

# THE KILTIED KIDNEY



Together We Are Stronger

Renal Young Adult Support Newsletter

**W I N T E R 2 0 2 5 /  
S P R I N G 2 0 2 6**



Welcome to the second edition of the Renal Young Adult Newsletter, "The Kiltied Kidney". This is brought to you by Jess, Victoria, Sharlene and the volunteer team. We hope you enjoy reading it and would love your feedback on how you're finding it so far - you'll find a QR code near the end so please scan this.

We were thrilled to have our very own Sharlene recognised as a finalist for 'Staff Member of the Year' at last year's **Celebrating Success Award**. She was nominated for demonstrating the value and visibility of this pioneering service. We received some more good news in February - The Renal Young Adult Service has secured **permanent funding** thanks to NHS Lothian. This means we can continue to build on the success of the last year and we look forward to what 2026 brings!

**World Kidney Day** was the 12 March. It's an annual event that raises awareness of kidney health and celebrates progress in care and support.

## Halloween Event

Great fun was had all round on Wednesday 29 October for the Renal Young Adult Halloween event. Ten attendees were able to come along.

We enjoyed making different light-up shapes (stars and moons) from willow branches provided by Lou Evans, Nature Ranger for the RIE.

Huge thanks to Lou for teaching us how to make these and we loved being able to take them home.

Spooooooky treats were snacked on and we enjoyed some Halloween inspired fancy dress.

Special shout out to Stephen for his 'Scream' costume - you really went all out!

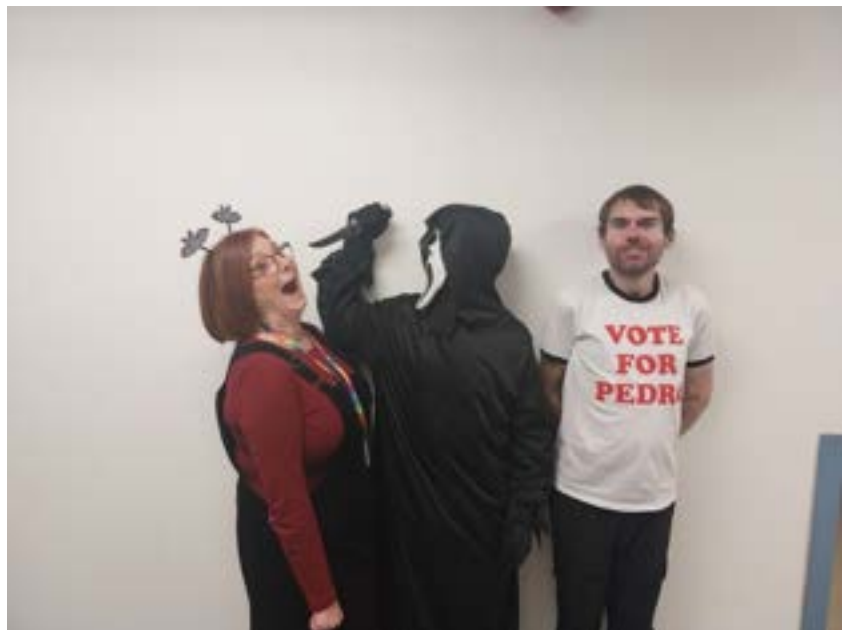
Thank you to our newest member who travelled from the Borders to join us - it was lovely to meet you.

We hope you all had fun!



Members of the group making stars with lights using willow branches

Credit - Sharlene Taylor



Enjoying some Halloween fancy dress. Stephen as 'Scream' and Euan from 'Napoleon Dynamite'.

Credit - Dawnn Relph, Renal Social Worker

## Save the date!



Lou is joining us again for a spooky lantern walk at the RIE on Wednesday 28 October.



Credit - Sharlene Taylor

## Residential Weekend

Kidney Care UK organised a fun-filled Residential Weekend for the Young Adult Kidney Group at Mount Cook, Derbyshire. We were there from 5-8 September and a special highlight was the disco in a bar!



