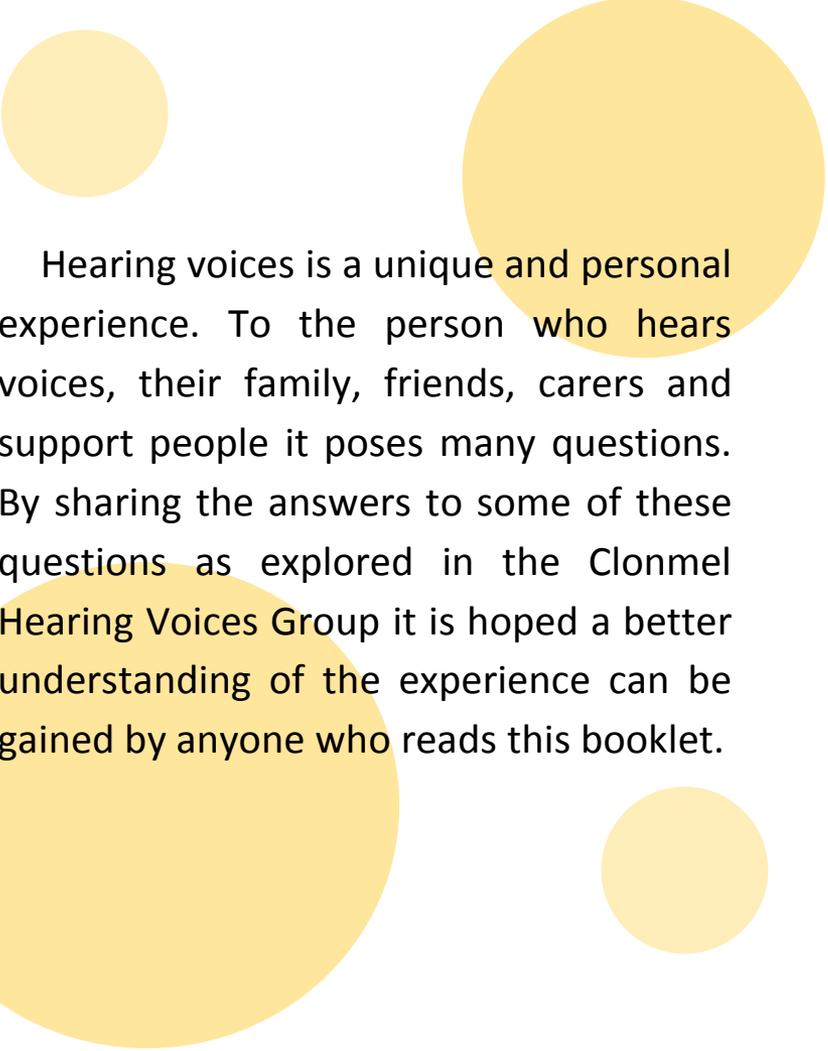


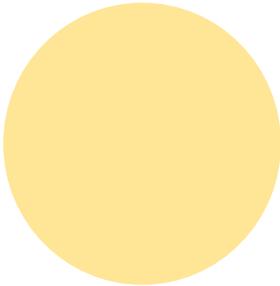


Hearing Our Voices

Clonmel Hearing Voices Group



Hearing voices is a unique and personal experience. To the person who hears voices, their family, friends, carers and support people it poses many questions. By sharing the answers to some of these questions as explored in the Clonmel Hearing Voices Group it is hoped a better understanding of the experience can be gained by anyone who reads this booklet.



Acknowledgements



A big thank you is extended to all who helped put this collection together in particular members of the Clonmel and Tipperary Hearing Voices Groups for the generous sharing of their personal stories, knowledge, ideas and information.



Some questions explored in our group... a voice hearers perspective... our conversations...

How would you describe the voice hearing experience?

