



Self-Help Groups

User Manual

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Section 1

Introduction

Welcome

In reading this opening statement of our Hearing Voices User Manual for Self-Help Groups, you have begun your journey.

The nature of your particular journey will depend on your personal status and therefore interest in HV Self-Help Groups.

You may be a Voice Hearer, Carer, Group Facilitator, Service Provider or just an interested member of the community.

In particular, if you are a Voice Hearer, this is your journey toward recovery. Through Self-Help Groups you will learn many techniques to help cope, and, over time, take control of your voices.

This manual is intended to provide the platform for all participants within a Self-Help Group environment, and the guidelines and ideas for their successful execution. The content in this manual is limited to those objectives. More detailed information regarding Hearing Voices can be found at our web site www.hvnsw.org.au or the many other Networks around the world, which are linked to our site.

We wish you well on your journey.

History of the Hearing Voices Approach

In 1987, in Maastricht, Marius Romme, a social psychiatrist and Patsy Hage, a voice hearer, went on Dutch television to speak about voice hearing and asked people who heard voices to contact them.

Following the TV program:

- 750 people responded
- From that group 450 heard voices
- 300 of those could not cope
- 150 were able to handle them.

Research following on from this response led to the establishment of the Resonance Foundation – the first self-help group.

The first Hearing Voices conference was held in Maastricht in 1988, to give Professionals an insight into the voice hearing experience.

This led to a world wide movement that works towards raising awareness and supporting those who are distressed by hearing voices.

Around the world, groups of voice hearers meet and talk, sharing viewpoints and strategies to support each other, telling their stories and exploring ways to work with, rather than against, their voices, in order to reclaim control and rebuild their lives

Message from Ron Coleman

Ron Coleman is an independent consultant and trainer. He has been involved in work to promote recovery for many years, has written extensively on the subject and was heavily involved in developing the first hearing Voices Networks in the UK – Ron is a voice hearer.

Hi,

As a voice hearer myself, I have experienced first hand at how the hearing voices network can change your life.

I remember going to my very first group and being asked a simple question by Anne Walton, one of the founders of the UK network. Her question was “do you hear voices?” My reply was “yes”. **Her response was “they’re real”.**

Those two simple words changed my life; for in those words was a fundamental truth that no matter how many times I was told to ignore the voices, I could not because I did hear them and it was the fact that I heard them, that made them real.

Those two simple words also had a great deal of power because if the voices I heard were real, then I could do something about it. Whilst they remained unreal, as I had been taught by the system to believe, I was always waiting for someone else to come up with an answer. Once I accepted their reality for me, then I began to take ownership over my experience, and with ownership over the experience of hearing voices came ownership over my journey to recovery.

In the self-help group I learned many techniques to help me cope and control my voices. I also learned to come out of my shell and to live again. This is, in my opinion, the power of the network.

I hope you will find your way in whatever journey you are on as a voice hearer, or a family member or a mental health professional.

How to use this manual

The single most important thing to remember about this user manual is that it is simply **a guide**, it is not intended to be prescriptive.

It must be said, however, that its content has been derived by drawing on the enormous amount of experience of the many Hearing Voices Networks around the world. These Networks have been developing, over many years, a successful model for the establishment and running of self-help groups for voice hearers. In the main, we have adopted that model in producing this manual.

These guidelines will assist voice hearers, facilitators and service providers in laying the foundation and providing the fundamental tools to move forward.

Once established, all self-help groups tend to adopt their own style and approach. **There is no one way to run a group.**

The group will set its own rules, and will often add/change the overall guidelines to best suit their needs. The most important thing to remember is – **what works for the group, decided by the group, will be the most effective group.**

Section 2

Hearing Voices

About Hearing Voices

Definition

The term “Hearing Voices” constitutes a range of experiences, commonly referred to as ‘Hallucinations’.

These can be Auditory and Visual, amongst other sensations, perceived as being separate from oneself.

What is it like to hear voices?

Unless you have experienced hearing voices, then it can be difficult to explain. It may be the same as hearing a voice in the normal way, through your ears, the difference being the “voice” has no physical cause.

As well as hearing voices through the ears, people also hear voices as if they are thoughts entering the mind from somewhere outside themselves.

There are many different ways to hear voices. Voices can be experienced in the head, from outside the head or even in the body. It may be one voice or many voices.

The voice may talk to you or about you.

Voice hearers can find themselves experiencing an overwhelming world and their power of reason may be virtually extinguished, making it impossible to go about their lives.

Communication between voice hearers gives you the opportunity to share experiences and to learn from one another.

This can be achieved by joining a self help group.

Three Phases of Voice Hearing

The startling phase

Voices often start after a traumatic experience or at a time of great suffering. Most voice hearers describe the onset of voices as a startling and anxiety provoking experience; although the level of intensity does vary for different people.

During the startling phase the voices may be hostile and demand a lot of attention, alternately the voices may be helpful and a person may feel a sense of recognition.

This phase can be confusing and sometimes very frightening. People need reassurance and possibly some strategies or assistance to cope with their anxiety.

The phase of organisation: Coping with voices

Once a person's initial anxiety and confusion has been reduced, it is possible for them to organise the voices and their relationship to them.

In this phase people seek to find meaning and to arrive at some understanding of their experience. The process may take months or years and is often marked by an attempt to actively negotiate with the voices.

Voice hearers often seek ways of controlling or coping with voices by:

- Ignoring them (through distraction)
- Listening to them selectively
- Entering into willing conversation with them
- Making specific appointments with them.

Voice hearers report that the most helpful strategy is to select the positive voices and try to understand them by listening to them and only them. Another useful strategy is to set limits and structure the contact with voices, however it is important to accept them.

During the organisation phase it may be useful to attend to these issues:

- The possible significance of the voices in terms of a person's current and past experiences.
- The meaning of the voices in a person's everyday life.
- The particular circumstances under which the voices are heard.

The stabilisation phase: “I hear voices and I Cope with it”

In this phase a person has learnt to cope with their voices and has begun to live in balance with them:

- The person thinks of the voices as being part of themselves.
 - The relationship with the voices is more reasonable
 - The voices become less controlling and the person is re-empowered.
 - The person is able to choose between following the advice of the voices or following their own ideas.
 - The voices have a more positive influence
 - The person is less anxious about their voices.
-

What is a Hearing Voices Network

A Hearing Voices Network is the consolidation of numerous Hearing Voices Groups and affiliated members, established and supported by a Management Committee.

Members include voice hearers, carers, friends, service providers, as well as other support organisations.

