

# Singing for Life

## Report outline

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### ABSTRACT

This report details research carried out as part of the Singing Surrey programme for Arts Partnership Surrey, and investigates the health and wellbeing benefits of group singing and other creative activities with a view to developing more opportunities.

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CCE: Creative Partnerships

  
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## Executive Summary

This reports investigates the impact of the Singing Surrey project, and looks at the potential opportunities for enhancing and developing ‘arts and health’ partnerships and projects in the County.

The methodology included observations, interviews and group discussions to develop case studies (included in the appendices) and inform a rich thematic analysis of findings. This was supported by consultation with professionals and an analysis of existing research/writing on the subject. Alongside, the team facilitated an Open Space event bringing together key cross sector partners to further debate and discussion under the banner ***‘How can arts and health professionals work together to improve health and wellbeing in our communities?’*** The report from this event is included in the Appendices.

The findings draw together perceptions of ‘health’ and ‘wellbeing’ and identify significant physiological, psychological, social and spiritual benefits associated with participation in singing/creative group activity, supported by a variety of direct quotations from participants. These echo the findings of a body of similar research.

The Open Space event, recorded in detail in the Appendices, identified considerable energy, enthusiasm and existing activity and expertise in the arts and health field. Its recommendations relate to enhancing information sharing, networking and opportunities for training.

The overall recommendations of the research are structured in relation to further development of singing groups, developing partnerships with health professionals, information sharing and networking and training. The report is intended to practically inform the development of strategy and delivery and as such includes, where possible, details of further information/useful contacts and well as suggested next steps.

***“He who sings scares away his woes.” (Cervantes)***

## Introduction

### *The purpose/aims of the research*

Arts Partnership Surrey (APS) commissioned Creative Partnerships Sussex & Surrey (CP) to evaluate the impact of arts activities on peoples' health and wellbeing. The Singing Surrey project acted as a core focus for the research, with additional evidence being gathered from a variety of sources and consultations. The information and evidence provided in this report will contribute to informing the future development of arts and health initiatives in Surrey.

APS aims to build a sustainable creative project that offers the opportunity of referring community members who may benefit from being part of a singing group project with the aim of improving the individual's health and wellbeing.

Therefore the brief included 2 strands of the research:

- Evaluating 'Singing Surrey' as an example project of arts benefiting health and wellbeing in communities.
- Making recommendations to APS for the future development of arts and health development projects, including assessing the possibility of developing GP referral for arts activities, such as 'Singing on Prescription'.

We intend that this research will seek to advance the strategic priorities for Surrey of building Safer and Stronger Communities, Health and Wellbeing and to connect with children and young people, as appropriate.

### *Background to APS, Singing Surrey Project*

Arts Partnership Surrey aims to promote and develop high quality sustainable opportunities for participation in the arts across the county.

Arts Partnership Surrey includes: Elmbridge Borough Council, Guildford Borough Council, Mole Valley District Council, Runnymede Borough Council, Spelthorne Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Tandridge Trust, Leisure & Culture, Waverley Borough Council and Woking Borough Council.

For the Singing Surrey project each local authority participating in this project identified an appropriate community group who would benefit from the development of a new singing group.

### *The research team*

To carry out the research Creative Partnerships appointed the following people:

#### **Rebecca Meitlis – Lead Researcher**

Rebecca is a cultural leader whose activities have included developing policy, strategic planning and innovative outreach programmes in the UK and internationally. Her career in opera began at **Scottish Opera**. She was then a staff director at **English National Opera** and with her colleague David Sulkin co-founded and directed the Baylis Programme, the education and outreach department of ENO. Since then she has worked in a freelance capacity for many arts and education organisations including: **Youth**

**Music** where she researched and developed the strategy for the Singing Challenge, Singing Communities and the Singbook; **Creative Partnerships** where she was a Creative Agent and **Arts Council England** as an Artsmark validator. Rebecca has wide experience as a facilitator, particularly enjoying working with large diverse groups through processes such as *Open Space*.

### **Hannah Wheeler – Lead Researcher**

Hannah graduated from **London Contemporary Dance School** with a BA Hons in Dance Performance in 1998. Since then she has developed a career as a performer, teacher, choreographer, arts manager and trainer. Hannah works with a wide range of organisations including **South East Dance**, the **Brighton Dome & Festival**, **London Youth Dance**, **Sadler's Wells** and **Creative Partnerships**. Hannah has written a range of arts-related training courses and resources for dance, commissioned and published by Youth Dance England and Hampshire Dance.

See [www.hannahwheeler.co.uk](http://www.hannahwheeler.co.uk) for more information.

### **Paul Hanna - Research Consultant**

Having graduated from the University of Brighton with a BA Hons in Social Science in 2006 Paul went on to read Social Psychology at **Sussex University**. Following the successful attainment of his MSc in Social Psychology, Paul returned to the University of Brighton to undertake his doctoral thesis in Social Psychology. During his time as a doctoral student Paul has worked as a **Lecturer of Psychology and Research Methods** at the **University of Brighton**. He has also worked on a range of research projects in assistant, associate, analyst and consultancy roles. The focus of these projects has included: mental health, and sexual abuse. Paul has published in a range of academic journals and has presented at international conferences both in the UK and Australia.

**With support from Cindy Cox** - Programme and Development Manager, **Creative Partnerships** at CCE: University of Sussex.

The Creative Partnerships (CP) programme [www.sussex.ac.uk/creativepartnerships](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/creativepartnerships) closed at the end of September 2011 and Cindy Cox and Catherine Orbach from CP have established a new community interest company, **Culture Shift** to continue to promote **creativity as a catalyst for change** [www.cultureshift.org.uk](http://www.cultureshift.org.uk)

## **Methodology**

Singing Surrey activity took place at a variety of venues across the county, as identified by APS. The membership/location of each singing group varied from borough to borough with many boroughs having chosen priority communities. Some were formed with pre-existing client groups, such as the sessions in Geesemere, which took place at a day centre for adults with learning needs. Other sessions were open access and aimed at attracting a range of ages. For more details on all the groups please see Appendix A.

Rebecca and Hannah visited 6 of the 7 groups between them. For the purpose of this research the groups that were mainly used to draw evidence from were 4 adult and intergenerational groups, as they included a wide range of ages in each. The researchers observed the sessions and then had the opportunity to talk to the participants and the tutors.

### ***Individual Case Studies***

Willing participants were then asked to volunteer to be case studies, enabling the researchers to gather more detailed evidence about their experiences of participating in the groups, and whether they felt this had any impact on their health and/or wellbeing. The case studies were called for a phone or Skype consultation at a later date; the conversations were recorded and then transcribed by the researchers. Each case study was asked a series of prompt questions, as well as being encouraged to share additional thoughts on the impact that singing has had on them. These framework questions can be found in the appendices.

For the full transcriptions from the 9 case studies please see Appendix D.

Having collected the interview and observational data a thematic analysis was conducted. Thematic analysis has long been identified as a plausible method for analysing qualitative data with a direct focus on identifying common themes across a variety of data sets. The first step constituted the reading and re-reading of the data to gain an overall 'feel' of what the participants were saying about their participation in the singing groups. Following this, all interviews and observational data was read in more detail and coded, to give a series of key themes for the findings. See the 'Findings' section for more detail.

### ***Open Space***

In addition to the core research with the singing groups, an Open Space event was held at Burchatt's Farm in Guildford, on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2011. The purpose of this event was to investigate the potential of developing arts and health initiatives in Surrey. A broad spectrum of guests attended including:

- Health professionals
- Representatives from health charities
- Researchers in the field of arts and wellbeing
- Arts practitioners/professionals
- People with experience of participating in arts projects

The event was attended by almost 50 people and discussions took place about a variety of issues including, 'how we can increase opportunities to include the arts in obesity prevention', 'how we can combine the arts with outdoor environments to benefit health and wellbeing throughout Surrey' and 'how do we get health and social care professionals to refer people for arts projects'?

A copy of the full Open Space report can be found in the appendices. See Appendix G.

### ***Consultation with Health Professionals***

Several healthcare professionals attended the Open Space event and contributed to discussions on the day. Other possible contributors were also identified and asked if they would be willing to take part in consultation. Whilst some did not respond, we were fortunate to receive a great deal of information from Maya Twardzicki, Public Health Lead - Mental Health, Surrey Primary Care Trust (PCT).

The purpose here was to ascertain what (if any) benefits healthcare professionals felt participation in arts activities could have on people's health and wellbeing. They were also asked to comment on whether they thought GPs (or other health workers) would feel happy to recommend, when appropriate, for some patients to attend arts activities. If they felt that a referral system might be a possibility they were also asked to comment on what the opportunities and limitations for this might be.

For full details of the consultation with Maya please see Appendix E.

It is important to note that at no point during this research is participation in arts activities believed to be a substitute for medical care. However, the idea that health professionals might feel able to recommend it, as something that could bring about additional benefits for their patients, is something that was investigated.

It should be noted that in relative terms this is a small-scale study. Visits were made to 6 groups overall, 4 of which constitute the key focus for this study (i.e. not including the school groups). Whilst detailed conversations have been made with the 9 case studies, we were not able to follow them for a long period of time, which means that the information we gathered was a snapshot of their thoughts at a particular point in time. Approximately 120 people were observed participating in the Singing Surrey sessions, and approximately 60 of these took part in a group discussion with the researchers. The study began after the singing groups had begun, and therefore we do not have the ability to note differences between their feelings about health or wellbeing prior to starting singing. However, the evidence gathered includes many examples of participants making direct links between the singing and improvements in their health and/or wellbeing. It also corroborates much of the previous findings in numerous reports on the effects of singing, by professional bodies such as the Sydney De Haan Research Centre, at the University of Canterbury. More details about key pieces of existing research can be found in Appendix F.

*NB: The names of all participants - both in the transcriptions of the individual case studies and the group discussions - have been changed to protect people's identities.*

### **Group consultation**

Though long, perhaps the most insightful aspects of this research are the discussions that have been transcribed from Rebecca and Hannah's visits to the groups, as well as the conversations that took place with the case study volunteers. The personal nature of these quotes and the participants' willingness to talk so openly about their experiences have meant that there has been little inference needed from the researchers, as the value of the qualitative data has been excellent.

## **Findings**

The findings from the research have been organised thematically from the case studies, group discussions and group observations and augmented from the discussions at the Open Space event and interviews with health professionals and other research. The themes are as follows:

- Understandings of 'wellbeing'
- Understandings of 'health'
- Perceived benefits:



- Physiological
- Psychological
- Social
- Spiritual

### **Understandings of 'wellbeing':**

Many people expressed 'wellbeing' as a feeling of interconnectedness within themselves, both physiologically and psychologically between themselves and their families and communities.

**Mark:** *"It's about recognising that every one has skills and talents that everyone has a right to follow, so that individuals can feel good about themselves and feel secure and so its that rounded thing, having a place in Society and being valued for the person you are. I like the notion of wellbeing, but being a realist ... I think it's about giving as much as taking. It's emotional wellbeing which is also material health so you have enough money to survive with and a little extra for treats, feeling you have a place."*

**Francesca:** *"You need to be healthy, reasonably fit, fairly relaxed, content with your life within reason, we all have good days and bad days you have to try and aim at being relaxed with your life"*

**Gemma:** *"It's not just a physical thing its an emotional and psychological feeling, it's being in a good place "*

**Jayne:** *"Feeling fit and well enough to do the things I want to do in life. And mentally feeling well enough to do the things I want to do in life. Not just physically. Being in a good place to improve myself"*

This could be compared to the following definition: 'wellbeing is the subjective state of being healthy, happy, contented, comfortable and satisfied with one's quality of life. It includes physical, material, social, emotional ('happiness'), and development & activity dimensions.' (Felce & Perry 1995; Danna & Griffin 1999; Diener 2000).

One person also felt being cared for gave a sense of wellbeing. It is interesting that many of the positive comments about the singing leaders referred to their caring qualities.

**Darren:** *"Being well looked after by whoever is there."*

**Jane:** *"You start by singing only your line and it doesn't sound like anything and then you put them together and you've got this amazing sound out of no where and Anna is wonderful she is so encouraging even the first time she got us to sing a note together and she just went "Wow!" and we didn't even know each other then."*

### **Understandings of 'health':**

Several people thought that health is to do with not having an illness, or about attitudes to illness.

**Darren:** *"Health is being well, nothing serious wrong, if there is something wrong taking medication for that. I am diabetic so I take pills for that"*

**Jayne:** *"There are people who are healthy and there are people who are well within their illness. These people have an acceptance of things that are happening to them and live their life to the full as they can within those limitations. The people who don't accept and deny what is happening to them or, let what is happening to them overwhelm them so they don't live life either, are dealing with things in a less healthy way."*

The World Health Organisation have previously used the following definition of health: 'health: comprises physical and mental wellbeing, and (despite philosophical debate) is usually operationalised in terms of the absence of symptoms, illness and morbidity.' (WHO 1948; Danna & Griffin 1999; WHO 2004). This shows the link between 'health' and 'wellbeing' and acknowledges both the physiological and psychological aspects.

### **Perceived benefits:**

The following are extracts from the case studies and observations showing how individuals' perceived the benefits of singing in their group.

#### **Physiological**

**William:** *"I can't breathe deeply and couldn't take enough breath in to sustain an 8-bar stanza for example, though I could manage a 4-bar if it was fairly brisk... the breathing exercises are invaluable and are a big help."*

**Luke:** *"Generally you feel good in yourself and you feel more energetic. I seem to feel I have more energy afterwards."*

**Jayne (reporting comments from a group discussion):** *"Being more aware of their posture, how to stand properly, how to breathe properly, there was someone who was a swimmer who thought that her swimming standards were better because of the exercises for the singing."*

It was also noted from group discussions with the Spelthorne group that one member had suffered from a displaced diaphragm and feels that the singing group has helped to improve this, as singing develops better breathing techniques and lung capacity.

#### **Psychological**

Growth of confidence was important to many people, and lack of confidence was an issue in coming to the group in the first place, performing and performing solos. However once these hurdles had been overcome participants appreciated the changes in themselves.

**Luke:** *"You're a bit shy at first but once you start singing and let yourself go...I thought I can sing in a choir as it doesn't matter what you sound like... and they get you better and you get your confidence back. It builds your confidence and it's even good for public speaking. It trains your voice to get better. I think it's fantastic."*

**Gemma:** *"I looked back to the first one [performance] when I was absolutely terrified, but now my confidence had grown because I didn't even think about it, it was just OK 'I'm going to do it', and I did it. That's been another positive outcome of it, for someone who is a fairly confident person, or perceived to be confident, but when it comes to things like that I'm not, but I've noticed that change in myself."*

**Francesca:** *"I'm quite a quiet person but there's an extrovert trying to get out, it does come out sometimes...I get quite nervous in strange company and don't find it easy"*

**Luke:** *"I think psychologically you feel a lot better by being in the groups. You're so busy thinking about the songs that any other problems you've got you forget about."*

**Participant from Bletchingley group:** *"About 6 months ago someone said 'why don't you join a choir?' I didn't know of one and then the community choir started. From the first evening when I went home with a big grin I have been really enjoying it. I have been quite down and the choir has been part of my recovery."*

Many participants referred to periods of depression or periods where they were unhappy, and some made direct links between singing and improvements in their mental health.

