

special issue:

Hearing Voices



**News from the
Joan of Arc Project
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Editorial:

This relatively small collection of some subjective accounts of '*voice hearing*' alongside some of the interests of some '*professionals*' is not intended to be at all definitive. Rather, it represents but one small cross-section of the views of these people affected in different ways by 'voices'. It is hoped that by reading these articles together, an appreciation of how voices can impact upon people's lives may be gained. Such insight is often claimed but is the *experience* of voice hearing ever really *understood*?

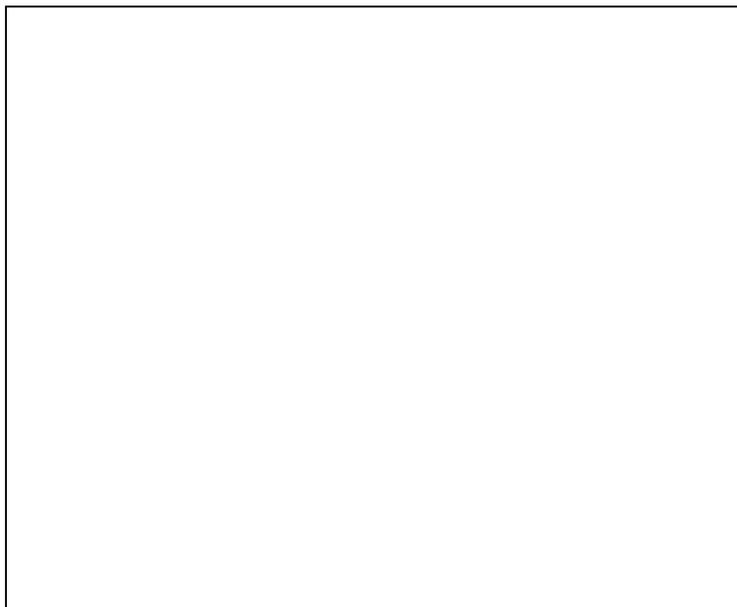
Thanks to the honesty, frankness and spirit of the '*experts-by-experience*' for providing their accounts. It is hoped that '*carers*' reading this issue will appreciate and respect their sense of altruism. They have already come a long way. Thanks also to the carers who have provided access to their understanding of voice hearing. Their commitment also deserves respect. Non-voice hearers may gain knowledge by reading this special issue of the Joan of Arc Newsletter. Voice hearers may also benefit by learning about other hearers' voices and experiences as well as from carers' viewpoints.

Hopefully, the message in the following pages will suggest that both enquiry and support; empathy and hope are becoming increasingly available from those who care about others who suffer with voices. This appears to be gaining momentum at local, national and international levels. Hear our voice!

Full names of authors are available on request.

Other Joan of Arc Project news is enclosed separately.

The newsletters may also be accessed at: www.recoverydevon.co.uk



Joan of Arc Project Special Issue: Hearing Voices



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The Hearing Voices Group

We sit in a room.
A candle is glowing.
We drink our drinks
And nibble some goodies.

We talk of the Ward,
Our fears when at home.
We speak of our voices
And things that we see.

We are friends all together
United as One.
We say that we know
How the others are feeling.

We smile, we cry.
There's hurt inside.

We then hug and kiss.
Our goodbyes are all said.
We make our way home
Hoping things will get better.

We are the hearers, the hunted, the trapped.
Why were we chosen, by what or by whom?

Jean

Balance

A raindrop trickles off the tip of a dying leaf,
Penetrating the still cool liquid below,
Drip drip
It disturbs the silence, creating a ripple.
Is the ripple not a life of its own due course?
A beginning searching for an end.
Is this not being?
Is this not essence?
For whom is to say what life is?
Only what has given life shall say so,
And so the balance of the universe is maintained.

Chris B

Questions 2 Voice

Our inner voice - who would be without it? - until there are outside presences? How do I begin to write about voices? Are voices writing about me? Outside forces maybe, devils or angels, are they really expressions of our inner selves? Perhaps no-one understands - we could be contacted by spirits? I have experienced a spiritual woman through to an alien family, friends and enemies? All of them are a reality particular to me. Each individual has a different experience.

Most people relate to an inner critic or to gremlins when they try something new. But when an apparition or ghost talks to me how can I say that it is not as real as say ... buying tea bags?

A voice is as real as a rainy day.

Voices Saturday

Witch in my mind she is laughing
In the graveyard opposite the room where I sit
Anger
Blood spillage.
Talk
The head spies
Shrill scream
Hot chocolate
Room full of ghosts.
A child cries.

Deep dark
Scary
Busy with bees
Anger has his own name
No prayers
No empty echo
Voices weave a web for me to fall into.

Anna L

Anne's Account

I grew up in a violent and hostile environment.

I was attacked, raped and held at gun point whilst living in France in 1992. I returned to England and suffered a serious nervous breakdown. I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital in Margate in Kent where I stayed for a period of six months. This is when my voices started: each time I become ill, I hear voices.

My voices are extremely hostile. They tell me to do the most weird and crazy things. For example, in the past, they have told me to take things from shops. They have also told me to book a holiday for two in Spain. I had to get a doctor's certificate in order to obtain a refund - even though I didn't have a passport! My voices once told me to get married so I went into a jeweller's shop and chose a wedding ring for my husband-to-be. The voices then told me to take the ring and to leave the shop. A policeman brought me back to the jeweller's - I asked him if he would marry me - unfortunately, he was already spoken for!

I do my very best to ignore the voices but in the end they seem to put so much pressure on me that I obey. When I was in hospital, the voices told me to take off all my clothes and to use the most awful language. Now I regard hospital as a place of safety for me when I am not well. I literally breathe a sigh of relief when I am in hospital because I know that I am in safe hands.

When I am well, I feel happy and content. I now work part-time for The Joan of Arc Project where, for the most part, I feel OK. I regard the people I meet there to be my loving family whom I love and cherish in return. I feel that my psychiatric illness has given me a deep insight into other people's problems and has enabled me to be a good source of support for them.

I am hoping that after being on medication for the past 14 years, I will soon begin to try to cope without it. I thank God for all the nurses and doctors and for my Consultant, Dr. Blewitt. Much love to you all. God Bless.

Anne

Kate's Account

I was driving to work one day in March 1999 on a perfectly normal day. Suddenly, I felt as if someone else was in the car with me.

I then heard a voice saying "you f ***** g bitch". I thought it must be the radio but it wasn't on. I thought it must be my conscience and that it would go away but it didn't. Different voices started saying threatening and abusive things to me. I could be anywhere and the voices would just 'appear'. I was admitted in October, 1999 and I told a nurse (the first person) about the voices but she said not to worry about them.

The voices by this time would talk amongst themselves about me in a derogatory and abusive way using language that I would never use. They made me feel so unworthy. They would set tests for me to prove myself such as self-harm and even suicide.

If I am thinking about something, the voices take an opposite stance. The voices are both inside my head but also come from the television and from people in the street. I was given medication in hospital and after a while it did seem to take the edge off the voices making what they said seem less urgent.

