

Humans

of

Scotland



**Community Links
Worker Edition**



Foreword

We are both in a privileged position, having been involved in the Links Worker Programme (LWP) since February/March 2014. Over this time, we've witnessed firsthand the profound impact this innovative programme has had on individuals and communities. It has been a journey of connection, compassion, and transformation.

This publication brings together a collection of stories that reflect the diverse experiences of those who have engaged with the LWP—Community Links Workers, GPs, and the people they support. These stories offer a rich tapestry of perspectives, each one shedding light on the realities, challenges, and triumphs encountered along the way.

Storytelling has always been at the heart of the LWP's success. Through these narratives, we are invited to explore themes of resilience, belonging, mental health, social isolation, empowerment, and community. They are honest, moving, and deeply human.

We hope this collection serves not only as a testament to the lives touched by the programme but also as a starting point for reflection and dialogue. Within these pages are stories of love, loss, hope, and healing—universal experiences that remind us of the power of connection and the importance of community.



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Dr Blane's story

The Community Link Worker programme is about recognising that health is shaped by much more than medical care. In areas of high socioeconomic deprivation, many people come to their GP with problems that are rooted in social circumstances - such as poor housing, low income, or social isolation - that can't be solved with prescriptions. Community Link Workers (CLWs) help bridge that gap. They bring expertise in connecting people to community resources, building confidence, and addressing wider determinants of health. They have become a vital part of the general practice team in Deep End practices.

I've been involved with Community Link Workers through both research and clinical practice. Over the past 7 years, I've worked with two fantastic CLWs in two different Deep End GP practices (in Pollokshaws and Possilpark), where they have become trusted colleagues, offering time, skills, and knowledge that GPs don't always have. They bring a way of working that is relationship based, flexible, and community oriented and that



complements medical care. For practice teams, they ease some of the pressure by helping people with issues we know are important for their health but fall outside the traditional medical model. They can also help to upskill practice teams, making them more community oriented, poverty aware, and trauma informed.

For the people they work with, the impact is often life-changing, though sometimes in small and steady ways rather than dramatic ones. Having someone listen, take their concerns seriously, and walk alongside them to access support can build trust and hope. I've seen people gain confidence, reduce isolation, and feel more in control of their lives. Over time, that translates into better wellbeing, less reliance on crisis services, and a stronger sense of connection to their community.

I'd like to see the programme embedded for the long term, with sustained investment and recognition that this is a core part of primary care in deprived areas. Community Link Workers need stability, training, and ongoing support, just like other health professionals. I'd also like to see more evaluation and sharing of learning, capturing not only individual stories but also the broader system impact, such as on reducing inequalities in access to care. In the future, it would be good to see every practice in Scotland, and especially those in areas of greatest need, having a Community Link Worker as part of the team.

CLW Olly's story

Being a Community Link Worker (CLW) is about initially offering people a space to speak their mind and to talk about what is going on with them. The first session is almost always for them to talk and, that in itself, can be such a relief for people. They don't necessarily want to talk to their friends and family about these sometimes deeply personal and upsetting issues, so it is important to give them the space to get it off their chest. It can be incredibly powerful for people and is such a pleasure for CLWs to have that trust from them that they can share such personal stories with us.

In addition to that, once we start to delve into what the challenges are, we are the gateway to putting them in touch with people who can help and support them long term. Medical staff don't necessarily have the time, or the knowledge of what is available, so being able to take the social aspects away from the practice staff is a real privilege.

When I started, COVID was still quite prominent and the common challenges we were hearing from participants were





There is a statistic that for every £1 spent on CLWs it saves the NHS £8.79. There is a very clear argument there for the programme and we have a lot of support.

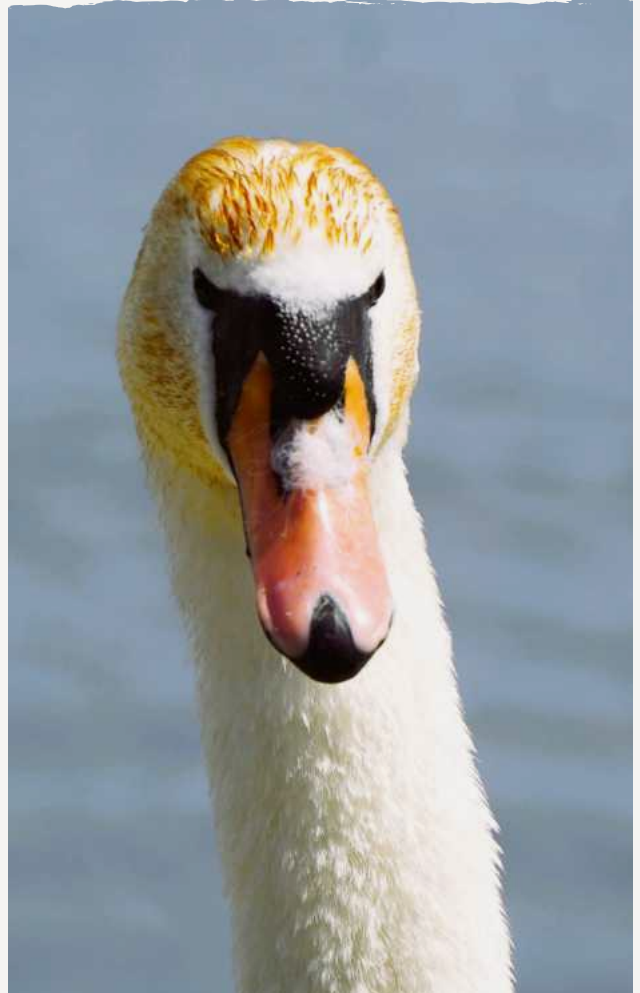
about the anxiety of emerging from lockdown and settling into a new normal way of life. As the years have gone by, the major concern is about housing – around a quarter of people I see have experienced homelessness in the last year. It is not a quick turnaround for available housing currently so people can be in temporary accommodation for six months before they can move to somewhere more suitable. There is definitely a housing crisis in the city with currently around 6,500 homeless people in Glasgow.

