LIBERTY CHOIR UK

UNLOCKING HEARTS THROUGH SONG
Richie surrounded by his friends and alternative family in MJ's Community Choirs where he has been singing every week since his release in the Autumn of 2014.
On April 1st 2014, fifteen women and men – who had travelled from Brighton and all over London – entered Wandsworth Prison to join 20 prisoners in a small chapel of the Trinity Wing, a new wing for prisoners who are about to be released into the community, and launched the first chapter of the Liberty Choir. It’s hard to say who was more excited, as well as apprehensive – the singers from MJ’s community choirs, outside, or the men inside.

A few of us had gone into the wing the previous week and handed out leaflets and encouraged the guys – while they were queuing to pick up their dinners to take into their cells – to just come along to the chapel and hear MJ, the music director, have a sing and we would tell them all about the Liberty Choir: how it wasn’t a religious group, how we sang everything from Jessie J and Bob Marley to gospel and swing and Vivaldi, and we promised they would like it all. And, you know – given where they were – why not give it a go?

Well, they did give it a go, and how. Since then this Liberty Choir programme has just gone from strength to strength. We are entering our fifth year in HMP Wandsworth – what we call the Mothership – which is acknowledged as one of the most challenging and largest prisons in Europe.

“Liberty Choir is now entering its fifth year in the Trinity Wing of HMP Wandsworth and it is considered to be one of the most successful volunteer programmes at the prison,”

JEANNE BRYANT, Governor HMP Wandsworth

We are in direct contact with over 40 of our Liberty Choir graduates; men who sang with us inside prison and are now back in society. Some of the ex-offenders sing regularly in our four community choirs on the outside. Others come to special concerts and events. Some just keep in touch on social media or by phone – letting us know they are okay and showing appreciation for the work we did with them in prison.

Some of our singers had been in prison on numerous occasions but have not been since their involvement in Liberty Choir. One singer was what is known as a “revolving door prisoner”. At the age of 54, he had never experienced more than two consecutive Christmases out of prison. From the age of 19, when he was first imprisoned, he had only lived out of prison for five years – sporadically – in his whole adult life. Since becoming a member of Liberty Choir, he sings in both of MJ’s London community choirs regularly, participates in the concerts and festivals and, at the time of publication, has now celebrated four consecutive Christmas festivities.

As former Wandsworth Governor, Ian Bickers, says:

“In the criminal justice system, we consider that each prisoner who does not reoffend has a positive impact on at least 100 people in the community.”

Every year, we have a Friends and Family concert – attended by the relations and friends of the imprisoned singers, as well as of the volunteers – and our graduates come back into prison (which takes some

WINSTON CHURCHILL
WINSTON CHURCHILL’S FAMOUS HOUSE OF COMMONS SPEECH, GIVEN AS HOME SECRETARY, JULY 29, 1910 IS THE CLEAREST POSSIBLE CONDEMNATION OF PUNITIVE, AS OPPOSED TO REHABILITATIVE, IMPRISONMENT:

“In 2015, the Liberty Choir (members of our HMP Wandsworth graduates alongside the volunteers from MJ’s community choirs) sang the chorus on the title track single from David Gilmour’s bestselling solo album, Rattle That Lock. The choir was part of an extensive publicity campaign both in the UK and abroad.

“‘The whole concert was a demonstration of what can be achieved with time, care, work and belief - elements which one imagines have been in short supply for much of those prisoners’ lives. Every prison should have a choir - and more concerts please.’

SANDRA PARSONS, LITERARY EDITOR, DAILY MAIL (FRIENDS AND FAMILY CONCERT, SEPTEMBER 2017)”

spirit and share their experiences and stories of hope with the Liberty men.

“My name is Roy. I was a prisoner in Wandsworth about a year and a half ago. I joined the choir on Tuesday nights – probably one of the best decisions I’ve ever made. It’s given me a complete new outlook on life. Since being released from prison I have continued going to the choir and have changed my lifestyle. I now attend Narcotics Anonymous and have been clean of all mind-altering substances, have sung with David Gilmour’s new album and have performed at a lot of fantastic gigs and have been part of something new and exciting. This experience for me is totally alien to anything I’ve ever been involved with before. I’ve been in care and in prisons throughout my life. I’m now 51 years old and I can honestly say I’ve changed and this has helped me beyond the words I am incapable of putting in this letter.

The choir give up their time to try to make that connection that most people in our society either don’t or don’t get the opportunity to try to help people like myself. It’s amazing. I just wish this was available to me at an earlier age.

