

Voices Vic Reunion

9 December 2009

Attendees

Ros	Wodonga	Gail	Prahran
Lani	Wodonga	Karin	North Melbourne
Taania	Wodonga	Marg	Essendon
Kelly	Wodonga	Kylie	Kew
Jacqui	Prahran	Rebecca	Fairfield
Michelle	Frankston	Brendon	Mornington
Peter	Frankston	Janet	Malvern
Jade	Prahran	Indigo	Malvern
Lee	Prahran		

Represented at the meeting were six mental health services, six voice hearers, two carers, four current groups & five groups in planning

Voices Vic Update



- There are now 7 hearing voices running in Victoria
- Another 9 groups are expected to start by the end of January.
- Six more groups are planning to start but are having some issues.
- There is an article on Voices Vic in the latest New Paradigm (Spring 2009)
- Voices Vic has drafted a workbook for facilitators which will be available in the new year.
- Voices Vic shared a draft outline of training for 2010 – this will be released in the new year.
- Voices Vic hopes to make a major presentation at the Vicserv Conference in April next year. We are keen for people from the network to get involved – contact us if you're interested.
- We hope to form an expert advisory group for Voices Vic in early 2010 – comprising of voice hearers and workers representing all interest groups, and which will help to set the direction and priorities for Voices Vic.

What is working well in Hearing Voices Groups?



- Groups are **exploring new topics** that have never been discussed before. The groups discuss a wide range of subjects.
- Running it as a **closed group** (ie, not open to new members) builds lots of trust, familiarity and continuity. But it can end up a very small group if some people drop out.
- At Mornington they are doing the

Maastricht interview with individuals outside the group, and have found that it prepares people very well for talking about voices with others. This is also a good role for keyworkers who aren't facilitating groups.

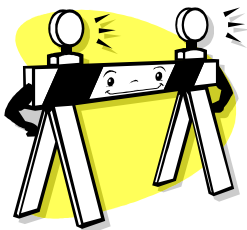
- The groups really reinforce **expertise by experience**.
- Having a focus more on **acceptance** than on change.
- Several people commented that Hearing Voices Groups are **'like no other group I've been in'**. People talked about how different the experience of these groups can be, and how positive this felt.
- Facilitators said they had noticed the following **positive changes in people** attending groups:
 - Increased confidence
 - Ability to reflect
 - More social connections outside the group
 - Being about to articulate experiences
 - Having significant 'light-bulb' moments
- Several people say they have found the **Ron Coleman workbook** really useful in their groups. Once facilitator said they prefer to have a few sessions up front without the workbook – and use these sessions to get the group to connect with each other.
- Facilitators said that voices are not the only thing discussed in groups – dreams and **other aspects of life** are commonly explored as well.



What are the challenges in Hearing Voices Groups?

- Finding **the right length** is difficult - 1.5 hours is not enough but 2 hours feels too long
- Some individuals have found the groups overly **confronting**, particularly in discussing belief systems which are radically different from their own).
- **Gender balance** has swung towards men at the Prahran Mission open group. We are now starting a women's only group to ensure there is a safe space available.
- Opening a group up to **the community at large** has been an issue for some services who are restricted to only current clients of their service.
- **Paying for facilitators** was raised as an issue. In many cases services are already funded for group facilitators, however paying for facilitators with lived experience is often unfunded.
- **Dealing with trauma** raised in group settings was raised as a topic. We discussed that while groups are a good place to acknowledge that trauma can play a role in triggering voice hearing, that exploring trauma in a group setting is not ideal. Doing so can vicariously traumatize members of the group – and facilitators. It was recommended that trauma discussions be acknowledged but then sidelined for addressing outside the group. Where needed, participants should be referred to an appropriate support service or worker. It is a good general rule to 'check-in' with people towards the end of a group, and to have a private catch-up with people where needed.
- Concern was raised about what to **do if someone has no support worker** and is needing extra support (ie, a participant from the general community). Brendan suggested using his current strategy, which is to meet individually with all participants before they join the group, and at this meeting to get a name and number for someone who is a support person. Also get agreement from the person about the conditions under which you would contact this person.

What's getting in the way of starting new Hearing Voices Groups?



Getting manager approval to start a group is a common issue. In particular, managers have asked for documentation to justify running hearing voices groups, and want to see the evidence, and a discussion of risks. There is also a concern about doing trauma work in groups.

- Voices Vic will prepare a paper targeting managers and clinicians which addresses the evidence and risks of running Hearing Voices Groups. Rebecca Ponchard and Karin Johannsen will assist with review and editing.

Voices Vic support – what's working and what else is needed?

What's working:

- Email newsletter
- Website / brochures
- Site & group visits (particularly useful)
- Phone and email support



Proposed new supports for 2010 were all endorsed:

- Buddy system for voice hearers (May 2010)
- Quarterly workshops, with monthly video conferences in between (support for facilitators)
- Sale of books and DVDs on Hearing Voices
- New training for individual work

Additional suggestions by the group:

- Provide training to clinicians (raise awareness of approach), and to student clinicians (especially psych nurses).
- Provide training to all keyworkers and case managers, not just group facilitators (to allow for one-on-one work).
- Run training in regional areas if possible.
- Provide resources/info on trauma (eg, Spectrum, CASA, etc).
- Provide more info (training and notes) on working with suicide