

Life & Living

With Health Reporter Helen Sturdy

Soothe stress with a song

COMPLEMENTARY therapies were once thought of as a flash-in-the-pan approach to healing. But they are becoming increasingly more successful in treating a number of conditions - including depression and stress. Now one Teesside therapist has learned an innovative technique, as **HELEN STURDY** discovers.

SUSAN Lever was always nervous. In a room full of people, the East Cleveland therapist would shake violently with fear.

It's hard to believe that the now confident and articulate woman could ever be wracked with terror.

"I was just very scared of people," Susan explains eloquently.

"I grew up with very little sense of myself.

"I always wondered what people were going to think of me.

"So I started to get involved in personal development."

Soon Susan started taking part in a soothing type of chanting.

"That is very repetitive and I stopped worrying about what I was saying," she continues.

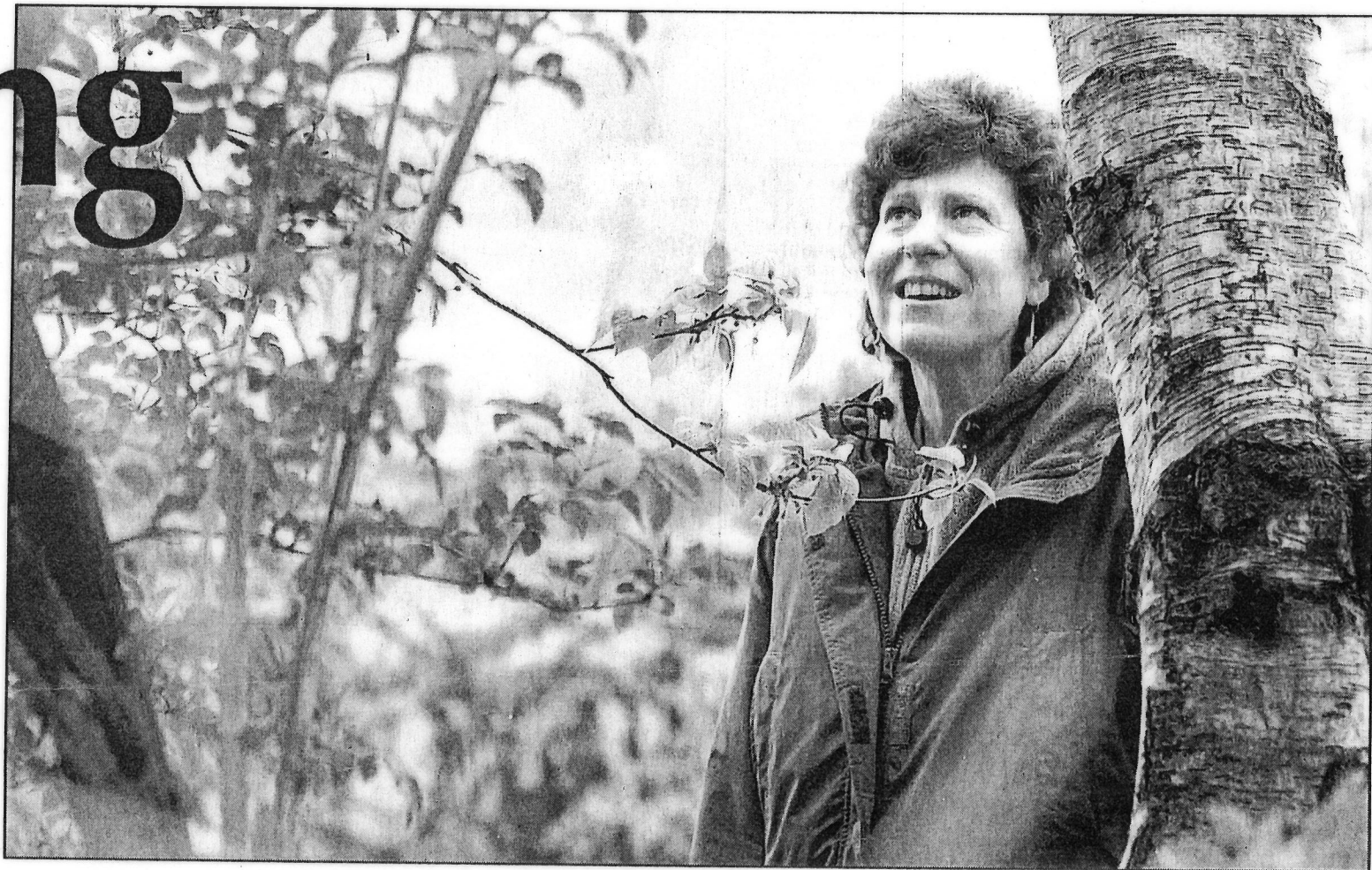
"I had always quite liked singing and I had singing lessons.

"That gave me a lot more confidence."

Susan then began to branch out into writing her own songs.

And soon, she had created a repertoire of about 40 tunes.

"It was just like a key had turned," says Susan.



VOCAL SUPPORT: Music therapist Susan Lever believes singing together is a great way for people to relax, have fun - and reduce stress levels

Picture: **STEPHEN BROUGH**

"I realised that everybody is creative and has talents."

When folk singer Frankie Armstrong offered to help out, Susan jumped at the chance of working alongside - and being trained by - the famed expert.

"We both believed that people can enjoy their singing voice," she adds.

"Nowadays, people do not join in singing like they used to and it does make you feel good to sing."

"She told me I could start doing workshops."

Susan believes fear is one of the main reasons people no longer enjoy the art of singing together.

And that's one thing Susan wants to change.

Because using your voice is one of the powers the therapist wants people to harness through her teaching.

"Some people are so scared that they are so out of tune that people will notice," says Susan.

"But in doing that, they are losing all the benefits."

The therapist originally began running a series of different sessions, encouraging people to

use their voices to their own advantage - and to help others.

And she has already had a number of different reactions from the workshops.

"People say they feel much more relaxed and it helps keep stress away," she smiles.

"They also don't realise how powerful their own body is until they start to sing."

At her Guisborough home, Susan has also practised a number of other skills, including the ancient art of Reiki.

"They have all helped me," she explains calmly.

"A major source of stress is that people simply do not breathe properly.

"Then when people begin to sing, they relax and have fun."

The professional believes a person's belief in their inability to sing often stems from childhood.

She says: "A child just does not think. They are not worried about people judging their voice."

"Then when you get to school, you are told children should be seen and not heard - we say something and we are told off."

"Once you are told something as a child, you begin to believe it, and if you are told you cannot sing, that's where it begins."

There are fewer than 300 people in the

country teaching voice therapy full time.

But Susan now wants to extend her own skills to business, rather than one-to-ones or group workshops.

She says: "I want to go into organisations and use it to help release stress."

"The work I do is so simple but it is such an effective way of people changing their state of mind."

"People need to relax more and have fun - and singing is much more fun with other people."

"Sometimes people get too focused on stress and they need to have more fun."

Susan is now looking for organisations too book her services for sessions.

"Reducing stress reduces the number of days off sick," she adds.

"Organisations can benefit from that."

The expert's next introductory session will be held at Hurworth Community Centre near Darlington on May 19.

The workshop will run from 10am to 5pm and costs £40.

And in Darlington Arts Centre, a six-week course is on offer every Wednesday, starting on May 22.

For more details, phone Susan on 01287 636350.