



COMMUNITY VOICES

A guide to establishing
and developing a
community choir



Music and
Creative Arts

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Aims and objectives	5
What's the benefit?	6

THE LOGISTICS

Location, time and frequency	8
Case Study 1: Ayr Community Choir	9
Case Study 2: Hedge End Community Choir	10
Case Study 3: Bexleyheath Come and Sing Community Choir	11

ADVERTISING 12

THE REHEARSAL

Structure	14
Welcome and icebreakers	15
Warm-Ups	16
Song Choice	18
To read or not to read	20
Harmony	22
Tone Deaf?	23
The Community Choir Leader	24

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Performance Opportunities	28
Integration and choir socials	29

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

Finances, health and safety/risk management	30
Accessibility	
Safeguarding	31
Recommended Resources	32
Copyright and support	33



Photography by Bobby Weir and Michael Webb

INTRODUCTION

Community choirs have been in existence for a relatively long time, but in the last five years communities all over the country have seen choirs popping up. Gareth Malone and his BBC documentaries, Songs of Praise 'Choir of the year' and other such programmes have been a real catalyst in promoting this concept.

Music and Creative Arts are committed to looking at fresh and current ways in which we can support local corps in their mission. We recognise the importance of developing quality relationships by engaging with those outside of corps, and one of the many ways of doing so is through community choirs. By beginning to create a culture of involvement, those already plugged into corps activities can be empowered to support God's mission through forming new friendships. This will continue to encourage them to actively live out the gospel in their community.

This booklet will provide you with the information, knowledge and ideas you need to get going and start a vibrant community choir within your local setting.



BEFORE GETTING STARTED

Here are a few key questions you need to ask yourself:

The first step is prayer! Add this topic to any existing prayer network within your corps or set up a specific network to cover this in prayer. Establishing and running a choir is not a small commitment for individuals and corps. It's important to pray for direction, creativity and wisdom, so you know how to begin to take this forward.

'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'

(Philippians 4:6 NIV)

Do you need to start a choir?

Is there a vision and need for this type of initiative in your corps/community? Has this idea been previously mentioned by people in your corps/centre who maybe have no other outlet for musical participation?

Are there existing community choirs in your local area?

Be sure to do your homework and find out if there are community choirs in your local area by looking online and asking around. If there are, it would be a good idea to pop along to a rehearsal to see what it's like, see how they run it and whether it has a similar setup to what you have in mind. There may be opportunities to collaborate and partner with these other community choirs rather than start your own. You will probably also pick up tips on how/how not to do it!

What are your aims and objectives?

Having a clear direction for the choir is crucial to the initial start-up. To help, here is a summary table of aims and objectives used by existing Salvation Army community choirs:

Aims and Objectives

- For the church to build new relationships and get to know the community better
- To engage with the wider community through participation in community events
- To provide an alternative means of worship for members, some of whom call the choir their 'church'
- To give people the opportunity to discover, rediscover and express their God-given potential and creativity
- To have fun
- To provide a place where people can come and enjoy singing, regardless of their ability
- To introduce people to The Salvation Army in a 'non-threatening' environment
- For people to learn a new skill or develop their existing skills
- To bring people into a friendly fellowship which will create a caring environment and a sense of belonging
- To create a space that brings people together from all walks of life within the community

You will need to work out which aims and objectives are your priorities. Perhaps choose and adapt three or four and use these as your focus.

Does the corps/centre have the resources and time to commit to this?

Who is going to be responsible for taking ownership of the choir? Running a community choir is a big commitment,

especially within a corps where a busy weekly programme already exists. So, consult and liaise with existing music sections, ie songsters/senior band. Ensure the community choir does not 'compete' with these sections but, instead, provides another opportunity for singing/worshipping, bringing people into church and forming new relationships. If this is understood by the corps from the beginning, you won't go far wrong.

From our experience, it is good to include Salvation Army musicians within the choir who are involved in weekly worship at the corps. This shows an integrated approach and a united feeling of corps ownership. The last thing you want is for the choir to become detached from the corps and run independently. This can lead to isolation and losing sight of the main aims and objectives.

If you can answer the four pivotal questions above then you are in a good place.

'Singing is a fantastic way of bringing diverse people together with a common aim; creating relationships, combatting loneliness and isolation, supporting community cohesion and facilitating the significant physical, emotional and spiritual benefits of the group.'

(Captain Matt Spencer, New Addington corps community choir SingCR0nise)

WHAT'S THE BENEFIT?

Not sure on why singing and choirs are good for you? Here are some benefits that could further convince you as well as those considering getting involved:



COMMUNITY

- Choirs are a great way of meeting new people and building community.
- New relationships can begin to form and existing relationships strengthened.
- Choirs are inclusive - anyone can join in.
- It provides an opportunity to network and use each other's gifts and areas of expertise.



CORPS

- It is an outward-facing initiative which serves the surrounding community.
- It could potentially open doors to introduce others to Christ.
- It raises the corps profile in the community and awareness of The Salvation Army.
- It gives opportunities for the centre to be open more and increase footfall.
- It provides further possibilities for mission when giving 'performances' at the corps/centre.
- It allows any corps members who aren't already involved in music ministry, to have the opportunity to do so.
- You can utilise the gifts and skills of members of the choir into the life of the corps; for example, gifted children's workers or members with the gift of hospitality etc.

HEALTH



- Singing is a great aerobic workout for your heart and lungs.
- It promotes a healthy lymphatic (infection-fighting) system and in turn boosts your immune system.
- It can reduce anxiety and help you to relax.
- It improves your posture, exercises your facial muscles and tones the stomach.
- It makes you happy - when you sing your body produces 'feel-good' hormones called endorphins.

PERSONAL



- You can learn a new skill or develop an existing one.
- It can improve your self-esteem and build confidence.
- It's simply great fun.

'The choir is adding to the overall ministry of the corps - not taking over or taking off in an independent direction. It's one item on a menu of complementary ministries.'

(Bobby Irvine, Ayr Community Choir)

OK, so you want to go ahead... now what? We have identified a few key areas which are crucial to understanding the running of a choir.



