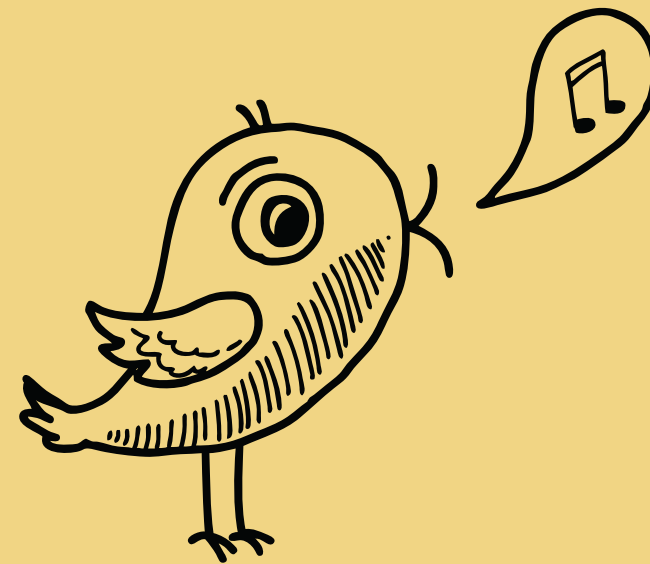


WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A CHOIR FOR UNPAID CARERS?
FINDING THE BENEFITS TO EMOTIONAL WELLBEING IN ORDER TO
SECURE INVESTMENT AND FUNDING TO SUPPORT THIS COMMUNITY.



Sarah Summers

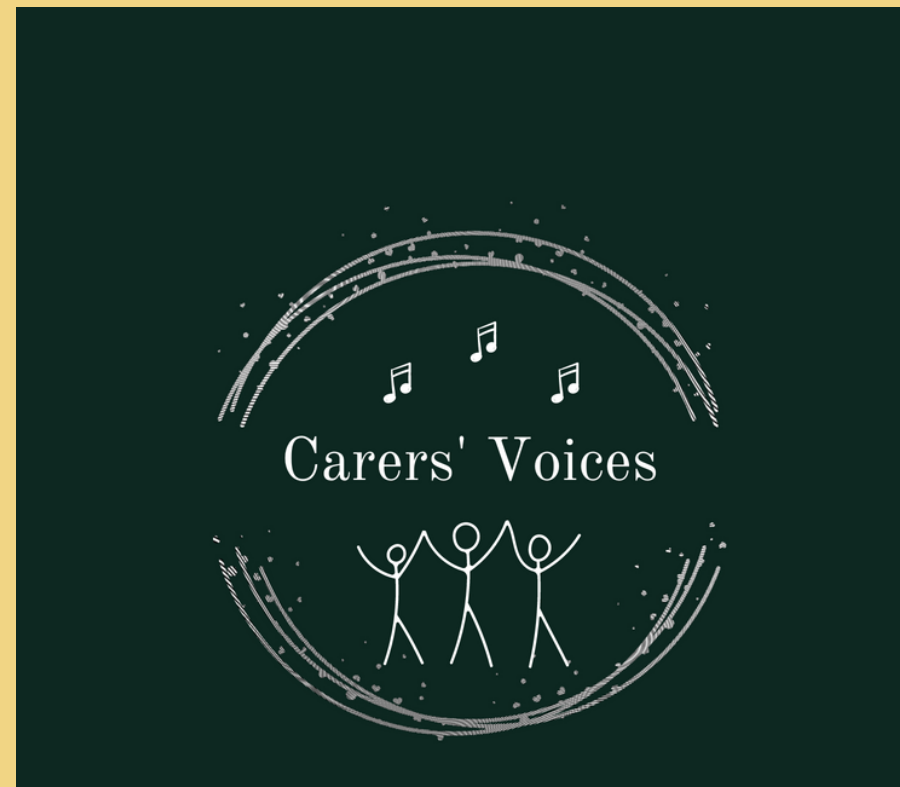
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Attended by Unpaid Carers and Former Carers

Unpaid Carers: 'anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support'
(NHS England).