It is neither calm nor peaceful and it can cause anxiety

The voices are very real to the person that experiences them

For some people voices cause no distress but for me it can be very distressing

Upsetting

It would be very hard to understand the experience if you've never heard voices

Voices can be complimentary, critical, neutral or a mixture of all depending on how I feel

What helps you cope with your voices?

Speaking to my voices can sometimes help

Being firm with them can allow you time
if they agree to leave when
you ask

Practising mindfulness can calm the mind
however they don't always
allow you time

Using colouring books

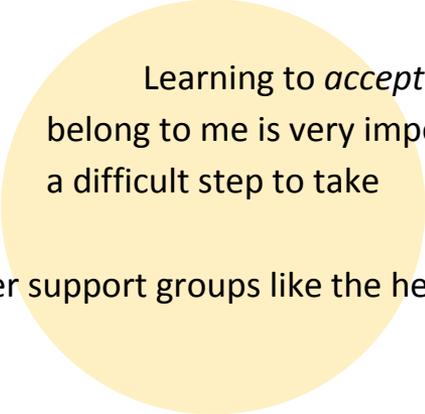
Negotiating with my voices

Journal entries

Medication

Taking regular
physical exercise

Keeping a diary helps me to recognize problems
and feel more in control



Learning to *accept* that my voices belong to me is very important but it was a difficult step to take

Peer support groups like the hearing voices group

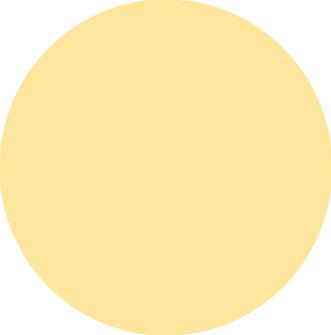
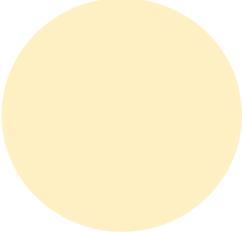
Acceptance is a big step in moving forward

People talking about their experiences in a non-judgemental way



Spending time with supportive friends and family

Attending a hearing voices group



What is the least helpful and most annoying thing that people say about voices and visions?

Saying they don't exist, they are all in your mind

Some people don't try to understand

Being labelled and stigmatised, I feel labelled

I feel worse talking to the doctor, they can only understand to a point

Going to out-patient clinics, having to repeat my story **again** to a new doctor....

Not being believed, I felt alone when my counsellor didn't believe me, I could tell she was sceptical of me, it made me feel more isolated



I like following soccer, Gaa, rugby, golf, hurling and travelling the world. I've been to Australia to see my fiancée's family last year.

I've been hearing voices the last few years. Listening to music really helps. Only for the support of my family, friends, mother, brother, St Luke's, the Hearing Voices Group, I wouldn't be here today.

Jason Fallon



What is the most annoying thing that people do?

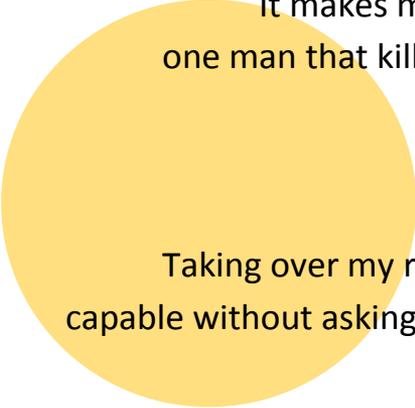
Treating me differently and being put in a category

I don't feel part of a group because I'm different

People trying to be too helpful can be agitating even though they mean well

That people hide from me or don't want to look at me and look away

It makes me feel ashamed, I know one man that killed himself because he felt so ashamed of his voices



Taking over my role and thinking I'm not capable without asking me

What do you like about attending the hearing voices group and how does it benefit you?

Meeting other people with similar problems allows you to feel less alone

Friendly environment, can talk openly
I'm not alone!

