

REPORT: PACT Singing Group The Bushlarks

December 2019/January 2020

The Bushlarks have now been going since April 1 2019 with the welcome support of PACT. A small volunteer group has developed as well to support the on-going logistics, eg. keeping the members list, collecting the money, setting up the chairs, the refreshments for the breaks etc. We invite more people to volunteer to help us along.

The venue for the sessions in 2019 has been the Ainslie Arts Centre, but we have now organised an alternative venue to start the new year, because of the bad parking situation at Ainslie. Our new venue will be St. Simon's Anglican Church Kaleen. This location seems to suit everyone, and the parking is easy, just close to the front door and to the side of the building.

Our first session for the 2020 will be Monday January 13th at 10.00am.

We have developed a lovely group of up to 25 people. I believe with the improvement of the parking situation we'll attract more people to our singing group.

Since April The Bushlarks have had three performances. We sang outdoors at the Walk in the Park Event in October (our Premiere), in November we sang at an Open Garden in Wallaroo, and late November we were able to share our songs at the PACT Christmas Lunch at the Irish Club.

The Bushlarks now have a repertoire of over 30 songs, including some favourites suggested by members. The songs are varied, some folk style, some old classics, some popular and some jazz as well!

We are gradually including some part-singing, and also begin with a round, to continue developing this skill. The warm-up and exercise session at the beginning is helping members to strengthen their voices and also to have some fun. Each session starts with a series of vocal and breathing exercises to enhance voice and breath strength. The exercises are fun to do, and feedback has been very positive.

The main emphasis for the choir is the 'arts' aspect of singing, the engagement in a creative activity that has other benefits such as the social interaction, the positive effect on voice and breathing. The warm-ups and exercises are taken from different sources. Normal singing teachers' vocal warm-ups and skill enhancement exercises are designed to serve the purpose of strengthening voice and helping with clear articulation. I also use exercises researched and sourced from other Parkinson's choirs and programs.

A very important part of each session is the socialising! Members start the morning with a coffee and chat, and halfway through the singing, we have a refreshment break with the opportunity to chat, mingle and socialise. This, along with the singing, helps to enhance our mood, and we all go away feeling uplifted!

I would like to invite more members of PACT to join The Bushlarks, particularly now that the parking situation is much improved. Kaleen is easily reached from Southern Canberra via the freeways and highways that skirt the city, and of course very convenient for those living in the Belconnen area and North Canberra.

I wish everyone a Happy New Year, and look forward to starting again in 2020 with the Bushlarks in our lovely new space!

All the very best,

Chrissie Shaw