

*experts by* **experience**

# Hearing Voices Information Booklet



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## HEARING VOICES NETWORK AUSTRALIA

Auspiced by Richmond Fellowship of WA

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## HVNA Supporters

### Publishers

This booklet is proudly designed and produced by the **Hearing Voices Network Australia, Richmond Fellowship WA** as an in-house publication. First published in May, 2007 and to our knowledge, the first and only such publication produced in Australia. Subsequent updates have been made however, in order to maintain current information and relevance.

Where possible material within this booklet is referenced. However, 'the literature' on voices groups has been traditionally shared across Hearing Voices Networks (HVN), voice hearers and their allies and as such we have included certain well-known elements or aspects which you will see elsewhere. Some information we have simply absorbed and come to know, therefore, we may have inadvertently reproduced it without direct acknowledgement; other information we have been given permission to reproduce.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to thank those "experts by experience" and "experts by profession", who have shared their words of wisdom and various material responding to calls for inspired wisdom. It is very heartwarming indeed to feel the presence of our academic allies and those with the gift of the pen. Thanks also to those who have taught the voices approach, such that we have come to know and use the strategies, knowledge and framework that have allowed us to create this booklet.

Some of this learning has been absorbed within the halls of learning institutions, some in conferences, workshops and gatherings, and some in hearing voices groups themselves. Some of our learning has occurred in the bright lounge rooms of Dundee, Scotland (thanks Maria & Audrey), sunny drop-in HVN centres of Dundee (thanks Pat and the crew) Deptford, London (thanks John Robinson & Ben), and Manchester HVN (thanks Julie Downs and Chris Stirk), and, some in our own office where our home-grown experience blossoms. We very much appreciate the wisdom of those who have gone before us and treaded the boards of the Hearing Voices Network Development. Those who, like us, are in their developmental stage - such as our Palestinian, Irish and New Zealand brethren (Arana, Lorna & Magdel) who offer hope and inspiration to go on when we tire.

We also thank the heroes of our Australian journey: Ron Coleman, Karen Taylor, Professor Marius Romme, Dr Sandra Escher, Paul Baker, Pat Webster, Maria Griffin & Audrey Reid and our inaugural chair Jen Stacey. Also to Professor Mark Rapley, Rob Rowe, Dr Bill Bennett, Joe Calleja, & the RFWA Board (who are all in part responsible for bringing knowledge about working with voices to Western Australia).

Throughout the course of the establishment of the HVNA there have been many needs; such as a need for a number of supporters offering an auspicing role (and all the support that accompanies this), referrals for grant proposals, proposal development & strategic planning support, and, the need for Voice Hearer Group Facilitators and Co-Facilitators and voice hearers generally.

Such needs have been met by many and we would like to thank:

- Our volunteers - particularly Marlene, Will, Stacey, Deano, Gary;
- Richmond Fellowship WA Board and Management, LotteryWest & Myer Foundation who have contributed financially;
- Hearing Voices Network Development Working Party Members (particularly the inaugural chair Jen Stacey);
- 'The Haven' - Scottish Hearing Voices Network Members in Dundee;
- Ron Coleman & Karen Taylor—Working to Recovery Ltd;
- Professor Mark Rapley—Professor of Clinical Psychology, School of Psychology, University of East London;
- Prahara Mission in Melbourne (particularly Sandi Noble, Harriet Dance and Jacqui Stewart);
- June O'Connor Centres (June herself, their board and workers across all sites);
- INTERVOICE: (the International Network for Training, Education and Research into Hearing VOICES);
- Professor David Copolov, & Dr Neil Thomas of The Mental Health Research Institute Melbourne (at the specialist Voices Clinic offering psychological treatment to people who hear voices);

- Dr Geoff Smith FRANZCP—former Director of Mental Health;
  - Rockingham Kwinana/South Metro Mental Health Service (Dr Mike Wise, (Clin Psych), Paula Edwards (Soc Wk), Virginia Pulker (OT), Warwick Smith (Soc Wk));
  - RFWA staff (particularly Susan, Natalia and Kirsty for their Voices work);
  - Liz Pattison, Maureen Helen, Pathways Bunbury (Jocelyn & Mick), UWA Georgie Paulig (Phd cand) & Jo Badcock;
  - Our radio supporters—RTR FM, ABC Radio National, and 6PR;
  - And to those too numerous to mention - many thanks
- Lyn Mahboub and Theresa Hewlet—Editors, May 2007



We are very grateful to Hywel Davies (UK) who continues to support the Hearing Voices Network Australia with munificent monetary donations. Hywel, your generosity has made the publication of this information booklet and subsequent updates a true reality. On behalf of voices hearers, their families and friends, we say THANK YOU!

HVNA team

We dedicate this booklet to all those lost lives for whom the system failed. We commit to strive for change always.

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## Welcome

Due to the increasing demand from voice hearers, family, friends, and workers alike, the Hearing Voices Network Australia Information Booklet has been reviewed, revised, and reprinted! We have handed out over more than 3,000 copies since the first print in May 2007, which is an amazing achievement!!

The Network has slowly expanded over the past three years, thanks to the support from a number of individuals and organisations. Richmond Fellowship WA's Board, CEO, Joe Calleja, and staff members are continually supporting the work done within the Network, and this was particularly evident with RFWA hosting the *Recovery from Psychosis* Conference and the annual INTERVOICE meeting in November 2008. A huge thank you to RFWA for allowing this happen, and also for continuing to sponsor the HVNA now that it is unfunded from July 2009.

Thank you to Hywel Davies, without whose financial support the reprinting of this Info Booklet and the Coping Strategies Poster would not have materialized this quickly. Also thanks to Ron Coleman and Karen Taylor for the unfailing support they provide us with time

and time again; thanks to the whole INTERVOICE community through whom we network with the many HVNs around the world. Thanks to Lyn Mahboub for her outstanding work within the Network since its inception. Lastly, thanks to all those voice hearers, consumers, family, friends, and workers who believe in the work that is being done within the Network, and continue to encourage us all along the pathways of recovery!

I hope you enjoy reading this revamped booklet, and trust it will meet your needs and inspire you to work with those who hear voices, and that voice hearers may gain an understanding of their experience, and move on to live very productive and meaningful lives!! If you need any assistance or you read something you would like further information about, please don't hesitate to call or email us! We're happy to chat with you!



Take care and believe in yourself!!

Cheers  
Marlene Janssen  
Coordinator HVNA

## From our patron

As patron of the Hearing Voices Network Australia I have been privileged to watch the growth of the Australian Network over the last three years. From an idea that was shared by a few people in WA it has quickly become a nationwide concept with groups already formed in Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. At the time of writing, the Richmond Fellowship Tasmania has just announced that it will be supporting the development of a Hearing Voices Network in Tasmania.

In each of the states it has been the support of an NGO agency that has allowed the network to grow and my thanks go to them. This is clearly true in WA where not only has the Richmond Fellowship WA supported the development of local hearing voices groups but supported by his board, the CEO has been given a remit to financially support the development of the Hearing Voices Network Australia.



Ron performing at INTERVOICE 2008

Perhaps one of the most exciting developments last year was the convening of Intervoice (The International Hearing Voices Network) in Perth WA which ran for two days after the International Recovery from

Psychosis Conference. The conference brought together many of the world leaders in the field of voice hearing. This was the first time that Intervoice had met in the Southern Hemisphere an event that many in Europe thought would be difficult to pull off. Not only did it happen, but it was one of the best-attended and successful Intervoice meetings ever held. Once again I would like to thank RFWA who went ahead with the event despite the fact that it was likely not to break even. The fact that it did is a testimony to the hard work put in by all involved. For myself the best thing was the numbers of Scots who flew down to Australia for the meeting.

As this new updated brochure goes to press HVNA is preparing for the launch of its website on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 2009. This will be followed by the formal launch of the Hearing Voices Network Victoria on August 26<sup>th</sup> 2009. I feel privileged that I will be involved in both events.

Finally I hope that you will find this updated brochure useful in giving you the information you need and that you will join us as we work together to create safe environments in which voice hearers can take control of their voices and their lives.

Cheers  
Ron Coleman

## Hearing Voices Network Australia (HVNA)

### Our Role

To enable acceptance and recovery for people who hear voices through support for self-help groups, education and awareness

*(Where recovery is defined as living a meaningful life from the perspective of the individual)*

### Our Vision

To be at the forefront in achieving innovative, consumer-led approaches to recovery

### Our Key Principles

- Accepting that hearing voices is a valid experience.
- Respecting each person's interpretation and beliefs about their experiences.
- Fostering and enabling safety and wellbeing of all.
- Promoting hope.
- Helping consumers to know that they are not alone.
- Believing in each person's capacity to take control of their experience and recover.
- Encouraging people to come together and feel safe in sharing their experiences and coping strategies.
- Working collaboratively and inclusively with other services to develop knowledge and achieve holistic approaches to recovery.
- Fostering and supporting consumer independence and empowerment.



## About Hearing Voices

### Hearing Voices

Within the Hearing Voices approach the term 'hearing voices' is a short hand expression used to describe a range of sensory experiences which are not always experienced as auditory and are commonly known as 'hallucinations'. They may include visual, feeling, smelling and other sensations. Essentially, 'hearing voices' encompasses any extra ordinary perceptual experiences that are perceived as separate from oneself.

### Who hears voices?

Between 10-25% of the general population hears voices.<sup>1</sup>

People who hear voices are many and varied within the community. Those who become distressed by this experience are often labeled as suffering from a range of conditions from the schizophrenia spectrum. In our modern culture, voice hearing is frequently regarded as an indication of a serious 'mental illness'. However, the commonness of this experience in the general population strongly suggests that this is an incorrect assumption.

