

# The A-Z of Coping with Voices

- A**ccept the reality of your voices
- B**reak through the victim barrier
- C**onsider all your options
- D**evelop coping strategies that suit you
- E**nter into dialogue with your voices
- F**ocus in on your voices
- G**o to a self help group (a hearing voices group if there is one)
- H**elp others by sharing your experience
- I**dentify the areas of your life on which that you need to work
- J**oin in activities outside mental health organisations
- K**eep a diary
- L**ive your life not your label
- M**ake space for yourself
- N**egotiate with your voices
- O**wn your voices
- P**erseverance is the name of the game
- Q**uestion your voices
- R**eward yourself when you succeed
- S**mall is beautiful
- T**ake your time; haste can mean failure
- U**se services to your advantage
- V**ictories have to be fought for
- W**ork on your weaknesses
- X**periment with different coping strategies
- Y**ou make your decisions, not your voices
- Z**ap your negative voices by gaining control over them

# Living with 'Hearing Voices' ... A mind-opening workshop with Arana Pearson

*ON 11-12 October 2006, during Mental Health Week, New Zealand and Australian director of Keepwell Ltd and a colleague of the International Mental Health Network, Arana Pearson, presented an inspiring and powerful workshop on 'Hearing Voices that are Distressing: A Simulated-Training-Experience'. Rangi Ponga reports ...*

Working alongside renowned peers such as Dr Patricia Deeghan, Ron Coleman and Merinda Epstein, Arana is one of many who now provides training and counselling to voice hearers, carers, community and 'clinical professionals' in recognition and acknowledgement of voice hearing recipients. Arana openly defines himself as being 'Mad and Proud' of it, and uses colloquial statements of 'MAD Pride' as a means to fight for equality of mental health, both as a voice hearer and trainer.



Consumer consultant, trainer, facilitator, musician, writer and public speaker, Arana Pearson inspiring participants at his Mental Health Week workshop in Alice Springs

Having experienced previous Simulated-Voice-Hearing workshops in New Zealand with Ron Coleman, through the Like Minds, Like Mine consumer advisory group (late 90's), it was easy for me to relate to Arana's workshop and enjoy his methodology as a reality based experience of learning. So it was an honor to host this fellow New Zealander for the period he spent in Alice Springs over Mental Health Week in October.

As Arana says, "My mission is to carry a message of hope and recovery, delivering the best wellness focussed resources to people. I am passionate in using my own experiences and talents to make recovery both an aim and a reality within all communities in the world, and to support people into wellness."

## Resources

Keepwell Limited and International Mental Health Network have developed workbooks as tools to assist voice hearers, their families, carers and 'professionals' to acknowledge the experiences received. Their aim is to work toward reducing continued distress experienced by many receivers, and / or simplify recognition of what is being experienced. Identified learning objectives in the

workbooks clearly define and achieve the desired outcomes to ensure the stigma of mental health is recognized and reduced.

Following are comments from participants who attended the 2-day workshop—and, with permission from Arana, we have reprinted excerpts from the workbooks on the following pages regarding how to reduce the stressors associated with hearing voices.

If you are interested in gaining more information on the processes involved and/or the workbooks, there are workshop participants who are willing to share details on how to use the book (see my contact details below).

It is the intent of Keepwell Limited and the International team (Ron Coleman and others) to support recipients of voice hearing experiences to develop support groups in their own regions and provide education to others on how to manage their experiences. A very progressive process to recovery...

I would like to acknowledge the methods used by Arana and the humor expressed. His wit affirms the adage, 'If I say it, that's ok, but if you attempt to do it, then that's discrimination.' "I may be Mad but I'm not stupid." ❌

**MAD – Movement  
Against Discrimination**

**QBE – Qualified By  
Experience**

**FEAR – Face Everything  
And Recover**

## A Lived Experience response to the Hearing Voices Workshop

I attended the 2-day workshop with Arana Pearson during Mental Health Week in Alice Springs.

My voice-hearing experiences were the result of my looking into psychological space for that extra perception and out of the ordinary experiences that sometimes occurred in my life and about which I was curious. This has now been an ongoing journey for about 15 years during which time I have been guided by many voices.

I initially dealt with unwanted voices with the assistance of a mantra, will and breath-work and was free after three weeks. I then sat in meditation and learned how to use my voice for healing. After a short period I began to sing the notes I heard and I still live in wonder and awe of this healing process so different for each person. Much of my journey has been one of faith and hope and I continue to hope that voices are addressed from a spiritual perspective while accepting that a medical model may initially be needed for some.

If the hearing of voices was demystified to some degree perhaps help would be sought earlier by people and so might be easier to deal with.

