

Emerging Themes from the Inaugural Meeting

Northern Devon Forum for Practitioners in Neurodivergent Needs (PINN Forum)

Introduction and Context

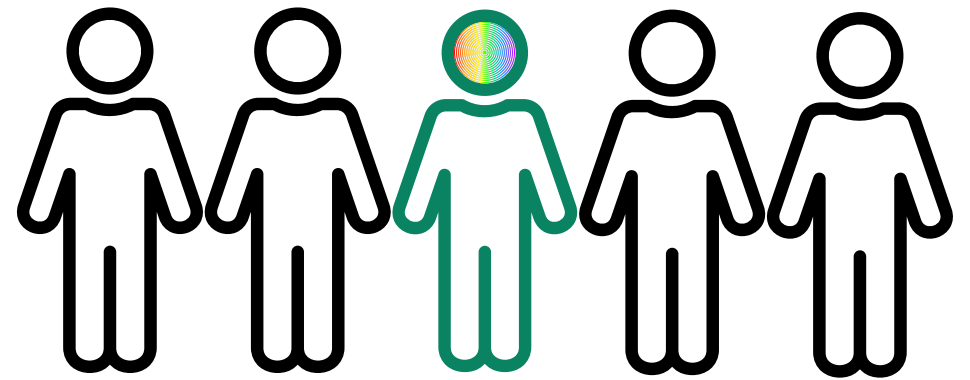
The inaugural meeting of the Northern Devon Forum for Practitioners in Neurodivergent Needs (PINN Forum) took place on 28th September 2023, organised by WayMakers. The aim of the PINN Forum is to bring professionals across sectors together to explore how best to collectively support neurodivergent people in our communities.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the key themes and insights that emerged from the PINN Forum's inaugural meeting. Using a collaborative methodology called Ketso (<https://ketso.com>), participants were able to outline priority areas for supporting neurodivergent individuals and map out a strategic vision for the future of the Forum.

Development of the PINN Forum

Participants explored the most effective ways to harness the potential of the PINN forum and ways in which it can develop. The discussions were aimed at identifying key themes related to supporting people with neurodivergent needs in communities and outlining a strategic course of action for the future of the PINN Forum.

The collaborative group discussions highlighted six overarching themes that can encapsulate the core goals of the forum and can be used as its guiding principles. The PINN Forum has the overarching goal of advancing understanding of neurodiversity and promoting advocacy.



Communication and networking

- Fostering open channels of communication and opportunities for networking, enabling members to connect, share, and collaborate.



Support and empowerment

- Cultivating an environment that empowers individuals, both within the Forum and the neurodiverse community, by offering guidance, resources, and emotional support.



Knowledge exchange

- Facilitating the exchange of insights, experiences, and expertise, with a focus on enhancing understanding and awareness of neurodiversity.



Practical solutions

- Identifying and exploring practical solutions to real-world challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals, aiming to improve their everyday lives.



Service user challenges

- Addressing the specific challenges encountered by neurodivergent individuals as service users and striving to enhance their experiences and outcomes.



Service provider offers and delivery

- Evaluating the services provided by organisations, institutions, and practitioners in the neurodiversity field, with a focus on quality, accessibility, and inclusivity.



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Challenges for Service Users with Neurodivergent Needs

Participants highlighted the challenges service users experience if they have neurodivergent needs and are seeking support.

Service users often face an array of personal challenges, including:

- sensory issues
- social interaction
- mental health problems – such as stress, depression, and anxiety
- social isolation
- erosion of trust
- a sense of being misunderstood.

'Sensory, social, emotional.'

'Isolation, feeling misunderstood, disconnected.'



Systemic Challenges

Systemic challenges for people with neurodivergent needs were also discussed, such as:

- Discrimination
- Complex bureaucratic processes
- Lack of support to access services
- Lack of funding for services.

'Compiling and composing evidence (to support referrals).'

'Complicated access to work programme application.'



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Raising Awareness

Participants emphasised the importance of raising awareness and fostering greater understanding of neurodiversity among all service providers and professionals. Many practitioners commented that service-users experience long waiting lists for diagnosis and a lack of support after diagnosis.

Participants also perceived there to be lack of knowledge about what support is available to people in Northern Devon. These factors present challenges for people with neurodivergent needs and those seeking to support them.

'Feeling judged.'

'Trauma and gaslighting.'

'[Lack of] awareness and understanding amongst other educators and professionals.'



