
Background to Creating the Song “Side by Side” Submitted June 2018 for WPC 2019

We are a singing group run by the Edinburgh Branch of Parkinson's UK with some 35 members who are people with Parkinson's, caregivers and friends. We call ourselves Singing4Fun and meet weekly throughout much of the year to do just that – sing for fun. Our songleader, Penny Stone, begins with physical warm-up exercises and games for the voice then we sing all sorts of music from all sorts of places. We are currently singing a range of African songs so we can join Penny in a beach party to celebrate 100 years since the birth of Nelson Mandela. Now and again, we return to Gaelic songs, helped by our Gaelic speaking Singing4Fun member. We often sing in 3 part-harmony (and occasionally more!).

In a nervous sort of way we wanted to try, despite our inexperience, to write a song for the World Parkinson Congress 2019 so a number of us met to see what we could create under Penny's guidance. Who would have known we could put a musical composition together and have such a good time doing it?! We began by finding words and phrases to express how we felt about Parkinson's but that were well balanced by our awareness of all our positive feelings about the singing group and the community we have around us – Branch Members, family, caregivers and friends. Out of these the verses began to take shape. Then a few notes began to emerge from our various hummings. By our second session we had a melody for the verses. Then emerged a chorus which we wanted other people, the attendees at the Congress for example, to be able to sing easily. The chorus and the title of the song have been inspired by the Side by Side course run annually by the Branch to provide information and support for those who know, live, or work with someone who has Parkinson's.

With some work by Penny on a 2-part harmony and final tweaking at a Singing4Fun session we feel we have a song that very much reflects the positive community spirit of the singing group and the Branch as a whole AND we like to think of Congress attendees heartily joining in at the chorus. Whatever notes come out at Singing4Fun we always see it as 'singing in harmony'.