



Photo: Graham Denholm

WITH ONE VOICE

How **Creativity Australia** is changing the world, one voice and one community at a time.

For the past 10 years Creativity Australia's *With One Voice* program has inspired tens of thousands of lives by enabling opportunities for social inclusion and bridging socioeconomic division using the incredible power of group singing, sharing supper and granting of wishes. Singing in a group improves wellbeing, inspires personal growth, saves and changes lives and transforms communities in an age of increasing depression, anxiety and social isolation.

LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

All the lonely people, where do they all come from? All the lonely people, where do they all belong?

The life and death of Eleanor Rigby, in the bleak Beatles song, reminds us that loneliness kills. Recent studies conclude loneliness and social isolation are the next big public health issues, on par with obesity, domestic violence and substance abuse.

At some stage of our lives, loneliness affects almost all of us. But for many, it is a core factor in mental and physical health problems, and economic disadvantage.

Swinburne University and the Australian Psychological Society are conducting the country's first research project on the impact of loneliness on physical and mental health. In a survey conducted by the researchers in 2018, 50.5% of Australians reported they felt lonely for at least a day in the previous week; 27.6% felt lonely for three or more days; and nearly 30% rarely or never felt they were part of a group of friends.

Overseas, a meta-analysis conducted by researchers in the US concluded that actual and perceived social isolation are both associated with increased risk for early mortality, and that risk is comparable to other well established risk factors. This followed an earlier study which found that lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and that loneliness is potentially twice as bad for older people's health as obesity and almost as great a cause of death as poverty. On top of this, UK studies have found loneliness to be an even greater concern among young people than the elderly. In 2018 a Minister for Loneliness was appointed in Britain.

Cultural minority groups and those facing disadvantage, including asylum seekers, migrants, people with disabilities and serious illnesses

– those facing discrimination, racism, unemployment and isolation – are particularly susceptible. And when people feel they hold little importance or value in other people’s lives, it also harms our communities as well as the individuals.

WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT, WE ARE ALL PART OF THE GLOBAL EPIDEMIC OF OUR TIMES – LONELINESS

Trends such as our ageing population and the increase of single-person dwelling compound the problem of loneliness and social isolation. Another factor is the rise of technologies that have transformed the way we relate to others.

We are social animals, but social media and technology have made it easier to avoid forming substantive real-life relationships. Some people can live out their lives not stirring from their bedroom, if they have a laptop computer and a mobile phone.

THE PACE OF CHANGE

Exponential technological acceleration and globalisation is unleashing a wave of economic and social change on an unprecedented scale. Australian and international research suggests between 40 and 60% of current middle-class jobs won’t exist in 10 years’ time due to robotics, artificial intelligence and other new technologies. While many people will gain from such transformational change, there is a real risk that more people in our society will become even more socially isolated because their jobs become redundant or they can’t keep up with the pace of change. There is an all too pervasive sense it is becoming harder to find your place in the world or get ahead.

A NEW MODEL FOR COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Compounding this, despite various attempts by governments and community organisations, the dominant Australian and global social welfare and engagement groups support people from

WITH ONE VOICE - FAST FACTS

- 10 years of the *With One Voice* program
- 25 choirs across Australia
- Goal of 40 choirs nationally by the end of 2020
- 6,000+ choir participants
- 100s of volunteers
- 1,000+ inspiring performances at community and corporate events and functions
- 3,000+ wishes granted (since 2013)
- 100s of work experience, skills, mentoring and employment opportunities
- 100s of connections to health and social services
- National and international interest to commence new choirs
- Development of the *With One Voice* social franchise model

similar backgrounds or disadvantage.

Although this provides for focused attention and is comfortable for participants, it also puts individuals in silos, reinforces segregation, entrenches labels, creates a dependency mentality, and ultimately traps individuals within their existing network. Once so trapped, it’s hard to break out.

This top-down social welfare approach has been unsuccessful to date. Given the continued increase of disadvantage (Australia’s welfare is currently reported at being more than \$176 billion per annum, up from \$150 billion the previous year, and more than one in four families received a government handout), we need to find a better model for supporting, and, in fact, ending disadvantage and isolation, especially in our first world country.

Emerging evidence and research shows that complex social issues can only be tackled successfully at a local level, with whole-of-community involvement. And prevention and early intervention are the key. If we want to create cohesive and inclusive communities where every voice matters, then we all need to share in finding the sustainable solutions to our growing social and economic problems.

