

Giving a voice to people with chronic communication impairments: A feasibility study

Background

Many people with communication difficulties report social isolation, reduced community participation (often due to lack of appropriate groups or services), and preserved singing ability relative to speech. The solution? A community singing group!

The Magic of Music

Speech therapy involving music has been shown to improve factors ranging from speech intelligibility and naturalness to receptive language; from participation in therapy to mood, agitation and distress^{1,2}

Singing Group Aims

- Increase community engagement
- Build a social support network
- Improve mood and wellbeing
- Provide an opportunity for verbal output

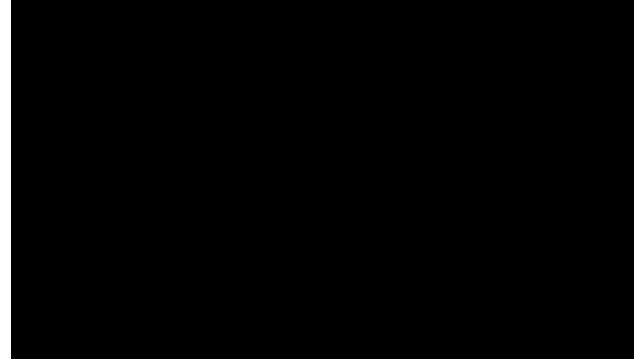


Singing Group Logistics

Began in 2014 with 8 members. Currently has 25 active members across 2 groups. Runs for 1.5hrs fortnightly from the Community Rehabilitation Centre Group Room. Each session includes warm up exercises, singing and afternoon tea.

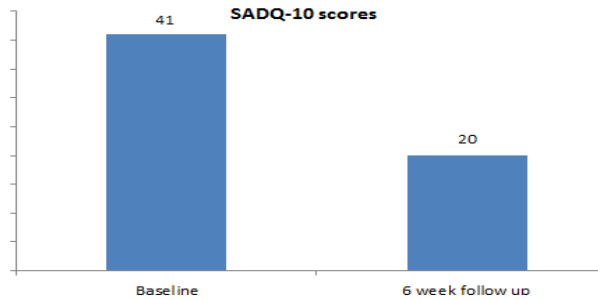
How does it work?

Karaoke videos are streamed from YouTube and projected onto a screen. All we need is a computer with internet, a projector and a decent set of speakers. Participants take turns selecting songs from the song list. The list currently contains 160 song options compiled from group members' favourites.



Outcome Measures

Stroke Aphasic Depression Questionnaire (SADQ-10) scores decreased by >50% from baseline to follow-up.



Evaluation Questionnaire

- 92% said they enjoyed the group
- 92% found the group fun
- 83% felt they could join in with the singing
- 75% had made new friends
- 33% felt they had become more involved in the community

Feedback

Allied Health Staff Feedback

- Patients speak about group as a highlight of their week
- Patients 'coming out of their shell' to talk about singing group
- Improvements in voice, speech and language in some patients

Family/Carer Feedback

- Participant looks forward to each group session
- Participant sings more at home and bring out their favourite CDs / records to listen to
- Participant initiates more speech at home
- "He called up his mother on her birthday and sang happy birthday to her over the phone. It was the first time she had heard his voice properly since his stroke over 7 years ago.

Participant Observations and Feedback

- High levels of enjoyment, retention and attendance
- Many arrive early to catch up with other group members for lunch
- Improved breath support from warm-up exercises
- Wanting group to run more often

Summary/Further Directions

These results support the implementation of singing groups to increase mood and quality of life for patients with chronic communication disorders. Future research is needed to more rigorously test the effect of such groups with larger participant numbers.

References

1. Jungblut, M., & Aldridge, D. (2004). The music therapy intervention SIPARI with chronic aphasics – research findings. *Neurologie und Rehabilitation*, 10, 69-78.
2. Nayak, S., Wheeler, B.L., Shiflett, S.C., & Agostinelli, S. (2000). Effect of music therapy on mood and social interaction among individuals with acute traumatic brain injury and stroke. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 45, 274-283.

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Building a **Healthy Community**, in Partnership



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