THE LOGISTICS

LOCATION

Consider the best rehearsal venue to suit the community and your target audience. Our recommendation would be to use a Salvation Army hall if possible. Wherever you choose, make sure you have all you need to run the choir effectively - for example, enough seating, piano, electric points for backing tracks etc. It sounds so simple, but you could be in some trouble if you don't check beforehand.

TIME

The timing of your rehearsal will depend on the demographic you are aiming for. If you have older/retired singers, rehearsals might work well during the daytime on weekdays. It would be best for children's and youth choirs to rehearse after school; for adults, weekday evenings may be preferred. Be sure to check and confirm the availability of the rehearsal location for your chosen days/times in advance before advertising this information.

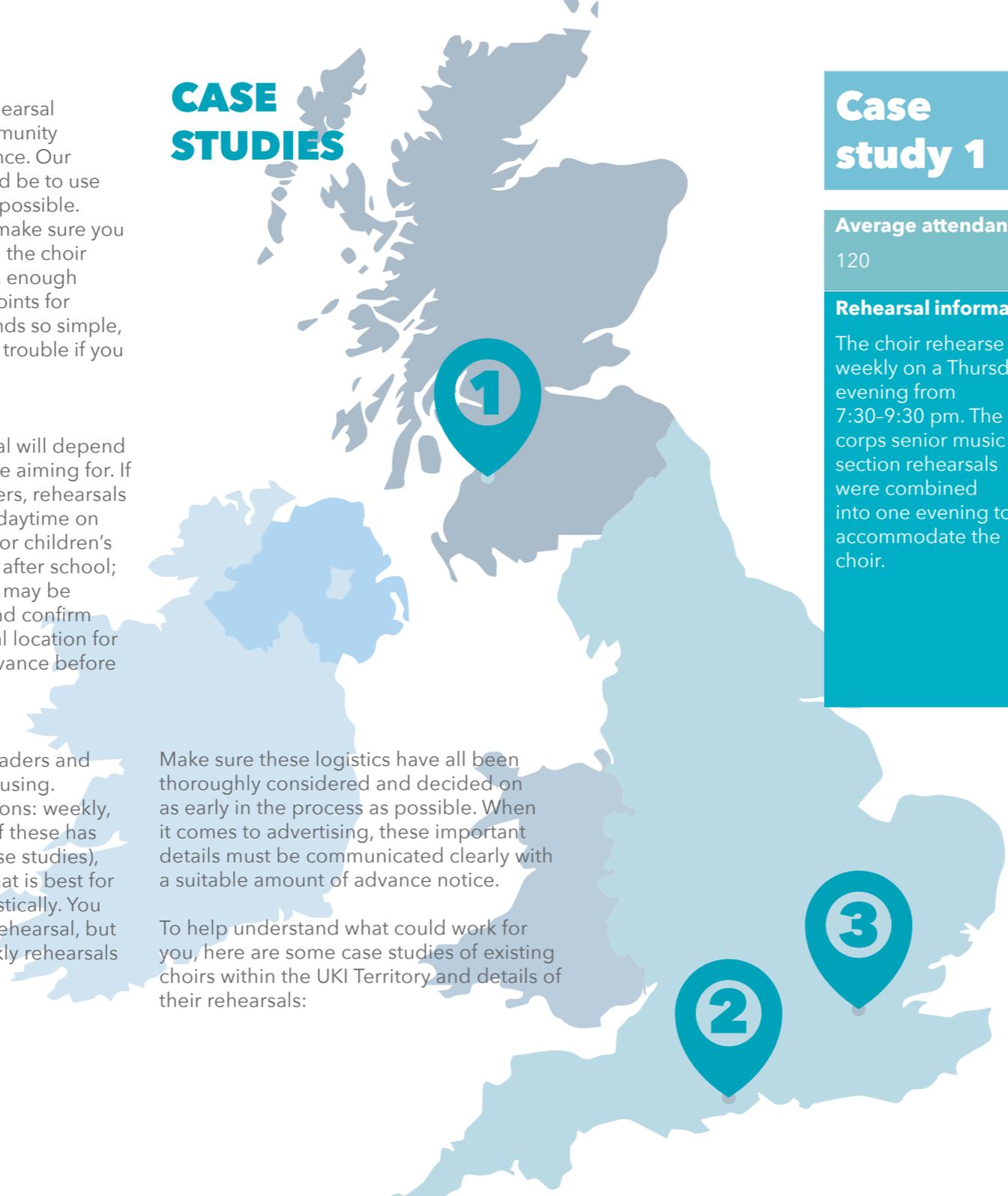
FREQUENCY

This totally depends on the leaders and availability of the hall you are using. Generally there are three options: weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Each of these has its own pros and cons (see case studies), so it is up to you to decide what is best for the choir, practically and realistically. You might start with a fortnightly rehearsal, but discover that monthly or weekly rehearsals work better.

CASE STUDIES

Make sure these logistics have all been thoroughly considered and decided on as early in the process as possible. When it comes to advertising, these important details must be communicated clearly with a suitable amount of advance notice.

To help understand what could work for you, here are some case studies of existing choirs within the UKI Territory and details of their rehearsals:



Case study 1

Ayr Community Choir West Scotland Division

Average attendance

120

Rehearsal information

The choir rehearse weekly on a Thursday evening from 7:30-9:30 pm. The corps senior music section rehearsals were combined into one evening to accommodate the choir.

Demographic

The age starts from 16+, with half of the choir being over 55 years. The choir is around 40% non-churchgoers.

Observations

- Weekly rehearsals mean learning music becomes easier and increases the opportunity for social interaction and relationship building, which also increases the sense of belonging for the members.
- Most of the songs are taught aurally (by rote - refer to 'To read or not to read' section on page 20) which benefits non-music readers.
- A choir of this size requires a large amount of organisation, management, pastoral and preparation time. With just under 200 members on the register, this can be a full-time commitment.

Note:

Weekly rehearsals will produce a quicker turnaround of music. Make sure you are prepared for outlets and opportunities to sing.