My voices make me feel like I am a bad or evil person because of what they say - it is as if what they say comes from within me. I do try not to believe the voices and to not do what they say. I try to bargain with the voices telling them that I will deal with them later if they will just go away now.

I now go to the Voices Group in Exeter. Being able to talk about my voices and how they affect me with people whose experiences are similar to mine, makes me feel less isolated. It is a huge relief. Medical professionals tend to recommend things such as taking a hot bath, listening to music, trying to relax, etc. to assist when the voices are bad. Personally, I have not found these strategies beneficial. Being with other voice-hearers does help me.

Kate

Kelsey's Thoughts

When I tell someone that I hear voices, I notice a slight pause in the conversation, as if to say - well, what does that mean? Often I end up explaining what I mean by hearing voices although it seems that it is always hard to convey to a non-voice hearer exactly what it is I am referring to.

I hear voices. They are in my head but not in my head. I hear them but not with my ears. They are background noises but they also come from around me - they sound just like people. Now, that seems to throw people: *'Do you hear them like you're hearing me now?' they ask. 'No', I reply - 'You see it's far more complex than that', I say, or at least I would say if the conversation ever continued beyond that point. In fact, you could say I think my voices but also hear them. I don't know how I would explain that to someone? Perhaps a doctor would say that the voices are my own thoughts but that seems strongly counter-intuitive?*

Yes, it is very striking how the voices and my own thoughts seem to interact. Very often, I will spend lengths of time 'talking' to my voices - this means that I will address thoughts to them and they will reply and a conversation will develop. I say 'conversation' but it is more often a heated argument!

'So, for how long have you heard voices', an interested person will ask - 'Well, I don't really know how to answer that question', say I. Before the idea of 'hearing voices' was introduced to me, I had no conceptual framework for understanding my experiences as 'voice-hearing'. But if I think very hard about it, I could give a rough time in my life when it started.

Is voice hearing the same as schizophrenia? - I often ask myself. Well, in my experience what later seems to have been voice hearing started several years before any overt illness or diagnosis. Some of my friends do not hear voices but have other problems associated with schizophrenia. So, in answer to that question, I am obliged to say 'no'.

So, *what are these voices and why am I hearing them?* That seems to be the ongoing questions that even doctors can't answer for me. I seem to go through many permutations and combinations of theories about 'the voices' and some-times I feel that I am making progress only to realise later that nothing has changed. I am therefore somewhat powerless in the face of this 'voice-phenomenon'. Certainly, it is intrusive and can make life very difficult.

However, I remind myself that I am not the only one and that voice hearing is very common. I find the support and encouragement that voice hearers can give each other is very reassuring.

Just to throw a spanner in at the end though, I've noticed that the experience of voice hearing varies from person to person. There is no neat group of voice hearers and non-voice hearers after all! It would have to be messy, wouldn't it?



Angelic Whispering

My experience of hearing voices happened after my granny had passed away. The pain of losing someone dearly loved is unlike any pain I have ever experienced. At this point of my life, I was at my lowest ebb both spiritually and emotionally. Then I had some experiences that gave me a deeper awareness of a spirit energy all around me. It made me feel that I was not alone.

This is when I am aware that angels came into my life to help and protect me. My experiences of hearing a voice first happened when I was lying in bed listening to the radio. Suddenly, I heard gentle piano music and then the voice of an angel or spirit saying to me – ‘don’t worry, you are safe’. Then the radio went back to normal.

This experience had a profound effect on my beliefs and perceptions from that moment on. I have held the hand of an angel and I have felt and seen the glory of angels. The truth for me is that angels of light are here to protect us. If you need their help, you can just call upon them.

Anna R

Bob's Thoughts

My experience of voice-hearing is not a happy one but it does have its moments. The power of the voices - be they good or bad - can be overwhelming, distressing and disturbing. They are not worth giving up for. They may be anything from memories, demons, telepaths, and other angelic forces as well as from many other sources sent either to hinder or to help.

I have found no coping strategy myself other than dancing to music to release some of the negative energy and tension from my body and my mind. I find this to be very useful even if it's only for a couple of minutes of dancing to my favourite song (find somewhere quiet to do this).

I do hope that voice hearers continue their struggle against their voices if they are affected badly (some will have helpful voices). I feel sure that we will win the battle. My heart and spirit goes out to all of you.

Bob

Chris' Comments

My voice hearing problem has been in the air for a decade and a half. The voices are difficult if not impossible to manage, though there is I have found support amidst the deluge of negative words flying in the air. Most of the voices are negative, problematic, difficult and disordered. Differentiating one voice from the other washed up some voices announcing themselves relatively early on to be, in the mythology of the voice hearing problem, the authorities for overseeing voices and providing friendly personalities to talk to. Yes that's right I talk to my voices, I must be mad! I couldn't have managed without them, their advice, listening ability, their friendliness, and their patience, their ability to intervene and to manage the whole situation in the sky: the sky is in fact where I hear the voices - strangely they don't seem to be in my head. So the voices split into two groups, well really a group plus one present support voice. Fortunately the support voice has always seemed to be the authority.

The voices come from different directions, one to the north, two to the east, and the support voice to the west. The problem voices or mentally ill voices seem to be far the furthest away, maybe not far enough in a way! The voices are divided as three male and one female. In the mythology of the voices the reason for me being singled out of the world for this phenomena is a problem based way back in history no less, in fact in the middle ages, pretty strangely enough, in wars and lives as imagined lives as writers and knights and dreamers. Rumours of outrageous past lives are rife, though they are very difficult to work out the truth about, if at all. Although my voices do change though not for the good that much, I've changed and developed in my ability to understand and find different ways to relate to the issues that crop up. I find it difficult to see the voices as not autonomous or real in the sense as being actual people. One theory is that the way people hear it is not a frequency of sound thought to be ultra sound. In the way other creatures here things hundreds of miles away, like whales, elephants, lions etc, this however is too unscientific for a science mad methodology, but it's the best explanation that I have so far come upon.

As to explanations for why voices are negative or always threatening, I think the best answers I have found are located in the arcane text books of psychology, if you have a very lateral mind! Perhaps not something to go into, though do read some if you can because you can put some working theories together to work out why voices are the way they are. I studied a bit of child development 'O' level which seemed very helpful. Unfortunately, so far I have not found a psychologist who could cure the voices, in the mythology they have troubled backgrounds, impossible to treat conditions. Sad really. And there seems to be no end in sight, as I wander through life trying to make sense of this or that puzzle, in fact to a degree I find it interesting, though it's

all so horrendously nasty. I think through struggling to cope I became a stronger person, my understandings a little more sophisticated, though the struggle was full of terrible pit falls, some near fatal! Anyway, such is life: - keep well: my advice is to write about it all, log it, turn it into art - it's a kind of form of recycling of the backwaters of some societal hangover.

