Choirs in Crisis:  
Soundbites of singing through the first year of COVID-19

Five case studies from Brighton & Hove, South-East England, 2020-21

CONTENTS

Introduction 3
Background 4
Case Study 1: Harmonessence 8
Case Study 2: Hullabaloo Community Quire 12
Case Study 3: Brighton gay mens chorus (BGMC) 16
Case Study 4: Choir With No Name (CWNN) 21
Case Study 5: Sing For Better Health 26
Reflections, Links & References 30
INTRODUCTION

When I heard the first whispers and fears around what was to become the Coronavirus pandemic, like many people I was stopped in my tracks as I stood in shock, denial, bewilderment and incomprehension at the scale the impact was going to have on every aspect of all our lives.

So, once I had made some kind of naive sense of how I felt I could help and support my nearest and dearest, my thoughts turned to how the community and participatory arts sector, with whom I have been involved with in a variety of ways most of my professional life, was going to cope and respond.

Within the first few months of the first lockdown, the research centre I am an associate with, the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health, based at Canterbury Christ Church University, undertook an online survey investigating singing group leaders’ experiences of online singing sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic. As an adjunct to that, I wanted to hear and record the stories of some of the organisations and extraordinary individuals that were continuing to work through the crisis as it developed and spread.

I chose Brighton & Hove as it has such a rich cultural and participatory arts sector and because on 6th February, Brighton and Hove was the third place in the country to identify cases of COVID-19, with Steve Walsh, a businessman from Hove, who after recently returning from Singapore on 28th January, was quickly identified and thought to have infected eleven people - five of whom lived in the city.

The choirs represented here from the Brighton and Hove area are an ad hoc cross section of the wide range of community singing groups in and around the city but do reflect some of the groups of people that come together regularly to share their time – and vocal cords. The first conversations were in June 2020, a few months in from the first lockdown in March, and the second follow ups were at the end of February 2021, so overall covering the first year of the UK’s experience of COVID-19.

What emerged from my conversations with these singing group leaders and organisers are stories of passion and perseverance, care and commitment. Passion for their art form; perseverance through what turned out to be three lockdowns in the first year; real care for their choir members and commitment to do their best for them using their art form to support their health and wellbeing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Angus McLewin
Kent, March 2021
BACKGROUND

Demographic

The city of Brighton & Hove has a population of 290,395 (2017) with 21% under 20; 62% 20 - 59, 11% 60-74 and 6% 75+. There are projected to be 23,300 more people living in the city by 2030 (compared with 2017, an 8% increase to 311,500 people).

The city consists of different population groups living in a range of communities. One in five people (19.5%) are from a Black or Minority Ethnic group (14.5% South East, 20.2% England). Their best estimate of lesbian, gay and bisexual residents is 11% to 15% of the population aged 16+.

At least 2,760 trans adults live in Brighton & Hove, with many more who visit to socialise, study or work. 52,000 residents were born outside of the UK (18% of the city’s population), higher than the South East (14%) and England (16%) and 49% of residents have a religion, lower than the South East (65%) and England (68%).


The city’s population is predicted to get older, with the greatest projected increases in the 60 to 74 years (33%, 10,800 extra people) and 75+ age group (30%, 5,300 extra people). There are projected to be 700 more 85 to 89 year-olds and 400 more 90+ year-olds. More than one in 20 residents say their day-to-day activities are ‘limited a lot’ due to a long term health problem or being disabled.

Cultural Participation

From the Active Lives Survey 2015-17, three out of four Brighton & Hove residents attend an artistic event (73%); half of residents spend time doing a creative or artistic activity or craft (49%); Nearly two-thirds visit a museum or art gallery (63%) and about three in ten residents dance (29%).

Health & Wellbeing

Life expectancy is 79.5 years for men and 83.4 years for women, with a healthy life expectancy of 61.6 and 62.2 years respectively. 78% of adults are physically active while 22% of adults aged 20+ and over have more than one long-term physical or mental health condition. 41% of people over 65 years old live alone and the City has similar rates of diagnosed dementia in older people to the rest of the UK, but higher rates of age-related macular degeneration (preventable sight loss), falls and hip fractures. 40% of people die in hospital; 26% at home with another 23% in care homes and 7% in a hospice.
COVID-19

On 6th February Brighton and Hove was the third place in the country to identify cases of COVID-19. Steve Walsh, a businessman from Hove, who had recently returned from Singapore on 28th January, was quickly identified and thought to have infected 11 people - five of whom lived in the city.

https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/18228004.coronavirus-brighton-timeline-outbreak/

By July 2020, Brighton and Hove had 775 cases of COVID-19- fairly low numbers (266.9 per 100,000 of the population) compared to some of the highest areas such as Bradford with 4,352 (810.2 per 100,000).

In total in Brighton and Hove, there had been 72 COVID-19 deaths in hospital, seven in hospices, five in "other communal establishments" and 51 in care homes. Up to Friday 22nd May 2020, 139 people with COVID-19 had died in Brighton and Hove out of 961 total deaths since the start of the year – almost 15 per cent


Update - March 2021

By 4th March 2021, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases for Brighton and Hove was 14,100 and by the end of February 2021, the total number of deaths recorded with mention of COVID-19 on the death certificate was 442.


Care homes

There are 38 care homes in the city of Brighton and Hove and up to May 2020, the death rate in care homes was lower than the national average, with Brighton and Hove ranked 204th out of 317 local authorities, according to the Office for National Statistics. By June 2020, the total number of deaths in care homes in the city since the beginning of the year was 284. In June 2020 it was also reported that 40% of those 38 care homes had cases of COVID-19, and by December 2020, there were 1,811 care home residents in the area as of December, according to analysis of Care Quality Commission data by CSI Market Intelligence.

https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2020/06/09/no-council-care-home-staff-have-coronavirus-health-chiefs-report

According to the ONS, UK wide since the beginning of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (between the period 2nd March to 12 June 2020, registered up to 20 June 2020), there were 66,112 deaths of care home residents (wherever the death occurred); of these, 19,394 involved COVID-19, which is 29.3% of all deaths of care home residents.

Of deaths involving COVID-19 among care home residents, 74.9% (14,519 deaths) occurred within a care home and 24.8% (4,810 deaths) occurred within a hospital. From 2nd March 2020, of all deaths in hospitals involving COVID-19, 15.5% could be accounted for by care home residents.