*Darren: "I had a nervous breakdown in 1996 and when I was well enough I went to a singing and movement group. It was lovely (it offers you) the chance to sing, to move, to relax. It cheers people up it makes people smile."*

*Gemma: "I was slipping back along the slope of depression"*

*Luke: "I had depression about a year and a half ago. The singing got rid of it."*

See interview with 'Jayne' in Appendix D for conversation about the use of drugs and the benefits of singing in helping depression.

Some people mentioned that singing helped to keep their brains active and develop their mental alertness. Participants in the Spelthorne group noted the following benefits: 'It (singing) keeps your focus and interest, and keeps your brain active' and '(Singing) helps with memory – learning the songs keeps your mind active.'

*Francesca: "It helps your memory as you're getting older because you have to remember the words"*

*Mark: "It (performing) tests us, which is good, we could probably do with out the tension, but its good that we stretch ourselves a bit, otherwise you can become complacent."*

They also attributed the effects of singing with helping to alleviate or combat stress.

*Francesca: "I have been less stressed and singing helps...I love hearing the sound we all make, when we are singing I don't think about anything else, I just think about the singing."*

Even the youngest member of the intergenerational groups that we saw, found that singing helped him to offer him a form of escapism: "After a long, hard day at school I come here to take it all out my head and relax."

### **Social**

Many participants commented on the benefits of group or choral singing, as opposed to singing on their own. They noted that the group scenario gave them amongst other things, more energy and commitment as they felt a responsibility to the other members. Many of them also enjoyed the sound that can be created by a group of singers, as opposed to what they might be able to achieve by themselves. For the less confident singers this was a chance for them to feel safe and supported.

*Luke: "First of all you've got to sing in a group, it's much better than singing on your own."*

*Francesca: "I think it is good for you, for me I don't think about anything else when I'm there. There's a lot of laughter that goes on in our choir, it's a happy choir, I don't know everyone yet, but every one is very friendly,"*

*Gemma: "Every week, I'm looking forward to going back to learning new songs and meeting up with people again. A group of people I most probably wouldn't come in to contact with through any other way. There is a great sense of being part of the group now which is really nice."*

**Darren:** *“The fact that we can sing together, without ever singing together before in our lives.”*

**Francesca:** *“It’s always good to socialise, the older you get the more important it is.”*

### **Spiritual/positive emotions**

Comments about the positive feelings people have when singing could be interpreted as being in a state of contentment with yourself and the world, expressions such as ‘uplifting’ and ‘euphoria’ are more than just feeling good, they verge on the spiritual.

**James:** *“I don’t feel that singing has had an impact on my health as such, but it does make me feel good.”...“When you hear a choir sing it is a very positive and uplifting experience.”*

**Francesca:** *“I must confess I feel very content at the moment and singing must have something to do with it.”*

**Francesca:** *“I feel so good when I stop singing, and whatever song, not all the songs are what I would like necessarily, but I just enjoy singing, and then you hear a group of people singing together, it always sounds so good, even when we make our mistakes.... I always leave on a high.”*

**Gemma:** *“A feeling of almost euphoria”*

**Jayne:** *“I came back at the end of the session and my partner, she said to me “you have a big fat grin all over your face.” I just know that at every session it just lifts me and I know it energises me”*

**Jayne:** *“The first time (we performed) I was a bit nervous, but the second time it was great to see how much the audience was enjoying it as much as we were.”*

The benefits of singing in a group are often expressed in an interconnected way as participants’ talk about the psychological, physical, social and spiritual benefits, all in the same breath.

All of the comments noted here are closely linked to those findings referenced in the ‘Singing & Health’ report, by the ‘Sydney De Haan Centre’, at the University of Canterbury. See Appendix F.

Amongst other effects this research noted the following benefits that result from regular participation in group singing:

- Stimulation of cognitive capacities – attention, concentration, memory, learning
- A sense of disciplining the skeletal-muscular system through the adoption of good posture
- A sense of exercising systems of the body through the physical exertion involved in singing – especially the lungs
- A sense of personal transcendence beyond mundane and everyday realities, being put in touch with a sense of beauty and something beyond words, which is moving or good for the soul
- Emotional release and reduction of feelings of stress

Once again the effects of singing are multiple and are not only psychological, or only physical, but affect different people in different ways, often with several benefits being noted by the same person.

## Recommendations

The recommendations from the research fall into four areas:

### A. Development of Singing Groups

If APS are looking to continue, expand or initiate new singing projects we would recommend building on the most successful aspects from the groups we observed during this research.

The success of the Singing Surrey groups set up by the APS depended on several factors:

#### 1. Logistics

The venues were well positioned for the particular community they served with easily accessible transport links, good acoustics and pleasant surroundings. The timings of the sessions were also suitable for those in work or connected to the school year.

#### 2. Leadership

The feed back on the singing leaders was extremely positive. It is clear that the personal qualities and musical skills of the leader are important for the success of the group: **Francesca** *“Our teacher is very encouraging and very good, whatever type of singer you are she will make you feel encouraged. She has a lovely voice; I don’t know how she carries all the tunes in her head!”* Participants also expressed their faith in the authority of the leader and how this gave them confidence: *“A. is wonderful she is so encouraging even the first time she got us to sing a note together and she just went “Wow!” and we didn’t even know each other then.”*

#### 3. Music genres and approach

All of the groups visited taught a wide range of songs aurally and introduced a good approach to healthy singing, paying attention to full breathing, easy and good posture and pitching the music well to suit the mixed abilities within the groups. It is important that these choirs do not require people to read music as this can be perceived as a barrier: **Jayne** *“a counsellor I was seeing suggested to me that singing might be really helpful so I’ve been on the look out for something but I needed a choir that didn’t require me to read music. All the other choirs I know about want you to follow the little black dots; which isn’t one of my skills. It was just what I’ve been looking for.”* We asked for feedback about genre of music sung and several people said it didn’t really matter.

**Darren** *“It could be a nursery rhyme and it would be the same.”*

The appreciation of the songs selected was more to do with how easy they were to learn and the sound made by the group. One person reflected that the words were often uplifting and that was important.

**Jayne** *“Sometimes some of the words have touched the situations I have been in and when you add music to the words its really quite powerful. We did the “Lean on me” song, helping people in different situations. I think there are a lot of people leaning on me, but I’m not good at leaning on them. There was a spiritual we did, “Bright morning star” again it was talking about having hope, seeing something beyond the present and I found that very helpful to.”*

#### 4. Socialising considerations

Several participants thought going to a group for the first time could be daunting. It would be a good idea to have a “buddy” system for first-timers. See Jayne & Mark’s interviews in Appendix D.

This could be linked to the referring organisations, so for instance if **First Steps** ([www.firststeps-surrey.nhs.uk](http://www.firststeps-surrey.nhs.uk)) had information for their clients about various singing groups they would also be able to call on members to introduce first-timers. The social aspect of the singing group was very important to many of the interviewees. Given that many used the group as an opportunity to combat feelings of isolation and in some cases bereavement it would be beneficial to introduce more opportunities to meet within the group, for instance a refreshment break or special celebrations where friends and families could be invited. One of the participants suggested they would be happy to pay towards this as he viewed it as an important aspect of the gathering.

#### 5. Targeting groups

Most of the groups were general community groups although the two school groups were aiming at becoming intergenerational and the group at Geesemere was for adults with severe learning difficulties. At the early stage of our observations it seemed the general community groups were the most successful, due to the fact that they were the most well attended, the feedback from all the participants’ was almost entirely positive and some were beginning to work towards small public performances, indicating the progress they had made in a relatively short amount of time. People valued the age ranges, both sexes, and mixed abilities. One participant (Mark) suggested that their choir could sing together with the Orpheus Centre musicians ([www.orpheus.org.uk](http://www.orpheus.org.uk)). This seemed an excellent way forward to integrate special groups into the community and could be extended to others such as Alzheimer’s groups. Not unusually there are fewer men in the groups than women. Elsewhere groups have been set up that are men only. For an example of a highly successful intergenerational project please see [www.musicmindspirit.org/songtreescommunity.html](http://www.musicmindspirit.org/songtreescommunity.html) which has some very persuasive video footage, and is based in Dorking.

It is worth noting that whilst we have focused on the development of singing groups, much of the recommendations that we have made would also pertain to any other arts activity groups, especially the issues relating to transport, timings, considerations with socialising participants and the considerations for targeting groups.

#### **B. Forming partnerships with Health Care professionals**

*Gemma: “I was very lucky with the GP I saw, she was remarkable in that way. I think it’s potluck. There are some GPs out there who are looking for alternatives and don’t necessarily want to hand over the prescription of pills there are others who are more than willing to that. I think it has to be through ongoing education and projects like this and because it’s on a county-wide basis as well”*

Three of the case studies had been recommended to take part in a singing group by a health professional (a GP, a nurse and a counsellor). It is interesting that this range of health care professionals all felt confident to recommend singing as an activity that would bring about positive developments for their patients. This research highlights some areas for development in order to encourage more healthcare professionals to feel able to give this kind of recommendation to people that they feel may benefit from participatory arts activities of this kind.



## Fitting into the System

A key starting point is to link in with current approaches and initiatives. Given that six of the nine case studies mentioned, that depression and anxiety are states that singing helps alleviate, it is important to find a way of communicating this to health professionals. This table;

<http://www.surreyhealth.nhs.uk/SERVICES/PROFESSIONALS/dpc/Pages/default.htm>

shows how GPs map solutions for anxiety and depression. When discussing the role that singing and other arts could play in treatment plans it is clear we are suggesting that this could happen at step 2 of the process.

## Health Action Plans

At the Open Space event it was suggested that with increased awareness of the benefits of participatory arts activities they could be included in Health Action Plans. The following web-link explains how young people or adults with learning disabilities can fashion their own health action plan. This can include doing things that interest you. Once the plan is submitted health professionals assess if the plan is suitable and help to implement it.

[.http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/Browseable/DH\\_4098111](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/Browseable/DH_4098111)

## From the Health professionals viewpoint

An interview with Maya Twardzicki, Public Health Lead - Mental Health, Surrey PCT (Appendix E) was very helpful in how to proceed with this. Interestingly Maya herself is a singer and has had direct experience of the health benefits of singing.

### 1. Evidence & Research

Maya thought that health professionals should be made aware of the body of research that is available, and appreciate the rigour of this work and the commonly agreed benefits of arts activities. "They rely so much on things like NICE (National Institute for Health & Clinical Excellence [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)) and randomised control trials." In fact the benefits for exercise and health is seen as being evidence based and is in the NICE guidelines for treatment for anxiety and depression. A few studies about participating in the Arts and resulting health benefits are also on the NICE website under "Shared Learning Database" but are not (as yet) accepted in their guidelines.

Maya suggested contacting Mark Shakespeare from the Mental Health Trust - [Mark.Shakespeare@sabp.nhs.uk](mailto:Mark.Shakespeare@sabp.nhs.uk)

Mark attended the Open Space event and Maya wondered if APS and the Mental Health Trust could combine forces and run some groups for patients that they could evaluate with clinical/psychological outcome measures.

### 2. The New Landscape in Mental Health Care in Surrey

It is important to realise that the Health Service itself is going through structural changes and cost cutting exercises. For mild and common mental health problems there are currently two key organisations in Surrey, 'First Steps' and 'New Thoughts'.

**First Steps** is Surrey Community Health's first port of call for information on Emotional Well-being material and training. Its aim is to provide the general public, communities and organisations with

relevant information and strategies to help raise awareness on emotional wellbeing and to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues. [www.firststeps-surrey.nhs.uk](http://www.firststeps-surrey.nhs.uk)

**New Thoughts** is a new psychological therapy service based in the community and GP practices across Surrey. They are responsible for stage 2 cases for those over 18. The authority has commissioned KCA, a charity committed to providing specialist, effective care and empowering people affected by drugs, alcohol or mental health issues, to deliver this. [www.kca.org.uk](http://www.kca.org.uk)

As the Public Health Lead for Mental Health in Surrey, Maya recommended contacting both these services to show them the evidence, give them a practical demonstration of the benefits and give them lists of singing groups/choirs and other participatory arts activities groups so they can signpost patients there.

Many people have discussed hosting a conference for 'Health & Arts Professionals'. Maya's recommendation was that it would be more successful if this topic was either represented at a conference for health professionals that was already scheduled, or was added to a conference that was aimed at showing the effectiveness of other evidence based interventions (such as exercise).

Discussions with the above organisations will help clarify a strategy for this next stage in progressing opportunities.

### 3. Further Contacts

The following Health Professionals were all invited to participate in the Open Space event. Of these only 3 attended on the day, but all of these contacts could potentially be consulted in the future:

Name	Organisation	Contact Info	Attended Open Space
Richard Whitaker	NHS Surrey	<a href="mailto:richard.whitaker@sabp.nhs.uk">richard.whitaker@sabp.nhs.uk</a>	Y
Shahnaz Bano	NHS Surrey	<a href="mailto:shahnaz.Bano@surreypct.nhs.uk">shahnaz.Bano@surreypct.nhs.uk</a>	Y
Sophie Mumford	Mencap National Centre	<a href="mailto:Sophie.Mumford@mencap.org.uk">Sophie.Mumford@mencap.org.uk</a>	Y
Alison Prescott	Leatherhead Clubhouse	<a href="mailto:Alison.Prescott@maryfrancestrust.org.uk">Alison.Prescott@maryfrancestrust.org.uk</a>	N
Mark Cremmen	Art Matters	<a href="mailto:Mark.Cremmen@RichmondFellowship.org.uk">Mark.Cremmen@RichmondFellowship.org.uk</a>	N
Clive Stone	Oakleaf Enterprise	<a href="mailto:clivestone@oakleaf-enterprise.org">clivestone@oakleaf-enterprise.org</a>	N
Mike Munson	Richmond Fellowship	<a href="mailto:Mike.Munson@RichmondFellowship.org.uk">Mike.Munson@RichmondFellowship.org.uk</a>	N
Jane Cattermole	ESRA	<a href="mailto:jane@esrasurrey.co.uk">jane@esrasurrey.co.uk</a>	N
Gabby Alford	NHS Surrey	<a href="mailto:gabby.alford@surreypct.nhs.uk">gabby.alford@surreypct.nhs.uk</a>	N
Belinda Hemingway	NHS Surrey	<a href="mailto:belinda.hemingway@surreypct.nhs.uk">belinda.hemingway@surreypct.nhs.uk</a>	N



### **C. Information sharing and networking**

The Open Space event brought together people from both the health and arts sectors, and served as a way of kick-starting further discussion and interest in 'arts and health' in Surrey. It was encouraging to note how many of the delegates were already working in this field or had an interest in developing this type of work. The event framed with the following investigatory question: **'How can arts and health professionals work together to improve health and wellbeing in our communities?'** This led to a range of discussion topics each chaired by delegates from the event.

