



Annual Report of the Trustee Executive Committee of Rising Voices Wessex – May 2021

The Executive Committee of Rising Voices Wessex Community Choirs presents its sixth annual report, covering the period from May 2020 to April 2021 and the accounting year ending March 2021.

The past year for *Rising Voices Wessex* has been dominated by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the steps taken to adapt and keep the choirs and the long-term project sustainable. Happily these efforts have so far proved successful.

Supported by the Trustees and Steering Group the changes adopted at the close of the previous year continued with the Musical Director and her Associate using Zoom technology to keep members involved in singing virtually. Each week some 40- 50 members engaged with the Zoom sessions on either of the rehearsal evenings – maintaining both musical and social contact.

During the year the charity lost the support of one of its Trustees, Roger Preston, who sadly passed away. Sara Schwetze- Kemp, a local businesswoman and professional musician, was co-opted as a Trustee to ensure an appropriate range of professional skills and backgrounds is maintained on the Trustee board. As planned the Choir Director Ali Sharpe, retired at the end of March 2021.

Through online processes of advertising, interviewing and auditioning ***Rising Voices Wessex*** was delighted to appoint Wendy Morrow as Choir Director. She will be supported by Mark Anstead who is continuing his association with the choirs as Musical Co-director.

Rising Voices Wessex choirs have been established to support people whose lives have been affected by cancer - patients, those bereaved through cancer or carers. Music also has power to communicate with individuals at times of difficulty – music making has benefits for many chronic medical conditions. Through singing, the choirs aid recovery of confidence and social interaction as well as promoting the concept of living well with and after cancer. Most members of ***Rising Voices Wessex*** choirs come from the communities in the Bournemouth-Christchurch-Poole (BCP) conurbation.

Rising Voices Wessex was launched on the 8th January 2013 and became a registered charity in January 2016. ***Rising Voices Wessex*** is a member of Arts and Health South West, The National Council for Voluntary Organisations and Living Well Active.

Public performances are a key objective and regular feature for **Rising Voices Wessex** choir members (on Zoom during the pandemic). They are important in the following respects:

- they demonstrate the benefits of singing to confidence and wellbeing,
- they help raise funds that enable the choirs to be sustainable,
- they encourage ongoing member recruitment.

Some key public performances and highlights since the choirs' formation include:

- Visiting Cherbourg, to feature at a French cancer awareness event early in 2013
- Being an invited supporting choir for Russell Watson at the Lighthouse in Poole in June 2015,
- Being an invited supporting choir for Blake at the Regent Centre in Christchurch in 2016
- Being an invited supporting choir for the Parry 100 Festival 'Glad Day' with Mike Westbrook at St Peters Church, Bournemouth in 2018.
- **Rising Voices Wessex** has been called upon to perform at other charity events in the conurbation, especially those associated with cancer further promoting singing for health and wellbeing as a means of living well with or after cancer.
- Its last in-person public appearance was at a "Sing from The Heart" concert in Wimborne in February 2020 prior to the Covid - 19 pandemic restrictions that subsequently suspended choir activities nationally.

Performances by **Rising Voices Wessex** predominantly take place in the locality and demonstrate the power of singing to build confidence and wellbeing as well as offering the educational message locally of "living well with cancer".

Rising Voices Wessex has continued its aim of presenting its work publicly since the onset of pandemic restrictions through a combination of online virtual choir productions and concerts:

Online Christmas concert - available on YouTube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ofUddHZqiM&t=4s>

Online Spring Concert excerpts available on Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/RisingVoicesChoir>.

Rising Voices Wessex continues to appreciate the support of St John's Church, Parkstone, Poole and The New Church, Tuckton, Bournemouth.

In "normal" times **Rising Voices Wessex** meets for rehearsals at these locations:

- Monday evenings - The New Church, Tuckton, Bournemouth
- Tuesday evenings - St Johns Church, Ashley Road, Parkstone.

Rising Voices Wessex looks forward to resuming these choirs in autumn 2021 when it is to be hoped relaxed Covid-19 restrictions will permit choir singing and associated social interaction – so fundamental to the **Rising Voices Wessex**.

