

Ashley's Story

"When I hear voices and see things I feel very scared. They threaten me every day, ask me to do things I do not want to do ... something I know is wrong and unsafe. They also tell me people are spying on me or people are not who they are not who they say they are. They can also shout at me or talk about what I am doing to each other. At times I feel as if they are in control of me or of those around me. When it is at its worst I feel as if I am trapped in another world, I cannot escape.

I used to have 12 voices (they are the voices of children), but now there are more. I see a man in black, who follows me around and threatens me, the spirits of 3 children he murdered and a person, who sometimes appears as a woman and sometimes as a child, who has a badly scarred face. I also see aliens, spiders, scorpions, spirits, things changing colour or . At times I struggle to cope and have felt suicidal because I have to cope with this every day.

No one else hears MY voices – only me (they told me I was the chosen one), but through the project I have met other people who hear voice too, so I know I am not alone.

I cannot remember a day when I did not hear the voice, because they began when I was so young.

It is hard for people to understand how it feels to hear voices and see things. When I was in hospital someone told me I was imagining the voices. This really upset me, because it was not true. I began to feel as if people thought I was lying and I did not want to talk about it to anyone. When I do, I feel embarrassed and worried about how they will react. I do not feel doctors always understand.

My mum has always been there for me since the beginning. She helps me to feel safe and uses exercises and games to help distract me. If I want to talk about the voices I can, but she never forces me, it is my choice. Sometimes I just need a hug. I also have a supportive sister.

The Voice Collective Project has been amazing. They really understand me and how I feel, because they have heard voices too. I know they believe me too, which is important. They help me to challenge the voices and feel safer by giving me coping strategies. I go to a weekly group where I have met other young people who are experiencing similar, which has helped me to realise I am not alone. I also meet with the project individually or communicate with them by telephone or email.

They are always there for me. They focus on the positive aspects of what I achieve, not on what I do not achieve and are always there to listen. I have also participated in art and drama workshops with the project, which were brilliant. I trust everyone at the project and they know and understand me too. They have really helped me and I will always be thankful to them."

Eleanor's Story

"I've heard voices for over ten years now, and in the beginning was utterly tormented by them. What made the difference for me was getting away from psychiatry's conventional 'cure' response – which is ignoring the voices, dismissing them as meaningless or trying to medicate them away.

Instead I began to explore, understand, accept and integrate the emotional meaning of the voices in terms of my life history – the recovery response. I'm no longer frightened by my experiences, and would even miss the voices if they went! And 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!

The way I see it is that 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".

Dolly's Story

"I first heard voices and saw things when I was 14. Because of abuse, I wasn't happy child, but after the voices came, I knew there were children in hell, because that's where I was. Because of the fear I stopped going to school. I reached out for people to help me but got disapproval, threats, violence and coldness instead.

People kept telling me to pull my socks up. It is hard to do that if you think demons are eating your soul. I was in hell and professionals were adding petrol to keep it going. It was only when one person said to me in my early 30s, I believe in you and you have the power to change that the hell quelled and the fire began to turn into light.

I felt as a teenager with these experiences that I shouldn't dream. Basically I was told I wasn't allowed to. But dreams can come true. Mine have. What I want to say to young people with these experiences not to stop dreaming because with some support and a little self-belief, you can make your dreams come true".

Eoin's Story

"I have co-existed with my voices for as many years as my memory can recall. It started off mainly as a mixture of a positive, but occasionally bothersome, experience. I was comfortable with our coexistence for many years, until when I was 14, when the voices really turned up the heat and the volume. I gradually descended into a set of beliefs surrounding myself, as my voices became increasingly angry and violent. One of them vanished, and in the vacuum the other began speaking twice as much.

Luckily I was able to contact Voice Collective relatively early into my distressing experiences, and they really helped. I hopped in and out of hospital like it was going out of fashion, and received a diagnosis which I didn't really agree with. I've began to develop a working relationship with my voice, and tried to understand her and what drives her.

I don't think 'recovery' and 'not hearing voices' are the same thing- if anything, I get more upset when I have a period of 'silence'! My voices have been a very formative experience in my life, and with Voice Collective's help, I'm discovering more about my self and my experiences than being labeled or medicating ever could".