

ENTERTAINMENT



Soprano and Creativity Australia founder Tania de Jong with choir members of With One Voice. PICTURE: GRAHAM DENHOLM

CHOIRS GIVE VOICE TO OUR NEEDS

The success of the With One Voice program shows singing in a group not only improves wellbeing and inspires personal growth but also transforms communities, **Fifi Lim** writes

For a decade, people have been gathering weekly to sing in a choir, inspired by Creativity Australia's With One Voice program.

Come Sunday, December 2, more than 400 voices will sing together in a celebratory concert to mark this 10-year milestone.

With One Big Voice, to be held at the Melbourne Town Hall, will feature soprano and Creativity Australia founder Tania de Jong, Alan Fletcher (*Neighbours*) and Lydia Griffiths (*Les Misérables* — West End).

The repertoire will include popular songs such as *You're the Voice*, *Hallelujah*, *Imagine* and *Can You Feel the Love Tonight*.

Providing opportunities for social interaction, sharing meals and helping grant people's wishes, With One Voice has been hailed as a program that has brought

positive changes to the lives of many.

Ms de Jong says the program supports 21 choirs across Australia.

By 2020 and with up to \$10,000 seed funding, Creativity Australia aims to support up to 40 choirs.

She says the choirs empower all participants to find and share their voice.

"Anyone can sing, there are no auditions and everyone is welcome," she said.

Looking back at how With One Voice has grown, Ms de Jong says there's greater awareness today of the social inclusion and community wellbeing aspects of the programs.

"People love the Wish List and the concept of helping others as well as singing together," Ms de Jong said.

The choirs have members that range

from chief executives of small businesses to people with depression and disabilities, job seekers, single mums, councillors, lawyers, doctors, teachers, seniors, and asylum seekers.

"The community choirs unite hundreds of people aged 9 to 90, from all faiths and all walks of life. As a result, we are seeing more diverse wishes," Ms de Jong said.

"Many older people ask for help to set up gmail accounts or to get their wills completed.

"Other popular wishes include help with resumes, finding a job, finding accommodation, learning English, household goods, singing and guitar lessons.

"More than 3000 wishes have been granted since we started the Wish List program in 2013," Ms de Jong said.

With the rise in social media, Ms de Jong points out that we talk more to boxes and screens than we do with one another.

"It is no wonder that loneliness and social

isolation are considered the global epidemic of our era. It becomes fundamentally important to nurture the attributes of human beings that set us apart from machines—love, compassion, empathy, kindness, caring, creativity and determination.

"Our innovative model is groundbreaking in the social innovation/welfare space, as it brings the fortunate and the marginalised together as one community to reduce inequality and create a sense of "we".

"We are social animals and we need to connect, feel, touch and sing and dance together.

"This is part of our human DNA. Social media cannot replace these human experiences."

7 With One Big Voice, December 2, 3pm – 5.30pm. Tickets \$15 to \$25. To book go to events.humanitix.com.au/wobv Details: creativityaustralia.org.au