**20 June 2018**

**Volunteers needed to help share music to support stroke recovery**

Stroke survivors in Northern Ireland can now benefit from singing and musical performance to aid their recovery thanks to National Lottery funding secured by the Stroke Association from the Big Lottery Fund.

The ‘Singing for Stroke’ project is the first of its type in Northern Ireland and received an ‘Awards for All’ grant of £7,990. It launches in September 2018 and will provide structured singing and musical activity to four of the charity’s stroke peer support groups and will include more than 50 stroke survivors at this initial pilot stage.

In the months and years following a stroke, survivors often experience social isolation and poor mental health. Many of the charity’s stroke support services use the power of music and song to successfully improve wellbeing, as part of the recovery process. More than 350,000 people in the UK live with aphasia, a communication disability which can be caused by stroke. Aphasia affects a person’s ability to communicate and research has indicated that many stroke survivors have been able to find a voice once more through singing. The social interaction that comes from singing together and having fun can also increase a person’s emotional wellbeing and improve memory, learning ability and self-confidence.

Ruth Adair, 76, is a stroke survivor taking part in this new project and attended the taster session at the Belfast South and East Group earlier in June. Ruth said: “I thought it was just magical. I had a few mini-strokes over three years ago and I know I’ve been very lucky with my recovery compared to a lot of other people. Looking around the group during the singing, I noticed how everyone, even those of us who struggle to talk, really did their best to take part. I would love to see this happening in our group every week, it’s just fantastic.”

The pilot project will work with the Belfast North and West group, Belfast South and East group, the Bangor group and the Newtownabbey group. These groups had already expressed an interest in being part of the project or have already introduced informal singing sessions into their weekly activities. Following this initial pilot stage, it is hoped that similar activities will be made available to all 13 groups across NI and that, in time, this might lead to the formation of an aphasia choir.

Mark Dyer, Volunteering and Community Manager with Stroke Association NI, said: “We’re really looking forward to starting our ‘Singing for Stroke’ project. I’ve witnessed people who were unable to speak or express themselves clearly, now able to sing along with the group. Many people have told me that it’s the confidence boost they needed and made such a difference. We want to offer more of the same in all our weekly activities and need volunteers to help us achieve this.

“The project funding will make it possible to train volunteer Singing Group Leaders who will bring a sense of energy, fun and an ease around people of differing abilities. They don’t need to be able to read music or play a musical instrument. They just need to have a keen interest in the subject and bring plenty of energy and imagination. Volunteers will receive training and equipment needed to make music and singing a sustainable part of the group’s programme of activities.”

A key partner in delivering this project will be Belfast Metropolitan College. Students on the HND Music course will be able to attend, assist or lead group activities as part of their community music module.

The charity is keen to hear from willing volunteers right now and if you’re interested, visit our website [www.stroke.org.uk/singvolunteerni](http://www.stroke.org.uk/singvolunteerni) and apply or contact the charity’s Belfast office on 028 9050 8020 for more information.

**Ends**

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Notes to editor

* A stroke is a brain attack which happens when the blood supply to the brain is cut off, caused by a clot or bleeding in the brain. There are more than 100,000 strokes in the UK each year; that is around one stroke every five minutes. There are over 1.2 million people in the UK living with the effects of stroke.
* Stroke Association is a charity. We believe in life after stroke and together we can conquer stroke. We work directly with stroke survivors and their families and carers, with health and social care professionals and with scientists and researchers. We campaign to improve stroke care and support people to make the best recovery they can. We fund research to develop new treatments and ways of preventing stroke. The Stroke Helpline (0303 303 3100) provides information and support on stroke. More information can be found at [www.stroke.org.uk](http://www.stroke.org.uk/)