



The FoNS Creating Caring Cultures Fellowship: Making a difference to early career learning disability nurses and the people they care for

NHS England and NHS Improvement



The FoNS Creating Caring Cultures Fellowship, for aspiring leaders and early career frontline registered learning disability nurses (RNLD) is now in its second year. It aims to support early career learning disability nurses to become the facilitative leaders of the future, while working to improve current services.

Four cohorts were planned, starting January 2021 and finishing in June 2022. Supported by the Burdett Trust for Nursing and NHS England/Improvement (NHS E/I), fifty-six participants were recruited and workshops and active learning sessions were facilitated by programme lead **Giselle Cope**, and facilitator, **Dr Theresa Shaw**. The evaluation found that over 98% of participants completed the programme.

This executive summary is drawn from the independent evaluation undertaken by the ImpACT Research Group at the University of East Anglia, researched and authored by **Carolyn Jackson**, **Dr Lynn Furber** and **Daniel Marsden**.



“It has been an absolute privilege and honour to have facilitated this bespoke programme of support and development for early career registered learning disability nurses! To have the opportunity to support and work alongside such inspirational nurses has been

phenomenal. The Fellows have been absolute trailblazers for this programme and ambassadors for this wonderful profession.

Culture change is complex! And challenging the status quo and how things are done around here is not easy. However, the Fellows have demonstrated even small changes can have a huge impact in creating more person-centred cultures of care which are safe and effective.

Their commitment, compassion, and resilience throughout the fellowship, despite the challenges of working during a worldwide pandemic and workforce pressures, have been outstanding. But even more incredible has been witnessing how everyone has flourished from this experience, in many different ways and the impact that this has had, for not only themselves but for the teams they work alongside, their organisation and ultimately the citizens they serve.

We want to thank each Fellow, mentor, NHSEI and The Burdett Trust for Nursing for supporting and shaping this programme so that now other early career nurses can also benefit from this unique opportunity.”

Giselle Cope, Programme Lead and FoNS Facilitator



“I am delighted to be a small part of the FoNS Creating Caring Cultures fellowship. Since its inception almost three years ago, it has fast become the hallmark in post registration training for early career learning disability nurses. By delivering a programme founded on the principles of understanding system culture, it is meaningfully nurturing fellows to become transformational leaders of the future...”

At a time when our health and care system faces so many challenges, the fellowship serves as a critically important enabler, by actively inspiring clinicians to become the authentic and courageous leaders they hope to be and by feeling invested in as a profession. As a first for learning disability nursing, the fellowship has set the bar for excellence, ensuring learning disability nurses feel both valued and recognised for their unique contribution. It is such an amazing programme.”

David Harling, National Deputy Director for Learning Disability Nursing, NHS E/I



The Evaluation’s Conclusion

The FoNS Learning Disability Fellowship provides opportunities for practitioners working in often isolated roles to learn from each other, developing collaborative support networks, and important person-centred practice development skills. The opportunity to critically reflect in, through and on practice in a psychologically safe space away from workplace pressures enables them to have protected time to focus on their journey of discovery. The evaluation shows that the programme helps participants to develop insights into how to improve practice, workplace culture and test out new ideas, strategies and tools and share that learning together. This in turn helps participants to develop self-confidence, apply for career progression and development opportunities and make a difference to their workplaces by putting into practice the creative practice development tools and strategies they have learned.

Evidence from this evaluation identifies that the fellowship has the potential to really transform the future career trajectory and development opportunities for learning disability nurses across England and beyond if momentum can be maintained and investment continues to flow.

The Programme

Based on [FoNS' Creating Caring Cultures](#) model and resources and building on the work of the [Celebrate Me](#) report, the main components of the programme are:

- Three full day and six half day workshops (online)
- Five full day active learning sessions (online)
- Mentorship and coaching support at a local, regional, and national level
- Personal development planning

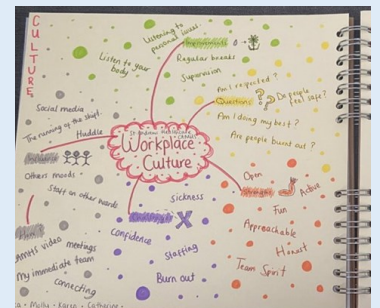
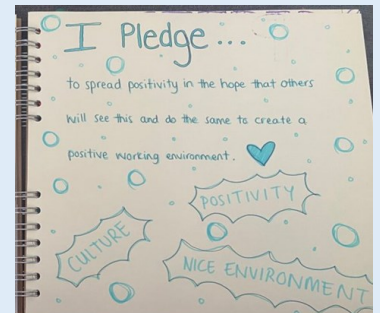
Entry requirements:

1. Registered learning disability nurse, in England
2. Between 1 and 3 years post registration
3. Line manager and executive level support within their organisation
4. Have an internal mentor arranged and to have identified people with lived experience/families/advocacy services to work with

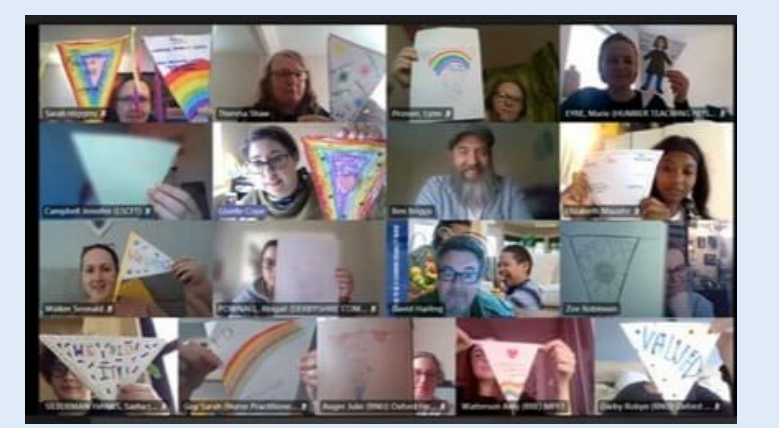
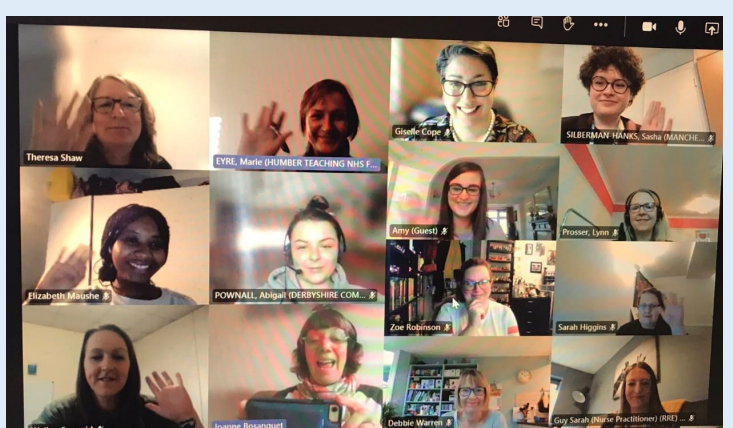
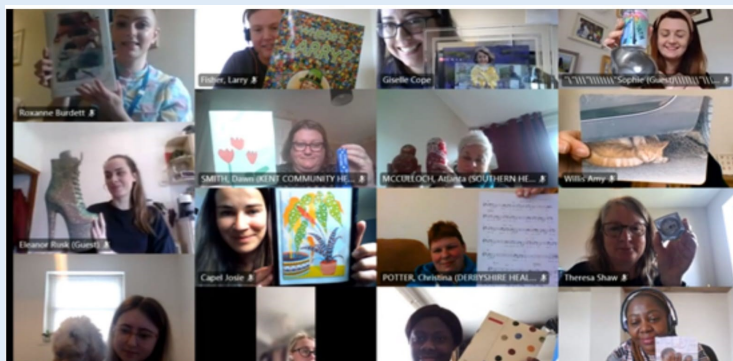
The workshops explored ideas such as:

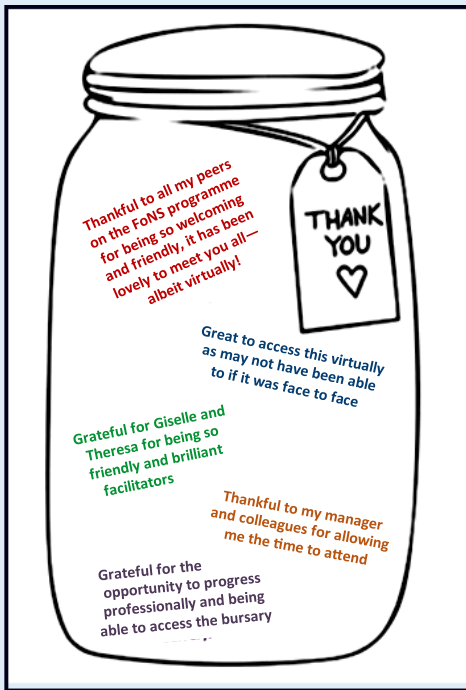
- What is the meaning of culture and person-centredness?
- What is the role of leadership and facilitation in enabling person-centred cultures?
- What are the links between staff engagement, wellbeing, and teamwork?
- What are values and how can we work with values?
- How can we work collaboratively?
- How do we celebrate success and continue momentum?

