Emerging Voices Strategic Plan

2024-2027

Contents

Document Purpose

Emerging Voices has been successful in being awarded several contracts and grants to enable delivery of key services to support its mission across a variety of projects over the past five years. During this period, key themes have emerged, as well as a need to develop a clear strategy to inform current and future decision making regarding the direction of the organisation. As such, this document outlines the process and strategic priorities that have been agreed over the coming three years.

Developing our Strategic Plan

The strategic plan was developed by the Board of Trustees and will be reviewed by all trustees, volunteers and freelancers. The process involved horizon scanning in the area of operation to identify gaps, opportunities and potential risks, alongside turning inward to assess the current strengths of the organisation. This data was captured in a SWOT and PESTLE analysis which revealed some key trends. Trends were sorted into categories which were then developed into strategic aims.

Once strategic aims had been identified by two of the trustees, these were reviewed by the full Board of Trustees including a trustee with lived experience. The strategic aims outlined within this document represent those that were agreed by the board.
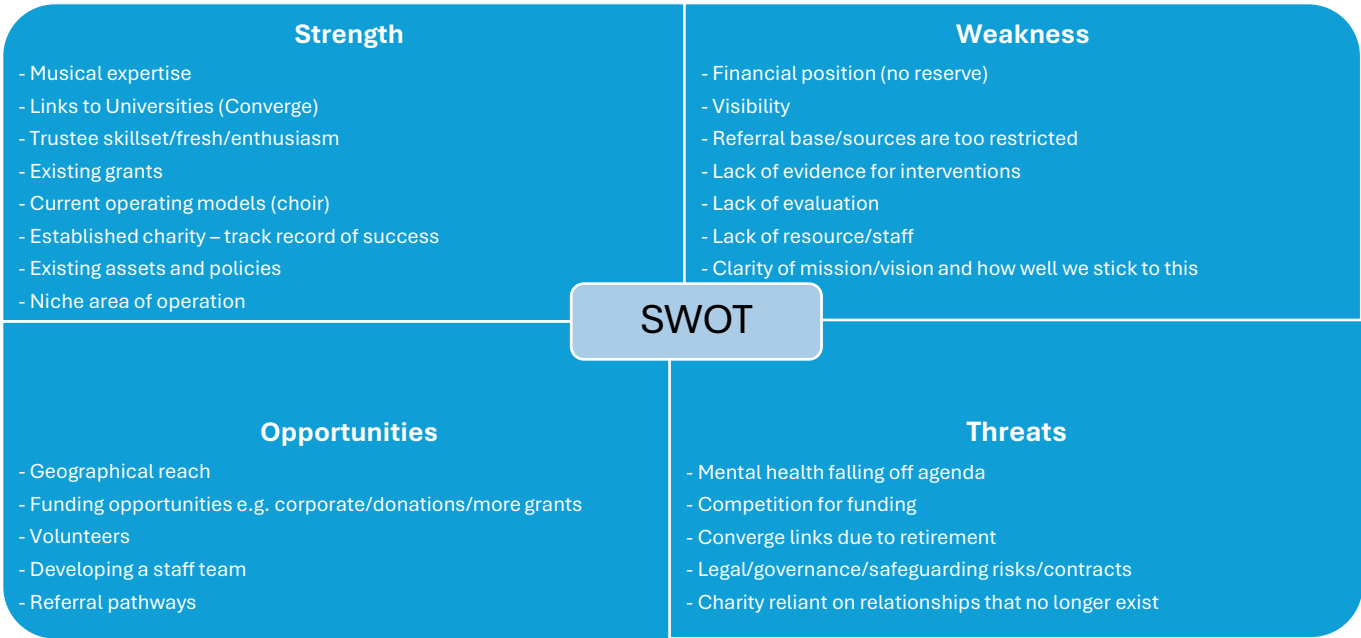
Strength
- Musical expertise
- Links to Universities (Converge)
- Trustee skillset/fresh/enthusiasm
- Existing grants
- Current operating models (choir)
- Established charity – track record of success
- Existing assets and policies
- Niche area of operation

Weakness
- Financial position (no reserve)
- Visibility
- Referral base/sources are too restricted
- Lack of evidence for interventions
- Lack of evaluation
- Lack of resource/staff
- Clarity of mission/vision and how well we stick to this

SWOT

Opportunities
- Geographical reach
- Funding opportunities e.g. corporate/donations/more grants
- Volunteers
- Developing a staff team
- Referral pathways

Threats
- Mental health falling off agenda
- Competition for funding
- Converge links due to retirement
- Legal/governance/safeguarding risks/contracts
- Charity reliant on relationships that no longer exist

Figure 1. SWOT analysis

Organisational History

Emerging Voices grew out of the hugely successful and innovative Converge project of York St John University. It was established as a charity in 2019 and initially focussed on delivering music based mental health rehabilitation within the university. This work has continued but in 2023 the charity also began to establish programmes across North Yorkshire with choirs, song writing and music production starting in Harrogate (2023) and Selby (2025).

