



## **Interim Report for Scottish Government on the Scottish Community Link Worker Network**

**1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

### **Background**

Since April 2021, Scottish Government's Primary Care Directorate has provided project funding to Voluntary Health Scotland to establish and develop the Scottish Community Link Worker Network. The Network aims to create a shared space for community link workers (CLWs) in primary care settings across Scotland to share learning, and to develop, network and support each other to improve outcomes for their patients and local communities.

### **Alignment with national outcomes**

Our primary care and Scottish Community Link Worker Network activities specifically align with the following national outcomes:

- We have high quality, affordable and accessible public services and facilities that positively enhance our lives.
- We prioritise health and wellbeing at national and local government levels and actively implement healthy public policy.
- We use evidence intelligently to continuously improve and challenge existing healthcare models.

### **Current staffing**

Between April and September, Roisin Hurst continued working 3 days a week as part of her secondment from Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council. From 1<sup>st</sup> September, Roisin has moved full-time to Voluntary Health Scotland to act as Project Manager for the Network. The Network has also been supported during this period by social researcher Findlay Smith who has been working 3 days a week as Research and Policy Officer for the Network. Findlay left his post in early September to focus on his PhD studies at the University of Aberystwyth.

In addition to these Network-specific posts, the Network's activity is also supported by VHS's Chief Executive and its Event and Engagement Lead as well as a working group of Community Link Workers and an advisory group made up of CLW programme leads, representatives from Scottish Government's Primary Care Directorate. The

advisory group membership now also includes Dr Peter Cairns who is an Edinburgh GP practising in Wester Hailes.

### **Network Activity: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

Below is a summary of the Network's main activity during this 6-month period.

#### **1. Network Events**

##### Scottish CLW Network Conference 2023

The first Network Conference took place in May this year at The Studio in Glasgow where we welcomed 140 Community Link Workers, Programme Leads, third sector partners and guest speakers to hear keynote speakers Maree Todd, the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport and Gerry McCartney, Professor of Wellbeing Economy at the University of Glasgow. The conference programme also included a CLW/GP panel session with 2 Deep End GPs and 2 community link workers from Edinburgh and Orkney, 4 workshops led by separate CLW teams and exhibitors including Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland, Home Energy Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans. Feedback on the day was extremely positive, with 100% of delegates rating the event as 'excellent' or 'good'.

*“Great day, interesting speakers and great workshop.”*

*“Loved the day - the buzz, the conversations and information sharing.”*

Planning is now underway for the next Network conference which will take place in May 2024. The key messages from the 2023 Conference can be read [here](#)

##### CLW Programme Leads Events

Following on from discussions at the Network's advisory group meetings, it was agreed that the Network should explore hosting events specifically for programme leads, i.e., those who have responsibility for leading CLW teams and/or commissioning CLW programmes in their HSCP. Ahead of the first of these events in April this year, delegates were asked to nominate topics they would like to discuss and the key areas are listed below:

- Funding, sustainability and future planning
- Models of delivery and adapting to change
- Securing primary care practice buy-in
- Evaluation and demonstrating outcomes

Delegates agreed that having the opportunity to come together to discuss strategic issues had been useful and would welcome these events becoming a regular fixture in the Network's event calendar. The key messages from the event were sent to those who attended. The next Programme Leads event will be held in October. This will feature Findlay Smith as guest speaker who will be presenting on the key findings from his upcoming research report – Essential Connections: Mapping the Range and Scope of Community Link Worker programmes in Scotland.

##### Knowledge Exchange Events

As the Network grows its membership and reputation, we want it to continue to act as a channel for facilitating communication and connection between CLWs and

organisations that can support both them and their patients. There is a demonstrable demand for the Network to offer this brokerage role, from organisations keen to be part of the social prescribing landscape. We now host regular knowledge exchange events to facilitate these connections. Our third knowledge exchange event in June featured speakers from Kidney Research UK and Age Scotland with 50 CLWs in attendance to listen to [presentations](#) and engage in discussion with the speakers.

We have a further two knowledge exchange events confirmed for November and January which will feature presentations from The Pain Association (Scotland), Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland, Pancreatic Cancer UK and Paths for All. We are also in early discussions with Arts Culture Health and Wellbeing Scotland (ACHWS) to host a knowledge exchange event to look at the link between culture, health and wellbeing and social prescribing.

### Community Link Worker Peer Support Events

The Network peer support events provide an opportunity for practising CLWs to come together to chat together about key issues and share good practice. The September event focused on some of the main challenges that CLWs are currently facing and how they are trying to overcome these. The event also featured conversations on available training and support. The 25 delegates heard short introductions from Leeanne Killen from North Ayrshire's CLW team and Erika Copland from NHS Orkney before they were divided into smaller breakout groups for more in-depth discussions. The [key messages](#) from the event were emailed to delegates and were also shared via Twitter and on the Network's webpage. Our next Peer Support event will take place in February.

## **2. Training and Development**

Following on from the publication of the Network's [training and development needs review](#) in May 2022, we have worked with NES to support the development of a [social prescribing learning platform](#) on TURAS which can be used to support CLWs' training needs. The platform includes courses on realistic medicine, mental health and the prevention of self-harm and suicide, death, dying and bereavement and health literacy. The courses have been reviewed by Roisin and some of the Edinburgh CLW team and the platform will continue to be updated. We have also worked with Edinburgh CLW network to support the take up of places on their Bromley-by-Bow training to new community link workers and a number of community link workers from Highland, Forth Valley, Fife, North Ayrshire and Orkney participated. We would be keen to explore the possibility of this training being rolled out nationally.

## **3. Communication and Engagement**

Below outlines the main methods we use to engage our Network's 300+ members.

### Network Webpage

We have a dedicated [webpage](#) for the Network on the VHS website which we use to host blogs and articles relevant to the SCLWN as well as reports from our events and our Network newsletter. Recent blogs include Sandra MacAllister from NHS Highland talking about a recent social prescribing event she ran in Inverness and our post regarding the current challenges facing CLW funding in Scotland.

### Network Newsletter

We continue to send out monthly newsletters to the Network to over 300 contacts. The newsletters can be downloaded from our [webpage](#) and contain news from across the Network as well as information on useful events and training. These have been well-received, with lots of useful items for inclusion from across the Network and the Newsletter regularly has an open rate of over 60%.

### Twitter

We continue to be very active on social media, via our Network [Twitter feed](#), sharing and re-tweeting posts as appropriate. We now have 386 followers, which is up from 291 in April.

### Network resources

We worked with an external designer to produce A5 postcards for the Network to be distributed at events, workshops and conferences. We now also have a pop-up banner and Network pens to take to events and exhibitions. We will be using these at both the RCGP annual conference at the SEC and the VHS annual conference, both taking place in October.

## **4. Policy and Research**

Findlay Smith has continued his research work on the range and scope of community link worker programmes in Scotland. He has been conducting final interviews with programme leads and analysing and writing up the information from these and his survey to CLWs, capturing information on the range of CLW programmes across Scotland to gain a better understanding and overview of the structure of these programmes, the types of services they provide, how different programmes are monitored and evaluated, their potential impact and thoughts on future service design and delivery. The aim of the research is to:

- Assist the SCLWN to act as a forum for peer-to-peer learning
- Contribute towards the development of an evidence base regarding the collective impact of CLWs on public health, healthcare systems (particularly Primary Care), and health inequalities
- Help inform policy development related to CLWs at a national level, particularly in the context of the recommendation of the Health, Social Care and Sports Committee that every GP practice in Scotland has access to a CLW.

His draft report 'Essential Connections: Mapping the Scope and Range of Community Link Worker Programmes in Scotland' has been shared with Scottish Government's primary care directorate and also the Network's advisory group for final comments/edits. The report is now with the designer and is due to be published in November. At our first Network conference in May, Findlay provided a summary of some of the initial findings from his research and also produced a short [briefing paper](#).

## **5. Other relevant activity**

Manchester University multi-region evaluation into social prescribing link working  
VHS sits on the reference group for this [multi-region-evaluation-of-social-prescribing-link-workers](#) which is being led by the University of Manchester. The project will

include 2 areas of Scotland in its research – Lothian and Glasgow city. The aim of the research is to find out how link worker services operate, how well they work, who does and doesn't use them, whether they are of benefit to people and a good use of NHS resources. We have been supporting the research team to link up with key HSCP contacts in Scotland. Roisin also represented VHS at the first in-person meeting of the reference group in Manchester in August where the research team presented and discussed the 5 work packages that make up the project.

#### Age Scotland's Unforgotten Forces Conference

Roisin presented on the work of the Network and how CLWs can support older people at Age Scotland's [Unforgotten Forces](#) Conference in Dundee in June. The Unforgotten Forces partnership, which Age Scotland leads, encourages positive connections between Armed Forces charities and projects. Theresa Henry and Liam McGinlay from Sources of Support, Dundee spoke about their CLW programme and how they work with patients. This led to a discussion on the importance of the Armed Forces Covenant and how it is used in primary care. Following the event, Doug Anthony, Veterans' Officer at Age Scotland wrote a blog on the Covenant for the Network's webpage and newsletter.

#### The Improvement Service: Money Guiders' Network

Roisin presented on the work of the Network at The Improvement Service's Money Guiders' online event in August. She was joined by Leeanne Killen from North Ayrshire CLW programme who spoke about her team's work and the key challenges they are currently facing. The event's aim was to enable money guiders' network members to learn from community link workers' approach to their role. Following short presentations, there was further Q&A and discussion and a recording of the event is available [here](#).

#### Deep End GP Group

Roisin and Findlay delivered a presentation at the June steering group meeting of the [Deep End GP](#) group where they outlined the initial findings from the Network's research into the range and scope of community link worker programmes in Scotland.

#### Primary Care Health Inequalities Development Group

Both Roisin and VHS's Chief Executive are members of the Primary Care Health Inequalities Development Group and regularly attend meetings of the group to represent the interests of the community link workers and the Network.

**Roisin Hurst, Project Manager (Scottish Community Link Worker Network)  
October 2023**