There was a great deal of enthusiasm for a network to continue, and further develop the ideas and partnerships that were discussed at this event. Since the event the researchers have received several requests from attendees wishing to know who is now taking a lead on this, or how they can join the email list! This energy could be harnessed to develop a working group that might be able to contribute to the further discussion and exploration of some information sharing, and to gather useful evidence and resources that can be readily accessed.

We would advise that this report is circulated to the delegates from the Open Space event, along with an indication of what APS are planning for their next stage of development for this work. This would ensure that those people that have expressed an interest in 'arts and health' in Surrey are informed about the research that has taken place since they came together at Burchatt's Farm, in July and the recommendations for the next steps.

The artists' network that already exists in Surrey ([www.surreyartistsnetwork.net](http://www.surreyartistsnetwork.net)) may also be worth exploring as a means of generating more interest, or of further consultation with arts professionals that may have a keen interest in working in activities with a health focus.

#### **1. Harnessing the media**

Some Singing Surrey participants commented that they came to the singing group because they had read an article about it in the local paper. This seemed to offer them an assurance of quality and an insight in to the group that can't be achieved through marketing on a flyer or other sources. Another participant (Henry) noted that articles in magazines are a useful way of informing people of the perceived benefits of singing for health and wellbeing. Local radio, news items or phone-ins would also help spread the word. See notes on Henry in Appendix D, Case Study 3, for further information.

Therefore when setting up participatory groups of any kind it seems that press opportunities should be explored. These not only offer potential for more people from the local communities to hear about the sessions, but also serve to somewhat validate the activities.

#### **2. Using social media**

APS had previously mentioned the possible development of a video on YouTube that would include case studies of people who felt their health and wellbeing had benefitted from participation in arts activities. The idea would be that this video could be used to advocate to other prospective participants and/or to highlight the benefits to local healthcare professionals. Although this was initially suggested specifically as a tool for promoting arts activities specifically for people with mental health issues, it could be used to promote the opportunities more widely to all user-groups.

#### **3. Equipping health care professionals with useful information**

One of the key issues appears to be ensuring that GPs and healthcare professionals feel sufficiently confident of the benefits of regular participation in arts activities to be willing to make recommendations about them to their patients.

The creation of a resource pack for professionals looking for information could be an especially useful tool. This could be given health professionals and would provide them with basic information about the key benefits of participation in a range of different art forms. Additional consultation would need to be done with GPs/healthcare professionals to identify what would be most useful, and convincing to them, and in what format.

If this was a live resource (web-based) it could also include an up-to date list of activities that are happening in the Surrey area that they could refer patients to. This would need to be managed and updated regularly. There may need to be some quality assurance, to ensure that the listed activities were led by suitably qualified artists/tutors. It could also include a selection of case studies, detailing experiences of past participants. Again, these could be available via a YouTube video, rather than as written studies.

It was also suggested at Open Space that leaflets could be sent to GPs surgeries to notify local residents about arts activities. The recommendation would be that this was a centrally produced flyer, detailing approved activities. Again this would need regular management and coordination and the cooperation of local GP surgeries.

It was also noted that health professionals might be mindful of the associated costs of participating in arts activities, and could be concerned about recommending their patients to take part because they are unsure if they could afford to do so.

However, the actual costs are usually minimal for each participant and are often subsidised, if not free. Most of the people we spoke to at the Singing Surrey groups said they would be very happy to make a contribution to the group, even if they weren't currently being asked to do so. This indicates the value that they place on being able to participate.

*Mark: "I will make sure the doctors have some leaflets, even though we will spread it by word of mouth. But it's also the wider range of professionals. If you have a community nurse or outreach worker or something like that, certainly now that social care is linked to personal budgets, so making social workers aware that, this cost £3 a week for 2 hours, so this is a very low cost to get someone out of the house and uplift them."*

Maya Twardzicki suggested a travelling road show "bring along some advocates, people who have had mental health problems that have done the singing so they could talk about the benefits. Service users listen to other service users, rather than the professional preaching that this is a 'good' thing."

This insight that service users listen to other service users is good to keep in mind and a Youtube video that would be easily accessible would cover this ground.

#### **4. Making use of existing networks and partnerships**

It was suggested at the Open Space event that 'exercise referral' is recognised as an excellent support programme throughout Surrey, and is well used. It is not directly cash funded by any one source, but is supported by a number of partners, making the programme more robust. This model could be worth exploring to make an arts-activity referral system more viable. The Surrey Primary Care Trust has a lot of information about the referral system and contacts for the various boroughs in Surrey can be found here: <http://www.surreypct.nhs.uk/health/Pages/Healthylifestyles.aspx>

NHS Surrey, are also working in partnership with Surrey County Council and Surrey's boroughs and districts, to develop a network of 'Health champions'.

Health champions work with clients by providing information and signposting them to the NHS and other community services within health and social care. This, in turn, helps clients to live healthier lifestyles and access the support they need. This may be as simple as a referral to a stop smoking or weight management clinic or the more complex issue of navigating someone through mental health services or a housing application. See the previous link for more detail about this scheme.

The 'Health & Wellbeing Board' – this is a new structure as part of the Government's NHS bill and will have community representation on it as well as key health and social care and Clinical Commissioning Group representation, and may be worth pursuing as a platform for networking and sharing, and may be part of the new landscape for arts and health initiatives.

The Lightbox in Woking has been working in partnership with 'Corner House' a local mental health organisation, and are now a part of the Happy Museum project, which uses galleries and museums as spaces to encourage healing. The Lightbox could be a good partnership organisation for APS to link to with to further develop this work. ([www.thelightbox.org.uk](http://www.thelightbox.org.uk))

The NHS Community Network primarily works to support care for people with mental health issues – could this be used as a means to promote arts activities with specific objectives relating to the therapeutic interventions for mental health issues? E.g. 'Circle Dancing for people with Dementia' - see Further Reading Appendix F.

## **5. Dedicated Web site**

Several of the discussion groups at the Open Space event suggested a dedicated web site for initiatives in Arts and Health in Surrey. Below is a synthesis of these ideas.

The website would include:

- Information about Arts projects and groups pertaining to health and wellbeing issues
- Listings of events, forums and conferences
- Testimonials about the benefits of arts activities
- Research
- Information for Health professionals
- Training opportunities
- Funding opportunities
- Database of groups and individuals offering arts activities
- Links to You Tube
- Links to health care initiatives
- Contacts for Health Care organisations

The website would be used by;

- Clients
- Arts professionals
- Health professionals

There is no doubt that this would be a very valuable resource, all of the suggestions in this section of networking and sharing information could be presented through it. The question is whether this is a new initiative or a development of an existing site. It might be possible to produce and host this in conjunction with a health care charity.

## **D. Training**

### **1. Training for Arts Professionals**

Whilst training for arts professionals is important, there were suggestions by some practitioners at the Open Space event, that there are already a good number of practitioners with specific experience of 'health and wellbeing' working in the Surrey region. Therefore training may initially be developed to support these existing practitioners in developing their practice/creating new projects, rather than setting up development opportunities for those with little experience in the field.

Further down the line training could be developed to help support community leaders to develop activities, within their own neighbourhoods, that echo the ambitions of the Singing Surrey project. This may make the activity more sustainable and would help communities to become more active. Arts Officers may already be aware of active community leaders who may be suited to leading on this.

### **2. Better understanding of existing models in the area of 'arts & health'**

Further research about the Exercise Referral system could lead to the development of a similar system for 'creative referral' or 'arts on prescription'. Training may then be offered to community leaders/GPs/arts practitioners to roll out this model and take a lead on the development of it.

### **3. Making use of existing training**

Existing training courses could be used or modelled. The Royal Northern College of Music has developed 'Music for Health', created in response to an upsurge in interest around the impact of music making on health and wellbeing. The training offers professional support for musicians wanting to work with people in health and social care settings. See the following website for more information:

[www.rncm.ac.uk](http://www.rncm.ac.uk)

KCA also provides training for public, private and third sector employers to give staff the confidence to meet and address mental health and substance misuse issues arising through their work. For more information see:

[www.kca.org.uk](http://www.kca.org.uk)

## Final thoughts

This research has highlighted the beneficial impact that activities such as group singing, can have on peoples' health and wellbeing. It demonstrates as well, that many participants make direct correlations between the improvements in their general happiness/mood/positivity and their involvement in arts-related activity.

The Open Space event was very well attended and demonstrated the existing knowledge and expertise in the field of arts and health. The enthusiasm for developing this area of work further within Surrey is something that can be drawn on APS, and indicates that there is goodwill for it to succeed.

The level of detail that we were able to elicit from the individual case studies and group discussions, was very encouraging, and demonstrated a readiness from participants and leaders to talk about their experiences.

There is a wealth of supporting evidence that corroborates the findings that were made during this research, many of which are listed in the 'additional reading' section in Appendix F. This should help APS to make a strong case to local healthcare professionals, and whilst we have focused primarily on the singing groups and the effects of singing, the key impacts and recommendations should translate easily to other communities and other activities.

## Appendices

### Appendix A – Singing Surrey – group information

Group	Singing Leader	No of participants	Type of Participants	Update on group as at 18.10.11
Runnymede	Olivia McLennan	Approx 12	Adults with learning disabilities and mental health issues	The group sessions have now finished. All participants were reported to have enjoyed the sessions. The singing leader is still to meet with the staff at the centre to help with session planning so they can continue the music group themselves.
Spelthorne	Gail Windrass	Approx 20	Intergenerational group, but mostly older people	The Sing Spelthorne community choir continues to grow and develop with over 30 people attending Brooklands College, Ashford regularly. A few weeks ago the choir arranged for a charity celebration and performance in aid of the Helping Hands Charity Ashford and raised over £100. The choir will continue into the near future with several of performances planned for the Christmas.
Mole Valley	Olivia McLennan	Approx 17	Intergenerational group, but mostly older people	Singing sessions will take place at the North Leatherhead Community Association on Tuesday evenings from 6.30pm – 8pm. Taster workshops are being held at The Pitstop – a day-time drop-in centre for the homeless, unemployed & socially isolated and Leatherhead Start, Leatherhead's Night Hostel. The Arts Development Officer and Voluntary Action Mid Surrey are working with the group to set up an organising committee and make the group sustainable beyond this project. The group has been invited to join Leatherhead Choral Society for a Christmas Concert in December.
Tandridge	Anna Tabbush	Approx 25	Intergenerational group, but mostly older people	Bletchingley Community Choir has gone from strength to strength since its formation in March 2011. The current singer leader, Anna Tabbush, is now working with a newly appointed leader, Philippa Berry, in a mentoring capacity, with a view to Philippa leading the choir going forward from here. The Choir will continue to meet at St Catherine's School and Tandridge Trust will continue to act in an advisory role to the choir and help it in setting up a committee, so it can become a self managing entity in the New Year. The choir have had several very successful performances to date and they seem committed to continuing to meet

				and perform for the enjoyment of the local community in the future.
Woking	Kim Perkins	Approx 30	Currently young people only as takes place during school time	The Maybury School group is going from strength to strength with the new reception class and this year's year1 class continuing in-class singing session based around good vocal health, confidence, foundations in music-making and classroom topics. The senior children have been invited to join an afternoon school choir including adult relatives and teachers. There is a regularly attendance of approx. 15 (NB only been running 3 weeks), and a great community spirit and as young and old learn together which we hope might grow to reach new members and to advanced musical skills.
Godalming	Kim Perkins	Approx 30	Currently young people only as takes place during school time	Kim Perkins is continuing to run 10 classroom sessions at Green Oak School in Godalming for the reception class and years one and two. This term an after school session for the KS2 children and their families has also been added, which will form the basis for the community choir. The Head Teacher is enthusiastic about the benefits of the project to the children's learning and sense of wellbeing and would like the choir to continue beyond the end of the autumn term. Half term will provide an opportunity to review and discuss the legacy of the project and to consider how a transition to a local singing tutor might work.
Guildford	Anna Tabbush	TBC	<i>The start of this group was delayed and therefore they did not form part of the research</i>	Sessions are running on Thursdays from 7-9pm at Pond Meadow School. One of the teachers at the school is qualified in music and will lead some of the choir sessions after half term with a view to taking over from Anna once the initial Singing Surrey funding has finished. The Arts Officer is planning to support the school to help fundraise for the future. The school are providing space in kind, which it is hoped will help to make the group sustainable.

## Appendix B - Framework questions

Research questions for case studies:

- Could you tell me a little about what wellbeing means to you?
- Could you tell me a little about what health means to you?
- How did you come to be a member of this group (e.g. doc referral etc)?
- What do you feel are the positive aspects of participating in this group?
- What do you feel are the negative aspects of participating in this group?
- Could you tell me a little about any important experiences you have had in the sessions?
- What do you see are the benefits of coming to these sessions?
- In what (if any) ways do you feel coming to this group has impacted on your wellbeing?
- In what (if any) ways do you feel coming to this group has impacted on your health?
- Is there anything you would like to add that I haven't mentioned?

## Appendix C - Singing Surrey intergenerational and adult groups - observations and discussions

### 1. Mole Valley

**Group:** Trinity Leatherhead

**Date visited:** 28 June 2011

**Singing Tutor:** Liv McLennan

**Visited by:** Rebecca Meitlis

**Background:** The aim is for the group to be intergenerational, but on the day I visited most participants were 40-70 years. There have been several taster workshops to recruit members. Liv has been running sessions for about a term. They were working towards an open rehearsal in two weeks time where they could bring friends and family who would hear what they were working on and also have a chance to join in, in September.

We had a short discussion in the rehearsal break about the health benefits of singing.

Key benefits suggested, included:

- It being uplifting
- Confidence building

Comments from participants included:

- "I gave up smoking 6 months ago and a friend who is a nurse said its good for people giving up smoking because it makes you think about your breath and expanding your lungs."



- “When I had a nervous breakdown in ‘96 I was in hospital for 5 and a half weeks and when I was well enough I was in a singing therapy group it was a great help. If I can sing I get more and more happy, it’s a wonderful tonic.”
- “It’s great at encouraging people who are shy to have a voice, because you’re harmonised with other voices, you’re not using words but you’re projecting yourself out. It encourages you to be less shy.”

## **2. Runnymede**

**Group:** Geesemere

**Date Visited:** 28 June 2011

**Singing Tutor:** Liv McLennan

**Visited By:** Rebecca Meitlis

**Background:** This is a group for adults with severe learning difficulties. The individuals are from Geesemere and Fairways. Liv was well supported by the staff from both organisations. When the group came together it was still very dispersed, the levels of engagement extremely different. The activity started with a name song, which they obviously all enjoyed and had requested. Liv has arranged the songs so that participants can accompany on open string guitars (specially tuned) and simple percussion. There is a range of activity, including moving with scarves during one of the songs. There was also a section where they were listening to recorded music whilst holding a cloth between them and rolling a ball from one to the other. This was the closest they got to working together, and being calm as a group.

