



Ageing
Voices



CREATIVE AGING
INTERNATIONAL
We Celebrate Aging

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme
2017–2022





**Ageing Voices Online
Workshops**

**Musical Director
Fiona Flavin**

Songs, Stories & Smiles



A carefully designed community singing programme should aim to:

Connect

Stimulate

Comfort

Support

It is important to consider and understand the connections between our brain health, physical health and emotional wellbeing.

We can support all of the above by the simple act of coming together in one room and singing! 🎵



Dementia

Dementia is a neurological disability characterised by impaired memory, impaired reasoning, high levels of stress, and an acute sensitivity to environment. It is caused by a number of diseases which damage nerve cells in the brain.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia

Currently there are 64,000 people with Dementia in Ireland, this figure will more than double in the next 25 years to over 150,000 by 2045.

There are 24 million people worldwide with dementia and this figure is expected to reach 80 million by the year 2040.

In 2005/2006 the UK spent £176 billion on people with Dementia.

In Ireland in 2010 the Irish health service spent €1.69 million.

Alzheimer's will be an epidemic in 40 years unless there are new therapies.



How to keep the brain healthy and reduce the chances of developing Dementia in later life?

Lower stress levels

Keep yourself mentally challenged

Stay socially connected

(through psychosocial singing interventions)

*Remember

Some emotional memories and experiences are retained even in the advanced stages of dementia.

A person with dementia may not remember your name but they will feel the emotional impact of the experience that they shared with you.



Why Singing?

Singing indirectly engages what is possibly the body's greatest stress reliever- the breath!

When we speak, the hemispheres of the brain that deal with language light up, however when we sing, both parts of the brain spark into life.

Singing aids concentration, attention span and memory recall.

While the act of singing in itself activates several things in our bodies and brains, when we engage in it with others we add another layer to this.

Singing the weight of the words- sometimes speaking in metaphors or singing the words of someone else's song can more accurately express our feelings and emotions.

Singing is like an aerobic workout for your heart and lungs!

Singing can help to maintain speech and language skills- a person who cannot speak conventionally may still have the ability to sing.



The Healing Powers of Singing

The Vagus Nerve- did you know?

The Vagus nerve is the longest nerve in the body, connecting your brain to many organs including the heart and the lungs.

It influences your breathing and heart rate and can have a huge impact on mental health.

This nerve is connected to your vocal cords and the muscles at the back of your throat.

Regular stimulation of the Vagus nerve can lead to long term improvements in mood and wellbeing.



Guidance on setting up & running a singing group in your community:

Research what kind of singing groups are happening in your area

Consider local supports/partnerships

Financial planning to ensure the viability of your group

Appoint Coordinator/Musical facilitator/volunteers

Ensure facilitator, coordinator and any on going volunteers are Garda vetted

Identify and research potential participants

Insurance- public liability for a group of this nature

Sign in Book- name and emergency contact details for attendees

Emergency planning- defibrillator, access awareness, eircode of venue

Location- appropriate and accessible



Practical Considerations when choosing a venue:

Ramp/wheel chair access

Parking outside building

Ground floor room or a room with good lift access

Adequate space

Accessible toilets

Consider room set up and seating- supportive chairs

Set up and supplies for refreshments- access to kitchenette/sink



What does it take to facilitate and lead a community singing group?

Vocal/Musical Ability

Advanced preparation

Energetic Personality

Clear Concise Direction

Awareness

Adaptability

Intuition and Creativity

Active Listening





Ageing Voices Online
Workshops

Part 2

Musical Director
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Songs, Stories & Smiles



Getting Started with a New Group

Initial sessions

Take the time to get to know your group!

It is important to learn every participants name

Variety of songs and materials relevant and interesting to the needs/abilities/experience and age range of the group

Abilities and skills- assess and monitor strengths and weaknesses

Encourage peer support

Not all of the same repertoire will work for all groups

Remember carers and family members are part of the group too!

They want to know you and feel that they can open up to you- be genuine and sincere with your offerings.



The Session

Elements to consider including in a community singing session

Physical exercise

Breathing techniques

Vocal warm ups

Unison group singing

Familiar songs with gentle movement

Listening

Themes & Celebrations

Memory exercises and activities

Open Session for solo performing, sharing
and discussion

Song collections

Poetry and Stories



Planning and Structure

Decide how you would like to structure your session

Plan and practice your repertoire in advance

Gather a collection of old recordings of songs/pieces for listening part of session
(bring a device & good speakers)

Keep challenge level varied- low, medium to high

Try to avoid spending more than 10 mins on any single element of the session

Alternate between simple and more challenging songs/exercises/activities

Keep each song short (2-4 mins)

Make time for rest- some active singing and some listening

Include a 10-15 min break with refreshments



Planning and Structure

The fundamentals for structuring a 'Singing for the Brain' Session

Communication skills

Vocal/verbal sounds/gestures

Social Skills

Eye contact/interaction

Sensory Skills

Listening/awareness

Physical Skills

Fine and gross motor and movement

Cognitive Skills

Sequences/imitation/concentration



Physical and Vocal Exercises

Use plenty of imagination and imagery

*Think of yourself as a mirror

Breathing Techniques

Hiss/Huff/Sigh

Steady counting with inhalation and exhalation

Blow out candle/smell the flowers

Physical Exercises

Seated vs standing

Keep simple, short and repetitive

Cater to abilities of your group

Relate to household activities

Vocal Warm Ups

Humming

Siren Sounds

Playful mimicking



Repertoire Choices

How to carefully analyse song choices for your group

Consider choosing songs that you can incorporate some movement to

Always include some familiar favourites

Songs that have repeated lines in the verse or chorus are great for memory recall

Mood enhancing lyrics are very effective

include dynamics- soft and loud singing

Call and response songs work nicely

Alternate between both stimulating and soothing choices

Plan songs that are relevant to the time of year or an occasion within your group

Have fun with some comedic songs!

Use story songs to reminisce about a specific place or time that might connect with your participants

Consider choices from different eras and styles of music

Consider choosing songs that represent the locality or the county you are in

Always welcome suggestions from your participants!!



Should I use song sheets throughout the session?

Combination of both is most effective

Singing some songs without lyrics is important for memory recall/mental flexibility

Coloured paper is great for those with dementia- red, blue & green

Encourage everyone to collect the songs that you distribute and keep folders

Suggest to carers/family members to sing songs from the folder outside of the session

Invest in songbooks/poetry books/sing along lyric books and have to hand

Create your own sing along booklet for your group specifically





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