

City Bridge Trust – Monitoring Visit Report

Organisation: Choir with No Name	Grant ref: 10768	Programme area: Improving Londoners' Mental Health(c) Homeless people, transient people & rough sleepers
Amount, date and purpose of grant: 07/09/2011: £60,000 over three years (3 x £20,000) towards the salary cost (27 hours per week) of the Director on condition that the Trust is not the organisation's single largest funder in the third year of the grant.		
Visiting Grants Officer: Tim Wilson accompanied by Mrs Littlechild and Mrs Fredericks	Date of meeting: 24 th March 2014	
Met with: Jennifer Dyer (Development Manager), Marie Benton (Director) and choir members		
<p>1. Introduction to the organisation: Established in 2008, the Choir with No Name provides a safe environment for homeless, or recently rehoused people to sing in a group and to perform to audiences. The Choir aims to build participant confidence and sense of well-being. Its members are among society's most vulnerable people, and the Choir has been developed to provide a fun and empowering atmosphere.</p> <p>Initially just four people, the Choir now has groups in North and South London, Birmingham and Liverpool. It is exploring options to open new choirs in Plymouth and Sheffield. It has received a great deal of favourable publicity, including good press coverage by the Evening Standard and selection as John Lewis' charity partner. The Choir is well-supported by a group of committed volunteers, including some students from the Guildhall School of Music.</p> <p>The Choir's Founder/Director worked in the homelessness sector before she established the charity. She combined her love of gospel choirs with her professional background to create an activity that would be both stimulating and conducive to improved well-being.</p> <p>The Choir perform regular concerts, including their annual Christmas concert at the Union Chapel in Islington which is usually sold out.</p>		
<p>2. The project funded: You awarded a grant of £60,000 over three years (3 x £20,000) to cover part of the Director's salary. This core funding was sought to provide stability to the charity so it could develop and grow its existing services. At time of application, the Choir only operated in North London but had plans to start a South London project.</p>		
<p>3. Work delivered to date: The Choir celebrated its fifth anniversary in July 2013, at which point it calculated it had worked with almost 450 people, held over 370 rehearsals and performed in a range of venues including the Royal Opera House, Science Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum and Hammersmith Apollo.</p> <p>Since the start of your grant the Choir launched its South London group in November 2012, and has subsequently started other ventures outside of the capital. It has released an EP, primarily to raise its profile and give its members recording experience rather than to make money.</p> <p>The Choir conducts regular outreach 'taster' sessions for prospective members, and advertises at</p>		

homelessness centres. Workshops have taken place at St Mungo's, women's day centres, and NHS mental health support services.

4. Difference made:

The Choir undertook a general survey of its members in August 2013. This showed impressive outcomes including high levels of respondents reporting an increase in confidence since they joined the Choir, a large proportion of members who had formed new friendships, and who had learned skills in teamwork. The Choir also gathers audience feedback, which is also positive, with evidence that the charity's work helps change people's feelings about homelessness.

Testimony from one member provides helpful illustration: *"[The Choir] helps in lots of ways with my [mental] illness. Being around people, having routine, doing something creative, helps with my mind, even the meal means that I eat well too so it's very beneficial for me and my recovery"*

The relationship between mental health and group singing is a subject of academic interest. At time of this monitoring visit Stephen Clift, Professor of Health Education at Canterbury Christ Church University was with the Choir along with a group of his students. Professor Clift is organising a symposium in September to look at the physical and mental health benefits of singing, at which the Choir will perform.

5. Grants Administration:

Monitoring reports have been written to a very high standard since the grant was awarded and funds have been appropriately acknowledged in the Choir's accounts. There have been no compliance concerns during the life of the grant.

6. Concluding comments:

The monitoring visit proved an enjoyable opportunity to see the Choir in action, and to listen to their performances of songs from the Grease and Rocky Horror Picture Show musicals ahead of their participation in a concert at Cadogan Hall on April 4th.

When you awarded funding the Choir was primarily a group for people who were either homeless, or who had experienced homelessness. Since then, the organisation has moved to embrace a broader group of participants who have all, at some stage, experienced mental ill-health.

During the visit we had the opportunity to meet several members and discuss the reasons for their participation in the Choir. Many of the stories were very moving, and members spoke of the value of taking part in something which was fun, challenging, and helped them feel less isolated. The focus on working towards concerts not only provides members with the satisfaction of public support, but also helps raise the Choir's profile and engages new supporters.

The Choir's growth since you awarded funding is impressive, and there is potential for the work to extend to other urban areas as the idea is simple, and transferrable. The biggest challenge facing the Choir's expansion is finding suitable rehearsal space where members can also receive a cooked meal, but it has impressed by the network of partner organisations it has built since it was established.