



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S ANNUAL REPORT – 1 January to 31 December 2024

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1. OUR PEOPLE

We were pleased to see Warner Haldane awarded an MNZM in the 2024 King's Birthday Honours list for his services to arts administration, particularly music. Warner's contribution to music includes service to NZCF, the New Zealand Organ Association and the Bay of Plenty Music School. We were also delighted to acknowledge the 100th birthday of Life Member Coreen Gray, who had been one of the founders of the NZCF Bay of Plenty branch.

In June, NZCF presented Roy Tankersley and Carole Randall with Life Membership awards to honour their many years of service to the choral community of Aotearoa New Zealand. As both Roy and Carole had been vital figures in The Big Sing in their regions – Palmerston North and Otago respectively – their Life Membership was conferred on them at the gala concerts of those regional festivals.

Sadly, 2024 saw the passing of two NZCF Life Members: Leonie Lawson MNZM (aged 93) and Helen Robertshawe (aged 84). Leonie was Chair of NZCF Auckland for almost a decade, was active in the organisation of The Big Sing and was instrumental in initiating what has now evolved into The Kids Sing. Leonie played a crucial role in keeping NZCF operational during a period in the mid-2000s when our government funding was uncertain. Helen was a stalwart supporter of choral music in the Wellington region and beyond and had been a long-serving member of the NZCF Wellington committee. We also noted with sadness the passing of Roger Stevenson, a regular conductor at The Big Sing Finale for many years and the first and longest-serving Musical Director of the New Zealand Secondary Students' Choir (from 1987–2000).

a) Patron

We have been without a patron for NZCF since Dame Patsy Reddy's term as Governor-General came to an end in late September 2021.

b) Officers and staff

Governance Board

My sincere thanks go to the members of the Governance Board for the crucial role they play in guiding the organisation's direction and vision for the future. Special thanks to Chair Warwick Harvey for his tireless dedication to this voluntary role.

Warwick Harvey	Chair
Pete Rainey MNZM	Vice Chair
Melissa Absolum	
Kim Cunningham	
Dr Igelese Ete	
Dr Karen Grylls CNZM	
Robin Randall	
Raymond Tan	

Staff in 2024

Christine Argyle	Chief Executive
Emma Billings	Events Manager
Ann Gibbard	Finance & Membership Manager
Lisa Bates MNZM	Development Manager
Sophie van Waardenberg	Communications & Pasifika Outreach Coordinator
Maria Winder	Children's Outreach Coordinator (Jan – June)
Diana Cable	Youth Outreach Coordinator (Jan – June)

NZCF National Advisory Committee

The National Advisory Committee (NAC) comprised the NZCF Board Chair and the Chairs of each NZCF region. The chairs and committee members from the ten regions played a key role in NZCF delivering its activities and services.

2024 NZCF Regional Chairs

Penny Christiansen (Auckland)
 Jenny Lewy (Waikato-Bay of Plenty)
 Alison Thomson JP (East Coast)
 Roy Tankersley MNZM / Alison Stewart (Manawatu-Whanganui)
 Christopher Luke (Taranaki)
 Shawn Condon (Wellington)
 Lucy Rainey (Nelson-Marlborough)
 Courtney Hickmott (Canterbury-West Coast)
 Carole Randall/Rosemary Tarbotton (Otago)
 Christine McLeod (Southland)

Regional Committees

Changes to the NZCF Constitution in October 2024 led to the winding up of the NZCF Regional Committees from the end of 2024, paving the way for a new, more centralised structure. The NZCF Board and National Office extend their heartfelt thanks to the many dedicated volunteers across Aotearoa who contributed their time and energy to their regional committees. We are especially grateful to the Chairs in each region, and to the regional treasurers for their time spent preparing funding applications, reconciling regional transactions and overseeing their region's finances. We sincerely hope our regional committee members will continue to enjoy playing a vital role as members of event-specific committees and support teams convened by their Regional Coordinators for festivals such as The Big Sing, The Kids Sing and SingFest.

2. MEMBERSHIP

It is pleasing to see a continued increase in choir membership to 214 in 2024. This is the highest number of Member Choirs since 2017 (when the number of Member Choirs peaked at 217).

