# Aphasia Choirs Go Global: Individual and Collaborative Journeys Towards an Interprofessional Online Community of Practice

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### Review

This Community Voices article received an open review.

## Abstract

Aphasia Choirs Go Global is an international, Facebook group for directors and facilitators of choirs for stroke survivors with aphasia (loss of language after stroke or brain trauma) and others with neurogenic communication difficulties. Efforts to contact aphasia choirs throughout the world, through online searches and a digital survey, have led to closer international connections and the development of an international, interprofessional community of practice. Our network has seen an increase in online activity during the COVID-19 pandemic, with Zoom meet-ups, presentations, and choir to choir connections. This article outlines the three authors’ individual professional journeys as choir leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand, California, and Australia, together with reflections on the purpose, development, and activities of our international network.

## Introduction

Quality of life is better if you sing,

Surrounded by friends and all the love they bring;

Singing cheers you up, it’s a positive thing…

(Talmage et al., 2013, p. 48)

Aphasia Choirs Go Global (ACGG) is an international, interprofessional network of aphasia choir leaders. This network was formed by two speech pathologists with a shared interest in aphasia choirs – Ellen Bernstein-Ellis in California, USA, and Bronwen Jones in Melbourne, Australia. Ellen and Bron met in 2012 through an online introduction by Ellayne Ganzfried, then Executive Director of the (US) National Aphasia Association. New Zealand music therapist Alison Talmage met Bron at an Australian music therapy conference in Melbourne in 2013. Bron and Ellen’s efforts to contact aphasia choirs throughout the world, through online searches and a digital survey, have led to closer international connections and the development of an international, interprofessional community of practice.

The co-authors of this article, Alison, Ellen, and Bron, share a passion for supporting people living with aphasia to find their voices again through singing. The purpose of writing this article is to document the history of early collaboration by aphasia choir and neuro choir[[1]](#footnote-1) facilitators, to share the story of ACGG, and to examine the benefits and outcomes of this endeavour. We begin with an overview of aphasia choirs, followed by descriptions of our individual professional journeys, the impact of our meetings, and the development and activities of the ACGG network. We emphasise that this article predominantly represents our own experiences, and we warmly acknowledge the many ACGG members and their endeavours with their own choirs.

## What is an Aphasia Choir?

Aphasia is the chronic (long-term) loss or impairment of receptive and/or expressive language and reading and writing abilities, typically caused by a stroke or other brain trauma (Brady et al., 2016). People with aphasia are intelligent, competent individuals who retain the ability to think and make decisions. Having aphasia can be devastating and lead to a loss of confidence, result in depression, and/or negatively affect life roles and relationships (Berg, et al., 2020; Meyerson, 2019; Simmons-Mackie, 2018).

Many aphasia choirs have been formed across the world by people from varied professional backgrounds – predominantly speech-language therapists/pathologists (SLTs, SLPs or SPs)[[2]](#footnote-2), music therapists[[3]](#footnote-3), and community musicians (Jones et al., 2013; Sing Aphasia, 2021b; Talmage & Purdy, 2021). Practice-based tips for establishing a choir have been published by several choir leaders, including those from Aphasia Voices, UK (Cook & Richards, 2019). CeleBRation Choir, New Zealand (Talmage et al. 2013), and Sing Aphasia, NJ, USA (2021d).

Choirs and singing groups are known to promote wellbeing in both well and frail seniors (Cohen et al., 2006; Creech et al., 2013; Johnson, et al. 2018; Johnson et al, 2020). Singing - particularly in groups or choirs - has emerged as a creative, life participation approach for people living with aphasia (Holland and Elman, 2020). Choirs offer an enjoyable means to foster wellbeing, resiliency, and social connectedness, and to decrease loneliness (Bernstein-Ellis, 2018; Fogg-Rogers, et al., 2016; Good et al., 2020; Jenkins et al., 2017; Mantie-Kozlowski, et al., 2018; Tamplin et al., 2013; Zumbansen et al., 2016). Baker et al. (2018) identified participation in aphasia choirs as a potential evidenced based treatment for Level 1 of Stepped Care[[4]](#footnote-4) for depression for individuals with aphasia. Younger stroke survivors in the CeleBRation Choir also reported positive experience of choir participation (Christian, 2016; Johnston, 2019).

Singing may also help people with aphasia to maximise and improve their communication abilities, both confidence and speech and language recovery, but further research is needed (Cano Fox et al., 2017, 2018; Dingle et al., 2019; Good et al.; 2020; Kim, 2018; Thompson et al., 2016). Singing has long been identified as a relatively preserved skill in individuals with non-fluent aphasia (Racette et al., 2006). In addition, there is growing neuroimaging evidence of widespread, bilateral, cortical and subcortical overlapping neural correlates of music and language (Monroe et al. 2020; Patel, 2010; Tomaino, 2010). Singing-based language recovery has been premised on a “rewiring” of the brain, and recruiting right hemisphere regions to take over the tasks of damaged left-hemisphere language areas (Schlaug et al., 2008). However, Stahl and Kotz (2014) suggested that, rather than rewiring, singing success depends on both the slower tempo of singing, compared with speech, and an existing right-hemisphere role in producing “formulaic” language (including familiar song lyrics). Rather than a narrow, impairment-based approach, aphasia and neuro choirs address participants’ language recovery within the holistic, strengths-based, socially embedded philosophies of life participation approaches (Holland & Elman, 2021) and community music therapy (Ansdell, 2002; O’Grady & McFerran, 2007; Wood, 2006).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Currently, an international trial of choir singing for people with aphasia is underway, based at the University of Helsinki (National Library of Medicine (US), 2018). The Canadian SingWell project,[[6]](#footnote-6) based at the University of Ryerson, is also undertaking a large-scale international study. Adopting a sociobiological framework, this research will examine the impact of choir participation on people with communication disorders, including aphasia. (Good et al., 2020). Alison’s current PhD study also focuses on professional practice with people who are living with aphasia and other neurogenic communication difficulties in mixed neuro choirs (Talmage, 2020a). These new endeavours will be critical contributors to building a strong evidence base for the value and impact of aphasia and neuro choirs.

In summary, choirs are now an acknowledged therapy option for people with aphasia, and an expanding field for researchers around the world. Each ACGG choir director, choir, and choir member articulates their own priorities, in terms of a social focus and language recovery goals. Our individual journeys and professional interactions encourage us both to learn from others and to contribute our own perspectives, experiences, and aspirations.

## Our Individual and Collective Professional Journeys

We begin by telling our own stories of arrival, connection, and collaboration in this shared professional space. The parallel development of our choirs, our individual and interweaving paths, and the growth of the ACGG network is documented in the Appendix. We highlight collaboration within our own communities, performance opportunities, consultation by other potential choir leaders, and a steadily expanding international network.

#### Alison:

I am a New Zealand trained music therapist, now focusing mainly on older adults with acquired neurological conditions. I am Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent), but I live and work in a culturally diverse city, and welcome choir participants from all backgrounds. I have worked with the CeleBRation Choir at the Centre for Brain Research (CBR) since our 2009 launch, including a job-share arrangement with Shari Storie RMTh (2012-2017). In 2017 I also founded Sing Up Rodney (now governed by a Trust[[7]](#footnote-7)) that broadly follows the same framework.

