**Identifying human rights-based services and supports to improve the enjoyment of human rights in the context of mental health**

Hello everyone (name the important people) and thank you for inviting me to speak here today.

I speak as one who has been on both sides of the psychiatric system. The side with the power to help or do great harm and the side of the disempowered and voiceless and today I speak as a representative of the Hearing Voices movement. A movement which is now found in 33 countries around the world.

I want to tell you a story today, a true one taken from my thesis, to highlight a few aspects for why human rights abuses occur in psychiatry and why these actions are denied by psychiatry, and through this story see what CAN help and WHY. The HVN is a very good example of what works and how it, through activism and providing knowledge, can influence change in society, the community and psychiatry towards what one hopes will one day be a more humane system. The HVN is not connected to psychiatry it works outside of psychiatry.

Pat was a young 19 year old woman who was sectioned in psychiatry because she attempted to commit suicide after being raped. Despite staff knowledge of the rape being the reason she tried to commit suicide, it was the focus on Pat’s voices that took priority resulting in her diagnosis of schizophrenia and the implementation of forced treatment and locked doors. Pat was forcibly injected with medication and because she was never told why other than it was for her own good, she said and I quote:

“I got more paranoid, I wouldn't eat, I wouldn't drink, I felt everything was poison; that people were trying to poison me. Just because they never told me. I never understood what the drugs do, or did, so I was very sleepy, very sedated…”

Pat’s behavior became increasingly unusual she began to, for example drink from puddles and lick windows.

So from a psychiatric perspective Pat’s symptoms of bizarre and meaningless behavior reinforce the staffs belief that she has schizophrenia. And she has schizophrenia why? Because she behaves in a bizarre and meaningless way.

In other words the staff are engaging in psychiatric circular reasoning, and this form of circular reasoning is endemic in psychiatry. And remains so because of the power structures in place.

So in Pat’s case being framed and silenced in this manner resulted in her becoming a revolving door patient spending years going in and out of psychiatry.

On the surface many would think fear of poison, starving one’s self hearing voices and only drinking from puddles or licking windows could be classified as extreme behavior worthy of being called madness. And if one has this understanding of the world that madness is a diagnosable biological phenomenon that can only be controlled through chemical means, AND the laws are in place to make this perspective the right one, well then everything fits neatly in to, as in Pat’s case, the schizophrenia box and we have both the solution and the answer.

But what if there is another understanding another perspective connecting madness to lived life with all of the complexities of human meaningfulness in the center? This creates space for understanding, not just for the person in distress, but for those trying to help her. You see, Pat did not just carry a story of rape with her, she carried a history of extreme child abuse.

Pat was herself a child born of rape with the result that her mother treated her with great cruelty and violence. She was constantly beaten and berated for being the product of a rape. Now Pat is raped and already there is a link do you see it?

Pats home had a room in the cellar for their coal and from a very early age her mother would lock Pat in there as punishment. Sometimes for up to 2 whole days with no food or water, often naked and she would bury herself under the coal to keep warm along with all the bugs and other things that lived there too. There was a very small window and sometimes there, she could get a bit of water by licking the condensation off the window or if it had rained it might seep in so she could lick it off the window sill. Do you hear a connection forming already with her actions in psychiatry? In the coal cellar through the little window she could see the moon at night and the moon became her friend whom she could talk to. The moon was fickle however because its moon beams would point to where she could hide food that she smuggled in under her clothes, that is until her mother found out and sent her in there, naked. But being a child she did not understand the movement of the world and moon so when she went to find food it was not there anymore. Her voices that started in the coal cellar was among others the moon who could punish and comfort.

When she was 7 they moved and there was no coal cellar but her mother continued to derive new methods of horrendous punishments and all the while her mother would tell her what a bad child she was and that what she was doing to her was for her own good… Do you hear another link?

Since psychiatry’s discourse silences Pat, while at the same time not proffering any explanation for their actions towards her, a gulf between realities is created resulting in both parties thinking the others actions are incomprehensible and both create a narrative of understanding to account for the others actions. However it is psychiatry’s dominant discourse and the laws that support this that becomes the established truth and Pat’s truth is obliterated as she is forced into the role of a schizophrenic. But because her reality is silenced does not mean that it is gone, on the contrary it is there weaving itself into the dominant narrative created by psychiatry where it is perceived as madness and justifying psychiatry as an enterprise.

What if meaning and understanding is introduced and madness can be placed in a context; will that threaten to destabilize orthodox psychiatry as we know it? Or could that be the start of a more humane system of help?

For Pat after years as a revolving door patient she met the Hearing Voices Movement and first there found her voice along with her fellow voice hearers and peers, and is today out of the system helping others find meaning and understanding. And like her I am here today representing the HVM and its message that madness is meaningful and can be helped.

To quote C.S.Lewis "Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. For those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience”