



# TABOO & VIOLENT VOICES

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[www.westernmassrlc.org](http://www.westernmassrlc.org) | [www.behindthelabel.co.uk](http://www.behindthelabel.co.uk)

BEHIND THE LABEL.CO.UK

# Hearing Voices is a relatively common human experience



According to research:

- 26% reported hearing voices, 7.3% heard them continually (Ross et al, 1990)
- 59% of evangelical group reported hearing voices (Davies et al, 2001)
- 16% of mental health practitioners reported hearing voices (Fleming, 2009)

# But .. Hearing Voices is still a Taboo

In 2015, talking about voices in public can still be a risk.


In some settings, if we talked about our experiences we may be pathologized, marginalized, hurt, ignored, pitied, feared and/or have our basic human rights taken away.

Why do you think talking about voices openly in our society can be such a taboo? What is it about voice-hearing that causes people such concern?





# The Hearing Voices Movement



AMANDA WAEGLI, MOTHER  
280 MILLION PEOPLE HEAR VOICES  
EVERY ONE HAS A STORY - LETS LISTEN TO IT

'MY VOICES HOLD THE GRIEF &  
LOSS I LIVE WITH EVERY DAY  
WITHOUT MY CHILDREN  
IN MY LIFE'

**inter voice**

FIND OUT MORE: [WWW.INTERVOICEONLINE.ORG](http://WWW.INTERVOICEONLINE.ORG)



PAUL NOSWORTHY, SCIENTIST  
280 MILLION PEOPLE HEAR VOICES  
EVERY ONE HAS A STORY - LETS LISTEN TO IT

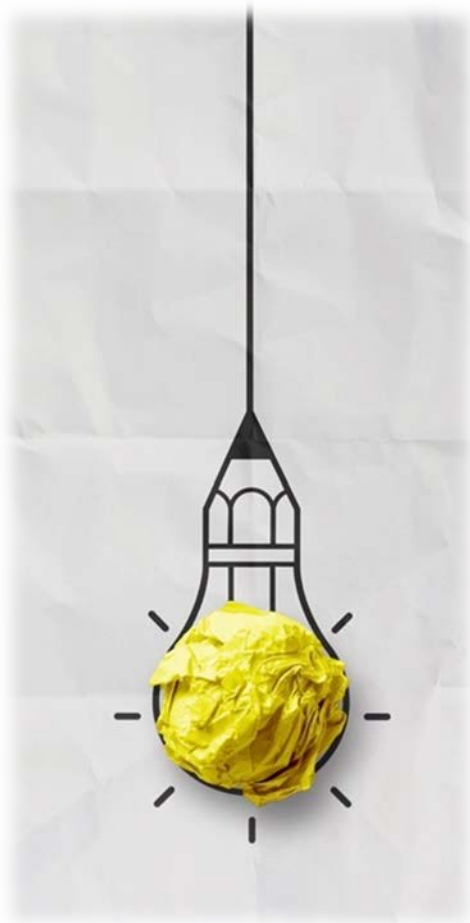
'ALTHOUGH MY VOICES CAN BE  
SCARY - THEY ARE A NATURAL  
REACTION TO A TERRIFYING  
EXPERIENCE'

**inter voice**

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The Hearing Voices Movement understanding voices & visions as a diverse and personally meaningful human experience that is not, in and of itself, a sign of ill health. It is a collaboration between experts by experience, profession, study and other supporters.

# What's so Special about Hearing Voices Groups?



- Hearing Voices Groups exist in over 28 countries (inc the US, Canada, UK, Serbia, Uganda, Malaysia, France and Australia).
- They offer a safe space for people to share their experiences without judgement. If someone is distressed by the voices they hear, the groups can help them find ways of making sense of them and finding ways to cope.
- Members are welcome to join, whatever they believe about their voices/visions - no single interpretation is viewed as the 'truth'.
- In our society, these spaces are **rare and precious**.

# We also Work to Change Society's Perceptions

Beyond the Medical Model

Our experiences are real!

Hearing voices is not a sign of illness.

