



NPN

September Edition 2021



Celebrate World Hearing Voices Day September 14th

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**Congratulations to the
Sheffield Hearing Voices Group
It has its 25th Anniversary this month the
longest running Hearing Voices Group in the
World**

THE SHEFFIELD HEARING VOICES GROUP

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

The Sheffield Hearing Voices group was founded in 1996 by Peter Bullimore with support from Sally Bramley.

It all began with a conversation, one of many conversations that Peter, and Sally had shared since they began working together in 1992 when Peter attended a day service where Sally worked. Their relationship was initially tightly demarcated along the service user-mental health worker divide. She ran groups and activities and he attended them.

Their relationship deepened when Peter and Sally (who became his keyworker) discussed his traumatic experiences as a child. Peter had not disclosed to a worker before, and Sally had never listened to an experience of abuse like it before. Although they

formed a deeper mutual understanding at times both of them felt unsafe. Sally often felt out of her depth, unsure how to respond or what she could or should do. Peter's deep-seated fear of women with authority led, for example, to him believing he could only speak to her on health premises. They lived in neighbouring streets, and he hid when he saw her locally. She was shocked when he told her - another conversation ensued. Expectations (some people call them boundaries) shifted again. A significant step in their trust was taken when Sally invited Peter in to her house one day. This trust and respect was consolidated shortly after when he arrived with a toolbox to fit a child's bannister rail because her daughter had fallen on the stairs.

The conversation about starting the hearing voices group happened one day after leaving the crown court. Peter had been the victim of a viscous assault and Sally had supported him to attend court. He was disappointed that an existing voices group in Sheffield was closing, and she suggested he start his own. Although he initially had reservations after many conversations, they did start a group by putting out an open invitation to people through the local mental health team. Peter ran the group which was open and informal. Sally took responsibility for identifying a room, an office for Peter, other resources and

support/supervision for him in his volunteer role. Conversations here involved: - making decisions about when and how the group ran; whether it was open or closed; if/how participant's involvement was reported to their workers; how difficult situations and disclosures were handled; as well as managing some negative attitudes towards both the group and Peter's involvement from some professionals. This partnership working resulted in a regularly well attended group, which although times and participants changed went from strength to strength.

The Sheffield Hearing Voices group from the beginning illustrated the importance of people having somewhere to talk about their experiences of hearing voices. It was all about creating a space where people could have conversations. Conversations that previously people had not been allowed to have, had not felt safe enough to have, were too ashamed to have or did not feel they would be believed or understood. That little group in a day service in Hillsborough changed all that for the people who attended and for those who continue to attend to this day. It has changed that for hundreds of others who are involved in the work Peter continues to develop nationally and internationally.

Working with the Hearing Voices and Paranoia Network Peter has inspired and nurtured people to help them recover. Peter and other group members, Kate, Shaun, Hannah, and Lyn have brought people together from across the country and the world. They have brought together voice hearers, their supporters, health workers, students, academics, senior health personnel, service managers to rethink how they approach the meaning behind hearing voices

His deeply felt modesty and humility means Peter deflects the praise that many express to him . Without his energy, determination, vision, intelligence, hard work, friendship, warmth, generosity of spirit, compassion, and courage the hearing voices group would not have happened. Because it happened and because Peter is who he is, many people who hear voices now feel heard, hopeful, believed, and freed.

It is a privilege to call Peter Bullimore my friend.

Sally Bramley

Being a Hearing Voices Group Facilitator

My hearing voices started when I was 21 (just as I got married, go figure, I'm divorced now)

It was a frightening time as it was as though they were my dirty little secrets that no one else had suffered with or understood and I'd be locked up if I said I was hearing voices. It frightened me to death! I was having daily battles; I was told constantly that everything was my fault made to feel inadequate at everything I tried to put my mind to. It was affecting my life as I look back on a constant barrage, of incessant inadequacy, belittled, ridiculed told I'm a horrible person and deserving of all the physical disabilities I have and constant pain I suffer 24/7, told to self-harm constantly also made to lash out at innocent individuals.

