) expanded materials collection, and (5) formal evaluation process.

(1) The idea behind Bird Tales resonated deeply with me when I first discovered the program, but I am a roadmap person and the program guide didn’t appear to have a focused map that describes how to implement the program. My experiences working with programs for people living with dementia have taught me to always have a plan, a back-up plan, and a back-up to your back-up plan. I started with creating a process to follow each week to help guide myself and the volunteers through each session. It included volunteer roles before, during, and after the program, and provided a point of reference to guide the program. The process was simply a roadmap for us to follow and allowed room for roadblocks, construction, and detours, all of which happened on a weekly basis and helped us improve the process over time. This process gives structure to guide the flow of the program, but allows ample opportunity for choice and flexibility for the residents. I found that this generic process worked fairly well for both indoor and outdoor Bird Tale sessions and was only irrelevant for craft days. Over time, modifying a version of this process for different settings (i.e. indoor, outdoor, group, one on one, etc.) could be helpful for leaders working on establishing their Bird Tales program. I would advocate for keeping the process as generic as possible; adding details will increase the complexity and limit the amount of choice the program offers to residents.

(2) I am a strong believer of intergenerational programming and when tasked with implementing this program, I immediately started looking for potential volunteers from the local community. The idea of implementing the program and using community members, students, or outside organizations to help was not my own, it was listed in the program guide as possible resources to consider when starting a Bird Tales program. That being said, I did manage to recruit and implement the program with student volunteers from the community. Bringing in members from the community not only enhances the resident experience, as they get to interact
with new faces and build new relationships, but it is also positive for the individual volunteering and for the facility. Volunteers generally feel positive about service and giving back to the local community, but as I will cover in Objective 2, the time spent working with Bird Tales enabled them to build meaningful relationships with the residents they worked with. For the volunteers, their time spent with Bird Tales provided them with an improved outlook on older people and those living with dementia. They also formed an opinion about the facility and nursing homes in general, and are likely to share their experiences with others which is good word of mouth publicity for the facility.

The local community was a wonderful resource for help with Bird Tales. During this project, I reached out to the local Audubon chapter, a gardening club, and a community foundation. Although these partnerships did not flourish during the span of this project, I have since received support from them as I continue to work with Bird Tales at the same facility and other facilities in the area. Involving the community can be done in different capacities; the Audubon society has helped me on the bird side of the program, the garden club has provided me with tips on planting native species and improving green spaces to attract birds, and the community foundation offered financial support to one of the facilities implementing Bird Tales. Providing these community organizations with information about Bird Tales can ultimately lead to more volunteers, and having more volunteers allows us to serve a larger group of older adults. For example, after this project ended I had several non-student community members show interest in learning more about Bird Tales through hearing about the program from members of various organizations. Today, approximately one third of my volunteers are non-student community members.

(3) Bird Tales is designed to provide residents with the opportunity to interact with nature, but it is also about encouraging interaction. This is one of the main reasons why I chose to involve volunteers instead of trying to do the program on my own with the help of staff at the facility. By having volunteers from the community, you can enlist more people to work with the residents and have a smaller ratio of residents to volunteers. Involving staff has pros and cons—they know the residents and working with the program allows staff to see residents as people, not as their job or responsibility, but they also may be distracted by work-related tasks that come up. In addition, staff members are often regarded as those in power by residents, who rely on them for care; using volunteers from and outside organization evens the playing field.
Through the PDSA cycles, I learned that smaller groups were better suited for encouraging interaction. Over time, we came up with a model that worked best for the residents’ needs and aimed to maximize interaction. The ideal program design for the residents participating in Bird Tales during this project included a 2:1 ratio of residents and volunteers when possible, small group work with no more than six people (4:2) for two thirds of the session, and a short lesson at the end led by the leader for all of the residents. The lesson was sometimes delivered at each small group and worked better, however this was not possible every week. These two components, adding volunteers and finding the best design to deliver the program, were imperative to improve the ability of residents to express themselves and socialize during the program, ultimately enhancing their overall experience.

(4) The most difficult part of implementing Bird Tales if you don’t have extensive knowledge about birds is coming up with lessons and materials. I am no birder, so the idea of creating lessons about birds for people with dementia was my biggest concern. The program guide has two nice samples of bird lessons in the appendix that enabled me to envision what I needed to do. From there, I scoured the internet for materials on birds and relied heavily on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s resources to compile information. The result of this research on birds resulted in 23 activity lessons to add to the samples lessons in the program guide. I have some more unfinished lessons I am still working on, and have made improvements to the ones I have used based on resident responses and volunteer feedback.

In addition to lessons, I had to create bird cards to match my bird models. The program guide provides five bird cards in the appendix and information on how to access them online. Although I could not access them online with the information provided, Ken Elkins sent me the cards from the guide. Once I obtained these, I created a template in Microsoft PowerPoint and created 20 additional bird cards to match my set of bird models.

Other documents were created for the program as supplements for this project. For example, one lesson is about learning about and noticing the bird markings. To help residents and volunteers communicate about this topic, I developed additional bird cards that showed both the male and female bird of each model. Other examples include maps that show migration patterns for each bird to complement a lesson on migration, hummingbird cards to compliment a lesson on hummingbirds, and nest cards to compliment a lesson on nesting. In total, I have
developed nine supplemental documents to enable volunteers to better support the residents for certain activity topics.