Together we need to find some ‘uber-innovative’ approaches and policy initiatives to redesign our social welfare ecosystem and start solving these social problems now. All of us need to be part of building tolerant, harmonious, inclusive, resilient and supportive neighbourhoods and communities that bring people together through their common interests, not differences.

CREATIVITY AUSTRALIA

Creativity Australia (creativityaustralia.org.au) is building a happier, healthier, more inclusive nation through the life-changing *With One Voice* program. We bridge the gap between people experiencing disadvantage and those more fortunate through the neuro-scientific benefits of community singing. We build supportive networks that help people connect to brighter futures. Together, we can change the world... one voice at a time.

I founded Creativity Australia in 2008 and following my TED talk, *‘How Singing Together Changes The Brain’*, we received global interest to replicate the *With One Voice* programs. Pilot *With One Voice* programs are now taking place around Australia and the world.

WITH ONE VOICE

Creativity Australia’s *With One Voice* program operates in Victoria, New South Wales, ACT, SA and Queensland with new programs commencing in WA and Tasmania in early 2019. More than 25 inclusive community choirs unite thousands of people aged nine to 90, from all faiths and all walks of life: migrants; people with disabilities; job seekers; executives; seniors; students; refugees; asylum seekers; and more.

WHY WE SING

Neuroscience proves that group singing makes us happier, healthier, smarter and



Photo: Graham Denholm

Founder of Creativity Australia, Tania de Jong.

more creative. Every time you sing, you fire up the right temporal lobe of your brain, and release endorphins including oxytocin which result in heightened states of pleasure, bliss, bonding and love. These chemicals also enhance neuroplasticity of our brains, boost our immune system, fight illness, depression and strokes, and help us handle pain better. What’s more, choral singers have been shown to have enhanced learning skills, synchronised heartbeats and enter patterns of yogic breathing. So what better activity for one’s mental health than a daily dose of song? The scientific benefits of singing are really mind-boggling! Singing together is a super-duper drug that integrates the mind and body and helps to heal our brains and enhance our learning abilities! And it’s free because we all have a voice.

OUR UNIQUE MODEL

With One Voice choirs are led by professional conductors and meet weekly, followed by supper. Through our Wish List program, participants grant one another wishes big and small: free music lessons; language and computer tuition; assistance with accommodation; and writing resumes. The choirs help people connect to whatever they need in life: friends; mentors; wellbeing; self-esteem; networks; skills; and employment. Over 3,000 wishes have been granted so far!

Through uniting more and more communities in song, Creativity Australia aims to create positive outcomes for people experiencing mental illness, disability, disadvantage, unemployment or homelessness.

OUR IMPACT

Swinburne University research and Creativity Australia member surveys showed 98% of *With One Voice* choir participants experienced less stress, 91% improved social bonds, 84% said they have made new friends/relationships, 66% feel less depressed and 70% gained new skills for work and an increased understanding and appreciation of diversity.

Creativity Australia received the 2016 Melbourne Award for Contribution to Community by a Community Organisation and has been named in the Anthill Smart 100 Innovations for the past five years.

FUNDRAISING, PHILANTHROPY AND PARTNERSHIPS

It costs just \$10 a week, or \$500 a year, to support a person in need to attend a *With One Voice* community choir. As one of our patrons, Marigold Southey AC, puts it: "That's just two cups of coffee a week to change or save someone's life!"

We seek donations from those wishing to support one of the more disadvantaged participants to increase diverse participation in this life-changing and life-saving program through The Giving Circle. We also encourage personal philanthropy from the more fortunate participants, many of whom sponsor the participation of those less fortunate. What is particularly inspiring is that many of the disadvantaged participants no longer feel like victims. As they become empowered they offer to donate and support those less fortunate. We create a true circle of reciprocity. Not only do participants feel good from the neuro-scientific benefits of singing in a group, but they also get to do good at the same time.

Our work is all about community wellbeing, alleviating disadvantage and inclusiveness. With enough support we can continue to create transformational outcomes for disadvantaged participants and develop our strategy to reach more people and communities in need.

I meet with donors and potential donors on a regular basis, informing them of our work, plans, outcomes and vision for the future. Through these meetings I have learnt the importance of listening and being very present. This builds rapport and an increasing understanding of what their values are and what is important to them. The organisation has then been able to show them how their contribution and support has led to the outcomes we are achieving in their key priority areas. In this way, I have managed to significantly increase the amount of donations and the number of donors.