The common goal of all concerned is to work towards promoting recovery, acceptance and education about the experience of hearing voices.

About Hearing Voices Self-Help Groups

Hearing Voices Groups are a social environment that encourage and promote:

- Self Empowerment
- Interdependence, and
- A view of members as ‘experts by experience’

Groups provide:

- Acceptance and a sense that one is not alone
- A safe place to talk about visions and voices
- An opportunity to learn what the voices mean and how to gain control over the experience
- An opportunity to build stronger social networks and supports, and
- A springboard to step into voluntary and then paid employment

Voice hearers in Self-Help Groups:

- Share experiences with patients and non patients
- Explore different ways of managing and coping with voices
- Access information and resources and learn about the recovery process

Section 3

Hearing Voices Network NSW

Our Mission

The primary objective of HVNNSW, is to establish, facilitate and support self help groups for voice hearers, throughout Metropolitan Sydney, as well as regional NSW.

We further aim to act as a source of information to voice hearers, carers and the general community.

Our purpose is to generate, in society, an awareness of the hearing voices experience, and a better understanding and acceptance of voice hearers and their carers.

This will be achieved through a collaborative approach between voice hearers, carers and service providers.

Our Role/Aims/Key Principles/KRA's

Role

- To provide a framework and environment which facilitates the processes that enables people who hear distressing voices to move towards recovery.

Aims

- To show that hearing voices is a real experience and may not always be a symptom of mental illness.

- To educate Society about the meaning of hearing voices, and help to reduce the stigma in the community.
- To develop appropriate Coping Strategies for voice hearers.
- To establish and support self help Groups for voice hearers throughout NSW.
- To develop ongoing strategies and solutions through the integration of voice hearers and professionals.
- To increase the quality and quantity of support available, through the creation of strong alliances with similar organizations worldwide.

Key Principles

- Acceptance and Validation
- Respect
- Promote Hope
- Independence and Empowerment
- Safety and Courage
- Collaboration

Key Result Areas

- Groups – Establishment and Consumer feedback
- Community – Awareness and Support
- Alliances – Quality and Quantity
- Growth – Physically and Intellectually

Hearing Voices Networks in Australia

In addition to our own Network (Hearing Voices Network NSW – HVNNSW), there currently exists one other Network in Australia.

In 2005, the Richmond Fellowship of Western Australia (RFWA) brought Ron Coleman (international speaker, voice hearer and mental health trainer) and Karen Taylor (mental health trainer and psychiatric nurse) to Perth to deliver a series of Recovery workshops.

Through Ron Coleman's encouragement, RFWA took the innovative step of auspicing the development of the Hearing Voices Network Australia (HVNA).

HVNNSW has drawn heavily on HVNA and its resources and Intellectual Property, to allow us to fast track the development of our Network. Both ourselves and HVNA are proud members of Intervoice, the International voice hearer's movement, and are linked to the many HV Networks operating around the world, working in unison.

Other Hearing Voices Networks

Intervoice - www.intervoiceonline.org

Hearing Voices Network Australia - www.rfwa.org.au

Dundee Hearing Voices Network (Scotland) - www.hearingvoicesnetwork.co.uk

Working To Recovery - www.workingtorecovery.co.uk

The Ron Coleman Story - www.roncolemanvoices.co.uk

Hearing Voices Network USA - www.hvn-usa.org

Grampian Hearing Voices Network Scotland - www.hearing-voices.net

Manchester Hearing Voices Network England - www.hearing-voices.org

Deptford Hearing Voices Service South London England - www.dhvs.freeuk.com

Keepwell New Zealand/Australia - www.keepwell.co.nz - www.keepwell.com.au

Section 4

Joining a Hearing Voices Self-Help Group

Benefits of attending a HV Self-Help Group

“In modern days, voice hearers are at best regarded as eccentric and at worst, as violent, crazed loonies” - Linda Hart (voice hearer)

Every experience of hearing voices will be different, and a process of trial and error is needed before people gain control.

Each individual has to find what works for them and what suits their needs. To reach the point of having a satisfying life takes time, it requires courage and persistence. **This is where voices groups can provide support and encouragement.**

Newer members can see and hear what others have achieved and can find the strength to carry on.

Romme and Escher (1994) proposed the three phases of voice hearing, the startling phase, the organisational phase and the stabilisation phase, (as explained in detail in section 2 of this manual)

Going to voices groups can help people who hear voices through these stages. Group members can gain relief by sharing their experiences openly with others who are understanding and tolerant.

Self-Help group members can look at and talk about different ways of coping with their experiences. They can see other members have learned to control their voices and decide that they too are going to take control and regain some power over their voices.

Talking to others in an understanding and supportive atmosphere can help lessen long standing feelings of guilt, unworthiness or inadequacy that may have played a part in the original development of the voices.

They can help members to identify traumas in their past and they may decide to have counselling or therapy to address these.

Hearing Voices Group Guidelines

These guidelines have been derived through collective experience. They are meant to be concise and clear, as to the specific focus and function of self-help groups. They are fundamental to the process, and provide the platform for group participation and structure:

- Is a self-help group and not a clinical group offering treatment
- Accept that voices and visions are real experiences
- Accept that people are not any the less for having voices and visions
- Respects each member as an expert
- Sanctions the freedom to talk about anything, not just voices and visions
- Sanctions the freedom to interpret experiences in any way
- Sanctions the freedom to challenge social norms
- Encourages an ethos of self-determination
- Values ordinary, non-professional language
- Focuses primarily on sharing experiences, support and empathy
- Members are not subject to referral, discharge or risk assessment
- Members are able to come and go as they want without repercussions
- Members are aware of limits to and constraints on confidentiality
- Accept people as they are
- Make no assumption of illness
- Are a self-help group not a therapy group
- Can be a community to which people belong
- Work towards upholding equity in the group
- Decide on the limits to confidentiality not the facilitator
- Work out problems collectively
- Share responsibility rather than the facilitator solely
- Members join for as long as it suits them
- Are open to people from other geographical areas
- Facilitator is not under clinical pressure to report back to anyone else
- Encourages, supports and enables voice hearers to take a co-facilitator or facilitator role.

HVNNSW has adopted these guidelines through consensus. Over time groups may vary or develop there own guidelines as they deem appropriate.

Membership

HVNNSW is an incorporated association, run and controlled by its members, typical of all such associations.

