



**SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE
TO**

**COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, ARTS
AND LEISURE**

FOR:

**THE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO
INCLUSION IN THE ARTS OF WORKING
CLASS COMMUNITIES**

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1. Background to The Crescent Arts Centre

The Crescent Arts Centre is a diverse community arts centre, situated in South Belfast, which has served the population of the city and beyond a wide range of arts and cultural activities for almost 35 years.

The Centre, a four storey listed building dating from 1873 and located at 2 - 4 University Road, underwent an award-winning refurbishment from 2008-2010. This has allowed the centre to expand and enhance the quality of arts activities on offer.

The neutral location of the building, within the Queen's Quarter, encourages visitors and attendance from all communities, and has provided excellent opportunities for cross-community work.

1.1 What we do

The educational arts programme of classes and workshops offered by the Crescent embraces:

- dance and movement
- visual arts
- creative writing
- music of all kinds
- theatre
- drama
- crafts

As a venue the Crescent Arts Centre has been a vital part of the arts infrastructure in the city playing host to public performances of:

- modern dance
- film
- music concerts
- theatre
- readings and much, much more.

The Community Outreach Programme has developed and grown, embracing new arts and cultural developments and creating new partnerships enabling our large bank of professional tutors to work with all ages and ranges of ability in all areas of the city.

The Crescent runs two key festivals each year, the Belfast Book Festival and CityDance, and is home to many arts organisations which occupy office space in an appropriate cultural environment.

1.2 Our Aims & Artistic Policy

- The advancement of the education of the public by promoting artistic activities, including art exhibitions and artistic performances, and tuition in a range of arts subjects
- To encourage and facilitate the participation in and appreciation of artistic activities by people from all sectors of society
- The promotion of a diversity of art forms and high standards in community arts activities and;
- The preservation and improvement of an historic building enjoyed by the public.
“The Crescent Arts Centre offers opportunities for everyone to meet and be inspired by a varied artistic programme of participatory events, performances and exhibitions.”

1.3 Our Objectives

- Consolidate and enhance its unique provision and promotion of diverse art forms to high standards that can be enjoyed by all members of the community
- Maximise its long track record of artistic activities and cultural diversity
- Expand the development of partnerships with a wide range of appropriate groups and organisations for the increased delivery of outreach activities
- Offer an exciting and innovative programme accessible to all
- Seek to attract practitioners in new and emerging art forms as well as those with skills and expertise in established art forms
- Aspire to broaden its current resident base by accommodating additional arts organisations
- Maintain the built and natural heritage of the Crescent building
- Develop the centre as part of the local, national and international arts infrastructure

2. Crescent Arts Centre Timeline

YEAR	EVENT
1978	Crescent Arts Centre leases premises in University Road. The Crescent opened in the building in 1978, when the building was leased from the department of the environment. At this time it was known as the Crescent Youth Resource Centre, but gradually moved towards more art-based projects, and became known as the CAC in 1980.
1988	Initial repairs and refurbishments undertaken. The condition of the building was even then unsatisfactory, and by 1988 immediate repairs had become necessary to allow the centre to continue to function.
1989	Crescent Arts Centre purchased premises in University Road. In 1989 the Board of the Crescent decided to buy the premises. Between 1989 and 1991, in order to purchase the building, funds of £220,000 were raised, from bodies including the Ireland Funds, the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI), the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Pilgrim Trust, and Ewarts plc. A further sum of £300,000 was granted by DENI to finance the re-roofing of the building, and to provide much needed art workshop and studio space on the top floor attic level.
1994	Further repairs and refurbishments undertaken. In 1994, grants from ADAPT NI and the foundation for Sport and the Arts enabled the Crescent to make the major portion of the ground floor fully accessible to those with limited mobility including wheelchair users
1999	Capacity of Crescent building reduced to less than 50%. In July 1999, when construction work was being carried out on an adjacent site in Lower Crescent, large machinery caused the wall of the Gym to collapse, putting the main space of the building out of use until February 2001. The main railway line, running alongside the Crescent, was enclosed underground, thereby reducing noise levels and disruption from the ongoing train services. By that year, further deterioration to the building meant that less than 50% of the total space was usable for public activities.
2001	Sale of no. 1 Lower Crescent. In 2001, the sale of No. 1 Lower Crescent. owned by and adjoining the Crescent raised £320.000. This sum was held in a Business Reserve Account. With the requirement from Central Procurement Department to engage a refurbishment design team under the new European regulations which came to force in 2006/07, this reserve was required to pay off the company of architects who had worked with the Crescent for the previous ten years, and had developed design plans to Stage D for the re-development.
2003	Award of funding for redevelopment of premises in University Road. In December 2003, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland reversed its previous decision of December 2001 regarding funding for the re-development of the building, and announced an award of £1.2 million towards the refurbishment and upgrading of the Crescent. Applications were concurrently submitted to Heritage Lottery Fund and DCAL.
2007	Capital Funds Secured: DCAL £4.5Million ACNI £1.45million NIEA - £529,000 HLF - £447,000 Further Funds secured later include: CAC Fundraising £300,000 Ulster Garden Villages £15,000 BIFF Awards - £50,000
2008	Crescent staff and tenants move to temporary accommodation in Ormeau Road. In March/April 2008 the staff and tenants moved out of the building in University Road to temporary rented accommodation in 165-169 Lower Ormeau Road at which it operated a full programme of classes and workshops.
2010	Crescent staff and tenants move back into redeveloped building in University Road. The lease for the premises in the Ormeau Road expired at the end of March 2010, by which time the redeveloped Crescent building had been handed over by the contractors.
2010	Opening Festival. The Crescent opened its doors to the public with a week-long series of c.100 free workshops, 14 live concerts/performances, aerial dance routines, and live outdoor Gamelan Orchestra on 19th April. This was followed by the first programmed term of classes and workshops from May-August and the first booked live performances in the Cube, the main performance space.
2010	Awards: UNESCO “Man and Built Environment Award” - (in recognition of the Crescent’s efforts in protecting the colony of protected swifts) William Keown Trust Prestige Award - (in recognition of the Crescent’s approach to accessibility throughout the building)
2011	Awards: Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors - Winners - Project of the Year 2011 (NI) Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors - Winners - Community Benefit Category Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors - Highly Commended - Building Restoration Category Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors - Joint Second - Community Benefit Category - UK Finals

3. The Crescent Arts Centre & Community Outreach

3.1 History

The Crescent Arts Centre has a long and respected tradition in Outreach and Education having recently been chosen by Belfast City Council as an example of best practice for a European delegation from *Euro Cities Framework*.

It can be argued that from its very inception, the centre was an outreach project. In the late 70s, a dark period in Belfast's history, the Crescent Arts Centre was seen as a safe and neutral space for children from all areas and backgrounds, to come and enjoy all manner of artistic activity in the then, Crescent Youth Resource Centre (founded by Dr Roger Courtney MBE).

This ethos of inclusivity and 'reaching out' has continued to feature very prominently in the life of the centre. The Crescent Arts Centre has always operated a community outreach programme whereby, the centre takes what it does in the centre right into the heart of **all** communities across Belfast.