The following notes are from a discussion at the end of the session. In the group were 6 people from Geesemere, as the Fairways group had left early.

Paul, the nurse, is questioning the group:

Paul: How do you feel after the singing group?

1 Pleasant, fine

2 Relaxed after you finished

3 Very interesting

4 It makes you think.

3 I enjoy coming to these sessions as well. I tried to blank Rebecca out

2 Beautiful

5 OK, All right! Do you like Toffee?

RM: I’m OK

6 TEA TEA

4 Happy

Paul: So you feel relaxed?

3 If you wanted to you could suggest it to someone who was unhappy.

4 It depends how you feel. If you feel relaxed or uneasy, or interested it's all right to sit outside away from it.

Paul: Have you felt sad coming into a session to begin with?

3 No

4 It helps me stop thinking about things

Discussion with Liv & Paul:

R: Do you think the benefits are for the individuals or for the group?

P: Individuals have benefited. 'D' was trying to stamp his authority on the group, he's learnt about developing, expressing and 'share-taking'. Because we have a mixed ability group, different people take different things. 'P' is mute so she says very little but she enjoys being with the group. 'B' was good when he said he stopped thinking about stuff because he has a lot of anxiety issues.

L: The idea is to pass on ideas of how to run singing activities to Paul and Caroline who have been the consistent staff.

P: We can take techniques from Liv; she has given us ideas of how they can be more responsible and to let them lead. We've learnt a lot.

L: It's very different from what I've done before, the age group and mental health issues and autism, different life experience and the fact that the group is from two places and that the Fairways group have to leave half way through.

P: The clients have different ways of communicating, like 'M' wants to say yes to agree. You have to be careful how you communicate.

R: Have you noticed changes in individuals or how the group behaves?

P: There are good days and bad days depending on how the individuals are. Other days it's productive and good. It depends on how they are feeling and how we are feeling, all the unconscious stuff will communicate. It's given 3 of them scope to be creative which has been good for them.

R: Does it spill over into the rest of their lives?

P: I would like to say yes but to be honest I think most of the clients slip back into their behaviour. But they can be different; 'D' can be demanding. 'P' is quite capable; she has to be reigned in, boundary wise. For her own safety. 'P' likes to feel she's being an assistant, if someone is distressed she might want to rush in. To be honest it's the same as other groups. (I.e. other activity groups they do)

R: Looking at the training element, what special skills do you think singing leaders need to work in this sort of setting? E.g. communication

P: You can learn Makaton or widget... but each individual will do Makaton in another way.

L: It's the basic level of communication skills, within your self, you can learn but you have to practise them and learn with each individual. And how to keep boundaries, but in a positive way: I didn't want to be patronising, I've done a lot of early years work, which I have adapted, I also used props like the scarves but they don't look patronised. The tactile games were very good.

R: Are there any ways you would justify funding a regular workshop like this?

P: We will continue but having someone as skilled as Liv is important. I'm happy to justify it, there are benefits... we will continue but it will be different. We were chosen because we are good at

communicating and aren't worried about taking part. It's good having staff and clients together in a group.

Later conversations with the group included the following comments:

- "It made me forget my problems and really made me happy"
- "Peaceful"
- "Sad Liv's leaving"
- "Calmer"
- "Entertaining, interesting"
- "I like the dancing"
- "I like the exercise"

### **3. Spelthorne**

**Group:** Brooklands College Ashford

**Date Visited:** 14 July 2011

**Singing Tutor:** Gail Windrass

**Visited By:** Hannah Wheeler

**Background:** The group has been running since May, as part of the Singing Surrey project. The sessions take place on a Thursday evening and Gail teaches a 2-hour session every week. The aim is that this is an intergenerational group, though there was only 1 young person there when I visited. There are approximately 24 regular members and the majority of the participants are in their 50's, 60's and 70's.

**Details:** Gail teaches a variety of songs, traditional and modern. She also encourages participants to suggest the songs they would like to learn, and has also enabled participants to bring in songs they have written themselves as part of the sessions.

The group has a live piano accompanist, which was something all the members seemed to be very pleased about.

*Benefits noted from discussions with participants:*

- The enjoyment of coming back to singing after many years.
- It keeps your focus and interest, and keeps your brain active
- Companionship
- Communication
- There is not a lot happening in Spelthorne
- Sense of community

- Makes you feel happy
- Opportunity to meet new people and make new friends.
- Feeling part of a group
- Increases stamina and energy
- Helps with memory – learning the songs keeps your mind active

The venue and time seems to be key: the venue needs to be easily accessible by public transport and evenings are preferred by majority of participants.

One member suggested ‘The Mozart Effect’ is a key piece of research to support the benefits of singing for people with Alzheimer’s.

Another member has suffered from a displaced diaphragm and feels that the singing group has helped to improve this as it develops better breathing techniques and lung capacity.

#### **4. Tandridge**

**Group:** Bletchingley Community Choir

**Date Visited:** 12 July 2011

**Singing Tutor:** Anna Tabbush

**Visited By:** Hannah Wheeler

**Background:** This group has been receiving singing sessions for one term as part of the Singing Surrey project. The sessions take place on a Tuesday evening and Anna teaches a 2-hour session every week, to an intergenerational group with approximately 20 members, ranging in ages from 10 years to 70+.

The main objective for the session was to integrate the ‘two ends of the village’, one of which is deemed to be more affluent than the other. It also aims to provide a positive activity that families can come to and is attended by a mother and daughter, and father and son, as well as many individual members. Some members had been in choirs before, for others it was a new experience.

**Details:** The majority of the participants are females in their 50’s and 60’s. There are only a few younger members in the group, but the group are very pleased that it is intergenerational and people of all ages are genuinely welcomed and encouraged.

The quality of the singing was really surprising and the commitment and enthusiasm that the members have for the choir is evident from the energy they bring to the session. This is backed up by thoughts that have been left in the ‘Comments Book’ that Anna started.

Comments included:

- *“What a great feeling to be able to sing out loud without fear of being absurd – love it.”*
- *“Came along filled with trepidation and fear...then we all started to sing – it sounded fantastic and lifted my spirits.... I left on a high, the following morning the buzz was still there. It was just the lift I needed at a down time in my life.”*

- *“Really good for my confidence and self-esteem.”*
- *“About 6 months ago someone said ‘why don’t you join a choir?’ I didn’t know of one and then the community choir started. From the first evening when I went home with a big grin I have been really enjoying it. I have been quite down and the choir has been part of my recovery.”*
- *“Still thoroughly enjoying myself. Good to get rid of all the day’s frustrations.’*

*Benefits noted from discussions with the participants:*

- Improvements in self-confidence
- Sleeping better
- ‘It helps me start the week better’
- Sense of achievement
- Raises self-esteem
- Opportunity to meet new people and make new friends
- Sense of achievement
- A positive focus
- Makes you feel cheerful
- Revitalises you
- It strengthens your immune system *“I used to have a lot of bronchitis stuff in the winter, and I don’t now”*
- Helps your memory
- Lung capacity – you learn to breathe better to be able to hold the notes
- It stops you feeling on edge
- It uplifts you

Anna also noted that there is evidence that group singing can increase people’s longevity. Singing also helps conditions such as asthma as it develops lung capacity and helps people to learn to breathe correctly. The youngest member of the group said *“After a long, hard day at school I come here to take it all out my head and relax.”*

When I visited the group were preparing for a performance in the local pub, which would take place the following week. They were all very excited and were keen to be able to demonstrate what they had learnt in a public arena, even though some of them were nervous.

## **5. Godalming**

Group: Greenoak Primary school

Date Visited: 28 June 2011

Singing Tutor: Kim Perkins

Visited By: Rebecca Meitlis

Background: The school has a history of having a lot of traveller families and many children stay at home, rather than come to school. The sessions started in the classroom this term. Kim is working in different classrooms throughout the day. She adapts the work to the curriculum. In the two sessions I observed the staff in one class were involved in that they were managing children with behaviour problems. In the other class staff were in the room but not participating. When I visited there had been 8 weeks of sessions. The plan next term open is to into the choir activity and get the parents involved.

#### Meeting with Kim Perkins

I asked if there was a culture of singing in the school. Kim wasn't aware that there was one, the head teacher said that some of the traveller families do have a strong tradition of singing.

We discussed the possibility of selecting case studies. Kim said that you do see a change week to week but a lot of what happens in between time, so it would be best to involve the staff.

K: Within each class there is such an array of issues. I use songs suitable for the age group, and then they make up their own songs. I just had good session with Owls doing a graphic score about a frog developing.

R: What are the aspects of health and well being that you notice in a school group?

K: Esteem benefits. If you are expressing yourself you feel part of the group.

R: What was the problem with the boy who was crying?

K: Adam has problems expressing himself. Sometimes the sessions are more supported by the teachers. (There were no staff taking part in the session) Because the class got on with it, he got on with it. He will lead although he has problems getting the words out. I asked him to sit out which upset him as he wants to be in it and part of it. The children worked well as a group as they walked around the room together singing the "on the train " song.

#### Notes from meeting with Hilary Loder (Head teacher) & Kim Perkins:

H: Since the school realigned 3 years ago we are looking for "learning for life, " "learning through generation". We are looking for vehicle for singing. We know the local community like doing this. Kim has brought in the expertise to do the healthy aspects of singing.

R: What are the benefits that you perceive through singing?

H: There are different layers, – emotional expression – a way they can always have their instrument. Whether its humming to your self or belting out in the shower...singing is a good means to express emotion.

#### Other aspects mentioned included:

- The learning process eye /voice, eye/ hand co-ordination moving the boundary in space
- Being better listeners
- Lead them to other activities such as dancing....
- The ability to breathe properly and generate a good sound
- It helps with their oracy skills
- Socially being part of a choir or group and compounding your voices with others is of inestimable value

- Ability to listen to empathise to take instructions

These skills are all transferrable.

R: Do you think we could identify any case studies.

H: Particularly if we are working with the families. I am happy to facilitate this. We would identify children who were receptive. Most families will be happy their child has been chosen and we would look for a family that might be interested. If we could dual it into literacy that would be helpful.

R: It would be good to find out if parents notice anything.

H: We used music as a vehicle for children who had physical and emotional barriers. Singing releases those endorphins and gives them a good feel. I worked with children who couldn't speak but could use singing to express themselves. Sometimes they borrowed themes from other songs, stranded together in a different way.

Some families here are 3<sup>rd</sup> generation unemployed and they have no hope of accessing what my family would take for granted. Inclusion to be involved has been removed because they are fearful of failing, be slapped down, the dream not come true. For children to find something they can do and do well that's magic.

Equally the people that interest these children are from the music world.

R: How do you plan to open out the singing to the families?

H: The challenges of families coming is to do with content, it has to be familiar and safe. Some of the folk from this community (two families) joined the rock choir in Godalming and I happen to know the £10 a week they need is being sponsored.... 'Mama Mia' might captivate these people. It's important to gain trust for people to come to a group.

KP thinks Mama Mia is great as it appeals through the generations, parents and grandparents (who could be early thirties!)

## **6. Woking**

**Group:** Maybury Infant School

**Date Visited:** 12 July 2011

**Singing Tutor:** Kim Perkins

**Visited by:** Hannah Wheeler

**Background:** The school has been receiving singing lessons for one term as part of the Singing Surrey project. The sessions take place on a Tuesday morning, and Kim teaches 4 sessions to 4 classes starting with the Reception Year. Each session takes place in the group's respective classroom and lasts 30 minutes.

There are plans to eventually move the singing sessions to an after-school club, which would be an intergenerational group involving children of all ages and their siblings/parents.

**Details:** The sessions involve a physical warm-up and some of the songs also include actions. There is a lot of vocabulary in all of the songs, even with the reception year children. Kim also encourages changes in the use of voice (from whispers to shouting) and changes in dynamics and speed. Most songs are sung with a musical accompaniment (CD or via the computer, rather than live) although some are sung without. It is evident that the children are familiar with the songs – they know the majority of the words and actions, and ask for other songs they would like to sing by name.

The level of involvement is very high from the majority of the children and they all seem to be really enjoying themselves.

#### **Notes from discussions with staff and Kim:**

The school has a high number of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL). The singing lessons have therefore helped these children to expand their vocabulary and improve their spoken English.

Singing helps all the children to develop confidence with using words and expressing themselves.

Singing together in a group can be very reassuring. They learn that there is no right or wrong way to sing (emphasis is placed on energy and imaginative use of voice, rather than singing in tune or singing 'beautifully') and this encourages children to enjoy communicating and making use of language and voice.

The staff have noted how keen the pupils are to sing independently, and they often ask to sing the songs outside of the singing sessions. They suspect they may also practise them at home.

The staff use the songs to help make connections to work or topics that they are exploring. For example, when 1 class went on a trip to the aquarium they sang a 'sea' song that they had learnt with Kim.

The instructions given in the group are mostly sung, (e.g. 's-it d-own') or whispered to the group. This mimics the methods that the staff use in using quiet voices and positive instruction and the children respond well. This is also done to protect the vocal health of the teachers and ensures that they use their voices in a safe way, without shouting.

The songs also help to develop the children's sense of rhythm and pulse, as they often clap or march to the music.

They also develop confidence in using their bodies as there are physical movements that accompany a lot of the songs.



## Appendix D - Transcriptions of individual case study interviews

### 1. Darren

**Group:** Trinity Centre

**Tutor:** Liv McLennan

**How many sessions so far:** a few weeks

**Previous experience:** yes (see interview)

**Age:** 67

**Occupation:** Works at Fairfield Centre playing cards and calling Bingo

**Date & Time of interview:** July 7 at 10am

**Method:** Phone & recording

**Length of Interview:** 12 minutes

**Well-being or Health issues:** Previously had nervous breakdown and has diabetes

R: I was touched that you offered to talk to me about your experiences

How long have you been in this singing group?

D: A few weeks

R: How do you find it?

D: Very good, they are all so friendly

R: So friendliness is important.

D: Yes

R: What else makes it work well for you?

D: The fact that we can sing together without ever singing together before in our lives.

R: So what are the factors that make it work so well for you?

D: That other people are able to sing without feeling too nervous, you bring them out of themselves by being able to sing with confidence and that just helps them, so you think if he or she is confident then I can be confident. And when we all sing out together which pleases Olivia.

R: Is there anything about the way Olivia runs the group or teaches that makes people feel confident?

D: She sings to us the notes or tunes and we sing back in parrot fashion and copy her.

R: Is there anything else that makes it work like is it a good time of day for you?

D: It is very good.

R: And the venue?

D: It's a nice venue but we don't know if we can continue there.

R: I gather you sang somewhere before...

D: Many times, I was in the Ashley Choral Society and we sang music by John Rutter

R: Do you think it makes much difference what you sing?

D: It helps if it's an easy song, then people who aren't used to it can join in when they want to.

R: Does it matter what type of song it is?

D: I don't think so, it could be a nursery rhyme and it would be the same.

R: I love your idea it could just be a nursery rhyme. This research is about health and wellbeing, could you tell me what you think about this?