Our neuro choir approach integrates community music therapy practices (Wood, 2016) with knowledge from neuroscience and speech science, and as such shares many principles of the Life Participation Approach to Aphasia (LPAA) (Chapey et al., 2000; Holland & Elman, 2021). Participant voices are central to our approach. Choir members value the contribution they make to the community, and to CBR research and dissemination. The 2020 New Zealand Documentary Edge Film Festival selected our short film, telling the stories of three CeleBRation Choir members - Sing, They All Said, Just Sing (Chadha, 2019; University of Auckland, 2020b). Sing Up Rodney has been highlighted by a participant in a digital research project for people living with dementia (Te Arai Research Group, 2019; Williams, 2019).

Our CBR multidisciplinary research, led by Professor Suzanne Purdy, has included music therapists, speech scientists, qualitative researchers, and students, completed a successful feasibility study, and investigated quality of life for choir participants (Jenkins et al., 2017), the role of rhythm for language recovery in aphasia (Thompson et al., 2016), volunteer experiences (Lindo, 2019; Tan, 2019), practicum experiences (Gordon, 2019), and interprofessional perspectives on neuro choir practice and research (Talmage & Purdy, 2021). I am further developing my choir approach through an action research PhD study, which has included an unanticipated shift into telehealth services during COVID-19 lockdowns (Pellegrino, 2020; Talmage, 2021; Talmage, Clulee et al., 2020; 2021; Talmage et al., 2020) and an exploration of songwriting (Talmage, 2021, 2022).

#### Ellen:

I am an SLP who worked (2009-2020) as Director of the Aphasia Treatment Program (ATP) in the Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences Department at Cal State East Bay (CSUEB), a public university in California, USA.[[8]](#footnote-8) I now serve as Program Specialist and Clinical Supervisor.. My involvement in aphasia group therapy started early during my student training at the VA Medical Center in Martinez, California, under the direction of Dr Robert Wertz (SLP). However, my experience with smaller conversation groups and life participation approaches (Chapey et al., 2000; Holland & Elman, 2021) goes back to the early 1990s, while working with Dr Roberta Elman (SLP) at Easter Seals Rehabilitation Center in Oakland, California. I first observed engagement in singing by individuals with aphasia during an informal holiday singalong group at Easter Seals, led by experienced singer and SLP colleague, Robin Jasiulek. When contemplating alternative service delivery models, Dr Elman and I were fortunate to visit Dr Aura Kagan (SLP) at the Aphasia Institute in Toronto, Canada, where we were inspired by their conversation-focused groups as well as their other life participation groups that included art and music. After working as the primary clinician on Dr Elman’s research investigating the efficacy of group treatment (Elman & Bernstein-Ellis, 1999), the Aphasia Center of California was launched in 1996. I led LPAA-based conversation groups and book clubs for over ten years (Bernstein-Ellis & Elman, 2006, 2007). I joined CSUEB as a clinical supervisor in 2008 and became ATP Director in 2009. Founded by Dr Jan Avent, ATP has a 25-year history of providing group therapy focused on improving communication (Avent 1997, 2004) and embraces an LPAA model.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Noting a high level of interest in our aphasia groups whenever we discussed music, I decided to offer a choir for ATP members in my first quarter as ATP Director. Carole Pound and colleagues (2000) suggest that offering direct participation in the cultural arts promotes the principles of social inclusion. I found early support for involving individuals with aphasia in singing groups in the aphasia friendly posts created by the Aphasia Institute music therapist, Linda Dessau (Dessau, 2006). We started with about 10 ATP members who sang under the clinical leadership of graduate student Michelle Lussier (Bernstein-Ellis et al., 2010).

In the ensuing 11 years, the choir has grown to approximately 35 members and continues to be led by musically talented graduate SLP students. It has provided an excellent training ground for teaching students how to “manage thinking about the intersection between communication and life participation” (Glista & Pollens, 2008, p. 355). We implement communication techniques that promote participation using the principles of Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (SCA) (Kagan et al., 2001). The members proudly wear their Aphasia Tones polo shirts and we incorporate aphasia awareness education into our performances. Noting evolving choir practices and goals, Madison Cano Fox and I began studying the experience of long-term participation in aphasia choirs (Cano Fox, et al., 2017, 2018). During COVID-19, we transitioned to an online choir (Birdee et al., 2021, Bernstein-Ellis et al., 2020).

#### Bron:

I am a speech pathologist (SP) and currently work at Scope Australia[[10]](#footnote-10) in Melbourne. My previous role as a community therapist working systemically with organisations, local communities, and individuals, promoting awareness and inclusion for people with severe communication difficulties, was part of a statewide speech pathology network, the Communication Access Network (CAN). At a local meeting in December 2008, stroke survivor Wendy Lyons proposed starting a choir, highlighting that people with aphasia often retain singing ability and that this impacts positively on stroke survivors and their families. A partnership with a local council was formed and after enlisting an experienced research team and gaining funding, a two-year research project to investigate the effects of participation in an aphasia choir began. Stroke a Chord began in May 2010. The research process did not disrupt the choir members’ own priorities of having fun and socialising with others with similar stories. Tamplin et al. (2013) reported findings about the positive effect of singing on mood and social engagement.

Stroke a Chord attracted publicity through the high profile launches of a documentary film, Stroke a Chord: A Story of Stroke Survivors who can Sing but Cannot Speak (Barton, 2012) and a book of personal stories, titled Voices (Spoor, 2011), as well as print and TV media stories, and performances at conferences, events, annual concerts, and mainstream performances such as For Those Who Rock at the Arts Centre Melbourne. This publicity gave them a platform for education about stroke and aphasia, the rights of people with communication difficulty, and strategies for community inclusion.

Choir roles ranged from responding to performance requests, aphasia advocacy events, ensuring aphasia friendly communications, fundraising, event planning, media, supporting volunteers and speech pathology students and being the referral point for new members. Opportunities for active participation included supporting choir members in public speaking, committee roles, and posting on the choir Facebook page. My role also included sharing information and resources with developing choirs around Victoria, Australia and even in Wales. The UK choir “Strike a Chord” was formed by Lucy Thomas, a Welsh speech pathologist, who volunteered with the choir whilst visiting Australia. Team members (including our music therapists, talented volunteer musicians, and committee members) not only brought specialised skills and unique talents to the choir, they also supported these roles.

#### Alison, Ellen, and Bron:

Our individual journeys, as aphasia/neuro choir leaders, illustrate the interprofessional nature of this field of practice and the emphasis on collaborative action. The next steps towards a global community followed Ellen and Bron’s meeting, and their curiosity about other aphasia choirs.

## A Meeting of Minds

#### Ellen and Bron:

During a 2012 visit to Australia, Ellayne Ganzfried (Executive Director, US National Aphasia Association, NAA) learned about the Stroke a Chord choir. That spring, she advocated for an Aphasia Tones performance at the California Speech-Language Hearing Association (CSHA) state conference, where she was a keynote speaker. Her match-making via email was the beginning of this ACGG collaboration.

At our first Skype meeting (November 2012), we quickly discovered that many of our rehearsal strategies and philosophies were alike, as were our numerous questions about running an aphasia choir. Despite the challenge of international time zones, we enthusiastically continued these discussions, bonding over the similarities and differences between our two groups. We marvelled that neither of us had yet engaged in an in-depth exchange with another aphasia choir leader. We were curious about the existence of other aphasia choirs and the possibility of starting other conversations. We knew about the CeleBRation Choir in New Zealand and we particularly wanted to know more about how other choirs were measuring the impact and value of participation.