It's great to learn from others by talking to similarly minded people

Practising some of the suggestions from other group members

Being able to share problems with other people

It's confidential

Gives me hope... in time with the help of the support group I hope voices might go away

Listening to other people's stories is helpful

I enjoy coming to the meeting

A combination of medicine and the group has benefited me

Meeting people with similar problems helps

Support... I feel accepted... I'm not judged, we respect and advise each other...

What is the most helpful advice someone said or did when you struggled with voices?

Speaking firmly to your voices will help, even telling them to shut-up...

Be firm, as opposed to being angry with your voices



Keep occupied eg. listening to music,
watching cookery programmes,
painting, working

Learn how to control your voices and not have
voices control you

Over stimulation from video games, horror
films, music etc. can be harmful and
make voices worse

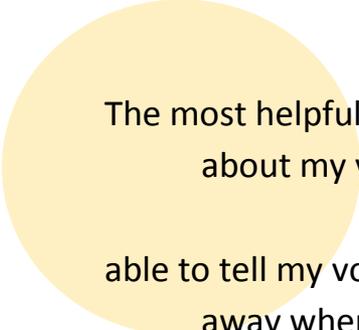


Be aware that back lit devices such as
ipads and mobile phones can
affect your sleep pattern

Choose the right film or music to lift your
mood

It's good to talk



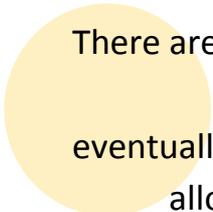


The most helpful thing is being able to talk
about my voices

It feels good being
able to tell my voices to shut up... they now go
away when I tell them to shut up... but it
took
time

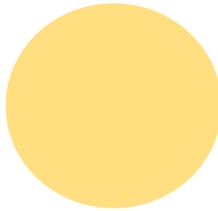


Advised me not to do too much, stop putting
myself under pressure



There are some people that understand,
when I was in college I
eventually told them, they made
allowances with my work

You can work with your voices and you
don't always have to
suppress them





David Galvin completed his honours degree in Crawford College of Art and Design in 2014. Going to the meetings helped him manage the voices. And he would recommend the hearing voices group to anyone distressed by auditory hallucinations.

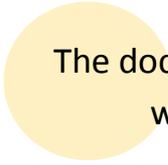


Who was the first person you told about the voices and visions and what prompted you to tell them?

Someone I trusted, I felt I really needed help

When I started talking about the voices it was the beginning of the journey of getting rid of them and learning to cope

A family member as I felt desperate



The doctor... I really needed help with my life, I wasn't leaving the house

My mother, I collapsed, the voices were
so bad

No-body knew what to do



How did you feel when you told somebody?

Relieved

Mixed, could someone else figure this out because I couldn't

It was comforting to tell someone

The voices got worse and I felt paranoid for a few days but it passed

Labeled, It's hard to take especially when I was so confused at the time

It might be better delaying giving a diagnosis rather than putting people in a box straight away

Is it ok to tell your friends about voices?

It could be a support I would imagine but
I haven't told them

I don't think they would
understand

Yes tell someone you trust that will not
break your confidence

Society has made it look like I'm bad,
schizo, a murderer, I couldn't comprehend that
people didn't believe me.

It's good to choose carefully who you would tell

Why should I be ashamed it's my life

Yes, it is nothing to be ashamed of

Not really, sometimes they would laugh at you
or slag you

What do your voices say and do they always tell the truth?

Voices do not always tell the truth

They can make lots of comments

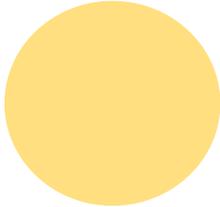
I couldn't believe there were good voices,
I only ever had bad ones

They would tell you to do something bad
but I know it's not up to them, it's
my choice

Sometimes I get a break from voices but I've
noticed I get depressed

Good voices can cheer me up

The voices always give me
the correct answers to the
quizzes on TV



Sometimes the voices call me names

I hear nasty childrens' voices but they
don't tell the truth.