Case study 2

Hedge End Community Choir Southern Division

Average attendance

40

Rehearsal information

The choir rehearse fortnightly on a Monday evening between 7:45-9:15 pm. This rehearsal alternates with the worship group rehearsals. A music reading session is also offered before the rehearsal.

Demographic

The age range is from 17 to 80 and has a good mix of both women and men.

Observations

- Having fortnightly rehearsals means music retention is quite good.
- The option is there to teach by rote, but with music reading classes beforehand, members are acquiring a new skill.
- Preparation is key here as everything for the rehearsal will need to be set up well in advance. These additional music-reading classes take up more time of both leaders and members alike.

Case study 3

Bexleyheath Come and Sing Community Choir South London Division

Average attendance

40

Rehearsal information

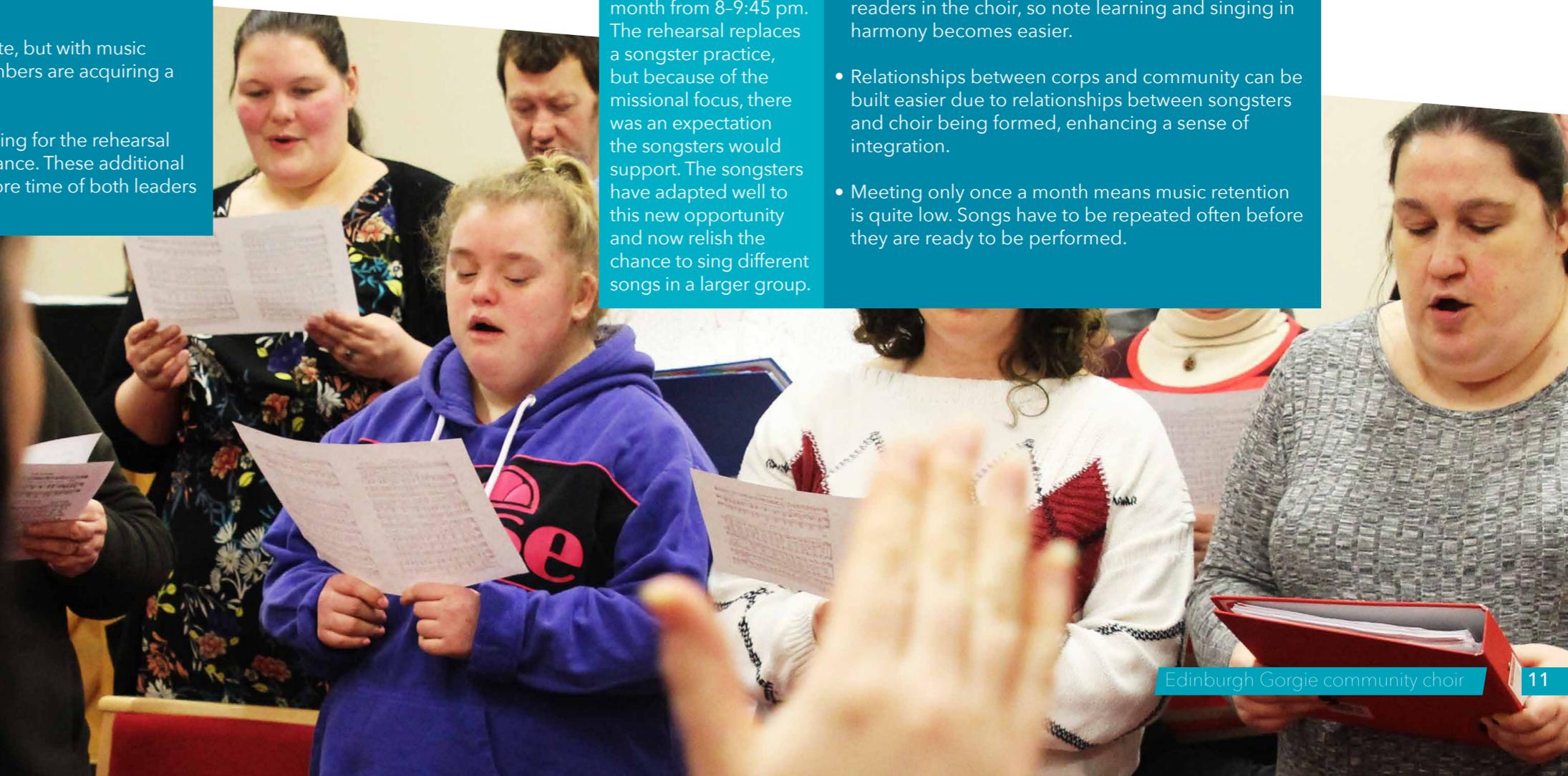
The choir meets on the first Thursday of every month from 8-9:45 pm. The rehearsal replaces a songster practice, but because of the missional focus, there was an expectation the songsters would support. The songsters have adapted well to this new opportunity and now relish the chance to sing different songs in a larger group.

Demographic

Age range is from 18 to 80+ but the majority are over 50. The choir mainly consists of ladies with a few men.

Observations

- With the support of the songsters, there are music readers in the choir, so note learning and singing in harmony becomes easier.
- Relationships between corps and community can be built easier due to relationships between songsters and choir being formed, enhancing a sense of integration.
- Meeting only once a month means music retention is quite low. Songs have to be repeated often before they are ready to be performed.



ADVERTISING

Advertising is an important aspect of forming a choir – people can't come if they don't know it is on. To help, we have created an eye-catching template that is downloadable. This will allow you to add in further details and print out copies. Visit www.salvationarmy.org.uk/music for the resources you will need to get started.

LEAFLETS AND POSTERS

Make sure these go up (with permission) around town and in public areas where they will be most visible – for example, at the library, post office etc. Think about what connections you have in the corps/centre or community you could potentially utilise – for example, maybe give some leaflets to the people in your corps who sell The War Cry and ask them to hand them out with the paper.