(5) Evaluating and documenting the program in several capacities was necessary to collect data for this study. The evaluation tools used, which include volunteer feedback forms, resident feedback forms and program evaluation forms, have been developed by experts on providing creative programming for people with dementia and modified to fit Bird Tales. Since this project, I have also started using an activity evaluation tool to gather more information on improving lessons. The field of aging is becoming more and more evidence-based, and facilities are starting to seek out programs and other innovations based on the amount of supporting research. Using the tools from this project is a first step in providing evidence that supports the benefits of Bird Tales for residents and volunteering.

**Resources Needed for the Bird Tales Program**

The original program cost estimate to implement Bird Tales for the duration of this project was $600.00. After I totaled up all of my receipts, I went slightly over this amount and spent a total of $692.77. As mentioned in the strengths section, these costs could easily be reduced. Bird Tales is inexpensive to start, and to continue the only financial contribution necessary is purchasing birdseed. Facilities could also decide to buy new models to provide more variety or have multiple models of the same bird, improve landscaping to attract birds, or purchase new feeders, but if the goal is to keep the cost down the only necessary input over time is birdseed.

Financially, the costs are low to implement the program, as are time related costs if facilities are provided with lessons, bird cards, and supplemental materials prior to program start. If these materials aren’t provided, Bird Tales would likely halt after two weeks/sessions (there are only two lessons provided) or the program would take on a completely different meaning. For example, I had the opportunity to visit Ken Elkins in Connecticut and watch him lead a session at one of the original Bird Tales facilities. I learned a lot from watching him, but what I learned afterward was more significant. The facility, at one point in time, had Ken lead Bird Tales every other week, but after the facility received Bird Tales training he stopped leading the program. The facility still has “Bird Tales,” however it looks very different than what I have described in the implementation section. For Bird Tales at this particular facility, the residents are placed in front of a television that plays recordings of birds and their songs. Although this is
considered an improvement in my mind to residents parked in front of the TV watching the news, this is not Bird Tales. Providing the proper materials to leaders is one factor that could help maintain the integrity of the program.

Other resources needed to implement the program include space and volunteers. Sadly, not all facilities have a safe space outside for people who have dementia and those that do may not have an indoor space to accommodate birdwatching. I found that both scenarios are okay. The program can be done indoors or outdoors and does not have to be implemented in a space that allows for residents to bird watch. Spatially, the only requirement is an area where residents and volunteers have enough room to interact without feeling as though they are on top of each other. I would also recommend selecting a room that doesn’t have great acoustics because too much noise can become distracting and agitating for even those with intact cognition. In this project, finding space that worked well for residents and volunteers took a few weeks, but was necessary. If we would have settled on our first room choice, the residents experience would have been compromised. A final resource needed to implement Bird Tales are volunteers. As identified in the strengths and improvement sections, volunteers were a critical element for implementing Bird Tales in this project. I prefer recruiting volunteers from outside the facility, but staff, family, etc. are all options when looking for volunteers to support the program.

**Barriers to Delivering the Bird Tales Program**

The barriers to implementing Bird Tales mainly stem from the limited supply of materials provided in the program guide. Those purchasing the guide need to have clear steps to follow to become prepared for the program and for implementing the program, as well as materials and resources to do so. Although the program guide does a great job of describing the bigger picture of the program, it does not delve into the details that are needed to get the program off the ground. Providing information in the program guide that goes into further detail on preparing and implementing the program would also improve the likelihood that Bird Tales is being implemented as intended.

The main barrier to program delivery was creating bird cards, lessons, and materials. To eliminate this problem, the program guide needs to either include more sample materials or should link to an online archive of materials that have been created. Once these items were created for the program, I was faced with the “how to” question. The program guide provides tips on holding a Bird Tales session, but does not give a detailed, process-based outline on how
to get ready to implement Bird Tales, or how to implement the program in general. Including this information in a modified version of the program guide would streamline how the program is implemented and help maintain authenticity of the program at different locations using Bird Tales. Another barrier to implementing the program is finding a space that can accommodate the residents and volunteers comfortable. Each facility has a different set up, so there cannot be any hard, fast rules when selecting a location. However, the program guide should provide tips on selecting the right space.

One challenge I encountered was retaining volunteers throughout the course of the project. I was fortunate to have connections that enabled me to recruit volunteers, but keeping them around proved to be difficult. The program guide should have recruitment strategies for volunteers and at the bare minimum, provide electronic resources to help with this phase of implementation. Along with these strategies, there should be information on supporting and retaining volunteers. Although I was not in any position to compensate any volunteers, I did my best to support them. This included monitoring interactions during the program to note any issues volunteers were encountering, addressing the issues through coaching before the next session (during the “huddle”), intervening when volunteers were uncomfortable, and giving out random “thanks you’s” to show my appreciation; I couldn’t have implemented Bird Tales without them and I made sure they knew how important their role was to the success of the program. Retaining volunteers was a challenge. Some volunteers wanted to commit to every week, others wanted to volunteer part time, and several dropped towards the end of the academic year when papers and finals were due. When volunteers don’t show up, the program suffered; we support residents based on number of volunteers, and when there are fewer you have to decide whether to compromise quality or cut back on the number of residents you include. Since this project, I have eliminated the option of volunteering part time and ask for a weekly commitment. I also provide potential volunteers with a volunteer description to give them an idea of what they are signing up for. Making this change has helped a lot in retaining volunteers and having consistency each week. The program guide should address these ideas to help users create a solid foundation for recruiting, supporting, and retaining volunteers.
Objective 2