One of the other things our participants are sharing with us are challenges with mental health. Waiting lists are high for services and CLWs are an important stop gap until people can get an appointment with the appropriate service. It is crucial that people feel they have someone to talk to during these difficult periods. We recently received some additional funding from the Inclusion Health Across General Practice (IHAGP) that allowed us to set up a mental health peer support group in the local area. It is a monthly session, and we collaborate with different organisations to come along to talk to the group about topics such as relaxation techniques, coping with isolation, and general health and wellbeing. Working on feedback given to us from participants, sessions going forward are going to be more focused on peer support. We are very keen that it is group led, so it is developing and evolving but it's their group and we are keen that it fits their needs. It is a fantastic thing, and we hope that eventually the group will become self sustaining.

Danielle's story

It all started a few years ago, my next door neighbours moved in just before lockdown but in July 2022 they began making my life a misery and it has been relentless ever since. Some of the things they have done, I wouldn't have believed if it wasn't happening to me. I live with my son who has additional support needs, a benign brain tumour, autism and ADHD, along with some other medical conditions. He is paranoid that he is being watched by them and is scared to play in the garden, fearing they will shout abuse at him. I have reported them to the police, I don't know how many times, but they still continue with their vile behaviour.

I went to my GP because my mental health had hit rock bottom and I didn't know what to do or who to turn to. They referred me to a Community Link Worker (CLW) to get support and help with housing. I am so grateful they did as she has been brilliant. She helped me to write letters to the Housing Association and looked into alternative accommodation for me and my family. I feel like I am stuck but, even when





Everyone should be able to live in peace and feel safe in their own home – that's all I want, and I don't think I am asking for a lot.

I have given up, she is really trying to help me. She has put me in touch with different agencies and always has a plan for the next step. Having someone to talk to and having someone on my side, supporting me, makes a massive difference. It doesn't seem to matter what I contact her about, she knows what to do. My parents both have health conditions, and I support them too, so it takes a weight off my shoulders knowing she is there for me. She knows I am struggling so even if I don't see her every week, she contacts me to check in. She really cares.

My living situation makes me incredibly anxious and depressed. I don't know what I am going to wake up to every day or what they are going to do. We have recently discovered that we have an issue with damp in the house as well and, as both my son and I have asthma, the house is totally unsuitable for my family. It doesn't have to be perfect, even if we have to move to temporary accommodation for a while, I will move anywhere because it will be better than where I currently am. Everyone should be able to live in peace and feel safe in their own home – that's all I want and I don't think I am asking for a lot.

David's story

I was widowed twenty-four years ago but in recent years I had become a bit of a recluse and I was really struggling with my mental health. It all changed for me when my GP referred me to a Community Link Worker (CLW). I wasn't aware of the service but when we first met, they took the time to get to know me, what my interests were, the things I was struggling with and started by putting me in touch with a few organisations and places I could go to talk and get the support I needed. One of the organisations was Glasgow Association for Mental Health (GAMH) and I have been working with them for a few years now.

When I first met with my CLW, I had very dark thoughts in my head but they encouraged me to get help and suggested things I can do to get out and about again. She takes the pressure off me, we have a laugh and I feel like I can tell her anything. She helped me to spread my wings and I have more confidence because I know that they are always there to talk to if I need them. I like to think that my life before I met my CLW was always winter but now, it is summer.

It is rare to meet professionals that really care, but they do. I feel like she knows if there is a problem before I even do. She talks it through with me, makes it all manageable and looks for solutions and things I can do to help myself. Television used to be my life but now my brother says I have a better social life than anyone he knows. He says I have changed so much in the last couple of years. It has opened the world up for me.

They are a constant support structure for me and continue to check in with me. My mental health has been better recently. I have had so much support over the past few years, and I am now in a place that I can start to repay some of that kindness. I am part of a focus group and have my own little support group at GAMH and I also speak to student groups through my doctor's surgery. I talk to my group of friends now and some

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of them haven't heard about the Community Link Worker programme. I encourage anyone to get in touch if they need help. As long as I am not stopping anyone else from accessing the support, I will continue to engage with my CLW. From the bottom of my heart, I cannot thank them enough for the work they do. They are not doing it for the praise, they are doing it because they have a genuine interest in people.