3.2 Summary

The Crescent offers a wide range of classes and activities, free at the point of delivery, to cater for all sections of the community, focusing on those who encounter barriers to accessing arts provision (regardless of age, gender, ability, ethnicity, socio economic background and geographic background).

Sections of the community include many participants from marginalised areas. Also included are children and young people, older people, intergenerational groups and people with various physical and mental disabilities. Activities include dance and movement, music, visual arts, verbal arts, drama/theatre, textile & design, creative play & storytelling, circus skills, pottery and literary activities.

A snapshot of the The Crescent has and currently undertakes outreach work with a number of organisations, as shown in the tables A-D.

3.3 Strategy and Implementation Summary

- To emphasize community arts service and professional support to community groups/organisations, schools, care homes and other groups across Belfast and the greater Belfast area.
- Continue to build a relationship-oriented programme of events. Build long-term relationships with various groups from all sections of the community to create an intercultural arts sector. This will help strengthen Belfast's rich mix of cultural identity.

- Focus on and target TSN areas. Outreach projects are aimed at groups who do not have easy access to participating in the arts for various reasons. These include living in high deprivation areas, high unemployment levels, personal physical disability, personal learning disability and social exclusion. Many of the projects are targeted directly at TSN areas. The TSN areas across Belfast.
- Deliver a creative, high quality and efficient programme of events.
- Differentiate and fulfill the promise. This is achieved via a strong presence / support network plus the friendly and professional work of the Outreach & Education Officer.
- CAC Outreach aims to differentiate itself from other arts organisations, whilst consistently delivering quality work that is specifically suited for group needs in the heart of all communities. The programme is aimed to be inclusive and provide equal opportunities for all. It offers programmes based upon experience and knowledge from the community and educational arts sector.

3.4 Objectives & Mission

“The Crescent Arts Centre’s Outreach & Education Department offers free quality artistic opportunities for everyone to meet, participate and be inspired by a varied artistic inclusive programme of educational and community arts events, projects and festivals.”

- The advancement of education of the public residing in TSN areas and other hard to reach areas of Belfast and the Greater Belfast area by promoting artistic activities, including visual workshops, dance, drama & music performances, and tuition in a range of arts subjects including drama, literature, music, dance, poetry, creative writing and drawing;
- To offer educational activities and support to local community groups, schools, care homes and hospitals who need assistance in organising and delivering quality outreach projects, workshops and events.
- To encourage and facilitate the participation in and appreciation of artistic activities by people from all sectors of society that do not normally participate in such activities, with the purpose of developing their sense of achievement and full capacity as members of society so that their conditions of life may be improved.
- To deliver creative and high quality community arts & educational outreach programme.
- The promotion of a diversity of community outreach & education art forms and high standards in community arts activities;
- To promote the Crescent via community outreach projects

- Encourage new visitors to attend the Centre via the opportunity to attend end of term showcases and performances.

Table 3A - Previous Projects 2010-11

Activity	Group	Activity	Group
GAMING PROJECTS	BALLYNAFEIGH	RANSOM OUTREACH PARTNERSHIP	RANSOM THEATRE
HIP HOP	CHARTER YOUTH CLUB SANDY ROW	STORYTELLING	BELFAST WOMEN'S INTERFACE NETWORK (FALLS & SHANKILL)
JEWELLERY MAKING YOGA / ZUMBA	FOOTPRINTS WOMENS WORKSHOPS	GRAFFITI PROJECT	ST JOHN VIANNEY YOUTH CENTRE
YOUTH THEATRE	CAC YOUNG PEOPLE'S THEATRE CO.	CARD MAKING	SUFFOLK COMMUNITY CENTRE
CRAFTS	WOMENS AID	CANDLEMAKING	HORN DRIVE COMMUNITY CENTRE
PAINTING	SOUTH BELFAST PARTNERSHIP	MURAL	WOOFHILL COMMUNITY CENTRE
DANCE GROUP	THE GROVE	ART & CRAFTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE	ANTIVILLE/CRAIGYHILL, LARNE
REMINISCENCE AND DANCE	THE GROVE INTERGENERATIONAL	STORY WRITING	WOMENS FOOTPRINTS CENTRE
BOOK CLUB	FRIENDSHIP CLUB	BABYDANCE	FIRST STEPS
SINGING	FIRST STEPS PLAY GROUP	CROSS COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS	UR CITY
DRAMA AND WRITING WORKSHOPS	ARTEMIS EAST BELFAST	DANCE CLASSES	DONEGALL PASS
SALSA	LIGONIEL	DANCE AND DRAMA	ARELLIAN NURSERY
ZUMBA	ST VINCENT DE PAUL	STORYTELLING	SUFFOLK COMMUNITY CENTRE
SPEAKING OUT AGAINST POVERTY	SAVE THE CHILDREN	OLDER PEOPLE'S ACTIVE WORKSHOPS	SLIG

Table 3B - Previous Projects 2012-13

Activity	Group	Activity	Group
TITANIC TEXTILE WALL ART	GREATER VILLAGE REGENERATION TRUST	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	ARDOYNE COMMUNITY CENTRE
ARTS CARE & CITY HOSPITAL	RED ROSE COMMUNITY ARTS INSTALLATION	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	SPECTRUM CENTRE
TAI CHI	WOMENS FOOTPRINTS	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	FALLS WOMENS CENTRE
FELT MAKING	SENIOR MOMENTS	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	DUNCAIRN COMMUNITY CENTRE
INTERGENERATIONAL GENERATION OF GLAMOUR	GIRLS MODEL HIGH SCHOOL	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	SHANKILL WOMENS CENTRE
VARIOUS ARTS	SLIG	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	GATEWAY CLUB-UPPER SPRINGFIELD
DRAMA	BALLYNAFEIGH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	SANDY ROW COMMUNITY CENTRE
STORYTELLING	BELFAST WOMENS INTERFACE NETWORK	GIANT BOOK CLUBS	MEETING OF ALL COMMUNITY BOOK CLUBS
CROSS COMMUNITY PROJECT	DONEGALL & MARKET COMMUNITY CENTRES	TEXTILES	LARNE YOUTH SHELTER
PRIMARY SCHOOL TOURS, WORKSHOPS & EDUCATIONAL QUIZ	GRUFFALO EXHIBITION	VARIOUS WORKSHOPS	DONEGALL PASS
YOGA	OUR LADY'S CARE HOME	VARIOUS WORKSHOPS	SANDY ROW
SELF PORTRAITS	BEACON CENTRE-FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT,FINAGHY	VARIOUS WORKSHOPS	MARKETS
PAINTING FOR FUN- OLDER PEOPLE	OPEN DOORS	DANCE PERFORMANCE/GROVE	CULTURE NIGHT/ULSTER MUSEUM
YOUTH DRAMA	FRANK GILLEN CENTRE-DIVIS	DRAMA EVENT	NDCS(NATIONAL DEAF CHILDRENS SOCIETY)

