

WELLER VOICES

PROPOSAL FOR ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY CHOIR

BASED IN LOWER CAVERSHAM

BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSAL

The Earley charity, a local funding charity, wished to invest in the Amersham Road Estate, one of the most deprived areas in Greater Reading and, after research and consultation, decided that the simplest pro-active way of doing so was to take over the management of the community centre on the estate for a period of 30 years. The Earley Charity has committed to funding the salaries of a group of staff, including a community learning manager, a youth work co-ordinator, an early years practitioner, a premises manager, and caretaking staff. Reading Borough Council, the landlord, also contributes to some costs.

In addition to extensive financial deprivation, the estate, which is the home of some 800 families, regularly experiences social difficulties ranging from drug crime to knife stabbings. Educational levels are low and literacy cannot be assumed. Activities at the centre include a community fridge, smoking cessation clinics and other health and welfare support; weekly financial advice sessions; mother and toddler groups; jacket potato lunches and special events for Older Residents. The centre also runs a schools uniform bank and revision sessions for youngsters sitting exams. It offers free sanitary products, maternity support groups, toe nail cutting and hair dressing services. It runs craft, Hip Hop and Irish dancing classes as well as cycle safety courses. It is regularly used by the Social Prescribers based in the various local surgeries. The Centre is used for prayer meetings by both Christian and Muslim believers. The Weller Centre basketball club is run by the Reading Rockets and a football club is being set up for girls and boys between the ages of 7 to 16.

However, one proposal which has been mentioned several times by residents but not been acted on so far is establishing a community choir. Neither the residents, the staff team nor the Earley Charity trustees have any experience of promoting and running a community choir. Our idea, therefore, is to ask an established choir to act as a mentor to the proposed community choir for a pilot period of two years. This is where we hope Parenthesis might come in.

WHAT THE CENTRE WOULD BE SEEKING FROM ITS PARTNER CHOIR

The partner choir would act as a host organisation for the financial management of the budget offered by the Earley Charity, paying the music director's fees and other costs. The Earley Charity budget would be paid in annual tranches. Use of the money would be accounted for in short reports submitted to the Earley Charity once every six months. It is emphasised that these 6 monthly reports are simple to fill and submit.

We would hope that the partner choir would also be willing to contribute to the more general musical direction of the community choir, and give support to the music director.

From the outset, we would need to agree not to fear failure or be despondent if things are slow to work out. This is in the nature of things on the estate.

The key features of the proposal (all of which are open to discussion) are as follows:

Table 1: Structure and parameters of the choir

1.1	Name	<i>Weller Voices</i> is a Work-in-Progress suggestion. There is a feeling that 'choir' might be seen as too formal and perhaps intimidating, at least to begin with.
1.2	Objective	To encourage people on the Amersham Road Estate and in Lower Caversham to sing together, meeting in a safe environment
1.3	Coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key organisational stakeholders would be: Parenthesis, the Weller Centre, the Lower Caversham Community Partnership and St John's Gosbrook Road. The Earley Charity will provide the core funding • Any individual can join. The choir is not reserved for residents of the estate. • There will not be any age specification, however, as the choir will meet after 19:30 in the evening, there is an assumption that young children will not attend • There is no requirement to be able to read music
1.4	Venues	The main venue for rehearsals will be the Weller Centre. Penny Cuthbert, incumbent at St John's, has also offered the use of the church when the centre is not available or for concerts
1.5	Time and frequency of rehearsals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either Tuesday or Thursday evenings from 19:30 to 20:45 • School term-time only • There may be additional summer schools, but these would be standalone projects, planned and funded separately
1.6	Length of project	Initially for 2 years. Could be extended or renewed if successful

Table 2: Budget assumptions

2.1	Core budget	The Earley Charity will provide core funding of £8,000 for the project. (From the Douglas Chilvers Music Fund administered by the Earley Charity)
2.2	Venues	Negligible -- the rehearsals at the Weller Centre itself would be free, and St John's would charge £20 per hour for heating and electricity
2.3	Insurance	The Weller Centre's public liability insurance would cover all meetings at the Centre itself. The Centre is asking its insurers about cover for rehearsals/meetings/concerts outside the centre [assumed to be covered, as the insurance covers other off-site activities such as the children's football club]
2.4	Photocopying and administrative matters	The Weller Centre has a commercial standard copying machine and the copying would be free to the choir; cost of other

		incidentals to be agreed on a case by case basis. It is hoped that the Weller Centre will be able to recruit a volunteer to assist with the administrative tasks
2.5	Copyright/intellectual property rights	Out of the core budget incidentals. Based on the figures mentioned by Parenthesis, budget for £100 per year
2.6	Accompanist(s)	We would intend to apply for one or two internships from the Careers and Placement service at the University of Reading. (The internships there are also funded by the Earley Charity)
2.7	Music Director	The major item of expenditure would be the director's fee, which would be just roughly £1,000 a term to cover weekly sessions, in school term time and any preparation time. A model budget for this item of expenditure might be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October-December: £1,000 • January-March: £1,000 • April-June: £1,000 • July-September: £500
2.8	Budget summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £3,500 Music Director's fee • £500 incidentals • Separate internship funding for accompanist • In kind: venue costs at Weller Centre, insurance, copying, advertising, administrative support

Table 3: Roles of Parenthesis, the Earley Charity, the Weller Centre and St John's

3.1	Parenthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor the Weller Voices, working with WV Music Director • Manage the project funding, releasing it as appropriate over the two years • Call project review meetings (quarterly?) as appropriate • Liaise with Earley charity, submitting 6 monthly reports, based on WV Music Director's information
3.2	Earley Charity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide core funding • Provide lead trustee liaison (Deborah Jenkins)
3.3	Weller Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide main venue • Advertise the choir and its concerts on the estate and in Caversham • Identify volunteer to assist with administrative tasks <p>NB: still investigating sound system available at the centre</p>
3.4	St John's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide venue on an occasional basis • Advertise the choir and its concerts in its catchment area