

# TALKING IN TUNE

## Annual Report 2020 – 2021



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## A message from the Chair of Talking in Tune



Welcome to Talking in Tune's annual report for 2020 – 2021.

As I write this our country is emerging from a long, difficult year;  
one that has been so sad for so many.

During this time our work for our two singing communities, The Memory Notes and Singing for Breathing, has become more important than ever, because our participants, all of whom are particularly vulnerable to Covid 19, have had to live in the deepest isolation for such a long time. The determination and talent of our singing leaders, the energy of our volunteers and the loyalty of our funders have all ensured that vibrant, sunny, singing gatherings have taken place online throughout the last year and that constant contact has been maintained with all our participants.

This work has made many new and complicated demands on everyone and I am more grateful than these words can express for the creative, energetic and sustained efforts of all concerned. I ended last year's introduction by writing "May we all be singing together again very soon." Last year that proved to be impossible, but now we live in real hope that this coming autumn that wish really will come true

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frances Sword".

Frances Sword

### 1. Our mission

The mission of Talking in Tune is to make singing and music-making accessible to all members of the community and to weave community singing into the cultural fabric of Cambridge. Our work is based on the knowledge that singing together enhances individual wellbeing and is an effective way to develop and sustain social connection.

***We aim to do this by:***

- Running singing groups for people who will benefit from singing but may not otherwise have the opportunity to access it.
- Organising singing workshops and events that are inclusive, accessible and welcoming to people of all ages and abilities. The workshops aim to develop the musical skills and confidence of participants and to develop confidence in creative self-expression.
- Organising performances and workshops led by musicians and singing leaders from different cultures which are educational and fun and nurture a sense of respect for cultural differences. These events are largely self-funding.
- Creating events and performances which are inclusive, participative, community-building and create an enhanced sense of community, often involving the sharing of food as well as song. These events are largely organised by volunteers and the proceeds go to charity.
- Supporting the work of community musicians who are working in similar ways. As a charitable trust, we can support grant applications for projects that fall within our remit.
- Promoting and engaging with local events that contribute towards our goal of an inclusive, creative music-making community.
- Training and mentoring singing leaders.
- Adapting our work wherever possible to fulfil our mission in Covid times.

Talking in Tune gained charitable trust status in 2004 and developed out of the singing work of Rowena Whitehead and Sue Parlby.

## 2. The year in brief

Our two funded projects, The Memory Notes and Singing for Breathing, have continued to find creative and effective ways to sustain their important work in very challenging times.

The Memory Notes continued to support people with dementia and their carers, through a virtual programme via a range of different media designed to provide support to its members and the wider community and to combat isolation.

The Singing for Breathing group for people living with lung disease has found successful ways to work with participants online to sustain its much-valued community.

Workshops and other events have been on hold throughout the year because of Covid.

This year we have received funding from the Evelyn Trust and the Strangward Trust, and two funding groups who prefer to remain anonymous, as well as from individual donations. We encourage donations via the web-based Local Giving scheme, which is a useful route for raising funds from individuals.

### 3. Funded projects

#### **THE MEMORY NOTES**

When Covid took hold in 2020, the Memory Notes leaders and volunteers worked swiftly to put a virtual programme in place, and this has been developed and refined during the year. As many participants are frail and vulnerable, their isolation can be intense and so keeping in contact is very important. Bearing in mind that not all participants have access to a computer, we have developed a range of different ways for people to be in touch.

**Emails** Sylvia has kept in regular contact with the group through email, both with those who regularly attend the Zoom meetings and with the wider group who haven't been zooming.

**Phone calls** Each participating family is phoned regularly by the same Memory Notes volunteer or leader so that a real and continuous conversation can develop from week to week.

**WhatsApp** An open WhatsApp group was set up in August 2020 for carers, leaders and volunteers so they could contact each other and share support and encouragement.

