

## Notes from the Network

Greetings, lovely voice people of Networkland.

The days are long, long gone when we could all just chat together over a hot bev and work out how best to do our jobs, or stand enthralled in eachothers' workshops and cherry pick good teaching that would work for us.

Now, thank goodness, we are a great big enormous thing with huge variety because, as we knew all along, (smug!) work with the voice is going to save the planet and all who sail on her.

The challenge now is how to share the good stuff and how to keep on with a learning journey for ourselves as individuals and between ourselves as a Network.

There are some fantastic working practices out there and I'd like to share some of them on a regular basis.

For example, I interviewed my friend Faith Watson about her mentoring system. Faith and I have worked together since way before the Network started and she is one of the most thoughtful and conscientious teachers I know. Some of you will have been on one of her Singing for Larks training courses or on one of her singing holidays abroad.

However, I was interested in the everyday practices that lie behind the headlines.

Faith is naturally community minded and found herself, over the last 10 years, running mentoring schemes as an extension of her regular local projects. She now has a "teaching team" of people who have been empowered over time to take on leadership or teaching roles.

It started with a normal set of workshops in a local community centre that she established as, The Shylarks, - a regular community singing group. Gradually a small group of people emerged from The Shylarks, who wanted to be able to teach songs themselves. The current number is seven. A teaching team have, for the last 10 years, met weekly, led by Faith. Mostly Faith provides the songs to work on but sometimes members of the team do to. Together they prepare the songs for teaching - you know what that involves! Faith is experienced and methodical, so they get a proper grounding. The teaching team then have a go at teaching The Shylarks, first with Faith's help and then on their own. They feed back to each other and to Faith and she to them. It's a frenzy of feedback! Members of the team have gone on to lead small groups and choirs of their own, deputise for others in the area and, jolly for us, have become fully paid-up card-carrying NVNers.

Faith has been approached dozens of times over the years to provide one-to-one mentoring, either as a long term project or one-off problem-solving and has a great reputation for thorough, useful training and not just among us in the Northwest region.

One thing though, despite all the lovely feedback she gets all the time, Faith never stops self-reflection. The learning always goes both ways. She takes great care over the feedback from her training courses, keeps records of what she has done and what needs to be developed - and that's over 21 years of Singing for Larks!

There must be lots of us out there - without big fanfares - just quietly getting on with really good sustainable practices that support ourselves and the Network.

Have you got a mentoring or peer support or teaching and learning practice that we could learn from? If so, email me for a friendly interview and let's share the love, people.

Jules Gibb - [julesgibb@ntlworld.com](mailto:julesgibb@ntlworld.com)