

Residents at The Farmstead Express Their Lives through Art & Music

Charlie Maguire, nationally known folksinger and songwriter, knows how an old, familiar tune can tap deep memories of important events and people in one's life. Maguire counted on the memory-evoking power of music as he led the "Songwriting Camp" last month with a group of older adults who live at The Arbor memory care, a living option of The Farmstead senior living community in Andover, Minnesota. The Songwriting Camp, held last month, was the first of three art camps being held at The Farmstead.

Through a grant awarded by the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC), The Farmstead is collaborating with Community Programs in the Arts (COMPAS) to host the camps for residents and their families. The camps are being taught by professional artists from COMPAS who are trained and experienced working with seniors at all levels of functioning. The award-winning COMPAS is nationally recognized for its creative and innovative approach to arts education in Minnesota.

"Here's Another One for You"

Maguire spent time across six days in July, telling stories and singing familiar songs with the participants to revive their memories and draw out their own stories. Mental and interpersonal engagement in songwriting and creativity gave the participants with memory loss an opportunity to connect with other people and their own history, and may strengthen their cognitive capacity and memory. Residents also created personal works of art in the form of cardboard eyeglasses. The designs reflected what each person wanted the world to see about who they are and what makes them unique.



Folksinger & songwriter, Charlie Maguire

By the end of the camp Maguire wove their memories into an original song entitled "Here's Another One for You" that was recorded for them to keep.

Barb LeClair was amazed when her mother, Lucile Patterson, who has lived at The Arbor memory care for 2 years, stood up and danced when Maguire began to sing. "It was wonderful," said LeClair. She was moved by the stories residents told, including one who had met the Dalai Llama and another who told how he drove a tractor at the age of 11. "When Charlie took what they shared and made the song, you could see their faces light up in recognition of their own stories," she said.

LeClair appreciates the daily care her mother receives at The Farmstead, but is especially impressed by the arts and music programs in the community. "The staff recognize that the spirit of a person never really leaves them, and they use art and music to engage and call out who the residents truly are and bring out their joy," she said.

Creative collaboration enriches lives

Cassie Peterson, Recreation Director at The Farmstead, developed the three camps in collaboration with Pat Samples, Coordinator for the COMPAS Artful Aging Program. “The art camps give participants creative skills and tools that increase meaning and purpose in their lives,” she said. Peterson is pleased with the success of the Songwriting Camp. “Charlie’s music and songwriting ability enriched all of our lives and touched the hearts of our residents, families, staff and volunteers. It was great to see the residents open up and share their stories for the song,” she said. Since the camp’s conclusion, residents and staff frequently sing “Here’s Another One For You” and reminisce on the good times they shared together.

More art camps to come

The second camp, “Memory Tile Making” to be held in Fall 2014, will involve residents who live in The Terrace senior apartments and The Commons assisted living. Professional artist Anne Krocak will help participants learn about each other and about clay and glazes while creating their own personal symbolic tile or sculpture that illustrates the “richness of the years.” The creative process will be documented in individual booklets for each participant through photos and stories that explain the images each person creates.



Pat Owen assisting with graphic memoirs

Writer Pat Owen will lead the third camp in the Spring of 2015 entitled “Graphic Memoir: A Day in a Life.” During this camp, participants will create a graphic memoir page—a story of a person’s day in words and pictures. Using simple techniques, each person, regardless of skill level, will create a colorful, fun, and meaningful graphic memoir page suitable for framing. The end result is a panoply of pages illustrating the special moments of everyday life each person experiences.

Taking stock, finding joy

Through the art camps, The Farmstead aims to give residents the opportunity to take stock and appreciate their own lives and find joy in creating art. “Hosting the camps would not be possible without the help of MRAC and COMPAS,” said Peterson. “We are so blessed to have been awarded this grant and look forward to our next art camp,” she said.



COMPAS Artist, Anne Krocak

About The Farmstead

The Farmstead offers townhomes, senior apartments, assisted living and memory care apartments, all with an array of services and amenities. For more information or to schedule a tour, call 763-712-7000 or visit www.farmsteadphs.org.

We’re all born creative. Here at COMPAS it’s our mission to help people stay that way. Why? Because when we build up the creative part of our minds we hold on to a piece of ourselves that make us better suited to not only survive in this world, but thrive.

COMPAS brings innovative, creative, art-filled learning to people of all ages. Working side-by-side with Minnesota’s most talented artists, individuals develop their creative selves, take risks, try something new, learn and grow.

From classroom residencies to public art projects, COMPAS writers, visual artists, musicians and performing artists inspire individuals and build community.