Dr Linzee-Gordon's story

We have a Community Link Worker (CLW) in the practice who we will refer people to if we think they would benefit from their input – although I know lots more people would benefit from them too. The role of a Link Worker is to engage with people who may be socially isolated or are having difficulties with social issues such as accommodation or finances and help use resources available in the community to help with their care.

Our Link Worker, Martin, brings a wealth of knowledge about available local resources to help support people, as well as a better understanding of benefits and housing options among many other things. Martin also provides incredible pastoral support to the people he works with, who have nothing but wonderful things to say about him. From my point of view, he is a very useful person to be involved with someone who requires significant time investment.

I can't stress what a difference Link Workers make to the practice and local community. I have not heard a single negative comment about our CLW. It helps to de-medicalise problems, bring in appropriate social management options and encourages more self-sufficiency within the local area. Martin also goes above and beyond. One person has drawn pictures of him and calls him the sausage man (links worker), much to everyone's amusement.

What I would like to see in the future – more Link Workers! The cutbacks to this vital service, I feel are a massive step backwards for the health service, and I think we need to increase the number of CLWs to help with more social prescribing and interaction amongst the community, as well as helping with the practical aspects of people's lives that GPs can't really help with.



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Dr Montgomery's story



Community Link Workers (CLW) are absolutely vital to the smooth running of our general practice. They are embedded in our team, which is essential to allow them to form close working relationships with the clinical and admin staff, but also for the patients to have a greater awareness of them and know how to access them directly.

The frustration that all Deep End clinicians had in general practice, before the introduction of Link Workers, was that patients would commonly come in for a multi agenda consultation – half of which would have a social dimension which we knew was at the root cause of many of the problems they were facing – and which we could either do nothing about or did not know what was out there to help them. Now the Link Workers have provided that invaluable bridge so that when patients present with multiple concerns, I now know that I have someone I can take the social dimension to, and they are able to provide the help and support so greatly needed.

Our practice was one of the original pilot projects, so we've got a lot of experience with the CLW programme. We were part of the initial evaluation that showed the enormous benefits that Link Workers provide. Our CLWs have been with us for many years, and they are much more familiar with, and involved in, community projects than we are as clinicians. They help to inform us of what's out there, which in turn when patients come to us, we now know that there are resources out there for them to access. There is a list as long as your arm in terms of the things that they can refer patients to; food banks, housing, finance and benefits are only a few.

Our practice is a safe space for our patients to access and so having a CLW literally in the practice allows me to go to them at the end of my consultations and refer any

patients to them, who I feel would benefit from their support. If they were not embedded in the practice, the take up would be considerably less than it is just now because they are part of our team, the patients trust them, and they are more likely to engage when they are conveniently located in a familiar setting. It also alleviates the barriers that some people may feel if they were to access an external service. If we can provide it all under one roof, it broadens the support we can provide.

The impact it has on people in the community is enormous. If I use the benefits system as an example, most clinicians have little or no knowledge of how the system works, apart from the fact that it is extremely complex and difficult to navigate your way through it. Being able to refer our patients to someone who can help them with their finances, look at spending and budgeting, refer them to agencies like Money Matters, and who can guide them through the benefits process, it is life changing for some of our patients. The support from the CLWs can be a real lifeline to many people in our community.

Looking to the future of the Community Link Worker programme, it is vital that funding is secured long term. We lost one of our Link Workers, who had been with us from the start, because she did not have job security. It's understandable – she had a mortgage to pay and because she was on a rolling contract, she had to move to a role with more job security. Link workers need to be given long term contracts that give them the security they deserve and there needs to be ring fenced funding to make sure that happens. We're already seeing CLWs being lost in other areas across Greater Glasgow because Health and Social Care Partnerships are having to make cuts.

There needs to be a national programme, nationally funded with a training structure to ensure that there's continued development and so that CLWs become a permanent feature of Deep End General Practice. And that is the most fundamental thing that needs to happen. Otherwise, we're going to lose staff or have really excellent staff who are constantly in fear of their jobs and work day to day not knowing how long it's going to last. Security of funding, security of training and ring fenced funding is what's needed to ensure this absolutely vital service thrives and continues to support the people in our communities in the years to come.

Fatma's story

I was forced to flee my home country in 2017 and in the process was separated from my daughters and husband. Being apart from them and living with the complex trauma that I experienced in my home country left me feeling anxious, depressed and isolated. I was really struggling with my mental health but then in 2022 my GP referred me to a Community Link Worker (CLW).

Initially he introduced me to the Maryhill Integration Network, the Joyous Choir and the Women's Group they have in my local area. Through these groups I had the opportunity to meet new friends and to talk to people who shared some of my experiences. He also linked me up with an organisation that would help to reunite me with my family. It was a long process but my CLW was there to support me through it all. In 2023, almost 6 years after we were separated, I was reunited with my family. I am so grateful to have them here and I took them to meet my CLW, to thank him for his support.