#### Alison:

My connection with Bron began through brief meetings at the Australian music therapy conferences in Melbourne (2010, 2013, 2016) and developed through two visits to the Stroke A Chord Choir, a brief meeting with two Stroke a Chord members at the Aphasia New Zealand conference (2015), and Bron’s New Zealand visit (2016). A collegial relationship also grew with Christie Cula-Reid RMT (Stroke A Chord leader, 2016-2021). To date, I have only met Ellen online through the ACGG network, particularly since we introduced online meet-ups in 2020.

## Extending our Network through an International Survey

#### Ellen and Bron:

Our initial vision for this group was to promote the sharing of ideas and experiences and to support each other’s research and clinical endeavours. During our Skype discussions, we had both noted that we were receiving multiple inquiries about how to start an aphasia choir. We began wondering how to best build a collegial international community of individuals interested in leading aphasia choirs. Since we found no formal directory of aphasia choirs, we began building a list through internet searches and professional contacts and identified about 12 choirs around the world. Through online searches, we built a list of 40 different international contacts that included aphasia choirs, aphasia organisations, and aphasia programmes.

We conducted a digital survey (Jones et al., 2013) investigating these choirs’ origins, current operations, and outcome measures, collaborating with SLP researchers, Dr Nidhi Mahendra (then at CSU East Bay, now San Jose State University) and Dr Miranda Rose (La Trobe University, Melbourne). We hoped that making contact with other aphasia choirs would generate the interest and momentum for launching a community forum, which we began referring to as Aphasia Choirs Go Global (ACGG). Our 2013 digital, English language survey, with 44 quantitative and qualitative questions, was granted ethics approval by California State University East Bay Institutional Review Board. The survey invitation was distributed to all on our list, and we received 15 responses from five countries, a response rate of 37.5% of our contacts at that time (Table 1).

The key findings of the survey were:

* Most aphasia choirs were relatively new, with the exception of the Netherlands[[11]](#footnote-11) which reported an extensive history and about 35 aphasia choirs;
* Music therapists and speech-language therapists/ pathologists were the most frequent collaborators;
* Common reasons for starting an aphasia choir included member interest in singing and music, improving life participation, and being inspired by other aphasia choirs;
* Few of the choirs had established protocols for measuring outcomes;
* Anecdotally, many respondents reported benefits such as improved social connection, life enjoyment, confidence, and enhanced aphasia awareness and advocacy; a few mentioned improvements in speech and language-related skills;
* Comparison of choirs revealed more similarities than differences in terms of purpose, staffing, adaptations, rehearsal strategies, performances, and perceived benefits and challenges; and
* Many of the identified challenges involved logistical difficulties, such as limited space, funding, staff, and member recruitment.

We shared these results in a poster presentation at the 2013 American Speech-Language-Hearing Association conference (Jones et al., 2013). Gillian Velmer’s multilingual survey reached further choirs (Velmer, 2014a, 2014b), and the network continues to grow.

Table 1

International Aphasia Choir Survey Respondents (Jones et al., 2013)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year Started | Choir | Location | Affiliation | No. of Participants |
| Pre-2000 | Afasiekoor De Vrolijke Noot  (The Happy Note) | Hoorn, Netherlands | Aphasia Association | 10-15 |
| 2009 | Adler’s Inspirations | Maywood, NJ, USA | Aphasia Centre | 10-15 |
|  | Aphasia Tones | Hayward, CA, USA | University | 21-25 |
|  | CeleBRation Choir | Auckland, New Zealand | Private initiative | >30 |
| 2010 | Afasiekoor Myosotis | Kampen, Netherlands | Rehabilitation Centre | N/A |
|  | Stroke a Chord Choir\* | Melbourne, Victoria, Australia | Council / Community | 26-30 |
| 2011 | Retune Choir | Adelaide, SA, Australia | Council / community | 10-15 |
| 2012 | Afasiekoor Drenthe | Norg, Drenthe, Netherlands | Private initiative | 10-15 |
| Cantabrainers Choir | Christchurch, New Zealand | University | >30 |
| Keystrokes | Oakland, CA, USA | Aphasia Centre | 16-20 |
| Lubbock | Lubbock, TX, USA | University | 10-15 |
| RIC Aphasia Chorus | Chicago, IL, USA | Hospital | 16-20 |
| 2013 | Afasiekoor Utrecht | Utrecht, Netherlands | Aphasia Centre | 16-20 |
|  | Siyathemba Singers | Pretoria, South Africa | University | 10-15 |
|  | Stroke a Note Choir | Geelong, Victoria, Australia | Council / community | 10-15 |

*Table note:*

\* Stroke a Chord partnership was formed in 2008, but the choir launched in 2010.

## Aphasia Choirs Go Global: Evolution of the Facebook Group

### Developing an Online Presence

#### Ellen and Bron:

Following this survey, we contacted survey respondents who had expressed an interest in the forum, and asked about their preferred social media platforms. In early 2014 we piloted a Google+ group; by 2016 Facebook had become more acceptable for professional networking, and Lucy Thomas (Strike a Chord, Wales) helped us transition to our current private Facebook group.[[12]](#footnote-12)12 We made a conscious decision to provide a forum for choir leaders, rather than choir participants or the general public. We wanted to offer a safe place to share our experiences, address challenging issues, and problem solve choir directors’ concerns. To promote engaged, experience-based discussions, we asked that members be actively involved with a choir.

Contemporary telecommunications and social media have enabled us to build a community of support across different time zones and locations through synchronous and asynchronous interactions. These connections have been particularly valued during the COVID-19 pandemic, with extended or intermittent periods of lockdown in many countries. Facebook metrics showed that, at the time of writing, the ACGG group has 105 members, 67 of whom have been active in the past month (May, 2021). Common Facebook interactions included sharing photos and choir information, celebrating concerts, events and recordings; recommending resources, and supporting new choir directors.

### Zoom Meet-Ups

#### Alison, Ellen, and Bron:

In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered our work as aphasia/neuro choir leaders. In common with other professionals, many choir leaders embraced Zoom and developed online choir programmes. ACGG also ventured into the world of video conferencing, as a means of enriching our connections and sharing strategies for successful choir leading online. Informal meetings and discussions further increased our sense of connection across the world, particularly during this challenging period. Where possible, these meetings are video recorded and shared with the group, with any confidential material deleted. Conversations can continue collectively in the Facebook group and privately between individual members who have shared interests.

More formal presentations have also given group members and invited speakers an opportunity to share their approaches to practice and research. In May 2020 Christie Cula-Reid RMT (then with Stroke A Chord Choir) and Emma Richards SLT (Voices of Aphasia[[13]](#footnote-13)13 presented about online aphasia choir approaches during COVID-19. Several ACGG members subsequently accepted Emma’s open invitation to aphasia choir leaders to share a song video for inclusion in a series of pre-recorded video sessions, led by music therapy students from the University of the West of England (Voices of Aphasia, 2021). Building on this, in March 2021 Dr Gillian Velmer, an SLP with a choral background, presented several projects developed during lockdown with Sing Aphasia, NJ[[14]](#footnote-14)14 (Velmer, 2021). These initiatives included international aphasia choir meet-ups (Sing Aphasia, 2021a) and a novel parking lot choir (Sing Aphasia, 2021c). Finally, the formation of the virtual International Aphasia Choir, and collaboration with Neurologic Music Therapist Trent Barrick, resulted in an inspiring music video of What A Wonderful World (Weiss & Thiele, 2021) with participants also speaking about the impact of aphasia. In April 2021, Dr Katie Strong, Assistant Professor of Speech-Language Pathology, Central Michigan University, presented recent research about songwriting with people living with aphasia (Piatek, 2019; Strong, et al., 2019). Her prior research highlights the importance of stories in a life participation approach for people with aphasia (Strong & Shadden, 2020, 2021).