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/
Timeline of the UK government’s Lockdown measures 2020-21

31 January - first two cases of coronavirus confirmed in the UK

6 February - a third case of coronavirus is confirmed in the UK in Brighton & Hove

5 March - first death from coronavirus in the UK is confirmed

16 March - Prime Minister Boris Johnson advises everyone in the UK against “nonessential” travel and contact with others, to curb coronavirus, as well as to work from home if possible and avoid visiting social venues such as pubs, clubs or theatres

18 March - 50th anniversary of the Glastonbury Festival cancelled as a result of the pandemic!

23 March - FIRST LOCKDOWN
Boris Johnson announced new strict rules applicable to the entire United Kingdom with the aim to slow the spread of the disease by reducing transmission of the disease between different households. The British public are instructed that they must stay at home, except for certain “very limited purposes” – shopping for essential items (such as food and medicine); one form of outdoor exercise each day (such as running, walking or cycling), either alone or with others who live in the same household; for any medical need, or to provide care to a vulnerable person; and to travel to and from work where this is “absolutely necessary” and the work in question cannot be done from home.

26 March - Clap For Our Carers
First 8pm applause that ran across the UK for ten weeks during the first national lockdown in 2020 to thank all doctors, nurses, carers, GPs, pharmacists and other NHS staff working hard to help those affected by COVID-19

27 March - Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Health Secretary Matt Hancock both test positive for COVID-19. Johnson self-isolates in No.10 Downing St and Hancock self-isolates at home whilst working.

23 April - first human trials of a coronavirus vaccine in Europe begin in Oxford

23 May - reports that Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson’s chief political adviser, visited Barnard Castle in Teesdale

4 June - No Clap For Our Carers street applause as Annemarie Plas said it’s time to end the weekly celebration as lockdown rules start to ease.

25 June - as the UK experiences a short heatwave, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council declares a major incident after as many as half a million people travel to the Dorset coast

3 August - Eat Out to Help Out scheme, offering a 50% discount on meals up to £10 per person, begins in the UK

5 November - SECOND LOCKDOWN
Second national lockdown comes into force in England

2 December - Second lockdown ends after four weeks and England returns to a stricter three-tier system of restrictions

15 December - PM says Christmas rules will be relaxed but urges the public to keep celebrations “short and small”

21 December - Tier 4 restrictions come into force in London and South East England
6 January - THIRD LOCKDOWN
UK is in a national lockdown due to a rapid rise in COVID-19 cases. ‘People must stay at home to prevent the spread of the virus and can only leave your home if it’s necessary.’

8 March – schools re-opened and twice-weekly rapid testing for secondary and college pupils - in addition to regular testing for all teachers - to reduce the chance of the virus spreading in schools. People allowed to leave home for recreation and exercise outdoors with their household or support bubble, if they are eligible for one, or with one person from outside their household. Care home residents also allowed one regular visitor.

SECTION BELOW CORRECT AT TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

29 March - outdoor gatherings including in private gardens, of either 6 people (the Rule of 6) or 2 households also allowed, making it easier for friends and families to meet outside.

12 April - opening of nonessential retail; personal care premises such as hairdressers and nail salons; and public buildings, including libraries and community centres. Indoor leisure facilities such as gyms will also reopen (but only for use by people on their own or in household groups); as will most outdoor attractions and settings including outdoor hospitality venues, zoos, theme parks, and drive-in cinemas. Self-contained accommodation such as campsites and holiday lets, where indoor facilities are not shared with other households, can also reopen.


CASE STUDY 1 - Harmonessence

Structure and schedule: 3 choirs running weekly sessions with termly fees

Membership and attendance: 3 choirs of approximately 30 members each

Length of time the group has been running: 5 years

Facilitator: Danny Vice

Length of time as facilitator/leader: since inception

Contact: 07941 760 866

Website: www.harmonessence.co.uk

Harmonessence was founded by Danny Vice; a professional singer, performer and vocal teacher with one idea, EVERYONE CAN SING. Danny supports people to sing in a fun, positive and inspiring space. Harmonessence has grown to become a community of singers supporting each other and having fun and they keep their choirs small with no more than about 30 members.

A few months in – June 2020

Sessions, members and practitioners

Danny runs three choirs in and around Brighton and Hove with normally 30 members per choir. They meet once a week and sign up with termly fees.

From the onset of the crisis, and informed by immediate feedback from some participants, Danny sensed very early on that many of them didn’t want to risk face to face contact. So, realising they had to change very quickly they ‘got on top if it all’ and were able to implement the online choirs by adopting and adapting to using Zoom within a day. This created security and continuity for members and in their first (pre-lockdown session) they ran this in-person session alongside a zoom session, so people had the choice.

“Many of my retired singers have really embraced it (Zoom). Some live alone and enjoy the social aspects this technology brings. As much as the singing, they love just hooking up and like the regularity in their day and schedule the choir provides.”
This has enabled the choir groups to continue uninterrupted, so after this first new session with face to face and having Zoom alongside simultaneously, they then shifted to online sessions from lockdown onwards. Although he has had an overall 30% loss in attendance, Danny has maintained the choirs at the 15-20 numbers throughout these last three months. He had already set up two What’s App groups to provide communication channels for each choir and a third was set up by one of the groups which provides support for each other during the week.

The structure and repertoire have had to adapt as the main challenge is keeping people engaged as they normally work towards two public performances per year. So, it became a combination of finding new songs and arrangements coupled with singing familiar old favourites to provide the community singalong experience members enjoy from the face to face singing groups they usually attend.

Whenever restrictions are lifted, their aim for the next stage is to create hybrid sessions where members can choose face to face and/or online participation.

One year on – February 2021

Sessions

Danny still has the three choirs going but after the initial enthusiasm and now after nearly a year that has inevitably worn over time. Danny puts the drop off in attendance and participation down to Zoom fatigue with some people saying they don’t want to do the digital sessions anymore and really wanting the face-to-face sessions and therefore are waiting hopefully for those to return.

Over the year they have introduced various different ways to keep peoples’ interest including virtual choir pieces and performances, an online Summer Show where the different choirs sang different parts to songs pieces. Danny then spent time ‘syncing’, mixing and editing all the videos together to make one complete piece and then had a YouTube premiere which worked really well, keeping up a lot of interest and creating a bit of a buzz.

The hardest thing has been the shifting landscape. When the lockdown restrictions were lifted, he made inroads into getting people back together in rooms again. With PPE.
precautions it was possible to start a few small groups of up to five people coming to him where he lives and those were brilliant and also did some ‘big sings’ in a large well-known park in Brighton. These ‘Big Sing Sundays’ invited about 30 people – the limit of socially distanced public gatherings at that time – and those also worked really well, but just when they could see the light at the end of the tunnel with everyone working with all the Covid protections to keep everyone safe then suddenly another lockdown happened and that really affected everyone.

