

## FEEDBACK FROM ANNUAL GATHERING 2019

Social and wellbeing	Good:	Improve
<b>General comments:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people being very friendly,</li> <li>• feeling supported, included and safe all weekend,</li> <li>• welcoming to newcomers,</li> <li>• buddy system much appreciated</li> <li>• appreciation of organisation of whole social and well-being 'package'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Still find it a bit cliquy (1 comment)</li> <li>• 'Would love free bars of chocolate, champagne and gin' <i>NOTE: finally a serious suggestion!</i></li> <li>• 'Great! Lovely! Felt well and full of beingness'</li> </ul>
<b>Wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lots of praise for Jo's input and appreciation of the well-being team. The JOMO (joy of missing out) was thoroughly appreciated with lots of comments about feeling relaxed and 'allowed to sit out'. It feels as if the message was truly taken on board this year - and JOMO is now a verb: 'Loved permission to JOMO!'</li> <li>• several mention the importance of the 'what's in the room that is not readable' e.g. 'imposter syndrome' and 'I'm safe - I matter'</li> <li>• 'Really appreciated the team + the scarf, very thoughtful. Made the gathering bearable! ♥'</li> <li>• 'Jo was awesome in her role and made me feel like it is okay not to be okay!'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make well-being and inclusivity part of the initial 'hello' - before any 'ice breakers'.</li> <li>• 'Icebreaker activity are pretty scary for many. Could we have a more gentle start?' 'Would have liked to start the Friday pm with a sing pre talking and announcements.'</li> <li>• Some would like more 'scarf-of-wellbeing' people</li> <li>• Some missed Jo's wellbeing speech - one suggested having a written display on the board</li> <li>• Quiet room was requested again from several people. 'Quiet room where one can withdraw with others, i.e. not just to own room'. 'I love having a wellbeing scarf available and to build on this...could we have a whole sanctuary room available and "staffed" all w/e so that we could go somewhere for time out but not alone, like having a permanent home for the scarf wearer.' <i>NOTE: we'd need a bigger venue with more rooms available</i></li> <li>• 'Applause can be very jangly on nerves already stretched with lights, carpet, air etc. Silent applause - sign language or a mix of sign and gentle could be supportive to many' (1 comment)</li> <li>• 'Would love stickers on the badges, e.g. Dog=love to hug, Cat=may like a hug, but ask first, Bird=not keen on being touched'</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several asked for a 'silent table' at meal times like last year.</li> <li>• 'The labyrinth was fab'</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inclusivity was appreciated again with many comments about feeling welcome and supported</li> <li>• the inclusivity team was praised for their support and organisation</li> <li>• 'Lots of support on offer at just the right level I feel'</li> <li>• 'People have been very positive in their support of me over the weekend, as a visually impaired person'.</li> <li>• 'Felt more looked after than I have previously'.</li> <li>• 'Everyone was very friendly and welcoming to me as a newbie. Wonderful staff (Jo was such a great presence) and my home leader Janet and my buddy. But everyone helped to make me feel welcome'.</li> <li>• 'TOTAL APPRECIATION TO INCLUSIVITY TEAM. It has been deeply wonderful to have support all w/e as and when needed. Thanks ♥'.</li> <li>• 'Buddies are a fantastic idea - supportive, makes you feel included'.</li> <li>• 'Wasn't expecting to, but loved having a buddy'.</li> <li>• 'I benefitted hugely from being both a buddy and an inclusivity champion. It gave me a role, gave me new people to talk to, made me feel useful and it was generally a <u>positive</u> thing. I hesitated to offer to be a 'champion' (not sure about the name) but I'm so glad I did'</li> <li>• Comment summing up inclusivity and wellbeing: 'Lots of thought has gone into this. Thanks!.'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Not acceptable for choir leaders in big room to go without microphone. Please explain to them why - loop system, not "Volume OK cos there's 2 of us"!' <i>NOTE: We have to enforce the use of mics (need one more clip-on mic)</i></li> <li>• 'Need large word sheets for big sings, please'</li> <li>• 'A lot of the wellbeing processes during the gathering seem to be visually orientated (including this feedback process). I'd be happy to feed in ideas to change this - Kate Portal'</li> <li>• 'Would have been nice for Kate to have Leon's words beforehand.' <i>NOTE: This is an important point: we should ask for printed matter in advance, where possible, so it can be sent to visually impaired members in preparation for the gathering. Same problem with teaching wordy songs, see further comments by Kate Portal.</i></li> <li>• 'Use of language "of course you all know this", "we all know" can feel quite excluding when you don't know, like you don't belong.' <i>NOTE: include in inclusivity briefing (also to workshop leaders)</i></li> <li>• 'Could you do some kind of thing where <u>everybody</u> has a buddy?'</li> <li>• 'The inclusivity team were all white and female - not very inclusive!'</li> <li>• 'On the issue of men being a minority/vulnerable group (as per Dom's workshop), should there be a special effort made for their inclusion here? (I am cis female)'</li> <li>• 'Important to remind about the inclusivity in singing in the bar. Good to do at least one song that everyone knows, like a song from Friday big sing'</li> </ul>

