

Guidebook 3: **Community Connections**

This guidebook shares learnings from projects where cultural leadership has been connecting organisations through song in pursuit of care.



Contents

Ageing Voices Introduction	3
Introducing Ageing Voices Guidebooks	4
Singing for Health and Happiness	5
Community Connects – An Introduction	6
Case Study: Aileen Nolan Carlow	7
Case Study: Mary Reynolds Longford	8
Case Study: Denise Rogers Waterford and Wexford.....	9
Case Study: Justine Foster West Cork.....	10
Case Study: DawnChorus.ie.....	12
Recommendations	14
Additional Resources	15
About this Initiative	16



Ageing Voices Introduction

Singing connects us. Lullaby, vesper or pop song chorus. Week nights in school halls and community centres. Across pub or kitchen tables. In the cultural palaces. Interweaving voices coming together in song reflect and reinforce the threads of national life we're woven into.

In Ireland the fastest growing section of the population are people over 80. People living well in their 60's and 70's are a growing percentage of the population which will continue into this century. Traditionally attention has been given to the individual voice as it develops from baby's coo through teenage mumble to adult voice. Now that many of us are lucky enough to live longer and singing brings such pleasure, isn't it time attention is given to the older and the ageing voice?

Fun, therapeutic, social, and stimulating singing already takes place in groups, choirs, health centres, even hospitals. Older adults who sing might be fit as a fiddle or challenged by illness. Innovation connecting singing with care is happening across Ireland. With Ageing Voices we are sharing learnings from the practices of these groups in order to encourage other like-minded people to get involved and bring the joy of singing to their community. We are on a mission to map and connect a network of these great people who have quietly evolved these groups over many years. We thank those with the wisdom to start the work we are now continuing.

Dominic Campbell
Creative Aging International

Dermot O'Callaghan
Sing Ireland



Dominic Campbell



Dermot O'Callaghan

Introducing Our Ageing Voices Guidebooks

Sing Ireland and Creative Aging International have come together to create a range of resources that will encourage and explore singing into older age, with support from The Creative Ireland Programme.

We believe that singing is invaluable. That it is a vital tool in the health and wellbeing of older people in our communities. That is why we have created four guidebooks that have been designed to give people the tools they need to create, run and nurture singing groups for older people within their communities.

1.

The Ageing Voice. This guidebook focuses on the voice as an instrument. What happens as we age? How can we maintain and sustain our voices? What happens if we do?

2.

Special Interest Choirs. Here we look at choirs in the community that are friendly to, and made with, people living with conditions like Alzheimer's or Parkinson's. These choirs support people, their families, and carers.

3.

Community Connections. This guidebook shares learnings from projects where cultural leadership has been connecting organisations through song in pursuit of care.

4.

Singing For Care. Our final guidebook discusses singing in healthcare settings and is particularly focused on sharing the experiences of groups led by nursing staff and care staff who sing and share their singing with those in their care.

Each guidebook will provide you with information, expert advice, recommendations, case studies and resources, to guide you through the process of setting up and running a singing group for older people. Our resources are continuously being developed, so if you have information to add, or need specific details please contact Sing Ireland or Creative Aging International, we'd love to hear from you.

Singing for Health and Happiness

Why singing is so important as we move into older age.

We should state at the beginning that singing is important in older age for all the reasons it is at any other age. It's about connection and belonging, it's about finding a place for your voice amongst others, it's about listening and being heard, facing challenges and building confidence.

/ Singing's secret weapon is joy.

Singing is physically good for you. Your heart, lungs, and vocal cords get a work out every time you sing. The brain blossoms with the challenges of learning new parts and adapting to sing alongside others. The endorphin release of performance or the dopamine of practice are all fantastically good for the brain and the body.

