



NPN

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The Sheffield Paranoia Support Group

We decided to run a group for people who experience paranoia. Now, of course, this was always going to be a bit complex, and many people said to us that it wouldn't work because of the nature of the experience. We decided we would run the group in an old school building. It was significant to hold the meeting in a place not associated with mental health issues.

We booked a room and sent out a flyer advertising a paranoia group for support and education. A colleague said to me that they thought calling it a paranoia group was too direct, but I couldn't imagine calling it anything else.

Going into a group for the first time can be pretty nerve-wrecking for anyone, so we tried to make this as easy as possible. On the flyer we included a contact number. When people would ring up, I'd give them details of the venue and was very clear about what was going to happen in the first meeting. I'd explain that it was going to consist of an introductory workshop on 'What paranoia means to you'. I also gave people the option of meeting me or Chris, the other facilitator on a day before the group so that they could get a feel for how things would be.

At the first meeting fifteen people turned up. There are now people regularly attending. I had thought we might see the same people who attend our Hearing Voices Group, but it has turned out to be a completely different clientele, including a policewoman who's never been within the psychiatric system and a guy who hadn't previously been out of his house for three years.

The diversity in the group is fantastic, it makes a real difference that some members of the group are used to being a part of the mainstream community as they are able to offer significant support to some of the other members for whom paranoia can be totally debilitating. In the group meetings we are looking at problem solving and coping strategies. We're talking about warning signs and triggers and the knowledges and skills that people have developed to respond to these.

There was one woman in the group, who talks about how she always thinks her neighbours are talking about her. In one of the meetings, she mentioned that she had done a lot of gardening on the previous weekend. I said to her, "well it was a lovely day, wasn't it, I bet there were a lot of people around'. And she replied, 'oh yes, all the neighbours were out, some were having a barbeque.' When I asked her how long she was gardening for, she said about three hours, and so I

asked her, 'in those three hours, did you think other people were talking about you?' And she said, 'well come to think of it now, I didn't.' We went on to explore why this was, and we heard her describe how doing the gardening focusing on the plants and on the small details, meant that she was free from paranoia during that time.

This is one of the things we do within the meetings, try to explore the times when the group members are free from the effects of paranoia and what it is that enables this.

In the group we also try to assist people to discern what are the effects of paranoia and what might be quite realistic concerns. Another young lady with learning disabilities who lives in her own flat. She has lived a very isolated life and when she complained that the neighbours were talking about her, she was diagnosed as paranoia schizophrenic and given medication. When she came to the group, we asked whether she had checked out whether the neighbours actually were talking about her.

The world can be cruel sometimes, particularly to people with learning difficulties. People often do talk negatively and critically about other people. We suggested that she could ask her worker to come

around and listen to check it out. The worker came around and reassured her that she couldn't hear anyone talking about and she found this really helpful

One of the key difficulties for people with paranoia is travelling on buses, because they often feel everyone on the bus will talk about them. If bus travel is not possible, then it is highly likely that they will become increasingly isolated. We spend quite a bit of time developing strategies for bus travel. Some people find it helpful to go on a bus with another person to check things out. When they then ask, 'is everybody talking about me?' The other person can listen and either confirm that everyone is indeed looking at them and talking about them, or they can clarify that this is not happening.

Some people have developed other strategies, perhaps they won't get on a bus if it is full, but they will if it is only half full. We have tried to assist people in their travels we ask what might make it possible for them to ride on a bus, perhaps it's taking it one day at a time and only getting on for very short distances. Perhaps it is travelling with three friends.

The one thing that we are consistently hearing is what a difference it makes to have other people to talk to about these experiences. One man turned up to the

group and it was the first time he had been out of his house in five years!

What's more, he caught the bus to get there, this was highly significant to me – that simply knowing there was a place he could go to talk about paranoia, where I guess he thought there was a chance he would be believed, made such a difference. This man needs the most support in the group. At times he gets really stressed. When he is speaking, he might suddenly say 'Why is everybody staring at me?' and we need to explain that is what happens when you're talking in a group. People will turn to look at you.