My husband was keen to build a life here, we wanted to integrate and contribute to society here and it was important for him to improve his English. Our CLW helped him to apply for courses to learn English but, knowing about his love of football, he also contacted the local amateur and community football club, United Glasgow. They support players of all genders, sexual orientations, religions, ethnicities, socio-economic positions and immigration statuses, aiming to integrate them into a safe, community led environment with a focus on improving their mental and physical health and wellbeing. Our CLW initially supported my husband to join these training sessions until he built up the confidence to go to them alone.

My daughters are settled into school and my eldest is looking for a part-time job at the weekends. My husband got a job as well but due to a delay in some paperwork, he was unable to accept the position. He is very hopeful that it will be resolved quickly and he can begin to work.

“ Thanks to our CLW I am now positive and focussed on the future. I don't know where we would be without the support he has given us.

Since I arrived here I have been living in a one bedroom flat but last year our CLW helped us to apply for new accommodation. The letters of support and the guidance he gave us with our application helped us to get a bigger flat in September last year. We want to make a good life for ourselves and our children here in Glasgow. Thanks to our CLW I am now positive and focussed on the future. I don't know where we would be without the support he has given us. I have been reunited with my family, we have a new home and he has helped us to integrate in the local community. He is always there for us, to listen to us and support us. We really cannot thank him enough.



Francesca's story

The staff in my local GP surgery referred me to a Community Link Worker (CLW). I have been struggling with my mental health, depression and anxiety recently and they have been a real support to me. It is great that they are based in GP surgeries as it allows me to have an appointment with my GP and then see my Link Worker for the social support I need.

I am really interested in photography, particularly wildlife, nature and landscapes. I like going camping and I take my camera with me. My CLW managed to get me a refurbished laptop from the Black Door Shop and I have been able to get a few memory cards, so I have somewhere to save all my photos. I struggle with technology but my Link Worker also put me in touch with the ALLIANCE digital team, and they have helped me learn how to use the laptop. I am planning to start a digital course from Glasgow Libraries as well so that will hopefully help me learn more and make me more confident to use my laptop.

One of my other hobbies is watching and collecting old films. I have a big DVD collection - I'm a real movie buff. There is a movie group in my local LGBT community, they meet up to talk about films and you can share your favourite movies and watch them together.

I am also interested in fishing, fly fishing mostly. The Glasgow Angling Centre are really welcoming and I feel comfortable going in there. I am transsexual and I have had a lot of hassle in my community from ignorant people. I have recently been mistreated in a couple of shops in town. All I want to do is buy new clothes for myself and get on with my life, but it can be quite challenging. I don't think people realise that they are causing so much harm. I try not to let it get to me and to carry on with the things that I enjoy but it can be hard. I have been feeling bogged down by it and I have been sleeping a lot and

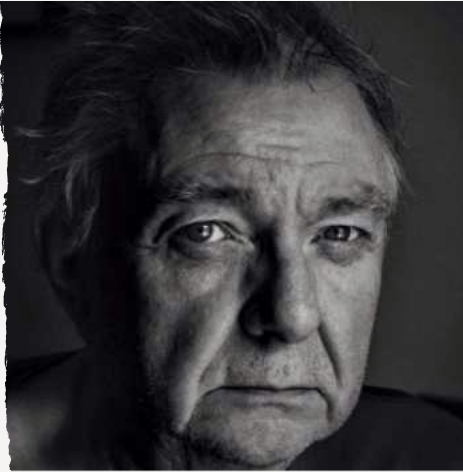


I want to continue to do the things I love, and knowing there is someone I can talk to and someone encouraging me to get out there and live my life is a great support.

isolating myself. My CLW has referred me to LGBT Wellbeing Glasgow a couple of times, but I haven't been ready to connect. She is great because she is trying to help me with social integration. She tells me about groups in my community and things that may be of interest to me like the local park group, Friends of Pollock Park, and birdwatching groups. I want to continue to do the things I love, and knowing there is someone I can talk to and someone encouraging me to get out there and live my life is a great support.



Frank's story



My cancer took a lot from me, but one thing it gave me back was my love of photography. I have a peg in my stomach so I can't eat or drink and it's boring and hard. Even watching television can sometimes be difficult, seeing adverts about food when you are hungry and not able to eat. It gets frustrating and there was a time when I found myself feeling darker and darker and I didn't know how to pull myself out of it. It was frustrating more than anything else. When I was diagnosed with throat cancer, I lost my job. My partner suggested I enroll in a photography class at Kelvin College. She just thought it would help pass the time and give me a purpose but I really enjoyed it and got a Higher National Diploma (HND).

I started taking photos of the local area I stay in. Photography is like music, it takes you back to a time or a place. When I was younger I used to see photos of Glasgow, of trams and shops that are no longer there. They are now a piece of history that has been captured, and that is what I am trying to do now. I take photos to communicate, it is why I enjoy it so much.

Before my diagnosis, I worked in television. I met some incredible people including Michael Douglas and Jack Nicholson and I even accidentally stood on the Queen's toe! I liked capturing stories through video but now I do it with my camera. I travel a lot now to Prague, Budapest and Paris but there are also some fantastic, beautiful places in Scotland. I like visiting new places, staying with locals and getting to know the area. I take a photo of the people I stay with and leave it with them everywhere I go. I like to think that I am leaving my finger prints wherever I go.



I am feeling more positive now, I am brighter...engaging with my Community Link Worker has opened a new door for me.