Activity	Group	Activity	Group
FIGURE DRAWING	FRIENDS SCHOOL	CERAMICS, JEWELLERY, & THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE	WINDSOR WOMENS CENTRE
DRAMA	GLENGORMLEY HIGH SCHOOL	SUFFRAGE EVENT AND BANNER WORKSHOPS	INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY
SUMMER SCHEME- GRAFITTI-	FRIENDS OF THE GROVE- COMMUNITY GARDEN	PAINTING	EAST BELFAST MISSION
TAKE OVER FILM	QUEENS FILM THEATRE	MUSIC	THE BASE DROP IN CENTRE-MERVILLE HOUSE
INTERGENERATIONAL –DANCE,VISUAL PERFORMANCE FOR IRISH PRESIDENT VISIT	FRIENDS OF THE GROVE, MODEL SCHOOL FOR GIRLS & SILVER THREADS	DRAMA PERFORMANCE BY ELDERFLOWERS	NORTH DOWN COMMUNITY FORUM
PROMOTIONAL DAY	FANE STREET PRIMARY SCHOOL	DANCE PERFORMANCE BY REVOLUTION DANCE CREW DURING A CRUSADERS FOOTBALL MATCH	FRIENDS OF THE GROVE
YOUTH DANCE	WOMENS AID	YOGA WITH MOVEMENT	ANNADALE NURSING HOME
COMMUNITY ARTS, ART INSTALLATION	EMERGING ARTIST- DOROTHY HUNTER	BABY DANCE	WOMENS FOOTPRINTS
WELCOME CREATIVE SIGN MAKING	MARKETS CC-REFUGEE WEEK	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	HIGHFIELD COMMUNITY CENTRE
WOMENS OVER 55 DRAMA/DANCE	ELDERFLOWERS THEATRE COMPANY	YOUTH DANCE	FRIENDS OF THE GROVE-REVOLUTION DANCE CREW
YOUTH DRAMA/DANCE	CRESCENT ARTS YOUTH THEATRE	LITERATURE	PASS IT ON BELFAST
SING FOR LIFE- COMMUNITY CHOIR	CRESCENT ARTS CENTRE& CANCER FOCUS NI	LITERATURE,CREATIVE STORY PLAY, STORYTELLING &CREATIVE WRITING FAMILY FUN DAY	BELFAST BOOK FESTIVAL
PHOTOGRAPHY/ WOMEN’S ISSUES	EMERGING ARTIST	VARIOUS DANCE ACROSS BRELFAST	CITY DANCE FESTIVAL
LITERATURE	CRESCENT ARTS CENTRE BOOK CLUB		

Table 3C - Current Long and Short Term Projects (Term Sept-Dec 2013)

Activity	Group	Activity	Group
THEATRE COMPANY	ELDERFLOWERS	PHOTOGRAPHY/ COMMUNITY	EMERGING ARTIST
YOUTH DANCE	FRIENDS OF THE GROVE	LITERATURE	PASS IT ON BELFAST
YOUTH THEATRE COMPANY	CAYT	LITERATURE	CRESCENT ARTS BOOK CLUB
MUSIC	SING FOR LIFE-CRESCENT ARTS CENTRE & CANCER FOCUS NI	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	HIGHFIELD COMMUNITY CENTRE
YOUTH DRAMA	FRANK GILLEN CENTRE- DIVIS	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	DUNCAIRN COMMUNITY CENTRE
TEXTILES/PRINT/ CRAFT	GREATER VILLAGE REGENERATION TRUST	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	FALLS WOMENS CENTRE
BABY DANCE	WOMENS FOOTPRINTS	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	SPECTRUM CENTRE
VARIOUS ARTS	BALLYNAFEIGH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION	VARIOUS ARTS	TAILORED PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY PROJECTS
VARIOUS ARTS	NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH TRUST		

Table 3D - Projects for 2014-15

Activity	Group	Activity	Group
THEATRE COMPANY	ELDERFLOWERS	PHOTOGRAPHY/ COMMUNITY	EMERGING ARTIST
YOUTH DANCE	FRIENDS OF THE GROVE	LITERATURE	PASS IT ON BELFAST
YOUTH THEATRE COMPANY	CAYT	LITERATURE	CRESCENT ARTS BOOK CLUB
MUSIC	SING FOR LIFE-CRESCENT ARTS CENTRE & CANCER FOCUS NI	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	HIGHFIELD COMMUNITY CENTRE
DANCE	CITY DANCE FESTIVAL	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	DUNCAIRN COMMUNITY CENTRE
TEXTILES/PRINT/ CRAFT	GREATER VILLAGE REGENERATION TRUST	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	FALLS WOMENS CENTRE
AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMME	CRANMORE PRIMARY SCHOOL	BELFAST COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB	SPECTRUM CENTRE
FASHION/ UPCYCLING	NEET	VARIOUS ARTS	TAILORED PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY PROJECTS
VARIOUS ARTS	NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH TRUST	MUSIC	GRAFITTI CLASSICS
EXHIBITION, WORKSHOPS,EVENT	ZERO WASTE COMMUNITY FESTIVAL	WEEK LONG WORKSHOPS& EVENTS	SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
PERMANENT MURAL	MS SOCIETY-DAY CARE SOCIETY	SHARED IDENTITY PROJECT	PRIMECUT PRODUCTIONS
COMMUNITY/ VARIOUS ACTIVITIES	BELFAST BOOK FESTIVAL		

4. Selected Key Projects – Brief Descriptions

The expansion of class programmes (e.g. in the areas of dance, visual arts, comedy, etc) has impacted positively on Crescent Arts Centre outreach expansion. It is also expected that many of the groups listed above will continue working with the Crescent's Outreach Department to establish new programmes over the next year (2014-15). The following are some of the key projects which continue on an ongoing annual basis.

4.1 Belfast Community Book Clubs

Following on from a previous project of 10 community book clubs, fully funded by Peace III European Funding, CAC Outreach has been able to continue the work with four community centres in delivering a monthly book club. The centres we are currently working in partnership with are Duncairn Community Centre, Falls Womens Centre, the Spectrum Centre and Highfield Community Centre. Our facilitator has continued to meet with each of the groups and there will be one giant book celebratory event next year with special guest speakers.

The aim is for all book clubs to be self organised and self led by the close of 2014. The Giant Book Clubs actively promote opportunities for all the community to meet up together in a supportive and encouraging environment. This promotes social inclusiveness whilst also helps to break down barriers that still exist between some of the communities. All book club venues are in TSN areas of Belfast.

4.2 Community Choir- 'Sing For Life'

CAC Outreach has developed and is delivering a new community choir called 'Sing For Life'. This project was developed in equal partnership with Cancer Focus Northern Ireland. With 100+ members and a regular weekly attendance of c.70, the choir is for those who have been affected by cancer, patients, carers and family members. There is clear evidence that singing in a supportive and friendly environment helps to promote calmness and general wellbeing. Studies have also shown that group singing can help in the alleviation of pain and stress. The Sing For Life Choir has not only given several public concerts but has also featured on UTV and BBC Radio. **(See Appendix 1).**

4.3 CAYT

CAYT is The Crescent Arts Centre's very own Youth Theatre Company for 13 to 18 year olds. The previous CAYT has had a complete overview by CAC Outreach following an extensive monitoring and consultation phase. This has resulted in CAYT being redeveloped with a new youth theatre Director leading the group. The outcome has been extremely positive, attracting interest from dedicated and enthusiastic young people. Outreach has successfully registered the maximum possible of 21 young people following a recent taster session. 100% of attendees registered to join CAYT's new term starting January 2014. This newly launched group is meeting weekly during term times each Saturday afternoon where they will create, explore, devise and surprise with their public performances to be showcased in the Crescent's Cube Theatre.

