

# Building community through song: The therapeutic hospice choir

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## Abstract

Music enables us not only to reflect upon the world in which we live but also to become active agents in creating and shaping it and ourselves. The Treehouse Choir is an innovative, therapeutic programme open to all adult service users and staff at one of the East Anglia's Children's Hospices. The target group of the choir membership focuses primarily on the mothers of children receiving care at the hospice and bereaved mothers. The choir addresses the need for psychosocial support for families as they face the challenges of caring for a child with life-limiting and complex health conditions, as well as families mourning the loss of a child. This article analyzes data collected from questionnaires and interviews referring to the emotional, psychological and social benefits of participation in the choir. It examines how singing in the choir serves as a means through which individuals form a community built on shared life experiences, bridging boundaries between service provider and service user, creating a means of self-expression, and breaking down barriers to enable new lines of communication within a non-threatening environment. It also examines the role of public performances in promoting greater awareness of the services provided by the hospice.

## Keywords

caregivers, family support, hospice, music, music therapy, singing

## Introduction

The Treehouse Choir is a therapeutic choir open to all service users and staff at a children's hospice in England. It was formed in January 2013 by the hospice's music therapist whose vision was to create a choir modeled on Gareth Malone's work with the military wives' choirs where "music and singing will help the women through a difficult time of worry and separation" (The Choir: Military Wives, (2018)). As Clift et al. (2016; 93) have noted, "long and unpredictable duty hours together with periodic redeployments and the risk of injury or death, can have an impact on the psychological and physical wellbeing of family members" of those serving in the military. A parallel may be seen between the military wives' feelings of an uncertain future, isolation, vulnerability, and reluctance to enjoy themselves while their husbands were on a tour of duty, and similar feelings, though for different reasons, felt by the families of children being cared for at the hospice. The choir was designed to create a safe space in which family members and staff together could create a musical outlet for stress and intense emotions, as well as build a sustainable and supportive community within and beyond the hospice.

The Treehouse, set in three acres of woodland in Ipswich, Suffolk, is one of the three East Anglia's Children's Hospices (EACH). It serves children, from newborn babies to young people up to the age of 18, with chronic and life-limiting conditions. It also provides support for families needing end-of-life care for their child and recently bereaved families. State-of-the-art medical equipment is subtly incorporated into beautifully decorated rooms that look and feel like home. In addition to day services, the hospice provides children and their families with overnight respite care and end-of-life care. It also offers therapeutic services, with music therapists, art therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, specialized nursing staff, psychologists, spiritual advisors, play specialists, a chaplain, and housekeeping staff. The hospice includes facilities such as a hydrotherapy pool, multi-sensory studio, sensory garden, and specialized play equipment inside and outside. Holistic, family-centered care is provided free of charge every day of the year (East Anglia's Children's Hospices (EACH), n.d.).

Unlike other services provided within the hospice, the Treehouse Choir is open both to hospice users and hospice staff who attend in their own time. There is no formal commitment required for membership—choir members come whenever

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they are able. The Treehouse Choir is the largest support group within the hospice, with consistently high regular attendance levels. As one participant commented, “choir provides a more regular opportunity to be able to reach out to others in similar situations.” While all members share the same reason for being in the choir—as service users or staff at the hospice—the focus is on a positive approach to learning and improving musical skills, having fun, and building friendships and support, rather than having a focus on the challenges many face on a daily basis.

The Treehouse Choir gives its members an opportunity to build connectedness based on shared experience. When performing, the choir provides a voice for the parents, their children, and the hospice to raise awareness within the wider community, which is essential for the sustainability of the hospice and its services. It provides a place to plan future events and create positive memories, for example, through performances, where shared membership allows boundaries between service user and service provider to be blurred but not crossed.

While the choir has an inclusive approach, its membership tends to consist primarily of mothers of children currently using the hospice and bereaved mothers. Although there are similar choirs at adult hospices, such as the St. Christopher’s Hospice Choir, the Treehouse Choir is innovative in that it is based in the children’s hospice and focuses on providing a therapeutic music service for the families of the children cared for by the hospice (Dives, 2015; Tsiris, 2015).

