



Hearing Voices Network

HEARING VOICES NETWORK AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND
NOVEMBER 2006 NEWSLETTER

First Edition of the New Zealand newsletter of the *Hearing Voices Peer Support Network Aotearoa New Zealand*



Above (left to right) Mahinarangi Tocker, Ron Coleman, Arana Pearson, Debra Lampshire, Vanessa Beavan

Welcome to the first newsletter of the New Zealand National Hearing Voices Network. This newsletter has been made possible by our friend Hywel Davies of the Wales Hearing Voices Network in the United Kingdom, who has kindly donated funds for the establishment of the newsletter. *Thank you, Hywel!*

Keepwell Limited has agreed to develop and foster the network for up to two years until it is ready to run under its own auspices.

The establishment of a network in New Zealand

On 14th September 2006 (the inaugural *World Hearing Voices Day*) a Hearing Voices Forum took place. The forum was organised by Vanessa Beavan, a researcher from Auckland University, with support from the Mental Health Foundation and the Mental Health Commission of New Zealand.

This was a forum with speakers presenting on the experience of hearing voices from cultural, spiritual and clinical perspectives. We heard about different perspectives on the experience of hearing voices; met other voice-hearers and shared experiences over a light supper; and discussed ideas for the establishment of a NZ Hearing Voices Network. All were welcome: voice-hearers, their friends and families, researchers and clinicians. Presenting were Vanessa Beavan sharing some of her research; Ron Coleman sharing his experiences from the UK Hearing Voices Network; Mahinarangi Tocker spoke of some Maori perspectives; Arana Pearson presented as did Debra Lampshire from Auckland.

We spoke about the establishment of this organisation and encouraged discussion on the setting up of a Hearing Voices Network in New Zealand. See inside for more information...

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Sounding out those voices that nobody else can hear

By Martin Johnston

Hearing voices when no one else can be a symptom of mental illness, yet a study of the phenomenon found nearly half the people who heard voices said their hallucinations were mostly friendly or helpful.

Furthermore, some participants in the Auckland University study considered their voices a blessing – although others thought them a curse.

Hearing voices tends to be more accepted in some indigenous cultures than in modern Western society – but it still finds a place, even at top levels.

Retired Australian athlete Herb Elliott, winner of the 1500m gold at the 1960 Rome Olympics, has written of the voice in his head that told him halfway through that race: “Herb, you’re bugged.”

He ignored the negative comment, won and became an adviser on the psychology of winning to a new generation of Australian Olympic athletes.

For the study, psychologist intern and post-graduate student Vanessa Beavan gathered answers from 154 voice-hearers by questionnaire and interviewed 50 of them for her PhD thesis. Her findings provide an insight into a phenomenon estimated to be experienced by 5 per cent to 10 per cent of people.

VOICE-OVER

- 154 people who hear voices took part in the Auckland University study.
- The voices were mostly friendly or helpful for 48 per cent, mostly negative or unhelpful for 25 per cent, neutral for 15 per cent and varied greatly for the rest.
- 54 per cent had been in contact with mental health services.
- Around 25 per cent heard voices talking or arguing with each other.

She is using her research to help promote World Hearing Voices Day on September 14. “Hearing voices is more complex than suggested by the psychiatric model of voices as a symptom of severe mental illness,” Ms Beavan said. “Voice-hearers ... reported a diverse range of experiences and explanatory models and most had never been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder.”

While 54 per cent had been in contact with mental health services, only 22 per cent said it was for reasons “at least somewhat related to their voice experiences”.

Positive voice content included hearing advice, encouraging and comforting words, and giggling. On the darker side, negative

content could be crying, criticism or commands to hurt themselves or others.

More than half identified a single event, mostly negative, happening shortly before they first heard a voice, yet, over time, participants’ emotional reactions to their voices became more commonly positive than negative.