Danny experiences this last lockdown as really the worst. It’s hard to keep peoples’ morale up and his own as well, at times. One choir has had significant drop off and Danny puts that down to it being on a Monday evening, but another has kept buoyant, and the numbers are up. Other drop off factors seem to be the age demographics of the different groups plus the ability or enjoyment of using Zoom. Danny also admits that he is probably more buoyant and upbeat on a Wednesday morning than first thing on a Monday and he is certainly looking forward to when all the restrictions are lifted, and everyone is vaccinated as he has enough people still waiting for when they can get back to meeting and singing in person.

“I had people saying to me - I can’t wait to get back to singing in person – I just don’t want to do it on Zoom – and I can understand that.”

“Some people who really flourish in a face to face group just say No I really don’t want to do it and other (precisely) because it isn’t face to face have really flourished.”

When he had the live small groups of 5 people plus him as leader, he had them queueing up for those live sessions during the time they were allowed and available. He is surprised the impact this last (and third) lockdown has had on everyone. On one level they’ve all been there before so know what to expect and do, but everyone is just tired and worn out by it at this stage and it really affects people.

Members

Some members have had Covid over this last year, some as early as last March and didn’t know what it was at the time. It has impacted on some of their families and in some cases quite severely but luckily no direct fatalities. It has affected morale and at times feeling they are all just ‘hanging on in there’. The Summer was a real boost as for a time things felt back to some kind of normality but then suddenly smacked in the face with the next lockdown and everything felt as though it reversed or regressed.

“I sometimes jump from teaching maths to then running a (choir) session to then back to childcare as my wife has a meeting.”
Practitioners

Danny and his wife continue to run their one-to-one sessions and they have flourished as people are at home more and have more time and can choose when to have time for themselves to do things. On the other hand, there are the issues of juggling work and childcare plus the added demands of home schooling which all add up to increased pressures on them all. So, there’s less opportunity to really plan or see the future so it just feels like firefighting a lot of the time.

On the other hand, online teaching has thrown up some rather unusual and unique opportunities so they will be maintaining the one-to-one tuition sessions as they work for the students and of course as a source of income, so it’s given them a chance to review their working practices and see how they can take things forward.

The future

They are trying to plan for the future, balancing putting concrete plans in place such as provisional booking of venues with having to be so flexible to accommodate and anticipate any change in government legislation. But until there is clarity and confirmation from the government, they have to stay adaptable, but they will ultimately be offering their ‘hybrid’ sessions again with a combination of live and zoom participation for members which Danny trialled last year. One opportunity that has arose is being able to create a full online choir which can even be nationwide and not just restricted to their normal local groups.

“We had our 2 metre markers, everyone hand sanitised and all with masks on and we probably overdid it but really didn’t want anyone to get sick, so we made sure everyone was completely safe and it worked so well, and it meant such a lot to everyone - we got a lot of thanks for that.”
CASE STUDY 2 - Hullaballoo Community Quire

Structure and schedule: Weekly sessions for three terms per year

Membership and attendance: About 100 members with now about 50

Length of time the group has been running: 22 years

Facilitator/leader: Kirsty Martin

Length of time as facilitator/leader: 22 years!

Contact: info@hullabalooquire.org

Website: www.hullabalooquire.org

Hullaballoo is Brighton’s longest-established Natural Voice community choir - founded on the simple principle that singing is your birth right and that everyone, given the right technical and emotional support, can sing together in glorious, high quality, spine tingling harmony. Renowned for their vibrant, innovative and accessible a cappella music, as well as collaborations with a fabulous array of professional musicians.

A few months in - June 2020

Sessions, members and practitioners

They were in the middle of a massive project for the Brighton Fringe Festival in May 2020 and had three or four weeks left in their choir term, so the Steering Group agreed to try and use Zoom and to provide free sessions.

It was a double project — The Raven by Ali Burns - which is a choral creation myth based on Northern Hemisphere mythology, and The Cosmos by Suzie Shrubb, a minimalist experimental piece based on cosmic science. They had to shelve that and return to their core repertoire which was pop, blues, rock, folk songs, protest songs, ‘world music’ and ‘singing in the bar’ type of music. So, with 100 people in the choir that term they were able to retain about 50, with many of those not taking part in the online sessions saying ‘Na, it’s not for me’.

“It’s really galvanised the community but only half of us – the ones that Zoomed.”

Socially distanced session in a large, local church
Although Hullabaloo is fundamentally a big sound, with the new and reduced online participants the first few sessions were quite fun as Kirsty’s role became more like an MC or a Butlin’s Red coat and she openly admitted she “needed a gin afterwards!”. Having initial technical difficulties with being able to play MP3s at the same time as singing, Kirsty’s partner modelled with her some two-part harmonies that became the USP of these online sessions. They soon were able to play the MP3 of one of the tracks then sing the other two parts over the top of it graduating it to three parts, after overcoming the technical challenges of warping, delay and quite a tinny sound!

That seems all seems a long time back now, as in April they normally have a break of a few weeks but have kept on “Zooming through the whole time” as they wanted to support their whole community and didn’t want any of them to feel more isolated than they perhaps were already, as many were self-isolating for the full twelve weeks.

Interestingly, the hard core group of about 30 - 40 members who have been in Hullabaloo since its inception are not necessarily the ones that have taken part in the new format. The more socially isolated people have been the ones who have embraced the online ways of singing whereas the people who were a lot more involved in other activities are less dependent on Hulla for their social interaction and came to it for the ‘harmony vibe’, for the ‘visceral’ harmony singing which the Zoom sessions didn’t give them.

As for the future, they think they won’t be able to actually meet up until 2021 but they are making two videos to go with the songs they have been recording and sending individual audio files to Kirsty to edit and create a Maestra track for the songs! They are working towards an end of term event ‘Live Stream’ Online Concert, in aid of Water Aid, which will feature the new videos and be a bit like an online cabaret. Kirsty feels blessed with a very supportive and efficient Steering Group, but they need to find what will keep people hooked in as they do quite unusual musical projects such as choral theatre projects and collaborations, which they may not be able to do via Zoom.

Additional information

Kirsty is the presenter and producer of the Vox Pop Choir Community Radio show - a monthly radio show on Brighton’s Radio Reverb, which is all about vocal harmony and choral music - and is sponsored by Hullabaloo. You can read more about it here:

https://www.hullabalooquire.org/vox-pop/

and you can listen to them all here:

“I’ve never worked so hard in my life – the amount of preparation needed – I’m making instruction videos as well.”
Sessions

Hullabaloo’s sessions, although initially complicated to set up and quite exhausting, now feel like they are getting there. There are fifty people in Hullabaloo and last term they did Room and Zoom sessions with thirty people in the room and the rest on Zoom. Although Kirsty would go back to it in a ‘heartbeat’ it was quite hard work giving the Zoomers as good an experience as the people actually in the room. The Room was set up by a volunteer team; five stalwart members of the choir who acted as front of house health and safety officers, taking the register, taking temperatures, putting out the chairs and measuring the two metre distance, setting up the long ethernet cable and tripod for the Zoom element and assembling the Perspex screen for Kirsty to stand behind and teach (making her feel a bit like Hannibal Lecter!)