Increasingly, government health reports refer to the need to build flourishing communities where individuals can feel a sense of belonging as an essential component of health (South, 2015). Qualitative and quantitative studies have demonstrated that being engaged in music activities, particularly singing in groups, can improve quality of life (Bailey and Davidson, 2003; Clift et al., 2008, 2010, 2016; Livesey et al., 2012; Tonneijck, Kinébanian and Josephsson, 2008)

According to Hinojosa et al. (2012), “family caregivers are impacted by higher levels of burden, uncertainty, greater depressive symptoms, poor quality of life, poor health, and increased mortality” (p. 500). Families caring for a child with a life-limiting condition may have to deal with financial burdens resulting from a parent needing to give up work to care for a child together with the increased costs associated with care (Hinojosa et al., 2012: 501). Parents face uncertainty, stress, loss of normality and loss of control as they try to balance competing and often conflicting demands on their time and attention within the family. There are potentially negative psychosocial effects on parents as they grieve the loss of the health of their child (Katz, 2002; Steele and Davis, 2006).

The conclusions drawn by Eccleston et al. (2015) in a recent Cochrane Report titled *Psychological interventions for parents of children and adolescents with chronic illness* suggest,

there is evidence that psychological therapies including parent interventions can benefit parents of children with a chronic illness, particularly for parents of children with cancer. However, due to the small number of studies in this review, future studies are likely to change the findings in this review. (p. 3)

The report further notes that

the impact of childhood chronic illness on other family members, including parents, has been of growing interest for two reasons. First, it is now recognised that parents who have significant emotional distress of their own, and poor family functioning, can either directly or indirectly affect child outcomes by engaging in problematic responses to children’s pain behaviours. Second, it is now recognised that adaptive strategies used by parents can have a positive effect on child adjustment to chronic illness. (Eccleston et al., 2015: 6)

From these findings, we see the value of providing parents with a positive experience that may impact not only on their own mental health but also on that of their child. Studies have demonstrated that group singing, in a variety of different contexts, can be beneficial for improved self-reported wellbeing whether with a focus on a particular medical condition or more generally within the context of community music making (Bailey and Davidson, 2003; Clift, Hancox, Morrison, et al., 2008; Clift, Hancox, Morrison, et al., 2010; Tonneijck, Kinébanian and Josephsson, 2008; Zanini and Leao, 2006). The Treehouse Choir offers the potential for creating a positive impact on the wellbeing of both family members and hospice staff working in often stressful situations.

## Treehouse Choir organization

The vision for the Treehouse Choir was to generate a group within the hospice in which regular choir rehearsals and performances would serve as a means of creating a supportive network for families. The choir usually meets fortnightly after lunch on Fridays at the hospice throughout the school year, with a break for Christmas and the school summer holidays. The choir has weekly rehearsals when leading up to special events, such as singing at Kensington Palace, performing live on BBC Radio Suffolk, or other public performances.

Despite complex family schedules, choir members recommended that there should be more choir practices, avoiding the long breaks over the school holidays. One respondent commented that “being able to be part of the choir even when we cannot physically be here” would also be beneficial, suggesting the idea of exploring future possibilities of using technology to enable members to participate in the choir remotely. The music therapist concluded that despite the desire of many members to continue with choir rehearsals throughout the year, it was important to have planned breaks in the rehearsal

schedule. Long breaks over the summer and after Christmas encourage parents to have other meaningful experiences with their families and friends that are different from singing in the choir. They enable families to have other shared experiences and help to reduce an unhealthy dependency on choir. The breaks also enable the music therapist to reflect on completed work; plan for future sessions, such as special events; develop new ideas; have a creative rest; and help to create a sense of anticipation when the choir starts back—all of which lead to a more positive environment during the choir sessions. The breaks help to create a sense of “season” which is extremely useful when working with bereaved and non-bereaved families in the context of palliative care. With a family-centered approach to care of a child with a life-threatening condition, this regular routine with defined practice periods and holiday breaks helps to foster more normality in lives that are disrupted by challenging family circumstances.

