

The Singing Project



STROKE RECOVERY ASSOCIATION
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Recovering the ability to speak through singing was the idea behind a program unique to Port Coquitlam put on by the Stroke Recovery Association of BC (SRABC). Supported by a \$2,000 grant from the Port Coquitlam Community Foundation and using donated space in Leigh Square Community Arts Village, The Singing Project ran for two 12-week periods in the fall of 2015 and spring 2016. The part of the brain that controls singing is in a different area than that which controls speech according to Tim Readman, executive director of SRABC.

There is a great deal of scientific research that indicates that stroke survivors can recover their ability to speak through singing, says Readman, adding that music therapists and speech pathologists help patients with communication disorders caused by damage to the left hemisphere of the brain by using singing to stimulate the undamaged parts of the brain. The Singing Project was open to all Port Coquitlam residents, integrating stroke survivors, caregivers and other residents, and providing opportunities to improve brain health. Between 12 and 16 people attended the weekly workshops.

We wanted the program to be impactful in the community as a whole and so it was open to stroke survivors, their families and friends, Readman says. We kept it informal and once people got comfortable we saw a lot of social interaction and more motivation for people to use their voices.



He says the program aimed to provide stroke survivors with an opportunity to participate in a community program, work at regaining their speech and to build friendships.

Participants also reaped the rewards of what singing offers: reduced stress, increased mental stimulation, improved posture, increased circulation, Readman says. Stroke is the number one cause of acquired long-term disability in adults in BC. Each year, there are more than 6,500 strokes in BC, from which 2,000 people will die, making this the third leading cause of death in the province. While the majority of people survive their attack, most remain affected by neurological disabilities over the long term. Currently, 55,000 adults in BC live with the effects of a stroke.

For information, go to www.strokerecoverybc.ca