In other meet-ups, ACGG participants have discussed stories, strategies, repertoire suggestions, publicity and publication, and the rollercoaster of pandemic experiences. Our activities ebb and flow, according to our participants’ interests and priorities; our motivation to share new initiatives, events or publications; and as a means of providing peer support.

## Reflections

The ACGG network has brought us together as a community of practice, and shows the value of contemporary communications technology for international, interprofessional peer support. Our current network of active members includes practitioners from Australia, Canada, Hungary, New Zealand, UK, and across the USA, as well as contacts in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Spain. The challenge of finding mutually acceptable times for meetings, across multiple time zones, means that someone is always getting up at the crack of dawn, staying up late, or viewing recordings rather than live presentations. Why, when we are all juggling personal, professional, family and community commitments, do we make time to engage with this online community?

Coombes et al.’s (2021) support for online communities of practice resonates with our experience, with opportunities for peer support, video conference meetings, and resource sharing. The range of activity levels within ACGG also reflects Donaldson’s (2019) observation that successful online communities of practice demonstrate a shared philosophy but evolving focus, and accept varied levels of participation (a leadership team, a group of active members, and a larger peripheral group).

#### Ellen:

In reviewing almost a decade of choir-related emails for this article, I was struck by the initial excitement of discovering other aphasia choirs by finding occasional news articles or YouTube videos, such as the Tip of the Tongue songwriting group (Adler Aphasia Center, 2009) and the UK’s Singing in the Rain Choir (Stroke Association, 2010). When I had the pleasure of connecting with Bron and engaging in regular discussions about our choir experiences, we recognised the value of forming a community of practice with other committed professionals with a passion for neuro/aphasia choirs. The interprofessional connections I have made through ACGG have been particularly valuable and informative. Having Alison step into a leadership role, alongside Bron and myself, has greatly contributed to advancing the sense of community, strengthening the interprofessional collaboration, and enriching the varied activities of the group.

Informal observation of ACGG and other social media posts about aphasia choirs reveals common themes, including high engagement of choir members, a strong sense of community and empowerment, and a sense of the members finding a voice. The growing popularity of this activity reflects Brown et al.’s (2012) recommendation that having something meaningful to do is essential to living well with aphasia – people with aphasia find great meaning in being a choir member. I have learned through my own experience, the aphasia choir literature, and our ACGG contacts that (1) there may be more similarities than differences in our choir practices around the globe, and (2) there appear to be multiple approaches to offering a successful aphasia choir experience.

#### Bron:

Whilst ACGG currently works as a platform to support those who run choirs, I believe it is also important in promoting the successful establishment and continuation of new choirs. In the past, word of mouth or a media event might have triggered contact with a choir, followed by a visit, and then a new choir might develop. With ever-changing new technologies, we now have easier sharing of video footage, interactive discussions, real-time choir interactions, and many more opportunities for choirs to crystallise, develop, and succeed. Whilst financial and logistical issues remain, barriers posed by time and distance are much reduced.

The combined knowledge within the group helps in supporting and mentoring potential choir leaders from different backgrounds and with different levels of experience. The similarities across current choirs, in both format and content, point positively to facilitators being able to share quality, tested resources, ideas and techniques. With a developing body of research and anecdotal stories about the benefits of neuro choirs, as well as increasing numbers of choirs, it is hoped that mainstream support and funding should follow.

As well as research outcomes and therapeutic discussions, one aspect that has delighted me is the excitement and joy shared when ACGG members have celebrated anniversaries, shared songs, and facilitated choirs meeting online (for example, Sing Aphasia, 2021a). The connection with Alison, Ellen, Stroke a Chord’s RMTs, choir facilitators, and other choirs has reinforced my active commitment to the importance of singing as a vital part of life for everyone, in every stage of life.

#### Alison:

Connecting with aphasia choir leaders across the world has enriched my practice and my thinking. When we proposed Zoom meet-ups, I valued a conversation with Christie about our respect for diverse approaches, cultural traditions, and professional training. Through ACGG interactions, I have noticed common values in community music therapy and life participation approaches, and I am excited that many international practitioners appreciate singing and songs as multifaceted resources. I have also valued the ACGG leadership discussions with Ellen and Bron; we have discussed potential ACGG activities and co-authored this article. Several New Zealand colleagues have joined ACGG, as well as connecting through Music Therapy New Zealand, and the CBR Neurological Singing, Choir and Voice Network[[15]](#footnote-15)15 (Talmage & Purdy, 2018). The uplifting experience of gathering as a community of practitioners mirrors the joy and peer support experienced by many aphasia choir members. Each choir is unique, but belonging to an active community of practice is encouraging as I continue with my PhD research.

#### Other ACGG Members:

Other active ACGG members have reflected on their experiences with the group. For example, one of our Hungarian music therapy colleagues commented:

I personally won a lot of self-confidence from this group. Especially in the pandemic situation it was really good to see that we all face the same obstacles with our choirs all over the world. And I learned a lot about the multidisciplinary cooperation, where neuropsychologist, neurolinguist, musician, and music therapist should find common ways. I am really thankful to be in this group. (Z. Fekete, personal communication, May 23, 2021)

A speech pathologist responded:

It's wonderful to have the support of the ACGG group, as well as Gillian's International Aphasia Choir. I get ideas and inspiration every time I see a post. (C. Nichols, Clinical Faculty, Department of Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences, Loyola University, MD, personal communication,, June 7, 2021)

ACGG also offers collegial support to students interested in leading and researching aphasia/neuro choirs:

The group has provided a safe space in which to discuss and reflect on the many issues and challenges we face in our work, especially those we have faced during the pandemic. Sharing the space with both music therapists and speech and language therapists has provided rich perspectives on the work we do. It has also been a place to celebrate achievements and share connections. Through the group, I have made valuable connections for research and collaboration. Alison Talmage and Dr Gillian Velmer have supported me enormously in my research project. I have also really valued article and book recommendations and the speakers, Dr Katie Strong and Dr Gillian Velmer, who presented their work in such an engaging way. I look forward to future meet ups and thank you for organising this important group. (S. King, personal communication, June 1, 2021)

Laura Fogg-Rogers, CeleBRation Choir co-founder and former co-researcher, now works in a different field in the UK, but maintains a keen interest in our work:

I like to stay in touch and see it's all still continuing and growing! I think being in touch with fellow professionals is so important for your identity as a professional and also to keep the community alive. Especially when we are all so spread out around the world, as there are no local communities to learn from. The wonders of digital connections! (L. Fogg-Rogers, Senior Lecturer, STEM Education and Communication, University of the West of England, personal communication, May 30, 2021)

#### Choir members:

While ACGG is a professional network, and this article focuses on our professional experiences, we also acknowledge our choir members, without whom there would be no aphasia/neuro choirs. ACGG exists to serve our current and potential participants, who speak enthusiastically about singing, as the following examples illustrate.