*Lynne Kennedy, Alice Springs*

**For more information contact Rangiwihua Ponga on 8950 4602**



Guest speakers Arana Pearson (right) with Wayne Schwass (left) and participants at a free Alice Springs forum on 10 October during Mental Health Week 2006

# Hearing Voices Workshop:

## 2 clinical perspectives ...

*that I have been to a workshop on hearing voices. Amazing how much you forget what clients must be going through.*

I found the first day an amazing experience. Wearing the head phones and listening to the voices I found quite disturbing and a bit frightening, trying to put myself into the place of someone who does hear voices all the time. I found the simple tasks of answering questions, filling out forms and doing the puzzles somewhat difficult as the voice in the headphone was very distracting.

This has opened my eyes to the problems and difficulties those must be going through and it has given me a more empathetic approach to nursing clients who do hear voices. I understand that they sometimes do not want nurses asking questions all the time, that they require space and time to themselves to deal with the voices, and some use diversional techniques to cope.

The second day I found interesting as I did not know that someone could hear more than one voice and that some could be very disturbing and insulting, and others quite calming and comforting. Hearing how Arana dealt with one particular client was interesting. Finding out that he was a person who heard voices and how he coped

with them after spending time in mental health hospitals was a revelation to me.

I got a lot out of the workshop and will use what I learnt to better understand my daily interactions with clients, not just those who hear voices but also those who have a varying degree of mental health problems.

I think this workshop should be compulsory for those who work in the field of mental health. Thank you for the workshop and the time that everyone put into it. I found it most enlightening.

**David Tymms**

*After attending day two of the Hearing Voices workshop I now feel empowered and better equipped to support those who experience 'negative voices'.*

Learning how to use the voices in a positive way, exploring their origins and connection to significant life events, was mind blowing for me. I can hardly imagine how empowering and healing this experience would be to the one who has the experience of 'hearing voices'.

I really appreciated the sharing which has given me a deeper understanding of the difficulties some people experience. This understanding creates the empathy that guides my practice as a Mental Health Nurse. Thank you.

**Helen Morgan**

**My mission is to carry a message of hope and recovery, delivering the best wellness focussed resources to people. I am passionate in using my own experiences and talents to make recovery both an aim and a reality within all communities in the world, and to support people into wellness. (Arana Pearson)**



## Arana Pearson

the director of Keepwell Ltd, has provided consumer consultancy, facilitation and training for mental health since 1993, currently working in Australia and New Zealand.

Arana is a musician and writer who became involved in mental health service sector some years after his own experience of using mental health services in New Zealand.

He was the first chairman for the National Consumer Advisory Group in the New Zealand Like Minds Like Mine project to counter stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness, and until recently was an advisor to the New Zealand Mental Health Commission.

Arana has performed with passion in a variety of forums including keynote addresses throughout Australia and New Zealand. Arana released a CD music recording of the mental health consumer anthem "I'm just a little mad" (2000) and a relaxation CD of piano music (2003) and is the organiser of Mad Pride™ concerts throughout Australasia.

**[www.keepwell.com.au](http://www.keepwell.com.au)**

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*"Kind words can be short, but their echoes are endless." Mother Teresa*

# Differences Between People Who Report **Being Able to Cope With Voices** and Those **Who Experience Them as More Distressing . . .**

## **Group A: People who feel they can cope:**

1. Feel self as stronger than the voices
2. Experience some voices as helpful (positive)
3. Experience less commanding voices
4. Set more limits to voices
5. Listen more selectively to voices
6. Experience more support from others
7. Communicate more often about their voices

## **Group B: People who experience more distress:**

1. Feel self weaker than voices
2. Experience voices as disturbing (negative)
3. Experience more commands
4. Do not dare to set limits to voices
5. Seek relief by using more distraction techniques
6. Experience less support
7. Communicate less about their voices

## **Hypothesized Phases of Coping with Voices** (from Romme & Escher 1994, p. 17)

### **Phase 1: The Startling Phase**

Voices usually begin with a sudden onset and are usually experienced as being quite frightening. One person described this as a period marked by 'fear, anxiety and escape'.

### **Phase 2: The Phase of Organisation**

This is the phase of exploring what/who the voices are and learning some way of coping with them. One person described this phase as being marked by 'investigation of what the voices mean and accepting them as independent entities'.

### **Phase 3: The Stabilisation Phase**

This is the period in which a more consistent ongoing means of dealing with voices is developed. One person said this phase included 'accepting myself, exploring what it is that I try to escape from, reversing the confrontation with the voices and not trying to escape any more.'

## **Suggestion for Helping Professionals who want to assist and support their clients who hear voices that are distressing** (from Romme & Escher 1994, p.26)

1. Accept the patient's experience of the voices. These voices are often felt as more intense and real than sensory perceptions.
2. Try to understand the different languages used by patients to describe and account for their experiences, as well as the language spoken by the voices themselves. There is often a world of symbols and feelings involved; for example, a voice might speak of light and dark when expressing love and aggression.
3. Consider helping the individual to communicate with the voices. This may involve issues of differentiating between good and bad voices and of accepting the patient's own negative emotions. This kind of acceptance may make a crucial contribution to the promotion of self esteem.
4. Encourage the patient to meet other people with similar experiences and to read about hearing voices, in order to help overcome the isolation and taboo.