The voices said they would come into my
room and kill me

I used to sleep on the couch because
I was afraid



I can recognise that in certain situations
or when experiencing some emotions I can
expect to have voices

When coping well my voices are
more positive





My name is David Norris. I built this cottage in pottery at the Cluain Training Centre. I do art and crafts and I also use the gym there three days a week. And I enjoy hill walking with my friends.

Why can it be hard to talk about the voices?

I don't want to tell people what the
voices are saying-it's
upsetting

I can't make out what voices are
saying

Shame, I feel ashamed
I'm afraid of people's reactions

I was the one who had problems with it
The people I told got on with
things, I didn't expect that

Some of my close friends want to know
more about it, they want to understand my
illness

I'm annoyed by people's reaction

People think you are funny, you are mad,
you are ashamed, you are stigmatised, people
are afraid of you

It can be hard to concentrate with all the
voices in my head

**What one thing would you like to change
about the voices and visions?**

That they would be nicer

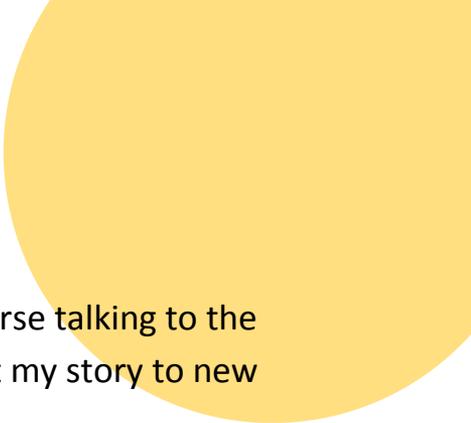
I would like a way to figure out if they are real

I often think they are outside the house, I
don't know if they are genuine or not

They can be very frightening

They affect my sleep

How they affect my lifestyle
People don't get it, I wish they could
understand



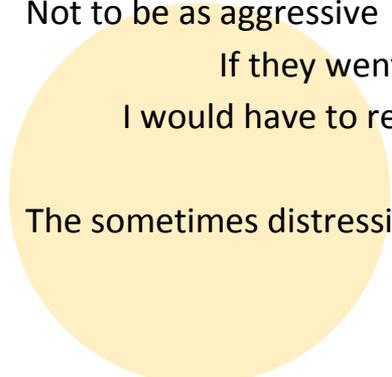
For them to disappear

Out-patient clinics, it feels worse talking to the
doctor, I have to repeat my story to new
doctors all the time,
having to go back to a time when I wasn't
well,
especially when I'm in a good
space

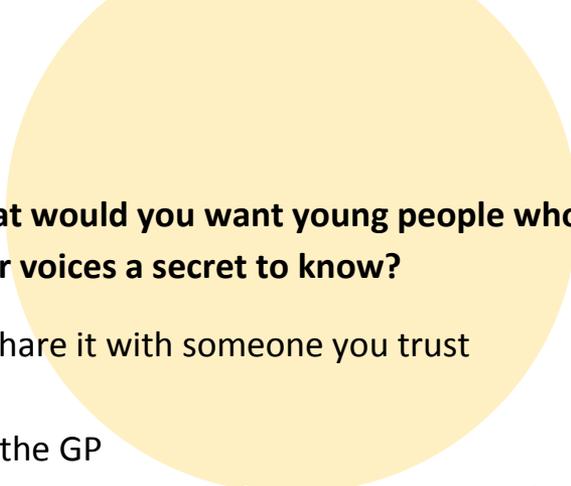
One day you are doing all day everyday
things, then that changes
the illness takes over and you are
told you're not able for that
life anymore



Not to be as aggressive
If they went it would be weird
I would have to readjust



The sometimes distressing nature of the voices



What would you want young people who keep their voices a secret to know?

