

## Rising Voices Wessex

Choirs for people affected by cancer

Spreading the word and sharing the magic.



## 'How to' guide

### Introduction

We want to share our experience and help others to set up similar choirs. This document is a 'how to' guide and there is a useful contact list and top tips at the end of the document to also help you, but first a bit about us.

Rising Voices Wessex is a vibrant and supportive Community Choir for local people whose lives have been affected by cancer. The first choir was formed in January 2013 based in Poole as a twelve week project, funded by the then Dorset Cancer Network. The second choir was set up in June 2015 in Bournemouth. The focus is on improving support for people affected by cancer using singing and music to help with the recovery of health and wellbeing.

A diagnosis of cancer shatters people's lives be it as a patient, carer or having lost a loved one. We aim to pick up the pieces by providing a supportive empathetic community and the sense of wellbeing and achievement that singing in a choir brings.

What our members have told us in our annual survey:

*"The friends I have met and made are now lifelong friends - you don't find that often in life. It's a special place".*

*"The unexpected close friendships and support I have gained is important to me, and the fun of singing, when it sounds great".*

*"Everybody that attends the choirs is so friendly, welcoming and understanding and obviously enjoys singing. The choir has become a massive part of my life; I love and enjoy every part of it".*

The above quotes are from choir members in a recent survey and highlight the benefits of singing with Rising Voices Wessex Choirs. Our annual survey of choir members has shown the choir to be uplifting, inspiring and great fun for members who have reported an improvement in their health and wellbeing. They have valued learning to sing together and especially the achievement they get from performances.

Furthermore members are also very positive about the empathy and support and friendship from within the choir - "Singing gives us back our sense of ourselves and of life". We want to spread the word and share the magic that we have with more people".

## **Would you like to set up your own choir?**

There are many types of choir – gospel, rock, classical, traditional, pop, jazz and many more – there's something for everyone! Singing is great fun and singing with other people even more so. Have you always wanted to sing in a choir but not found the right one for you? Why not start your own?

This is a guide on how to set up your own choir and get your colleagues, friends and community singing along with you.

## **What type of choir do you want to establish?**

Consider where you would like to set up your choir. Do you want to create a work place choir open to your colleagues, a community choir that's open to everyone or a closed membership choir for people affected by cancer or a long term health condition?

## **What are the aims of the choir?**

What type of performances do you want to do? Choirs often perform at community events, festivals, put on their own concerts or act as a support for other performers. Some even have the opportunity to do session work.

Rising Voices Wessex found performances had added to the benefits experienced by choir members, giving the choirs something to work towards, increasing the camaraderie and improving peoples' confidence.

## **Benefits of singing in a choir:**

Annual Surveys at Rising Voices Wessex show that there are many benefits to singing in a choir, it:

- Creates a sense of community.
- Promotes friendships.
- Improves well-being.
- Boosts your immunity
- Helps alleviate stress and anxiety.
- Improves your breathing ... and its fun.

## **Before you begin singing:**

Don't bite off more than you can chew, start small and focus on doing it well rather than growing too quickly and outstripping your resources and goodwill. You don't need to tackle it all yourself - find a group of like-minded individuals to help you out. A team approach will be more fun, more effective and give you more time to enjoy taking part in the choir.

Develop a three year strategy/plan of what you want to achieve and identify the resources you will need. Write a governing document/constitution (the ground rules for your organisation) – it will be time well spent. There is a check list for you in [Appendix 1](#). [Examples of all Rising Voices Wessex documents are on our website in the 'About Us' section.](#)

## **Who to involve:**

Identify who you would like to involve help support and run the choir and consider who can attend. At Rising Voices Wessex we have five Trustees who oversee the running of the choirs and define strategy. A clear purpose will help your choir flourish, so start off by defining this purpose and identify goals to aim for. This is essential if you want to later register as a charity. We also have an organisational steering group that is involved in the day to day running of the choirs. This group is mainly made up of members of the choir and it is chaired by a Trustee. You may however just want to form a single committee.