Chris

Lucy's Lies

My voices are so kind - they are always trying to help. They tell me if someone is not trustworthy or if they are not telling me the truth. They tell me what I really look like when I look in the mirror and I believe them - I have to because I wouldn't dare listen to what anyone would say. For example, most people tell me that I am pretty, kind and not fat but that I am a nice person. But it is the voices' version that I listen to and trust.

To be honest with you, I lied: my voices are **not** kind - they are unhelpful, hurtful, deceitful, annoying liars. But, in the end, it is my own voice and my own mind that I listen to and then my voices just don't make sense to me anymore. The voices just seem to continue talking the same old 'crap'. Yet if anyone asks me what my voices are like, then I tell them that my voices are kind!

Black Hole

Imagine yourself down a black hole but you can see a beam of light hitting the floor. You are the only one down there - you and your voices. The voices start to shout and scream at you and you shout and scream back but somehow, the voices always seem to win. They bring up your past - they make you remember things that you wouldn't normally have dared of thinking about again. You keep trying to get out the black hole but when you start climbing your nails start breaking and it becomes too painful. The voices start laughing at you. They tell you that you are stupid and that the only way out is death. At the time, it is tempting - after all, there seems nothing much to leave behind? But death would make everything go away - but when you look at the small patch of light below you remember that the light could grow - in time.

Lucy

I am not unique

It has taken me a lot of time to realise and accept that my 'hearing voices' experiences are **not** so different from other sufferers. Maybe in some sort of perverse way I wanted them to be?

I suffer from a bi-polar disorder (MD), one that has taken my mind and body through many a pleasing and many an unpleasant experience. I certainly do get 'highs' and 'lows'. The highs are fantastic – a feeling of overwhelming spiritual and emotional Closeness to God. It feels that God **Loves** me alone yet expects so little but my Faith in return (heaven?). The 'Relationship' is very hard to handle – it is a **very** heavy 'trip'! The highs can last for 6 months or more.

The lows are terrifying times of utter paranoia when I become literally paralysed by the belief that God **Hates** me alone - He will ensure that I shall be physically, mentally and spiritually tortured as well as mocked and ridiculed – for eternity (hell?). These attacks can last for hours at a time and may span a period of months. They are **very** terrifying and debilitating! It is only during these low episodes that I hear an internal, highly intelligent (much more intelligent than me?), incessant, punitive voice that impels me to obey its commands.

Whilst it is important to appreciate that the range of responses (to commands) is always limited by the context in which the voice hearer finds her / himself (i.e. whilst in the community, one has a much wider choice of behaviours available than if one is in hospital), perhaps it is not the act *per se* which is important? More crucially, why is it that a voice hearer should be compliant with their inner voice(s) anyway?

Psychosis is (for me) an incomprehensible experience that is very hard to place within any 'reality' that I know. The presence of a voice is, by its very nature, intrusive and challenges and questions one's very own identity – it is like being on the very edge of insanity where the awake, conscious 'self' must strive to 'make sense' of what is 'happening' (it remains unclear to me whether psychosis is a pre-condition of voice hearing or vice-versa or perhaps there is some sort of fuzzy area in between?). In any case, the voice seems to know just how much power it wields; it gradually increases the level of internal beliefs and threats and decreases behaviour choices until compliance to its demands are satisfied (in fact, it is **never** satisfied?). Even the onset of the voice very quickly becomes associated with a sick feeling of dread. It is within this 'dynamic' context that the weakened 'self' – confused and fearful – finds that it dare no longer 'disobey' the relentless, authoritative 'voice-person'.

So, for me, it is fear (terror) that drives and motivates my actions – fear of the voice's authority, fear of being commanded, fear of actually carrying out

commands and fear of the reaction that my behaviour will provoke from others (I am truly between a rock and a hard place!). It serves no purpose whatsoever to be told '... don't be afraid ... the voices can't hurt you ... they're not real'.

More practically, in my experience, it is very easy to build negative attitudes towards 'professionals' who are not in possession of an insight into the 'motivation(s)' behind a voice-hearer's behaviour (this applies across **all** of the 'caring' professions). There seems to me to be a sort of expectation on the part of some professionals that their particular 'take' on reality is inevitably 'correct' and is one that the 'patient' should unquestionably adhere to.

Conversely, it can be therapeutic (reassuring) to work with someone who does understand. This is why it is so important for carers to learn just how little choice a voice hearer may have and how profound the experience can be. Hearing voices workshops and self-help groups facilitated by someone who appreciates the 'voice experience' seem to be central to support and 'recovery'.

For me, having listened to other voice hearers describing the sorts of experiences that they have been through; having witnessed their frankness, sincerity and openness, I have come to appreciate that my doubts and anxieties are not just a function of my own feelings of low self-esteem and inadequacy, but are common features of this phenomenon collectively called 'hearing voices'.

I am not unique at least, until the next time?

Mystery : What paradise once lost is refound
no boring feet upon the ground
of boring man

in the warm embrace of us we fly
we touch we love we know we cry
we understand

true belief grace will be received
sick realization been deceived

there is but one great joke
on the whole of mankind the yoke

yes mystery is all there is to see
the Voice of God still bothers me

Peter

Multiple Personality with Psychosis

Multiple Personality Disorder or Dissociative Identity Disorder (the American name for it), is a psychiatric condition brought on by severe childhood trauma (either abuse or prolonged trauma). It is a condition of having two or more separate persons or personalities who inhabit the same body and at least two of these persons or personalities take control of the person's behaviour. In other words, I have other people living inside me who can work my body and talk with my mouth.

The reason I am telling you all of this is that I hear two different sorts of voices. The first is the voice of my alternative selves (my other personalities) that do not respond to medication. The literature says that it is perfectly normal to hear your other selves talking in your head. The other selves talk all day because they can't do anything else whilst I use the body.

I am very lucky as a 'multiple' because I am known as a 'co-conscious' multiple. This means that I am conscious of what my other selves do and say. The other sort of multiple is the 'amnesic multiple' who goes to sleep when one of the other selves is out front on the body (amnesic multiples can find themselves waking up in all sorts of strange situations). Amnesic multiples may also be able to hear their other selves talking whilst they are awake. My second sorts of voice are my psychotic voices: these do respond well to medication.

In conclusion, I would like to say how much I enjoy having my other selves around and how even my psychotic voices are, on the whole, quite pleasant. I find that my psychotic voices are a form of company and stop me feeling too lonely. However, I can get too high and get myself into trouble. To begin with, I was anti-medication but now I do see the benefits of a stable life enabling me to work with my other selves to achieve a fuller life for me and my other selves.

Jackie

Roman bars
From pagan cloth
Luna tic moon mite
Hera tic
Tic
Tic
Chain you neck

And leg
Wolf was healing
Were were weird
Damned again
Another thousand years
Walls have ears

Bob

Life is . . . the Soul Purpose?

Over the years, I have asked many people if they hear voices. I am frequently surprised by the answer I receive for so often it seems to me that the most unlikely person does admit to hearing them. Many are uncomfortable even at being asked such a question but I feel that it is OK to ask. I can only guess that their unwillingness to disclose is all part of their attitude to the notion that there is something 'wrong' with a person if they do hear voices.

