

KEY MESSAGES



GIVING A VOICE TO SCOTLAND'S COMMUNITY LINK WORKERS

SCLWN: Knowledge Exchange 25 November 2025

Introduction

Voluntary Health Scotland and the Scottish Community Link Worker Network hosted their latest SCLWN Knowledge Exchange event on 25 November 2025, featuring presentations from Professors Hester Parr and Hayden Lorimer on their Wintering Well Project, Alex Jones from Beat and Julie Duggan from Social Security Scotland.

Wintering Well

Hester and Hayden presented their [Wintering Well](#) project, which provides resources to help people cope with seasonal affective disorder (SAD) and winter-related depression.

Seasonal Affective Disorder Resources Development Project

Professor Hester Parr and her interdisciplinary research team, including cultural geographers and a community artist, developed resources to help people with seasonal affective disorder (SAD) and low winter mood. The project, funded by the ESRC, included a national survey of 350 participants and a smaller in-person programme with 20 volunteers in Glasgow. The team created public-facing resources, including workshops and materials for community link workers and libraries, which have been used in 80 GP practices and public libraries across Scotland. The resources, which were piloted with community link workers in Glasgow, have received positive feedback from professionals and are designed to be accessible to those experiencing SAD without requiring a clinical diagnosis.

Winter Wellbeing Research Project

Professor Hayden Lorimer presented on their research project addressing winter-related low mood, highlighting exercises to engage with outdoor light and

resources to support wellbeing. The project has developed an online course, a toolkit guide for professionals, and a creative arts-led guide, all of which are freely accessible. Media attention has been drawn to the project's creative exercises, including a letter-writing activity, and a [BBC Radio 4 series](#) featured participant voices.

Wintering Well Project Expansion

The project's success in Orkney Library was highlighted, where there has been high demand for the Wintering Well boxes containing SAD lamps. Hester explained that the resources are free and can be used by public libraries and GP practices. The team is looking to expand the project to other library services in Scotland and is seeking funding to do so. Erika Copland, a CLW from Orkney, shared her experience of using the resources with her clients, highlighting the positive impact of the resources and the media attention they have received.

Hayden and Hester shared information about [available resources](#) including hard copies that can be sent to practices. The group discussed how these resources could support green prescribing and reduce medication dependency.

Beat

Alex Jones, Beat's National Lead for Scotland, presented on the charity's work with eating disorders. He explained [Beat's helpline services](#) and their focus on encouraging early treatment for eating disorders.

Eating Disorder Support Initiatives

Alex discussed the organisation's efforts to support individuals with eating disorders, emphasising the importance of early intervention and the challenges faced by patients in recognising and seeking help for their conditions. He highlighted the organisation's remote support programmes, including guided self-help for binge eating disorder, and the variety of resources available for carers and families. Alex also mentioned the organisation's training programmes for professionals, including healthcare workers, schools, and universities, and the upcoming online conferences on topics such as men and eating disorders.

Eating Disorders and Treatment Challenges

Alex explained the meanings of ARFID (Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) and OSFED (Other Specified Feeding and Eating Disorder), noting that OSFED is the most common eating disorder diagnosis due to the imprecision of diagnostic criteria. He discussed the challenges in treating ARFID, which often overlaps with neurodiversity and can be driven by various factors such as texture aversion or fear of choking. Alex highlighted that the helpline has seen more complex cases over

the years, with barriers to care often stemming from GPs not taking eating disorders seriously. He also addressed the growing issue of people using weight-loss injections like Ozempic, which can interfere with the treatment for binge eating disorder by disrupting natural eating habits.

Weight Loss Medication Access Regulations

Alex mentioned that 30% of those contacting the helpline about injections have anorexia, and concerns about online access to these medications were raised. Additionally, he noted the increasing use of ChatGPT for mental health support, though concerns about its safeguarding capabilities were discussed. Alex discussed the importance of regulated access to weight loss medications, emphasising the need for both physical and mental health checks to ensure safety, particularly for individuals with eating disorders. He highlighted that these medications are helpful for those who qualify but should not be accessible without proper screening.

Scottish Eating Disorders Policy Review

Alex discussed the Scottish government's approach to eating disorder services, highlighting a 2021 national review and subsequent 5-10 year plan that aligns with charity recommendations. He expressed concern that the progress could be lost due to government changes, particularly regarding mandatory calorie labelling which was paused after public opposition due to its harmful impact on individuals with eating disorders. Alex also emphasised the need for increased mental health funding, noting that only 1% of UK mental health research funding goes towards eating disorders despite their significance, and promoted community-based treatment options as a more cost-effective and beneficial alternative to hospitalisation.

Alex concluded by talking about the work of a lived experience panel in Scotland, which has contributed to improving government policy documents, NHS information, and online self-help tools, as well as supporting health boards in involving people with lived experience in service design.

Social Security Scotland

Julie Huggan, Partnership and Events Manager, presented an overview of [Social Security Scotland](#), its values, and the benefits they provide, including family payments and unique Scottish benefits.

Julie spoke in detail about the various [Scottish social security benefits](#), including winter heating payments, disability payments for children and adults, and carer support payments. She explained the eligibility criteria, payment amounts, and application processes for each benefit.

Julie also highlighted the Special Rules for Terminal Illness process, which allows for quick approval of benefits for terminally ill individuals. She drew attention to the poor uptake of Job Start Payment which pays £319.80 for 16-to 24-year-olds who have been on certain benefits for six months or more to help with the costs of starting a job. She encouraged CLWs to mention this to any younger clients they are supporting to raise awareness of the support.

A CLW raised a concern about clients struggling to get help with filling out forms, and Julie provided information on local delivery services and advocacy support available to assist with applications.

Further information

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