

Practitioner Guide





Practitioner Guide for entry level practitioners

This guide was developed as part of Shared Harmonies' Diversity and dementia project alongside The Song Book - a collection of dementia friendly songs from around the world with ideas about how to use them. You can download a copy of The Song Book from our website

www.sharedharmonies.co.uk

The Diversity and dementia project explored making our singing for dementia groups more ethnically inclusive.

The project was devised and delivered by Shared Harmonies with So Many Beauties and was generously funded by the Paul and Nick Harvey Fund.

One of the aims of the project was to support emerging practitioners in delivering singing for dementia and singing for wellbeing groups.

This guide will hopefully provide some pointers which may be useful in helping with your initial planning and preparation. You may find it useful to refer to other ideas and links that are included in The Song Book.

There are many places where you can find out about funding but as a starting point you could refer to [Help Musicians UK's funding wizard](#) or visit Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance's [Funding Resource](#) page.





Background

Shared Harmonies

Shared Harmonies CIC is an award winning social enterprise delivering singing and development services for companies and communities.

Founded in 2013, Shared Harmonies specialises in delivering services for people living with long term health & wellbeing conditions including Parkinson's, respiratory conditions, poor mental health, dementia and Long Covid.

Shared Harmonies also delivers transformative services for organisations, developing team cohesion and effective leadership.

So Many Beauties

So Many Beauties produces large scale public performances of new pieces of music co-created with people living with dementia and their communities of care. These performances challenge the tragedy narrative around dementia and celebrate people's creative assets.

The project champions collaboration between stakeholder organisations and provides training and mentoring for amateur, student and professional musicians. You can watch a short video about their dementia friendly music festival at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester [here](#).



Diversity and dementia project

We are grateful to the Paul and Nick Harvey Fund for supporting a project which explored making our singing for dementia groups more ethnically inclusive.

The project was devised and delivered by Shared Harmonies with So Many Beauties.

We spoke to 20 different organisations and individuals about the barriers and enablers for people to access culturally appropriate dementia support.

We recruited 2 trainees offering them a paid learning experience and helping us to diversify our team in the process.

We worked in collaboration with SoundUp Arts, Age UK Salford, Dementia Forward and Touchstone Leeds.

We delivered 30 singing for wellbeing sessions attended by 123 older people living with dementia, Parkinson's and respiratory conditions.

We shared ideas with other organisations and individuals leading singing groups and invited them to contribute to this song book.

We hope this song book and the associated entry level practitioner guide will be a living resource that gets added to and adapted.

We're so appreciative of all the people who have worked with us to deliver this project - thank you so much.

You can stay in touch with Shared Harmonies by

emailing admin@sharedharmonies.co.uk
visiting our website www.sharedharmonies.co.uk
following us on social media



a) Basics - DBS, Public Liability Insurance

Working with vulnerable people in health and social care/community settings usually requires an Enhanced with Barred Lists DBS Check. (Disclosure and Barring Service). Individuals cannot apply for this directly and need to submit an application through the organisation they are working with. Be aware that not all organisations pay for these and you may be expected to cover the cost yourself. Click [here](#) for more information.

You must keep a paper copy of your DBS certificate and, for enhanced checks, you can keep your certificate digitally updated by joining the [DBS update service](#).

Many organisations expect practitioners to have their own Public Liability Insurance (PLI) to cover the cost of claims made by members of the public for incidents that occur in connection with their sessions. The Natural Voice Network offers PLI to its members as well as a range of other excellent services. The annual membership is currently £60 and there is a discounted rate for people who might struggle with the full amount. You can find out more [here](#).

If you are from overseas and need support with getting DBS and PLI in place, ask the organisation you are working with or other organisations you might know because they may be able to advise you. Or try contacting the [Musicians Union](#) for advice.

b) Setting up sessions - talking to venues and partners, identifying support staff, establishing safeguarding, risk assessment and consent frameworks, promoting and recruiting participants.

A useful first step for anyone wanting to set up singing / music sessions is to find out about what is already happening in your area. You might find the resources section of this songbook helpful and the Music for Dementia campaign are currently updating their UK wide map of existing activity which will be available soon [here](#).

By researching what is already on offer you may be able to plug gaps in provision or offer complementary services.

It is usually helpful to work in partnership with an existing dementia support service and/or a community venue. You can search the members of your Local Dementia Action Alliance to identify potential partners/venues. You could also contact your local branch of Age UK to find out about community daycare services and dementia cafes. Your local Community Voluntary Service may also be able to help with this. Find out what your CVS offers by visiting NAVCA.

