



Photo: www.sachamberchoir.org/alamo-city-street-choir/

Alamo City Street Choir's Lifesaving Music

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The indignities of homelessness are easily available for all to see; the ravages wrought by a lack of shelter, food and water can quickly drain a homeless person's mental, physical, and emotional health. Yet, the damaging effects of homelessness extend far beyond mere physical needs. Without the comforts that so many of us take for granted—art, music, literature, a sense of purpose, and the ability to form deep, genuine relationships with their fellow human beings—homeless people suffer isolation, an increased risk of depression and anxiety, and a slow, creeping death of a soul.

Yet, on the streets of San Antonio, Texas, a new, alternative story has emerged. An organization called the Alamo City Street Choir has taken root. Its mission is simple: to provide those experiencing homelessness and severe economic disadvantage with a safe space to make music, form community, and let their all-too often unheard voices take flight with song. The choir was founded in 2019 by Tracy Bjella Powers, a veteran choir and orchestra director who saw a need for the power of music to transform people's lives. Knowing of the uplifting

power of art and realizing that the homeless population of San Antonio needed a safe space and a healthy emotional outlet, she set about founding the choir.

The structure of the choir is extremely simple: choir members meet once a week. For an hour, they would gather together to make music, share stories and create a sense of community and fellowship in the basement of Travis Park United Methodist Church. Meal vouchers are provided for participants, and bus passes are provided for returning members who introduce new singers to the group. Rehearsals are held weekly on Wednesdays.

Though the choir certainly had a humble start, they have as of recently begun to soar. From a benefit concert to raise money for the choir's home, Travis Park Church, after it was damaged during a severe thunderstorm in October 2019. The benefit concert was a roaring success—it raised over 2300 dollars to be donated to the repairs and restoration of the church and Corazon Ministries, a nonprofit support agency serving the homeless located within and affiliated with the church. From there, they went on to perform at a Valentine's Day nonprofit gala. Though currently on hold since March because of the dangers of holding a choir during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this unique choir full of unique voices will once again soar.

The impacts of art on the psyche, soul, and human spirit are many. Art has been shown to combat depression, give people hope and even lengthen lives. Yet, all too often, people, either deliberately or not, tend to diminish its impact and ignore the very real changes it can make in the lives of people, *especially* those among us who are struggling, be it financially, spiritually or physically. The Alamo City Street choir is one such organization, and it will continue to refine the multitude of lost voices in San Antonio for many years to come.

Citations

Tracy Bjella Powers [Personal interview]. (2020, November 30).

P. (2017, August 30). 10 Health Benefits of Music. Retrieved November 30, 2020, from <https://www.gethealthystayhealthy.com/articles/10-health-benefits-of-music>