

Aphasia Choirs

A guide to setting up an inclusive and successful choir for people with aphasia
for SLTs and Music Therapists

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Our experiences

- ▶ Emma and Laura set up the Bath Aphasia Choir in 2017, as part of Laura's music therapy training placement.
- ▶ The placement ran for six months and then funding was awarded from a local charity which has allowed the choir to continue. Laura and another MT student now lead and accompany the choir on a self-employed basis.
- ▶ In 2018 the choir became a Stroke Association Volunteer Led Group.
- ▶ In 2019 Emma is supervising SLT and MT students to set up a new aphasia choir in South Gloucestershire. The students will run the choir as part of their placements.
- ▶ You can find videos of the Bath Aphasia Choir in action at <https://voicesofaphasia.com/videos/>

Inclusion criteria

- ▶ Our choirs are aimed at people with aphasia. Some choirs are open to all stroke survivors and people with other neurological conditions, but we aim to create specialised groups designed to particularly benefit PWA.
- ▶ Any severity of aphasia and/or apraxia of speech.
- ▶ Any length of time since onset.
- ▶ We are not able to provide personal care at rehearsals, so the choirs are open to people who are able to manage toileting, eating and drinking independently or who are accompanied by a carer who can support them.
- ▶ Think carefully about people with behavioural issues (possibly people with a diagnosis of dementia) and if these might be disruptive to the choir.

Student placements

- ▶ The Bath Aphasia Choir started through a student placement with a Music Therapy student from UWE Bristol. Music Therapy training courses take place at:
 - ▶ University of Derby (a new course from 2019 onwards)
 - ▶ Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh
 - ▶ Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London
 - ▶ Nordoff Robbins training centres in London and Manchester
 - ▶ Roehampton
 - ▶ UWE Bristol
 - ▶ Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge
 - ▶ University of South Wales, Newport
- ▶ Find a qualified MT at <https://www.bamt.org/british-association-for-music-therapy-resources/find-a-therapist.html>
- ▶ SLT students can also get involved as part of their placements.
- ▶ Students are free! In our experience a student placement can act as a pilot project (with evaluation with the choir members at the end) and can lead to sustainable and permanent funding.

Why should a Music Therapist lead the aphasia choir?

- ▶ Training in clinical background of stroke and neurorehab (which can be enhanced by an SLT giving specific training on aphasia and accessible communication).
- ▶ Flexible musicality - understanding what is possible and appropriate and improvising where needed.
- ▶ Trained in a client led approach.
- ▶ Experienced in creating therapeutic relationships and considering the wider psychosocial needs of clients.
- ▶ Trained in psychological theories and group dynamics.
- ▶ Good observation and note making skills.
- ▶ Will have supervision to reflect on and discuss any issues in the work.

What if I can't find/afford a MT?

- ▶ You could work with a community musician or choir leader to set up a choir, but they will need support and training to make the choir accessible to PWA. This would include:
 - ▶ Training in stroke, aphasia and communication approaches.
 - ▶ STARS competencies (online training) to improve awareness about stroke.
 - ▶ Training about appropriate music repertoire (see song choices slide).
 - ▶ Making sure that people can access the music as well as the language - use of visual gestures to indicate pitch and clear conducting to show entries and endings.
 - ▶ Making the rehearsals accessible through reducing and clarifying their spoken language and using gesture, pictures and props to support where appropriate.
 - ▶ The leader will need to provide musical support through singing clearly and articulating words while conducting (some PWA watch the conductor's mouth for cues).

Venue

- ▶ The venue will need to be fully accessible to both wheelchair users and people with limited mobility.
- ▶ Parking is essential.
- ▶ Good access via public transport.
- ▶ Accessible toilets.
- ▶ Kitchen for refreshments.
- ▶ Power for projector and piano.
- ▶ Chairs with arms are ideal.
- ▶ Lockable storage cupboard.

Equipment

- ▶ Electric piano or keyboard with a transpose function.
- ▶ Projector and screen for lyrics - ensure that your projector is bright enough to produce a good picture in a bright room. We use the the Optoma HD 39 Darbee (<https://www.richersounds.com/optoma-hd39-darbee-dlp.html>)
- ▶ Laptop to make and display lyrics slides.
- ▶ HDMI lead to connect to projector.
- ▶ Extension leads.
- ▶ Percussion instruments - some people enjoy playing and singing or will find playing easier than singing.
- ▶ Refreshments - tea, coffee, sugar, milk and biscuits (including gluten free if required). Also consider if any of your members require texture modified foods or thickened drinks due to dysphagia - speak to their SLT if you are unsure.

