



Building a
Better Health
Service

Seirbhís Sláinte
Níos Fearr
á Forbairt



How to Set up a Choir

for HSE Staff Health & Wellbeing



#Sing4HealthyIreland

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Foreword

I recommend this guide to anyone interested in setting up a HSE workplace choir.

Health Promotion and Improvement through the Staff Health and Wellbeing Programme have developed a number of workplace choirs which have proven effective in promoting staff engagement and improving staff health and wellbeing. At the time of writing this guide we have 16 HSE choirs up and running across the organisation. We have also supported research with the University of Limerick World Academy of Music and Dance to investigate the health and wellbeing benefits of participating in a HSE Staff Workplace Choir.

In October 2018 the Health Promotion and Improvement Staff Health and Wellbeing Programme hosted the HSE Staff Sing for Wellbeing Concert in the University of Limerick Concert Hall. There were performances from 8 HSE choirs and a mass participation grand finale in which all the choirs were joined by the audience in singing the final song.

The atmosphere was truly special and the talent was immense. All the audience acknowledged the occasion to be very special and it really demonstrated what can be achieved by working together for a common purpose. Teamwork and working to a common purpose are synonymous with choirs as are the proven health and wellbeing benefits they bring to participants. If you are a HSE employee or a retired member of staff who can hold a tune and are interested in improving your health and wellbeing then I highly recommend you join a HSE workplace choir. If there is no choir in your area and you would like to set one up then this guide is for you.

Wishing you every success in your musical endeavors

Helen Deely

Acting A.N.D., Health & Wellbeing, Strategic Planning & Transformation




Fergal Fox, Brian McKeown, Dr Cate Hartigan, Laura Tobin, Prof Roy Philip & Medical Students (UL Ark Children's Unit) fundraising at the HSE Sing for Wellbeing Concert in the University of Limerick Concert Hall Oct. 2018

Introduction

The development of workplace choirs in the HSE is a successful measure to promote staff health and wellbeing by increasing social engagement, boosting staff morale and improving mental wellbeing. Choirs have been supported by various worksites in the HSE over the years and have recently increased in popularity, becoming an integral part of staff engagement and the promotion of wellbeing throughout the organisation. This guide “How to Set Up a Choir for HSE Staff Health and Wellbeing” sets out some considerations and important steps for those interested in planning a workplace choir in your worksite.

As part of Healthy Ireland in the HSE, promoting Staff Health and Wellbeing is a key objective which looks to engage staff in their own wellbeing within a supportive environment with opportunities to promote their health and wellbeing while at work. The HSE recognise its future success can only be realised by a healthy, engaged and motivated workforce with staff being the most valuable asset the organisation has.



“I have found that with practice my ability to sing has improved and I would have seen myself as a fairly limited singer but breathing correctly and improving my posture has given me more confidence with my singing”

Joan Crawford, Health Promotion, Mullingar.

Why set up a choir?

• General Impact and Benefits

A growing interest in the impact of singing on health and wellbeing has seen a dramatic increase in the research available in recent years. Research reveals the overwhelmingly positive feeling that people get from singing in choirs and how it impacts positively on their physical, social and emotional wellbeing. It suggests the huge potential of choirs to improve wellbeing in settings such as workplaces, nursing homes and educational institutions. Research from the University of Limerick shows that people who sing in choirs report significant higher levels of wellbeing, it adds to the growing body of evidence that singing is good for our health. "Being part of a choir can elicit a strong feeling of togetherness and improved social wellbeing. Members gain a huge sense of fun and enjoyment from being part of a choir which is especially important in the pressures associated with everyday working life". Dr Hillary Moss, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick.

There are many reasons why singing is good for you.

• Physical Benefits of Singing

Research from the University of Frankfurt show that singing boosts the immune system. Proteins that function as antibodies were significantly higher immediately after rehearsal, while the same increases were not observed after choir members passively listened to music.

Other benefits include:

- Singing can strengthen the diaphragm and stimulate overall circulation.
- Singing and vocal exercises can help strengthen throat and palate muscles, which helps stop snoring and sleep apnoea. (Kreutx et al, 2003)

"Singing in harmony (at least some of the time!) with other people is quite uplifting, and "other-wordly". There's no space for the head to wander amongst uninvited thoughts. So it's not terribly unlike meditation. Good for us on levels we're not even aware of."