### Choir session structure

For many of the parents caring for a child with life-limiting conditions, this is the only time in the week when they can focus on their own health, taking time for themselves. The choir provides an important period of self-care. Choir rehearsals begin with breathing exercises, stretching, and vocal and physical warm-ups. Musical games are used as a fun way of enabling choir members to get to know each other in a relaxed environment. After warm-ups, the choir rehearses songs to prepare for a particular event, such as a concert, fundraiser, or bereavement service. In collaboration with the music therapist, choir members are actively involved in choosing musical and social goals for the choir.

After each rehearsal, there is time set aside for families to socialize, with refreshments provided by the hospice. Since hospice staff do not participate in the social time after singing, it has given parent choir members a sense of self-agency and empowerment as they are no longer reliant only on professional advice, but instead create the supportive networks from within the group, providing both practical advice and emotional support.

As one choir member commented,

After coming to the hospice for many years, I always found the social events quite uncomfortable and nobody really knew each other and it wasn't like you would just go up and talk to strangers. The choir for me has broken down barriers, it has given people the opportunity to get to know each other through singing, chatting and, of course, cake.

The group no longer relies solely on the more traditional form of parent–staff supportive relationship, but rather has become a group that can turn to itself for support. One parent commented that “it is great to be able to pick up tips and advice from others facing the same issues, rather than relying on professionals.”

The choir was conceived as a vehicle for people to connect through music in order to facilitate the formation of meaningful friendships that will be crucial in their lives ahead. It is a place where socializing is more than just the tea and cakes after choir practice but a way of providing a social network beyond the hospice itself. Although the focus is primarily on the psychosocial needs of the individuals and group rather than on purely aesthetic outcomes, over time, choir members have themselves increasingly raised musical expectations, benefitting from the challenges provided by learning new music. A practical guide to the goals and organization of the choir is found in Appendix 1.

### Repertoire

The music therapist serves the role of facilitator, using his experience as a music therapist rather than choral director to lead the group where he takes a goal-oriented approach, aware of the dynamic of the group, responding to individual and group psychosocial and musical needs where the process for using and accepting a song is organic. The multifaceted nature of music allows people to respond in different ways—physically, emotionally, and socially. A number of writers have discussed how musical meaning and identity are both constructed and relative to context—that its meaning is dynamic both for the individual and the group (Ansdell, 2002, 2010; Bonde, 2014; Ruud, 1998, 2010). Ruud (2010) comments, for example, that “identity is constructed through the narratives we will tell about ourselves in relation to musical events and experiences in different contexts” (p. 40).

Aldridge (1999) has written that:

memories of past events can be elicited through song ... [t]hrough playing such songs we can review our lives and say what is important ... using the words of others, we find a common understanding that communicates what we want to say. For those of us who are inarticulate in the face of strong emotions, pre-composed songs are the vehicle for expression. (p. 21)

Repertoire is deliberately chosen by the music therapist to encompass a broad experience of life (see Appendix 2 for a list of the songs chosen). Songs afford new meaning when sung by the choir, where choir members may respond very personally to a song based on their own life experience. Songs may also become associated with particular events, such as the choir's performance at Kensington Palace, that are uplifting, creating positive experiences and memories for choir members to take into their daily lives. Some songs have assumed a life of their own in relation to the choir with new meanings attached to them, helping choir members in a transformative way.

One choir member commented that, at times, the sentiments being expressed in the songs were too difficult to sing at first but, over time, it was the music which enabled her to face her emotions and move forward in the grief process. Singing with other people who share her experience has provided her with a cathartic experience in a safe and supportive environment.

Overcoming the challenges of working through a difficult song, feeling vulnerable in the early stages of the learning process, and building resilience and a means to work through the musical difficulties for a sense of achievement mirrors the psychological challenges of the choir members' daily lives. Choir members (families and staff) as well as the music therapist are there to support each other when songs elicit strong emotional responses from individual choir members. As one choir member commented, "[I benefit] emotionally—through particular songs I feel different emotions or certain songs remind me of happy/sad times/memories," and another commented that "sometimes songs can bring quite strong emotions," while another said that singing can be quite challenging as "sometimes the songs really hit home and are very emotional to sing."