Resident Response to the Bird Tales Program

The effort it took to implement Bird Tales was definitely worth it after watching the resident and volunteer reactions every week. All of the exchanges, smiles, and laughter observed the 11 week time span was evidence of this, but so are the responses to weekly feedback forms and the stories shared. Resident feedback was collected every Bird Tales session, with the exception of two days (the first day and an outdoor observation day). Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the feedback responses (see Tables 5-7 in the Appendix for a summary of descriptive statistics for each feedback form); volunteer evaluations were collected every week, as well, and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The findings from the resident feedback forms showed that residents enjoyed participating in Bird Tales! On the resident feedback form the residents were asked to respond to a set of questions using a scale of one to three, three being the highest. For question one on this form, “How much did you enjoy today’s bird class?” the average response was 2.83. Although responses from people who have dementia are oftentimes regarded as unreliable, studies have indicated that this is not true. In 2001, Feinberg and Whitlatch examined the decision-making capacity of people living with dementia in respect to their care preferences and choices. The results of this study indicated, “…that persons with mild to moderate cognitive impairment are able to respond consistently to questions about preferences, choices, and their own involvement in decisions about daily living and to provide accurate and reliable responses to questions (p. 374).” This finding was backed up in a more recent study, as well (Whitlatch, Feinberg, & Tucke, 2005).

To provide another perspective about the experiences of residents, volunteers were asked similar questions about resident enjoyment. On the volunteer feedback form, volunteers were asked to respond to the set of questions using a scale of one through five, five being the highest. For question six on this form, “How much enjoyment do you think s(he) got from the activity?” the average response was 4.43. Questions concerning resident enjoyment were also asked at the end of the 11 week period in a program evaluation. To summarize resident enjoyment, volunteers were asked the following on question five: “Overall, how well did the residents respond to the Bird Tales activities?” On average, the volunteers’ response was 4.57 on a scale of 1-5. Additional questions, that could be potential indicators of enjoyment, were also asked (to
see a full summary of feedback responses from each form see Tables 5-7 and Figure 3 in the Appendix 3).

The response to close-ended questions about resident engagement on the various forms all support the notion that residents were engaged during Bird Tales. In addition to close-ended responses, volunteers were asked a set of open-ended questions. The following quotes unequivocally complement the numerical patterns from the descriptive analysis:

“They all seemed to enjoy the activity. Sharon liked to hear the birds and we enjoyed talking about the differences.” – Volunteer

“Laughing! It was great to see Pauline making the birds sing and dance! It made both she and Jeanette laugh!” – Volunteer

“Dorothy enjoyed pushing the button to hear the owl’s noise a lot. I think she loved to hear it and she compared the noise with other animals too.” – Volunteer

“Dorothy B. came to the program today for the first time, although I have been trying to get her to come for the entire semester. I knew she would love it!! At the end of the session, she asked when we would be doing this again!” – Leader

One of the main goals of Bird Tales is to encourage social interaction (Griffin & Elkins, 2013). To shed some light on this outcome, questions about social interaction were included on the resident and volunteer feedback forms, and the program evaluation form. Residents were asked on a scale of one through three, “How much did you enjoy talking to other people during today’s bird class?” The average response to this question was 2.84. Volunteers were asked a questions with similar sentiments rated on a scale of one through five, “Did s(he) interact socially with others during the program?” The average response to this question was 4.05. In addition, volunteers were asked the following on the program evaluation at the end of the 11 weeks: “Overall, to what extent did Bird Tales encourage residents’ social interaction?” Their collective response was 4.86.

During the project, social interaction appeared to increase as we neared the final day of the program. The cause of this is unknown, but we realized that residents interacted more with each other during the group portion of the session; they also seemed to have a higher level of interaction the longer they were in groups and became more open to sharing over time. Based on these observations, I allotted more time for group work towards the end of the project and some days we didn’t break out of groups at all. On group days, I led the lesson with each individual
group and provided supplemental information to the volunteers, allowing them to incorporate some lesson material into group work. The following quotes highlight some of the interaction observed in this study (for more quotes extracted from the feedback forms, please see Exhibits 7-9 in the Appendix):

“All the elders at my table chatted with each other throughout the entire session - so much fun!” – Volunteer

“I enjoyed the interaction by the residents directed by us. It seemed that they gained confidence in sharing.” – Volunteer

“Everyone was social and talkative; they liked picking the seeds and such.” – Volunteer

“There were lots of positive experiences today. The residents shared stories with each other, asked questions, and some shared facts that I did not know! It was a really positive environment today.” – Leader

The other main goal of Bird Tales is to connect people with dementia to nature (Griffin & Elkins, 2013). To look at this outcome the program, I included a question about nature on the resident feedback form and on the program evaluation. On a scale of one through three, residents had an average response of 2.73 when asked if they felt connect to nature. Volunteers were asked in the program evaluation, “Overall, to what extent did Bird Tales connect residents’ to nature?” and on a scale of one through five, volunteers had an average response of 4.00. Both responses were the lowest averages from each respective evaluation tool, however, this doesn’t indicate that the goal went unmet, it just needs to be better addressed and measured in the future. Improving the lessons to bring in more natural elements and implementing the program in the spring would likely enhance resident’s connection to nature and improve responses to the evaluation questions.