4.4 Elderflowers

The Crescent Elderflowers Dance Theatre Company is an exciting performance company for women over 55. The group was established in 2010 and quickly gained momentum with their trademark wit and thought-provoking performances capturing the public's attention. Their performances explore current issues affecting older people through dance and theatre.

The shows are created through weekly workshops which include dance, creative movement, theatre and storytelling/reminiscence. All workshops are facilitated to suit the needs of the group in a fun, friendly and sensitive environment addressing current issues that are of interest to older women.

4.5 'Friends Of The Grove.'-Revolution Dance Crew

Revolution Dance Crew (based at The Grove) have developed self-motivational skills and have become more community led and self sufficient. The group, set up to encourage young people to get involved in a more urban dance form has been a huge success in not only giving the members more focus, but developing their self-confidence. The Friends of The Grove participated for the first time in 'Culture Night', performing a short dance routine at the Ulster Museum, have performed at half time during a Crusaders football match (broadcast on Sky TV) and various shows at the Crescent Arts Centre.

4.6 Pass It On Belfast

This is a new outreach project originally founded by Belfast City Council and now run by the Crescent. Outreach initially set up meetings with Belfast City Council prior to the Belfast Book Festival and it became evident that we could work together on a project called 'Book Swap'. The aim of the project was to promote free, easy access to reading whilst recycling old books. A number of cafes and community venues became hosts and the name changed to 'Pass It On Belfast'. When someone wishes to swap an old book for another they know where to go because the Crescent's marketing department developed a new website dedicated to this project: www.passitonbelfast.com

Soon after, Outreach was asked to take over the running of 'Pass It On Belfast' by Belfast City Council. Our aim is to secure eight venues annually (we already have thirteen venues listed on our website) with continued assistance from Belfast City Council. Having secured interest from BBC Radio Ulster, our long term aim is to develop 'Pass It On Belfast' throughout Northern Ireland.

4.7 Emerging Artist

The Emerging Artist Scheme will continue with our new artist photographer Joanne Mullin. Joanne is from Belfast and a recent BA Hons Graduate from Belfast's Art College (University Of Ulster-Belfast). Joanne has already won a prestigious award from London and aims to use her photography skills to highlight key social issues such as domestic violence and deprivation. Joanne will also be creating an Outreach photo storybook.

4.8 CAC Book Club (Crescent Arts Centre Book Club)

The new Crescent Arts Centre's (CAC) Book Club started recently due to a high level of demand from groups requesting to join our Belfast Community Book Club. It was important to include residents living and working in close proximity to the Crescent. All of the registered had never visited the Crescent Arts Centre. The feedback has been very positive and it is expected that this book club will be one of the Crescent's long running projects.

4.9 Belfast Book Festival Outreach Programme

Various literary activities will be delivered during this one week festival in June 2014. We are planning another Family Fun Day to encourage further access for all to participate in fun and exciting workshops and events. The festival will also include many free literary workshops for those with little or no income so that they can feel part of a literary community. As well as this, there will be an extensive concessionary scheme for those on benefits and the unemployed.

4.9.1 City Dance Festival

The Crescent's annual dance festival took place on Friday and Saturday 21st and 22nd February 2014. For the very first time, our Festival was delivered right into the heart of various communities across Belfast. Ten community centres took part on Saturday 22nd February, within which 40 free taster workshops were delivered all afternoon. Those who came along and participated were offered free transport and free entry to the evening dance performances in the Crescent Arts Centre. To further enhance engagement, all workshop participants were given promotional codes in order to receive substantial discounts for classes and workshops during the April- June programme of classes at the Crescent.

4.9.2 Tailored Community Arts Projects

Developed in partnership with various community groups across the city, who are in receipt of various grants, the Crescent Arts Centre develops and delivers bespoke projects to meet their funders' requirements and to assist in utilising their grants effectively.

The aim of this initiative is to help and support groups in organising events and workshops whereby CAC tailors their arts programme right from development through to delivery. It is available to any community group/ school/care centre etc., that would like to learn new creative skills from our talented artists and practitioners.

5. Statistics 2013-14

TOTAL NUMBER OF PROJECTS:

- Long Term Projects: 10
- Short Term Projects:123
- Development: 5 project developments

City Dance – 1,000 participants

Belfast Book Festival Outreach Programme:1,783 Participants

Belfast Book Festival Outreach Programme including Belfast Book Clubs: 1,964 Participants

Period April -September 2013 figures:

- Number of artist/facilitator contracts= 45
- No of individual participants =1951
- Total audience number= 7532

Projected Figures 2014-15

TOTAL NUMBER OF PROJECTS:

- Long Term Individual Projects: 11
- Short Term Individual Projects: 125
- New Project Development:6

- City Dance – 1,250
- Belfast Book Festival Outreach Programme:2,000 Participants
- Belfast Book Festival Outreach Programme including Belfast Book Clubs: 2,200 Participants

6. Barriers to Access

Due to the very nature of Community Arts Outreach work, many issues are faced when encouraging participants from working class areas to engage. Whilst not exhaustive, the following lists many of the common themes:

- Religious divide
- Language (i.e. when working with BME groups with little or no English)
- Health problems
- Disability
- No. of dependants
- Lone parent households (e.g. limited access to childcare)
- Transport
- No or low qualifications
- Unemployed

When developing projects, it takes time to overcome many of the issues outlined above as they have the potential to negatively impact on individuals' self confidence / self esteem.

In all of the community outreach projects the Crescent Arts Centre delivers, trust is a key factor. This takes time, (many projects can be 6 months-1 year in development), experienced facilitation, an empathetic and emotionally intelligent approach and ultimately strong financial support.

Background

Clift et al. (2007) performed a study examining psychological wellbeing and singing in choir members in England. Participants reported a general positive perception of the effects of choir participation, with most participants reporting average or above average quality of life (QoL) scores. However, a subset of participants reporting lower-than-average QoL scores did view choral singing as being beneficial to their psychological health.

Prior studies show benefits of choral singing on physical conditions such as COPD (Bonilha, Onofre, Vieira, Prado and Martinez, 2009) and chronic pain (Kenny and Faunce, 2004). A review of the issues surrounding singing for good health cites the importance of active participation in terms of psychological and physical benefits. (Stacy, Brittain and Kerr, 2002).

Ryan and Deci (2001) detail the concept of wellbeing as being composed of two strands - hedonic wellbeing (more short-term, pleasure/pain orientated) and eudaimonic wellbeing (long-term self-realisation and 'meaning' in life), arguing that studies of wellbeing must be careful to differentiate between these constructs. Similarly, Gick (2010) emphasises the importance of using the biopsychosocial model in evaluating the effects of interventions; that is, evaluating biological, psychological and social aspects in order to gain a thorough understanding.