Gerry Moran, Retired EHO

• Mental Benefits of Singing

Singing is known to release endorphins, the feel-good brain chemical that makes you feel uplifted and happy. The response creates an immediate sense of pleasure, regardless of what the singing sounds like. Singing can simply take your mind off the day's troubles to boost your mood.

Making music in any form is relaxing. Singing releases stored muscle tension and decreases the levels of a stress hormone called cortisol in the blood stream. (Kreutz et al 2004)

Choirs have been used to support and maintain mental alertness for ageing populations. Improved blood circulation and an oxygenated blood stream allow more oxygen to reach the brain. This improves mental alertness, concentration, and memory. (Clift et al 2007)

• Social Benefits of Singing

Being in a choir improves social connectedness. The bonds formed while singing with others can be profound, due to the level of sociability involved. Singing together inspires people.



• Benefits to the Individual

- Reduction of symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression when group singing
- Lower Blood pressure
- Lower heart rate
- Lower respiration rate
- Improved well being
- Improved sense of social connectedness
- Learn a new skill

• Potential Benefits to the Organisation

- Better staff engagement
- Better staff morale in the workplace
- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased staff health champions/volunteers
- Increased patient/client satisfaction

Listen to the interview given by Fergal Fox, HSE Lead on Staff Health & Wellbeing on Tullamore radio on setting up Tullamore workplace choir and its impact. [Click here for: Radio Interview](#)

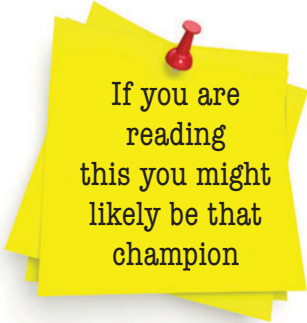
"It is nice to be part of a group with such a diversity of roles within the health service yet all united by their love of music and singing. This is an aspect of choir that I really enjoy, as being a lone worker - my colleagues are spread around the country- the choir gives me a great sense of belonging to a team locally and I really enjoy touching base with choir members weekly at practice and on the various outings. I have renewed old acquaintances and made new friends since joining the choir."

Bairbre Uí Theighneáin, Irish Language Officer, HSE Tullamore.

Steps involved in setting up a choir

1. Identify a Worksite Choir Champion / Leader

The first step to starting a workplace choir is to identify a champion or a few people that are passionate about starting a choir. These people are key to gauge interest and through their networks get other staff on board.



If you are reading this you might likely be that champion

2. How to gain interest and get staff involved

- Use HSE's internal communications network such as Yammer, intranet, Twitter or email
- Ask local colleagues if they are interested in the idea and build contacts
- Draft a flyer briefly detailing the idea, area and key contact; circulate it across your internal email distribution list and all relevant HSE communication channels
- Identify other interested colleagues who may work with you on moving forward with the idea.
- If there's an existing choir within a worksite look at rejuvenating it and recruiting new members



TIP:

Post in high footfall areas and areas where it will stand out, eg toilets, clock-in areas, beside/under door release buttons, doors leading to other depts.

3. Getting started

Key things to consider when starting a workplace choir are

- Proposal to support your idea and gain management commitment
- Rehearsal Space and Time
- Funding / Budget
- Choir Director
- Choir Member recruitment
- Music Repertoire
- Performances and Events

4. Proposal to support your idea and gain management commitment

In order to make a pitch to gain management support and commitment you must be able to make the case for why they should support and invest in the choir project. You must state the overall health and wellbeing benefits for the HSE employees as well as the workplace as a whole. See Appendix 1 for sample funding proposal.

5. Rehearsal space and time

Your space ideally should be convenient, suitable and conducive to rehearsing music e.g. hospital/office foyer or onsite chapel.

The space needs to be big enough to accommodate your choir members, choral director, their equipment, plug points and ample floor space for standing.

HSE worksites differ so it's worth considering the best option for your individual site e.g. offices / hospitals. Rehearsing after 5pm seems to work well for most groups as it's a quieter time of the day, when most staff are going home, facilitating easier access and parking. However this may not be possible so all options are worth considering such as rehearsing at lunchtime. Ensure you inform other staff remaining in the rehearsal building/space so as to minimize disturbance. These arrangements should be worked out on an individual site by site basis.