Joining HVNNSW is easy, just complete and submit the membership form as shown on our web site (www.hvnnsw.org.au)

Members come in many different forms:

- **Voice Hearers attached to a Self Help Group – these are our most important members, the very reason we exist.**
- Carers/Family/Friends – of Voice Hearers, supporting them in their journey toward recovery.
- Organisations – offering physical and often financial support to the association
- Service Providers/Mental health professionals – Provide various types of support including Facilitation and Training.
- Committee – those who give their time to administer/manage the network operations. These of course include voice hearers.

Voice Hearers are welcome to attend a self-help group meeting to see how things work, prior to having to become a member. If you decide to return to another group meeting, then at that point we would ask that you formalise your membership.

Members Rights, Expectations and Responsibilities

Power

Members are entitled to feel valued and be engaged in the group in ways that will best enable them to achieve power over their lives, develop their potential and help each other to achieve these ends.

Participation

Individual members should be encouraged to be actively involved in group planning, development and activities.

Respect

Acknowledge each persons uniqueness and value, every member should be treated with respect and courtesy.

Be non-patronising

All members of self-help groups should be treated as partners and not as “clients” or subordinates.

Safety and Confidentiality

Each member has the right to expect the group to provide a non-threatening environment in which they can find a voice to raise issues and share problems, safe in the knowledge that whatever they say will not be repeated outside of the group without permission.

Be non-judgemental

Members have the right to feel comfortable and safe in the knowledge that they will not be judged on the basis of any personal factors.

Equality

Members should not be treated less favourably or discriminated against on the grounds of any discriminating factors.

Members Responsibilities

Each member should take responsibility for their own words and actions and be aware of the limitations of personal liberty where their words or actions discriminate against or disempower others.

Section 5

Starting a Hearing Voices Self-Help Group

Why Start a Hearing Voices Self-Help Group

It is important to be clear about why you want to set up a HV self-help group, and it's fundamental Purpose and Objectives.

In trying to form a self-help group you will be asked many questions. Some questions you may be asked are:

- What are the Groups Aims?
- What type of Group is it, and what will it do?
- What do you think people will get from the group?
- How will you achieve what you want to do?

These questions will not only be posed by consumers (voice hearers), but also carers, mental health professionals etc.

You will need to be able to answer these questions.

You will find all the answers to these questions, and more, by researching the many hearing voices websites around the world. These are all noted in Section 3 of this manual.

You will find:

- Many testimonials from voice hearers who are members of self-help groups, these people are experts by experience.
- Articles, books etc from voice hearers who are now in control of their lives.
- Papers and articles from many Mental health professionals on the voice hearing experience, and the benefits to voice hearers of self-help groups, these people are experts by profession.
- Myths Busters – Debunking the many widely held myths about the voice hearing experience.
- A wealth of information (in addition to what is included in this manual) to assist you in forming your self-help group.

It is also recommended that you contact other group co-ordinators who will be only too happy to let you draw on their experience. These contacts are noted on the various network web sites.

Preferred Group Meeting Locations

The location of your group meeting requires careful consideration. The very success of your self-help group could be compromised if you choose the wrong location.

You must first consider the group members. Historical evidence suggests that most, if not all, of the members will be classified as mentally ill, suffering from hearing distressing voices.

You will therefore, in choosing a location, need to consider as a priority :

- Safety. A non-threatening environment is important for members to feel as safe as possible.
- Accessibility. The location needs to be easy to access, both to and from.

Other things to consider:

- Convenience to public transport.
- Parking
- Disabled access
- Mobility (stairs)
- Toilets easily accessible
- Is the room big enough for your needs
- Does it have basic facilities (chairs etc)
- Does it have good lighting
- Does it have power points, TV points, computer lines etc.
- Does the building have a no smoking policy
- Has it got tea/coffee making facilities.
- How will you pay for the room
- Is the room available on a regular basis.
- Does the owner of the room/building have adequate insurance cover.

In the interests of promoting wellbeing and recovery, it may be preferable to avoid locations which may inhibit these. Such locations could be a room in a hospital for people with a mental illness, or any hospital for that matter. Whilst this is not essential it would be best to choose a location away from “institutional” influence.

Having said that, some groups may have a large proportion of members who are high risk/acute. Therefore, such locations may be necessary.

It is considered that church and/or community halls, perhaps even a school, often provide the right ambience for your group meetings.

Getting Started

Planning

Setting up a hearing voices group can bring a whole new dimension to life, but it means extra demands on an individuals life. You will have to be prepared to spend time and energy running the group.

You will become involved in other peoples problems as well as your own. This can be emotionally challenging and it is a good idea to get some support for yourself on a regular basis. Try to find a colleague or friend who is willing to listen to you talk about running the group and any difficulties you may encounter.

You may be impatient to get the group started but time spent in planning will save time in the long run. Planning is about what you are trying to achieve and how you might achieve it. If everyone is very clear about what they are doing and why they are doing it, you will get much better results.

Planning itself can be a challenge, you will have to think about different aspects and factors that will affect the group. For example, what are the needs of the group members, facilitators and other interested people.

Training and Supervision will be available to all Group leaders/facilitators, organised through the HVNNSW Management Committee. This will be available prior to initial set up, as well on a progressive basis, and/or when difficult or sensitive issues arise.

What Planning Involves

Planning is a process of identifying what you are trying to achieve. It involves setting up and running your group so that it can achieve its aims. It is not always a short term process and can include evaluating how effective your group is from time to time. Planning can have many benefits and lead to the group becoming fully inclusive.

Benefits include:

- Meeting the needs of group members in a meaningful way.
- Better use of available resources (including people)
- Improved use of peoples time
- Clearer aims and objectives for the group
- Improved chances of getting resources you need to start the group
- Increase the confidence of financial supporters
- Better group for members.

Equal Opportunities

An important part of planning is considering equal opportunities. Including it at the planning stage means it becomes an integral part of the group rather than something that is added on later.

Discussing what equality really means at this stage means raising awareness of what you might need to do to become non-discriminatory. It is particularly difficult for a small group to fulfil all the demands that true equality requires and it is unlikely that you will be able to offer full equality to potential members.

It is still useful to raise this issue and do the best that you can with whatever resources you have available.

Mission Statements

Coming up with a mission statement can be a good way of raising all the factors involved in equality.

Some suggestions that the statement might reflect are:

- Attempting to not only have an equal opportunities statement but trying to make it work.
- Creating a group environment that members can have a feeling of confidence and trust in where they will be treated with respect.
- Encouraging and using the talents of the group regardless of sex and ethnic origin or disability.

Direct Discrimination

This is directly excluding certain people from the group. The nature of hearing voices groups means that some people will be excluded. For example, if you decide that only people who hear voices may be members, you are excluding all non-voice hearers. This is a decision that each group must make, but given the nature of self-help groups, this seems fair and reasonable.