Singing into older age can help to keep the body fit and healthy, to keep the mind sharp and the voice strong. It is an exercise regime that keeps you active. As we age group singing and choirs can begin to seem like a daunting prospect. Aspects of growing older can become obstacles that stand in the way. From failing hearing and eyesight, to unsure bladders and reduced bounce, our bodies can hold us back. Transport systems and architecture that are difficult to navigate make getting to practice more of an ordeal, and that's before we have to think about reading small fonts, standing for long rehearsals, remembering the words. These many challenges are often individually tiny but they can add up. However each and every one of them can be easily addressed by considerate choir members and thoughtful choir



leaders, and overcoming them will lead to enhanced confidence, self-awareness and mental strength in our participants.

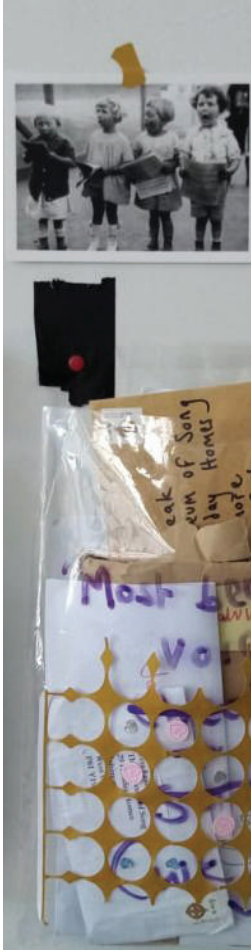
/ The value of the social interaction, support network and friendship that comes as part and parcel of joining a choir cannot be underestimated.

The challenges of isolation, the insidious subtleties of ageism, the despair of loneliness can all be addressed when a singing group is vitally connected into, or is, the connector of its community. Our case studies illustrate that even the most difficult moments of ageing and vulnerability, like life with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or living with Parkinson's, can be lessened and life enriched by a supportive singing group, led with attention and developed with care.

Choirs nurture care. As this programme develops we're recognising that a choir's social function in communities and workplaces should not to be underestimated for their mental, physical and social benefits. They operate in parallel to formal health care services and in some enlightened initiatives offer models of collaboration between agencies that bring care to the heart of the republic.

Older age is filled with innovation as we adapt to physical and emotional changes. A wide repertoire of song helps all of us find the resilience needed for life's inevitable challenges. As more of us live longer lives perhaps we also need to make new music to help us explore this unprecedented experience.

Community Connections – An Introduction



Ideas about collaborative creation have deep roots in the soil of Irish life: Meitheals, drama group's annual pantos, and rambling house trad sessions where great times are made by all players and virtuosi, these all weave together culture and creativity with community and health.

This attitude is apparent in Irish choirs and singing groups, estimated to be more plentiful than chip shops, they are great levellers of status, whose currency is enthusiasm and, perhaps with the exception of conductors, spaces of democratic multi-voiced creation.

/ So perhaps it's unsurprising that in response to Covid-19 the desire to sing inclusively has been a motivator of extraordinary social collaboration.

Sing Ireland and Creative Aging International connected on www.dawnchorus.ie to address the increased isolation of older people during the first lockdown. The Ageing Voices also developed during the pandemic.

Sing Ireland's role as advisor to the sector on safe singing, along with the Ageing Voices questionnaire, helped uncover extraordinary collaborative creativity as people explored what was possible with song, while being careful about infection and transmission.

During 2020 singing on online platforms has attained the level of artform. At the same time by working locally and across agencies, people uncovered ways for older adults to remain creative and socially connected. Often this creativity built around song. Exploring song or the elements of singing, or building on trust and relationships built pre-covid through singing, has offered ways that organisations can collaborate in the interests of individual care.

/ There are so many ways to connect and stay in touch through creativity, projects are evolving and adapting, finding more ways every day.

At the time of writing we are still in the pandemic, and still in the learning phase. We are already seeing lots of positive outcomes. **Going online**, in a group meeting session, such as Zoom, is perhaps the easiest way of attending a session in a cultural centre. **Remotely leading a singing session** in a residential care centre, by collaborating with PPE protected front line staff, is far safer than traveling between them. **Video, local radio, An Post and newspapers** have all been utilised in the quest to ensure that older people have the ability to stay connected through song in a safe way.