RADIO

Contact your local radio station and ask if they would be willing to advertise the community choir or, better still, go on as a guest to speak with the DJ/radio host and promote the many benefits of joining a choir live on air.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Advertising on Facebook/Twitter is a very powerful way of communicating with your community. Create a Facebook page where you can share pictures, video footage and information with choir members. This in turn may generate 'likes' and 'shares' which can prove to be a great advertising tool for attracting new people. Encourage your community choir members to share the Facebook page with their networks. You can also create an ad campaign for a small fee (anything from £4 and up) on Facebook that will target people of a selected demographic within a selected location – we have proof it works!

Visit this link to create a Facebook page: www.facebook.com/pages/create

For free social media support available to corps and centres, get in touch with regional Communications officers/the PR & Comms team: pr@salvationarmy.org.uk

Note:

Make sure you acquire members' consent before using their photos/videos to promote the choir.

WORD OF MOUTH

Building on the relational aim of the group, personal invitations are key when it comes to reaching out to others. Encourage your choir to tell as many people as possible – friends, family members, co-workers, etc.

CORPS

Simply spread the word within the corps fellowship and groups that use the centre throughout the week – for example, parent-and-toddler groups, BabySong and CAMEO club, etc.



Ayr community choir

THE REHEARSAL

The rehearsal is an integral part of a community choir. It is why people have come in the first place. This section will look at how to structure your rehearsal, best practice and how to get the best from your singers, plus tips and additional resource recommendations to help you along the way.

STRUCTURE

A good rehearsal will have a good structure - it's what holds the entire time together. There is more than one way of doing this as each choir is different, but the following pointers may help.

Known songs

It is always good to start with a song that is well known. This helps build confidence and get the group settled. Ending with a known song also helps create a good energy at the end of the rehearsal.

After a good mixture of vocal warm-ups and exercises (we will get to that bit later), begin with a song that the choir knows fairly well. Not only does this give confidence to the choir right at the beginning, but it also allows any newcomers to get a sense of the sound around them and to give them confidence to sing up. Then you can start on new songs.

Below is a very simple diagram of a good structured rehearsal:

Welcome

Warm-ups

Known song(s)

New song(s)

Break

New song(s)

Known song(s)

Break

This is an integral part of any rehearsal, but especially important for a community choir. You need to allow time for people to build relationships, get to know each other better and to enjoy one another's company.

Tip 1 - a break in the middle can be better than at the end of practice. People will tend to leave quicker if it is placed at the end.

Tip 2 - create a good environment for fellowship. Offering refreshments will certainly do that.

WELCOME

It is important that all members of the choir feel welcome and comfortable as much as possible right from the start. Dedicate some time (five to ten minutes or so) to give individuals an opportunity to introduce themselves to the rest of the choir. Depending on the size of the group, this can be achieved either altogether as a whole group or in smaller groups formed just where they are sitting. This is an essential step that shouldn't be missed, particularly for the first rehearsal.

As the choir leader, you will firstly need to introduce yourself to the choir and share a bit about who you are. Acknowledge any new faces at every rehearsal and don't forget to give a brief summary to recap what happened in previous rehearsals. You may want also to explain and remind them of the benefits in relation to the community and personal aims.

ICEBREAKERS

Easy and simple group icebreakers may include passing a microphone round and asking each person to stand up and share their name, why they have decided to come along, how they found out about the choir and perhaps a (random/singing-related) fact or two about themselves. Another way is to ask the group to get into pairs where they will need to 'interview' one another for a couple of minutes by asking a few questions (such as the examples above). Ask the pairs then to find another pair and each person will need to introduce their partner to the other pair based on what they have found out. There are so many fun and different icebreaker ideas to try, which you can search for online - the point is for the choir members to get to know each other and get talking!

Encourage and ask existing corps members who are part of the choir to help you welcome new faces and be a source of encouragement and friendship to these people during rehearsals.

Warm-Ups

This is an often neglected part of the rehearsal. It is typically regarded as something which is not needed and gets in the way of precious rehearsal time. This is simply not true. This time allows for good teaching on the physicality of singing (teaching best practice) as well as providing an 'icebreaker' environment which can often lead to people becoming more relaxed and, most importantly, gets them to smile! There are literally hundreds of warm-ups and exercises available - from deep breathing, to controlled vowel sounds and manic tongue-twisters, each of which serve a purpose and particular function.

Note:

Once the choir have grasped the concept of using the diaphragm for breathing, you may want to introduce the concept of breath support. The muscles that surround the diaphragm (notably the stomach) are needed to support the sound and to control the release of air.

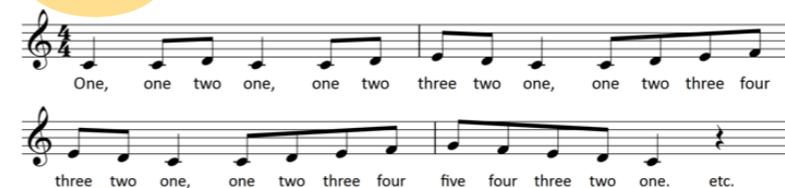
Here are some of our favourite 'go to' warm-ups:

1 Breathing - This is the most important aspect when singing. Without breathing correctly, you would struggle to maintain a healthy instrument and support a good sound. Instruct the choir to breathe in slowly through a rounded mouth shape, making sure the air is filling the diaphragm for four seconds - count out loud - then exhale through the mouth for four/eight/twelve seconds and so on. This will help the group begin to understand the importance of preserving breath and using it in the right way. For variation, ask the choir to breathe out using different sounds: 'sss, huh' for example, and exhale all the air they took in.

2 Opening the voice - The exercise below is useful for encouraging resonance and opening up the voice. Continue up the scale until the range becomes difficult for some. Allow the natural resonance of the 'ng' sound to carry right into the open vowel sound 'oh'.



3 Diction - This exercise certainly makes the choir think! It is a lot of fun and helps with word pronunciation and breath control.



For more advanced options, continue this exercise up to number eight (one octave), notch the tempo up, or repeat going up chromatically. For 'extreme' levels start at number eight and reverse the exercise. ie eight, eight seven eight, eight seven six seven eight, and so on.