The aims of HVN are that groups should be inclusive for all voice hearers. Therefore if a group strongly believed that the explanation for voice hearing was a spiritual one and base the group on this belief, this would automatically discriminate against people who have different explanations for voice hearing.

Indirect Discrimination

This is excluding people by, for example, not having access for wheelchairs, a hearing loop for hearing impaired people, or large print written materials for sight impaired people. It can also mean not letting people know about the group, for example, not placing information where all groups of people will see it.

Ground Rules

One way of ensuring equality in your group is to set ground rules.

Ground rules should reflect the issues raised in *Hearing Voices Groups; Members Rights, Expectations and Responsibilities*, covered in section 4 of this manual.

They should be set at the first meeting of the group and are about how the group wants to behave each time they meet. They should be suggested, discussed and agreed by all members. When new members join they must be given a copy of the rules, and agree to abide by them.

Rules are useful when conflict arises in the group. The rules should be clear and unambiguous.

Publicity

Once you have a clear picture of what the group is for – it's aims and objectives, and have effected all the appropriate planning functions, you could write a short article on this. If you are not confident in doing this, get someone to help you.

A short written article could be used for different purposes :

- Assist in getting funding to start the group.
 - Obtain advice and assistance in getting started from health workers and/or community development workers.
 - These people could also assist in identifying people who may be interested in joining the group or helping you set up/run the group.
 - Use the article to advertise the group by sending it to local newspapers, relevant magazines, newsletters and bulletins, community workers, hospitals etc.
-

Planning your First Group Meeting

The first meeting is about the aim and purpose of the group. Attendees will need time to get to know each other and decide if they can work together.

Your HVN Management Committee are there to offer help and support in setting up a group. They can:

- Give you details of groups in other areas
- Help with advertising your group
- Give you access to information about hearing voices.
- Provide advice and supporting setting up the structure of your group.

It may be preferable to adopt an informal approach until the group is more established. However, you will need to consider the business to be addressed by the Group.

Running a hearing voices self-group is covered in section 6 of this manual.

It is advisable that you develop a number of checklists as part of the planning process, and for use during and after group meetings. These checklists will be an ongoing development process as the group becomes more settled. However, in planning your first meeting here are some things to consider in developing your checklist/s:

- Do you have a substitute if you cannot attend the meeting for any reason.
- Arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled meeting to set up the room.
- Ensure all posters and learning aids are clearly displayed on walls etc
- Clearly display a sheet for people's names, phone numbers, email etc.
- If you are aware of exact number of attendees, estimate how much time everybody will have to speak.
- As this is the first meeting, you will need to allocate a reasonable amount of time for facilitator presentations/s
- Consider and provide for a wide range of "needs" in providing refreshments for the group
- Ensure you have a plan to cater for members who may become anxious/violent or harmful to themselves or others. (see "Risk and Safe Keeping Policies and Procedures", in section 6 of this manual)

Remember, this is the first meeting and members will be feeling anxious and will find many aspects intimidating. Again, lack of formality would be considered important to ease the anxiety and potential stress.

Things such as standing orders, and other formalities (such as group roles, Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary) can be touched on briefly at this meeting if you feel the members are comfortable with the flow. Use your discretion on this issue, and hold back until subsequent meetings if you sense “overload” on members.

Your presentations at this first meeting are important, and may set the tone and provide the framework for future meetings. It may also play a decisive role in strengthening the likelihood of a repeat audience in subsequent meetings.

It is hopeful that leading up to the first meeting, members have had the opportunity to gain some insight into HVN’s, and Self-Help Groups.

However, you should assume total ignorance, and plan your opening presentation along these lines.

The quality, clarity, and visual appeal of your presentation is important to instil confidence, and, most importantly clearly and concisely “**sow the seed**”.

Visual aids are recommended but not essential. The use of a computer simulated presentations (power point or similar) would be preferable, however, if you do not have the equipment and/or skills to produce this type of presentation, then an overhead projector or slide projector would be acceptable alternatives.

There is a large amount of information and advice available to aid you, and again, your HVN Management Committee will provide assistance in this vital issue.

If you achieve nothing else at the first meeting other than “sowing the seed”, then you will have conducted a highly successful meeting.

Once the first meeting has been held, you can start to think and plan a checklist for possible “Group Business” as things move along..

These matters are covered in detail both in this, and other sections of this manual, however they include items such as:

- **Accessibility:** Disabled access, isolated location etc (see “Preferred group Meeting Locations”, this section.)
- **Timing:** Day/Night best? People who work/have children.
- **Equality:** See “Getting Started”, this section
- **Length of Meeting:** Too long/short, open/closed, (see section 6)
- **Facilitation Skills:** See section 6
- **Research:** Where will members come from, referrals other centres/hospitals, other groups.
- **Aims and Objectives:** See sections 3 and 6
- **Brainstorming:** Short/Long term aids, what are the peoples hopes and dreams, determine one or two that are achievable, what is their motivation etc.

Section 6

Running a Hearing Voices Self Help Group

How should a HV Self-Help Group be run

When thinking about how voices groups should be run, there are many things to consider.

The first thing to remember is that all groups will be different. That is the nature of groups, what should be the same however, **is the ethos of the group.** When considering the aims and objectives before setting up a group, **you must consider the overall aims of HVN.**

All types of groups could be helpful to people who hear voices, **but self-help groups are more in keeping with the philosophy of HVN.** Remember the word of Marius Romme, for him HVN's and the self-help groups that make them up, **“offer voice hearers an organisation through which they can emancipate themselves”.**

At this point, review the Mission Statement, Role, Aims, key Principles and KRA's of HVNNSW, detailed in section 3 of this manual. **These will provide the footings (the ethos) of the framework you will establish for your group.**

Facilitating a HV Self-Help Group Meeting

Facilitators Role

Facilitating a group can be daunting, and sometimes a bit scary, particularly if you have no experience of facilitation. If the facilitator is a voice hearer, it is important to remember that although you are leading the group, and will have extra responsibilities, you are also a member of it. As such you are as equally entitled to support and help as any other member.

Facilitators should be careful not to impose their own belief on others, they should acknowledge and respect the beliefs of each member. Whether the facilitator is a voice hearer, a health worker, a carer, or other interested party, they will probably have conscious or unconscious beliefs about voice hearing .

