

## **Update from Frankie Armstrong - July 2018**

Summer greetings to you all. I'm writing this in the garden with rose petals wafting down in a gentle breeze. I hope all of you have been able to experience such pleasures over these warm weeks.

I'm off to the States for a month in a day's time so thought I'd put a few thoughts re. my involvements with the Network over the past months.

I do hope most of you are able to be part of a regional group. Here in South Wales we have a really supportive and co-operative group. I'm not sure just how many of us there are, but I can reel off over 18 immediately. Even if I'm not able to attend some of their events, I get to see much of the correspondence between the members and there is so much support, practical help and co-ordination between them - it is truly heart-warming.

What has been very wonderful to witness is how they have all managed to avoid treading on each other's toes. An example of this was some years back when I was approached at a singing event by a new Network member who asked me to gather the Networkers together at the break so she could ask whether it would be possible for her to start up a group in Cardiff. After a helpful discussion it was clear that one part of the city had no groups or choirs and would make a good area to create one. This seems to be a good model, with members covering teaching for each other when on holiday or sick, knowing that their groups will experience the same ethos and approach.

I recently ran a day along with two other members on "Looking After Ourselves". I was prompted to do this when I came back from my wonderful warm two months in Australia in April - I thought everyone, friends and colleagues alike, seemed quite worn out. It was obviously partly the long cold winter. However when I talked to Network members about this, they showed an interest in groups that I used to run to help colleagues in the "caring professions" to look after themselves better. I used both useful challenging ideas and practical steps to help make time to care for ourselves so as to keep our own energy and vibrancy alive, as well as being more "present" for others.

On the day one member started by leading a guided relaxation sequence, having us listening to glorious music, followed by a beautiful relaxing and focused Feldenkrais session with us rolling gently on the floor. Then a song and shared lunch, and then two of us led small group sharings and discussion. We finished with committing ourselves to at least one action that we'd identified as helpful. It's great to hear that the South West group (Glos and Wiltshire) would like such a day for themselves, so we've got a possible date for this in September.

I was in Brighton recently doing some recording with three young singers. I also ran workshops on "Finding Easeful Power" at the Street Choirs Festival there. I was only there for the two hours of my workshops as I find large groups very difficult to function in, due to my hearing and sight impairment. I am fine working in such settings but the socialising is pretty tricky. However I can pick up the atmosphere at the Festival and found it was buzzing, with everyone having a great time. Thanks to Kirsty Martin for organising this year's Festival. And what an ideal place to launch the new book "Singing For Our Lives". I'm so glad that NVN trustee Lotte and the Campaign

Choirs Writing Collective who put this unique and inspirational book together persevered and were able to give us all these stories of singing for justice and equality down the past decades.

And, talking of books, after many months of negotiation, Pluto Press has agreed to PRINT ON DEMAND the book "My Song Is My Own" - 100 women's songs spanning five centuries. The book was first printed in 1979 and compiled by Kathy Henderson with me and Sandra Kerr. We have negotiated for a discount price for NVN members - I'm afraid it isn't cheap and no longer has the illustrations, but it is an iconic book and important as an archive of women's history through song.

I wish you all a creative, relaxing and fulfilling rest of the summer, in whatever proportions suit your needs.

Frankie