

NEWSLETTER 12



Photo taken by Sally Hardy

Introduction and Welcome: From Local Promise to System Learning

By Johnny Yuen , Senior Research Associate , NICHE and Jo Odell, Senior Research Fellow, NICHE

Welcome to the NICHE Newsletter 12. This edition covers news and programme activities from June – August 2025. In this newsletter we share some insightful reflective pieces from individuals who have benefited from taking part in one of the many programmes that have been supported or run by NICHE, since its inception at the beginning of 2023. In this time, the health and social care system, which is consistently complex, has changed significantly. Additionally, in June this year, the long-awaited new Labour UK Government's 10-Year Health Plan was announced. This sets out a bold vision, and the [Kings Fund](#) have responded, setting out what is needed to deliver on this ambition:

- **Courage to change: creating the culture people need to thrive:** how leaders can support staff through change and build workplaces where everyone belongs, has a voice and makes a difference.

- **Strengthening digital inclusion together:** how staff can shape services, grow digital skills and ensure no one is left behind.
- **Working with people and communities and meaning it:** how to listen, build trust and make decisions with communities, not for them. Integrated care, community-led solutions and prevention-first approaches.

For those working across our local health and social care system, amid workforce shortages, rising need, and service fragmentation, the pressing question isn't what should change, but how meaningful change takes hold. It is the same for other counties like Norfolk; the gap between ambition and everyday reality remains wide.

NICHE has offered a compelling response: invest in people and communities and “*work with them rather than do to them*”. Over the last three years, more than 60 place-based projects have taken root, not through top-down directives, but by nurturing the leadership already present in communities, frontline teams, and voluntary networks. These projects are not one-off service innovations. They are expressions of authentic local leadership, shaped by lived experience, trust, and relational accountability. In short, they are place-based acts of possibility.

Now, as NICHE enters its evaluation phase, we are not just asking what has worked. We are exploring why it worked, who made it possible, and how we protect these fragile gains in a shifting national landscape. Evaluation becomes a way to amplify what's often overlooked: the quiet, consistent labour of those shaping our future health and social care system differently from the inside.

In a moment marked by uncertainty, central reform, and competing pressures, NICHE's approach reminds us that transformation grows from relationships and from the courage of those willing to lead with integrity, not instruction.

The future of our health and care system won't arrive ready-made. It will be built, relationally, from within. What comes next is up to all of us.

Cohort 3 of the NICHE funded James Paget University Hospitals (JPUH) Research, NHS Foundation Trust, Evaluation and Quality Improvement Scholarship Programme Celebration Event 10th June 2025

By Jonathan Webster, Professor of Practice Development and Co-Director

'Achieving the art of the possible, don't hide your achievements...be proud, becoming a community and feeling inspired' were some of the terms used by the embedded scholars and guests at the celebration event hosted at the East of England Air Ambulance.

The event marked the final Cohort of this programme, that NICHE has funded - delivered by the Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professionals Research Team (NMAHP) - at the James Paget Hospital. Participants across all three cohorts have had the opportunity to apply for dissemination and scalability funding to enable them to share their work through either conference presentations or publication, along with the opportunity for *'pump priming'* funding for their embedded scholarship project to take it to the next level. Presentations included:

When the time is right: A service evaluation of the process of continuing health care fast track (CHC FT) check-listing within a community NHS Trust	Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust
Building a sustainable healthcare future: Innovation and safer workspaces for waste portering heroes	James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Exploring the role of digital technology within a community neurology service: a service evaluation project	East Coast Community Healthcare CIC
Physical milestones traffic light guidance: Developing an online resource to empower families and professionals to support children of two with delayed physical milestones	James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Falling through the cracks: Addressing the hidden danger of falls	The Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Kings Lynn NHS Foundation Trust

Making the visible invisible: Organisational readiness and professional parity of opportunity for developing new roles/ advancing clinical practice	James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Supporting the unsupported: helping those with a new diagnosis of Functional Neurological Disorder (FND)	Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital
Improving working relationships between mental health and social care services	Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust
Developing a service evaluation toolkit for commissioned mental health and suicide prevention programmes	Norfolk County Council
Are we ready to share? Evaluating the organisational preparedness of three East Anglian Research Departments to implement the results sharing requirements of the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials Amendments) Regulations 2024	James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Bridging Gaps: Signposting for wellbeing in service users with serious mental illness	Together for Mental Wellbeing



