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FIVE NEW INCLUSIVE CHOIRS “BORN OUT OF THE PANDEMIC” LAUNCH IN-PERSON IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

Launch coincides with the release of a new song and music video created in lockdown by the West Midlands Inclusive Choir members

Five new choirs for the West Midlands that bring together young people of all abilities and that were created during the pandemic, are meeting for the first time in-person on September 18th as part of a major UK initiative. The West Midlands has the largest number of choirs in a nationwide scheme – the Soundabout Inclusive Choir network - that celebrates that everyone, no matter their abilities or disabilities, has their own way of sharing their voice.

Five West Midlands Inclusive Choirs will be launched, led and supported by Midlands Arts Centre and based in Birmingham, Coventry, Sandwell, Solihull and Worcestershire. The first in-person gatherings of the choir members coincides with the release of *Do What You Love* – a new composition created in lockdown by choir members in the West Midlands. Disabled and non-disabled musicians took part in a six-week online process that included song-writing workshops and vocal sessions overseen by renowned composer Alexander Campkin who has himself experienced disability and who, in the West Midlands, has previously worked with Birmingham Cathedral Choir and Royal Ballet Sinfonia.

MAC Makes Music, along with music charity Soundabout, have joined forces with Birmingham’s Services For Education and four other West Midlands’ Music Education Hubs to launch the five in-person choirs after meeting for the past 10 months via Zoom in people’s homes. The choirs have been supported with funding by Midlands Arts Centre alongside Vinci, who have enabled them to buy the equipment to launch the choirs.

The West Midlands Inclusive Choir project was inspired by MAC Makes Music who saw the work of Soundabout and reached out to fellow charities aiming to give voice to children of all abilities in the region and provide more accessible musical opportunities.

Holly Radford-James, Producer for MAC Makes Music, said: “In recent years, MAC Makes Music has been developing inclusive vocal opportunities for children and young people in Birmingham, and noticed a need for more. We wanted to expand and ensure young people across the region had an inclusive and accessible way to share their voice.

“We partnered with Soundabout, to combine their experience working with people with complex needs with our musical provision and network, to launch the West Midlands Inclusive Choir online

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during lockdown. Thanks to support from our funders, Youth Music, it's been possible to partner with local music hubs and create in-person choirs, launching soon for the local community."

Clare Cook, CEO of the charity Soundabout, said: "These new choirs – that will bring together young people of all abilities - would not have been created without the pandemic.

"The pandemic acted as a call to action – to overcome the increased isolation faced by young people with learning disabilities by making music together from their own homes. Now, thanks to the passion and drive of MAC Makes Music and the five Music Education Hubs, the choirs will meet for the first time in person. In due course, we are looking forward to welcoming other new members of all abilities to join us too."

In the West Midlands, Soundabout, MAC Makes Music, Services For Education (which delivers the Music Service in Birmingham), Coventry Music Hub, Sandwell Music Hub (SIPS), Severn Arts (Worcestershire Music Hub) and Solihull Music Hub, have collaborated to create the five new choirs that will be launched at their local venues on Saturday, September 18.

Stuart Birnie, Head of The Music Service at Services For Education, which is responsible for the development of the Birmingham Inclusive Choir, said: "The pandemic has been devastating for so many young people - especially those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. However, out of challenging circumstances, have come new opportunities. If it had not been for the pandemic, we would not have been able to simultaneously create so many choirs to support so many people.

"Bringing together young people of all abilities is key to the development and success of the West Midlands Inclusive Choirs. Getting together, whether on-line or in-person, removes barriers, encourages inclusivity and celebrates that everyone, no matter their abilities or skills, can enjoy and benefit from music-making."

Twelve Soundabout Inclusive Choirs have been formed nationwide - all with the intent of welcoming all voices and actively removing barriers to participation from those with severe and profound learning disabilities. They will meet regularly in-person with virtual meetings in between.

The project is backed by Youth Music, thanks to the National Lottery via Arts Council England.

ENDS

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

The first meetings in-person of the choirs will be on September 18. We would be pleased to help arrange interviews with choir members, their families, and organisers in the run-up to the inaugural in-person choir meeting.

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The following details are for information only as we are unable to facilitate media at the face-to-face choir sessions. Each choir will meet at different venues from 11am-12.30pm:

- Birmingham Inclusive Choir will be held at the MAC (Midlands Arts Centre) in Edgbaston (except for the first rehearsal on 18th September which will be hosted as detailed below*.)
- Coventry Inclusive Choir will be held at Sherbourne Fields School
- <https://www.sherbournefields.co.uk>
- Sandwell Inclusive Choir will be held at Cradley Heath Community Centre, Reddal Hill Road, Cradley Heath, B64 5JG
- Solihull Inclusive Choir will be held at The Core Theatre - <https://www.thecoretheatresolihull.co.uk>
- Worcestershire Inclusive Choir will be held at Warndon Community Centre <https://www.worcestercommunitytrust.org.uk/hire-our-hubs/warndon-hub/>

*For the first session only, The Birmingham Inclusive Choir will meet from 11am-12.30pm on September 18 at: Services For Education, Unit 3, Holt Court, Holt Street, Birmingham Science Park Aston, B7 4AX

Video and audio footage:

The “Do What You Love” by the MAC-Soundabout West Midlands Inclusive Choirs music video and B roll of footage from the creation of the choir creating *Do What You Love* is available at this private link: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/de4hwk5bw3gwks5/AAABKXrqeA7yx14Yq4piMO7ja?dl=0> The video will be released by Soundabout at 1700 hrs, Monday, September 13. We would appreciate it if you would not use footage prior to this time.

