

KEY MESSAGES



GIVING A VOICE TO SCOTLAND'S COMMUNITY LINK WORKERS

SCLWN: Knowledge Exchange 7 May 2026

Introduction

Voluntary Health Scotland and the Scottish Community Link Worker Network hosted their latest SCLWN Knowledge Exchange event on 7 May 2026, featuring presentations from Neurodivergent Birth and Penumbra.

Neurodivergent Birth Support

Victoria White from Neurodivergent Birth Support presented on supporting neurodivergent individuals during pregnancy and childbirth, explaining their training programmes and resources designed to help healthcare professionals understand and provide appropriate support.

She outlined their CPD accredited training for birth professionals, antenatal education resources designed for neurodivergent processing styles, and access fund for doula support. Victoria highlighted that neurodivergent people experience poorer outcomes during childbirth, with 60% of autistic people and those with ADHD experiencing postnatal depression, which is two to three times the rate in the general population.

Neurodivergent Support in Perinatal Care

Victoria discussed the importance of training for NHS professionals to support neurodivergent service users during perinatal care, highlighting four key support pillars: sensory processing, communication, executive functioning, and mental health. She explained how neurodivergent individuals may experience challenges in these areas and outlined specific strategies for reasonable adjustments, such as providing sensory support, clear communication, and reducing cognitive load. Victoria emphasised the need to address both the varied experiences of

neurodivergent individuals and the higher risk of mental health issues they may face during this period.

Neurodivergent Maternity Care Support

Victoria emphasised the difference between equality and equity in healthcare access. She introduced a free Reasonable Adjustments Toolkit available on their website, which can be used as part of birth planning tools and includes specific support needs for neurodivergent individuals. Victoria also referenced their CPD-accredited training programme, a published book titled "Why Neurodivergent Birth Matters," and a free podcast featuring legal rights information and support resources.

Neurodivergent Pregnancy and Childbirth Challenges

Victoria discussed the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals during pregnancy and childbirth, highlighting factors such as sensory overload, difficulty accessing information, and hormonal fluctuations that can contribute to postnatal depression. She explained that while some NHS trusts are using existing resources like maternity passports, others face administrative barriers due to governance procedures. Victoria also mentioned ongoing work with an MP and the Royal College of Midwives to develop a unified disability passport that could better serve diverse needs without diluting individual experiences.

Antenatal Course and Support Services

Victoria discussed a free antenatal course and tool that can help support individuals in birth planning and discussions with midwives. She explained that Community Link workers can contact the organisation through their website's Contact Us page to reach out for support or referrals. Her colleague Jo also referenced that they have a free podcast featuring fascinating guests, setting out clear legal rights and information, and signposting to other high quality support orgs/books/resources, all available through their website. Victoria also mentioned that they are planning to launch peer support services to better assist individuals seeking connection with other parents in neuro-affirming environments. The discussion included a question about the similarities between birth transition and shutdowns, which Victoria acknowledged as a relevant point for the workshop.

Penumbra

The Penumbra team, including Claire, Charlie, and Stephanie, presented on their self-harm support services in Edinburgh and shared information about self-harm behaviours, coping strategies, and alternative approaches. Gregor from Penumbra's Bipolar Support Service also provided an overview of their face-to-face support for people with bipolar disorder in Edinburgh.

Penumbra Self-Help Support Service Overview

Charlie from Penumbra Edinburgh Self-Help Support Service presented an overview of their service, explaining that they provide support for individuals aged 16-65 who self-harm, as well as offering training and support for loved ones through individual sessions and groups. The service uses a person-centred and trauma-informed approach, offering various support options including creative groups, writing groups, and awareness training for organisations. Charlie noted that referrals come primarily from self-referrals, NHS sources, and housing associations, with the process involving completing a referral form and risk assessment before contacting the locality team at Penumbra.

Self-Harm and Coping Strategies

Charlie and Stephanie from Penumbra presented on self-harm behaviours and coping strategies, explaining different types of self-harm behaviours and their functions, including communication, emotion regulation, and control. They discussed harm minimisation approaches and introduced tools like the Self-Harm Alternatives Mind Map and the concept of a wellbeing box for coping strategies. The presentation included information about helpful phone apps and resources for managing self-harm and information about the Self-Harm Network Scotland. The team also stressed that they work with people struggling with bulimia. Claire from Penumbra's Bipolar Peer Support Service also provided an overview of their Edinburgh-based service for people with bipolar disorder, which offers personalised support through lived experience.

Further information

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