Jonathan Webster (NICHE), Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professionals Research Team (JPUH) and embedded scholars

Professor Ruth Endacott, Director of Nursing and Midwifery for the National Institute for Health Research 10th July 2025

*By Jonathan Webster, Professor of Practice Development and Co-Director
of NICHE*

NICHE was really pleased to welcome Professor Ruth Endacott to meet with the participants on the NSFT Ignite Programme (see article on page 7), three of our NICHE Fellows, and two of our Embedded Scholars, who have received dissemination funding. Ruth shared her reflections on leadership with the Ignite participants before presentations from the NICHE Fellows and Embedded Scholars. Presentations were given by:

- Bonnie Teague, NICHE Fellow, on 'Co-Producing a Child Holistic Rural and Coastal Health Passport (CORACLE)'.
- Rene Grey, NICHE Fellow, on 'Improving Early Mobilisation after Femoral Fracture Surgery: A MDT Approach'.
- Nicola Ellis (on behalf of Alice Dean, NICHE Fellow) on 'Seeing Red- Improving End-of-Life Care Pathway across West Norfolk'.
- Samantha Nunn, Embedded Scholar, on 'Can a Research Champions Programme Support the NHS People Strategy? An Evaluation'.
- Felicity Gruneberg, Embedded Scholar, on 'Informed Consent for Induction of Labour: A Quality Improvement Project'.

Ruth visiting NICHE provided a great opportunity to share a flavour of the learning and outcomes from embedded programmes of research, evaluation, and quality improvement that NICHE have supported.



*Samantha, Sally, Felicity, Bonnie, Nicola,
Jonathan and Johnny*

Following the visit, Ruth stated, in the NIHR Research Delivery Network East of England Newsletter (August 2025), that it

“was an absolute pleasure to share some time with the Ignite participants and hear from the NICHE fellows and embedded scholars. It was evident that the NICHE ethos of ‘Ignite, Innovate and Embed’ is making a real difference to practice”.

'Flight of the Falcon' For Norfolk Museums Service

By Jonathan Webster, Professor of Practice Development and Co-Director of NICHE

I was delighted to be invited to Norwich Castle for 'Flight of the Falcon' to represent NICHE. The 'Flight of the Falcon' performance comprised of five dance pieces inspired by a falcon's journey through a medieval castle keep. The performance was led by Glass House Dance, a cast of local 'movers' from all ages and backgrounds who created this brand-new dance performance. The performance celebrated joy and creativity in an amazing setting – the Keep at Norwich Castle.

You can read more about this in the Norwich Museums blog here: [Flight of the Falcon – Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery](#). This performance was produced by Rosalind Hewett, (Learning and Engagement Officer at Norwich Museums). Rosalind is leading the evaluation of the Community Culture Club which is one of the Kintsugi Projects NICHE has funded.

The Community Culture Club Evaluation Report 2024-2025 can be found [here](#).



Members of the cast from Flight of the Falcon

The Ignite Programme - 'Leading and Facilitating the Development of Inclusive Care and Cultures' 8th – 12th July 2025, UEA

By Jonathan Webster, Professor of Practice Development, and Co-Director of NICHE

NICHE was delighted to have this five-day residential programme recommissioned by Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT). The programme built on learning from the [2023 NSFT programme](#) and the more recent programme delivered for the [Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn in January 2025](#).

The five day 'Ignite Programme' for NSFT was led by Jonathan Webster, Sally Hardy and Ann Jackson working with internal co-facilitators Zoe Challis, Rebecca Webster and Michaela Langley. Twenty participants from across the Trust took part in the programme, areas of focus included:

- Inclusive Practice
- Person-centred Cultures of Practice
- Developing Compassion and Self Compassion in Leadership



Each day participants met to explore and apply their learning to the workplace context in three active learning groups and on the final day participants fed back their learning to the whole group. Throughout the week many different approaches to learning were used in growing transferable insight and understanding to and from the workplace drawing on different creative approaches.