## Method

All current choir members were invited to participate in the study. There were no exclusion criteria—any current member of the choir could participate in the study, which received ethics approval from Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research. A decision whether or not to participate in the study in no way affected a person's membership of the choir. Interviews, conducted by the music therapist, were transcribed and data from both the interviews and questionnaires were analyzed initially to identify broad themes related to the participants' choir experience by noting recurrent words and phrases. The data were then re-read and analyzed for connections between themes. The results of the study revealed a number of broad categories including belonging, community, connectedness through shared experience, positive and uplifting experiences, personal time and escapism, challenges, grief processes, and raising public awareness of the hospice and the services it provides.

## Discussion of themes

### *Belonging and community*

The most frequent comments made by choir members referred to the supportive network provided by the choir and a sense of "belonging"—specifically a feeling of being part of an extended family where choir members both receive and provide emotional and practical support for each other. One mother felt she had learnt more from choir sessions about what wheelchair to buy, how to adapt her car, and how to cope emotionally than she had at any other support group. Another mother described the choir as "a life-line." Another participant commented that "I don't think I would have made these close friendships without the choir as it has brought us all together like one big family!"

Choir members talked about choir being a place where they "support, encourage and lift each other" in a safe, understanding, and non-judgmental environment. With the inclusion both of parents caring for children with complex health issues and bereaved parents, additional levels of support have occurred. Parents who have used the hospice services for some time have been able to impart their knowledge, experience, and care to new hospice users. One choir member commented that "Having got to know some of these people via the choir essentially makes these other support groups more effective for me as it's easier to participate in them."

Choir members referred repeatedly to how they have bonded with other families, receiving considerable emotional and practical support in their challenging lives. Participants made comments such as follows:

Choir has been an amazing bonding experience for us all and I wouldn't be without it now!!

I absolutely love coming to choir, firstly it has given me a chance to meet and get to know a lot of other hospice mums, it has helped me make some very close friends who help me through the good times and the bad.

EACH hospice has become a really big part of my life. It's lovely to be part of a group of wonderful people who each have a voice to be heard. I have made some wonderful friends through the choir. We all share a common interest, our children. I've laughed and cried with the members, and always leave with my spirits lifted. Singing is a real tonic and gives a great sense of belonging.

The choir provides a unique opportunity within the hospice for a safe space for hospice users and staff to interact socially through music where, as one staff member commented, "[we can make] new friends without crossing boundaries."

### *Shared experience*

Choir members identified the importance of shared experience and acceptance through the choir—knowing that everyone understands the challenges. There is no need to explain or justify their feelings and emotions. Participants commented that

... it doesn't matter if you're having a good day or bad, you can just enjoy being around people who aren't judging you.

even if you're having a difficult day, there will be people there to listen and chat with, or leave you alone if you're not wanting to talk at all, and everyone understands.

While each story is unique, choir members all feel a shared life experience through attending the hospice. As one participant commented, "we all have different stories to tell with something in common; every single one of us overcomes obstacles and live to laugh through another day." Singing in a group is an inherently social act (Ansdell, 2014), so it can help to break down psychological, physical, and social barriers, allowing participants to be themselves in a supportive, relaxed environment. Participants referred to a "common link," and to being "in the same situation" as other choir members who can support each other without being overbearing. Another choir member commented that "We care for each other as we know what each other faces every day. We don't smother each other."

### *Positive and uplifting experience*

There were many references to the positive and uplifting experience that the Treehouse Choir brings—a healing, therapeutic, transformative, and normalizing quality. Choir members commented,

... no matter what my mood is on that day, I leave feeling uplifted, partly from the singing and mostly from the fun rapport we have.

It is so uplifting being a member of the choir ... no matter what sort of day you are having, singing in the choir just changes everything.

... going to the choir puts all our worries behind us.

I often arrive at choir having been stressed/worried and have left feeling much better and far less stressed. Choir has improved my mental health hugely!

It is both through the act of singing and in the social aspect of being together through song that creates this positive experience—something that also extends during performances to audience members.

### *Personal time, normality, and escapism*

The choir provides an opportunity for parents to have fun without feeling guilty. Choir members talked about how, when they are singing, they are able to forget about the daily challenges and worries associated with caring for a child with complex health issues. They noted,

The Treehouse Choir has provided times of escapism, time out from a busy week, to completely forget about what has been happening at home ...

it provides an escape from the day-to-day life which is dominated by my son's condition—something just for me.