I went to my doctors and told him I had been hearing voices and he said, "I understand now that over the years I couldn't piece together what was the underlying cause to why you had severe clinical depression." He then told me about a group that happens every Monday morning, do you think you could go?" He asked.

I was frightened of the unknown, but I promised him I would!

Monday soon comes round when you hear voices. It was the day before and my voices were horrendous telling me to self-harm and commit suicide saying if I went to this group bad things are going befall me. But I plucked up courage to go, but when I got to the group, I

couldn't enter the door. My voices were screaming at me trying to discourage me. Then I met Chris Tandy who was one of the facilitators of the group and a health professional. He made me feel safe told me the group is voluntary and I could leave anytime. And he would be at my side if things got really bad.

I sat in the chair at the side of Chris and listened to all the people's illnesses mental and physical, how old they were, how long they had heard voices for and then it happened a light switched on in my head these people I was sat with were all like me! Suffering as bad, voices horrendous, physical traits some the same manifested by the constant barrage of abuse. I talked for the first time to strangers, but I felt they were going to be good friends, they understood what I was going through and gave me good advice of how to live with voices. I let my guard down for the first time in years, I felt safe.

I found myself talking each time Monday came around, I found it a cathartic experience. The facilitators that run the group every Monday were very good at talking to individuals especially coaxing information out and making people think what can be done to make things more comfortable for themselves.

I was approached by Peter Bullimore about becoming a facilitator as he felt I would be good at it. I did the training and I have been a facilitator now for going on 5yrs I love it. It also helps my voices stress and anxiety. Which at times are extreme. Also, the group is now online due to the pandemic and since lockdown started March 2020 running the group has been a privilege. I

meet different people with different issues and problems, as a group we help each other and welcome new members into our group setting making them comfortable enough to start the process to make sense of what's happening in the world of voice hearers. There are the usual people that come online weekly, but we get other people even from abroad that can access the group now. Everyone are so caring to new individuals just starting out on their journey to a better understanding and to just talk to people of similar backgrounds and lifestyles.

All the people that access our Sheffield network have said what a great help and understanding they get from the group and meetings.

As a facilitator I am proud of all the members and feel their journey although hard at the time of starting it come so far in sometimes such a short period. But it's dependent upon each individual and as a group we envelop new people and make them feel safe and not alone because Hearing Voices is very isolating.

Emma Knightley Sheffield Hearing Voices Group

The strength of a woman

The strength of a woman is her kind hearted ways
that she forever displays.

It's her loving confident smile that takes you to the
highest place with the glimpse of determination
shone upon her face.

The strength of a woman is the amazing ability to
withstand pain bring life into this world even if
the man does not want to entertain.

It's the ability to raise her child on her own when
the man left her all alone to support them until
they are grown.

The strength of a woman is the intrinsic style
to protect like a child without being hostile.

It's the humble heart she shows
that warms a soul when your spirits feeling low.

The strength of a woman knows how to restrain her
tongue when insults are being flung.

It's the lovely expression she conveys with the eyes
and respect for herself...she does not denies.

The strength of a woman is the devoted traits
she has standing by her man side when problems
arise.

It's her inspirational words she gives her mate
making him feel oh so great.

The strength of a woman is her gentle touch
you love so much.

It's her loyal love to one guy she continues to create
without being irate.

The strength of a woman is her intellectual mind,
oh so chic with the words she speaks.

It's the versatile
qualities she uses without spirit of guile.

The strength of a woman is learning how to love
when she has been hurt over again without
committing a sin.

The strength of a woman is not her traditional love
she has to live on, it's her unconditional spiritual love
that has not yet gone.

Ronnie

Professor Alec Jenner remembers his good friend Ronnie Laing

It is difficult for an old man to capture the atmosphere of almost half a century ago, and then to portray it to a younger audience. I was however, pleased to be asked to do so. I did have the privilege of knowing to some extent Ronnie Laing and we did have several very friendly and interesting interactions.

