



Annual Report of the Trustee Executive Committee of Rising Voices Wessex – 2023-2024

The Executive Committee of Rising Voices Wessex Community Choirs presents its annual report, covering the period from May 2023 to May 2024 and the accounting year ending March 2024.

Rising Voices Wessex supports adults affected by cancer, offering the benefits of making music singing in a community-style choir. It was initially launched on 8th January 2013 as a project funded by the by the Dorser Cancer Network to determine if there was local demand and whether singing in the choir proved beneficial. Initial assessment showed both to be the case, the choir continued.

Rising Voices Wessex became a registered charity in January 2016 and is a member of The National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Community Action Network

Music communicates with individuals at times of difficulty offering benefits for many chronic medical conditions. ***Rising Voices Wessex***, based in the Bournemouth-Christchurch-Poole (BCP) conurbation, was established to support people in the community whose lives have been affected by cancer – whether as patients, those bereaved through cancer or carers. ***Rising Voices Wessex*** promotes the concept of living well “after cancer”.

Over the past 3 years ***Rising Voices Wessex*** has been on a “journey” of recovery following the effects of the Covid pandemic and its associated restrictions. These posed major musical and financial challenges. Choir membership dropped to less than 50% of pre-pandemic levels and income from donations at rehearsal attendance by 67%. Resources from the Lottery Grant awarded in 2019 have, in effect, proved to be crucial to the survival of ***Rising Voices Wessex*** through and following the pandemic.

During pandemic restrictions, the Trustee Board prioritised maintaining the choirs’ activity through Zoom and virtual events in order to sustain the empathetic and supportive network intrinsic to the choir. This provided valuable support during a very challenging time of increased anxiety and social isolation for many. Professional music direction was retained.

This did incur significant expenditure but both the choir members and ***Rising Voices Wessex*** as an organisation benefitted from this decision. ***Rising Voices Wessex*** remained “open” and was able to resume its normal activity directly after restrictions were lifted. Unfortunately, initial post-pandemic membership numbers were low, reflecting a general trend experienced by similar entities in that period. During 2023 it became clear that continuing with both the Bournemouth and Poole choirs was not viable in the short to

medium term. The decision was taken by the Trustee Board to suspend the Bournemouth choir and focus on rebuilding numbers through the Poole based choir at St John's Church in Upper Parkstone. Bournemouth choir numbers were frequently in single figures which was both musically and financially unviable.

Understanding and support in respect of this change by the membership has generally been positive and regular attendance at Poole is now approaching 30 each week – for better financial viability a weekly attendance of 40 is desirable – and potentially achievable.

Rising Voices Wessex has performed at various charity events in the conurbation, especially those associated with cancer - further promoting singing for health and wellbeing as a means of living well with or after cancer. Importantly they also demonstrate the power of singing to build improved mental health. Public performances are a key objective and are important in the following respects:

- they demonstrate the benefits of singing for confidence, mental health and wellbeing,
- they help raise funds that enable the choirs to be sustainable,
- they encourage ongoing member recruitment.

Significant past performances that have boosted the choir's profile and sense of achievement include:

- Visiting Cherbourg, to feature at a French cancer awareness event early in 2013
- Being an invited supporting choir for Russell Watson at the Lighthouse in Poole in June 2015,
- Being an invited supporting choir for Blake at the Regent Centre in Christchurch in 2016
- Being an invited supporting choir for the Parry 100 Festival 'Glad Day' with Mike Westbrook at St Peters Church, Bournemouth in 2018.
- Creation of virtual choir recordings during lockdown to continue the spirit of public performance – its recording of "One voice" has been especially well received and has proved emblematic for Rising Voices Wessex.
- Rising Voices Wessex also presented its work publicly during pandemic restrictions in two online virtual choir concerts
- Workshop and performance with Apollo 5 at the Layard Theatre Wimborne in 2022.

Rising Voices Wessex has had a busy but effective year in 2023-24 as indicated by the summary of its events below.

Rising Voices Wessex events in 2023 – 2024

- Monday, 5th June 2023: AGM New Church, Southbourne, Bournemouth.
- Saturday, 29th July: 'Teach in' – at the Olive Branch in Wimborne.
- Monday, 7th August: Summer Live, Bournemouth Square.
- Friday, 18th August: Poole Day Care Centre 2- 3pm.
- Monday, 21st August: Family and Friend's Night at The New Church, Bournemouth.
- Tuesday, 22nd August: Family and Friend's Night at St John's Church, Poole.