**Zoom** Since the first Zoom session of The Memory Notes took place on 15 April 2020, we have run 36 sessions involving 11 families and nine volunteers, every week up to the end of September and fortnightly since then. Sessions are hosted by Rowena and Sylvia with the support of nine wonderful volunteers. We wondered how practical it would be to run Zoom sessions for a group like this, but with the support of carers and family members and with Sylvia's patient guidance, we were pleasantly surprised by the number of people who have managed to come along.

Having a sense of connection has become so important to our participants that all sorts of solutions have been found to help those who find the technology a challenge. For example, on several occasions, a suitably sanitised laptop, switched on and already tuned into the Zoom session, was delivered to the doorstep of one participant by their daughter each Wednesday to make sure they could take part. Our own version of Deliveroo!

We have evolved a way of working on Zoom that continues our aim of making people feel they belong in a supportive community where they are welcomed and appreciated. The sessions are relaxed and fun and with a focus on lightness and sharing stories as well as songs. Working on Zoom has been a steep learning curve! The team of volunteers and leaders have met together after each Zoom session for an evaluation meeting which helps us hone our skills.

Every session has a theme and it is wonderful to see how people engage with the ideas. We have had hat week, themed colour weeks, when people are invited to wear or bring something of a certain colour; we've celebrated festivals; we had a wonderful Christmas session when Sylvia coordinated the delivery by volunteers to everyone in the group of seasonal packages containing homemade mince pies, Christmas hats, tinsel, Christmas decorations, which were all opened together on the Zoom session and used as a basis for singing and celebration. We have shown each other our favourite teacups and ornaments and handmade objects, paintings and photographs; we've had tea parties and shown each other possessions that are precious to us with memories attached and have learned much more about each other than we knew before.



We have been able to extend a welcome to relatives left alone, such as Julie, unable to visit her mother in a care home, and bereaved family members who have been part of The Memory Notes family for a long time. On one occasion we had a Zoom visit from grandchildren in the Maldives who used to visit the group in person with their grandparents every year in the summer. At another, a carer who had returned home to Greece for a break joined us from the beach on Zoom, to the delight of everyone, including Peter, who she cares for.

**Videos on Vimeo** Rowena and Sylvia have produced nine short videos of singing and chatting, filmed in their own homes and gardens by relatives, and these have been placed on our own Vimeo channel so that our participants can access them whenever they like. This work was only possible because of the hugely generous technical input of Roger Giddings, Talking in Tune's treasurer, and Paul Christie, the husband of one of our Memory Notes volunteers. The following quotes show how the videos have helped people.

*"The night after your first video, I woke up in the night feeling anxious. Various things were going through my head and my thoughts turned to the video and I found myself smiling! I then thought of your lovely garden and what you had growing and then of our garden and drifted off to sleep contentedly. Looking forward to the next Zoom session."*

*"Thank you for the video, it was wonderful to listen to, and see our loved ones at the end in the group photo looking happy and well."*

*"Thank you for a lovely musical treat from two different venues."*

Some of the videos can be viewed via this link, using the password MN:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/7049448>

**The Memory Notes Songs CD** Fifty CDs and song sheets have been distributed to Memory Notes members and to care homes. The CD was recorded in 2020 by a group of volunteers, friends and supporters. Although this was intended for another project, we realised that the CD would be an additional support for our group, and they were distributed to Memory Notes families, to people in care homes, through our sister group in Sawston and to the wider community in Histon and Impington through their dementia care team who purchased a number of the CDs. We have received very positive feedback including the following:

*"Thank you very much for sending the CD and word sheets. We really enjoyed listening to the songs - Que Sera Sera seems very appropriate at the moment!"*

*"We are thanking you for this great CD. We received it yesterday evening and since then it is our favourite. Your voices make us comfortable to sing along and feel we are amongst our group's lovely people. Looking forward to see you all again next Wednesday. Thanks for being with us in these strange times."*

*"Thank you so much to all concerned for the Memory Notes CD. Lovely to listen to and beautiful singing, you all sound very professional. Mike and I have just listened to it for the first time and sung along, and it has lifted our spirits considerably."*

## **Participation**

In normal times we work with 20 families (approximately 40 participants) at any one time; we have found that if the group becomes bigger the quality of community lessens. The impact of social isolation on these families cannot be overstated; it has had a terrible effect on people with dementia, as well as their family members who are unable to visit their relatives in care homes. Since the start of the first lockdown, seven of our participants with dementia have died and several more have had to move into care homes due to deteriorating health.