Q. HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU SEEN A HEADLINE LIKE THIS?

**THE VOICES IN MY HEAD INSPIRED ME TO CHANGE THE WORLD**

Teenager speaks out after raising £1,000s for a children's charity

[WWW.VOICECOLLECTIVE.CO.UK](http://WWW.VOICECOLLECTIVE.CO.UK)

Q. CAN YOU TELL WHO HEARS VOICES?



[WWW.VOICECOLLECTIVE.CO.UK](http://WWW.VOICECOLLECTIVE.CO.UK)



ELEANOR LONGDEN, PSYCHOLOGIST

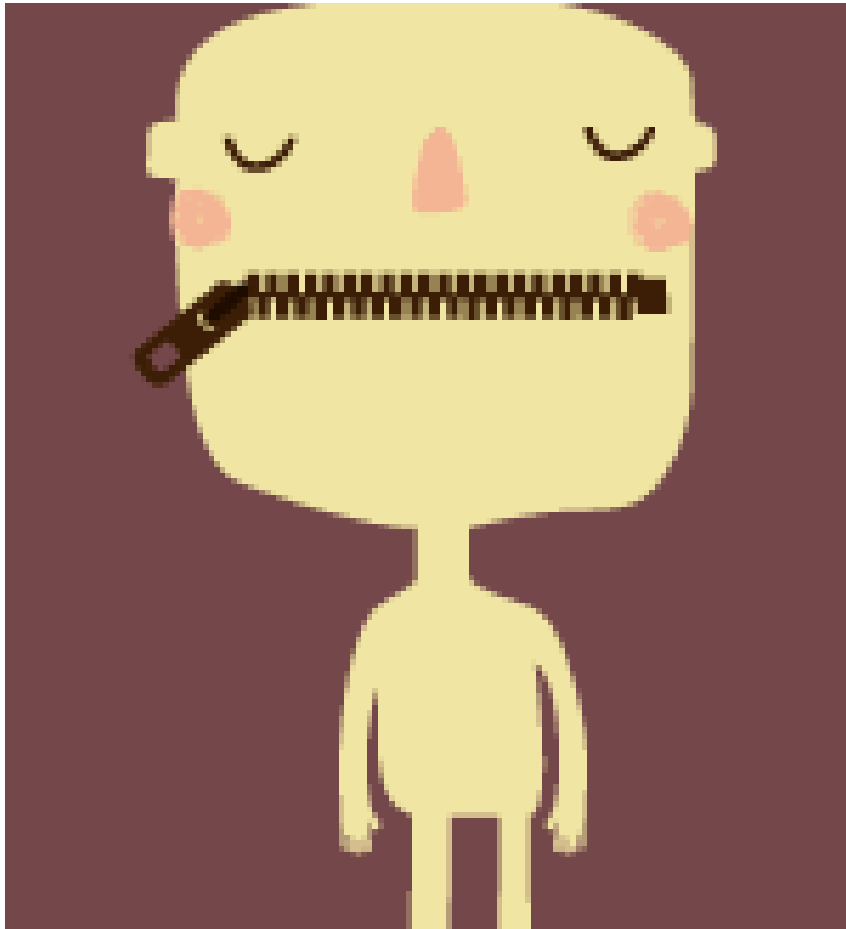
280 MILLION PEOPLE HEAR VOICES  
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'THE VOICES TOOK THE PLACE OF MY PAIN AND GAVE WORDS TO IT'

**inter voice**

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# ... but there's still a limit



- Even in progressive circles, there are still some voices that can be much harder to talk about.
- These voices may talk of violence, torture, sexual assault or break personal or societal taboos.
- They are voices that are taboo within a taboo.
- Why do you think this is?



# With fear, things can get polarized



- The fear surrounding violent/taboo voices can push us into 'react-mode'
- This can lead us things getting very polarized.
- We can end up drawn to either end of an extreme.
- To ensure we don't act purely on these 'pulls', it can be helpful to identify and recognise them.



# Polarisation #1: Attention

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**IGNORE IT** > Talking about everything except the voices, heavy use of medication, rewarding person for not talking about voices

**FOCUS ON IT** > Only asking about the voices (in detail) but never about the person's life

# Polarisation #2: Blame

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**PERSON = BAD** > Believing that the person is a potential perpetrator, that the voices relate to their inner desires; believing that the person is using their voices to manipulate.