To share it with someone you trust

Tell the GP

Sometimes it's necessary to get help

To learn to manage, minimise stress

Don't be ashamed

There are different things that will help,
remember we are all unique

Join a hearing voices group to
learn from others with similar and
different experiences



Things are not as bad as they used to be

Some people can get on with their life
with minimal support others may need
different levels of support and therapies

You can be very ill and still be out of
hospital

That they can talk to their voices and tell
them to go away

Knowledge can help them overcome
their stigma

People can come out in the open and not
be ashamed about hearing voices or their
mental health

The voices can reflect some inner turmoil

You may need to heed the advice of others
when you can't cope

Nature

Little leaves- I retrieve to draw, they seem designed and veiny

Small buds- groove to open, their opening a movement. Time spent grass a mass of green soft green- strong green- a precious carpet.

Old trees with their degrees of branchdom, go growing to the sky. Drawing leaves, I perceive a nature degree - the intricateness

The groovy opening of the buds-alive –minutes making more.

The softness of the green outside carpet is a perfect though imperfect thing

The branching trees

Like pictures in the sky

Each so unique to speak of !

Bridget Heffernan

Do you need to go to hospital if you hear voices?

No, you only need to go to hospital if your voices are so distressing that you can't cope

Lots of people hear voices and have a happy and fulfilling life

It's the relationship you have with your voices that counts

Sometimes its necessary to get help

You may need to heed the advice of others when you can't cope

You can be very ill and still not need to go to hospital

How did you feel about your first admission to hospital?

Being admitted to hospital the first time I found quite scary

I just wanted to be on my own

I was so full of anxiety, on the edge, I felt like I was going to explode

I wanted to be locked in seclusion as I felt it was the safest place

Until you get to trust someone you want to be on your own

No awareness before it happened

I felt I was going to be locked up forever

I felt no one understood me

I felt very lonely

Nobody really spoke to me for the first
two weeks except to give me medication,

I would have liked to feel people in
authority

thought more of me as a person

I just wanted to go home

I didn't really understand what was
happening and

nobody explained

**How do your family feel about you being a
voice hearer?**

My family are very supportive

My family don't really want to talk about it,
they change the subject

When I ask how *they* are coping they
don't tell me

I tell them how I'm coping but they won't
let me know how they are coping

What was helpful about admission to hospital?

I could sleep

It was good to get the break being
in a safe place

That doctors and nurses actually cared
for you because you're in such a lonely place

I felt really lonely, it broke my heart to
see my visitors leave

Groups are very helpful

I was very bored, I was allowed to bring in my
knitting

I felt it was easier not to have anyone to visit

I didn't tell anyone I was in hospital
because of the stigma

Visits from family made it tolerable



Margret enjoys making anything to do with textiles. Knitting comes naturally and passes the time. She has sold her creations and makes covers, blankets and these figurines.

What was *unhelpful* about admission to hospital?

Being in hospital blocked me from the outside world, it was difficult to readjust afterwards



I needed to be given time to think things out

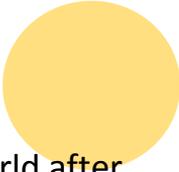
Constant repetition

Not helpful when psychiatrist changed so often I had to keep telling and reliving my story

It was difficult to find space to be on my own

What was it like leaving hospital?

It was lonely...



Readjustment to the outside world after leaving hospital was difficult



I felt lost

Stress makes voices worse and you are
going out to lots of stress

I felt institutionalised,
I felt out of place,
I wasn't used to having my own
freedom

My role was taken away from me when I
went home
I had to fight and claw my role back

I felt stigmatised

I was angry because other people had
taken my role at home

What needs to change?

The interactions people have with those that
hear voices

More education needed for the public
regarding schizophrenia
and mental health

Films stereotyping people who hear voices
Print media's attitude to voice hearers

Sensationalising the headlines eg.
schizo stabs woman

Out-patient clinics, sometimes I find it
makes the voices worse as it brings up
difficult memories that might have
settled.

For doctors, nurses and other
professionals to engage more with voice

hearers

Listen to the persons; our stories
... thank you.

This a voices hearer's personal story...

Hearing voices has been a major part of my life for the last 11 years, but let me take you back some 40 years, give or take a few, I won't be precise! To where it all started.