Once you have secured a venue/partner, find out what support you will have from staff before, during and after your sessions. It is important to find out about any safeguarding requirements/processes and to check the venue or partner's risk assessments. Find out what Covid guidelines you need to follow such as lateral flow testing/social distancing/ventilation and use of masks/hand gel. If you are hoping to document your work using photo/video, you will need to have signed consent forms in place for participants and staff.

Working in partnership can help with the promotion of the sessions and recruiting participants. Refer back to our list of enablers in The Song Book for other tips, such as working with community or faith leaders to help spread the word and using language and images on flyers that are ethnically inclusive.

c) Setting up the room - creating a safe, uninterrupted space, considering access/support needs, positioning.

Try to find a room where there will be minimal interruptions - away from busy offices or kitchens. You may need to follow specific Covid guidelines in setting up the room to allow for social distancing. Ideally you would create a semi circle (horseshoe) of participant chairs in the space - preferably seats without arms to allow room for physical warm ups. You may need to accommodate space for wheelchair users and you should make sure that people's access needs are taken into consideration before the session.

If your participants are seated, it might be helpful for you to be seated in front of them so you are at eye level. You may need to project your voice to make it clear for anyone with hearing issues and any visual aids need to be large enough for those with visual impairments.

d) Dementia friendly awareness - length and pacing of sessions, simplifying and using non verbal communication, mirroring - also appropriate for people who have english as a second language.

The length and pace of sessions should be informed by the types of participants you expect to be working with. If you are running a session that is longer than an hour, you might include a break for refreshments or a comfort break.


Speak to staff beforehand to make sure they can support participants during these breaks and make sure you know what catering facilities are available to you on site so you can advise participants if they need to bring their own water.

Before working with a group of people living with dementia it helps to have a good understanding of the impact of different types of dementia on individuals. Dementia Friends awareness sessions give a useful overview. You can also find some excellent resources on the Music for Dementia website. It is important to meet people where they are and to expand our range of communication skills.

Take everything at a much slower pace to allow people time to process the different activities. Then slow it down even more and don't be afraid of repetition. Repetition is really helpful - especially for people who are experiencing issues with short term memory.

Slow down any physical warm ups and remind everyone not to stretch or move further than is comfortable for them - regularly check participant movements to make sure they are comfortable.

Simplify your verbal instructions and consider ways in which your body language might help participants. For example, role modeling good posture, making positive and affirming eye contact, demonstrating the shape of melodies using your hands and using thumbs up gestures



If you see someone moving their bodies or hands to the singing, it can be helpful to mirror what they are doing to validate their expressions. Non verbal forms of communication are especially helpful for participants who have english as a second language.

People living with dementia may show unexpected behaviour or disinhibition during sessions. Only direct experience will help you to find ways of gently acknowledging but not spotlighting this and bringing things back to the flow of the singing. Staff can be useful allies here in sitting next to anyone who may need additional, individualised support.

e) Choosing appropriate warm ups, songs and activities - using relaxation, teaching simple songs through call and response repetition, songs with actions, co-creating within existing songs.


It's likely that any group will be made up of individuals who are all at very different stages on their dementia journey. It is helpful to start with really simple activities and songs and to slowly build from there.


We start most of our sessions with a guided relaxation which we have found brings a real focus and quiet to the start of sessions which sets the scene for learning. We have found that breaking songs into short chunks and teaching them using call and response really helps to cement the learning.

As you get to know your group, you can start to tailor the sessions around their abilities and interests. For example, you may be able to encourage more confident participants to sing in a round or in harmony.

You may be able to adapt the lyrics of songs to include people's creative ideas and/or translations of lyrics in different languages. Your group members may suggest songs that they like which could be played on a bluetooth speaker for the rest of the group in a designated song share part of the session or a break.

In the songbook, we've included simple unison songs, action songs, rounds and very simple harmony songs so you have a range of materials to draw from and ideas to inspire sessions. We invite you to think about the specific affordances of all your resources and to develop a toolkit that allows you to adapt your sessions in the moment rather than having a prescriptive set list for sessions.





f) Use of supporting materials - song sheets, body percussion, small percussion instruments, backing tracks, accompanying instruments. Involving staff members in sessions.

As the songs we use in our dementia sessions are simple and best learned through repetition we have tended to avoid using songs sheets. Although useful for longer, more complicated songs, sheets can be a bit distracting and people can become overly reliant on seeing the words. Some participants may struggle to read or follow the words and you may lose eye contact with them.

