



Annual Report of the Trustee Executive Committee of Rising Voices Wessex – 2022-23

The Executive Committee of Rising Voices Wessex Community Choirs presents its annual report, covering the period from May 2022 to May 2023 and the accounting year ending March 2023.

Music communicates with individuals at times of difficulty – music making has benefits for many chronic medical conditions thus **Rising Voices Wessex** choirs, based in the Bournemouth-Christchurch-Poole (BCP) conurbation, were established to support people in the community whose lives have been affected by cancer – whether as patients, those bereaved through cancer or carers. Singing aids recovery of confidence, mental health and social interaction and promotes the concept of living well “after cancer”.

Rising Voices Wessex was launched on the 8th January 2013 and became a registered charity in January 2016 Registration No. 1165053. It celebrated its 10th Anniversary in January 2023 with a small reception and concert at the Lighthouse, Poole on 28th January.

Rising Voices Wessex is a member of Arts and Health South West, The National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Community Action Network.

Over the course of the year 2022-23 **Rising Voices Wessex** has focused its “journey” on recovery following the effects of the Covid pandemic and the associated restrictions. The pandemic posed major challenges to the choirs both musically and financially. As regards finance, income over the past 2-3 years has fallen by 67% compared to pre-pandemic levels.

The lack of in-person rehearsals and a marked fall in choir numbers (primarily reflecting Covid risk factors amongst the choirs’ membership) coupled with the absence of public performances have been the main contributory factors for the loss of income. Resources from the Lottery Grant that commenced in 2019 have, in effect, proved fundamental to the Choirs’ survival.

During the period of pandemic restriction, the Trustee Board prioritised maintenance of the choirs’ activity through Zoom and virtual events in order to maintain an empathetic and supportive network provided during a very challenging time of increased anxiety and social isolation for many. Professional music direction was retained, which incurred significant expenditure. However **Rising Voices Wessex** has benefitted from this approach through its continued existence and being able to resume its normal activity reasonable quickly.

During the first few months of the year choir numbers were low but attendance has now improved, however this has not returned to pre-pandemic numbers; it is currently running around 50% of pre-pandemic levels. A positive sign is that there has been an encouraging number of new members joining **Rising Voices Wessex** since the start of 2023.

Word of mouth, posters and leaflets, media support, informal social networking, the website and social media presence all contribute to maintaining a profile for the choirs to encourage recruitment of new members.

With the reduction in numbers, however, it proved necessary to make some cuts to the level of musical direction during the year. Since October 2023, normal rehearsals have been led by a single Choir Director, i.e. with no accompanist. The arrangement is under regular review. It certainly is the intention to have both directors regularly present at normal rehearsals – one conducting and the other accompanying or managing backing tracks etc. but this objective currently remains under review.

Prior to pandemic restrictions **Rising Voices Wessex** performed regularly at various 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. Importantly they also demonstrate the power of singing to build improve mental health.

Public performances are a key objective and are important in the following respects:

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

Resumption of such events is a priority following reduction in Covid risk and there has been encouragement in the past year that these opportunities are re-emerging post-pandemic.

It is hoped that the relaxed Covid-19 restrictions will permit choir singing and associated social interaction to continue as it is fundamental to the Rising Voices Wessex.

Concerts put on by **Rising Voices Wessex** during the year 2022-23:

- Christmas concert 10th Dec 2022 Immanuel Church
- 10th anniversary Celebration at the Lighthouse 28th January 2023
- Celtic Night Concert - March 25th 2023

Apollo 5 - A "Come and Sing" afternoon followed by a concert with the internationally distinguished a cappella singing group Apollo 5 was set up using the theatre facilities at Canford School on the 24th September 2022. Musically the event was highly successful, giving the choirs a chance to work with a top professional singing group and to try a new repertoire. The audience numbers for the concert, however, proved disappointing resulting in a financial loss – fortunately **Rising Voices Wessex** received a generous subsequent donation to cover that deficit.

Rising Voices Wessex also featured at "Peter's Spectacular Show" on April 29th 2023 at Poole Lighthouse. Peter, a longstanding member, established a concert to celebrate his special birthday and engaged **Rising Voices Wessex** to sing along with other choirs with whom he had also been associated. The event was boosted with the support from local musicians. It proved highly successful as a concert and greatly enhanced the morale of those taking part as well as the reputation of **Rising Voices Wessex**.