**Volunteer Response to the Bird Tales Program**

At the onset of this study, I did not set up a mechanism for measuring or recording volunteer responses to the program that extended beyond a closed-ended questions on the volunteer feedback form and program evaluation. My previous experiences working with intergenerational programs should have prepared me for this outcome, yet it wasn’t one of my original research questions. In this study, volunteers managed to deeply connect and form relationships with the residents they worked with and I would like conclude this story through sharing snippets of a volunteer’s perspective on Bird Tales (to see the full reflection, see Exhibit
This volunteer was a graduating senior who volunteered from beginning to end during this study and went on to continue with the program as a volunteer at two additional sites. Here she describes walking with a resident back to his room, the interaction they have, and her thoughts on their relationship:

After the session, I strolled with Jeff back to his room. When we reached his room, I hugged him goodbye. I told him that I would see him the next morning. As I left the room, Jeff said, “you know what, Kaitlin? I love you. You’re my buddy.” This exchange has become our good-bye ritual and I love every moment of it. Every time, I turn back, smile and hug him again. Without my participation in Bird Tales I would never had had the opportunity to develop such a wonderful relationship with Jeff. I love him dearly. He has such a sly wit and a huge grin that he employs more often than not. He loves John Deere and we spend time chatting about how I need to spend less time doing schoolwork and more time sleeping. I could go on and on about Jeff. Put simply: he is my buddy. I owe our relationship to Bird Tales and the solid foundation the program provided for such a powerful intergenerational relationship.

She goes on to describe another powerful experience she had during Bird Tales at a different facility as her second time volunteering with the program. She indicates that she was nervous about working at this facility because she did not know the residents and during her other experience, she knew the residents prior to becoming a volunteer. After describing her nerves, she tells us about her experience with her friend June, June’s bird exploration, and their first time working together using Bird Tales.

I was partnered with June. Based on a couple preliminary questions, I found out that June loved to watch the Northern Cardinal. I spent the rest of the session showing her the Northern Cardinal bird model and sharing with her the facts about the bird on provided on the handout. Her face lit up when she saw the bird model and the picture of the Northern Cardinal. When I asked her what she thought the bird song sounded like, she intently listened to the song four or five more times and then told me “Pretty Pretty Pretty” – the exact mnemonic that is typically used for the Northern Cardinal. We looked at other brightly colored birds like the Painted Bunting (her second favorite behind the Northern Cardinal) and the Blue Grosbeak. It was so easy working with June, facilitating her bird exploration.
Unbeknownst to the volunteers, I spoke with the director of the facility extensively prior to meeting the residents and learned detailed information about all of the residents (I later put together an information sheet about the residents for the volunteers to reference). During this conversation, June was described as apathetic and I described this to her proceeding the session. Her reaction and the lessons she learned from these valuable experiences with two very different residents are captured below:

*After the session, Jenn shared with me that June is typically apathetic, depressed and often speaks in a monotone. I was blown away – the entire session, June was engaged, smiling and focused on the birds. While my experiences at Liberty had shown me the incredible potential for intergenerational relationships Bird Tales provides, my first session with June powerfully demonstrated that the program promotes well-being.*

To conclude this thoughtful reflection, the volunteer goes on to discuss what the program means to her and how it has impacted her life:

*I love this program so much that I even enrolled in an Ornithology course as my last elective to complete my Zoology major. I cannot express how much this program has given me. It promotes my well-being and I always leave happier and less stressed than when I came. I can’t imagine my life without Jeff, June, and the birds!*

As her thoughtful reflection alludes to, Bird Tales impacted not only her life in a meaningful way, but the lives of those she worked with. She also relates stories that depict the strong intergenerational bonds that Bird Tales promotes and how resident’s well-being is improved.

In conclusion, this study provides information on the process of implementing Bird Tales and gives insight on how the program was received by residents and volunteers. Although this study was limited to one nursing home, the findings provide an understanding of how to implement, improve, and grow Bird Tales which can be applied in various settings.

**Conclusions**

The findings of this research highlight the process of implementing Bird Tales in a nursing home and provide input on how those involved react to the program. In this section I will review the most important lessons learned from this process evaluation: (1) The Bird Tales program guide is helpful, but needs to be improved; (2) Building relationships with the local community improves interaction and breaks down stereotypes about dementia; and (3) There is room for growth to the conceptualization of the program.
Lessons Learned

*Bird Tales Program Guide*

This guide is a great resource to understand how to set-up your outdoor space and begin initial planning for the program. It provides an overview of implementation and gives a relatively agreeable summary of how to communicate with people living with dementia, however it does not give enough guidance for practitioners to use the guide to implement the “unique, easy and affordable” program without subsequent research (Griffin & Elkins, 2013). In short it does not provide the resources necessary to start the program and needs to be developed further.

I have several recommendations that should be included in a modified program guide:

1) **Language** – the program guide needs to clarify vague language and use directive words that describe how to get from point A to point B. Including information such as, “This program could be done in a group or one on one” should be followed with “if…then” statements that describe implementation.

2) **Process** – there is no program process or method outlined in the guide unless you interpret from the lesson examples. There is also a need for guidelines to implement alternative forms of the program, such as one to one scenarios and outdoor programs. Developing a process and incorporating it in the guide is critical for replication, sustainability, and evaluation purposes.

3) **Training** – guidelines on what educational materials are necessary to train people to implement this program and work with residents is under-represented. This information is also important for replication, sustainability, and evaluation purposes.

4) **Tools** – the tool section needs to be updated with lessons and bird cards. Packaging the program guide with bird models to match the set provided would be helpful. This will improve the likelihood of practitioners following through with program implementation, improve replication efforts across sites, and enhance quality management.

5) **Evaluation** – standard methods of evaluation must be added to the program guide. Providers seek evidence-based programs and proper evaluation standards need to be added to the program.

6) **Collaboration Hub** – an online virtual learning community could encourage different Bird Tales program leaders to connect, share data, success stories, advice, and support. This could be included in the price of the program guide and another way to control replication,
authenticity, and quality of the program. It could also start the beginning phases of developing an online platform, where training videos could be developed and provided, materials could be sold for purchase, and data could be stored.