**VOICE = BAD** > Characterising the voice as 'bad', ganging up with the person against the voice.

# Polarisation #3: Action

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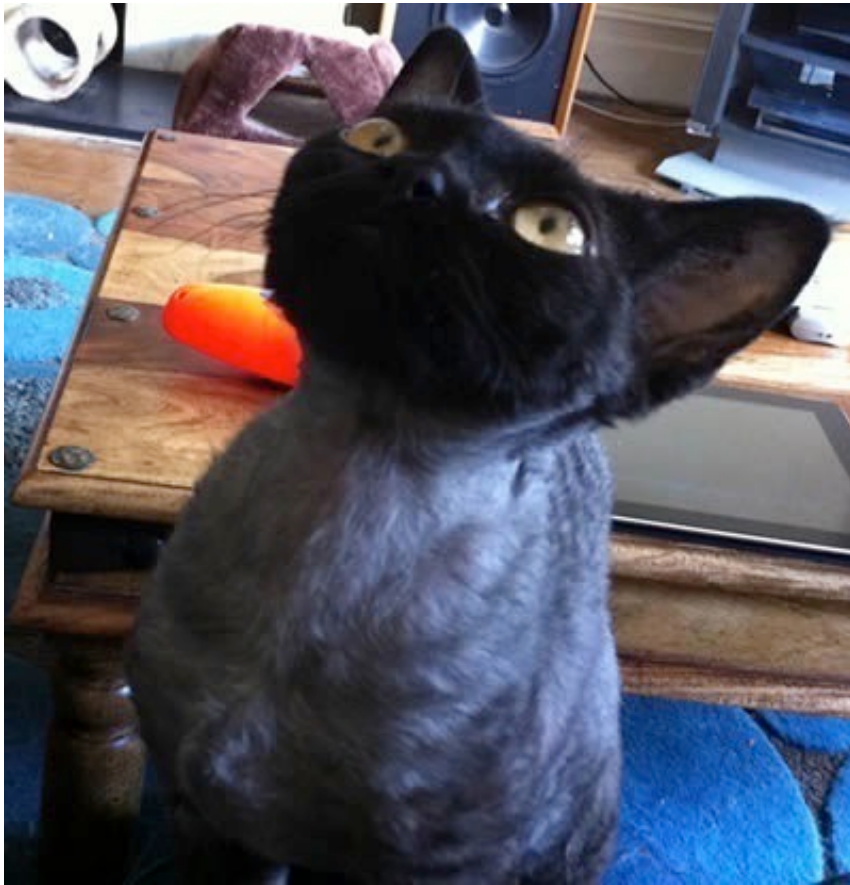


**CONTAIN** > Making the experience feel safe by very heavy use of medication, coercion and/or diagnostic language (rather than speaking about the experience itself).

**PASS THE BALL** > On-going escalation of referrals, believing that there must be someone else better suited to this work.



# So, what can we do instead?



▣ STEP 1: LISTEN. HEAR OUR STORIES

# Change how we think about violent voices. They could be...

- Understood as a metaphor.
- A reminder to protect yourself from harm (past or present).
- A vessel to hold anger and other emotions that feel too difficult to bear.
- An understandable response to betrayal and trauma.
- A message (to yourself and others) that can be understood.
- An opportunity for healing.
- A source of strength.