Between 55-75% of people hear voices at sometime in their life, often after experiencing a traumatic event.<sup>2</sup>

There are many people who hear voices that are not diagnosed with schizophrenia or any other 'mental illnesses'.<sup>3</sup>

The prevalence of voice-hearing in the general population propelled Romme and Escher's ground-

breaking research towards a new understanding of hearing voices as a natural variation in human experiences; typically, a reaction to unresolved trauma or stress.

### Hearing Voices Network

A Hearing Voices Network is a collection of Hearing Voices Groups and affiliated members (such as service providers, consumers, carers and friends) working toward promoting recovery, acceptance and education about the experience of hearing voices.

### History of the Hearing Voices Approach

In 1987, in Maastricht, Netherlands, Marius Romme, a social psychiatrist and Patsy Hage, a voice hearer, went on Dutch television to speak about voice hearing and asked people who heard voices to contact them.

Following the TV program:

- 750 people responded
- From that group, 450 heard voices
- 300 of those could not cope
- 150 were able to handle them

Research following on from this response led to the establishment of the Resonance Foundation - the first self-help group.

The first Hearing Voices conference was held in Maastricht in 1988, to give professionals an insight into the voice hearing experience. The led to a worldwide movement that works towards raising awareness and supporting those who are distressed by hearing voices.

During 1990 in the UK, a Hearing Voices conference was held in Manchester, brought about by Paul Baker and others who had learned about the Resonance Foundation and the research done in Holland. 13 people attended. Today there are more than 190 voices groups within the UK alone.

Around the world, groups of voice hearers meet and talk, sharing viewpoints and strategies to support each other, telling their stories and exploring ways to work with, rather than against, their voices in order to reclaim control and rebuild their lives.



## A new approach to understanding voice hearing

**The international Hearing Voices movement is a breath of fresh air amid the dominance of a simplistic and pessimistic overemphasis on genes, diagnoses and drugs. The real experts on what it's like to hear voices, and what is useful when this happens, are finally being recognized as having a hugely important contribution to make.**

Dr John Read  
Associate Professor of Psychology, The University of Auckland  
Editor of 'Models of Madness'

Traditionally, psychiatry has regarded the phenomena of voice hearing as a 'delusion', a 'symptom of psychosis' or schizophrenia.<sup>4</sup> In fact, they commonly thought what the voices say and the meaning that this experience has for the person concerned was meaningless.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, talking to someone about the voices they hear was, historically, thought to be ill-advised, and likely to reinforce the 'delusion'.<sup>6</sup> Treatment with medication was, and still is, considered the front line treatment offered for voices by traditionalists, and is likely to be recommended (or legally enforced under the Mental Health Act, 1996) with the aim of eliminating the voice/s.

However, from a voice hearer perspective, this is not as effective as was first hoped. Even whilst on the "newer" atypical antipsychotic drug 'treatments', approximately 50% of people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia still hear voices.<sup>7</sup> Such treatments often produce severe, disabling side (direct) effects which can destroy a person's quality of life.<sup>8</sup> This combination of problems produced a dilemma for both voice hearers and service providers.

The Hearing Voices Movement evolved out of a mental health system that was unhelpful to many. It was seeded via a conversation between two experts—one an expert by profession and another an expert by experience. Professor Marius Romme and voice hearer Patsy Hage were the founders of the movement, and it is through their, and others, courage and action that many thousands of people worldwide have benefited.

Romme and Escher's collaborative research with voice hearers sparked the Hearing Voices Movement by providing new insights that have significantly changed the way the phenomena of voice hearing is understood and responded to today.

Such research has demonstrated that hearing voices is a natural variation of human experience.<sup>9</sup> Current research (Beavan, Read, & Cartright, 2006) supports early studies, that have found that hearing voices is a relatively common human experience that needs to be accepted and supported.

Research shows that there is a relationship between past or recent traumatic, or intensely emotional, events (i.e., accident, divorce, loss of a loved one through death, sexual or physical abuse, love affairs, pregnancy & birth) and the onset of voice hearing for 70% of adults and 85% of children.

According to Martin (2000), Romme & Escher's suggestions for changing entrenched perceptions of voice hearing are, that professionals should attempt:

- To accept the patients experience of voices;
- To try to understand the different language patients use to describe their frame of reference as well as the different language the voices use for communication;
- To consider helping the individual communicate with the voices;
- To stimulate the patient to meet with other people with similar experiences and to read about hearing voices in order to diminish the taboo and isolation.



# Hearing Voices Network Australia

## Background

In July of 2005, the Richmond Fellowship of Western Australia (RFWA) brought Ron Coleman (international speaker, voice hearer & mental health trainer) & Karen Taylor (mental health trainer & psychiatric nurse) to Perth to deliver a series of Recovery workshops.

As a delegate from INTERVOICE (the International Network for Training, Education and Research into Hearing VOICES), Ron Coleman supported and encouraged us to begin a Hearing Voices Network in Australia.

This resulted in RFWA taking the innovative step of auspicing the development of the Hearing Voices Network Australia (HVNA). RFWA has supported the network's setup from day one and remains committed to its ongoing development across the country. RFWA has provided its own funds to enable HVNA's representation at the INTERVOICE Conference 2 years running, both in Scotland & Denmark. In addition, in March 2006 they employed a worker with a consumer background (consumer consultant) as the Director of the Hearing Voices Network Australia. In May 2007, two part-time project workers were also funded for six months to support the project, sponsored by Lotterywest. Throughout 2008 HVNA had two workers, the coordinator and a "personal assistant". The main role throughout 2008 was organizing the *Recovery from Psychosis* Conference, sponsored by Richmond Fellowship WA, as well as the annual INTERVOICE meeting, which was to be held for the first time outside of Europe. INTERVOICE was also sponsored by RFWA as well as Lotterywest. The Conference as well as the INTERVOICE meeting, both held in early November 2008, were hailed as a huge success! Currently, July 2009, the HVNA is back to a one-man team, with some assistance from the RFWA admin staff.

A Hearing Voices Network Development working party made up of local consumers, voice hearers and workers from the statutory & non-government sectors, assisted with the early development.

## Commitment

As a member of INTERVOICE, HVNA has good connections with global Hearing Voices Networks and international leaders in the field. We are committed to bringing quality service and innovative practice to

Australia; seeking to offer support to voice hearers, consumers, family members and mental health workers across Australia who are seeking to utilize a Hearing Voices approach. Ultimately, we hope to evolve into a consumer operated organisation.

## Role

We aim to enable acceptance of hearing voices and promote recovery for people who hear distressing voices (where recovery is defined as living a meaningful life from the perspective of the individual). This will be achieved through support for self-help groups, education and awareness.

HVNA supports a number of Hearing Voices Groups. You can read more about the Groups in another section of this booklet.

HVNA delivers an almost-monthly Hearing Voices Awareness Workshops, which are well attended by consumers, family, friends, and workers. If you are interested in attending one of these workshops, please don't hesitate to email or call us. Public Information Awareness Evenings are also held when the demand for these communicated to us. They prove to very informative, and particularly assist family and friends seek information they need to support their loved ones.

## Our Vision

Is to be at the forefront in achieving innovative, consumer led approaches to recovery.



## Three phases of voice hearing

Research has identified that there are three phases of voice hearing. The following is a summary of these phases, to assist you in making more sense of your experiences.

### The **STARTLING** phase

Voices often start after a traumatic experience or at a time of great suffering. Most voice hearers describe the onset of voices as a startling and anxiety provoking experience; although the level of intensity does vary for different people.

During the starting phase the voices may be hostile and demand a lot of attention, interfering with a person's life and making it hard for them to carry on with their everyday activities and personal relationships.

Alternatively, the voices may be helpful and a person may feel a sense of recognition and identify the voices as an understandable aspect of their internal self. Still, this phase can be confusing and sometimes very frightening; and people need reassurance and possibly some strategies or assistance to cope with their anxiety.

### The **ORGANIZATIONAL** phase

Once a person's initial anxiety and confusion has been reduced it is possible for them to organise the voices and their relationship to them.

In this phase people seek to find meaning and to arrive at some understanding of their experience; and learn to accommodate and cope with the voices in their everyday life. In order for this to occur there needs to be some form of acceptance. The process may take months or years and is often marked by an attempt to actively negotiate with the voices.

Voice hearers often seek ways of controlling or coping with voices by:

- Ignoring them (through distraction);
- Listening to them selectively;
- Entering into willing conversation with them;
- Making specific appointments with them.

Trying to ignore the voices by distraction rarely works, as the effort involved often leads to a severely restricted lifestyle. People may understandably go from an initial feeling of powerlessness to feeling angry towards the voices. All feelings must be supported, so that a person might find their own coping strategies.

Voice hearers report that the most helpful strategy is to select the positive voices and try to understand them by listening and talking to only them. Another useful strategy is to set limits and structure the contact with the voices. However, in order to learn to cope effectively with hearing voices it is important to accept them. Denying them is not helpful. People need to learn to think positively about themselves, their voices and their own problems.

During the organizational phase it may be useful to attend to these issues:

- The possible significance of the voices in terms of a person's current and past experiences;
- The meaning of the voices in a person's everyday life and their family's attitude towards the voices; and
- The particular circumstances under which the voices are heard.

### The **STABILIZATION** phase

In this phase a person has learnt to cope with their voices and has begun to live in balance with them.

The person thinks of the voices as being a part of themselves. The relationship with the voices is more reasonable. The voices become less controlling and the person is re-empowered. The person is able to choose between following the advice of the voices or following their own ideas. The voices have a more positive influence. The person is less anxious about their voices.