Our Story

When I felt the safety and warmth of family life as a young boy, I would play with my friends from morning till dusk. We would joke and laugh and make fun of others to draw attention and give chase, we were mindless of our distaste. But we knew our limits before disgrace, as our parents graced upon our face from time to time to keep us inline. Wild happy carefree were my pals and I, Oh how I look back at what happiness should be, full of life and energy did our hearts plead. We would run and swim and run again for everyday we wrestled to play, we were adventure seeking monsters you could say.

In a time when friends were friends with unconditional love, there were days we would fight, but we still stayed close, friends forever even when life chose to part us.

My youth was mindless that I was also prey, plotted against by the bullies that paid good attention to my looks and ways.

But even more fierce predators mingled within our shadows, awaiting opportunists with their filth laden hands.

Unexpectedly cornered they ravenous our bodies to their amuse, then left us shamefully dazzled and confused. Like so many others we took the blame, afraid to cry out when frozen in fear.

A rebellious nature started to churn, the heavy hands and weapons did hurt and burn. But to my dismay the course of my life had taken a turn.

As our minds constantly try to regurgitate the shameful stains, an imaginary box opens where we can stash away the pain, but unknowingly these revolting episodes will stay engraved within our minds.

Now a young boy riddled in sin, my youth taken away by the touch of their hands, time and time again.

Oh what we would give to able to rewind, but as life goes on who could we trust, my friends soon disappeared as I turned them away, I sort comfort in loneliness and came closer to God, a perpetual friend that offers me love.

Throughout our childhood we look forward with immense excitement to the future, to come of age to be able to ride a motor bike, or to drive a car, and in some cases to fly a plane. And the day dreams roll on and on to pastures greener, little did we expect that this would be a constant redeemer, which leaves us vulnerable to the hidden obstacles that lay in wait for us to stumble upon.

From broken bones to broken homes.

From reckless relationships to the loss of a love one.

From the pounding of bullies, to the stress and strain to maintain our survival. The continuous bombardment of negative reactions, secretly reeks havoc on our delicate minds.

That imaginary box becomes full to the brim, behind the scenes it begins to weep.

We now take notice of a mental illness, as for I, schizophrenia started to unravel.

From delusional episodes, to aggressive hallucinations.

To the wonderment of hearing voices.

Afraid to seek help from a mental health institution, for the blemished stigma surrounding these places.

Oh I was an ignorant fool and as I struggled on and on there came a point where I could no longer prolong, reaching out my hand I took their help. They treated me with kindness, a kindness that I never had felt throughout my years.

As the inner demon reigns in, we begin to heal, slowly we can learn to cope with a new lease of hope.

At the beginning of 2015 I received a phone call from a young lady by the name of Aoife.

Aoife is a facilitator of the hearing voices group in Clonmel Co. Tipperary. As well as being a psychiatric nurse, Aoife invited me to come along and join the group.

Finally somebody reached out their hand to help me, I jumped at the chance and never looked back. As well as joining the group Aoife also gave me one to one weekly sessions which I found invaluable, and as time progressed

the voices lessened along with the delusional episodes and the aggressive hallucinations.

How grateful could we be for the efforts of a kind one.

To hear somebody call your name, you automatically respond, but when you turn around and nobody is there, your suspicions flair.

From the mumbling of people in deep conversations, to the sudden out bursts of laughter, to the sinister taunting of them continuously calling your name, to make you stand up and listen time and time again.

I try to converse but it falls on deaf ears.

But what is the driving force behind these voices, did we give birth to an inner demon from the trauma that dispersed throughout our minds.

There are countless questions after questions with little replies.

Being a voice hearer is difficult at times, but when taking part in a hearing voices group we can listen to others, and learn how they cope with the voices they hear.

Unfortunately there are those who keep their doors tightly closed.

Forever ploughing forward to stay ahead of their past, but like any illness that is left to fester, it continuous to cast its aspersion upon you.