<b>Home groups</b>	<p>Many comments of appreciation of home groups: feeling safe and supported, having a relaxed place to talk outside the big gathering, being listened to, getting to know people. Several comments saying 'keep the home groups'. The facilitators were much appreciated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Felt very safe and valued'</li> <li>• 'Xenia held the home group wonderfully'</li> <li>• 'Lovely home group with Gitika'. 'Gitika was a fabulous facilitator'.</li> <li>• 'So lovely and caring - I loved the home group and all the organisation, was so well organised that I felt safe. Thanks.'</li> <li>• 'Home group much needed. Janet v. warm and easy'.</li> <li>• 'Jane was a fun and fair facilitator'</li> <li>• 'Coloured name group badges very reassuring when first arrived'.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer members in each group? <i>See previous note about available rooms</i></li> <li>• 'The home groups are a great idea, but ours went badly wrong this time. How can we get really clear on purpose for facilitators?'</li> <li>• 'I wonder how much the home group leaders are able to make those groups their own/adapt to individual needs etc. Maybe include something in the guidance about there not being just one way of doing it?'</li> <li>• 'I know there can be issues with 'air-time' not being equally shared in home groups - can this be more actively addressed? Talking stick? Clearer guidelines?'</li> <li>• 'I understand there were helpful suggestions for facilitators to follow but our group got lost. Maybe emphasise to facilitators to explain the purpose [of the home group] first.'</li> <li>• 'One home group could be ½ men and ½ women'</li> </ul>
<b>Programme</b>		
<b>General comments</b>	<p>Lots of comments appreciating the whole event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of thank yous and smileys and words like 'wonderful', 'rejuvenating', 'refreshing', 'entertaining', 'joyful'...</li> <li>• 'Best gathering ever (I've been to)'</li> </ul> <p>And (my favourite):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'I think the whole team that planned the event need applauding – must be a massive undertaking to please so many people. I've heard a lot of niggling complaints from others over the most minute things! I think it's been great for all our needs.'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Not the best time of year'</li> <li>• 'Yes! Important theme. Would have liked more discussion and analysis of our potential role'</li> </ul>
<b>Programme and organisation</b>	<p>All round appreciation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of comments appreciating the theme and variation, e.g. 'A great mixture and good to have a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of comments calling for more vocal warm ups – special mentions of warm up not happening on Saturday morning. Also asking for special warm up as a start to the</li> </ul>

	<p>focus'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Much praise for the organisers and appreciation of the work that had gone into planning and organising. 'Big thanks to all who organised. Good variety and all flowed well.' 'Amazing feat of organisation, well done!'</li> <li>• More time between sessions appreciated as was 'free time' slot. Also, the continued message of JOMO meant more felt free to take time out for themselves. 'Felt a bit more spacious this year'.</li> <li>• More time in homegroups appreciated (although a few wanted more).</li> <li>• 'So brilliant that workshops were flagged up in advance'.</li> <li>• Well described sessions and good signage. 'Clear communication of where everything was!'</li> </ul>	<p>gathering.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More signage upstairs, displaying workshop programme. Consider venue programme on each workshop door.</li> <li>• 'Would like more information on content of workshops (to know what we're signing up to) to make choosing easier.'</li> <li>• 'Please can we have more advance notice of the programme, specifically the workshops to allow us to decide whether or not to come'</li> <li>• 'Not enough time to breathe'</li> <li>• 'Name tag could be left on until the end – not collected early - I needed to find people and wanted to say good bye using their name'</li> </ul>
<p><b>Workshops</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good and interesting variety of workshops and sessions. Making workshops a full hour seems to have taken away the feeling of being rushed, reported by many last year.</li> <li>• Much appreciation of workshops, content and quality of teaching</li> <li>• Great range, helpful content and something for everybody. 'Theme and programme were separate and that was <u>good</u>. Some things reflected the theme, others didn't (we all come for many reasons)'</li> <li>• Leon Rosselson's sessions and general attendance (incl. Sat cabaret) was highly appreciated with comments like 'Lovely to have Leon with us – a privilege'; 'Leon was a real treat'; 'Enjoyed Leon Rosselson – he is legend!'; 'Thanks Leon R for activist history'; 'Loved Leon's knowledge and reflections and song intros'. 'Learned a lot from Leon's session about historical context'...