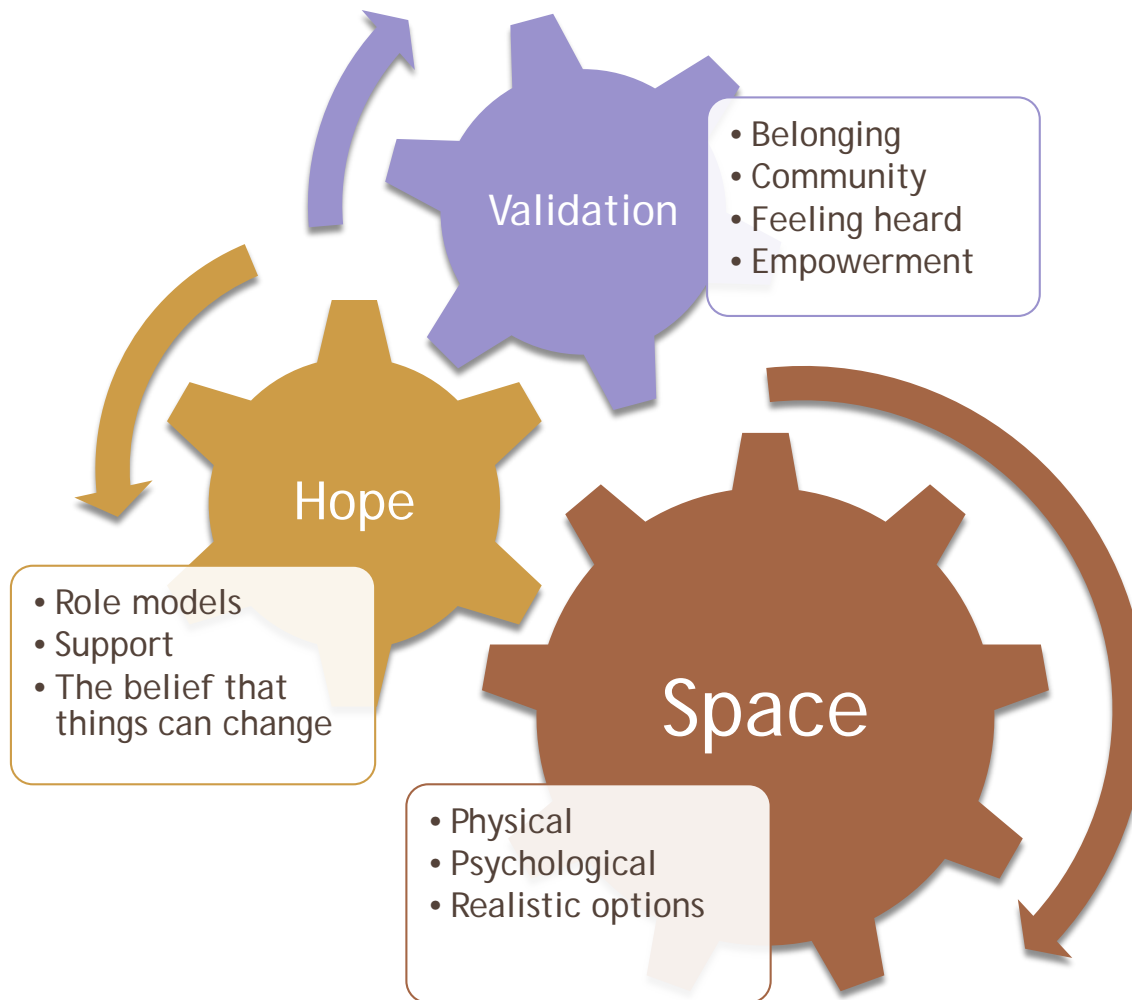
# Why do Some People Act on Violent Voices?



- 'The voices told them to do it' is not a sufficient answer to this question.
- Lots of people do not act on violent voices. Those that do are more likely to hurt themselves than others.
- To truly understand why some people follow the commands of violent voices, and others don't, we need to look beyond the voices and consider the complex web of factors in a person's life - their story.
- We cannot predict violence - but what we can do is use this thinking to put things in place that can support someone to make choices about their behavior.



# Some Key Factors to Think About



- Everyone is different, so different things can enhance (or jeopardize) these key factors.
- For example, for some psychiatric medication can increase a sense of space. For others it can reduce this, triggering a feeling of threat or impulsiveness.

# Finding a way to listen, safely



- Many of us find ways of not listening to the voices we hear - especially if listening risks becoming consumed/overwhelmed.
- It can be important to find a balance between having completely impenetrable walls and knocking them down. The walls are there for a reason, after all.
- For the following ideas the person may want support setting strict time or place limitations (e.g. listening for 5s and setting and agreeing to move rooms afterwards, or having a routine the person does after listening).