Photos take by facilitators with consent from participants of the week.

Evaluations from each day and the week as a whole was very positive – the energy created from the week was immense along with the opportunity for participants to create new workplace connections and networks to support each other. Ann Jackson will be working with participants for the next 12 months helping them to embed their learning in the workplace through participants' Commitments to Act. Please see our NICHE Website for the [Evaluation Report](#).

You can also read a reflective piece from one of the participants of the programme in 2023 who then went on to become a co-facilitator in 2025 on this programme (Please see page 14).

A 12-month participant follow up impact evaluation of the 2023 NSFT programme was also undertaken in 2024, which demonstrated personal and professional growth, improved team dynamics, enhanced patient care and acted as a catalyst for broader workplace cultural change within NSFT. You can read this report [here](#).

Queen Elizabeth's Hospital Kings Lynn (QEH) Master class and In-FLIGHT programme

By Sally Hardy, Professor of Mental Health and Practice Innovation and Director of NICHE

Two programmes have been commissioned by Chief Nurse Pippa Street at the Queen Elizabeth's Hospital Kings Lynn (QEH), to enable and support clinical leaders in their corporate and professional development.

On the 1st July 2025, 12 participants attended a one-day masterclass event, hosted at Tapping House. The aim of the masterclass was to explore how to lead and influence during complex system challenges and fast paced structural change. The day involved negotiating how to work effectively together, resulting in agreement of how to capture collective intelligence as a shared learning opportunity. Throughout the day a series of facilitated exercises encouraged deep critical reflection and a focus on amplification of collective professional mastery from and amongst participants, both now and into the future.

In the afternoon object theatre was introduced, used specifically to engage creative exploration of "wicked problems". Object theatre is where participants are invited to bring a meaningful object to share with the group. Time was spent exploring how these objects represented perspectives on work and how we understand relationships and connections between people. At the end of the session, participants evaluated how they had gained better understanding of each other's contributions as culture carriers and system leaders. One participant stated at the end of the day that despite being sceptical at first, it was the object theatre exercise that had resonated the most for them. This had encouraged a different approach to understanding problems at work and how to resolve them with more creativity and engagement with others.

The second programme is the “In-FLIGHT Programme” which is specially designed for corporate leaders focusing on safe and effective workplace cultures and is aligned to the transformation priorities of QEH. Achieving transformation of this nature requires corporate leaders with the skills to facilitate an integrated approach to learning, development, improvement and knowledge translation. This is directly relevant to building highly effective workplace cultures, with high performing teams with the capacity to develop together, utilising best evidence to achieve sustainable transformation that maximises health and well-being outcomes for all.



The “In-FLIGHT” programme combines active and experiential learning approaches to enable a critical reflective space for participants to work together, as a peer group, to allow innovative work to emerge and be monitored over time. To date, we have achieved three of the nine sessions, and the participants are working to address and achieve an in-house project which will be presented at the end of the programme with findings and recommendations.

*Birds in flight Sculpture:
Pensthorpe Nature Reserve.*

*Photograph courtesy of
Jonathan Webster.*

Learning through Evaluation: Ripple Mapping and Impact Narratives from NICHE

By Johnny Yuen, Senior Research Associate, NICHE

Internal evaluation is a major strand of work in NICHE, capturing how more than 70 individual projects across Norfolk and Waveney (and Suffolk) are sparking transformation in health and social care. Over the past year, we have been working alongside project leads, practitioners, and community members to explore the difference NICHE is making not only through outcomes, but through the relationships, practices, and cultures that sustain change.

Our approach combines complexity-informed and critical realist methods with a strong emphasis on participation. This means the evaluation is not something done to projects, but something created with them. Through in-depth interviews, shared reflections, and creative techniques such as ripple mapping, we have been able to surface powerful stories of personal growth, workforce wellbeing, and cultural transformation. These insights are being distilled into impact narratives and case studies that highlight how learning is spreading across the system.

So far, five case studies have been developed for deeper analysis and will be showcased in upcoming publications and conferences. Early findings underline how NICHE's way of working enables not just project-level innovation, but also wider ripple effects such as building confidence, strengthening networks, and embedding change across organisations and communities. By prioritising participatory learning and embedded impact, NICHE internal evaluation ensures that the lessons from NICHE are not only recorded but actively shape ongoing practice and policy.