Voices vary from being very problematic and undesirable to being thought of as a special ability or gift. Either way many people would not want to stop hearing voices, as they may fulfill a useful psychological function.<sup>10</sup>

### **EDITORS NOTE:**

*People can move through these phases interchangeably. For example, they may have made sense of one voice they are hearing, but then begin to hear a new voice, and they will be back in the Startling Phase for the new voice, but in the Stabilization Phase for their first voice.*

*If you would like some more information on the three phases, please contact us at HVNA.*

The Hearing Voices Network Australia received a substantial grant from the Mental Health Council of Australia to develop its own website as well as a new logo and banner. The new logo can be found on the front cover of this Information Booklet. The banner can be viewed on page 6.

The new website will be launched late August 2009. Please take some time to visit our new website. We'd appreciate some feedback about the website if you have a few minutes spare to let us know what you think of it!

The website address is:

**[www.hvna.net.au](http://www.hvna.net.au)**

*"What the research shows is that the voices exist. We must also accept that we cannot change the voices. They are not curable, just as you cannot cure left handedness or dyslexia, human variations are not open to cure - only to coping. Therefore, to assist people to cope, we should not give therapy that does not work. We should let people decide for themselves what helps or not. It takes time for people to accept that hearing voices is something that belongs to them."*



**Professor Marius Romme  
as cited in Martin (2000)**

Prof Marius Romme

Traditional psychiatric notions of the phenomenon of hearing voices need to be questioned as does the belief that psychiatric drugs are the first resort to cope with voices which are experienced as distressing. There is a meaning in the voices people hear and what they say which is often understandable in the context of someone's life. I think it is important to focus on the social contexts that can give rise to voices (e.g. abuse, powerlessness, racism etc).

Many current approaches to helping people who hear voices focus at an individual level and are based on the idea that people are wrong in their beliefs about their voices. What we need instead is a greater appreciation of the variety of experiences of those who hear voices. Research of the 'normal population' suggests that many more people hear voices than psychiatric textbooks might have us believe. Some people are not distressed by their voices and may not go anywhere near mental health services - they may even regard them as gifts (e.g. Spiritualist mediums). Others may hear voices in the context of an upsetting event in their life (e.g. bereaved people hearing the voice of a deceased loved one). Some may hear a mix of positive and negative voices, whilst others may hear extremely distressing voices.

Instead of a pathologizing approach we need to help people find a better fit between these experiences and the lives they wish to lead. People need a forum where they can consider the best way of understanding their voices that fits for them and learn ways of coping from others with first hand experience of voices. There's also a need to reduce the distress which often comes from a sense of isolation when hearing voices and the self-help groups like those facilitated by the Hearing Voices Network Australia are an excellent meeting of this need.<sup>11</sup>

David Harper, PhD

## Hearing Voices Groups

If you experience any auditory, visual or other sensations (such as feeling, smelling and so on) that others cannot hear, see or experience, then you are in the right place. A voices group may be just for you. The benefits of participating in a Hearing Voices Group are well known within Europe and the UK where the “hearing voices approach” has become mainstream.

Hearing Voices Groups provide peer support and encouragement. There is the recognition that for many people mental health services have not worked. Hearing Voices Groups can be thought of as an addition to existing treatments, yet these groups do not mirror services. Instead, something new is offered which has already improved the lives of thousands of mental health consumers around the globe.

### Benefits of groups

Research into Hearing Voices Groups internationally has documented numerous benefits:

- They offer a safe environment where voice hearers can talk freely about their experience and feel accepted and comfortable;
- Groups encourage active participation and recovery, and may reduce hospitalizations;
- They promote partnerships between voice hearers, service providers and mental health consumers;
- They help people who hear voices to know they are not alone; and
- Groups help people to build confidence and gain mastery over their voices (eradication is not the goal).

### What can I expect?

Typically within a Hearing Voices Group a number of people who share the experience of hearing voices come together to help and support each other, to exchange information, and to learn from one another. Groups are based on the commonsense idea, that ‘a problem shared is a problem halved’. This is based on the principal of peer support.

### Peer support groups

The value of peer support has been heralded as

beneficial for many different groups from cancer recovery to mental ill-health recovery groups. Although the notion of peer support, in a more formal sense, largely arose out of the Alcoholics Anonymous movement in 1935, the idea that people who have faced similar adversity might be of value to each other has been around since antiquity.<sup>12</sup>

Since the inspiration of AA, peer support principles have been adopted by other arenas and disciplines from education to addiction, and more recently in mental health – where mental health consumers are slowly being recognized as a valuable resource to their peers. Specifically, the voices movement is among this group and provides mutual or reciprocal support.

Voice hearers meet each other in a group and have an opportunity to:

- Share experiences with patients and non-patients;
- Explore different ways of managing and coping with voices;
- Access information and resources to learn about the recovery process.

### Hearing Voices groups provide...

- Acceptance and a sense that one is not alone;
- A safe place to talk about visions and voices;
- An opportunity to learn what the voices mean and how to gain control over the experience;
- An opportunity to build stronger social networks and supports; and
- A springboard to step into voluntary and then paid employment.

In voices groups, people are enabled to choose the way they want to manage their experience. For some they will want to sit with their experience, for others they will want to understand it and to learn from it. Voices groups provide access to information and resources so people can make their own choices.

Further, Hearing Voices groups allow people to explore the relationship between their life history and their experience of hearing voices should they want to do so.

“My Hearing Voices group has helped me get my life back, it has been simply amazing to connect with others, who, like me, hear voices. I did not realize how many people feel like me. I now feel less alone and have hope in my future.”

Anonymous

## Hearing Voices Groups

The following are details of the groups currently in operation (as at time of print). Please contact HVNA for further information or updates.

### **BASSEDEAN**

Wednesdays 5:30-7:30pm  
Bassendean Library  
Old Perth Road, Bassendean  
Contact: Jillian Sheppard – 9279 2536

### **QUEENS PARK**

Tuesdays 10:30-11:30am  
Richmond Fellowship WA QP site  
126 Railway Parade, Queens Park  
Contact: Lin or Amanda – 9451 5362  
Note: participants to call prior to attending each group meeting

### **SUBIACO**

Fridays 1-3pm  
June O'Connor Centre, Subiaco  
2 Nicholson Rd, Subiaco  
Contact: Helen – 9381 7175

### **JOONDALUP**

Thursdays 1-3pm  
June O'Connor Centre, Joondalup  
Unit 1 / 20 Mercer Lane, Joondalup  
Contact: Emma – 9301 1131

### **ROCKINGHAM**

June O'Connor Centre, Rockingham  
8 Baralda Court, Rockingham  
Contact: Vicki – 9527 9113

### **BUSSELTON**

Venue and times vary  
Contact: Rod – (08) 9781 1200

### **BUNBURY**

Venue and times vary  
Contact: Trudy – 9722 5900

### **MANDURAH**

Wednesdays 1-3pm  
June O'Connor Centre, Mandurah  
1 France St, MANDURAH  
Contact: Katrina—0437 153 271



### **ACT**

Mental Health Consumer Network  
Contact: Simon.Viereck  
[simon.viereck@work.netspeed.com.au](mailto:simon.viereck@work.netspeed.com.au)  
Ph: 02 6230 5796

### **NEW SOUTH WALES**

Hearing Voices Network—NSW  
Contact: Douglas Holmes  
Ph: 0413 464 469  
[www.hvnsw.org.au](http://www.hvnsw.org.au)  
[douglas.holmes@optusnet.com.au](mailto:douglas.holmes@optusnet.com.au)

### **QUEENSLAND**

Contact: Mary Ranke  
Ph: 0423 208 218  
[maryranke@gmail.com](mailto:maryranke@gmail.com)

### **VICTORIA**

Prahran Mission  
Ph: 03 9692 9500  
[www.prahranmission.org.au](http://www.prahranmission.org.au)

## HVNA group guidelines

### Groups:

- ✓ Accept that voices and visions are real experiences;
- ✓ Accept that people are not any the less for having voices and visions;
- ✓ Respect each member as an expert;
- ✓ Sanction the freedom to talk about anything not just voices and visions;
- ✓ Sanction the freedom to interpret experiences in any way;
- ✓ Sanction the freedom to challenge social norms;
- ✓ Encourage an ethos of self-determination;
- ✓ Value ordinary, non-professionalised language;
- ✓ Are a self-help group and not a clinical group offering treatment;
- ✓ Focus primarily on sharing experiences, support and empathy;
- ✓ Members are not subject to referral, discharge or risk assessment;
- ✓ Members are able to come and go as they want without repercussions;
- ✓ Members are aware of limits to and constraints on confidentiality;
- ✓ Accept people as they are;
- ✓ Make no assumption of illness;
- ✓ Can be a community to which people belong;
- ✓ Work towards upholding equity in the group;
- ✓ Participants decide on the limits to confidentiality not the facilitator;
- ✓ Work out problems collectively;
- ✓ Share responsibility rather than the facilitator solely;
- ✓ Members join for as long as it suits them;
- ✓ Are open to people from other geographical areas;
- ✓ Facilitators are not under clinical pressure to report back to anyone else; and
- ✓ Encourage, support and enable Voice Hearers to take a facilitator or co-facilitator role.<sup>13</sup>

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The overall aim... is to create acceptance that hearing voices is a valid experience for which there are many explanations. By doing this, we aim to erase the stigma of voice hearing, and enable voice hearers to realise their place in a society which knows and understands their plight.