Asking **"What might we want to keep after Covid?"** offers new engagement strategies for arts organisations, and prototypes for community health care professionals. At policy level it suggests we need to better articulate the difference between "networked" and "connected" There is a need to give serious consideration to the role played by singing groups as the grease and glue of community.

Some of this work was in train before Covid. Social Prescription programmes where GP's, link workers and educated community organisations connect for social health, have been tried and tested. Once we agree singing is good for you then perhaps who delivers it matters less than their ability to deliver quality.

Perhaps the following case studies are prototypes for an evolving care service responding to our ageing population and indicate the foundations for a Republic built from a culture of care?

Case studies

There are many groups and programmes across the country working to connect older people through song evolving during Covid. We share some of them and the stories of their creators to show they have adapted and evolved to stay in touch and move forward in trying times. We hope they inspire your work in the future



Aileen Nolan From Carlow Streams

**Culture & Creativity Team at
Carlow County Council.**

The county has a rich tradition and history of engaging multi-disciplinary arts programmes and practice for all ages. Carlow Arts Festival and the Festival of Writing and Ideas, Carlow Youth Theatre, ASPIRO choir and the new contemporary VISUAL art space have all contributed to placing Carlow firmly on the cultural landscape.

/ The ethos guiding Aileen and the team is about encouraging people to come together as community through the arts and they acknowledge the contribution creativity and cultural engagement can have on our overall well-being and quality of life.

With the onset of a lockdown, as a result of Covid 19, Aileen began thinking about what could be done for people who were going to have to self-isolate. Having always actively engaged older audiences with creative activities, she and her team wanted to ensure cocooning individuals did not get left behind. They wanted to find a way for people to retain connections with each other, their communities and their roots.

As a traditional musician herself, Aileen's initial inspiration came from the old Rambling House idea (the place Irish people would have gone to 'engage in the social media of the day' pre-twitter/smart phones and TV) and a resource 'from Carlow streams' that had developed in Carlow. The website promotes songs, stories and poems from and about the county and is Carlow man Dave Barron's brainchild.

Aileen's first steps were to look for a singer to collaborate with, and to approach the local radio station. She invited singer songwriter Fiach Moriarity to take part and convinced KLCR, to commit to a six week trial with a ten minute weekly slot on the 'Johnny Barry Show' presented by Brendan Hennessey. Aileen reached out to The Carlow Nationalist newspaper to come on board and the project evolved into lyrics being printed in the newspaper, inviting people to singalong with

the 'From Carlow Streams Singalong Sessions' live on the radio.

The response was huge. Six weeks was extended to ten, the slot became thirty minutes. Funding was secured for an additional ten sessions. People listened from Carlow, nationally and internationally.

/ Aileen suggests the 'live' and interactive elements are huge parts of the project's success. She felt people really needed to connect with their community and welcomed being part of something bigger at this moment in time.

The content struck a balance with the opportunity to sing, listen and learn about the history of a song or a related place. Many people commented on the natural chemistry between presenters Fiach and Brendan which made them feel they were listening in to an informal conversation – clearly something which was limited for people in their day-to-day lives.

An offshoot and legacy of the project is the production of a CD of eight popular ballads and eight Carlow songs – some which have never been recorded before. The CDs will be distributed for Christmas to those socially isolating around the county. Awareness of the 'from Carlow streams' resource has increased massively as a result of the project and Aileen believes people have developed increased pride in their heritage and area as a result.

Aileen and her team hit on a great idea at the right time and assembled the perfect community collaborators.