They were able to make these sessions work using a church venue with the highest ceiling in Europe, which reinforced their precautions and care regarding health and safety for their members.

That was last Autumn (November 2020) but now she is back running virtual sessions from her home studio and has had some feedback that the IT is quite ‘glitchy’ which is always frustrating for all concerned. She and her partner have spent a lot of time on the Natural Voice Network leaders forum asking questions, getting advice and opinions, resulting in purchases of more equipment to maintain and raise the quality of the sessions, to make them more innovative – and fun.

Members

Their overall numbers are still down by about 50% but it feels good that they had up to fifty people more or less on Zoom and very happy to get it up to fifty people in the room when restrictions allowed, but Kirsty knows that it is the team effort that keeps them all going as a choir.

“I am very much the figurehead – not the crew. The crew are the real ones holding it all together - I just have to stand up there and wave my arms around.”
Practitioners

Kirsty finds running two choirs in Brighton and London using Zoom needs four times as much prep as you can’t do anything really spontaneous, so you can’t just start something off in a singing circle as you would normally, as everything has to be pre-recorded and so she knows when and where to drop in or drop out parts. Having said that she thinks she will carry on using Zoom even after lockdown as she’s getting people coming to join from all over the place and is going to re-start another dormant choir project as it is not place based and not dependent on venue hire or availability.

Last year she managed to keep the two choirs going but as a solo practitioner felt she had ‘gone to seed’ a bit so this year she is upping her game – including IT wise - as she recognises she is a bit of a technophobe. She is involved in the Women of the World Festival and some other solo projects which ‘feels good and uplifting’ after all the challenges and sheer hard graft of last year. Keeping projects ‘burning’ and finding new ways to present workshops to people as she would have done in real life has got her re-energised this year.

Following the NVN research, Kirsty has now reconfigured her Zoom set up, and is using an ethernet cable, a mixer and audio interface and headphones (rather than teaching ‘into the room’). This is something she initially tried in the first lockdown but was defeated by the technology. However, making these amendments has radically improved the quality of the zoom broadcast and choir members have unanimously agreed that the experience is richer and more authentic. In addition, Kirsty has bought a vocal looper, which allows her to improvise polyphonic songs on the spot - something she would usually do in an IRL choir warm-up - and which has added to the spontaneity and authenticity of the session delivery.

Future

When the 2021 new year arrived and yet another lockdown, they took stock and realised this could be for some considerable time again, so renewed their efforts to make it better for everyone. This has included a collaboration with Irish composer/cellist Vyvienne Long who has played with Ed Sheeran and Damien Rice. Kirsty heard her song a Glass of Laughter on Radio 6 music and she just wrote to her saying she wanted to arrange it for her choirs and she agreed. These collaborations are part of Kirsty’s brief in her choir role and the choir has been doing these for over fifteen years so this was very fitting and timely as it can fit in with their ‘gig’ schedule for this coming year.

This is especially pertinent as the Brighton Fringe has been moved from May to June in 2021 and as their term started in January, they felt they needed to keep to the May schedule to keep the momentum up. Last year they were able to do two online cabarets, but Kirsty doesn’t think they will be doing any live performances until at least Xmas 2021, but hopes things could be back to some sort of normal by September.

“Last year was so existentially weird that I had very little resilience by the end of it so have had to re-energise.”
CASE STUDY 3 -
Brighton Gay Men’s Chorus

Structure and schedule:
Regular weekly sessions on Tuesday evenings

Membership and attendance: Approx. 90 members with 40-50 regularly attending

Length of time the group has been running:
Over 15 years, started in January 2005

Chorus Director: Joe Paxton

Length of time as facilitator/leader:
Assistant MD for six years and appointed Chorus Director in May 2019

Contact: enquiries@brightongmc.org
Website: www.brightongmc.org

Interviews with Silvio Grasso - founding member and Paul Charlton – current vice chair.

Brighton Gay Men’s Chorus is a space where people can celebrate music, celebrate their sexuality, enjoy the fellowship of other like-minded people and contribute to the local community. (BrightonGMC) was created in January 2005 when a small group of friends who loved singing were disappointed at the lack of a ‘non-scene space’ in which to socialise. They decided it was high time Brighton & Hove had its first gay male voice choir and so created a space where people can celebrate music, enjoy the fellowship of other like-minded people and contribute to the local communities of which they are part. It is now the biggest gay men’s chorus in UK outside of London.

A few months in – June 2020

Sylvio Grasso - founder member

Sessions, members and practitioners

Lockdown was on Monday 23rd March, so their regular Tuesday session was cancelled. The Trustees quickly met online on with the Chorus Director and discussed options, wanting to ensure they maintained their three core principles of the 3 S’s: Singing, Socialising and Supporting. So, they developed the Virtual BrightonGMC to immediately replace the Tuesday sessions, with these being run as normal, with an introduction by the chairman and then going into the singing sessions.

They were very pleased that so many members still attended, with between 35 – 40 weekly out of their regular 40-50 attendance for normal sessions. The sessions were

“We couldn’t find a viable solution for us to all sing together - the technology is not there unless you want to spend loads of money... so Zoom seemed the easiest to use.”
structured by keeping to their four singing parts: two Tenors, Baritone and Bass: the first 30 minutes being with each group separately, with their individual directors having either piano accompaniment or singing themselves, or introducing a new score digitally - each group was able to see the timeline moving which helped as they could all see the same score. Then after the first thirty minutes, everyone came back into the same ‘room’ and tried to sing it all together. All voice parts were recorded in advance for learning at home and so they made a recording of all four parts together so everyone could sing along with all voice parts. After these new session formats, they all “unmuted” so they could all chat and socialise as they normally did – as this was when the gin and wine comes out!

The main way they fund the chorus is through the regular shows and performances they do throughout the year. They plan eighteen months in advance and normally open the Brighton Fringe in May and have a pre - Pride performance in August. Plus, this year is their 15th anniversary so were planning a celebration show at the Brighton Dome Concert Hall for December, but all these have had to be cancelled or postponed.

normally, as well as their regular weekly sessions, they have a once a month all day (six hour) rehearsal at a weekend that usually has some element of vocal training, so the lockdown has given them the opportunity to implement this now in a more structured way. They record all these training sessions so they can look at them in their own time for members that can’t always attend. Its aim has been to enrich the membership musically as well as to keep them engaged with each other and the chorus.