D: I had a nervous breakdown in 1996 and when I was well enough I went to a singing and movement group. It was lovely!

R: What did that offer you?

D: A chance to sing, to move, to relax. It cheers people up it makes people smile. Not everyone smiles back; they can look at you as if you are mad.

R: Well that's just sad. Were there any aspects of your illness that singing helped with?

D: It just made you feel better.

R: What does wellbeing mean to you?

D: Being well looked after by whoever is there.

R: What does being in good health mean to you?

D: Being well, nothing seriously wrong, if there is something wrong taking medication for that. I am diabetic so I take pills for that.

R: I think that is an interesting difference between your idea of health and wellbeing. So when it comes to Singing is that more to do with wellbeing or health?

D: More to do with wellbeing

R: In what way to you feel coming to the group impacts on your wellbeing?

D: The chance to sing together.

R: And how does it impact on your health?

D: It makes me happy which makes a lot of difference.

R: Absolutely, next week lots of people will join in with you, will there be any benefits?

D: Yes getting new members.

R: Yes that would mean you could carry on. How did you find out about this group?

D: Olivia and Kate came to the Fairfield Centre where I work, we had a singing workshop and they asked us to come along.

R: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?

D: I don't think so

R: Would you mind if I rang you again in the research period

D: Not at all

## **2. Francesca**

**Group:** Bletchingly

**Tutor:** Anna Tabbush

**How many sessions so far:** from 24 April onwards

**Previous experience:** in school choir

**Age:** 62

**Occupation:** has been school assistant and hospital ward clerk, now retired

**Date & Time of interview:** July 21 at 2pm

**Method:** Phone & recording

**Length of Interview:** 28 minutes

**Wellbeing or Health issues:** High blood pressure

R: Tell me something about yourself.

F: I'm married, coming up for 37 years, I've got two children, grown up, unfortunately they both live in Australia. Bletchingly isn't far from me. I did work, not when the children were small... when they got older I did a part time job working in a nursery school. Then I went on to a junior school (11 years) and was a teaching assistant. It was something I always want to do... Though I didn't have a qualification. Moved on to Surrey hospital where I worked as a ward clerk. I've always looked after people.... I looked after my mum who died last year.... and my husband's mum and dad....we're still caring for his mum... at home and 91, my mum was a few months short of 89. Dad was 53, my brother died when he was 48... I hoping I'll follow my mum's side of the family.

R: Do you have any health issues that are relevant?

F: I have high blood pressure.... It's been under control, I do try to keep it that way, heart disease in my family is very bad. I keep an eye on my diet, I'm a little lax, I'm about 10lb overweight... I do rush around a lot but it's not like exercising, I like swimming and walking. I retired when I was 59. I am very fortunate that the way we planned I was able to do it...(planning financially) ...we are enjoying our retirement to the full.

R: Why did you start the singing group?

F: It was on my to do list to do some singing when I retired. I love singing, I always have done, I'm not a good singer but I was in my school choir. When I'm on my own at home I sing along to what ever I've got on at the time. My friend had joined the choir with her daughter and I said I had always wanted to do that. That's why I joined the choir. I love singing. I just enjoy it. It's supposed to be good for you.

R: Yes that's what we're trying to find out, if it is good for you or if people have a perception that it is good for you

F: Well I can certainly help you with that. I think it is good for you, for me I don't think about anything else when I'm there, There's a lot of laughter that goes on in our choir, it's a happy choir, I don't know everyone yet, but everyone is very friendly, I'm quite a quiet person but there's an extrovert trying to get out, it does come out sometimes...I get quite nervous in strange company and don't find it easy. But I have been to the gym on my own and gone swimming on my own, I can do it. It helped that I was going

with my friend. I feel so good when I stop singing, and whatever song, not all the songs are what I would like necessarily, but I just enjoy singing, and then you hear a group of people singing together, it always sounds so good, even when we make our mistakes.... I always leave on a high, when I go home. I was thinking about this morning, I must confess I feel very content at the moment and singing must have something to do with it. And I can be a worrier and it helps, I must keep my stress levels down because of my family heart history, so the more I can do that. I have read articles and things and they say its one of those things that produce those feel good things. It helps your memory, as you're getting older because you have to remember the words. It's always good to socialise, the older you get the more important it is. And it's good at home because my husband doesn't sing so it's good having different interests as well as same ones. Our teacher is very encouraging and very good, whatever type of singer you are she will make you feel encouraged. She has a lovely voice; I don't know how she carries all the tunes in her head!

R: If you had to define what wellbeing is how would you describe that?

F: You need to be healthy, reasonably fit, fairly relaxed, content with your life within reason, we all have good days and bad days you have to try and aim at being relaxed with your life, we do have our strains and stresses, my husband and I hated it when our kids went away, we do miss them, it's not what we envisaged at all and Australia is the other end of the world, but well ultimately you want your family to be happy and healthy and touch wood they are, and you cannot guide your children's lives. I think health is incredibly important, the older I get the more important I think it is to keep yourself healthy.

R: So how would you describe good health?

F: I would say I was fairly healthy at the moment. My joints are very good, they complain occasionally. My blood pressure is a problem in that I've got high blood pressure. We have a good social life, we get out and about, I sleep well, I get stressed, but nothing like I used to, I'm much more relaxed than when I was working, but I've worked on that to try and be more relaxed. I had a bit of a wake up call when I was looking after my mum, when she was really ill I was commuting between Devon and here.... and I ... was very stressed I had a terrible pain in my head I ended up in A&E it was a real wake up call and I knew I had to slow down, it was too much.... The only way to be less stressed was to have mum nearer me and my mum survived another 6 months but I could see her every day so it was a treasured time. Since then I have been less stressed and singing helps.

R: Tell me when you are singing or singing in a group, what are the feelings you have that make you feel less stressed?

F: I love hearing the sound we all make, when we are singing I don't think about anything else, I just think about the singing. The only time I get nervous is when she tries to get us to sing on our own, and I get nervous then. I'll do it. It's good to push yourself beyond your comfortable boundaries, I do get very nervous. Once I've done it I feel great and I think I've done it.... You end on a high, for the couple of hours nothing else seems to come into your mind. You think about what you are singing the people you are with. Learning new songs or just trying to sing the ones we do the best we can. ... When I go home I'm usually humming away in the car.

R: Tell me, if you went to the doctor with your high blood pressure and the doctor said to you, "I think what I recommend to you is that you join a singing group" what would your reaction have been before you joined this singing group?

F: I probably would have said. "I'll give it a try". If you had asked my husband, his first reaction would be "I can't sing" but when people say that to me I often say, "Well everybody can sing". Often people have been told very early on in their life that they can't sing, but most people can sing, but perhaps they've never had the opportunity to try or have wanted to. My GP did encourage me that exercise was good for stress and blood pressure and that was when I first went to the gym. This was quite a few years ago

and I joined because of that and that was when I got my blood pressure under control. So if she said that I probably would give it a whirl, but I would have been lucky because I do like singing, so it wouldn't have been too difficult for me.

R: Do you think your husband would give it go, if it was recommended, given he isn't that keen on singing?

F: I really don't know, I catch him humming my songs occasionally which amuses me, but if it was recommended I think possibly ...but it isn't really his thing but if he was told it would help him get fitter then he might try it. We want to stay healthy, if for nothing else, than to manage our plane flight out to Australia.

R: Has there been any discussion amongst the group about benefits people are feeling?

F: Anna said that Surrey were doing this thing looking into if it could help people, depressed people who needed more of an outlet. Anna said we have a book for writing in comments... and your colleague came the other day and told us. When we were talking everyone was saying similar things. Every one had very similar feedback. I think it's really encouraging.

R: How can people find out about it and how can health professionals advise?

F: One way of promoting it is that we have sung somewhere else, we sang in a pub on Tuesday and at the Bletchingly summer fair, we weren't very experienced, we hadn't been singing that long. Most of us were there the other night, we had two slots, everyone in the pub enjoyed it, we looked like we enjoyed it, and we were smiling. We handed out leaflets ... come along and have a go... We have one more slot. We're singing at the Tandridge Leisure centre when they open it, because it's the year run up to the Olympics. It's mentioned in the local paper.

R: How important do you think performing is rather than just singing in the group?

F: I get a little nervous but I feel that I have achieved something. You definitely end up on high. Anyone who has applause for something and can see you have entertained someone will feel it's good. If I just went to the singing group at the school I would be happy, but you do have a sense of achievement if you have entertained someone.

R: Is there anything else you would like to mention?

F I've probably covered how I feel... I've told my family about it and they're all very supportive.

### **3 Gemma**

**Group:** Bletchingly

**Tutor:** Anna Tabbush

**How many sessions so far:** joined in March since the first week

**Previous experience:** years ago at school, in the church choir, over thirty years ago

**Age:** middle 40's

**Occupation:** Health and safety officer for Leisure Company.

**Date & Time of interview:** August 2 at 7pm

**Method:** Phone & recording

**Length of Interview:** 16 minutes

## Wellbeing or Health issues: Depression, bereavement

R: Tell me something about yourself.

G: I am in a full time relationship although we live apart. I work full time and I have quite a stressful job. I've worked in leisure for 11 years, before that, I worked as a police officer for 17 years, so going from one stressful job – I worked in child protection and domestic violence, so going between one stressful job and another. The reason I left the police force was because I suffered from depression for three years, so I do have a background with suffering from mental health issues, depression in particular. The reason I actually joined the choir is two-fold, I actually work with Tandridge Leisure and was going to go along just to show support. But it coincided with my going to see my doctor because I could feel I was slipping back along the slope of depression. My mother died back in December of last year after a lengthy and not particularly nice illness which was a strain on all of us and between then and March I've been trying to keep things going and I just reached the stage where I realised things were not going well and I would need some intervention and funnily enough one of the things she said to me was 'get yourself some sort of outside activity' and it was just then that choir was starting up. So I went to give support and to see that everything was going OK and I came away with such a feeling of having had a great time, a feeling of almost euphoria, that it was a case that this was definitely the way for me to go and having something to focus on and enjoy.

R: Amazing, it's so wonderful how these things happen.

G: Exactly, the timing couldn't be better I saw the doctor one week and the sessions started the following Tuesday. It's just been wonderful to keep it going.

R: When you came along to the group did you know that part of the project was to do research into health and well being benefits?

G: Yes I did actually, I was aware of that. But didn't give it that much thought for myself and it wasn't until I went along and came away with that feeling that I realised it really does make a difference.

R: Have you had a chance to talk with your GP about it?

G: Yes I did. I went back after a few weeks which was basically going to be the time when we were going to make the decision if I was going to go back onto medication or have some sort of counselling and she just said ... "I'm not saying it's 100% to do with the choir but I am sure its part of it" and she did notice the difference. It was a combination of that and of being to see her and vocalising how I was feeling and having something like the choir to step into and to focus on, yes she did notice the difference.

R: Um, you don't have to answer this question, but did it mean she didn't prescribe medication?

G: No she didn't, we both agreed that if I felt the need I could go back. But to be honest I haven't felt the need to go back at all.

R: Isn't that fantastic. Given this experience of yours how would you describe wellbeing?

G: Well, how to describe it without using the word 'wellbeing'. It's an overall feeling of, how can I describe it? It's not just a physical thing its an emotional and psychological feeling, it's being in a good place... things may not be 100% but you know they are heading in the right direction and you know they are nearly as good as they can be whether they are physical or mental health. Having that general feeling of contentment and happiness I suppose.

R: So what does 'health' mean to you?

G: When I talk about health I am still thinking about physical health like having major illness or small ongoing colds. I do think of psychological things like sleep issues, not being able to sleep or disturbed

sleep, or the mental side of things. If you had asked me 15 years ago my answer would have been very much around the physical, but since my first illness and being aware of myself since then, I do think not just of the physical but of the emotional and psychological well being as well.

R: Thinking about the sessions besides the first experience of almost euphoria, have there been any other important experiences? I understand you have done some performances as well.

G: Yes we have. There have been some big steps. The first performance was coming up and some of the songs we were singing had some solo parts and I didn't want to volunteer I didn't want to put myself forward, but as it happened on the first night there was one woman who was meant to be singing a solo part and was unable to come along, so I did actually step up and say "alright I'll do it." That first night, standing and singing in front of people was absolutely terrifying. But we have now done 3, no, 4 performances in fact and the last one was at my place of work, and I was adamant that I wasn't going to sing a solo. And it was just at the end and Anna said, "we are just going to do one more song and it is..." it was the one I had to do the solo! I looked back to the first one when I was absolutely terrified, but my confidence had grown because I didn't even think about it, it was just OK 'I'm going to do it' and I did it. That's been another positive outcome of it, for someone who is a fairly confident person, or perceived to be confident, but when it comes to things like that I'm not, but I've noticed that change in myself.

R: It's amazing and in such a short time. What about in the sessions themselves, have there been any special experiences.

G: Nothing that really stands out, but every week, looking forward to going back to learning new songs to meeting up with people again. A group of people I most probably wouldn't come in contact with through any other way. There is a great sense of being part of the group now which is really nice and just the enjoyment of looking forward to the sessions and really having that high at the end of each session

R: Does it matter to you what genre of music you are singing?

G: No it doesn't. I love music, I always have done. Music plays a hugely important part in my life. I've usually got some sort of music playing, either in the car— I'm dying at the moment because my CD player is broken in the car so I am having to rely on the radio or I would be lost. I have music on most of the time. I enjoy music; I enjoy the rhythm of it. I used to do a lot of dancing when I was younger I just do get an uplifting feeling from singing.

R: Have you spoken to other members of the group about benefits that might have come from it or from the singing?

G Yes, not going into huge detail but just standing round in the session in the break or before or after. I think every one has vocalised in some way the positive feeling they take away from the session. You know some people have spoken more about how much they feel they are taking from it for different reasons.

R: So it seems to me that your GP was rather exceptional in not going down the traditional route. How do you think we could encourage other GPs to consider that any of the arts might be beneficial to their patients?

G: Gosh! They are such a strange group aren't they! How to go about educating them? I think it's got to be through having projects like this and being able to present them with the research, saying, "this is what actual people say they benefit from doing it." I was very lucky with the GP I saw; she was remarkable in that way. I think it's potluck. There are some GPs out there who are looking for alternatives and don't necessarily want to hand over the prescription of pills there are others who are more than willing to that. I think it has to be through ongoing education and projects like this and because it's on a countywide basis as well, you can say it's having these benefits and you could talk to people in Primary Care trusts as well.



R: Is there anything else you would like to add?

G: No, I've said it all, that's why I was more than happy to be contacted because I knew that my particular circumstances fitted the criteria and I knew I could give that positive feedback on the difference it's made to me. It's a fantastic project and I am so pleased to be able to be part of it.

#### **4. Henry**

**Group:** Trinity Centre

**Tutor:** Liv McLennan

**How many sessions so far:** a few

**Previous experience:** Yes, but not in a choir on a regular basis like this one

**Age:** 46

**Occupation:** between jobs/IT

**Date & Time of interview:** July 8 at 4.30pm

**Method:** Phone & recording

**Length of Interview:** (20 minutes but lost some of the recording)

**Wellbeing or Health issues:** No real health issues

R: Could you tell me a little about what wellbeing means to you?