[www.hearingvoicesnetwork.com](http://www.hearingvoicesnetwork.com)

## Positive voice hearing experiences

“...Hearing voices has traditionally been viewed as a negative thing and a symptom of mental health problems, but new research has revealed that not only do 4% of the general population hear voices, but some say that the voices are a positive part of their lives. Research suggests that many people hear voices in their head without suffering from any mental illness. Some people report that their voices offer them encouragement, comfort or inspiration as they go about their lives. Many researchers believe that hearing voices may be part of normal human experience and that everyone is susceptible to hearing voices to differing degrees - for instance, most people have had the experience of hearing someone call their name when in fact nobody is present...”<sup>14</sup>

For me, hearing spirit is a blessing—I am told and shown certain interesting things sometimes, told about things to do, often given advice such as turn off the iron or bring in the washing. Other times, I am given wonderful ideas or taught better ways to do things such as shortcuts on the computer. Often I am woken from my sleep and given information.

I grew up in a spiritual household where it was normal to think about spiritual things and for my mum to be “off in the astral” and so I guess it was a natural progression to open to spirituality—that was about the age of 15, but even so I had to work at hearing spirit. For a long time I practiced channeling techniques and learning to ‘listen’ in a quiet way. Eventually I came to be able to ‘hear’. I was able to hear messages for others, their ‘guides’ or other energies, showed me things about the person. Those messages were always filled with love and positive advice for their emotional healing and journey of recovery.

I never thought of this as ‘hearing voices’, as such, although I have always said “they say”, “spirit said” or “I heard spirit say” - it’s just shows I guess, that I, like so many, knew so little about what ‘hearing voices’ meant and associated ‘hearing voices’ with something ‘bad’. And I had experienced ‘bad’ with dark energies, visions and what I call ‘heard thought’. I’ve had lots of distressing experiences with visions and breakdown, and, on several occasions I have heard external sound and whispers. During these times I was very unwell. I was terrified because I didn’t understand about voices work then. I much prefer the wonderful experiences I have with spirit and seek to learn to bring the positive experiences to the fore when experiencing the distressing times. Since meeting other voice hearers, I now realize that my experiences come under the umbrella of voice hearing and have come to see that I share so many like experiences with others and am not alone.

Linnie Mahboub

# Strategies For Coping

## Hearing Voices

### FOCUSING TECHNIQUES

- Accepting that voices are not 'the' problem, they are a consequence of a problem. Your job is to find out more
- Identify your voices—number, gender, age and so on
- Learn about boundaries to apply to people and your voices (i.e., make a deal with your voices, "be quiet now and I'll listen later")
- Listen out for positive voices too—they can be allies
- Schedule a time to listen to the voices and ask them to leave you alone until that time
- Tell negative voices that you will only talk with them if they are respectful towards you
- Voice dialogue—let a trusted family member, friend or mental health worker talk directly to your voices
- Work through Ron Colman & Mike Smith's "Working with Voices II" workbook with a trusted family member, friend or mental health worker
- Write down what the voices are saying to you

### POSITIVE EMOTIONAL TECHNIQUES

- Go for a picnic
- Listen to energetic music
- Look at good things achieved list
- Look at photo albums
- Look at the list of good things others have said about you
- Make a list of your assets or strengths

- Make an emergency comfort bundle (of goodies)
- Read books, love letters, love poems
- Read joke books, emails, etc
- Say positive statements to self
- Record positive statements on tape (your voice)
- Watch films – comedy or inspirational

### POINTS TO REMEMBER TO ENABLE ME TO LOOK AFTER MYSELF

- Do something nice for 'me' each day
- Eat a healthy diet
- Keep regular appointments with my support network even if I am feeling OKAY
- Look up, get perspective, stretch or shift your body
- Plan my day; ensure I do not have long periods of time with nothing to do
- Reach out. Talk to someone
- Take medication as prescribed (in consultation)
- Think about how I am feeling and be realistic about what I can achieve
- Try to see the grey areas

### EMOTIONAL FOCUSING

- Discuss feelings with another person
- List emotional triggers
- Paint or draw emotions
- Rainy day letter
- Write a diary
- Write poetry or prose regarding feelings

### THINGS THAT MAY HELP VOICE HEARERS TO COPE

- Acupuncture
- Avoiding street drugs
- Chanting or singing
- Distraction e.g. reading, and computer games
- Focusing on the voices
- Going to Hearing Voices Groups
- Having good support around you, good friends, family, nurse, counsellor etc
- Holidays
- Humour
- Identifying when you are most likely to hear the voices
- Ignoring voices
- Isolating yourself
- Keeping a diary about them
- Keeping occupied e.g. cooking, house chores
- Keeping physically active and healthy
- Listening to music
- Massage
- Meditation
- Money
- Positive attitudes
- Praying or speaking to God
- Religion and Healing
- Sex
- Shouting at the voices
- Sleeping
- Staff listening to you
- Talking (to a trusted person)

### WHAT MAY NOT HELP

- Being over-medicated
- Being told not to talk about voices
- Dreams and trying to get to sleep
- Labelling

Our thanks to the Dundee Hearing Voices Network for allowing us to draw on their THINGS THAT HELP VOICE HEARERS TO COPE and WHAT DOES NOT HELP categories.



# With Distressing Voices

## Network Australia



- Lack of sleep
- Not having information
- Other people denying the existence of voices
- Other people denying your explanation of your voices
- Professionals thinking they know more about your voices than you do
- Side effects of the medication
- Thinking negatively
- Being socially isolated

### RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

- Acknowledge fear, worry, and stress and let go consciously. Trust
- Count your breaths
- Dancing or walking
- Focus on the position of your body
- Focus solely on breathing, breathe deeply
- Give yourself permission to relax
- Guided fantasy dreamtime
- Learn (figure 8) Yoga breath
- Listen to guided relaxation on tape
- Listen to relaxing music
- Massage hands, feet, head, etc
- Relax each muscle individually
- Swimming or floating
- Yoga

### THINGS THAT MAY WORK FOR ME IN A CRISIS

- Ask for help sooner not later
- Create a personalised crises plan when you are feeling well
- Cry
- Find a safe place
- Have PRN medication
- Kick boxes around outside
- Let people know where I am

- Let someone know how I am feeling
- Plan safety
- Remember that situations and feelings frequently change-"This too shall pass" (King Solomon)
- Rest on my bed
- Shout into my pillow
- Try to identify how I am feeling

### COMFORTING TECHNIQUES

- Buy or pick fresh flowers
- Change the sheets on your bed
- Cuddle up to a teddy
- Eat a favourite food in moderation
- Have a bubble bath
- Have a soothing drink
- Hold a safe comforting object
- Find a safe space
- Hug someone
- Listen to soothing or favourite music
- Prayer, meditation, creative visualization
- Put lights or the radio on (to sleep)
- Sing favourite songs
- Sit in a safe place
- Soak your feet
- Spray room fragrance
- Stroke or brush your pet or someone else's
- Use perfume or hand cream
- Take a warm bath
- Use pot pourri and essential oils
- Wear comfortable clothes
- Write a diary or talk about how you feel with another person
- Zen seeing (with a friend)

### GENERAL IDEAS

- Don't beat yourself up, we all make mistakes
- List achievements
- Make a contract with your voices
- Positive self talk
- Self forgiveness (find yourself innocent)
- Talk to the voices, find out how they feel
- Wear one ear plug

### DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES

- Cinema
- Clean or tidy things up
- Do puzzles or develop a hobby
- Exercise – walking, running, dance, beach
- Gardening or striking pot plants
- Listening to CDs or mp3 player
- Paint or draw pictures, posters, cards
- Playing games, cards, computer
- Reading out aloud or hum a tune to yourself
- Sewing, knitting, collecting
- Shopping
- Sports
- Telephone a friend
- Use visual imagery or count to yourself when trying to get to sleep
- Visit a friend
- Walk in shallow water
- Washing
- Watch TV or a DVD
- Write letters

**\*NOTE: Distraction techniques are useful when voices are particularly distressing or intrusive but are not recommended as an on-going coping technique.**

Special thanks to Maria & Audrey for sharing their personal collection of strategies and thanks also to the members of the Hearing Voices Network Australia for their contributions. Please respect the collective minds of Voice Hearers – any replication from this document must acknowledge its source (s).

## Silencing My Voices Forever

By creating lists of feel-proud achievements and turning the contents of the lists into feel-proud stories ... and then telling myself these stories all day for three weeks [that is, very solidly engaging in disciplined all day every day continuous good self-talk] enabled me to silence my voices forever!

For those persons who [akin me] want to rid themselves of their voices, this article is not a statement about 'how to do it', rather: it contains ideas to 'make your own' and make 'work for you' and so enable you to silence that damned reviled uninvited intrusion in your life.

### My Voices

After a very personal and completely devastating dressing down delivered to me at the age of 14 years by my Headmaster, I began hearing my voices. Within days, I had located them as coming from inside my head. They spoke to me every day, and they spoke to me all day! – for the next 43 years! My voices were actually three voices, usually speaking in unison. But at times, I could hear each separately - shouting and laughing and scorning and ridiculing and degrading me.

For the first 20 years of my voices' existence, they very graphically and repeatedly told me that I was an animal, a worm, and a lump of s\*\*t. For example: "You are worth only to be flushed away down a lonely deserted street's drain and into the sewerage pipes deep beneath the city – then to disappear forever into the bowels of the earth and never to be heard of again! Ha! Ha! Ha! You are nothing but refuse which no one wants to have anything to do with! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

My voice's favorite trick, whilst I was talking to other people, was to shout and laugh so loudly that I could not hear what others were saying... which led to many embarrassing moments in my conversations with many, many people over the years.

It was not till I was 34 years old, that I managed to convince my voices to change what they had been saying to me. As a consequence, over the next 23 years, instead of telling me I was an animal and worm

and lump of shit, my voices continuously reminded me of my ineptitudes, embarrassments, stupidities and sins. They continued to laugh and ridicule me as I was conversing with others, plus use their favorite trick of drowning out other's talk.