Recently we held a social evening for everyone in the paranoia group and everybody enjoyed meeting up. The isolation that is so often a consequence of paranoia is gradually diminishing.

Non-Denominational Spiritual Experiences

People sometimes hear voices as part of a spiritual experience which occurs outside the context of any particular formal religious belief system. Several studies have suggested that this phenomenon is not at all rare. For example, in a comprehensive survey conducted by the Religious Experiences Research Unit at Oxford University in which numerous first-hand accounts of religious experiences were collected, 431 of 3,000 respondents (7%) reported having heard voices. The authors of the survey commented that these seemed to be entirely self-vindicating, primary experience whose reality for the subject was beyond question. The experiences reported seemed to fall into two main types: 'Voices calming' and 'voices guiding.' The following is an example of the calming type of voice experience:

Gradually I became aware of this power and began really to court it. It has come to me often – once in a dream – as light, warmth, comfort and love past understanding. IT has walked with me and sometimes I hear something or someone calling my name.

Some of the survey respondents said that the voice they heard seemed to come from within themselves whilst others said that it originated in the outer world. Some felt that it was both at once. In many cases this voice experience had a great religious significance for the hearer and often made a very profound impression upon them.

The results of a number of other studies lend support to these findings and suggest that a variety of voice experiences having a religious or spiritual nature are widespread in the human population. In a recent study of 375 college students, for example, 43 (11%) said that they heard a God's voice. This experience specifically involved hearing God speak 'as a real voice' not simply knowing it as something in one's heart. The psychologists who conducted this research concluded that these kinds of 'normal auditory hallucinations' probably play a significant role in the development and reinforcement of many people's religious and supernatural belief systems.

In another recent study of 186 people who reported hearing voices it was found that nearly half believed their voices were a friend or a guide and tutor whilst others believed themselves to be paranormally gifted ('Clairaudient'). The author of one study of 'Inner voice

experiences' identified a group of persons for whom inner voices served as 'Channels towards a higher self'. Many of these persons felt that their inner voice was related to intuition and they consistently saw it as part of the spiritual dimension of their being. Voice experiences of this kind appear to have provided an important source of spiritual guidance to many people, including some very famous ones:

Mahatma Gandhi, both a spiritual and political leader, relied on 'inner voice' as his primary guidance in life.

Gandhi described the inner voice as full of power and authority. A year before his death the voice told him. 'You are on the right track, move neither to your left, nor right, but keep to the straight and narrow.'

Many examples can be found of voices providing spiritual comfort or guidance to persons in situations of extremely physical and emotional distress. There are war-time reports, for example, of torpedoed sailors immersed in the sea for hours who conversed with an audible God. Solviu Craciunas who suffered imprisonment and torture as a member of the Romanian post-war resistance movement, has described how when he had reached his lowest physical and spiritual ebb, a 'personality' appeared to him in his cell in the form of a wise old brahmin who claimed to be

a manifestation of Craciunas' inner spirit. Over many weeks the conversations that Craciunas had with the brahmin nurtured his spirit and provided him with the strength he needed to survive his painful ordeal.

A somewhat similar experience occurred to the famous sixteenth century Florentine sculptor Benvenuto Cellini whilst he was imprisoned in Rome by order of the Pope. As he contemplated suicide Cellini suddenly felt that a divine power in the form of a 'guardian angel' had intervened to prevent him from harming himself.

"At First, I dreamed that God had saved me but as my suffering continued and I once more was faced with suicide, the invisible being that had prevented my laying violent hands upon myself came to me, still invisible, but spoke with an audible voice. It shook me, made me rouse up and said, 'Benvenuto, Benvenuto, lose no time. Raise your heart to God in fervent devotion and cry to him with the utmost vehemence.'

Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish polymath and teacher of William Blake, claimed to have held long conversations with what he believed were angels. He eventually developed his elaborate cosmology of spirit worlds as a result of conversing with these angels in the guise of inner voices.

Angels talk with each other just as men do in the world, and on various subjects, as on domestic matters, and on matters of civil, moral, and spiritual life. And there is no difference except that their talk is more intelligent than that of men, because it is from more interior thought. I have been permitted to associate with them frequently, and to talk with them as friend with friend, and sometimes as stranger with stranger, and as I was then in a state like theirs, I knew no otherwise than that I was talking with men on the earth. Angelic speech, the same as human speech has distinct words; it is also audibly uttered and heard; for angels, like men, have mouth, tongue, and ears, and an atmosphere in which the sound of their speech is articulated, although it is a spiritual atmosphere adapted to angels who are spiritual.

Reclaiming Control

Peter Bullimore

The experience of hearing voices is all about power, but I never tell people to try to get rid of the voices. If someone is being tyrannised by a particular voice, then it is the experience of tyranny that needs addressing. Over the last fifteen years, it has been recognised that sexual abuse and physical abuse are all about power. If you're sexually abused, you're offered counselling. If you're physically abused, you're offered counselling. But if you're verbally abused by voices you are given medication and there is rarely any consideration given relations of power. So often, the voice that people hear are the voices of those who have physically, sexually, or emotionally abused them. These matters need addressing. Ways must be found for people to reclaim control over their own lives.

Let me offer an example. Francine is a young woman who was severely physically abused by her father. He broke her arm, her leg, and her ribs. At fourteen, her father left, and her mother would then ring him up and get Francine to pass messages to him – they insulted each other with Francine in the middle. Francine overdosed at fourteen and stayed in an adolescent unit for two years before being moved into an adult unit.

The drugs weren't working, and she wasn't complying, so she was labelled as having a personality disorder. Her mother asked me to go and see her, so I did.

Again, to begin, I simply asked Francine some questions so that I could get to know about her life, and she told me the history of what had happened to her. At that time, Francine was hearing two voices. One was what she believed to be the voice of God saying, "only I am keeping you alive." And the other she said was the voice of the devil saying, "God's only keeping you alive to be tormented." She was hearing these statements over and over again and had got to the point where she believed there was no point in living.

As Francine told me about the story of her life, it seemed to me there were a few key themes. Firstly, she was involved in a cult that told her she was possessed and in which she would talk in tongues. And secondly, she visited her dad every Friday night through loyalty, but he was always drunk on that particular night of the week and he frightened her.

First of all, we looked at the cult; Francine said that she went to their meetings on Sunday nights because she was bored and had nothing else to do. So, I asked her if she liked to drink, and she said 'yes' So I suggested we went for a drink on Sunday nights instead. We started

having a drink socially on Sunday nights and I'd invite other hearing voices group members along so if I wasn't there, she was still able to go out. After some time, when I gained her trust, I asked Francine "Why don't you go visit your dad on another night?" and she decided to go on a Tuesday when he'd be more sober and more receptive. This took away two major stresses from Francine's life.

We also needed to look at the issue of self-harm. Francine like many people who hear negative voices, was harming herself when the voices were ordering her to do so. Francine is very attractive and had never cut her face. I was interested in this, particularly as I have a scar on my face, so I asked her about this, I asked if the voices ever told her to cut her face and she said "Yes, quite regularly', When I asked her why she never obeyed them, Francine replied 'well, I like my looks.'. We'd discovered that whenever the voices told her to cut her face, she would cut her arms.

In talking together, we realized that the particular type of cutting that she was doing was actually making a stand against the voices. They were not being able to dictate her life to the same extent that she had thought. These are important distinctions – particularly for people who are hearing voices that overwhelm them. If

we can find the examples of the ways in which they are able to make their own choices, no matter how small, then these can be openings for new sorts of lives.