## **Consider involving:**

- Health care professionals who can bring support and expertise to the committee and provide helpful links to local cancer services.
- People who are involved in local arts provision i.e. Arts and programme manager for the council.
- Local college, university, arts centre.
- Patrons who are willing to give their support.
- Stake holders – people who are willing to support you and offer you services – i.e. printing tee shirts or leaflets.
- Local companies and community organisations who are willing to offer their support.

## **Membership of the choir:**

- People affected by cancer or other long term conditions during or after treatment
- People who have been bereaved
- Carers

Consider how you will keep members details, in a folder, on a spread sheet or in a database. You need to also take into account the need for confidentiality and data protection.

[An example of Data Protection Policy is on the Rising Voices Wessex website.](#)

Use a membership form that sets out the details you need and which also includes permission for photographs (contact us for an example). We also give all our new members a membership pack which gives them some background details of Rising Voices Wessex and the lyrics of the core songs in our repertoire.

### **Form a committee:**

Forming a committee (steering group) early helps to share the workload and provide a focus. Get together a group of people with administrative skills; they can help with the organisation of rehearsals and performances.

The committee can help to define:

- Aims and objectives.
- The choir's governing document e.g. Constitution or Strategy.
- Skills required.
- Direction and organisation.
- Resources required.
- Relevant documentation.
- Plans for the future.
- How problems will be dealt with.

An example of a Constitution and Strategy is on the Rising Voices Wessex website.

Organise a meeting or workshop to which you invite representatives of all those identified above and identify what skills you will need to take the choir forward in a sustainable way. Consider who will be your chairman, secretary and treasurer (to maintain accounts). Do you need someone to lead on fundraising, public relations or for legal advice?

### **Roles and responsibilities:**

As trustees/committee members, you must:

- Always act in the best interests of the choir – you must not let your personal interests, views or prejudices affect your conduct as a trustee or committee member.
- Act reasonably and responsibly in all matters relating to your choir – act with as much care as if you were dealing with your own affairs, taking advice if you need it.
- Only use your choir's income and property for the purposes set out in its governing documents.
- Make decisions in line with good practice and the rules set by your choir's governing document, including excluding anyone who has a conflict of interest from discussions or decision-making on the matter

Legal requirement: beyond reasonable expenses, your choir's trustees/committee members should not financially benefit without specific authorisation from either its governing document or committee. Trustees/committee members must avoid situations where their duties as a trustee conflict with their own personal interests.

**Chairperson:**

- Leading the Trustees/committee and the choir to enable it to fulfil its purpose.
- To ensure an effective relationship between the committee and the staff/volunteers and the external stakeholders/community.
- Acting as a spokesperson and figurehead as appropriate.
- To ensure overall governance of the choir especially as a registered charity.

**Treasurer:**

- Oversee the financial affairs of the choir and ensure they are legal, constitutional and within accepted accounting practice.
- Ensure proper records are kept and that effective financial procedures are in place.
- Monitor and report on the financial health of the organisation.
- Oversee the production of necessary financial reports/returns, accounts and audits.

**Regular meetings:**

Set up regular meetings with a simple agenda to keep people engaged and share the workload. This does not need to be circulated formally when you first start, it could be written on flip chart or white board, or projected. You may want to formalise these later when you want a 'paper trail'. Consider terms of reference for the committee (ground rules). Make notes/minutes that can be referred back to later if required.

An example of Terms of Reference is on the [Rising Voices Wessex website](#).

**Research:**

Do some homework – check out if there are any other choirs in the area and get in touch with them to talk about your plans. They could be helpful to you and may be able to offer to help you and provide you with links. They may also know of someone who could help you engage a musical director and accompanist. There are also several publications relating to the benefits of music and singing for health, check them out so that you know your stuff.

**Plan timelines:**

It is worth spending a bit of time planning a time line. It take at least six months to set up everything so don't rush into it. Plan out what you will do when and work towards you launch date.

## **What's in a name?**

At one of your meetings/workshops, brainstorm to identify a name, Google it to make sure it is not already in use and check on the Charity Commission website – you may need to amend or rethink.

Make sure you are unique – this is important when you come to develop a website, Facebook page or open a bank account.