TIP:

When practicing, open a window to arouse interest in other staff or passers by.

6. Funding / Budget

Sourcing funding for workplace choirs can be challenging but should not be off-putting. Funding arrangements for HSE choirs differ across the organisation. You could make contact with your Head of Service - Health and Wellbeing (CHOs)/Healthy Ireland Lead (HGs) as staff health and wellbeing initiative funding has been used in some areas to support choir costs. A funding template is included in Appendix 1. It can be photocopied, with relevant details added and sent to the CHO Head of Health and Wellbeing/HG Healthy Ireland Project Lead. All high level strategic information and governance issues have been included for you, with a "Funding proposal outcome" section for use by the funder. This template can form a record for both parties of the terms and conditions by which the funding is being awarded.

Funding may be secured on a short term basis, subject to review after which it may be extended or staff themselves may be asked to contribute towards the cost. Venue and insurance costs are generally covered by the HSE with the cost of an external choir director constituting the main cost for which you will be seeking funding.

7. Choir Director

Once your project is set in motion, you will need to consider designating someone to be your musical / choir director who will help choose your music repertoire, direct and accompany your choir.

Consider the following qualities when choosing a choir director:

- Musical background such as running a music school, singing, playing in a band or orchestra, private music training or conducting other group/s.
- Higher education in music performance, theory, composition or conducting.
- Knowledge of choral repertoire and resources for directors.
- Natural ability to lead a group and a charismatic personality.
- Understanding of planning performances linking in with choir leader / champion choosing suitable and appropriate venues


Source: Chorus Connection, How to set up an employee choir in 8 steps.

Sourcing a suitable Choir Director can be challenging. Liaise with regional community partners who have knowledge and expertise in this area such as County Council Arts Offices, Music Schools or other established Workplace / Community Choirs.

8. How to recruit Choir Members

Here are a few ways to get the word out about your Choir:

- Display flyers in break rooms, canteens and reception areas.
- Email all contacts, internal distribution lists etc. announcing the choir
- Create a social page on HSE Yammer or Twitter and invite co-workers
- Post articles in CHO/HG newsletters
- Use any HSE/CHO/HG events as an opportunity to inform and encourage other staff to join.
- Invite interested staff and retired staff to come and sit in on one of your rehearsals so they get an idea of what it's about.
- And remember..... never under estimate the power of word-of-mouth it's one of your best tools for recruiting new members!
- Consider ongoing recruitment throughout the year, between Choir events or when starting to learn a new set of songs.



NB: Don't forget to notify retired staff who may wish to join

To Audition or not to Audition

Successful choirs can be auditioned or non-auditioned. To date most if not all of the existing HSE Workplace choirs are non-auditioned choirs as the focus is on the health and wellbeing benefits of singing as part of a choir as opposed to becoming a competitive choir.



9. Choosing your Music Repertoire

If you have an experienced musical director, it is likely they will source and suggest pieces that will suit the membership and capabilities of your choir. Some choirs sing in unison while others sing 3 or 4 part harmonies. Member's ideas and suggestions for song choices should be taken into account with the emphasis being on singing for pleasure rather than an overemphasis on competition or mastery of complicated pieces.

10. Performances and Events - share your success

Once your choir is established and confident it's good to have a variety of performances to work towards. The goal should be to maximize the personal enjoyment of singing with the positive social, fun, and enjoyment elements of interacting with your audience and with other choirs.

Some examples of where it may be appropriate to have your choir perform:

- HSE Events - staff retirements, corporate events, launches or openings. Some choirs use national health and wellbeing campaigns and holiday times e.g. Christmas / St Patrick's Day.

Watch this short video of members and friends of Tullamore HSE Staff Choir as they perform a lip sync to the Proclaimers "500 Miles" as part of their celebration of the Healthy Ireland Love Life Love Walking Day on Valentine's Day 2018. [Click here to view: youtube HSE Tullamore Staff Choir](#)

- Informal Performances - residential care units, hospitals, day centers or with partner agencies and charities.

