



# The ParkinSings Choir

## Evaluation Report: Pilot (Jan-Apr 2025)



Photo by Chris Lloyd

**Author: Rosie Dow**



## Ti a Fi (You and Me)

*As sung by ParkinSings, by Bronwyn Lewis*

### Cymraeg

### English

Gwelaf nawr y machlud haul,  
Cerddwn ni am yn ail da'n gilydd  
Toddi calon ngalon i,  
Gwelaf ddyfodol gadarn i ni'n glir nawr

I see now in the sunset,  
Let's walk one by one together  
Drowning in the heart of my heart,  
I see a mighty future for us clearly now

Pan ddaw'n nôs cwympha'n ysgafn arna i.  
Dal yn dynn i'n nwylo i am ein hoes

When the night comes fall lightly on me  
Hold tight onto my hands for all our lives

Edrycha i fy llygaid i,  
Rho dy gariad llawn i mi,  
Dwi'n dy garu di ers oes

Look into my eyes  
Give your complete love to me  
I've loved you for an age

Ti a fi, ti a fi, ti a fi,  
Ti a fi, ti a fi, ti a fi.

You and me, you and me, you and me,  
You and me, you and me, you and me.

Brwydro nawr am amser maith,  
Ti a fi ar un daith dan gilydd  
Heb droi dy gefn arna i,  
Trwy pob peth arosaist ti yn ffyddlon

Fighting now for a long time,  
You and me on one journey together  
With you never turning your back on me  
Through everything you stayed faithful

Pan ddaw'n nôs cwympha'n ysgafn arna i.  
Dal yn dynn i'n nwylo i am ein hoes

When the night comes fall lightly on me  
Hold tight onto my hands for all our lives

Edrycha i fy llygaid i,  
Rho dy gariad llawn i mi,  
Dwi'n dy garu di ers oes

Look into my eyes  
Give your complete love to me  
I've loved you for an age

Ti a fi, ti a fi, ti a fi,  
Ti a fi, ti a fi, ti a fi.

You and me, you and me, you and me,  
You and me, you and me, you and me.

Rwy'n siwr mae ti yw's unig un,  
Sefaf gyda thi  
Dim ond ti a fi  
Wrth ddeffro i di wyneb di,  
Mae pob peth yn iawn,  
Mae fy nghalon yn llawn.

I'm sure that you're the only one  
I'll stand with you  
Just you and me  
To give me your face,  
Everything is fine,  
My heart is full.

Gwelaf nawr y machlud haul  
Cerddwn ni am yn ail da'n gilydd, o!

I see now in the sunset  
Let's walk together one by one, together. Oh!

Ti a fi, ti a fi, ti a fi,  
Ti a fi, ti a fi, ti a fi.

You and me, you and me, you and me,  
You and me, you and me, you and me.

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Funder	Arts Council of Wales

The team would like to thank all the choristers who took part, Hefin David MS, Jeremy Miles MS, colleagues at Parkinson's UK Cymru and Choirs for Good who supported the choir and the Arts Council of Wales for funding this pilot.

## Choirs for Good

**Choirs for Good** are a network of community wellbeing choirs, who exist to promote the importance and benefits of community singing, and the many wonderful ways that choirs can unite people and place. As part of their mission to contribute back to their local communities and realise the potential of choirs to support wider society, the organisation often partners with health charities and providers to offer specialist choirs for people affected by conditions. This work helps them learn more about the benefits of singing, complementing and connecting to their core network of 12 regular community wellbeing choirs in Wales and England. Through all this their core aim is to help people feel good and do good, for good.

[www.choirsforgood.com](http://www.choirsforgood.com)

## Parkinson's UK Cymru

**Parkinson's UK Cymru** is a charity that's here to support every Parkinson's journey, every step of the way. Their work includes running campaigns for better health and care, funding research into groundbreaking new treatments, and offering life-changing support services. The charity in Wales works closely with people affected by Parkinson's to develop a range of life-changing initiatives that support people's wellbeing in their own communities, and their wider network includes families, volunteers, campaigners, fundraisers, scientists, health and care workers united by one mission: improving life with Parkinson's.

[www.parkinsons.org.uk/about-us/parkinsons-uk-cymru](http://www.parkinsons.org.uk/about-us/parkinsons-uk-cymru)

## Arts Council of Wales

**Arts Council of Wales** is the official body that funds and develops the arts in Wales. Their vision is that the arts are part of the daily lives of the people of Wales, connecting people to each other, integral to their wellbeing, and inspiring people now and for generations to come. They distribute funds from Welsh Government and the National Lottery.

[www.arts.wales](http://www.arts.wales)

## Report author: Rosie Dow

Rosie Dow is a freelance consultant who helps organisations think about how they develop, support and sustain arts projects in health settings. Her work encompasses mentoring and coaching, strategy, income generation and data/evaluation. Before going freelance, Rosie set up and led several arts and health programmes and oversaw the 'HARP' innovation and funding programme for Nesta/Arts Council of Wales. She also led on engagement and policy for Prof Daisy Fancourt's Research Group at UCL and is a Board Director of the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance. Her evaluation clients have included Arts Council of Wales, NHS Charities Together, Global Cultural Districts Network, and Breathe Arts Health Research. She has an MA in Anthropology and Community Arts from Goldsmiths (2018) and an MSc module in Health Economics from Aberdeen University (2024).

[www.rosiedow.com](http://www.rosiedow.com)

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## Executive summary

- Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition with over 40 symptoms, including tremor, slowness of movement and muscle stiffness. There is currently no known cure, however it is known that staying active and maintaining social connections can help people with Parkinson's to mitigate the significant physical and emotional impacts of the condition.
- The ParkinSings pilot project was established in January 2025 as a partnership between Parkinson's UK Cymru and Choirs for Good, funded by Arts Council of Wales, to find out whether group singing could improve the perceived physical and mental wellbeing of people with Parkinson's and their support carers. 49 people joined the ParkinSings choirs in 3 locations across Wales, meeting fortnightly to rehearse for three months, before 35 choristers delivered a showcase performance at the Senedd in Cardiff on 1 Apr 2025, to mark the start of World Parkinson's Month.
- This light-touch evaluation focused on establishing whether and how the choir met the aims of the project around improved wellbeing and health for people affected by Parkinson's (people with a diagnosis and support carers). The main data collection method was surveys to choristers upon joining the choir and after three months, designed to measure their perceptions of changes in their mental and physical wellbeing, and ask how they thought the choir benefited them.
- Clear improvements were seen in people with Parkinson's' self-rated physical health (20% mean improvement) and voice control and vocal strength (24% mean improvement) after three months of singing. People with Parkinson's also overwhelmingly agreed that their vocal strength and voice control had improved since joining the choir (95% strongly agreed or somewhat agreed). These results are very encouraging in terms of establishing a link between choir singing and a sense of physical wellbeing for people with Parkinson's.
- For all choristers (people with Parkinson's and support carers), there was a 17% mean improvement in self-rated mental health and wellbeing across the three months, and 97% agreed or strongly agreed that their wellbeing, anxiety and depression had improved since joining the choir. People remarked that they had made new friends in the choir, gained confidence and skills, and that it had lifted their mood.
- 97% of choristers expressed a wish to continue singing in this choir, and all said they would be willing to make a financial contribution of between £2.50-£10.00 per rehearsal session, though additional funding from external sources would also be needed to sustain the choir.
- Although these early results are from a small group with no comparators, the positive trends and feedback here indicate that the choir is a valued, effective way of supporting people affected by Parkinson's and, crucially, that they themselves believe it to be so.
- The successful partnership between Choirs for Good and Parkinson's UK Cymru was built on a shared ethos of community building and improving wellbeing, where both partners had clear roles and brought specific and important expertise to the project. Key recommendations for the future include carefully considering how the choir can become financially sustainable long term, retaining clarity on partner roles and increasing chorister numbers.