Reflections on the JPUH / NICHE Research, Evaluation and Quality Improvement Scholarship

By Sarah Lauchlan | Team Lead Physiotherapist - Integrated Community Neurology Team, East Coast Community Healthcare CIC

As an experienced community physiotherapist, I've always been passionate about helping people directly through my clinical work. But after completing the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) research internship, I realised that involvement in research and quality improvement (QI) could extend that impact much further - improving care for many more people than I could ever reach alone. That realisation led me to apply for the Research, Evaluation and Quality Improvement Scholarship run by the JPUH and funded by NICHE, an opportunity that has proved both challenging and rewarding.

I was excited to be accepted onto the programme, though I'll admit the thought of the final presentation filled me with nerves right from the start! Walking into our first training day was daunting, but the enthusiasm and encouragement from the NMAHP Research team and my peers quickly built my confidence. Working alongside such a motivated group of scholars from different professions and organisations was one of the highlights—we shared ideas, inspired one another and were united by the same goal: to improve patient care.

The scholarship provided one day per week of protected time: a real gift for a busy clinician! This time allowed me to read widely, explore policy at both local and national levels and understand my service in the context of the wider health system. We had one full day of teaching every month and were so lucky to hear from many inspirational speakers, covering such a range of topics from data analysis to governance and leadership. It was exciting to push myself to move away from the comfort of my established clinical role, challenging my brain to learn quickly and think a little differently!

The embedded researcher model, applying learning to a real project in our own workplace, was an inspiring way to bring theory to life. It took some time to define my project aim initially, but through the structured programme and with endless support from the team and my mentor, I was able to deliver a service evaluation 'Exploring the role of digital technology within the Community Neurology service'. I was aware this is an area of huge potential in healthcare, but one which I strongly felt should be shaped carefully around the needs of patients.

One of my favourite aspects of the project was patient participation. Through field notes, local groups, and a large survey, patients generously shared their experiences and views about digital technology and their care in general. Their openness and honesty gave the project real meaning, and I can't thank them enough for their participation.

The final outputs—a poster, abstract, and blog article—took me far outside my comfort zone! Learning design skills in Canva was not something I ever imagined myself doing as a physio, but I surprised myself with what I was able to achieve. Taking my poster to the CAHPR (Council for Allied Health Professions Research) East Conference and then

Reflective accounts from staff who have been supported by NICHE



standing up at the final celebration event (despite my nerves!) were proud milestones that pushed me to grow both professionally and personally.

Now that the scholarship has ended, I do miss the structure and the dedicated project time. But the knowledge, skills, and confidence I have gained are staying with me. I'm continuing the work I've started, sharing learning with my team, and even taking on more public speaking opportunities. What once felt scary, now feels like an opportunity to build enthusiasm and momentum for change.

The scholarship was an incredible experience — one that not only expanded my skills but also reinforced my belief in the power of research, QI and service evaluation to make a real difference for patients. I once again extend my gratitude to the JPUH NMAHP Research team and to NICHE for the opportunity.

Reflections on the Research Champions Programme (RCP) – supports workforce satisfaction and has the potential to be scalable nationally!

By Samantha Nunn, Research Facilitator, Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust, East of England NIHR ARC Impact Fellow.

I have been leading our Research Champions Programme (RCP) since its inception in 2018, and what a journey of growth and opportunity it has been! The RCP started as a proposal for an improvement project for both newly qualified school nurses and health visitors, in Cambridgeshire Community NHS Trust (CCS NHST), it has since developed to be an established annual training programme offered to all staffing groups across Cambridgeshire Community NHS Trust and Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust. The programme aims to build staff confidence, capability and awareness to engage in research, support the research culture of the Trust and to build a multi-professional cohort of Research Champions. The programme has been delivered in its current format since 2023, we are now well underway with delivering cohort 4 of the RCP this year, and we have a total of 33 staff who have joined the programme to date.

