



## Voices and Visions in Children TV and Film

Written by: Voice Collective Development Worker

*In September 2020 I attended 'Voice hearing representation in children's TV and film' webinar with the National Hearing Voices Network. I had recently joined the Voice Collective Team and I wanted to learn more about how voices and visions are portrayed in media for young children, especially as they can be influenced by what they watch. Initially I was preparing myself to be frustrated by inevitable highly stigmatized views of people who hear voices and see visions. However, I left the webinar feeling a little bit more hopeful how some TV and film are dealing with the idea of voices and visions in a less stigmatized way.*

*Some examples really stuck out for me. I'll start with Kyri and Lou who are two dinosaur friends from New Zealand. SPOILER ALERT Lou has a 'calm inner voice,' and in one of the clips we saw, Lou is introducing Kyri to his calm inner voice which he speaks to when he is in one of his 'sticky situations.' Instead of the voice being portrayed as something to hide and be ashamed of, Lou seems happy to share and talk about the voice, even making Kyri feel jealous that she doesn't have her own calm inner voice! There is an interesting turn here when Kyri becomes annoyed and frustrated that she cannot hear Lou's voice and she thinks that the voice is saying mean things about her. I appreciated how this aspect highlights the feelings of frustration in regards to hearing voices, and it being a struggle to communicate with others about it when they don't also have this experience.*

*Another clip highlighted unhelpful times when voices occur. Lou is feeling happy and resting against a tree to take a nap. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, the voice asks him if he is ok because he thought Lou had 'called for him.' Even though Lou manages to stay calm and relaxed and politely tells his calm inner voice that he is not needed today, there is content around how sometimes voices can interrupt daily life when you don't want them around. For a programme that appeals to quite a young age range, I feel that Kyri and Lou starts to de stigmatize the idea of hearing voices, without sugar coating it too much, recognising some of the distress voices can cause. Here is the link if you want to have a watch for yourself!*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOcuH09e\\_oA&t=25s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOcuH09e_oA&t=25s)



*The second example was the main song from Frozen 2 'Into the Unknown.' The essence of this movie song is Elsa starts to hear a singing voice that no one else can hear. Initially she seems confused and embarrassed that she is hearing this beautiful sound, so she doesn't tell anyone. Initially, Elsa tries to deny its*

existence claiming that she 'can't hear,' and 'blocking out your calls.' Unlike Kyri and Lou, but maybe more common in stereotypical views of voice hearers, there is a desire to ignore the voice and not engage with it. This can be due to fear of what might happen, this is often experienced by children and young people who come to us at Voice Collective. However, I sense Elsa has a feeling of wanting to delve 'into the unknown' to find out the possible meaning of the voice, even if she is a worried, 'I'm afraid of what I am risking if I follow you'. During the song, Elsa is able to accept her inquisitive nature and decides to follow the voice. She begins questioning, 'what do you want?' 'are you here to distract me?' and seems to have a powerful realisation when she admits that she really does want to listen!



Elsa uses her powers and imagination to create beautiful animals and mythical creatures. At one point the prancing horse and the singing voice run away and Elsa explains that she doesn't want to be left alone. This part of the song has creatively portrayed how some voice hearers empowered and connected with their voices that if they were to stop hearing them they would feel lonely. Even though Elsa does feel scared by the singing voice at the start, her journey and her experience seem very positive, glittery and magical, which is obviously not experienced by everyone who hears voices. In fact it can be quite the opposite experience. This is something I am learning to check in on during my time at Voice Collective – being non-judgmental of voice hearer's experiences. Here is the link if you want to listen for yourself:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIOyB9Z Xn8s>

Often, children and young people who hear voices have an urge to engage with their voices to try and understand them, but they're advised against this by different education and mental health services. I have worked in statutory services in the past and some of the views I supported I now regret. I once supported an 8 year old girl who had already been diagnosed with 'psychosis.' Despite some of my attempts to suggest to her school to support her more creatively to explore and play in her own way, there was an underlying expectation to continue to tell her that the voices and things she was seeing were not real. How differently I would approach this situation now after becoming a part of Voice Collective!

I acknowledge that some of these examples of films, TV, and music could be seen to invalidate or de-value how scary and painful some voice hearing experiences can be for children and young people. The media might be viewed by some as either heavily stigmatizing hearing voices, or sugar coating it as only positive and exciting experiences. I feel however that these examples could be taken as providing some nuance to the experience. Not all media, TV and film is portraying voice hearing as a 'dangerous' or 'psychotic' experience. For younger children being subjected to these more positive visuals can help them to develop a more balanced understanding of the experiences for voice hearers.