Over coming years, Emerging Voices intends to extend its activities throughout North Yorkshire and to increase the range of musical activities that are offered

The External Environment

National situation and trends

One person in six reports experiencing mental health symptoms each week in England and one in three is taking medication or having therapy.[1] There was a 20% increase in the prevalence of mental health disease between 1993 and 2014 [1] and the COVID-19 pandemic has since further increased anxiety and depression worldwide by 25%. [2]

NHS spending on mental health disease was expected to increase to 8.92% of total NHS spending in 2023 [3] and yet the British Medical Association have recently published an article entitled *"It's broken": Doctors' experiences on the frontline of a failing mental healthcare system*.[4] The *Mental Health – Rehabilitation Getting It Right First Time* report advocates adopting closer collaboration between trusts, commissioners and voluntary sector partners, with rehabilitation to be undertaken in a community setting whenever possible.[5]

Music and Mental Health Disease rehabilitation

There is much literature supporting the view that almost any musical activity can improve self-worth, confidence and in the case of group activities social cohesion. These are important in combatting marginalisation. Furthermore, there is evidence that music can directly help with a range of mental health problems including stress related anxiety, depression and even "serious" psychiatric disease.[6] Emerging Voices activities provide a reason to engage, a period of time away from day to day stresses and a sense of achievement when a musical piece is delivered successfully. The benefits to mental health are easily appreciated during Emerging Voices sessions.

Local situation and trends

York has led the way with its Community Mental Health Transformation Programme and pioneering work with community voluntary organisations including Emerging Voices. This collaborative model is being copied in other centres around the UK and worldwide. Across North Yorkshire there are networks of mental health services and community voluntary sector organisations that provide mental health rehabilitation services and where voluntary sector involvement is increasingly welcome.

Summary of opportunities and threats

The main opportunities are:

- The demand for musical sessions to support mental health rehabilitation in North Yorkshire is growing and far outstrips the supply
- There is a growing enthusiasm for collaborative working both with and across the voluntary sector
- Funders are focussed on the need to support mental health rehabilitation

The main threat is:

- The charity depends on shorter term and restricted grant funding, the ongoing availability of these grants is not guaranteed.

The Organisation

Scope of activities

Emerging Voices funds musical activities in North Yorkshire. This includes three choirs in York, Harrogate and Selby, song writing and recording activities. Musical instrument tuition is also provided when required.

Program operating model

The charity is governed by its board of trustees, the day to day running or the organisation is delegated to an operational team. The operational team consists of a project lead, a fund raiser and an administrator. Income is from grants and fundraising events, there is a close relationship with the music department of the University of York. Musical directors are engaged on freelance contracts.

Governance

The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered with the Charity Commission in England and Wales (charity number 1183043) and is governed by its governing document.

The trustees have diverse skills and have ultimate responsibility for the governance of the charity. Trustees meet regularly and focus on strategic decisions; the operational running of the organisation is delegated to the operational team.

Summary of strengths and weaknesses

The charity's strengths include being local, and able to adapt rapidly due to its smaller size. There are valued and strong links to both the music department of the University of York and the Converge programme of York St John University. There is a close working relationship with the York Centre for Voluntary Services and an established link to the Out of Character theatre company. Since it was established in 2019 the charity has built a reputation in York for providing high quality musical activities. The skill mix of the trustees, volunteers and freelancers are broad with high levels of commitment from everyone involved.

The weaknesses of the charity include the lack of an adequate financial reserve and over-dependence on restricted grant income. Until recently the charity was little known outside of York.

Vision, Mission, and Strategic Aims

Our Vison

To promote social inclusion and empower people who experience mental ill health, through music

Our Mission

To provide quality music-making opportunities. Through such musical participation, we will support individuals to improve their general wellbeing, integrate into society and realise their musical aspirations.

Our Strategic Aims

1. **Increase the accessibility of our services by developing new referral pathways and evidence-based co-produced projects in areas with high levels of social isolation and poor mental health in North Yorkshire.**

2. **Develop an organisational infrastructure which supports effective design, implementation and monitoring of all of our services.**

Planning

To meet each of our strategic aims, we will do the following:

Increase the accessibility of our services by developing new referral pathways and evidence-based co-produced projects in areas with high levels of social isolation and poor mental health in North Yorkshire.

- Work to identify areas of need by using national and local data
- Create strategic relationships with 3rd sector and public organisations to strengthen referral pathways
- Co-produce all projects
- Monitor efficacy of all projects

Develop an organisational infrastructure which supports effective design, implementation and monitoring of all of our services.

- Identify and monitor governance requirements with respect to policies and infrastructure and operational needs
- Recruit volunteers
- Effectively identify and apply for relevant funding opportunities in areas of need
- Explore corporate relationships and fund-raising events as alternative sources of income
- Include core costs in any grant applications
- Increase reserves to at least 6 months of total operating costs.

Reviewing our Progress

This document and progress towards the strategic aims will be reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees. The document will need to be revised in 2027 at the latest.

References

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