Five attendees and one volunteer leaving for Mount Cook

Credit - Sharlene Taylor

The weekend offered lots of activities including:

- climbing and abseiling
- orienteering
- walks
- bushcraft
- land karting
- zip lining
- arts and crafts
- archery tag
- games
- team building events and challenges



Aodon won the Fancy Dress competition with his costume from 'Ratatouille'. We especially loved your little Remy on your shoulder!

Credit - Residential Weekend Event Organiser, Kidney Care UK



If you've attended before and are now over the age of 30, why not consider attending the next one as a volunteer?

**Save the date for the next Residential Weekend!**  
4-7 September 2026

If you're interested in attending a Residential Weekend, remember that Sharlene can support you with your application. Get in touch with her or scan here for more information. Sharlene is attending this year so she will see you there!



## Annnd...Breathe

Forest bathing is the concept that time spent in nature, specifically amongst trees is beneficial for our mental health and has measurable physiological results too.

Winter can be a tough time for some with the reduced sunlight and colder temperatures. Christmas festivities don't always fill everyone with joy. Even if you do find the time magical, it can also be overwhelming. Moving with the seasons and slowing down the pace with regular micro meditations can help when stress starts to rise.

**Try this 10 minute active meditation, NO phones, just for 15 minutes!**

Find a tree you feel drawn to, it could be on your walk home or just in your garden. Observe how tall it is, Fully take in the roots that anchor it, the shape of its trunk. What form do its branches create, are they close together or reaching out? Maybe they are gently waving.

Does your tree have any leaves? Maybe it is wearing a layer of frost. If you can, walk around your tree to see it from all angles. Place your hands on the bark and close your eyes. Focus on touch and smell. What sensations are under your fingertips? Thick, craggy bark or maybe it is cold and smooth.

Take **3 slow deep breaths**, in through your nose and out your mouth. Draw your attention to the temperature difference between your nose and mouth breath. What do you smell? The air might be crisp, dry or damp and forest like.



Do you hear any wind, any birds, creaking twigs?

Open your eyes 

How do you feel? Silly? Calmer? Was there anything you noticed about this tree you haven't before?

Maybe you will feel inspired to incorporate this exercise elsewhere. The key is 3 deep breaths and paying attention to each of your senses in turn.



From left to right: Ryan, Sharlene, Stephen, Hannah, Victoria, Fiona, Euan and Namarik.

Credit - Hans Clausen, Tonic Arts Charity

## Just the Tonic

Tonic Arts is NHS Lothian Charity's Arts in Health & Wellbeing programme.

They are responsible for much of the art you find in hospitals and collaborate with other organisations to provide a variety of experiences and opportunities to patients and staff.



Big thanks to the Art Project artists - you're all amazing. We missed you Jess!

Credit - Hans Clausen, Tonic Arts Charity

The Renal Young Adult Support Group had the opportunity to work with Hans Clausen from Tonic Arts in partnership with local artist Fiona Maher to create individual and collective artworks entitled "My Journey". This title was the result of a participant vote.

Fiona specialises in printing. The group worked both at Edinburgh Printmakers and Fiona's personal studio where we got to test our strength using beautiful old roller presses. We got messy with ink as our tutor demonstrated various methods and materials helping us brainstorm, experiment and bring our ideas to life.



Artists: Sharlene and Fiona  
Credit - Nina Howden-Kunkel



Artist: Jess  
Credit - Nina Howden-Kunkel

For more information on Fiona's work,  
visit: [www.theprintstigator.co.uk](http://www.theprintstigator.co.uk)



## Just the Tonic continued...

An unexpected positive of the 12 week project was spending time in a non-hospital environment.

Reflecting, Fiona said:

“Working with this group has been really interesting - they each came with their own stories. It felt amazing to be trusted to help them develop their ideas and concepts which were surprising and totally inspiring. As the project developed - their ideas have become both more refined and complex in their concepts”.

Fiona also noted how in spite of working on individual projects, we supported and encouraged each other throughout - that's teamwork!