# Introduction and background



## About Parkinson's

Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition. This means that it causes problems in the brain and gets worse over time. People with Parkinson's don't have enough of the chemical dopamine in their brain because some of the nerve cells that make it have stopped working. It was back in 1817 when James Parkinson's Essay on the *Shaking Palsy* was published that the first recognition of Parkinson's was marked as a distinct medical condition.

Around 153,000 people live with Parkinson's in the UK and around 8,300 people in Wales. There is currently no cure, and it's the fastest growing neurological condition in the world.

Symptoms start to appear when the brain can't make enough dopamine to control movement properly, and there are over 40 symptoms of Parkinson's. But the three main symptoms of Parkinson's are a tremor (shaking), slowness of movement and rigidity (muscle stiffness). Emotional and day-to-day impacts on people with Parkinson's and their carers can be very wide ranging, limiting people's confidence and ability to engage with activities that they enjoy and to socialise. Being active is especially important to help with symptom management, mood and emotional wellbeing.

## ParkinSings

One of the symptoms of Parkinson's is a weakening of vocal strength which can lead to a person's voice becoming quieter and difficulty enunciating words clearly. The ParkinSings project offered individuals with Parkinson's potential improvements in voice control and breathing, and along with their carers, the opportunity to experience the therapeutic benefits of community singing and overall mental and emotional well-being.

Over the course of three months, fortnightly group singing sessions were held in Bodelwyddan in North Wales, Newport in South Wales, and Aberaeron in Mid/West Wales. These culminated in an event at the Senedd Cymru in Cardiff Bay on 1 Apr 2025 where 35 members of the choir performed three songs, in three-part harmony, to an audience of Senedd members, staff and visitors. The event aimed to raise awareness of Parkinson's at the start of World Parkinson's Month and how the condition affects people living with it, as well as showcasing the health and wellbeing benefits of singing.

## The role (and evidence) of choirs for health and wellbeing

A growing evidence base points to many potential health and wellbeing benefits of engaging in music and singing. The *What Works Centre for Wellbeing* has concluded that there is 'strong' evidence that group singing helps older adults by enhancing morale, mental health, quality of life, and reducing isolation, anxiety and depression. They conclude that "there is a particularly strong case to support participatory music and singing programmes which can help to maintain wellbeing and prevent isolation, depression and mental ill health in older adult age groups."<sup>1</sup> This echoes large-scale,

longitudinal research into the links between health and arts engagement generally across the lifespan, which indicates that people who engage in the arts live longer, and live better both in terms of physical and mental health, and cognitive reserve<sup>2</sup>.

Indeed, group based social participation interventions, like choirs, are recommended by the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in their guidance on promoting the mental wellbeing and independence of older people. NICE recommend that these activities “take place at regular times and in a regular location, provide the opportunity to socialise and complement other activities that may support different aspects of older people's independence and mental wellbeing, such as their physical health, their sense of belonging to a community ('social connectedness') and their sense of purpose.”<sup>3</sup>, which fits the model of community choirs.

In terms of direct studies of choirs, a systematic review of wellbeing outcomes for music and singing reported that “there is reliable evidence for positive effects of music and singing on wellbeing in adults.”<sup>4</sup>, building on the raft of studies showing positive benefits of choirs and other music groups for people with a range of mental and physical health conditions. An economic evaluation of a community singing group also estimated that singing was 60% more cost effective than usual activities for older people, because whilst the singing group required additional investment, this was made ‘worthwhile’ and met NICE’s threshold because of the improved quality of life enjoyed by participants<sup>5</sup>.

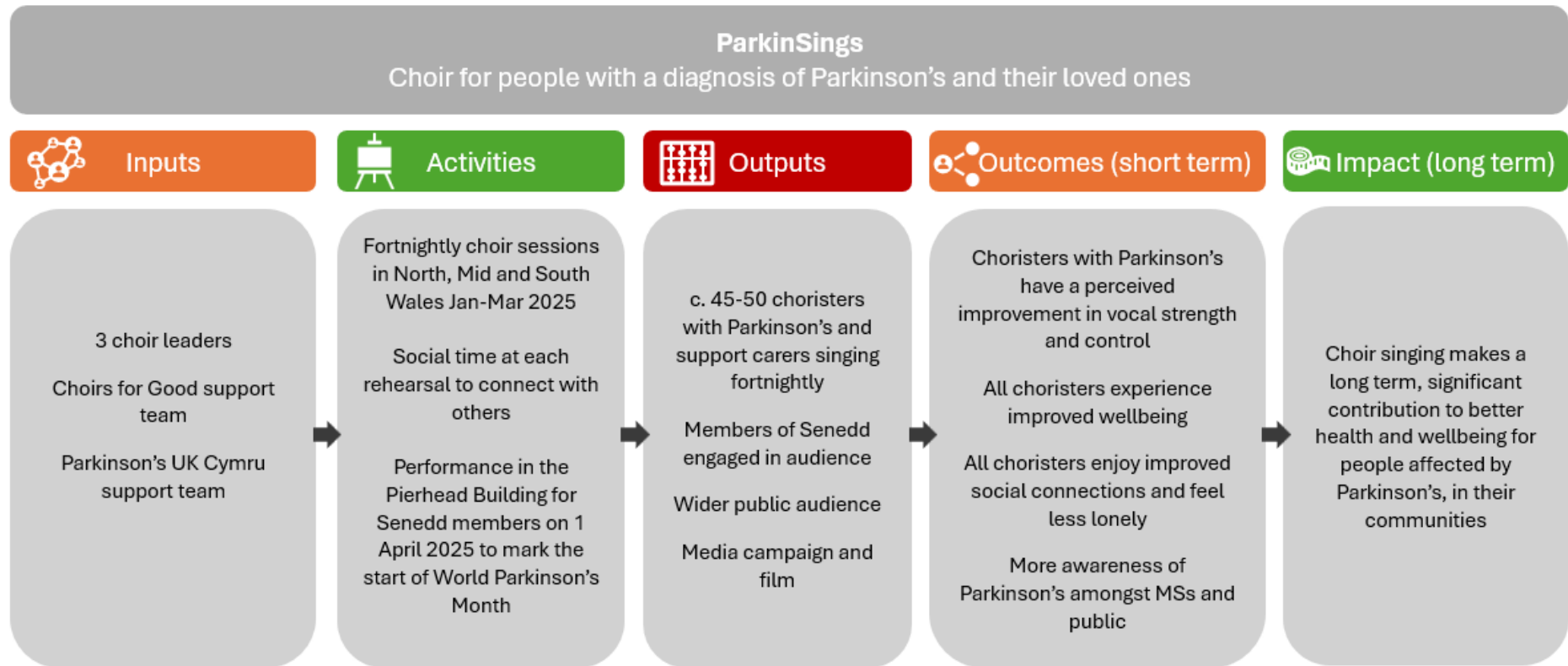
Studies that have looked at the effectiveness of singing for Parkinson’s have generally been preliminary and small-scale, though several have indicated that singing may help improve people’s quality of life<sup>6</sup>, as well as their voice<sup>7</sup> and respiratory strength<sup>8</sup>. It’s worth noting that most of these studies’ authors recommend that further research be conducted to achieve greater certainty around the benefits, since their sample sizes were small, and the studies were all uncontrolled (meaning they didn’t use a comparator/control group to compare improvements to). However, early indications are positive, and worthy of further investigation.