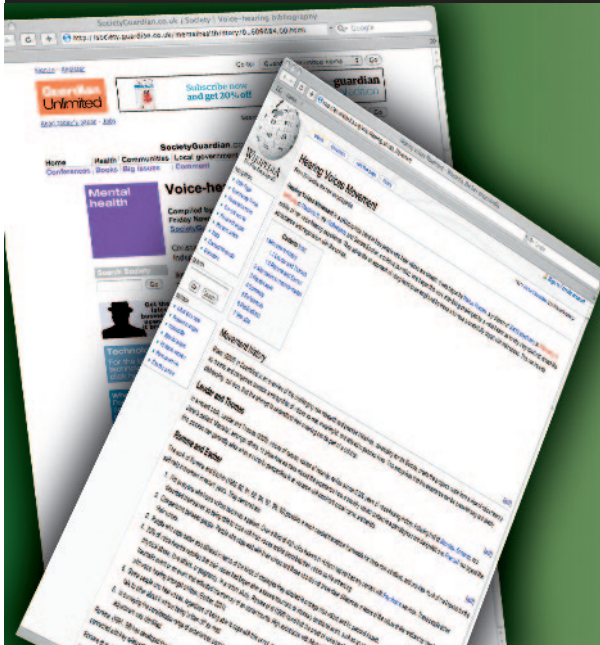
Voices of deceased people were the most common; others included parts of the self, gods and aliens. People attributed their voices to causes like brain dysfunction, drugs, trauma and spiritual entities.

Ms Beavan said people needed to develop their own coping strategies, but techniques like “selective listening” could be effective. Many participants wanted voice-hearing to be considered normal, to reduce the stigma they experienced.

Waitemata District Health Board psychiatrist Dr Wayne Miles said not all hallucinations were associated with mental illness. Many experienced them when waking or falling asleep, or if someone close had recently died. About a fifth of people suffering from schizophrenia heard voices.

“We are more likely to see people in a distressed state because the voices are in some ways negative,” he said. “The worst are the ones that constantly tell you you’re terrible, you should kill yourself. It’s likely they aren’t that common.”

PUBLICATIONS ON HEARING VOICES



Accepting Voices: A New Approach to Voice-hearing Outside the Illness Model by M. Romme & S. Escher. Mind, 1993.

Hearing Voices - A Common Human Experience by John Watkins. Hill of Content Publishing, Melbourne, Australia, 1998.

Making Sense of Voices - A guide for professionals who work with voice hearers by M. Romme and S. Escher. Mind, 2000.

Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity - Studies of Verbal Hallucinations by Ivan Leudar and Philip Thomas. Routledge/Psychological Press, 2000.

Working with Voices - Victim to Victor by Ron Coleman & Mike Smith. Keepwell Publications, 2002. (Available from www.keepwell.co.nz)

Adam James’ *Raising Our Voices* provides a philosophical and organisational account of the UK Hearing Voices Movement. It also gives a biography on Ron Coleman and how he became involved in the movement.

For more information on the Hearing Voices Movement go to *Wikipedia*: www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hearing_Voices_Movement

For a hearing voices bibliography go to: www.society.guardian.co.uk/mentalhealth/story/0,,609684,00.html



The necessity for a New Zealand Hearing Voices Network

In 1996 I attended the The Mental Health Services Conference of Australasia (TheMHS) in Brisbane, Australia. 1996 was a seminal year for me for many reasons. It was the year the New Zealand Mason Report was released, a document that had just five recommendations for the improvement of our mental health sector in New Zealand.

That report was the document that led to the formation of the Mental Health Commission and to the development of the 'Like Minds like Mine' project to counter stigma and discrimination associated with stigma amongst other things.

I have been privileged to work with both of these organisations. 1996 was also the year in which I accepted a job of consumer support and liaison in a hospital in which I had been a patient. I, along with Ngaire, was only the fifth (and sixth) person to be employed within the mental health services in New Zealand in a consumer role. There are now over 67 such roles in the country and also many others employed in the NGO sector.

In 1996 I was at the meeting where the Australian national consumer network was formed and I became a delegate of the New Zealand Aotearoa Network of Psychiatric Survivors (ANOPS) that year.

Pat Deeghan of America was a keynote speaker at the TheMHS conference in '96. Pat spoke with a passion and intelligent clarity that moved me to identification and tears. She also ran a workshop that she had developed at TheMHS: "Hearing Voices that are Distressing".