# Some starting points

## Increasing Distance

- Anything that gives people a sense of distance or detachment when trying to talk about the voice(s).
- **This may include:** writing in third person, storytelling, puppets, becoming an observer, talking when engaged in another task, visualisation, metaphor

## Focusing on specifics

- Rather than focusing on the whole - which can be overwhelming - this involves choosing a specific feature of the voice.
- **This may include:** tone of voice, age, words, feeling, pitch, change in tone from room to room, placement, distance, start/stop points



# Expressing 'taboo/violent' voices



# Some ideas ...

- ❑ **Creating Russian Dolls** (the outside represents how the voices first appear, inner layers can represent what might be going on underneath the surface).
- ❑ **Physical expression** (boxing, energetic sports, 'spinning', playing the drums, dancing, breaking things ...).
- ❑ **Externalising the content** by writing it down (in speech bubbles, for example) or painting it. Deciding what to do with the results of this (e.g. answer it back/rip it up ...).
- ❑ **Expressing the emotions** linked to the voices (either how the voices might feel, or how the person feels - or both).
- ❑ **Writing a creative story** around the voices/situation, where the person feels more empowered.
- ❑ **Screaming/shouting** (somewhere people won't be alarmed)

# Some more ideas ...



- Choosing photos, images, music that represent the voice(s)/emotions at different times.
- Using metaphors, finding a language that expresses experiences safely (e.g. weather)
- Creating a circle where each voice has a space to share how they're feeling/what they think about something.
- Thinking about the story of the voice - what may have led them to where they are. Thinking about your story too.
- Drawing a timeline/making a scrap book to track your journey.

# Transforming relationships / power



- Power balance is important in any relationship ... if we feel disempowered, oppressed or controlled by someone else there is little space for our own thoughts, ideas or perspective.
- We may feel trapped and unable to think things through clearly.
- The power balance is especially important if someone is hearing voices that are giving them commands.



# Ideas for shifting the power balance



- Say 'No', 'Not Yet', 'Yes, but ...' or 'I've just got to do this first' (delay tactics)
- Do a 'half assed job' (instead of fully complying)
- Become an interpreter (voices don't always say what they mean ... they have a message but it can get lost in translation)
- Be kind, but firm (after all, bullies have often been hurt themselves)
- Setting limits (creating some boundaries to the relationship - time, content).
- Be curious (asking questions and exploring the experience, rather than accepting them at face value)



# Violent voices *always* have a context



- It's easy to focus in on 'violent voices' as the source of the problem. However, violent voices do not happen in isolation.
- It's important to be attentive to what it is that is going on in a person's life/emotions that may be triggering or strengthening these voices.
- We need to create safe spaces to enable a person to explore their experiences, rather than simply try to silence them.
- Many people hear voices like these, but most will not feel comfortable telling us about them. We can change do something about this.

# Wise words ...



**DOLLY SEN, WRITER & FILM MAKER**  
280 MILLION PEOPLE HEAR VOICES  
EVERY ONE HAS A STORY - LETS LISTEN TO IT

**'MY VOICES ARE THE SANEST  
PART OF ME, THE MADNESS  
IS NOT LISTENING TO  
THEIR PAIN'**

**inter  
voice**

FIND OUT MORE: [WWW.INTERVOICEONLINE.ORG](http://WWW.INTERVOICEONLINE.ORG)

- Q: What 3 actions from this workshop will we take back to the conference? What needs to change?

# For more information

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- Hearing Voices Network USA  
- [www.hearingvoicesusa.org](http://www.hearingvoicesusa.org)
- Western Mass. Recovery Learning Community  
- [www.westernmassrlc.org](http://www.westernmassrlc.org)
- Behind The Label Training & Consultancy  
- [www.behindthelabel.co.uk](http://www.behindthelabel.co.uk)
- Intervoice - International Hearing Voices Network  
- [www.intervoiceonline.org](http://www.intervoiceonline.org)
- English Hearing Voices Network  
- [www.hearing-voices.org](http://www.hearing-voices.org)
- ISPS - [www.isps.org](http://www.isps.org)