



A COMMUNITY CHOIR

Source: Internet

I can't sing the praises of choirs, especially kids' choruses, enough. I spent many years of my own childhood singing in them, and started one. We started building a small, folksy chorus for mostly homeschooled kids who would come from all over Ottawa and rehearse once a week in the morning. And it grew and grew. And now we have an established choral community – a group of families supporting this choir as it evolves and strengthens.

We know a lot about what singing, especially in a group form like a choir, does for kids.

It fosters creativity

Gives kids a bridge into other musical and performance media like studying an instrument, theatre and helps to tune their ears

Encourages memory

Builds practice habits and concentration

Gives kids the chance to gain the confidence to speak and sing in front of others

Teamwork, all of the wonderful benefits of supporting one another as a team

The importance of being punctual and showing up when you say you will

There seems to be a decline in choirs. Fewer choirs in schools, communities and cities. There's probably a myriad of reasons for that, but I've always thought it's best to start small, and make positive change from the ground up – right where you live.

If you have been thinking about starting a choir where you live, especially if you happen to homeschool or your children don't have a choir in their school, here are some ideas and tips – things we've learned over the last year.

ONE – Be super excited about it (and talk about it everywhere you go)

Before we actually found the right person to lead it, and long before anybody was signed up.. I talked about this new choir everywhere we went. The community garden, the farmer's market, play groups, play dates, with neighbors and everyone at the local Folk Music Store/ Music School. Sometimes gossip and "word getting around" is a really great thing, and we tried to use it to our advantage. It didn't matter if it hadn't actually been created yet.

TWO – Ask around and thread your way to the right person to lead the choir

Finding the right person to lead your choir is the most difficult and most important challenge. In our case, we needed someone who was available during the day, excited to work with younger children, very musically talented (a musician!) and so much more. We started by asking recent Teaching Education (i.e. teacher) graduates in Music and while enthusiastic, most of these people were in the midst of securing full time teaching positions in schools. But it might be a great option for someone who is between such positions. And then we asked people in Ottawa’s music community, and threaded our way to the right person.

THREE – Find a quiet, calm space to rehearse (Our, sometimes, underutilized, Corps buildings)

Since kids can easily be overstimulated and overwhelmed with noise, adult conversations, etc. we wanted to make sure they had every opportunity to concentrate and learn together. We also wanted the choir to become routine in their lives (and ours) so we picked a day and time and stuck to it. We ended up finding a neighborhood church who lets us use their quiet, calm basement in the morning. There are doors to a small waiting area where moms and dads and siblings can hang out.

FOUR – Focus on process, not performance

So much musical learning happens outside of actual performances. And being a bit more laid-back and easy-going in terms of choir culture means that the focus is on what happens each Thursday morning, not what happens during their infrequent performances. Every few months they will sing at a retirement home, a coffee house or on a proper stage for family and friends. It’s fun, and helps build critical performance skills. But it’s not really what it’s all about. By keeping it light and fun, it means less anxiety for the kids and less tension around the concerts.

FIVE – Keep the cost low

Keeping it affordable helps siblings participate together, and helps open the door to lots of families.

SIX – Have shows for fun, at coffee houses, outdoors... anywhere!

A show can happen almost anywhere!

SEVEN – Encourage team spirit and have the kids commit to learning the material

Much like a team, a choir is made of children who sing and support one another. Having the children commit to practicing at home and learning all the words is a great way to build team spirit and help the choir progress.

EIGHT – Be sensitive to age ranges, developmental grouping

We have found that 4 or 4 and a half to about eight or nine works pretty well for a larger group. A smaller group might be best with kids in the 5-7 (or Kindergarten) age range. Doing a separate choir for

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pre-teens and teens is probably best as their musical taste and interests are more than likely to be different.

NINE – Build a song community, and keep it going.

Once you've got your choir started, made it past the initial weeks and months of growing pains and everyone learning to trust one another and work together.... keep it going! Find new members, make concert plans and talk about ideas for next semester / year.

TEN – Logo and t-shirts

We had a simple logo made, and used it to print on some t-shirts for the kids to wear as a uniform. We noticed a real change as soon as the t-shirts came – it seems to unify them and make them feel special, as a team.