



NPN

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The articles are the views of the contributors and not necessarily those of NPN.

## **Hearing Voices Movement – Greece**

### **Spreading the word –Twelve years HVN Greece Creating Space for Our Voices**

After a series of visits by members of the English Hearing Voices Movement to Athens and Thessaloniki, during which they gave talks about an alternative approach to voices and paranoia, the Greek Hearing Voices Network (HVN) was founded in 2010. It represents a partnership between individuals who hear voices or have other extreme or unusual experiences, professionals, and allies within the community, all of whom are working together to change the assumptions made about these phenomena and create support, learning and healing opportunities for people across the country. The Network operates at national level, supporting people who hear voices and promotion alternative approaches to voices, and is part of the Intervoice Network.

But from our point of view, what is described above is something more than collaboration. It is a vivid, autopoietic system that aims at producing meaning and therefore life. And that's how it started: from the quest of meaning deriving from the sorrow, the self-awareness and the radical stance of a young woman, Marianna Kefallinou, who met a creative rebel, open minded person Peter Bullimore. And the spark

was there. In our history this was our Big Bang moment. Meaning and dreaming... And then some professionals came, voice hearers entered the meetings, family members, students, persons coming from a community that has been violently attacked from neoliberal politics that aim to destroy the community. So, these meetings turned out to be something more than a network of people. It proved to be a dreamland; a movement that aims to keep people connected. Here in Greece, it was stated that “there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families.” But also here in Greece, the Hearing Voices Movement stated that there is no life without connection, there is no life for human beings without meaning.

The Hearing Voices Network (HVN) Greece is one of over 35 nationally based networks around the world joined by shared goals and values, incorporating a fundamental belief that there are many ways to understand the experience of hearing voices and other unusual or extreme experiences.

Goals of the HVN Greece include:

- Raising awareness about voice hearing, visions and other unusual or extreme experiences.
- Supporting anyone who has had these experience by providing opportunities to talk about them freely and without judgment amongst peers especially by setting up self-help groups.

- Supporting anyone who has had these experiences to explore, understand, learn, and grow from in their own way.
- Supporting individuals providing treatment and helping family, friends, and the general community to broaden their understanding and ability to support individuals who have had these experiences.

Our work includes:

- Promoting and supporting the development of HVN support groups in accordance with the values and ethos of the movement worldwide.
- Providing training for carers, family, friends, and the general public on the HVN Approach and the experience of Hearing Voices and other unusual or extreme experiences. Most of these events have been organized with the invaluable support and contribution of the UK HVN. In parallel, presentations and discussions are organized to educate its members and help them familiarize with the ethos and core values and concepts of the HVM.
- Providing training for individuals interested in becoming HVN group facilitators and starting new groups and supporting HVN group facilitators to network and support one another.
- Promoting access to information and resources about hearing voices and related topics through writing up information about the history of the

network, collecting and translating material produced by the Hearing Voices Movement and other useful resources.

A crucial principle characterizing our work is the participation of voice hearers at all levels of our actions. Apart from 'spreading the word' those outgoing activities contribute to the empowerment of everyone included. The voice hearers gain confidence through the acceptance they receive from the audience. They are also empowered, because they challenge themselves by exposing personal issues and speaking through their experience, they present a new perspective about 'psychosis' to professionals. Family members also convey a new non-pathologizing approach which helps them to broaden the way they deal with the problems that arise in their families. But even professionals find an emancipatory path since they adopt a new language, a more human approach. Furthermore, all the work done in the community brings us in touch with other social movements such as associations for human rights, antifascists movements etc...

However, a recovery community incorporates pain, experiences, significant turning points, and enjoys the benefit of companions who chart their own paths. The pain concerns more people than the person directly experiencing psychosis included are also family members called to stand in support and manage an endless series of dilemmas, personal anxieties, fears, and the duty for responsible action as prescribed by society. Also included is, the mental health professional, who

is faced with the same endless series of dilemmas, personal anxieties, fears, and the mandate for responsible action issued by society; and last but not least, the ordinary citizen viewer, who is coming face to face with an unfamiliar condition usually stigmatized by fear, in response to which s/he is invited to reconsider ethical, ideological and personal self-evident beliefs in what is also a confusing challenge to overcome oneself.