Transport

- ▶ Think about whether you can pay for transport for members if your budget allows.
- ▶ Look into local community transport schemes for those who are not able to drive or use public transport. These are usually provided by volunteer drivers so are not always available every week.
- ▶ Budget for transport to performances if needed (accessible minibuses).

Finding members

- ▶ Stroke Association groups (particularly communication support groups).
- ▶ Other brain injury charities such as Headway and Different Strokes.
- ▶ Acute stroke units.
- ▶ Inpatient rehab settings.
- ▶ Community therapists.
- ▶ Social media (Facebook and Twitter) and YouTube - you could consider making an aphasia friendly 'video flyer' which healthcare staff and therapists can share with PWA.
- ▶ Local press and websites.
- ▶ Existing members can recruit others through word of mouth.

Family members and carers

- ▶ We encourage family members to stay if they wish. There can be some wonderful moments of connection and a chance for people to hear their loved one's voice.
- ▶ Some PWA come to choir on their own, allowing their carer some time for respite and errands.
- ▶ Family and friends are always invited to come to performances.
- ▶ Carers of members of the Bath Aphasia Choir said:
 - ▶ "Its a new topic of conversation with our family, something we share when they visit"
 - ▶ "Choir gives him the opportunity to do something he is good at"

Social media

- ▶ Recording consent: each participant (including carers who sing with the choir, volunteers and students) will need to give consent for
 - ▶ Recording
 - ▶ Sharing of recordings online
- ▶ Consent might have to be given by carers but think about making an aphasia friendly version of the form to keep PWA informed.
- ▶ We use an adapted version of the Stroke Association's form - check with your organisation. It will need to comply with GDPR regulations by explaining how the recordings will be used and how they will be stored and shared.
- ▶ Set up a Twitter account and Facebook page.
- ▶ Maybe a website or blog on wordpress.com.
- ▶ See the facebook group 'Aphasia Choirs Go Global' and singaphasia.com.

Communication support

- ▶ Forms and handouts should be adapted to be aphasia friendly:
 - ▶ Language simplified and presented one sentence at a time
 - ▶ Large, clear font with lots of white space
 - ▶ Key words written in bold
 - ▶ Concrete and relevant pictures and icons to illustrate key points (e.g. clock face with times, photos and maps of venues).
 - ▶ See the Stroke Association's Accessible Information Guidelines for more specific instructions:
https://www.stroke.org.uk/sites/default/files/accessible_information_guidelines.pdf1_.pdf
- ▶ Training for music facilitator and volunteers about the impact of aphasia and how to use supported conversation.
- ▶ Tea breaks:
 - ▶ Materials to facilitate choices of drinks and food
 - ▶ Materials to support general conversation - maps, pen and paper, feelings charts, iPad to look up pictures etc.
- ▶ See lyrics page for ideas to make the singing accessible.

Example of an aphasia friendly handout

Sunday 22nd April

Aphasia choir performance at Colston Hall



Meet at **St Martin's Hospital**,
Midford Road, Bath, BA2 5RP.
Parking is available.



A **minibus** will be leaving
at **10.30am**.



We are **performing** at Colston Hall, Bristol, BS1 5AR from **12.30 – 1.00pm**.



The minibus will **pick up** from Colston Hall at **1.30pm** and return to **St Martin's Hospital**.



Colston Hall is **wheelchair accessible** and there are **disabled toilets** available. There is a **café** in the foyer where we are performing.



Volunteers

- ▶ Volunteers are incredibly helpful for choirs but will also need training on stroke, aphasia and supported conversation.
- ▶ Volunteer jobs:
 - ▶ Supporting PWA to participate and communicate
 - ▶ Making and serving refreshments
 - ▶ Collecting subs (at the Bath Aphasia Choirs members are asked for a voluntary donation of £2.50 per week to cover venue hire and refreshment costs).
 - ▶ Operating the powerpoints/projector
 - ▶ Setting up and clearing the room
 - ▶ Singing!
- ▶ You could recruit volunteers via an organisation such as the Stroke Association. Independent groups will need to consider issues around data protection, client confidentiality, insurance and health and safety of volunteers and members.
- ▶ If volunteers are not working unsupervised with vulnerable adults they do not legally require a DBS check. However you should assess the risks involved in your project to decide what safeguarding measures you will need in place to protect both volunteers and choir members.
- ▶ See <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/your-team/volunteers/keeping/ncvosafeguardingforvolunteerinvolvingorgs.pdf> for a useful guide.