The name needs to reflect what you do and lend itself easily to a logo you can use for publicity. Helpful to also have one key colour that you use as a brand colour for everything you do – for example Rising Voices Wessex use royal blue.

Things like your name and logo, and generally how you promote yourselves, can influence the type of people you attract or deter from joining your choir.

## **Who will lead the choir?**

The choir leader - musical director will train and lead the group so that the choir can give its best when performing. Speak to local arts organisations, music departments in schools, colleges or a local university - they may have teachers or music students looking for experience. Advertise in local press or on arts websites.

Key to the success of the choir is a good musical director. The Rising Voices Wessex musical director is freelance and we engage her services. To select the musical director at Rising Voices Wessex we auditioned and asked applicants to teach the assembled members a new song. The members had a tick sheet to rate the performance and this was taken into consideration at the formal interview. Although self-employed we have a job description and terms of agreement for the musical director.

Contact us if you would like an example.

## **What equipment will you need?**

At initial set up you need a minimum of equipment and your musical director may provide this – something to play music on, computer and printer for lyrics and a music stand.

As the choir gets bigger and you do more events you may want to have better equipment.

For example we have:

- A boom box and PA system for backing tracks at rehearsals and events.
- Music stand.
- Portable staging and a podium for the musical director for performances and events.
- Home computers and printers and have a laptop we can use for events.

- Mobile phone.
- Pull up and pull out banners and a sandwich board for events.

### **Spread the word:**

Get the word out there! Use word of mouth, local media, the internet and social media, create posters and flyers.

Plan your media campaign – there is a lot of ‘noise’ out there, it can be difficult to be heard. How do you want to be heard by the media and how do you want to communicate with your members and supporters.

You need to gain your readers trust, engage them emotionally and give them reasons to believe in you. The ‘human interest’ is a strong persuasive factor, so with your members permission use quotes from them and case studies. Avoid using jargon that the general public will not understand, for example it is better to say ‘lost a loved one’ than bereaved.

Everyone loves a good story so try to weave in all three elements – readers trust, use a statement from a professional or research, include an emotional story or quote and give the reader a reason to believe that you can achieve success. Think about a tag line or mission statement and make your heading impactful but don’t sensationalise. Your style should be concise, punchy and easy to understand with short paragraphs.

Press releases are still the most popular format for informing the media of your activities, but they need to be written in a way that the journalist can access easily. Use only one page for the press release and one for background information/editors notes. Make sure you include your contact details.

Social media includes Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. These are just other communication channels – another way of reaching your audience, sending messages, sharing photos and they are easy and cost effective. You may need a social media savvy member to help you set them up, but they are simple to manage.

Build up connections online to ‘friends’ or ‘followers’ people who are interested in what you do and can support you and help spread the word.

Websites are useful for not only giving information but also for storing information and those all-important photos – every picture tells a story. We have a separate section on our website for members which is password protected; here they can find lyrics and information about performances. Simple websites can be set up and managed cheaply although you may need the help of a IT literate member for this.

Posters and leaflets are really helpful especially as your local hospitals and GP’s surgeries will take them. Posters for hospitals will need to be laminated. Also consider taking them to

local libraries, supermarkets and chemists. Ask members to be responsible for checking them and topping them up.

An example of a Marketing and Communications policy is on the Rising Voices Wessex website.

### **Involving health care professionals:**

Try to meet with the health care professionals to talk about your plans for the choir and how they can support you. When you speak to them find out exactly what they can and can't do for the group.

Show the health care professional that your group is run responsibly, so that they feel happy to be associated with you. Show them your aims and objectives and documents such as strategy, policies and guidelines.

Send them any required information, links to website, leaflets or posters immediately after the meeting and invite them to support your events and performances. They may not come as they are busy people but at least you have kept them up to date with your activities and that can help to spread the word.

### **Where and when:**

Finding the right venue for your choir to rehearse in is important and can make a big difference to the success of the choir. If you are a community choir you may want to look at local churches and community halls. Decide on a time and place to rehearse suitable for your group.

A suitable venue would include:

- Good access with disabled facilities.
- Plenty of space to move about.
- Good acoustics.
- Toilets with disabled access.
- Kitchen space for that all important tea break.
- Storage space.
- Warm in winter, cool in summer.
- Car parking.
- Accessible on public transport.
- Access to audio/visual equipment.