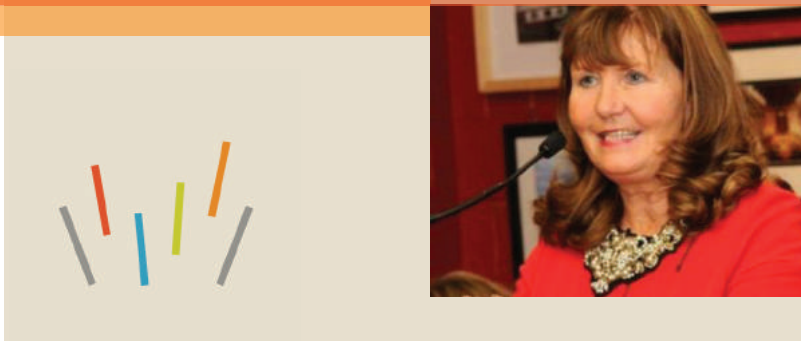
/ Her advice to others is to have courage in a pilot project, pick up the phone and don't be afraid to ask.

She says one of the downsides of her current work is that she doesn't get to actually sit down and meet the partners involved as everything happens online. However, as can be demonstrated through 'From Carlow Streams Singalong Sessions', communities can find ways to overcome all kinds of barriers by being flexible and creative in their approach – and by working together.

Case study:

Mary Reynolds

County Librarian in Longford and Creative Ireland Co-Ordinator.



/ 'Music is my medicine of the mind.'

Longford county library, music appreciation programme participant

Within the county there is a strong tradition of engaging participation of older people in cultural, social and education programmes and in creative multi-disciplinary community partnerships and collaborations.

Music and Song has always featured prominently in the county's provision and is woven throughout the programming landscape.

At the County Library, the hugely successful 'Music Appreciation Programme' has run for four consecutive years – delivered by two retired music enthusiasts. Drawing a regular weekly audience of between 50-70 people, the dedicated music lovers literally brave storms to get their weekly fix of music and social activity. During Positive Ageing Week – a concert with volunteer local musicians is an annual crowd pleaser and hotly anticipated event in a Longford Hotel.

Collaboration with younger audiences is something Mary has been exploring in relation to intergenerational activity. Recently a Children's Arts Festival invited schoolchildren to learn older songs through workshops (e.g. Percy French) which they then performed to older people in concert. This sowed the seeds for the ongoing development of an Intergenerational Choir with community partners including local schools, HSE dementia groups and public health nursing staff.

Clearly, Mary has an extraordinary ability to harness cross-sector groups and community networks together for a common purpose – her work could probably be best described as exemplifying the Irish expression of 'Meitheal'.

/ She stresses grassroots support as essential to the development of community programmes.

For people looking to set up projects and programmes for older people, she suggests starting with county Public Participation Networks, organisations such as Tidy Towns, the community

Gardaí, organisations representing older people including Age Friendly Alliances, Active Age Groups, Alone.

/ Listening directly to the needs and wishes of older people themselves is crucial in planning according to Mary.

She has an older people's council and they have been able to meet online via Zoom throughout Covid 19. One of the concerns raised by the council reinforced by the current worldwide pandemic is the issue of older people's use and access to technology. Mary is investigating how to use the cable TV network in the area to reach older people with cultural programmes. She has also instigated digital skills programmes for older people.

Undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges of 2020 for those programming for older people, has been how to reach our most vulnerable and isolated in nursing homes. The national Bealtaine festival which happens every May is traditionally a highly attended and anticipated event in the county's cultural calendar.

/ With true ingenuity and creativity, Mary and her team hosted 'Bealtaine at Ballymahon', a filmed musical performance staged at a local nursing home, which was shared online and which received huge publicity.

Building on the success of this, an ongoing collaboration between county nursing homes, a Musical Director Angela Reynolds has developed into weekly interactive 'Singalong' sessions on Youtube.

As for the appeal of music and singing, Mary believes it's about accessibility and lack of exclusivity. There's also no need to 'be an expert' she says. She tells the story of an intergenerational concert where a frail, normally unresponsive 90 year old lady suddenly started singing along with young children to a song they were singing from her childhood. Of all the cultural activities she is involved in, Mary says

/ 'Nothing compares with singing.'

Case study:

Denise Rogers

**Clinical Psychologist, Waterford
Wexford Mental Health Services.**



Denise's role involves working with the inpatient mental health unit and with older people with mental health and intellectual disabilities. Many of the people Denise works with have spent most of their lives in institutional care and have significant risk of psychological and physical health issues.

The counties of Waterford and Wexford have an exceptionally strong history in cultural programming and provision within healthcare settings. In 1990 the Arts was introduced into daily life at University Hospital Waterford with the establishment of Waterford Healing Arts Trust, in 2008 Ireland's first Centre for Arts and Health was established on the grounds. The online resource artsinhealth.ie was established in 2011. The 'Music in Mental Health Settings' programme began in 2007 and evolved into an extensive participatory arts and mental health programme 'Iontas' which runs over 200 multi-disciplinary workshops and activities a year across community, hospital and hostel settings.

Most recently the service hosted the Mobile Music Machine in the gardens of the Dept. Psychiatry at the hospital for 'The Covid Concert series' bringing classical music to the lives of vulnerable isolating individuals.

Denise recalls that when she took on her current role, many told her what she was trying to do was impossible. Undoubtedly Denise relishes a challenge. She has a dogged determination to push for change at systemic level in the healthcare system combined with a personal passion for music which guides her work in 'seeing people come alive' through creativity and participation. She says:

/ 'The more opportunities we can provide for people, the more choice they will have about what their life will look like.'

Denise has a 'holistic' approach – or as she says, she 'brings the human' with her to work. For Denise, bringing her whole self means bringing her own knowledge, skills and love of music, culture and singing to her professional life.

The word 'privilege' is one Denise uses frequently in terms of the ability to be able to touch other people's lives through creative practice.

In Denise's experience, realising successful creative work within the healthcare environment involves a number of interrelated factors.

/ Relationship building and creative collaboration is key – both internally and externally. Strong leadership skills, excellent communication with flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness.

This work calls for an ability to rise to the challenges of balancing care with creativity, risk with a sense of adventure and innovation. Denise suggests

/ 'don't be afraid to give something a try.'

Denise believes one's capacity to build individual relationships is key. In situations where anxiety and stress levels are high, being mindful of opportunities to build relationships and to meet people 'where they are at' (which may be different at every session hosted) is something to consider.

Denise and her colleagues cultivate structured and unstructured approaches. Multi-layered, uncomplicated programmes encouraging social engagement, the initiation of responses and skills development. Guiding their approach is a dedication to 'generate curiosity' and a commitment to trusting 'the process' rather than being firmly attached to an 'outcome'. To 'see someone come alive' is the reward.

Formal evaluation and measurement is important to validate this work but Denise highlights personal stories and testimonies as places where the truly multi-dimensional individual meaning and impact can be gleaned.

Case study:

Justine Foster

Uillinn West Cork
Arts Centre



Justine Foster is Education & Community Co-Ordinator in Uillinn West Cork Arts Centre. Founded in 1985, the centre has firmly established itself as a cultural and creative hub embedded in a purpose-built space in the heart of Skibbereen town. The centre attracts locals and visitors alike with a range of Irish and international interdisciplinary art programmes and activities. The centre has three artist studios, a dance residency and a superlative Arts in Health programme.

When Covid hit, the Gallery spaces closed, artists had to leave the building and the dancing stopped. Shifting to online provision in terms of participation for younger audiences continued and the long established youth theatre group has been interacting on Zoom. Physical exhibitions where possible shifted online. The Arts in Health programme however presented bigger challenges to Justine and her colleagues in ensuring continuity of creativity and communication on their Community Hospital Arts and Day Care centre programmes.

Justine describes her ability and success at programming in a pandemic as

/ hugely dependent on the strong, mutually beneficial and trustful relationships Uillinn have with their health partners – from Directors of Nursing to Public Health nurses.

