



Everyday Impact Award – New Enterprises

Name of organisation or individual nominated

The Choir with No Name

1. What were you trying to change? (maximum 200 words)

Help us understand the vision, aims and objectives

The Choir with No Name aims to provide a safe environment for people who have experienced homelessness or exclusion to enjoy singing and build up confidence, skills and friendships along the way. When I set up the choir in 2008, I was Senior Project Worker at St Mungo's and noticed that people in hostels can be quite isolated and find it hard to make lasting friendships. I wanted to give people something to bond over that was about more than the negative stuff. Research indicates that social and arts activities can improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people. However, I had witnessed many arts projects for vulnerable people that were too "earnest" and, truthfully, not that much fun for participants. Drawing on my (other) experience as a professional choir director, I wanted to create something which allowed people to have a brilliant time, and bond over the joys of singing. No-one else was running a choir for people who had experienced homelessness, and no-one was working with our repertoire of accessible and uplifting pop music. A London choir was the start. If it worked, my vision was to create similar choirs in other UK cities with a homelessness problem.

2. What did you do to make change happen? (maximum 200 words)

Tell us about what actions you took, who you worked with, what resources you had to use etc.

I set out to find a perfect venue, and built a relationship with Only Connect in Kings Cross, who offered us free use of their theatre space every Monday evening. I started to build up a group of volunteers. They had to be the right ones. I began by drawing in jazz musicians from the gospel choir I was directing, so from the outset there would be top notch instrumental accompaniment at rehearsals. I also decided that after each rehearsal there would be a shared meal, and so additional volunteers were recruited to form a cooking rota. I secured three company directors, using contacts. I e-mailed everyone I knew in the London homeless sector, sent recruitment posters to all the hostels I could think of, and talked to people. There was no money to begin with. I cobbled together £1,500 from family and friends to get us started, we got an amazing windfall of £5,000 from Secret Millionaire, and things built from there, including an award from UnLtd, which funds social entrepreneurs. I didn't pay myself anything for six months.

Despite limited funds, we always focused on quality, and this included securing great gigs for choir members.

3. What were your tangible results? (maximum 200 words)

Outline what happened as a result of the work and the impact it had

We had an average of 16 choir members in Year 1. We now have 47, and have worked with well over 200 people, providing weekly rehearsals, (on average) monthly performances, workshops in hostels and day centres and individual singing lessons. We take immense pride in the difference the choir is making to members' lives. They are building confidence, self-esteem, forming great friendships and singing confidently to audiences of 1000+ people. Many have moved into independent accommodation, and a few into employment. 75% of people who walk through our door stay as regular members. 80% of members recently reported an improvement in their sense of wellbeing since joining the choir. In 2010 nearly 3,000 people attended one of our gigs, and nearly 10,000 people contacted us online. We have supported Coldplay at two gigs and made an album. We have achieved excellent (national) press coverage and our performances have been described as "inspirational" and "euphoric". We believe we are helping to reduce stigma around homelessness. We now have two staff members, 15 fabulous volunteers and a waiting list, 7 trustees and... we will be launching a Choir with No Name in Birmingham in September 2011. More choirs are planned from 2013.

Additional Nomination comments from others