We always have a waiting list for The Memory Notes, and would normally easily recruit new people to fill vacancies, but inevitably our ability to do this has been hampered and so our numbers are now much lower. We currently have an average attendance of ten families at our Zoom sessions. This sad reality also has an impact on our finances as donations from our participants have dropped to around £60 per month.

We have been in contact with care staff at different care homes to encourage them to come to the Zoom sessions with residents. In December 2020, we were joined for a session by a small group from the Alex Wood House, supported by care staff, but since then they have not had the staffing capacity to make this possible. We will continue to encourage this sort of participation, but of course this is a challenging time for all care homes, and we are aware that organising this puts extra pressure on staff time.

Despite the lower numbers of participants, we know with absolute certainty that our work is making a vital difference to peoples' lives at this challenging time of great social isolation, as shown by these recent quotes from the participants.

*"It was great to be back at Memory Notes to see so many friends and thank you so much for including me. You must have done an enormous amount of work to set it all up and as you said a month ago hardly anyone had heard of Zoom!! It really is appreciated it and I so enjoyed the session. Almost like old times!"*

*"Thank you very much for this morning. It is good to see everyone again! We are enjoying the CD v much."*

*"We just wanted to say a big thank you to you both and all the fantastic volunteers for a lovely Christmas party and especially to Nikki for the most welcome goody bags and to Cathy for delivering ours."*



*"Thanks for the lovely singing session this morning. Audrey so enjoys it. She's very good at remembering the words to all the old songs."*

*"We will be tuning in again as we both enjoyed [the first Zoom session] last week. Really appreciate you taking the trouble to stay in touch, you are lifting our spirits, keeping us all going - we need it!!"*

*"I really appreciate, as I'm sure we all do, your efforts in helping us retain our sense of community."*



### **The Singing for Memory project**

From 2018-2020, Rowena led a pilot project to train staff and volunteers at Alex Wood House in Cambridge to lead singing sessions for their residents. We have been pleased to hear that, despite the pandemic, two members of staff have continued the singing sessions we initiated. Our plan to roll out this staff training into other care homes has been on hold this year, partly due to the pandemic and partly due to the fact that Rowena took time off work following an accident.

### **Future plans**

For the foreseeable future, we will continue to deliver sessions on Zoom. We are planning an outdoor small group session in the garden of the Stable Block, St Andrew's Church in the summer. If government rules allow, we will start leading group sessions in September 2021 at the St Andrew's Centre, Histon, which has full Covid compliance rules. We are planning a publicity drive including via local village newsletters to increase our group membership. We will re-engage with the Singing for Memory project once it is possible to visit care homes. We will do everything in our power to continue our efforts in all our strands of activity until the time comes when we can return to our normal ways of working.

## SINGING FOR BREATHING

This has been a challenging year for Singing for Breathing. The pandemic was more serious and lasted longer than predicted at the outset, but we learned the skills needed to run a successful group online, and the silver lining for many of our members is that they have been able to continue taking part even when they are housebound because of poor health.

### Membership and recruitment

Eight new people joined the group this year, with 24 active members on the register at the year-end. Only five former members did not make the transition to meeting online, either due to not having the relevant computer skills or devices, or to being uncomfortable with the online platform. They received telephone support, but decided to pause their involvement until such time as we can meet in person again.

Attendance was especially good at the start of the year, rising to 19 one week in April. We were very pleased that some former members and volunteers decided to return to the group. The camaraderie of the group and the relaxation, exercises and singing helped carry everyone through the difficult time of the first lockdown, when most members were shielding and feeling very isolated.



In addition to our regular members we also welcomed a number of visitors, including five Occupational Therapy students from Brunel University; two musicians from the USA who were interested to see what we do; a visitor from Anglia Ruskin University, who came to discuss setting up a study of our move to meeting online; a friend who came to advise on Gaelic pronunciation of a song; and a newly qualified Singing for Lung Health leader based in Oundle, who is hoping to start a group in the Peterborough area.

