

Active Voice and the Allied Health Professional community: A collaborative approach to enhance practice

The Scottish Dementia Working Group (SDWG) and the National Dementia Carers Action Network (NDCAN) continue to prioritise work to enhance workforce development for health and social care staff who are working with people affected by dementia. It was with this commitment in mind that Stuart Dougall from SDWG and Frank O'Hagan from NDCAN eagerly accepted an invitation to present at a recent Allied Health Professionals (AHP) learning event at Napier University in Edinburgh. This continuing professional development (CPD) event was influenced by the growing global perspective of a human rights-based approach to advance AHP knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences of people living with dementia and their carers to empower a partnership approach to and with practice.

The Active Voice session commenced with a presentation by Norie Williamson, Active Voice Development Officer, who highlighted the significance of integrating insights from individuals with lived experience into improving practice. His introduction effectively established the tone for the session, paving the way for Frank and Stuart to share their personal narratives. Both speakers delivered powerful and insightful presentations that demonstrated how individuals affected by dementia value the contributions of AHP's, and moreover, they both offered some personal ideas into possible areas for practice improvement.



Active Voice Team with AHP colleagues Elaine Hunter & Fiona McLean, and Alzheimer Scotland Chief Executive Henry Simmons

Stuart (SDWG)

Stuart shared his personal journey since being diagnosed with young onset Alzheimer's disease. Reflecting on his initial struggles with cognitive decline while working in a job he loved, Stuart illustrated the profound impact of dementia on daily life, including challenges in memory, perception, and performing basic tasks. Despite the emotional challenges that accompanied his diagnosis, he found solace and support from his doctor, who reinforced the importance of maintaining a sense of normality through routine and motivation.



SDWG member, Stuart

Stuart added that his journey took a positive turn after connecting with Alzheimer Scotland and joining the SDWG. He explained that one of the first projects he became involved in was an AHP animation project aimed at raising awareness and sharing rehabilitation advice for those living with dementia. Throughout his experience, he emphasised the significance of individual support and understanding for people facing similar challenges. Concluding his speech, Stuart urged attendees to recognise that dementia does not define a person, and therefore encouraged a holistic approach to care that focuses on preserving quality of life and individual identity. “My life may have changed, but it’s certainly not over”, he noted, celebrating the support from Allied Health Professionals and the potential for continued engagement.

“By treating those you will work with in your careers as ‘individuals’, supporting and encouraging them to be themselves and do what’s important to them, you will be able to help ensure they are not defined by their situation, but that they continue to live their best life possible.” - Stuart

Frank (NDCAN)

In his impactful presentation, Frank underscored the pivotal support provided by AHPs to both carers and people living with dementia, whilst at same time he urged them to actively inform carers about available resources, as many remain unaware. He warned against a 'one size fits all' approach, highlighting that personalised support is essential. Frank also brought attention to the principle of 'nothing about us without us', advocating for increased collaboration with those who have lived experiences of dementia.

He also acknowledged that carers often struggle with feelings of inadequacy but stressed that AHPs can play a crucial role in fostering a positive mindset and guiding them through challenging times. In concluding his presentation, Frank expressed heartfelt gratitude for the indispensable work that AHPs do, reiterating their vital contribution to the well-being of both carers and those living with dementia.

"There is a big opportunity for you as AHPs to see yourselves in the role of consultants. By that I mean passing on some of your skills to the carer so that they can, to some extent, reinforce and multiply the value of your work." - Frank

NDCAN member, Frank



In conclusion, it is evident that the AHP community is committed to make full use of their skills and deliver consistently great care across Scotland – and this learning event highlighted their commitment to collaborating with SDWG and NDCAN, integrating the invaluable insights of those with lived experience in pursuit of their goals. It was particularly pleasing to note the valuable contributions of Frank and Stuart were acknowledged in the event feedback, reinforcing the significant impact they have on driving positive change. Together, we are making strides towards better healthcare for all, and we look forward to continuing this vital work.

"Elaine and I wanted to send on our sincere thanks to you, your colleagues, Stuart and Frank, for the presentation last week at our AHP CPD event at Edinburgh Napier University. Your team contribution is very much valued by us all and, as ever, feedback was super. It really makes a difference to how our AHPs think about the design and delivery of their services." – Dr Fiona Maclean, Head of Subject Allied Health & Social Care Sciences, Edinburgh Napier University



Want to know more about the Active Voice at Alzheimer Scotland?

The Active Voice of people living with dementia and their carers is about upholding rights and driving change. We support people with lived experience to help influence and shape policy and practice – Your Voice Matters! You don't have to be politically minded or need any qualifications to be involved. The only important thing is you know what issues affect you as a person whose life has been affected by dementia. If you would like further information or an informal chat with a member of the Active Voice Team, please email: activevoice@alzscot.org.