They featured a variety of methods and approaches which participants experienced and participated in. Fellows kept a scrapbook which they used to reflect on their learning and were supported to work towards a practice service improvement project.



The Participants





Six Impact Themes for Participants

1. Improved self-awareness and self-confidence
2. Development of person-centred leadership skills for facilitating effective workplace cultures
3. Creative learning strategies that support reflection in, through and on practice
4. Self-improvement and career progression
5. Support networks and overcoming challenges together
6. Impact on teams and services

Theme 1: Fellows improved their self-awareness and self-confidence

Participants developed the capacity and capability to reflect in, through and on practice to maximise opportunities for growth. They reflected on their leadership knowledge, skills and development throughout their journey. This helped them to gain insight into their own strengths, areas for development and how to influence others in their workplace teams. The supportive learning environment gave them confidence to try out different tools and strategies in their own workplace.

Participants said:

“The group have helped me develop my confidence and the tools that we have learned about e.g., check in/out, touchpoints have helped me develop my confidence in my leadership skills.”

“This group has always made me feel as though my input is valued and I feel I am presenting myself better now in practice as I believe in myself more.”

“This programme has been a huge eye opener for me. I have learnt things about myself that I never thought I would. I have developed a newfound sense of confidence which has enabled me to ensure my voice is heard in discussions, which has enabled me to advocate further for the people I support.”

Theme 2: Development of person-centred leadership skills for facilitating effective workplace cultures

The fellowship helped participants to explore and develop the skills to become the leaders they aspired to be. Fellows were able to practice giving and receiving feedback that enables growth, and reflect on the contribution they can make to enabling others to flourish in their workplace teams.

Participants said:

“I have learned that ‘people make cultures’ and that everyone has a part to play in improving workplace culture and that all our individual and collective actions have the potential to change things.”

“I am now more aware of workforce culture and how this should be positively facilitated and how not only our own attitudes, but our colleagues’ attitudes and language can affect how we care and look after people and their families.”

“The way in which I think about leading my teams has changed, I am very much of the mind set now that coaching and empowering the people that I work with is the best way to facilitate change and leadership when you’re aiming to get the best out of people.”

“I have learned to become a facilitative and compassionate leader with a collaborative working style.”

“This course helped me to realise of myself that I am capable of leadership, that I am invested in the success of the “we,” rather than the “me,” because there is more benefit to be felt to service users being cared for by a team consistently performing well and being filled with happy and motivated individuals, than there would benefit from individual successes of individuals in that team.”

Theme 3: Creative learning strategies that support reflection in, through and on practice

The tools and strategies, including the use of group work and the Emotional Touchpoints technique, enabled participants to critically reflect on their growth and development and develop insight and awareness of their core values and beliefs and how these impact attitudes and behaviours in their teams and workplace cultures.

Participants said:

"I found sharing experiences from colleagues working in different roles and areas useful as it enabled me to see how different things are done and to reflect from listening to other people's experiences whilst working as LD nurses."

"Using the Emotional Touchpoint tool has improved my reflective skills, increased levels of engagements and sharing of emotions with enhanced delivery of compassionate care. The exercise encourages open conversation amongst people and ensures that people's voices are heard and they feel valued thereby, influencing patient satisfaction."

"We teach student nurses to reflect, however, in practice, we don't always make the space to allow for meaningful reflection ourselves. There is so much value in carving out time to self-reflect, and also allow for group reflections, to promote service improvement and shared goals, in unison with promoting positive cultures and wellbeing."

The FoNS Learning Disability Nursing Fellowship
My journey, learning about strategies, skills and gaining confidence to become an effective leader in healthcare in the future
Lela Gaunt RNLD

Highlights from the programme
Creating Caring Cultures Model
Importance of check ins with colleagues and how this could be implemented with the community learning disability team
Workplace culture
Person-centred care
Reflections
Staff wellbeing
My aspirations
Evaluating services
Celebrating success
Emotional touchpoint interviews
My service improvement project: Emotional Literacy Toolkit

My Development
Increase in confidence
Introducing nurse huddle
Introducing nursing help thread
Using emotional touchpoint interviews
Collaborating with other disciplines

How FoNS has helped me?
Time to reflect
Given me the tools and ideas to move forward
Have a mentor with expertise to support my leadership journey
Networking, meeting others with similar views / thoughts / passions
Working together
Time to share and listen
Learning from the workshops
Check in ideas
Importance of staff wellbeing
Stress management
Supervision
Protected time

Resources for Toolkit

EMOTIONAL LITERACY TOOLKIT

Burdett Trust for Nursing | NHS England and NHS Improvement | Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

"My confidence has soared since beginning the fellowship. I feel confident to challenge and to advocate for people with a learning disability. I even braved a band 6 interview for a community nurse role and was successful! My work promoting STOMP has only just begun, and I hope to take the lead in developing our trust's STOMP pledge further in the years to come. FoNS gave me a focus, but also gave me the ability to celebrate my achievements, that of my peers and also celebrate our profession! Together we are doing definitely better! I will continue to network and hope to maintain the friendships I have formed with my peers on the course."

Theme 4: Self-improvement and career progression

The experience of learning together in a network of practitioners committed to raising the profile of learning disability nursing, along with the support of mentors and programme facilitators, had a powerful transformational impact on practitioner self-confidence.

Participants said:

"I am grateful for this opportunity as it has allowed me to connect with fabulous LD nurses across England who have helped me to become a more confident person and have inspired me to continue and aim high in my career. I have also had a chance to be linked with a great external mentor who has helped guide and advise me. I am now a more reflective person. I have changed how I engage with the people I support and have incorporated appreciative inquiry to my practice and the feedback has been fab! I have also been offered a senior nurse role that I never thought I would get and I think the skills and confidence I got from this programme helped with that!"

Theme 5: Support networks and overcoming challenges together

Participants came to recognise and value the opportunities to work with other learning disability nurses from elsewhere in the country.

Participants said:

"The programme has connected me to fabulous LD nurses across England from different walks of life. In my professional career it can feel quite lonely being the only LD nurse but having the opportunity to connect with the LD nurses has made the journey not feel so lonely. They have inspired me and made me feel more optimistic for my future."

"I initially saw myself like the lilly pad in the picture, connected to others by reeds, however now I have completed the course I see myself and my role within the NHS and patient care as being the water in the pond, we move and adapt enabling others to get the support and care that they need from ours and other services."

Theme 6: Impact on team and service culture

The opportunity to learn with other learning disability nurses really helped participants to cope with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to support their own and others' wellbeing.

Participants said:

"The Covid pandemic has hit everybody hard. One thing I found was that a lot of my colleagues appeared to be struggling but when asked how they were, they would always say "I'm ok". As a team, we developed weekly reflective practice sessions where we could all offload in a safe space. I introduced 'checking in and checking out' after experiencing this during our FoNS sessions, and finding it really helped to evoke feelings, emotions and conversation. My team were really open to using different techniques, such as Evoke cards and colours to reflect how they were feeling. This allowed me and colleagues to offer support, and sometimes this was just in the form of listening, when someone was able to open up and explain that they were having a difficult time. This has benefited the team, as we have become closer and feel more able to 'open up' to one another."

"The programme acted as a catalyst / booster on improving the service not only for me but for the whole team. All that I have learned will benefit the service as well as professionals I work with. The issue of culture in a place of work is very important however, and it is important that we try and challenge or change the way we work to suit everyone."

"I hope to be able to use what I have learned to make positive changes in my workplace to promote staff wellbeing and togetherness."

Feedback from External Programme Mentors

"Great to impact on an early career nurse from another geographic area, ask them questions about their vision for their career and provide them with food for thought."

"Great to meet people from different areas, I feel that I have also learnt from mentees."

And the fellows said:

"The external mentorship support has been phenomenal! Support from my external mentor has helped me to set goals and clearly map out potential career development."

"Grateful to the external mentors and guests for exploration of diverse opportunities and having an 'open invite' to connect and ask questions."

Foundation of Nursing Studies Learning Disability Nursing Fellowship
Programme Project and Experience by Daniel Branch

The start of the programme
The programme was recommended to me by a friend who is a more senior and experienced nurse. I was excited and proud to get a place and to a newly qualified nurse determined to be the best. I was also given a bag of support resources. I hoped that the programme would be both a fun experience and a useful developmental learning journey to help me in my role.