For me, it is the most natural thing in the world. I am sure that all native tribespeople hear voices – how else do they get to the nearest watering hole or place of safe shelter if they are not guided by some unseen force which I suspect 'speaks' to them in their head? The great healers of the world use voice(s) to help them work on the diseased area of a person's body. Soothsayers use voice(s) to communicate that which needs to be heard by the recipient.

It is an old story, but sadly one that has been given a lot of bad press. We get to hear of the sorry stories as a kind of warning i.e. 'don't dabble into that which you (we) know nothing – there will be dire consequences if you (we) do'. I will never forget being at a dinner party with friends when I disclosed, quite happily, my involvement with voice hearing and of the work I was doing with a friend of mine who was suffering and confused as a result of her inner voice. A man leapt out of his seat and moved backwards behind his chair. He all but formed his fingers into a 'protective' cross as though he were confronted by the devil! He told me that I should never interfere with God's Work and that what I was doing was very dangerous and possibly harmful. He was positively shaking with fear but his wife continued to ask me questions out of what did seem to be genuine interest. That incident did really show me the fear that many people have around this subject. I find it infinitely sad that those people who do own up to experiencing 'hearing voices' have to be seen as 'sufferers' or as 'mentally unstable'. I do sometimes wonder just how much church doctrine has, over the centuries, contributed to this attitude which is so crippling for those who hear voices.

Many voice hearers do suffer – of that I am sure. I myself had a period of suffering some years ago. Initially, there was a clearly spoken voice that would impart information to me on all manner of subjects. This later became a cacophany of voices - not particularly audible and certainly not offering quiet revelations from what I now know as a 'higher perspective'. This is what I and others such as Dr Carolyn Myss, who also experiences it, may call the '*spiritual overview*'. The cacophony or what a dear friend of mine refers to as '*mindchatter*' was of no help to me and was very confusing creating further distress in an already very distressing and alienating situation.

After that disturbing and emotional period, the voices seemed to settle down and were minimal in the interference of my daily life.

The most persistent and consistent voice remaining was clearly identifiable as that of my mother. The root of all the cruel criticism and emotional abuse experienced as a child was still running like a tape in my head. It was as though she was still ever-present waiting to pounce on me to point out my stupidity and uselessness. Once I became aware of this specific voice, with the aid of my much respected and highly regarded counsellor Anne, I was able to work with myself to remove or at least to minimise its power over my life, my decisions and my choices. I developed the ability to 'notice' it before I acted upon it or acted to avoid its retribution and sabotage.

As this 'noticing' became a well-honed practice and I developed a much more compassionate, caring attitude towards myself as well as towards my inevitable errors, the power of the voice seemed to fade. I do still hear it from time to time (trying it on?) but I instantly recognise – I say in my head 'no, not today thank you' – and it is rare for the voice to get 'a word in', so to speak. Other voices do pop in sometimes but I 'hang in there' to identify them. If their communications do not feel supportive of me but seem to provoke fear and anxiety, I exercise my power not to give them any credence. I am learning that nothing and no-one has the right to 'put me down'. AND IT'S THE SAME FOR YOU.

And do you know what the good news is? The wonderful, quiet, informative, patient voice from my early years has come back. Perhaps it never went away but was drowned by all the other '*mindchatter*'? I suspect so. Stress, distress, anxiety, self-doubt, confusion, and not forgetting what Lazarus refers to as '*the deafening knell of self-pity*', all deny us the opportunity, or rather the ability, to hear what Anne called the '*still small voice within*'. I'm suggesting that we all hear or can hear an inner voice whose sole purpose is to guide us through our life – for the good of our soul. Just maybe, it is part of our soul's journey through life to experience the negative side of our voice hearing in order that we should know - and then harness - the one true voice that is our own personal inner guide. If we can only give unto it - its rightful opportunity, then it can guide us not only on our journey to personal fulfillment but also unto a harmony with this beautiful planet.

Antoinette

Idioms of Insanity - Sayings of the Sane

They said I was mad, I said they were mad, damn them, they outnumbered me (Nathaniel Lee).

9 out of 10 voices in my head agree that I'm sane (www).

Truth is said to be stranger than fiction; it is to most folks (Josh Billings).

In all matters of opinion, our adversaries are insane (Mark Twain).

If you talk to God you are praying. If God talks to you, you have schizophrenia (Thomas Szasz).

Sanity is a nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there (www).

I do have a grip on reality - just not this one (www).

A casual stroll through a lunatic asylum shows that faith does not prove anything (Friedrich Nietzsche).

Psychoanalysis is confession without absolution (GK Chesterton).

There are fools everywhere, even in asylums (George Bernard Shaw).

Anybody who goes to see a psychiatrist ought to have his head examined (Sam Goldwyn).

The voices may not be real but they have some pretty good ideas (www).

Some people hear voices; some people see invisible people; others have no imagination whatsoever (www).

The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums (G.K. Chesterton).

Doctors say I have a multiple personality but we don't agree with that (www).

I hate it when my little voices argue with your imaginary friends (www).

MAN: *Doctor, you've got to help me - I'm hearing voices but I don't see people.*

PSYCHIATRIST: *Tell me sir, when do you here these voices?*

MAN: *When I'm on the telephone.*

Coping with Voices

My own personal experience of hearing voices has been limited to two brief occasions. Once when I was suffering with the flu (I can't remember much about it now) and once when I was lying in bed feeling rather tired and stressed and I quite distinctly heard my sister call out to me, as though she were in the same room with me. It really startled me - she was in Totnes at the time and I was in Exeter! I do not really know to this day why this happened, though in talking it through with her I wonder now whether it was in relation to some guilt that I had carried with me for fighting with her when we were teenagers. The voice had cried out: 'Jim, stop it!' – just as she had in our argument all those years ago. I do not claim to know or understand why people hear voices; nevertheless it did lead me to have a very fruitful heart-to-heart with my sister and saying sorry to her about the row we had.

Many of the people I work with have already had years of hearing voices by the time I get to work with them and have consequently usually worked out and developed their own particular coping strategies and understanding of the experience by the time I meet them. Within my role as a care co-ordinator I offer practical advice on ways in which somebody might work on their overall health and well-being in order to minimise the disabling effects that such an experience may entail. We might therefore discuss diet, exercise, relationships, meditative techniques, activity levels, medication, drugs / alcohol or anything else at all that might be helpful. I try not to be too prescriptive as I think people usually intuitively know what is helpful to their health and happiness in the long-term.

What my own personal experience suggests to me however, is that it may sometimes be helpful to think through, perhaps with somebody else, what the voices mean to you personally. My best guess is that they may possibly carry an underlying message that might be helpful to address in some way. Whether this message comes from deep within the person themselves or from some external force or power, or even from other people, feels to me to be immaterial to the need to *connect with the experience* in some way. I am very aware of how much of a tall order it can be to work with and through a difficult experience. I also feel that it is up to other people to make their own minds up as to what the experience means to them and whether they wish to have a dialogue about it or not.