Watch this short You Tube Clip of the Tullamore HSE Staff Choir as they perform Coldplay's "Fix You" in the foyer of Tullamore Hospital: [Click here to view: youtube HSE Tullamore Staff Choir](#)

Watch this performance of HSE Tullamore Staff Choir as they sing Pink Floyd's "Wish you Were Here" in a flash mob in Heuston Train Station, Dublin to raise awareness of World Suicide Prevention Day 10th Sept. 2018: [Click here to view: Flashmob Heuston Station](#)

- Inter Choir Performances – with other HSE choirs, corporate workplace choirs or community choirs

The link below gives a short promotional overview of 8 individual choirs and all the 8 choirs along with the audience performing "You're the Voice" accompanied by the Dr. Diarmuid O Herlihy Pipe Band, Cashel, at the HSE Staff Sing for Wellbeing Concert in the University of Limerick Concert Hall Sunday 21st Oct. 2018: [Click here to view: 8 Choir Promos](#)

Additional Information

Additional information available from:

Clodagh Armitage, Health Promotion & Improvement,
Community Healthcare Midlands Louth - Meath
e: clodagh.armitage@hse.ie t: 086 3801099

Siobhan Mangan, Health Promotion & Improvement,
Community Healthcare Dublin South, Kildare and West Wicklow
e: siobhan.mangan@hse.ie t: 087 1327399

Adrienne Lynam, National Staff Health & Wellbeing, Community Healthcare West
e: Adrienne.Lynam@hse.ie t: 091 775928 / 087 7975983

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Further Reading

Association of Irish Choirs
<https://www.aaic.ie>

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<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/media/pressrel/newsarchive/2013archive/nov2013/musicalmemories.html>

Takelessons.com : 11 Surprising Health Benefits of Singing
<https://takelessons.com/live/singing/health-benefits-of-singing>

Appendix 1

Funding Proposal Template To Heads of Service Health & Wellbeing (CHOs)/Healthy Ireland Leads (HGs) To enable the establishment of a HSE workplace choir

Proposal Name: To establish a workplace choir in _____

Proposal Coordinator: _____ **Position:** _____

Submitted to: _____ **Date:** _____

Background:

The development of workplace choirs in the HSE is a successful measure to promote staff health and wellbeing (SHW) by increasing social engagement, boosting staff morale and improving mental wellbeing. As part of *Healthy Ireland in the Health Services*, promoting SHW is a key objective which looks to engage staff in their own wellbeing within a supportive environment with opportunities to promote their health and wellbeing while at work. For research evidence see *How to Set up a Choir for HSE Staff Health and Wellbeing*.

Current position:

Funding arrangements differ across the organisation. Existing choirs have received funding via Health & Wellbeing funding through Heads of Service - Health and Wellbeing (CHOs)/Healthy Ireland Leads (HGs). Funding may be secured on a short term basis, subject to review after which it may be extended or staff themselves may be asked to contribute towards the cost. Venue and insurance costs are generally covered by the HSE with the cost of an external choir director constituting the main cost for which funding is sought.

Aim: To enhance the physical, mental and social health and wellbeing of staff in _____ CHO/HG through the establishment and participation in a HSE workplace choir.

Objectives:

1. To employ workplace choirs as a tool to improve and promote positive mental and physical health and wellbeing among staff in CHO _____ / _____ HG
2. To deliver our obligations under:
 - > Healthy Ireland in the Health Services Implementation Plan
 - > The People Strategy
 - > HSE Corporate Plan
 - > DOH Healthy Workplace Framework (Pending)
3. To positively contribute to the staff and public profile of the HSE

Outputs: A _____ Staff choir that sings for pleasure to enhance health & wellbeing that is capable of representing the HSE in Workplace Choir competitions and is willing to perform at both in-house and charity celebrations, festive occasions and fundraisers.

Outcomes:

- Increased staff engagement
- Increased staff participation
- Increased staff morale
- Increase in staff health champions/volunteers
- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased client satisfaction

How will the success of the initiative be measured?

