



Developing training for practitioners: Project Report

Contents

Proposed project	1
Funder	2
Mapping element	2
Workshops.....	2
Workshop 1: Developing Singing for Health Training	2
Workshop 2: 18 June 2024, Building Singing for Health Training & Peer Support	3
Podcasts.....	3
Plans for the short course	3
Network Progress	4
Next steps.....	4

Proposed project

This project focuses on identifying and developing training for singing for health practitioners based in Scotland. Led by Scotland's Singing for Health Network, the project has two distinct strands. The first phase of the project will map existing training available to singing for health practitioners in UK, with the aim of identifying barriers and gaps. The second phase will directly engage our practitioners to develop accessible and inclusive singing for health training.

Funder

This project was generously supported by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Innovation Studio.

Mapping element

We have produced a map that showcases training in Singing for Health in the UK:

<https://portal.rcs.ac.uk/scotland-singing-for-health-network/singing-for-health-training-for-singing-leaders/>

We identified 18 organisations and made sure to distinguish the kind of training they offer (online, hybrid, or in-person) by using different icons. Most of the training is online, opening accessibility to anyone across the UK. That said, at the workshop, practitioners highlighted the importance of in-person sessions, noting that they felt it important to experience practice rather than passively observe it through an online session.

When mapping the training provided by organisations, we collected the available information about the cost of attending the training. Of the training that charges fees, there is a price range of £80 - £6,500. As such, the average cost of training and CPD for singing for health is £1214.333.

We also compared the cost of training and CPD opportunities for non-health-specific choir leading / conducting, which was costed at £680-£730 for a week's course.

Workshops

We held two in-person workshops at the RCS on 19 April and 18 June 2024.

Workshop 1: Developing Singing for Health Training

The first workshop we shared and discussed the kind of training singing for health leaders felt they needed, whether that be CPD, new starter training, ideas for practice-based sessions, bespoke training working with people living with specific conditions, etc.

Our speakers were Nicola Wyndebach, Director of Training for Sing to Beat Parkinson's and Anne Ritchie from the Cheyne Gang, who both shared how they developed training programmes for singing leaders working in Singing for Parkinson's and Singing for Lung Health. Both have expertise of designing training courses for practitioners, including developing accredited training. Their general feeling was that for charities, accredited training is too costly to develop with the knock-on costs directly affected practitioners, who inevitably must pay more to attend the course. As such, both had decided to avoid accreditation.

However, we have been in discussions with current medical professionals who have noted that singing for health practitioners who have participated in accredited are more desirable, as they can trust that they have the knowledge and experience to work with service users who have complex conditions. This is also discussed by Dr Julia Puebla Fortier here:

<https://artsandwellbeingpractice.wordpress.com/2024/06/18/international-social-prescribing-conference-presentation/> and was based on her PhD study, available to read here:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367525677_Navigating_Ambiguity_and_Boundaries_The_experiences_of_arts_health_and_wellbeing_facilitators_working_with_individuals_with_challenging_conditions_or_situations.

At the RCS, we have an advantage in that we are already embedded in the accredited/credit bearing model and it does not cost us significantly to develop a credit-bearing short course. In fact, Marlisa Ross, Business Development Manager at the RCS, encourages it as it often makes the short courses more attractive for students who might be looking to continue to further study. We considered this carefully in the development of our short course (discussed in more detail below).

Both speakers (and participants at the workshop) also emphasised the need for evaluation skills from their practitioners to maximise opportunities for showcasing what the groups do and obtaining further funding. They noted that this was an area they had been unable to develop in their training programmes, noting it fell outside the remit of leading a singing for health session, even though it would be useful.

Both acknowledged the importance of in-person, practice-led sessions, but noted online training was the more accessible and cost-friendly. Currently, both run a combination of in-person and online training sessions throughout the year, with their presentations highlighting how those sessions typically run.

Workshop 2: 18 June 2024, Building Singing for Health Training & Peer Support

Our practitioners had previously given us feedback on wanting more mentoring and peer support to help them when working in the Singing for Health field. We invited Jo Miller, coordinator of the Trad Arts Mentoring programme for Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland, and Anne Gallacher, Director of Luminare – Scotland’s Creative Ageing organisation, who discussed the recent evaluation of Luminare’s peer support pilot. Both have much experience in setting up mentoring and peer support opportunities, and we were keen that attendees hear how they approached setting up these initiatives. Furthermore, we wanted to identify if it might be possible to include such initiatives in the training we were developing, or if this would be a separate strand.

It was very clear from the presentations and discussion that both mentoring and peer support initiatives require their own time and investment for them to run effectively, and, as such, cannot be incorporated into the short course at present.

The second half of the workshop focused on us obtaining feedback on the proposed short course. We have taken these points on board and used them to refine the short course.

Podcasts

Two follow up podcasts were published via Spotify and YouTube following the workshops. These podcasts allowed us to capture what was discussed at the workshop with our invited speakers and serve as a useful repository of the workshop discussions.

These podcast episodes are a valuable way of sharing what we are doing with our wider network, while also engaging a much larger audience.

Plans for the short course

The short course is now fully designed and moving through the academic approval process. All going well, the short course will be advertised in January 2025, with it set to run in summer 2025.

Network Progress

At our March 2023 workshop, we listed a number of short, medium and long term goals, and through this funding we have managed to successfully achieve the following:

Short term (next 6 months)

- Making training more available and accessible, including signposting to training opportunities via Scotland's Singing for Health website.
- Providing ongoing support as part of Scotland's Singing for Health Network, for example, via peer group meetings, and communicating upcoming funding opportunities and events on social media and the network email list.

Medium term (next 6-18 months)

- Facilitating more workshops like Workshop 3 to work together on identifying issues and solutions.

Long term (more than 18 months)

- Collating training opportunities in a Higher Education setting, including possibilities for accredited training in the future.
- Linking up singing leaders with researchers to carry out evaluation and offer training on evaluation.

This funding has allowed us deliver on goals we set out over a year ago, and that would not have been possible otherwise.

Next steps

We have key next steps for the network following the completion of this funding. We have grouped these into short, medium and long term:

Short Term (next 12 months):

- Identify bursaries to allow students to participate in the short course if they are not financially able to afford it.*
- Advertising and delivering the newly designed short course.*
- Continue to advertise other training opportunities to our network that are not covered by the new short course.*
- Providing ongoing support as part of Scotland's Singing for Health Network, for example, communicating upcoming funding opportunities and events on social media and the network email list.
- Further promote the work of singing for health groups across GP practices and primary care via the Scotland's Singing for Health website, flyers, posters, the banner at events we attend.

Medium Term (12-24 months)

- Reflect on feedback following the short course and adjust the content if necessary.*
- Continue discussions with organisations who already deliver peer support and mentoring opportunities and seek funding to develop our own initiatives.*
- Continuing to build links with medical schools to educate medical students. Including linking up with social prescription ambassadors in each medical school.

- Having a seat at the table in social prescription conversations.

Long term (24-36 months)

- Possibly developing further training opportunities such as another short course that focuses on new practitioners or developing modules for existing undergraduate programmes at the RCS.*
- Developing a Masters Programme in Creative Health.*
- Generating new research and compiling existing research into the cost-saving benefits of singing for health for the NHS.

Some of these goals were already identified in our previous funding stream and were not the focus of this project. However, we still feel it is important to list them here. Others are direct outcomes of the work from this project. These have been marked with a *.

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