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## The Mercury

# Voice of reason wins out

HELEN KEMPTON

RON Coleman spent more than a decade in and out of mental health institutions as he tried to deal with the voices in his head.

Once he understood that auditory hallucinations are often a normal response to an abnormal or traumatic life event, he came to terms with his predicament and started helping others.

The 2000 Tasmanians who suffer auditory hallucinations will soon have support through Hearing Voices Network Australia which will operate in Hobart, Launceston and the North-West under the auspices of Richmond Fellowship Tasmania.

"In my case, it was the voice of the Catholic priest who abused me and the voice of my first wife who had died which decided to make themselves heard," Mr Coleman said yesterday.

He has been in Tasmania to train those who will offer support to sufferers.



**YOU ARE NOT ALONE.** Facilitator Ron Coleman, from Scotland, with Andrew Brimble, 25, and Joel Lovett, 27, both of Lindsfarns, who hope a new network will make their lives easier.

Picture: RAOUL KOCHANOWSKI

People like Joel Lovett and Andrew Brimble.

Mr Lovett has been hearing voices for 20 years but has only recently started talking about his experiences. Mr Brimble also has been hearing voices since he was a young child.

"It is good to be able to

discuss these things with others who understand and to realise that you are not alone," Mr Brimble said yesterday.

Mr Coleman said he had witnessed a big change in both men.

Hearing voices is not always a symptom of mental

illness but rather a reaction to a major event.

"In many cases, voices can be positive," Richmond Fellowship Tasmania chief executive Patrick Carlisle said.

Some famous high achievers who identified themselves as voice hearers include Leonardo da Vinci, Winston

Churchill, Gandhi, Joan of Arc and Anthony Hopkins.

Research has found that about 4 per cent of the population hears voices but only 0.5 per cent of those are diagnosed with schizophrenia.

The new network will allow Tasmanians to share coping

strategies and explore ways to work with the voices rather than against them.

A public meeting will be held at the Colonial in Elizabeth St, Launceston on Thursday.

Information from Richmond Fellowship Tasmania on 6228 3344 or 0408 166 397.