Conversely, there has been a decline in individual memberships since 2022, partly attributable to fewer Big Sing and Kids Sing directors taking up the offer of complimentary ACD membership in the last 2 years. If we subtract the complimentary Youth memberships, we find that paid Personal membership dropped by 30 members from 2023 to 2024. With fewer tangible benefits to Individual membership, NZCF struggles to increase its individual member base. Many singers feel it is sufficient to be a member of a Member Choir.

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Personal	142*	199*	205*	153	162	168
ACD total	231	249	281	323	384	335
<i>Paid</i>	93	112	120	142	124	121
<i>Free via TKS/TBS</i>	138	137	161	181	260	214
Life	17	17	17	16	14	14
Total Individual	390	465	503	492	560	517
Choirs	214	211	193	207	204	203
<i># Singers in member choirs</i>	7538	7337	6343	7264	7533	7571

* These numbers include 47 complimentary Youth memberships for members of NZ Youth Choir in 2022, 30 in 2023 and 13 in 2024.

3. FINANCES

In 2024 NZCF had a consolidated surplus of \$344,241. This comprises a surplus of \$481 from NZCF National, a surplus of \$9,159 from NZCF Regional branches and a surplus of \$334,601 by Chor 2024 Ltd.

Consolidated accumulated funds at 31 December 2024 were \$1,364,331 (\$1,109,620 NZCF National; \$254,665 NZCF Regional branches; \$46 Chor 2024 Ltd). A dividend of \$718,607 was paid from Chor 2024 Ltd to NZCF National in December 2024.

Our sincere thanks to NZCF Finance Manager Ann Gibbard for her meticulous work and valued expertise. Warm and sincere appreciation goes to our regional treasurers in 2024, for their careful stewardship of NZCF's financial accounts.

4. FUNDING AND SPONSORSHIP

a) Creative New Zealand funding

2024 was the fifth year of NZCF's 6-year funding agreement under CNZ's Tōtara Investment Programme. Feedback from CNZ on our 2024 reporting included: "You consistently meet your contractual requirements and outcomes, excelling in delivering quality arts experiences that align with our strategies and reach a diverse range of communities... We value the high-quality experiences and opportunities NZCF provides for audiences and choirs, and the significant impact your organisation has on the singing community and wider performing arts sector here in Aotearoa and internationally."

NZCF has recently been offered a 1-year extension on the current CNZ contract through to December 2026, and will need to apply in 2026 for renewed funding for a multi-year contract from 2027 onwards.

b) Ministry of Youth Development funding

Our current funding agreement with Ministry of Youth Development for \$65k towards The Big Sing ends on 30 June 2025. We applied to their new Youth Contributory fund in November 2024 but were advised in March 2025 that our application was unsuccessful, since The Big Sing no longer closely aligns with MYD's new Youth Strategy (which specifically targets under-served communities). However, we are hopeful that another MYD funding opportunity will open up to enable ongoing support from MYD.

c) Ministry for Culture and Heritage

NZCF is immensely grateful for the substantial support we received in 2023-24 from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, which enabled us to deliver our *Singing for Lifelong Wellbeing* outreach programme. See Section 10 for further details.

d) Sponsorships, Partnerships and Donations

Our thanks go to Tour Time, Trinity College London (NZ) and Alpine Energy for their continued support of The Big Sing Cadenza and Finale in 2024. We are also sincerely grateful to Rosemary Collier, Felicity Wong, Blenheim Choral and Nelson Civic Choir for their generous donations to NZCF and The Big Sing.

e) Community Grants

We were hugely appreciative of the many grants we received both nationally and regionally in 2024 from community trusts, foundations and regional councils. These included the Adam Foundation, Aotearoa Gaming Trust, Elisabeth Ball Charitable Trust, First Light Foundation, Foundation North, Four Winds Foundation, Freemasons Foundation, Geyser Community Foundation, Lion Foundation, Nelson City Council, Nelson Building Society, NZ Community Trust, Otago Community Trust, Pelorus Trust, Pub Charity, Rotorua Energy Community Trust, Southland Creative Communities, The Trusts Community Foundation, Toi Foundation, Trillian Trust, Trust Aoraki, Trust House Foundation, Venues Wellington and Wellington City Council. A huge thank you to Lisa Bates (Development Manager) and all those in the regions who managed these applications for NZCF.