H: Feeling healthy.

R: Could you tell me a little about what health means to you?

H: Not having any ailments or anything that stops you doing things.

R: How did you come to be a member of this group?

H: I saw a poster and I've brought my wife and daughter and neighbour along.

R: How do practical things like the timing of the sessions work?

H: This works well now as I'm between jobs but when I get another job it depends where it is, if I'll be able to get back in time. The venue works very well.

R: Do you think it's important what repertoire you sing?

H: I don't think it makes any difference. I love singing the gospel and religious songs, but I like the mix. Liv is very good at pitching it right for the group

R: Do you think if people thought that singing was good for them, do you think it would attract more people to sing in groups?

H: A good question. It could only help, it couldn't deter them. If there is someone out there who has an ear to health and wellbeing and you make that connection in their minds, it could encourage them to come along. I can't imagine it having the opposite effect.

R: (explains Arts on Prescription and example of exercise and singing) What would be your response if your Doctor suggested you joined a singing group?

H: Now, because I know the benefits of it I would respond very positively. How would I have felt two years ago? For instance, now I know the benefits of running, 2 years ago I wouldn't have known about



the mental health effects of running until I started running, got interested in it and I started reading research and getting Runners World magazine where there's story after story about how people, with quite severe mental health problems, found running very helpful. You would get mixed reactions but it's something that should be tried. If there is some evidence building behind it. If there is evidence that singing or running have benefits we can offer the doctors have got that. They can show that chemicals can have a positive impact why shouldn't we tell people when we discover these things? It costs us very little to do and are far more natural, I don't know what the term would be is it homeopathy? opti-opathy?...arts therapy?

H: Is there anything else I haven't asked about you would like to mention?

N: Because I wasn't there at the start I missed how we can continue the group. We need to learn how other groups manage to get funding. Kath did mention she would talk about it. Maybe she'll tell us more next term. I'd be interested in the research report when you get to the end of it.

## **5. James**

**Group:** Spelthorne

**Tutor:** Gail Windrass

**How many sessions so far:** 1 term

**Previous experience:** Musical Theatre group in Stanwell, plus singing group at The Green School and The New Festival Choir

**Age:** 77

**Occupation:** retired

**Date & Time of interview:** 15<sup>th</sup> August at 2.30pm

**Method:** Phone

**Length of Interview:** 35 minutes

**Wellbeing or Health issues:** triple heart bypass in 2004

H: Have you had any other singing experience, other than the Spelthorne group?

J: I used to belong to a Musical Theatre group in Stanwell, which was fantastic but unfortunately shut due to lack of new members. I have also attended singing lessons for starters at The Green School, and I have performed in several musical review shows.

H: How would you describe what wellbeing means to you?

J: I think that's about feeling good and being healthy. I am lucky that I have been happily married for 50 years now and we also have a fairly substantial income in our retirement, which means we are able to do things. We have a very close family and we all support each other too, and I think this is important in creating a sense of wellbeing. Family back up really helps.

H: And what would you say 'health' means to you?

J: Well we have been quite fortunate in that we are both quite healthy and don't really have any problems at the moment that stop us from doing anything. I did have a triple heart bypass operation in 2004 but thankfully I now feel well. I don't feel that singing has had an impact on my health as such, but it does make me feel good.

H: What is it that you enjoy about singing?

J: Well, I am not a good singer, but I have a keen interest in music. In 1993 I joined a theatre group in Stanwell, which sadly shut a while ago due to a lack of new members joining the group. I like to learn songs from shows and I also enjoy learning some of the more modern pop songs. I won't ever be a brilliant singer, but I enjoy singing at these groups.

H: What is it about being part of a group that you enjoy?

J: I enjoy the social aspect of meeting new people. It is a shame that there aren't more men at any of the groups though. I wish there was more men, but it seems to mostly be women who come to sing.

H: What do you think is the most positive aspect of attending a singing group?

J: It's just something I feel good about. It makes me feel good, and I enjoy joining in with other people. When you hear a choir sing it is a very positive and uplifting experience. We also have a laugh and a joke, there are about 5 men in one of the groups I go to (the Spelthorne group) and I we have a laugh together. The women I have spoken to there are also very nice. At most of the sessions I have been to we have a tea break part way through and I think this is essential as it gives us a chance to be social together and to get to know each other. There is a sense of togetherness when you belong to a group.

H: What do you think is the least positive aspect of attending a singing group?

J: To be honest I can't think of one.

H: What else do you find beneficial about singing?

J: We sometimes do performances and I think this really builds your confidence. I have done a solo performance before and it was a very proud achievement. I also love the sound of harmonies. It would be great if there were more men at the groups so we could do more harmonies. I love the Welsh Male Voice Choir.

H: Do you think you will continue singing?

J: Yes, as long as I can continue to get there I will go.

H: Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

J: We are very lucky that the Spelthorne group is free. At The New Festival Choir we pay £46 per term, but I still think this is good value considering how much I get out of it. Listening to these songs and getting to sing them is a very emotional experience. Especially songs from shows like "Les Miserables". Some of them are very emotional songs. Sometimes we have had to sing duets and I think this is a marvellous idea as it really helps to bring out the emotions of the songs. Some of the music is very uplifting.

## **6. Jayne**

**Group:** Bletchingly

**Tutor:** Anna Tabbush

**How many sessions so far:** since it started beginning March

**Previous experience:** Sings at church, sang in church choir

**Age:** 58

**Occupation:** part-time, nurse, I see people in their own homes, & drive a lot

**Date & Time of interview:** undisclosed

**Method:** Phone & recording

**Length of Interview:** undisclosed

**Wellbeing or Health issues:** Depression

R: Sounds like you're very busy at the moment!

J: Life the universe and everything!

R: Thank you for taking part.

J: I just think it's so fantastic I want to do anything to support it.

R: Tell me something about yourself

J: I live with my partner just outside of Bletchingly

R: How did you find out about the singing group?

J: There was an article in the local magazine

R: What made you want to join it?

J: Well a counsellor I was seeing suggested to me that singing might be really helpful so I've been on the look out for something but I needed a choir that didn't require me to read music. All the other choirs I know about want you to follow the little black hat isn't one of my skills. It was just what I've been looking for. I used to sing in the church choir but the choir director changed and I didn't really fit in, I've sung with various organisations. I've always known I've enjoyed but I haven't 'till now found a venue.

R: It was interesting your counsellor suggested it, what do you think was her thinking behind it

J: Well she was suggesting things that would raise my mood and she felt that singing is good for everybody.

R: What does wellbeing mean to you?

J: Interesting question. I think it is feeling fit and well enough to do the things I want to do in life. And mentally feeling well enough to do the things I want to do in life. Not just physically. Being in a good place to improve myself.

R: What does health mean to you?

J: Mmm. There are people who are healthy and there are people who are well within their illness. These people have an acceptance of things that are happening to them and live their life to the full as they can within those limitations. The people who don't accept and deny what is happening to them or, let what is happening to them overwhelm them so they don't live life either, are dealing with things in a less healthy way.

R: That's a really interesting distinction. It sounds like what you are saying is that health issues are things that happen to you and how you feel about them is your responsibility. Is that what you are saying?

J: We have different levels of health within our bodies that we have some control over but not always. But I suppose wellness is how you live, in whatever circumstances you are in, I haven't really thought about it myself

R: Looking at singing, how do you think singing in groups can help either with health or wellbeing?

J: Well in the first week I went along not knowing what to expect. And I came back at the end of the session and my partner, she said to me “you have a big fat grin all over your face.” I just know that at every session it just lifts me and I know it energises me. I suppose I’m going to miss it over the summer.

R: Isn’t that amazing that it can do that after a busy day.

J: Yes, often I’ll go and I’ve worked physically a long day and I’m tired and I’ll go and get enthused by the singing. I think it’s when you sing in harmony and the hairs on the back of your neck start standing. You start by singing only your line and it doesn’t sound like anything and then you put them together and you’ve got this amazing sound out of no where and Anna is wonderful she is so encouraging even the first time she got us to sing a note together and she just went “Wow!” and we didn’t even know each other then.

R: Has there been anything special during the sessions that you’d like to mention that made you feel particularly good?

J: For me its going back to sing something you really know well, when we were rehearsing for a gig things that we did last term and it just came together but you have to go through the initial stage to get to the point. Sometimes some of the words have touched the situations I have been in and when you add music to the words its really quite powerful. We did the “Lean on me” song, helping people in different situations. I think there are a lot of people leaning on me, but I’m not good at leaning on them. There was a spiritual song we did, “Bright morning star” again it was talking about having hope, seeing something beyond the present and I found that very helpful to.

R: That’s very interesting and leads me onto another question. Do you think it’s important what kind of songs you’re singing?

J: I think I have a preference for some genres rather than others but I find I’m happy to sing anything, the important thing is the singing.

R: What about the performing, is that important to you?

J: I think because it gives us a focus and something to get ready for as a group. The first time I was a bit nervous, but the second time it was great to see how much the audience was enjoying it as much as we were.

R: You said you came because of your depression. Do you think it has helped your depression at all?

J: It’s difficult to know, in the last 12 months I’ve been juggling with medication and I am now on a full dose of medication. It’s the first time I’ve been up to that level. So my mental health has definitely improved since I’ve been singing in the choir but how much is because of the medication and... I think it’s probably some and some. I’m definitely in a better place than I was in March before the choir started.

R: Have you spoken to your Doctor at all about the fact you are singing?

J: She herself said she enjoyed singing and that it was a great stress-buster.

R: So now that you feel you have this better balance, this isn’t meant to be a suggestive question but a genuine question, do you think that your level of medication could come down?

J: I don’t think so at the moment, I haven’t been at that top dose for long and although my mood is better, I still know, I have a very depressive personality. Whether I am going to be able to come off and how soon and how much I’m not sure.

R: It would be interesting to know...

J: I don't know. I'm beginning to realise that I became particularly depressed because of things that happened. Both my parents were depressed so I think my depression is learnt behaviour. I can... I'm nearly 60 I can change things to a certain extent but in some ways I'm the person I am. It's probably about learning to live within the restrictions of that rather than picking up and change completely radically. I'm still kind of working on things like that. Sorry, I've got a bit lost on that. I'm not keen on changing the medication, when I changed before it was bad. I am chary about reducing the drugs; I could easily go down again

R: No, once you've found something that works you don't want to play around with that. How do all the practicalities work? Like where it is and the time, the group?

J: The group is lovely. 7.15 is a bit early, coming home from work and having dinner. But the early start time is good for when I do need an early night. That's a hard one to find a balance. The venue is fine. There's car parking near.

R: (Explains 'arts on prescription') If you went to a doctor with a problem and a GP suggested you took up singing what would be your reaction?

J: I would be quite positive about that particularly if they had somewhere to refer me on to. The counselling I had because of something available through work. The local practice doesn't have anything like that I was told I could ring on Wednesday between set times in the afternoon. It wasn't terribly encouraging. If the GP can actually say this group happens on a Wednesday evening. I knew I enjoyed singing. It's always difficult when you go along for the first time because you don't know what to expect. That would be true of any group you might join.

R: Besides the idea that the GP should be informed if there is a group like yours in the vicinity what other things do you think he should know to make a suggestion like that?

J: Hum I don't know... research based stuff will be great for them, I guess some of the people-quotes. I was interested in the group when we were talking about the physical benefits about singing, how many things people managed to come up with.

R: What sort of things?

J: Being more aware of their posture, how to stand properly how to breathe properly, there was someone who was a swimmer who thought that her swimming standards were better because of the exercises for the singing.

R: That's funny because I know singers who will do swimming to improve their breathing!

J: Maybe there's a bit of both ways.

R: Is there anything else you would like to mention?

J: The uncertainty for us is whether the funding is going to continue and whether Anna will be able to stay, I think it's quite unsettling I think if we had some more stability it would be really good. It will carry on in September but Anna has said her time is very limited and she is very special, I know there are other choir people out there but I can't imagine anyone being so inspiring as her. I hear rumblings about the money. Some people are willing to pay more so that is possible. But I don't that is the problem there might be other things I don't know about.

## **7. Luke**

**Group:** Spelthorne

**Tutor:** Gail Windrass

**How many sessions so far:** 1 term

**Previous experience:** Morley College, currently going to 3 groups

**Age:** 66

**Occupation:** retired

**Date & Time of interview:** 12<sup>th</sup> August at 9.30am

**Method:** Phone & recording

**Length of Interview:** 18 minutes

**Wellbeing or Health issues:** depression

H: Have you had any other singing experience, other than the Spelthorne group?

L: I joined Morley College, which is a group you have to pay for, but it's a fantastic group, and once I started I realised how beneficial it was. Then when I saw the advert for the Spelthorne group I thought I would go to that too. There is another group I go to on Thursdays, which is also a good group. Some of the people there are very old. Some of them are in their 80's and the singing leader says how much better it makes them feel.

H: What do you think it is about singing specifically, as opposed to any other activities you might take part in, which makes you feel good?

L: First of all you've got to sing in a group, it's much better than singing on your own. It's good to learn to do solo singing but when you're in a group and you're split up into your voice parts you get to know the people. Especially if you're not very good – first of all you've got the effort of singing the right part and you're part of a team and have got something to work for. When you're retired you do have things to do but you don't have the incentive so much and you have to drive yourself. Whereas when you're in a choir they drive you along. You've got aims to work for. It's fantastic, but it's got to be in a group.

H: Is there something around the shared responsibility when you're in a group then? Maybe that you feel that you're doing something together, and therefore you should go every week because you're part of a team?

L: I miss out now it's the summer and they're not on. I've signed up for 2 lots at Morley College now on two different nights.

H: So how many nights will you be singing now, or how many sessions will you do each week from September?

L: There will be 3 definitely possibly 4. The other thing is the Salvation Army has asked me to join their songsters group.

H: They often do performances don't they. Will that involve you singing publicly?

L: There might be later on, but I've only just started.

H: How would you describe what wellbeing means to you?

L: Generally a feeling of feeling good in yourself and you feel more energetic. I seem to feel I have more energy afterwards (singing). I think it goes back to the war time when people used to do community singing in the blackout when the air raids were on because it lifts the spirits. I think it definitely perks people up.

H: It sounds as though that is has an emotional impact on you in terms of 'lifting your spirit', 'feeling more energised'. Are there any physical benefits that you've experienced from singing?

L: I had depression about a year and a half ago. The singing got rid of it. It's marvellous. You're a bit shy at first but once you start singing and let yourself go...I thought I can sing in a choir as it doesn't matter what you sound like... and they get you better and you get your confidence back. It builds your confidence and it's even good for public speaking. It trains your voice to get better. I think it's fantastic.

H: And what about socially, I imagine it's been an opportunity for you to meet new people as well?

L: There are about 5 people I have actually spoken to whom I didn't know before. I expect the more you go the more people you'll meet.

