

MAY 23 2019 - 12:30PM

New choir for singers of all-vocal ability making a bright note

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A NEW choir is at full voice in redefining what it means to be singers. Collectively, they are working to break down barriers of well-being and social inclusion through song.



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There was a special timbre to the With One Voice community choir when UFS Dispensaries staff first saw and heard the program in action in Melbourne

UFS has worked with Creativity Australia to bring the health program to Ballarat, led by professional conductor and performer Suzanne Hobson, with the first notes sounding out this month.

With One Voice acts on research showing singing with others an improve general health, a sense of community, and feelings of inclusion.



Sue Lloyd with Ballarat's One Voice choir on Wednesday night. Picture: Adam Trafford

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About four in five participants said the choir helped reduce feelings of anxiety and depression and improved well-being while 98 per cent said it was a great way to de-stress and 95 per cent felt better after singing, a Swinburne study shows.

UFS Dispensaries chief Lynne McLennan said the concept of the choir being open to all ages, backgrounds and singing abilities was important for promoting health and community in Ballarat.

Participants pay what they feel they can for each hour-long session. Supper follows each session as a way to encourage social connections.

Community members can turn up for weekly rehearsals, without booking or auditions, at UFS' administrative building in Armstrong Street North.

"The concept perfectly resonates with the social and community values of UFS and we share a like-minded approach to living well," Ms McLennan said.



With One Voice conductor Suzanne Hobson. Picture: Adam Trafford

In a twist unique to Ballarat, UFS is backing the program with a mentoring program to establish a sustainable choir before handing it over to the community, with its own committee, in two years' time.

For more details: www.creativityaustralia.org.au/choirs/ballarat.

Choral festival to sing into action this weekend

Meanwhile, 11 choirs from across the region will be on show for the annual Ballarat Choral Festival at St Patrick's Cathedral on Sunday afternoon.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Ballarat is hosting the free event, which will feature the cathedral pipe organ.

Deer Park Young Adults choir, featuring Samoan and Tongan singers, will represent the host church.

Other choirs include: St Patrick's Cathedral Choir, Ballarat Choral Society, Pyrenees Chorale from Beaufort and Avoca, U3A Choristers, Daylesford Soul Choir and the newly-formed Buninyong Community Choir.

School choirs include Ballarat Grammar Chamber Choir, Beaufort Secondary College Singers, and Phoenix P-12 Community College Choir.

Donations from the event go to House of Welcome, supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Ballarat. The event starts 1.30pm.

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