People with hearing loss may appreciate having cues on overhead projectors, smart screens, white boards or flipchart. For instance in our breathing exercises we invite people to exhale making "Sssss" and "Shhhh" sounds and it could help to write these down as they might sound the same to someone with a hearing impairment.

Using clapping and body percussion can be a great way of building the energy within a song but being mindful of people's physical restrictions and energy levels.

If you are thinking of using either tuned or untuned percussion instruments, make sure that you select high quality ones that can be cleaned with alcohol wipes. Some instruments look great but don't sound very good. Try to select ones that are interesting, tactile and have good quality, clear sounds.

Think carefully about why you are introducing instruments. Are you hoping to develop the group's rhythmic skills by playing untuned percussion? Are you co-creating a new song and using tuned percussion to help create the tune? Will the song you are learning be enhanced by adding percussion?

As outlined above, Shared Harmonies focuses on the specific experience of groups singing a cappella (without accompaniment) although our leaders sometimes use backing tracks or piano and guitar accompaniments. In the songbook, we have included the chords for quite a few of the songs should you wish to add an accompaniment.

Technology can be useful in building up the harmony parts of more complex songs. You could record the group singing the melody using a smart phone and play this back over a bluetooth speaker for people to sing the harmony part over. Or you could pre-record a 3 part harmony and play that for people to sing over.

Invite support staff or volunteers to be part of the group and give them some tips on how they can best support the sessions. Dr Jane Bentley gave us an excellent tip to encourage people who identify as “non singers” to sing which was to invite them to sing in their Happy Birthday voices. Usually everyone joins in with that song, whatever level of ability they feel they have.

There are some accompaniment generating programmes available free online although these tend to be limited to progressions of just four chords. See <https://chordchord.com>. Keeping things simple is usually the best bet and singing a capella without accompaniment is a great way of helping people to feel connected on a really human level.

g) Performance - giving groups informal, safe experiences of “performing” - how and why?

It can be very validating for participants to showcase their singing to other people, being mindful there is no ‘pressure’ to do so. . Creating informal opportunities for groups to perform for others can build a sense of social connection and create positive emotional memories. Even performing songs at the end of each session can add a buzz, ensuring participants still have enough energy to do so.

h) Reflective practice and evaluation - how to monitor your own work and gather feedback for partners/funders

It is really helpful to keep a log or reflective diary which you complete after sessions. What worked? What didn’t work? Was there anything that surprised you? What could you improve on or change next time?

The work is incredibly rewarding and often moving. If you have the chance to debrief with staff after sessions you can exchange ideas from different perspectives and they can support you with anything that may have been surprising or even upsetting.

Try to work with the venue or partner on an evaluation plan before the sessions start so you can capture feedback. Evaluation can help in the process of trying to secure funding.



It is good to find dementia friendly and ethnically inclusive ways of gathering feedback and avoid long written questionnaires.

We have sometimes used a single word feedback circle where participants are invited to say one word in response to the session, without thinking about it too much.

Here are some examples;

Intuition, Instinct, Joy, Memory, Experience, Belonging, Harmony, Mystery, Play it again Sam.

Calm, Enjoyable, Uplifted, Friendly, Peaceful, Serene, Tranquil, Better, Harmonious, Optimistic.

We've also carried out more extended feedback circles which we recorded and transcribed with people's written consent.

"I've never really sung with other people in a new way, joining in and listening and thinking, yea, I'll do that.. and It's such a pleasure - it's difficult to put into words"

"I just thoroughly enjoy it - I enjoy the community"

"It brings people closer together. The music - it grabs everybody"

"It's part of our species that we should sing or even find it. A lot of people never sing and they don't know what they're missing. It's a beautiful part of our voice, more attractive than maybe conversations and more spiritual"

"I've got dementia but I completely forget about my abnormal brain scan - surely that's a miracle"

"I've loved every minute of it. I've found myself at home and one day I thought, what's that whizzing around me brain and it was one of your songs"

You may be able to gather recorded vox pops from participants which highlight their lived experience. With the right consent in place, photographs and short films of the group singing can also be a powerful way to evidence the impact of singing on participants.

There is also an excellent free toolkit on singing groups and mental health available from

<https://www.singingsidebyside.co.uk>

For more ideas, songs and links,
including dementia friendly guidance
and ways of making your work more
ethnically inclusive, please refer to The
Song Book.

Follow us on social media
for updates on our community and corporate services



Thank
You