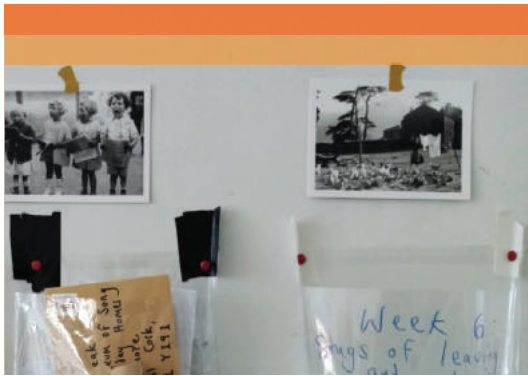
She describes the extraordinary sensitivity, flexibility and responsiveness required in dealing with Nursing Homes who literally found themselves thrust into ‘emergency’ mode, and how each organisation was affected in different ways, at different times. She says for

the Centre, it was certainly not the time to try to forge new relationships or diversify but rather to dig deep, work to support those valued and established partnerships in more innovative ways and be brave enough to take creative risks within that context.

In addition to external partnerships and stakeholder relationships, within Justine’s own team (which can extend to 50 artists working on multi-disciplinary programmes a year) there were challenges. The highly organised and structured team, largely based on face to face conversation and networking immediately encountered communication and connectivity issues. There were also personal human challenges for many who were isolating or ill.

She describes the pandemic as ‘dividing the team’ - the immediate Government Covid support payment for some meant they couldn’t work directly with the organisation but obviously ensuring they stayed connected was hugely important. Of the nine core staff in the Arts in Health team, Justine was able to ensure three remained fully engaged with the programme. Re-prioritising, retaining and re-purposing funding was a huge strategic challenge for the organisation. The big underlying fear was health funding in particular would be re-deployed elsewhere – just as they saw with staff and other resources.

Justine and the team came up with a range of projects and programmes in response to Covid with the overall aim of keeping a creative conversation and dialogue going with their audiences.



For 'Isolation 20', composer and violinist Justin Grounds invited a group of twenty singers, aged between 17 and 80 years to work with him on recording their responses to the pandemic. The diverse mix of ten men and ten women were interviewed about their experience of isolation and Justin is creating a new composition reflecting their individual responses. Linked to an exhibition in West Cork Arts Centre in 2021, visitors can stand in front of a selfie of each contributor and hear their individual voice or experience everyone singing together in unison in the centre of the room. 'We are all in this together' is made real through the voices of participants.

'Museum of Song' was about to happen in April 2020 as an Arts in Health project working within community hospitals. Justine, alongside Sharon Whooley of Drimoleague Singing Festival and artist Tess Leak had to re-think how to make it work. The traditional music collecting project became a postal project with the extraordinary co-operation of Director's of Nursing, activity co-ordinators and staff. Previously unheard of issues like the necessity for post being incubated due to infection control measures meant that the six week project in reality turned into a phased six part project running over three months. But this was all about the process. Postal packages of poetry and song were sent out with stamped addressed envelopes inviting people to contribute songs. Themes such as 'Songs of Mothers or Fathers' and 'Songs of Leaving and Returning' were provided. Letters and their responses were kept in isolation within restrictions and the project found its own rhythm in writing and response. Staff embraced the opportunities to talk with people about the project, song choices, memories and ideas. Participants were delighted to have a focus and purposeful activity. The response was overwhelming and with the support of Creative Ireland, the project was extended to Sherkin, Cape

Clear, Bere, Heir, Dursey, Whiddy and Long Islands off the coast. A Museum of Song 'songbook' of over 150 contributions is currently in production!

With "Bringing Art Home" – essentially a correspondence creative project, Justine says it was 'not nice but necessary'. When Community Daycare centres closed, staff were deployed and there was a danger of losing contact with over 500 older people who were engaging and participating in activities. One of the biggest hurdles was trying to connect, seek permissions and invite those who wanted to take part in a new 'home-based' multi-disciplinary 6 part programme.

