

# Group Singing as a Resource for the Development of Healthy Publics

## Participant Comments

This document should be read in conjunction with the journal article 'Group Singing as a Resource for the Development of Healthy Publics', as it provides additional information to the article in the form of participant comments. The document contains links to a selection of participant comments which illustrate how the project themes have developed, and how findings and conclusions have been reached.

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## 4.2.1 Triad 1 Belonging

Emphasising the affordances of group singing to promote social cohesion and bonds of trust and attachment between people

### Fellowship Responses

- Our group quickly bonded on the climb and we all felt a sense of achievement as we reached the summit. As we all gathered to sing together there was a great sense of camaraderie and purpose. Looking out on the view as we sang I wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else. [SM-96]
- Singing our hearts out on the top of Great Gable was a wonderful collective experience. My favourite line in the Fellowship song was just a little snippet - 'who held with us'. I imagined us all holding hands metaphorically on the hills today, but also stretching back and holding hands with the men who fought; with the men of the club with the vision to ensure the fell tops were free to all; with people who enjoy and walk the hills, and also stretching hands out into the future. It was lovely connecting with new friends and with the hills in such a positive and thought-provoking way. I am only just processing and unleashing the emotions of the day. [SM-90]
- The first time that we sang the Fellowship song on the summit was very moving - singing taps straight into the emotional centre of [our] being: we had finally made it 'upon this mountain summit' singing the song that was the whole reason whilst we were there and looking out over the magnificent panorama of the mountains.. Singing the words 'that the freedom of this land the freedom of our spirit shall endure' to the mountains themselves just made me well up. The sense of camaraderie amongst the group became very strong through our experience today and I feel that I have made friends on a much deeper level. [SM-75]
- The group was made up of singers from various community choirs in Cumbria and the north-east. It was an opportunity to not only stretch our legs but reach out to connect with one another at a deeper level; sharing stories jokes and experiences along with water and suncream. [SM-67]
- I met a group of new people and the joy of singing connected us. [SM-70]
- There are many facets of enjoyment about groups singing but reflecting on yesterday's experience I can't deny that much of my enjoyment came from learning more about the individuals I was singing with as we walked the route to and from Great Gable. The little things that help you build a stronger sense of the person/people you are committing to spending your time singing with. That snippet of conversation with one fellowship member about her allotment as we approached windy gap or the chatter between us about pet chickens sailing to St Kilda ancient sourdough starters campervans border collies dancing travelling to Nepal Morocco and many other adventures. In these little moments between our songs we found common ground on which to stand and therefore singing is not the only thing that we share we are so much more than just a singing group. We share the seeds of friendship. I reflect back today on those members of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club who shared their love of climbing and mountaineering. Those individuals who had their enjoyment of climbing cut short by their untimely death during the war. I read their letters home during the war and see hints of those friendships forged in the mountains of Cumbria and I feel incredibly lucky that I can

connect with these individuals through my experience of singing today as I forge new friendships of my own. This is what singing on this day and in this place means to me. [SM-83]

- Then there's the social side of it - nothing like rehearsing with people to get to know them and enjoy their company. Straight away you've got a shared experience. [SM-106]
- Yesterday I walked into the Friends Meeting House in Keswick not knowing anyone of the fifty singers. Today walking uphill in my group of ten I said hello to each one and had a conversation with several. During the 10 hours of walking and singing together many of the fifty came into focus with a smile passing word or shared detail of life pleasure or pain. Walking together is the best breaker of barriers especially uphill on a hot struggling muggy day. Singing together puts cream on the experience. Memory thought and eye contact within the circle. Singing the Peace round on Allen Craggs was a fitting end to the day before the long descent to the valley. Thank you everyone. [SM-153]
- I met many of the people in the choir for the first time in May when we rehearsed for the first climb to Great Gable. Now after completing the final climb I feel that we have bonded over a remarkable experience. We were all so emotional singing Dear Native Regions Joy of Living and Fellowship of Hill and Wind and Sunshine and the words will remain with me always. I have a warm glow just thinking of us singing with the amazing landscape around us. [SM-156]
- There is nothing quite so affirmative as making music with others and this was definitely one of the highlights of my life as a music lover and singer. We met as strangers on Saturday morning and departed exhausted yet exhilarated as friends on Sunday evening. I will remember this very special event for a very long time to come. [SM-99]
- Singing in a group is powerful and all absorbing. You can be carried by and support the singers around you simultaneously which gives a sense of connection and safety. [SM-144]