The Chorus Director also wanted to find ways to maintain interest and support for the guys so with his Music Team, which includes Music Director and Accompanist Tim Nail and Assistant Music Director Jack Simmonds, they introduced three 12-week training sessions, based on what members requested or said they needed:

1. Vocal Training – theory
2. Music theory – basic as up to half members don’t read scores
3. Music theory – intermediate and advanced as some members are Grade 8 - chords, arrangements

Following the success of the initial training sessions, the team has started three additional training modules: ‘Sight Singing’, ‘How to Make Choral Arrangements’ for their more musically advanced members and ‘Grade 1 Music Theory’ for members that wanted to gain an accreditation at the end of a module.

Also, long-standing members created a monthly karaoke-style gathering affectionately called ‘Abandoned Gay Cabaret’ where members could perform songs in a supportive and friendly space, before auditioning their solos for one of the Chorus’ shows. This has also been transposed to Zoom and proved very successful.

“We’re very social – we hug each other – we go to the pub after rehearsal.”
The trustees also introduced a support scheme for members during the lockdown with an initial three months free membership if needed, which has now been extended at least until October, as well deciding to support their regular host venue by continuing to pay their fees.

Other ways to keep supporting members and keep them connected with each other is through videos of the group singing and some members have additionally made quartet and duet videos too which have been well received on their social media channels.

From the onset of lockdown, BrightonGMC created a WhatsApp group for all members called ‘The Third S’, as in Supporting, so they can post videos and chat - and laugh - with a lot of jokes and memes shared. They also have individual WhatsApp groups for Tenors 1 and 2, Baritone and Bass to provide support as they understand that a lot of their members will be feeling isolated.

Looking ahead

Planning ahead they know that their existing rehearsal spaces are not big enough to accommodate social distancing, so they are exploring additional spaces there and also other venues and they are already thinking about the issues around when and if people have to wear masks in public spaces.

The Chorus has recently released their first music video during lockdown, Just Can’t Get Enough by Depeche Mode, which was premiered at Nestlé’s employee digital LGBTQ+ conference. The video has generated donations to one of the local charities supported by the Chorus, the Rainbow Fund. And they are already working on two further video projects for Brighton Pride in August and for the UK and Ireland choir festival Hand In Hand in September.

Video: https://youtu.be/yn_yVD_DVsU

One year on – February 2021

Paul Charlton – vice chair

Sessions

The Choir Team took advantage of the period in the Autumn of 2020 when some of the lockdown restrictions were eased to get back to some face-to-face sessions but in a local church where they could set up the two-metre distancing. They had about thirty members taking part but also had about ten people via Zoom as were able to use the Wi-Fi setup in the church. As the church is huge, they were able to have up to forty people, so they had six people in a row and then the Musical Director was six metres away from the front row with the pianist to the side and they used additional plastic screens.

Everyone was pre-booked, then signed in and had to declare themselves symptom free before having their temperature taken and then escorted to their seats where they had to remain, so none of the usual mixing. These sessions were shorter than their normal two and a half hours so only an hour including some time for chat and the doors were kept open so a bit chilly as Autumn approached, but they continued those sessions right up to Christmas till the third lockdown.

"The chorus is made by the members and the members make the chorus."
Members

The numbers have remained the same and even the ones not attending are still paying their subscriptions. For many, having to work from home, having spent all day on Zoom they really can’t face more of it in their evening and leisure time, so two camps really – those who are okay with it and those who don’t want any more screen time at the end of the day. The other issue has been what are the rehearsals for? Normally they are working towards two or three big concerts a year, but now without those definite goals and dates the momentum is harder to find.

They have tried to recreate the social element of their choir sessions which normally would have been held in their regular pub by introducing the Virtual Pub. Using the recent new Zoom facility, they created some break out rooms where members can pop in and out and chat to each other and they’ve also encouraged those who don’t come to the virtual rehearsals to feel free to come to the virtual pub just to chat afterwards, enabling people to switch between break out rooms so they can catch up with who they want to.

People are either at home, working from home or going out to work. The choir has its Facebook groups so they can keep in touch with each other as well as each choir section has its own What’s App group and each section leader keeps in touch with them as best they can. They’ve had a few members catch Covid and it has affected some wider family members, although amongst the membership, no one bad enough to go into hospital and no one has died luckily.

They have continued their membership support scheme for members who can’t afford their subs and although it’s a small number they do still make it available on a three-month basis. Even though it affects their overall income slightly this has been outweighed by not having to pay for venue hire.

Practitioners & Team

The musical team are managing but the Choir team are keen to support them as much as their members as they recognise that the choir is a significant contribution to their income as free lancers and self-employed musicians, and they are continuing with their music theory and arranging courses which is additional income for the musical directors and team.

They set high standards and the music team all do recordings of all the parts for any new repertoire and there is plenty of online support and tutorials, so members can go away, download them and rehearse online independently. There are also recordings of the piano arrangements and all this comprehensive support and tuition is seen as vital as they do produce three big concerts a year.

“People use (the support we have created) in the ways that work for them.”
Looking Forward – Looking Back

They are aiming to do something in June as part of the Brighton Festival Fringe, replacing their regular full concert with one with just solos, duets and comedy sketches rather than the full chorus. Then they are planning a full concert in August 2021. They are hoping to get back to face to face rehearsals for this but still with social distancing measures in place. They would normally start rehearsals in May for a concert in July so are allowing extra time for the build-up to the one in August. Beyond August they are planning a Christmas concert, hopefully at the Brighton Dome.

The last year has been very challenging but they’ve learnt a lot about how to do things (through this time), but they’re hoping they won’t have to put them back in place again. Now, in Spring 2021, like everybody else they are optimistic they can start back even with just the in-person rehearsals, as just being able to stand there and hear other people singing is such a huge thing. So even if they have to continue to stand two metres apart, they can still perform, and are determined to do whatever they can or need to do enable the planned public performances to go ahead, including maybe doing two smaller concerts on the same day, for smaller and socially distanced audiences.

“The last year has been very challenging and hard work as its really difficult to run a choir on online learning but also it’s been brilliant that we’ve managed to keep on doing it and very few people have dropped out.”
A few months in – June 2020

Sessions, members and practitioners

The first phase of the Coronavirus crisis made the Team very concerned for the welfare of their members, many of whom are hidden homeless, not always having access to all the services they need. They also would not have access to make music in their living circumstances. The original choir finished about two weeks before the official lockdown. They then worked with Digital Brighton and Hove for support on enabling digital inclusion to help individual members get up to speed on IT skills needed and they now run a Digital Inclusion Project to get technology to members as the crisis showed how digitally excluded this group of people often are. As many other services have migrated online, this time has had a positive impact by making people more ‘tech savvy’ and that means they have been able access other vital services that they need.