The evidence base of the programme has been developed through a cycle of evaluation and improvements each year. In 2023, myself and a colleague from the Norfolk and Waveney ICB were successful in gaining a place on the Research, Evaluation and Quality Improvement Scholarship programme, run by the JPUH and funded by NICHE. Our focus was to evaluate the impact of the RCP for both Research Champions (RC's), and Service Managers. Encouragingly we found that the RCP supported RC's confidence to engage with research and that managers were highly supportive of the programme. My 'day job' of research facilitator means that I get to see the exciting impacts of the programme for staff, services and patients. Within the research team, for example, we know that some RC's go on to support study delivery or become the 'go to' person in their team for all things research, develop journal clubs, or add a more leadership aspect to their role and take on the role of Principle Investigator for the first time. It is so rewarding to see people develop into their research champion roles!

Reflective accounts from staff who have been supported by NICHE



Seeing this got us thinking.... we know that staff retention is a national priority area, we know that involvement in research can support staff satisfaction, so we wondered... (although, not the main aim of the RCP) can the RCP contribute to staff satisfaction and retention? So, we worked with our Head of Strategic Workforce Planning to understand what factors contribute to staff satisfaction and retention and included questions related to these in our 2024 evaluation.

Excitingly, we found that the RCP has indeed contributed to a sense of satisfaction in RC's current role, has provided opportunities for personal and professional development, has enabled adoption of changes to their current role and RC's reported that they felt like their contributions were more valued now. These are all factors known to positively influence workforce satisfaction and retention and we were grateful to receive the subsequent NICHE Anchor Institute Dissemination award to present our poster of this evaluation at this year's RDF (Research and Development Forum) Annual conference in Manchester. (See poster on next page).

Exciting times are ahead for the RCP. There are now several national frameworks that position research as being everyone's business and there is a renewed emphasis on supporting workforces across the system to become 'research ready'. We know however, that implementation of such frameworks across organisations within a complex system, requires change and the capacity to navigate this, and that this can be a challenge. As the RCP offers a potential solution for those seeking a 'first-step' programme on their research journey, last year I applied for an East of England National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) Impact Fellowship, to explore how scalable the RCP might be across the wider system. I am very grateful to have been [awarded an ARC Fellowship](#), which is now well under-way. So far, I have undertaken some national benchmarking of similar programmes and I am meeting with other organisations to understand what may be needed by them from a research champions programme. It is so great to hear about the enthusiasm and commitment to support research ready workforces across the country! Exciting times ahead!



Photo of our 2024 RCP cohort during our final Celebration workshop.

Reflective accounts from staff who have been supported by NICHE



Poster presented at the Research and Development Forum Annual Conference 2025.



Can a Research Champions Programme support the NHS People Strategy? An evaluation.

Lauren Moody, Research Assistant, CCS NHST; Samantha Nunn, Research Facilitator CCS NHST and JPUH Research, Evaluation and QI Scholar 2024 (funded by NICHE); Lucy Dennis, Head of Strategic Workforce Planning, CCS NHST. ccs.gen-cambs-researchhub@nhs.net

Background

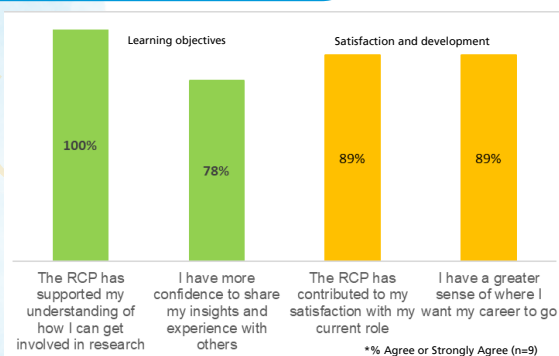
Our Research Champions Programme (RCP) aims to build staff confidence to engage with research across our community NHS Trust, by providing skills, training and a peer support network. Many positive impacts have been captured relating to our people and our services, since its inception in 2023 (see QR code). We know that involvement in research can improve staff satisfaction, engagement and retention: critical components for a healthy organisation. For our 2024 RCP, informed by the priorities identified in the Trust's People Strategy, we evaluated whether the RCP has an impact on factors known to affect staff satisfaction and retention.