Other **Rising Voices Wessex** engagements during 2022-23:

- 17th April 2022 - Bon Marche, Poole High Street.
- 30th April and 1st May 2022 - Chrissy Hedge Workshops Wimborne.
- 21st May 2022 - Eco Fair, Ringwood.
- 24th May AGM - St Johns Church, Parkstone.
- 28th May 2022 - "Sing from The Heart" Concert, Wimborne

- 13th August 2022 - Marie Curie, Red House Museum Christchurch
- 24th Sept 2022 - Apollo 5 workshop and performance
- 3rd December - Poole Shopping Precinct
- 6th December 2022 - Abbeyfield afternoon Concert– Wimborne Minster
- 17th December - Southbourne Green
- 8th January 2023 - Christmas Party Celebrating 10th Birthday of RVW
- 11th April 2023 - St Aldhelm's Church, Branksome, lunchtime recital
- 29th April 2023 - Peter's Spectacular Show, Poole Lighthouse

Some other 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.
- During lockdown Rising Voices created virtual choir recordings to continue the spirit of public performance – its recording of "One voice" has been especially well received and has proved emblematic for Rising Voices Wessex
- **Rising Voices Wessex** also presented its work publicly during pandemic restrictions in two online virtual concerts

Rising Voices Wessex continues to appreciate the support of St John's Church, Parkstone, Poole and The New Church, Tuckton, Bournemouth, where the choirs meet for rehearsals. The New Church, Tuckton is currently up for sale – while a rapid sale is unlikely, preparations are in hand to look at alternative venues in the locality for the Bournemouth.

The choirs meet and rehearse on:

Monday evenings - The New Church (Hall), Tuckton, Bournemouth – 7.00 – 9.00 pm

Tuesday evenings - St Johns Church, Ashley Road, Parkstone – 7.00 – 9.00 pm.

The social interaction over tea, coffee or a soft drink creates a supportive environment offering peer support. This was hugely compromised during pandemic restrictions but the choirs adapted by having online social events such as quiz nights and party nights on Zoom and by the use of social media, WhatsApp. Etc.

Choir directors' report 2022-23

This is my second year of directing Rising Voices Wessex. It has been one of growth and change as we emerged from the more cautious time of the pandemic into a more relaxed and social period. Numbers remained low at the beginning of last April but have been steadily growing. We are particularly excited to see younger members and male members joining the Choir again as we set out to broaden the demographic of the Choir. It has changed the balance of voices for the better and given us opportunity to try more modern material which has refreshed all of our members.

We have not only expanded within the Choir, but also into the wider community. Christmas is always a time of outreach for the Choir and we performed in local shopping centres and Christmas Fairs. So many requests that we could not fulfil them all! This Easter saw us invited to a local church, St Aldhelm's, as part of their lunch time recital series.

We have also brought in local musicians to sing with us. Their talent has lifted and inspired the Choir and given our concerts a boost of professionalism. Our Christmas concert and our recent Celtic Concert extended our repertoire further as we took on suggestions from the musicians of songs they would like to perform. This included gospel singing and experimental synth folk collaborations as well as originally composed material. We look forward to further collaborations with them at Ringwood Eco Fair next month and also with other local musicians who are requesting to play with us after hearing our concerts.

We also had a successful collaboration with Apollo 5. The professionalism of the group and their teaching was a unique and special experience for the whole Choir. One of the songs they brought to us was 'The Lighthouse' and this has become a firm favourite of the Choir ever since. I took the opportunity to work on a piece called 'If' that I had composed for the Choir and it was lovely to have their voices join us on it. Their director has since taken the song to her community choir thus establishing musical connections and collaborations far beyond the day itself.

In April we celebrated the 70th birthday of one of our long-standing members, Peter. Peter is blind but attends every rehearsal under his own steam by using the local bus service. He gifted a concert at The Poole Lighthouse to us and to 3 other choirs as part of his celebration. We sang with over 150 voices at some points. It is a testimony not only to the way the Choir has touched Peter's life, but also to the fact that the Choir has meant so much to him, that he wished to give such a gift back.

As always, the Choir is a team effort and it would be remiss not to mention the amazing input of our Trustees, Steering Group and Co- Director Mark Anstead, most of whom have had to deal with personal or health challenges in their private lives as well as keeping the Choir going.

We are now at a point where we have committed new members - hopefully they may also help with some of the roles involved in supporting the Choir as they become part of our Choir family. This means we can plan for the future knowing that the choir is well established and growing for our future members who have yet to need our support, but may need to seek us out one day.

Wendy Morrow, Musical Director, Rising Voices Wessex on behalf of myself and my co-director Mark Anstead.