It’s been five years since I had a stroke. And all the things I c… all the things I couldn’t … I couldn’t sing! And now I … love it, I love it! And so now I go here Monday and it’s lovely, really lovely. People are so friendly. I love it! (Participant with aphasia; CeleBRation Choir, 2020)

I think it’s very good because...then, the public gets to see...well...we had something happen in our life but we can still do something really enjoyable. (Aphasia Tones member with mild anomic aphasia and AOS, 2017)

Getting together... with lots of people .... and singing and smiling ... and I am happy to be there all along. (Stroke a Chord member with moderate aphasia, 2021)

Choir member: Well, I (puts hand near mouth, twists fist in front of lips, struggling) ...uh….(stops and changes hand as if grabbing at something inside mouth, pulls hand away from mouth in a fluid motion) I song (stops again, gestures away from mouth) but, I, uh, no

Interviewer: Okay, so singing is easier, but talking...

Choir member: Yeah!

Interviewer: Is hard.

Choir member: Yeah, yeah.

(Aphasia Tones member with moderate-severe Broca’s Aphasia, 2017)

Choir members are often the strongest champions of choirs and research, as they share their own experiences and advocate for peers who may not have access to the same opportunities and services.

## Limitations

While aphasia/neuro choirs offer many benefits for participants, they may not suit everyone. For many people, choirs also complement, rather than replace, conversation groups and other therapeutic services. Choir programmes often include rhythm instruments, for the purpose of adding colour and supporting rhythmic speech and singing, and music therapists also offer individual and small group work. Similarly, one spin-off of the Aphasia Tones Choir is a harmonica group that promotes participation across all levels of severity of aphasia and apraxia of speech. (Bernstein-Ellis & Van Pykeren-Gerth, 2015). We also agree with recommendations for further research investigating the choir experiences of people from different sociocultural backgrounds (Dingle et al., 2019), and participation in diagnosis specific and mixed diagnosis neuro choirs (Talmage & Purdy, 2021).

## Conclusions: The Future of Aphasia Choirs Go Global

ACGG has achieved Ellen and Bron’s aim of bringing together enthusiastic aphasia choir leaders. We are now connected with aphasia choirs across the globe, many of which have emerged in the past 10 years. As a group of speech-language therapists/pathologists and music therapists, we appreciate the expertise of each profession and continue to learn from each other about language rehabilitation and socialisation through music.

We hope that sharing our stories of choir development and international collaboration may inspire readers to form new choirs, enabling many more people with aphasia and social and communication needs to benefit from the positive effects of music and singing. We hope to continue to grow our connections with aphasia choir leaders in other countries and to extend the network’s regional, cultural, linguistic, and professional diversity. We encourage you to join us, if you are working or hoping to work with an aphasia choir. We recommend this form of networking and endorse Coombes et al.’s (2021) encouragement for practitioners to join or set up online communities representing other fields of practice.

As songwriting and song adaptation have emerged as areas of shared interest within ACGG, we conclude with a parody song by the present co-authors, to the traditional tune of Auld Lang Syne.[[16]](#footnote-16)17 These lyrics sum up the importance of aphasia choirs and ACGG.

Aphasia Choirs (Parody Song)

Aphasia makes it hard to speak,

But the words may flow with a song;

Come join a choir and sing with us,

Find joy in singing along.

*Aphasia choirs, aphasia choirs invite you all to sing;*

*Aphasia choirs, aphasia choirs invite you to join in.*

And if you don’t know all the words,

“La la la la la” will do;

Just give it a go, and give it a try,

Find joy in singing too.

*Aphasia choirs, aphasia choirs invite you all to sing;*

*Aphasia choirs, aphasia choirs invite you to join in.*

Choir is friendly, upbeat, fun,

We will welcome you along;

You will not want to leave when you

Find joy in singing a song.

*Aphasia choirs, aphasia choirs invite you all to sing;*

*Aphasia choirs, aphasia choirs invite you to join in.*

Aphasia Choirs Go Global!

Let’s all sing and let’s be heard!

Let’s sing and raise awareness,

Spread this joy around the world.

*Aphasia choirs, aphasia choirs invite you all to sing;*

*Aphasia choirs, aphasia choirs invite you to join in.*

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## Appendix:

## Timeline: Choir Journeys and the Development of Aphasia Choirs Go Global

Timeline: Highlights of our Individual Journeys, and Landmarks in the Development of Aphasia Choirs Go Global

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2008 |  | Stroke a Chord choir partnership formed with stroke survivor Wendy Lyons (and Croydon Stroke Support group), Jack Mulholland access officer (Maroondah Local Council) and SP Bronwen Jones (Yooralla CAN) (December) |  |  |
| 2009 | Launch of CeleBRation Choir, with seed funding from Music Therapy New Zealand[[17]](#footnote-17)  and first performance at the University of Auckland’s Centre for Brain Research (CBR)[[18]](#footnote-18)  Recruitment via CBR community partners, and web page developed by Laura Fogg-Rogers  Local news story (Verran, 2009) | Seed funding for choir research received from Helen McPherson Smith Trust[[19]](#footnote-19) | Launch of Aphasia Tones Choir Fall Semester 2009, student director Michelle Lussier |  |

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2010 | Performance at the Raukatauri Music Therapy Centre[[20]](#footnote-20) fundraising concert  First of many rest home performances (Ranfurly Home, Auckland)  Visit by Robin Matthews SLT, whose initial focus was singing for people with Parkinson’s (Di Benedetto et al., 2009) and launch of The Brainwave Singers[[21]](#footnote-21)  Alison & Laura Fogg-Rogers present at the MThNZ Conference (Christchurch) inspiring Kimberley Wade RMTh & Susan MacDonald SLT to develop a neuro choir  Article in The New Zealand Listener (Boniface, 2010), and radio interview (Fogg, 2010) | Anneliis Way RMT employed as choir conductor  Research partnership group included Dr Jeanette Tamplin RMT, Dr Felicity Baker RMT,  Dr Stuart Lee, Neuropsychologist, as well as Anneliis and SP Bronwen Jones (Yooralla CAN)  Launch of Stroke a Chord Choir  First public performance for an audience of family and friends, at the rehearsal venue (Aedy, 2010) | First annual Aphasia Awareness campus concert under student directors, Shiri Oren, Jen Driscoll, & Ava Scofield | Alison and Laura Fogg-Rogers present at the AMTA conference (Melbourne) and meet Bron and Stroke a Chord Choir |

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2011 | Introduce occasional sessions with locum music therapists  Choir perform at Brain Day for the first time, an annual event presented by the CBR and Neurological Foundation[[22]](#footnote-22)  Concert at St Luke’s Church, Remuera  First music therapy student placement  Multidisciplinary SPICCATO feasibility study (Stroke & Parkinson’s: Investigating Community Choirs and Therapeutic Outcomes) funded by the Health Research Council, with Principal Investigator Suzanne Purdy (several conference presentations, and reported in Fogg-Rogers et al., 2016; Talmage et al., 2013) | Choir website developed,(no longer active) with support from Maroondah Council access officer, Jack Mulholland and Swinburne University  Choir performs at Royal Melbourne Hospital at launch of new health programme  Book published (Spoor, 2011)  Bronwen presents paperat Speech Pathology national conference, Darwin  Local Darwin television news interview with Bronwen and SPA Northern Territory president  First Annual Concert sold out 300+ seats | Ellen and students present Aphasia Tones poster at American Speech, Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) conference (Bernstein-Ellis et al., 2011)  2nd Annual Aphasia Awareness Campus Concert: *Aphasia Tones Celebrate National Aphasia Awareness Month;* student directors, Karen Fremont & Jaqui Standel |  |

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2012 | Shari Storie (née Ludlam) joins the CeleBRation Choir in a job share role (until 2017)  CeleBRation Choir are the first clients to participate in a MThNZ conference, in a workshop presented collaboratively by CeleBRation and Cantabrainers Choir facilitators (Rickson, 2012)  CeleBRation Choir team receive a University of Auckland equity award nomination  Local newspaper story (Fletcher, 2012)  Launch of Cantabrainers Choir (Christchurch) by Kimberley Wade, Susan MacDonald & Therapy Professionals[[23]](#footnote-23) (subsequently developed as a charitable trust), following the CeleBRation Choir model, but co-led by RMTh and SLT (O’Hagan, 2012) | Footage of the choir shown at the Melbourne Recital Centre following a presentation by Professor Sarah Wilson, clinical neuropsychologist, about her research into the use of music to stimulate brain recovery.  Stroke a Chord short documentary film(Barton, 2012)  Stroke Association Victoria Forum Performance  Lucy Thomas SLT (UK) volunteered at Stroke a Chord for a few months while travelling in Australia (2012-2013)  Anja Tanhane RMT joins the choir  Second Annual Concert at Karralyka theatre | Contacted by Karen McFeeters Leary about starting an aphasia choir in Vermont (see Polovoy, 2014)  CSUEB Diversity Day performance  Aphasia Tones first aphasia choir to perform at a CSHA state conference - supported by Ellayne Ganzfried, Executive Director, National Aphasia Association (NAA)  3rd Annual Aphasia Awareness Concert: *Celebration!* Student directors, Karen Fremont, Acacia Quien, Jaqui Standel, Stephanie Caruthers | Ellen discovers the Stroke A Chord website, and emails a colleague, “I’ve found a soul sister in Australia!”  Ellayne Ganzfried (NAA) introduces Bron and Ellen via email; beginning of Skype meetings  Ellen and Bron’s Skype connection with Dr Glenn Goldblum SLP, Tanya Brown MTh, and an aphasia and cognitive-communication conversation group (University of Pretoria, South Africa)  (see Goldblum et al., 2012); they plan to launch a choir in 2013  Bron and Ellen have regular Skype calls to discuss new choir links and videos, start an international list of aphasia choirs, and plan a survey, aiming to establish a community of learning and support |

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2013 | CeleBRation Choir farewell co-founder Laura Fogg-Rogers, who returns to the UK  Performance and radio recording to support Sir Paul Reeves’ Memorial Lecturer, by CBR founder, Prof Sir Richard Faull (RNZ, 2013)  Research article published, including choir song as part of research dissemination (Talmage et al., 2013)  Song writing project with Shari Storie - *Summer Celebration Song* | Performance at Aphasia Association Australia National Conference.  Marion Melrose (stroke survivor with aphasia) and husband from Geelong, Victoria, visit Stroke a Chord, and start Stroke a Note Choir  Stroke a Chord documentary public launch at local cinema and is shortlisted for Golden Panda award in Cheng Du, China  Bronwen and Anja Tanhane RMT present paper and choir perform at the AMTA conference in Melbourne  Choir performs to a dinner audience of 400 at a statewide Local Government Conference in Melbourne’s exhibition centre  Third Annual Concert: Thank You for the Music  Research article published | Aphasia Tones perform in Yosemite National Park to celebrate the launch of the first aphasia-friendly park guide; accompanied by Dr Nidhi Mahendra and Dr Janet Patterson  Aphasia Tones’ first global concert, performing to a crowd of about 200 in South Africa via Skype with the Siyathemba Singers, the Stroke-TBI choir from the University of Pretoria, led by Tanya Brown MTh & Dr. Glenn Goldblum SLP (Belamide, 2013)  Aphasia Tones records *Happy Birthday* video to celebrate Dr Oliver Sacks’ 80th birthday, at request of National Aphasia Association  CSUEB Disability Awareness performance  4th annual Aphasia Awareness Concert: *All Voices Created Equal;* Student directors, Stephanie Caruthers & Acacia Quien  Inquiry from Gillian Velmer, in preparation for a multilingual aphasia choir director survey as part of her Master’s thesis. | Bron and Ellen encounter a large network of aphasia choirs in The Netherlands, with a 30 year history, and funding through nursing homes; contact with Dr Dorothea Van Gallen  International Aphasia Choirs survey, led by Ellen and Bron, with collaboration of Dr Miranda Rose and Dr Nidhi Mahendra - results of aphasia choirs survey presented at American Speech Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) conference in Florida (Jones et al., 2013)  Alison presents at the AMTA conference (Melbourne) and meets Bron again and Anja Tanhane RMT |

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2014 | First CeleBRation Choir participation in World Voice Day  Public Facebook page launched, after a trial of a less successful private group; administered and moderated by the RMTh with some volunteer/member assistance  Case study publication (participant with Parkinson’s) emphasising the mixed neuro choir membership and potential outcome measures tested in the feasibility study (Talmage et al., 2014)  Donation and promotional video by The New Zealand Music Foundation (2014)  Public Facebook page launched, after a less successful trial of a private group; administered and moderated by the RMTh with some volunteer/member assistance | Story on ABC TV (national broadcast channel) celebrating the choir’s 4th birthday.  Rotarian, Ray Brown, visits Stroke a Chord; subsequently (2015) sets up RAASCALS (Rotary Aphasia and Seymour Choir Acquiring Learning Skills) choir  Significant grant from Victoria State Government Health and Human Services Disability Self Help programme  Contacted by Julia Halvorson of Minnesota Connect Aphasia Now (MnCAN) as they prepare to launch a choir  Annual SP placements with the choir begin (2014-2019)  Fourth Annual Concert: My Island Home: Songs of Place and Belonging | Invited by Jerome Kaplan, SLP (Boston University) to meet with Brian Harris, MT and CEO of Medrhythms, to discuss logistics of launching an aphasia choir: Sargent College Aphasia Chorus (Medrhythms, 2019)  Aphasia Tones featured in video of CSHA Award to National Parks (California Speech, Language & Hearing Association, 2014)  CSUEB Week of Inclusive Excellence performance  5th Annual Aphasia Awareness Concert: Happy! Celebrating 5 Years Singing Together; student directors, Julie Spicer & Gabe Angeles | Contact with Singing Hospitals, an international network started in Germany to promote healing and health, and their UK Ambassador, Catherine Pestano  ACGG started as an email distribution list, then moved online as a Google Plus Group (an online platform, discontinued in 2018).  Gillian Velmer’s survey invitation sent to ACGG group and others - survey offered in six languages (English, Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch, & French)  Lucy Thomas (Former Stroke a Chord volunteer) establishes the first aphasia choir in Wales, Strike a Chord Cymru, in Cwmbran, which includes several Welsh-speakers; choir led by musician Ali Shone (Stroke Association, 2016) |