“Singing and being creative and sharing food together are two of the most human things you can do so they go hand in hand.”

CASE STUDY 4 - Choir With No Name

Facilitator/leader: Freya Wynn-Jones (music director) Alex Procter (choir manager)

Structure and schedule: Weekly choir sessions with shared food for people experiencing homelessness in Brighton

Membership and attendance: between 40-60

Length of time the group has been running: 2 years

Length of time as facilitator/leader: Alex 2 ½ years – Freya 2 ½ years

Contact: alex.procter@bht.org.uk

Website: www.choirwithnoname.org/choirs/brighton-choir

The Choir with No Name runs choirs for homeless and marginalised people. “We’re a diverse bunch of folks; all genders, all colours, all ages - everyone is welcome. We were founded on the premise that singing makes you feel good; it distracts you from all the nonsense in life and helps you to build confidence, skills and genuine, long lasting friendships.”
Once they checked in with all their members, they then set about how they could ‘migrate online’. A Zoom choir emerged from this, but it needed a two-tier approach to first ensure people could have online access and then second, to restructure the choir sessions, as normally they include a sharing of food as part of the communal experience.

The challenges for the facilitator has been how do you translate the feel of a choir when it’s just the choir director singing and then everyone just singing back in silence effectively? The Zoom sessions have continued on the same night and times as normal, but one of the surprises has been that there is something about being in your ‘own space’ that allows for spontaneity. So, they might be exploring a musical theme and then one person puts on a silly hat and then before you know it 30 people have put hats on while they are all singing! So they feel there’s been something about that in terms of growing a community through this time.

Their core group is about fifty five people and over the two years they have been running, they have had over two hundred people come through their doors. One of the other changes now is that they don’t get people just dropping in: it’s really just established members and guests of established members.

One of the biggest changes for the choir is that they aren’t singing together so there isn’t that sense of connectedness of all being together but equally there is a sense of them all coming to this (virtual) space to see each other and keeping it “alive a little bit.” They also acknowledge that at the moment they can’t be there for new people who might want to try something new or are at that point in their recovery on their journey with homelessness.

As for the future, they want to cater for their members needs but each choir has different needs and Brighton is distinct from London or Liverpool or Birmingham, where they also run choirs. Some of their members have got quite severe physical illnesses and also understandably there is quite a bit of anxiety about people eventually physically coming together and their physical welfare is a major concern for the organisation. So, as for many other organisations, they don’t know what is going to happen next but “they are working on it”.

“The brilliant thing is that we haven’t stopped – nearly every week we’ve done something throughout this whole time.”
One year on – February 2021

Sessions

They haven’t stopped at all with their regular sessions and the Zoom sessions have now become a staple. On top of that, they had a wonderful period during the easing of restrictions where they were all able to meet up in person. In September, they started meeting outside in groups despite there being many reports at that time that singing was more dangerous than talking, there were also reports (from Norway?) that in fact if everyone was properly socially distanced then it could be quite safe.

So, they helped their members self-organise into groups (or bubbles of six) to encourage them to come up with creative ideas and projects. The immediate benefit of that was people were able to actually see each other in person. That led to meeting up in bigger groups in a local large park where they had a system of booking people in and having the area marked out with sports cones. It was very successful but with many logistics to overcome such as the choir leading singing into the wind sometimes and not being easily heard, and at one time hearing police sirens and thinking they might be coming for them to break it all up.

Then in October they found a Covid safe space in a big old church so they could move to indoor sessions but after one session the second lockdown came into effect. In December they managed to meet again indoors for about four sessions which was “glorious” (4.42) after being on Zoom all that time. Additionally, in December, they managed to do a ‘big gig’ online with over three hundred members of the public joining in.

Organised through Choir with No Name, utilising the support of the organisation and their other choirs across the country in Birmingham, Liverpool and London, which led

Organised through Choir with No Name as a full organisation during lockdown.
Members

The numbers have remained constant and as they found that many people who had initially been reluctant to use the Zoom sessions - because they had taken part in the outdoor and indoor sessions, coupled with the Digital Inclusion project they instigated - were now happy to take part in the online sessions. In fact, they have gained a few new members, with one of them becoming a member volunteer as a Digital Champion, getting people well and truly embedded in the community.

Something else interesting that has emerged through using Zoom, is they now leave some open time at the end of the singing sessions for members to chat to each other and connect and this has led to people setting up little support networks for each other, so this free time is now incorporated into the structure of the online sessions. When Alex checks in with members, she finds they might have gone for a walk with someone else or set up a support bubble to have some quality contact time outside of the sessions.

Based on her conversations with members and data collected throughout the past year, it appears that no members have caught Covid although it has affected some family members. Alex puts that down to how well the Homeless Support sector has dealt with the crisis, especially in Brighton, as many of their members are the hidden homeless, living in temporary accommodation.

There have been a couple of non-Covid related deaths in their choir community and it’s been difficult not being able to come together physically to comfort each other, but one of the very positive things to have come out of their very supportive approach is that many more members now feel more able to do things digitally and one or two have been able to move into better circumstances through these new skills via the Digital Inclusion project and that would never have happened if they had just been running things normally.

The Future

“Holding more than one potential future very lightly” has become their mantra for dealing with and planning for an uncertain year ahead.

They are concentrating on keeping their current offer of sessions going and keep checking in with members about what more they can do together and have also secured their indoor venue, so they are ready to go to their physical meet ups as and when restrictions allow. This last year’s experience has meant that they now have a system with all the templates regarding health and safety and Covid safety for when they can meet up again in ‘real life’. So, they are ready to go to deal with whatever variation of circumstances emerge or re-emerge this coming year.

“There is definitely a future”
They want to plan another ‘gig’ this year as gigs are very much part of what they do so want to have something specific for Brighton in some way, so talking and planning with members in the next few months. They can keep doing what they are currently doing but the road map back to any kind of normality is still very uncertain, but are staying as flexible as possible. As for Brighton Festival it seems plans are being made for 2022, not so much for this coming year.

Facilitators/Practitioners

It’s been a great opportunity to be flexible and responsive to their members needs but it has also been and is exhausting for Alex, co-ordinating all the choir sessions admin, working closely with the choir leader, plus supporting the wellbeing needs of the members.

One of the best things to have come out of it for her is being more closely connected to the other choirs in the organisation in Birmingham, Liverpool and London as they check in with each other each week and sharing best practice. It’s empowering and energising and feels much better and more supportive teamwork now, feeling not just a local project but part of a bigger organisation.

“I’m exhausted but also quietly pleased with how we’ve done.”