## Non-Fellowship Responses

- In our choir we shared stories at an anniversary meal about the choir. I realised then that the choir knits us together. That we sing we laugh we cry and all is held. [SM-58]
- We obviously couldn't chatter during the performance but there were masses of shared looks, shared smiles and shared twinkles of eyes. We came out of the venue much tighter as a group and all wanting to get on to the next venture. Hugely emotionally satisfying and an end feeling like being snuggled in an enormous warm duvet. [SM-17]
- After months of medical issues I can honestly say It was the best medicine so far! I made friendships which I know will last. Unity in Song! We supported each other both physically and emotionally and over the weeks a bond formed between us. I for one felt more confident and comfortable being totally out of my comfort zone. There was a feeling of safeness within the group. Sadness for the weekend being over but excited for the next time we all meet up. [SM-26]
- I think the act of group singing reaches deep into the subconscious mind. Singing together in a group is a means of human creative expression that is authentically shared. We make the sound together and none of us can create a musical sound like that on our own. As a result one feels a very deep sense of connection and intimacy with the other members of the group. It is not even necessary for members of the group to know each other very well as individuals for this to happen. Joining together in song breaks down all barriers and creates a shared experience in the moment that is

both honest and heartwarming. I think the sense of joy I get from group singing definitely has its roots in this. [SM-2]

- I met with a group of people many of whom I had not met before and we really came together as a group and my abiding memory is of the fun we had. [SM-10]
- It was difficult joining an established group but I was made to feel incredibly welcome. Travelling to the event there was a great sense of comradeship. A 'We're in this together' feeling. [SM-17]
- Being part of a singing group is like being part of a special gang or clan. You enjoy seeing each other and spending time together. Each meeting brings you closer. [SM-27]
- I have made so many friends through [the choir] & we are connected together through our shared experiences. [SM-62]
- In this context I am surrounded by women within my community that I may not have interacted with otherwise. Therefore strengthening the support personally felt from where I live. [SM-74]
- When I moved to [the area] I joined the community choir to meet other people and made some great friends mostly with women older than me. It gave me a sense of community and these friends became very close and have supported me greatly at times when I most needed it. [SM-109]
- Over 15 years ago when my children were tiny we used to go to the park straight after school with lots of other families. Through a chance meeting on park bench we somehow got into a conversation about singing - there were 4 of us 2 of which had quite a lot of experience already and then me (and my now very close friend) had just always harboured the desire to sing. There was a moment when one of the mums told us about her experience in community choir and the rest of us replied at (literally) exactly the same time 'we should start a singing group'. So we did and now our kids are flying the nest and we are still together having never missed a Thursday night sing. We've never had a 'proper' leader but we established ourselves and seemed to become a favourite with the local WIs who always tried to recruit us when we performed for them!! I've loved every second of being part of this small group of women - they are my family and the most brilliant thing is that our kids who seem to be very embarrassed by our singing have established a lovely 'cousin-like' bond still get together independantly from us and enjoy a good hearty sing song themselves. I don't doubt for a second that being part of this group has helped me grow in confidence made me feel loved and supported and has got me through challenging times. We have laughed so much till our sides ache and the best bit is that I know we will carry on till we are 100 and grow old together in the most disgraceful way. I don't think this would have happened had it not been for singing. . . it seems to break down all the barriers? [SM-147]

## 4.2.2 Triad 2 Experience

Emphasising the emotional / spiritual dimensions of group singing

### Fellowship Responses

- The special moment of the day that will stay with me was the spiritual connection our small choir and songs made with the unsuspecting fell runners who raced past on the summit - a shared moment of fulfilment. [SM-71]