Kevin Macken was the president of ANOPS at that time and he led a consumer run organisation in Hamilton called Centre 401. Kevin organised for Pat Deeghan to come to New Zealand in 1997 and train six of us to deliver her workshop. I was one of those six people. That training was funded by the Like Minds Like Mine project. Pat returned the following year in 1998 and trained another group of New Zealanders to deliver the workshop. Two years later I trained a group of South Island voice hearers to deliver the training.

Pat had taught us about the work of Professor Marius Romme and of the UK Hearing voice network. I was later to meet Ron Coleman of Scotland who had been a coordinator of that network. At Ron's invitation I funded my own travel to the UK in 2002 and I stayed with him and his wife Karen in their

house (then) in Gloucester. I met Professor Marius Romme there and had two sessions with him discussing my own experiences of hearing voices. My own recovery was greatly enhanced by those two sessions. I became convinced that New Zealand needed more than just awareness raising about this topic of hearing voices. The 'hearing voices that are distressing' simulation workshop was not enough. We needed leadership for people to recover through accepting their voices.

A few years ago I met Vanessa Beaven. Vanessa contacted me to explain she was researching the New Zealand experience of hearing voices for her PhD thesis. I agreed to be a research subject and also to help with letting others know about the research so more people who hear voices might be recruited to the research. We went onto the Holmes show on TVOne news and spoke about voices and the need for research. Also, Ron and Karen supported me to publish their books *Working with Voices*, *Working to Recovery*, *Working with Self Harm* and *Psychiatric First Aid in Psychosis*.

I formed a training organisation called Keepwell Limited to deliver training and to publish of these books: they are available on the Keepwell website.

Most of this training has been aimed at the mental health sector staff in Australia and New Zealand. There has been relatively little recovery effect and flow on to consumers of Australia and New Zealand. *Why?*

Services do not easily adopt new ways of working. Also, something is missing in the service mix. If mental health recovery is to be effective then it must be led by people with experience with mental illness.

Also, peer support is a proven complement to clinical health services. In many instances, peer support produces the environment to nurture a person's recovery.

The Australians formed their Hearing Voices Peer Support network last year. The British did so 19 years ago and their hearing voices peer support groups are now funded mental health services because of their recognised effectiveness. When I was in the UK in 2002, they signed up the 100th peer support group; there are now over 160 groups there.

New Zealand is lagging behind in this area of mental health service development and our poor recovery outcomes reflect that. This is about to change with the publication of this newsletter which heralds the beginning

of the New Zealand Hearing Voices Peer Support Network.

Consumers/service users must support one another to make things happen! This newsletter is supported and funded - for which we are eternally grateful - by the Cymru Hearing Voices Group in Wales via Hywell Davis, who made contact with me at the suggestion of Ron Coleman. Without this support I would not have had the motivation to go ahead with this new project. My heartfelt thanks go to Pat Deeghan, Ron Coleman, Kevin Macken, Maree Piece (who funded the first Hearing Voices training for us), to Vanessa Beaven for her research and commitment to working with us, Debra Lampshire, Mahinarangi Tocker and Garry Platz. I would like to acknowledge the memory of Olive Lewis, whose life will be forever remembered by me and others of us who were part of that first group of people trained by Pat in 1996.

So now it is a decade later. 2006 is time for the seed of this work to begin to flourish in this nation. Our goal is that every person who hears voices will know about the Hearing Voices Network Aotearoa New Zealand and have the opportunity to attend meetings of support and to hear a message of hope for recovery with hearing voices.

Our goal is that every household in New Zealand will know about the hearing voices network and that hearing voices is an experience that people can live well with. In fact, maybe we can ask the question: *How can you live well if you do not listen to the voice(s)?*

We will need many friends and much help in order to further this work. My personal goal is to seed this work and ensure structures are in place for the network to be securely established and be ongoing through the appointment of effective leadership and adequate funding. I anticipate it to be a two year project, and once set up, I will exit the organisation and then work on other goals. For now the newsletter is under the auspices of Keepwell Limited. Keepwell is a consumer-led training organisation and I am a director of that organisation.

