



Kirsten Malcolm

**NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde
FoNS Learning Disability Scholar 2025 and Residential Programme
participant**

For me, it was such a wonderful and unique programme. And it was something that I'd never done before, totally out with my comfort zone, it really challenged me, but challenged me in a good way.

I've been reflecting a lot since I came back, trying to think about what made it different and how I help it to stick with me. Sometimes you go away and it's wonderful and then you come back to the real world and you think, how do I bring this into practice? I would say that the mentorship has really helped me to stay focused and to refocus when I get a wee bit lost in the in the world of the NHS.

I think the residential programme had a really powerful impact on me individually, giving me that space and time to reflect and reconnect with myself and with my own values as a nursing leader. I was able to think about not just what I do, but how I show up as a leader, how my presence is felt by the teams that I support. It gave me the time and space (and such beautiful scenery) to connect with myself and also then connect with others.

Then also the programme was very creative, which again was completely out with my comfort zone! I don't think I've painted and cut things out since I was a kid! But I really enjoyed it and I think it's given me permission to use those creative skills and think a bit more creatively when I'm with the teams that I'm supporting.

The models that were introduced, were introduced in such an accessible way that it really helped. It wasn't just PowerPoint presentations. It was much more accessible than that. And there was time to think about how you would use those models in our own practice and reflect on what that would look like.

We were encouraged to think of critical questions and my critical question was all about my presence within the teams that I support: How is that received? How do I want it to be received? And what does it feel like within a person-centred culture? I think that aspect really helped me to reconnect to my values as a nursing leader, and reminded me of the importance of leading with authenticity and compassion and courage. At the end of the week, I left feeling completely re energised. I was ready to take on the world! I had a real renewed sense of purpose and a stronger belief in myself, to be honest: I had done something that



“At the end of the week, I left feeling completely re energised”

I never thought I would be able to do and I'd come away and completed it and felt really good about that. It also gave me a stronger belief in creativity and reflection and relational leadership and really working alongside people.

“Since the residential programme, I have found myself using a lot of the skills and approaches that we used during the week, particularly when I'm facilitating training, or I'm supporting others”

In terms of the impact on the teams and the people that I support, I'm the practice development nurse in child and adolescent mental health services and I cover 17 (soon to be 19) teams. It's a huge staff group and as a learning disability nurse by background working in mental health services there's been a lot to learn. Since the residential programme, I have found myself using a lot of the skills and approaches that we used during the week, particularly when I'm facilitating training, or I'm supporting others. When I deliver training, I have been trying to do it more creatively, using some of the resources we experienced with FoNS. The residential has given me the confidence and permission to lean into more of those creative approaches.

People sometimes roll their eyes at the beginning but by the end of it, they're focused, engaged and enthusiastic and connected with each other and I think that's been a huge change. And that's reflected in the feedback, people are commenting that it's a lot more creative, it's not slide heavy, more scenario based, much more about how we feel and what we're bringing. So I think it's had a good impact.

In terms of supporting the teams, it's really helped me to see team members as individuals first and helped me to really try to connect with people on a people basis first, which is difficult when you cover so many teams. I'm also trying to focus on meeting people where they are. Things are incredibly challenging in the services that I work in and I think it's important to recognise that everybody is doing their best with the resources that they've got, People are here because they care.

Sometimes a system we work in is a challenging system, but bringing it back to the basics and bringing it back to the values of the individuals and the teams is really helpful. I don't know if I would have had the same confidence to do that without the residential programme. The shift has really changed how I engage with the teams; I think I'm creating more space in team development meetings to have tricky conversations with curiosity and empathy. I feel more confident now to be able to take that pause and to reflect with people and I think that's helped me to have more courageous conversations but in a compassionate way.

How did the residential programme differ from other courses you have done?

It was much more about how we connected with the information that we were being given and what that meant to us in our own individual practice. It was about experiencing and then reflecting on, for example, the models that we were looking at and discovering how they fit within our own practice. There was a real blend of independent work and group

work which I think was really important. We would be asked to consider things individually first and then come together as a group, which allowed me to process things deeply and think about what it meant for me and also the chance to learn from my colleagues and my peers who were there with me.

I think the most valuable thing was how the facilitators created a psychologically safe space from the very beginning. For me, that's what made the biggest difference because it really encouraged honest reflection and genuine connection. On the first day, feeling vulnerable walking into that room, I didn't know anyone. But by the end of that first day, I thought this is actually going to be OK and I think I'm going to enjoy it.

So overall, I think it was the combination of having that creativity, accessibility and psychological safety that really helped us to connect as a group. I left the programme with new tools and insights and a deeper understanding of how to lead. I also now think back to how we created that safe space or that brave space, and that's what I'm trying now to do in a person-centred way in the teams that I'm supporting.

“I left the programme with new tools and insights and a deeper understanding of how to lead”

What about the scholarship?

It wouldn't have been possible for me to access the residential programme without the scholarship. With the funding cuts that are happening now, there's no way that I would have been able to access it. The organisation wouldn't have been able to support it.

“It's like there's that light again, which I think was going out a bit, so it's definitely re-energised me”

People are noticing the difference, they are saying to me that I seem different since I came back. It's like there's that light again, which I think was going out a bit so it's definitely re-energised me.

What's next?

I definitely want to do more though I'm just not sure what that looks like yet. It's quite an exciting time. I enjoy working with teams and developing staff. We've just recruited 19 or so newly qualified nurses. I'm going to put on a two-week induction for them. It's going to be really nice to spend that time with them to really connect with them at the very beginning of their career and then follow them throughout. It's really lovely to see people developing in the service.