

Voices Heard: Students experience life with auditory hallucinations

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By John Miller

To raise awareness for schizophrenia and psychosis, Catholic Charities of Broome County teamed up with the Counseling and Psychology departments of SUNY Broome to offer students a unique experience — completing daily tasks while hearing voices.

Students had the chance to fill out a word search, a job application or simply answer a series of questions while wearing earphones. I tried all three. There would always be something playing in the earphones, it would start with the song “Soul Man,” before changing to disturbing voices. Sometimes they screamed and sometimes they whispered, but they always kept babbling in your ear.

It was horrible.

You're worthless.

Don't look up. Don't look around. Eyes down. Discipline!

Stop writing; drop your pen.

They're all looking at you.

They know what you're done.

You're a filthy person.

Don't tell anyone.

Write it on your face. Write it on the walls.

If your eyes offend you— pluck them out!

Obviously, the tasks were very difficult to complete. In the beginning, when just the music was playing, it wasn't

so bad. I could relax, focus on the task and almost forget what I was listening to. The voices were a different story.

It didn't matter if they were yelling or whispering, I couldn't focus. I would try to ignore them but it didn't matter. I'd start writing my name and the voices would say hurtful things and I'd have to stop. I couldn't block them out; I couldn't function. I cannot imagine what it would be like to deal with this sort of illness every day. It was an unforgettable experience.

The purpose of the event, held May 13 in the lobby of the Student Center, was to show students and faculty what schizophrenics and psychosis patients go through in their day to day lives.

Lori Accardi, the Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Broome County, started the program last fall to remove the negative stigma that mental illness carries with it.

Writer John Miller is a SUNY Broome student.



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