Of one thing I am certain, hearing voices can an extremely disturbing and distressing experience for many people and I feel privileged to have witnessed the courage and strength by which people live their lives.

Jim

Hearing Voices in the Secure Hospital

There are different ways of knowing about hearing voices and, in some ways, I know quite a lot. Most of what I know comes from reading books and research papers and talking to voice hearers about their experiences. However, like the vast majority of people, I have occasionally heard voices at times of emotional upheaval. At the time, I assumed that I was telepathic and what I was hearing were the thoughts of other people. Maybe it is a possibility?

As someone who, in some ways, knows quite a lot about hearing voices I'm often asked to teach others about it, both students and people who are having difficulty making sense of or coping with their voices. At these times I've found that explaining just how common voice hearing is, and sharing my own brief experiences, is the most important thing that I've said. Students suddenly realise that, despite their darkest fears, they are just like everyone else. For service users, who have already been officially labelled as not like everyone else, it can offer the possibility of other ways of understanding their experiences.

This kind of approach to working with voice hearers is somewhat novel in the secure hospital setting where I work. For so long, voices have been defined as symptoms of mental illness and indicators of risk, to be eradicated with whatever dose of medication is necessary. Understanding voices in this way helps to maintain the clear distinction (and the power imbalance) between 'us' and 'them'. Challenging this understanding inevitably meets with resistance and rejection, and can be pretty demoralising at times. That is when I experience a different kind of voice, one that I know to be my own thoughts rather than someone else's. It tells me to keep going and not to give up, because showing both service users and professionals that there is a different way to think about hearing voices is important. And because this voice is so strong and determined (even when I feel weak and unsure), I've found that change is possible.

Working together with members of the Hearing Voices Group in Exeter, we've set up some in-reach sessions. Members of the group visit the hospital to provide a safe space where service users can talk in whatever way they want about their voices, with someone who understands the experience and has no power to make decisions about them. A considerable amount of bureaucracy has had to be negotiated in the process but perseverance resulted in some successful one-off sessions. The experience of meeting service users who were finding their own way in the community seemed to offer our service users hope and a sense of connectedness with something beyond the hospital. Service users asked for repeat visits and one began accessing the group in the community. A proposal for regular sessions met with a positive response from both the management team and the nursing staff; one nurse commented that she was glad service users would have somewhere to talk freely about their experiences without fear of the consequences. Hopefully the sessions will continue to be successful. I feel that they are an example of what listening to your inner voice can achieve.

Young Voices: Pathways and Dilemmas

I am a Clinical Psychologist working in young peoples' mental health services (a CAMHS team) in South Devon. I have greatly enjoyed and valued working alongside the Exeter Hearing Voices Network over the last 10 years. My interest in this area began when I was doing my training locally and came across the newly developing Joan of Arc Room community. What I remember most strongly from this time was the sense of there being a different, more welcoming creative place - one that enabled voice hearers and workers to join in and develop freeing conversations together. There has always been a sense of home-coming and welcome for me, even though I am not a voice-hearer, and was training to be a part of the 'system' that many people were trying to move away from. I think this generosity of spirit which sits alongside an ongoing challenge and critique of orthodox ways of approaching mental health, is one of the qualities of the community that has helped me not only to grow as a person but also to feel the potential for hopefulness and change in my work.

Although my interest began by talking about voices and visions with adult members of the Exeter group, I went on to work mainly with young people and families, some of whom were hearing voices and saw unusual things. Again it has been by following them into a very alive imaginary and playful world that I have probably learnt the most. Nevertheless the pathways in and out of these special worlds have also been strewn with plenty of distress and confusion and the signposts and route-maps that we have looked for don't always seem to fit.

Looking in the obvious places:

Recent research has shown that voice hearing in young people is much more common than we had once thought. In the conversations I had with people locally, I was surprised that people could remember vividly unusual voices, images or characters appearing as young as 3 or 4 years old. These experiences in childhood were often responded to with curiosity rather than distress. In other cultures young people who hear voices or see visions are regarded as having special emotional or spiritual qualities.

Although understanding about the early development of voices and visions could be seen as being in its 'infancy', there has been considerable interest and focus recently on the 'early identification' by statutory services of young voice hearers (usually attached to the idea of 'psychosis' and 'risk'). This is despite a consistent finding within research over the last 10 years by the Hearing Voices Network that the majority of voice hearers will not need mental health services. This is a problem in

that we risk 'pathologising' young people unnecessarily and without being specific enough about causes of distress (i.e. not necessarily the voices!). I am interested in exploring a more cautious and considered approach which begins from an ethical position that is sensitive to the context of young peoples lives. This approach would also seek to avoid a re-creation and repetition of existing mental health systems and processes, just with a newly captured younger population.

As Alison Reeves commented several years ago, and several recent conversations with disillusioned mental health workers confirms:

“Early Intervention appears to have broken out of the negative approach of traditional Psychiatry in so far as it has a far more optimistic view of recovery. However, it is still very much influenced by the Medical Model and the main focus of treatment is still trying to control symptoms and relapse through medication. Early Intervention at present does not challenge the wisdom of the Medical Model or the measures employed to enforce treatment compliance. It is these measures of coercion, either overtly or covertly, that can be so damaging to individuals and can easily reinforce feelings of helplessness and powerlessness and encourage avoidance of seeking help.”

(Alison Reeves, Voice Hearer, 2000: p.323)

Looking in the obvious but neglected places:

If we started from a position of curiosity and ethics by asking voice hearers (both young and old) about the early development of unusual experiences and the context in which they occur (real or imagined worlds, communities and families being equal), then perhaps we could let go of a perspective which looks back along a single-line track of inevitability from 'psychiatric service user' to 'disturbed' child or adolescent. Young people's views to date have been poorly represented, especially in statutory services, and are often drowned by the adult voices around them.

Within the ever-growing body of psychosis literature and 'evidence base', there is surprisingly little which puts forward the experiences, voices and direct accounts of young people which might begin to map out alternative tracks and pathways to the depressing psychiatric career option with which we are all familiar. This makes the Underground Sound Project in Exeter an exciting development as a new kind of space for young people.

We would not want to increase distress as a result of contact with an organised network, e.g. by over-focus on voices as problematic, or by

making positive experiences become negative by unhelpful interpretation of them in terms of pathology or abnormality. The message that voice hearing is far more common than we previously thought, and for many people will be a rich experience that adds to their lives seems to be one that young people need to hear.

It seems important that services for young people make a distinction between hearing voices *per se*, and problems that may arise in dealing with and expressing them. Many problems associated with voices are caused by prejudice, lack of information and framing voice hearing as a sign or symptom of 'madness' or 'mental illness'. This account of voices is dominant within the 'Medical Model' used by many statutory services, and is still often the only framework of meaning offered.

Many of these ideas can be applied to young people in a helpful and practical way, giving them coping skills before they embark upon a 'psychiatric career'. Diagnosis of 'schizophrenia' for the individual in childhood is currently associated with a poor outcome with a recent study in the UK by the Maudsley Hospital showing that despite contact with Mental Health services, many of the 110 individuals followed up into adulthood continued to experience mental health problems, isolation, poor relationships, and high numbers were in residential care.