- It can be an intimidating thing to walk into a room full of strangers but the idea of creating a 'Fellowship' of people who have a shared bond of singing and a shared love of the Lake District fells has I think really worked here. There's definitely a sense of a shared spirit of common ground that has enabled us to come together as a group. [SM-102]
- The rain began the mist descended and the wind gained strength and a new feeling emerged between us. We have to help each other get over the boulder field of huge wet and slippery rocks. Hands and words were offered as we trudged along then wisps of music dancing on the wind would enter our ears. Small groups were singing in harmony it was beautiful and uplifting. [SM-100]
- Recently I joined a group of about 60 people who were strangers to me. We met as a unique group to sing some rather special songs celebrating a very special event in some exceptional locations. The songs reflected the allure of our wonderful countryside in the regions of the West the importance of special places where we can see all our friends and look back on life and the way that walking reconnects people with the countryside and the spirituality of treading routes that have been used for millennia. We met in Keswick on Saturday to learn the songs then spent all day Sunday together walking up to and singing on Thorneythwaite Fell Glaramara and Allen Crag. For me this proved an enlivening and almost spiritual experience. It also reinforced the view that people who want to get together and sing from whatever background and of whatever ability are really nice! So if you want to get fit meet interesting people have your spirits lifted connect with your inner self and come away feeling a sense of fulfilment join (or even form) a group and get singing. [SM-140]
- When I reflect on this project I sense my motivation for group singing has evolved through this experience. I talked with a couple of my fellow singers on the route after our final sing of the day yesterday and they seemed to feel this evolution too. You seemingly start out in a place of self. You think about: 'How can I remember those who made this ultimate sacrifice for me' 'Will I be able to do this project justice' 'Will I enjoy this group singing experience'? And I guess there is nothing wrong with these thoughts and feelings. But the more time I have spent singing with and getting to know this group I realise that my happiness during this project is based in the knowledge that the collective singing group and those supporting the project are happy that they feel a sense of achievement that they feel proud to be a part of this project that they feel we are commemorating those who made the ultimate sacrifice in a fitting and lasting way. I feel happy to be a cog in that wheel. When I arrived home I tried to find a word that would describe this feeling and maybe this word is altruism? Is group singing an altruistic experience. . . . the more I think about it the more I realise that it probably is. I feel happiest seeing my friends in the basses dancing away merrily to the rhythm of the song or catching the sparkle in the eyes of a tenor or a beam of contentment in an alto or indeed the joy in the face of our choir master when he senses a moment of magic. I think this is why group singing feels so joyous and that is its value in my world. [SM-142]
- The singing itself was incredibly emotional and I came away feeling that I had a new family. After the June walk I spent a very contemplative evening alone - I had a rare feeling of really deep inner peace and contentment and slept like a baby that night. The following morning I woke up got my coffee suddenly burst into tears - pulled myself together and went to work. Got asked about it - struggled to explain felt my chin wobble got through it. Second person asked tried to explain - burst into tears at work! I don't know what happened but I can't wait to meet up with the Fellowship Choir and do it

again. What an amazing thing we have shared and I just feel so grateful to everyone who made it happen. [SM-148]

- The fellowship fell singing day on Glaramara was a life-affirming experience. It felt like a real connection was established between us all coming together with a single purpose to sing our hearts out and doing all of that with the backdrop of the beautiful lake district. During the walking I heard stories of people's lives and careers their travels and hopes for the future. Not to mention the moving tribute to the veterans. The whole experience was magical. [SM-155]
- When we sung it on the open top of Great Gable in the large group with confidence and joy we created a fantastic sound - but this was the lesser part. It is hard to take into account the growing sense of connection of the song to the fells to the land around and how this connection through music and group grew each time it was sung. [SM-79]
- This has been such an amazing experience. so many special moments in a wonderful day. the excitement in the car park setting off on our walk and the friendship going up the mountain. the great views from the top of Gable that were intensified by the moving words of the fellowship song. the sound of the wind being the only sound I could hear as we finished the first recording. I felt so uplifted and happy to be singing with so many people. every one looked happy when I looked around at the faces of other singers. someone listening to us from behind said our song echoed out around the summit sounding amazing. the very last song we sang at the end of the day Adios Hermanos brought a little lump to my throat as everyone was smiling waving and making eye contact and even though my feet were aching and my knees had had enough by then i didn't want the day to end. A day to remember and share for a long time. [SM-80]
- It's something that you don't get to experience everyday. It's something absolutely different. The whole day singing on top of the mountains was incredibly satisfying because once you climbed the mountain you feel as if you challenged yourself therefore you feel like you've accomplished something but then it's not it - then you get to sing with people who you've just met the other day but it feels so warm and nice because all of these people share something similar which is love for music and nature. You feel like a part of community where everyone's only wishing the best to one another and I definitely felt more connected to people and nature around us. It's one of the most memorable experiences and it really inspired me as well to participate in events like this more to be more open to new people and new experiences. It was an active intense and simultaneously incredibly calming and refreshing day. [SM-82]
- With all the focus on remembering the words and when to come in it was sometimes easy to forget the fundamental reason why we were there but just looking at the plaque was a good reminder. And the silence when we finished our first song was spine tingling our words almost echoing around the mountain before a gust of wind swept up and blew them out over the surrounding fells. It was just such a fantastic day. Great people a great reason to be there great weather (my enthusiasm might have been a little less if it'd been pouring and blowing a gale. . . ) an experience that'll keep giving me goose bumps and smiles in equal measure for a long time to come. Roll on the next weekend! [SM-85]
- Singing with others takes me out of myself into another space. Singing on Great Gable was an almost mystical experience. I felt my precious sense of self drifting away on a wave of harmony. The fells reach up to the sky and our voices unified the rock and the air and through our singing respect was

