London Hearing Voices Project: Prisons & Secure Units

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Mind in Camden’s London Hearing Voices Project

2005 – 2009: London Hearing Voices Groups Project

2009 + Voice Collective

2010 + Prisons Project

2012 + Paranoia Groups
The Prison Project: Overview

- 3 years funding
- Establish a trained, supported & sustainable network of Hearing Voices Groups in London’s Prisons & Secure Units
- Limited staff time (4 days development worker, 2 days manager)
London Prisons – some context

- 8 prisons in London
  - 1 women’s prison
  - 1 young offenders institution
  - 6 male prisons

- Over 7,500 people in prison (90,000 + in UK)

- Many many more in secure forensic units
  - NHS & Independent
A bit about the people in prison

- Average age: 27
- 70% diagnosed with 2 or more mental health problems
  - ‘Psychosis’: 7% male, 14% female
    - 26% of these spend 23hrs+ in cell
- High suicide rate (x 15)
  - ‘Hearing Voices’ involved in 20%
- High levels of trauma -> Hearing voices a common experience
Support for people in prison who hear voices

- Mental health inreach teams
  - NHS run
  - Provision varies, but ALL overstretched
  - Don’t always feel able to help voice-hearers

- Charities
  - Samaritans, St Mungos, WISH, Women In Prison, Southside
  - Overstretched and underfunded

- GAPS ... GAPS ... GAPS
Bored of statistics?

It’s about people, not numbers
The Plan:

Engage
- Prisons
- Staff & volunteers
- Prisoners

Inform
- Training
- Resources

Pilot
- Groups
- Evaluate
- Learn

Establish
- Roll out groups
- Support facilitators
- Sustainable network
The Reality #1:

- A slow start
  - Prisons interested, but overstretched
  - Jumping through hoops
  - Lots of training and development work
  - Learning how to influence from a distance

- Turning points
  - Getting clearance!
  - Launching first group (HMP Holloway)
  - The group WORKS!!
  - One day conference (28 June)
The Reality #2:

- Gathering momentum - Increased engagement & enthusiasm
  - Prison officers
  - Healthcare
  - Voluntary agencies
  - Prisoners

- Change the model – develop what we can, where we can

- Plans with HMP Pentonville, HMP Wandsworth, HMP Belmarsh, YOI ISIS, HMP Bronzefield
The Group: HMP Holloway

- Launched 20th May
- Drop in (Day Centre clients)
- Optional
- 13 women so far (2-6 per group)
- Partnership between MiC & prison
The Group: What we’ve learnt

■ Don’t Panic!!!
  ■ Lots of initial anxiety from staff
  ■ Included belief that unstructured groups won’t work
  ■ In truth: IT’S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE, IT’S A GROUP

■ Hold On To Your Hat
  ■ Fast paced – so much for women to share
  ■ Voices, visions, trauma, diagnosis, spirituality, families, self harm, bullying, sentencing, prison life, guilt, loneliness, motherhood

■ Dealing with our own frustration & powerlessness
The Group: What members tell us they like about it

- Acceptance
- Trust
- Space
- Respect
- Mutual Support
- Friendship
- Hope
- Inspiration
- Tears
- Survival
- Laughter
- Connection
Want to find out more?

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