The 'psychological impacts' remain once the caring role is over
(Orzeck and Silverman, 2008, p. 217).



JUSTIFICATION, AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Originally set up by Swindon Carers Centre, the choir is currently self funded.

Reduced session times no longer allow for a social break and donations may be unaffordable for many and become increasingly so as the current cost-of-living crisis continues.

Research could support funding applications which would allow for greater accessibility.

Research would allow for a deeper understanding of how a choir can meet the needs of Unpaid Carers.

Showing the value of a choir for this community may encourage others to consider providing a 'carers choir'.

METHODOLOGY

Interpretivist ontology



Epistemology will be to interpret data collected in order to inform understanding



Pragmatic Paradigm to allow flexibility in methods



Methodology will be mixed methods



METHODS

Literature review



Journal recording own observations



Questionnaires

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Insider researcher



Possible wellbeing implications

MODEL OF REFLECTION (DRISCOLL, 2006)

- What? Findings
- So what? Analysis of data
- Now what? Next steps and recommendations for further research

Literature Review

In the UK, Carers Allowance is just £69.70 a week - the lowest benefit of it's kind.

(Gov.UK)

Unpaid carers can neglect their own wellbeing which impacts on their ability to care for another person.

(Spencer and Swinglehurst, 2020)

Existing studies show how group singing positively impacts wellbeing.

(Livesey et al., 2012)

Caring as a social determinant of health (Public Health England, 2021) - wellbeing needs.

The hidden costs of caring (MarieCurieUK, 2015) - financial challenges.

Similar studies, such as Singing for the brain (Osman et al., 2016) and Building Community through song: The therapeutic hospice choir (Gosine and Travasso, 2018) influenced a desire for qualitative methods.



Questionnaire offered to all members of Carers' Voices

Are you currently caring for somebody?

Why did you join a choir for Unpaid Carers?

Why do you continue to attend a choir for Unpaid Carers?

What are the advantages of attending a choir for Unpaid Carers?



Singing

8 out of 8 carers

2 out of 3 former carers



Community benefits

8 out of 8 carers

3 out of 3 former carers



Personal time

6 out of 8 carers

2 out of 3 former carers



SINGING

Sub-themes:

1) Singing together

2) Singing for emotional wellbeing

I love music, listening and singing with other people.

Singing is good for my soul.

SINGING TOGETHER

Sharing a common
love of singing

Singing has always been
an enjoyable pastime and
in a choir with harmonies
is uplifting.

really enjoy singing
with the people who
attend.

Enjoyment of singing with others

7 out of 11 participants



Singing with others is specifically linked to wellbeing

2 out of 11 participants



WELLBEING BENEFITS OF SINGING ARE INCREASED WHEN SINGING
WITH OTHERS
(STEWART AND LONSDALE, 2016).



SINGING FOR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Ones mental health can suffer due to the level of demands on me as an unpaid carer.

In a short time my mood can change in a positive way, that helps to sustain, re-energising me, enabling me to continue in my caring role.

'THE CONCENTRATION REQUIRED TO LEARN AND PERFORM THE
REPERTOIRE ACTS AS A STIMULUS FOR MENTAL ENGAGEMENT',
ALLOWING DISTRACTION FROM OTHER THOUGHTS
(BAILEY AND DAVIDSON, 2002, P. 246).

THE CONTROLLED BREATHING THAT IS INVOLVED IN SINGING IS
CONDUCTIVE TO RELAXATION
(CLIFT ET AL., 2010).



Sarah recognises the individual struggles and needs of the members and does her best to accommodate as much as she can. Some learn by ear. Some sight read. Some know the songs already, others have never heard them. There are members who sing and perform regularly in a variety of groups, others who are very nervous of performing. She often provides a variety of notation, lyrics and opportunities to learn by ear to meet everyone's needs. She carefully places people to ensure everyone is comfortable and supported.

Hendry et al, (2022) found that emotional wellbeing benefits obtained from singing together are influenced by variables such as the style of the choir, group dynamics within the choir and the personality of the choir leader.



COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Sub-themes:

1) Like-minded people who understand

2) Support

3) The ability to offload

It's MORE than a choir

I feel like I'm part of something lovely

LIKE MINDED PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND

Being with others who understand the demands, stress on me as an unpaid carer, the ability to be myself and not be judged when having a bad day.

Everyone understands if can't get there.

'CHOIR MEMBERS IDENTIFIED THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED
EXPERIENCE AND ACCEPTANCE THROUGH THE CHOIR—KNOWING THAT
EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS THE CHALLENGES'
(GOSINE AND TRAVASSON, 2018, P. 21).

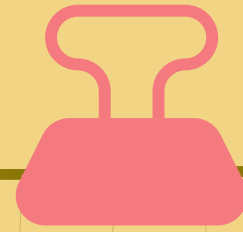


SUPPORT

It is a support network as well as a choir and when times are tough everyone understands without long explanations.

The group helps me, and I hope being part of this particular group helps other members when they need it.

SUPPORT



C7 was a little late this morning, following a medical appointment. She was visibly upset with tears in her eyes. C6 noticed that she looked upset and took her straight over to a spare sit next to her own, saying 'come and sit next to me, I want you to get this bit right with me'.

5 out of 11 participants refer to the supportive nature of Carers' Voices

4 out of 8 carers



1 out of 3 former carers



FORMER CARERS SHARING INFORMATION WITH ACTIVE
UNPAID CARERS MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS FOR BOTH
SITUATIONS

(ANGELIKA ET AL., 2022).

SHARE & OFFLOAD

The time that we used to have to socialise was important because we had an opportunity to share and offload as well as sing.



I talked to her at the end of the session, aware that she might like the opportunity to offload before going home and she told me about the caring challenges that she is currently facing, finishing with 'thanks for the singing – that helped'.



'MANY CARERS FEEL THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING LISTENED TO
THERAPEUTIC AND ENERGISING, ALLOWING THEM TO CONTINUE IN
THEIR ROLE OF CARER WITH VIGOUR AND ENTHUSIASM.'

(KELLY, 2010, P. 20)



These findings support the need for a social break during rehearsals.

Carers could make disclosures that indicate that specialist support is required.

Helpline information could be useful.



PERSONAL TIME

Sub-themes:

1) Self Care

2) Demands of caring

important part of taking care of myself so I can carry on in my caring role

allows me to put myself first

We are not always available for rehearsals even when we would like to be.

DESPITE THE WELLBEING BENEFITS OF ATTENDING CHOIR, CARERS
FACE BARRIERS TO JOINING OR COMMITTING TO A GROUP:

CARERS MAY HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT LEAVING THE PERSON THEY
CARE FOR (CAMIC ET AL., 2013, P. 158).

‘MANY SPOUSE CARERS PUT THEIR OWN LIVES ON HOLD’ TO ENSURE
THAT THEY ARE ABLE CARE FOR THEIR LOVED ONE (KELLY, 2010, P. 18).



Conclusions

Choir members believe that they gain emotional wellbeing benefits from attending Carers' Voices. This suggests benefits to the wider community of Unpaid Carers.

Participant data suggests that a social break would be useful in allowing choir members time to emotionally offload. This is supported by existing literature.

Funding would allow greater accessibility and may help to provide for longer sessions to include a social break.

Recommendations for further research

Further research into how a choir is managed in order to ensure that emotional wellbeing remains a priority.

Explore how best to provide for the needs of former carers, utilising their caring experience to enhance the supportive nature of the community, where this proves to be beneficial.

Find ways in which this community can be supported to allow regular personal time away from their caring roles.

Reflection on learning and next steps

Insider researcher - keeping emotional distance.

Focusing on data analysis and reviewing literature allowed for a bigger picture to emerge which I found helpful.

Reading questionnaire responses has allowed me to see beyond the role of the Musical Director which has added depth to how I see my own role within the choir.

Whilst carers value the opportunity to "share and offload", this could encourage disclosures that need to be acted on. The provision of helpline information would be useful.

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