

## MAY - EMPLOYER SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING

**Organisation:** Newcastle Glee Singers

**CONTACT NAME:** Edna Howard  
**ADDRESS:** Annesley Hall, South Promenade, Newcastle, Co Down  
**REGION:** Co Down  
**ART FORM:** Music & theatre  
**DATE STARTED:** 1950's

Newcastle Glee Singers are one of the most well-established arts groups in Northern Ireland. The group was initiated in the 1950's by a group of people who looked at the talent in all the church choirs in the town and realised the potential they would have if they all came together. Thus the Newcastle Glee Singers were formed with an inter-denominational ethos. It is a musical society which stages concerts, cabarets and musicals throughout the year, as well as having a youth group that performs a pantomime each January.

The Newcastle Glee Singers has a membership of over 130; 50 in the senior group and 80 in the youth group. The overall age range is between 8 and 80 years.

The Newcastle Glee Singers are nearly self-supporting, although a certain amount comes through sponsorship from local business. In the past Newcastle Glee Singers received support from LOMAC Tiles. Some of the Newcastle Glee Singers members are able to offer in-kind legal and accountancy advice when needed. The Newcastle Glee Singers also seeks support and advice from the umbrella groups National Operatic and Drama Association (NODA) and the Association of Irish Musical Societies (AIMS).



The main success story of the Newcastle Glee Singers has been the purchase and refurbishment of Annesley Hall on the South Promenade in Newcastle town. The Hall has been refurbished to a very high standard. The main challenge for the Newcastle Glee Singers is raising enough funds to become sustainable. The group has evolved over time. It initially concentrated on choral work and now the repertoire has broadened to cover musicals, drama, dance etc. The purchase of Annesley Hall means the group has a high profile in the community. The members are encouraged to take ownership of Annesley Hall and all that is in it. They encourage pride in their achievements.

There are individual benefits to being involved in the Glee Singers, as Careen Sharkey explains in the individual case study on p. 23. It is a confidence builder, especially in the youth group. It is good for individuals' self esteem as mixing with people of different ages and from different backgrounds is good for character and self-development. It also encourages the raising of artistic standards: Cathy McKay of the Newcastle Glee Singers was named as best female singer at the AIMS Annual Award in association with Volkswagen in 2004.

The Newcastle Glee Singers admit the main challenge for the future is keeping it fresh and relevant. Trends are continuously changing and there exists a need to take that on board and incorporate new trends into the work of the group. There are many plans for the future of the Glee Singers; they would like to organise and host workshops in all areas of stagecraft and are constantly looking at ways to increase their audience base.



## INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY: Careen Sharkey

Occupation: Civil Servant

Age Group: 35+

Position: Committee Member, Librarian and Producer & Musical Director for the Pantomime for the younger age group

Careen joined the Newcastle Glee Singers in 1970 as a child member, and apart from a 10 year break to have children, has been part of the Newcastle Glee Singers ever since. It has been a major part of her family and could be said to be a family tradition. Her grandmother was one of the people who founded the Glee Singers, her parents only recently retired from the group. Her daughter is also a member.

Careen states that the main benefit of being in the organisation is the fact that it draws in people from all parts of the community. It allows an opportunity to mix with other religions and people from various walks of life. It is a way of meeting people and finding out what the community is about, especially for people new to the area. She states "the bond is music and performance, and this allows for a good community focus".

Careen points to a number of reasons for her personal involvement in the Glee Singers. The performing helps her self-confidence. She also enjoys working with children. It is a musical outlet and a cohesive way of uniting the community through music. She believes being a member of the Glee Singers "makes me a rounder, more fulfilled person."

Careen can envisage herself in the group for a long time. She has a family association and history with the group; the Newcastle Glee Singers' is 'in her blood'. She is well settled in Newcastle and she "couldn't imagine life without participating in the show every year."