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Finding sanctuary, welfare, and social networks: stories from art therapy suggest refugees and people who hear voices, have parallel lives.

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Learning Goal:

Parallel societal themes in the lives of refugees and people who hear voices. How these parallels facilitate an understanding of human connection. The response and historical adaptation of therapeutic approaches in art therapy. What we have learnt from service user movements. Art Therapy stories that illustrate some of this.

Abstract Text:

Finding sanctuary, the wherewithal to live, and social networks are the key elements of survival for most people. Parallels, between asylum seekers finding refuge, and people grappling with strange experiences in psychosis, help me as an art therapist think about what to do and about the conversations that might be helpful. Refugees and voice hearers struggle with finding safe human connections in the midst of loneliness and poverty.

Art Therapy history has moved through adaptations of its therapeutic approach and briefly I will indicate these. Whereas I acknowledge how an understanding of 'terror' and 'attacks on linking': concepts from psychoanalysis may be of value in understanding a period of intense distress. I think cuts in services and the loss of societal safety nets, mean it is often wise to adapt, and to focus on service-user agency.

The focus on self-agency in the Hearing Voices Movement (HVM) has provided inspirational change in the lives of many people across the world. The HVM approach has pointed to a recognisable range of human solutions. Using art therapy, maybe from a base within inner-city community studios, could help some people consolidate the gains and the healing.

I have permission to share art therapy stories that illustrate the parallels between the lives of refugees and the lives of people who hear voices. Within the stories there are shared themes. There is a strong sense of the need to hide usually with an idea of keeping safe. One form of hiding is to be silent in the company of people with power. Another strong theme is loneliness, often compounded by the need to hide, and by poverty. Finally there is shame: it seems to underline all themes.



**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**