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Whose voice is it anyway?

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A short story providing insight into the thoughts and feelings of a person with lived experience being detained under the Mental Health Act 1983. Exploring how Approved Mental Health Professionals interact and engage and how this is interpreted by the person with lived experience.

Whose voice is it anyway?

Social Worker: Not much luck on the rota today, warrant written out and a referral has just come in. I wonder if that system will stay with this online business. I quite like a trip out to the courts, its practically a day out. Since the local Magistrates Court was closed, we have to jump on the train to the City Centre.

Social Worker: The referral looks quite urgent too. Must call Bob at home. It is 3pm on a Friday afternoon, getting home in time, have tea and go to the 7pm viewing is looking bleak. Sam was on the rota yesterday and he said there are no beds again. Don't know why they closed that ward last year. I think this girl is known. Just enough time to get a brew on, then see what's what.

Sophie: I know Dad has called the Crisis Team, as he's been on the phone most of yesterday and today. I don't know why he did that when all I need is peace and sleep. Him stomping around the flat and being grumpy doesn't help. He makes me and my emotions feel worthless when he does that. I then feel like I don't deserve to eat. When I don't eat it angers him more so I feel like I can't win, instead I do nothing except stare into space. I'm good at that, staring blankly. Nobody expects anything

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3 from you then. I feel like I haven't got anything left to give anyway. I'm spent, a void,
4 a shell.
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6 Social Worker: Sun is shining, and daffodils are coming out, doubt I'll have time to
7 get any of those freebie vitamin D rays today. What do we have on the notes.... Did
8 not attend duty appointment, visited duty last March with an increase in anxiety and
9 depression. Dad called in worried, might give him a ring now.
10
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12 Social Worker: Patients presentation is not usual, hearing voices and not looking
13 after herself, she's been acting bizarrely putting tin foil around the TV and refusing to
14 eat. Will need a second doctor, got the duty doctor already. No idea where I put the
15 doctors list. Come on... think, think, think. Right, where does she even live? Doctor
16 is not available until 4.30pm, there is no way I'm going to see that film and I can't
17 pass this to the Emergency Duty Team.
18
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20 Sophie: I know I'm not well mentally as I keep hearing and smelling things I know
21 aren't there. There's even been voices coming out of the TV that don't match the
22 person speaking so I covered the TV in foil. Everything inside my head is so loud,
23 lots of shouting, it's a cacophony. I feel afraid so very afraid. I'm scared to move and
24 make a sound in case Dad wonders what's going on and shouts at me. I hate myself
25 and I'm thinking about killing myself as these suicidal impulses are strong. The
26 voices, all competing with each other, are urging me to "do it, do it" Some of the
27 voices are so loud and others are barely audible, they're all intense though. So
28 intense I feel like I'm missing a layer of skin, everything is raw, so raw.
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32 Social Worker: Phew it's a flat with two storeys, I hate lifts. I always feel
33 apprehensive on the way to an assessment, even though I've been doing this for
34 years. Need to refocus and get my head in the game. Dr. Patel is here but Dr.
35 Robertson is always late.
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38 Social Worker: Number 11a. A tall man swings the door open and grunts a gesture
39 to come in. "You must be the doctors?" he says, looking us up and down with a face
40 of distaste. "Took your time then, I have been on the phone all day since yesterday
41 trying to get some help, I guess you have other more important things to do".
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44 Sophie: I hear the door knock. I know it's the Crisis Team. Dad's rude to them and I
45 wish he wasn't as they hold all the power. The voice in my head screams "What the
46 hell do they want?" Leave me alone I want to say.
47