He struggled to improve the mutual understanding of therapists and their clients. In particular he wanted to treat them all as people. He was intrigued and greatly influenced by the writings of continental philosophers especially in this regard by the Austrian Jewish Theological Martin Buber.

As a younger writer Buber extolled as the central issue for mankind their mystical relationship with God. Later on, he put such mysticism somewhat more on one side and emphasized the real centrality of the bond with the other person. He wrote at first about I and Thou (in German Thou is Du and used in everyday language with children and close friends as well as God and animals. In

other words, it was a sympathetic expression about and towards the other person. Laing demonstrated his desire to understand the mystical which he sought by visiting India. He displayed it too by suggesting the possibility that some so – called schizophrenic experiences might at times more influential and down to earth with other people and the later emphasis of Buber on the difference between Thou and It. Quite massively modern science makes us increasingly grant the likely validity of materialistic explanations of human nature, illness and psychology. However, a line does need to be drawn between what we must currently accept as knowledge and what remains in need of a different language. Modern man has gone too far in one direction.

Could schizophrenic experiences be mystic insights?

Laing was perhaps less generous to modern scientific psychology than Buber, He did agree though with Martin Buber, the philosopher Karl Popper and the great scientist Claude Bernarde. As well as so many other writers that good scientific studies while are by definition difficult to refute, that is only so for the moment. In time they reveal their own parochial and technical limitations although it can be and often is stupid to try and reject the expert's evidence, almost

with a Buddhist philosophy Laing seemed to say that taking what is a useful rule of thumb to its extremes is the ultimate inanity when applied to other areas. Further if that is so extrapolations are unsafe especially if denying our everyday life experiences which we seem to understand so well.

I will try to make this clearer when referring to Laing's great hero Sartre. Ronnie Laing was born 1927 and brought up in Glasgow in a Presbyterian atmosphere and family. He went to university there as a medical student. I have been told by an ex-classmate that no one thought of him as being unusual. He spent some time after qualifying as a doctor in the army and then moved onto working in the University department of Psychiatry in Glasgow. Subsequently he worked for a while in the Tavistock Clinic in London. There he had a training psychoanalysis. Finally, he worked for most his life as a private psychotherapist but also as the founder of the Philadelphia Association which set up homes for the mentally distressed persons. In time he fell out with the Association and continued working for himself and continually writing books and poetry. He was in addition a moderately talented pianist. He was certainly the most widely known rebel Psychiatrist in the world. Sadly, Ronnie died of a heart attack while playing tennis in France in 1989.

While the real history of human outlooks is always to great extent and a surge of many people's opinions and outlooks, some individuals like Laing stand out from the crowd. They exemplify what is being taken to be important and so at that time. Catch phrases and slogans may help.

Us to capture a vision of what was going on. Perhaps these will serve my purpose here too.

Here are some that were written in graffiti in many places and are only my selection:

'Make love, not war.', "Don't change your mind, there is a fault in reality.", "arms are toys for the boys."
"Psychiatry has a diagnosis of paranoia but not for those who aren't aware of their persecution.' 'Remember they are hoping to get you.' And 'Existence precedes essence.'

The last quote may seem difficult to understand, it is from French writer Jean Paul Sartre whom Laing so admired.

Sartre wrote that Laing had understood him very well and much better than most commentators. Clearly Laing was influenced by much thought like Sartre's and was often called existentialist.

The point again being made is that scientific studies of mankind tend to reduce us to machine like objects 'ITS'. In my time this was expressed by 'it's all in biochemistry really.' Today, brain scans are hoped to lead us nearer the final answer or pure essence of what is fundamental. In our lives though there is much which has meaning and that is not easily reduced by simple materialist philosophies.

The existentialist approach was mainly quite untheological, and Sartre was a declared atheist. His case depends on the fact that to pretend to believe others are machines is inauthentic in their everyday existence no one does in their own relationships.

Laing might have added they only do so when wearing a white coat. In one's everyday existence and experiences together with other people we are as Sartre put it "doomed to be free". We make moral and aesthetic judgments and almost everything we respond to a degree liking or disliking it.

