



## **PRESS RELEASE**

February 2009

# **Music brings hope to brain injured** *- thanks to the Henley Festival*

In the past few years there has been increasing excitement in the music world about the positive health benefits that music making can provide. So it is with real interest that Henley Festival's Artistic Director, Stewart Collins, and Community Project Manager, Mandy Beard, proposed - in the teeth of the current economic recession - to renew the Festival's commitment to provide music therapy for clients at brain-injury charity Headway's Thames Valley centre.

Says Mandy, "We began this project 5 years ago. Henley Festival funds a music therapist to work year-round with Headway clients. Our partners in this scheme are Headway - of course - and Nordoff-Robbins, who train music therapists. Overwhelmingly, those who come to Headway and see or take part in the sessions: the brain-injured, their carers and families alike, see the benefits that music therapy brings. We are absolutely delighted that this project will continue to support and given joy to so many throughout 2009."

Headway clients come from across the Thames Valley: Bracknell, Oxfordshire, Reading Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead and Wokingham. Their injuries were all acquired after birth, about half being from road traffic accidents and the others through such causes as meningitis, brain tumour, brain haemorrhage, seizures or epilepsy.

Sharon Warne, an outreach Nordoff-Robbins music therapist, has just begun her second year on the project. She says, "The fact is, any one of us could be a Headway service-user, depending on fate or circumstance. I'm happy to say music therapy has proved to be a very valuable and beneficial intervention for the clients in so many different ways.

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The impact of an acquired brain injury cannot be underestimated: people's lives are changed for ever. Unemployment and the concomitant loss of the sense of self, disempowerment, physical incapacity, mental and emotional impairments can lead to great suffering for both the brain-injured person and those who care for them. Social isolation and loneliness are big risks."

The music therapy on offer consists of individual sessions for those who need them, which help to express often difficult emotions (e.g. like using cymbals to express anger), group music therapy sessions which help with listening and responding to group members, and larger choir sessions for Headway clients, their carers, friends and families.

Says Sharon again, "Singing familiar songs can aid and improve memory recall; vocal warm-ups encourage people to focus on their breathing and posture, and listening skills have been greatly improved through singing many of the spirituals and African rounds we have recently been learning. The choir has developed to such an extent that they are now practising singing in 2-part harmony (as opposed to unison singing) and singing songs and rounds in different African dialects, all from memory. This is something we will continue to develop for 2009. It has been wonderful to see how much the choir's confidence has grown and how willing the members are to sing solos and duets in front of each other and in public performance - they are very supportive of each other.

"In 2007 the choir performed at the Kenton Theatre, Henley to an invited audience; in 2008 we were lucky enough to receive a visit from the renowned singer Hayley Westenra who was headlining at the annual Henley Festival; this was arranged through Mandy Beard, Community Projects Manager for the Festival. The choir sang to Hayley, who then performed to us and answered questions; it was a truly memorable event and a real privilege and I feel that, thanks to Henley Festival, in 2009 this can only get better. As for my biggest hope for 2009, this has already been fulfilled thanks to the Henley Festival Trust, who took the decision at their 2008 AGM to continue to fund and support music therapy provision at Headway Thames Valley for another year."

Henley Festival 2009 runs from 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> July. For more information on the Festival and its outreach projects visit [www.henley-festival.co.uk](http://www.henley-festival.co.uk).

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**Note to Editors: Henley Festival Trust**

As in previous years, all net proceeds from The Henley Festival 2009 will go direct to parent charity The Henley Festival Trust, to finance Henley Festival's charitable and community activities. Examples of this valuable, and much appreciated work include: SHOUT (Schools in Henley OUTreach) which places artistic professionals in Henley area schools all year round, the creation of the Henley Festival Orchestra for beginner musicians, visual arts workshops at the Chiltern Centre for Disabled Children, and instruments for promising young musicians.

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