Method

A mixed method design was used between November 2024 and January 2025: Research Champions from all cohorts (n=14) and managers (n=14) were invited to complete a short online survey. Questions explored learning objectives of the RCP, impact of the RCP on satisfaction and development, experience of the programme and types of activities research champions had engaged in. Five research champions subsequently completed a semi-structured interview, which focused on three themes exploring changes to professional role, opportunities for personal and professional development and impact on satisfaction of their role, as a consequence of the RCP.

Results

Survey and interviews



Impact on satisfaction

"It's flavoured my role and it's probably one of the reasons why I didn't jump ship to something else, it kept me in my role".

Opportunities for development

"Expanding my ability to deliver up to date research to my colleagues shows teaching aspects, helping me to develop".

Changes to professional role

"It has allowed me to take a much more research focused approach to things... you start to embed that knowledge into your practise without realising it".

Summary and impacts

- The RCP provides staff with professional and personal development opportunities.
- The RCP improves staff engagement, satisfaction and retention.
- The RCP contributes to CCS NHST being an excellent employer.
- The RCP creates a culture of learning and curiosity in research across the organisation.



References: Fitzpatrick, C., Buckingham, T., Merrell, J., McCooey, C., & Richardson, D. (2020) Engaging nurses in research and quality improvement is associated with higher job satisfaction and lower rates of unscheduled time off work: A pilot study, *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 31(7), 702-704; Harding, K., Lynch, L., Porter, J., & Taylor, N. F. (2016) Organisational benefits of a strong research culture in a health service: a systematic review. *Australian Health Review* 41(1), 45-53; Rees, M. R., & Bracewell, M. (2019). Academic factors in medical recruitment: evidence to support improvements in medical recruitment and retention by improving the academic content in medical posts. *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 95(1124), 323-327; Our NHS People: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/our-nhs-people/>

The RCP is delivered in partnership with NCH&C. We would like to acknowledge the JPUH Research, Evaluation & QI Scholarship team for their original programme and NICHE, Anchor Institute, UEA for the funds to attend this conference.

Reflection: From Participant to Facilitator - Journey of growth on the NSFT Ignite residential programme

By Michaela Langley, Community Team Manager, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT)

Two years ago in 2023, I attended a week-long residential course (See article on page 7). NSFT in collaboration with NICHE co-designed the residential programme, designed around experiential learning, using active, participatory, and creative approaches. At the time, I was newly appointed as a Community Team Manager in Older People's Mental Health, following a period of work-related stress and a temporary role that left me feeling vulnerable and jaded. Despite initial reservations, I remained open to the experience.

The programme focused on co-creating inclusive practices and workplace cultures rooted in person-centredness, compassion, and self-compassion in leadership. It involved cycles of learning through dialogue with self and others, observation, and action. The experience was profound and transformative, helping me reconnect with my values and develop as a reflective, self-aware leader. As a social worker this has always been so important to me. Following the programme I was fortunate to access a mentor, through NICHE. This opportunity has been instrumental in continuing the reflective journey that began during the residential week. Through regular dialogue and support, I've been able to deepen my thinking and further develop both personally and professionally as a leader.

Mentorship has given me the confidence to challenge assumptions, ask "why," and embrace vulnerability without fear. I've learned that it's not only acceptable, but essential, to acknowledge when something feels difficult or when I need help. This shift has reinforced that vulnerability is not a weakness, but a gateway to authentic leadership and meaningful connection.

This year, I returned, not as a participant, but as a co-facilitator. Supporting others through the same journey was deeply motivating and offered fresh insights into my own development. As a participant, I felt uncertain and emotionally raw. I questioned whether I could truly benefit from the programme, given my recent experiences. However, I also felt a quiet hopefulness and a willingness to engage. As a facilitator, I felt a deep sense of responsibility and privilege. Watching others grow, struggle and connect reminded me of my own journey. I felt inspired, humbled and affirmed my commitment to compassionate leadership.

The programme was impactful both times. As a participant, it offered a safe space to be vulnerable and to rediscover my strengths. As a facilitator, it allowed me to witness transformation in others and reflect on how far I've come.