Photo by Chris Lloyd

## Theory of Change: *ParkinSings*

The theory of change below is intended to show how the project's activities link directly to the short and long term impact on choristers.





## Evaluation approach and methodology



The main purpose of this evaluation was to measure to what extent the project met its aims, and whether the impacts and outcomes noted in the Theory of Change did, in fact, take place. To do this we took a light touch, **mixed methods approach**, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection as follows:

1. A survey offered to all choristers (people with a diagnosis and their support carers) upon joining the choir, which asked them to rate their own mental health and wellbeing on a Likert scale (1-5) and asked open questions about the impact of Parkinson's on their lives and what they most hoped to get out of the choir. Additionally, in this survey people with a diagnosis of Parkinson's were asked to rate their physical health and their voice control and vocal strength on a Likert scale (1-5). Their answers gave us a valuable baseline from which to assess any improvements or benefits they might experience from the choir, as well as helping us decide on what aspects to measure in the follow up evaluation.
2. A survey offered to all choristers after the three months of singing, asking people with Parkinson's and support carers to again rate their own mental health and wellbeing (1-5), and asking people with Parkinson's to rate their physical health and vocal control and strength (1-5). Additionally, this second survey asked to what extent all choristers believed the ParkinSings choir helped their anxiety, depression and wellbeing and enabled them to learn a new skill, and people with Parkinson's were asked to what extent they believed the choir had helped their vocal control and voice strength. Questions were also included about whether participants would be willing to make a financial contribution to the choir and how much that might be. Finally, they were asked open questions about what they considered to be the best things about the choir experience, and recommendations for the future.
3. A focus group of choir leaders, Parkinson's UK Cymru staff and Choirs for Good staff to share findings from the participant questionnaires, explore the process of delivering the pilot project and consider recommendations for the future.

### Responses

- Survey respondents at beginning of project = **49** participants from **3** choirs
- Survey respondents at end of project = **35** participants from **3** choirs
- Matched responses (i.e. participants who completed surveys both at the beginning and end of the project) = **29** participants from 3 choirs



North Wales ParkinSings choir rehearsal - Photo by Chris Lloyd



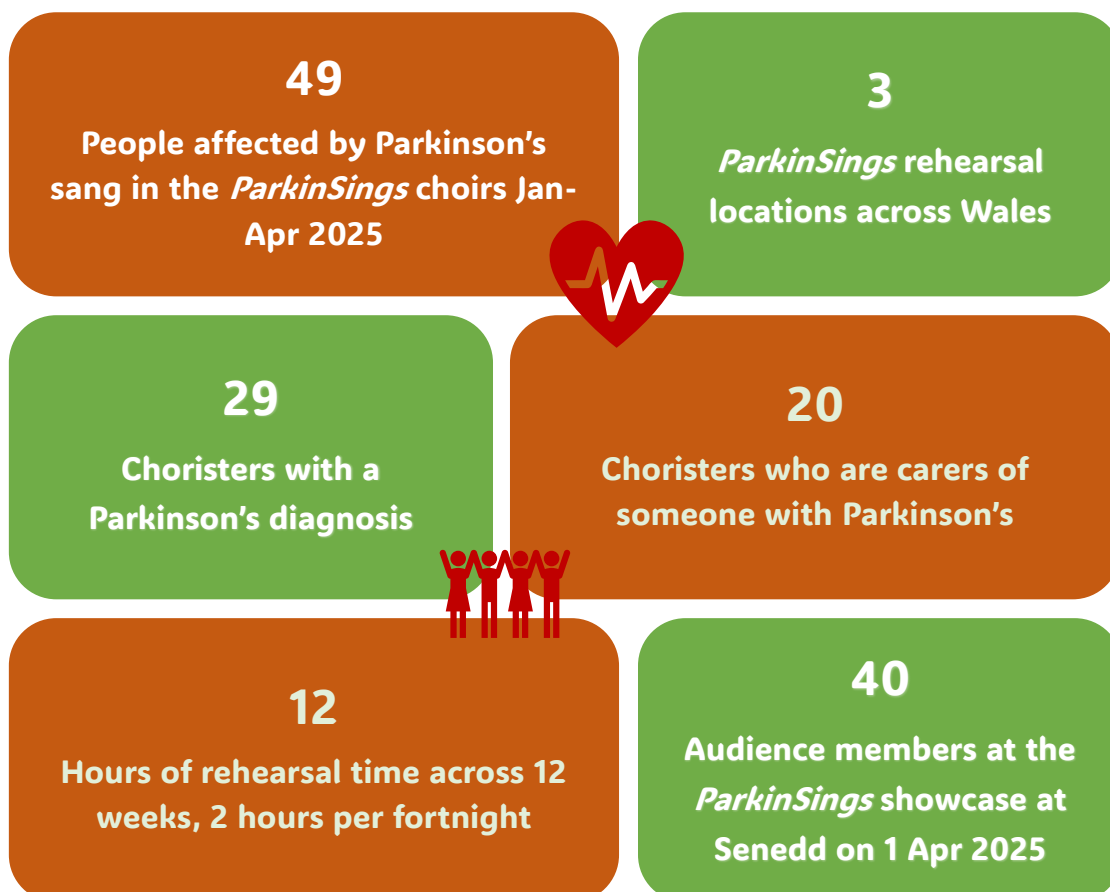
South Wales ParkinSings choir rehearsal - Photo by Chris Lloyd

## Findings



### Reach, scope, and audiences

The following shows the scope and scale of the project and its reach.



## Impact on participants

To measure the impact of the project on choristers' mental health and wellbeing, they were asked to complete surveys at the beginning and end of their participation.

In the first questionnaire upon joining the choir, all choristers were asked to say whether Parkinson's had led to certain impacts for them. From a pre-determined list, choristers selected which applied to them.

- 82% of respondents selected at least one of the impacts suggested.
- The most common answer was 'more anxiety or depression', selected by 59% of choristers, followed by 'staying at home more' (49%).
- Less common were loneliness (12%) and stopping work (16%), which is perhaps due to this being an older, retired population overall.

