

People's Stigma Free Network



Stigma Free
Lanarkshire

**SUMMARY
REPORT**

**JANUARY
2026**



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Introduction

The People's Stigma Free Network (PSFN) brings together people with lived experience, professionals, and community members to explore mental health stigma and support more compassionate, inclusive responses across Lanarkshire.

PSFN connects members through shared learning, reflection, and action, creating opportunities to talk openly about stigma, understand its impact and translate learning into practical change.

Building on learning from PSFN sessions throughout 2025, this summary report shares key learning from the January 2026 session, including member feedback, confidence changes, and priorities for future PSFN activity.

Our Aims:

Together we will...

Create a safe and inclusive space where individuals from all walks of life can share their experiences

Foster open conversations and share all learning, specifically good practice, and what is working in the communities of Lanarkshire

Provide a platform for the voices of network members to offer ideas and inspiration

Encourage further action to create safe places while challenging mental health stigma and discrimination

Identify ways in which we can support members to achieve their own goals in creating stigma free environments



Session Overview

Stigma Free Lanarkshire hosted the first PSFN session of 2026 on 21 January, bringing together 21 members, including five returning participants, reflecting early-stage network development.

Members brought lived experience from community and in-patient settings, alongside perspectives from third sector mental health and family support services, peer support roles, community mental health, education, and policing. This diverse mix of lived experience and professional backgrounds supported shared learning across community, clinical, and workplace contexts.

What happened on the day:

- Spotlight on stigma-free practice in organisations – representatives from Lanarkshire Links and Police Scotland shared examples of good practice
- Lived experience sharing – members heard personal stories about the impact of stigma
- Scenario-based learning – interactive activities explored supportive responses to mental health disclosure
- Round-table action planning – members identified practical steps to challenge stigma in workplaces and communities

The session opened with a Safer Spaces Agreement to support respectful and mindful participation throughout.

Spotlight: Lanarkshire Links & Lived Experience

The session opened with a spotlight on Lanarkshire Links, highlighting local anti-stigma work and the role of community-led mental health and wellbeing groups across Lanarkshire.

Two members of Lanarkshire Links then shared their lived experiences, speaking openly about how stigma has affected their everyday lives and reflecting on the sense of inclusion they found through the organisation's creative groups and community connections. They described how feeling welcomed and supported played an important role in their healing journeys. Their stories grounded the session in real experiences, creating space for empathy, reflection, and deeper understanding.

Members described the lived experience contributions as powerful and meaningful, reinforcing that stigma is not abstract — it affects real people in real ways.

Key reflections highlighted the value of hearing directly from others to deepen understanding of stigma's impact, alongside increased mindfulness in their own language, assumptions, and everyday interactions.



Spotlight: Police Scotland

PC Ross Park, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Co-ordinator for the Lanarkshire Police Division at Police Scotland, also shared insights from his role as a wellbeing lead.

He spoke about the significant involvement of policing in responding to mental health crisis and supporting people in the community, while recognising that Police Scotland is not a health service. Ross reflected on the ongoing challenge of balancing the limitations of the policing role with the needs of individuals in crisis, noting that while the wider system is not perfect, there is strong commitment at ground level to work in informed, compassionate ways.

Ross also spoke candidly about mental health culture among staff, highlighting increasing awareness, strong peer support, and the importance of creating safe spaces where colleagues can look out for one another.

A number of police & prison officers have also taken part in Stigma Free Lanarkshire's Understanding Stigma workshop, highlighting emerging interest in stigma free practice across justice settings.





Interactive Learning

Members took part in interactive scenario-based learning using Mentimeter, exploring how to respond compassionately to everyday situations involving mental health and stigma.

Scenarios reflected real-world experiences, including disclosure in workplaces, community settings, and personal relationships. Members were invited to share responses anonymously, supporting inclusive participation and encouraging honest reflection.

The activity prompted rich discussion about:

- Listening without judgement
- Acknowledging emotions and validating experiences
- Being mindful of language and tone
- Avoiding assumptions or “fixing” too quickly
- Offering practical support and reasonable adjustments where needed

Members valued seeing a range of perspectives and learning from one another’s approaches. Many reflected on how small changes in language or response can make a significant difference to how supported someone feels.

Overall, the scenario learning supported practical skill-building and helped members feel more confident in navigating sensitive conversations across different settings.



Action Planning

Following the scenario learning, members took part in round-table discussions to reflect on what they had learned and consider how it could be applied in their own workplaces and communities.

Members shared challenges, examples of good practice, and practical ideas for challenging stigma locally. This created space for collective problem-solving and learning from one another's experiences.

Action planning supported members to identify small, achievable steps they could take forward after the session. These included:

- Being more mindful of language and assumptions
- Creating space for open conversations about mental health
- Sharing learning with colleagues and peers
- Supporting compassionate responses within teams and services

Time was also built in for informal connection and networking, helping strengthen relationships across lived experience, community, and professional roles.

