



CHANGING THE WORLD ONE VOICE AT A TIME



STORY KERRY HEANEY | PHOTO JASON XU

Members of With One Voice Brisbane.

IT'S ALL ABOUT REMOVING BARRIERS AND MAKING EVERYONE WELCOME.

EACH WEDNESDAY NIGHT, the basement of Brisbane's City Hall rings with the voices of people exercising their human right to sing.

Led by conductor Cath Mundy, the members of With One Voice Brisbane fill the heritage-listed Wynnum Room with tunes from Cold Play, Johnny Cash and even *The Skye Boat* song from the hit *Overlander* series.

Choir members come from diverse backgrounds. Some are professionals or educators, others are international students or differently-abled. It's all about removing barriers and making everyone welcome. Then the magic of music and singing takes over, releasing endorphins to make people feel healthier, happier, more creative and connected.

Cath has welcomed many new choristers over the past five years including Hayley, a visual artist who has the genetic skin condition Neurofibromatosis.

"Coming along was a big step for Hayley, but her confidence has soared and she has made new friends in the

choir," Cath said.

"We also have international students who find it a joy to meet and sing with locals."

Established for more than nine years, the nationwide Creativity Australia program has more than 6000 participants backed by hundreds of volunteers.

Why do people keep turning up each week? Most say the choir sessions are a great way to de-stress and make new friends. It's a result backed by research conducted by Creativity Australia, in partnership with Swinburne University of Technology's Centre for Social Impact.

The research revealed that participation in the program contributed to enhanced

wellbeing and reduced stress, depression and anxiety. It also created strong networks that become a valuable resource in times of need, especially for those who don't have strong family or community support elsewhere in their lives.

Enhancing the choir's social support aspect is the 'wish book' that sits alongside the sign in sheet at the welcome table every session. Choir members either record something they need or something they have to offer.

Cath Mundy says this circle of giving and receiving has included wishes for a fridge and a car, which were both granted. Others have received a laptop or even just good wishes for a job interview.

Since 2013, more than 3000 wishes have been granted via With One Voice across the nation.

Membership of the choir is by tax deductible donation, which helps sponsor attendance for disadvantaged participants. Payment option plans range from \$120 to \$600 per year according to circumstance. ■

START YOUR OWN CHOIR

Creativity Australia has a target of 40 With One Voice community choirs by 2020 – people and groups can apply for grants of up to \$10,000. Find out more from creativityaustralia.org.au.