Rank	Impact	Yes	%
1	More anxiety or depression	29	59%
2	Staying at home more	24	49%
3	Seeing friends less	18	37%
4	Stopping leisure activities	10	20%
5	Seeing family less	10	20%
6	No impacts	9	18%
7	Stopping or reducing work	8	16%
8	Loneliness or isolation	6	12%

We also asked people what they hoped to get out of being in the choir. Things people mentioned were:

1. Socialising or making new friends (15 respondents)
2. To help voice or breathing (15 respondents)
3. Enjoyment (8 respondents)
4. To help improve mood or wellbeing (7 respondents)
5. Learning a skill or improving confidence (5 respondents)
6. Supporting a partner (4 respondents)
7. Getting out of the house (3 respondents)

These answers informed the questions in the follow-up questionnaire, which choristers completed after three months of singing. In addition to repeating the questions asking them to self-rate their mental and physical health and vocal strength, we asked choristers to what extent they believed the

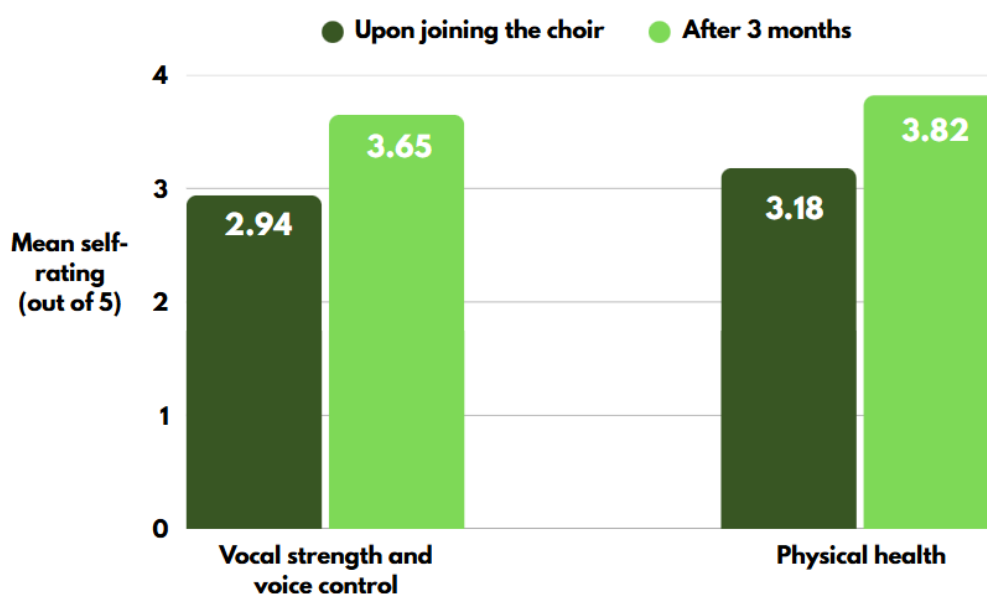
choir had helped with the things they told us were most important to them: their anxiety and depression, their vocal strength and their social connections.

## Changes in physical health, voice control and vocal strength

17 choristers with a diagnosis of Parkinson's rated their physical health and vocal strength and voice control on a scale of 1-5, both before singing and after three months in the choir (note: support carers were not asked to complete this question). Their scores were aggregated and the mean scores compared.

There was an average **24% improvement** in choristers with Parkinson's' self-rated **vocal strength and voice control** from a mean score of 2.94 out of 5 before singing to 3.65 after three months in the choir for the same group of people with Parkinson's. One respondent noted a deterioration in voice during this period, nine said there was no change, and seven noted an improvement.

### Choristers' self-rated physical health scores before and after singing in ParkinSings (people with Parkinson's, n=17)



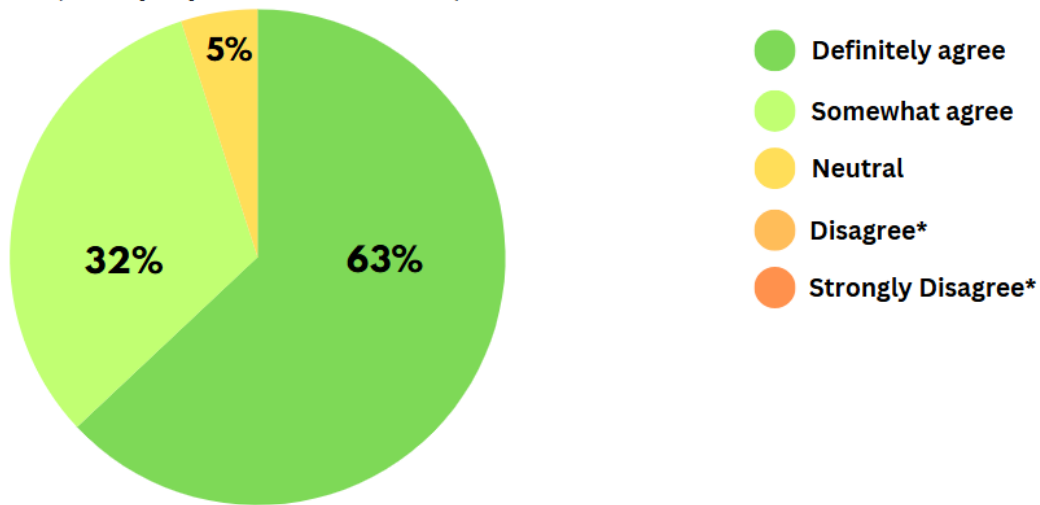
Choristers with Parkinson's' perception of whether the choir had helped their voice also was very positive: **95% (n= 18 of 19) agreed** that the choir helped **their voice control and vocal strength**; 63% (n=12 of 19) selected 'definitely agree'.

In terms of general physical health, there was an average **20% improvement** in choristers with Parkinson's' self-rated **physical health** from a mean score of 3.18 out of 5 before singing to 3.82 after three months in the choir for the same group of people with Parkinson's. One respondent noted a



deterioration in physical health during this period, eight said there was no change, and eight noted an improvement.

**To what extent do you agree that the choir helped your vocal strength and voice control? (n= 17 people with Parkinson's)**



*\*Zero responses for categories 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree'.*

Whilst not a clinically objective measure, these results indicate that singing in the choir improved, or at least maintained, people with Parkinson's *perceptions* of their physical health and vocal strength. This is important because it relates to self-efficacy - an individual's own belief in their ability to successfully complete a task or achieve a goal, which we know is an important factor in quality of life for people with Parkinson's<sup>ix</sup>

*"Helped me overcome some of my Parkinson's problems. Helped my voice."- Chorister*

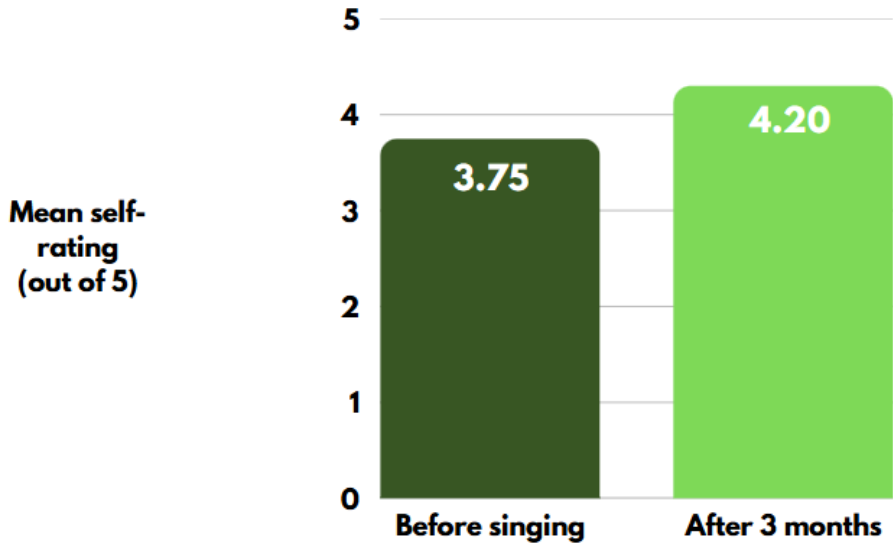
*"We can still participate rather than spectate" – Chorister*

## Changes in mental health and wellbeing

29 choristers (people with Parkinson's and carers) rated their own mental health and wellbeing on a scale of 1-5 both before singing and after three months in the choir. Their self-rated scores were aggregated and the mean scores compared.