We have also worked hard to revitalised the board and patrons with key board members and patrons including Lady Southey, Hugh Morgan, Professor Allan Fels, Rosie Lew and Pradeep Philip. And we are always on the look-out for innovative thinkers with specific skills to fill out our board and help us to achieve the vision of the organisation.

We run an annual *With One BIG Voice* concert bringing together choirs from all over the country at the Melbourne Town Hall. This connects many of the choirs, friends, families, co-workers and general public, builds awareness of our programs and serves as a fundraiser.

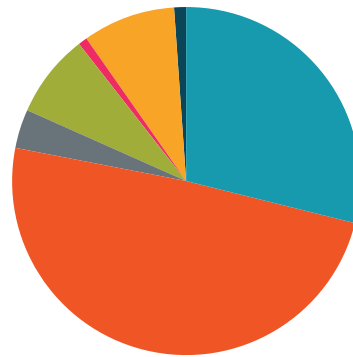
Creativity Australia is also the charity of choice for the Creative Innovation Global conferences and a percentage of booking fees and proceeds from the Conference Gala Dinner are donated to the charity.

WITH ONE VOICE SOCIAL FRANCHISE

Based on the successful outcomes of the *With One Voice* program launched in 2009 and implemented in more than 20 locations over seven years using a traditional charity model, the social franchise model was devised because we identified long-term risks (including the increasing financial, infrastructure and human resources that would be required) with centralised fundraising and program delivery. Furthermore (and more importantly), we identified the many benefits of empowering local communities to 'own' their own programs from the beginning, including building capacity and capabilities and local fundraising to leveraging existing networks.

Central to the model is the mentoring program and series of video tutorials. Delivered in five phases, each one addresses the critical components of successfully starting and growing programs to be sustainable and self-sufficient.

Creativity Australia is passionate about nurturing communities across Australia and beyond to sing together in the spirit of joy, wellbeing and inspiration. We have also commenced a Conductor Development



Creativity Australia 2018 Revenue

Trusts & foundations	29.2%
Individual donations	49.3%
Corporate donations	3.7%
Participant contributions	7.7%
Performance contributions	0.9%
Government grants	8.6%
Other income	1%

Program and have developed a *With One Voice* startup fund to provide small grants to enable community leaders from around Australia to commence programs and replicate our model.

OUR SOCIAL IMPACT GOAL

Creativity Australia's social impact goal is to help break down the traditional silos of the social welfare sector, building cohesive communities that include and support one another, rather than relying on 'top-down' services. Thus, we mobilise and multiply community change-makers far beyond the capacity of our organisation: diverse people who will pay it forward and help address the deep issues that impact our society.

Whatever happened to being nice to each other and all of us keeping an eye out for our neighbours?

Loneliness is far more than a social misfortune. It is a significant problem that leads to a vast amount of human suffering and unfulfilled human potential. We are all part of the solution.

We don't want to become a nation of Eleanor Rigbys. We should look to the positive message of another Beatles song: we all can benefit from *A Little Help From My Friends*.

Together, we can change the world... one voice and one community at a time. **F&P**

HOW TO START A CHOIR

To celebrate our 10th anniversary and through the generous philanthropy of our supporters and a federal government grant, Creativity Australia is offering **10 grants of up to \$10,000** before June 30 2019 through the *With One Voice* community choir startup fund. We have already provided a number of similar grants in 2018 to fulfil **our strategic plan of expanding to 40 choirs nationwide by 2020**.

Local community groups, social businesses and not-for-profits wanting to promote social inclusion and tackle loneliness, isolation, depression and disadvantage in their community are invited to apply. Funding will assist with venue hire for weekly rehearsals, payment for professional conductors, food for a shared meal after each rehearsal and other costs associated with running a choir. Each recipient also joins a 12-month intensive mentoring program.



Tania de Jong AM

Tania is an acclaimed Australian soprano and a successful entrepreneur and innovator. She has developed five businesses and three charities over the past three decades. She is the founder of Creative Universe, Creativity Australia, Creative Innovation Global, Mind Medicine Australia, Dimension5 co-working hub, MTA Entertainment & Events, Pot-Pourri and The Song Room. She was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 2008 and in 2018 was named in the 100 Women of Influence and the 100 Australian Most Influential Entrepreneurs. Tania's mission is to change the world, one voice at a time!