It was not simple though because people whose trust has been regularly betrayed often need to know that you are going to hang around. Francine rang me at three o'clock one Sunday morning and said she was going to kill herself. I had to get to the other side of Sheffield to see her. I made it there and I sat on the settee with her till 'half past five. She didn't say anything then she said 'You can go now because I feel better.' This was a turning point between us. She realized I wasn't just a worker who would be there from nine-five.

Up until this time we had not talked in detail about Francine's voices, but now we did. At first, I didn't really know what to do with the God/Devil thing. I started by asking Francine about her religious beliefs and she said she didn't really know what she believed. So I said "Well bearing in mind you've been involved in a cult, would it be okay if we just took God out of the equation? Or are you a true Christian who says God Rules?" And Francine said, 'Well I'm not bothered, we can take God out of the equation.' And so, we scribbled God off the sheet of paper we were working with. Then I said 'Well, if you're

happy to take God out of the picture, the devil's supposedly a fallen angel, so how about we remove the devil too?' Francine said she was happy to look beyond the religious aspects, but the statement itself really mattered to her – was she only being kept alive to be tormented?

In my experience, it's vitally important for people to be able to give their voices an identity, so I asked Francine, "This voice that says these things, it needs a name, give me a man's name.' And like lightning before I even stopped saying the sentence, she said 'David'. When I asked Francine who David was, she said 'I don't know'. And that's what everyone says when you first ask them that question. So, I asked again, 'Come on, who's David?' This then went on for quite a while because I was determined to find the story that related to the name David. Who was this David that meant she would give the voice his name? eventually I heard that David was a lad at school who Francine had known when she was fourteen. David had wanted to have sex with Francine and when she wouldn't he would beat her up. I heard that Francine got beaten by her dad and beaten by David. Eventually David tried to rape her but didn't succeed.

So, I said, 'Okay, what we're going to do, is we're going to make the voice David's.' And she says, 'No, no, I'm

too scared of David.’ She’d made peace with her dad over the years, but she was still frightened of David.

So, I said, ‘I’ll tell you what we’ll do. We’re going to challenge David. We’re going to challenge the content of everything he says. I’ll tell you what to say to David and then we’ll see what he says’. But she wasn’t happy about this either. She said she simply couldn’t speak back to him. So, we took a different tack. I said ‘I’ve got another idea; I’ll give you the things to say to David, but you tell him that I’ve said these things. You tell him. ‘Pete’s told me to say this’. So, we started having a conversation in which Francine would tell me the things that David was saying, and I would give her responses that she would relay to him. Gradually in this conversation I would give the answers a bit quicker until eventually she got to a point where she just gave the answers to David herself without mentioning that they were coming from me. When this had happened a few times, we stopped, and I pointed out what had happened. I asked Francine, ‘Just a minute ago, what happened when you gave him that other answer?’, she said ‘nothing’, so I said, ‘how did you feel?’. She said, ‘I felt alright’. I said, ‘do you realize what this means? You’ve now challenged David without saying Pete said and nothing terrible has happened we can do more of this’ This was the beginning of Francine developing a

different sort of relationship with her voices. On in which she could speak back to them, one in which the balance of power was changing.

Once this had occurred, we could then take steps in life building. Francine wanted to do a humanities course in English, Law and History. So, I travelled to the local and helped her enroll in College. As she took up this new life, her self-harming became much less frequent. Sometime down the track I asked her about this, and she told me that the only day on which she was self-harming now was on Tuesdays. I had never heard of such scheduled self-harming, so I asked her more about this, and Francine said, 'Well every other day of my week is now busy, but on Tuesday's I've got all day to myself and I just listen to David and do what he says'. Her cutting was quite serious on her arms and legs, so what I suggested to Francine was that I could set her homework to do on Tuesday's. I was quite strict about this and I set it up so that she would bring me each week, the homework she had completed on Tuesday. This hasn't completely stopped the self-harming but it's now only happening about 30% of the time that it was. Francine hasn't got rid of the voices but her relationship with them has changed. The balance of power has been altered and she is living a completely different life.