The hearing Voices Network accepts all explanations and beliefs about voice hearing. There is no conclusive proof to give weight to any one particular explanation. **What is important is how people cope with their experiences and how groups can help people to discover the best ways of doing this for themselves.**

Members of voices groups will often take a lead from the facilitator, they may quietly observe how the facilitator runs the group. **It is therefore important that the facilitator sets an example that is useful to other members.**

Some handy tips:

- Be the broadest minded, most optimistic, compassionate, informed, non-judgemental, resourceful person you can be.
- Work just as hard on becoming happier as the group members are working on becoming happier.
- When you don't know – say so.
- When you are being biased – claim it.

The main thing is to try to be as relaxed as possible before each group.

Ask yourself – If you facilitate a Voices group, how do you define recovery? Define it for yourself, but don't insist there is only one definition. **Let people define recovery for themselves.**

Facilitation Skills

Some basic skills you need to develop, or may already possess:

- Social Skills
- Putting people at ease
- Resolving Conflicts
- Organisational skills
- Sense of Humour

Communicating with Group Members

When people first come to the group, they usually want to tell their story. They want to explain how long they have been hearing voices and how it has affected their lives. Once they have gone through this process, which may take many months, they may begin to disclose further more personal information.

This in itself can be a ***cathartic*** experience, a kind of cleansing of the mind.

If someone feels safe enough to tell others about very traumatic and critical parts of their lives it is important that their disclosure receives due respect. When this happens you need to allow time for the person to say all they want to say. Accept what they say and allow time for all group members to accept it.

Facilitators need to be able to listen to what each group member is really saying, so good communication skills are essential.

Developing Communication Skills

- Don't dominate the conversation
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to talk
- Encourage people who are quiet to speak – *but very gently*
- Be open about time and order of speakers
- "X" is going first because she needs to leave early
- Help people to connect to one another – commonalities
- Concentrate on what people say
- Take people seriously
- Making sense of what people say – assistance with overwhelming feelings, "Been there"

What not to do

- Display Boredom, impatience, hostility
- Devalue what a person is saying
- Make assumptions or draw conclusions too quickly
- Pass judgement about people or situations
- Talk too much
- Favour specific people
- Bad body language – fussing
- Filling in silences too quickly
- Interruptions
- Asking too many questions
- Insisting your beliefs are right.

Strategies for developing listening skills

- **Eye Contact** – Show that you are giving your attention to an individual by making eye contact.
- **Asking open ended questions** – These are questions that cannot be answered “yes” or “no”. They are questions that encourage people to expand on what they are saying. For example “**What do you feel about that?**” “**How do you cope?**” or “**Can you give us an example**”
- **Repeating key words** – Picking up on one word that seems important to what the person is saying.
- **Check what people are saying** – If you are not sure what someone really means, check with them what they are saying. It is easy to make assumptions that are completely wrong.
- **Summarising** – Summing up what someone has said gives you and other group members a chance to understand better what has been said, and the person who has spoken the chance to say if you have grasped their true meaning.

Co-facilitation

Co-facilitating requires that facilitators discuss and negotiate with each other beforehand to work out exactly how you will support each other. Co-facilitating can be worthwhile and rewarding and the group can gain from the extra security this can give.

Like most things, however, it has advantages and disadvantages, and it is helpful to be aware of these:

Advantages

- Sharing meetings with someone else forces you to plan more carefully and reflect on your work together.
- It is usually easier to deal with conflict and problems that arise in the group.
- Sharing the leadership task means less pressure on each person. For example, one facilitator can offer emotional support whilst the other focuses on practical issues.
- Planning how the meeting will run is sometimes easier with two people
- Members will have two people to show interest in them
- Members can see two people working together collaboratively with respect for each other even though they may have differences.

Disadvantages

- There can be some competition, stress or tension between facilitators for various reasons. This can be distracting and unhelpful for group members.
- Facilitators may make different assumptions about members, pace of the meeting and how meetings are run.
- Group members may decide that one of the facilitators is the “goodie” and the other the “baddie”. The facilitators have to have a strong relationship to withstand and address issues such as these.

The facilitators need to get along well together and share the same aims for the group. They will need to plan how they will deal constructively with foreseeable problems and conflict in the group.

Running your first group meeting

Do not expect too much from your first meeting, it takes time before people learn to trust each other. However, first impressions are important, and most people feel safer if there is some kind of structure to a meeting.

It would be good if the members, with your help, develop the agenda. However, it is more than likely, being the first meeting that they look to you to take control. Therefore here is an example plan for you to follow:

- Before the meeting, arrange chairs into a circle, put the kettle on and prepare refreshments.
- First 10-15 minutes. Greet members informally and individually, offer refreshments and encourage members to get to know each other.
- Start group by introducing yourself, say a bit about yourself and (without putting pressure on or forcing them) invite other members to do the same.
- Discuss the aims and objectives of the group, find out if others share them. You will need to steer this process by examples and visual aids.
- Take a short break, explain before it that you will discuss ground rules after it.
- Discuss and set ground rules (again table a set of rules by way of example to help prompt input, HVN sites have many examples you can use).
- Explain HVN’s view that all explanations for voice hearing are equally valued and accepted
- Invite members to share a bit about their experiences and to explain their beliefs about why they hear voices. If you are a voice hearer you could begin by talking about your own experience.
- Towards the end of the meeting try to lighten the atmosphere, perhaps you could have another cup of tea.
- Try to see that members leave in a positive frame of mind.
- Decide time of next meeting.

Ongoing Development of the Group

Once your group is established and members are happy supporting each other and meeting regularly, you might like to think about developing and extending your activities.

Some things you might consider:

- Resources : See below.
- Guest Speakers: inviting people of interest to your group
- Library: Developing a library of pamphlets, brochures, newsletters, books etc.
- Extra Activities: Outings, relaxation sessions etc.
- Help Line: Telephone support for people who cannot attend meetings, or out of meeting support for regular members.
- Developing a newsletter.
- Providing Training.

What Resources will you need

- Room Rent
 - Refreshments
 - Printing and Stationery
 - Office supplies
 - Equipment (computer/projector/screen etc)
-

Reviewing Self-Help Group Meetings

It is important that you develop a structured review process of the group and its activities.

You should document the outcomes and compare to prior review data as a means of assessing the overall success/performance. This will allow you to modify/add/delete specific group functions and procedures as appropriate, and if deemed necessary.

One approach could be:

- From time to time ask each member what they think they are getting from the group.
- What do they want from the group?
- Does it meet their needs?
- What makes it work and why?
- What would make it better?
- What don't people like?
- Talk to people one on one and in group to be sure people aren't just being polite.

It is also very helpful to get an “outsiders” view as to their perceptions of the conduct and flow of your group meetings. This could require attendance at more than one group meeting.

