

# With one voice: singing for social inclusion

A COMMUNITY CHOIR SOCIAL INCLUSION PROGRAM IS ALLOWING A DIVERSE RANGE OF VICTORIANS TO DISCOVER THEIR CREATIVE VOICES AND MEET ON COMMON GROUND.

BY TANIA DE JONG



Creativity Australia's With One Voice community inclusion choirs bring a sense of celebration and purpose through their shared stories and song.

Our key program Melbourne Sings, led by conductor Shaun Islip and myself, fills the Sofitel Melbourne on Collins every Tuesday evening with the resonant sound of CEOs and city workers singing alongside the elderly, migrants, the unemployed and disadvantaged. Together, they build the sounds of hope and joy.

Some nights, With One Voice (WOV) members such as recent Chinese immigrant Ji-De Ni ('JD') and Cameroon migrant Nathalie Mbala share their stories of transformation and empowerment with the group, explaining how the choir has helped them find a place within their newly adopted home – somewhere to learn English, access job opportunities and find friends.

All present, members and visitors alike, are reminded that no matter what language they speak, singing within a group environment offers opportunities to learn, grow and express who they are. It is also an excellent way to improve the mind, health and overall wellbeing. There is now global research showing the benefits of singing to brain plasticity. When you find your voice, your neural pathways connect in a whole new way.

The benefits of the WOV program are as diverse as the participants. Led by professional conductors, WOV choirs meet



weekly and have the opportunity to perform several times each year. Supper is provided at the end, with a chance for members to build networks, skills, access job, wellbeing and mentoring opportunities, and grow new friendships.

Anyone can come along to any WOV choir to connect with their community and discover their potential whilst experiencing the joy of group singing.

Membership is by tax-deductible donation (it is free for healthcare/disability card holders). Numerous businesses are supporting their employees to be part of this transformational program.

Anyone interested can visit the Creativity Australia website for more information and a list of all the choirs. Visit [www.creativityaustralia.org.au](http://www.creativityaustralia.org.au).

**Tania de Jong AM is the Founder and Chair of Creativity Australia.**