H: And you think you'll carry on?

L: Oh yes, definitely.

H: The one at Spelthorne is fully funded isn't it?

L: They did think they'd have to charge a nominal amount but then they said we didn't need to pay. The one at Morley College does charge but you get a discount as a pensioner.

H: I have noticed that some of the groups I have been to have been intergenerational, although there tends to be mostly older people there. What do you think it is about singing that particularly attracts older people?

L: I think it takes people back to their war years. I don't think the younger people are so interested as they're all walking around listening to their MP3 players. I would like to see more younger people there though. They don't seem to join in singing much but I think it could be beneficial for young people who are getting in trouble and give them a sense of belonging to a 'gang' in a different sense, and give them a bit of stability.

H: As singing is a fairly new thing for you how was it in terms of confidence?

L: I have sung a couple of solo numbers now, but that's something I wouldn't have done before and singing does help you build your confidence up, and you get better at speaking because it builds your voice up too. For me it's wonderful.

H: Does it make you feel physically fitter in any way?

L: I am physically fit anyway, but I think psychologically you feel a lot better by being in the groups. You're so busy thinking about the songs that any other problems you've got you forget about.

H: It's a kind of escapism when you're there then would you say?

L: It's more than that because I practise the songs outside of going there. You're supposed to practice them at home too.

H: Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

L: Please put down that if it were on the NHS it would be very beneficial, especially for people that don't get out and about.

## **8. Mark**

**Group:** Bletchingly

**Tutor:** Anna Tabbush

**How many sessions so far:** a few weeks

**Previous experience:** in church when young



**Age:** sixties

**Occupation:** retired social worker

**Date & Time of interview:** 27 July

**Method:** Phone & recording

**Length of Interview:** 33 mins

**Wellbeing or Health issues:** Depression

M: I'm, married 43 years today, and just retired, early retirement. Most of my working career has been in Social care mostly with Local authorities. Managing disabilities with learning difficulties in Redhill and I stepped out of that 18 months ago. I thought I was taking early retirement when I was approached by another organisation to ask if I could work with them, it was meant to be very part time but turned out to be 4 days a week for a period of a year. That was on the personalisation agenda for people managing their own personal budgets so I did some work on that, which was quite interesting. I have a couple of children, daughter getting married on Saturday, son lives in Bath with a couple of children and I have close family around. I have done voluntary work throughout my adult life. Currently I'm a governor at the local school, which is how the singing came up, and I'm a trustee of an organisation that does intensive interaction with adults with profound learning disabilities. I'm chairman for a sports club for people with disabilities, so we work along side them and the singing now.

R: So you have a very full life!

M: And I have to paint the house now! But keep putting it off.

R: So had you sung before?

M: Only in the church choir until I was about 11. Very low key stuff and nothing since then, but have always wanted to and just to test my lungs. I had no idea whether I could sing or not! I could in the bath, but just something that I also thought, I can't read music or anything like that so the prospect of doing something formal has always put me off so I'm not churchy so it's nothing that interested me there. But when we were talking about something to bring the community into the school, one of the teachers said why don't we have one of them, and it just so happened that Katy Potter from Tandridge Leisure lives along the road from me, I told her I was thinking about this and she said it fitted in with something she was thinking about, and that's how it all started.

R: How is it going?

M: I think collectively we all feel it's a really satisfying experience, 50% of us have not sung in a choir before, others in various sorts of choirs, and what brings us together is Anna Tabbush the leader and I just think she is so inspiring, just an amazing person and all of us are just in awe and she is very forgiving. So it is very uplifting, I am very conservative in most things that I do and it's taken a long time to try, I tried a one line solo two or three weeks in and couldn't do that but now I can do that.

R: You're singing solo!

M: Well most of its choral and melody and that sort of thing and we've all got different bits and then I volunteered to sing about 5 words and I just froze but now I can do that ... and they are a wonderful group of people, they come from all walks of life and they are all very supportive and encouraging, so that's again a very pleasant experience on Tuesday evening. So you have to focus so there is nothing else going around your brain and you think "am I going to remember the words again" It's a very wide range of music that we do and there is no accompaniment, so you don't have to work out that. Anna is mostly folk based and she has such a wide range of songs that she can draw on so she fits that around where she thinks we are at the time. I found it quite difficult to find out where my voice was at, I started fairly high then we sang one song where my voice dropped, so I joined the men's side, we are a minority



group the men, and I'm more comfy with this, but I am still finding my way really in finding the right pitches for me but really it's OK. I try not to put people off when I'm singing my bits but it is fantastic. We started off with us singing the same line and now we are singing 7 different parts and it seems to work.

R: I bet it makes a really good sound!

M: Yes we've tested ourselves out and sung at a couple of pubs and the village fair we had a few groupies come with us. Interesting to see how we developed form when we first started, it's only been a few weeks. We sang at the White Hart, and the owner didn't know what he was letting himself in for, was over the moon, and we got a write up in the local paper. What it is that people see we are enjoying ourselves.

R: Do you find the performing part is important to you?

M: It tests us, which is good, we could probably do with out the tension, but it's good that we stretch ourselves a bit, otherwise you can become complacent. We have been invited by Tandridge Leisure to do something for the launch for the Olympics. It was well organised but we were standing outside. We had an audience of 3 old ladies who walked away just as we started! Then a few adults and three children joined and loved it and there were curtains tweaking looking on. I don't think we'll go for the Rock choir stuff. It's not about making a big noise; it's about enjoying it.

R: (reminds about research) What does well being mean to you?

M: Being in Social care this is the latest thing from the Government, it's about recognising that every one has skills and talents that everyone has a right to follow, so that individuals can feel good about themselves and feel secure and so its that rounded thing, having a place in Society and being valued for the person you are. I like the notion of wellbeing, but being a realist (inaudible) I think it's about giving as much as taking. It's emotional wellbeing, which is also material health so you have enough money to survive with and a little extra for treats, feeling you have a place.

R: What do you mean by health?

M: I think you start off with emotional health, a level of wellbeing. I personally can be depressed which is partly genetic and partly because of stress, so I have sought help in a very mild form. I think it's not always understood by others. Some people can get a feeling of being very isolated so I am very lucky to be surrounded by family. I'd start with that because I've not had any major health issues so I've been very lucky, but I've also seen the impact that disability has on people, how they think they are perceived by others and how the system, NHS doesn't meet the needs of people at very difficult times in their lives. Feeling good about yourself and that someone is caring for you is part of the recovery and coping mechanism. Personally that's yet to come. I have a 97-year-old mother but she has had falls recently and loss her confidence. My brother in law had a stroke, and that was life changing, it showed the strength of when friends pull together. It was traumatic for him. It shows how it can change things but how people can bounce back, given the right support.

R: How do you think that belonging to a singing group can help some of these health and wellbeing issues?

M: I personally think it has a tremendous potential. One of things I tried to do was to take out the arts to those who attended the day service. They had a difficulty in communication and I did think there was potential there. It would be worth experimenting, but we couldn't get the funding. But I want to explore this further, because it does help people express themselves and gives them status and a feeling they can do something and present themselves in a different way. If I could get funding I'd like to see if Anna could help. We have the Orpheus centre down the road and they have a community choir and I have suggested to Anna that we go down the road and join them, there's great potential. I heard about them

because I heard about them through the volunteer recruitment. In an ideal world we would integrate people into the community choir. For people with mental health issues there's a lot of scope. Just jamming. Some of the songs we're doing just have La's.

R: (explains 'arts on prescription')

M: Yes it started with GP referrals for exercise.

R: Can you imagine if you or a member of your family went to the doctor with a problem and they said join a singing group, what do you think their response would be?

M: They'd probably think he was barking mad! It depends on the Doctor and the culture of the practice and if it fits into their broader approach to health. I must say I went to the surgery to pick up a prescription and I did think I wonder if they have a leaflet up here? Because it is where it all starts. I would hope they would consider that as part of a treatment plan. You could probably have a buddy to come along with you to give you confidence, because you could walk into a room with 30 people, they could be very welcome, but it could be threatening for someone who was not very well and not in the best of health.

R: Given your professional background, what do you think Doctors would need to think along these lines?

M: Perhaps they could join a choir first.

R: Interesting because they say the levels of depression can be high amongst doctors.

M: Yes well certainly suicides. It's really upon ourselves, if we go to a choir making sure we keep them aware of it. It adds something to our lives. I will make sure the doctors have some leaflets, even though we will spread it by word of mouth. But it's also the wider range of professionals. If you have a community nurse or outreach worker or something like that, certainly now that social care is linked to personal budgets, so making social workers aware that, this cost £3 a week for 2 hours, so this is a very low cost to get someone out of the house and uplift them. You will also find a lot of issues around transport, like they can't get it in the evening, not all of us have cars

R: Is the school accessible?

M: Yes it is but they don't have disabled toilets, but maybe the Orpheus do.

R: Thinking about the music you sing? How important is what you sing?

M: People seems to like it, it's unaccompanied so the choir is getting bigger. We haven't got a constitution together, a structure and a secretary and as it gets bigger, you can have conflicts and ownership issues. The other thing I thought around is that Anna is exceptional, everyone is in awe how she's has all these parts in her head. But she comes all the way from Farnham, which is a long; long stretch it's a couple of hours. If she wasn't available to us, I hope we would carry on but that style suits me very light touch. With the music and the songs she brings it doesn't have to be too formal, the rock song things doesn't really doesn't interest me.

R: Is there anything you would like to mention?

M: Well we have a grant now and we charge £3 a week, so we have money in the bank. Having the right person to start it is crucial and the right person to maintain it is crucial. It is about maintaining that.

R: Thank you so much

M: Well I am, as anyone would have told you a bit of a talker! But I don't talk during the sessions!

## 9. William

**Group:** Spelthorne

**How many sessions so far:** 1 term

**Previous experience:** Morley College, currently going to 3 groups

**Age:** 65

**Occupation:** retired

**Date & Time of interview:** 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2011, 10am

**Method:** Phone & recording

**Length of Interview:** 25 minutes

**Wellbeing or Health issues:** problems with diaphragm that affects breathing, plus issues with walking

H: Have you had any other singing experience, other than the Spelthorne group?

W: Spelthorne is one of the only groups I have been to in recent time. I have been previously to a group in Teddington and also joined in a group at the Southbank a while ago. But prior to that I have been a choir leader myself and have been heavily involved in singing since the age of about 16 or 17.

H: So it's something that you've always loved doing, and it's been a constant pastime for you?

W: Yes, I was asked to sing a solo at my church for the Salvation Army and I was absolutely petrified at the thought of it and I was really shaking in my boots. The strange thing was the choir leader at the time had got sufficient confidence in me for me to do it. So it was a case of doing it not to let him down!

H: So you sort of fell into it and have been doing it ever since!

W: Yes, and then ironically his job moved him, and I was then made deputy choir leader and then ultimately choir leader, so that was quite interesting and I was the choir leader there for about 5 years before entering full time ministry.

H: And how do you find it now being part of a singing group, rather than being the choir leader?

W: Well at my age you're not looking for responsibility, you're looking for something you can just go to and can pick up and put down as you like, rather than having to get a group of 30 people ready for rehearsals etc.

H: You have obviously got a wealth of experience to draw on which is fantastic. As you know our research is around the effects that participation in activities such as singing may have on health and wellbeing, so can I start by asking what you would describe as 'wellbeing'?

W: It's not necessarily to do with health, although that plays a part in it. Well-being I suppose is being happy, content with what you're doing in the community, content with what your lifestyle is and what opportunities you have to go out and be a part of different organisations like the Spelthorne group and so on.

H: Could you tell me then what you feel 'health' is?

W: I think health really is like the umbrella of everything. If you're healthy it's not just a case of physical wellbeing, but case of being healthy in your mind, body and spirit. It's a matter of all three inter-reactions...being content and happy with what you're doing. At the moment my health is a little erratic, which does have an effect on the other two.

H: Does this have an impact on your ability to attend the (singing) groups?

W: It all depends. At the moment I am having difficulty walking in as much that I am getting rather breathless and I think it's down to being dehydrated. I'm eating the right foods but not necessarily the right amount. I'm not eating junk food; I'm eating healthy food but not necessarily the right amount at the right time. Also, as far as my body is concerned my diaphragm is in a completely different position to 'normal people'.

H: So does singing have an effect on that?

W: Only in as much as your breathing. I can't breathe deeply and couldn't take enough breath in to sustain an 8-bar stanza for example, though I could manage a 4-bar if it was fairly brisk. Pavarotti and people like that shouldn't really be able to sing as they are too big, and it is similar with me that I shouldn't really be able to sing (due to the problems with my diaphragm) but I can and that is an achievement in itself, because my diaphragm is squashed in to a position where it should be lower down.

H: The breathing techniques are something you can use to increase your lung capacity then I presume?

W: Yes, the breathing exercises are invaluable and are a big help. If nothing else they certainly extend your range.

H: Now we have touched on what we feel the differences are being 'health' and 'wellbeing' can you tell me if there's ways that you feel coming to a singing group has a direct impact on your wellbeing?

W: Well I think if nothing else it gets you out of your doldrums. If you're feeling sorry for yourself and generally feel run down it gets you out. But far more than that it gives you a sense of belonging and achieving, and it makes you feel part of a larger picture, which will ultimately will have an effect on the community by the virtue of being able to do a singing festival at a later date. So, it gives you a focus and gives you something to concentrate on and a sense of being around other people who are like-minded and enjoying the thrill of being able to perform to an audience at some stage.

H: So performance is important do you think? Does the opportunity to take part in a performance increase the impact it has on wellbeing, as opposed to just singing in a group?

W: I think it depends upon your personality. I'm quite an outgoing person so yes, I do enjoy the performances, either solo or with a larger group, but some people would hide behind someone else and might not enjoy it.

H: And what about the group aspect? Do you think singing with a group, as opposed to singing on your own, has an additional impact?

W: I think so because you're part of a 4-part harmonising group, so if you're not performing the group is lacking something. You're all listening out for one another, so for me it's case of re-learning that as I was used to singing as a solo singer. I am lucky that my wife has been able to tickle the ivories in no mean feat and has been able to provide musical accompaniment for me, and indeed we have also done duets together. So I have been very lucky in that respect and have been able to push myself forward to do things I wouldn't otherwise have done.

H: That sounds like a lovely thing to be able to do together.

W: It was and unfortunately my wife has Multiple Sclerosis so her coordination isn't all that she would want it to be so it is now almost impossible for her to do the things that she used to do. She can play simple tunes and 4-part harmonies but that's about all she can do now.

H: So, are you from a musical family William?

W: My Dad was in the band that I played in and he was in the choir that I was choir leader for, as was my Mother. They could learn music quite easily, but not in the sense that they could read or write music.

H: What do you think then are the most positive aspects of belonging to a group like the one in Spelthorne?

W: It gives people the opportunity to do something different. It's not everyone's cup of tea to sing and perform but nonetheless if you're given the opportunity to have a go (even if you don't want to perform) then that's something and I'm sure there are many people who'd like to give it a whirl, even if they don't want to perform. They are giving something and receiving something.