### **Working in Self-Help Groups**

One of the main aims of the Greek Network is to set up self-help groups. Those groups are not in themselves a form of therapy: rather they offer therapeutic support and education. Professionals such as psychologists and psychiatrists may well attend to provide information while group members provide expertise through experience to professional courses in some universities. During the last 8 years the voice hearers have highlighted some issues that they consider important. They indicated a number of factors as being vital for their operation, such as positive feedback, the normalization of experience, the establishment of safety and acceptance, the joint investigation of the factors that trigger voices and the acknowledgement that there are different phases in learning how to manage these voices. As Julia says, "If 26 years ago, when I collapsed for the first time,

there had been a group like Hearing Voices, I would not have had to write these 'dark' lyrics. I would certainly have avoided several mental and physical discomforts (involuntary commitments, insults, humiliation, mistakes due to panic attacks etc..) I am now convinced that we [voice hearers] are not 'idiots' but 'exceptions' with a right to 'difference'. In the same spirit, another member of the Greek Network shares the following sentiment with his team: "The Voices are the strings of the mind; whenever they grind with perhaps unnecessary ideas and thoughts, the result is cacophony. We have to look for the right notes to be able to listen to the melody that we like to have in our heads at one point. Voices are a different form of reality, the reality of a plastic world that we live in, accumulating like rubbish in in the dump until we put fire and burn it. We should not turn our minds into a dump."

### **Recovering Together: relatives and friends of people experiencing voices**

Experience shows that recovery is not feasible unless there are some important others available, those who will believe in the reality of the experience, who will feel the pain and suffering experienced and who will trust that recovery is possible despite the mythology about incurable schizophrenia and chronic neurodegenerative diseases that the medical gospel presents. And these important others, especially in the south of Europe are mainly relatives and

friends. They are the people who, however different their stories, identities or roles find that they share common feelings and thoughts: “The feeling that is not easy for us to be understood by others and that there is no room for us to talk openly recedes when we create a common space of understanding through the group process (...) Each of us can speak confidently of what is happening to him/her in the present time and of what s/he has in his or her own mind at a given moment. In this sense, the best way to deal with our uncertainties is to reconcile ourselves with them.”

Nevertheless, the ‘demand to place oneself in those people’s shoes’ still remains a persistent process, in any case. Marianna, a sister of a voice hearer, reminds us: “But I can now understand why he and many others who have found themselves in a similar position with his own find it intolerable - I hope for the moment – to speak publicly about their experience I support that things are more difficult for anyone who has directly suffered the disrespect and irrational violence of a system that is unresponsive and places preconceptions, trade interests and insecurities and the contributions of insurance funds before human beings.

Also, I am now in a position to respond to the professionals who had earlier claimed that my brother would not remember anything from his phase of fixation because of being unaware of the situation or due to insensitivity; I can tell them with conviction that in fact he remembers everything. But he cannot bear to relate to it often. Thus, it was they, the professionals who rather lacked empathy, as

well as sensitivity, since they did not realize that they were causing harm. I have always seen my brother's unusual beliefs as completely intertwined with his personal story. Knowing how troubled he was in various phases of his life and how many dreams of his have been frustrated, I could at least discern a reasonable meaning behind what he described. A narrative that most practitioners dismissed as delusional garbage helped me understand a part of his anxieties, fears, and hopes. He finally brought me closer to him."

### **The recovery of the mental health professional**

Much more likely than ordinary citizens, professionals, fortified as they are behind their knowledge-given power, and already armed through a tedious journey of many years of education, finally fail to discern their own recovery path. As U. Galiberti points out, mental health professionals, deprived as they have been of their own humanity, attempt to explain man objectively like any natural phenomenon.

However, concepts such as "personal encounter with the sufferer", "common learning process", "partner like cooperation in developing common goals", "solidarity", "development of self-help potential", "acknowledgement of the personal responsibility for the disease and health." Are all trying to describe a less authoritative and more effective way of working together. In the end, the emancipatory process for the professional can only pass through a challenge, such as that described by F. Kafka in the message

to the Emperor: “It’s easy to write recipes, it’s hard to get in touch with the world.”