### My Feel-Proud Lists

Throughout my 43 years of efforts to prove to my voices that they were wrong in what they had been saying to me and about me, I would from time to time create Feel-Proud lists and spend periods of time reading and recalling the things I'd done of which I was proud. In other words, I spent varying periods of time, whilst alone, in continuous good self-talk. This activity always made me feel good... Very, very good!

It was, sometimes, very difficult to create a list – simply because I didn't feel positive about myself and felt I didn't deserve positive self-recognition. Sometimes, feeling so low, it would take me months of perseverance ... till finally I forced myself to create a list ...

and was always rewarded for so doing.

I constructed my Feel-Proud lists in the following way; I would always begin with a heading that determined which activities and achievements I would include in the list. My headings were always whatever took my fancy, and included: work, sport, creative, friendship, cooking, good deeds, kind acts, making others laugh, just to name a few.

Most lists usually began after I'd done something of which I was proud, and so the items on any list would start with recent achievements. After all recent activities had been recalled, I'd then go further back in my life and make a more extensive list.

Items were included in my Feel-Proud lists purely because I felt proud of that which I had done. Any thoughts I had about how others might scoff or discount an achievement were squashed, and this included my voice's comments. This was my list and it detailed the things I'd done of which I was proud!

Sometimes, in thinking back, I could not recall anything for a period in my life. To overcome this memory block,

**Using feel-proud stories as the basis for all day, continuous good self-talk, enabled me to silence my voices forever!**

I would daily carry a small notebook and pencil. Throughout the ensuing days, I would remind myself that I wanted to recall my achievements when I was this-age or at this-suburb or country, etc. After a number of days, right in the middle of doing something unrelated, a memory would occur to me, and I'd quickly write it down. Using this method over weeks and months, I came to recall many achievements and experiences I'd forgotten about.

As I was making lists, I'd always spend time every day (anywhere from 1 to 4 hours) recalling and recounting and luxuriating in my Feel-Proud achievements and memories. I'd go through the list, over and over again – feeling really good about myself. Over the years, I increasingly imagined my telling my list to my friends ... and so over the years, my recounting of lists developed into private 'telling my friends stories', which became the format, for me, for continuous good self-talk.

One golden rule I needed to abide by during these good self-talk sessions was: I never told anyone about the list, any items on a list, nor that I was spending time alone using them as a basis for continuous good self-talk. I did this because I feared I would become boastful and egotistical and obnoxious and turn people away from me. To turn people away from me would have given my voices very hurtful ammunition to fire at my ever-hard-fought-for self-esteem. The attitude I developed was: if I wanted to create these lists and spend hours telling them to myself and feeling very good, it was solely my business - and it was no-one else's business – and so I 'kept mum' about what I was doing.

### Continuous Good Self-Talk

One day, at the age of 57 years, as I was creating a Feel-Proud list and spending 2 to 4 hours each afternoon telling my stories to myself, I suddenly realised I hadn't heard my voices whilst doing so. One second later, one of my voices spoke and said in a commanding voice to me: "Hey! You! I've got something to say to you!" I instantly responded with anger and replied: "Shut Up! I'm busy! Go away and come back

later!" I immediately returned to telling myself my good self-talk stories. The voices obeyed! I began thinking about that fact!

Over the next few days, it dawned on me that I did have a way of controlling my voices. I realised that by engaging in continuous good self-talk I could silence them. This discovery began an exciting and promising momentum inside me. Within days I began wondering what would happen if I told myself my Feel-Proud stories all day and every day. I wondered ... if I could silence my voices for 2 to 4 hours by telling myself my Feel-Proud stories, what would my voices do if I engaged in continuous good self-talk all day and every day ... in exact opposition to their all day and every day bad self-talk?

Tremendous excitement began welling up inside me! I began experimenting and practicing! Whilst going about my business for the day, I would tell myself my Feel-Proud stories, initially for 2 hours at a time, then building to 4 hours a day. I developed the skill of doing the two things together [business for the day + continuous good self-talk stories] ... learning the limitations & impediments and dangers to watch out for whilst doing both activities at the same time.

**Examples:** [1] Servicing my car and continuing good-self talk simply involved quickly alternating between both activities. [2] However, driving my car and engaging in continuous good self-talk was dangerous, and I nearly had two collisions before I realised I needed to give my driving more attention than my stories. I then very quickly learnt to

keep my driving as foreground in my mind and my, often emotional, good self-talk as the background—like my car radio! [3] I had to work out how to conduct my everyday business and have conversations whilst engaging in continuous good self-talk. For me, it became obvious that to successfully do both, I had to reduce my talking to people, and yet work out how to do this without disadvantage to myself!

During these practice periods, I always listened for and then noted that my voices never spoke and so I strongly

**If I wanted to create these lists and spend hours telling them to myself and feeling very good, it was solely my business - no-one else's...**

suspected that I had the key to silencing them forever. It took eighteen days of continuous good self-talking all day and every day! I awoke on the nineteenth morning and immediately started telling myself my Feel-Proud stories. After a minute or two I heard a very funny noise in my head and asked: “What is happening?” One of my own-voices told me: “Your voices have realised you are no longer welcoming them and they are leaving. They are very angry and the noise you hear is them smashing up things before they leave!” I excitedly returned to my Feel-Proud stories. Two hours later, I ceased my story-telling so that I could hear my voices. I noted that their volume had diminished somewhat—they were indeed slowly disappearing from my hearing. I calculated that by around 4pm that afternoon their volume would be zero! I rechecked my calculation two hours later by listening to them again – and decided that indeed by 4pm I could make a pronouncement regarding their eagerly sought-after death.

I waited till 5pm before I ceased my Feel-Proud stories and then listened for my voices. I heard nothing! NOTHING! NOTHING! IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN 43 YEARS!! For the next 4 hours, I walked around my house alternatively laughing and crying! While it had taken me 43 years, I had finally achieved the promise I’d made to myself as a 14 year old! I had silenced my voices! I had won! This was and will always be the greatest day of my whole life! And during that evening, I warned my voices that if they ever attempted to make a re-appearance, I’d simply do again. For the next three days, to reinforce that

resolve, I kept telling myself my Feel-Proud stories for a few hours each morning after waking.

On four occasions over the next six months, my voices attempted to return – but I immediately warned them of their folly and began my all day Feel-Proud stories. They were instantly crushed ... silenced!

My life changed in many positive and subtle ways [not appropriate to detail here] after the silencing of my voices!

### Postscript

*The voices we hear arise in each of us from different experiences and for different reasons, and the voices we hear say different things to us, at different times, with different intensities, therefore our voices have very different implications and meanings in each our lives. This article is simply an ideas statement which I hope helps you deal more comfortably with your voices.*

*I simply wonder whether the method I used to rid myself of my voices could be used to counter or lessen other continuous negative experiences? In other words, could disciplined all day every day, continuous good self-talk, be strategically used to advantage with an assortment of personal discomforts?*

I hope you get some good ideas and I wish you all the best in your endeavors!

John McEwen  
[endvoice@chariot.net.au](mailto:endvoice@chariot.net.au)



*“Indeed, if every inspiration that comes to one with such commanding urgency that it is heard as a voice is to be condemned out of hand by the learned qualification of a morbid symptom ... who would not rather stand with Joan of Arc and Socrates on the side of the mad than with the faculty of the Sorbonne on that of the sane...”*

*Johan Huizinga, “Bernard Shaw’s Saint”*

## The soldier and the advocate

The soldier and the advocate  
 Took a walk one night  
 Stood on the edge of reason  
 And began a desperate fight  
 The soldier told the advocate  
 The cuts within his flesh  
 Were from his frontline duty  
 When as a trench man he was fresh

The advocate then asked him  
 “But don’t you hold the knife  
 And when marching with your enemy  
 Carve away your own sweet life?”  
 “Well yes!” declared the soldier  
 “But our battle lingers on  
 And when the pain starts screaming  
 One cut and all is gone”

The advocate could not believe  
 How this could be the plan  
 To beat the opposition  
 That fought inside this man  
 He knew that fighting demons  
 Was a bitter bloody sight  
 But while they held the battle plans  
 They would always win the fight

So he asked the soldier bluntly  
 To face his demons one by one  
 And to find the strength to tell them  
 “This battle will soon be won”

The soldier wailed at the advocate  
 As he hung his head to cry  
 “If I talk with them again you fool  
 Then surely I will die”  
 “Trust me” sobbed the advocate  
 “For I have demons too  
 But together through these trenches  
 We can do what we must do”

That night went on for ever  
 A slog through winters snow  
 But the soldier and the advocate  
 Knew where they had to go  
 The battle was so fierce  
 As the demon snipers raged  
 Sweat and blood and flesh were shed  
 But the enemy soon caved

Now if you listen closely  
 At Devil’s Point each night  
 You will hear the demons sleeping  
 Exhausted from the fight  
 So the story ends with peace  
 On this battlefield of life  
 Where the demons took their leave  
 And the soldier dropped his knife

And the moral of the story  
 Is pure and sweet and true  
 If you face your demons one by one  
 Then peace will reign for you<sup>15</sup>

## INTERVOICE 2008

Lyn Mahboub, the main organizer of the event, commenced by welcoming all international and national guests to “our country”, explaining on behalf of the traditional land owners the history of the land we were meeting on. A welcoming word was spoken by Ron Coleman, the HVNA patron, and Professor Marius Romme introduced the overarching theme of INTERVOICE 2008, namely “Voices and Emotions”.

Five speakers then formed part of a keynote presentation, telling their personal stories of how they dealt with their voices and the emotions it brings up for them. It was very enlightening to listen to Amanda Olsen, Marlene Janssen, Jacqui Dillon, Jeanette Woolhuis and Debra Lampshire. It’s interesting to note that although they live in different parts of the globe, experiences as a result of hearing voices can be very similar. Voices and emotions are definitely not limited or restricted by immigration, and there is no barrier between the experiences of living in a different country.. From morning tea till afternoon tea, discussion groups were organized, where the different delegates discussed all kinds of topics and issues related to the experience of hearing voices.