However, if we extend our lens to the whole population of young voice hearers, including those who have never contacted services, we find a very different pattern. A recent 4-year follow-up study in Holland of 80 children reports that over 60% of those identified as voice hearers at the start of the study, had no symptoms 4 years later. How can we account for these differences? Is this a new pathway forward?

Lynn

Hearing Voices Group Research

Five members of the Exeter hearing voices group collaborated on a research study. The study explored members' experiences of living with voices and of being part of the group. Three focus groups were carried out based on an open dialogue with members.

The following main points were found:

Members talked about the group as:

- A self-management and empowering group. They said that the group allows members to be active agents who have choice and control over which pathway to take. It also offers them opportunities to be actively engaged in helping themselves and others.
- Accepting and non-judgemental. They said that the group allows members to be themselves and to tell their story within a context of mutual support and understanding.
- Providing a totally different context to that of the medical system. Participants talked about the medical system as having a negative impact on individuals, especially in the way it treats people as passive 'patients' in need of medication. Participants viewed medical practices as providing them with a set of negative identities which limits what they are able to say, feel and do.
- Enabling individuals to position themselves outside a medical understanding and to move away from the identity of a 'patient'. This allows members to change their understanding of voices and the way they view themselves.
- As a space of safety and protection from the outside world. Participants talked about needing to become a "multitude of people" and as having to put on a "façade of normality" outside of the group. This involves hiding their reality and keeping what is authentic to them secret. Participants' comments highlighted how individuals need to deal not only with their own puzzling experiences but also with the negative societal responses towards them.
- As offering opportunities for improving mental health services through training. Members saw their personal experiences as valuable in informing others and in contributing towards a better understanding of distress. Personal experiences of distress were valued within the group and seen as a strength and a resource in making positive changes within mental health services.

(continued)

Participants saw themselves as having unique personal stories whilst at the same time recognising the common elements between them. One commonality between them was their experiences of having been mis-heard and de-valued as a result of people’s fears of mental distress. The group was seen as a space where individuals are allowed to “come together as one” in fighting against powerlessness and oppression.

Group members talked about the strong sense of group identity, deep understanding and trust within the group. They said the group provided a collective space where experiences, coping strategies and mutual support are shared within a safe and healing context.

The research shows the value in having safe contexts, like the Exeter Hearing Voices Group, where people can talk and make sense of their experiences.

I hope this research will highlight the rich knowledge and experiences that group members have about their lives, about mental health services and about healing contexts. I also hope that it will contribute towards a better understanding of the group and of what is like to live with and survive distress.

I thank all who were involved in the research for their time and commitment and for having shared their rich experiences with me.

Patricia

I am looking for people for whom spirituality is important and who hear voices to take part in an interview. Interviews will be conducted in Exeter, Devon. All personal information will be kept strictly confidential. If you are interested or would like to find out more, then please contact Josh on: 07888 706 631 Thank you.

True Healing Possibilities for 'Hearing Voices' and Related Issues

It is widely felt that something is missing from the diagnoses and treatments given out by doctors in the mental healthcare services. People who 'hear voices' are diagnosed as having one disorder or another - a label of convenience. Then attempts are made, mostly with drugs, to suppress the 'symptoms', rarely with great success and all too often with untoward side effects. However, I have had experiences, and I've also channelled information from a higher source, which identify a real underlying cause for the hearing of any troublesome sort of inner voices. The good news is that, at last, there are real healing possibilities for the full resolution of the underlying cause of troublesome inner voices and certain related phenomena.

There is not sufficient space here to fully explain how the vast majority of 'hearing voices' cases arise; this may be found on my web page: ***Night Terrors and Hearing Voices***, (www.philipgoddard.com/voices.htm). I am well aware that this explanation lies outside of the materialist-reductionist belief system that underlies our mental healthcare services, but that is precisely the point! Psychiatry fails to take into account the broader dimensions of reality within which lie the causes of so many personal issues and indeed nearly all cases of so-called personality disorder and mental illness. That's why psychiatry as we know it is an intrinsic failure in terms of real healing.

To summarize from my web page, troublesome inner voices are normally caused NOT by brain malfunction but by the presence of a certain low-level type of astral being around the person. These are real, discrete non-physical conscious entities which have been attracted to the particular people because those people are carrying a huge amount of fear and related emotions such as anxiety and panic, with which these astral beings resonate. Such huge amounts of fear are generally buried and may not be recognised on the surface as fear but they may manifest in various ways which themselves adversely affect the person and in some cases may get labelled unhelpfully as mental illness or personality disorder. In the vast majority of cases this accumulated fear has been caused by ***childhood night terrors***, not only in the present lifetime, but in various previous lifetimes too.

The person may not be aware of having had night terrors in this lifetime, for they are so overwhelmingly hellish that the memory of them is commonly suppressed upon waking up, and indeed they may manifest only in certain lifetimes and thus may not have manifested in this one - but the accumulated fear emotions from the earlier lifetimes, albeit mostly buried and not being felt, are still with the person to attract the astral beings to him / her.

These astral beings, quite apart from their troublesome communications (the 'voices'), are often the cause of massive surfacings of fear and related emotions, including depression. So, when a person with these astral beings suffers say, an 'attack' of panic or depression, it is most likely that it is a real attack from the astral beings, which are seeking to make an emotional wreck of that person.

On the webpage referred to above, I go into detail about methods of removing the astral beings and of managing them in cases where they cannot yet be removed. The most fundamental healing which is required, though, is the dissolution of the buried trauma emotions - fear, anxiety, panic, and indeed any other painful emotions such as depression, grief and so forth. If you can release these from yourself, then you become invulnerable and repellent to the astral beings and cannot have further 'attacks' of those emotions. Drugs and ECT **do not** remove painful emotions - they only hide them - so they are no healing answer at all!

Although there are many methods of emotional healing and sorting out of your life, by far the easiest, and also the most powerful one that I've encountered, is called ***The Work***. It was developed by Byron Katie and it is described in her book: ***Loving What Is***. To find out more, please visit my website: www.philipgoddard.com/spirit/thework.htm, and / or Byron Katie's website: www.thework.com. The latter site offers various free downloadable resources for practice of *The Work*.

The Work is a process of methodical inner inquiry, based on four fundamental questions and one or more turnarounds which are applied to each belief, judgement and stress-laden thought which we are carrying. Our emotional issues and the sense of trauma which underlies some of them, all derive from our having innocently come to believe particular basic thoughts, especially at times of stress, instead of examining those thoughts to see how they differed from reality. We then carry those thoughts as negative and limiting beliefs and patterns, commonly loaded with stress and even trauma. *The Work's* inquiry process enables us to carry out that examination of those thoughts and become free and well functioning again. We don't actually try to get rid of any thoughts, but instead we become free from our *attachment* to them; to put it another way, we 'un-believe' them. I was able in just a few minutes, to dramatically diminish the remainder of my own night terrors trauma by subjecting to inquiry a few basic underlying thoughts.

