



Care Home Choir Buddies

Connecting with Communities

NAPA COMIC RELIEF CHOIR PROJECT REPORT

Project Aim

To encourage mutually respectful and caring relationships between residents and care staff by sharing a common interest in singing and choral singing in particular and to boost morale in the staff member and well-being in the residents



NAPA

National Activity
Providers Association

INDEX

Executive summary	3
Evaluation	4
Learning points from the project	6
Conclusion	12
Appendix 1 <i>wellbeing asesment form</i>	13
Acknowledgements	14

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Sylvie Silver, NAPA's Chief Executive successfully applied for funding from Comic Relief. Funding was from the Care Home Challenge Fund, which is the first funding stream by Comic Relief to focus on projects in care homes. Ten projects across England were funded at around £20,000 each.

Alison Teader was approached by NAPA to manage the project. She was chosen due to her experience of running arts projects with older people, including setting up and managing several choirs in care homes, as part of her role as Creative Arts Officer for C&C, a Registered Social Landlord, based in London.

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To encourage mutually respectful and caring relationships between residents and care staff by sharing a common interest in singing and choral singing in particular and to boost morale in the staff member and well-being in the residents

What Happened

Choirs, consisting of staff, residents and relatives. were set up in six care homes owned by Fremantle Trust and Greensleeves Care. These homes were chosen for the project by NAPA, due to the fact that they all have 'Good' CQC ratings and are owned by charities who place a great deal of importance in the provision of activities.

Six professional singing facilitators were recruited and attended a training workshop at the beginning of the project. They delivered a total of 72 choir sessions in the six homes, coming in on a fortnightly basis for six months.

The choir groups sang familiar songs, learned some new ones and in one home, wrote their own song. They also learned about singing and performing techniques.

Staff buddies in each home were encouraged to attend sessions with residents and to talk about the project in-between sessions and provide encouragement, sharing the experience with the residents.

Staff helped evaluate the project by filling in well-being assessment forms with the residents and writing in their own reflective diaries. Facilitators filled in feedback forms for each session and an exit form at the end of the project.

Links with local community groups, including a local young peoples' theatre, college and local choir groups were made for three of the six homes and people from these groups joined with the care home choirs and took part in the celebration events.

Each home held a celebration event at the end of these sessions, where the choir performed the songs they had been singing to an audience of other residents, staff, family and friends.

EVALUATION

Evaluation methodology consisted of:

- **'Well Being Assessment Forms'** which staff were asked to ensure were filled in for each participating resident, before and after each session
- **Reflective diaries for staff**, providing a means for them to capture quotes and anecdotes from sessions and to record their own observations of outcomes and their responses to the project.
- **Facilitator feedback forms** filled in after each session
- **Exit forms** for care homes and facilitators
- **Observational visits** and informal chats with participants

SEE APPENDIX 1

NAPA was aware that getting staff to complete Well Being evaluation forms before and after each session would be difficult. Therefore an attempt was made to devise a very simplistic quantitative method which was not too time consuming to fill in but which would provide useful data for the future. In order to gauge mood before and after the singing, residents were asked to choose one of four images of faces, each conveying a different emotion, Neutral, Anxious, Happy and Sad (SEE APPENDIX 1). The idea was that this would help us to measure changes in mood, as a result of taking part in a singing session

In reality, despite much encouragement and many gentle reminders, not all of the homes filled these in! Discussions with other researchers reaffirmed this as a real challenge, with staff pleading lack of time and lack of consistency with shift rotas etc. It was also difficult to devise any kind of incentive system to encourage completion by a workforce traditionally uncomfortable with the written word. However the combination of evaluation methods: Wellbeing Assessment Forms; Staff Reflective Diaries; Facilitator feedback and exit forms, filled in by facilitators and senior staff from each of the homes as well as material collected in observational visits, do all combine to produce a body of rich and varied data.

Statistics

Choir facilitators provided regular stimulating and creative activity for 87 people for 10 weeks which made positive and in some cases long-lasting impacts to the community of the homes.

Total of 60 residents in 6 homes took part.

Total of 27 members of staff in 6 homes were part of the choir.

Total of 125 relatives and friends attended concerts.

“

It's good for the soul and when you feel good you are good to others.

”

Resident

“

I like singing – I'm glad I am part of the choir

”

Resident

Data from Well-being assessment forms

A total of 75 forms were filled in, each form measuring an individual resident's mood before and after the choir session. The results are as follows:

- 40 residents changed from neutral to happy - positive change
- 12 residents were neutral at the beginning and end - no change
- 2 residents started sad and ended happy - positive change
- 7 residents started anxious and ended happy - positive change
- 9 residents started happy and ended happy - no change
- 2 started anxious and ended neutral - positive change
- 2 started sad and ended anxious - change but not positive
- 1 started anxious and ended anxious - no change

Therefore in these 75 evaluations of singing sessions, 51 residents changed positively in mood after the singing (68%).