Challenges included navigating group dynamics and ensuring psychological safety, but these were outweighed by the richness of shared learning and connection. The immersive nature of the programme, its emphasis on experiential learning and reflective dialogue, was key to its effectiveness. It created space for authenticity, self-compassion and collective growth. Facilitating the course deepened my understanding of leadership

Reflective accounts from staff who have been supported by NICHE



as relational and emotionally intelligent. It reinforced the importance of creating cultures where vulnerability is met with empathy and where learning is co-created.

This experience has been pivotal in shaping my identity as a leader. It reminded me that growth often comes from discomfort and that leadership is not about having all the answers, but about being present, curious and compassionate.

What have I learned:

- **Vulnerability is a strength:** Allowing myself to be open and honest about my experiences created space for healing and connection.
- **Self-compassion is foundational:** Leadership rooted in self-compassion enables resilience and truthfulness.
- **Growth is cyclical:** Revisiting the programme as a facilitator highlighted how learning continues and deepens over time.
- **Facilitation is a mirror:** Supporting others in their development reflected my own progress and areas for continued growth.
- **Culture matters:** Creating and sustaining compassionate workplace cultures is not only possible but essential for wellbeing and effectiveness.

I intend to continue fostering reflective practice within my team and advocate for spaces that support emotional wellbeing and inclusive leadership. Especially at a time when NSFT is going through a period of transformation and causing many to question their roles and identity. The opportunity to learn from this experience has supported me to cope and manage the uncertainty. I also hope to remain involved in the future supporting others on their journey and continuing my own.

Reflections on presenting a quality improvement project to improve informed consent for induction of labour at the Royal College of Midwives Conference 2025

By Felicity Gruneberg, Midwife, Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn

I am a midwife, working at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn and was fortunate to gain a place on the Research, Evaluation and Quality Improvement Scholarship run by JPUH and funded by NICHE. I embarked on a quality improvement project to improve informed consent for induction of women's labour and was guided by a fantastic team to evaluate the service and start making improvements.

Thanks to the subsequent dissemination fund awarded to me by NICHE, I was able to attend the Royal College of Midwives Conference in Birmingham on 30th April – 1st May. I had submitted an abstract to the conference, and I was chosen to present the work I had completed during the scholarship. I had some wonderful feedback from others, and lots

Reflective accounts from staff who have been supported by NICHE



and lots of interest in the findings of my work. There was an opportunity for questions after and I received lots of encouragement from fellow midwives to publish the work, which I am in the process of doing now.

I am very grateful for the opportunities NICHE have given me, to build my understanding of research and be able to support me to share my project nationally. I had felt that my work was so small and insignificant but taking it to the conference gave me such encouragement. I now feel the work I have done has been validated, I have a renewed sense that publishing is important, and I should continue to pursue this despite the lengthy publishing process.

Reflections following conversations with the THEO project nurses.

By Sally Hardy, Professor of Mental Health and Practice Innovation and Director of NICHE

The THERapeutic Optimisation (THEO) project developed by the NICHE Anchor Institute at the University of East Anglia, is a novel and complex intervention research study aimed at optimising nurses' and patients' experience of care. Working with two wards within Norfolk, the THEO intervention is providing an uplift of two experienced registered nurses (graded at band 6 and 7) working as clinical embedded researchers and is combined with a process of participatory action research. The intervention started in February 2025, and I was curious to know more about how the THEO nurses were embedding these roles, because at one of our previous NICHE shared learning events (May 2025), the THEO nurses had stated:

"We are moving people out of their comfort zones, into open learning zones as safe spaces to ignite interest and conversations that takes the work forward."

But what did that look and feel like in the hectic world of clinical practice? What was it like for these pioneering roles juggling clinical demands with research and achieving participant engagement? I was keen to understand more about the reality of working as embedded facilitators and co-ordinating the THEO project in busy clinical wards.

So, on 2nd July 2025, Professor Alison Leary, who has been involved in THEO from inception, joined our visit with Helen Rossiter and Jo Challoner at the North Walsham and District Memorial Hospital, Norfolk Community Hospital Trust (NCHC), and then on the 13th August, 2025 we met with Rachel Brice and Catherine McMillan at the James Paget Hospital (JPUH).