5. THE BIG SING (TBS)

The Big Sing Regionals

160 schools registered for the Big Sing Regionals in 2024, 10 more than the previous year and exceeding the pre-Covid 2019 peak of 149. While the number of schools taking part has rebounded, the number of choirs is still down on pre-Covid levels, with 239 choirs in 2024 (20 more than 2023) compared with 260 in 2019. Overall student participant numbers rose to 7186 students (878 more than 2023), which was a marked increase from 2022 (5224 students) but not yet back to pre-Covid levels (8187 in 2019).

Regional adjudicators in 2024 were Shawn Condon (Canterbury-West Coast, Manawatu-Wanganui, Nelson-Marlborough), Anthony Ritchie (Auckland, Waikato-Bay of Plenty, Taranaki), and Rosemary Turnbull (Wellington, East Coast, Otago, Southland).

Heartfelt thanks go to our 2024 TBS Coordinators: Sophie van Waardenberg (Auckland), Bonnie Heberton & Jeremy Whimster (Waikato-Bay of Plenty), Andrea Wilson (East Coast), Jeff Grange (Taranaki), Karen Hall (Manawatu-Wanganui), Julie Sperring (Wellington), Jodie Freeman (Nelson-Marlborough), Caitlin Godfrey (Canterbury-West Coast), Rosemary Tarbotton (Otago), Alan Menzies (Southland).

The Big Sing Cadenza

2024 saw 36 choirs participating across three Cadenza festivals in Timaru, Hastings and Rotorua. This was the first time the Lower North Island Cadenza was held in the East Coast region.

Our sincere thanks go to our Cadenza Coordinators – Jenny Lewy (Upper North Island), Andrea Wilson (Lower North Island), Martin Kane (South Island) – and their committees for their highly successful management of these festivals.

The Big Sing National Finale

The Big Sing Finale 2024 was held in the Michal Fowler Centre in Wellington at the end of August. 24 choirs from Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Invercargill took part in the three-day event. Adjudicators in 2024 were Michael Stewart, Henrietta Hunkin-Tagaloa, Paul Holley (Aus) and Toni Huata (Auahi Kore award). Eight competitive sessions culminated in a gala concert which was compèred by Nick Tipping of RNZ Concert. The concert was livestreamed on Facebook, Face TV, the Radio NZ website and on the NZCF website and reached an audience of over 50,000 worldwide — likely significantly more when accounting for viewers through the RNZ channels.

Our warmest thanks go to Julie Sperring and her Wellington committee for the considerable work they put into ensuring Finale was such a success. Special thanks also go to our Events Manager Emma Billings and the **TBS National Committee** which in 2024 comprised Pete Rainey (Chair), Melissa Absolum (GB), Dr Siliva Gaugatao, Katie Macfarlane, Peter Watts, Emma Billings (Events Manager) and Christine Argyle (CE).

6. NZCF/SOUNZ AWARD

Since 2021, we have run two student composition competitions in collaboration with SOUNZ. 2024 saw a record number of entries, with 25 in the open category and five entries in the category of compositions with texts in te reo Māori. The adjudicators were Eve de Castro-Robinson (open) and Takerei Komene (te reo Māori).

The winner of the open category was Jesse Wallace from Palmerston North Boys' High School, with *A Winter Evening*, and the winner of the te reo category was Elizabeth Te Puni from Tawa College, with *Te Oriori o Hine-Nui-Te-Pō*. Performances of both winning compositions were recorded and played at The Big Sing National Finale in the Michael Fowler Centre.

7. THE KIDS SING

The Kids Sing was held in eight centres in 2024: Auckland, Hamilton, Hastings, New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Wellington, Nelson and Dunedin. This was the first time The Kids Sing was held in Dunedin and the event attracted 400 students from nine primary and intermediate schools. A total of 4438 primary and intermediate students participated nationally (over 1000 more than in 2023). At each event, apart from in Dunedin, school choirs presented up to three songs before joining together as a massed choir. In Dunedin, all schools performed a number of items together as a massed choir.

Many thanks to our 2024 regional TKS Coordinators: Maria Winder (Auckland), Julia McIntyre (Hamilton), Georgina Cole (Hastings), Jeff Grange (New Plymouth), Roy Tankersley (Palmerston North), Jenny Gould (Wellington), Lucy Rainey (Nelson) and Carole Randall (Dunedin).

8. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

SingFest

Our regional NZCF committees delivered a total of seven local SingFests in Rotorua, Hastings, New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Nelson, Christchurch and Invercargill. The SingFests in Invercargill, Palmerston North, New Plymouth and Hastings were day-long festivals at which community choirs from each region gathered to perform for and with each other. Nelson's Summer SingFest was an outdoor event showcasing a vibrant array of multicultural choirs who performed alongside the region's community choirs in an inclusive and supportive environment. The Christchurch SingFest featured pop-up choirs in four locations across the city, allowing them to engage audiences beyond those who would typically attend a choral concert. Immediately after the World Choir Games, NZCF Waikato-Bay of Plenty hosted local and international choirs at a SingFest called *From the World to Wai-BOP*, at the Sir Howard Morrison Centre in Rotorua. Additionally, NZCF Wellington held its popular annual May Workshop, with around 80 singers performing Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* under Isaac Stone.

Regional Workshops

Workshops for adult choral singers/conductors were presented in Auckland, Marton, Wellington, Kāpiti and Christchurch. The Auckland workshop focused on vocal technique and was presented by Catrin Johnsson; Judy Bellingham presented her *Viagra for the Voice* workshops in Wellington and Kāpiti; Maaike Christie-Beekman led a workshop in Marton; and Dr Karen Grylls led a conducting workshop in Christchurch.

9. THE ASSOCIATION OF CHORAL DIRECTORS (ACD)

a) Fine Tuning

11 Fine Tuning workshops for Big Sing choirs and their conductors took place in 8 high schools in Cambridge (with Elise Bradley), Christchurch and Ashburton (Andrew Withington), and Invercargill (David Squire).

b) Giving Direction

Rowan Johnston led 6 online Giving Direction workshops for conductors of secondary and/or community choirs.

d) ACD Facebook group

Membership of this closed Facebook group remained relatively static over the course of 2024, with a slight increase from 243 to 248. The group remains a valuable space for exchanging advice on choral matters, recognising members' accomplishments, exploring repertoire ideas, and promoting events and courses of interest.

Our thanks go to the 2024 **ACD Advisory Committee**: Dr Karen Grylls (Chair), David Squire (Deputy Chair), Maria Colvin, Jared Corbett, Sue Densem, Megan Flint, Jono Palmer, Mark Stamper, Christine Argyle (CE) and Emma Billings (Events Manager).

10. MCH OUTREACH PROGRAMME

In 2023, we began rolling out our outreach initiative, *Singing for Lifelong Wellbeing*, funded by the MCH Regeneration Fund and that programme concluded on 30 June 2024. The goal of this initiative was to get more children singing—and to keep them singing after they leave school—through the delivery of training and resources to primary and intermediate teachers.

During 2024, outreach activities took place across the country, with a further 92 teachers from over 80 schools attending *Let's Get Singing* workshops, and 36 teachers receiving one-to-one mentoring in their schools, to support them in leading classroom singing.

Nine further videos in our series of 12 song-teaching videos for use in primary and intermediate classrooms were recorded and produced in 2024. All 12 of these videos were uploaded to the NZCF website in 2024 and were received by classroom teachers with enthusiastic acclaim. Our thanks go to Megan Flint (Artistic Advisor) and Juliet Dreaver (Producer) and all the presenters for their outstanding work on this video series.

In addition, Megan Flint, Maria Winder and Mary Cornish collaborated to update and re-publish our *Hear Our Voices* handbook for leaders of children's choirs.

The funding from MCH also allowed us to run young conductor training for 18-25-year-olds. In 2023 and continuing into the first half of 2024, 24 young choral conductors received training in workshops in Auckland and Wellington with tutors Elise Bradley and Andrew Withington, as well as one-to-one Zoom sessions. Six young conductors were also placed in internships with choirs in Auckland, Christchurch and Kaitia.

Diana Cable created a valuable resource on the NZCF website titled *A Young Person's Guide to Starting a Choir*. This resource brings together administrative and artistic advice on how to start a choir, and went live on the NZCF website in mid-2024.

We are deeply grateful to our hugely dedicated Outreach Coordinators Diana Cable and Maria Winder for all their work on this initiative. We continue to acknowledge the foundation work laid by the late Helen Acheson in 2023.