Quantitative Findings

Based on pre- and post-session responses from 10 members:

- **43%** of members showed improved confidence scores
- **50%** remained the same
- **7%** showed a marginal decrease

Overall, **93%** of members reported stable or improved confidence following the session.

100% of members reported feeling confident recognising mental health stigma both before and after the session, reflecting a high baseline level of awareness among attendees.

Members also reported strong positive experiences of the session:

- Comfort participating in discussion increased from **86%** to **93%**
- **93%** felt the session was inclusive and accessible
- **93%** felt the examples and activities were relevant to their experience

Figure 1. Overall change in confidence following the session

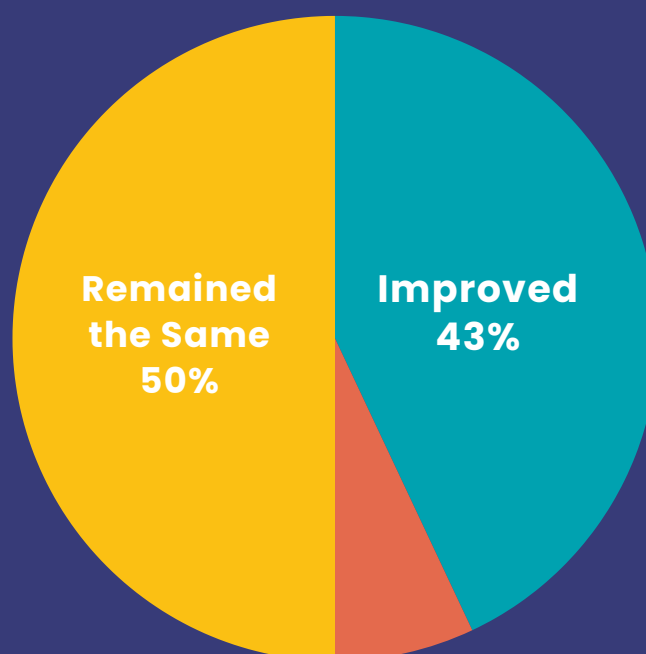
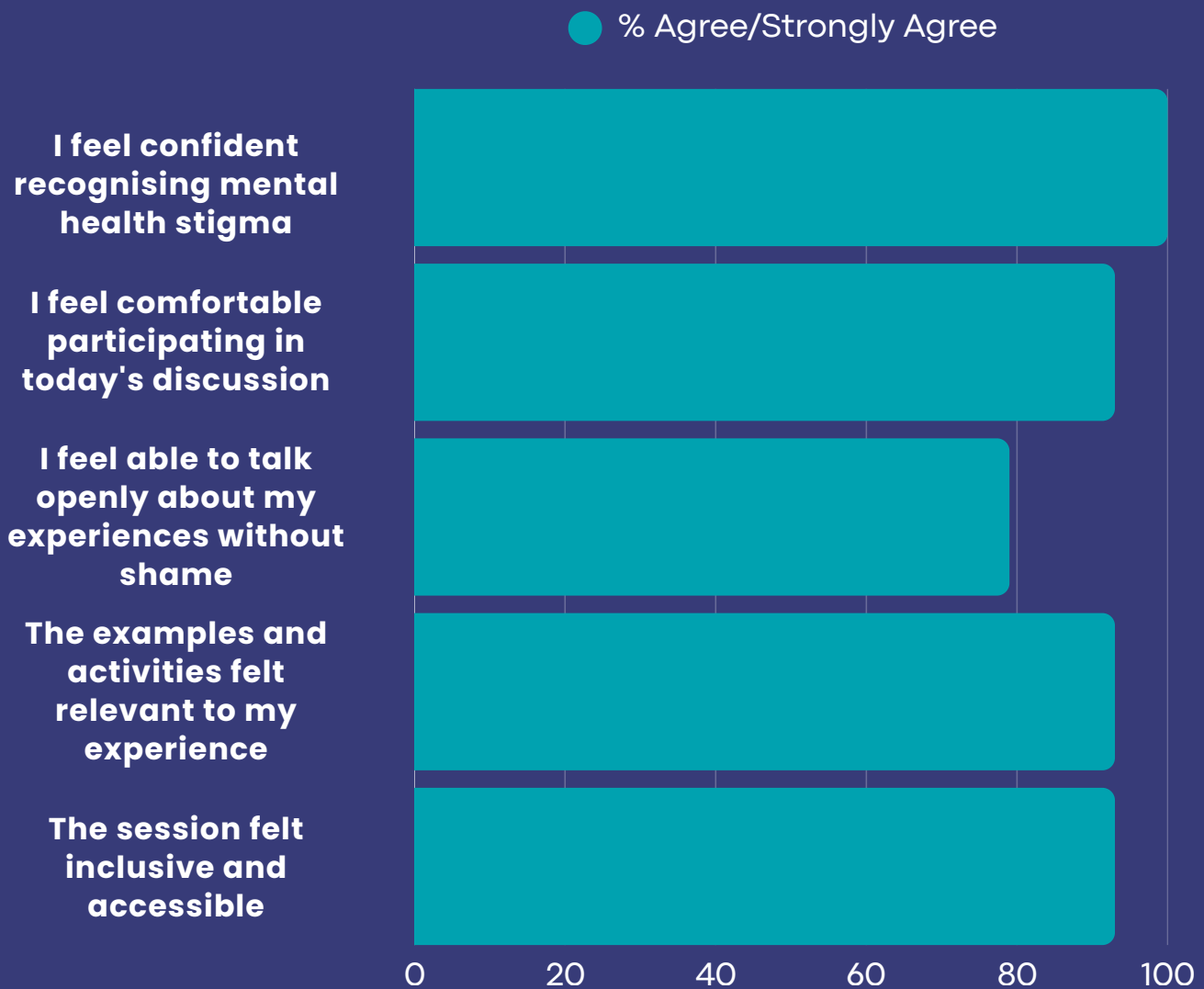