Marlene Janssen was the chair of the second day, and she welcomed all back, expressing thanks to all those involved with organizing the dinner the night before. Then it was on to discussion groups, which included the following topics:

- Existential anxiety
- How do professionals encourage instead of hinder consumers’ recovery and self help?
- Advance directives—the ability to choose treatment BEFORE becoming ill
- Violence, danger & voices—media, judicial & public perceptions of hearing voices
- How could you lessen the feelings of paranoia?

- Working with voices approach—drug induced psychosis & dose
- How to set up a voice hearers group without it being voice hearer led. Further, how to get to that point where it’s voice hearer led.

The afternoon was mainly spent on listening to the reports from the various international Hearing Voices Networks, including the following countries: Denmark, UK, Scotland, Germany, Holland, Italy, Japan, Palestine, New Zealand, and of course, Australia. As the reports were being presented, a slide-show with all the photos taken throughout the past 2.5 days was shown. We were also treated to a slide-show of what life is like in Palestine, and it increased our awareness and realization of how difficult it is in Palestine to work with those who have a mental illness.

Lyn and Marlene, as well as William Harbeck, Theresa Hewlett and Amanda Olsen from the Australian HVN, took this opportunity to start a new tradition. In the fashion of “handing over the baton”, the Dutch contingent was asked to come to the front to receive a hand-made Australian Quilt (made and donated by Margaret Harbeck), which was to signify that we’ve finished our job in Australia, and it’s now over to the Dutch HVN to take over organisation for the next meeting. David sang his final song, accompanying himself with both guitar and didgeridoo.

INTERVOICE 2008 closed off by everyone standing in two circles, one within the other, and facing each other. As we rotated, one circle to the left and the other to the right, we had the opportunity to say “goodbye, and till we meet again” to all participants face to face.

All in all – a very successful INTERVOICE 2008 meeting!! <sup>16</sup>

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

*Margaret Mead*

# Memories of INTERVOICE 2008



## Stepping Stones To Recovery

By: Ron Coleman

Any journey has a beginning, and for me it was my meeting with Lindsay Cooke, my support worker. It was her who encouraged me to go to the hearing voices self-help group in Manchester at the start of 1991. It was she, not me, who believed that a self-help group would benefit me. It was she who saw beneath my madness and into my potential, it was her faith in me that kick started my recovery and it is to her that I owe an enormous debt.

There are other essential requirements for a journey to be successful; one of these is the ability to be able to navigate to your desired destination. In this I was fortunate not to have one navigator but many.

### Navigators

In this section I will mention only five of them. The first is *Anne Walton*, a fellow voice hearer who at my very first hearing voices group asked me if I heard voices, and when I replied that I did, told me that they were real. It does not sound much but that one sentence has been a compass for me, showing me the direction I needed to travel and underpinning my belief in the recovery process.

The second is *Mike Grierson*. Mike was the person who navigated me through my first contact both with my voices and with society. He encouraged me to go out and socialize with people who had nothing to do with the psychiatric system. He also took me to places like the cinema and classical concerts which reawakened my love for the arts. Mike was not only my social navigator, he was also one of the people who helped me to focus on my voices in a way that allowed me to explore my experience.

The third and fourth are *Terry McLaughlin* and *Julie Downs*. Terry and Julie were my navigators back to normality, they rekindled my interest in politics and took me into their family without reservation. It was with Terry that I developed much of my early thinking around training and mental health. Now with Julie as a co-worker I am continuing to develop training packages,

which we use to explore the world of mental health.

My fifth person is *Paul Baker*, another of my navigators on the road to recovery. Paul, who brought the hearing voices network to the United Kingdom, encouraged me to become involved in the network, then when the time was right handed over the development of voices groups to me. To all of my navigators; Anne, Mike, Terry, Julie and Paul I owe my sanity.

**Choice is the mortar  
that holds the bricks  
together**

### Mapmakers

Navigators require a map or a plan from which to navigate, and I have been fortunate, for the people who were my mapmakers were; *Patsy Hage*, *Marius Romme* and *Sandra Escher*. I do not believe that these three people fully understand what they have done. Little did Patsy know when she read the book by Julian Jaynes that the questions this would make her ask were going to affect so many people, indeed it is because of her questions that the Hearing Voices Network and resonance and other networks throughout the world exist today. Whether she wants it or not she has a premier place in the history of the hearing voices movement.

Sandra Escher is without doubt the person who made sure that ordinary people could understand the maps that were being made. Her ability to put across the message in language that is accessible to everyone has meant that the group's work has not remained in the world of academia but has been used by voice hearers from the very beginning. Sandra and Patsy have played a very important part in my recovery.

The final map maker is *Marius Romme*, who in his own words, is a traditional psychiatrist is without doubt one of the greatest map makers who it has been my good fortune to know. When he listened to Patsy Hage and explored what she was saying it was then, in my opinion, he stopped being a traditional psychiatrist. When he asserted in public for the first time that hearing voices was a normal experience and that voice hearing was not to be feared he stopped being a traditional psychiatrist.

**...recovery can not and does not happen in isolation...**



When he continued his work despite being ridiculed and criticized by his peers, he stopped being a traditional psychiatrist, and in my opinion, became a great psychiatrist. To Patsy, Sandra and Marius I only owe one thing and that is my life.

Up to this point I have mentioned nine people who have been participants in one way or another in my recovery journey and therein lies the first stepping-stone to recovery - people.

### People

If I were to name all the people who have played a part in my recovery the list would be massive. The other thing about this list would be the fact that the majority on it would not be professionals. One of my fundamental beliefs about recovery is the premise that recovery cannot and does not happen in isolation. Nor can it happen if all our relationships are based on a professional and client interaction. Recovery is by definition wholeness and no one can be whole if they are isolated from the society in which they live and work.

For many years I had argued that there is no such thing as mental illness and this has led me into some interesting debates with people over the last few years. One of these debates was with Marius Romme, during this discussion it became clear that Marius was not arguing a case for biological illness, what he in fact was saying was that illness could be expressed as a person's inability to function in society. This I can accept as it means that recovery is no longer a gift from doctors but the responsibility of us all.

This raises the question of whether society is prepared to take any kind of responsibility for the recovery of people with mental health problems. I am of the opinion that they will not, for in our sophisticated culture we too have bought into the notion of a biological explanation for mental health. I suppose that my expectations of society might appear to be too high, but that must be seen in the context of those societies that do accept responsibility for those amongst them who become "mad".

For example, in the Aboriginal culture when someone goes mad, the whole tribe comes together to discuss

what the tribe has done to cause the person to be mad. Can you imagine this happening in our cultures? I think not. When someone goes mad in our culture it is off to hospital with them. It is not a gathering of the local community that gets together to decide what is wrong with the community. It is a ward round made up of so-called experts who get together often without the person concerned being present who decide both what is wrong with the client and how it will be treated. This scenario, alas all too familiar, does not hold out much chance of recovery for the client. It is an impersonal rather than a person-centered way of approaching the problem. Within this scenario recovery is objective not subjective and the person is no longer a real factor in the process.

### Self

If people are the building bricks of recovery then the cornerstone must be self. I believe without reservation that the biggest hurdle we face on our journey to recovery is ourselves. Recovery requires; self-confidence, self-esteem, self-awareness and self-acceptance and without these recovery is not just impossible, it is not worth it.

We must become confident in our own abilities to change our lives; we must give up being reliant on others doing everything for us. We need to start doing these things for ourselves. We must have the confidence to give up being ill so that we can start being recovered. We must work at raising our self esteem by becoming citizens within our own communities, despite our communities, if need be. We are valued members of our societies and we must recognize our value.

We need to recognize our own faults, as the system may have created our diagnoses, but often it is ourselves who reinforce it. We need to be aware of our learned behaviour, this should be part of our old lives. We need to change those behaviours that still trap us in our roles as patients. We need to accept and be proud of who and what we are, I can honestly say my name is Ron Coleman and I am psychotic and proud. This is not a flippant statement, this is a statement of fact.

I am convinced that when we grow confident about who and what we are; we can then be confident about who

**If people are the building bricks of recovery then the cornerstone must be self.**

and what we might become. For me these four selves; self-confidence, self-esteem, self-awareness and self-acceptance are the second stepping-stone on the road to recovery.

### Choice

The third step is closely related to the second and it is rooted in our own status. I believe that we ourselves have a great deal of say in our own status. We can choose to remain victims of the system, we can choose to continue to feel sorry for ourselves, we can choose to remain the poor little ill person who requires twenty-four hour care from professionals. On the other-hand we can choose a different direction, we can choose to stop being victims and become victors, we can choose to stop feeling sorry for ourselves and start living again, we can choose to stop being the poor little ill person and start the journey of recovery. This for me is the third stepping stone... choice.

When we thought of ourselves as ill it was easy to let others make our choices. The recovery road however demands that we not only make our own choices but that we take responsibility for all our choices good and bad. As we make choices we will make mistakes, we must learn to see the difference between making a mistake and having a relapse. For it is the easy option to go running back to the psychiatric system when we make mistakes. Rather than face our own weaknesses we fall into the trap of blaming our biology rather than our humanity. If people are the building blocks of recovery and self is the cornerstone then choice is the mortar that holds the bricks together.

### Ownership

There is one other stepping stone in the recovery process and that is ownership. Ownership is the key to recovery, we must learn to own our experiences whatever they are.

Doctors cannot own our experiences, psychologists cannot own our experiences, nurses, social workers support workers, occupational therapists, psychotherapists, carers, and friends. Even our lovers cannot own our experiences. We must own our experiences. For it is only through owning the experience of madness can we own the recovery from madness.