**Community Relationships and Meaningful Interactions**

Establishing and building upon community relationships were an integral part of planning for and designing Bird Tales for this specific project. This effort to include individuals from the community not only improved interaction in the program (i.e. more volunteers), it allowed for a connection to form and grow between the resident and community member. Volunteers learned from the residents and in return, residents learned from volunteers. Over time, the shared experiences between them turned into friendship. Involving the community definitely improves the quality of life for both volunteer and resident, and allows for collaboration between groups. The more people involved, the greater the opportunity to build, grow, and sustain the existing structure of the program and break down more stereotypes about people living with dementia, their capacities, and nursing homes in general.

**Let it Grow, Let it Grow, Let it Grow**

As is, Bird Tales is a powerful program that offers multiple opportunities to connect people living with dementia to the environment and others around them (Griffin & Elkins, 2013). Why stop here? Bird Tales has so much to offer to all residents living in long-term care settings – should dementia be a prerequisite? One resident who was staying at the facility for rehabilitation came to every session during her stay because she simply loved birds and wanted to learn more about them. She taught us a lot about birds when she was present and really contributed to resident interaction. Although this particular resident had no qualms about attending a program geared for people who have dementia, others might. Eliminating the “for people with dementia” clause to the program would likely foster more engagement from the general population. The program conceptualization could easily be expanded in multiple ways to promote engagement among residents who aren’t living with dementia. For example, monthly meetings could be held for residents to plan for and maintain green spaces, a gardening component could be added for residents, and residents could even help in planning or teaching activity lessons, especially in a Continuing Care Retirement Community. During this project, one particular resident filled up all of the feeders and alerted me when we were low on certain seeds – he did not have dementia, but needed something to do. Filling up the feeders provided
him with a sense of purpose and attending the weekly sessions gave him a chance to communicate with others and talk about one of his favorite subjects: the beauty of nature. At the close of this project, it is clear that this new innovative program can and should be successful, but it’s also clear that is has potential to be so much more than a program for people with dementia. The sky is really the limit.

Limitations

A number of study limitations need to be acknowledged. Foremost, I want to acknowledge that the PDSA model used was not a limitation, but rather a reoccurring challenge every week; making sure the findings from each cycle were considered and incorporated. Another challenge I faced during the course of this study was my role as researcher, leader, and advocate for the residents who lived at the nursing home. I have fairly strong relationships with most of the individuals who participated in this research. This challenge at time was a limitation; it could pose questions about vested interest in outcomes. To protect the findings from researcher bias, I triangulated data from other sources (volunteers and residents) to make sure my conclusions were accurate and not a product of my biases.

Another fundamental limitation was training for both volunteers and myself. Prior to this project, I worked with people who have dementia and implemented the program one on one with residents in a nursing home. I was, however, never formally trained to lead Bird Tales and had no preceding knowledge on birds. Once introduced to the program, I spent endless hours researching birds, but this does not make up for the fact that there was no training to prepare me for implementing the program. Likewise, my volunteers were not trained to work with the Bird Tales program; they all had participated in formal training for an intergenerational arts program for people living with dementia to teach them how to work and communicate with those living with dementia, but the nature piece was never included in their training background. Volunteers were also not consistent every week—some people participated every week, others only joined in on a handful of occasions. This could impact how the residents reacted to the program and how well the program was implemented that day. As volunteer participation is critical in implementing the program, there were some weeks that did not have an ideal number of volunteers, negatively impacting program implementation.
Future Directions

This study was purely exploratory in nature and is to be used as a starting point to kick start future research efforts. Bird Tales has a lot of potential, but more research is needed. In June, I will be flying to Connecticut to meet with Ken Elkins and people from the local Audubon Chapter he is from, the local nursing home the program was first implemented at, and other key stakeholders invested in Bird Tales (these individuals have yet to be identified to me). This meeting will allow me to disseminate these findings and help them continue their planning for the future. In this dissemination, I plan to present the lessons learn from this study.

The next step in this process is making changes and improvements to the program guide to create an outline that is universal for all interested implementing Bird Tales. This step should include the information from this study to inform program process and designs, updating the materials and tools presented, making necessary changes to the program, and updating the overall process of implementation. Bird Tales is wonderful for residents and volunteers alike, but the findings from this study alone are not enough to fully inform future steps in regards to program development; it can only inform ideas and changes needed to make the program guide a better tool for users. From the findings of this study and future studies, the program process and guide must be upgraded.

Another important future step is related to program planning – how will Bird Tales grow, both conceptually and geographically? As mentioned earlier in the conclusions, Bird Tales is a program that has room for much growth conceptually. Designing a comprehensive plan to grow the program concept will be beneficial; it will allow for marketing to a wider audience and could potentially improve the impact of the program. Along with this advice, I would suggest developing guides and documents that explain how to grow the program in local areas, and connect with local organizations. Finally, I would highly recommend planning for the future. After process evaluations have reached saturation, there needs to be a focus on monitoring programs, ensuring authenticity among Bird Tales sites, and starting a new path towards being an evidenced-based program. All aboard—the conductors of Bird Tales need to figure out how far they’d like to travel, where their final destination is, and how to properly map out their trip.
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Appendix

Exhibit 1. Bird Card Example

Bird Tales

Northern Mockingbird
Holding the bird model provides the opportunity to examine the bird up close and appreciate the details of each bird.

Look
Notice the markings
They have a white patch on each wing and when they fly, these become large white flashes. The white outer tail feathers are also fleshy in flight.

Look at the eyes
Their eyes are a yellow-green color and stand out next to their grey and brown markings.

Fun Facts
- In the nineteenth century (1800’s), people kept so many mockingbirds as cage birds that they nearly vanished from parts of the world. People took babies out of nests or trapped adults and sold them in several cities, like Philadelphia. Really good singers were worth up to $50.
- Northern Mockingbirds continue to add new sounds to their collections throughout their lives. A male may learn up to 200!
- The oldest Northern Mockingbird on record was 14 years and 10 months old.