48 Social Worker: Mike (Dad) leads me to the sitting room where I am introduced to
49 Sophie. Reading the notes, you imagine what someone will be like, make all these
50 mini assumptions and they are always wrong. Sophie is slouching on the sofa her
51 hair covering her eyes. Head bowed, not even noticing we've come into the room.
52 Curtains are drawn, windows are open. Its freezing. I ask if it is ok to sit down and
53 introduce myself and ask the doctors to introduce themselves. Sophie looks
54 frightened. I try to explain the reasons why we are there; Sophie interrupts and says,
55 "I'm fine, I don't need any help!".
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58 Sophie: The Social Worker says "Hello" and attempts to engage with me and I stare
59 blankly at the floor and don't look up, I know her game. She wants me to participate
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3 with her and the Doctors she has brought with her, and I want to be left alone. She
4 seems friendly enough. Cherry docs good choice. The one doctor though appears to
5 be distant, aloof and stuck up. They always are. There's nothing warm about him
6 apart from his tie. I feel miserable and am aware I need some help but feel
7 intimidated and scared by their presence. I'm angry with Dad for putting me through
8 this process again. I just think it's his inability to cope with my own emotions around
9 my illness and what happened. "Selfish git", I want to shout and throw things, but I
10 don't, I'm so annoyed. I am ashamed of being like this so much, so I don't want
11 anyone to see me. So, I sit passively and await the Crisis Teams next move. It's like
12 a game of chess except there are no winners in this game.
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16 Social Worker: I am going through all my normal questions asking Sophie about
17 herself. Do you live here on your own? Do you know why your family are worried
18 about you? Trying to normalise the situation as Mike paces the room. Sophie says
19 nothing, not looking up. Time is going slowly, my engagement with Sophie is not
20 happening. I want to help; I need to give her time. I look for clues in the room to help.
21 The table has some new pictures of a new-born and a woman who looks a little like
22 Sophie, maybe that's her sister. Next to it a little note "Thanks auntie Sophie for my
23 new toys, I love them" surrounded by baby handprints. Sophies face looks gaunt, her
24 hair is sticking to her face, she has dried mud and grass stains on her jeans and
25 chipped glossy teal nail varnish. She looks shaken and jittery like she just stepped
26 out of a car crash. She seems intimidated by both of the doctors – why wouldn't
27 she? I would.
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31 Sophie: I feel like a wreck, my head feels all over the place, and my thoughts and the
32 voices are all getting jumbled up. How can I begin to tell the Doctors and Social
33 Worker what's really going on for me? I've learnt over the years that you can't be
34 honest with them. They rarely seem interested, having already made their
35 assumptions and are at best patronising. They just want to treat my outward
36 symptoms and not the inner causes that led to my feeling like this. If only my Mum
37 hadn't forced me to have that abortion in my teens, maybe I wouldn't be so upset
38 about my sister having a baby now. I don't feel jealous, I just feel a sense of loss.
39 The baby would have been twelve now. I think Noah would have been a good name.
40 Mum never wanted me to talk about it and I feel like she took my right to have
41 choices away. Like I had no rights over my body or mind. Much like these people
42 from the Crisis Team. As I glance over at the team, I see the pictures of my nephew
43 on the table and can taste the bitterness of bile in my mouth. Still hurting, I know my
44 dad feels he's also part of the problem, which I don't understand. He didn't know
45 about the abortion until after the event, I know he feels bad about this. I can't handle
46 Dad's emotions about this at the minute, I can barely handle my own. I'd love to tell
47 the Doctors what's going on, only I know they have the power to take away my
48 liberty too, so I stay tight lipped.
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53 Social Worker: Every now and then she looks over to the kitchen door, as if she is
54 expecting someone to burst into the room. Eyes alert and then back to head down.
55 "She says Amy Winehouse is in there, in the kitchen. I have told her he ain't". Mike
56 stumps over to the door. "Look see... no one is there". Sophies body language
57 changes to that of fear. "I ain't seen her like this before, she ain't eating, speaking...
58 tell the lady Sophie". Sophie rocks slightly with her hands over her face. I think she
59 maybe responding to something in the kitchen.
60

Sophie: The Social Worker is asking me if I will go with her and the Doctors to hospital? I feel so angry about this as again it's as if my rights and freedom to have choices are being taken away. If I don't go voluntarily, they will section me and take me anyway. I feel so powerless, angry, hurt and upset. I want to scream and cry but I don't and hold myself in tight. I just wait, the Social Worker asks again if I will go with them. I meekly nod my head in agreement.

Social Worker: I need to get used to this outlook calendar thing, is it on Teams or old school real life. Multi-disciplinary meeting today, I wonder if they will let me out once I've seen Sophie. Would that look rude I wonder? The meeting usually goes on for half a day. I'll see how she is before the meeting. The ward is busy Norman runs straight over to me. "When are you coming to see me, can we go to the shops, do you think you can sort me out some leave, have you spoken to my mom, I want my own flat, you look nice today, you had your hair cut?" Speaking at me at high speed with intent and frustration. "I'll speak to you in a bit Norman... promise". Just realised I haven't done his housing forms. Simon the Ward Manager ushers me to the safety of the nurses office out of Normans reach. I have come to see Sophie, how's she been? "All good, settled in well, smokes like a trooper. That first day she came, she was elated running around the gardens, rolling around in the pollen. She said, "it felt liberating", that's not happened since. Medication changes but they will talk about that in MDT. Catch you later".

Social Worker: In the meeting Sophie looks terrified. She's only seen me once before and I doubt she's met these other professionals in this multi-disciplinary meeting. There are eight of us and Sophie. It feels like we are on the interview panel. It's hot in here, I think we are all a bit nervous. No one has spoken to Sophie beforehand as she doesn't seem interested in talking with anyone. The consultant psychiatrist begins talking about medication. 10 milligram this, 30 milligram that. I am bored and tired, and I think Sophie is too.

Sophie: This meeting in the Hospital is terrifying. I don't know anyone and they're all looking at me. I'm used to the drill. It feels like the spotlight is on me like I'm in an auditorium. Just say what the psychiatrist wants me to say and do what they want then they'll let me go home. Showering every day, yes, washing my hair, yes, eating and sleeping, yes, yes. Have the suicidal thoughts gone? Yes. I'm good to go home. I don't know why they bother with these meetings, I'd be better on a one to one. They never explain anything about what or why I ended up in here, how my diagnosis might affect me in the future. Nobody explained the side effects of the medication either. I've been here a month and have put on a stone in weight, none of my clothes fit me, I also worried about my self-esteem being plumper. I think it's the meds or is it the food? This gives me another problem. Again, I feel like somebody has control of my mind and body. I realise how I might have presented to the Doctors initially but that was all in response to a situation in the past that triggered a response in the present. All because my sister sent me a photo of my nephew, if only they asked me about that. But you know I'm not sure I'd say anything. I'm not ready. I don't say this though. I half smile at the social worker as she passes, she says "Your look really well Sophie". I know I am looking better but I'm just playing the game. The voices are a little kinder to me now with the volume dialled down. The Social Worker looks tired, and I wonder what sort of day she's had. I can only

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surmise her thinking is similar to mine, “When can I get out of here? Do I have a voice?”.

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