How *Rising Voices Wessex* makes a difference

The charity's overall strategy continually aims to try and capture the benefits of being part of the choir through the use of a simple questionnaire. Annual Survey Monkey questionnaires are utilised by **Rising Voices Wessex** to obtain feedback and an indication of how much members benefit from being part of the choir – full results from the surveys are available on the website at <https://www.risingvoices.org.uk/about-us/governance-documents>

Key findings from the survey include the following quotes and observations from choir members taken from the March 2023 survey:

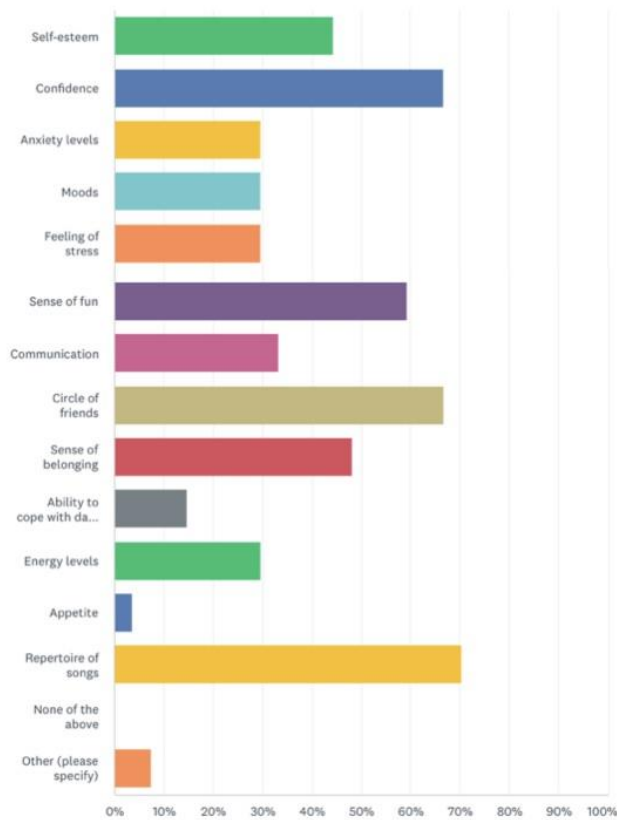
- **“Good company - a friendly, happy and fun choir to be in, enjoy singing and learning new songs”**

- **“A caring choir family - positive feeling of being supported with a circle of friends who have understanding of living with cancer”**
- **“Love singing and enjoy the health benefits of singing - feeling less stressed, more confident and improved self-esteem - a happy retreat every week and an escape from life’s worries”**

The March 2023 Annual Survey Results show the benefits of both mental health and wellbeing from attending choirs and include the questions and responses below:

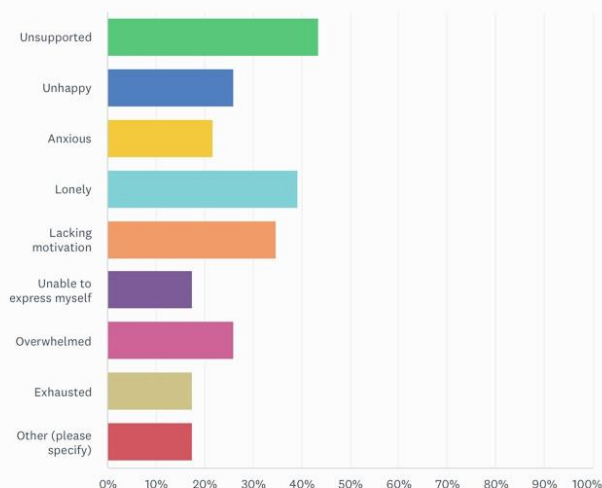
I feel that attending choir has improved my (tick as many as appropriate)

Answered: 27 Skipped: 0



Since attending Rising Voices Wessex, I no longer feel (tick as many as appropriate)

Answered: 23 Skipped: 4



Full information from the surveys are available on the website - <https://www.risingvoices.org.uk/about-us/governance-documents>

Management, Governance and Administration

As a registered charity **Rising Voices Wessex** 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 and 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 are currently two unfilled Trustee vacancies which are advertised on the website and locally; the current Trustees may also approach suitable skilled and qualified individuals to become Trustees - obtaining new Trustees with the right skills and understanding of the work of **Rising Voices Wessex** is a priority as the board looks to securing its long-term sustainability and ongoing development.

Executive Trustee Board members are:

- Dr Alastair Smith (Chairman), Retired NHS Consultant, former Clinical Lead NCSI (will retire May 2024).
- Noëline Young (Vice chair), Retired Clinical Nurse Specialist/ former NCSI Project Manager.
- Rob Taylor (Treasurer), Finance Director, Porterbrook Leasing Company Ltd.
- Jean Querol, Retired therapy radiographer and practice manager – retires May 2023.
- Chani Darnell, Retired Community Midwife.
- Sara Schwetze-Kemp, Businesswoman & Musician.

