



FOUNDATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE

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NEW GRANT BOOSTS HEARING VOICES APPROACH IN USA

(Wilsonville, OR) - A pioneering approach to understanding voices, visions, and other extreme states will now be available to more Americans, thanks to a \$300,000 grant to the Hearing Voices Research and Development Fund.

For more than 25 years, the Hearing Voices Network – an international collaboration of professionals, voice hearers, and their families and friends – has been working to develop a peer-support based approach to help those coping with distressing voices, visions, and other anomalous experiences. It enables voice hearers – even those who have been chronically disabled – to come to terms with their voices or to silence them altogether. One in ten people will hear voices at some point in their lives, and for many, this experience can be terrifying and isolating. The most common treatment in the US is a long-term course of ‘antipsychotic’ drugs, which are often ineffective and can have unwanted side effects. Only now are real alternatives starting to become known here.

Since 2015, the Hearing Voices Research and Development Fund at the Foundation for Excellence in Mental Health Care, working in close collaboration with the Western Massachusetts Recovery Learning Community, has enabled the training of more than 150 new peer-support group facilitators, who have fanned out from Portland, Oregon to Dover, Delaware and more than doubled the number of Hearing Voices groups in the US. Voice hearers in at least some locations can now access safe, non-judgmental support in their local communities. As one participant said, “I really feel that if this group had been available to me in the 1980s, I might have completely avoided the psychiatric system.” Three of the new groups have been specifically designed for military veterans, pioneering a new approach to coping with post-combat distress.

In addition to these training efforts, the Fund has been supporting a team of researchers who are working to provide a stronger evidence base for the Hearing Voices approach. Their specific goal is to identify the essential elements of Hearing Voices peer-support groups that make them so effective. The team includes both psychologists and voice hearers to ensure fidelity to participants’ lived experience, and data are being collected from all over the country via questionnaires and follow-up interviews with those who have participated in HV groups. The new grant will allow for a significant expansion of the scope of this research and for a much wider distribution of its results.

The grant will also allow the team to respond to more of the many requests it receives from all over the country for new facilitator trainings, as well as being able to offer continuing outreach to those already trained to create networks in their regions. In addition, a series of free public information events will be launched in diverse locations around the US to raise awareness of

the Hearing Voices approach and to involve local communities in spreading the word about this pioneering alternative. The grant will also enable the team to offer different types of trainings, to develop videos, webinars, and resource packs, and to expand its online support to reach the many voice hearers, family members, and mental health professionals across the US who are seeking advice and consultation.

Project Co-Director Gail Hornstein, Professor of Psychology at Mount Holyoke College, says: "We are very excited about the possibilities that this new grant will offer. The Hearing Voices approach has transformed the lives of thousands of distressed people all over the world, and we are eager to help to make this positive, cost-effective, and often life-saving alternative or supplement to medication available to more Americans."

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