The Tenovus pilot study by Gale, Enright, Reagon, Lewis and van Deursen (2013) was a key influence on the development of the Sing for Life choir in Northern Ireland. Results showed that regular choral participation was followed by improvement on quality of life (QoL) measures and depression scores even while physiological measures showed no change (echoing results seen in some participants in Clift et al., 2007). Qualitative methods identified the choir as an important support mechanism for people affected by cancer.

The Sing For Life Choir in Belfast was established in September 2012; it is run as a partnership between Cancer Focus Northern Ireland and the Crescent Arts Centre. This study aims to evaluate the effects of choir participation on participants' subjective feelings of wellbeing.

The objectives are:

- collect participants' experiences using qualitative methods
- perform a survey to gather up-to-date quantitative data about choir attendees
- analyse membership records (as of November 2013).

Methods

Participants

Sing for Life is a community choir run in partnership between Cancer Focus Northern Ireland and the Crescent Arts Centre, based in Belfast. The choir is open to all affected by cancer; this is a broad statement encompassing patients, family, carers and healthcare staff. The choir has been running since September 2012, and has performed throughout the year at charity events and for a BBC local interest programme.

Quantitative

Analysis of membership activity was performed using the member database:

- Number of total members; gender.
- Basic geographical information.
- Monthly attendance averages.
- How members describe themselves as being affected by cancer.
- How members found out about the choir.

A response form (see Appendix):

- Length of attendance
- Frequency of attendance
- Subjective rating of choir benefits out of 10
- Do you access any other forms of cancer-related support?

Qualitative

An open response survey form (see Appendix) was used. Initial information sheets about the research project proposed the use of one or more focus groups; however, scheduling difficulties arose with participants which would have resulted in an unrepresentative sample. It was therefore proposed that a form with several open-ended questions (reflecting the focus group interview schedule) could act as an alternative method of data collection. It was hoped that this would bypass scheduling difficulties while still allowing for a wide range of responses.

Results

Demographics Survey

The following data is sourced from the Sing For Life membership database. All new members fill in a standard form, which records their personal details for contact purposes, alongside two additional questions: “How are you affected by cancer?” and “How did you hear about the choir?”

Average monthly attendance (Mar-Oct 2013)	
March 13	41.6
April 13	41.6
May 13	33.6
June 13	33.5
July 13	N/A
Aug 13	37.6
Sept 13	41.6
Oct 13	54.6

122 members provided specific location information. The geographical area breakdown was predominantly Belfast-based, with 80 members (64%) describing their location as in Belfast; geographical reach extended as far as the Bushmills area.

Members	125
Male	26
Female	99

Membership records as of November 2013.

Responses to “How are you affected by cancer?”

Response	Number (%)*
Patient	32 (25.6%)
Family member	47 (37.6%)
Friend	15 (12%)
Healthcare professional	5 (4%)
Not provided	26 (20.8%)

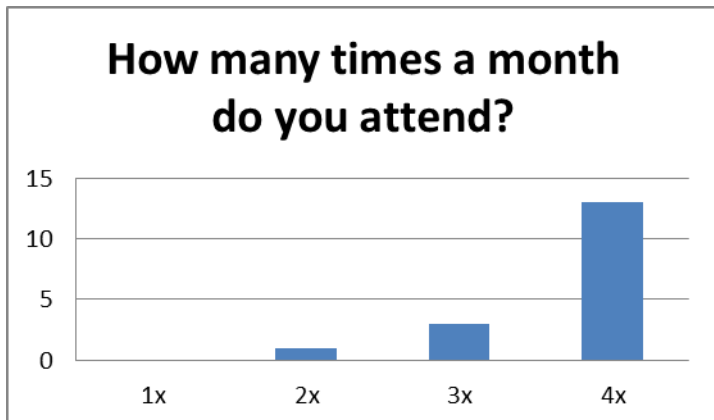
Responses to “How did you hear about the choir?”

Response	Number (%)
Cancer Focus or other cancer service	9 (7.2%)
Crescent Arts Centre	19 (15.2%)
Leaflet	15 (12%)
Online	6 (4.8%)
Press/TV/Concert	9 (7.2%)
Recommendation/Word of Mouth	38 (30.4%)
Not provided	31 (24.8%)

It should be noted that the demographic information collected may not reflect the week-to-week make-up of the choir attendance due to the discrepancy between total recorded members and monthly attendance averages.

Quantitative Membership survey

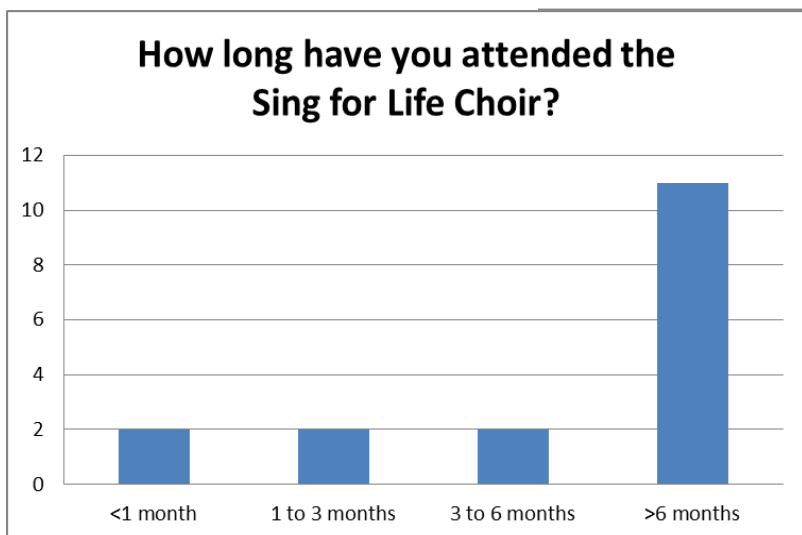
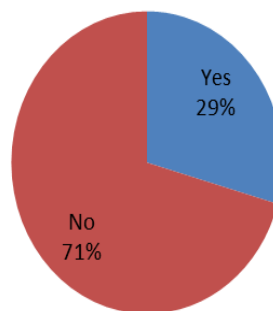
For this section of the survey, an opportunistic sampling strategy was used during two evening rehearsals. The number of respondents was eighteen.



The majority of respondents attended four times per month (taken as every week). Interestingly, respondents attended at least twice per month, suggesting that choir participation was a significant commitment for members.

Do you access any other cancer support services?

This was perhaps a surprising result; over two-thirds of respondents did not access any other cancer support services. However, it should be noted that responses were based on a single point in time, which did not account for support services accessed in the past. Despite this, it is interesting that the choir is perceived as sufficient support.



The majority of respondents had been attending the Sing For Life choir for more than six months, while a smaller number had been attending for between one and six months. It can be seen that the Sing For Life choir is retaining members for a long period of time, whilst still attracting new membership.

Qualitative Results

Collected responses were transcribed and analysed for common themes that arose from each question. Full anonymous transcripts can be found in the Appendix.

Why did you join the Sing For Life Choir?

Many participants mentioned joining the choir because they had long-term ambitions of being in a choir, or that they enjoyed singing as a hobby and wanted to challenge themselves. The secular nature of the choir was valued as well, as it therefore welcomed people from all backgrounds to participate.

“I love singing, have done so since I was younger, and wanted back into it but not in a church choir.”