paid to the people before us who had ventured to meet their destiny. People like my grandfather bayoneted in the Great War lover of mountains and great artist. A man of very few words who loved walking and song. And we walked and we sang and it was beautiful. My legs still ache but my heart is full of gratitude for this opportunity to partake. A day to remember and in remembrance to be thankful. [SM-91]

- It was exhilarating to sing on a mountain summit in four part harmony. Singing the same words Winthrop-Young spoke on the same summit with a group of people who had only come together because of a want to share that same experience was a truly moving and quite tender moment. [SM-98]
- Yesterday I was with a large group of singers who were all excited to sing on some of the summits given to the nation to help survivors of WW1 in their recovery. We had had a great rehearsal the previous day and now all we had to do was get up Scafell Pike! The day started grey but our Slow And Steady group did just that and we made the top in just over two hours. We had encouraged various members of our group and we were so thrilled to get there sooner than expected. All the groups then assembled to sing balancing on the rough trail with a drop behind us to Sty Head tarn. We nervously began our song 'The Joy of Living'. After a few takes it really came together and we were able to get across the feeling behind the words and some of us struggled to keep composed. It felt great to be inside the group feeling protected from the worsening weather plus being able to make a wonderful sound together. The rain began the mist descended and the wind gained strength and a new feeling emerged between us. We have to help each other get over the boulder field of huge wet and slippery rocks. Hands and words were offered as we trudged along then wisps of music dancing on the wind would enter our ears. Small groups were singing in harmony it was beautiful and uplifting. However wet or cold we felt we embraced our next song and evidenced our fun together as we swayed to the rhythm of 'This Land is Your Land'. It captured exactly what we were celebrating the gift of that land to the nation for all to feel joy restoration and fellowship. [SM-100]
- And much later in the day when I was wet through to my skin my boots squelched at every step and I was cold and tired and hungry and aching singing This Land is Your Land and celebrating our legal right to have made ourselves cold and wet and hungry and aching by walking through this landscape actually made me feel warmer and more full of energy than all the tea in my flask or cake in my bait-box had managed to. Feeling the faint warmth coming from the other tired cold and aching people huddled together singing by the tarn feeling the warm breath coming out as sound feeling the vibration right through the core of your self. The thing is to know you're alive it can't always be days in the sun and the air like wine. It also has to be singing of the hurt and the pain and the joy of living. [SM-102]
- I wasn't prepared for how moving the song 'Joy of Living' would be when sung on top of Scafell and when a white gull soared over and circled back while we were singing it and rededicating the fell to the memory of the fallen. A rare poignant and truly spiritual moment for me. The singers and the song around me were enormously comforting and it felt as if us singers had really acknowledged and perhaps even lightened the enormous legacy of grief and grieving that war - and this one in particular - entails. [SM-104]
- The day was long and hard but filled with spirit and joy. This was the second part of our three weekends with the Fellowship of Hill and Wind and Sunshine climbing Scafell Pike and the

surrounding peaks of the massif. Fittingly it poured down and blew a fair breeze so that our voices knitted with the rock and curled around with the mist as in a provocative dance. We chatted and walked and huddled and sang and ate and shivered and all was well. Our laughter defied the elemental weather that kissed our meeting and rose above the highest mountain in the land. A brilliant and memorable day. We deepened our bonds and forged new links. It has taken three days to dry everything out but up in the hills our laughter still hangs. [SM-107]

- For me - it has been a huge privilege to be part of the Fellowship of Hill and Wind and Sunshine - a commitment that has involved a good deal of personal reflection fun emotion and most of all - a feeling of personal expansion where through the act of singing and being together with folks of a common spirit in such a magnificent landscape for such a great project has dissolved my sense of i-ness into we-ness. As i struggle to find meaning to my life following the death of my [partner] the chance to sing with the Fellowship has given me purpose. For that i am forever grateful. [SM-145]

