

## Case studies: How have culture and creativity been supporting people in health, care and other institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Organisation: Sing Inside  
Region: England & Wales  
Designed for: People serving sentences

“Although it has been very challenging not being able to access prisons during this time we have worked to provide remote musical learning that helps embed a sense of community and being part of something bigger. Our work repeatedly finds that this feeling of inclusion can be life-changing for people and a huge boost to wellbeing.”



A performance from a Sing Inside group of prison residents and volunteers at HMP Whitemoor in 2019. Credit: MBP Productions

### Introduction

Sing Inside is a charity bringing group singing workshops into prisons, using musical learning to build confidence in residents. Our workshops are led by local volunteers, bringing people together through shared musical connections to break down stereotypes surrounding prison communities. We use group singing to break down these social barriers and encourage creativity, confidence and a greater sense of self-worth.

As an alternative to our usual group singing workshops we have created and distributed several sets of in-cell learning resources for residents to use. These consist of CDs and printed worksheets including warm-ups, songs to learn and general musical literacy. The CD includes pre-recorded learning tracks from our musical leaders, plus backing tracks with piano and small band accompaniment. We have also used local prison radio stations to broadcast short warm ups and workshops.

Volunteer engagement has continued to be central to our work throughout the pandemic, helping volunteers take a leading role in our work. In April, encouraging volunteers to take part in the 2.6 Fundraising Challenge raised almost £7000. We have provided remote workshops via Zoom, learning the same songs as are on our remote learning resources, and also run Zoom workshops at the same time as prison radio broadcasts to encourage a sense of learning together. Volunteers have also provided vocal tracks for the learning resources, contributing to prisoner in-cell learning themselves.

To date we have produced two rounds of resources, and distributed almost 400 CDs into 18 prisons across England and Wales.

### Who is it for?

Our target group is anyone living or working in prisons across England and Wales. We also run specific tailored sessions for residents living on PIPE units in partnership with local NHS staff, but these groups have found learning remotely challenging.

### Are these people you have worked with before, or new participants?

Both

### How many people took/are taking part?

It is hard to give exact numbers, but having sent out around 200 CDs per round of remote resources, we would expect between 200 and 400 people in prisons to have accessed our resources over lockdown, taking into account repeat users of resources. We have also run workshops for volunteers online and worked with approximately 30 people.

### Where is it happening?

We work throughout England and during the pandemic have reached prisons in Wales.

### For how long has it been happening?

The virtual resources were first sent out in April, as a continuation of the in-person workshops we were providing. This will continue until visits can resume.

### What were/are the main outputs?

It was difficult to plan for practical outputs given that accessing institutions was so difficult, beyond the production of CDs and running remote workshops over Zoom. One prison did manage to send us videos of songs they had rewritten the lyrics for and performed on the wing; these were published on our YouTube channel.

### What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

- Boosting wellbeing and positivity, and improving mood
- New knowledge/increased understanding of singing technique, musical literacy and/or learning of songs
- Increased sense of community and engagement with others, at a time of intense isolation

### Have you adapted existing work to make this happen? If so, how?

We have taken many of the songs and warm-ups previously used in workshops and our volunteers have modified and recorded these on CDs. These are accompanied by a written information pack which includes the song lyrics, information on the music and music theory games. We have worked to maintain the same values of accessibility, whatever your musical background to these resources, by providing aural resources for those who cannot read music.

### Evaluation & Feedback

This has been very challenging. We have sent feedback forms in and not had great takeup; of the resources circulated, we only received 14 feedback forms. Staff have provided some verbal feedback, but this is not as detailed as we would normally hope for. We have used questionnaires emailed into prisons and printed/distributed by staff. This has given us a vague sense of how things are being received and the key barriers to engaging with our work, for example not having a CD player in your cell. Generally, the resources have been well-received, but in comparison to the normal levels of positive feedback we have received, participants how found learning on their own is a very different experience to learning with our groups of volunteers or musical leaders in person.

Key survey results can be found [here](#).

### What is your own impression of how it has worked? What have been the challenges and successes for you?

It has certainly been a challenge as our workshops are usually centred on interaction and community. We hope to have provided some support and maintained our presence through the resources we have provided.

### Are you reaching more people/fewer people/different people?

We are providing resources to prisons we have not had a presence in before, so meeting some new people, which has been good. However, we are reaching fewer people than we would with a group workshops. Those who are not confident enough to sing alone yet thrive in the group setting; singing alone in their cells will not appeal to them, so building that confidence needed for greater uptake is difficult.

### What new skills have you or your colleagues had to develop to deliver this work?

We have had to develop our music technology and production skills as well as learning new workshop leading expertise to broadcast via radio! Communication has of course had to happen virtually so we've been learning the most effective ways to conduct meetings, workshops and meet new people over Zoom.

### What would you say has made this project possible?

Mainly the commitment and hard work of our volunteers and committees. The executive team has worked continuously and innovatively to make the project possible and the endless support of our trustees and supporters has been invaluable.

### What would have made it easier?

Better guidance from prisons on creating digital resources that meet their requirements and are accessible. Additionally, we applied for project funding to cover the time it took to design and create these resources, but were unsuccessful. Creative activities have been so hard to come by during lockdown, but we have really struggled to find funding as a small voluntary charity. Most of those organisations who have been funded are already established orgs with offices and staff to furlough, whereas we have had to continue making do with volunteer time despite it being much more time consuming work than our normal activities. Funders have not been keen to support new organisations to do different or adapted work which has been very challenging.

### Further information

<https://www.singinside.org>