- Increased staff engagement and participation will be measured by number of members in each choir and numbers of staff participating in other SHW initiatives e.g. Steps to Health Challenge
- Increased moral will be measured via the results of subsequent *Your Opinion Counts* National Healthcare Surveys
- Increase in staff volunteering as health champions will be measured via number of team co-ordinators coming forward to run staff challenges, set up choirs, engage in IHF Active@Work /Walking Leader training and numbers of staff engaging in MECC training
- Reduced absenteeism will be monitored via HR statistics/monthly returns
- Increased client satisfaction will manifest through results from the *National Patient Experience Survey*

Resources:

1. In-house Worksite Choir Champion / Co-ordinator
2. On – site rehearsal venue
3. Choir Director*
4. Funding for Choir Director, music scores and application fees for Workplace Choir Competitions*
5. Travel costs to events / competitions & refreshments (self funded by members)
6. In-house Communications

Estimated Expenditure:

Remuneration for Choir Director: €_____ per week for _____ weeks

Miscellaneous (music scores and/or application fees) €_____

Governance:

Governance will come under the CHO Staff Health & Wellbeing Working Group/HG Healthy Ireland Project Lead who will provide funding as outlined below. The Choir Co-ordinator/Champion will liaise with these and provide a short quarterly summary of activity and future plans.

Key Stakeholders:

HSE Staff, CHO Heads of Service Health & Wellbeing, HG Healthy Ireland Project Leads, Health Promotion & improvement (HP&I), Retired HSE Staff & local community choirs and charitable organisations.

Communication Strategies:

The Choir Co-ordinator/Champion will liaise with local HSE Communications to draft a simple communication plan to recruit members. Local communications will also assist the publication and

dissemination of newsworthy items to Health Matters and local press re HSE events, Staff Recognition Awards, workplace choir competitions and partnerships with other choirs and community groups.

Major Risks: None

Potential Issues:

Public perception that the HSE is funding staff choirs to the detriment of patient service provision. This can be addressed through:

- Highlighting that investing in staff will lead to a better service for patients and that staff are service users too
- The provision of pilot phase funding with a contribution towards part funding by choir members, in the longer term.

Funding Proposal Outcome

I _____ (name & title) have reviewed this funding application and have decided to award / not to fund the establishment of the above mentioned workplace choir.

This decision has been arrived at for the following reason:

1. _____

Current level of funding being awarded € _____ under the following terms and conditions:

1. _____

2. _____

This funding arrangement will be reviewed on _____ (date)

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 2

What does being in the HSE Staff Choir mean for members?

Mary O' Kelly

General Manager Primary Care | CHO 7, Tallaght | Dublin 24 |

"It has been a super experience – a great way to get to know people and have a laugh. The choir is something lovely to look forward to and from a work point of view it boosts confidence and really helps combat stress both physically and psychologically."

Hilary Mallen

Environmental Health Officer. Athy Health Centre, Co. Kildare

"Joining the choir gives me an opportunity to sing and be part of something special in an atmosphere of encouragement and fun. By Thursday I usually feel tired and somewhat stressed, but after a session with the choir I feel relaxed and upbeat. If only we could bottle that feeling!!!"

Lorraine Ashe

HR Business Manager | CHO 7 Oak House | Millennium Park | Naas | Co. Kildare |

"The Staff Choir has helped me to take time out for me and also I've gotten to know people in the building whom I never would have met. It's great to have a topic of conversation in the tea room which is not work related. The choir has also given a lift to those who are working in the building while the choir rehearse and are disappointed when we are not around."

Mairead Walsh

Senior Executive Officer, NHSS National Coordinating Unit & Schedule of Assets
Oak House/ Naas, /Co Kildare

"The Workplace Choir has been a fantastic and fun way to get to know colleagues. It is so energising and a brilliant way to de-clutter the mind after a hard day's work. There is a real sense of workplace camaraderie and pride which is so important. Being in the choir is confidence building in terms of standing up in front of a crowd and singing and I feel that this has knock on benefits for everybody."

Amanda Ross

Business Support Manager, Office of the Director of the National Ambulance Service, Health Service Executive| Tallaght, Dublin 24

"Being in the work place choir gives me the opportunity to just switch off and have a laugh after a busy day in work, no matter how your day has been going in work you are guaranteed to have a smile on your face when you are at choir practice. It has also gives me to opportunity to meet new people from around the HSE and has allowed me to do things I never thought I'd do like sing in front of a full house in the Moat Theatre in Naas, which I know we all really enjoyed."

Dr Rita Lawlor

Professional Development Co Ordinator for Practice Nurses/Interim Immunisation Co-Ordinator Primary Care Unit, CHO 7

"Being involved in the workplace choir allows me to have some fun and get to know colleagues. Learning something new, like music and singing is great for unwinding after a day's work."

