

Great Beginnings by Heather Emberley



Healthy Start for Mom and Me interpreter services based at Knox United Church translates in eighteen languages to help mothers new to Canada.

Baby steps. Brave little first steps toward infinite possibilities. That is what immigrant and refugee moms and those new to singing in a performing choir have in common.

To support new mothers new to Canada, **Spirit's Call Choir** will perform a benefit concert Sunday, December 8 at 2:30 pm at Jubilee Place, 173 Talbot Avenue, in support of **interpreter services** at Healthy Start For Mom & Me. Performing with guest artists **Those Guys**, Spirit's Call Choir will donate the proceeds to support the interpreter and translation services for immigrant and refugee women. Some of the 15 to 20 languages represented include Amharic, Mandarin, Nepali, Urdu, Tagalog, and Russian with attendance often reaching seventy moms plus babies, all in one room.

Workshops are given on what is available for maternal care in Canada, as well as parenting information. Moms are given food coupons, bus tickets, meal bags, Vitamin D and prenatal vitamins. They are taught the importance of breastfeeding, family planning, booster seats and the introduction of healthy finger foods. They learn about first aid, diabetes, medications, how to plan healthy family meals, housing and healthy relationships. The facilitators work hard to break down the barrier of fear that often intimidates women new to Canada who have never been to a doctor or had pediatricians in their homeland. Postnatal services

include information on postpartum depression and community resources.

Both Healthy Start for Mom & Me and Spirit's Call Choir embrace the new, the nervous, the risk takers. Sometimes just showing up can be an act of courage. While moms can bring their babies to any one of nine Healthy Start for Mom & Me programs in Winnipeg, interpreter services for mothers who do not speak English are unique to the Knox location. While there are many wonderful choirs in Winnipeg, what is unique about Spirit's Call Choir is how their welcoming approach is making singers out of folks who believed they could not sing. Every Sunday afternoon, all ages and stages of music awareness experience the spirit uplifting and health benefits of singing with Spirit's Call Choir. The magic of gaining confidence, whether it be singing in front of others or parenting Canadian style, happens because of peer support and gentle coaching.



A warm-up massage sets the tone for a healthy beginning for each choir practice, another unique feature of Spirit's Call Choir.

The personal connection by word of mouth is a great motivator in encouraging people to take a risk in venturing into something new. This is how most moms without English reading skills learn about Healthy Start for Mom & Me. Coincidentally, an overheard conversation at this year's Folk Festival is how **Cheryl Andrew** learned that if you can talk you can sing and that Spirit's Call Choir is the foremost non-audition choir in town to develop that ability.

Cheryl says she experiences a "feeling of peace that lasts," something she values, as she also started a new job. She says the conductor and her new peers "take you as you are, welcome you and teach you. They have given me strength and shown me I can do something I thought I couldn't do."

Candice Ludwig also appreciates how support from others is transforming her into a performing alto. A healthy living coach by profession, Candice heard a feature on CBC radio "on the drive home." She was intrigued by an interview of a winner in an Unsung Hero competition, namely, **Margaret Tobin**, Founder of Spirit's Call Choir, who was explaining the health and spiritual benefits of singing.



Margaret Tobin, Founder of Spirit's Call Choir with new altos, Candice Ludwig and Cheryl Andrew

The choir's mandate of giving back to the community also hit a high note for Candice who says her entire experience of learning new songs and breathing techniques are added personal bonuses to the honour she has discovered by being part "of something bigger than all of us."

Candice speaks for all 160 members of the choir when she says that conductor, **Jeremy Valance**, is a force of energy in getting the task of managing and blending the myriad of vocal abilities into a concert quality sound. She is now "in bliss" every time the choir is together and she receives the peer encouragement and gentle instruction. Success in learning to read music is like

learning a foreign language; support in a safe atmosphere is key to mastery of the new concepts.

Coincidentally, Candice's experience mirrors that of the new mothers and the way they feel about Healthy Start, according to Executive Director, **Gail Wylie**. The public health nurses, dieticians and outreach workers also provide gentle basic instruction in new parenting life skills as new mothers relate to the Canadian experience.

Ms. Wylie proudly documents a success rate of 80% increase in initiating breastfeeding and a marked reduction of low birth-weight babies due to the prenatal education at Healthy Start for Mom & Me. Likewise, Jeremy Valance and Margaret Tobin proudly document over \$170,000. raised through Spirit's Call Choir benefit concerts for local charities, as well as enhancing the singing enjoyment that is everyone's birthright.



ADULTS \$16
YOUTH (5-17) \$5

For Tickets: See a choir member or call
Margaret 204/488/0078 or
Healthy Start 204/949/5350

SPIRIT'S CALL CHOIR

BENEFIT CONCERT 2013

For Healthy Start for Mom & Me

NET PROCEEDS will support language interpreting for newcomers to
Canada to learn about having a healthy baby and family

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2013

2:30 PM RUSH SEATING (NO INTERMISSION)

JUBILEE PLACE, MBCI

173 TALBOT AVENUE | WINNIPEG, MB

Guest Performance by:

