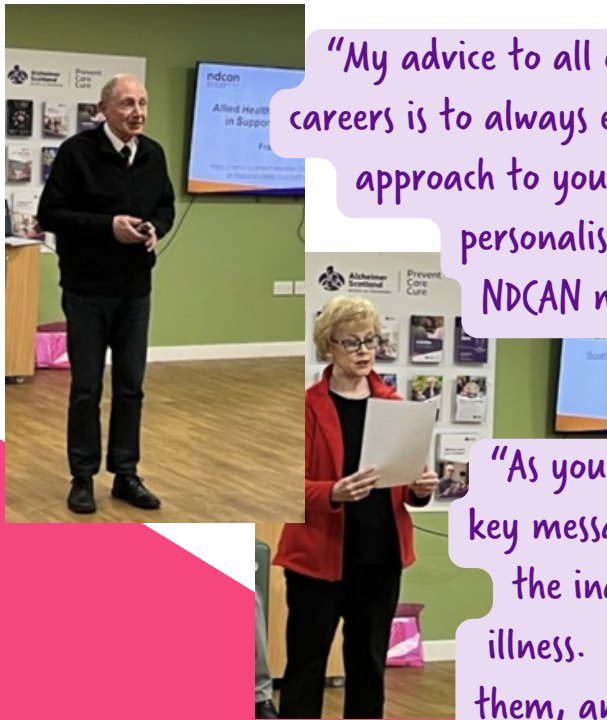


Empowering future Speech and Language Therapists: An interactive engagement event with students – Tuesday 11 March

Members of the National Dementia Carers Action Network (NDCAN) and the Scottish Dementia Working Group (SDWG) recently engaged with an enthusiastic group of 37 Speech and Language students from Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. Organised by Elaine Hunter, Alzheimer Scotland's National Allied Health Professions Consultant, this annual event is designed not only to share insights about dementia, but also to empower the next generation of Speech and Language Therapy professionals through shared experiences.



"My advice to all of you as you go forward in your careers is to always ensure you avoid a 'one size fits all' approach to your work - please remember that personalised support is essential."
NDCAN member Frank O'Hagan

"As you prepare for your new careers, a key message I would give you is - recognise the individual, not their age or their illness. Listen to them and get to know them, and find out about their interests, their feelings, and their views."
- SDWG member Margaret McCallion

Understanding dementia through lived experience

The day kicked off with a presentation by Norie Williamson, Active Voice Development Officer. Norie's passion for the Active Voice ethos set the tone, emphasising how important it is to incorporate lived experiences into the decision-making processes that shape our approaches to dementia care.

Following this introduction, students were treated to two insightful and inspiring presentations. Margaret McCallion (SDWG) and Frank O'Hagan (NDCAN) shared their personal stories, shedding light on their experiences and involvement with their respective groups. Margaret and Frank also shared some invaluable advice by asking the students to carry forward the principles of person-centred care into their future careers.

Interactive discussion: Bridging the gap between theory and practice

Following the opening presentations, and with the added presence of ten other SDWG and NDCAN members, the event transitioned into engaging small group discussions. Each group was guided by NDCAN and SDWG members who invited the students to pose questions. The smaller group format provided opportunity for the students to delve deeper into the complexities of dementia, ensuring that their learning was not only meaningful but based on real-life scenarios.



Student reflections

As the event came to a close, students had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. The feedback collected was extremely positive and included insightful quotes that echoed the success of the learning event. Here are just a few of the thoughts shared by those who participated:

"I really appreciated hearing from people with dementia and carers. How important it is to treat an individual to accommodate their own needs. Not one size fits all!"

"I learned how essential it is to support the carer just as much as the person and how essential it is to pass on education and encouragement. I really valued speaking to everyone."

"As someone who is going into this career with no experience of people living with dementia it was very good to interact and ask questions to people who are actually living with dementia."

"The key take-away for me is that dementia is versatile, and everyone's experience is different".

"It was great to hear real life stories from people from all different walks of life and how everyone is different. I found it helpful to expand our view towards dementia in general, how it affects lives, and how we as SLT students can make an impact"

Looking ahead: A lasting impact

In conclusion, both SDWG and NDCAN recognise the importance of workforce development in their efforts to raise awareness and promote positive change. The members of both groups are always grateful for an opportunity to connect with aspiring healthcare professionals. They hope that this engagement will make a lasting impact on attendees, inspiring future speech and language therapists to recognise the significance of inclusivity and the invaluable role that lived experiences can play in understanding and supporting those affected by dementia. A huge thank you to everyone who participated and contributed to this inspiring event - together, we can help pave the way for a more inclusive and person-centred approach to dementia care.

"The students really value the honest, professional and reflective personal stories of all the members who joined the event. Many students know nothing about dementia, so this is a really positive experience for them as our future health workforce."

- Elaine Hunter, National Allied Health Professions Consultant



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 Team, please email: activevoice@alzscot.org