They feel free to laugh together—where people do not judge them for having fun—a reminder of normality and a time of escapism and a time to "let off steam." Choir members talked about how choir represents an important period of personal time (even when their children are with them at choir)—an opportunity to feel refreshed and better able to cope—a time that they find rewarding. They explained,

Choir is also something I do for me, it's my time, my space and time for me to be me.

Gives me time to myself (without caring for children), makes me feel happy, "time out," time not to worry.

I don't often get the chance to go out and socialise. I felt a bit lonely and trapped so the choir provided a regular opportunity to have some time for myself away from being at home.

### *Challenges of participation*

Choir members referred to enjoying the musical challenge of learning new skills in a supportive environment in contrast to the daily challenges they face in caring for their children. Participants made the following comments:

The challenge of learning harmonies is very different from most of the daily challenges that we are faced with.

It's good to have the challenge of learning harmonies—makes a nice change from some of the other challenges we have to deal with.

Through rising to these musical challenges, they build confidence and gain a sense of achievement. This process of facing challenges, of feeling vulnerable when singing unfamiliar music, of performing in public or singing solos, fosters resilience which choir members are able to take into their everyday lives. In many ways, the choir experience parallels the psychological experiences of the parents in their day-to-day lives.

There are also practical challenges for parents to participate on a regular basis. Choir members spoke, for example, of the difficulties in coordinating school pick-up times and medical appointments. In addition, many parents face psychological challenges related to their family circumstances. One participant commented that

I love the fact that it challenged me in the early days when it took every ounce of will-power in my body to get up and out of the house. Once I had overcome that hurdle, I couldn't wait to get to each rehearsal.

For staff, there is the challenge of not crossing professional boundaries. The choir encourages a more relaxed relationship between staff and hospice users as they sing together as equals, yet staff recognize the need to maintain a professional approach in interactions with service users since this is a hospice support group rather than an independent choir.

### *Grief process*

For families coping with bereavement, the choir has become an important mechanism for exploring their grief journeys and building resilience to continue with life after losing a child. Some of the parents talked about how they felt that choir was a way of bonding with their deceased child—a way of keeping memories alive. One participant commented that

Choir helps me to continue my bonding with my child. It helps me to feel close to him. I feel as though choir in some way is my chance to spend time with him and sing to him.

Another parent movingly recounted how she had sung to her baby when he was alive, she sang to him when he was dying and sang at his funeral, and that the choir allowed her to continue to sing to him and feel that close bond through the act of singing to someone close. Parents spoke about the choir providing an outlet for their grief:

The choir has literally been my saviour ... It got me back out there and gave me (gives me) a direct communication link to my son ... It has given me the confidence to tackle the normal everyday things that completely overwhelm you after losing your child. The people I have met, the friends I have made have made a very sad, lost and lonely lady feel reconnected with the world and if that is not a miracle in itself, I don't know what it is?!

### *Public awareness*

From the outset, building public awareness has been a fundamental part of the choir, with BBC radio and television performances, a performance at Kensington Palace for the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, a flash mob in a supermarket, and many local public performances. Many of the choir members referred to the importance of using performances to demonstrate that the hospice is a positive, family-oriented, fun place in order to address misconceptions surrounding their situations and their children's interactions at the hospice. They commented,

performances are very important, it allows us to spread the word that children's hospices are a vital service to our community and the support they give families is hugely essential.

[the choir] raises awareness of the charity. It gets us out into the community—breaks barriers about perceptions of what EACH does.

Public performances interweave songs with stories told by parents of their families' lives and their connections to the hospice to create individual and group narratives allowing audiences to have a much better understanding of the role played by the hospice.

The choir's first public appearance was a flash mob at a local supermarket at which both choir members and many of their children participated. Employees from the supermarket and members of a local dance community joined the choir to promote greater awareness of the services offered by the hospice, giving voice to the families who use it and connecting with the local community. One choir member commented that "The flashmob for me was where the whole connectivity between everyone came about. I think that was a real turning point. Where we all started to learn a little bit more about each other and why we were there."