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Singing walk lovely with David. Need to know info detail in advance: steepness, length and time factors. 3 people got lost and left behind. Names hidden under coats. So improvement planning required'</li> <li>• Ideas for workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'Choir leading by introverts'</li> <li>- 'More in composing songs, please'</li> <li>- 'I did miss range of style from other musical genres such as gospel, soul etc.'</li> <li>- 'Offer a safe, supportive constructive space for <u>new</u> teachers to teach?'</li> <li>- 'Something on vocal health?'</li> <li>- Need to share: how do we work with teaching our songs?'</li> <li>- 'Be good to have a whole workshop on practical tips and demos only of easy warm ups'</li> <li>- 'Please provide a session that explains NVN practices, principles (not how it works behind the</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other special workshop mentions were Caroline Bithell ('absolutely love Caroline Bithell's talks') , Rod Paton' (Rod's w/s was fab!'), Joan Mills, Roxanne Smith ('Great workshops – loved Joan's ball on and Roxanne's polyphony one'), Heather Murray ('Loved Heather - looking after yourself'), Janet Swan ('learned lots about breathing'), Dominic Stichbury ('really great lecture style') Kit Heyam ('learnt lots...Kit was excellent – more on this please!'); David Burbidge ('Singing walk: brilliant!')</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<p>scenes, but how choir sessions work in general), e.g. why don't we use notation or why we teach in a circle. This would be great for new and old members.' A further comment on the same theme: 'Please include more focus on NVN principles and values. As a 'newbie' I've got to the end of the weekend and still am no wiser as to how they work in practice'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several comments about Leon Rosselson's keynote workshop being too long, sit-down session, and not to everybody's taste (inclusivity issues dealt with under 'inclusivity' heading): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'Too intellectual and passive sitting. Lost track.'</li> <li>- 'Give clear remit to visiting speakers (seemed like Leon R thought everyone in the room was an informed left-winger)'</li> <li>- A 2-hour keynote speech on Sat felt very long and not necessarily universally appealing. Could Keynote be shorter?' <i>NOTE: was actually 90 minutes, but must have felt longer to some.</i></li> <li>- The introduction of Leon Rosselson should have been clearer about who he is, his history, the purpose of his talk (lots of people didn't know who he was). We missed Frankie on this, couldn't be helped.'</li> <li>- 'We need singing before keynote workshop'</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 'Words should be taught before displayed. Large amounts of words need to be appropriately organised in advance for visually impaired participants. That includes keynote speakers and workshop leaders. I'm willing to feed into this constructively. Kate Portal.'</li> <li>• 'Bring in new people for teaching songs and leading in song shares etc. to give more experience.'</li> </ul>
<p><b>Songs and warm-ups</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big sings very popular with the variety and quality of song leaders mentioned by many. Friday night was mentioned in particular.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More invitation to improv. Over choir leaders' songs would be lovely. Encourage us to be free, even over our own material'</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Excellent number and variety of song leaders in Big Sing sessions – esp. liked variety on Friday evening.’</li> <li>• ‘So great to get a good dose of big sings. It is such <u>amazing</u> soul food!’</li> <li>• ‘Emily’s song on Fri eve made me weep – in the best way!’</li> <li>• ‘More Ali Burns teaching – always brilliant’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See comments under inclusivity above (mic, written material)</li> <li>• ‘Vocal warm ups were missed – so important to look after our vocal health’</li> <li>• ‘Would prefer song sessions not to be “hijacked” for personal promotion of the teacher’</li> </ul>
<b>Techie</b>	Recording all the sessions is appreciated, so people can experience even sessions they couldn’t go to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to get a ‘buddy’ for Neal, so he does not feel obliged to be at all sessions.</li> <li>• Keep reminding people of the ‘no individual recording’ policy, incl. videoing people singing in the bar.</li> <li>• ‘Microphones are a necessary thing in this room. People need to get over it!’</li> <li>• ‘Could we use technology and get words on screen (in big room) rather than bits of paper?’</li> <li>• ‘Sound quality of microphones awful – buy some new ones’</li> </ul>
<b>Party:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Thank you so much to Clara!’</li> <li>• Well done Clara on the party’</li> <li>• ‘Clara’s party was wonderful. A sense of freedom and a laid-back feel was most welcome’</li> <li>• ‘Loved the protest songs in the cabaret’</li> <li>• ‘Party and cabaret great fun as ever - Bar sings excellent!’</li> <li>• Loved the party and late night singing’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘The cabaret was good but too long’</li> <li>• ‘The cabaret was very long! I didn’t make it through to the end and ended up missing my performance. Please can we be more limited on number of performers/more realistic about how long they’ll take - it <u>will</u> end up being more than 3 mins.</li> <li>• ‘More time for dancing’</li> <li>• ‘Felt the cabaret evening was a bit serious’</li> </ul>