Listen
To hear the song of the bird, squeeze its belly.
Both male and female mockingbirds sing, and they often mimic the sounds of birds (and frogs) around them. Many of their songs are whistles, but they also make sharp tills.

Unmated males are the most insistent singers, and carry on all day and late into the night.

Feel
Feel the shape of the beak
Their beaks are long, slim, and back. They use this thin beak to pick up insects, berries, and fruit.

Feel the tail
The tail is soft and grey. As you feel the tail, try to imagine what an actual feather would feel like.
Exhibit 2. Activity Lesson Example

Birds with Attitude

Overview: Many common birds will be visiting our feeding stations. Let’s learn about their personality types.

Theme: Backyard bird personalities

Materials: Bird models and LLF cards of—

- Black-capped chickadee
- Blue jay
- Tufted titmouse
- Mourning dove
- Downy woodpecker
- American goldfinch
- American robin

Time: 30-45 minutes

Introduction:

Pass a bird model to each participant, showing him or her how to hold it and demonstrating how the model plays sounds that the bird makes. Explain that we will be discussing the different personality types of the birds visiting our feeder station.

Core Activity:

1) Spend a few minutes sharing each bird model with the entire group. Use the LLF cards to show how the models are designated to look like the real-life bird. Briefly stop with each participant and provide the opportunity for him or her to LLF each bird.

2) Start out the parade of birds by first asking questions. Hold up a bird model and ask, “What do you think this bird is like? / tell me something about this bird’s personality.” If residents don’t respond, give examples of different traits to try to spur discussion (i.e. curious, intelligent, funny, quiet, sad, and energetic). Go through each of the following birds doing this exercise.

   a. Chickadee—naturally curious, first to find new feeders, other follow chickadees in the winter to find food (personality descriptors: curious, leader, fearless)

   b. Blue jay—most intelligent bird in the courtyard, can recognize predators better than other song birds (personality descriptor: intelligent)

   c. Tufted titmouse—always on the move finding food, chasing insects; we only see a flash of them at our feeders because they grab a seed and fly to a branch to eat it (personality descriptors: energetic, motivated, goal-oriented)
### Table 2. Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Date</th>
<th>Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>October</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Making New Feathered Friends</em>: 1-Oct</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bird Songsters</em>: 8-Oct</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Exotic Birds</em>: 15-Oct</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Feeding Our Feathery Friends</em>: 18-Oct</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Birds with Attitude</em>: 22-Oct</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bird Watching in the Courtyard</em>: 25-Oct</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>November</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Taking a Look at Birds</em>: 5-Nov</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Feeding Our Feathery Friends 2</em>: 8-Nov</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Honey, I’m Home!</em>: 12-Nov</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>What’s For Dinner?</em>: 19-Nov</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>“Hoot” Knows About Owls?</em>: 22-Nov</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>December</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bird Beak Experiment</em>: 6-Dec</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Walk This Way</em>: 10-Dec</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3. Attendance Frequencies 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Sessions Attended</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Residents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4. Attendance Frequencies 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Sessions</th>
<th>1 to 3</th>
<th>4 to 6</th>
<th>7 to 9</th>
<th>10 to 13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Residents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exhibit 3. Bird Tales Process

1) Make name badges
2) Review activity lesson for the session (Huddle)
3) Leader will get residents one by one and bring them to the activity area
4) Introduce yourself to residents
   a) If you don’t know what to say, tell them a story about a time you had a memorable encounter with birds, nature, or the outdoors
5) Help residents make their own name badge (let them write their own name if they can)
6) Pass a bird model to each resident
   a) Show resident how to hold it
   b) Demonstrate how the model plays sounds that the bird makes
7) Opening remarks
   a) Leader will thank everyone for coming and highlight the bird activity we will be doing during the session
8) Spend a few minutes sharing the bird models with the group (part one of core activity)
   a) Show how the models are designed to look like the real life bird
   b) Talk about the look, listen, and feel elements of the bird
9) Start activity lesson
   a) The leader will start the activity plan
   b) Volunteers will float around the residents, fielding their questions, helping them with the models, etc.
   c) If a resident needs 1:1 attention, a volunteer will work with them outside of the group
10) Room for stories
    a) Here we will discuss stories or memories about birds, bird watching, outdoor experiences, etc.
    b) This is left for the end of the group session, but can be infused throughout the entire session
11) Closing remarks
    a) Leader will thank everyone for coming and engaging in the program
### Exhibit 4. Resident Feedback Form

Today’s date: ___________________                 Resident’s Name: ___________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Very much</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How much did you enjoy today’s bird class?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How much did you enjoy talking to other people during today’s bird class?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How often were you able to do what you wanted during today’s bird class?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Did you feel connected to nature?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you think your time was well spent?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Lokon, E. J. (2008). *Opening minds through art (OMA): The resource handbook*. Unpublished manuscript
Exhibit 5. Volunteer Feedback Form

Today's date: ____________
Your position:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did you personally enjoy today’s activity?</th>
<th>Very much</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>How well did you work with the participants in this activity?</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Very poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>How appropriate was the activity lesson for the participants?</th>
<th>Very appropriate</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall, how would you rate this activity lesson?</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Very bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please complete the section below for the participants that you worked most closely with today.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did s(he) participate in the activity?</th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>How much enjoyment do you think s(he) got from the activity?</th>
<th>Very much</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did s(he) appear happy or content during the activity?</th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did s(he) interact socially with others during the activity?</th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did you notice any reactions to the program (positive or negative) expressed by the participants? Explain these situations here:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>What are your thoughts about today’s activity lesson? Please include honest answers; these will help to modify future lessons.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>What went well during the session? What didn’t go well? Please include suggestions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please use the other side for additional comments.