And then when I met my Community Link Worker earlier this year, he asked me what I was interested in, and I told him I take photos. He put me in touch with Jackie at the new Health and Wellbeing Hub in Parkhead. I have sent her some of my photos and they are hopefully going to display them within the hub. It would be amazing to go into the Hub and see them up on the wall, all in one place.

I am feeling more positive now, I am brighter, I have a new camera and I am excited about getting out and taking more photos. Engaging with my Community Link Worker has opened a new door for me. This is a great project to be involved in and gives me real confidence in my work.

Izadin's story

I moved to Glasgow about 3 years ago with my wife and two of our children. In the beginning I really struggled. I knew I had made the right decision for my family but we are still waiting for a decision on our asylum status and this is incredibly stressful, particularly for our children. Our daughter is now at university and our son is at school. They are trying to build a life here but when their future is uncertain that causes worry and stress.

I originally met my Community Link Worker (CLW) at a Community Breakfast. She has really helped me and my family since I started meeting with her. My health has not been great, and I really wanted to get fit so she suggested my wife and I join the Health Walk in our local area. On one of the walks, we chatted about our interests, and we told her that we used to enjoy cycling. She introduced us to a free E-Bike scheme through 'Bike For Good' and we were set up with an E-Bike on loan for twelve months.





It is a vital service in the community and one I am eternally grateful for.

She really supported us with the application process and when we got our bikes we went to see her to show them to her. It has been great for us, we go out more, we go to different parks in Glasgow and to areas we haven't been to before. We have also enrolled in English classes at college. My wife had become very shy and had lost her confidence but I can see a positive difference in her now thanks to the classes. We use our bikes to get to college and it reminds us of cycling in our younger days back home. We can go shopping; it saves us money on transport and we are more active and fit now. I also use it to go to hospital appointments. It really has made a huge difference to our lives.

The local community is important to my wife and I and we now feel settled and integrated in the area. We both enjoy volunteering – I help at the local community garden and my wife at the local food market.

My CLW has made such a difference to our lives. I know that I can contact her when I need help and she will be there for me. She has connected me to services and support that I didn't know existed and this support has helped me to improve my health and wellbeing, develop my English language skills and get more involved in the local community and feel more settled here. It is a vital service in the community and one I am eternally grateful for.

James' story

I was referred to a Community Link Worker (CLW) for support to help me migrate from the old benefits system to Universal Credit. It is a complex process, and I didn't know how to do it on my own.

I am profoundly deaf and I am now losing my eyesight as well. I struggle with anything to do with my benefits and my housing especially. I am under a lot of stress right now as I'm at risk of eviction and facing legal proceedings. I also have damp and mould in my home and this has resulted in my mental health declining recently.

My CLW has supported me by speaking to the housing association on my behalf, making them aware of my concerns and chasing things up for me. He has visited the homelessness team with me and kept in touch with them so that I know what my housing options are. He has sent supporting information to my solicitor to help with legal proceedings and referred me to Lifelink where I have attended counselling appointments which are crucially BSL interpreted. He also set up



my Universal Credit. He is a great support, and I really don't know what I would do without him. Some of the processes are so complex and tricky to navigate so having my CLW on hand – he is available when I need him by phone or in-person during appointments – it gives me peace of mind and helps me manage all the different challenges I am facing at the moment.

I am glad I have the support of my Community Link Worker as I am under so much stress and need someone outside of my family that I can turn to for help. He is really helpful and consistently keeps in touch. Knowing I have someone in my corner, working on my behalf, is so important to help me navigate the current struggles I am facing.

Lesley's story

The first noticeable symptoms started in September 2019. I was driving along the motorway with my Mum - we had just been to visit my Aunt in hospital. My left hand was on the steering wheel and all of a sudden my hand gripped the wheel and brought it down and I couldn't move it back. Luckily there was no one around me so I didn't cause an accident. A couple of months later, I mentioned it to my GP that my arm had not been the same since that day and he referred me to neurology. Unfortunately, ten days later we went into COVID-19 lockdown so it was over a year before I was diagnosed, and two years before I saw a physiotherapist. I have been told by my physiotherapist because of the delay, I won't get back to where I was before.



I was able to manage my symptoms for a couple of years but when my speech went funny and my movements were unpredictable, I had to stop working and I haven't been able to since. The way I ended work wasn't the way I wanted it. One day I was at work and then overnight everything changed and I couldn't go back.

My GP had mentioned the Community Link Worker (CLW) programme to me a few times but I didn't feel that I was in the right place to access it at that time. A couple of years later, the GP mentioned it again and I felt it was something I was now able to try. My GP put a referral in and coincidentally I met my CLW, who was the walk leader at a local walking



My Community Link Worker has really encouraged me to move forward and to see things more positively. Even though things take time, she is always there supporting me and showing me all the things I have to offer.

group I had started around this time. From that, my CLW came to my house to meet with me. She listened to me and asked me about my background, what my interests are, what I have done in life and about my illness. She told me that I still had a lot to offer and that she was there to help me live my best life in the circumstances I find myself in.