It would be more than unreal to downgrade for example sociology and politics to physics and chemistry.

Sartre suggests that we create the concepts of right and wrong behaviour. It is not so much the matter of correct or incorrect but more like paintings which are not

correct or incorrect, but they are good and bad according to our taste. It is nevertheless the heinous which tends to make most know what is to be rejected and resisted.

He was referring to German National Socialism (The Nazis).

For Laing much in psychiatry can be shocking because a medicalisation of reality has blinded the workers Especially in the 1950's with the discovery of powerful psychoactive substances it seemed psychiatry could just be lie other branches of medicine.

There are however few borders between different disciplines even if trade unions in particular want to draw them for obvious reasons. It is nevertheless true that drugs do work in psychiatry for example both reducing (phenothiazines) or producing (amphetamines) paranoid delusions. As far as I know Laing did not quite say so and he certainly did not do so to me, but there is two remaining issues that he would have considered relevant.

For example, in this case the two types of drugs mentioned are respectively a major tranquilizer and a powerful stimulant. He would have emphasized that one socially plays one's cards differently in different

states of arousal and there not the possibility that major tranquilizers are chemical strait jackets, smoothing over rather than revealing the real problem? Much of the protests of the sixties was about coercion and freedom to be oneself.

Laing I would think, would have drawn attention to the fact the word schizophrenia was coined by Bleuler to emphasize the fact that it was not an incurable condition (as the old expression dementia praecox implied)

In the earlier years it was nevertheless very much the unspoken belief that the environment human and otherwise was irrelevant to progress. In the period in which German was the language of psychiatry, roughly the first half of the twentieth century most of the distinguished writers started with the assumption that they were studying an incurable physical genetically transmitted disease of the brain.

Their excitement and stimulation came from the great successes of physical medicine especially from bacteriology and the increasing classification of disease entities. That produced in others a feared takeover of religion, the arts, literature, and philosophy and certainly medicine which included psychiatry by the advancing army of natural sciences.

Negative Belief Systems

A particularly important legacy of abuse is the belief system that a child develops and the way in which the child subsequently views its world. We all have a variety of beliefs, some emotionally positive, some negative and others neutral. For example: “I am okay.” And “the future looks rosy” are positive beliefs which would leave any of us feeling good, negative beliefs such as “I am weak” and “these people are dangerous” would leave us feeling miserable or afraid while neutral beliefs like “the sun will rise”, “I have brown hair”, have little emotional impact. These beliefs might be true or false, but if I believe that I am ok, I feel good and if I believe that I am weak, I feel bad.

Survivors of childhood trauma tend to have more than their fair share of negative beliefs, so their view of themselves and their outlook is more likely to be negative too. Professor Jehu, a British psychologist and one of the first to study the belief systems of women who had been sexually abused, found that their views of themselves, others and the future were distinctly negative. His findings are summarized in table 2.2. in view of these, it is not surprising that many survivors of abuse struggle with their mood and relationships.

Common Beliefs among survivors of abuse 2.2

- “I am bad.”
- “I am helpless.”
- “I am unclean”.
- “I am a misfit” .
- “I am nothing.”

The last one described those who felt that they had no real personal identity or purpose. Not everyone in the survey felt this way – in fact, some clients were quite positive about themselves, but these beliefs were common enough for us to see the themes emerge. Again, one is left thinking that it is little wonder that a child who had endured abuse and developed some of these beliefs is vulnerable to having problems as an adult.

Thinking Processes

In addition to showing a tendency towards certain beliefs, the actual thinking process of survivors of trauma might be subtly different in some ways. The two main findings of researchers are:

- Survivors tend to “detach,” “Space Out,” or “Tune out.” More than the average person (this is a common phenomenon called dissociation.)
- Survivors are much more sensitive to abuse related triggers, so that, for example, a violent or cruel passage in a book would have a stronger impact on someone who had experienced childhood violence or cruelty.

Detaching or “Spacing Out.”

