Voice and communication therapy groups for trans and non-binary people

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Voice and communication therapy groups for trans and non-binary people: Safe voice change and well-being

International Festival of Public Health
Thursday 5th July 2018

Dr Sean Pert,
Senior Clinical Lecturer, University of Manchester
What are your pronouns?
Challenges

• Charity funded programme
• No funds for speech and language therapy
• Big demand for services
• Long waiting lists at Gender Identity Clinics (GICs)
• Voice specialists in community viewed trans voice and communication work as highly specialist and declined referrals
• No precedent for a community-led, non-medical model service
• Indirect transphobia
Risks of voice practice in isolation

- Potentially harmful vocal exercises
- Undiagnosed voice problems
- Vocal abuse and, long term can lead to permanent damage such as nodules or polyps requiring corrective surgery and rehabilitation speech therapy
Aims of Project

- Pilot scheme
- Voice and Communication skills for trans people
- Addressing barriers to access
- Gather research and learn from partnership model of delivery
- Mutually benefit trans service users and university students
Who is the service for?

People who are:

✓ Trans individuals
✓ Gender non-compliant
✓ Wish to project a gender which differs from their biological sex
✓ Male spectrum
✓ Female spectrum
✓ Inclusive of all people, regardless of biological sex, sexuality, and gender presentation
Voice and communication

• **Advice on vocal hygiene** and protecting the voice when making changes

• **Assessment**
  – Computerised assessment of vocal pitch and loudness
  – Assessment of voice and communication

• **Voice coaching**
  – Exercises in groups
  – Individual home practice
Gender perception

- Pitch
- Articulation
- Resonance
- Language use
- Volume
- Non verbal
Student training
Weekend Intensive course

• One-to-one
  – Interview
  – Voice assessment
  – Goal setting
Weekend Intensive course

- Breathing
- Voice activities
- Discussion

- Group

- 12-14 clients
- 12-26 students
- 1-2 SLT supervisors
Outcomes: Trans people

• “Every aspect was an eye-opener...”
• “...really helped build my confidence and capacity/ability to do the exercises”
• “Thank you so much. I have felt on my own for so long with regards to my voice, ...This has been a lifesaver (genuinely)”
Outcomes: Students

- 10-26 volunteers for each group
  - Only one student had previously worked with a trans person
  - More likely to want to work with trans people in their future career
  - All felt more skilled with working with trans people
  - All recommended volunteering to other student speech and language therapists
Outcomes: Professionals

✓ Better shared understanding
✓ Feedback and involvement of trans people to shape services
✓ Specialist knowledge to share with colleagues:
  – Email and ‘phone advice to other SLTs
  – Part of the advisory panel for the competencies framework at the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, London
  – Knowledge and skills to train future SLTs
Winner Staff
Volunteer of the Year 2018

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists’ Sternberg Award 2017

Innovation in Health & Social Care with the VCSE sector in Greater Manchester Runner-up 2018
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