

Peer Perspective: Jeannie Bass



Before writing this piece on how I came to be featured in the [NBC short documentary on the hearing voices movement](#), I sat at the desk in my office at Tewksbury Hospital and reflected. When did the Jeannie Bass I am today emerge from that lost girl roaming the streets preaching the gospel as Mary Magdalene and searching for disciples? When did I become

someone with a life that might possibly inspire others?

The biggest achievement I thought I would reach was to stay in day treatment for the rest of my life and be “compliant.” This was the goal I believe most people had for me. After I stumbled upon the hearing voices movement completely by accident, many interpreted this new life I was living to be a magic carpet ride destined to crash. They didn’t see me striving for a life where I was seen AND believed in my capabilities. However, the new life I never dreamed possible continued to take shape. After finding more ways to immerse myself in the hearing voices movement, I eventually applied and was invited to join the Hearing Voices Network (HVN-USA) board of directors.

One of the fun parts of being on the HVN-USA board is that I get to manage the [HVN-USA Facebook page](#) which is how Marshall Crook, the NBC film maker, found me. He contacted HVN-USA through the page and asked for some background on the movement for a documentary. We had a phone conversation that I thought would be nothing more than one phone call, but as it turned out he was moved by my story and asked to feature me in his documentary. Marshall and his producer flew to Salem, MA, where I live, and spent a couple days interviewing me.

I did a ton of prep work prior to the interview, but when it actually occurred, the experience proved to be a lot more intense than I had anticipated. It was intense both for me and for the voices I hear that others don’t. NBC was incredibly patient and caring with me throughout the ten hours we spent together. In addition, they gave me an abundance of reassurance easing the fear I navigated internally during the editing process. In the end, I wouldn’t have changed a thing. I am grateful they presented a balanced piece on the hearing voices movement. They shared

just what was relevant from my story to illustrate why the HVN approach and community is so crucial.

Being a Peer Specialist

Behind me are the many years I spent on social security and the revolving door of hospitals and programs, today I dedicate much of my time working full time as a Certified Peer Specialist for DMH at Tewksbury Hospital. Many of the patients here feel like kindred spirits. Some were in treatment with me or I have known from the outside world. I love my job very much. One special aspect is that I am able to bring the worldwide Hearing Voices Movement here to Tewksbury.

I co-facilitate a weekly Exploring Unique Experiences: an affiliated HVN-USA support group with the Director of Psychology, Dr. David Greenleaf. We tell members this is a community and not just a group. We don't try to get rid of people's voices (unless that is what they want support with), but instead seek to create acceptance and a space to learn new strategies to work with these experiences. We thread our stories together having solidarity with others who have similar experiences from around the globe.

Equally important is Beyond Belief, a group that I am fortunate to co-facilitate with Psychologist Dr. Carina Iati. This is one of very few groups around the country where we support people working with beliefs that are labeled as "delusions," in addition to other beliefs about ourselves and our world. Together with group members we see that "a belief, is a belief, is a belief" and all beliefs, whether unusual or not, hold some meaning in our lives.

Tewksbury's Peer Support Services Department hosts an annual World Hearing Voices Day event on September 14th each year. This year we had some amazing art work created to display as well. Tewksbury Hospital and the Northeast Area have also hosted several international leaders in the Hearing Voices Movement within the last few years for workshops, speaking events and staff trainings. This has included HVN leaders Psychologist Dr. Rufus May, Peter Bullimore and Shaun Hunt from the UK, and Elisabeth Svanholmer from Denmark. I am eternally grateful for the trust and support from my co-workers in the Peer Support Services Department and the hospital administration in allowing us to carve out our own little corner of the Hearing Voices Movement in the Northeast Area of DMH, and within the walls of Tewksbury Hospital.

I'll leave you with something I mention at the Exploring Unique Experiences group every week. I tell members: "There are almost no promises I can make about your

journey and struggle, but I can say one thing with absolute certainty: You are not alone." If group members carry even one thing with them as their lives move on, I do hope it is this guarantee.