Cathryn Buckley

Communications & Change Specialist, National Finance Division, HSE, Millennium Park, Naas, Co. Kildare

"I had been looking for a choir to join locally for some time as I had been very involved in my school choir (many years ago!) and wanted to get back into singing. Also, I was new to the building and thought it would be a good way of meeting more people."

"I really look forward to our weekly practise. It's great fun, a stress reliever, confidence builder and it's terrific to interact with colleagues outside of work. I have enjoyed our performances, particularly for hospital patients and nursing home residents. Overall the whole experience has been fantastic. "

Megan Mc Glynn

PA to Chief Officer of CHO7, Oak House Naas, Co Kildare.

"I joined the HSE staff choir because I love to sing and I had just started the new job and wanted to meet new people. What the choir means to me is finishing up after a stressful day in work and getting to sing with a great bunch of people to lift my spirits no matter what mood I am in. "Strive for progress, not perfection"

Siobhán Mangan

Senior Health Promotion Officer – Staff Health – Oak House HSE Naas, Responsible for setting up HSE Naas Staff Choir.

"I love being part of the choir and everything it embraces, the music, the people, the friendships, the fun after your hard day, the feeling of being part of something so positive and uplifting.

It's also about being able to share the beauty of music and singing and the positive wellbeing impact it brings to our

audience as well as us. It's is very a humbling experience to sing for and with others, my wish is for us to do and share it more within our HSE workplaces and communities.

I feel so lucky to be part of our Naas staff choir, so, get out there join your local workplace or community choir, you'll be surprised the many health and wellbeing benefits and joy the whole experience brings."

Bairbre Uí Theighneáin
Irish Language Officer, HSE Tullamore.

"It is nice to be part of a group with such a diversity of roles within the health service yet all united by their love of music and singing. This is an aspect of choir that I really enjoy, as being a lone worker - my colleagues are spread around the country- the choir gives me a great sense of belonging to a team locally and I really enjoy touching base with choir members weekly at practice and on the various outings. I have renewed old acquaintances and made new friends since joining the choir. Another essential element of our choir has to be Andrius, our Choir Director, whose comprehensive knowledge, talent, musical ability and indomitable sense of humour makes the choral experience so enjoyable!"

Teresa Cannon
Office of Assistant National Director, Strategic Planning & Transformation, Primary Care Unit, Merlin Park Hospital, Galway.

"I got involved in the Merlin Park Choir as I have been involved in my local Community Church Choir for many years and the idea appealed to me it being a workplace choir as the range of songs and music would be different. I am thoroughly enjoying participating in the choir. I have learned a lot in the last year, made new friends and loved taking part in the various competitions and the comraderie and enjoyment has been food for the soul!"

Bernadette Furey
Asst. Staff Officer, Tusla Finance. Galway.

"I joined the Merlin Miscellany to "sing with my co-workers, enjoy their company and challenge myself to open my mind to other possibilities and because it has been on my bucket list of things to do" It has been that and more, I have made new friends and travelled a very enjoyable journey and I have always looked forward to my Tuesday lunchtimes."

"I love being part of the choir and everything it embraces, the music, the people, the friendships, the fun after your hard day, the feeling of being part of something so positive and uplifting".

"Joining the choir gives me an opportunity to sing and be part of something special in an atmosphere of encouragement and fun. By Thursday I usually feel tired and somewhat stressed, but after a session with the choir I feel relaxed and upbeat. If only we could bottle that feeling!"

"Being involved in the workplace choir allows me to have some fun and get to know colleagues. Learning something new, like music and singing is great for unwinding after a day's work."

"I joined the HSE staff choir because I love to sing and I had just started the new job and wanted to meet new people. What the choir means to me is finishing up after a stressful day in work and getting to sing with a great bunch of people to lift my spirits no matter what mood I am in. "Strive for progress, not perfection"

"I joined the Merlin Miscellany Choir to sing with my co-workers, enjoy their company and challenge myself to open my mind to other possibilities and because it has been on my bucket list of things to do. It has been that and more, I have made new friends and travelled a very enjoyable journey and I have always looked forward to my Tuesday lunchtimes."

"I feel so lucky to be part of our Naas staff choir, so, get out there join your local workplace or community choir, you'll be surprised the many health and wellbeing benefits and joy the whole experience brings".