We all dissociate at times; it is the mental process of “detaching” and we do this to differing degrees. Sometimes it is only partial and we perhaps “drift off” a little, daydreaming or doing a task without really thinking about it. Sometimes we “cut off” from our emotions or we don’t really take in what is happening or we don’t feel quite “real”. Sometimes the dissociation is more profound than this and a person can be so detached that they can’t remember what’s been happening; they have no memory of events.

How I Became a Hearing Voices Group Facilitator

I've been hearing voices since I were six years old, I didn't go to psychiatrist services until 1992 and I spent the time in the psychiatrist services going round in circles. Doing group after group and detox after detox. which didn't work, as I was trying to blank the voices and everything else out. I didn't have a life just to make this brief. Just barely existing, I had a new keyworker, I'd been sinking for a couple of years. Then out of the blue he asked me why I didn't talk about my voices and paranoia. I said I can't, if I do, I would be put in hospital, and they would never let me out again. He tried telling me that would not happen, but I knew it would. Then he said, 'how about going to a group?' I wasn't doing anymore groups as I'd been to them over the years. He said, 'No, this is a group for voice hearers. I have no idea anyone else heard voices I thought I was the only person. He came on Monday morning and took me to the group. It started at 10.30. I sat there very scared, with people that I couldn't see as I just looked at the floor, too scared to look up I sat there listening to every single person. how their voices affected them, and I sat there thinking everyone in this room is going through the same things as I am with my voices.

For the first time in my life, I felt as though I belonged. There were other people who understood me. I might

now have the chance of having a life and not just an existence. I was on the brink of suicide, but now there could be a slight bit of hope that maybe I could live with my voices like some of the group members were doing. So, I went back the next week and I heard stories from people who were suffering with voices but have a different way of coping with them. Maybe that could be me, maybe this is my lifeline. Every week I went listening, taking everything in what everyone was saying and trying different coping mechanisms. Instead of mine which was just drinking to pass out.

I never missed a week, I went every single Monday, that was 2011. When I started going to the group. And I'm still going to this day, Mondays in the group, is the only time I don't have to wear a mask. You don't have to in this group, you can be you. Everyone knows what you are going through. They can tell if you're not coping, and every single person is supportive.

I did facilitator training in 2015 with Peter Bullimore and from 2015 I have been one of the facilitators of our group, even today through the pandemic we are still running the group. A bit different now because of Covid19. In 2020, we went online, so we could carry on with the group virtually. The hearing voices group is my family. The only people that understand me, and that is so precious to me.

Lyn Sheffield Hearing Voices Group

My name is Adam McGrath.

I was a support worker in mental health for six years, but for the last two, I have been studying my Masters in Filmmaking at *Sheffield Hallam University*.

During this time, I have made a short film called *Listen*, in which the main character is a voice hearer and suffers with paranoia; I would really love to hear your feedback, if you can spare 10-15 minutes?

Before you watch, it is important to note that *Listen* was shot in only one day, under Covid restrictions (rule of 6) and is a “proof of concept” film; meaning it has been a learning exercise, in which I could experiment with how the voices appear on screen, how to direct the actors (with the voices as an added element) and so much more.

The plan moving forward is to use *Listen* (and the information gathered from the attached survey) in order to write a new script, with-a-view to representing voice hearers as authentically as possible and creating a compelling story. I will then apply for funding to the *BFI (British Film Institute)* and try to raise money myself, in order to make the film to the highest possible standard - if that goes well, then I'd like to make a feature film ... but let's not get ahead of ourselves!

If you could watch the film (<https://vimeo.com/595924278/8dc621bf42>) and fill out the survey (<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BMKKCYG>), this will really help in the development phase of the next version of the film.

Thank you for reading and I hope to hear from you soon.

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

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

Hearing Voices Group Ireland

A group for people who hear voices or experience
paranoia and unusual beliefs, on Zoom

Facilitated by Michael Ryan

Every Sunday @ 4pm

Zoom Link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89201253186>

Email: vhmichael9345@gmail.com

With enquiries