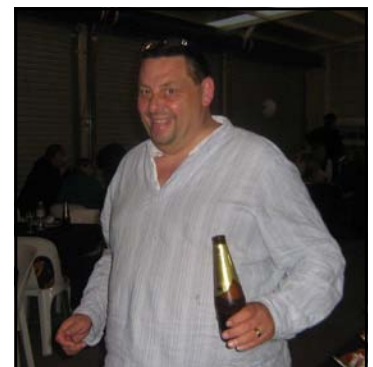
The journey through madness is essentially an individual one, we can only share part of that journey with others,

most of the journey is ours and ours alone. It is within ourselves that we will find the tools, strength and skills that we require to complete this journey for it is within ourselves that the journey itself takes place.

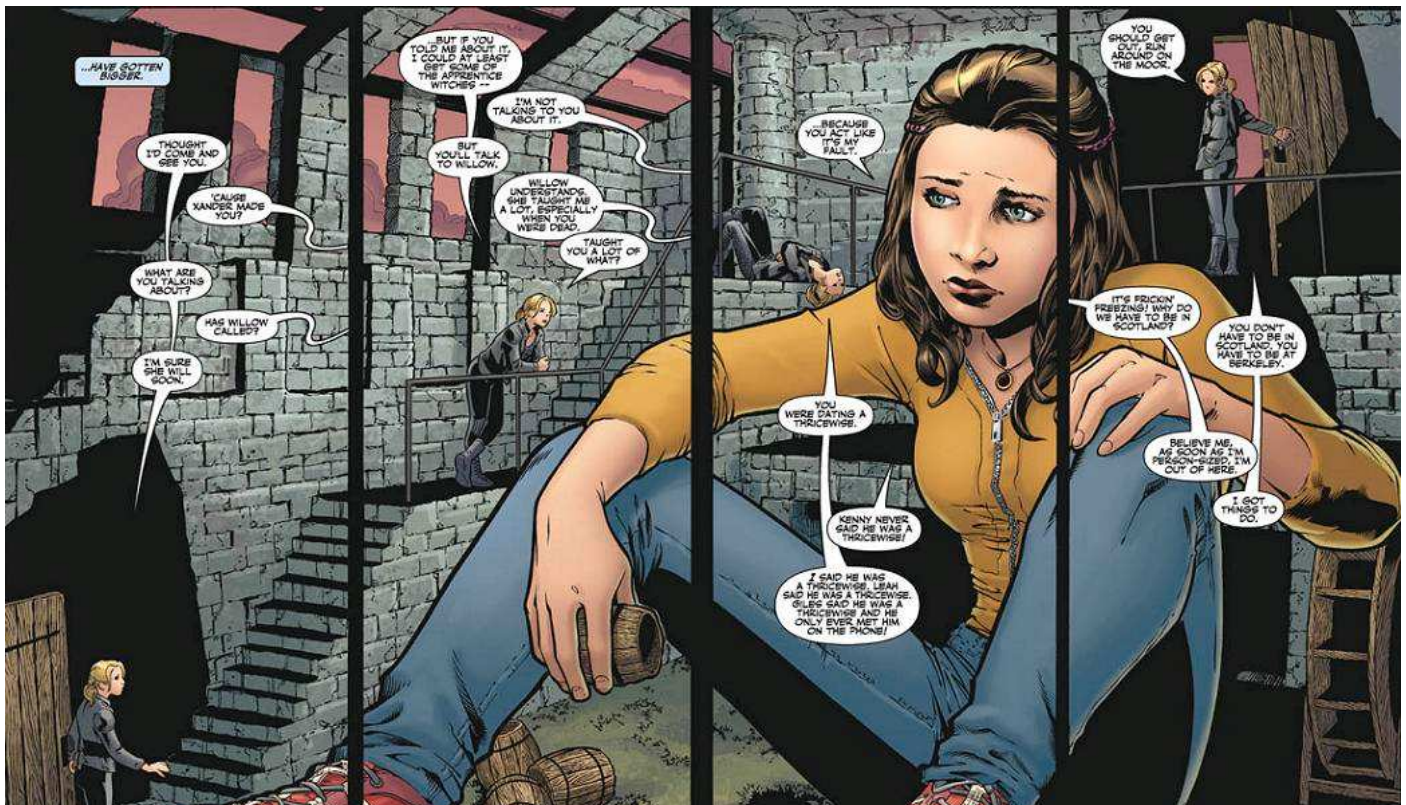
Recovery has become an alien concept, yet nothing I have talked about so far is based on rocket science, rather it is based on common sense. It is not anything new, it is merely a reiteration of a holistic view of life. We need to realise that sometimes we, all make things much more difficult than they need to be. It is almost as if we need life to be a rocket science that we can never understand. We seem to spend much of our time making the complexities of living even more complex through our appliance of scientific objectivity rather than exploring our lives through the simple mechanism of personal subjectivity. The time has come to have a close encounter with an alien concept - it is time for recovery.

Recovery is on the agenda, not clinical, or social recovery but personal recovery. The responsibility for recovery lies with us all, professionals, users and carers, we can only achieve it by working together, we can only achieve it by talking and listening to each other. We can only achieve it through shifting the paradigm from one of biological reductionism to one of societal and personal development.

The work of Romme and Escher has started this paradigm shift, it is up to all of us to continue this work until the shift has been made. Until we succeed, people will still be locked away from society because they hear voices or see visions or have different beliefs. Until we succeed, people will still be treated against their will. Until we succeed, society will still fear madness. Until we succeed, civilization will remain uncivilized. Recovery is our common goal, it is achievable now, let us not lose the moment let us work together to make it happen.



Ron is an independent consultant and trainer. He has been involved in work to promote recovery for many years and has written extensively on the subject. He was heavily involved in developing the first Hearing Voices Networks in the UK.



## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

I have been hearing voices for as long as I can remember. Some days are better than others and I can deal with them fine, but some days there are three of them all at the one time – they shout and they abuse me. Sometimes I have to shout at them to stop, to try and control them. This is difficult though if I am walking down the street or at the shopping centre. People will stop and stare and sometimes people shout in my face that I'm a nutter.

I go to a group and they told me about the idea of carrying an old mobile phone around. **Now if the voices are getting too much – I take out my phone and I talk or shout into it.**

It's funny cause I don't get any hassle now – it must make me seem like everyone else.

## Richmond Fellowship Western Australia

*Recovery First*



Richmond Fellowship of WA (RFWA), is a non-government organisation that was established in Britain 1959, on the principle that recovery from mental illness is significantly enhanced when a person is living in a supportive community setting. The organisation was introduced to Western Australian in 1975 and its comprehensive program works to integrate key elements of recovery with accommodation and support services. The program involves such things as personal recovery planning, mutual self-help groups and counseling to enable individuals in their recovery journey.

Joe Calleja, CEO of Richmond Fellowship WA, recently stated in a press release:

*“Mental illness is often perceived as a permanent and incurable disease. This perception is incorrect and contributes to a person’s sense of helplessness. People can and do recover from mental illness and go on to lead rewarding and productive lives.”*

Although various forms of mental illness are categorized (diagnosed) for treatment convenience, such ‘labels’ do not accurately define individual conditions and can be misleading. “We sincerely believe that a mental illness diagnosis does not mean the end of the road, but the starting point to recovery. With an understanding of the recovery approach and action on one’s recovery journey, mental wellness can be achieved and people can return to a normal life<sup>1</sup>” (Joe Calleja).

### Recovery Principles

The following principles are representative of the dimensions and characteristics of the recovery process:

- Recovery is based in the fact that people can and do recover from mental illness;
- Recovery is born out of hope;
- Recovery is a journey defined by the individual;
- Recovery needs a supportive environment to

thrive;

- Recovery is an active and ongoing process;
- Recovery is a non-linear journey;
- Recovery skills can be learnt;
- Recovery involves a person educating themselves about their illness; and
- Recovery involves dealing with both internalized and external stigma and discrimination.

### Recovery Assumptions

Recovery is based on a range of beliefs that are then used as the basis for recovery initiatives:

- People with severe mental distress can live in the community with the minimal use of inpatient services;
- People with severe distress can be helped to function more successfully in the community by means of skill and support development interventions;
- A psychiatric diagnosis does not correlate with successful community living;
- It takes time for interventions to have an effect on people with mental distress; and
- The helping relationship is one of the most potent factors in effective outcomes.

Most of the recovery literature of people who have recovered from mental illness tends to favor the psychosocial approach in both helping to understand causation and ways of working with and moving the person forward.

Moving away from a medicalized paradigm of mental illness is essential if we are to promote real recovery.

A change in understanding of what mental illness really is; is necessary for both the person with the designation, and those working with them.