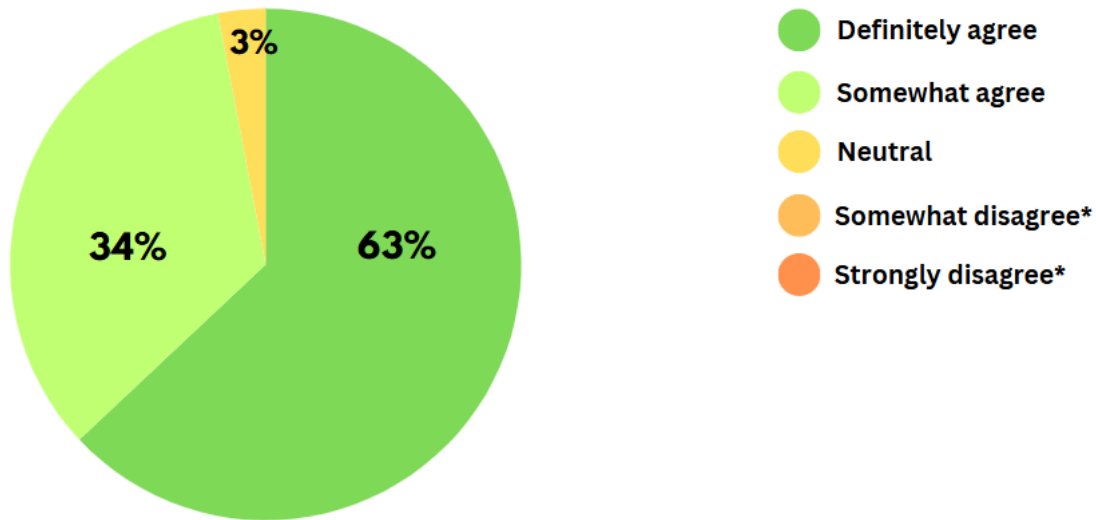
There was an average **15% improvement** in choristers' self-rated **mental health and wellbeing** from a mean score of 3.75 out of 5 before singing to 4.30 after three months in the choir for the same group of respondents:

**Choristers’ self-rated mental health and wellbeing before and after singing in ParkinSings (people with Parkinson’s and carers, n=29)**



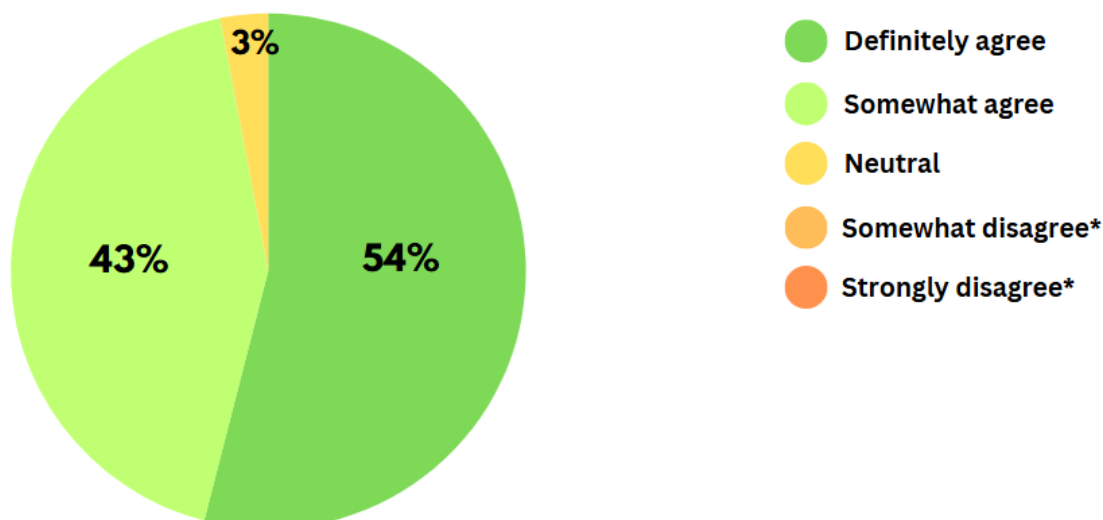
97% of respondents (34 of 35) agreed that their wellbeing had improved since joining *ParkinSings*, and 97% (34 of 35) agreed that they were less anxious and depressed.

**To what extent do you agree that your wellbeing has improved since joining the choir? (n=35 people with Parkinson’s and carers)**



*\*Zero responses for categories ‘Somewhat disagree’ or ‘Strongly disagree’.*

**To what extent do you agree that you are less anxious and depressed since joining the choir? (n=35 people with Parkinson's and carers)**



*\*Zero responses for categories 'Somewhat disagree' or 'Strongly disagree'.*

This is important because both people with Parkinson's and carers told us that anxiety and depression were the most common impacts of Parkinson's, and this was also the area that choristers were hoping that the choir would help most with. In that respect, the choir has met its aims as a project, but it has also met the aims of the choristers with respect to their own mental health and wellbeing.

In terms of why these improvements might be happening, in the open-text answers respondents reported that the choir helped them to **socialise** and **make new friends**. It also **lifted their mood** by creating a **fun, enjoyable experience**. Several choristers remarked on the fact that the choir **was tailored to the needs of people with Parkinson's**, which ensured a positive experience that was **accessible** for them.

*"[The best thing about the choir was that it was] personalised for people with PD. "Feel good" with like-minded people... Making new friends." - Chorister*

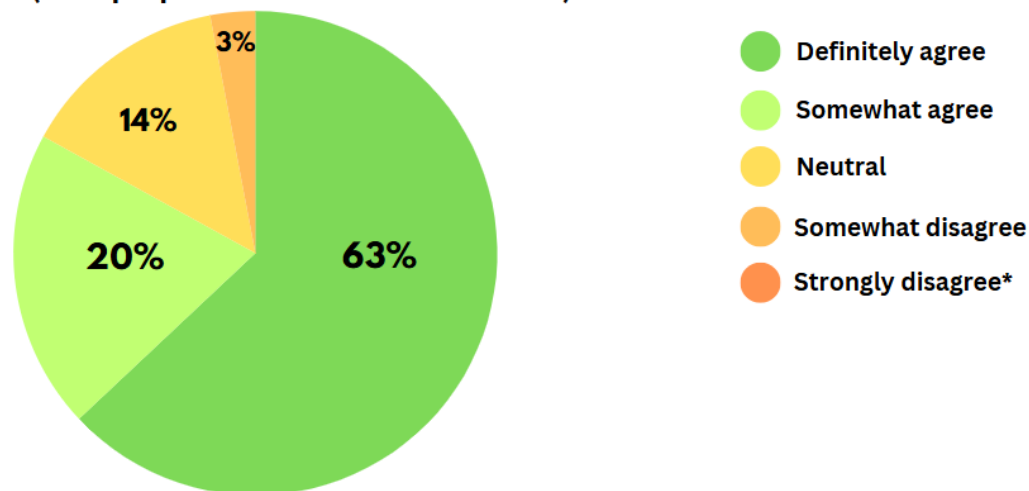
*"Being part of a community of people who understand. Realisation that we can still participate rather than spectate." – Chorister*

*"Being able to meet other carers and swap notes and top tips. Seeing my husband feel normal because he is with other [people with Parkinson's]." – Chorister*

## Learning a new skill

83% of respondents (29 of 35) agreed that they had **learned a new skill** since joining *ParkinSings*.

