



- The Big Sing workshop is all about creating a relaxing environment for people to test their voice.

# Music group helps people find their voice

BY EMMA WATSON

MORE than just a social gettogether, about a dozen people participated in a community music-making workshop in Morwell on Thursday.

Community members joined the Big Sing workshop at the neighbourhood house on Thursday, led by community musician Jane Coker in collaboration with Phillip Chalker.

Having grown up with music camps and now chair of Community Music Victoria, Ms Coker helps budding musicians establish music-making groups in their own locality.

She said she had been mentoring Mr Chalker for

about three years, and had seen “enormous changes” in the vision-impaired Traralgon resident’s musical ability.

“He contacted me looking for a teacher; what he was interested in was being involved with community music,” Ms Coker said.

“His singing and playing is better and he’s practised leading ukulele workshops - he can now do that on his own. He has also become a more confident communicator; a better community activist.”

Ms Coker described music as “the oldest form of human interaction” - a tool that pre-dated language and enabled people to use their bodies to

communicate and relax.

She said making music was a “fundamental experience” that stimulated chemicals in the brain, assisting individuals’ mental health.

While Ms Coker continues leading the Big Sing workshops, she is confident Mr Chalker will lead his own in about a year’s time.

“(Working with Phillip) is fantastically educational - it makes me aware of the barriers people who are vision impaired have when music-making,” she said.

“All kinds of things other people would be able to easily do - there are obstacles in his way, which he is very good at finding his way around.

"In a year's time... you might find he has moved on a whole lot more and is leading his own singing workshops.

"He is an incredibly determined person - he just keeps moving forward."

Ms Coker said she hoped participants would find their voice without feeling under pressure - something she's been doing for the

best part of 30 years.

"They (Big Sing participants) will have a great sing together and be in a social environment where the emphasis is on fun and enjoyment," she said.

"And they'll be able to participate without fear of being judged.

"There is no requirement for people to

think of themselves as a singer, it's just about coming along and having fun - we make sure that is the environment they come to." For more information about the Big Sing workshops, phone Phillip Chalker on 0400 603 367 or email [latrobemusic@gmail.com](mailto:latrobemusic@gmail.com)