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?

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

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

Group
- Breathing
- Voice activities
- Discussion

- 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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