

What are the Benefits and Challenges of Music Groups and Choirs for People with Aphasia?

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Introduction

Aphasia is a **communication difficulty** that often follows stroke. People with aphasia can have various communication difficulties, but the most common problem is some difficulty with spoken production.

People who struggle with speech production sometimes present greater fluency when singing familiar songs or melodies. Therefore, group singing is sometimes recommended as a therapy intervention or rehabilitative activity for people with aphasia.

Aims & Methodology

This project sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the **challenges and benefits** for people with aphasia participating in **music groups and choirs**?
2. **How do music group leaders support** individuals to **take part and communicate**?
3. Are there **specific challenges** associated with **online groups**?

This study gathered information from four sources:

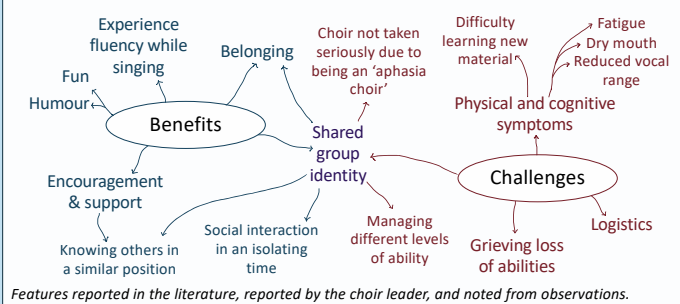
1. A **literature review** of the reported benefits and challenges of aphasia choirs
2. **Analysis of the zoom recordings** from a music interest group
3. An **interview** with a local **aphasia choir leader**
4. **Observation** of the rehearsal sessions of a local **aphasia choir**

Background

This study relied heavily on the involvement of two local music groups for people with aphasia: the **North East Trust for Aphasia (NETA) music group** and the **Magenta Singers, from Sage Gateshead**. NETA is a charity who run a range of special interest support groups for people with aphasia, including this one centered around music, which includes singing and quizzes. The Magenta Singers is a choir for people with aphasia. They meet to sing and share music together. Both groups are run by Kerry Green, a musician and Speech and Language Therapy Assistant.

Neither of these groups claim to provide speech, language or music therapy.

What are the Benefits and Challenges?



How can the Challenges be Overcome?

The methods used to facilitate participation in the singing group were often specific to the online or in-person context. The following methods have been reported by the choir leader and noted from observations.

Facilitating Participation for Participants in an Aphasia Choir

In-Person	Both Settings	Online (Zoom)
Ensure lyric sheets are ≤1 page	Use individual's names to direct speech toward them	Assist participants with internet and zoom setup
Face towards those who lip read	Encourage singers to drink water	Avoid noise pollution from adjacent areas of people's houses
Point / gesture towards people when talking to or about them	Use large fonts for lyric sheets	Limit group size to 6-8 people so that everyone can be seen at once on gallery view
	Adapt accompaniments to the speed of a soloist	Use 'share screen' to share lyrics
	Know the participants well	Ensure a backup technology for accompaniment
	Use a whiteboard for writing key words	Ensure microphones are muted when needed
	Be open to chaos	Encourage everyone to use gallery view

Specific challenges of the online setting relate to **general technical literacy**: navigating **zoom**, managing **multiple sound sources** and adapting to the **lag**.

Conclusions: Main points

- Participation in music and singing groups can have broad and positive impact on a person's wellbeing and personal identity.
- There are many barriers to carrying out these groups effectively, but a large portion of these can be mitigated through a wide range of adaptations.
- There are some difficulties of aphasia music groups which are difficult to circumvent, such as managing grief caused by loss of previous abilities and managing the wide range of abilities present among the group members.
- Running an aphasia music group or choir online presents additional challenges to those that take place in-person.

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