## Session content

Each week the session opens with 30 minutes of informal group conversation. This is muchvalued, but people can choose to join towards the end of the chat if they find it too tiring. Several of our members live with chronic fatigue, and, as more people with Long Covid join the group, we are being especially careful to encourage participants to take things at their own pace and do as much or as little as they are able.

The led part of the session begins with 10 minutes of guided relaxation. This is followed by 20 minutes of breath, body and voice exercises, then around 25 minutes of singing. We finish with a 5-minute cool-down.

We have enjoyed expanding our repertoire of songs this year, and many were chosen to express our sorrows or lift our spirits in the difficult times of the pandemic. Favourites included *Better Times will Come*, *Lean on Me*, *Somos el Barco*, *I am a Deep Pool*, , *Oran na maighdinn-mhara (Song of the Mermaid)*, *Pourra Mame*, *The Water is Wide*, and *Keep You in Peace*.

## Benefits

Group members with a variety of lung conditions including asthma, bronchiectasis, COPD and pulmonary fibrosis, continue to report that Singing for Breathing helps them to make the best use of their lung capacity, both during the sessions and also in day-to-day life. The relaxation techniques and breath exercises are especially useful if they suffer an exacerbation (flare up) when they are alone at home.

Some of our members are now receiving hospice care at home and they appreciate being able to continue attending the group, giving and receiving support, and enjoying the singing and contact with the other members. Even those who are very weak continue to join for the relaxation and to meet their friends. It is a much appreciated aspect of the online sessions that people can take part while being relaxed and comfortable in their own surroundings.

## Evaluations

Two online questionnaires, about the health benefits of singing for breathing and the experience of meeting online, were set up by Tracey Enderby and completed in July, and yielded encouraging results, including this comment:

*“Going onto Zoom has been invaluable especially for someone like me living alone and having to shield due to vulnerability... Being online, people can participate as little or much as they feel able to... it gives scope to join without having to leave home and it’s good for those who have transport issues or may be feeling poorly.”*

The following WordCloud was created from words used by Singing for Breathing participants in their questionnaires, highlighting their concerns and the things they value:



## Promoting Singing for Breathing

In the past, visiting Pulmonary Rehab (PR) groups was our most effective way to recruit new members. Unfortunately all the local NHS PR groups – at Papworth, Brookfields Hospital and Brown’s Field Centre – were forced to stop in March 2020 because of the pandemic. Plans were made to re-start online in September, but when the second wave of Covid began the respiratory physios were called to work with Covid patients. As a result, the launch of the planned online PR groups was deferred until April 2021.

Despite this setback, respiratory health professionals continued recommending Singing for Breathing to individual patients. Some found us independently through a web search. One joined after hearing about the English National Opera 'singing for long Covid' initiative on the radio.

Kay began posting updates about the group, with photos and videos, on the Singing for Breathing Facebook page. Posts were sometimes shared by Papworth Hospital and others. Kay wrote a post about Singing for Breathing on the Nextdoor app, which was successful in attracting two new members.

A new online flyer was produced, along with a printer-friendly version suitable for distribution by clinics and GP surgeries. Information about the group was also sent to the editors of local newsletters in Cambridge and the surrounding villages, several of whom have said they will run the feature in upcoming issues.

## **Events**

On 15 December we held an online Christmas Party, jointly with the Edinburgh and Gloucestershire Singing for Lung Health Groups. The party was a great success and we all enjoyed meeting each other in breakout rooms. People wore Christmas jumpers and tinsel and brought their own refreshments. The three teachers led two songs each, along with some Christmas-themed warm-ups. We finished by singing 'Let the Circle be Wide', with a toast to our new friends.

The groups met again on St Patrick's Day, 17 March, for a joint Irish Session. People were invited to wear something green and to decorate their Zoom space with shamrocks. We sang Irish songs and listened to Irish poetry. We met each other in breakout rooms to discuss 'The silver linings of lockdown' and 'What we are most looking forward to after lockdown'.