Churches, church halls and schools make good venues at a reasonable cost.



## **Finances - Money Matters:**

Whatever the size of your choir you will need to think about the finances. You need to think about how much it will cost and how much money the group will need and how you are going to raise that funding.

An example of the cost of running Rising Voices Wessex is included in our annual reports, available on our website.

## **Make a plan:**

To work out the choirs basic costs ask these questions, how much will:

- The venue costs be?
- A choir director and accompanist cost?
- Promotional materials cost?
- Refreshments cost?
- Lyric and music cost?
- Printing cost?
- Insurance costs? (The National Council for Voluntary Organisations can direct you to free advice).
- Guest musicians cost?
- Events cost?
- Equipment cost?

## **Open a bank account:**

If you are applying for start-up grants or funding you will be required to have a separate account in the choir's name.

Having a separate bank account in the choir's name will make managing the finances and accounting much easier.

The main high street banks will offer special accounts for clubs and societies, so ask their advice and they will guide you through.

Whilst singing in a choir as a member is an inexpensive hobby, running a choir requires some investment, therefore you will need to work out how to raise the extra funds required to run effectively and be sustainable.

## **Fundraising:**

You may want to consider fundraising for those extras by running a raffle, requesting donations for rehearsals and events, charging for tickets, jumble sales, sponsored events, coffee mornings and cake sales. On the whole we have found the simple approach to be more effective.

The banks and supermarket 'green disc' schemes are also a good way to raise funds locally. Getting the support of the local supermarkets is helpful. With the supermarkets support consider 'flash mobs', for example in Waitrose, Boots or Tesco. They have all supported Rising Voices Wessex.

The majority of our funding comes from applying for grants from various sources. Rising Voices Wessex initial set up grants came from Macmillan Cancer Support and more recently a Lottery Grant. The most important thing to remember when applying for grants is to follow the basic principles for promoting your choir- gain people's trust, engage them emotionally and give them reasons to believe in you. Think about that tag line and keep your bid short, snappy and in plain English. Judges will have a lot to read so make it easy for them and if you can include a photograph or eye catching logo and don't forget to add your website and social media links.

For choir rehearsals we ask for a donation of £4 per person, this includes tea and biscuits and helps to cover some of our running costs.

## **Good Governance:**

When setting up and running your choir keep in mind the good governance guidelines in [Appendix 2](#): Consider what you need to establish first to give your choir good foundations. Remember the more professional you appear the greater the sense of purpose for your group. Formalising your aims and objectives at the beginning will help you plan realistically what you can achieve both in the short and long term.

## **Launching your choir:**

You will need to plan the launch of your choir well in advance to ensure that you have plenty of people attending and you attract people how can support and influence the development of the choir as well as members of the choir.

Brainstorm and identify all the people you would like to come, local Mayor, Hospital Chief Executives, local hospices, Consultants, Lead Nurses, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Librarians, people from the local arts and sports centres, local firms who may offer their support, local media, Macmillan Development Manager for your area, TV and radio. Write to them individually inviting them to your event, don't forget to gain your readers trust, engage them emotionally and give them reasons to believe in you. The 'human interest' is a strong

persuasive factor. Keep a list of who you have invited, so that you can keep them engaged and updated with your progress. Create posters and leaflets inviting people to attend the launch, promote on local radio, and advertise in the newspaper to spread the word and share the magic.

Work with your musical director to choose what you sing – simple easy songs familiar to all can be fun and draw everyone in to have a go. You want everyone to leave singing.

Have leaflets or cards ready to give people information about the choir and with details of the rehearsals and who to contact. Make a list of those who are interested in becoming members and get back to them with the rehearsal details. Tell them that you are looking forward to seeing you next week/month.

### **Membership:**

Have members of your choir/committee who are your 'meet and greet team' so that as soon as new people arrive at a choir rehearsal they are greeted by a member of the team and introduced to the musical director. Give them a membership form and a welcome pack and introduce them to other choir members who have a similar singing voice. If they are not sure let them swap about until they find the right voice range for them.