These public engagements raise the profile of both the choir and the hospice in the local community and beyond. Through performances, choir members have a musical and social goal, an opportunity to address misconceptions about the hospice and for potential donors to hear first-hand about the role played by the hospice in the lives of families while listening to music in a relaxed environment. One choir member commented that

it's important to me for us to let other people know that the hospice is not all doom and gloom, and that we can and do have fun. So many people get the wrong idea of a children's hospice and we need to bring it to people's attention that the work done here can be enjoyable for the children that use it.

## Role played by music therapy within the choir

There are many different ways to run a choir. Having the choir run by a music therapist leads to a broader vision of the choir than might be found if it were run by someone without a music therapy background. It also ensures a therapeutic relationship can be maintained with choir members, providing emotional support when necessary. Similar to Small's (1998) concept of *musicking*, it enables the focus to be on the ongoing process of meeting and singing together rather than on the product of a single performance or musical perfection.

Knowledge and experience of working with choir members' children has enabled a level of trust, understanding, and a relationship that is unique and useful in supporting the parents as they often bring their children to practices. The choir is essentially a form of music therapy that aims to meet the parents' wellbeing needs, while also addressing some of the organizational needs of the hospice such as promoting the hospice's values and ethos, responding to media opportunities, and generating income for the hospice. The primary and over-arching goal of the music therapist/musical director is, however, the wellbeing and development of the individuals participating. This may include being able to help a choir member overcome a fear, increase a sense of resilience, make new and supportive relationships, draw an individual out of isolation, and share creative, positive, and healthy experiences. Ultimately, the development of positive relationships is always the directing force behind the choir, rather than the focus being on the quality of the sound.

One of the challenges of running the choir as a support group is ensuring that hospice staff fully understand the purpose of the choir as something that goes beyond simply being a vehicle to perform or serve as an "act," such as at fundraising events or events designed to raise awareness about the hospice. The choir model is much more than performing; yet the performances are often the only time when the choir is visible to hospice staff as well as trustees, donors, and hospice management. The essence and value of the choir lies in the importance of the relationships that are created over the weeks and years of the choir. Even aspects of the choir such as the choice of performance location and performance programming are made by the music therapist with therapeutic goals in mind.

## Future plans

One of the challenges with the current choir organization is that the music therapist serves as the sole musical support—organizing, directing, and accompanying the choir. Ideally, the choir could benefit from additional musical support, such as a volunteer keyboard player enabling the music therapist to focus more on the needs of the choir members. Future plans include creating new experiences for choir members, such as workshops on beat-boxing, rapping, operatic singing, or other new techniques for members. Such musical experiences could be invigorating, creative, and fun for members. However, acknowledgement would be needed that for some choir members, participating in these types of joyful experiences may prove difficult at various points in their hospice journey, and therefore, a sensitive approach within the context of the therapeutic benefits of the choir would be of paramount importance—surpassing any potential musical or aesthetic goals.

## Conclusions/reflections

The choir serves as a haven for parents, providing an environment in which to experience a balance between finding something challenging and having the necessary skills to succeed in the task. Csikszentmihalyi (2008) describes this as "flow," exemplified in the choir by members being engaged both musically and emotionally and helped to develop greater resilience to overcome personal challenges free from fear of failure. Singing in the choir brings confidence, strength, and an ability to overcome difficulties associated with feelings of isolation and loneliness—with an increase in wellbeing that extends beyond the choir sessions themselves.

Within the Treehouse Choir, members refer to the meaningful relationships that have been formed through singing together. All of the choir parents are connected to the hospice because of a child with complex health needs or bereavement. They would not choose to be part of a hospice community, yet out of their experiences and through shared music making, they have formed a supportive environment akin to family.

Music can reflect and help direct emotions serving as a powerful tool that can bring structure, hope, and calm out of chaos and despair. Like the grief process, singing together is dynamic with the potential for multi-layered interpretations of meaning and emotional response. It is perhaps for this reason that music can ease some of the pain associated with the process, enabling a person to regain a sense of control over their emotions and their situation.

The choir serves as a model for an innovative social approach to care for families because it is providing music therapy to adults within the children's hospice and facilitating supportive relationships that can develop between choir members. The aim of the choir is to create an experience of music that can lead to growth, expression, comfort, and joy—to connect people, who can make meaningful friendships that will be crucial in their lives ahead.