““I have a form of cancer - chronic leukaemia but love singing and had been looking for a choir to join.”

Additionally, participants raised the issue of confidence and singing ability; the choir requires no audition to join, and all abilities are welcomed. This was positively noted by respondents as encouraging them to join.

Participants also explained their experiences of being affected by cancer, whether as a patient or a carer of someone with cancer. The choir could offer common ground, as well as members not having to hide their state, or feelings related to cancer.

“My friends (two sopranos) from Belfast told me about joining this choir which supported cancer sufferers and friends. We had previously been in a bigger choir and ironically our tutor got cancer. I have to travel by car and train to get to rehearsals but it is worth it.”

“I have had cancer twice and face major surgery on my thyroid gland with a vocal chord going through it which makes the surgery very difficult. So the music helps me to relax and I enjoy Monday evenings very much, yet wonder if I will be able to sing postoperatively.”

“After my cancer diagnosis I wanted to join a choir again and when the Sing For Life Choir was advertised I was delighted.”

“After being treated for cancer, I heard about the choir and thought I would enjoy it.”

“A wish to engage in music again after retirement on medical grounds. I wanted something to enhance my life experience following my career.”

“My sister and I sing for our dad in honour of his talent and we LOVE it.”

Further to the love of singing discussed above, some members talked about a general sense of wanting to do something “life-enhancing”, away from frequently medicalised environment, that does not remind them of being affected by cancer.

“I made a good recovery from cancer and was lucky to do so. The choir is very much a life enhancing experience. There is such a sense of camaraderie in the choir. It must be uplifting for anyone.”

“I have always enjoyed singing and saw the choir on TV. It looked like good fun and it certainly has been. I wanted to have some new experiences and turn negatives into positives.”

Do you feel that participating in the Sing For Life Choir has increased your quality of life? If so, how?

“Physical, social, emotional and spiritual” effects; several participants mentioned the act of singing improving breath control and lung function.

“The singing itself is very uplifting (as long as there are not too many 'sombre' songs). The companionship – everyone is so friendly and supportive. I also have lung disease and the singing helps with lung expansion, breath control etc.”

As can also be seen in the previous quote, a key aspect of the choir's social nature was meeting people with similar experiences, outside the environment of a conventional support group structure. This was said to have a beneficial effect on quality of life.

“The choir helps you to relax, you are surrounded by people who have had the same experiences as you have had. Cancer is a lonely disease and you try to protect your family and friends from knowing how scared you are.”

“I have seen broken, sad, unwell people come, with poor confidence and low self esteem, and seen them flourish, laughing and enjoying the choir practice and venues.”

“I feel I have more confidence, and feel more comfortable in myself – this has been made possible by the lovely people in the choir and the social element that this ensures.”

“I believe music is a wonderful soother and healer for all conditions, minor or major. Singing in a choir has so many benefits – physical, social, emotional and spiritual. So yes, so glad I joined this particular choir. There is not so much pressure as in a normal choir. Tremendous fun and lovely uplifting songs!”

How do you see the Sing For Life Choir developing in the future?

Almost unanimously, participants expressed the wish for the choir to continue and grow in the future.

“I can only see it getting bigger and better.”

“Getting bigger and attracting more members especially with increased publicity obtained via the TV, media, concerts etc.”

“I hope it goes on for a long time.”

There were some suggestions for working with more instrumentation; “Would it be possible to have the support of a band for the concerts. I know I want icing on the cake.”

“More instrumental, [...]a soloist, duets or quartets.”

Respondents also discussed a wish to perform at more outside venues, carry out fundraising and compete in choral festivals and competitions, as a way of challenging themselves. This demonstrates high hopes for the future and positive belief, both as individuals and as a whole choir.

“Perhaps links with other choirs. Why not enter choral competitions or festivals?”

“Hopefully growing and getting more engagements. Maybe evening [sic] making a CD for Cancer Focus and Crescent Arts Centre funds.”

“Expanding our repertoire of songs. Continuing to sing at outside venues, hopefully raising money for the AMAZING choir.”

One of the ambitions for the future was the choir 'giving something back' to the community, both to those generally 'in need', and more specifically to those undergoing treatment for cancer. This is a remarkable statement, that not only involves outreach in general, but addressing individuals affected in a similar way and offering hope, and a focus for the future.

“Hopefully we can undertake more appearances at venues. I would like to see us sing in the Cancer Centre Radiotherapy Department – the waiting is long and it would let others see there is life during and after diagnosis. We could also sing on the wards and in outpatients.”

“I would like to see us singing to/for groups of people who would enjoy it e.g. cancer/terminally ill/elderly/disadvantaged, just to try and give something back to others.”

Is there anything else not covered above that you would like to add?

Keith Acheson (the choirmaster) and the Cancer Focus staff who facilitate the choir in conjunction with Crescent Arts Centre were consistently highly praised by respondents. They convey a sense that the choir would not be what it is, without the hard work of the staff from both organisations.

“I would like to say that the friendliness of the Cancer Focus staff, combined with the unique and engaging and entertaining personality of the choir master [from the Crescent Arts Centre] makes this a very special choir indeed. He gets the best from us all – thoroughly enjoyable.”

“We all love Keith and appreciate his commitment and wonderful humorous approach to teaching, which reaps great results, and the choir will continue to thrive with Keith in charge.”

“Keith, our choirmaster is very talented and patient. Great personality which is ideal for this situation. Liz and Deirdre do a wonderful job keeping the whole thing going. I can see that is quite a fair bit of work!”

“Everyone enjoys the positive feedback we get after venues. We all love Keith and appreciate his commitment and wonderful humorous approach to teaching, which reaps great results, and the choir will continue to thrive with Keith in charge.”

“Conductor/tutor Keith is FAB-U-LOUS! Just hits the right note, helps with the musical phrases and wicked sense of fun. ACE!”

“Keith is super, his antics are so funny and he works so hard to get the results he wants and he does! I hope he will be playing his flute at the Christmas concert, the music is MAGIC.”

“Keith is brilliant. He makes it such fun and has so much patience.”

Some practical modifications were suggested in this section; one participant suggested nametags, due to the size of the choir itself, especially for new members' benefit. Additionally, the suggestion of possibly splitting into two choirs was raised by one respondent. Another comment simply said: “More rock n roll!”

Conclusion

The Sing for Life choir continues to grow; in line with participants' wishes. Discussion of these results with Deirdre Conlon (from Cancer Focus Northern Ireland) was useful. In terms of adding instrumentation to the choir, it was suggested that this would be on an invitational basis for practical reasons; the choir has previously been accompanied by piano and violin, and it was felt that this worked very well.

The choir benefits from a diverse membership, all whom have been affected by cancer. This has led to positive effects from the common ground and learning from each others' experiences, and the frequently discussed "camaraderie".

From the membership survey, it was found that attendance was regular (majority of respondents attended every week) and notably, that few reported using other methods of cancer-related support. Participants reported that the choir had an extremely positive effect on their subjective sense of well-being and quality of life. The choir attendees perceived numerous benefits both physical and mental and have great ambitions for the future. Along with the growth of the choir (which shows no sign of slowing), there is a keen wish to 'give something back' to the wider community. Respondents did talk candidly about their experiences with cancer, but showed determination to live their lives to the full.