11. PASIFIKA OUTREACH PROGRAMME

Our Pasifika outreach programme (funded through CNZ's Pacific Arts Strategy) was established at the start of 2024 with the goal of reaching school communities with high numbers of Pacific students and where there has been no, or only minimal, participation in The Big Sing. Over the course of 2024, NZCF facilitated 56 hours of mentor pairings with a total of 19 choirs across Auckland, Rotorua, the East Coast, Hutt Valley, Porirua and Wellington. These included several schools we have had little to no contact with previously, such as Alfriston College, Kelston Boys' High School and Kelston Girls' College in Auckland; Gisborne Boys' High School, Lytton High School and Ilminster Intermediate School in Gisborne; and Western Heights High School in Rotorua.

Our sincere thanks go to our 2024 Pasifika Outreach Coordinator Sophie van Waardenberg for her tremendous work in establishing and rolling out the programme. The success of the initiative resulted in an offer of further funding from Creative NZ for this mahi in 2024.

12. WORLD CHOIR GAMES 2024

The 13th World Choir Games, hosted in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland from 10–20 July, proved to be a resounding success. After four years of preparation, Auckland welcomed 11,000 singers from 250 choirs representing 42 countries — including over 50 choirs from Aotearoa New Zealand — for ten vibrant days of singing, competition, celebration, and community building. Throughout the city, the Games brought a constant flow of music, delighting more than 25,000 audience members who attended a rich array of ceremonies, concerts, and competitions in both the central city and wider Auckland region.

Events and activities took place across 31 venues, including 16 main-stage and supporting venues in the central city and a further 15 city and suburban community venues that hosted a total of 54 free daytime Friendship Concerts. Choirs competed in 28 different categories across two levels: one for highly-skilled ensembles and another for less experienced groups, with each competition assessed by panels of international jurors. Altogether, the Games delivered 490 events and 885 performances, supported by a dedicated team of 360 volunteers.

The artistic programme, curated by a team led by John Rosser, included spectacular opening and closing ceremonies at Spark Arena, and two sold-out performances at Holy Trinity Cathedral of the groundbreaking choral work *Matariki He Kāhui Reo* (Matariki, a constellation of voices), written by six different NZ composers and performed entirely in te reo Māori by seven choirs. Many local and international audience members hailed it as the finest choral experience they had ever attended.

INTERKULTUR president Günter Titsch commented, "Auckland has thrilled the world! We have already received enthusiastic feedback from so many choirs, who described the World Choir Games 2024 as a magical and incredible experience." A rundown of some of the highlights of the event is on our website here: <https://nzcf.org.nz/about/news/looking-back-world-choir-games>

Our New Zealand choirs came away inspired by the extraordinary performances they heard, invigorated by the workshops they attended, and proud of the medals they earned through months of preparation. Hosting the World Choir Games was a tremendous boost to our choral sector and the benefits will reverberate for years to come.

Our heartfelt thanks go to the **WCG 2024 directors** John Rosser (Artistic & Games Director) and Kylie Sealy (Executive Director), their staff, and the members of the **Chor24 Board**: Warwick Webb (Chair), Jane Blackmore, Jason Cooper, Juliet Dreaver, Michael Littlewood, Peter Walls, Seiuli Terri Leo-Mauu.

13. IN CONCLUSION

2024 was an extraordinary year for NZCF. Hosting The World Choir Games was a gargantuan undertaking that demonstrated our organisation's ability to step up and deliver a highly successful major international event. Our specially funded Children's, Youth and Pasifika outreach programmes saw us providing valuable training and resources above and beyond our usual capacity; and the overhaul of NZCF's structure and Constitution was a huge piece of work that will 'future-proof' our organisation in a world of declining volunteerism.

I want to once again acknowledge and thank all our regional committees and the teams of volunteers who have helped deliver our events nationwide over many years. I sincerely hope they will remain involved in regional activities under our new structure. I also wish to warmly thank the NZCF and Chor 2024 boards for their wise stewardship. And very special thanks to Warwick Harvey, John Rosser and Kylie Sealy for their outstanding contributions to NZCF in 2024.

My heartfelt thanks go to *all* who played a part in advancing NZCF's vision throughout 2024. Their collective efforts have helped nurture vibrant singing communities across Aotearoa and have enabled New Zealand's choral voice to shine proudly on the world stage.

Ngā mihi nui



Christine Argyle

Chief Executive

New Zealand Choral Federation

Te Kotahitanga Manu Reo o Aotearoa