## Non-Fellowship Responses

- Singing together takes away your separateness. There's a connection with other people that happens not just on a social interaction level but in a way that feels much deeper more fundamental. Group singing is more powerful than you can even begin to imagine. Start doing it and see where it takes you. [SM-89]
- I am a regular swimmer cyclist and gardener. For some time I have recognized the value of these activities in releasing endorphins making me feel good mentally despite the physical demands of all three activities. In addition over the past 7 or 8 years I have been involved in some form of community choral singing and I confess to being quite surprised to find that it has the same refreshing effects on my mental condition. I understand that it has to do with the release of the body's feel good chemicals. [SM-14]
- Singing with [the choir] has been life enhancing for me. After my husband died I was at a loss at what to do, then I remembered singing as a teenager and gave it a try again. Singing in a group brings out camaraderie and strong friendships have been formed which I would never have believed possible. Once I'm singing and taking part, everything else disappears into the background, it is all encompassing. It is impossible to feel down when your heart is full of joy from singing. [SM-160]

## 4.2.3 Triad 4 Value

### Creative Tension

Music's power to affect people's experience of it lies in harnessing *both* aesthetic and participatory dimensions

### Fellowship Responses

- Music helps us to connect - to other people and to nature itself. It helps sooth us in the tough times and shares our joy in the good times. The joint experience magnifies the positive impacts - knowing that warm glow is shared by so many others - and creates a positive feedback loop. This event



epitomises my love for music - an expression of our innermost feelings and emotions opening up to the world and to those people present. Increased confidence compassion and joy are obvious benefits to such events as this one but the most profound must be the sense of connection I alluded to earlier. To know our place in this world and smile at it. [SM-94]

- I love fell walking and I enjoy singing so to combine the two was an experience I couldn't miss. Although I already know the physical and psychological wellbeing benefits of group singing and walking and they always raise my spirits doing both on a mountain (and as it turns out in adverse weather conditions) was another level of experience in that I felt much more bonded and connected to the people who had shared the experience than before the event. [SM-128]
- In July of 2018 I sang in a pop up choir that popped up (!) on the top of Glaramara (783m), a mountain in the Lake District National Park. At this time I was already singing in a number of choirs and I led others in choirs linked to singing and wellbeing but this was different. The event started on the Saturday with what I thought was going to be just a rehearsal. But from that first meeting... I knew we were in for a special experience. They both spoke so passionately about the project that I was immediately hooked and wanted to give my full attention and best performance to the project. Jessie gave us some background about how she had found the story of the poet and mountaineer Geoffrey Winthrop Young. What an amazing man he was!, He lost a leg in WWI but still went on climbing and later was part of the ceremony that dedicated the mountain tops to the nation, put into the care of the National Trust. (It was his speech at that ceremony that inspired the name for the choir - 'Fellowship of Hill and Wind and Sunshine'). Then [the choir leader] spoke more about each of the songs that we were to learn ready to be sung on the mountain tops the following day. I was moved to tears at how much it mattered to [the leaders] and learnt a great lesson that day about how important it is to really feel connected to what it is that you want to teach others especially if you want to inspire them to do well.

It was also really great to see how invested the other singers were in the whole thing. They too had probably been affected by what we had heard during the introduction and many of them had sung on all three occasions throughout May June and July. Also, they still had massive smiles. So maybe the climbing was going to be a doddle?! After the rehearsal and the opportunity to meet others we were going to be singing alongside we went away to prepare ourselves emotionally and physically for the big push! Especially the climbing but also of course the singing on the mountains the following day.

As we were walking up the mountain it was funny how we got to talking about other adventures that we had in life. This really was an adventure and it connects you back to other times when you felt that you were really pushing yourself. We also talked amongst ourselves about how important singing was in our lives and how we had come to be here. But the moment when I felt most connected to others and was most moved was when we sang just below the summit of Glaramara. This was not captured by the BBC or the official photographers who had all moved up to the summit ready for us to do the big thing. This was just us as a powerful and bloody good choir singing a simple round called 'Peace within me' - a small act of peace loving and companionship. I filmed that on my phone and will remember it always.