Here are some online resources that are readily available to you to help explore a wider range of warm-ups and best practice:

Total Choir Resources

<http://www.totalchoirresources.com>

A downloadable 'cheat sheet' with 10 tips for warming up choirs.

BBC

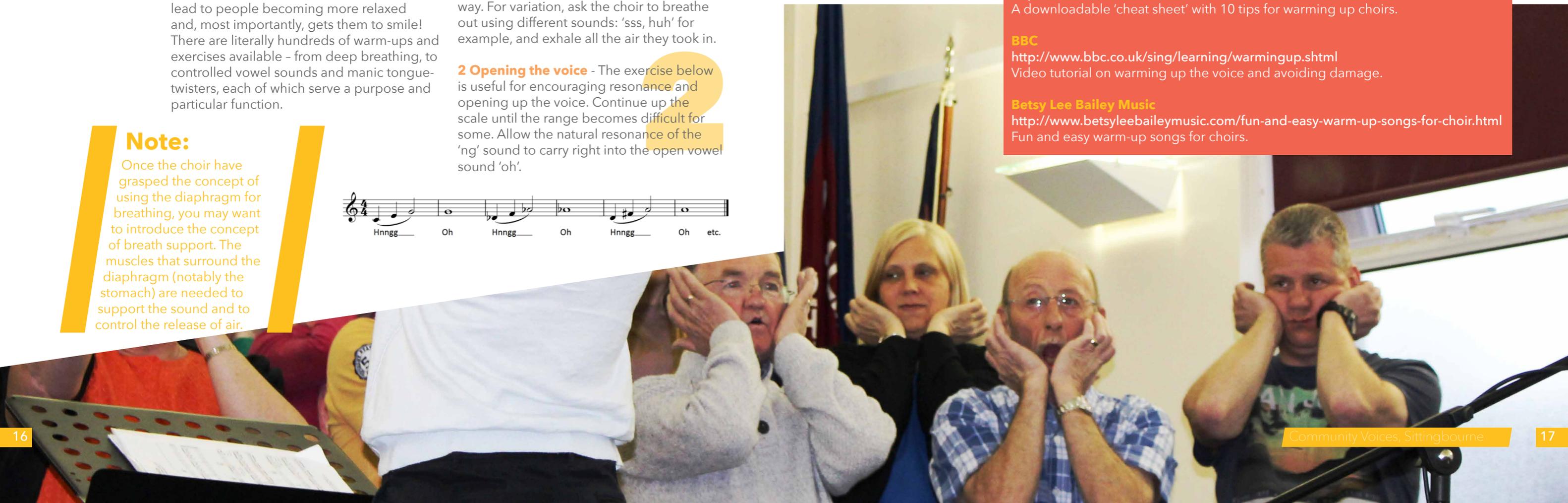
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sing/learning/warmingup.shtml>

Video tutorial on warming up the voice and avoiding damage.

Betsy Lee Bailey Music

<http://www.betsyleebaileymusic.com/fun-and-easy-warm-up-songs-for-choir.html>

Fun and easy warm-up songs for choirs.



Song Choice

Song choice is a crucial part of any rehearsal – choose the right song and the choir react in a positive way, singing with enthusiasm and generating a sense of excitement. Choose the wrong song and the energy drains away like a slowly deflating balloon. So, how do we choose the right songs? Here's some advice:

- Choose songs which reflect the choir's personality and general demographic. For example, if the choir consists of mainly an older generation, then look at some well-known songs from their era and popular show music.
- Choose some songs that are not overtly spiritual. To begin with, these types of songs will help to welcome in and be relevant to those in the choir who have a different faith or no faith.
- Choose positive songs. This mainly refers to the lyrics of a song, but the feel and tempo can also make a difference. Many songs give a positive undertone that can be uplifting, such as...

'Ain't no mountain high enough'
Nickolas Ashford, Valerie Simpson

'Happy'
Pharrell Williams

'Lean on me'
Bill Withers

'Something inside so strong'
Labi Siffre

'True Colours'
Billy Steinberg, Tom Kelly

Image by Thomas Mathie

'Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.'

(Psalm 96:1 NIV)

- Choose songs which are recognisable. If you choose a popular song which the choir can sing along to straight away, you are on to a winner. Not only do choirs generally enjoy a song they know, but it can really cut down on rehearsal time.

- Choose a broad range of music. Don't get stuck on one style of music for the choir. Variety is the spice of life and it's the same with a choir – mix it up!

- Choose some songs suggested by the choir. This will allow members to be more involved and have some ownership. It will also be fun hearing those suggestions!

To read or not to read

How do you teach songs to the choir? Do you want to use hard-copy music or do you want to teach by rote? Here are some things to consider:

*What is teaching 'by rote'?
Rote learning is a memorisation technique based on repetition.*

Teaching by rote can work really well. It means it is not necessary for choir members to be able to read music and puts everyone on an even playing field. It can also be quick when taught well and negates the need for printing pages and pages of music sheets.

Tip:

Why not give the choir members a copy of just the lyrics (either printed or on a PowerPoint slide)? This can help if learning all aspects of the song at once becomes difficult.

The frequency of rehearsals is key to whether teaching by rote can work. It can if the rehearsals are weekly or fortnightly. For any period of time longer than this, the chances of the choir remembering the song, let alone their different parts, quickly diminishes. This can lead to going over the same parts of songs at every rehearsal, which means progress can be slowed considerably and may not be much fun for some.

Here is a step-by-step guide to help you teach by rote:

1 Prepare the song - you will need to know all the parts and be able to sing them confidently (or have someone play the song on piano). Ideally sing them yourself; the choir will pick up on the style and other aspects more quickly from your singing.

2 To teach a song effectively, you must have the choir's full attention.

3 Learning new songs happens in three stages: by listening, echoing and remembering.

4 Short songs are best taught all in one go with a 'whole song' approach. Longer songs should be broken up into sections, one phrase at a time.

5 To begin, sing the whole song to the choir a couple of times. This is the listening stage.

6 Next, invite them to hum along if they can; this is a great help. Humming is a good way for people to find their voice as it helps to develop the ability to hear the song inside their head.

