

STARTING A DEMENTIA CHOIR

Singing is great fun, but as you may know, it's been regularly documented as being hugely beneficial for overall well-being. Starting a dementia choir is a rewarding project, but hard work. If you're thinking of being the singing lead you'll have to be able to hold a tune, but more importantly is patient and encouraging, and mindful of the fact that the group needs to have a fun and relaxed feel. If you're thinking embarking on such a worthwhile venture, it's a good idea to partner up with someone who has good organisational skills – s/he doesn't need to be a good singer too though!

Once you have your team together, it's time to make a few decisions:

1. How often are you going to run your sessions? Weekly, or monthly, and are you going to stop over the school holidays?
2. Find a suitable venue – church halls and community centres are a great place to start, usually happy to provide a decent sized room for minimal cost. Ideally it needs to be on the ground floor, with good toilet and kitchen facilities, with plenty of chairs and the odd table.
3. Pick a suitable day, and time. Make sure your group isn't going to clash with anything else (particularly if it's noisy) going on in the same venue – and take into consideration people with dementia are generally more attentive in the morning.
4. Decide if you're going to charge. Most groups charge a nominal amount to cover room hire, photocopying of music, and refreshments – anything from £2 to £3 per singer.
5. Ask around and find a willing volunteer who's happy to make tea/coffee and wash up afterwards – this can be done once you have your group up and running – quite often a carer will happily step in.
6. Advertise the group! Create a poster and distribute locally to key places such as community boards, doctors' surgeries, libraries, post offices, local shops, pubs and cafés.
7. Decide what you're going to sing – once your group is up and running you will be able to ask your members for requests, but until then some of the more popular options have been - Scarborough Fair; Edelweiss; Waltzing Matilda; Twist & Shout; Oh What a Beautiful Morning! Don't assume that the songs have to be familiar with your group, learning simple new songs is just as rewarding.

It's essential that the dementia sufferers in your group feel accepted, and are treated appropriately.

Assume the sufferers are able bodied and thoroughly capable of passing around a sheet of lyrics, for

example. Always address the sufferer rather than the carer if you have a question – the sufferer has difficulty with cognitive skills then the carer would probably answer on their behalf, but make it their decision.

Always ask for help – there are plenty of organisations around who may be able to assist you. For more information please see below:

Alzheimers Society: <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/your-support-services/singing-for-the-brain>

Age UK : <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/conditions-illnesses/dementia/dementia-and-music/>