



Setting up your own singing group



Singing is one of the easiest ways to incorporate music as a part of dementia care because we can all do it. There are lots of dementia singing groups and choirs across the UK – you can [find out more here](#).

If you're feeling inspired by the wonderful Our Dementia Choir and want to set up your own group or choir, we've put together some tips on how to get going.

What would people like?

Speak to people within your dementia network – what would they most value, what do they most need? Do they want a formal choir that works towards performances or do they want a group that meets for social support but has singing at its heart? Or is it a bit of both? Is it a group only for people living with dementia or is it for them and their carers? What would being part of your group mean for people?

Who can help you to get going – who do you need?

If you're a singing leader, it would be great to work with someone from a dementia network – it could be a local community group or the host of the dementia café. They'll be able to spread the word about the group, help you think about how you make it dementia friendly. Think about who's going to take on the day to day running of the group? Are you going to do this alongside running the sessions or will someone else manage that?

If you're a dementia practitioner for example, you might already run a dementia café, and you want to work with a musician or music therapist, you can contact the [British Association for Music Therapy](#), [Live Music Now](#), and [Sound Sense](#) and they can connect you with practitioners who can lead the musical side of the group for you.

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Your community – what's already happening?

Do a bit of research about things that are already happening in your community. There might be a day service you can join up with or a dementia café, or there might already be a singing group or choir. Can you work together or join up in some way? If you want to set up something separately, think about your timings to ensure it doesn't clash with other dementia-friendly events that are happening. Look at when might be a good time for people to come to the group – ask people when would work best for them.

Other helping hands

Coming together to sing as a group is an amazing way of supporting people to stay connected to their local communities. It can be sensible to team up with other people in the community to help. For example, is there a transport service or a taxi company who might be able to offer discounted rates, or a local café who might be able to donate refreshments so people can socialise after singing?

You may also want to enlist some local volunteers to help with admin and promotion, as you'll need to spread the word through local services, websites and via social media.

To ensure your sessions are also informative and useful, are there local dementia services who could drop into sessions once a month to provide advice, answer questions and connect people to other services?

A good place to start is to talk with other dementia singing groups or choirs and find out how they do it – what tips and advice can they share with you?

Where is it going to take place?

There are lots of things to consider when selecting the right venue for your dementia singing group. It helps if the venue is familiar to those that will be attending. Places that could be suitable include a place of worship, community centre, arts venue, café or, pub. Do also consider accessibility as attendees may need wheelchair access and plenty of parking. Think about what you need the space to provide – do you need a kitchen if you're going to provide refreshments, does it have easily accessible bathroom facilities, is it on a bus route, does it have a space or room big enough to accommodate the size of group?

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Find out what people need

What support do people need to attend the group? How does each person's dementia affect them? Does anyone have a hearing impairment? Are there sounds people can't tolerate or songs they don't like? Try and find out as much as you can about your group members so you're providing a really personalised offer for them. Getting to know your group will ensure that you're making informed choices about your approach both musically, socially and practically – right down to how long the group meets for each week or every other week.

Funding

This can often feel like the tricky part. We recommend you start local – often businesses are looking to support local initiatives for their communities. They might sponsor the room hire, provide refreshments or provide support in kind. Talk with local dementia focused services and charities as they will be able to advise on funding, how and when to apply.

Social prescribing is becoming more active across the UK – talk with local link workers and GPs about what support they can provide and if the local NHS trust can provide or signpost to funding options.

There are also lots of sites online which can signpost to local [funding](#). Depending on what scale you want to aim for, there are bigger funders out there who can be approached but if you're starting small, starting local might be the best option in the first instance.



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And last but not least, **the music!**

Talk with potential members of the group about what music they'd like to sing. Music is most impactful when it's been personalised. Share suggestions and ideas about styles and genres and encourage members of the group to think about a song they could share or teach to the group. Think about how you can reflect people's cultures and identities through song choices. Some groups like to theme the music each month. Others sing at least one familiar song each session, as this can provide familiarity and structure, especially if you start or end with the same song each week. How do you arrange the music so it's accessible for everyone? Will you provide people with song sheets and written music or give them a link to a playlist so they can sing in between sessions? Being flexible in your musical approach is really important so that you remain responsive to people's ever-changing needs as their dementia develops.

Most of all be playful – this is about being together in music to help enhance and enrich people's experience and to help people live well with dementia.