One of the beauties of *The Work* is that it doesn't depend even in the slightest degree upon a specific theory or understanding of reality. All one does is use inquiry to see how each of one's thoughts matches reality as it is observed. Thus you find very precisely what is really and deeply true for you, and there is nothing that you have to accept from anyone else apart from just learning to use inquiry.

It would therefore be of the utmost benefit if mental healthcare workers started using *The Work*, to replace many of the unhelpful diagnoses and treatments which at the moment characterize 'mental health' work in Western civilizations.

You can learn to practise *The Work* on yourself just from reading *Loving What Is*, as I've done with spectacular results, but many people find workshops and 'facilitation exchange' or 'inquiry circle' groups helpful as well. I now include *The Work* in healing / counselling sessions that I give (*details on my website - www.philipgoddard.com*). *The Work* does not get rid of astral beings directly, but its ongoing use speedily makes you less vulnerable to them and progressively increases the likelihood of them leaving you.

Incidentally, **it is important that care workers who take up *The Work* be good role models by using it consistently on themselves.** If they do, then when they assist clients with *The Work* they are in subtle ways encouraging self-empowerment and self-healing, whereas if they do not, they are unawarely encouraging helplessness and neediness in their clients.

It is my intention to run regular (even weekly) workshops for people to learn and start using *The Work*, but I want first to see what the demand is. So, a free introductory workshop entitled "**Becoming Whole – Using *The Work***" has been arranged for **Tuesday 12th September** in the **Joan of Arc Room** at **2.00 - 4.00 pm**. This is for local mental health workers as well as people associated with the Joan of Arc Project. Please bring a pen and firm surface on which to write.

For further information or to book a place please telephone me on: (01392) 432167 or on my mobile: 07758 727 988. If necessary, a later overflow workshop can be arranged. Also, if you would like to come to such a workshop but can't at the above date / time, please let me know, and if there is the demand an additional workshop could be arranged.

I particularly want to have mental healthcare workers alongside service users in workshops, for our work together could then at last start eroding the pernicious divide between the supposedly mentally ill and the supposedly mentally well. With *The Work* we find ourselves ALL on a journey of self realization and we leave behind the concept of mental illness.

Philip

Can you hear that?

The experience of hearing voices is not as uncommon as people sometimes think, some estimates suggest 10-15% of people hear voices at some time in their lives. Some people hear voices from childhood, others only later in adulthood. Some people hear voices almost constantly, while others hear voices intermittently or for a brief spell in their lives.

There are conflicting explanations regarding what causes the experience of hearing voices. Until recently hearing voices was primarily considered to be a symptom of 'severe mental illness' and certainly 'auditory hallucinations' still feature as diagnostic indicators in psychiatry's classification of disorders such as 'schizophrenia' and 'bipolar disorder'. In its extreme form, a medical perspective assumes that voice hearing is a result of an organic brain dysfunction, that the content of the voices is meaningless and that medication is required.

However, alongside increased questioning of the usefulness of such diagnoses, it has become apparent that voice hearing experiences are much more widespread and wide ranging than was first thought. The experience of hearing voices has been connected with psychological distress of many different types, for example links have been suggested between voices and physical ill health, bereavement, extreme stress and drug and alcohol use or withdrawal. Cognitive theories, or theories of brain processing, have tried to explain this by suggesting that voices are caused by a bias in information processing, so stimuli in the brain may be interpreted (or as they suggest, misinterpreted) in particular ways, and that this will be more likely when a person is under pressure or stress.

Social psychological theories have begun to make links between voice hearing and social factors, for example deprivation, poverty and victimisation. Specifically, recent research has found traumatic or abusive experiences in childhood to be highly linked to the development of voice hearing experiences, particularly voices that make critical or abusive comments or command that the person do things.

Ultimately the 'causes' of voice hearing experiences remain unknown. Social, psychological and biological factors may all play a role in the development of the voice hearing experience but as yet none of these theories have found it possible to explain the precise mechanisms by which this may occur.

In addition, these theories have tended not to consider the many people who hear voices who do not find the experience distressing, would not consider themselves to have mental health difficulties, and may in fact find their voices offer companionship, comfort or inspiration. Research seems to suggest that

the extent to which people feel able to cope with their voice hearing experiences depends upon how they make sense of them. Some people attribute the voice hearing internally, i.e. to a part of themselves, or their own thoughts, whereas others attribute the voices externally, i.e. to a source outside of themselves, for example a known person or people, such as family members or friends, or to unknown people or spiritual phenomena. It is thought that what is important in coping with voices is not where they come from or what they say, but the nature of the relationship a person develops with their voices, and how much they feel they have control over the experience.

Current thinking suggests that the content of the voices will be meaningful and will speak to the person in a metaphorical way about their lives, relationships, feelings and environment. For some, making connections between their current life, life history and their experiences of voices, which may previously have felt overwhelming, confusing or incomprehensible, may be enough to have a therapeutic effect. Because of this, people are now more likely to be encouraged to engage with their voices, to get to know them and to try to take some ownership of them. Many people who have had experiences of hearing voices have found it helpful to meet with, and share thoughts with, others who have had similar experiences. This can help to reduce feelings of isolation, separateness and being controlled and can help to increase self-confidence, self-esteem and feelings of being in control.

Emily

The omniscience of God is that
He hears every whisper of
creation. He is stood as close to
you as He is to me

To every evil under the sun
there is a voice which answers
listen to what the Holy Spirit
says to the churches

Voice unto voice can be heard
rhythmical soft
but only where day
endless shines.

St Francis of Assisi
(donated by Cavan)

News from the Bristol Hearing-Voices Network

The Bristol Hearing Voices Network self-help group was launched in May 2002, with the help of Ron Coleman, following a number of 'consultation' meetings in Bristol. The group met weekly, initially at Methodist Church Hall in Redcliffe, transferring to Bristol Mind offices in February 2004.

The network was awarded a grant from the Service User Reference Group (SURG) challenge Fund in 2002, which resulted in members setting up a community bank account to administer the monies. This was mainly used for purchasing Voice Hearing books and resources, joining the National Hearing Voices Network, enabling members to attend National Voice Hearing events, and meeting with local groups.

In the summer of 2005 numbers attending the self-help group dropped significantly. The 'facilitators' involved decided to suspend the weekly group meetings from the end of November 2005, with the hope of securing funding to pay for a 'facilitator', in order to re-launch in 2006. There was a feeling also that the self-help group was not going in the right direction. We've always had aspirations of becoming user-led, and self-running, but for one reason or another, we haven't been able to achieve this YET!

Members and allies set up an advisory group to oversee the fundraising, and begin planning the re-launch. I'm pleased to say that we have been successful in securing two grants, one of which was from the Service User Reference Group (SURG) again (a big thank you for their support). We are now in the process of recruiting a 'facilitator' with the hope of finding someone who hears voices themselves. It was interesting to read Andrew's thoughts about 'facilitation' in Joan of Arc newsletter (April – June 2006), which made me think more about exactly what 'group facilitation' is?