Make contact with your network management committee who will assist in finding a suitably qualified person to assist in the review process.

A key part of external input in the review process would be to assess and rate you, the facilitator, and give you feedback as to their perceptions of your strengths and possible weaknesses.

Your HVN Management Committee will be particularly interested in your feedback, to assist in the establishment and development of other groups throughout NSW.

Your HVN Management Committee will run conferences and forums from time to time, as well as workshops to develop “best practice” in all facets of the establishment and ongoing structure of self-help groups.

To do this the ongoing review process across all groups is the key ingredient.

Your HVN Management Committee will help you develop a generic template for conducting your group reviews.

Feedback

Ongoing interaction between self-help groups and the network management committee is crucial to the ongoing development, and subsequent success, of the self-help group philosophy.

It is therefore incumbent upon all self-help groups (leaders and facilitators) to, as a matter of practice, provide formal feedback to the HV management committee of any newly adopted strategies, rules, training aids etc, that a group may adopt from time to time.

The HV network management committee will then disseminate this information through a centralised process to all self-help groups, to maintain consistency and an ongoing dialogue for the benefit of all.

Risk/Conflict and Safe Keeping Policies and Procedures

With running a self-help group comes the responsibility and duty of care to provide a safe and risk free environment for the members (and yourself)

The group guidelines will touch on the issues of Ethics and Confidentiality. These in particular, need to be strongly reinforced with members, as they sit at the very core of group functionality.

Many challenges will be placed before you by group members. Some of these challenges are fundamental to running the group effectively, and constitute minimal or low risk.

Some, however, may escalate to a high risk situation for one or more members (and yourself), if not dealt with appropriately. Remember, the degree of potential volatility of members could vary significantly.

At the low end of the scale, some challenges you could face are:

- **Dominant personality in the group** – This issue may not necessarily present a direct risk. However, your ability to temper a dominant personality (without offending), is very important. A dominant personality could undermine the fundamental aims of the group and intimidate other members. **You should address this issue one on one with the member involved outside the meeting or at a break.**
- **Interpersonal clashes** – This has the potential to become a higher risk if not dealt with immediately. **Again, speak with the offending members individually, and in this case collectively. It is more than likely that they have stepped outside the group rules. You need to point this out to them and advise what the repercussions will be if they persist. You may wish to get both parties to apologise to the group. This will emphasise that the rules are enforceable.**
- **Breaking Group Guidelines** – This is a serious matter. Unlike the rules, your group guidelines are the very essence of what your group is all about. These are the laws. **Any member who steps outside the group guidelines (and they may do it unintentionally) needs to be alerted to the fact. If it persists the group will need to decide on the best course of action, which could include expulsion from the group. Not to act would make a farce of what the group stands for.**

- **Disruptive Group Member** – Again, this member/s will most likely be in breach of both the rules and group guidelines. **You need to take the appropriate action as mentioned above.**

In regard to general safety and wellbeing, as voice hearers the members of the group from time to time will display symptoms of anxiety and agitation. This may often occur in the latter part of a meeting as they struggle to cope. **It is important that you constantly be on the lookout for these symptoms amongst members.**

The course of action you need to take will depend on the level and nature of the concern. **If a member, or more than one member, appears unsettled it may be best to have a general break. At this point you should speak with the member/s and assess the situation and act accordingly.**

If a member is highly agitated/anxious, and may disclose suicidal ideation or self harm urges, **you need to address this matter directly and immediately. Take the member aside and try to keep them calm and reassure them that they are safe – do not leave them alone or allow them to leave.**

You should attempt always to have a comprehensive list of alternate contacts for all members. This should include a family member/s or close friend, and also (if applicable) their doctor/psychologist/health care case worker, local support services, lifeline (if appropriate) etc. In this situation you should contact one of these immediately.

If you believe that the member is an immediate risk to themselves and/or others beyond your control, as a last resort you may need to contact the local police station for assistance.

Please remember that dealing with matters of such volatility (if they occur), is a specialist skill, and your primary objective at all times is to minimise the risk as best as possible.

Making contact with other groups and networks to gain their experience and review specific case studies is strongly recommended.

The advice provided above is very broad and should not be construed as all embracing.

Section 7

Hearing Voices Self-Help Groups Publication Aids

Guidelines to Coping with Distressing Voices

These guidelines should be produced in poster format (A2/A3) and placed on the wall at group meetings as a learning aid for members. These have been developed over many years by other networks/groups and have proven to be successful. **They have been developed by voice hearers.**

A3 PDF versions can be found on the HVNSW web site.

- **Try not to isolate:** Talk to someone about how you are feeling – about your experience. Come to a Hearing Voices Group.
- **Do something to take charge of your recovery;** The only person who can change things is YOU – take a step on your recovery journey today. If you have always looked to others to fix you – have a good look at this pattern – how often is this helpful really? How realistic is it to think that it will be different this time? It is important to try and do things that will empower you – that will enable you to finding coping strategies and gain mastery over the voices.
- **Plan your Journey:** It is important to think about your destination, what do you want in your life? Mental distress can *interrupt* ones life at any age, however, some of us forget to get back on the journey of life...we can begin to live our label. You can STOP this from today, and begin to reflect on who you are and where you want to go. Plan to get your life back or plan for a new life, also make a plan for what you want to occur if you experience a crisis. What can you do when things come up/get in the way? Who will you enlist to assist?
- **Find a friend/supporter:** Although you may, at times, feel very alone and not worthy, there are people who feel the same as you, or who are there to offer a listening ear. Enlist a friend or mentor to be there as a navigator on your journey. This may mean taking a risk of reaching out to someone you don't know (or even someone you do know). Pick someone who is reliable and can listen and support you.