My body and my movements have changed quite a lot in the past few years and she suggested I go to Dance Health for Parkinsons. I have Functional Neurological Disorder (FND), which is basically a problem with the way that the brain and the body send and receive messages, so I have symptoms of a stroke, Multiple sclerosis (MS) and Parkinsons, without actually having any of those conditions. My CLW thought Dance Health would be a good way to help me like my body again. So, I set up my iPad on my ironing board and do the class from home. I do most of it seated because of my balance issues but it really helps my confidence and coordination.

I worked as a midwife for 27 years and my CLW thinks that there would be opportunities for me to share my skills and expertise through volunteering. We are looking into that just now. She has really encouraged me to move forward and to see things more positively. Even though things take time, she is always there supporting me and showing me all the things I have to offer.

Lisa's story

I went to see my GP because I felt like I had hit rock bottom, I was having suicidal thoughts and I didn't know how to get out of the situation I was in. It really hit me in February this year when I realised it had been a year since it all started. I am so proud of where I am now but it has been the hardest year of my life.

One of the support services I was referred to was the Community Link Worker (CLW) programme. A CLW contacted me to introduce herself, to explain her role and what support she could offer me. One of the first things she did was to help me get out of the place I was living and she got me into a homeless shelter. It wasn't ideal but it was a stop gap and at least I was away from my ex-partner and the toxic situation I was in.

I was given a place in sheltered housing but I use a walking stick and the room was on the first floor. I was terrified living there because there were random people banging on my door, people using drugs and making noise at all times throughout the night. After a few weeks there I was allocated a council house, however, it took





Not too long ago, my Community Link Worker was the only light in my life - now I am surrounded by light.

four months for the council to let me move in. During that time my CLW was an incredible support. She helped me get in touch with the council to find out what was happening, she knew the questions to ask and just knowing she was in my corner, it really made a massive difference.

I was at a really low point in my life and the only person who checked on me was my CLW, she showed me she cared when no one else did and she always seems to have a plan. She separated my problems into manageable sections and made me see a way to get through this time and to deal with the things I could do something about. She helped me set necessary boundaries for people in my life and this will help me moving forward.

I remember calling my CLW when I moved into my new house and I could hear the genuine joy in her voice. My first night in my new home, I remember sitting in the silence and I finally felt like the ordeal was over and I could start living again. I am not exaggerating when I say that I don't know if I would still be here, or where I would be if it wasn't for my CLW. I have heard that they are cutting the programme in some areas and I think that is crazy. What is going to happen to people like me? The service is a vital lifeline and these people will slip through the gaps – I know I would have. Not too long ago, my Community Link Worker was the only light in my life - now I am surrounded by light. My cat is back living with me, and I have just rescued a second one. I am so happy to be able to share the end of my nightmare with her, I truly can't thank her enough.

Mr O's story

This is not a situation I ever saw myself getting into. I used to own a successful photography business and travelled the world taking pictures for holiday brochures. Following the breakdown of my relationship, I moved out of my home and into a hostel. I have Type 2 Diabetes and have always been good at managing it and keeping myself healthy but during that time my health deteriorated. There was no fridge to store food and drink and nowhere to cook food, so my blood sugar levels went very low, and I didn't have anything to eat. I went to see my GP and they suggested I meet with the Community Links Worker (CLW) within the practice to discuss the support they can offer.

I didn't mind where I stayed, I just needed somewhere suitable that I could make my home. The CLW was amazing, she helped with my application and they found a house for me, she helped me get white goods and furniture, I even got a bed for my daughter so that she could stay with me. But on top of that, she encouraged me to look after myself and keep myself healthy so that I could get back on track.

I have always worked hard and during that challenging time, I found it very difficult not being able to work and having so little control over my situation. But with the guidance of my CLW, I signed up to an agency and got a job as a cleaner. One day when I was cleaning one of the offices they were having problems with their computer systems. I offered to help and managed to fix it for them and from that they offered me a permanent job. I now travel throughout the UK and Ireland in a role I really enjoy and I can support myself and my daughter again.

I have two other children from a previous relationship who live in England. I have found it incredibly hard being away from them, especially since my youngest son has recently been diagnosed with autism. My CLW has put me in touch with autism support services and charities so that I can learn more about how to support my son and I have been working with a solicitor to get access to see them. My main goal now is to be a part of their lives going forward.



I call her my angel as just knowing that there is someone there to talk to has made such a difference. The support really has been invaluable.

Looking back on it, it has been quite a journey so far. I didn't expect to end up in the situation I was in but with the support and guidance from the Community Link Worker programme, I have a safe, warm home, somewhere my daughter can come to stay with me, my health is back on track and I have a job I really enjoy. I call her my angel as just knowing that there is someone there to talk to has made such a difference. The support really has been invaluable.



Patrick's story

I got my tonsils out when I was four but that is the only time I have been in hospital. I never used to go to the doctor. When I was young, if you cut your knee playing football the scab was like a badge of honour but it was nothing serious and you certainly didn't go to the doctor for treatment. But about a year ago, following a routine eye test, my optician suggested I go see my doctor. My GP sent me for various blood tests and they diagnosed me with Type 2 Diabetes.