“It’s definitely tested the limit of my role and my abilities and skills – I’ve been at the edge of those many times, but it’s also been exciting in many ways too”.

"CWNN have somehow managed to transfer this “feel” during lockdown! Zoom rehearsals, which are a fab mix of unmuted anarchy and serious song learning, phone calls from volunteers, WhatsApp chats full of support and info about finding meals or other help. All in all CWNN Brighton has made the “real life to online” leap with energy, commitment and love!"

- Dee CWNN Brighton

Website testimonial
CASE STUDY 5 - Sing For Better Health - Udita Everett

Structure and schedule: 4 groups per week with 1 hour online sessions

Attendance: 80 to 85 per week

Length of time the group has been running: February 2007

Facilitator/leader: Udita Everett

Length of time as facilitator/leader: since the beginning

Contact: Udita - 01273 556755

Website: www.singforbetterhealth.co.uk

Sing For Better Health have shown how singing profoundly benefits health and wellbeing. There are four groups per week to improve peoples’ health and wellbeing, using a combination of specific relaxation/posture/breathing exercises, and having fun singing songs together. You don’t have to be able to sing to join!

A few months in – June 2020

Udita started the groups thirteen years ago as Breathe Easy singing groups just for people with breathing problems, but now runs up to five groups in around Brighton and Hove under the banner of Sing For Better Health, open to older people in general and those with a long-term health condition.

Normally the groups would have contributed to the Brighton Fringe Festival through a public event, inviting the audience to join in. They regularly took part in the Brighton Ageing Well Festival, and often went out into the community as well as singing in care homes. They never saw themselves as a performance group – but rather welcomed everyone people to join in and experience the joy and benefits of singing for themselves.

“Not so much has changed for our groups – the numbers haven’t reduced – if anything they are closer now as a community, as many come to all 4 of our online weekly groups.”
So, with the sudden onset of the COVID-19 virus and the lockdown the group members were at first shocked – one of them said “What is going to happen to us?” Udita quickly discovered Zoom as some colleagues from Singing for Lung Health suggested it on their Facebook page. The Singing Groups adapted very quickly and only missed one normal week, and it has been working really well ever since. Out of her five ‘Singing Groups’ one of them was small with very elderly frail members without access to the internet. That group didn’t continue, but the other four have, including a group at a Holistic doctor’s surgery, the Brighton Health and Wellbeing Centre.

The groups have kept to their original days and times, but all the new online sessions are open to anyone from all the groups. This has meant that many of the members who are unable to travel or are too disabled can now take part in all the group sessions, and many of them are joining in all four sessions per week. This has created a great sense of community, and Udita always allows about 10 minutes at the beginning for people to check in, chat and to get to know each other better. When they were meeting face to face, they had a tea break where they socialised. Udita also allows time in between songs to talk, when the members are so uplifted from singing that there is much warmth and laughter.

The numbers for all the groups has remained as full as before lockdown and Udita feels that it’s because they are such fun sessions with people so obviously enjoying themselves. Many say it is the highlight of their week as some of them have still not been out of their flats for over four months as are too vulnerable and it is the one thing in the week that brings them in contact with other people. They have people who have got cancer, people with COPD, and with strokes – there a lot of people who are extremely vulnerable, who are afraid to go out and for whom these singing groups are a real lifeline.

Udita guides the singers through posture and specific breathing exercises for 10 to 15 minutes, particularly important at this time of Covid. Sing For Better Health has a songbook of about 250 songs, the words of which the singers can read via Zoom screen share. Before lockdown the songs were recorded with their most accomplished pianist, and Udita now uses the recordings in the sessions via iTunes. She has the upgraded version of Zoom which includes a phone-in facility for members who do not have internet access to join the singing. The phone singers have copies of the songbook.

“It’s so uplifting and people are so cheerful – talking and joking with each other now – it’s such a nice community.”
Udita had never heard of Zoom before the crisis, but finds it very suitable and now does her flute tuition online too. She feels it all works well for the singing groups as they sing as one voice, just with recorded piano (with singing of one of the groups) accompaniment.

To avoid the time delay on Zoom she has to mute the members during singing and unmute them again between songs, so they can chat and feel connected to each other. At the end of a session the screenshare is stopped and the singers can all see each other and chat before they say good-bye.

Like many other practitioners at first Udita found it very tiring and demanding in new and different ways but now it is relatively easy as she doesn’t have to travel and set up physically in a venue each time and in fact now finds it energising and uplifting.

For the participants, considering this extraordinary situation and not being able to physically meet and/or touch, they get as much as they can out of this new format of singing and being together. This is especially true for those people who are not online who very quickly have become very isolated and cannot have any direct contact with others or see their grandchildren so now, being able to communicate like this and even just through a phone is a really big thing for them.

As for the future, Udita can’t see them all being able to meet up again in person for the time being as people are scared. There is likely to be a second wave of the virus and there is still so much they all don’t know, so until it is completely and utterly safe, they will continue as they are doing.

Testimonials

“The therapeutic value not only from the singing itself, the initial exercises and breathing have woken my body up when it’s felt sluggish, the singing has given my vocal cords a chance to stretch themselves and to have people zooming into my lounge giving me a chance to chat and smile and be part of such a caring friendly group has lifted my spirits higher than I thought possible at what could have been a very deep, dark, depressing time.”

“It’s so up-lifting, ......joyous and heart-warming and a real pick me up tonic, just what is needed in these *surreal* times. I can only truthfully say that I’ve no idea how I would have gone through the last 3 months without our singing sessions and I fervently hope that this will continue for the foreseeable future.”

“I have been attending Udita’s zoom singing sessions with my mum, each week, throughout the lockdown period. It is incredible that Udita has managed to offer them throughout, and they have been an invaluable and consistent oasis of community, calm and brightness for my mum and me. We have enjoyed connecting with others through singing so much. The singing and chats have made us smile and laugh - sometimes the only time in very difficult weeks.”
One year on - February 2021

Sessions
Udita’s four online weekly singing groups are running really well – she has led 200 online sessions! In the first lockdown some people were not ‘tech savvy’ enough to immediately use Zoom, but with the help of AbilityNet they were able to join in online. The groups have many newcomers via referrals from the British Lung Foundation, and mainly from the Brighton Health and Wellbeing Centre where one of the groups was held prior to lockdown. Some singers joined through recommendations from other members. One member had moved to London and then found the group again online.

Members
Sadly, they have lost one member to Covid who got infected after being admitted to hospital for something else - but the remaining eighty members are generally healthy. Some have experienced mild reactions to the vaccine such as extreme tiredness, but Udita keeps a close eye on them and always asks them to let her know how they are.