About the partners:

Soundabout:

The charity Soundabout’s work is built from the starting point that everybody deserves to have a voice. Rather than focusing on what people can’t do, they want to emphasize what they can. They believe that people with severe and profound learning disabilities including autism should have a life full of expression, passion and enjoyment. That’s why they use music to enable people with learning disabilities to express themselves, connect with others, and feel the warmth of music.

Their music sessions bring children and adults with various and complex learning disabilities together alongside their families and carers to take part in music-making, from our inclusive and virtual choir to our workshops. Music is just the start; they aim to help develop a sense of belonging and confidence for people to take through life, working to create communities without barriers.

Soundabout was launched in 1995 in Oxford with the aim of empowering school staff working with children and young people with special needs to make music interactively with their pupils with severe and complex disabilities. The overwhelming and enthusiastic response to this project by both pupils and school staff suggested that a permanent staff training programme would be welcomed in schools across the UK and in December 1997, Soundabout was officially founded as an independent charity. Since then, Soundabout has blossomed and is now a national charity that has pioneered the use of music, rhythm and sound to give children and adults with disability a voice, a way to express themselves and be listened to.

As of September 2021, they will have a network of 12 Inclusive Choirs across the country.

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MAC Makes Music

MAC Makes Music is an award-winning programme* providing innovative music making opportunities for children and young people with limited access to music provision. We work with Families, Pupil Referral Units, Charities, Primary Schools, Children's Services, Centres for Newly Arrived Children and Young People, Resource Bases/Focus Provisions and Special Schools to influence sustained music making activity for those with limited access to music provision.

Our passion is to offer young people high quality music making experiences led by a team of highly experienced musicians. The young person's voice and creativity is at the heart of a diverse music offer in new music technology, song writing, band development, singing and music production.

MAC is a strategic partner of Youth Music working towards creating a musically inclusive England, where every child can access music-making opportunities, regardless of their circumstances. Through MAC Makes Music, we champion innovation in music making approaches, support workforce development and advocate for equality in music education in partnership with Music Education Hubs in Birmingham, Coventry, Sandwell, Solihull and Worcestershire.

* Outstanding Musical Initiative, Music and Drama Education Awards, 2020

* Excellence in Primary & Early Years, 'Tune into Listening' Music Award for Excellence, 2017

<https://macbirmingham.co.uk/mac-makes-music>

Alexander Campkin and *Do What You Love*:

Do What You Love composer Alexander Campkin's work has been performed or broadcast in over forty countries. It features on over 20 CDs recorded by ensembles including the London Sinfonietta and the BBC Singers, and one of which was Christmas CD of the Year for Classic FM. His musical journey was changed forever after medical symptoms and the diagnosis of multiple sclerosis aged 17. This was shortly before he was due to perform with the Arad Philharmonic in Romania as a viola player. He said, '*MS changed my life. It stopped me playing viola. But it certainly didn't stop me composing.*'

The piano introduction to *Do What You Love* was written by choir member Cerys Davies aged 18 from Northfield, Birmingham. Cerys has Down's Syndrome and Global Development Delay.

The lyrics of *Do What You Love* were inspired by a poem written by Anna Glass, an Emerging Leader with Soundabout from Kent. Click [here](#) for the lyric sheet.

Services For Education:

An education and training charity based in Birmingham, Services For Education brings music and learning to life.

Services For Education employs more than 200 staff delivering music tuition to children, and expert training and development to teaching and school support staff. It has annual income of £7.4m (Y/E August 2019). Part-funded by the Arts Council, England it also has its own fund-raising and subsidised commercial operations.

Services For Education's Music Service, one of the largest in the country, works with most Birmingham's schools and each year teaches music to nearly 38,000 children – as well as running 67 ensembles that are free to everyone. It provides 27,000 musical instruments free-of-charge to ensure all children have access to playing and enjoying music together. It also runs music schools, provides private music tuition to all ages as well as working with partners to deliver music and choral opportunities to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

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Services For Education's School Support Service provides expert training and development to teaching and support staff in nearly 600 schools in the West Midlands and increasingly across England, to improve practice and ensure teachers are best equipped to respond to developments in curriculum and policy. It is a leading provider of safeguarding education, delivering training, in-person and on-line, to 400 schools. It also delivers innovative programmes to support the physical and emotional health of children and young people through Health for Life and other community-based activity.

Services For Education has been recognised regionally and nationally for its work:

- Music and Drama Education Awards 2020: Outstanding Music Education Resource (winner)
- Music and Drama Education Awards 2020: #Goldstars Awards
- Music and Drama Education Awards 2020: Excellence in SEND (finalist)
- Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce Annual Awards
 - 2021: Excellence in Contribution to the community (finalist)
 - 2021: Excellence in Training and Education (winner)
 - 2020: Excellence in Sales & Marketing (finalist)
 - 2019: Excellence in Training & Education (winner)
 - 2018: Excellence in Training & Education (finalist)
- Education Awards 2019: Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community
- Educational Resources Awards 2019: The Educational Book Award (finalist)
- Birmingham Education Awards 2019: Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community
- Birmingham Awards 2018: Contribution to Education
- Birmingham Post Business Awards 2018: Not-For-Profit Organisation of the Year (finalist)

Services For Education's Annual Report for 2020 is available here:

<https://www.servicesforeducation.co.uk/annual-report-2020/>

For media support on Services For Education and the Inclusive Choirs:

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