Yours sincerely,
Roy”
“WHAT’S REALLY EXCITING ABOUT THIS TO ME IS THE IDEA OF THE COMMUNITY THAT IS CREATED INSIDE PRISON BEING TRANSFERRED TO A COMMUNITY OUTSIDE THE PRISON. THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN RELEASED WILL – THROUGH MUSIC AND SINGING – BE JOINED TOGETHER WITH MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC, AND OTHER EX-PRISONERS, IN AN EXTERNAL COMMUNITY WHICH HELPS THEM FIND THEIR WAY BACK INTO SOCIETY …..AND IN A WAY THAT IS PROBABLY BETTER THAN THEY EVER HAD BEFORE.”

— DAVID GILMOUR
PATRON OF LIBERTY CHOIR, SINCE 2016

David Gilmour and MJ Paranzino conducting the Liberty Choir for the title single on David’s bestselling solo album: Rattle that Lock, 2015, Church of the Holy Spirit, Clapham. PHOTOGRAPHER: BEN MUELLER-BROWN
“Before Liberty Choir, I was a revolving door prisoner. Now I have a roof over my head, a job and I sing every week. I am learning how to use a computer. It is no exaggeration to say that Liberty Choir has saved my life.”

RICHIE
SELF-HARM REACHED A RECORD HIGH OF 41,103 INCIDENTS IN THE 12 MONTHS TO JUNE 2017, UP 12 PER CENT FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, 2018

"LIBERTY CHOIR IS VALUABLE – TO INMATES, EX-INMATES, NON-INMATES, FUTURE INMATES, TO SOCIETY IN GENERAL. IT GIVES HOPE... IT IS THE MOST WONDERFUL THING. I HOPE THE MOVEMENT GROWS AND GROWS."

ROBERT BATHURST, ACTOR

"LIBERTY CHOIR GIVES YOU THE SENSE OF WHO YOU CAN BE AND OFFERS HOPE THAT YOU CAN BE SOMETHING BETTER."

PRISONER, HMP WANDSWORTH, EVALUATION REPORT, FEBRUARY 2017

"BEING HERE WITH YOU GUYS HAS BEEN MY HOPE. WITH MUSIC, YOU GIVE US AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH OUR SOULS. I BELIEVE THROUGH MUSIC, WE CAN ACHIEVE CHANGE."

HMP WANDSWORTH, LIBERTY CHOIR SINGER, SEPTEMBER 2017
“I was lost but now I’m found. Liberty Choir gives me a structure and a whole new way of life and friendship. I’ve performed in amazing places and enjoy the weekly rehearsals. It’s exciting but also healthy and fulfilling.”

Francis
“The Liberty Choir began as a loving and safe space at the most desperate and fearful time of my life. It then developed into a community both inside and outside the prison that unlocked creativity within me. Liberty Choir has made me a different person and I have returned to my family a better man.”

Ross
IT COSTS £35,371 TO IMPRISON SOMEONE FOR A YEAR

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, 2018

SAVINGS TO THE TAX PAYER BECAUSE OF LIBERTY CHOIR TO DATE: MORE THAN TWO MILLION POUNDS AND RISING WITH EACH NEW PRISON

LIBERTY CHOIR’S MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

THE LIBERTY CHOIR VISION IS THAT THE REOFFENDING RATES AMONG EX-OFFENDERS CAN BE SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED THROUGH A NETWORK OF CHOIRS LOCATED WITHIN PRISONS AND THE COMMUNITY. WE BELIEVE THAT THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CASE FOR THE CHOIRS IS OVERWHELMING.

OUR MISSION IS THAT BY 2020, THE LIBERTY CHOIR WILL BE DELIVERED ACROSS A MINIMUM OF 8 PRISONS ALONG WITH A “THROUGH THE GATE” ARTS PROGRAMME WHICH WILL BE RECOGNISED AS A MAJOR FACTOR IN REDUCING REOFFENDING.

THE LIBERTY CHOIR PROGRAMME WAS HIGHLY COMMENDED IN THE NHS-FUNDED MENTAL HEALTH AWARDS, 2014*

*This was the Partnership Working Award, National Positive Practice Awards for the Positive Practice Collaborative for our work in the Forensic Ward of the Shepherdsley Choir, under Dr Gill Mezey.
“LIBERTY CHOIR HELPED ME TO STAY CONNECTED TO MY HUSBAND DURING A VERY DARK TIME. WHEN THE CHILDREN FELT SO SAD AND FEARFUL FOR THEIR DAD, HIS MUSIC WAS ALWAYS OUR RELIABLE HAPPY PLACE TO GET HIM AND ALL OF OUR FAMILY FEELING POSITIVE. KNOWING MY HUSBAND WAS SAFE FOR TWO HOURS A WEEK, KEPT ME GOING AND WAITING FOR HIM WHEN HE GOT OUT.”