I'll be relieved once the self-help group starts again, as I believe peer support and advice is often the most helpful way of taking back control. I hope too that the Network in Bristol continues to go from strength to strength. Watch this space!

Nick

(Nick.Redman@awp.nhs.uk)
tel: 011179 597585

Peace and Light: Cornwall HVN: an update.

First, I have to come clean and say that I am not a Voice Hearer. I support one of our groups in the West of Cornwall (Truro) and everything that I write here is based on this. Cornwall has other hearing voices groups in Newquay, Wadebridge and Penzance.

Our Cornish groups were born over three years ago in response to the need for a safe, non-judgemental sharing space for Voice Hearers. Andrew Barkla and 'team' provided the vision and the energy for our initiative. Without them at the starting line, we would have floundered.

As with most mutual support groups, attendances do vary - sometimes one or two people, sometimes six or seven. And what happens when people with similar experiences get together? Well, sometimes we laugh, sometimes we feel sad, sometimes we feel angry, sometimes we just want to talk about ordinary stuff, sometimes we just want to be there and be part of it, and sometimes we want to celebrate who we are and what we are. Each group in Cornwall is different and each group is the people who go to it.

In the time I have supported the West Cornwall group, I have learnt how special and unique each persons' experience is and how important it is to accept that what each person describes is how it is for them. I am not there to challenge or argue - I am there to be whatever people in the group need me to be.

We are all fellow travellers on life's road and every now and then we get the chance to meet up with someone of the same ilk who helps to make the journey so much richer and fulfilling. That is how it is for me and I would like to thank everyone involved in our groups for being who they are. Peace and Light!

Trevor

If you would like more information about our groups please contact:

trevor.moses@cornwallrcc.co.uk tel: 01872 261037
or nicki.jones@cornwallrcc.co.uk tel: 01872 223250

HVN HO

There is so much going on in HVN at the moment (see latest Voices Magazine). Since we moved the National Office last September, we have experienced many difficulties, most of them boring. Arguing with utility companies (at one stage we were getting two electricity bills) and the telephone saga was a nightmare. Moving is always stressful and we did expect some of it but it turned out to be worse than we feared. So much so that of late we had been feeling quite stressed and bogged down in bureaucracy. But things have changed.

A while ago now I went to London for a few meetings, one of these being the London facilitator's meeting. The meeting was so packed we were short of chairs. The mood was good. London had just found out that they had got £120,000 funding for developing HVN London-wide. But this apart, as I listened to the innovative and exciting things that different groups are involved in there, I became more and more enthused and invigorated by the meeting.

As I listened to the different projects being explained, ideas and experiences shared, it reminded me of why I still do this job. It really focused me on the meaning of what a network is - a sharing of knowledge, ideas and experience - a '*collection of creativity*' if I may use a fanciful phrase (please excuse the flight into alliteration). Ten new groups have started in London and another five throughout the country.

I came back to Manchester renewed and optimistic ready to forget the last few months of stress and move forward and ready to spread this feeling amongst my colleagues. This further underlined what we are working for - to help people of all ages to make changes to their lives but also to change the future for young people. There are far too many young people who get stuck in a system that takes away their hope; that leaves them to struggle alone until their hopes and dreams are replaced by despair; sadly too many escape the misery by ending their lives.

A major cause of people's misery often comes from the isolation that can stem from the stigma attached to mental distress. That is why this year we are holding a World Hearing Voices Day on September 14th. The aim of the day is to raise awareness and try to reduce the stigma of hearing voices. It will be worldwide with events happening in many different countries including European countries, Palestine, Australia and New Zealand. We go forward with optimism and continue our work never underestimating the value and contributions of all the people who make HVN the great network that it is.

I hope that soon I will be visiting the South West and hope to arrange a meeting with as many people as possible there, to discover what you are all up to and will no doubt come back further inspired.

In the meantime I leave you with these words:-

". . . Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever does." (Margaret Mead)

Julie

(National Co-ordinator of HVN)

(julie@hearing-voices.org)

Hearing Voices International

Over the last 15 years the Hearing Voices Network has gone from strength to strength in the UK. Scotland has had its own national organisation for five years and is developing as a real force here.

Throughout Europe, the HVN is growing with many new groups forming and more importantly being accepted as a real alternative to services that have not previously worked for voice hearers. The Intervoice event was very successful this year with representatives from Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Palestine, New Zealand, Australia, and the UK. It was hosted by the Scottish Hearing Voices Network that did a fine job. People were welcomed with a piper and a heather posie. They were entertained on the first night with a fine duo playing Scottish and Irish music. There was much dancing including Marius doing a few twirls!

Beyond Europe apart from Japan, things have until recently been pretty quiet. The last couple of years have seen the development of fledgling movements in other non-European countries. In this article I will focus on these new hearing voices networks.

Palestine

Perhaps the greatest pleasure for me was to be invited to Palestine a country that is still occupied and whose people are subject to movement restrictions imposed by Israel that would not be tolerated anywhere else in the world. Despite the appalling conditions that people are forced to live in, there is still an optimism about them that is both amazing and humbling to the outside observer.

Our work started in Bethlehem hospital where we met with both the staff and some voice hearers. In no time at all we established that the experiences of voice hearers in Palestine are exactly the same as those in the UK. The voices movement in Palestine is small but developing at a quick pace with groups forming in other cities such as Hebron, Ramalla and Gaza city.

The biggest problem we faced during our visits to Palestine was getting through the checkpoints into cities like Bethlehem. During our last visit the wall that is being built around Bethlehem was almost complete and as you look from the hilltops down into the city it appears almost like a massive secure hospital.

It says much about the people that the groups still run despite workers not having been paid since April because Europe alongside the USA have stopped all funding to the Palestinian authority.

Members of the hearing voices group in Bethlehem face a walk of up to five hours to attend the group as they cannot afford the 25p bus fare.

We should consider ourselves lucky indeed that we do not face this kind of discrimination on top of the usual discrimination that voice hearers go through.

New Zealand

Although New Zealand does not yet have a network, there are a couple of groups running in the Auckland area, and regular voices and recovery workshops are carried out across the country by us and Arana Pearson. A young psychologist Vanessa Beavan has just completed a 3-year study on voice hearing similar to Romme's early work and it has come up with very similar statistics. This is good for the Voices Networks as it gives an evidence-base for our work. Last week Vanessa attended the Intervoice meeting in Dundee to tell us about her work.

Australia

After visiting and running voices workshops in Perth last year, it has been decided to set up a National Hearing Voices Network, helped by Richmond Fellowship Western Australia. Lyn Mahboub, a consumer leader has been given two paid days a week to get it going. They have already had their first hearing voices network newsletter and are busy applying for start up grants. Lyn also attended the Intervoice event and visited the Dundee HQ to pick up ideas. Voices of the world unite!

Karen and Ron

(www.roncolemanvoices.co.uk)

"And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear".

Exodus 32:18