7 Now sing the song line by line and ask them to copy each line like an echo (echo stage). Then sing two lines at a time, and ask them to echo both lines one after the other. This is the beginning of the memorising stage.

8 Finally, sing the whole song together, encouraging everyone to have a go. You might find people tend to join in at the end of each line or phrase, as they remember. It will help if you are able to give a prompt word at the start of each phrase.

9 Always review a new song at the next rehearsal to make sure it's well remembered and to give the choir more confidence.

Tip:

Some existing community choirs in the territory have offered beginner music-reading classes before rehearsal in order to help members who want to learn to read music.

Tip:

When teaching by rote, try to use your hand to direct where the melody rises and falls.

HARMONY

Singing in parts may seem a long way off in the first instance, but you would be surprised just how quickly singing in parts can be achieved. For new choirs with little singing experience, unison (one part) is the ideal starting point, but there are ways of introducing parts into songs.

Female Singers

For female singers, a good place to start is by splitting the women into two groups - those that are comfortable with singing a slightly higher part (soprano), and those who prefer to sing lower (alto). If music is handed out, then perhaps members who can read music would be better placed on the alto part as it can speed up the learning process. (One strong singer who reads music can make a BIG difference!)

Male Singers

We have found in our research that the general demographic of existing community choirs consists of mainly women and just a few men! It is important to make sure these men are and feel valued. If they are uncomfortable with learning their own part, ask them to sing with the sopranos singing the tune an octave lower. Then, slowly introduce little phrases they can sing on their own (bass) or introduce a few notes that create harmony.

Even singing one chord in three-part harmony will be sure to make the choir smile and give them a sense of achievement.

Example:

Sopranos
F

Altos
C

Bass (men)
A

Play or sing each part individually and then get each section to sing back. You can build the chord up and get everyone to sing their notes together. Hey presto - you have a SAB (Sopranos, Altos and Bass) choir!

Tip:

Don't be afraid to adapt a song for your own choir's needs.

TONE DEAF?

Many people think they are tone deaf, but it may just be they have a limited range or struggle to hear and home in on the correct note.

If singers have a limited range, try to spend some time with them finding out which notes they can sing in tune. When they hear they can do this, they will have more confidence and will slowly be able to build up their range by introducing notes below and above what they can already pitch. You may need to write them a simple part using just the three or four notes they can pitch, and buddy them up with someone in the choir who is confident and is happy to sing that part with them.

If the singer struggles to centre the notes or to hear the difference between what they are singing and what is actually written, surround them with confident and tuneful singers standing either side and behind them if possible. If they have the right notes being sung around them, their voice is more likely to lean towards what they hear. It is important they know to listen to the sound and to try and match it. They may need to sing quietly until they can do it, but it will come with patience, practice and time.

Ultimately it is important that all singers feel included, irrespective of ability. Mixing abilities will improve the overall sound of the choir.

Tip:

The whole song doesn't have to be sung in parts even if written out. Pick out selected bars or sections in which harmony can be introduced.



THE COMMUNITY CHOIR LEADER - A TO G KEY POINTERS

The choir have come expecting and it is up to the leader to deliver. As a leader, it is important to remember that some choir members may bring their personal pressures of life along to rehearsals. Although the leader is not directly responsible for dealing with these underlying issues, it is just one of many aspects a leader has to be considerate of - not always an easy task. Seek further advice and support from corps leadership if you are not sure who you should refer individuals in your choir to if they are struggling to cope with the pressures they are facing.

As well as musical ability, there are many other skills that are required of a good leader. A good leader needs to be:

'Be prepared to adapt and change as a leader, as you learn what works and, equally, what doesn't.'

(Fiona Buckett, Community Voices in Sittingbourne)

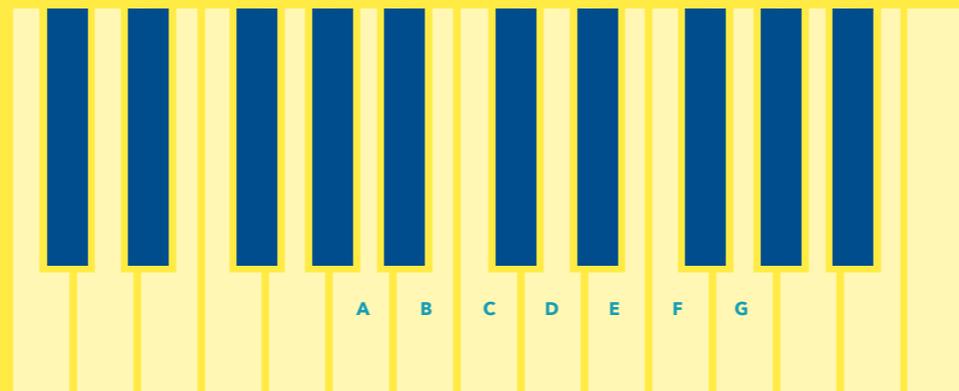
Tip:

Being a good musician is great, but remember to explain any technical detail using the right kind of language at a level the choir can understand. Be sure to check if the choir clearly understand and follow your explanations. Give them regular opportunities to ask questions in case anyone is still unsure.

Approachable - The choir members will feel they can come to you with their concerns or ideas. Your mood is reflected back to the choir. If you come across flat or detached from the rehearsal, the choir will pick up on that and respond in the same manner. You won't always be in the best of moods when leading a choir, but try not to let it show!

Communicate well - Good communication is key to the success of a choir. It will gain and retain people's attention. Think about what you need to tell them and what is the clearest way of getting the message across - for example, rehearsal details, updates etc. You may also want to think about people with additional needs who may need information communicated differently - for example, large print, repetition of information.

Excite and inspire - You want to create an environment that will have people coming back and enjoying every rehearsal. Being confident in your own ability as a choir leader takes time and practice. Aim to generate a culture of patience, positivity and persistency and the choir will become part of that ongoing learning journey.