I made it to the top of Glaramara and sung on the top of it. I am so proud of that even though because of my old knees and having had a bit of a fall I had to come down just after that. So that was my big challenge and out of it I think I became a better choir leader, certainly learning the value of inspiring others and recognising the huge amount of effort that people want to put into something when it matters. That is a particularly important thing to do when working with people with long term health conditions but of course with all of us, we all want to be part of something special. Thank you! [SM-141]

- I just love the feeling of being connected with the group of singers that I experience each time. I want more of that in my life. I feel better able to cope with whatever life throws at me; better resourced and more confident. No matter how I'm feeling when I arrive at one of these gatherings, after a very short time of being with and singing with the choir I have a big smile on my face that reflects my wonderful internal sense of belonging and rootedness, joy and connectedness. With all the limbic resonance, regulation and revision that's going on, probably out the groups' conscious awareness, I know that we're all going to have a beneficial effect on each other. When I go into any new group, whether that's a choir, a party, a festival or a crowded city centre I know that I'll not only have my own anxiety and depression to deal with but that I'll also have to deal with the counter transference that flows between me and any number of other individuals. This is hard and sometimes physically painful as well. Most often my solution is to avoid these situations. However, I know now that if the shared focus of singing is involved that I'll have a short cut to an almost euphoric sensation...and I want more of that in my life. Feeling happy! That's good. [SM-164]
- Singing in a group is one of the most uplifting experiences there is. I am part of a regular choir outside of this project who meet weekly on a Monday evening. As a busy working Mum of young children I'm very often shattered by 7pm and generally putting my shoes and coat back on to leave the house is not appealing in the slightest. But I know from experience that as soon as I'm there I feel the tiredness and stress of the day falling away and by the time I get home at 10pm I'm buzzing so much that I can't get to sleep for at least an hour! Nothing else gives such a sense of support - it doesn't matter if you're good at sight reading or learn by ear loud or quiet high or low - everyone has something to contribute and can all come together to create a meaning and beauty that is far far greater than the sum of its parts. I don't think of myself as a great singer but am really proud of the part I've played in my usual choir and in the fellowship project. It has really boosted my own confidence in my musical ability. Singing in a group is something I would struggle to live without. Thank you for making this project possible I will remember it for the rest of my life. [SM-138]

## Non-Fellowship Responses

- There are physical sensations that are much more intense in large group singing. For example moments when I am so enthralled by the tidal wave of sound that I am part of creating that I can actually feel the hairs standing up on the back of my neck. Emotionally too the effects can be incredible. The surging harmonies that very large choirs can produce are sometimes almost too much to bear. It is at moments like this that I feel a visceral connection with every other singer in the hall. Although most of these people are 'strangers' to me those moments bring us all together as one. I feel an instant sense of belonging and a deep conviction that we are expressing something

fundamentally human that feels important and feels right. Being together singing together breathing together and feeling together - what magic is here! [SM-61]

- Whilst singing a Croatian song during [a festival performance] I saw a lady sat at a table eating and watching us sing and she suddenly burst into tears. She obviously recognised the Croatian song we were singing and took her mobile phone out of her bag and rang someone still crying she held the phone up so the person who she had phoned could also hear us sing. She caught sight of me watching her and started really grinning from ear to ear and she put up her thumb and mouthed thank you. The thought that we had touched her heart and maybe her friend's heart too was such a beautiful experience. The connections singing together makes is endless and contagious. The world would be a better place if we all sang more. [SM-34]
- There's [a] shared goal of wanting to make the most beautiful harmonies that we can. I know I want to make those beautiful harmonies because of the impact it has on me and the way it resonates within me and that can just feel spine-tinglingly beautiful. [SM-xx]
- The great thing is that you don't have to be very good at singing in order to experience [the power of harmony] in a group but as your confidence grows through practice the thrill of singing in harmony grows exponentially. [SM-02]
- When I arrived a little late for a rehearsal in the church I heard the full glory of the three part harmonies of the song the choir was practising. I was blown away by the beautiful sound and thought 'wow - this is us doing that and we sound brilliant! [SM-35]

## Paramusical Benefits

### Fellowship Responses

- there's a connection with other people that happens not just on a social interaction level but in a way that feels much deeper more fundamental. I would come home from those evenings on a high and feeling full of joy at being alive. [SM-89]
- The constancy of friendships and of the mountains has been a great support for me over the last few years of cancer treatment and bereavement. It was lovely connecting with new friends and with the hills in such a positive and thought-provoking way. I am only just processing and unleashing the emotions of the day. [SM-90]
- Increased confidence compassion and joy are obvious benefits to such events as this one but the most profound must be the sense of connection I alluded to earlier. To know our place in this world and smile at it. [SM-94]
- As i struggle to find meaning to my life following the death of my wife and partner in November 2016 the chance to sing with the Fellowship has given me purpose. For that i am forever grateful. [SM-145]