Qualitative Evidence

Much of the evaluation for the project took a more qualitative approach. Staff noted down comments about the sessions in their reflective diaries, which were very informative about both residents' and their own responses to the singing. Observational visits were also very helpful in terms of gauging how the project was going. The response to the choir sessions was overwhelmingly positive as can be seen by some of the many quotes from participants which are scattered throughout this report.

“

Singing together changes the mood of all the members of the group for the better

”

Staff member

“

My granddaughter said she was very proud of me and that makes me feel good

”

Resident

LEARNING POINTS FROM THE PROJECT

'Buddying'

One of the main aims of this project was to get residents and staff with a mutual interest in singing to join in the choir sessions and enjoy the experience together. NAPA hoped that individual staff members would talk about the choir with the residents in-between sessions, practise singing the songs and develop more meaningful relationships through their shared interest.

Less staff got involved in the project than was envisaged and this is possibly due to unrealistic expectations. Even in these six homes, which all have 'Good' CQC ratings and are owned by organisations who place a great deal of importance in the provision of activities, it was hard to get 5/6 staff who were able to attend each choir session. As a result, it proved difficult to get the buddying aspect of the project to work consistently. As one deputy said "We are finding it hard to get the staff involved but each week more residents are keen to join".

Although staff took part in all of the choirs, regularly attending sessions with residents, they did not always champion the project outside sessions as much as envisaged. There were a variety of reasons for this including lack of confidence as well as staff rotas and working patterns which made it hard to involve the same staff throughout.

However, several staff in each home did take part on a regular basis with some coming in on their days off to be part of choir. Getting staff to try something new and do something creative on an equal footing with residents was beneficial. It helped to develop relationships within the homes, making them more meaningful and added to job satisfaction for staff and quality of life for residents.

Examples of the 'buddy' role in action include staff singing with residents as they wheeled them round home in wheelchair and staff member asking for song sheets to songs so that they could practice singing together in between sessions.

There is a lot of qualitative evidence in the staff members reflective diaries to suggest that most of them gained a great deal from the project in terms of job satisfaction. A domestic staff member enjoyed having the chance to sit and interact with residents, saying "it's lovely to interact with residents in a different way".

Others also commented that it was good for residents and staff to be part of project together saying "It's good to sing with the

Suggestion for how to use 'buddying' within care homes

A practical way of implementing this would be for homes to do a survey of staff interests as well as for residents, possibly inviting relatives and friends to take part too. This would enable them to put people into groups to enjoy shared interests, group members to decide on activities together. This could work well even if groups are very small eg 1 staff member and 1 resident. This 'Buddying' method could really help to develop person centred care within homes as well as promoting staff satisfaction and feelings of belonging and community.

residents". They also realised the purpose of involving staff in the project, one person commenting "with staff sitting in-between the residents a better sound was created and staff could help the residents follow the words"

NAPA would like to encourage homes to use this idea of 'Buddying' when delivering other activities in care homes aspect - eg gardening, cooking, art, craft, poetry, yoga even things like shopping.

Benefits of singing

It is clear that music can have a very positive role to play in the care of older people. When talking to care staff working with older people, it is very common for them to mention the benefits of music. There is also a body of research to back up the claims that music is beneficial for people with dementia.

Staff and facilitators noted that by the end of this project, several very withdrawn residents who can be hard to engage with were taking part and enjoying the sessions. A facilitator commented that over time he saw people with dementia starting to join in with familiar songs, learning new songs and singing parts of them without having the words in front of them, showing that new information was being absorbed. Engagement in terms of eye contact and smiling was also notable for several of the residents in the advanced stages of dementia in many of the choirs.

Several people commented on the social benefits of singing together, and the following anecdote from one of the facilitators illustrates this well:

A resident who suffers from acute anxiety had not left her room for two years. She came to one of the choir sessions and then attended the final celebration event, coping with sitting in a room full of people that she didn't know, happily talking to the 19 year old students.

Others mentioned their pride in having learned new skills and accomplishing something.

One of the most powerful outcomes from using music in care settings, seems to be the way in which it can transform peoples' mood. It is a very accessible activity for large numbers of people but also has the ability to communicate with and touch people on an individual level.