- Tuesday, 10th October: Extraordinary General Meeting at The New Church, Bournemouth.
- Tuesday, 17th October: Lunch time recital at St Aldhelm's Church, Branksome.
- Saturday, 11th November: Commodore Club, Poole.
- Tuesday, 14th November: A Friend's and Family night with Bournemouth University – 'Sing out for Health' part of the 'Being Human Festival'.
- Wednesday, 15th November: Age Concern Hall on the Hill, Christchurch.
- Saturday, 2nd December: St John's Church, lighting of the tree service.
- Monday, 4th December: Aranlaw House.
- Wednesday, 6th December: Abbeyfield Event, Romsey Abbey.
- Wednesday, 6th December: Rhinefield House.
- Friday, 8th December: Asda at Castle Point.
- Saturday, 9th December: Bournemouth Christmas hub, Castle Point.
- Saturday, 16th December: RVW Christmas Concert, St George's Church, Oakdale.
- Sunday, 11th February 2024: Big ABBA Singalong at Talbot Heath School.
- Saturday, 24th February: Absolute Music Recording Studio.
- Tuesday, 26th March: Spring Concert at St Aldhelm's Church, Poole.
- Saturday, 11th May: Eco Fair, Ringwood.
- Wednesday 15th May: Garden Party at Buckingham Palace.
- Tuesday, 4th June: AGM.

Highlights 2023 – 2024 include:

The Abbeyfield Concert at Romsey Abbey, Singing at the Christmas Fair in Rhinefield House, The Christmas Concert, The Big ABBA Singalong and Absolute Music Recording Studio.

Our professional music video is available on YouTube

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=fqVgYbZfJKI> and Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/RisingVoicesChoir/videos/932243648901371>

Following nomination by UK Music, Rising Voices Wessex were honoured to receive an invite to attend a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace to celebrate the Creative Industries. Noeline Young and her daughter Hannah attended on behalf of the charity.

Rising Voices Wessex continues to appreciate the support and hospitality of St John's Church, Parkstone, Poole for its weekly rehearsals. It is also appreciative of the equivalent support given by The New Church, Tuckton, Bournemouth where it met for rehearsals prior to the suspension of the Bournemouth choir from October 2023.

Musical Directors' report 2023-24

This is my third year of directing Rising Voices Wessex and it has been an exciting one that has seen many changes, not least the amalgamation of the two choirs into one super choir! The stronger sound and the confidence gained from our members from having a strong core group has meant the choir is now growing again and we have welcomed quite a few new members in to the fold this year.

It has also been as always, a year of sad news, the loss of one of our founder members, Jean, was a shock to all of us and many members have faced health challenges. It is a testament to the care and commitment of our members that those who face such challenges

are supported and carried through their process and I have witnessed this happen time and time again.

Our outreach into the wider community continued this year as we welcomed Ian Roberts, one of most supportive local musicians, as a trustee. His expertise in business has already helped us make some very needed changes to our structure. We continue to work and invite the local musical community to work and support the Choir and this brings great benefit to all involved.

Christmas is always our biggest time of outreach for the Choir and we surpassed ourselves this year as we were in much demand in many shopping centres and care homes! The highlight was indeed the Christmas Concert which was perhaps a turning point for the Choir in terms of performance, the sound, balance and overall tightness of our delivery was obvious to all and I did wipe a tear or two of happiness at the sheer beauty of it.

Our recording at Absolute Music Studios, who have always been supportive of us, was a tremendously exciting experience for many who had never had the chance to record professionally and we had so much fun in the process.

This Easter saw us invited back to a local church, St Aldhelm's, as part of their lunch time recital series. The sheer professionalism of our performances was obvious to all. We have perfected a core repertoire of songs that communicate and carry the sentiment of our community and this always reached our audiences, but now the delivery has taken that to another level and the feedback we receive affirms the progress we have made.