### Non-Fellowship Responses

- The downside of living in a fast moving and high-tech knowledge-based society is that we can often feel isolated and opportunities for genuinely shared human experiences are rare. Group singing is an

antidote to this and reminds me that I am a human being - that joy comes from within and is generated by our positive appreciation of and shared experiences with other people. [SM-02]

- I had been suffering from another bout of clinical depression my counselling and therapy was over and I was just taking mild medication to keep me stable. I had managed to take part in group exercise classes where I had made new friends. In the changing rooms after one of those classes a few of us were singing the last song that had been played in class. I was told about I had a nice voice and should join the local U3A singing for pleasure group. It took me a few months to be able to go along to a singing session I still lacked confidence and struggled in new situations among people unknown to me. I was introduced to the group leader who introduced me to a very friendly group many who I now class as personal friends. As the weeks went on my confidence improved and I started singing out loud and proud with a huge smile on my face. Five years on and I'm still singing [with more than one group now] and enjoying every minute of it. Sure I still get low moods but when I'm singing it all goes away. Along with my exercise classes it's the most uplifting activity I do. [SM-29]
- One couple in our group (she has PD and dementia he is primary carer) were having a very hard time coping with life. Conversation was almost non-existent. After a few weeks of singing he told me they were practising the songs in the car and his wife was more animated and she was able to converse more than before about a wider range of topics. Neither had ever sung in a choir or group before. Before the singing group began he was at his wit's end and not in the best frame of mind. Since singing he and his wife look forward to singing and having a the cuppa afterwards where they have a chance to talk and share a little of their life and how the week has gone. I can't even begin to put a price on how valuable this experience has been for me let alone the likes of my new friends who are so in love with our singing Fridays and so much more able to cope for the other six days of the week as they manage the relentless intrusion of Parkinson's Disease and dementia. [SM-65]
- I don't doubt for a second that being part of this group has helped me grow in confidence made me feel loved and supported and has got me through challenging times. We have laughed so much till our sides ache and the best bit is that I know we will carry on till we are 100 and grow old together in the most disgraceful way. I don't think this would have happened had it not been for singing. . . it seems to break down all the barriers? [SM-147]
- It enables you to loose yourself and helps you to forget any problems you may have even if its only for a short space of time. [SM-158]
- Group singing provides me with a feeling of wellbeing, enjoyment and development of self awareness and confidence building. It also develops thinking skills and brain activity ie the learning of words English and other languages, tunes and beat. [SM-159]
- Once I'm singing and taking part, everything else disappears into the background, it is all encompassing. It is impossible to feel down when your heart is full of joy from singing. [SM-160]
- Taking part is good for your health, good for your well being, and makes the soul sing [SM-162]

## 4.3 Focus Group 'Theming' Workshop

### 4.3.1 Communitas

- So it was almost like a collective experience more than with-- the full survey people had their own sort of individual experiences. So you can see with-- but that one with the value as well is all sorts of-- the fellowship seem to be together in their experiences. [TW-02]
- The other thing that interests me, in the rejection of the notion of performance - as a group performance, as a goal there - that you've always styled these as singing groups, not choirs. The label choir comes with an expectation. And in some cases, people with an experience of seeking to achieve a performance. And a performance aim, and an achievement of a performance being a core rallying cry. Whereas we associate because of joy of singing, as opposed to with a specific aim of performance, individual performance or collective performance. [TW-08]
- Yeah. There's a similarity with the [Fell and Rock Climbing Club] as well. Because obviously they were the [mountain leaders who] were brought together, a lot of those were actually part of that association, not individuals. And this is a brilliant thing. How 60, 70 people who are on top of there, including mountaineers actually. I think we took the mountaineers into the group. Almost from day one, they didn't kind of understand it. But then boom, they then became part of that. So it wasn't just the choir. But you got this other 10, 15 people. [TW-07]
- I travel there with a few other people and it's very different in the car before and after, but while we're there, there's what I would call a very deep connection sometimes when we're harmonizing beautifully and all that sort of thing. Beautifully being interpreted any way [laughter] but when you're in the car, the different personalities emerge and as soon as you start talking [inaudible] it's possible. And it's the same with Quaker meeting or guided meditation. As soon as people start talking [laughter] the harmony can disappear and that interests me very much. [TW-05]
- We talked a lot about the feeling, about how sometimes-- well, certainly for me, the stronger the feeling and the sensation was about that connection, the less able I was to articulate it in the stories. [TW-10]
- You become more and more interconnected as people and with the place and with the sound. And all of a sudden, something starts happening in your brain. I was driving home thinking, "What is that feeling like?" [TW-06]
- listening to what you're saying which makes a lot of sense, it's as if culturally we simply don't acknowledge this, and therefore have no language for it. So I'm wondering whether other cultures might have language for it. It's quite hard to find out because we might not even have the translation for their language. [TW-04]