I will conclude with a quote from a choir member, which I found quite appropriately sums up these findings:

"I know of at least 2 people in the choir who openly declare that it has turned their lives around, from loneliness and sadness/anger/depression – to enjoying the fun, laughter and friendships, and the uplifting feelings you get when you're singing your socks off. (Whether you can actually sing or not.) Everyone is grateful to CFNI and Crescent Arts for the choir and their on-going support."

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Deirdre Conlon and the staff of Cancer Focus Northern Ireland for facilitating this research project and providing feedback throughout; Keith Acheson of Crescent Arts Centre for inviting me to visit the choir; and the members of the Sing For Life Choir, who graciously took the time to share their experiences. I wish everyone all the best for the future.

About the Organisations

The Crescent Arts Centre, NI's longest running arts centre, sees community arts outreach as one of its key activities. From its beginnings, almost 35 years ago, the Crescent Arts Centre as an organisation, could have been described as an outreach project, when in late 70s and early 80s Belfast, it was seen as a safe and neutral environment for young people from all communities to gather and participate in artistic activity.

The centre, whilst running its in-house arts programme of over 250 weekly classes in all art forms plus weekly live performances from theatre to classical music, completes c. 100 community arts outreach projects right across Belfast on an annual basis. This ranges from working with nurseries, primary schools and nursing homes to work with prisoners, asylum seekers and those suffering from substance abuse. All the more impressive when one considers that the Community Outreach Department is headed up by one staff member, Outreach and Education Officer Ann Feely.

Generally, the Crescent Arts Outreach & Education programme provides access to various arts activities and community events for all. The Crescent Arts Outreach & Education programme is organised and delivered in partnership with community centres, schools, trusts, voluntary groups, charities, hospitals and day care centres to provide innovative, sustainable arts activities for the whole community which encourage creative expression, learning of new skills, cultural understanding and enjoyment.

The Sing For Life Choir has been a huge success for the Crescent Arts Centre in partnership with Cancer Focus NI, and is enhanced by the very 'in-house nature' of its artistic leadership i.e. the Crescent Arts Centre Director is the Choirmaster and the Administrator Megan Boyd is the accompanist.

Both have found the project a welcome diversion from the cut and thrust of a dynamic and increasingly busy arts centre. Keith has stated "Taking on the direction of the choir has been one of the best decisions I have ever made. I have met so many new people who I can now safely consider friends. Individual choir members regularly come up to me at the end of rehearsals to thank me and say how enjoyable they are finding the experience. Well, the feeling is mutual. Every week I leave the rehearsal with an extra spring in my step, and that is simply down to the enjoyment I receive, from working with such a loyal, friendly and hardworking group of people."

Cancer Focus Northern Ireland

Established as the Ulster Cancer Foundation in 1969, Cancer Focus Northern Ireland supports people affected by cancer when they need it the most. Cancer Focus provides comprehensive support services, including a dedicated helpline, counselling and Family Support Service, with a Driving Service available for individuals struggling to arrange travel to hospital appointments. Alongside the Sing For Life Choir, Cancer Focus runs a walking group, art therapy and writing groups.

The organisation also do considerable health promotion work across the country, reaching thousands of schoolchildren every year with the Fit Factor and Smokebusters Club programmes. Other initiatives include the NI Smoker's Helpline and the workplace health programme.

The Sing For Life choir is run in partnership with the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast. Choir rehearsals and performances are managed by Liz Atkinson (Head of Care Services) and Deirdre Conlon (Care Services Manager).

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Appendices

Appendix I

Cancer, Wellbeing and the Sing for Life Choir Research Project Information Sheet

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in the Cancer, Wellbeing and the Sing for Life Choir study. This sheet will give you information about the project; attached is a consent form if you wish to proceed. This study aims to examine your experiences as participants in the Sing for Life choir and its effect on your general wellbeing.

My name is Laura Johnston. I am a final year Psychology student at Queen's University Belfast and I'm on placement with Cancer Focus this semester. This project aims to evaluate the Sing for Life choir project's effects on participants' quality of life.

The study will take place as a focus group which asks about a number of different topics about your experiences of participating in the choir. Ideally, between 5 and 10 participants would be sufficient; the focus group will take place at a time that's suitable for most participants. The focus group should take around an hour to complete, and will take place on a day that suits you, within the first two weeks of November.

The focus group will be based around these questions:

- Why did you get involved in Sing for Life?
- How do you think it has helped you in terms of being affected by cancer?
- How do you see the choir in the future? (Is there anything you'd like to see?)
- Anything else you'd like to talk about!

Even if you do not want to take part in the focus group, I would be grateful if you would complete the short questionnaire overleaf.

Cancer, Wellbeing and the Sing for Life Choir

Research Project Consent Form

You have the right to withdraw from this focus group/survey at any point, for any reason. This includes retrospectively (after the focus group/survey has finished). You can contact me at any point on the above email address to withdraw; all your data will be removed from the study and destroyed without consequence.

All your responses will be confidential in compliance with the British Psychological Society's Ethical Standards and the Data Protection Act. While some responses may be quoted in the final report, you will not be identifiable. You are not required to talk about any personal/private experiences that you do not feel comfortable with.

The final report will be available through Cancer Focus NI; you are welcome to request a copy once the report has been completed; this should be around mid-December 2013.

While the utmost care has been taken to avoid causing distress, if you are in immediate need of assistance call Lifeline (24hrs) on **0808 808 8000** or the Cancer Focus NI Helpline (9am-1pm Mon-Fri) on **0800 783 3339**.

If you consent to taking part in the study, please sign and print your name below, along with the date.

Signature _____
Print Name _____
Date _____

Appendix IV
Sing For Life Choir Research Project
Open Response Form

Please answer the questions below to whatever extent you feel comfortable with. You can stay anonymous, and your responses will not be able to be linked to you in the report.

Why did you join the Sing For Life Choir?

Do you feel that participating in the Sing For Life Choir has increased your quality of life? If so, how?

How do you see the Sing For Life Choir developing in the future?

Is there anything else not covered above that you would like to add?

Thank you for participating!

Open Response Survey Transcripts

Question 1: Why did you join the Sing for Life Choir?

"A wish to engage in music again after retirement on medical grounds. I wanted something to enhance my life experience following my career."

"I have always enjoyed singing and saw the choir on TV. It looked like good fun and it certainly has been. I wanted to have some new experiences and turn negatives into positives."

"Initially I wanted to join a choir because I had enjoyed taking part in the Singdive (?) choir. I didn't realise at the outset what it was all about. I had heard it was a great choir and wanted to participate. Only later did I realise its particular focus! I suffered from cancer 10 years ago so felt drawn to the choir."

"I've always enjoyed singing and have been in various choirs over the years (e.g. school and church). After my cancer diagnosis I wanted to join a choir again and when the Sing For Life Choir was advertised I was delighted."

"To meet people, camaraderie."

"Love of music/support charity."

"To sing with other people."

"After being treated for cancer, I heard about the choir and thought I would enjoy it."

"A friend invited me along as she knows that I enjoy singing."

"I love to sing but couldn't sing on my own to audition!"