And now we have the Eco Fair and Summer concert to prepare for. As a director, I can look forward to bringing new material and reworking the old with the trust and communication that takes time to establish, but is always a pleasure to work with when supportive and positive. I believe we have made an effort to maintain the positivity of our community and have overcome those situations that inevitably try to shake us and now we are bearing the fruit of our dedications!

Well done to all of those who continue to give their time and effort to keep the choir alive and kicking!

How Rising Voices Wessex makes a difference:

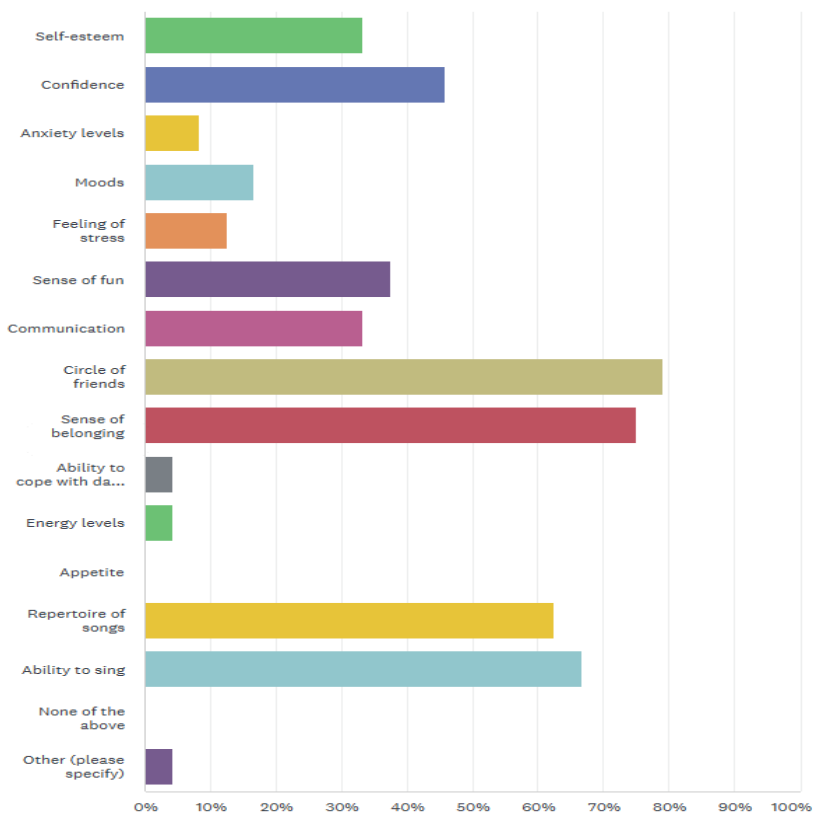
The charity's overall strategy continually aims to try and capture the benefits of being part of the choir through the use of a simple questionnaire. Annual Survey Monkey questionnaires are utilised by **Rising Voices Wessex** to obtain feedback and an indication of how much members benefit from being part of the choir – full results from the survey are available on the website at <https://www.risingvoices.org.uk/about-us/governance-documents>

Key findings from the survey include the following quotes and observations from choir members taken from the March 2024 survey:

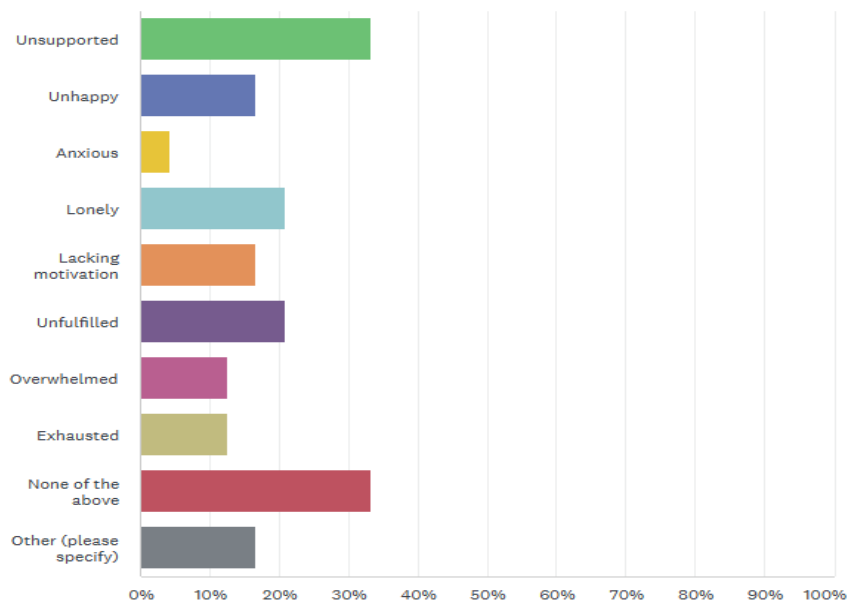
- **What you do well** - *“welcoming people of all standards of singing – massaging them into a reputable choir. A highlight for me was the ABBA singalong - wonderful music, great conductor, and a lovely opportunity to sing with other choirs”.*
- *“The highlight for me was the day spent in the recording studio. It was great fun to see how it all worked, to be in the spotlight and to be singing and socialising with friends. It was also an honour to have Hannah and her colleague there filming it all. A fabulous day!”*
- *“My highlight of the year was singing in Romsey Abbey, followed by Rhinefield House. Also, our Annual Concerts. Every Choir practice is a High Moment for me”.*
- *“Over the last year RVW has had wonderful opportunities and invitations to sing. Particularly of note, at Romsey Abbey in December, 2023 in front of a large and appreciative audience. The Spring Concert, held in March 2024, at St Aldhelm's Church, Poole, including a full programme of new and favourite material. The choir benefits greatly from musical leadership from two professional Directors who both inspire us and take us to greater vocal heights. We are so lucky”*

There were 24 respondents to the online March 2024 Annual Survey Results which show the benefits to both mental health and wellbeing from attending choirs and include the questions and responses below:

I feel that attending Rising Voices Wessex has improved my...



Since attending Rising Voices Wessex I no longer feel...



The full report can be found here: <https://www.risingvoices.org.uk/about-us/governance-documents/annual-survey-for-rising-voices-wessex-2024>

Management, Governance and Administration

As a registered charity **Rising Voices Wessex** is managed at a strategic level by a Board of Trustees drawn principally from the community. The Board encompasses a range of professional backgrounds - clinical, musical, finance and business – appropriate to the needs of the charity. The Chairman and other Trustees are appointed (and may be re-appointed) at the Annual General Meeting.

The skill mix of Trustees is subject to review to enable succession planning and optimum balance of expertise. There are currently two unfilled Trustee vacancies which are advertised on the website and locally; the Trustees may also approach suitable skilled and qualified individuals to become Trustees - obtaining new Trustees with the right skills and understanding of the work of **Rising Voices Wessex** is a priority as the board looks to securing its long-term sustainability and ongoing development.

Executive Trustee Board members are:

- Dr Alastair Smith (Chairman), Retired NHS Consultant, former Clinical Lead NCSI)
- Mrs Noëline Young (Vice chair), Retired Clinical Nurse Specialist/ former NCSI Project Manager.
- Mr Rob Taylor (Treasurer), Finance Director, Porterbrook Leasing
- Ms Sara Schwetze-Kemp, Businesswoman & Musician.
- Chani Darnell- Retired Midwife
- Ian Roberts – Local businessman and musician.
- Jean Querol retired as a Trustee following the 2023 AGM and sadly died unexpectedly in January 2024. Jean was one of the founders of **Rising Voices Wessex**. Her contribution to its running and success over the past 10 years was substantial – both as a choir member and as Trustee. It was particularly appropriate that a **Rising Voices Wessex** choir was able to sing at her funeral service.

Dr Alastair Smith (Trustee Chair) will be resigning as Chair following the 2024 AGM. Mrs Noeline Young (Trustee Vice-chair) has indicated her willingness to serve as Trustee Chair and to aid transition and engagement of new Trustees. The Trustee Board was delighted to co-opt and welcome Mr Ian Roberts, a local businessman and musician, to the board during 2023-24

Rising Voices Wessex aims to continue with a dynamic and active Trustee Board that ensures its continued status as a registered charity. The critical benefit to members of **Rising Voices Wessex** remaining as a charity is that singing is made available to those affected by cancer at minimal cost – there is no subscription required, accessibility thus is a critical part of the project. In this context **Rising Voices Wessex** remains on the lookout for suitable individuals with the necessary skills who would be able to take the charity forward.