Hi My offering, Personification Poem.

Just one more guilty pleasure, then I will start, promise.
She never does, well pretends she does, for a day.
Never thinks I know all her secrets, her tricks.
She hides things in front, behind and even blames the
dog.

Her face used to peer at me, positive, glowing and
happy.
Mornings she would make healthy porridge, with
cinnamon and honey.
But semi skimmed milk now drowns her sugar laden
cornflakes.
Bread, bagels, crumpets
crackers and butter, jams, marmalades and more

You should be filling me up with nutritious, delicious,
fresh colours that entice, aromas that tempt the
nostrils, wanting more.
Instead, prepacked plastic, pasta ,pizzas ,pies pancakes ,
profiteroles , by peach trifle
Morello cherries not in jam, Carrots, not in a cake

Know it's covid, baggy jumpers, oversized dressing
gowns, pyjama days.
Remember the message you stuck on me. EAT HEALTHY,
SMILE.

The Hearing Voices Network Ireland (HVNI) is pleased to host the Intervoice Congress 2021 in Cork, Ireland, from

1 – 3 September 2021.

We are planning a hybrid type format (delegates joining us in Cork and delegates joining us virtually/online, with events online and events in Cork). Of course, everything depends on Covid19 related restrictions (travelling, social distancing etc) now and in the future. With this ongoing uncertainty, we are interested to find out about the nature of the attendance at the 2021 Intervoice Congress. It will help us in planning the Congress events.

Thanks for taking the time in completing this brief survey:

<https://forms.gle/LbBYFLHQVr1WHP4s8>

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/12th-world-hearing-voices-congress-cork-ireland-1-3-sept-2021-tickets-145886254715>

<http://hearingvoicesnetworkireland.ie/intervoice-congress-2021/>
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScbpp24eR>

Canterbury Christ Church University Research Project

HAVE YOU READ ANY OF THE FOLLOWING BOOKS?

Accepting Voices by Marius Romme
Living with Voices: 50 stories of recovery by Marius Romme and Sandra Escher

Young People Hearing Voices by Marius Romme and Sandra Escher

Hearing Voices, Living Fully by Claire Bien

Recovery: An Alien Concept? by Ron Coleman

Working with Voices II: Victim to Victor by Ron Coleman and Mike Smith

We are a research team from Canterbury Christ Church University looking for participants for a study exploring voice-hearers' experiences of reading narratives about hearing voices contained in the following books:

We would like to talk to adults (18+) who identify as hearing voices (currently or in the past) and have read at least half of one of the above books. If you are interested in taking part in this study or would like some more information, please visit

<https://tinyurl.com/3bzbrswp> or email Becky Donne (lead researcher) at b.donne204@canterbury.ac.uk.

Participation is completely voluntary and all personal information will be kept confidential.

Maastricht Interview Training for Hearing Voices & Problematic Thought Beliefs & Paranoia Is available online from the National Paranoia Network. Other training available online Working through Paranoia, Making Sense of Hearing Voices & Working with Childhood Trauma

It can be delivered across the world for more information and costings Email enquiries@nationalparanoianetwork.org

Online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Groups Join our online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group Meetings on ZOOM

Thursday 3pm -4.30pm with Paul Meeting ID 88460268952 Password 375878

Sundays: HVN USA on ZOOM 6:30p - 8:00p USA Time with Cindee 11.30pm – 1.00 am UK Time Meeting ID 827 5463 8654 No Password Needed

Saturdays Texas USA HVN Meeting on ZOOM 10am-11.30 USA Time with Paul 4pm-5.30pm UK Time Meeting ID 83079149464 No Password Needed

Monday Sheffield Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group with Emma & Lyn On ZOOM 11am-12pm UK Time Meeting ID: 558 685 8263 Password 6DyVca