

INFORMATION FOR OTHER CLUBS THINKING OF SETTING UP SINGING FOR MEMORY

What is Singing for Memory?

It is a service run by Grange Soroptimists which uses singing to bring people with memory loss together in a friendly and stimulating environment. Sessions are weekly in blocks of 10 or 12. Each session lasts between 1.5 – 2.0 hours and costs £2 for each participant.

There are two main elements –

- using singing to reawaken memory and restore for at least a time a sense of identity. Sally Magnusson said of her mother “Someone starts you on a song and suddenly you are awake again, alive and remembering who you are” (Where memories go 2014). Music is the one thing dementia cannot destroy
- reducing isolation and being able to be part of a group – the stigma of the word dementia keeps people isolated, both people living with dementia and their carer

Additionally

- Singing gives us the feel good factor – aerobic exercise which improves the respiratory function, Lowers stress and produces calmness, Raises immunoglobulins which boost the immune system
- The benefit for carers – carer has the opportunity to relax their usual levels of heightened vigilance, as there are many eyes to help monitor and assist. Singing for Memory is one of the few environments away from home that is supportive and non- judgemental, peer support providing empathy , coping strategies and practical solution

Background

In 2014 44 million people across the world and 850,000 people in the UK had been diagnosed with dementia. 2/3 of these are living in their own homes

The World Health Organisation estimates the global figure will reach 135 million by 2050. That’s a new case every four seconds!

Two thirds of these are women, who are twice as likely to develop dementia as breast cancer

Research shows that dementia sufferers enjoy recalling and singing familiar songs, even when their speech and memory are impaired.

Using the research, The Alzheimer’s Society established Singing for the Brain (SFTB) – a carefully structured programme using music therapy techniques.

How Singing for Memory Came to Grange-over-Sands

In 2014, the club celebrated its 60th charter President Janice wanted to set up a sustainable project for the community. She chose SFTB because Grange is a rural retirement area with a very sizeable elderly population and she loves music.

The club was keen to support the project because women are more likely to be carers for dementia sufferers as well as sufferers themselves.

The Alzheimer’s Society had to be repeatedly pestered to allow the club to set up a pilot to prove the need for Singing for the Brain in the local community.

Singing for the Brain could only go ahead if our club raised the money to cover the costs of the training, the first block of sessions and any equipment we would need.

We raised over £3000 altogether through donations and fundraising.

Three of us trained to be Singing Leaders. 12 Club members trained to be volunteers and the whole club supported the fund raising efforts

Alison offered to organize the volunteers and refreshments, leaving Janice free to lead the singing sessions.

The first session was in October 2014

The original block of 10 sessions was so popular it extended to a further 5 blocks each of ten weeks

From the start, the participants both those with memory loss and their carers loved SFTB and became regular attenders – many are still with us today. SFTB is beneficial for carers as well as dementia sufferers – possibly more so!

In 2016, just as the money we had raised was running out, the Alzheimer's Society told us that they were closing down SFTB to channel funds into research and could no longer endorse our group.

Carers, participants and volunteers were all devastated to think of the group ending, so we decided to set up a similar group of our own called Singing for Memory (SFM), which is going from strength to strength. The group is for anyone with memory problems brought about through illness, accident or age; not just people living with dementia

SFM is self- sustaining because it is run entirely voluntarily by a team of Soroptimists from Grange Club. We have more participants than ever and everyone involved loves it and gets something worthwhile from the weekly sessions.

Format and Structure:

SFM is a carefully structured programme using music therapy techniques. The format is the same each week so that there is a recognisable framework

Same opening and ending songs are used at each session – these are set markers, anchors, and lessen any stress at the start and end of the session. It is essential to have a team of a Singing Leader, an Administration Leader, and a group of trained volunteers who help with welcoming, refreshments, giving out song sheets and instruments and supporting the participants.

Welcome, registration and a half an hour of socialising, tea and coffee

An hour long session of singing with participants sat in a circle

Warm up exercises, breathing, relaxation and whole body preparation for singing

Everyone welcomed by name in a call and response song; followed by a welcome song

A familiar song from childhood

Learn new songs – It gives a real sense of achievement to learn something new

Part songs, rounds, layering and addition and subtraction songs – to increase concentration

Action songs – actions help with words but also stimulate body to brain connection

Passing objects around to help with peripheral awareness and left- right coordination

Reading clear lyrics and using pictures for association

Uses a variety of visual stimulation – bean bags, bubbles, parachute, pictures, percussion instruments, ribbon sticks

SFM can help to give purpose and focus to the morning and can lead to attendees having a better day. For the carers it is a real life line and a highlight of the week.

When it was thought that the sessions would not continue, Dee a carer sent us a card to “Team Soroptimists” that read

“Thank you so much for making it possible for us to continue singing, it is the highlight of our week and we really appreciate the hard work and commitment more than it is possible to put into words. You are all absolute heroines”

This is a project which has brought so much joy, learning and benefit both to the community and our club and is still gaining in momentum. The experience is uplifting for us all!

If you would like to know more please contact either

Janice Carrick 01539558001 janice.carrick2@btinternet.com – Singing Leader

Isabel Huggett 01539536378 huggett735@btinternet.com – Administration Leader