Operational management and administration continue to be undertaken by a Steering Group that consists of two of the current Trustees with volunteer choir members, capitalizing on the range of skills that members can offer. The Steering Group meets monthly and reports to the board of Trustees. The Musical Director and Co-director are also part of the Steering Group.

Rising Voices Wessex aims to present a professional image that highlights its identity in public performance. Members wear black clothing with royal blue accessories for formal evening performances; for informal daytime events members wear **Rising Voices Wessex** badged polo shirts and fleeces.

Members pay a lower than cost price to **Rising Voices Wessex** for these garments; members on joining also receive a folder for music and song lyrics in the choirs' repertoire.

Financial summary 2023-2024

Presently, overall donated income remains significantly reduced. As numbers at rehearsals start to increase this will provide income through the suggested donation for those attending of £5.00. A Benefactors' scheme has been initiated which has also helped the financial position.

The successful **National Lottery Community Fund - Reaching Communities** application from May 2021 has continued to provide critical support during and in the aftermath of the pandemic restrictions. The award is an ongoing contribution towards running costs over a five-year period – in this past year it has ensured the survival of Rising Voices Wessex in the critical post-Covid recovery period – across the board the profound effect of the Covid pandemic on normal social activities continues to be experienced. It seems likely that recovery will be a slow and steady process.

In 2023 - 2024 **Rising Voices Wessex** has received generous grant support from the Hendy Foundation, towards the costs of the Big ABBA Singalong to which other choirs and the public were invited to take part. There was also a grant, from Dorset Community Foundation to support promotion and publicity for the choir and valuable support from Palm Print and the Douch family in supporting its concerts.

Following initial funding in 2012 by the Dorset Cancer Network, **Rising Voices Wessex** has sought and received ongoing financial support from various other sources, these include:

- Macmillan Cancer Support.
- The Big Lottery.
- The People's Lottery Fund.
- Going for Bust.
- Greggs Foundation.
- Bournemouth Football Club – 'The Cherries'.
- Arts and Health South West.
- Pegasus Life.
- Westbourne Rotary Club.
- Waitrose
- The Hendy Foundation.
- Dorset Community Foundation.

Financial Review

Income: We saw an increase in income in the year, from £28.6k in 22-23 to £30.3k in 23-24. The principal reason for this was an increase in grant income in addition to amounts received from the National Lottery (£12.5k), securing c.£5.5k of additional grant income. Other income relating to choir contributions, regular donations and other activities was c.£12.2k.

Expenditure: Expenditure was £26.4k in 23-24, a reduction of £2.8k from 22-23. The primary reason was a reduction in function and support costs. The bulk of expenditure was incurred on professional fees being £18.9k, the cost of venues of £3.3k, storage of £1.1k and admin and other costs of £3.1k.

We expect expenditure to remain at similar levels in 24-25.

The net trading position was a surplus of £3.8k reflecting an operational shortfall of £8.7k, offset by Lottery grant income of £12.5k. In 24-25 we forecast that the operational shortfall will be a deficit of £16.5k before Lottery income of £12k.

Cash: The cash position at 31 March 2024 was £19.7k, an increase of £3.8k from £15.9k in March 2023. With known and anticipated income in 24-25, the charity has sufficient resources to continue operations for more than 12 months.

Thanks, and acknowledgments:

Thanks are due to all those who continue to support the choirs – many have done so since its foundation; the additional commitment of members ‘old and new’ is so important to the ongoing existence of the choir. Help with fundraising, running raffles, support at venues for events and making cakes are all examples of the terrific support given by members.

Thanks also to those involved in the administration of the day to day running of the choirs by the Steering Group.

The Trustees thank Musical Director, Wendy Morrow, and co-director, Mark Anstead, for their musical and technical support.

Thanks, are also due to Lucia Sanchis and Paul Querol. Lucia has stepped back from the role of administrator as she and her husband Paul have started a new business enterprise. Their support and contribution to **Rising Voices Wessex** has been invaluable. We thank them and wish them every success in their new business.

Signed:

4th June 2024

Chair of the Trustee - Dr Alastair Smith

Vice Chair of the Trustees – Mrs Noeline Young