**To what extent do you agree that you have learned a new skill since joining the choir? (n=35 people with Parkinson's and carers)**



*\*Zero responses for 'Strongly Disagree'.*

The presence of more neutral responses may be because a few choristers had **previous singing or choral singing experience**, although the results were still overwhelmingly positive. Many commented on the **excellence and skill of the choir leaders**. Several said the choir gave them a **sense of achievement** and helped their **confidence**.

*"Achieved something I never thought I was capable of." - Chorister*

*"Tiffany [the choir leader] is an absolute force of nature, encouraging everyone to just go for it. I have never even contemplated joining a choir, I thought I couldn't sing. Tiffany has provided a safe space to sing, and I have loved every minute!" - Chorister*

*"People with Parkinson's are used to hearing and reading about Parkinson's; we are used to encouragement and reassurance (thank you Parkinson's UK Cymru) and for those who can even join in the various activities created for us. It's all part of the process of waiting and hoping*

*'But [this] was unique: a group of us came together and created, from nothing, something wonderful with the only instrument that we can all play - to a greater or lesser extent - our voices. Of course, it was all organised and orchestrated for us (thanks as before, plus to Choirs For Good) but for once we were empowered and WE DID IT!'" - Chorister*

## Chorister perspectives



### Angela Llewellyn - Mid Wales choir



“Taking part in community and arts-based initiatives certainly helps with my Parkinson’s journey. Not only do these activities get me out of the house and provide an opportunity to socialise, they also help with my symptoms. Taking part in the ParkinSings choir helps with my breathing and control of my voice. My husband comes along too, and he really enjoys it - it’s something we can do together. I haven’t been in a choir since school so it’s great to have the opportunity to sing again. My favourite songs that we’re doing are the Welsh language ‘Ti a Fi’ by Bronwen Lewis and ‘Here Comes The Sun’ by The Beatles although both are quite challenging. My husband and I often go to see concerts and musicals in Cardiff and beyond so now it’s our turn to be on the stage. Super exciting but slightly daunting. In some ways Parkinson’s has opened new doors for me and I intend to live life to the full and enjoy all these new experiences.”

### Peter Baston - North Wales choir



“I love music, hence my interest in the community singing project between Parkinson’s UK Cymru and Choirs For Good - it’s right up my street. My wife comes along as well so it’s nice to do something together. I used to play the guitar, but I can’t play anymore due to Parkinson’s. So now my voice is my instrument and singing is my passion. I find music helps a lot - I’m sure even just listening improves my dopamine levels. I’m a fan of folk music and one of my favourite songs is Tryweryn by Meic Stevens.”



### Julie Evans - South Wales choir



"I enjoy taking part in a range of activities. I have enjoyed the choir immensely and it makes me feel happy and [gives me] the confidence to do something I wouldn't normally try. Singing is new to me, and I love doing the song 'Ti a Fi' as my grandchildren all attend Welsh language schools. But it's definitely the most difficult song to sing."

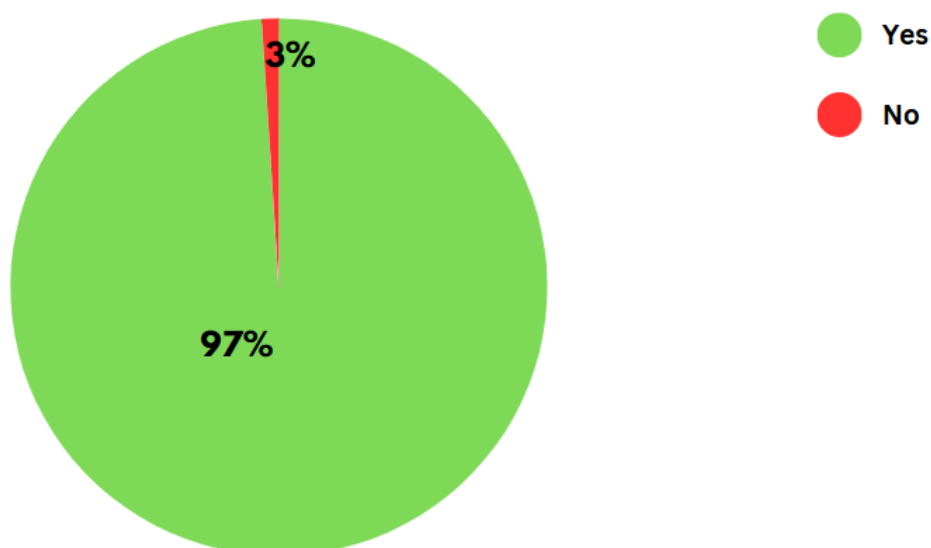


ParkinSings Mid Wales choir rehearsal, photo by Chris Lloyd

## Choristers' intention to continue singing in a choir

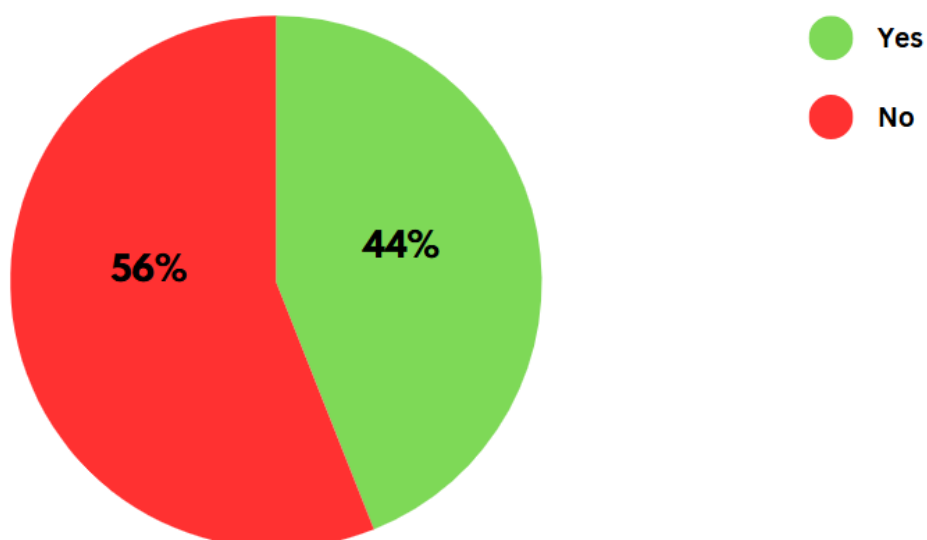
To help with future planning, all choristers were asked whether they would like to remain in the ParkinSings choir if it continued after the initial pilot period. An overwhelming majority of respondents, **97% (33 of 34)** said **yes, they would want to continue** singing in this choir.