Faithfully,
Arana Pearson, Editor

Keepwell Ltd was awarded a Gold Award for Excellence at the TheMHS conference in October 2006 for its training programmes and publications in the field of 'real recovery solutions in mental health'.

World Hearing Voices Day: Thursday, 14th September 2006

*Is hearing voices part of an illness or a human variation
that does not have to result in illness?*

*Have you ever heard a voice that seemed real to you
when there was no apparent external cause?*

The international hearing voices movement knows many people who have. Unfortunately, most people who hear voices keep it to themselves - in our society it's a very stigmatising experience and people automatically assume you must be crazy if you say you hear voices. For this reason we have decided to hold our first World Hearing Voices Day as a way of both celebrating this variation in human experience and to counter the secrecy and negative stereotyping surrounding this way of being.

In November last year, Louise Pembroke, a voice hearer and psychiatric survivor from England proposed that INTERVOICE (The International Network for Training, Education and Research into Hearing Voices) should hold its own World Hearing Voices Day to:

- Celebrate the hearing of voices as part of the diversity of human experience and increase awareness of the fact you can hear voices and be healthy
- Challenge negative attitudes towards people who hear voices or the incorrect assumption that this is in itself a sign of an illness, an assumption made about them that is not based on their own experiences, is stigmatising, isolating and makes people ill
- Raise awareness of the issues facing the estimated 4% of women, men and children who hear voices across the world

For a mostly unfunded network this was a challenge indeed, but one that has been taken up by our members with energy and creativity and has resulted in an impressive array of events and activities that are being held in 14 countries across the world - from Australia to Finland. See below for further details about the events we are holding.

The theme of the World Hearing Voices Day addresses whether hearing voices should be considered an illness or as part of the diversity of human experience that does not in itself have to result in an illness.

Jacqui Dillon, Chair of the English Hearing Voices Network said:

"I have been a voice hearer since I was a small child as a consequence of serious abuse that I experienced throughout my

childhood. My own experiences within mental health services were so damaging and negative that I was passionate about improving services so that they would be helpful to people in mental distress rather than hindering them.

"When I joined the Network I saw a powerful means of making change, which enabled voice hearers to reclaim their experiences and the Hearing Voices network has enabled me to make changes in my world and to become part of a collective voice for change. For someone who was told that she would never recover, life could not be better!"

In announcing the World Hearing Voices Day, The President of INTERVOICE, Dutch psychiatrist, Professor Marius Romme said:

"Because of the fears and misunderstandings in society and within psychiatry about hearing voices, they are generally regarded as a symptom of an illness, something that is negative, to be got rid of and consequently the content and meaning of the voice experience is rarely discussed.

In contrast, our work and research has shown that over 70% of people who hear voices can point to a traumatic life event that triggered their voices; that talking about voices and what they mean is a very effective way to reduce anxiety and isolation; and that even when the voices are overwhelming and seemingly destructive they often have an important message for the hearer. With the support of the worldwide hearing voices network, voice hearers, some of whom have spent long periods of time in psychiatric care have reclaimed their lives and are now able to say they hear voices and accept them as part of themselves. Our journey to better understand the voice hearing experience has now been going on for almost twenty years and we thought this would be a good time to celebrate our achievements and to make our work better known across the world."

This research and work on hearing voices represents a real challenge to the current understanding of the voice hearing experience, provides a message of hope and the possibility of recovery from serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

September 14th 2006: World Voices Day

It is estimated that worldwide, up to 4% of men, women and children hear voices. As part of a worldwide initiative, the Hearing Voices Network is holding a series of international, and national events to increase awareness of the voice hearing experience.

Is hearing voices an illness or a human variation that does not have to result in an illness?

Social presumptions about hearing voices are negative and are not based on the experience of voice hearers. These assumptions are stigmatising, isolating and therefore make people ill.

"Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, they are the only ones who ever have."

Margaret Mead

Project Support Groups

Your invitation to participate in the New Zealand Hearing Voices Network...

Our goal is to support the establishment and to network hearing voices peer support groups in every city in New Zealand and to have established a fully funded national coordinator to support these groups and supply ongoing resource and leadership development to these groups.