Once they have returned the membership form, file it and enter the details on your data base or spread sheet so that you can contact them again.

Consider the age range your choir is open to. If children are attending ensure that the appropriate safeguarding is in place. For Rising Voices Wessex we say children under the age of 18 must attend with a parent or grandparent.

### **You are now ready to begin singing.**

#### **Rehearsals:**

You've got your venue, a regular time, a choir leader and recruited members - now it's time for the rehearsals.

Effective planning will help you get the most from your rehearsals.

These are our top tips:

- Outline what songs and sections you need to cover; this will help the group focus on what needs to be achieved.
- Always use a warm up and consider different ways of learning – you could include physical movement and listening exercises.
- Always start and finish with songs that the choir know; this will help keep up enthusiasm and confidence.

- Build in some contingency time, so if there's an area that needs additional rehearsal it isn't rushed.
- Keep a note of arrangements, material worked on and areas for improvement to help plan future sessions. You can also use recordings to help choir members practise between rehearsals or if they have missed a session.
- There are plenty of places to find sheet music such as libraries, online and music shops. You need to be aware that music is subject to copyright law, which applies to all choirs. For information on copyright visit The UK Copyright Service: <http://www.copyrightservice.co.uk/>.

Rising Voices Wessex have two choirs one in Bournemouth and one in Poole. Both choirs meet on a weekly basis for two hours. We meet in the evenings and after a bit of chat, 'warm up' and then sing until the important 20 minute tea break this allows people to have some social time before we sing again.

### **Who does what?**

Think about who does what at those first few rehearsals, you may need to consider who does:

- unlocking and putting lights and heating on,
- putting up posters, banners and signs so people can find their way,
- meeting and greeting new members,
- refreshments, making teas and washing up,
- clearing up, leaving the place as you found it and locking up.

### **Events:**

It is fun to have a goal to work towards and events big or small provide this. Don't expect everyone to take part, however for those that do this can be a great achievement and a real boost to their confidence.

Start small, nursing homes, local fetes, schools, churches or hospital events. Once you get better you will get requests to perform at events, think about how you want to handle these. Have a standard request form – there is an example on our website.

If you are invited to a big event think about the experience for the choir and importantly the extra costs this may involve, ask about claiming expenses or collecting at the event.

### **What to wear?**

Members of Rising Voices Wessex wanted a 'uniform'. We started with our logo embroidered onto white polo shirts then when we had decided on our royal blue 'brand colour' we progressed to having other branded items, fleeces, scarves, ties and bags. Members buy these from us at below cost as we have a funding grant or sponsorship to

cover the about half of the costs. This uniform is worn for most events in the daytime and casual evening events.

For formal events in the evening we wear black evening wear and the gents wear black shirts and trousers.

### **What will you need for events?**

Have a sign-up sheet so that you know how many members to expect at an event and can keep track of members to check how they all are.

Remember when you are planning events to think about the equipment you will need.

For the musical director, something to play the tracks on, keyboard or piano, extension cable, memory stick, manuscripts, music stand, map light, podium. Your musical director should take responsibility for what is needed.

For the choir – will they have seats or be standing, will they need staging to be able to see properly. Will they need their lyrics, if so what colour folders will you use?

For promoting the choir, do you need banners, sandwich board, balloons, collection buckets, merchandise, leaflets and posters?

Carry out a risk assessment at the venue and ensure that all equipment has trailing wires secured to mitigate against trips and falls.

### **Volunteers:**

The role of volunteers will be crucial to running a successful choir; they can help in many ways; running of rehearsals, administration, fundraising, promotion, teas and coffees, setting up for events, backstage and front of house.

You can get volunteers from a number of different sources, such as:

- choir members,
- word of mouth,
- personal recommendation,
- advertising in national or local press.

Volunteers aren't paid for their time but they should be paid for any out-of-pocket expenses. These expenses could include:

- travel,
- postage and telephone costs if working from home,
- essential equipment, such as computer ink and paper.

Volunteers should provide receipts for all expenses they incur, to ensure you have a paper trail for the treasurer/accountant/audit to follow.