**Would you want to continue singing in the ParkinSings choir if it continues after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025? (n=34 people with Parkinson's and carers)**



When asked about singing in a different choir, i.e. not the ParkinSings choir, responses were more mixed, with **only 44% saying yes**.

**If the ParkinSings choir doesn't continue, would you join another choir after this? (n=34 people with Parkinson's and carers)**



This may be linked to the fact that lots of people considered the tailoring of the choir to people with Parkinson's was an important factor for them, and/or to the other logistical elements of the rehearsals such as them being held in the afternoons, when most choirs meet in the evenings.

## Financial considerations and choir member contributions

With so many choir members expressing a wish to continue singing in the choir, we asked whether they would be prepared to make a financial contribution towards the running of the choir. **100% of respondents (n=33 of 33 who responded) said they would be prepared to pay.**

When asked to suggest an amount they would be willing to pay per rehearsal. Suggestions ranged from £2.50 per session to £10 per session, with the mean being **£5.41 per session**. With an average attendance of 40 choir members per rehearsal, that would raise **£216.55 per session** towards the choir's running costs.

The cost of running the ParkinSings pilot project was **£15,600 for three months**, including the choir leader fees, venue hire, materials, equipment, promotional materials, project management and evaluation. Over the same period, had the choir members been contributing financially at the level the suggested they would have generated **£1,516 (£216.55 x 7 sessions)**, around **10% of the project's costs**.

This indicates that whilst choir member payments or donations could make a worthwhile contribution to the ongoing choir costs, subsidies in the form of grants or sponsorship would also need to be sought. Increasing membership numbers would also be a priority.

This is not unusual for pilot projects of this kind, which require a high level of logistical and pastoral input to make the experience safe, accessible and high quality for a particular group, especially during the set up phase. The choir also ran over three locations, which increased choir leader costs. Over time these costs may decline as the group becomes more established, and membership levels (and therefore payments) may increase to cover a greater proportion of these costs.

## Practical and partner reflections

Key reflections from choir leaders, Parkinson's UK Cymru and Choirs for Good staff were:

- The choir leaders' experience working with non-singers and building their confidence was crucial. They ran the sessions in a similar way to how they would with other community choirs, only making adjustments (for example, slowing down the learning pace) if the choristers asked them to. The choir leaders noted that their focus was more on what the choristers *could* do, and not on what they couldn't do, and they built up the duration and complexity of vocal warmups and teaching over the first few sessions.
- This approach was particularly successful in terms of helping build choristers' self-belief in their ability to sing: one choir leader noted that the choristers thanked her for "not treating them like they had Parkinson's for once".

*"If 100 [per cent] is what we're aiming for, let's start there, and then together find out [what the choristers can do]... I'm going to treat you as people who want to give the best performance that you're capable of"* - Tom, Choir Leader

*"Instead of 'loud' and 'strong' [to describe the voice] I used words like 'forward' and 'share' "* - Lesley, Choir Leader

*"We never spoke about Parkinson's in the sessions... it was about the singing and we just talked about other things."* - Tiffany, Choir Leader

*"It's interesting to hear the choir leaders say that they just engaged with this choir the way they would with any other, because [the choristers] have really valued being pushed. People often don't get pushed when they have Parkinson's."* - Wendy, Parkinson's UK Cymru

- At the request of the choristers with Parkinson's, choir leaders gave the choristers vocal and breathing exercises to use at home, as well as making the learning materials available for home use, which they reflected may also have helped with people's vocal strength and voice control.
- The three songs were carefully chosen to create a dynamic performance, to be accessible to new singers, and to reflect the message of the choir. The commitment to do a third of the repertoire in Welsh led to the selection of 'Ti a Fi', a ballad by Bronwen Lewis; some choristers were initially resistant to singing in Welsh if they weren't Welsh speakers, but the Welsh speakers were particularly pleased to sing in their own language in the Senedd. Parkinson's UK Cymru staff observed that this reflects common differences in feeling towards the Welsh language in Wales.
- Parkinson's UK Cymru staff observed that the choir sessions stood apart from their usual support activities in their ability to boost people's mood. They also reflected on the friendships formed because of choristers travelling together as a group to Cardiff for the Senedd performance, and the informal conversations and mutual support that happened as a result.

*“A couple of weeks ago I went to visit a group, and a chorister shared a poem she had written about the experience... it’s been enormous, huge. All our groups are wonderful, but this has been something else. And the way they sounded [at the performance] surpassed all our expectations” - Wendy, Parkinson’s UK Cymru*

- The performance was also felt to be an important factor in the choir’s success, enabling choristers to feel a great sense of achievement and for them to be seen and heard. Choir leaders reflected that the performance helped people form a new sense of identity, by being seen as singers and performers and not just people with Parkinson’s and support carers.
- Positive feedback was also received by Parkinson’s UK Cymru staff from choristers about the fact that the choir gave couples where one of them is caring for the other the opportunity to do something ‘side by side’. A couple in North Wales remarked that the choir helped their relationship.
- Choirs for Good’s expertise in leading choirs and Parkinson’s UK Cymru’s knowledge and connections within the Parkinson’s community were felt to be a strong combination for this project. Parkinson’s UK Cymru helped with logistics, recruitment and ongoing support, and organised training for the choir leaders about how the condition might affect choristers. Choirs for Good organised the music, facilitated the sessions and put the performance together; they also managed the budget, funding application / reporting and evaluation.
- The organisations’ shared purpose and ethos around bringing people together and improving wellbeing made the partnership a natural and easy one. Both partners deeply appreciated and valued the skills, knowledge and expertise offered by the other partner in the programme and believed that the partnership was crucial to the project’s success and choristers’ positive experiences. Choir leaders also felt well supported by both Choirs for Good and Parkinson’s UK Cymru.

*“I have to congratulate all three of the choir leaders, because the spirit of those sessions has resonated so beautifully with the people who participated. We’ve known some of the choristers for years and years and they talk to us really honestly, and there hasn’t been a bad word said about this project. ” - Wendy, Parkinson’s UK Cymru*

*“It’s very unusual for us to come up with an idea and find an expert partner who can really deliver on that idea, but Choirs for Good did that.” - Rebecca, Parkinson’s UK Cymru*

*“Thank you [to Parkinson’s UK Cymru] for trusting us with your idea and your people. There’s a lot of skill involved in facilitating these choirs; it looks easy, but it isn’t. You allowed us to do it in our way, which was a wonderful thing for us.” - Ruth, Choirs for Good*



# Recommendations



## Recommendations from choristers

- Carefully consider locations and travelling time. Weekly or fortnightly rehearsals in the afternoon seem to work best for this group (not in the evenings as people with Parkinson's tend to get very tired).
- Some choristers asked for a greater variety of genres of songs, including Welsh language songs.
- For choristers with prior musical experience, some expressed the desire to be able to use a musical score to help them learn the songs more easily.