This goal will be achieved by 2008. We know there are already in existence a range of hearing voices support groups in New Zealand and our first task to this goal is to establish links with these groups and to identify people for developing new groups.

If you hear voices and/or you want to be involved with this development then send us your name, address, e-mail and phone number.

OUR POSTAL ADDRESS:

Keepwell (NZ) Ltd
P.O. Box 10 771
The Terrace
Wellington 601

OR VISIT:

www.keepwell.co.nz and click on the Hearing Voices contact link there to e-mail us your details.

We can then begin the task of identifying and supporting the growth of hearing voices recovery groups in your region in New Zealand.

Hearing Voices Network

HEARING VOICES NETWORK AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

What is a hearing voices support group and what does it do?

Hearing Voices Groups.

- A hearing voices peer support group helps voices hearers to regain some power over their lives. People who hear voices tell their stories and explore ways to work with, rather than against their voices.
- The key to the success of a Hearing Voices Group is that it is consumer driven; where consumers are encouraged by each other to actively participate in their own recovery.
- The Hearing Voices Group is not intended to be an alternative to appropriate use of psychiatric medication.
- Hearing Voices Groups gives consumers some additional ways of working with voices.
- The purpose of hearing voices groups is to offer a safe haven where people feel accepted and comfortable. The groups offer an opportunity for people to accept and 'live with their voices', in a way that gives them some control and
- A Hearing Voices Network is a support structure connecting hearing voices peer support groups.

Keepwell NZ's Arana Pearson pictured during a recent training session with Hapai te Hauora Tapui Ltd in partnership with kaumatua. Over 2006, Arana delivered training to Auckland marae, exploring cultural understandings about hearing voices.



Well-known voice hearers

PHILOSOPHERS AND THINKERS

Socrates
Plato
Aristotle
Pythagoras
Descartes
Goethe
Sigmund Freud
Carl Gustav Jung
Mahatma Gandhi
Jean-Paul Satre

AUTHORS, MUSICIANS AND CREATIVE ARTISTS

Jonathan Swift
Cervantes
Beethoven
Robert Schumann
Mozart
Wagner
Rossini
Schopenhauer
Henri Rousseau
Byron
Chopin
Dumas
Shelly
Walt Whitman
Edgar Allen Poe
Charles Dickens
Virginia Woolf
Evelyn Waugh

Sylvia Plath
Philip K Dick
Anthony Hopkins
Paul McCartney
Brian Wilson

SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS FIGURES

Moses
Jesus
St Paul
Mohammed
Joan of Arc
Peter the Hermit

Luther
Calvin
St Augustine
St Francis
John Bunyon
George Fox (founder of the Quakers)
Joseph Smith (founder of the Mormons)

LEADERS AND RULERS

Alexander the Great
Caesar
Attila
Charlemagne
Oliver Cromwell
Napoleon
Hitler
Mussolini
Stalin
Churchill

Hearing Voices Network Aotearoa New Zealand Affiliates and Sister Organisations

Sponsoring Organisation for our newsletter:

Hearing Voices Network Cymru

Upper Robeston,
Robeston West,
Milford Haven,
Pembrokeshire, SA73 3TL,
United Kingdom.

INTERVOICE International Network aims to:

- Show that hearing voices is a normal though unusual variation in human behaviour
- Show that the problem is not hearing voices but the inability to cope with the experience
- Educate society about the meaning of voices so as to reduce ignorance and anxiety and to ensure this innovatory approach on voice hearing is better known by voice hearers, families, professionals and the general public
- Demonstrate the wide variety of voice hearing experiences and their origins, and peoples' approaches to coping
- Increase the quality and quantity of mutual support available to all people and organisations involved in hearing voices work across the world
- Make our work more effective and develop more non-medical ways of helping voice hearers cope with their experience.

Sister organisation:

Australian Hearing Voices Network

Perth Hearing Voices Group

Contact: Lyn Mahboub

Consumer Consultant

Director Hearing Voices Network

Richmond Fellowship of WA Inc

BA (Hons) Psychology/Comm.Cultural Studies

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Cairns Keepwell Group

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