<b>Venue</b>		
<b>General</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numerous comments on venue being easy to reach, easy to find, good parking, having everything in one place, easy to orientate.</li> <li>• ‘Great spaces, great food, great rooms. All good from</li> </ul>	<p>There were comments about the type of venue and its suitability (in addition to all the comments about air and light problems):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ‘Venue seems at odds with NVN vibe. Harsh lighting</li> </ul>

	<p>me!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'So grateful for a lovely clean warm room, hot food and very helpful staff'</li> <li>• 'Great venue, v. comfortable rooms, helpful staff'</li> </ul>	<p>and noisy aircon. But I appreciate there are few venues that can manage so many people'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'Rent a mansion. Cook for ourselves in home groups. Come together and sing'</li> <li>- 'A venue that had more natural light/connection with the natural world would be great. Could the gathering be in the summer? (maybe even just once for 25 year celebration?)'</li> <li>- 'I would like a different venue with a calmer feel and more outside spaces'</li> <li>- 'The venue is not ideal. I know it's a huge job to investigate other possibilities but maybe if enough of the members look for an alternative this could be an option.'</li> <li>- 'Would like a less corporate and more earthy venue'</li> <li>- 'Something more rural and affordable perhaps with a kitchen space people can use?'</li> <li>- 'Might be time to try a venue further north – Birmingham is easier for most'</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communal rooms and facilities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many comments appreciating space and comfort.</li> <li>• Good spaces for workshops: 'Good range of spaces for activities'</li> <li>• Spa and pool much appreciated: 'Loved the pool and sauna etc.'</li> <li>• 'Loved it. Please don't change a thing'</li> <li>• 'Great staff, great food. I really think too much fuss is made about a carpet!!'</li> <li>• 'Couldn't care less about the carpet' (x2)</li> <li>• 'Love the carpet, loved the staff, complimentary biscuits and tv ☺'</li> <li>• 'Carpet is OK. Open a window when hot. All great!'</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of daylight and fresh air in the hotel was mentioned by many, biggest problem in Buckholt with the neon lighting.</li> <li>• 'Keep door in Buckholt open to outside all the time'</li> <li>• 'Temperature never right' <i>NOTE: impossible task!</i></li> <li>• 'Could have more liaison beforehand with staff to let them know our needs, i.e. no background music at meal times, Sat night bar closing etc.</li> <li>• 'Bar closing at 12?!?'</li> <li>• 'Locked doors a bit tricky'</li> <li>• 'There were lots of times when loo roll and hot water ran out'</li> <li>• THE CARPET (Buckholt) as usual caused many comments re being 'distracting', 'intrusive', visually problematic for some people, and so on.</li> </ul>

<b>Rooms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overwhelming number of positive comments about the rooms being 'comfy', 'lovely', 'great' etc.</li> <li>• 'Very luxurious setting – I had a huge television in my room which was a revelation! Everything easy to get to'</li> <li>• 'Rooms lovely – fridge was fab!'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few had problems with working the heating controls in their bedrooms, e.g. 'Inaccessible method of operating the lights and heating turned on by card'</li> <li>• A couple of people mentioned that more could be done environmentally, e.g. no needless washing of towels (despite hanging them up), use of small plastic shampoo and soap bottles etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Food</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many comments on nice food (less so from vegetarians and vegans)</li> <li>• Lots of comments on helpful, friendly and accommodating staff, right from chefs and kitchen staff to bar &amp; restaurant staff, excellent service</li> <li>• 'Great breakfast'</li> <li>• 'Good food'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many (40+) comments about the food in general being much less interesting than previously</li> <li>• Many comments on the vegetarian food being unimaginative and repetitive (e.g. the same every meal such as baked potato with baked beans...), and vegan food, in particular, short of protein. Could be more nuts and pulses.</li> <li>• Would like better range of salads, desserts, even vegan cake (also for break times) plus more vegetables.</li> <li>• A couple of comments on the quality of the coffee, also lack of decaf and choice of herbal teas (rooibos).</li> </ul>
<b>Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff were universally praised as being helpful, attentive, friendly, responsive, accommodating and well organised</li> <li>• 'Wonderfully helpful and friendly staff'</li> <li>• 'Staff really lovely – what a fab welcome rap!!'</li> <li>• 'Excellent, helpful can-do staff'</li> <li>• 'Venue staff were super helpful and accommodating'</li> </ul>	