Feedback is key - The easiest way to get this is to ask the singers to let you know how they are getting on in the choir. Look out for ways to improve your rehearsals. Having a personal teachable attitude and willingness to keep on learning how to better yourself will model the culture you are hoping to achieve.

Be prepared - How can you teach a song you don't know yourself? Preparation really helps in feeling in control of what is happening and in turn will lead to better results for the choir. To help prepare, sing and play through the vocal parts, getting to know the meaning behind the lyrics and marking the most appropriate places to breathe etc. This will help influence how you shape phrases. You can also listen to demonstrations or other groups performing the song online to give an example of the end product.

Discern and understand - As a choir leader, you will begin to understand what works and, just as importantly, what doesn't work with the choir. Producing a good sound is important but results take time. Try not to do everything at once; instead focus on one area of singing for a number of rehearsals (eg breathing, intonation or singing with confidence) and relate it to the repertoire you are using. Don't forget to refer back to what you have taught in previous weeks to build a stronger singing technique overall.

Get to know the singers - Begin to form friendships and create the space for the choir to get to know each other. Using a variety of icebreakers would be a good way for forming new relationships. Encourage them to speak to one another, especially if you have to spend some rehearsal time focusing on practising with those singing different parts. Refer back for more tips on ideal times within the rehearsal structure in which to do so.

**'Do what you can, with what you have,
where you are.'**

(Theodore Roosevelt)

'Where you are' is in front of a choir. 'What you have' is your own personality, teaching ability and musicianship, and 'What you can do with what you have, where you are' is:

**'Make every effort to give yourself to God
as the kind of person he will approve. Be
a worker who is not ashamed and who
uses the true teaching in the right way.'**

(2 Timothy 2:15 NCV).

Muriel Yendell - Let Them Sing

In Exodus 4 when Moses wasn't so sure how he would communicate with his people effectively, God told him to look at what he had in his hand. God took what Moses had to offer and used it powerfully for his purposes. God then affirms Moses and his own self-inefficiency:

'Then the Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

(Exodus 4:11-12 NIV)



BUILDING COMMUNITY

To build links within the community involves being intentional about pushing beyond your comfort zone and living alongside a diverse range of people from all walks of life. Every individual is of infinite worth, created in the image of God with unique characteristics, beliefs and abilities.

Always seek for opportunities to be inclusive and invite others from the community to join the choir.

PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

With any music group, it is important to have something to work towards – no matter how small the performance. It generates excitement within the group, creates a buzz and develops a team spirit approach; and that's without the benefits for those who will hear the choir!

In the beginning it is best to start small and with something achievable. This way the choir will be able to see and hear the results and consequently gain confidence in their own ability. Read on for some ideas to get you started:

- Look out for local opportunities – for example, fetes or festivals – where the choir may be able to sing. Use your existing choir members to help locate opportunities – some of your members may already be associated with local schools, charities or venues. Begin building bridges and interdependent partnerships.

- Arrange some time during a rehearsal at your corps/local venue to give a 'sing out'. Invite the family and friends of choir members to the last half-hour of rehearsal and use that time to perform two or three songs and offer refreshments afterwards.

- Integrate the choir as part of a service, invite them as guests or use them at specific times during the year – for example, Christmas.

- Don't forget to advertise your performances both online – Facebook/ Twitter etc – and offline through word of mouth and posters/leaflets.

Idea:

Why not try a themed evening concert and sing songs around that theme, eg 'a night at the musicals' or 'the greatest love story'?

Here are some performance ideas that have been tried and tested with existing corps community choirs around the UKI Territory:

- Concert in a local theatre with other music groups from the area.

- 'Sing-along' visits to local care homes/ Salvation Army Lifehouses/local Homelessness Service Unit.

- Participating in local fundraising events that build on community relationships.

- Local choir festivals.

INTEGRATION

For some members, the community choir may be their first experience of being included in a church community, whatever that looks like. Be intentional about being welcoming, friendly and building trust. Give opportunity for these choir members to see what else is on offer at the corps/ centre during the week. Aim to build on the fact that the choir is already a community sharing the same interest in singing. There may be a relevant midweek event such as an Alpha Course, a community programme or a voluntary opportunity that they could be invited along to.

'We have regular events in the calendar to help keep the enthusiasm levels at a high.'

(Lee Highton-Nicholls, Oldbury Community Choir)

'Imitate God in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.'

(Ephesians 5:1-2 NLT)

CHOIR SOCIALS

It would be a good idea to include and arrange occasional group activities outside of the rehearsals, such as a meal out to a local restaurant, a picnic/sports day at the park or a trip to see a show/concert. These can be times to celebrate choir performances, birthdays etc. These social aspects will bring the choir together and continue to grow and maintain friendships. Feel free to appoint choir members to help plan and co-ordinate these gatherings and ensure that everyone is invited.

Remember: never lose sight of why you started the community choir in the first place. Recognise the God-given potential in each and every individual involved and how as a leader, you can empower them to serve the community through learning from one another and sharing musical knowledge. It is through these growing relationships that mission can begin to take place.

Idea:

Produce a leaflet of all the corps activities during the week and hand out to members as an introduction to the corps. Always have some leaflets/posters somewhere on display in the room to promote other weekly activities that take place at corps. Alternatively, if the equipment is available, you can let the choir know by sharing information using a projector.



OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

FINANCES

Finances can sometimes be a tricky subject to talk about and is sometimes overly complicated - but it doesn't need to be. Clearly state if you intend to ask for donations prior to the practice. If members want the choir to run and be sustainable, they will have no problem making a small donation at each rehearsal or once a month, for example. It may be the corps can look into supporting financially for a period of time from a community fund, or corps sections could donate a percentage towards the running costs. Speak to your corps officer for advice. Some of our existing choirs choose to do this in a number of different ways. Oldbury Community Choir leader Lee Highton-Nicholls says: 'We ask for £1 per month each which keeps us sustainable. In addition, we ask that each person brings a food item for the food bank at the same time.'

Tip:

Why not ask members of the choir to take it in turn to bring some refreshments?