"I love singing, have done so since I was younger, and wanted back into it but not in a church choir."

"I have always loved to sing and having had a close family member affected by cancer I found the whole ethos of the choir ideal for me."

"I have a form of cancer - chronic leukaemia but love singing and had been looking for a choir to join."

"My friends (two sopranos) from Belfast told me about joining this choir which supported cancer sufferers and friends. We had previously been in a bigger choir and ironically our tutor got cancer. I have to travel by car and train to get to rehearsals but it is worth it."

"I have had cancer twice and face major surgery on my thyroid gland with a vocal chord going through it which makes the surgery very difficult. So the music helps me to relax and I enjoy Monday evenings very much, yet wonder if I will be able to sing postoperatively."

"After I was diagnosed I saw a flyer about it. I thought I would give it a try. I always wanted to be in a choir but never had the confidence to try."

"I heard about it and thought I'd like to join. Talked to my sister about it and she also liked the idea of it. Our dad was a beautiful opera singer and choir master. He died of cancer of the bowel, only weeks after our sister died of breast cancer. He had hidden his illness due to family distress over our sister's illness/dying. My sister and I sing for our dad in honour of his talent and we LOVE it."

Question 2: Do you feel the SFL choir has increased your quality of life? If so, how?

“Yes, I have met new people whose problems are probably greater than my own. We have a great laugh and are improving (sometimes!). It really gives me a boost, even in the dark nights as I take public transport.”

“Yes, it certainly has. I look forward to every meeting. I enjoy meeting new people and making friends. Love all the songs we have learnt. It is so much fun – Keith is a really funny person. It gives me a sense of achievement, it improves my breathing, mental health and stress levels and is a great focus.”

“Of course. I made a good recovery from cancer and was lucky to do so. The choir is very much a life enhancing experience. There is such a sense of camaraderie in the choir. It must be uplifting for anyone.”

“Yes, before my diagnosis I didn't really go out much. I really look forward to the rehearsals which are a lot of fun. Have met new friends and learnt new songs.”

“It has give me enjoyment and it makes you feel good that you can do something to help others.”

“YES, I look forward to this every week! It's one of the best things I'm doing while I'm here and I hope I can find something like this when I must leave. I love this!”

“New member – excellent to date.”

“Simply meeting people with similar interests.”

“Yes, definitely. It's very sociable and enjoyable. I enjoy the singing and the company. I find myself singing the songs all week long.”

“Probably too early to say, as I've only been here a few weeks.”

“Definitely. It is great fun and Keith is a star!”

“Yes, I feel brighter and happier.”

“I feel I have more confidence, and feel more comfortable in myself – this has been made possible by the lovely people in the choir and the social element that this ensures.”

“The singing itself is very uplifting (as long as there are not too many 'sombre' songs). The companionship – everyone is so friendly and supportive. I also have lung disease and the singing helps with lung expansion, breath control etc.”

“I believe music is a wonderful soother and healer for all conditions, minor or major. Singing in a choir has so many benefits – physical, social, emotional and spiritual. So yes, so glad I joined this particular choir. There is not so much pressure as in a normal choir. Tremendous fun and lovely uplifting songs!”

“The choir helps you to relax, you are surrounded by people who have had the same experiences as you have had. Cancer is a lonely disease and you try to protect your family and friends from knowing how scared you are.”

“Without a doubt. Such a sense of achievement. It is really uplifting.”

“Not as such. I am a nurse and have worked with cancer patients for 26 years. I see the enjoyment and camaraderie, and empathetic relationships/friendships developing among choir members. I have seen broken, sad, unwell people come, with poor confidence and low self esteem, and seen them flourish, laughing and enjoying the choir practice and venues. It's great to see.”

Question 3: How do you see the choir developing in the future?

"Perhaps links with other choirs. Why not enter choral competitions or festivals?"

"Hopefully we can undertake more appearances at venues. I would like to see us sing in the Cancer Centre Radiotherapy Department – the waiting is long and it would let others see there is life during and after diagnosis. We could also sing on the wards and in outpatients."

"More of the same – performing in a range of cross-community and cross-cultural settings. Shopping centres, hospitals, community centres. Individual singing and whole choir singing. Performances across the border and beyond. Fundraising for specific purposes."

"Hopefully growing and getting more engagements. Maybe evening making a CD for Cancer Focus funds."

"I hope it goes on for a long time."

"Might need 2 choirs if size increases? Might consider a small charge to cover cost of copying etc."

"Growing, encouraging other charities to copy."

"It should go from strength to strength."

"I really hope it continues."

"Getting bigger and attracting more members especially with increased publicity obtained via the TV, media, concerts etc."

"Would it be possible to have the support of a band for the concerts. I know I want icing on the cake."

"More instrumental, for...(indecipherable) a soloist, duets or quartets."

"I can only see it getting bigger and better."

"I would like to see us singing to/for groups of people who would enjoy it e.g. cancer/terminally ill/elderly/disadvantaged, just to try and give something back to others."

"Hopefully some tenors will join! Enjoy doing the appearances with just a few songs and more people should definitely join. I love the co-operation of the schoolgirls (piano and violin) and think joint projects are a great idea."

"I see it as an essential treatment for those who have had cancer or are having treatment – so it is an important aspect of the person's life."

"I think it will grow and grow. Would love to do more concerts and functions."

"Expanding our repertoire of songs. Continuing to sing at outside venues, hopefully raising money for the AMAZING charity that CFNI is. Not too many venues though, as I do hear members talk about struggling to attend them all. Choir transport is excellent. Everyone enjoys the positive feedback we get after venues. We all love Keith and appreciate his commitment and wonderful humorous approach to teaching, which reaps great results, and the choir will continue to thrive with Keith in charge."

Question 4: Is there anything else you would like to add?

“The friendship and support is so good. I only joined in September and love it. This choir is a very positive experience to be part of and we all have a connection.”

“I would like to say that the friendliness of the Cancer Focus staff, combined with the unique and engaging and entertaining personality of the choir master makes this a very special choir indeed. He gets the best from us all – thoroughly enjoyable.”

“Meeting new people with the same and different cancers and talking.”

“Having nametags that we re-use each week would be helpful.”

“More rock & roll!”

“Just that I genuinely love this choir and feel that for anyone affected by cancer or otherwise it is a fantastic outlet.”

“Keith, our choirmaster is very talented and patient. Great personality which is ideal for this situation. Liz and Deirdre do a wonderful job keeping the whole thing going. I can see that is quite a fair bit of work!”

“Maybe visits to old people's homes/hospitals, or shopping centres (Xmas). Conductor/tutor Keith is FAB-U-LOUS! Just hits the right note, helps with the musical phrases and wicked sense of fun. ACE!”

“Keith is super, his antics are so funny and he works so hard to get the results he wants and he does! I hope he will be playing his flute at the Christmas concert, the music is MAGIC.”

“Keith is brilliant. He makes it such fun and has so much patience.”

“I know of at least 2 people in the choir who openly declare that it has turned their lives around, from loneliness and sadness/anger/depression – to enjoying the fun, laughter and friendships, and the uplifting feelings you get when you're singing your socks off. (Whether you can actually sing or not.) Everyone is grateful to CFNI for the choir and their on-going support.”