It is important when setting up choir groups to consider what is meant by the term 'choir'. The facilitators taking part in this project each had very different approaches to their brief. In one home where some of the residents had musical backgrounds and were used to reading sheet music, the repertoire chosen by the facilitator was very demanding, including harmonies and singing in parts. Other facilitators took a more gentle approach, encouraging participants to sing very familiar songs together and then

“

It brings us all together and you can make new friends

”

Resident

“

I want to set up my own choir now

”

Staff member

“

I think it's good for people to be in a group and get together

”

Resident

introducing more challenging material. In one case the facilitator presented the group with music created specially for the project and also encouraged residents to help create a new song with him.

The role of the arts within care homes

The arts have a very powerful role to play within care home settings. Singing, dance, drama, creative writing and visual arts can all be used as a very enjoyable way of providing residents with stimulation, enjoyment and the chance to socialize and learn new skills. Arts projects within homes can also be used as a way of training staff in the value of creative activities by demonstrating the many different beneficial outcomes. Since the arts generally value the importance of individuality and self-expression, participation in arts projects can also enable staff to share more of themselves, allowing them to interact with residents on a more personal, meaningful level

However, something that became very apparent during the project was a clash of cultures between care homes and art facilitators. On certain occasions it almost seemed like the two parties were speaking a different language. For example, in one home when the facilitator asked the residents to enunciate the song words in a Shakespearean way, in order to stress the importance of diction when singing, it was clear that staff did not really understand what was being asked of them or why, resulting in some confusion and alienation from the project.

It would be useful for arts facilitators going into care homes in order to run activities and projects to have basic training to help them work with older people and get staff on board. Such training courses do exist for example the many courses run by NAPA and Green Candle Dance's Moving into Maturity course for staff using dance in care settings. However a specialised course for artists and arts facilitators hoping to move into this field of work would be very valuable. It would also perhaps be useful for the role of care staff to be re-examined with consideration given to how the role could be developed to include creative skills necessary for good social interaction with people with dementia. Seeking an interest in the creative arts when interviewing new staff might also raise the importance of this area of dementia care.

Care homes also sometimes don't realise what closed communities they can be to people from outside. As a result in some cases, staff can fail to be very responsive to needs of people coming into the homes to visit or work with residents, making it hard for these visitors to make suggestions. Because the homes' duty of care is to their residents, there can be a tendency for staff to expect facilitators to just 'fit in' and not make any demands or do things in different ways to the norm. This is very understandable and facilitators do need to be sensitive in terms of adapting to the needs of the home, routines and timetables. However in order for arts activities to be truly meaningful and successful, homes

“

I enjoyed it and I'm getting better at singing

”

Staff member

“

We learned how to sing in a round today and that was fun

”

Resident

also have to be open to the suggestions made by facilitators and prepared to work in new ways and take risks.

Role Of Facilitator

Most of the facilitators were excellent and developed very good relationships with the homes. However in a couple of cases, this relationship proved challenging. This was mainly due to personalities but also to the homes and facilitators having different expectations about the project. These problems were for the most part successfully overcome due to the fact that both parties wanted to achieve the same thing – an enjoyable, positive experience for participants of singing in a choir

However it is clear that the personality of the facilitators for this project was a key factor in forming a successful choir. Prior experience of dementia and working in care settings was advantageous but not the main requisite for a good choir leader. Sensitivity, flexibility and empathy coupled with an extensive knowledge of music and the mechanics of singing seemed to be the key attributes.

Links to local community

We had originally hoped to make community links with local choirs or singing groups for all six homes but only managed to achieve this for three of them. These contacts were initiated and developed by the facilitators and illustrate the types of opportunities which may be available in the local area for other care homes.

The project resulted in some lovely intergenerational activity for two of the homes as well as links with local choirs. Chesham Leys home made links with The Theatre Shed, a group for young people and this link will be maintained now the project has finished. Broadlands made links with students from Lowestoft College studying Health & Social care and this link with the college will also continue.

The contact with the Lowestoft College was particularly significant. Students came and joined in the choir sessions on a regular basis as well as the celebration event. The outcome of this is that the college want to use this type of activity as a placement for students and are already organising a singing event at the college with people that attend a day centre. They hope to continue working with Broadlands in this capacity.

The experience has been very positive and beneficial, both for the community of the homes and for the local organisations and choirs involved. In all three cases these contacts will be sustained now that the project has finished, the outcome being ongoing choir singing of some sort in these homes.

In hindsight, the homes could have played a much larger role in this element of the project, using their local knowledge to suggest

“

She's a good choir master – I'm learning something

”

Resident

“

I wasn't sure at first but now I really love it. I love sitting with the residents and singing

”

Staff member

people and organisations to approach. For example contacting local schools, churches and colleges may have resulted in the type of community links we were looking for.

