



an inclusive choir for those living with dementia

Thursdays with *Alchemy Chorus*: 'turning music into gold' (and more gold)

Alchemy: a blending of ingredients to produce something valuable

The therapeutic power of music is well known and in recent years, its value for those living with dementia has become apparent. Canberra's *Alchemy Chorus* has taken things a step further. Founded in 2016, by Brian Triglone and based on the Giving Voice Chorus in Minnesota, USA, *Alchemy Chorus* caters for people living with a mild to moderate level of dementia, and their carers.

One of our carers commented that once dementia strikes, couples tend to withdraw from normal social activities. The choir gives them the opportunity not just to get out but also, to do something normal and purposeful:

"I don't remember the last time my husband smiled before he came to the choir"

"Thursday is the best day of the week"

“When things get really tough at home, I think of Thursday and that helps me through”.

“This choir means the world to us.”

For two hours on Thursday mornings up to 90 people gather to share their love of music and singing. The range of music varies but tends to reflect the sort of music our members would have related to in their early adulthood and includes songs from musicals, Beatles songs, Australian songs, Irish, Scottish, American, gospel and folk songs. We add about two new songs each week and currently have a repertoire of 75 plus to choose from.

We often use some simple three part harmonies, canon type arrangements and rounds with piano, guitar and double bass accompaniment.

There are some beautiful voices among those with dementia and they are able to inject deep feeling into their singing despite the otherwise solemn demeanour which can be characteristic of those with dementia. Many a tear has been shed by those hearing it and the pride of their carer is palpable.

Alchemy Chorus is more than singing; members love the social interaction that the choir offers. Thursdays provide a morning of ‘glorious ordinariness.’ After an hour of singing we have a morning tea break and this is clearly a highlight of the morning.

And *Alchemy Chorus* is not just a community sing-along. Performance is a vital part of the choir. It gives us a goal and further validates the members. Our performances are always moving for both the choristers and the audience and they lend structure to our practices, lifting them from the sing-along category to the working choir category. *Alchemy Chorus* has given four public performances since its foundation in 2016 and more are scheduled for this year.

Special events have included a visit from Keith Potger (The Seekers) and at the end of each term we have an in-house entertainment morning, with members performing solo.

The contribution of our volunteers is invaluable. In addition to helping with the logistical arrangements of the choir, they also add some structure to the singing and help people with their parts. Volunteers comprise around 20% of the total membership of about 95.

One of our initiatives has been to introduce a 5-10 minute session each week when one couple gives a potted history of their lives. Once again, this is aimed at validating people living with dementia and their carers, whose contributions to society, like those of the aged generally, are often unacknowledged or forgotten. These life stories have become a highlight of our practices.

We have had extensive coverage in Australia on TV, radio and in the press. One clip of the Alchemy Chorus can be seen here:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-01/australia-wide-3-june/8580374>

Our website is currently under construction at: <https://alchemychorus.com>

And there's more gold...*Alchemy Chorus* director Brian Triglone is keen to expand this valuable community activity and establish additional choirs based on this model in larger regional centres.

If this is something you are interested in, contact Brian at:

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