Collaborative Collage  
by various artists



Artist: Sharlene



Artist: Hannah



Artist: Rikki



Artist: Sharlene



Artist: Stephen



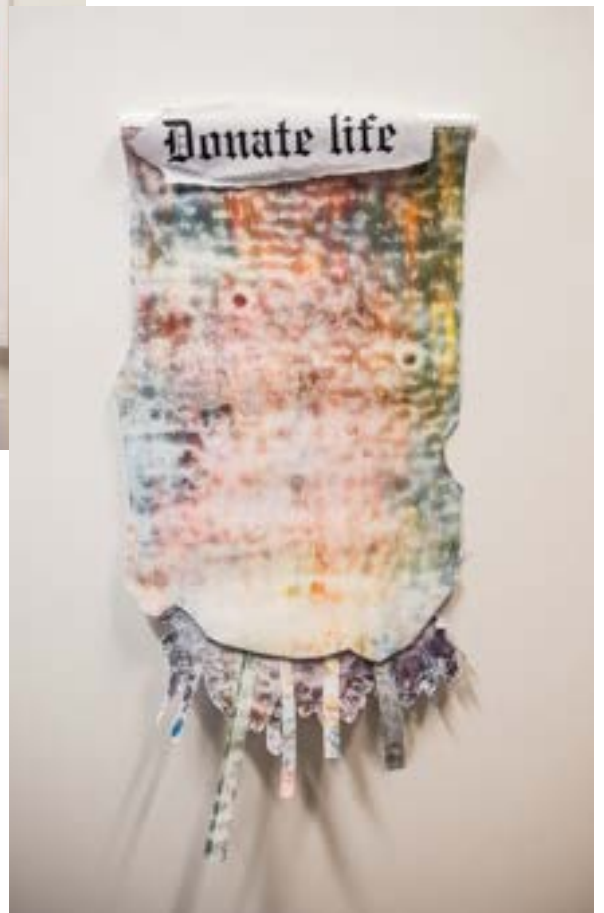
Artist: Stephen



Artist: Jess



Artist: Euan



Artist: Euan

## Let me tell you about the (CKD) birds and the bees

The Young Adult Renal Support Group enjoy lots of fun activities whilst learning how to navigate chronic kidney disease (CKD). We aim to reassure and encourage each other but there are certain subjects that have a higher tendency to be avoided. Not here though! We take an honest, stigma-free approach to topics that can feel awkward or embarrassing when living with CKD. Members recently shared their experiences around libido, menstruation, conception, and intimacy, supported by Renal Consultant Fiona Duthie, who reminded everyone that kidney teams understand these issues and are there to help.

As CKD progresses into stage 4 and beyond, people may notice a reduced interest in sexual activities. It's not unusual for women's periods to be irregular or stop, while men may experience erectile dysfunction (ED) particularly when taking medication for high blood pressure. Low libido, ED, and menstrual changes can stem from toxin build-up, low iron, fluid overload, and sheer exhaustion.

## Let me tell you about the (CKD) birds and the bees

Mental wellbeing plays a huge role too—body image changes from weight fluctuations, dialysis lines, and scars can bring feelings of being overwhelmed, fear, and guilt even after transplant.

Open communication is key. Talk to your partner and your renal team, because there are options to explore. For those in a relationship, your partner often needs reassurance too—they are also navigating this new and changing situation. They may worry about hurting you, accidentally tugging lines or be exhausted from increased responsibilities around the home or extra work hours.

A joint appointment with your renal doctor can help both of you understand why these changes are happening and what support is available. After a transplant, most sexual-function issues gradually improve as the body recovers.

## Pregnancy and what the men should know

If you are thinking about pregnancy at any stage of CKD it's imperative to bring this up with your renal doctors early on because of the additional strain it puts on the kidneys. Doctors strongly advise using contraception and avoiding pregnancy whilst on dialysis.

Dialysis and pregnancy are both tough on the body, combined they can cause serious risks for both mother and baby including miscarriage. If pregnancy does happen, contact your consultant immediately, even if you're not on dialysis and your team will go through what this type of high risk pregnancy will entail.

Men also need to consider their health in the six months before conception, as this directly affects sperm quality, success of conception and pregnancy outcomes. After a transplant, it's advised to wait a few months before the undies get whipped off for sexy times! There's no rush. Go with what suits you and take things slow.

