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They spent 7 weeks studying signing and rehearsing online during the coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown.

Now, after returning to the classroom with new skills and songs under their belts, members of Darwin's Sing Song Signers choir are ready to entertain audiences at the Darwin Festival this weekend.

"Everyone is very excited to be out in the community again performing," said choir director Rachel Kroes.

Mrs Kroes is Executive Officer of Down Syndrome Association of the Northern Territory (DSANT), an NDIS provider, which offers signing classes to the choir. She has been teaching the choir to sign for about 20 years.

"Our choir is doing something on stage the majority of the audience watching cannot do and that's a levelling experience when you're watching someone with a disability that you as a person without a disability cannot do," she said.

The Sing Song Signers is a choir of young people, most of whom live with disabilities, including Down syndrome, autism and hearing impairment.

One choir member is 25-year-old NDIS participant Rebecca Mackrow, who lives with Down syndrome. She has been performing with the choir for more than 10 years and is often chosen to lead the group because of her advanced signing skills.

Rebecca attends signing classes every Saturday through her NDIS plan.

"Rebecca is naturally very quiet and shy but she loves the choir and it has given her a lot of confidence and increased her social skills," said Rebecca's mother, Caroline Mackrow.

"Since Rebecca joined the NDIS, she's become a lot more social and has definitely improved her communication skills."

Last year, the Darwin Festival invited the choir to perform for the first time. It was so popular, organisers invited the Signers back for 2020.

But the global pandemic brought unexpected challenges. Signing classes and rehearsals for new songs were moved online.

"It was a challenge for members to learn to use technology like Zoom but it was a great success," said Mrs Kroes. "They now have new skills and have gained more confidence."

Mrs Kroes founded the Sing Song Signers choir when her own daughter, who has Down syndrome, was in transition and needed friends to communicate with.

“Music is a good way to teach signing to people with Down syndrome and there is a literacy underpinning the signing, they are learning to read and understand the words,” said Mrs Kroes.

“People love to watch the choir and they make sure they’re at events where we perform,” said Ms Kroes. “We have a strong following because people are moved by our performances.”

Mrs Kroes said appearing at the Darwin Festival again was significant.

“In Darwin, this is a big event,” she said. “It’s a chance to promote ourselves in a mainstream festival where we are presenting alongside people who are well known in arts and culture and music.”

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