



Hearing Voices

By Teagan Presler

On December 16th, the Center for Human Development's Alaska Training Cooperative provided the opportunity for a unique training for Alaska Child and Family on the topic of internal stimuli. The morning started with a DVD lecture of someone who specializes in auditory stimuli, and has auditory hallucinations herself. She was able to describe her experience from a unique standpoint, backing up her experiences with data and research on the subject.

The most thought provoking time period was the second hour of training. During this time, participants wore headphones with MP3 players designed to simulate what it is like to hear voices. The simulations included static and whispers, angry voices yelling at and insulting you, and a friendly voice saying "we choose you. You are the only one who knows the way." At one point, my voice was telling me that everyone was laughing at me and I turned around to see that my group mates were, in fact, laughing at me. I was supposed to be completing a mock intake assessment with one of the trainers at this point, but had just started staring off into space and laughing without realizing it.

After putting on the headphones and splitting into three groups, we were asked to do a series of tasks. In one room, we had to fill out a questionnaire and complete an intake assessment at a therapist's office. I touched on my experience with this above. In the second room, our group was asked to work together and build a house. Planning and teamwork were difficult, as there was already plenty of teamwork going on in my head. The third room was a mock job interview. We struggled at recalling even simple information, such as how long we worked at the agency, as we attempted to tune out the voices and think.

Every once in a while the voices would go silent, and I could feel a sigh of relief as I got a break from constantly working to focus. I was able to collect my thoughts for a minute before they started up again. It had never occurred to me the amount of resiliency and strength people have who hear voices. Plus, I knew it would end in 40 minutes, and that this exhaustion would be relieved.

I also gained a new appreciation about how valued patience is when experiencing auditory hallucinations. Yes, I did get caught up in the voices to the point you had to say my name three times to get my attention. Yes, it did take me over a minute to recall what brand of laundry detergent I use. And yes, it was nearly impossible to remember what my degree was after hearing voices for an hour. The extra time it takes to focus and process is not something that would have occurred to me without this experience.

I would highly recommend this training to anyone who works with clients who have hallucinations, or is just curious about what it is like to live with the condition. It was highly enlightening, and I cannot even begin to explain the impact it had on everyone who attended it. It is something that one must simply experience.