Achievements to date across both sites has been the recruitment of co-researchers, who come from the different roles across the clinical team. This committed band of 'practitioner-researchers' are exploring the vision and values of the ward and then gaining evidence from interviewing staff and patients and observing care. Using this narrative to inform and critique what is happening now, comparing this with the vision and values

Reflective accounts from staff who have been supported by NICHE



and working towards co created actions. Ultimately the overarching aim is to safely and effectively implement change for the better.



Funded by



Delivered by



At the JPUH, Rachel and Catherine are six months into their THEO roles, as they were recruited slightly ahead of the team at NCHC, yet the enthusiasm and energy of our conversations was equally as exciting. Jo and Helen at NCHC spoke of their own professional development within these THEO roles. Rachel and Catherine shared multiple examples of subtle changes already taking place where interventions were being achieved to improve the patient experience. All four THEO nurses spoke of the level of engagement and participation they have achieved in such a short space of time, and were confidently undertaking interviews and about to achieve some observations of care.

At JPUH, the ward is re-locating to a new part of the hospital as part of the redecoration plan, yet the co-researcher team were keen to observe and capture how the clinical team were preparing and responding to this change and seeing this move as an opportunity to do things differently.

In discussion with both THEO nurse pairs, we witnessed a high level of practice expertise being utilised. The THEO nurses were each actively supporting and mentoring staff whilst working on 12-hour shifts and using their own knowledge and skill to proactively assess and manage complex care needs of patients they encountered. We explored the extent to which alternative options for patients' experience of the ward could be achieved and how the THEO roles could be further scaled, in a time of cost constraints, once the THEO project completes. We are excited to see what the external process evaluation brings together, in the form of multiple sources of evidence to capture where and how the THEO nurses are making a difference.

The THEO Project Protocol is published in the British Medical Journal as an open access paper, so you can read more of this work and the detailed project methodology [here](#). The final THEO project report will be due June-July 2026, written in collaboration with our University of Staffordshire colleagues, who are undertaking the external research, as the data is collated, scrutinised and analysed.



Alison Leary, Jo Challenor, Helen Rossiter and Sally Hardy NCHC

Sally Hardy, Rachel Brice, Catherine McMillan, and Alison Leary JPUH.

- ★ [‘Thinking back and looking forward – leading with authenticity and integrity in a complex world’](#) a blog by Jonathan Webster, and [‘What the World Needs Now is...’](#) a blog by Ann Jackson are now both published on the NICHE Website.
- ★ **SOFTN Conference 2025:** 27-29th October Cinnamon Lakeside Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Now is the time to book your place and join a committed team working to Shape Our Future through New Coalitions, actively exploring planet and population health. Visit our website to see the programme, meet the three key note speakers and join international workshops, events and site visits: <https://softnconf2025.com/>
- ★ Registration is now open for the **Henry Hawkins Lecture & Celebration** 2025 on the 15th October at the Norwich City Football Ground. You can find out more [here](#).
- ★ **The 9th Psychological Festival** is being held in Norwich this year on the 17-19th October. Register for your place to hear “Untold stories: Tales of Community Strength”. The NICHE team will be hosting a ‘world café’ presentation in collaboration with 3 partners on the morning of the 17th Oct. For more information and tickets visit the website here: [9th Community Psychology Festival | BPS](#)

Announcing our final Issue of the NICHE Newsletter

As this will be the final issue of what has been a series of regular NICHE Newsletters, sharing work achieved across our multiple partners, we want to use this opportunity to say a heartfelt thank you.

It has been a privilege to walk alongside our partners, collaborators and change makers, sharing the bold delivery, learning, innovation and impact you have brought to life across Norfolk and Waveney.

We are deeply grateful to NHS England, East of England for funding the NICHE Anchor Institute and making this journey of place-based, embedded transformation possible.

However, our journey is not over. Next, we will be publishing the NICHE Final Report in early December 2025, as an opportunity to reflect on how your efforts have helped make Norfolk and Waveney a healthier, more connected place to live and work. Other work we have commenced will continue until completion, with information shared via our website.

We look forward to continue to share learning and evaluation with you of the longterm sustainability of inclusive and highly effective partnerships to enable the shaping of the future.

Thank you all for journeying with us.

Best regards from all The NICHE Team.