Recurring Barriers

Discussions highlighted three recurring barriers prevalent in the service provision landscape within Northern Devon:

- The lack of suitable transport options
- A scarcity of employment opportunities
- The lack of integration of regional services which limits the capacity of service-user to access much-needed support.

'Complicated access to work programme application.'

'Regional disparity.'

'A lack of integration; housing and finance; travel and transport; education, and access and schooling.'



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Biggest Challenges for Practitioners in their Roles

Participants discussed the biggest challenges in their roles supporting people with neurodivergent needs.

Resource Management and Capacity Issues

This included 'Demand and Capacity', 'Large Workloads', 'Lack of Resources', and 'Waiting Lists'. These challenges stem from managing the high demand versus limited capacity, dealing with large workloads, and coping with the lack of resources.

Organisational and Inter-Organisational Challenges

This relates to 'Lack of Joined-up Working', 'Time Lapse Response from Partners', and 'Pressures from above- balance'. These challenges highlight the difficulty in collaborating effectively within and between organisations.

Funding and Support

'Lack of Funding' and 'Lack of Support' were discussed, clearly indicating financial and operational support challenges.

Staffing and Recruitment

These challenges involve filling staff positions and retaining talent but also dealing with issues of individual confidence and self-perception within roles - 'Imposter Syndrome'.



Trust and Relationship with System

'Lack of Trust in the System' and 'Misdiagnosis' were discussed. Misdiagnosis can undermine trust and impact the relationship with service users.

Service User Engagement and Understanding

'Reaching People' and 'Understanding the Needs of the Service Users' indicate challenges in effectively engaging with and understanding the needs of service users.

Priority Setting

'Prioritising' discussions related to challenges in setting the right priorities in organisations and making effective decisions with limited resources.



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What Service Providers at the PINN Forum Offer and Deliver

The diverse range of services and offers from various providers in Northern Devon were represented at the meeting. The participants and their organisations play a pivotal role in supporting and empowering neurodivergent individuals, ensuring they receive the assistance they need.

The services and offerings encompass a wide array of critical areas:

- alternative education
- autism support
- bereavement support
- bespoke awareness training
- bespoke support for neurodivergent individuals in mainstream schools
- careers advice
- business support
- coaching
- counselling
- diagnostic assessment
- employability skills and training
- environmental events and education
- family support
- free courses to support mental health
- peer support
- recovery communities for adults
- specialist teaching
- staffing solutions for providers
- support to access health services
- wellbeing providers
- youth support group.

The purpose of the Forum was perceived as being an initiative to bring service providers together to improve outcomes for people with neurodivergent needs through:

- knowledge exchange
- creative solutions
- feedback
- collective advocacy.



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Feedback on the Event and Ideas for Future Events

All attendees found the event enjoyable and useful.

'Just what we need.'

'Keep traction on this worthy network.'

'Refreshing, bright and positive.'

'Very useful. Liaising with other service providers gave me valuable links, information and signposting.'

The majority of attendees at the first Forum meeting would like to meet twice a year, in-person, for three hours, at a venue in Barnstaple.

The majority of people would like future meetings to have a blended focus of action learning and networking.

Overall Summary

The inaugural meeting of the PINN Forum marks a meaningful step toward building a supportive community and improving outcomes for neurodivergent individuals in Northern Devon. Through collaborative discussions, participants identified core focus areas, challenges, and potential solutions in shaping a strategic vision for the Forum. While challenges exist, many promising services and offers are already in place to empower neurodivergent service users. The PINN Forum was received as a very welcome space to network, exchange ideas, coordinate resources, and develop initiatives.

The PINN Forum is run by Waymakers CIC. If you or your organisation would like to join, please complete [this form](#) or email alex@waymakers.co.uk

The Key Feedback

'Takeaways' from the Forum centre around knowledge-sharing, resource-leveraging, and collaborative action to fill service gaps. There is an emphasis on proactive rather than reactive responses, with a commitment to tangible actions, such as:

- sharing best-practice
- creating a directory of providers and services
- joint funding applications
- sharing contact information ahead of meetings to enable enhanced networking
- accountability measures for assigned tasks to help translate ideas into realities
- opportunities for service providers to introduce their organisations and make specific requests of the Forum members
- seeking input from other regions which could catalyse innovation
- case studies and experience sharing to serve as a soundboard to evolve services
- incorporating autistic and neurodiverse perspectives, along with understanding user needs
- mapping clear pathways to access support.



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