For more information on Richmond Fellowship WA , contact:  
Joe Calleja—CEO  
joe.calleja@rfwa.org.au

## Recovery: it's about...

### Expecting, Connecting, Respecting, Accepting

Inspiration, Perspiration & Passion

Acting with Integrity

Taking responsibility

Allowing ownership

Celebrating Diversity

Equality & Democracy

Rediscovering Life Dreams

Searching for Meaning

Challenging, Risking, Stretching & Growing

Caring, Allowing & Letting Go

Looking at the Big Picture

Radiating Compassion & Hope

Communicating & Allowing Silence

Balance, Believe, Be Bold

Think Deeply, Act Compassionately,

Connect Wholeheartedly

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Sidgewick et al., 1894; Tien, 1991; Posey & Losch, 1983
- <sup>2</sup> Leudar & Tomas, 2000; Millham & Easton, 1998
- <sup>3</sup> Posey & Losch, 1983; Barrett & Etheridge, 1992; Tien, 199; Honig et al., 1998; Eaton, Romanoski, Anthony, & Nestadt, 1991; Romme & Pennings, 1994
- <sup>4</sup> Berrios, 1991; Jaspers, 1962
- <sup>5</sup> Leudar & Thomas, 2000
- <sup>6</sup> Leudar & Thomas, 2000
- <sup>7</sup> Coleman, 2006
- <sup>8</sup> Breggin & Cohen, 1999
- <sup>9</sup> Romme and Escher, 1993
- <sup>10</sup> William James, 1902, as cited in Fulford, 1997
- <sup>11</sup> Author of: Delusions and Discourse: Moving Beyond the Constraints of the Modernist Paradigm. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* - Volume 11, Number 1, March 2004, pp. 55-64
- <sup>12</sup> Davidson, Chinman, Sells and Rowe, 2006
- <sup>13</sup> Our thanks to the UK Hearing Voices Network, Manchester, for permission to utilize their guidelines as a basis for our own (which are constantly growing and changing.) Although our groups prefer to work in a non-clinical setting, we do support those in clinical settings who would like to offer voices work to voice hearers.
- <sup>14</sup> BBC Manchester, Science and Nature, *Listening to the voices*, 2006
- <sup>15</sup> Tig Davies © 2006. Recovery Trainer, Published Poet, Singer Songwriter and Consumer, Glasgow, Scotland
- <sup>16</sup> Taken from the HVNA newsletter—publication No. 5

## Related Links

The following links may be of interest to you. Jump online and have a look!

### **Australian networks and supporting agencies:**

[www.rfwa.org.au](http://www.rfwa.org.au)  
[www.hvna.net.au](http://www.hvna.net.au)  
[www.prahranmission.org.au](http://www.prahranmission.org.au)  
[www.joc.com.au](http://www.joc.com.au)  
[www.hvnsw.org.au](http://www.hvnsw.org.au)

### **International networks and supporting agencies:**

[www.intervoiceonline.org](http://www.intervoiceonline.org)  
[www.hearingvoicesnetwork.co.uk](http://www.hearingvoicesnetwork.co.uk)  
[www.workingto\\_recovery.co.uk](http://www.workingto_recovery.co.uk)  
[www.hvn-usa.org](http://www.hvn-usa.org)  
[www.hearing-voices.net](http://www.hearing-voices.net)  
[www.hearing-voices.org](http://www.hearing-voices.org)  
[www.keepwell.com.au](http://www.keepwell.com.au)

### **Other:**

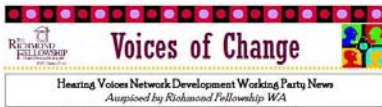
[www.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.health.wa.gov.au)  
[www.copmi.net.au](http://www.copmi.net.au)  
[www.waamh.org.au](http://www.waamh.org.au)  
[www.mifwa.org.au](http://www.mifwa.org.au)  
[www.breggin.com](http://www.breggin.com)  
[www.isst-d.org](http://www.isst-d.org)  
[www.rufusmay.com](http://www.rufusmay.com)

### **Emails:**

[comhwa\\_inc@yahoo.com.au](mailto:comhwa_inc@yahoo.com.au)  
[info@workingto\\_recovery.co.uk](mailto:info@workingto_recovery.co.uk)



# HVNA Publications Available



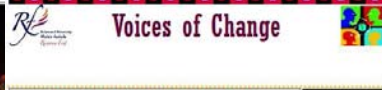
**Hearing Voices Group for Perth WA:**  
Ron Coleman visit inspires

On July 20th Richmond Fellowship WA brought together a group of workshopers to attend a meeting with Ron Coleman in Perth.

Ron and his wife Karen Taylor (a professional) shared a range of workshopers' experiences and insights into the hearing voice experience. Both Ron and Karen have an international reputation as speakers and authors. Their approach to Mental Health services provides an alternative to the current model, working to integrate recovery processes and practices into mental health services globally.

The workshops held in Perth were extremely well attended by workshopers, carers and service providers alike, giving the way for future partnerships.

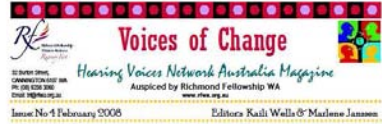
While in Perth, Ron suggested the Hearing Voices Group could be set up in WA. Richmond Fellowship WA Development of Hearing Voices



**Australia Represented at Worldwide Hearing Voices Network**

Issue No. 2  
July 2006

The 20th meeting of the Hearing Voices Network, which was held in Perth, Australia. HVNA will support a representative group of workshopers to attend the meeting. The group will be led by Marlene Janssen, HVNA Coordinator. The group will be supported by Richmond Fellowship WA. The group will be supported by Richmond Fellowship WA. The group will be supported by Richmond Fellowship WA.



**Voices of Change**  
Hearing Voices Network Australia Magazine  
Inspired by Richmond Fellowship WA  
www.rfwa.org.au

Issue No. 1 February 2008  
Editors: Kaiti Wells & Marlene Janssen

PO Box 618  
BENTLEY WA 6105  
Ph: 08 9258 3060  
Email: hvna@rfwa.org.au  
AIRC: 6105001272

Issue: No 2 - February 2009  
Editors: Marlene Janssen & Leena Fowler

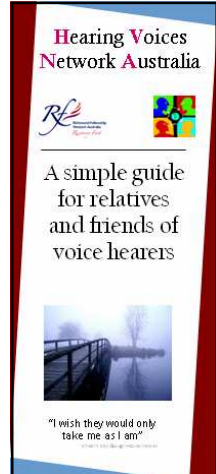
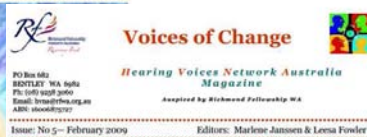
**From the Chair: Jen Stacey**

A few short months with Ron Coleman has been the time that I have spent in WA. In that time, I have been fortunate to have met many people who are passionate about the hearing voice experience. The Hearing Voices Network is a group of people who are passionate about the hearing voice experience. The Hearing Voices Network is a group of people who are passionate about the hearing voice experience. The Hearing Voices Network is a group of people who are passionate about the hearing voice experience.

**Sister Organisation for Hearing Voices Network Australia**

Dear Hearing Voice Network

I am pleased to hear that you are planning to visit Perth. I would be happy to meet with you and discuss the hearing voice experience in Perth. I would be happy to meet with you and discuss the hearing voice experience in Perth. I would be happy to meet with you and discuss the hearing voice experience in Perth.



Contact Richmond Fellowship WA and the Hearing Voices Network Australia at...  
Ph: 08 9258 3060 or [hvna@rfwa.org.au](mailto:hvna@rfwa.org.au)  
for your copy of any of these publications.

## “Hearing Voices Awareness Training” Working with voices for professionals

- The 2-day program includes info about:
- Hearing voices and other like experiences
  - Working with Voices Approach—background
  - Simulated voices exercise
  - Consequences of hearing voices
  - The research
  - Interview schedule for working with voices
  - Basic group facilitation
  - Ways of working with voices:
    - Voice profiling
    - Voice dialogue

*Learning to live with or gain mastery over ones voices is considered a relatively new concept in Australia. However, for the last 20years, Social Psychiatrist Professor Marius Romme and colleagues Sandra Escher, Ron Coleman, Dirk Corstens and many others across Europe and the UK have been helping people who hear distressing voices.*

*Increasingly, within Australia, professionals are seeking to move beyond limiting beliefs and ways or working to embrace the Working with Voices Approach.*

Contact Marlene Janssen, Coordinator of the Hearing Voices Network Australia to register your interest in this workshop. [marlene.janssen@rfwa.org.au](mailto:marlene.janssen@rfwa.org.au) Workshops held multiple times throughout the year.



Become a friend of the

# Hearing Voices Network Australia

Hearing Voices Network  
Australia...  
Auspiced by  
Richmond Fellowship WA

Membership  
Application  
(12 months)

TAX INVOICE

Payments to:  
The Richmond  
Foundation  
PO Box 682  
BENTLEY WA 6982

ABN: 38100 709 644  
HVNA ABN:  
16006875727



RFWA is proud to support  
HVNA

Please tick the appropriate box:

I wish to join the Hearing Voices Network Australia (HVNA)

I wish to renew my membership

Individual **unemployed**, consumer or voice hearer —FREE

Organisations—\$50.00

Individual **employed**, consumer or voice hearer—\$25.00

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Payment Method:**

I enclose CHEQUE or MONEY ORDER to the value of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please debit my  VISA Card  MASTERCARD

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp \_\_\_\_\_

Name on card \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

----- Cut along this line and return the portion above. You can retain the below information -----

Hearing Voices Network Australia (HVNA) provides an opportunity for people to connect; working toward gaining a better understanding of the experience of hearing voices, seeing visions and other like experiences.

Voice hearers, consumers, service providers, carers and friends share ways of coping and working with voices, aiming to reduce anxiety, ignorance, stigma and isolation by offering peer support groups, raising awareness, training and education.

### HVNA Key Principles:

- Accepting that hearing voices is a valid experience
- Respecting each person’s interpretation and beliefs about their experiences
- Fostering and enabling safety and wellbeing of all
- Promoting hope
- Helping consumers to know that they are not alone
- Believing in each person’s capacity to take control of their experience and recover
- Encouraging people to come together and feel safe in sharing their experiences and coping strategies
- Working collaboratively and inclusively with other services to develop knowledge and achieve holistic approaches to recovery
- Fostering and supporting consumer independence and empowerment

### HVNA Membership Provides:

- At least two (2) newsletters per year
- Up to date information on “working with voices approach”
- Support to begin a hearing voices group
- Access to speakers and lectures
- Tax deductibility as payment is made to the Richmond Foundation as a donation