If a volunteer receives any type of reward or payment other than expenses, this may be seen as a salary and they could be classed as an employee or worker. This then gives them some employment rights. Make sure your insurance covers your volunteers. Even if you don't employ staff, you may still decide to take out employers' liability cover for volunteers.

### **Confidentiality:**

Ensure that all members are aware that confidentiality is important to members both during and after choir rehearsals or events. Choir members may discuss personal details relating to their health or personal life and these should not be divulged to other members unless by prior consent.

Ensure that member's details are not left lying around and are stored securely and appropriately.

Refrain from making information public that could identify a member without prior consent, this includes photographs.

### **Ending your choir:**

There are many reasons why you may decide to end your choir. It is important that you plan to end on a positive note and take care of the practicalities such as:

- Closing the group's bank account.
- Donating any remaining funds to a similar group or charity.
- Informing relevant organisations.
- Contacting groups and organisations that hold your contact details.
- Closing website and social media presence.
- Ensure all members' details are deleted from the data base and paper copies are shredded.

## Useful Contacts:

Rising Voices Wessex – email [admin@risingvoices.org.uk](mailto:admin@risingvoices.org.uk) – website <http://www.risingvoices.org.uk> Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/RisingVoicesChoir/>

Mobile Phone – 07500 676083

Macmillan Cancer Support – <http://www.macmillan.org.uk>

Charity Commission – <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk>

National Council for Voluntary Organisations – <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk>

National Association Voluntary and Community Action – <http://www.navca.org.uk>

Cancer Equality – <http://www.cancerequality.org.uk>

Incorporated Society of Musicians – <http://www.ism.org/>

Arts and Health South West – <https://www.ahsw.org.uk/>

The National Lottery – <http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk>

The UK Copyright Service – <http://www.copyrightservice.co.uk/>

Health and Safety Executive – <https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/>

Community-Based Solutions – <https://www.dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk>

## Top Tips for setting up a choir

## Appendix 1

### for people affected by cancer or other long term conditions.

Here is a handy reminder of the things we have covered. To make sure you are on top of everything you can check and tick them off.

Tick	Top Tips
	Consider what you want your choir to offer and identify your aims and objectives.
	Research to see if there are other choirs in the area and speak to them.
	Consider how you make your choir open and accessible to people affected by cancer or other long term conditions in your community.
	Assess what different skills you need to run the choir.
	Publicise you choir's first meeting in places where interested people may be and invite those who may share your interest or be able to help.
	Work out the basic costs of running your choir and identify sources of funding or fundraising.
	Develop a publicity plan or marketing and communications policy to make sure your members and audiences know about what you are doing.
	Develop links with health care professionals who can pass on your choir's details to people affected by cancer or other long term conditions.
	Find a venue for choir rehearsals that is accessible, comfortable and welcoming.
	Make sure your members understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality.
	Develop a timeline and strategy or action plan for the next three years so that people can see what you are trying to achieve and this helps keep you on track.



## Top Tips for the governance of your choir long term

## Appendix 2

Here is a handy reminder of the good practice we have covered. To make sure you are on top of everything you can check and tick them off.

Tick	Top Tips
	Aims and objectives – Constitution, Strategy, Policies and guidelines.
	Consider registering as a charity <a href="https://www.charity-commission.gov.uk">https:// www.charity-commission.gov.uk</a>
	Have a management structure to share the workload and manage the choir in a clear and accountable manner.
	Ensure anyone you engage as choir/musical director or accompanist are suitable and have the appropriate qualifications.
	Run activities according to your member's needs. Welcome everyone equally and take steps to be open and accessible.
	Have appropriate public liability insurance.
	Organise finances with a separate bank account for the choir. Have financial records that are checked or audited annually.
	Public relations - promote your choir and events to the media on your website and social media. Providing accurate, practical information.
	Maintain a member's Database that is compliant with Data Protection regulations.
	Carry out Risk Assessments – for rehearsals and all events involving members of the public see <a href="https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/">https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/</a>
	Evaluate the service you are providing to be able to show the benefits of singing in a choir for people affected by cancer and other long term conditions.
	Work with the co-operation of local health care professionals and be able to support each other through times of loss and allow people time to grieve.