## Recommendations from partners

- Given choristers' and partners' clear wish to continue the choir, the partnership needs to consider the best possible routes to achieve long term sustainability, including funding, evaluation, 'ownership' of the choir, communications and day-to-day running. This should be done in conjunction with the Parkinson's community.
- In view of choristers' indicating that their willingness to contribute financially, partners believe Choirs for Good's fee-paying structure of £16.99 a month for its general community choirs could be applied here, adapted as necessary for the number of sessions held, and with options for lower income choristers. Travel costs for performances could also be partly met by choristers if they are happy to pay.

## Recommendations for evaluations of future similar projects

- Future similar work would benefit from **more qualitative data collection from choristers**, which would help the team to understand some of the quantitative data and recommendations better and lend more depth to the assumptions and analysis herein. Given people with Parkinson's' difficulties in writing, interviews and focus groups would prove especially illuminating.
- Given the financial aspects of these findings, future evaluations should also explore **models for sustainability and opportunities for fundraising** as well as looking at operational considerations like recruitment and project management.
- Robustly measuring the impact of the choir on participants' wellbeing will always be challenging given how subjective wellbeing is as a concept, however it could be worth attempting to measure participants' wellbeing before and after participation using **validated wellbeing scales**, which could still be adapted to suit the needs of participants and the

project. This might allow the evaluation team to measure attributable change rather than just gathering retrospective feedback. If Parkinson's UK were able to help recruit a control group of people who did not wish to, or were not able to, participate in the choir over the same period, that would strengthen results further.

- **Involving an academic research team** who can do the above and build on the findings of this evaluation to measure change and report results in peer-reviewed journals may help to further boost the credibility of the work, especially in terms of its health and wellbeing impacts. They could also explore economic measures such as cost-effectiveness, healthcare utilisation and social return on investment, and apply for funding for these kinds of studies.
- All this should be grounded in good **coproduction** principles, which means involving a range of people affected by Parkinson's in the design of the next stage of the evaluation to inform methods, questions and areas for exploration.

## Call to action for policy makers and funders

This project has emphasised the vital role that creative activities like choral singing can and must play in the lives of people affected by health conditions, in their own communities.

Indeed, with the physical limitations and anxiety that accompany conditions like Parkinson's the arts have a unique and irreplaceable position in these people's lives, and must be supported, maintained and invested in if we want to help people live well with long-term health conditions and prevent deterioration.

We therefore call for a long-term strategic vision by the Welsh Government to properly fund cultural and sports sectors so partners can continue to offer a wider range of activities in the community. Despite the recent announcement by the Welsh Government to provide a £4.4m annual top-up for the arts, it needs to be more than a sticking plaster and long-term guarantees are now required.

A Senedd Committee report, launched earlier this year, highlighted that after a decade of cuts Wales now ranks third from bottom of European countries in terms of spending per person on recreational and sporting services and second from bottom for cultural services. Wales has £69.68 spending per person for cultural services compared with the UK's £91.12 spending per person. In this challenging financial climate, of course funding the NHS is vital, however it's also important to carefully consider the health and wellbeing benefits of arts and sports and recognise their important place as part of the overall management of living with chronic conditions such as Parkinson's.

## Conclusion



This evaluation indicates that the ParkinSings choir shows much promise as an acceptable, enjoyable and effective way of supporting people with Parkinson's and their carers. This project offered a tailored, safe and high-quality experience that delivered the benefits that people affected by Parkinson's most want: social connections with people who understand their situation, the chance to learn a new skill and gain confidence from that, and improvements to their mental and physical wellbeing. ParkinSings also provided choristers with a sense of fun and light-heartedness that many said was important to them, and an opportunity for partners to do something positive together.

The project also benefited from a strong partnership between Choirs for Good and Parkinson's UK Cymru, both of whom contributed important, specific and complimentary expertise to this project but also worked with a clear, shared purpose and ethos around community building and improving wellbeing. This partnership was crucial to the success of the project and will remain so as the project progresses into the future.

Finally, this evaluation indicated that nearly all the people who took part in the pilot wanted the choir to continue, largely in its current form, and would be prepared to support the choir financially to make that happen. Since the costs to continue the choir would likely outweigh the contributions choir members are able to make, and it's important to protect the accessibility and equity of the choir offer to members, subsidies will need to be sought.

These findings both connect to, and reflect, the broad evidence base around how beneficial choir singing can be for people affected by long-term health conditions, and they underline the vital importance of developing and protecting community-based creative activities for people's mental and physical wellbeing. The hope is that the positive indicators and feedback in this report may support the project team to secure more, and long-term, funding to continue offering the ParkinSings choir to anyone who needs it.

**Rosie Dow**  
**May 2025**

## Appendix: Infographic Summary

### \*Impact on choristers:



**97% agreed that their wellbeing had improved since joining the choir**



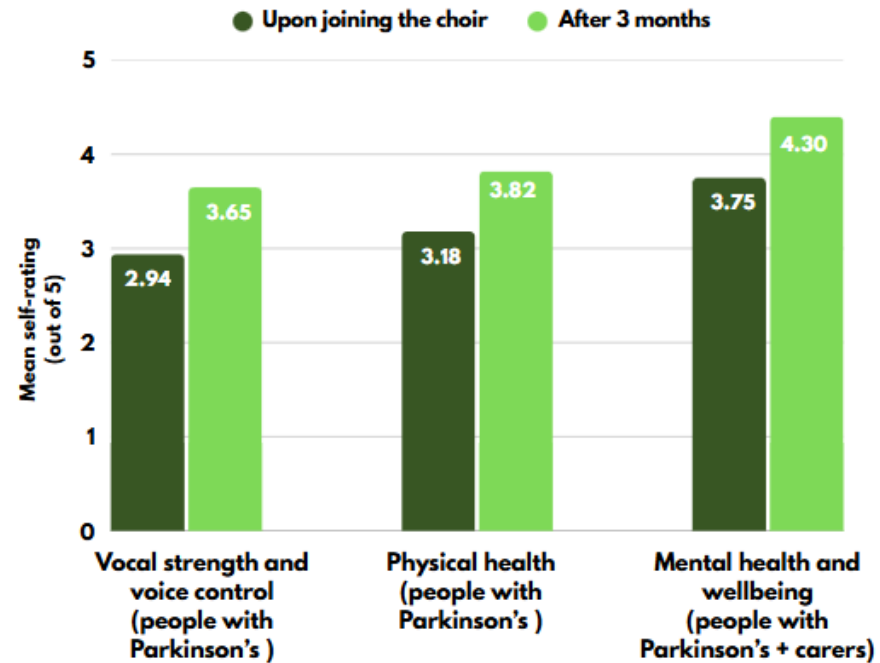
**97% agreed that they are less anxious and depressed since joining the choir**



**83% agreed that they had learned a new skill**



**95% of people with Parkinson's agreed that the choir had helped vocal strength & voice control**



## References

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- <sup>1</sup> [What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2016.](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [UCL, 2023](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [NICE, 2015](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [Daykin et al, 2017](#)
- <sup>5</sup> [Coulton et al, 2018](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [Yoon Irons et al, 2019](#)
- <sup>7</sup> [Tanner et al, 2015](#)
- <sup>8</sup> [Stegemoller et al, 2016](#)
- <sup>ix</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13548506.2022.2058032>