Team review
I was encouraged to learn to consider my team and my place and role within it whilst considering everything from an organisational to wellbeing.

Project idea
Through a combination of completing the FoNS programme to the point including the sessions on celebrating success and achievements and general observations of my peers' how some of the conditions that affect the team in general positive and supportive of each other, we are not very good at celebrating our successes and expressing gratitude to each other. This has at least in part been exacerbated by Covid-19 restrictions meaning that we are often working from home and the nature of the team, meaning you might be working with a slightly different group of people each day. This means that hypothetically it could be several days before you see that person again.

Project aims and objectives
The aim of the project is to try and encourage team members to express their gratitude and other compliments towards each other by the means of having badges with different positive messages on which can be exchanged.

Stakeholders
Who are your stakeholders and what is their role, why are they important?
The first group are the members of the essence support team (IST) who have directly been identified by me as being under stress. They will be directly impacted by taking part in the project.

How does the project link to the Creating Caring Cultures model and key themes in Celebrate Me?
Enabling staff wellbeing is a fundamental part of the Creating Caring Cultures model. The valuable key themes of Celebrate Me require nurses to be at peak performance to achieve to the highest degree possible. My experience and observation is that the role of our team, consistently working long hours with some of the patients with highest needs in the trust carries more stressful and over time this can lead to burnout and an associated reduction in performance. The performance of the team would therefore be reduced and the level of person centred care provided would be impacted.

IST team survey
As part of my FoNS programme, I am working on a project to try and improve how people in the team are feeling at work. In order to start doing this, I have come up with this short quiz to try and establish a baseline for how we are feeling after a busy and tiring year.

Co-production with my team
Taking part in the programme has not only highlighted to me the importance of co-production in this type of project, in this case I was able to talk to my team from the start of the improvement plan.

Service user collaboration
I had not initially thought that there would be an opportunity for much service user involvement in the process. However as I engaged with the team, it was brought to my attention that we have a service user who had made badges.

Criteria for success/evaluation
This aspect is still a 'work in progress'.

Evaluation
We are looking to achieve and be able to demonstrate an improvement in mental wellbeing. A baseline will be established by completing a staff survey. The badges will then be introduced and further surveys will be sent out. The achievement could be signposting an improvement in staff mental wellbeing. Although the patient outcome assessment can be looked at to see if we have maintained, improved or even had a decline in what we are doing.



What enabled the fellowship to be a success?

On an individual level, the fellows came to the programme with personal commitment and a willingness to learn. They had access to mentors, skilled facilitators, inspiring peers and supportive colleagues at work, and importantly, time away from practice to focus and engage.

The fellowship was delivered by experienced programme facilitators, with a focus on person-centred workplace culture. Their facilitation created a psychologically safe learning environment and reflective space.

Organisational support was vital, as well as having protected time and space to reflect and learn. In practical terms, participants needed good IT infrastructure and resources.

Nationally, the strong support and involvement of NHS E/I was invaluable. Additionally, the networking and mentoring opportunities from national workforce leaders provided fellows with opportunities to connect with key areas of development for the profession.

How did the programme design support success?

The programme was underpinned by models and frameworks with strong theoretical underpinnings to support learning, including the *Creating Caring Cultures Model* and the *Guiding lights for effective workplace cultures that are also good places to work* (Cardiff et al., 2020).

It provide opportunities to recharge and re-energise, to learn together in small active learning groups in creative ways helping to develop new strategies to enable change. The fellowship exposed participants to different tools and strategies to use in practice with colleagues and service users. To support on-going development, participants were supported to self-assess their leadership strengths and areas for development. The programme a project focused on building service improvement skills.

What were the outcomes?

For individuals, there was renewed energy and improved morale, participants felt supported, valued, listened to and respected. They became more reflective on practice.

Fellows were able to grow and develop, with enhanced self-belief and self confidence. They learned how to create a caring culture at work and developed the confidence to influence change.

In turn, this enabled greater role clarity, greater advocacy for learning disability nursing, greater awareness of development and training opportunities and for some, promotion into leadership roles.

The strong links between the fellows and practice enabled the development of enhanced team morale and feelings of being respected and valued in the workplace, as well as embedding feedback and service improvement in care pathways.

For people who use services, there was a greater commitment by staff to making a difference focused on what matters to people, an appreciation of how to advocate on behalf of service users and their families and improved service user experiences and outcomes.

Finally, the programme engendered greater pride in learning disability nursing, celebrating diversity in, and greater advocacy for, learning disability nursing.