Structure of the rehearsals

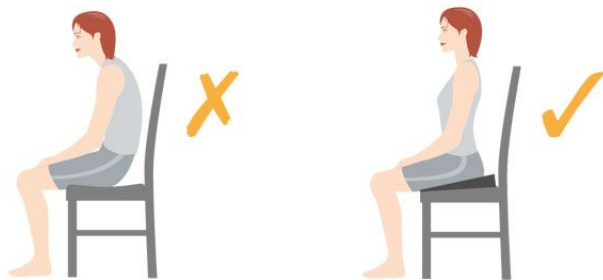
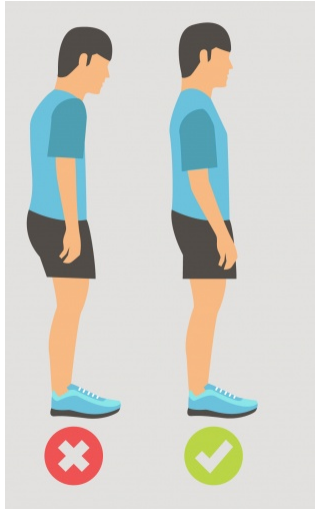
- ▶ An example from the Bath Aphasia Choir:
 - ▶ 10.15-10.30 Arrival
 - ▶ 10.30-11.10 Warmups and singing (3-4 songs including 1 new one)
 - ▶ 11.10-11.30 Break
 - ▶ 11.30-12.00 Singing (3-4 songs, perhaps including 1 other new one)

Warmups

- ▶ Some examples of warmup exercises:
 - ▶ Use pictures to illustrate good posture (feet flat on floor, imagine a piece of string coming from the top of your head).
 - ▶ Breathing exercises - encourage diaphragmatic breathing, then sounds such as 'ha', 'sssss', and 'sh' on the outbreath.
 - ▶ Humming (a gentle start to vocalisation for people that may not speak much) - to line shapes (see next slides)
 - ▶ Sliding patterns from notes 1 - 5 of the scale and back down to:
 - ▶ Mmmm
 - ▶ Ooooo
 - ▶ Eeeee
 - ▶ Aaaah
 - ▶ Facial warmups - your smallest, screwed up face followed by your biggest/shocked face (use pictures and give a demonstration of this).
- ▶ See a video of our warmups at <https://youtu.be/OgsblOv6Myo> Please note that this is a private unlisted video so will not show up on searches of YouTube or google.

Warmups - example slides

Posture:



Humming lines:



Song choices

- ▶ Sing songs which are:
 - ▶ Well known (although as your choir gains confidence you can tackle more challenging material!)
 - ▶ Meaningful to your choir members - ask them to suggest songs by bringing in CDs or pictures if they are not able to tell you song or artist names
 - ▶ Have a strong rhythmic beat
 - ▶ Relatively simple and repetitive with a strong chorus
 - ▶ A slow to medium tempo (or slow down faster songs)
 - ▶ Not too many words
 - ▶ Gaps between lines are helpful
 - ▶ Uplifting songs can help to improve people's moods, but think about a balance between acknowledging the difficulties people with aphasia and their loved ones face while offering an uplifting and therapeutic experience.

Song choices

- ▶ Some examples of favourite songs from the Bath Aphasia Choir:
- ▶ Upbeat pop songs:
 - ▶ With A Little Help From My Friends
 - ▶ Thank You for the Music
 - ▶ Top of the World (The Carpenters)
 - ▶ Take Me Home, Country Roads
 - ▶ Here Comes The Sun
 - ▶ I Can See Clearly Now
- ▶ Traditional songs:
 - ▶ Cockles and Mussels (Molly Malone)
 - ▶ When Irish Eyes Are Smiling
 - ▶ Amazing Grace
- ▶ Slow songs:
 - ▶ What a Wonderful World
 - ▶ Old Man River
 - ▶ Can't Help Falling In Love With You
- ▶ Musical theatre/songs from the shows:
 - ▶ The Sound of Music - Edelwiess, Do Re Mi, My Favourite Things, Climb Every Mountain
 - ▶ Oh What a Beautiful Morning
 - ▶ Singing In The Rain
- ▶ Part singing:
 - ▶ Oh When The Saints/Swing Low/I'm Gonna Sing in 3 parts

Lyrics

- ▶ Use aphasia friendly slides to display the lyrics:
 - ▶ 1-2 lines per slide
 - ▶ Large text
 - ▶ Key words in bold
 - ▶ Relevant pictures (from google images) - aim to use a picture to represent the whole meaning of the line rather than individual words. The aim is to orientate the choir to the part of the song they are singing rather than cueing individual words.
- ▶ Use a projector and screen to display the lyrics (make sure it works in a bright room).
- ▶ It can be useful to practice new lyrics through rhythmic chanting, but this is not essential as the aim of an aphasia choir is not perfect word production. We encourage members to sing along however they like, whether this means singing all the lyrics, singing to 'la', humming or just listening!

