

## You know your voice matters when you've lost it!

Is ageing, disability, injury or illness affecting your ability to be heard?

The pitch, pace, pause, tone and volume of your voice comprises about 38% of all your communication.

We challenge you to reflect on the quality of your voice, to take action to improve it whether or not you have lost it.

The quality of your voice affects your communication, so it matters. There is a range of things you can do to improve it, such as

- joining a choir
- attending a drama group
- going to a speech and drama teacher

If your problem is significant then we recommend you see a Speech Language Therapist through the public health system or privately.

Some Christchurch people with neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease, and Stroke, are learning to use their voice effectively with the Cantabrainers Choir. The Choir was established by Therapy Professionals in 2012. On 1 January 2019 the Cantabrainers Therapeutic Choir Charitable Trust took over management of the Choir.

This is a choir with a difference. Its purpose is not so much to create sweet music but to provide a safe environment in which members can rediscover their voice.

Difficulties with vocal expression are common in neurological conditions. For example, in Parkinson's disease, the voice can become very quiet, rapid, flat and monotone. Following a stroke, people may experience a complete or partial inability to form spoken words. Even with the ability to plan words and sentences people may lack the muscle coordination, making words sound slurred and incomprehensible.

Singing can be a route to overcome some speaking difficulties. For example, it is well-known people who stutter can often sing quite well; the underlying rhythm provided by music can overcome the difficulties in planning the sequencing of regular speech. For others, problems with speech may be due to memory impairment or word finding difficulty. The use of familiar songs, rhyming and repetition can be a very effective way of helping them become more fluent.

Research shows, after trauma the brain may recover some abilities given effort and the right stimulation. Like getting fit, rewiring the brain (neural plasticity) requires intensive exercise to be done accurately and regularly. Choral singing makes practice enjoyable while the group encourages rehearsing for longer and experimentation. As a result people may, for example, speak louder, for longer and use more words.



The Cantabrainers Choir is run by a Music Therapist and Speech Language Therapist because music and speech share many characteristics: pitch, rhythm, tone, pace and the volume.

The Speech Language Therapist's expertise is in understanding the relationship between ageing, disability, injury or illness and how it affects your voice.

The Music Therapist's expertise is in using music and singing to promote positive change with the voice.

While the Music Therapist leads and accompanies the choir, the Speech Language Therapist focuses on individual coaching.

If you have a neurological condition you may like to join the Cantabrainers Choir.

Contact details are:

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 **Cantabrainers  
Choir**  
for people with neurological conditions  
to find their voice again