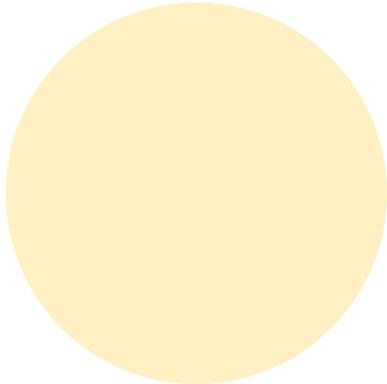
Eventually their mental illness will reel in the slack, after it takes over you'll definitely be struck in your tracks.

Reality starts to bend as they struggle to comprehend, your defenses have all but diminished as suicide begins to pry. Becoming more and more deluded by the sweet temptation of the promised land, over whelmed by all its glory and grandeur, as it lures you in with all its sensual prowess. Captivating you with exaggerated love and excitement as it shrouds around you like the softness of a blanket. Now in its grasp the stronger of you will struggle to pull back, while the weak fall unknowingly victim to all the false promises, when suddenly whisked away in an instances. Ever so secretly made unaware that once beyond the point of no return, "Reality Bites."

As the silence of the darkness fills their shoe's.

We urge you now to put out your hand while there is still time, we'll pull you to safety, and we'll get to work on your mind.

How kind are those that the stigma in us chose to push away. Please listen to me for I've been there, like so many before me. Make a stand, and shout to yourself enough is a enough. Then Put your trusting hand in theirs, so that you can witness the birth of tomorrow, without all that sorrow.



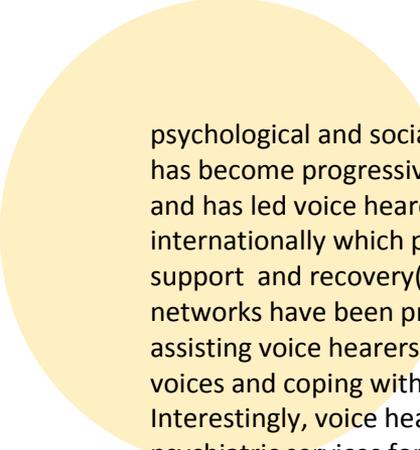
Many thanks to Bridget, David, Conor, Rachel, David, Frank, Pat, Margret, Aoife, Jason, David, Kay, Paul, Jim and Thomas for being so open about their experiences in the Clonmel Hearing Voices Group. In particular special thanks to David Galvin for his creative contribution in developing this booklet.

Facts about hearing voices

- Auditory hallucinations, or hearing voices occurs when a person perceives the sound of a voice in the absence of external stimuli (Ruddle et al 2011).
- Non traditional methods of working with people who hear voices challenge the medical model and refuse to accept the disease model, instead insisting that people who hear voices are processing trauma or emotional distress (Read et al 2005).
- Watters (2010) suggests that voice hearers , in the absence of mental illness experience more positive voices and a higher level of control over them than people who have a diagnosis of serious mental illness.
- Romme and Escher (1993) found that people who cope better with voices feel stronger, set more limits on voices, listen more selectively, communicate more about the voices and experience more support from others. They recommend encouraging people to meet others who also hear voices.
- Voice hearers welcome respectful inquiries regarding their experiences; the Maastricht Hearing Voices Interview by Romme and Escher is a tool to structure information gathering and facilitates the hearer to explore their own experiences and create

emotional distance from the voices. The assessment tool allows engagement with the service user or voice hearer in depth and without fear of worsening symptoms. The tool is designed for use with “Making sense of voices” which is a guide for mental health professionals working with voice hearers (Romme and Escher, 2000).