## **Training and CPD**

Kay took three online refresher modules with the Singing for Lung Health training team, who are now working as an independent group called The Musical Breath. The modules included new research and ideas and a discussion of ways Singing for Breathing techniques can alleviate the breathlessness and fatigue of long Covid.

Kay also met regularly for peer support with the leaders of the Edinburgh and Gloucestershire groups, and this was especially valuable during the initial transition to meeting online. Kay provided teaching support for the Edinburgh group when their leader was called to do jury service.

## **Volunteers**

Volunteers Peter Scourfield and Laura Cherry have continued attending regularly, bringing stability, reassurance and good humour during the uncertain times of the pandemic. A new volunteer, Mary Denn, joined in October. Mary has a background in dance as well as singing, and has recently completed a singing for health course. We have involved Mary in leading some warm up exercises and songs, and have especially enjoyed 'painting our kinesphere' to a musical track.

## **The future**

We are grateful for the support of the Strangward Trust and the Evelyn Trust, which has enabled Singing for Breathing to be accessible and affordable for anyone living with breathlessness in Cambridge and the surrounding area. We hope to secure further grant funding as we take the group forward.

Meeting online has worked very well for this group. It is especially good for people who are too breathless to leave their homes. Singing together in person continues to be designated a high risk activity, due to the aerosols generated from deep in the lungs, and our participants are particularly vulnerable.

Feedback from the group indicates that they would like to continue meeting online, even after we are able to safely meet in person again. So it is likely we will continue offering online sessions, perhaps alongside some in-person meetings, for the foreseeable future.

## 4. Workshops and other events

No workshops or other events took place during this period because of Covid restrictions.

## 5. Future plans

The form and nature of all our future work depends on how the Covid crisis develops. Some of the intentions listed below can only become real when the crisis has passed, but others are in development now and can take a virtual form until we can resume normal working.

1. We will continue to find creative ways to continue our work during the Covid crisis and to learn from the experience wherever possible.
2. We will consolidate the work of the Memory Notes and offer training and support to people who wish to set up similar groups.
3. We will continue to support the work and encourage the development of Singing for Breathing.
4. We will continue to create events, workshops and performances which are inclusive, participative and community-building and we will work to widen the demographic of participants.
5. We will organise accessible, high-quality singing workshops and performances. Some of these will be fundraising events for Talking in Tune projects.
6. We will look for alternative sources of funding for our work and continue to encourage local people to support our work via Local Giving.
7. We will continue to support volunteers who want to develop singing workshops and activities and to support the work of local singing leaders.
8. We will continue to liaise with other organisations in the city to support the development of more music making and singing in the community.
9. We will investigate ways to 'futureproof' Talking in Tune's activities, in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of our work.

## 6. Grateful thanks to:

The Talking in Tune Committee for all their hard work and support in keeping Talking in Tune organised.

Rowena Whitehead, leader of The Memory Notes, and Sylvia Dannreuther, Coordinator.

Kay Barrett, leader of Singing for Breathing.

The volunteers with The Memory Notes: Andrew Bradford, Elaine Brown, Chris Burgess, Christine Garner, Kate Grillet, Cathy Hadridge, Jenny Knoweldon, Nikki Searle, Jo Thulbourn, with occasional support from Val Worcester and Penny Lutoslawska.

The volunteers with Singing for Breathing: Laura Cherry, Peter Scourfield, Mary Denn and Tracey Enderby for setting up the questionnaires for Singing for Breathing.

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All the other volunteers who give cheerful and practical support to enable the Talking in Tune events happen.

Our funders:

- The Evelyn Trust
- The Strangward Trust
- Two other funding trusts who wish to remain anonymous
- Friends and supporters who have given financial aid.

## 7. Talking in Tune committee 2020-21

Frances Sword (Chair)

Roger Giddings (Treasurer)

Sue Durham (Secretary)

Rowena Whitehead, Musical Director (non-voting member)

Anne Chippindale

Anne Clark

Val Worcester