Social interaction over tea, coffee or a soft drink creates a supportive environment that strengthens with the support provided through the choirs. This however has not been possible through the pandemic, however the choirs have adapted by having online social events, using social media, WhatsApp and having Phone Friends as well as Zoom evenings of social interaction and quiz nights.

During the pandemic restrictions **Rising Voices Wessex** has experienced drop in income of around 67% through loss of regular weekly donations that contribute to running costs – see financial report below. The suggested members' donation of £4.00 goes towards running costs and would normally be collected at live rehearsals and some members have continued to support the choirs via Just Giving.

Notwithstanding the effects of the pandemic **Rising Voices Wessex** has recruited new members during the past year – word of mouth, informal social networking websites and social media presence have all contributed to maintaining a profile for the choirs during the difficulties of the past year and helped recruitment of new members.

How Rising Voices Wessex makes a difference: the overall project strategy continually aims to try and capture the benefits of being part of the choir - available resources are currently not sufficient to fund formal academic evaluation of benefits; instead simple questionnaire and feedback surveys are undertaken annually via Survey Monkey. These continue to indicate that members derive significant benefit from **Rising Voices Wessex**. Full results from the most recent survey can be found on the website <https://www.risingvoices.org.uk/about-us/governance-documents/survey-results-2020>.

There are also some key findings from the survey of the virtual choir. It is also clear from the questionnaires that the personality and approach of the Musical Directors is very important to the success of the choirs.

Rising Voices Wessex has also contributed in the past to questionnaire research run by Tenovus Cancer Care into the benefits of music and singing for people affected by cancer.

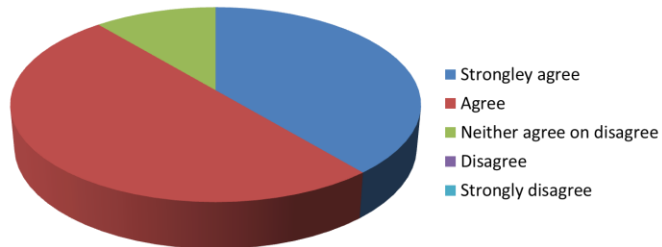
Quotes and observations from choir members taken from the 2020 (September) survey of the Virtual Choir:

- *“Yes, thank you to all those involved in the thankless task of trying to do things online, with all the problems that involves.”*
- *“Keep up the good work and thank you all so much it means a lot.”*
- *“Thankyou team RVW for fun evenings that have been even more important during Winter.”*
- *“I think EVERYONE involved in the organisation is AMAZING.”*
- *“A life saver in these troubled times! Thank you for all your hard work.”*
- *“Without dedication and enthusiasm RVW would have come to a temporary grinding halt!”*
- *“I am so pleased I found the choir, it’s been a huge help to me throughout my cancer treatment and beyond, I will be forever grateful for the friendships I’ve made and the support I’ve received from the other members. It’s a brilliant inspiring group I always feel happy after I’ve been to choir. Thank you, Rising Voices”*

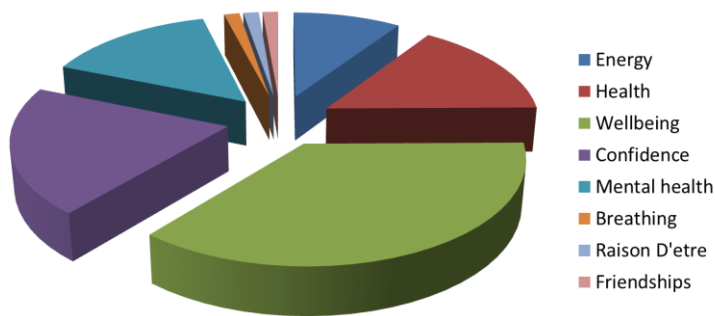
2020 (January) Annual Survey Results include:

I get support from other choir members

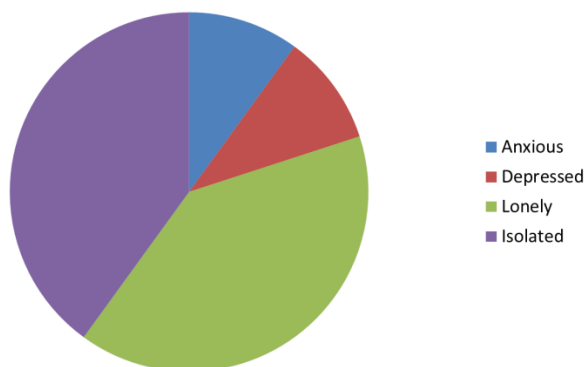
Support



I feel that attending choir has improved my:



I no longer feel:



Rising Voices Wessex, as a registered charity, is managed at a strategic level by a Board of Trustees drawn principally from the community. The Board encompasses a range of professional backgrounds - clinical, musical and financial – appropriate to the needs of the charity. The Chairman other Trustees are appointed (and may be re- appointed) at the Annual General Meeting.

The skill mix of Trustees is subject to review to enable succession planning and optimum balance of expertise. There is currently one unfilled Trustee vacancy and a process of advertisement to find a suitable candidate with experience and skill in appropriate areas has been initiated.

Executive Committee members (Trustees) are:

- Dr Alastair Smith (Chairman), Retired NHS Consultant, former Clinical Lead NCSI.
- Mrs Noëline Young (Vice chair), Retired Clinical Nurse Specialist/ former NCSI Project Manager.
- Mr Rob Taylor (Treasurer), Finance Director, Trenitalia c2c.
- Mrs Jean Querol, Retired therapy radiographer and practice manager.
- Dr Susi Caesar, GP – retiring from the Trustee board May 2021
- Sarah Culley, Choir Member.
- Ms Sara Schwetze-Kemp, Businesswoman & Musician – Co-opted December 2020.
- Mr Roger Preston, BSO Cellist (until his sad death in November 2020).

Rising Voices Wessex is grateful for work of the Trustees.

Operational management and administration of the choirs is undertaken by a Steering Group that consists of the Musical Director, Co-Director, two of the current Trustees with volunteer choir members, capitalizing on the range of skills that members can offer. The Steering Group meets monthly and reports to the board of Trustees.

In public performance **Rising Voices Wessex** aims to present a professional image that highlights its identity. For formal evening choir performances members wear black clothing with royal blue accessories and for informal events members wear **Rising Voices Wessex** labelled polo shirts and fleeces. Members pay a small donation for **Rising Voices Wessex** for these garments; members on joining also receive a folder for music and song lyrics in the choirs' repertoire.

Fundraising and grant applications:

Following initial funding in 2012 by the Dorset Cancer Network **Rising Voices Wessex** has sought and received ongoing financial support from a number of sources, these include:

- Macmillan Cancer Support.
- The Big Lottery.
- The People's Lottery Fund.
- Going for Bust.
- Greggs Foundation.
- Bournemouth Football Club – 'The Cherries'.
- Arts and Health South West.
- Pegasus Life.
- Westbourne Rotary Club.
- Waitrose.

The successful **National Lottery Community Fund - Reaching Communities** Application from May 2020 has provided invaluable support during the pandemic restrictions. The award is an ongoing contribution towards running costs over a 5 year period – in this past year it has ensured the survival of Rising Voices Wessex during the pandemic restrictions and will greatly help to re-establish in-person rehearsals and a return of associated social activities as and when pandemic restrictions permit.

Presently overall donated income is around 30% of normal levels mainly due to loss of the regular weekly member contributions at rehearsal sessions. Recovery of retrospective gift aid and funeral donations has offset some this reduction – along with the fact that there have been no venue hire costs during the year.

Rising Voices Wessex Co Musical Director Mark Anstead Report:

The past year for **Rising Voices Wessex** has been a challenging one for all involved due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The choir has not sung at a live event or concert since February 2020 and the final time everyone was in the same room together was in March 2020 – over a year ago. Since March 2020 the choirs have ‘met up’ virtually on the Zoom platform. This has proved to be very important for many people’s mental well-being as well as for the continuity and sustainability of the choirs.