Example of aphasia friendly lyrics

What would **you do**
if I **sang** out of **tune**?



Would you **stand up**
and **walk out** on **me**?



Example of aphasia friendly lyrics

Lend me your **ears**
and I'll **sing you a song**



And I'll **try** not to **sing** out of **key**



Oh I **get by** with a **little help**
from my **friends**



Performances

- ▶ Performances can be an excellent way for your choir to share their skills and to raise awareness about brain injury and aphasia. However, some people with aphasia will not wish to perform so performances should always be an optional activity.
- ▶ We have previously performed as part of the Bath Festival, at the Stroke Association Christmas meal, held a summer concert and meal for family and friends and performed at our local acute hospital and community hospital. Many of our members were patients at these hospitals following their strokes and were able to perform for people who have recently had a stroke.
- ▶ Think carefully about the practicalities of performances - transport, parking, accessibility, toilets, access to drinks/a café etc. Visit the performance venue and do a full risk assessment before the performance date. Also be aware that some people will find evening events difficult due to fatigue.
- ▶ Ensure that members are aware that audience members might take photos and videos during a public performance and that your recording consent forms are up to date.

Funding - keeping it going

- ▶ If you set up a choir as part of a student placement this can act as a pilot project and provide evidence that the project should receive continued funding.
- ▶ We used an adaptive version of the AIQ-21 scale to ask members about their experiences of coming to the choir (with permission from the creator of the scale, Kate Swinburn. Members and carers were also supported to give qualitative feedback about the impact of participating. You could use other quality of life and wellbeing outcome measures before and after the pilot period.
- ▶ Potential funding sources could include a combination of:
 - ▶ Local authority
 - ▶ Local community grant making organisations and charitable trusts
 - ▶ The National Lottery Community Fund
 - ▶ Arts Council
 - ▶ Local and national business sponsorship (banks and building societies often have community funds)
 - ▶ Fundraising schemes in local supermarkets
- ▶ See www.fundingcentral.org.uk for a useful search engine for funding options.
- ▶ Always apply for the best possible funding options (i.e. to cover all your operational costs) as you may still be awarded a smaller amount which can be supplemented by other funding sources.
- ▶ It is possible to fundraise through selling tickets for concerts and CD recordings, but it is unlikely that you will completely cover your outgoings this way.

Health and safety considerations

- ▶ Emergency contacts - each new member (or their carer) will need to complete a form giving details of who to contact in an emergency, and their medical, mobility and communication needs.
- ▶ Two responsible people (including staff and volunteers) must be trained in Basic Life Support. We would recommend the Emergency First Aid at Work qualification, which is valid for three years.
- ▶ Risk Assessments must be completed and updated for the rehearsals and any external events or performances.
- ▶ Insurance: the choir leader will need to have Public Liability Insurance in place if working in a self-employed capacity. You will also need insurance to cover any equipment from theft or damage.
- ▶ Evacuation plans - assign one person to each individual with aphasia to assist in the event of an emergency evacuation. This might be a partner/carers who attends with them or a member of staff/volunteer.
- ▶ Staff and volunteers must be trained in manual handling and client assistance if they need to support members with mobilising and transferring.
- ▶ Consider if any of your members require texture modified foods or thickened drinks due to dysphagia - speak to their SLT if you are unsure.

A final word...

- ▶ A testimonial from Catherine, whose husband Tim has aphasia and is a member of the Bath Aphasia Choir:
 - ▶ ‘Tim has been attending the Aphasia Choir since its inception, and he really enjoys it, as do others. The session is very friendly, supportive and stimulating, and everyone has a lot of fun. Many of our friends have commented on how Tim's speech has improved since he has been attending choir, and I too feel that it has.
 - ▶ Tim's voice is still very strong when he is singing, and I think this helps to boost his self-esteem. He has aphasia but can read, and so can sing confidently when the words are in front of him, as they are at choir, up on a screen in front. This facility would not be available to him at any other choir.
 - ▶ Attending the aphasia choir gives him an enjoyable opportunity to engage in an activity which takes him out of his disability and doesn't remind him of it. We are very grateful for the hard work put into the choir by all the organisers and leaders.’