Celebration events

The celebration events in the homes were joyful occasions which provided motivation and something to work towards. People loved having the opportunity to perform and share their achievements. Participants chose the name of their choir and in several cases wore a special outfit, consisting of colourful scarves or flower corsages, which helped emphasise their role as performers. In one home the cover for the song book for the performance was designed by one of the residents, an accomplished artist aged 100. Involving people in all aspects of the choirs helped give them ownership, making participants feel special and proud of being members of a choir.

Those homes that developed community links with local groups had particularly lovely events:

The Chesham performance with pupils from Theatreshed where the group sang some original compositions mixed with familiar songs,

The Mount Ephraim event in their beautiful lounge with several friends and family in attendance as well as a Julia George, a presenter from the local BBC Radio station

The Broadlands intergenerational concert with pupils from the local college.

The other three homes' final events were also very successful and meaningful for participants in different ways. As one facilitator said "the choir exuded confidence and the vocal power was definitely pushed on by the excitement of the occasion. Adrenalin kicked in and the volume and concentration was heightened making them sound very strong and confident."

What next?

NAPA would love to get additional funding on order to provide more choir sessions in care the homes. It would be nice to do some longer more concerted projects with more regular sessions and a definitive objective. For example, one of the facilitators is keen to develop the more creative side of choir singing, using themes of home and family memories to create new songs with the residents, and giving people the chance to learn about composing songs and creating new material.

“

We must do more singing in our groups, perhaps if I practise I will get better

”

Staff member

“

It's something to look forward to

”

Resident

NAPA has produced a short film, showing footage from three of the concerts which will be used to publicise the project on their website and at talks and training events, to emphasise the importance of singing in care homes.



https://youtu.be/CjMX_p3Mhug

NAPA is also providing input into *A Choir in Every Care Home* (ACIECH), a project funded by Baring and managed by Live Music Now. NAPA will share the findings from this project, including a case study and the film footage.

NAPA is also in discussions with the ACIECH team about producing a Care Home Choir Song Book, including large font, copyright free songs sheets for staff and choir facilitators to use and tips on setting up choirs in care homes. One goal is to launch this at National Care Homes Open Day Event 2018 and funding options for this are currently being looked into. As a nice finale to this project, Chesham care home's choir have been asked to perform at the NAPA Gala Awards.

See www.achoirineverycarehome.co.uk for toolkits for care home managers and a complete evidence review of the published evidence about music for older people, including those with dementia.

The facilitator at Broadlands in Suffolk who initiated the contact with Lowestoft College, sees the value of working alongside Health & Social Care students when running community choir sessions and mentoring students if they want to eventually facilitate sessions. She is considering the possibility of doing a funding bid to take this initiative further.

“

*I am coming back
next week – save
me a chair*

”

Resident

CONCLUSION

The care sector is under more pressure than it has ever been. The unexpected introduction of the National Living Wage coupled with the reduction in local authority budget spend on social care has led to many home closures – up to 3000 quoted for 2017 – and talk of crisis and low morale across the sector. On the plus side the Care Quality Commission has a much more rigorous approach and has far greater focus on the quality of life not just the quality of care. NAPA is pleased that there is much more attention being paid to the benefits of engaging with the arts and cultural activities and many providers are looking for cost effective ways to be more innovative and creative in order to achieve Outstanding Quality Ratings. This project is a perfect example of how engaging a professional in their field – in this case Choirmasters – can have a real impact on the quality of life of residents and the morale and skills of the care team. It has also demonstrated that care homes can engage with their local communities when encouraged to do so. Making a commitment to a public performance definitely influenced the commitment made to the project and ‘forced’ the care homes to be less introspective.

NAPA is delighted to be able to share such a positive project which has taken place with these six care homes. Throughout the UK there is a wealth of creative projects taking place in such settings. However unfortunately it is often only the negative stories which tend to make the news. Moving into a care home can be an extremely positive experience for people, allowing them access to new activities and things they never had the time or opportunity to do during the rest of their lives. This needs to be celebrated!

APPENDIX 1

wellbeing asesment form

DATE OF SESSION:

RESIDENT/STAFF

NAME:

Please circle image which most accurately shows how you feel BEFORE session:



HAPPY



NEUTRAL



ANXIOUS



SAD

Please circle image which most accurately shows how you feel AFTER session:



HAPPY



NEUTRAL



ANXIOUS



SAD

PLEASE GIVE THIS TO YOUR ACTIVITY ORGANISER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks very much to the residents and staff from the following organisations and care homes for taking part in this project so enthusiastically by supporting the choir sessions and contributing to the evaluation:

Greensleeves Care

Mount Ephraim House

Pelsall Hall

Broadlands

The Fremantle Trust

Farnham Common House

Chesham Leys

Apthorp Care Centre

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Tony Wille

Mary Lovett

Rona Topaz

Nick Jones

Sovra Newman



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