The sessions have been led by Ali Sharpe and myself with technical expertise from Lucia Sanchis, utilising her computing expertise. Combined with my music technology knowledge it has been possible to optimise equipment use to obtain the best quality sound by using mixing desks and audio interfaces to connect microphones, keyboards and backing tracks all to create adequate musical support for the sessions on Zoom.

During the year Rising Voices Wessex produced two virtual concerts; these included five choir songs alongside performances from around a dozen guest artists. Choir members acquired new skills whilst making their individual audio/video recordings for these productions. *Rising Voices Wessex* is extremely appreciative of the efforts of Paul Querol, Lucia Sanchis and Hannah Young using their computing and sound engineering skills to produce the final virtual choir videos that are now accessible on the website. We thank them for the many hours of work involved in creating these productions.

As **Rising Voices Wessex** Co-Director, I would like personally like to thank each and every choir member, steering group member and Trustee for their support over the past challenging year. I would especially wish to give personal thanks to Musical Director, Ali Sharpe, for her efforts working with me to overcome the challenges presented by leading choir sessions on Zoom – as well as for her fine work with the choirs during the past six years.

In April 2021 Rising Voices Wessex welcomed its new Musical Director, Wendy Morrow. I look forward to working alongside her as her co-director. Above all, like everybody else connected with the choirs, I look forward to the time where we are meeting together in person as choirs, singing, having fun and performing together.

Mark Anstead Rising Voices Wessex Co-Director 24.4.21

Financial Review

Maintaining the financial stability of the charity has been paramount during the pandemic and we are pleased to report that, whilst the cost base has remained broadly constant, income has increased, leading to an improvement in available cash. In 2021-22 we expect costs to increase modestly (mostly premises expenses as choirs return) but income to increase also.

Rising Voices' policy is to maintain cash reserves of at least 6 month's normal trading.

At 31 Mar 2021 we have approximately 9 months of reserves at current expenditure rates, assuming no further income. We expect the reserves to increase to approximately 12 months by 31 Mar 2022.

Income:

Income of £29,602 (2019-20: £16,121) was made up:

- £5,030 (2019-20: £10,019) of contributions from the members of the choir, including Just Giving contributions.
- £19,000 (2019-20: £2,496) from the National Lottery Community Fund, which has allowed us to continue online despite a reduction in receipts from choirs. In 21-22 we expect to receive £16,500 from this fund.
- £3,158 (2019-20: £nil) for historic gift aid claims.
- £2,414 (2019-20: £3,606) from donations and other activities.

Expenditure:

Expenditure of £23,745 (2019-20: £23,292) was made up:

- £15,674 (2019-20: £13,523) of professional fees.
- £7,194 (2019-20: £3,754) of admin expenses, including IT costs and the organisational strength review
- £877 (2019-20: £4,521) for merchandise, storage and function expenses. Only the storage costs have remained at pre-lockdown levels
- £2,414 (2019-20: £3,606) from donations and other activities.
- £0 (2019-20: £1,494) for venues and printing. We expect this cost to increase in 21-22 as lockdown eases.

The net trading position was a surplus of £5,857 this, however, reflects the benefit of support from the Lottery Fund without which the financial position would be somewhat more precarious.

Cash:

The cash balance remains healthy, with £17,744 in the bank at 31 March 2021 (Mar 2020: £11,888). There are no ring-fenced income streams or expenditure commitments.

Thanks and acknowledgments:

Thanks are due to all those who continue to support the choirs – many have done so since its foundation; the additional commitment of members 'old and new' is so important to the ongoing existence of both choirs. Help with fundraising, support at venues, events, making cakes are examples of the terrific support given by members.

Thanks also for the administration for the day to day running of the choirs by the Steering Group.

The Trustees thank Musical Director Ali Sharpe, for her committed and enthusiastic choir direction.

The Trustees also thank Mark Anstead for his musical and technical support.

Thanks must also be recorded for the ongoing technical support of Lucia Sanchis in the organisation and administration of the Zoom rehearsals, social events on Zoom, editing and refining the online virtual choir recordings and at Steering Group meetings.

The Trustees also wish to place on record their thanks to David Marshall for his volunteer musical support and expertise over many years in deputising for the Musical Director when needed and also for leading some of the choirs' performances.