



Caring for young minds

Anna Freud Centre

Information sheet: Peer Support Group Referrals



Anna Freud Centre, in partnership with Mind in Camden, is seeking referrals for their Voice Collective peer support group. The group is open to young people (aged 12-18) who hear, see or sense things that others don't.

8% of young people have experiences like these, so if you work with someone who may benefit from our service, please read the information below and support them to access it.

- To refer to the group: Email: Natalie.Merrett@annafreud.org, Call: 020 7443 2230
- For an informal chat or more information: Email: info@voicecollective.co.uk, Call: 020 7625 9042

WHO CAN ATTEND?

The AFC Voice Collective group is open to young people, across London, who are:

- aged 12-18
- hear, see or sense things that others don't
- open to engaging in peer support work

Group members may hear voices related to:

- Traumatic or difficult life experiences
- First episode psychosis
- Dissociative experiences
- Difficult or overwhelming emotions
- Isolation and insecurity (including voices which provide comfort and reassurance)
- Spiritual or cultural understandings
- Unusual and/or distressing beliefs

ABOUT VOICE COLLECTIVE GROUPS

Voice Collective groups are simply **peer support groups** based on the understanding that, for many, the biggest blocks to recovery are fear, isolation, stigma and loss of hope.

Each week, a range of activities are offered to members including coping strategy work, problem solving and creative expression. The emphasis is on mutual support rather than formal therapeutic intervention.

THE GROUP IS ...

"The group is kinda cool. It's hard to keep it in all the time. It's good to trust people and let it out. It's good to have people who can understand me and know what I'm going through"

- Chloe*, Aged 13

- a **safe space** for young people to meet with others who understand
- **user-centred** and based around the needs and interests of their members
- **flexible**, using activities that suit group members (from chatting about issues important to them, to using the creative arts)
- **social**, rather than being solely focussed on distress or unusual experiences
- **recovery-focussed**, seeing current distress as temporary and ultimately understandable
- **hopeful**, encouraging young people to envision a positive future for themselves (whether they continue to hear voices or not).
- **open to a range of understandings and explanations** around voices (including spiritual and ones rooted in an individual's culture)
- **complementary** to other forms of support

BENEFITS

"Without the group I would be isolated. I used to think I was the only person this is happening to, that I was freakish or wrong. It helped me realise that there are other people. It normalised it and made it less inhuman"

- Andy*, Aged 16

When meeting a young person for the first time, we encourage them to set their own goals for being part of the group. These are, by their nature, highly individual.

However, feedback from young people, their families and the professionals supporting them, indicate that the groups can be helpful in the following ways:

Voice/vision-specific

- Increased number and range of coping strategies
- Reduced distress and anxiety
- Increased confidence in talking about their experiences
- Increased ability to link voices/visions to thoughts, feelings and life experiences
- Increased awareness of own triggers
- Increased ability to identify when additional support is required (and confidence/knowledge to access this)

Personal

- Increased confidence and self esteem
- Increased sense of empowerment
- Increased sense of being 'normal'
- Increased emotional wellbeing skills
- Increased hope for the future

Social/Educational

- Reduced isolation
- Increased engagement in social/educational opportunities (including support integrating back into school/college)

In these evidence-based times, we recognise the importance of systematic evaluation. Following our successful pilot project the Anna Freud Centre is conducting a three year evaluation of the Voice Collective project.

REFERRAL PROCESS

If you know a young person who may be interested in coming to the group, please contact us and we will email you a referral form and information pack. Alternatively, feel free to give us a call at our office if you'd like to find out more about the group or have an informal chat.

In line with the self help aspect of our project, we encourage **self referrals**. It is important that the young people who come to our groups really do want to be there.

We understand, however, that contacting us may be a daunting task for some young people and we welcome your help in encouraging and supporting your clients to access our service.

If you do fill in the form on behalf of the young person, we encourage you to talk the form through with them first.

On receiving the form, we will make contact with the young person (and/or their parent or guardian, as appropriate) to arrange an initial meeting.

OTHER SUPPORT

Voice Collective offers a range of services for young people who hear voices, their families & supporters. This includes advice, information, coaching, short term 1-2-1 work, creative workshops and training. For more information, contact Claire or Rachel on the details below.

Voice Collective is a Mind in Camden project, made possible by funding from:

- ★ BBC Children in Need
- ★ Comic Relief
- ★ City Bridge Trust

For more information, contact Voice Collective:

Email: info@voicecollective.co.uk, Call: 020 7625 9042, Web: www.voicecollective.co.uk

Voice Collective, Mind in Camden, Crossfields Centre, 8 Fairhazel Gardens, London, NW6 3SG