

Tonic: Singing for Health

Impact Report
Spring 2025

A partnership project in collaboration
with Cohere Arts and Suffolk
Community Libraries.



Executive Summary

Tonic: Singing for Health at Leiston Library was a series of 7 group singing workshops delivered by Cohere Arts in partnership with Suffolk Community Libraries, supported by SAGES.

37 people from the Leiston area took part in weekly 90 minute seated singing sessions and social time.

On average, participants reported a 9% improvement in self-perceived health and wellbeing, citing positive impacts in physical health, mood, feelings of connection and accomplishment.



The story so far...

Tonic: Singing for Health at Leiston Library was a series of 7 group singing workshops delivered by Cohere Arts in partnership with Suffolk Community Libraries.

The project was made possible with support from Suffolk's advice, guidance and emotional support service (SAGES).

Participants attended one 90-minute session every Wednesday morning from 15th Jan - 26th Feb 2025, at no charge.

The activity was led by Cohere Arts' Creative Associate, singing leader Francis Goodhand and supported by one Producer from Cohere Arts and the Senior Creative Health Producer at Suffolk Community Libraries.

Activities were designed to suit the needs of people living with a variety of health and mobility challenges.

Each session included 60 mins seated singing activity (vocal/breathing exercises and songs in a range of styles) followed by 30 mins social time with free tea, coffee and biscuits.

The sessions were supported by three volunteers, who all currently volunteer for Suffolk Community Libraries.

Leiston Library Manager was hugely supportive in the recruitment of the volunteers, the space adaptations and general library care.

Engagement

Total number of participants over the 7 weeks: 37

All participants were local to Leiston and nearby villages.

Total number returning participants: 35

Participants live with a range of health challenges, such as:

Average number of participants per session: 25

- Asthma
- COPD
- Long Covid
- Back/joint pain
- Cancer
- MS
- Diabetes
- Bipolar disorder
- Anxiety and depression

Average age of participants: 67

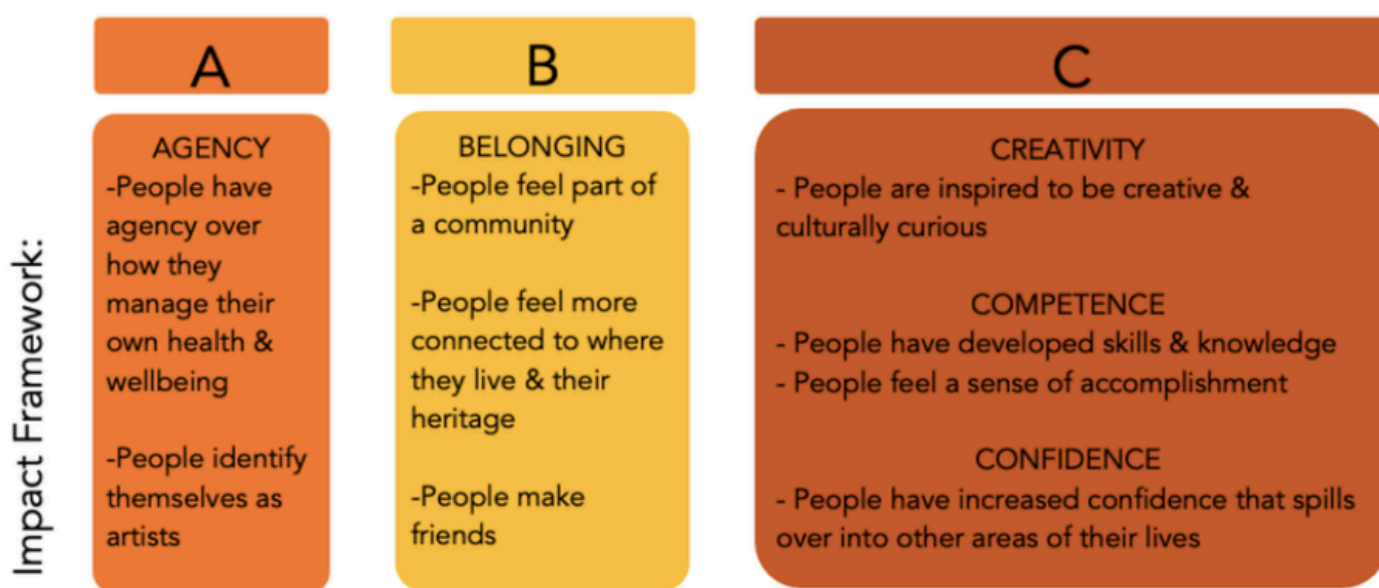
M/F ratio: 1:6

Average number of participants per session:

25

Evaluation approach

Cohere Arts' ABC Impact Framework was used as a methodology to measure impact. This examines the impact of taking part on five aspects: Agency, Belonging, Creativity, Competence and Confidence.



27 participants completed health and wellbeing questionnaires both pre and post project, rating 5 aspects of their health and wellbeing:

- Physical health
- Mood
- Connection
- Empowerment
- Accomplishment.

Qualitative evidence was gathered through 4 interviews and 14 feedback cards.

Health data headlines

- 117 (63%) respondents reported improvements in overall health/wellbeing
- 7 (26%) stayed the same
- 3 (11%) reported lower post-course ratings

On average, improvements in subjective health and wellbeing were seen across all 5 aspects, with the highest impact seen in physical health ratings, where the average increase was 14%.

Post covid for the 4th time, I struggled to breathe for the length of the phrase. Singing has helped to rebuild my lung capacity and fight back to health.



ABC framework

AGENCY

Participants noticed that singing has helped their breathing and general wellbeing.

They report feeling happier and less anxious after singing.

Some have found the workshops gave them a break from caring responsibilities.

The group welcome the inclusive ethos developed by Francis; “not minding what noise you make”.

“I had been depressed recovering from a hip operation and losing my cat. Now I’ve sung again after 50 years, and bought a keyboard to practise on.”

“From a disparate group of people who didn’t know each other we became friends who left smiling.”

CREATIVITY

Participants enjoyed singing a variety of styles of music.

Some participants reported a renewed interest in creative expression.

BELONGING

People made friends that they have seen outside of sessions. People feel less isolated from others.

Joining the group was a joyful distraction from the ‘destruction’ caused by the Sizewell C development.

“I did find a few of the songs too emotional and had to politely refrain from singing and just hum. But that’s ok, it’s good to empty my emotions and grief.”

COMPETENCE

The singing leader made participants feel appreciated. Attendees were inspired to practice singing outside of sessions - one sang to her sheep. One participant felt it was a “dream come true” to learn to sing. One regained some of her upper register as a result of attending.

“Having had anxiety for years, joining groups is hard. I’ve always wanted to sing. I don’t want to perform though. This group is such fun, is local and perfect for me.”

“I have moved from feeling negative and despondent about singing to much greater belief in myself.”

CONFIDENCE

Participants felt empowered to be able to sing in a group. Two were prompted to join another choir. One has been inspired to return to other volunteering opportunities following a break after a spousal bereavement

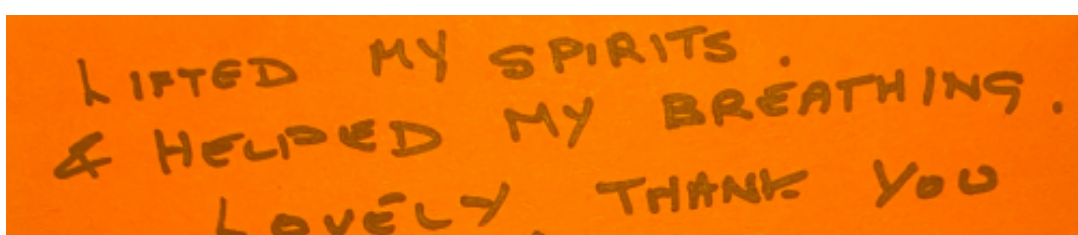


Case study one

Mrs M lost her husband 6 months ago and had been feeling low and isolated. A regular volunteer in the Leiston community previously, she had not been feeling able to engage with volunteering activities since the bereavement. Having sung in her school and church choirs as a young person, she was interested in trying out the Tonic sessions. She told us that attending Tonic has improved her mood dramatically:

“It has just made me feel happier, the physical act of singing and being part of that soaring noise. The laughing when we pull funny faces. Two weeks ago, [Francis] got us sticking our tongues out and putting them in different places, like the dentist asks us to do, and there was a lot of laughter. He's brilliant.”