I was told by my GP that I needed to start exercising and change my diet but I am unemployed and I don't have a lot of money so I find this quite difficult. I was referred to a Community Link Worker (CLW) who got in touch with me. She explained what her role was, as I had never heard of the programme before, and suggested I go along to the walking group in my local area. It has been a great way for me to get out, to meet new people and to start doing some exercise. I don't think I would have had the motivation to do it on my own, so it was a massive support to meet others in a similar position to me.

I talk to my CLW regularly on the phone and one of the first things she suggested for me was an Elevator Course. They provide personal development and confidence building programmes that offer various activities for people with mental health issues, stress, depression, anxiety or isolation. I get quite anxious about going out sometimes, but this has really helped me to meet other people.

It sometimes feels like I am at the GP surgery more than I am in my own house, and that can be quite scary, but knowing that my GP is helping me with my physical health and my CLW supports me with my wellbeing makes such a difference to how I feel. There are things that I am not able to do because I don't have a lot of money, but my CLW is always looking out for things in my community that I can get involved in and that she thinks I would be interested in. She always keeps in touch with opportunities and services that might suit me.



Before I met my CLW I didn't do any of this, I didn't know any of these services existed and I definitely wouldn't have felt able to access it myself. Being referred to her has been life changing, and in the best possible way.

I have had some really low points but my CLW is the first person I have really felt like I can open up to. I told her about times in my past that I have struggled and felt like I had nowhere to turn. I have anxiety and she found me a support service to help manage it. I don't always feel confident to go to the things she suggests but I go to as much as I can. Before I met my CLW I didn't do any of this, I didn't know any of these services existed and I definitely wouldn't have felt able to access it myself. Being referred to her has been life changing, and in the best possible way. She once told me that everyone has a low point and that I have perhaps reached mine, but she then pointed out that I am still here, I have survived it. I now feel like I am living, not just getting by.



Ruth's story

Following the breakdown of a family relationship everything began to feel like it was spinning out of control. I was experiencing a mental health crisis, I was unable to go to work and I found myself homeless. I was seen by my community mental health team and was working quite closely with them, but I was also referred to my local Community Link Worker (CLW). I didn't have a social network out with my family, and with the breakdown of that relationship, I found myself quite isolated. Although I was very anxious, I knew I needed to introduce some social activities back into my life and that it was important for my recovery going forward. When my Community Link Worker, Laura, initially contacted me I wasn't having a good day but she was so understanding. People don't all need the same support but the programme is designed with a flexible approach and to work with each individual. She explained how the service could help me, gave me her number and told me to call her when I was ready.

When I finally met Laura, I was really nervous but she told me about a Women's Café they have every week. The group meet at a local café, they have a hot drink and a blether. When I first went along there were only a couple of other women. I was made to feel so welcome and there was no pressure to talk or to tell anyone anything about myself – for them just turning up was enough. I couldn't believe I had made it!

That was back in March and I have been every Wednesday since I started. I have made a real friendship with one of the other women. We meet up on a Saturday as well and get our nails done every couple of weeks. I am even going to her house for Christmas. There have been challenges but I can see that I have come a long way. I tend to catastrophise things and immediately go to the worst-case scenario but Laura has taught me to set boundaries for myself and to say when I am not well enough to do something.



There have been challenges but I can see that I have come a long way.

A new person has recently started at the group and I was able to give her a bit of advice and tell her what I did. That gave me such a boost to be able to help someone else, the way the group has helped me. Sometimes I worry about slipping back to where I was but if I am struggling or if I need help with something they are there to chat and that makes a massive difference to me. I have learned to be kinder to myself, I am gradually becoming more sociable, and I am proud of where I am. I am now getting counselling and I still see the Community Mental Health team but the support I get from the Links Programme has been life changing.



Shekha's story

I arrived in the UK in August 2020 after escaping from Somalia. I had been separated from my children and had endured years of fear and violence in my home country. My husband was killed during the conflict, so I knew I was the only person who could take care of our children. It broke my heart to be separated from them but it gave me the determination to make a better life for us.

I have an injury to my hand that I sustained back in Somalia and just over a year ago I was attending my GP for treatment. I was referred to the Community Link Worker (CLW) within the surgery and they have helped me and my family so much. I have learned to speak English since living in the UK but I struggle to read and write and sometimes to understand complex conversations but my CLW has been an incredible support.

I am in my second year of a design course at college and I hope to go on to study English next year. I believe that if I can complete my course and my hand continues to improve, I will be able to work and support my family.

In January 2024 I was finally reunited with my children. My son is fifteen, my daughter is fourteen, my youngest is nine and I also care for my sister's child who is sixteen now. I struggle sometimes as a single parent but no more than others.

I like living in Glasgow and my children are settled and enjoying school but our home is very overcrowded. We currently stay in a two bedroom house but there are five of us and my son struggles without his own space. He has been sleeping in the open plan living room kitchen area but it would be great if he had his own space to do his school work. The CLW has really helped me and knowing that there is someone there to support me and to help me out when I really need it has made such a difference to my life. I am so much happier now, if you had seen me before I was reunited with my children you would have thought I was 20 years older.



Knowing that there is someone there to support me and to help me out when I really need it has made such a difference to my life.



