

Song Birds is a community singing and wellbeing group which meets twice a week in Ulverston. Sessions are led by professional singer and musician Kirsten Taylor.

Kirsten studied commercial music at the University of Westminster and sang in dance, jazz, and pop groups and a gospel choir.

As well as Song Birds, Kirsten also runs regular Singing for the Brain sessions in Barrow for the Alzheimer's Society for people with dementia and their carers.



Why was your group founded?

Kirsten says: "Whilst studying Commercial Music at the University of Westminster I sang in a few groups (dance/ jazz/pop) and a gospel choir. I got so much energy from singing with others and loved the feeling. It stayed with me long after the singing/performing. I knew I wanted to bring this feeling to others. It brings such vitality to our wellbeing; socially, physically and mentally.

"Back in 2003, The Sage in Gateshead were running training and apprenticeships in Community Music that allowed me to practice in Cumbria and the northeast. I was then asked to lead Lanternhouse Voices in Ulverston and things led on from there."

What services does your organisation offer?

Kirsten says: "I love working with people, composing and improvising; and work in many settings, some therapeutic, some educational, some celebratory and some just for the fun.

"I've led singing sessions in woodlands, caves, schools (Early Years/Infant/Primary/Secondary/ Further Education), adult education, prison, women's groups, Children's Services/Looked After Children, family groups, MIND, Youth Music, Sing Up, residential homes for older people, for adults and children with Special Educational Needs - Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (SEN - PMLD) and training for teachers/ team building courses.

"Song Birds offers singing sessions to suit the participants - we can keep things simple and sing in unison or make it more challenging and sing in harmony/counterpart - and for the more confident singers, I run guided improvisations and circle singing (where we layer parts). My main aim is to bring people together and give them a voice using simple and accessible music in a relaxed way, making it as fun as possible."

How many people use your services every year?

Kirsten says: "At the moment, Song Birds probably has 70 regular participants across three groups. I can be commissioned to run singing sessions for any number of people from a handful to a hundred."



Feedback from participants:

"Wonderful teacher/leader/warm presence. Totally joyous and magical," Leah Cox.

"Singing with Song Birds is better than therapy!" S. J. C.

"It was a wonderful experience and I thank you so much. A couple of times I was so overwhelmed with being together like that I became too choked up to sing but still so enjoyed joining in and listening," Wendy Rowe.

"My Thursday morning hour is joyous and relaxing with singing that stretches my ears, my larynx and my comfort zone. Kirsten picks a good bag of songs. Good fun. Highly recommended," John Fox, MBE.

"I really cannot put into words the value of the sessions that you deliver to my guys. I know that my service users and staff team so look forward to the Wednesdays, and I love listening to you all when I am in the office," Carolyn Neville, Supervisor, Mill Lane Day Services.

"Song Birds vocal improvisation group is inspirational, fun and liberating. The sessions bring women together, helping them to find their voices in a playful and supportive environment. She is open and accepting towards all who attend her groups and has a unique ability to encourage those who lack self confidence to develop their creative skills and make positive connections with others. She has great creative integrity and is a skilled group facilitator," Marett Troostwyk.

"Kirsten is very popular with the Singing For The Brain group. Always willing to go the extra mile in researching a favourite song from the past mentioned by one of the group and delighting them by producing it at the next session. Very patient and kind, Kirsten is a pleasure to work with," Anne Reed, former Dementia Support Worker, Alzheimer's Society.

"That's the fastest hour of the week," Eric, Singing For The Brain group participant.

"Kirsten is sensitive to the needs of people with dementia and their carers and her group feels inclusive and everyone has an opportunity to share their views and participate in a way appropriate to them. Kirsten makes music fun and accessible to all, even those who may not have considered themselves to be particularly musical. She has an open and easy manner which encourages participation and puts people at ease," Tara Edwards, Services Manager (former) for North and West Cumbria's Alzheimer's Society.



Feedback from participants:

“When I hear the beautiful sounds that we make as a group I feel uplifted,” Louise Clegg.

“Song Birds welcomes anyone, whatever their ability and experience. Gradually, a new member can make friends. When we sing, overactive minds have space only for concentrating on singing so all other thoughts and worries can be put to one side,” Deborah Roberts.

“If you can't sing come along and Kirsten will prove you wrong. I've discovered I can sing, I can perform to a crowd and I do remember the words. Through warm-ups and introductions each week I've got a name. Go on risk it! All that can happen is you might have fun!” Julie Wilson.

Can you tell us about any future projects?

Kirsten says: “With the increased awareness of the holistic benefits of singing, I hope I will be able to offer more sessions in areas of health and wellbeing, and singing therapy - whether that is through the NHS or through SONG BIRDS sessions/commissions. I also want to find the time to write more music for my singing groups. I love writing for specific themes. Song Birds’ ‘Feel Good Singers’ have just started to sing at local events so we are open to offers if you’d like us to bring some community spirit to your event.”

Are there any opportunities to get involved?

Kirsten says: “There are two weekly singing sessions a week in Ulverston on a Thursday at 10.30am and a Monday at 7pm open to all abilities. New members are always welcome. I also run a regular Singing For The Brain session in Barrow for the Alzheimer’s Society for people with dementia and their carers.

“We also have YULE SING HOAD coming up in December where we get to experience singing inside the fantastic acoustics of The Sir John Barrow Monument. This event is on top of Hoad Hill so is only open to regular walkers. Space is very limited so booking is essential to take part. Contact: Kirsten Taylor, email: feelgoodsingers@outlook.com, Facebook: SONG BIRDS ULVERSTON, website: <https://songbirdsong.webs.com/>.”