HEALTH AND SAFETY/RISK MANAGEMENT

Speak to your corps officer for all the details you will need for running such a group and what paperwork will need to be completed before starting - for example, registration and confidentiality regarding contact information.

ACCESSIBILITY

You may have people attending the choir who have additional needs for any physical or learning disabilities. Taking the time to find out what these might be and asking individuals how you can best support them will make the overall experience more enjoyable for them and for you. This is often simple to do but will make all the difference to an individual. Here are some important things to consider:

- **Parking:** Is there parking available for people with disabilities (blue badge holders) which ensures they can park in a suitable place to access the building?



- **Access:** Is it possible to get from a parked car to the area used for choir rehearsals without going up or down a step or stairs?

- **Ramps:** If there is a ramp on-site, are there handrails on both sides?

- **Doors:** Is at least one major entrance to the building wide enough for use by wheelchair users? Can doors be opened easily by a wheelchair user or other people with a disability? Is the floor level each side of the doors?

- **Free movement:** Are walkways and corridors kept free of obstacles to enable free movement of people with limited mobility or those who use a wheelchair?

- **Seating:** Is there space for wheelchair users where they can sit with others? Give people who use a wheelchair a choice of where they sit, eg at the back, middle or front of the room. Are there seats with arms and seats with extra legroom for people with mobility difficulties? Are seats provided near the entrance for people with mobility difficulties to minimise walking?

- **Toilet:** Is there an accessible toilet for use by wheelchair users?

- **Hospitality:** Can people with disabilities easily access refreshments?

- **Music sheets:** What is the best format for individuals? Music and words, printed words only, printed words with large print? Do they need the music sheet printed on blue/green/cream coloured paper? Consider a personalised approach and prepare the music sheets with the individual in mind.

SAFEGUARDING

Make sure you follow the current Safeguarding Policy and Procedures regarding the recruitment of the leader/leadership team. Ask your corps officer for further information and ensure that those on the leadership team receive relevant safeguarding training.

Here are a few additional things to consider:

- Should the leader become a member of the pastoral care council or corps leadership team? If so, an enhanced police background check may be required.

- If the group includes children, the leader or a member of the choir leadership team should obtain a police background check.

- A Safe Mission Safeguarding Risk Assessment should be reviewed to take account of this activity (Safe Mission Plan No 1 and Safeguarding Adults - Premises Risk Assessment).

- Ensure the activity is covered under insurance.

- Add the activity to corps organisational structure diagram.

- Ensure opportunity is given to all members of the leadership team to view the information and awareness videos, ie
 - o Safe & Sound for Everyone (groups with children)
 - o Safeguarding Adults Level 1.

- Appoint a safeguarding lead for the activity who must have attended appropriate training - ie Safe & Sound for Leaders training (groups with children) Adult Safeguarding Training - Level 2.

- Ensure an Incident Management Plan is in place - for example, what action should be taken if there is a theft at the hall, who should be contacted if a member becomes ill etc.

Contact safeguarding@salvationarmy.org.uk for further information or advice on any of the above.



Edinburgh Gorgie community choir

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Music and Creative Arts have a number of songs of varying difficulty and contrasting genres that have been adapted from the Sing To The Lord Mixed Voices and Childrens' Voices series. Adapted to suit community choirs' needs, they include copies of the music with added chords, simplified choral parts so they suit SAB format, and a separate lyric sheet to help with word-learning or if you are teaching by rote or sing without music.

All these resources are FREE and available to download from our website:

www.salvationarmy.org.uk/music

In addition to this, explore the links below for all the resources you will need, from finding suitable songs for your choir, to purchasing downloadable backing tracks, tips on singing and more!

ONLINE RESOUCE	WEBSITE	WHAT IT OFFERS
Ameritz	www.ameritz.co.uk	Preview and download thousands of MP3 backing tracks
Asiacornerstone	www.asiacornerstone.com	Christian accompaniment music, from traditional hymns to upbeat gospel tracks
BBC The Choir	www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/17dRqxmPNyXrDb4wVfzWHPK/resources	Includes resources for setting up a choir, tips on singing and some free songs to download
Bigbigsongbook	www.bigbigsing.org	Free collection of songs to download, listen, learn and sing
Choir Player App	Available to download from iTunes and Google Play	Multi-channel choir vocal training app
JW Pepper	www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/welcome.jsp	Online sheet music store for bands, orchestra and choral music, piano sheet music and more
Karaoke-version	www.karaoke-version.co.uk	Purchase professional backing tracks for a small fee
Mark de Lisser Sing out	www.markdelisser.com	A series of purchasable books that have been adapted for mainly SAT choirs
Musicbacking tracks	www.musicbackingtracks.co.uk	Downloadable backing tracks
Musicroom	www.musicroom.com	Downloadable sheet music

COPYRIGHT

If you have any questions about copyright, licensing or performance of songs inside or outside a Salvation Army centre, then contact music@salvationarmy.org.uk with your questions.

SUPPORT

Make sure you speak to your corps officer or divisional mission enabler about inviting your regional Music and Creative Arts or community specialist to come to meet with you, give advice, offer expertise and valuable support. Invite them to lead a rehearsal and get involved!

Contact the Music and Creative Arts team at THQ with your questions and feedback on how helpful you have found this resource - we will be glad to help and hear from you!

Here are some questions to consider:

- 1 Is the community choir achieving its aims/objectives? If not, why not?
- 2 What did you find most helpful? What did you find least helpful?
- 3 What worked well? What didn't work well?
- 4 What would you do differently next time?
- 5 How would you rate the overall Community Voices' resource pack?

Email music@salvationarmy.org.uk
or like us on Facebook at
www.facebook.com/musicandcreativearts





The Salvation Army is a Church and registered Charity in England (214779), Wales (214779), Scotland (SC009359) and the Republic of Ireland (CHY6399)

The Salvation Army Territorial Headquarters

101 Newington Causeway, London, SE1 6BN

Tel 020 7367 4500

For more Music and Creative Arts resources which are free to download, please visit: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/music

Get in touch and email us at music@salvationarmy.org.uk or like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/musicandcreativearts

Design: **Camset**