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2015 | CeleBRation Choir pilot study of rhythm in aphasia recovery (published as Thompson et al., 2017)  Article acknowledging the 5th anniversary of the CBR and the CeleBRation Choir (Ingenio, 2015)  SoundsWell Singers (Wellington neuro choir) established and co-led by Penny Warren RMTh & Megan Glass RMTh, based on CeleBRation Choir model but co-facilitated by two RMThs (Labone, 2016) | Story on local Melbourne evening news celebrating Choir’s 5th birthday  Online interview with public radio international news show. Journalist Joel Carnegie interviews choir member Tim and Bronwen (Adams & Jones, 2015)  Fifth Annual Concert: *The Power of Song* | Aphasia Tones partners with City of Hayward: Music & Memory event at City Hall  CSUEB Performance: Campus Credential Event  Participate in a CSUEB Community Sing event led by Dr. Ysaye Barnwell, founding member Sweet Honey in the Rock a capella group  6th Annual Aphasia Awareness Concert: *Hear Us Roar!* with student directors, Gabrielle Angeles, Ruchi Kapila, & Kasondra Vanpykeren Gerth  Aphasia Tones receive RAISE “Most Creative” award from the National Stroke Association (Cal State East Bay, 2015)  Aphasia Tones featured on KQED National Public Radio (Klivans, 2015)  Darla Hagge, CSU Sacramento, CA confers about starting aphasia choir: launches Vocally Devoted Choir | Regular Skype meetings (Ellen, Bron, & Lucy Thomas)  Alison reconnected with Anne and Barry Cole (Stroke A Chord Choir) at the Aphasia New Zealand conference (Auckland), and co-presented with Danielle Waterhouse (SLT, Cantabrainers Choir)  Stroke a Chord forwards aphasia choir advice request to ACGG, from Sydney (NSW), Logan (Queensland) and Adelaide (SA)  Audrey Holland (SP, USA) requests *Happy Birthday* choir videos for 25th anniversary of aphasia group in Boston; Approximately 6-7 choirs from ACGG group send videos. |

<https://www.therapyprofessionals.co.nz>

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | | Stroke A Chord Choir | | Aphasia Tones Choir | | ACGG |
| 2016 | Intergenerational project with Ellerslie School for Brain Day (led by Alison Talmage, Shari Storie and teacher Maria Winder)  CeleBRation Choir participation in CBR Music Therapy Week Symposium, in collaboration with Music Therapy New Zealand, hosted by Prof Suzanne Purdy, Alison, and Shari Storie RMTh  TV appearance for Music Therapy Week (Hine, 2016)  Start of interview research with current and potential neuro choir leaders - RMThs, SLTs and community musicians (published in Talmage & Purdy, 2021)  Donation from Auckland International Airport’s Staff Giving Programme  Performance in multi-choir Christmas concert in Holy Trinity Cathedral, coordinated by the Stellar Singers | Christie Cula-Reid RMT joins Stroke a Chord (until 2021)  ABC radio story (Burin, 2016)  Sixth Annual Concert: Reach for the Stars: A Musical Journey | | Lynn Gallandt of BRAIN[[24]](#footnote-24) (Los Angeles) observes Aphasia Tones before starting a choir for her members with traumatic brain injury (TBI)  Performance at Forever Pioneer Event to alumni  7th Annual Aphasia Awareness Concert: Fighting for a Change; Raising Aphasia Awareness; student directors, Cynthia Byward, Madison Cano Fox; Aphasia Tones receive Bay Area Proud Award from local news station[[25]](#footnote-25)  Cindy Nichols Loyola University, MD, visits and observes ATP, and decides to start a chorus  Aphasia Tones featured in Stroke Connection Magazine (Caswell, 2016)  Qualitative interview research with ATP members initiated on the long term impact of choir participation (Cano Fox & Bernstein-Ellis, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) | | Alison meets Christie Cula-Reid at the AMTA Conference (Melbourne) and visits Stroke a Chord Choir  Bron visits New Zealand and meets neuro choir leaders Alison, Shari Storie RMTh, and university speech science colleagues Dr Clare McCann and Julie Plourde (CeleBRation Choir); Kimberley Wade RMTh (Cantabrainers Choir), Megan Glass & Penny Warren (SoundsWell Singers), & Robin Matthews SLT (Brainwave Singers)  Bron & Ellen continue to capture media reports of aphasia choirs, via internet search and email requests  ACGG Facebook group established, with guidelines for posting etiquette, and request for aphasia choir photos | |
| Year | CeleBRation Choir | | Stroke A Chord Choir | | Aphasia Tones Choir | | ACGG |
| 2017 | Launch of Sing Up Rodney group (North Auckland) based on the CeleBRation Choir model, with seed funding from Music Therapy New Zealand  CeleBRation Choir film for Brain Day (Storie, 2017)  CBR Neurological Choirs Workshop and establishment of CBR Neurological Singing, Choir, and Voice Network[[26]](#footnote-26)  in response to many inquiries about neuro choirs  Alison commences part-time PhD action research study, focusing on neuro choirs  Publication of research highlighting positive quality of life for neuro choir participants (Jenkins et al., 2017). Follow-up research with neuro choirs and community choirs (Thompson, 2017)  Creative writing about the CeleBRation Choir published by choir leaders and one participant (Talmage, 2017; Talmage et al., 2017) | Choir perform at 2017 AGOSCI (Australian Group on Severe Communication Impairment) national conference at Grand Hyatt Hotel Melbourne  Melbourne Seventh Annual Concert: Life’s a Journey | | Ellen contacted by Rebecca Stewart, graduate student at SUNY Plattsburgh about starting aphasia choir[[27]](#footnote-27)  Elizabeth Lanza of Northeastern Illinois University visits prior to starting a choir as part of her Master's thesis project  Song writing project, led by graduate students Madison Cano Fox & Marian Alonso; I’m Here (song) premiered at ATP 20th Anniversary Gala  8th Annual Aphasia Awareness Concert: Singing Our Message: I’m Here; student directors, Madison Cano Fox & Marian Alonso  Presentation of initial qualitative interviews at national ASHA conference (Cano Fox et al., 2017) | | Ellen, Bron & Lucy meet regularly via Skype to establish international links and map choirs globally.  Preliminary discussion of an article comparing AT and SAC approaches - on hold, and some content included in this article | |

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2018 | Music therapy student placement (Gordon, 2019) - including leading a performance at the NZ Society for Diversional & Recreational Therapists conference  Filming for a short documentary film (Chadha, 2019)  CBR Music Therapy Research Symposium, with keynote speaker, Dr Jeanette Tamplin  Trust established as umbrella organisation for Sing Up Rodney, to develop sustainable funding  Article in Ingenio: The University of Auckland Alumni Magazine (White, 2018)  Poster presentation about the CBR network, at the conference of the British Association for Music Therapy (Talmage & Purdy, 2018)  CBR connections with Sing to Beat Parkinson’s,[[28]](#footnote-28) relevant to mixed neuro choirs | Stroke a Chord transfers to new auspice organisation[[29]](#footnote-29); continues a capacity building model of showcasing living well with aphasia through advocacy, weekly rehearsal/support, and performances  Choir sings live in the ABC radio studio, and Bronwen is interviewed about stroke, aphasia, and the choir  Eighth Annual concert: This is Me | Aphasia Conversations podcast: interview with Dr Melinda Corwin about aphasia choirs (Bernstein-Ellis, 2018)  Aphasia Tones & CSU Sacramento Vocally Devoted Aphasia Choirs joint performance at CSHA conference  Introduction of Aphasia Tones & aphasia choirs concept to ASHA President at CSHA conference  9th Annual Aphasia Awareness concert: Stand By Me; student directors, Jessica Ong, Theresa Jingyun Yao  Presentations at national and state conferences on additional interview data and on treatment protocol (Cano Fox & Bernstein, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) | A hiatus as Ellen took leave, and Bron changed jobs. |