- The prevalence of voice hearers is approximately 10-15%; Beaven et al (2011) report that findings from their study support the current movement away from a pathological model towards understanding voice hearing in the context of lived experience and on the continuum in the general population. It is imperative that the mental health services embrace research that creates a discourse regarding non traditional methods of psychiatry and promotes recovery and values the narrative of the voice hearer.
- Medication is only effective for approximately 33% of people who hear voices. (World Health Organisation).
- Romme and Escher’s research shows that at least 70% of people who hear voices have had some traumatic experience which they connect with hearing voices. (More recent research has estimated that this figure is much higher-more than 90%).
- The Maastricht Interview is the work of Marius Romme and Sandra Escher and works on the premise of accepting and coping with voices using



psychological and social interventions; this approach has become progressively influential internationally and has led voice hearers to organise networks internationally which promotes empowerment, peer support and recovery(Corstens et al 2008). These networks have been proven to be effective in assisting voice hearers in finding meaning with their voices and coping with same (Ruddle et al 2011). Interestingly, voice hearers who come to the psychiatric services for help, either voluntarily or against their will, have become stuck in destructive communication patterns with their voices (Romme and Escher 2000).

- Whilst one in three people who hear voices become a psychiatric patient - two in three people can cope well and are in no need of psychiatric care. No diagnosis can be given because these 2 out of 3 people who hear voices are quite healthy and function well. It is very significant that in our society there are more people who hear voices who have never been psychiatric patients than there are people who hear voices and become psychiatric patients. (Romme & Escher, 2001).
 - In research concerning people who hear voices it was found that 77% of the people diagnosed with schizophrenia the hearing of voices was related to traumatic experiences. These traumatic experiences varied from being sexually abused, physically abused, being extremely belittled over long periods from young age, being neglected during long periods as a youngster, being very aggressively treated in
- 

marriage, not being able to accept ones sexual identity, etc (Romme & Escher 2006)

- Charity Mind estimates that between 5-28% of the adult population hear voices. Thinking about this in context 10% of the world's population is left handed, which is a similar statistic so there are just about as many left handed people as voice hearers.

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Helpful Resources and Supports

www.hearingvoicesnetworkireland.ie

www.voicesireland.com

www.criticalvoicesnetworkireland.com

www.intervoiceonline.org

www.hearing-voices.org

www.shine.ie

www.hse.ie

www.stanmentalhealth.ie

www.Headspace.com

www.Yourmentalhealth.ie

www.Livinglifetothefull-lltff.com

www.Getselfhelp.co.uk

www.Spunout.ie

www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk

www.irishadvocacynetwork.com

www.lfightdepression.com

Samaritans: A confidential 24 hour emotional support service for people who are feeling distress or despair. 1850 60 90 90 www.samaritans.org

Aware: A service for people who experience depression. www.aware.ie 01 6617211/1800804848

Grow: Nurtures mental health, personal growth and recovery www.grow.ie 1890 47 44 74

Family Carers Ireland. www.familycarers.ie

**Clonmel Hearing Voices Group, Morton Street,
Clonmel. 052 6183470 / 086 0457215/
087 6349205**

Mental Health Ireland: Promotes positive mental health and supports persons/ families with a mental illness. www.mentalhealthireland.ie 01 284116

**Recovery College South East: Provides educational work shops on recovery, developed by people with lived experience of mental health challenges, carers and professionals 056 7703666
Recoverycollegesoutheast@gmail.com**

**Shine Discovery: Support, Information and education for those effected by mental ill health. www.shine.ie
051 852 528**

Comhar: Adult Counselling Service for adults who have experienced trauma and abuse in childhood. 1800 247247 Wed-Sun 6pm-10pm. 1800 234 118 comhar@hse.ie

SHIP: Counselling for people aged 16 and over who are experiencing suicidal, self/harm thoughts. Waterford, Wexford, Carlow, Kilkenny and Tipperary South. 087 2586028

C-Saw: Community Suicide Awareness Workers. Clonmel, 052 61 72 477 c-saw@live.com

**ETBI (Educational Training Board of Ireland)
052 6121067**

**NLN (National Learning Network) 1890 283000
052 6181555**

**Citizen' s Information Market Street Clonmel
0526122267**

**MABS (Money Advice and Budgeting Service)
076107200 052 645077**

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