



info sheet



Mind in Camden's Voice Collective is a new project that is developing peer support groups for young people (aged 12-18) who hear, see or experience things that other people don't. This sheet should give you a good idea of what the groups are about and whether they might be for you (or someone you care about). If you want to find out more: email us (info@voicecollective.co.uk), call us (020 7241 8978) or check out our website (www.voicecollective.co.uk).



VOICES, VISIONS & OTHER UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES

Around 8% of young people hear or see things that other people don't. These kinds of experiences can affect all of your 5 senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell). Some people find these experiences comforting, especially if they've been through a difficult time, but others feel overwhelmed and scared by them. Whatever your experience is, and however you feel about it, it's good to know that you're not alone in it.

"I'd been living all these years in a strange isolated bubble, thinking I was unique, and then I realised there were all these other people just like me." Ruth*

There are lots of different ways of understanding voices & visions. Some see them as a reaction to stressful situations or as a creative way that our minds cope with things that worry or stress us out. Others believe that they're a special gift or ability. Some believe that are spiritual experiences or have a way of understanding them that is based around their culture.

Others think of them as being part of mental ill health or emotional distress. They can also be seen simply as a matter of individual difference. Some people are left handed, some people hear voices.

At Voice Collective, the most important thing is that you're supported to find a way of understanding your experiences that makes sense to you.



COPING, RECOVERY & RESILIENCE

Voices, visions and other sensory experiences affect people in different ways. Some find them inspiring, reassuring or have voices that can make them laugh. Their voices may give them good advice or support. Others may feel confused and frightened by the things they see, hear and experience. Many find it harder to concentrate at school, feel isolated and worry that others will think they're 'crazy'.

The good news is that hearing voices or having other unusual experiences doesn't have to stop you from living the life you want to live. There are lots of ways of coping, and living with, these experiences – and many people do.

"I'm no longer frightened by my experiences, and would even miss the voices if they went! Because I've been able to change the relationship with my voices I can give them a personal and positive meaning, take pride in my experience, reclaim it, take control of it - and just get on with it! When my mum's really stressed she gets bad migraines, and when I'm really stressed I get bad voices - it's as simple, and no more scary, than that." Eleanor*

Recently, Dr Sandra Escher did some ground-breaking research with young people who hear voices (and often had other unusual sensory experiences). She found that, over a 3 year period, 60% of the young people she spoke to stopped hearing voices altogether.

Most of those who still heard voices felt much more able to cope with them and were getting on with their lives.

The key to recovery seems to be dealing with the real life issues and feelings that are linked to the voices and visions (both as a cause and result of them).

PEER SUPPORT AND SELF HELP

Peer support is based on the idea that, often, the best people to help us through difficult times are those that have been there too. It's about getting together, sharing experiences and finding ways of coping with them. It's not about there being an expert standing up at the front, telling you what to do. We all have our own expertise and we all have something to offer – even if we don't always realise this.



VOICE COLLECTIVE GROUPS

Voice Collective groups are peer support groups for young people who hear, see or sense things that other people don't. They are safe spaces for young people (aged 12-18) to meet others who understand what they're going through, without worrying about being judged or made fun of.

"For the first few weeks I didn't say much, but I listened alot. I was really suprised to find that I related to what others were saying. I realised I wasn't alone. It was the first step to getting my life back." R*

The groups will help different people in different ways. You might: feel less isolated and make

friends; begin to feel 'normal' again; try out new ways of coping with your experiences; explore different ways of making sense of them; share what's going on in your life; feel like you can be yourself with people you trust.

Whilst all groups will hold to some basic ideals (respect and mutual support), they will all be unique. As a group member, you will have a big part to play in shaping it to fit with what you need, and want. Some groups will spend a lot of time sharing their experiences in words, others may take a more active/creative route.

THE PRACTICAL BITS

An average group will meet for about an hour each week and be made up of 5-8 people. There will usually be some social time built in, meaning you get chance to chill out with other group members. Groups will be co-facilitated by someone who has experience of living with voices themselves (a member of the Voice Collective team at Mind in Camden)

There's no pressure to come each week - we think it's important that you are there because you want to be, not because you feel you have to.

All groups will be run as partnerships between the Voice Collective team (Mind in Camden) and organisations that support young people (including the Anna Freud Centre and NSPCC's Tower Hamlets Young People's Centre).

WHAT NOW?

If you'd like to come to a group, get in touch and we'll send you a self referral form. All you need to do is fill it in (either by yourself, or with the help of someone you trust) and send it back to us. If you'd like to speak to us first, get in touch on the details below.



Contact Voice Collective:

Email: rwaddingham@mindincamden.org.uk, Call: 020 7241 8978

Voice Collective, Mind in Camden, Barnes House, 9-15 Camden Road, London, NW1 9LQ

* Quotes contributed by people who have heard voices as young people and later attended an over 18s group