In addition, through attending the group each week, Mrs M has gradually felt more connected to others: *“I've met people who I knew years ago, and I've met new people, like a lady who has been very kind to me. It's just been wonderful socially, to meet people. What I'm finding hard is living on my own. There's nobody to talk to, so you go out to the shops just to talk to people. I never thought that'd be me. So it makes a whole difference to be part of something social.”* Mrs M told us that she has also welcomed the mental stimulation of learning exercises and songs, particularly where gentle movement and physical actions have been involved. She now feels like she might be ready to return to her volunteering responsibilities.

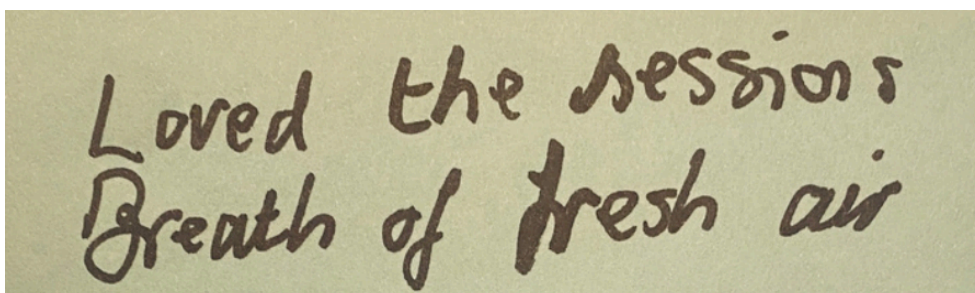


Case study two

The response and uptake for the Tonic: Singing for Health sessions has been overwhelming. I was uncertain about how much interest there would be...28 people for the first session (and that number more or less for the rest!) was incredible. It can be hard to gauge how activities in Leiston will be received and this was obviously just what our community needed. Lots of people who came were regular library customers. Some were a little uncertain before they attended. Some were very keen. However, every customer who has come in has said how fantastic the sessions have been.

Fun, engaging, relaxed, friendly, uplifting. Comments like “I’m not a singer but I’ve really enjoyed it” have come from several people. One lady who has been more isolated since lockdown said “this is the best thing I’ve done since I moved here [some years ago]”. She was even inspired to buy a second-hand keyboard and start playing again. Another customer who has breathing difficulties has said that it’s helped with that. Those attending have spoken about meeting new people, looking at joining other singing groups and they’re so keen for it to continue. It really has had a positive impact on individuals, on the community and on our library.

Thanks to everyone who made it happen. It’s so lovely to hear good news from our customers, especially when Leiston is having a tough time. I too hope more sessions can be delivered to keep the momentum of this positivity.



Challenges

Current library configuration means that space is limited. More adaptable furniture (e.g. shelving on wheels) would help address this problem.

There is limited parking at the venue for those with mobility needs. Music by its nature can be emotive, and some songs were attached to difficult memories for some participants.

In future provision, the singing leader will work with the group to choose musical material with minimum potential for discomfort.

Conclusion

Tonic: Singing for Health at Leiston Library was a successful pilot of an accessible activity that supported the physical and emotional health of older Leiston residents living with health challenges.

Engagement was unprecedentedly high, with an average of 25 people from the Leiston area attending each week.

Choral leader, Francis Goodhand developed an inclusive ethos, encouraging singers of all levels of experience to feel confident and comfortable.

On average, participants reported a 9% improvement in self-perceived health and wellbeing, citing positive impacts in physical health, mood, social connection and accomplishment.

Through this activity, a lovely community has developed and there is a strong appetite for more sessions.



For more information about this project, please contact:

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