H: Lastly, how did you come to find out about the group in Spelthorne.

W: A friend of mine told me and I think he had read about it in the local free paper.

## Appendix E – Transcriptions of interview with Health Professional

**Maya Twardzicki**

**Number:** 01372 201573 [Maya.Twardzicki@surreypct.nhs.uk](mailto:Maya.Twardzicki@surreypct.nhs.uk)

**Consent Form Completed:** no

**Organisation:** Surrey PCT NH

**Role:** Public Health Lead - Mental Health

**Date & Time of interview:** 27 September

**Method:** Phone & recording

**Length of Interview:** 24 minutes

R: Do you have a particular interest in arts and mental health?

M: yes I run a couple of projects around that and I'm a singer myself, I write my own stuff as well as covers - a sort of mixture of Folk and jazz

R: Have you experienced any benefits yourself?

M certainly, I could identify several of these. I must say I find a great difference between group based singing versus solo singing.

R: Do you think there are other benefits that you would identify? (I gave examples from the case studies)

M: I think maybe something to do with breathing, you end up taking in more air than you usually do, so some of the physical feelings might be to do with having a more oxygenated system than you normally have. You can always slot that into categories, for me there is a physiological thing, you feel like a tingling throughout the body which is a mix of the oxygen and. ...but then I'm not a physician.

R: If you can oxygenate the body through exercise why singing? What sort of evidence do you think Health Care Professionals and doctors would need?

M: They would want hard-core evidence. I don't think anecdotal stuff on its own is going to swing it. They rely so much on things like NICE and randomised control trials that with something that's possibly nebulous you need to find the hardest evidence that you can. What studies are there? How rigorous are those studies that itemise these benefits? Are there any meta-analysis level of studies? You need to highlight the findings of the Sydney de Haan research.

R: I expect that doctors do not have the time to read through pages and pages of that sort of report.

M: No absolutely not, you could categorise them into physiological, psychological, emotional/ spiritual. So they can see four areas of benefit.

R: Three of our case studies were recommended to join a group or singing group by their doctor or a nurse, I suppose they might have experienced the benefits of singing themselves.

M: And/or they might have witnessed the benefits in other patients who have done it.

R: Could we do something to help health care professionals to have a personal experience themselves? At the Open Space event it was suggested that we could have a conference for this, do you think that would be helpful?

M: Yes I do, but I wonder if you wouldn't have better attendance if you combine it so it's not just music and the arts, because if someone's not interested in that they're not going to show up, but that if that was a section of a conference that was showing other evidence based interventions, you're going to get other people along without them being prejudiced about a waffly arts-based activity, which some people will be.

R: Something like Exercise for Health?

M: Yes that is certainly evidence based and is in the NICE guidelines for treatment for anxiety and depression. That would be a useful one to tag it along side with.

R: Might there be any regular conferences or conferences coming up that we might be able to piggyback on? (Pressure on time for GPs and Health workers)

M: We had one last January on mental wellbeing that was very well attended. It was more pitched at other agencies, not just health care professionals. You would be best to contact our provider services, such as our mental health promotion service called **First Steps**. They would be very good; they are signposting for every stage before people get to the therapy stage. It would be very good to meet with them with your evidence. Give them a whole list of group singing and choirs around Surrey, they are Surrey wide, they could help sign posting they would be your first and best port of call.

Manager about to leave Dan Kolubinsky 01483 846436, [dan.kolubinski@surreypct.nhs.uk](mailto:dan.kolubinski@surreypct.nhs.uk)

[Belinda.hemingway@surreypct.nhs.uk](mailto:Belinda.hemingway@surreypct.nhs.uk) 01483 846436

The other service is our Psychological therapy service KCA New Thought.

Contact: Caroline East 07590712808

If you are organising something for practitioners those two are services before things go into specialist mental health services, which is the best. If you liaise with them you could organise just with those two organisations. See how that goes start small, once you have scoped out the evidence. Get your evidence into the categories, get the information from the Sydney de Haan centre about the studies they have reviewed, what level of academic rigour are those studies, not just anecdotal. So you can produce a strong evidence base for these two organisations.

R: (explained about Neil and running through reading magazine article.) How can we educate or inform patients of the findings of this sort of study?

M: They won't need the academic rigour.

R: Do people pick up leaflets?

M: I would go through the organisations that exist, there a lot of groups for people with mental health problems; and you could do a travelling road show, bring along some advocates, people who have had mental health problems that have done the singing so they could talk about the benefits. Service users listen to other service users, rather than the professional preaching that this is a 'good' thing. (see MT's list)

R: Are there any other art forms you think would be beneficial?

M: Writing, poetry so people can express their feelings through writing, you could run a workshop so people could learn a skill or become more confident. Drama to some extent although that might be harder for people if they are not confident. Some other forms of music, percussion? The other person to link with is Mark Shakespeare Head of Arts therapy at Surrey Borders Mental Health Trust (he was at the Open Space) He will have access to service users and he is doing art stuff with them that would be another group at the more severe end.

R: Is there any funding for taking workshops to these groups in the health service?

M: No. I don't think you would get anything. There are massive cuts to be made and the PCT is winding down. Mark Shakespeare might be able to fund something like that because he has a department dealing with that kind of stuff, but that's just for their patients. You can get grants from local councils; I got some grants for comedy and mental health work that I did. Each council has pots of money put aside for this sort of thing.

R: Do you think there would be any economic arguments for Arts on Prescription (example of person (give reference) who didn't need to go on drugs or have therapy after joining a group £3 a week versus the cost of drugs or therapy)?

M: Social Care has personalised budgets for some service users where they can chose how to spend the money for their care. Head of Social Care could put you in touch.

R: Thank you so much!

From Maya after the phone call:

Just to summarise, for health professionals:

- Categorise the benefits e.g. physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual
- Comment on the rigor, strength and amount of evidence
- Contact First Steps and New Thoughts Services (for mild and common mental health problems) show them the evidence, give them a practical demonstration of the benefits, give them lists of singing groups/choirs so they can signpost patients there
- Contact Mark Shakespeare at the Mental Health Trust – to see if you could combine forces and run some groups for patients that they could evaluate with clinical/psychological outcome measures
- Discuss with all these services their interest in a conference that includes singing/arts benefits for Mental Health



For service users:

- Contact Mark Shakespeare re service users with more severe/enduring mental health problems
- Contact New Thoughts – KCA
- Contact voluntary MH organisations: Leatherhead Clubhouse  
[Alison.Prescott@maryfrancestrust.org.uk](mailto:Alison.Prescott@maryfrancestrust.org.uk)
- Art Matters - [Mark.Cremmen@RichmondFellowship.org.uk](mailto:Mark.Cremmen@RichmondFellowship.org.uk)
- Oakleaf Enterprise – [clivestone@oakleaf-enterprise.org](mailto:clivestone@oakleaf-enterprise.org)
- Richmond Fellowship – [Mike.Munson@RichmondFellowship.org.uk](mailto:Mike.Munson@RichmondFellowship.org.uk)
- ESRA - [jane@esrasurrey.co.uk](mailto:jane@esrasurrey.co.uk); offer to run a singing road show with their clients and take along 'champions' who have had/have mental health problems and have found that singing benefits them

Funding:

- Local Authorities have Local Area Grants
- Some local authorities have Arts Officers with budgets
- Perhaps Mark Shakespeare at SABP Trust may know if there are any funds within his trust

## Appendix F – Existing research

### *Singing*

#### **'Choral singing and psychological wellbeing: Findings from English choirs in a cross- national survey.'**

Authors: Stephen Clift, Grenville Hancox, Ian Morrison, Bärbel Hess, Gunter Kreutz, and Don Stewart (2007)

Description: Includes findings relating to the ability of singing to counteract anxiety, due to the use of deep breathing.

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/Resources/Research%20Centres/ArtsHealth/Choral-singing-and-psychological-wellbeing.pdf>

#### **'What do Singers Say About the Effects of Choral Singing on Physical Health? Findings from a Survey of Choristers in Australia, England and Germany.'**

Authors: Stephen Clift, Grenville Hancox, Ian Morrison, Bärbel Hess, Gunter Kreutz, Don Stewart (2010)

Description: Looks at the differences in opinions between men and women, as well as from survey participants across three countries.

<http://mpr-online.net/Issues/Volume%203.1%20Special%20Issue%20%5B2010%5D/Clift%20Published%20Web%20Version.pdf>



### **'Singing and Health: Summary of a Systematic Mapping and Review of Non-Clinical Research'**

Authors: Stephen Clift, Grenville Hancox, Rosalia Staricoff and Christine Whitmore with Ian Morrison and Matthew Raisbeck (2008)

Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts & Health

Description: Includes findings on the effects of singing on mood, and details a range of common benefits identified by existing reports on the effects of singing as a therapeutic intervention for one or another health issue.

<http://www.ourplacenetWORK.org.uk/jdd/public/documents/pdf/singing-and-Health.pdf>

### **'The Perceived Benefits of Singing: findings from preliminary surveys of a university college choral society.'**

Authors: S M Clift, G Hancox, University of Canterbury (2001)

Description: Looks at the impact of music on health, as well as singing.

<http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/SDHR/Documents/BenefitsofSinging.pdf>

### **'Group Singing Fosters Mental Health and Wellbeing: findings from the East Kent "singing for health" network project.'**

Authors: Stephen Clift and Ian Morrison (2011)

Description: This paper describes the development and evaluation of a community singing initiative with mental health services users and supporters.

<http://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/profile.asp?guid=93b11007-c1d0-487d-b0a9-6458360bfecd>

Additional papers on the benefits of singing can be found on the Social Care Online website:

<http://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/searchp.asp>

Many strands of research into the effects of singing are being carried out by the 'Sidney De Haan Centre for Arts & Health' at the University of Canterbury. For full details of research, both completed and ongoing, please go to:

<http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/SDHR/ResearchProjects/Home.aspx>

### **'Music & Dementia: Freya Wynn-Jones (Glyndebourne Education Department) writes about the project held at Glyndebourne Opera House for people with dementia and their carers.'**

Authors: Glyndebourne Education Department (2010)

Description: This article describes an innovative project for people with dementia and their carers at Glyndebourne Opera House, which included an evaluation of the effects of their engagement in singing and music activities.

<http://www.scie-socialcareonline.org/profile.asp?guid=14db3cf8-c14f-4f11-b292-e296cab85716>

### **'The MusicStart Project: Evaluation of an Isle of Wight Early Years Music Initiative.'**

Authors: Stephen Clift, Karen MacKenzie and Fiona Bushell (2007)

Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts & Health

Description: The aims of this project was to make music making and singing part of the everyday creative life of each Island family with members 0-5 years, to promote personal learning and development for children. This report evaluates the success and findings of the project.

<http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/SDHR/Documents/music-start-project-report.pdf>

### **'How singing unlocks the brain.'**

Description: A news item about singing work with Alzheimer and Parkinson patients. Founded by Chreanne Montgomery-Smith. (2005)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4448634.stm>

In more detail the Alzheimer Reading Room has an article about the benefits of low tec interventions

<http://www.alzheimersreadingroom.com/2009/02/advances-for-alzheimers-outside-lab.html>

### ***Other Art forms***

**'NRG2 Research Study' - looking at the impact of creative dance on the health and wellbeing of young people.**

Authors: Hampshire Dance (2010)

Description: The NRG2 research study looked at the impact of creative dance on the health and wellbeing of young people and whether there is any difference for boys and girls.

[http://www.hampshiredance.org.uk/youth\\_nrg.php](http://www.hampshiredance.org.uk/youth_nrg.php)

### **'Circle Dance for People with Dementia.'**

Authors: Cynthia Heymanson & Kath Kershaw (2008-2010)

Description: Details the impact of social dancing on people with dementia.

<http://www.circledanceindementia.com/>

### **'New Body Languages - the emergence of participatory arts in health.'**

Author: Derek Freeman for Mole Valley District Council (2006)

Description: Looks at the potential of arts and creative practices to address wider social, economic and environmental agendas.

[http://www.molevalley.gov.uk/media/pdf/n/g/New\\_Body\\_Languages\\_2006.pdf](http://www.molevalley.gov.uk/media/pdf/n/g/New_Body_Languages_2006.pdf)

The following research projects are from NICE's Shared Learning database.

**'Enthusiasm for life: creative stimulation and behaviour change for older people and others.'**

Project Director: Simon Goodenough (2008)

Description: 'Upstream' trained mentors work with GPs, health and social care professionals and communities to identify older, more isolated (socially, psychologically, physically, financially) and often depressed people, and to engage them in stimulating, creative and social activities that increase self-confidence and independence. Mentors visit referrals to assess needs, overcome barriers and agree individually tailored programmes (c.12 weeks) that help people join existing community activities or encourage them to participate in small, informal Upstream activity groups close to home, where they can share experience and skills (from felt-making to circle dancing to reminiscence), engage in collaborative and intergenerational projects, be motivated to continue activities independently, and build supportive relationships within their communities. The project is continuously evaluated by the Peninsula Medical School and the service is currently being disseminated throughout Devon.

<http://www.nice.org.uk/usingguidance/sharedlearningimplementingniceguidance/examplesofimplementation/eximpresults.jsp?o=183>

**'Dancing down Memory Lane: Circle Dancing as a Psychotherapeutic Intervention in Dementia.'**

Project Leader: Dr Michelle Hamil (2011)

Description: The National Dementia strategy (2009) outlines that 'by 2014 services are expected to be able to enable everyone to live well with dementia'. There is increasing recognition that psychological interventions for people with dementia and their carers are of value (NICE-SICE, 2007).

Neuropsychological considerations and exploration of the literature point towards the potential benefits of dance and movement therapies as non-verbal, body-oriented interventions that can be used to work psychotherapeutically with people as their cognitive abilities deteriorate. This group uses circle dancing with a view to enhancing the quality of life and emotional wellbeing of people with moderate to advanced dementia and their carers.

<http://www.nice.org.uk/usingguidance/sharedlearningimplementingniceguidance/examplesofimplementation/eximpresults.jsp?o=411>

**'A Change for the Better.'**

Project Director: Simon Goodenough (2009)

Description: 'Enthusiasm for life' is helping isolated and depressed older people in Devon get out and about in their community. The aim is to improve people's health by helping them to make new friends and learn new skills.

The scheme highlights the principles advocated in NICE's guidance on behaviour change ('Behaviour change' [NICE public health guidance 6]). These cover not only how to help people change but also, crucially, how to tackle the barriers to change that so many people face.

<http://www.nice.org.uk/newsroom/guidanceinfocus/achangeforthebetter.jsp>

## **‘Consultancy Work to Support the Development of a National Forum for Arts and Health ‘**

Authors: Globe Consultant’s Limited (2011)

[http://www.artsforhealth.org/resources/final\\_national\\_forum\\_report.pdf](http://www.artsforhealth.org/resources/final_national_forum_report.pdf)

### **Appendix G – Open Space report**

Please refer to attached PDF