### 4.3.2 Fun and Enjoyment

- we thought that the overall story for everybody seemed to be much more of a sense of enjoyment rather than something that they were trying to achieve. [TW-02]

- people just want to have fun basically. And did have fun. Yes. More than anything else. Yeah. That was the overarching thing. [TW-05]
- Even though it was physically demanding, it didn't come across as being one of the most important things, whereas for some people it might have been quite a physical challenge. But it came across as not being as important as actually going out and enjoying themselves. [TW-02]
- When we talked about the part of the [Value] triangle where it seems that we don't want to perform, or don't desire to sound good for others, but we seem to have that desire to sound good nonetheless. Was it to do with beauty of the place, and maybe the sense of duty possibly as well because of what the whole project meant, that there was something about sending that sound into and around that beautiful place, that had it not sounded good, it would've really jarred, wouldn't it, and detracted from the whole thing? So maybe it's something about the relationship within the group itself, where you want to make it sound good for everybody else, so that everyone's enjoying them[selves] off that experience. But also because of the beauty around you as well. [TW-05]

## 4.4 Interview with Singing Therapists

### 4.4.1 A Sea of Emotions

- B: 'To be [energetically 'open' in public] would be really unsafe and painful and difficult. And I would be inviting all sorts of weird energies in. So I don't do that. So it's really nice to be in a place where I feel safe enough to be that open. Because in the letting down of my psychic boundaries or energetic boundaries, whatever it is that allows my *bubble*, my *aura* to merge with somebody else's in a way that's healthy and safe and good and enjoyable and not threatening at all, that is such a joyful thing to be able to experience.'

### 4.4.2 Safe Danger

- A: 'It's a safe way of being in a group where we are generous. We're generous. We care about each other on not a very intense level, not a massively personal level. But we've got a shared purpose. We do this thing that sort of stimulates lots of happy hormones and chemicals. All those things are going on. We breathe together. We work together. We make the same sounds together. And it's something that human beings need, isn't it?'
- B: 'in our therapeutic work, you use your genuine self, so there's an impact on you of that relationship with somebody who is necessarily in some sort of pain. So you make that connection. And that can be a hard thing to carry, and you do it. And we have ways of dealing with that. But one of the things I like about group singing is that you make that connection. And it doesn't hurt. It's not painful. You're not carrying anything difficult. In the [therapeutic] work, we're carrying the other person, aren't we? We're there to support them. It's not a reciprocal thing as such. But when you're singing with the choir, it is reciprocal. It's probably the closest thing to being one with a group that I've ever experienced.'
- A: 'I'm aware that in therapeutic work, if I'm not my authentic self, it doesn't work. And the only way it does work is if I find that deep inner self and relay that, even if it feels uncomfortable to do so, to the people I'm working with. The choir helps me find my real self, as well. I guess within the choir, there isn't a responsibility with it. So within the working environment, I feel that sense of responsibility. And within the choir, I'm able to find a more joyful place.'

## 6 Discussion

### 6.2.2 Mutual Recovery

- B: 'the more things we do together, the more gigs we do, the more singing up mountains we do, the stronger the bond becomes. And even the shyer members of the choirs, when they come in now, they look around and smile. And there were a few people who never did that to begin with. They would just come in and go to a place, their usual place where they would feel safe because, "That's my place." And they were very shy about making eye contact. And now, I've noticed, they come in and they stop and they look around a little bit. And I think, as they look around, not only are they placing themselves within this new space and finding, "Who am I in this space?" I believe they're also looking for eye contact and smiles and heart-to-heart connection. And I think it's a very healing thing for all of us.'

### 6.4 Limitations

- A: Have the people who come to choir got similar attachment styles or just a level of security that you're able to do that? And I suspect that we have. For a well-established and bonded group, somebody coming into it might find it hard.'