/ Offering a range of choices and information entry points was key.

Partners in public health collaborated extensively with Justine in engaging participants and establishing the dialogue which artists are currently continuing. People taking part receive a tailored project pack through the post and are invited to engage and respond in a variety of ways depending on the project and artist. Those that require art materials receive them.

/ The beauty of a deeply connected arts and health partnership is that the wraparound community supports people are receiving like public health nurses are aware of the project and able to engage with people on a creative and social level rather than simply a health one.

Projects like this are everyday conversation starters and most of all, continue creative dialogues where otherwise there would be nothing. As Justine says there's the expectation that there will be another communication coming to you (and there's an expectation that you are going to respond!).

Case study:

Dominic Campbell

www.DawnChorus.ie



Dominic has 'history' with festivals and celebrations and he is passionate about ageing. Previously artistic director with St Patrick's Festival and Bealtaine Festival, he has developed and delivered national and international celebrations and is now a Director of Creative Aging International where he says **'celebration has become a strategy'**.

He describes how festivals have the power to bring wide ranging organisations together and are an energetic hotbed of ideas and creativity, generating new innovative ways of engaging audiences and each other.

At Creative Aging International which Dominic founded with Bea Kelleher, they are passionate about celebration, collaboration and creativity. Dominic is an Atlantic Fellow for Equity & Brain Health with the Global Brain Health Institute and aware that it's possible to work across community groups, education and research, city and county local structures and commerce to transform and inform the way we view and approach age and ageing. Their projects here in Ireland and internationally aim to bring together cross-sector interdisciplinary partners to push the boundaries and promote best practice around celebrating ageing and ageing well. Dominic says

/ 'As people live for longer, we together as societies need to adapt...creativity is key to adapting.'

In March 2020 at the start of the Covid pandemic, the team at Creative Ageing examined their projects and what they could keep going in the knowledge that the mental health impact of isolation on the older audiences they were working with was potentially huge. They felt a sense of tremendous urgency and responsibility about responding as efficiently and to as wide an audience as possible – but within restrictions. They looked to models of projects they had developed previously and examined how to adapt or pivot in their response to Covid.

They drew inspiration from Dawn Chorus an initiative begun in Age & Opportunity's Bealtaine Festival which encourages people to learn songs together then sing on waterfronts at dawn in May. Adapting the model, the team created www.dawnchorus.ie a space online where cultural, social and health organisations would connect through a focus on singing. Rehearsing apart could happen in lockdown before eventually singing together would happen as restrictions eased. Forward looking it was hope inspiring.

Building partnership across Sing Ireland, RTÉ, Royal Irish Academy of Music, enabled a national invitation to connect by learning songs. Bringing Alone, Healthy Ireland, and the Alzheimers Society of Ireland on board on board allowed contact with their existing help-lines and service users to be established. This led to singing over the phone lines, take-up by residential care home staff, and lots of experimentation.



Dominic Campbell



Bea Kelleher

This learning, practical suggestions on how to get involved, how to link in with like-minded singers and lyrics and musical arrangements were provided on the website while the social agencies brought them to people's front door.

As one would expect, for someone fascinated with neuroscience, Dominic has interesting insights about why a singing project is relevant in these times and its potential impact on participant's health. He says we are only 'beginning to understand' what happens to us when we make music and that one's sense of self is directly related to our voice. We all need our voice to be heard, he says – and when we sing rather than speak 'our normal use of language grows wings'.

He thinks inviting people to be creative releases them to explore their sense of themselves and their place in the world. At the moment our responses to "The Covid" are immediate, but he is looking forward to a time not far away when 'reflection and renewal' will be the focus. One guesses he already has a few ideas up his sleeve for when that time comes. 'Singing together is like making something new' he says and

/ 'being creative is ultimately hopeful.'