Figure 2. Post-session experience ratings



*** Note:**

One member reported a marginal decrease in overall confidence post-session (7% of respondents), which accounts for the small decrease shown in the overall change breakdown. This coincided with qualitative feedback relating to respectful disagreement and the importance of acknowledging lived experience.

Given the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, the session opened with a Safer Spaces Agreement, recognising that while complete psychological safety cannot be guaranteed, members were encouraged to respect diverse perspectives and share only what felt comfortable. This highlights the importance of continuing to balance open dialogue with emotional safety, particularly when facilitating conversations involving lived experience.



KEY LEARNING

Building on learning from the September 2025 PSFN session, which demonstrated strong gains in confidence, openness, and motivation to act, January's findings suggest members are increasingly arriving with higher baseline confidence in recognising and challenging stigma. Confidence in recognising mental health stigma increased from **82%** to **100%** during the September session, while January members reported **100%** confidence both before and after, indicating growing awareness among those engaging with PSFN.

This may reflect a broader cultural shift locally and suggests PSFN is attracting individuals who already align with stigma free values and are seeking connection, learning, and opportunities for action.

Notably, a number of January attendees had previously taken part in Stigma Free Lanarkshire's *Understanding Stigma* workshop. This suggests that workshop engagement may act as a catalyst for further involvement, with participants feeling motivated to continue learning, connect with others, and take more active roles within the network. In this sense, PSFN may function as a natural next step for individuals seeking to build on earlier awareness-raising activity.

In this context, PSFN is evolving from an awareness-raising space into a community hub that brings together lived experience, professional practice, and peer learning. While early repeat attendance remains modest, many members may attend once and take learning back into their workplaces, families, and communities, acting as wider advocates for change.

Future evaluation will therefore place greater emphasis on behavioural and community-level outcomes alongside continued monitoring of confidence and engagement.



Qualitative Insights & Themes

Several consistent themes emerged from member reflections.

Learning and Awareness

Members reported increased awareness of how stigma appears in everyday language and interactions, and how small comments can have lasting impact.

Many described becoming more mindful of tone, expressions, and assumptions when engaging in conversations about mental health.

Lived Experience

Hearing lived experience was repeatedly highlighted as powerful and grounding. Members valued learning directly from others and understanding how stigma affects people differently across settings.

Practical Skills

Members appreciated scenario-based learning and practical guidance on:

- What to say (and not say)
- How to listen without judgement
- How to respond supportively in challenging conversations

Several described gaining clearer tools they could apply in workplaces and community settings.

Inclusivity and Diversity

Members valued hearing diverse viewpoints and felt encouraged to consider perspectives different from their own. Many reflected on the importance of creating inclusive spaces where disagreement can be explored respectfully.

Sharing Good Practice

Members described intentions to share learning within their workplaces and networks, including resources and approaches discussed during the session.



Areas for Improvement & Future Directions

Members identified priorities for future PSFN sessions, including:

- More lived experience speakers
- Greater focus on workplace stigma and reasonable adjustments
- Exploring stigma across a wider range of lived experiences (including neurodiversity and long-term mental health conditions)
- More practical, action-focused learning
- Improved accessibility in timing, formats, and facilitation

Members also expressed interest in attending future PSFN sessions, participating in workshops, and continuing opportunities for networking.

PSFN will take this learning forward by:

- Continuing to centre lived experience
- Strengthening facilitation of sensitive discussions
- Expanding practical workplace content
- Maintaining accessible formats such as Mentimeter
- Supporting members to take learning into their communities
- Continuing conversations beyond sessions through follow-up reflections and light-touch check-ins, supporting members to notice and apply stigma-free learning over time
- Responding directly to member priorities in future session planning

PSFN will continue to centre lived experience and practical, community-led action, ensuring sessions remain inclusive and responsive over time.

Questions? Contact us.

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