To conclude at a time when technological approaches are glorified and when difference and diversity tend to be discredited., societies become frightened and thus easily fall prey to fascism, to the effect of consenting to or keeping silent in the face of easy institutionalization and suppression and at a time, moreover when the ruling psychiatric practice is dominated by one way institutionalization and suppression then Network of Voice Hearing People in Greece advocates alternative ways of dealing with mental discomfort through searching for meaning in the discomfort.

Perhaps as Albert Camus once said, the world we live in is intrinsically unreasonable and the only real role afforded to humans is to become conscious of their lives, their rebellion and freedom. Overall, we strongly believe that the HVM offers a paradigm shift (in the Kuhnian sense) in the area of mental health, that it opens up new Horizons for a different and innovative understanding of people who have been diagnosed with schizophrenia and most importantly: IT WORKS!

## A Secret Cause & Cure For Social Anxiety

**The Fatal Flaw:** A deeply buried, un-nameable sense that:

*Something is wrong with me. I am missing some vital ingredient that other people have. I am set apart, different. I don't quite fit in anywhere.*

Fortunately, the Fatal Flaw is not as bad as it sounds, because it's not a real flaw. Instead, it's something far more powerful than a flaw. It's a feeling.

Legions of people walk this earth held back by something which they cannot understand, and for which they have no words. It's a feeling with the power to hold brilliant men back from achieving their full potential and powerful women back from becoming presidents of companies. It's a feeling that will not *break* you, but it will *dog* you. It will keep you standing alone at the PTA meeting or sitting pretending to work while others chat freely at a conference. Unaddressed, it can set you apart so that you feel alone, and gradually wear away your connection to the world.

### **The Fatal Flaw**

The Fatal Flaw is a product of the invisible, subtle powerful force, Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN): *A parent's failure to respond enough to a child's emotional needs.*

Children who grow up in households where their feelings are ignored or discouraged push their emotions down and away, to adapt. As adults, they lack access to their own feelings, which are a vital source of richness and connection in life.

Deep down, they sense something missing in them that other people have (it's their emotions). These two results combine to form this un-nameable sense of being different, of not fitting in, of being alone and out of place: a perfect breeding ground for social anxiety.

Because its source is so invisible, many people who grew up with CEN are completely unaware, and so many with the Fatal Flaw are completely unaware. It is, in fact, your lack of awareness that gives the Fatal Flaw so much power over you.

### **This Pandemic is a Good Time to Face Your Social Anxiety**

Are you secretly relieved that social distancing is giving you a built-in excuse? Few social demands, fewer social gatherings, canceled group activities?

Remember how you used to feel when you were invited somewhere? All kinds of things went through your head as your discomfort grew:

*How many people will be there?*

*I prefer one-on-one.*

*I'd rather be alone.*

*I don't like being in a group.*

### ***I don't want to go.***

Most people enjoy parties, reunions, conferences, and group activities of all kinds. But there's a fairly large subset of people who feel so exquisitely uncomfortable in a group that all they can think about is:

#### *When can I escape?*

How many times have you thought, or said, one of the sentences above? If your answer is, "Many," I want to assure you that you are not alone. Being in a group requires a different level of confidence and different social skills than spending time with someone one-on-one.

Having talked with countless numbers of folks who avoid groups, I can say with confidence that most likely it's not the group itself that you're avoiding.

Actually, you're avoiding a particular feeling or set of feelings that you have when you're in a group.

#### **Common Feelings CEN People Experience In Groups**

- Left out
- Trapped
- Lost
- Overlooked
- Freaked out
- Anxious
- Sad
- Ignored
- Judged

- Panicked
- Confused
- Self-conscious
- Alone
- Invisible
- Inferior

What causes these feelings? What is it about being among a number of people that would cause a person to have any of these uncomfortable emotions? Is it a result of anxiety or depression? A social phobia? Is it a weakness or a fault?

Sure, some of these can be possible. Depression can make you feel like isolating yourself, and anxiety or social phobia can make you too nervous to enjoy the company of others.

But if you're reading this looking for answers, I want you to dispose of the idea that your discomfort is a result of personal weakness or fault. Neither of those is the answer.

And now I'd like to give you a far better explanation than any of those. Chances are high that your discomfort in groups is caused by one of three factors.