Exhibit 6. Program Evaluation Forms

Today’s date: ____________

Number of Bird Tales sessions attended: ____________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rating Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Overall, how would you rate Bird Tales?</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Overall, how much did you enjoy Bird Tales activities?</td>
<td>Very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Overall, how well did the <strong>facilitator</strong> work with the</td>
<td>Very well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participants throughout the program?</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overall, how well did the <strong>volunteers</strong> work with the</td>
<td>Very well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participants throughout the program?</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Overall, how well did the <strong>residents</strong> respond to the Bird Tales</td>
<td>Very well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>activities?</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Overall, how appropriate were the activities in the program for the</td>
<td>Very appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participant?</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, to what extent did Bird Tales:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rating Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>encourage residents’ self-expression?</td>
<td>Very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>encourage residents’ social interaction?</td>
<td>Very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>improve residents’ mood and/or behavior?</td>
<td>Very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>connect residents’ to nature?</td>
<td>Very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What have you learned from participating with Bird Tales? Please feel free to make comments and suggestions too. Thank you.

Adapted from Lokon, E. J. (2008). *Opening minds through art (OMA): An art program for people with dementia.* Miami University / OhioLINK
### Table 5. Resident Feedback Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enjoyed project</th>
<th>Enjoyed talking</th>
<th>Do what I want</th>
<th>Connected to nature</th>
<th>Time is well spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>96.00</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>96.00</td>
<td>95.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Central Tendency**

| Mean            | 2.83           | 2.84           | 2.75                | 2.73              | 2.90              |
| Median          | 3.00           | 3.00           | 3.00                | 3.00              | 3.00              |
| Mode            | 3.00           | 3.00           | 3.00                | 3.00              | 3.00              |

**Dispersion**

| Standard Deviation | 0.43          | 0.39           | 0.50                | 0.57              | 0.31              |
| Variance          | 0.18          | 0.16           | 0.25                | 0.33              | 0.09              |
| Range             | 2.00          | 2.00           | 2.00                | 2.00              | 1.00              |

### Table 6. Volunteer Feedback Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enjoy activity</th>
<th>Work with residents</th>
<th>Activity appropriate</th>
<th>Rate activity</th>
<th>Resident participation</th>
<th>Resident enjoyment</th>
<th>Resident happiness</th>
<th>Resident interaction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>59.00</td>
<td>59.00</td>
<td>121.00</td>
<td>121.00</td>
<td>121.00</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Central Tendency**

| Mean            | 4.73           | 4.57           | 4.64          | 4.68                    | 4.33               | 4.46               | 4.51                 | 4.19|
| Median          | 5.00           | 5.00           | 5.00          | 5.00                    | 5.00               | 5.00               | 5.00                 | 5.00|
| Mode            | 5.00           | 5.00           | 5.00          | 5.00                    | 5.00               | 5.00               | 5.00                 | 5.00|

**Dispersion**

| Standard Deviation | 0.48          | 0.62          | 0.69          | 0.60                    | 0.92               | 0.76               | 0.73                 | 0.84|
| Variance          | 0.23          | 0.39          | 0.47          | 0.36                    | 0.84               | 0.58               | 0.53                 | 0.71|
| Range             | 2.00          | 2.00          | 3.00          | 2.00                    | 4.00               | 3.00               | 3.00                 | 3.00|
Table 7. Overall Evaluation Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sessions Attended</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Enjoy</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Volunteer</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Self-expression</th>
<th>Social interaction</th>
<th>Mood/Behavior</th>
<th>Nature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central Tendency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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<td>Mode</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
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<td>5.00</td>
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<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dispersion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.49</td>
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<td>0.38</td>
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<td>0.53</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>16.90</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. Overall Evaluation Summary

Figure 1. Overall Evaluation Fall 2014
(n=7)

Questions

Exhibit 7. Volunteer Feedback Quotes

*Did you notice any reactions to the program (positive or negative) expressed by the participants? Explain these situations here:*

**Verbatim quotes:**

**Did you notice any reactions to the program (positive or negative) expressed by the participants? Explain these situations here:**

Verbatim quotes:

Very positive sensory project. The participants loved to pet the soft birds and listen to their song.

The participants were really engaged with feeling the birds and listening to their songs. One of our residents was really excited to share his knowledge about the birds.

Pat said that activities like this were his favorite part about living here; Sharon said she loved it! And had a really good time.

Participant remembered her days when she used to watch birds & recognized some birds as well.

Laughing! It was great to see Pauline making the birds sing and dance! It made both she and Jeanette laugh!

I love that residents liked what they created so much and wanted to hang them by their windows.

Dorothy really enjoyed listening to the birds' songs, she held a bird during the whole session.

Very positive - Kate was always smiling ;)

These two people shared their knowledge about owls and told stories. They enjoy talking to each other and others around the table too.

*What are your thoughts about today’s activity lesson? Please include honest answers; these will help to modify future lessons.*

**Verbatim quotes:**

Loved it! Learned lots of interesting facts. I like that participants can ask questions and share their personal stories!

I really like the group set up and how there were more volunteers per resident.

Was very appropriate today, even for the resident's with more severe cognitive impairment.

I liked how you got the participants to participate by describing the birds. Asking simple questions made people more interactive and details made it more interesting. It went GREAT!!

Keeps getting better and better! It's so great that you're able to involve everyone in the group discussion and facilitate such good participation!