While aesthetic considerations have become increasingly important to the choir, the primary purpose of the choir remains pragmatic and therapeutic—a means of increasing wellbeing and support—where individuals can explore often intense emotions in a safe and supportive environment, built on trust. The process leads to increased self-agency, building personal and collective narratives—where positive emotional responses through music can be transferred into everyday life and supportive networks can be built.

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### Author biographies

Ray Travasso is a Nordoff-Robbins trained music therapist and has been working in palliative care for over 16 years. He works at The Treehouse (part of East Anglia’s Children’s Hospices, EACH) in Ipswich, Suffolk, UK. He is also Director of Suffolk Music Therapy

Services, an organisation that provides music therapy to children and adult care services across East Anglia. He manages a team of 12 music therapists and regularly supervises music therapists in the UK, specialising in palliative care.

Dr Jane Gosine is a professor in musicology at Memorial University, Canada with expertise in 17th-century French music. She has collaborated with music therapists on research projects in Canada and the U.K, as well as volunteered for many years alongside music therapists. She co-directs a choir for people with breathing difficulties and is a team member with Shallaway Youth Choir's neuro-diverse choir, Lauda.

## Appendix I

### *Practical guide to the goals and organization of the choir*

- The purpose of the choir is to bring together any service users (so any family members with children currently using the services of the hospice and bereaved families who continue to attend support groups) and staff from the hospice.
- All staff who attend the choir do so on their own time.
- In part, because of family logistics, the choir consists primarily of the mothers of children using the hospice or bereaved mothers.
- Throughout the year, there are fortnightly choir rehearsals with more frequent rehearsals prior to performances.
- There is no commitment to membership of the choir and so individuals can attend single one-off rehearsals. Most members attend regularly, often with their children.
- The rehearsals take place in different spaces within the hospice and include an hour of singing and always finish with refreshments provided by the hospice, and a social time for the families, without East Anglia's Children's Hospices (EACH) staff present.
- The choir is directed by the music therapist at the hospice with the time taken from his contracted hours at the hospice. He is responsible for booking and arranging rehearsal space, concert programmes, repertoire (in conjunction with choir), communication, and administration.
- A therapeutic and strategic stance was taken with regard to performance locations and performance programming.
- The hospice's wellbeing care manager takes a managerial and supportive role for the music therapist.
- The choir has its own social media platform accessible and administered only by family members, not staff. The administrators liaise with the music therapist on communicating information to choir members about rehearsal dates, performance events, and so on. The choir's social media has provided a communication tool for the parents to interact without any involvement of the hospice, becoming a vehicle of support in its own right.
- Community engagement beyond the hospice, such as during the supermarket flash mob, is an integral part of the choir and is valued by choir members as a means of demonstrating to other people the reality of what the hospice offers its users.
- The model for this hospice group is to use the choir experience as a catalyst to engage families to support each other without reliance solely on staff. A kind of "elder parent" support has occurred, where parents who have used EACH services for some time have been able to impart their knowledge, experience, and care to new members who are just beginning their journeys.
- Rehearsals begin with fun physical and vocal warm-ups, and time to welcome new members.
- Repertoire is chosen by the music therapist in consultation with choir members and with therapeutic goals in mind. There is a fluid approach to repertoire choice dependent on the needs of individual and group needs.
- The music therapist both directs and accompanies the choir, but it would be preferable to have additional musical support.

## Appendix 2

### *Repertoire list*

"Let it Go" (*Frozen*)

"Ordinary Miracle" (Sarah McLachlan)

"Movin' On Up" (Primal Scream)

"Grace Kelly" (MIKA)

"Somewhere Only We Know" (Keane)

"Rule the World" (Take That)

"Lego House" (Ed Sheeran)

"Photograph" (Ed Sheeran)

"I Will Wait" (Mumford & Sons)

"Something Inside So Strong" (Labi Siffre)

"Gentle Light" (Paul Mealer)

"I'll Think of You" (Kurt Schneider)

"I Gotta Feeling" (Black Eyed Peas)/"Every Breath You Take" (Police)/"I'll Fly Away" (Brumley)—mash-up

"Don't Worry About Me" (Frances)