- **Remember distress will often impact on voices:** Stress/Distress can come from physical illness and health issues, social circumstances, family problems, foods (such as too much caffeine, sugar foods, not enough vitamins and good food), substances such as marijuana and other drugs (both from the street and from the chemist), can all effect us in ways that may make voices experiences worse.
Learn to notice what events in your life are stressful or cause you to have emotional or mental distress. Have you just had an argument, is your rent late or has someone just snubbed you or tried to control you? No wonder your voices are giving you grief! What help might you need to overcome these life events? It is important for you to learn ways that you personally can use to de-stress, to advocate for social support and to get what you need in order to live. What is good for YOU? Perhaps cutting down on certain foods/substances, taking relaxing baths, walks, stimulating talks, movies/music etc? Finding assistance to get work or somewhere safe to live. Take some time to write a **de-stress list** and a **mental wellbeing list** so that what when you need to you can revisit it: be proactive and take responsibility for feeling better so you can dream a little and reclaim your life.
 - **Distinguish between what the voices say and what others say:** Check-in with a trusted friend or fellow voice group member. If the voices are saying you are “worthless”, “no good”, and other nasty things – check in with that person as to how they see you. It is important that you recognize that although you may not believe them ‘yet’, they do have a different perception of you than your voices. This means that the voices are simply offering you their ‘perception’.
 - **Tracking Voices and Triggers:** It can be helpful to record what is happening for you each time the voices get bad or get louder, and especially to note what is happening when they quiet down. Tracking helps you to seek if there is a pattern or particular circumstances/people that helps or hinders. For example, while on public transport your voices may get worse and while listening to music they may get better. Once you find this out, then you can begin to learn how to reduce your distress during these times. One hint may be to combine the two; such as listening to music while on a bus. There are different ways of reducing distress that suit different people – going to voices groups is a way to tap into other’s ways of coping that may be of some use.
 - **Coleman, R, and Smith, M. (1998). *Working with voices II; Victim to Victor*. Handsell Publications UK**
-

Strategies for Coping with Distressing Voices

Like the guidelines above, these strategies need to be prominently placed on the wall at group meetings in A2/A3 format.

These strategies should also be copied and given to each group member. They should put it on the wall in their bedroom, or elsewhere in their home (or hospital). They may need more than one copy to place in a number of areas where they live.

These are also available on HVNNSW web site.

Focusing Techniques

- Accepting that voices are not ‘the’ problem, they are a consequence of a problem. Your job is to find out more.
- Identify your voices – number, gender, age etc.
- Learn about boundaries to apply to people and your voices (ie make a deal with your voices, “be quiet now and I will listen later)
- Listen out for positive voices too – they can be allies
- Schedule a time to listen to the voices and ask them to leave you alone until that time.
- Tell negative voices that you will only talk with them if they are respectful towards you.
- Voice dialogue – let a trusted family member, friend or mental health worker talk directly to your voices.
- Work through Ron Coleman and Mike Smith’s “Working with Voices II” work book with a trusted family member, friend or mental health worker.
- Write down what the voices are saying to you.

Positive Emotional Techniques

- Go for a picnic
- Listen to energetic music
- Look at good things achieved list.
- Look at photo albums
- Look at the list of good things others have said about you.
- Make a list of your assets or strengths.
- Make an emergency comfort bundle (of goodies)
- Read books, love letters, love poems.
- Read joke books/emails
- Say positive statements to self.
- Record positive statements on tape (your voice)
- Watch films – comedy or inspirational

Points to Remember to Enable Me to Look After Myself

- Do something nice for 'me' each day.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Keep regular appointments with my support network, even if I feel OK.
- Look up, get perspective, stretch or shift your body.
- Plan my day; ensure I do not have long periods of time with nothing to do.
- Reach out. Talk to someone.
- Take medication as prescribed.(in consultation)
- Think about how I am feeling and be realistic about what I can achieve.
- Try to see the grey areas.

Emotional Focusing

- Discuss feelings with another person.
- List emotional triggers.
- Paint/Draw emotions.
- Rainy day letter.
- Write a diary.
- Write poetry/prose regarding feelings.

Things That May Help Voice Hearers To Cope

- Acupuncture.
- Avoiding street drugs.
- Chanting or singing.
- Distraction eg. Reading, computer games.
- Focusing on the voices.
- Going to Hearing Voices groups.
- Having good support around you, good friends, family, nurse, counsellor etc.
- Holidays.
- Humour.
- Identifying when you are most likely to hear the voices.
- Ignoring Voices.
- Isolating Self.
- Keeping diary about them.
- Keeping occupied eg. Cooking, house chores.
- Keeping physically active and healthy.
- Listening to music.
- Massage.
- Meditation.

- Money.
- Positive attitudes.
- Praying/speaking of God.
- Religion/Deliverance and healing.
- Sex.
- Shouting at the voices.
- Sleeping.
- Staff listening to you.
- Talking (to a trusted person).

What May Not Help

- Being over-medicated.
- Being told not to talk about voices.
- Dreams and trying to get to sleep.
- Labelling.
- Lack of sleep.
- Not having information.
- Other people denying the existence of voices.
- Other people denying your explanation of your voices.
- Professionals they know more about your voices than they do.
- Side effects of the medication.
- Thinking negatively.
- Being socially isolated.

Relaxation Techniques.

- Acknowledge fear, worry and stress and let go consciously. Trust.
- Count your breaths.
- Dancing/walking.
- Focus on the position of your body.
- Give yourself permission to relax.
- Guided fantasy dreamtime.
- Learn Yoga breath.
- Listen to guided relaxation on tape.
- Listen to relaxing music.
- Massage hands, feet, head etc.
- Relax each muscle individually.
- Swimming/floating.
- Yoga.

Things that May Work For Me In A Crisis

- Ask for help sooner not later.
- Create a personalised crises plan when you are feeling well.
- Cry.
- Find a safe place.
- Hand in my medication/blades or other similar items.
- Have PRN medication.
- Kick boxes around outside.
- Let people know where I am.
- Let someone know how I am feeling.
- Plan safety.
- Remember that situations and feelings frequently change.
- Rest on my bed.
- Shout into my pillow.
- Try to identify how I am feeling.

Comforting Techniques

- Buy/pick fresh flowers.
- Change the sheets on your bed.
- Cuddle up to a teddy.
- Eat a favourite food in moderation.
- Have a bubble bath.
- Have a soothing drink.
- Hold a safe comforting object.
- Find a safe place.
- Hug someone.
- Listen to soothing music/favourite soft song.
- Prayer/meditation/creative visualisation.
- Put lights/radio on (to sleep).
- Sing favourite songs.
- Sit in a safe place.
- Soak your feet/Radox bath.
- Spray room fragrance.
- Stroke/brush your pet or someone else's.
- Use perfume/hand cream or take a warm bath.
- Use pot pourri/essential oils.
- Wear comfortable clothes.
- Write a diary or talk about how you feel with another person.
- Zen seeing (with a friend).

General Ideas

- Don't beat yourself up, we all make mistakes.
- List achievements.
- Make a contract with your voices.
- Positive self talk.
- Self forgiveness (find yourself innocent).
- Talk to the voices, find out how they feel.
- Wear one ear plug.