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2019 | Participation in a university vigil for victims of the Christchurch mosque shooting; follow-up collective development of code of conduct  CeleBRation Choir World Singing Day[[30]](#footnote-30) event  Alison is nominated by CeleBRation Choir volunteers for a Westfield Local Hero award[[31]](#footnote-31)  CeleBRation Choir 10th anniversary event during Music Therapy Week and performance at the CBR’s 10th anniversary dinner  Music Therapy New Zealand promotional video highlights Cantabrainers Choir and SoundsWell Singers (Pattinson, 2019)  Student research highlighting the role and motivation of neuro choir volunteers (Lindo, 2019; Tan, 2019) | For those who Rock -We Salute You performance at Hamer Hall Arts Centre Melbourne  Choir performs at Monash Hospital Melbourne for International Day of Persons with a Disabilities  Ninth Annual Concert: Peace, Love, and Happiness: Celebrating the 60s in Song  Wendy Lyons (choir co-founder) wins $10,000 for the choir in a community selected Westfield Local Hero award[[32]](#footnote-32) | Aphasia Tones 10th Annual Aphasia Awareness concert: *One Choir, One Voice, Many Journeys*; student directors: Jessica Ong & Weiyan Zheng  Pacific Stroke Association (2019) Conference performance to over 200 doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and researchers; first aphasia choir exposure for most attendees |  |

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2020 | Alison is awarded a Kiwibank Local Hero medal for CeleBRation Choir work (Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year Awards, 2020)  Development of online choir during COVID-19, although shorter lockdowns in NZ (Talmage, 2020a; Talmage et al., 2020): increased focus on humour, e.g. a banana or apple with a candle, in lieu of a fruit cake; renewed focus on songwriting; peer support, including an additional weekly meet-up during lockdown  Doc Edge Festival (online during pandemic) selects choir documentary film (Chadha, 2019)  Interviews with Alison in The New Zealand Listener magazine (Pellegrino, 2020) and on 95bFM radio (Talmage, 2020b)  University of Auckland articles about choir online (Centre for Brain Research, 2020; University of Auckland, 2020)  Recording of Celebration, by jazz composer Ben Fernandez (2020a), and small group participation in the album launch concert (Fernandez, 2020b) | Development of online choir during COVID-19: greater focus on fun activities, silly warm ups, and adopting the CeleBRation Choir’s “cakes” idea; quiz and interactive activities; the Grateful Song - as a sharing time; sharing the burden of Melbourne’s lockdowns - 5 months in total | Aphasia Tones transition to virtual format, and singalong concert; student directors, Raveena Birdee, Weiyan Zheng,  Presentation about online choir format at Aphasia Access 24 Hour Teach-in (Bernstein Ellis et al., 2020) | Start of ACGG Zoom meet-ups - informal conversation and peer support, and presentations about online choir, by Christie Cula-Reid (RMT, Stroke a Chord) and Emma Richards (Voices of Aphasia[[33]](#footnote-33))  Several ACGG members (including Alison) connect by contributing to Voices of Aphasia’s pre-recorded choir sessions, and with Sing Aphasia’s international meet-ups  Gillian Velmer (Sing Aphasia) attends CeleBRation Choir’s Zoom session for New Zealand’s Music Therapy Week |

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| Year | CeleBRation Choir | Stroke A Chord Choir | Aphasia Tones Choir | ACGG |
| 2021 | Kimberley Wade RMTh (Cantabrainers Choir) is also awarded a Kiwibank Local Hero medal (Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year Awards, 2021) - awareness of NZ’s neuro choirs continues to grow  Book chapter, emphasising the inclusive, music-centred approach of neuro choirs (Talmage, 2022) |  | Aphasia Tones online singalong concert, student directors, Weiyan Zheng, Megan Godoy & assisted by Cleopatra Degher, & Christy Thies  Student poster presentation (awarded best student presentation) at Aphasia Access Leadership Summit (Birdee et al., 2021) | Zoom presentations continue with Dr Gillian Velmer (SLP, Sing Aphasia, NJ): activities during COVID-19; and Dr Katie Strong (SLP researcher, Central Michigan University): songwriting  Small group meet-ups to swap song ideas, including parody songs for aphasia choirs, and strategies for publication and publicity  Current consideration of regional as well as global Zoom meet-ups  Collaborative article submission |

1. In this article we use the term neuro choirs to encompass all choirs and singing groups for people living with a neurological condition - including (but not limited to) aphasia choirs, dementia choirs, Parkinson’s choirs, and mixed neurological choirs that cater for people with a range of diagnoses. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Terminology (SLT, SLP, and SP) varies between countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Music therapist means a professional who holds a tertiary qualification in music therapy and the credentials, licensure or registration available in their country or state - e.g. New Zealand Registered Music Therapist (NZ RMTh) in Aotearoa New Zealand, RMT in Australia, or Music Therapist - Board Certified (MT-BC) in the USA. We also use generic abbreviation MTh here, as in New Zealand the h is added to distinguish music therapists from music teachers. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Stepped Care* is a 4-level system of assessment and intervention to prevent and treat depression (Baker et al., 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For further information, see Ansdell’s (2002) landmark discussion of community music therapy in comparison with the “consensus” model of (clinical) music therapy; and for a discussion of community music and community music therapy, see O’Grady & McFerran (2007). These terms are well understood by music therapists, but may be less familiar to others. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.singwell.ca> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://kahikateamusictherapyandcommunityartstrust.wordpress.com> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.csueastbay.edu/slhs/clinic/atp.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Further LPAA resources and training are available from Aphasia Access, <https://www.aphasiaaccess.org> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.scopeaust.org.au> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.afasienet.com/nieuws-professionals/afasiekoren-in-nederland-2> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1632141370371583> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13 <https://voicesofaphasia.com> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14 <https://singaphasia.com> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2000049436906577> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 17 *Auld Lang Syne* is a poem by Robert Burns, set to an older, traditional melody, and widely sung at Hogmanay or New Year’s Eve. The song is recorded as both numbers 6274 and 13892 in the Roud Folk Song Index, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_folk_songs_by_Roud_number> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <https://musictherapy.org.nz> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <https://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/en/faculty/cbr.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <https://hmstrust.org.au> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. <https://www.rmtc.org.nz> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1123145097697724> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. <https://neurological.org.nz> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <https://www.thebrainsite.org> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. [https://www.nbcbayarea.com/on-air/as-seen-on/bap-aphasia-tones\_bay-area/129704/](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.nbcbayarea.com/on-air/as-seen-on/bap-aphasia-tones_bay-area/129704/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1629201161175432&usg=AOvVaw0JQMkNiykxtj_bhxx80-t4)  [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2000049436906577> [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. <https://www.plattsburgh.edu/news/news-archive/suny-plattsburgh-uvm-aphasia-choirs-to-join-for-june-2-concert-in-south-burlington.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. <https://www.singtobeat.co.uk> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. An *auspice organisation* is an Australian term for a larger umbrella organisation under whose auspices an organisation or group acts. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. <https://worldsingingday.org> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. <https://res.cloudinary.com/scentre-group-au/image/upload/v1569821663/ljhwp8bko4lyx5nd3z3z.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. <https://www.westfield.com.au/knox/story/3bjNIBTitvamHf357cmYiv/wendy-lyons> [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. <https://voicesofaphasia.com> [↑](#footnote-ref-33)