



# VOCAL ESSENCE Vintage Voices

## Year End Evaluation Report 2016

In 2016, **90**  
Vintage Voices choir  
members participated  
in **4** choirs at **4** sites

### About Vintage Voices

Vintage Voices is a choral program developed by VocalEssence that integrates the arts into the everyday lives of older adults. When it comes to participating in artistic endeavors, this population generally faces many barriers including cost, mobility, and access to trained artists. Vintage Voices addresses these barriers by bringing a free, professional quality, choral program to assisted living communities and senior centers. The program includes 12 choral rehearsals with trained musicians that culminates in a formal choir performance in front of an audience.

*"Music changes people; it was transformative."*

*-Activity Director*

To assess the program's major achievements, The Improve Group conducted interviews with activity directors from each choir host site. Choir members provided feedback during wrap-up sessions, after the final performance, and after attending a VocalEssence concert. In the first weeks of rehearsal, members were asked about their reasons for joining the choir in order to help determine whether the benefits they received matched the goals they had at the beginning of the choir experience.

*"(Vintage Voices) is nothing but joy."*

*-Choir Member*

### Mental Health Benefits

Participants said the choir contributed to their improved mental health in a variety of ways. They explained that being in the choir brought them joy and happiness, made them feel energized, and put them in a better mood. Many participants said joining the choir gave them more opportunities to socialize and boosted their self-esteem, both of which can improve mental health. The activity directors reported that the program can be therapeutic for participants, particularly those with dementia. In addition, the program contributed to the de-escalation of behaviors and symptoms related to one member's mental health issues.

*"(Vintage Voices) served a purpose to get those people who tend to be more introverted and isolated be more participative with their peers."*

*-Activity Director*

### Social Benefits

Vintage Voices helps build relationships between members by having the same conductor at each rehearsal and integrating activities and social opportunities during and after choir rehearsals. Choir members said they enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people and develop new friendships through the program. They added that the conductor created a safe and welcoming environment that allowed them to socialize with people they did not usually interact with. At one site, the choir served as a bridge between assisted living and independent living participants—two groups who usually do not mingle together in public spaces like the cafeteria.

*"Always feels nice to belong to a group."*

*-Choir Member*

### Improved Self-Esteem

Vintage Voices builds participants' self-esteem and confidence by teaching singing skills, empowering participants to express themselves, and encouraging people of all skill levels to join. Many participants said that they never thought of themselves as singers before joining the choir and explained that the program has helped them to embrace a singer identity.

Prepared by:

**The Improve Group**

## An Engaging Challenge

Many members enjoyed the challenge that the choir provided. Some members had never sung before, some had sung but never in a choir, and others had never performed. Vintage Voices tries to match the repertoire to the skill level of each group, challenging skilled choir members but making it easy for less experienced singers to participate. Complex compositions with multiple parts created a challenge for more experienced choir members, while newer singers learned what it takes to rehearse and perform in front of an audience.

*“The rest of the day feels good; you forget your troubles.”*

*-Choir Members*

## Removing Barriers to Participation

Vintage Voices is designed to be inclusive, welcoming everyone to join regardless of skill level. Some host sites brought in memory care and assisted living staff to help with the program, resulting in greater participation among these clients. At one site, Vintage Voices made it possible for two deaf residents to participate in the choir by working closely with onsite American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters before and during rehearsals. For members with cognitive challenges, the conductor modified the pace of choir practice to increase comprehension.

Activity directors felt that Vintage Voices staff did a good job of creating opportunities for choir members to provide feedback about the program and acted on each group’s recommendations. For example, they made it easy for less mobile members to come to the choir by arranging rehearsal spaces to allow for scooters and wheelchairs. To address transportation barriers, Vintage Voices held choir rehearsals on-site and helped to arrange transportation when needed.

*“Vintage Voices has built relationships within the independent living clients and assisted living clients, and even into the memory care clients.”*

*-Activity Director*

## Building community

Vintage Voices helped to build community both within the host sites and with different organizations. At one host site, a new resident came to the site for the first time during choir rehearsal. Instead of getting a tour of the facility she went straight to the rehearsal and ended up singing all of the songs. She joined the choir that day, which helped her integrate into the community. The program also helped to create community through a multiracial and intergenerational collaboration between the Sabathani choir and Champlin Park High School. This project gave choir members two opportunities to perform a newly commissioned piece in front of an audience of friends and family members—once at Sabathani and again at Champlin Park High School.

## Benefits to participating organizations

Activity Directors said the choir is meaningful and accessible for participants, including quiet or difficult individuals who do not often participate in programming. One activity director described the choir as a transformative experience for the organization. In addition, the program is a fun and enjoyable way for host site staff to engage with their clients. Host sites commended Vintage Voices staff for great communication about roles and expectations of partner sites.

## Benefits of using trained artists

The conductor and accompanist’s expertise and passion for music were important for building respect and engaging participants. Many participants cannot read music and the conductor was able to accommodate by teaching parts vocally for more complex choral arrangements. Host sites appreciated having access to music and art professionals who are well-connected to the music community.

*“(Vintage Voices) is great fun. I think that is such a great experience. Yes, yes, yes to anyone who thought about it or wanted to do it!”*

*-Activity Director*

## Future considerations

While activity directors and choir members were enthusiastic about their experience with Vintage Voices, they did have some ideas on how to continue to improve the program. To help with recruitment, the activity directors recommended collaborating with organizations close to the host sites. Participants recommended continuing to tailor the practices and performances to each group so that they are fun and challenging, but not overwhelming. Both participants and activity directors recommended simplifying the music folder even more, especially for participants with memory loss.