Distraction Techniques

- Cinema.
- Clean or tidy things up.
- Do puzzles or develop a hobby.
- Exercise – walking/running/dance/beach.
- Gardening/strike pot plants.
- Listen to CDs/MP3 player.
- Paint or draw pictures/posters/cards.
- Playing games/cards/computer.
- Reading out loud or hum a tune to yourself.
- Sewing/knitting/collecting.
- Shopping.
- Sports.
- Telephone a friend.
- Use visual imagery or count to yourself when trying to get to sleep.
- Visit a friend.
- Walk in shallow water.
- Washing.
- Watch TV/video.
- Write letters.

NOTE: Distraction techniques are useful when voices are particularly distressing or intrusive, but are not recommended as an on-going coping technique.

Books and Other Reference Material

The following is a list of a variety of literature on Hearing Voices issues. These will assist voice hearers, carers, friends, service providers, mental health professionals, to better understand the hearing voices experience.

Many other publications can be found on HVN web sites, which are referenced in section 3 of this manual.

***Accepting Voices*, Romme, M., Escher, S., (1993) – MIND Publications: London. www.mind.org.uk**

***Beyond Fear*, Rowe, D (2002), Third Edition Harper Collins**

***Coping with voices and visions: A guide to helping people who experience hearing voices, seeing visions, tactile or other sensations*, Downs, J. (Ed.) (2001) Hearing Voices Network Dundee, UK.**

***Depression: The Way out of Your Prison*, Rowe, D (2003), London: Routledge**

***Hearing Voices: A Common Human Experience*, Watkins, J (1998), Melbourne: Hill of Content Publishing Company**

***Hearing Voices: A Self-help Guide and Reference Book*, Watkins J (1993), Melbourne, Richmond fellowship of Victoria**

***Raising our voices*, James, A (2001), Handsell Publishers: www.workingtoorecovery.co.uk**

***Recovery an alien concept*, Coleman, R (2003), P & P Press: UK. www.workingtoorecovery.co.uk**

***Recovery a holistic approach*, Reeves, A (1999), Handsell Publishers UK**

***The voices inside: The practical guide to coping with voices*, Baker, P (1995), www.mind.org.uk**

***Understanding voices: Coping with auditory hallucinations and confusing realities.* Romme, M., and Escher, S., and Hage, P (1998), Handsell Publications: UK**

***Working with voices: Victim to Victor*, Coleman, R., and Smith M (1998), handsell Publications: UK**

***Victim to Victor II: Working with Self-Harm*, Smith, M (2000), P & P Press: UK**

Testimonials/Letters etc.

The following has been extracted from the Hearing Voices Australia Information Booklet.

These are true life commentary from voice hearers and others, regarding their experiences as members of hearing voices self-help groups.

Hi There,

I have been hearing voices for the last 6 years – there were 4 lots of them: tinny computer voices, a dominant male voice, a nice female voice, and a bunch of monks chanting in the background.

I have been attending hearing voices groups now for about a year, and have learnt a lot from them. Coping skills I use include distraction to take my mind off the voices, aromatherapy to relax me, and lately I have taken to write down what the voices say to me. It has been interesting to note that since I started writing down what the voices say, they have not bothered me that much.

My voices have also changed. I don't hear the male voice, and the female voice anymore, and the tinny voices have changed to normal people's voices, but who they are I don't know. I still hear the monks chanting in the background from time to time. I think hearing voices groups are a valuable thing, assisting in coping with voices, and being able to talk about them without being looked at as if you have some strange disease. I now facilitate two groups, and really enjoy doing so. I'd like to encourage all voice hearers to attend the groups as they are extremely beneficial.

Marlene

Co -Facilitator Freo Voices Group & Armadale Group

Hi,

I have got a lot out of the Hearing Voices Group. How to use the strategies and which ones I found the most useful and were to use them for my personal comfort. Sometimes in some groups I find it hard to express myself or tell the other members at that time what I am experiencing.

I have found friendship in the group and trust among them. I feel confident with the group members, and I hope they feel the same about me.

I would like the hearing voices group to continue on in 2007.

Rockingham, Voices Group Member

Hi,

I found the Hearing Voices Group changed my life.

The staff were very patient and understanding. Everybody within the group were very supportive. During the 8 week course I learnt new ways to challenge the voices and ignore the voices. I have found they now leave me alone. Or when they do return I challenge the voices until they leave.

I would like to thank Paula Edwards for being such a great support.

Rockingham Voices Group Member

These are just a few samples of the many testimonials and letters from voice hearers, sharing their experiences.

All the HV Networks (see section 3 of this manual), display these testimonials and all are encouraged to visit these sites and review all their material.

Some of the NV Network sites have blogs and chat lines which you can also visit.

Section 8

HV Network NSW and Mental Health System/Professionals

HVNNSW Philosophy and Approach.

As previously stated, the majority of the members of HVNNSW, and in particular, those who attend Hearing Voices Groups, are diagnosed through the mental health system as being “Mentally ill”.

As a consequence the majority of these members will be in the care of mental health professionals in some form.

HVNNSW does not see itself in opposition to the professional beliefs and practices within the mental health system, and therefore does not consider itself to be in conflict in any way in regard to its members and, where applicable, the advice and treatment they receive from their mental health professional supporters.

To the contrary, HVNNSW promotes a strong alliance with the mental health system in any way possible to promote recovery for people who hear distressing voices.

As the HVNNSW Group Guidelines clearly denote :

- These are **not** clinical groups offering treatment, they are self-help groups.
- They make **no** assumption on illness.
- They are self-help groups **not** therapy groups.
- Members are **not** subject to referral, discharge or risk assessment.

In addition:

HVNNSW its committee and members **will not**:

- Offer opinion or advice to members regarding medications prescribed by their mental health professional.
- Offer opinion or advice to members regarding issues such as substance abuse or use of drugs.
- Offer opinion or advice about the merits, or otherwise, of clinical, therapy groups and any form of mental health treatment a HV member may be receiving.

Notwithstanding the above, HVNNSW reserves the right to express opinion, as long as it is on an informed basis, and will support contrary views, if such view is supported by undeniable facts, which can be substantiated.

Section 9

Acknowledgements

The development of this “Hearing Voices Self-Help User Manual” would not have been possible without the help and support from other networks around the world.

The greater part of this manual has been developed by drawing on the vast array of information included in “**Hearing Voices Network Australia Information Booklet**”. **We would sincerely like to thank Lyn Mahboub, Director HVNA and her team for kindly allowing us to source their intellectual property.**

In addition, we would like to thank HVN in the UK for the use of extracts from their “**Starting and Supporting Hearing Voices Groups**” booklet.

The information sourced from both organisations has been invaluable, and again, we thank you enormously.