VICKY, WIFE OF ROSS
“WHEN YOU WAKE UP IN PRISON, YOU HAVE HIT ROCK BOTTOM AND YET FROM THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR LIBERTY CHOIR CREATES PROFOUND CHANGE, CONFIDENCE AND TRUST THROUGH MUSIC.”

ED
Ginny Dougary is an award-winning journalist best known for her interviews with the great and the good. She worked for The Times for several decades and her work has appeared all over the world. She now writes freelance for a variety of newspapers and magazines. Her role is to develop and extend the Liberty Choir programme, lobby, publicise, create opportunities and be an advocate for the prisoners and the Liberty Choir.

www.ginnydougary.co.uk

Mj Paranzino
Co-founder of the Liberty Choir

Mj Paranzino is the director of four community choirs – Brighton City Singers, South London Choir, West London Choir, and Hastings Town Singers. She is also an entertainer, composer and arranger who has been leading vocal workshops in the UK and the USA for twenty years. She is passionate about singing and how it is a force for all that is positive in life. MJ’s Choirs are non-auditioning choirs, with over 300 members. The choirs sing all styles of music, from Mozart, gospel to rock. She music directs Liberty Choir, creates the music programme, and is responsible for auditioning and training new musical directors and conductors.

David Gilmour
Patron

David Gilmour CBE, guitarist, vocalist and songwriter with Pink Floyd, and a renowned solo artist, has been a Patron of the Liberty Choir since July 2016; he was introduced to the Choir, by his son Charlie. David’s single, Rattle That Lock, featured the Liberty Choir. David and his wife Polly Samson, continue their support through the DG Charitable Trust. “I have been in prison and seen the joy the Choir brings to the prisoners and I have also met the guys singing in MJ’s community choirs when they come out of prison. Now it is exciting to see it enter more prisons which will mean more hope for prisoners and more hope for society when they come out.”

Cherie Blair
Patron

Cherie Blair CBE, QC, is a leading international lawyer, campaigner for women’s rights and the wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Cherie is the Founder of the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women and Founder and Chair of Omnia Strategy LLP, a pioneering international law firm. Cherie has joined founding Patron, David Gilmour, to become a Patron of the Liberty Choir. “I am delighted to be a Patron of Liberty Choir. I have visited many prisons and believe in giving prisoners the opportunity for meaningful rehabilitation. Choirs offer a great sense of community and support. Liberty Choir is a wonderful combination of the two.”

Sheila Jones
Board Member

Sheila Jones is a psychoanalytic and psychodynamic psychotherapist. She has over 20 years experience in the profession and is committed to working with people suffering from mental health problems. Sheila works in the NHS, a professional training organisation and also has a small private practice.

Alessandro Lanzetta
Chair of Omnia Strategy LLP

Alessandro Lanzetta is the Founder and Managing Director of Omnia Strategy LLP, a pioneering international law firm. Cherie has joined founding Patron, David Gilmour, to become a Patron of the Liberty Choir. “I am delighted to be a Patron of Liberty Choir. I have visited many prisons and believe in giving prisoners the opportunity for meaningful rehabilitation. Choirs offer a great sense of community and support. Liberty Choir is a wonderful combination of the two.”

Emma Parsons
Board Member

Emma Parsons has been working in business development and design in the charity sector for over 20 years and uses this experience to inform Liberty Choir progress and expansion. She has just completed a Foundation in Art and Design and intends to combine her part-time role as Liberty Choir’s project managing consultant with working as a fine artist.

Paul Webster
Board Member

Paul Webster was appointed Editor of The Observer in April 2018. Prior to that he held the post of Deputy Editor since 1996. Previously he was Foreign Editor and Home Editor on The Guardian and Business News Chief Sub Editor at The Sunday Times.

Michael Gove
Board Member

Michael is the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. He first became interested in prisons when he was Education Secretary under David Cameron. As Justice Secretary he was convinced that the criminal justice system should be about helping people to lead better lives in the future rather than judging them forever on what they might have done in the past.

