

Sing and Breathe Salisbury

Evaluation Report Summary

I think it's been the most helpful thing that I've ever actually had suggested, done, or been supported with, because it's helped me with my breathing. It's also made me very conscious of not putting myself in situations that will make my COPD worse.

An evaluation of Sing and Breathe Salisbury was commissioned by Friends of Salisbury Medical Practice to: gather, collate and analyse data to enable judgements about the extent to which intended aims and outcomes are met; support ongoing review and improvement; and provide a summary of key data, successes, challenges and learning from the project. This document is a short summary of the key findings described in a longer evaluation report.

The evaluation design used an outcomes framework in addition to an “illuminative” evaluation approach. Evidence and data collected were primarily self-reported accounts from participants using written questionnaires and phone interviews, in addition to an interview with Wiltshire Health and Care’s Respiratory Clinical Lead. Qualitative data were thematically analysed to notice common patterns and summarise the interviews and questionnaires into core themes.

The evaluation process concluded that the overall aims of the project, *to support and educate people with lung conditions in Salisbury to better manage their breath through singing*, were achieved for those who took part. Two out of three intended outcomes for individuals who took part in the project were strongly achieved, with the third outcome being achieved to a lesser degree.

Outcomes for individuals – because of this project:

- People will learn how to manage their breath more effectively and efficiently.
- People will gain peer support and connection through attending, thus reducing social isolation.
- People will become more aware of other community-based health services they can access.

Participants’ motivations for taking part in the introductory courses were predominantly to improve their breathing, with a small number of people wishing to manage their stress and anxiety or improve their mood. The majority of participants felt the course addressed their motivations for attending very well. People spoke of the techniques they learnt, such as “belly breathing”, as being “a revelation” and “life-changing”. The evaluation was not a clinical trial or led by healthcare professionals, therefore participants were intentionally not asked about clinical indicators. Some people, however, did offer information that their peak flow had increased since starting the course, that their use of reliever inhalers had reduced, and they felt that using the breathing, posture and relaxation techniques had prevented acute episodes.

About Sing and Breathe Salisbury (SABS)

SABS was a year-long pilot project to support people with respiratory conditions through Singing for Lung Health. There were 3 strands to the project:

- 6-week introductory courses to teach breath management techniques (repeated for 4 groups over the year).
- An ongoing follow-on group, the Breathless Singers.
- Outreach sessions to raise awareness.

SABS was a partnership between Friends of Salisbury Medical Practice and Music for Wellbeing CIC. The project was led by experienced community musician and singing leader Olivia (Liv) McLennan who completed the British Lung Foundation’s singing leader training course in 2017. The project was financially supported by the Postcode Community Trust and received in kind support from the Bemerton Heath Centre.

For more information about Singing for Lung Health see the [British Lung Foundation’s website](#) and a [systematic literature review of research evidence about Singing for Lung Health](#).

It has definitely helped to manage my asthma. There are days when I get a bit breathless just climbing the stairs which is – to me – ridiculous. I was in denial for such a long time that I had asthma. But then, just remembering the breathing techniques and using those muscles that you’ve learnt to isolate... to help you managing your breathing. It does actually come into play in those situations.

I think it can be life-changing. When I get out of breath when I'm talking... I've learnt how to just sit back, get my posture right, sit, take some deep breaths and some belly breathing and calm that down, and then all of a sudden I'm, you know, back up and running again. So, I do think it's absolutely worth its weight in gold.

The first two introductory course groups met in person. Due to coronavirus, the second two groups were held online using Zoom. The second intended outcome around peer support and social connection was strongly achieved for many people in the face-to-face groups. Participants spoke of meeting new people, enjoying the camaraderie of the group, and gaining social support from the empathising of others in similar situations. The feeling of gaining social support occurred for fewer people in the online groups. Many, although not all, felt that an online group was not really meeting people and the opportunities for

social contact were limited. The impacts of the online groups regarding learning the breathing techniques were as great as for the face-to-face groups. The third outcome around awareness of other services was achieved for some, although it did not feature highly in what participants valued about the courses.

I did feel the support of everybody because everybody was really kind. They've all got their issues and, you know, you just feel you were in a supportive group.

Interviews with Breathless Singers members, some of whom had taken part in the group for three years, echoed the contributions of introductory course participants. They found that the techniques they had learnt helped them to manage their respiratory conditions and they valued the social support they gained from the group. Members spoke of various ways they used the techniques in their daily lives. Due to the longevity of the group, the strong social connections flourished into a support group during the COVID lockdown.

Wiltshire Health and Care's Respiratory Clinical Lead practitioner reported referring patients to SABS and some who had taken part, giving her positive feedback that it had helped their posture and helped with anxiety. She also noted that SABS was not suitable for many of her patients who had severe end-stage disease or did not have online access. Some patients she referred found the idea of singing to be a barrier. The evaluation concluded that healthcare professionals appreciated having an activity which was appropriate to refer their patients to, and they were clearly confident about the quality and impact of what SABS offered.

I do a lot of walking – puff like billy-o when going uphill.... I feel I'm now handling that situation far, far better. Much better than I was handling it before. So, yes, controlling how I breathe has been a vast improvement I would say.

Most valuable thing is the relaxation and the breathing techniques. They help me cope with my everyday demands. I'm a 24-hour carer for my husband – and he is not easy. I've been able to take a deep breath and walk away.

The “illuminative” aspect of the evaluation sought to understand what was important to people about the course beyond the intended outcomes. It was notable that participants and healthcare professionals repeatedly spoke about the skills and personal qualities of the singing leader as being important to making the group fun and accessible. People felt they received the individual attention of the

singing leader and they found her kindness and encouragement to be very supportive.

A second theme important for understanding for whom SABS was effective, is “self-help”. Several participants viewed SABS as a self-help strategy and were clearly motivated to engage in activities they perceived as self-help. People were appreciative of the course being available. The only suggestion for improvement which participants spoke of were that the courses were more widely known about so others could also have the benefits they had experienced. There was also concern that taking part online was not an option for people who did not have internet access.

I have two inhalers. One is a maintenance one... they call it 3-in-1. But I have one for any acute situation. It's in my bag just now – I carry it with me all the time. I have not used it since I started this. I haven't had to use it.

In summary, the evaluation judged SABS to be very successful at helping people who took part to manage their respiratory conditions through Singing for Lung Health techniques. Participants particularly valued the social support they gained from the groups and were greatly appreciative of the supportive and encouraging approach of the singing leader.

For more information about SABS contact:

Liv McLennan (Music for Wellbeing CIC)

livmclennan@yahoo.com

Stephanie Coady (Friends of Salisbury Medical Practice)

stephanie.coady@nhs.net

Numbers involved:

32 Introductory Course Participants (in total)

24 Introductory Course Participants (participated to the end)

16 Breathless Singers Participants

212 Outreach Session Participants