I enjoyed the interaction by the residents directed by us. It seemed that they gained confidence in sharing.

This activity prompted more social interaction than the usual lessons, which was great!

*What went well during the session? What didn’t go well? Please include suggestions.*

**Verbatim quotes:**

Sitting in the bigger room definitely worked well and sitting all together in front of the lesson. The only thing I didn't know how to do was engage one of the participants who wasn't really interested in holding the birds.
The amount of time to review the birds and their facts was perfect. The flow of the session and lesson at the end went really well.

The group discussions and trading the first two birds for the next two to talk about. Discussing the birds as a small group was a lot more successful than one-on-one with just one or two birds.

Taking turns reading the bird facts and passing around the birds to feel their beak, feathers, and tails was really fun and interactive for the group.

All the volunteers! Having a one to one ratio really made things so much easier!

All the participants around my table connected and responded to the lessons. For example, if Jenn mentioned something they have seen before they would add to the conversation.

Having one-on-one time with Jenn was really nice and interactive
Exhibit 8. Program Evaluation Quotes

What have you learned from participating with Bird Tales? Please feel free to make comments and suggestions too. Thank you.

Verbatim quotes:

I love this program! I am becoming a small bird fanatic… I love seeing how participants are engaged in a multi-sensory way and can express themselves, chat with each other and the volunteers, and enjoy their time :)

First, learned a lot about birds. Then, learned that there are some residents who really connect to birds and have always loved watching birds. What more? Learned that bird tales is another great intergenerational program that connects them to nature as well as helps them keep engaged. Going on a good track!!!

I think the residents really enjoyed bird tales. They felt connected to nature and shared their stories which was good to hear. So, I learned that using birds as a sensory stimulant to people with dementia really works. Since, this is your first time there’s some room, but I am sure birds is going to be all over Ohio. Good luck for your future!

Bird tales has shown me that there are a variety of interesting, engaging and age-appropriate ways we can help older adults (and particularly) people with dementia to express themselves.
Exhibit 9. Bird Tales Experience Reflection
Bird Tales Experiences by Kaitlin Moore

I started my experience with Bird Tales last semester at the pilot site, Liberty, in Oxford. I volunteered because the Liberty residents are my favorite people and I wanted another scheduled time during the week where I could spend time with them without stressing about schoolwork. I am now volunteering at three different sites every week because of the incredible response to the program I witnessed at Liberty last semester.

Bird Tales is a structured multisensory program that still provides ample opportunity for flexibility and exploration by the residents. Many of my favorite memories volunteering at local nursing facilities (and I spend a lot of time volunteering) have been with Bird Tales. I would love to share some highlights with you:

One evening last semester, I sat at a small table with three of my favorite people: Jeff, Robert, and Pat. Whenever they sit together, conversation is sure to fly and I am there as an active observer – throwing in my two cents whenever it is possible, but mostly listening to them joke around and one up each other with bird stories. Robert had a lot to say about the Blue Jay, or as he called it, “the tattletale of the forest” as he talked, he grandly gesticulated and spoke of the beauty of God’s creations (even that nasty Blue Jay). Jeff talked about the Downy Woodpecker and how he certainly wouldn’t want one in his backyard hammering away on a fence line all day. Pat shared that an owl’s eyes are bigger than their brains, hence the phrase “bird brain” – I definitely giggled at that, particularly Pat demonstrating how big an owl’s eyes are by bugging his own out.

After the session, I strolled with Jeff back to his room. When we reached his room, I hugged him goodbye. I told him that I would see him the next morning. As I left the room, Jeff said, “You know what, Kaitlin? I love you. You’re my buddy.” This exchange has become our good-bye ritual and I love every moment of it. Every time, I turn back, smile and hug him again. Without my participation in Bird Tales I would never had had the opportunity to develop such a wonderful relationship with Jeff. I love him dearly. He has such a sly wit and a huge grin that he employs more often than not. He loves John Deere and we spend time chatting about how I need to spend less time doing schoolwork and more time sleeping. I could go on and on about Jeff. Put simply: he is my buddy. I owe our relationship to Bird Tales and the solid foundation the program provided for such a powerful intergenerational relationship.

Another powerful Bird Tales experience occurred my first time volunteering at Adult Day Services this February. This was their first ever session of Bird Tales and I was a little nervous – when I started volunteering at Liberty I knew every resident, but at ADS I was meeting most of the elders for the first time. I was partnered with June. Based on a couple preliminary questions, I found out that June loved to watch the Northern Cardinal. I spent the rest of the session showing her the Northern Cardinal bird model and sharing with her the facts about the bird on provided on the handout. Her face lit up when she saw the bird model and the picture of the Northern Cardinal. When I asked her what she thought the bird song sounded like, she intently listened to the song four or five more times and then told me “Pretty, pretty pretty” – the exact
mnemonic that is typically used for the Northern Cardinal. We looked at other brightly colored birds like the Painted Bunting (her second favorite behind the Northern Cardinal) and the Blue Grosbeak. It was so easy working with June, facilitating her bird exploration. After the session, Jenn shared with me that June is typically apathetic, depressed and often speaks in a monotone. I was blown away – the entire session, June was engaged, smiling and focused on the birds. While my experiences at Liberty had shown me the incredible potential for intergenerational relationships Bird Tales provides, my first session with June powerfully demonstrated that the program promotes well-being.

I love this program so much that I even enrolled in an Ornithology course as my last elective to complete my Zoology major. I cannot express how much this program has given me. It promotes my well-being and I always leave happier and less stressed than when I came. I can’t imagine my life without Jeff, June, and the birds!