Recommendations

1. Can do!

Have a can do attitude. Don't let yourself become disheartened by obstacles, creativity will help you to find a way to make your ideas work. Where there's a will, there's a way. This is unexplored and exciting territory and people are learning by trial and error. So keep a diary to see what you're learning? And don't forget to make time to sing yourself.

2. Enthusiasm is key

Engage groups and programme directors with enthusiasm and passion. You have the power to inspire, excite and get them involved. Your positivity can be contagious.

3. Be flexible

Covid has driven us all to new levels of flexibility, it's made us adapt and evolve and that is a great thing! Be open to new ideas and new ways of working, speak to lots of people, find out what works for them and be ready to carve your own path.

4. Mapping and Triangulation

Communities have multiple resources. The case studies mention many. Maybe map yours to start with, then think about how you might join them together in different ways? Often this is easiest to do around solving a practical problem. Who in your community might find it hardest to get involved in singing? Why? What might their challenges be? What ways can you address these together? Sometimes the hardest thing to do offers the greatest rewards. Connecting communities is a creative process, and maybe it's an art!

5. Celebrate Diversity

Everyone has something to bring to the table, involve different groups, engage different voices, take advice and learnings from everyone.

6. Listen and support

You will be connecting with a wide range of people with different abilities and various levels of "tech ability" as well as a whole world of accessibility. Ask questions, especially of older participants, so that you are better able to help them to connect and you can see how you can help to improve their experience.

7. Let the singing do the talking

Often times the sheer act of bringing a group together to sing or engaging a person in song, is the most powerful endorsement for the work. Find opportunities to do this. There are countless examples of a single project/workshop/session that has developed into a blossoming and longer term programme.



Additional Resources

Follow the following links to find additional resources, training and networks:

Additional resources regularly updated are available at www.singireland.ie/participation/ageing-voices-resources including

The Community Connects panel discussion featuring people mentioned above can be found here <https://youtu.be/B1Be2ZP1Z4M>

Sing Ireland has many useful guides and links to local groups <https://www.singireland.ie/participation/useful-tools>

Art and Health workers network <http://www.artsandhealth.ie/> is a valuable resource for information about arts and health projects

Uilleann, West Cork Arts Centre's animated video explaining how their arts and health work develops is great if you're thinking about community mapping <https://www.westcorkartscentre.com/arts-for-health>

Local Authorities are made of many parts. Arts Officers, Librarians, Community Development Teams, the Creative Ireland and Healthy Ireland representatives are all interested in this type of initiative and worth a conversation.

Public Participation Network a great resource to find local organisations or promote your activities <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/b59ee9-community-network-groups/>

Get Started

Singing is fun, therapeutic, social, and stimulating and is a great tool to help older people keep active and involved in the community. If you are currently involved and would like some advice or support, or if you are considering starting a choir in your area, please get in touch.

About this Initiative

Sing Ireland is the national development agency for group singing in Ireland. We lead, enable and connect communities of singers in Ireland.

Creative Ageing International celebrates ageing. We work creatively with communities, companies, individuals and organisations worldwide to transform for the better how we view and approach old age.

In the early stages of the pandemic both organisations connected on **www.dawnchorus.ie** with the aim of connecting isolated older people through song. This started a conversation about the wider role of group singing and its connection to the growing number of older people in Irish society.

This led to involvement with generous support from the Creative Ireland programme. This five-year programme connects people, creativity and wellbeing is an all-of-government programme committed to the vision that every person in Ireland should have the opportunity to realise their full creative potential.

Ageing Voices was conceived as a way for all of these agencies to work together to ensure that choirs aimed at our older generation have the support, resources and expertise they need to keep singing.

Written by

Dominic Campbell, Dermot O'Callaghan,
Rebecca MacLaughlin, Aisling O'Callaghan

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all individuals and organisations involved for their continued support in the development of this programme:



**CREATIVE AGING
INTERNATIONAL**

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme
2017–2022