Mahnaz Malik
Board Member

Mahnaz is an award-winning barrister and author. She practices international law at 20 Essex Street Chambers. She established the British Pakistan Law Council Advocate Programme in partnership with the Law Society through a network of pro bono lawyers which helped over 300 children in detention in Pakistan, and is currently working to empower young women in Lyari - one of South Asia’s largest slums - by training them as bakers.
THANK YOU

WIMBLEDON FOUNDATION COMMUNITY FUND, THE MORPURGO’S, KOESTLER TRUST, HASTINGS VOLUNTARY ACTION, BEN LANE AND THE ARTS COUNCIL, ROGER DIXON, SHM LAW AND RADIO TIMES, ANDY GEORGE OF HEARTS & MINDS WHO VERY GENEROUSLY LET US USE HIS PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO FOR SEVERAL SHOOTS (W1STUDIOS.CO; HELLO@W1STUDIOS.CO), TAYLOR BLOXHAM (WWW.TAYLORBLOXHAM.CO.UK) WHO KINDLY DONATED THE PRINTING FOR THIS BROCHURE, CAZ ROBERTS, JOHN MULHOLLAND (WITHOUT WHOM THIS BROCHURE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE), MARK HARRISON, CILL MORGAN, THE BOARD OF LIBERTY CHOIR, SALLY HILL, JEANNE BRYANT, ROBIN ELDRIDGE, LOUISE SPENCER, IAN BICKERS, KENNY BROWN, ROSS, VICKY, RICHIE, ED, FRANCIS, THE VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS OF MJ’S COMMUNITY CHOIRS, AND DAVID AND POLLY, ALWAYS.

BROCHURE TEAM:
EDITOR GINNY DOUGARY
ART DIRECTOR CAZ ROBERTS
PHOTOGRAPHER MARK HARRISON
PRODUCTION EMMA PARSONS

OUTSTANDING SUPPORTERS:
GREGORY NASMYTH AND SAMANTHA ROWE-BEDDOE; DAVID KOWITZ AND SARAH GORMAN KOWITZ

MAJOR FOUNDING SUPPORTERS: POLLY SAMSON AND DAVID GILMOUR, PETE TOWNSEND, ROGER DALTREY
FOUNDING SUPPORTERS: IAN HISLOP, DAVID SUCHET CBE AND SHEILA SUCHET, BARONESS KINGSMILL CBE, GARY MULGREW, ED LAW, VICKY BELL, FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOUNDING FRIENDS: DR CHRISTINE PICKARD, DAVID BOWEN, SIR NICHOLAS UNDERHILL, GINO CHIAPPETTA, RAVENSTONE PRIMARY SCHOOL
CONTINUING MAJOR SUPPORTERS: DAVID GILMOUR AND POLLY SAMSON; ROGER DALTREY; PETE TOWNSEND;
IAN HISLOP
CONTINUING FRIENDS: JOSEPHINE FAIRLEY AND CRAIG SAMS

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO ORGANISED OR PARTICIPATED IN A COMMUNITY FUNDRAISER ON BEHALF OF LIBERTY CHOIR: MJ’S COMMUNITY CHOIRS’ CAROL SINGERS, JOHN BRINKLOW AND SARAH SKELETON FOR CHRISTMAS CARDS, SINGSWELL CHOIR, BATTERSEA CHORAL (ST THOMAS’), THE SHIRLEY TAPPERS AND HOT FOOT TAPPERS, SALLY GIBBONS’ COLLEAGUES

SPECIAL THANKS TO FORMER MANAGING CHAPLAIN HM PRISON WANDSWORTH TIM BRYAN AND ED VAIZEY, FOR BELIEVING IN, AND HELPING US REALISE, THE VISION OF OUR LIBERTY CHOIR PROGRAMME

YOU CAN MAKE A DONATION THROUGH OUR WEBSITE: WWW.LIBERTYCHOIR.ORG

YOU CAN DONATE

LIBERTY CHOIR UK REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1173799
REGISTERED OFFICE: JACKSON HALL, PORTLAND PLACE, HASTINGS, EAST SUSSEX TN34 1QN
WWW.LIBERTYCHOIR.ORG

THIS BROCHURE HAS BEEN PRODUCED THROUGH CHARITABLE DONATIONS OF MONEY AND SERVICES. THERE IS ZERO FINANCIAL IMPACT ON THE LIBERTY CHOIR.

YOU CAN DONATE

WWW.LIBERTYCHOIR.ORG

THANK YOU FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE

WWW.LIBERTYCHOIR.ORG

YOU CAN DONATE

WWW.LIBERTYCHOIR.ORG

THANK YOU FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE

WWW.LIBERTYCHOIR.ORG