### **3 Reasons You May Be Uncomfortable or Anxious in Groups of People**

1. **The prevailing feelings you had in your first group.**  
And by this, I mean your family. I have seen that those who grow up feeling uncomfortable in their family group often carry those uncomfortable feelings with them. So think back to when you were growing up. When your family was together did you

feel ignored? Overlooked? Left out? Alone? Invisible? (All of those feelings are typically a result of Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN). Or did you feel trapped? Inferior? Targeted? Were you constantly preparing for some unpredictable eruption of anger or erratic behavior of a family member? Whatever your prevailing feelings were, you naturally carry them forward into your adult life. These old feelings then arise in situations that mimic the family experience. Like being in a group.

2. **Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.** Research has shown that when we expect people to treat us a certain way, we can unwittingly pull for it from other people. We actually unconsciously bring it upon ourselves. In a landmark study, it was shown that children who were labelled and treated as extra smart by their teachers actually acted smarter, and did better in school, regardless of what their IQ truly was (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Since 1968 it's been discovered that self-fulfilling prophecy happens in many different ways and in interpersonal arenas of all kinds. So expect to be treated as an outsider by a group of people, and you may actually bring about exclusionary behaviour in the people around you.
3. **The Fatal Flaw.** The Fatal Flaw is a feeling that something is wrong with you. It's a sense of being different; of being missing some vital ingredient that everyone else seems to have. A surprisingly large number of people walk around with this feeling. It can lie there, under the surface, making you feel on the outside at social events both professional and personal. The Fatal Flaw can make you feel you don't

belong, even when you really, really do. It has the power to make you avoid group situations.

### **The Real Problem**

Notice that none of these potential causes of your discomfort are a product of the group itself. The actual people in the actual group are not the problem. The real problem is a feeling that you have; a feeling that you bring with you wherever you go.

### **And now the good news.**

You can't control other people (except perhaps unconsciously, thanks to Self-Fulfilling Prophecy). But you can control your feelings. Feelings can be managed. And now, during the pandemic, while the pressure is off, it's an excellent time to start working on your discomfort!

### **5 Steps to Overcome Your Discomfort in Groups**

1. Come to grips with the true nature of your discomfort. The people are not the problem. It's a feeling inside of you that's the problem. Is it Cause #1, 2, or 3 above? Or is it a mixture of several? Understanding what you're truly bothered by, and why, is a powerful Step One toward resolving it.
2. Put words to your uncomfortable feeling. Choose them from the list above and/or add your own. Naming a feeling instantly reduces its power.
3. Talk with a trusted person about the feeling and how it makes you want to avoid group events. If you don't feel comfortable talking with a friend or family

member, talk with a therapist about it. Sharing your feeling with another person will even further reduce its power over you.

4. Start exposing yourself to group situations a little at a time, with support.
5. Before you go to the group event, set an amount of time you will be there. Remind yourself that you have to manage your feeling while you are there. Talk back to the feeling when you feel it.

*These people are fine. They're not the problem.*

*You're an adult, and no one in this group can hurt you.*

*You're a good person and you belong here.*

*It doesn't matter what other people think.*

*It's just a feeling. It's old, and you don't need it anymore.*

*You're a person, on equal footing with everyone else here.  
And you matter.*

**Gillian Carter**

**Phenomenal woman**

**“It’s in the reach of my arms,  
The span of my hips,  
The stride of my step,  
The curl of my lips.  
I’m a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That’s me.”**

**‘Phenomenal Woman’ shows that even though a woman might not be beautiful according to society’s standards, every woman is beautiful on the inside. Inner beauty is much more beautiful when worn with confidence. That is what I have effectively portrayed in this gorgeous poem.**

## **Positive Voice Hearing Experiences**

### **For me, hearing a spirit is a blessing.**

I am told and shown certain interesting things sometimes, talked 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 up 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 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 breakdowns, and, on several occasions, I have heard external sounds 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 similar experiences with others and I am not alone.

**Linne Mahboub.**

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

**1 – 3 September 2021.**

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

**Thanks for taking the time in completing this brief survey:**

<https://forms.gle/LbBYFLHQVr1WHP4s8>

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

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

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

It can be delivered across the world for more information and costings Email [enquiries@nationalparanoianetwork.org](mailto:enquiries@nationalparanoianetwork.org)

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

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

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

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

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