The singers talk to each other between songs and have bonded really well. They are in contact with each other even between sessions. Several disabled members are grateful to be able to continue singing, as they would be unable to attend physically. Because so many people were alone over Christmas, they did an open session on Christmas Day, which proved very popular!

“In a way we’ve all come a lot closer with these sessions – because we know each other so well now.”

Practitioners
A year on Udita is very grateful she has work and can earn money, but also that she can give back to the community. So many people from her groups say how much they get out of it -so she’s happy she can do something that can really support people through these times. She puts emphasis on the importance of breathing and posture exercises during her sessions.

Udita finds Zoom sessions much easier and less exhausting than leading the physical groups, so she’s been finding that these virtual sessions take less out of her than the physical ones.

The Future
Looking ahead Udita will continue online for now and see how the situation develops. Life is not ideal at present - many have grandchildren they cannot see and are longing to have more contact with friends and relatives. She hopes that her group members will all be well enough to continue to sing!
Reflections

Reflections
Brighton and Hove case studies

As well as the common themes of passion for their art form, perseverance through three lockdowns in an unprecedented national pandemic, deep care for their choir members and a dedicated commitment to their health and wellbeing, a few other themes and issues emerged:

- Use of churches as available, accessible, affordable and safe spaces
- Ubiquitous use of Zoom to keep the singing sessions going over the last year
- Making the most of the large local parks during the times for permitted outdoor gatherings
- Teamwork needed to keep everyone practically safe and meet the health regulations as they developed and changed
- Online support networks of supplementary musical tuition
- Use of social media to keep everyone in touch with each other
- Facing unprecedented challenges with determination but often with no outside support
- Acknowledging their own shortcomings and loss of leadership energy or focus at times
- Surprise and enjoyment of the unexpected – spontaneity in some of the Zoom sessions
- Fun and laughter throughout the adversity
- Realising they were really contributing to developing and keeping these singing communities closer together.

National Day of Reflection 23rd March 2021

Reflect – Connect – Support
Spearheaded by end of life charity Marie Curie, and set to take place on Tuesday 23rd March 2021 – the anniversary of the UK going into the first national lockdown – care organisations, charities, businesses, membership organisations, community groups and many more have committed to supporting this day to mark the huge amount of loss seen over the last year and show support for everyone who has been bereaved in the most challenging of circumstances – be that from Covid or any other cause.

It includes a minute’s silence at midday to reflect on those who have died, daffodils (fresh, drawn or crafted) placed in windows, as a symbol of hope; and online talks featuring people who are bereaved, celebrities and expert panellists sharing experiences and answering questions. As night falls, the nation will appear on their doorsteps with candles, torches or simply lights from their mobile phones - for a minute of silence in the evening, sharing a beacon of support in these incredibly tough times.

https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/get-involved/day-of-reflection
**Links**

Some of the other singing groups & choirs - Brighton & Hove

**Brighton City Singers**
http://www.brightoncitysingers.co.uk/
A non-auditioning, all-embracing choir singing Mozart to Abba, gospel to swing, musicals and new contemporary works.

**Soul of the City Choir**
https://soulofthecitychoir.com/?portfolio=join
The choir is a great opportunity to sing, socialise and meet new people [many of us head to the pub after each choir practice!]. With the sessions being up-beat, you’re bound to have a fantastic time!

**Songbirds of Brighton**
https://songbirdsbrighton.wordpress.com/
We sing a variety of heart warming, soulful, toe-tapping songs from around the world and from different traditions. From English folk to Gospel, to African and everything in between.

**Brighton goes Gospel**
https://www.bggchoir.org.uk/about-us/
Brighton Goes Gospel is about more than just singing. We’re a friendly, fun-loving, supportive community choir that aims to inspire, encourage and challenge each member to reach their goals, both personally and collectively.

Some of the other singing groups, choirs and networks - UK wide

**National Association of Choirs (NAC)**
The NAC is an organisation run by volunteer officers with the aim of promoting choral music across the UK.
https://www.nationalassociationofchoirs.org.uk/

**Rock Choir**
The UK’s original and award winning contemporary choir. It’s all about singing, fun, community, friendship and life-changing experiences! No auditions and no musical knowledge needed and they rehearse in over 250 towns across the UK.
https://rockchoir.com/

**Military Wives Choirs**
With 72 choirs and nearly 2,000 members in British military bases across the UK and overseas, the Military Wives Choirs is a charity that brings all women in the military community closer together and empowers them through singing. The emphasis is on all women: the choirs contain wives of serving personnel, but also those currently serving, veterans, mothers, sisters and daughters, and others with a military connection.
https://www.militarywiveschoirs.org/

**Natural Voice Network**
A network of people who share a common philosophy in relation to singing and groupwork. Creating an accepting community is an essential element of our approach: a community where singing together is a natural experience that is open and accessible to all. NVN believe that singing is everybody’s birthright. For thousands of years all over the world people have sung - to express joy, celebration and grief, to aid healing, to accompany work, devotion and the rituals of life - without worrying about having a “good” voice or “getting it right”. Singing has been a part of life, a way of binding communities.
https://naturalvoice.net/
Other references


https://www.musicologyresearch.co.uk/

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350156851_Singing_group_leaders%27_experiences_of_online_singing_sessions_during_the_COVID-19_pandemic_a_rapid_survey


Brighton & Hove City Council – Our Plan 2020 to 2023

Angus McLewin Associates

Angus originally trained as a photographer, subsequently as a teacher, a theatre practitioner and also as a drama therapist. For over twenty years he worked with disadvantaged and disaffected groups in project delivery, development and management, particularly in the areas of mental health, disability, community arts and criminal justice.

From 1999 -2004, he became co-director of the Unit for the Arts and Offenders (now known as the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance) and helped develop its role as the national umbrella organisation for supporting and promoting the value of the arts in relation to criminal justice issues in the UK. He co-edited the first comprehensive literature review on Arts in the Criminal Justice System, ‘Doing the Arts Justice’, funded by Arts Council England, DCMS and the DfES.

From 2004 he became an independent consultant in arts and social policy, working on a range of national strategies for arts-based interventions and programmes including arts-based approaches to gun and gang crime. He developed the idea of an accessible online database for the evidence from the Arts and Criminal Justice sector – the Evidence Library received an RSPH Arts and Health Award in 2013.

His research interests and personal life naturally led him to a focus on Arts and Health issues which has included becoming the UK consultant for the Danish Wounded Warrior Polytrauma Pilates Society (DWWPPS). Angus joined the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health as an Associate in 2016 to create and manage the Repository for Arts and Health Resources, and is a member of the Royal Society for Public Health, Special Interest Group for Arts, Health and Wellbeing.

Relevant publications


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