CLW Tommy's story

I had only been in post for three months when the COVID pandemic hit and lockdown was announced. The first few months I concentrated on getting to know people, networking in the local area and trying to learn what support and services were available in the local community. But we had to rethink the way we did things during lockdown and look for new ways to keep in touch with the people we worked with.

Our role is to walk alongside the people referred to us, to find out what matters to them, what are the challenges they are facing and give them the courage to engage with support and services that can help them. I can easily fill someone's week with things to do but it's not about me, it needs to come from them.

We have a lot of people coming to us with anxiety and mental health concerns. When we first meet with them, they are managing it with medication and one of the first things I work with them is on what else they can do in partnership with their medication. Together, we look at their nutrition, sleep, exercise, their relationships, finances and housing, to see where they can make changes and where they are willing to make these changes. They sometimes don't realise that there are other things they can be doing until we sit down and talk about it. Structure, routine and sleep are so crucial to our wellbeing and there can be simple changes that make such a huge difference to people's lives. I always talk about the things that they have control over and rather than looking for one big fix, it's about breaking it down into manageable pieces. A lot of the time it is also about people acknowledging their challenges and if they are willing to make the effort, they get more out of the services we link them with.

I am an advocate for people getting into education and enrolling in courses, at Open University for example, or doing voluntary work. It is a great thing to showcase when they are looking to get back into work. I always advise them to do something they enjoy and something they find interesting. The library is also a great resource in the community. They can attend groups and classes, they can borrow DVDs as well as books



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and they can use the computers. It is a safe space, it gets them out of the house and gives them a change of scenery. It is often the small things, or a series of seemingly small things, that make a huge difference to people's lives.

We are lucky in our role that we have time to talk to participants and we don't have to hurry them. Sometimes it can take them a few sessions to open up, and we might only really get into it months down the line but other times they come in and share it all. On some occasions there is something that has been bubbling under that they don't want to divulge straight away so a lot of it is about relationship building. I set up a male bereavement group, giving men the space to share their stories and experiences, to look at the grief process and to get support from others in a similar position. It was an important group to establish and was well received in the local area.

Housing is a common concern we are also seeing at the moment, it is in a critical condition across the city. There are a variety of reasons for housing issues – people fleeing domestic violence, unsuitable housing, or unsafe conditions are only a few – and the system is hard to navigate. The forms are online and they don't provide paper copies so we often have to talk people through the process and guide them through the steps. After that it is down to their housing officer and the local association to hopefully find them a suitable place to live.

Our Community Links Workers



Community Link Workers are not a destination service, we are there to work alongside people in the community, to signpost them to support and services that are available. It is not always about finding a solution, it is sometimes just about being there for them. Managing the small things can often have a positive domino affect into other areas of their lives and we are there to help them get started.

This publication is dedicated to the memory of CLW Bruce McDermott.

Bruce was a kind hearted, generous person, with a larger than life personality that always made time for those around him. He never presented without a smile on his face and a few bad jokes up his sleeve. He went to great lengths to look after his family, colleagues and patients alike. He lightened many loads, always looking for solutions, ways to help and create ease for others. People like Bruce are rare and we were extremely fortunate to have had the time we did with him. He continues to be missed by all that met him.



31/01/1969 – 04/01/2025

Acknowledgments

The ALLIANCE would like to express gratitude to everyone who generously shared their story with us. Everyone who has taken part in this project has given up their time to capture lived experience.

We also want to thank Frank for not only sharing his story but also sharing some beautiful photographs to use throughout the book.



About the ALLIANCE

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) is the national third sector membership organisation for the health and social care sector. We bring together over 3,500 people and organisations dedicated to achieving our vision of a Scotland where everyone has a strong voice and enjoys the right to live well, with dignity and respect. Our members are essential in creating a society in which we all can thrive, and we believe that by working together, our voice is stronger.

We work to improve the wellbeing of people and communities across Scotland by supporting change in health, social care and other public services so they better meet the needs of everyone in Scotland. We do this by bringing together the expertise of people with lived experience, the third sector, and organisations across health and social care to shape better services and support positive change.



The ALLIANCE has a strong and diverse membership of over 3,600 organisations and individuals. Our broad range of programmes and activities deliver support, research and policy development, digital innovation and knowledge sharing. We manage funding and spotlight innovative projects; working with our members and partners to ensure lived experience and third sector expertise is listened to and acted upon by informing national policy and campaigns, and putting people at the centre of designing support and services.

The ALLIANCE has three core aims.

We seek to:

- Empower people with lived experience: we ensure disabled people, people with long term conditions, and unpaid carers are heard and that their needs remain at the heart of the services and communities.
 - Support positive change: we work within communities to promote co-production, self management, human rights, and independent living.
 - Champion the third sector: we work with, support and encourage co-operation between the third sector and health and social care organisations.
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Published 2025



Humans of Scotland is a unique collection of stories about people's lives.

The Community Links Worker Edition shares the experiences of people that have been involved in the Links Worker Programme.

The book tells the personal stories of people who experienced isolation, cancer, mental health, homelessness as well as other social impacts on health.

This collection is an important one, and one that we hope will be revisited by readers for years into the future.