Jean Querol is retiring as a Trustee with effect from the AGM. Jean is one of the founders of **Rising Voices Wessex** and her contribution to its running and success over the past 10 years has been invaluable – managing the week-by-week finances, dealing with its banking and being a welcoming presence at rehearsal venues, especially Bournemouth. Prior to the pandemic her hospitality for in-person Trustee meetings and other key meetings to do with the running of the choirs was extremely helpful. The Board thanks her and wishes her well as she will continue to be a choir and Steering Group member – freed a little from administrative and management worries!

The Board is actively seeking potential new Trustees – in the first instance to replace Jean Querol but also in anticipation that Alastair Smith (Trustee Chair) will retire in 2024 and Noeline Young (Trustee Vice-chair) has given her clear intention to reduce her commitments from 2024 as a step towards eventual retirement. **Rising Voices Wessex** will be seeking to identify and interview motivated and skilled individuals capable of taking the Charity forward.

In the current environment finding suitable volunteers to take on such roles may not be easy, but every effort will be made. As a registered charity the key benefit to members is that singing is available to those affected by cancer at minimal cost – there is no subscription required, accessibility thus is a critical part of the project. In the absence of being able to appoint suitable Trustees **Rising Voices Wessex** would need to give up its charitable status and become a subscription choir.

Operational management and administration continue to be undertaken by a Steering Group that consists of three of the current Trustees (Noeline, Jean, Chani) with volunteer choir members (Adrian, Jacky, Sue, Heather), capitalizing on the range of skills that members can offer. The Steering Group meets monthly and reports to the board of Trustees. The Choir Director and Co-director are also part of the Steering Group.

Rising Voices Wessex aims to present a professional image that highlights its identity in public performances. Members wear black clothing with royal blue accessories for formal evening performances; for informal events members wear **Rising Voices Wessex** labelled polo shirts and fleeces.

Members are asked to pay a half price (50%) of the cost charged to **Rising Voices Wessex** for these garments; members on joining also receive a folder for music and song lyrics in the choirs' repertoire.

Financial Summary 2022-23:

Presently, overall donated income remains significantly reduced. As numbers at rehearsals start to increase this will benefit income through increased numbers of the suggested donation for those attending of £5.00. A Benefactors' scheme has been initiated which has also helped the financial position.

The successful **National Lottery Community Fund - Reaching Communities** application from May 2020 has continued to provide critical support during and in the aftermath of the pandemic restrictions. The award is an ongoing contribution towards running costs over a five-year period – in this past two years it has ensured the survival of Rising Voices Wessex during the pandemic restrictions. It will continue to be critical in the post-Covid recovery period – across the board the profound effect of the Covid pandemic on normal social activities continues to be experienced. It thus seems likely that recovery will be a slow and steady process.

In 2022 – 2023 **Rising Voices Wessex** received generous grant support from Choralis Fiscus and valuable support from Palm Print and the Douch family in supporting its concerts.

Following initial funding in 2012 by the Dorset Cancer Network *Rising Voices Wessex* has sought and received ongoing financial support from various 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.

Financial Review

Income: £28,606, (21-22: £25,266) made up of grants from the National Lottery Community Fund of £13,000 (21-22: £16,500), choir contributions including Just Giving, Amazon and SumUp of £11,654 (21-22: £8,100) and other donations and income of £3,952 (21-22: £666). This is an increase from 2021-22 primarily as a result of increased choir contributions and other donations.

Expenditure: £29,245 (21-22: £26,482), made up of professional costs £18,214 (21-22: £21,341), property and storage costs £3,141 (21-22: £1,956), admin costs of £3,533 (21-22: £3,185), stationery and printing costs of £214 (21-22: £0) and function expenses of £4,143 (21-22: £0). The increase in expenditure is as a result of more in-person events compared to the previous year.

The net trading position was a loss of £639, reflecting an ongoing operating shortfall of £13,639 which is largely cancelled out by £13,000 of income from the National Lottery. It is worth noting that the 23-24 Lottery Grant reduces to £12,500 and for the 24–25 financial year to £12,000. There will be no Lottery Grant for the 25-26 financial year.

Cash: The cash balance remains healthy, with £15,889 (21-22: £16,528) in the bank at 31 March 2023. 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, Wendy Morrow and co-director, Mark Anstead, for their musical and technical support.

Thanks, are also due 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. Lucia has stepped back from this role as she and her husband have started a new business enterprise. Her support and

contribution to ***Rising Voices Wessex*** has been invaluable. We thank her and wish her and her husband every success in their new business ventures.

Trustees 2022-2023

Chair - Dr Alastair Smith – Founder Member

Vice Chair - Noeline Young – Founder Member

Finance Manager - Jean Querol – Founder Member

Rob Taylor – Treasurer

Sara Kemp

Chani Darnell