

Notes from the Network - Andi Jaeger

Here's a lovely tale of long-term networking and the wonderful results it can bring in the right hands.

Andi Jaeger lives in Monchengladbach in Germany. Even as a girl she was drawn to song leading - by ear- and knowing that everyone had the right to sing. When she was a young woman, Andi spent a year in Oxford and through a mutual friend, she met NVN member, Helen Lyle from Sheffield.

Andi was thrilled. At the time, Helen ran Body of Sound, a women's choir. At home, Andi was living in a commune and taught English songs, as a way of learning the language, to all the children and their parents. She was also running a feminist choir, Heart Core, in her local women's centre, so very quickly the two song leaders arranged an exchange. In 2001 Body of Sound and Helen visited Germany, and all in all four exchanges took place between the two choirs over the next few years - sharing repertoire, skills, politics and friendship.

Through Helen and other friends, Andi was introduced to the Women's Singing Week at Laurieston Hall. Being a commune, Andi was right at home there. Laurieston Hall - just in case you are unfamiliar with it, is a seminal place in the development of many of the Network's longest-standing members. That is where many of us first met, before there was a Network, and realised we were all doing the same kind of work. For over 25 years many of the same women song leaders would meet, share new skills and repertoire and hone our craft, learning from each other and forming community. When Andi came in 2002 and fitted right in, she realised it was a great place to bring those little singing children from home. They were teenagers by then, but had sung natural voice all their lives. So from then on Andi and a core group of friends and young people were regular visitors.

If you've heard the term "Community of Practice" bandied about but not been sure how it works, then what Andi says about those Laurieston years sums it up beautifully. Over the years Andi watched very many good NVN practitioners and picked up the different ways we do things, not only teaching but dealing with mistakes, dealing with groups, making community. She observed all the different ways of doing things and brought back to Germany the skills she needed. She says she collected the jigsaw pieces to fit her skills and abilities and preferences. Val Regan now keeps up the Sheffield connection and, with others, still visits Monchengladbach every year, sometimes with her choir Out Aloud. Now we learn from Andi.

Andi's Heart Core is still going strong 23 years later. She has been running a workplace choir for 20 years and a choir for some of her patients with mental health issues for the last 8 years. She still runs a girls' choir. Her small performing group Piece of Peace has always been cross-generational. And what happened to all those singing youngsters? The ones who grew up the NVN way? They are now all grown up with degrees and world travel under their belts and are busy building up NVN work of their own.

And here's the happy ending. Andi, along with her highly skilled young voice leaders, like Mira and Nora, have formed a German branch of the NVN. Look out for their first voice leader training weekend in Monchengladbach very soon."