### Protection

Those planning a pregnancy should typically wait a year for healing, stabilisation of the kidney, and adjustment of immunosuppressants. Some anti-rejection drugs can harm sperm or developing pregnancies, so early communication with your team is important.

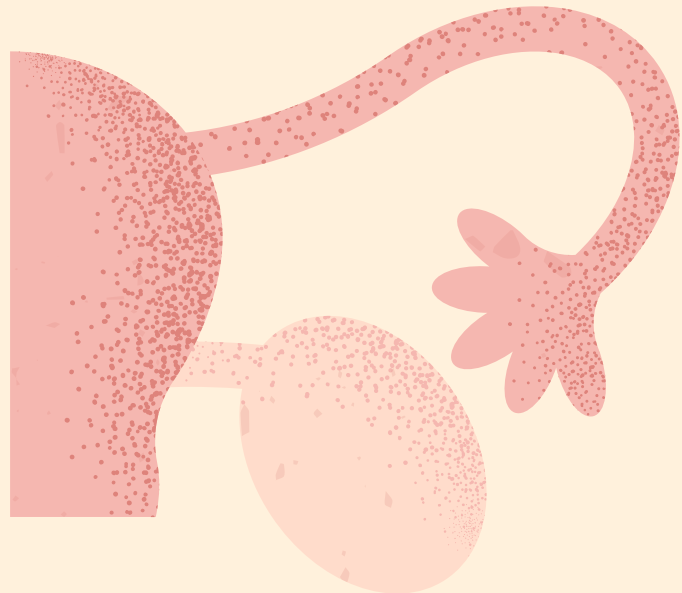
Doctors are super knowledgeable about planning a pregnancy with a transplant. Both male and female transplant recipients may need to take different medications for 3-6 months before conception. This is why contraception is vital. Many forms of contraception containing oestrogen aren't suitable due to clot and cancer risks post transplant.

## Biological Clock

The unpredictability of when a transplant will occur combined with the required healing times, frequently causes concerns about the biological clock.

Fertility can be assessed through Obstetrics and Gynecology, and options like IVF, egg freezing, surrogacy, and adoption can be explored, although they generally have to be self-funded. Many women, including transplant recipients, have healthy pregnancies into their 40s.

Although these topics can feel daunting, no one is alone and there is support. Talking openly helps reduce stigma and opens the door to further conversations around dating, disclosure, and body image. Chronic illness affects many areas of life, by acknowledging this we can feel validated and reassured.





**Tell us what you think  
of the newsletter**



Something you like?

Something you don't like?

Please scan this QR code with your  
phone.  
It'll take you to an anonymous  
online survey.

# Upcoming events

2026

**MAR**  
**25**

## **GUEST SPEAKER**

Volunteer Guest Speaker Paul Barclay from TCV, Seminar Room OPD4

**MAY**  
**27**

## **BAKE OFF**

The Great Scottish Kidney Kitchen Bake Off with guest judge, Seminar Room OPD4.

**JUL**  
**29**

## **LIVED EXPERIENCE**

Lived experience talk with a patient and her family, Seminar Room OPD4.

**SEP**  
**4-7**

## **RESIDENTIAL WEEKEND**

Kidney Care UK Residential Weekend to Mount Cook, Derbyshire.

**SEP**  
**30**

## **PEER SUPPORT GROUP**

Update on the Residential Weekend and picture show, Seminar Room OPD4.

**OCT**  
**28**

## **HALLOWEEN WALK**

Spooky lantern walk led by Ranger Lou Evans. Meet at RIE.

**DEC**  
**2**

## **CHRISTMAS SHENANIGANS**

Christmas catch-up. Fun and nibbles to be had, Seminar Room OPD4.

Look out for the Youth Scotland Awards

Sharlene will send more information once details have been confirmed



## ABOUT ME

We know that living with chronic kidney disease (CKD) looks different for everyone. We want to help others understand what it's like to live with this condition while getting to know you a bit better.

We'd love for you to be included in our **About me** section of the Renal Young Adult Newsletter. Please write up to 150 words and send this with a photo of your choice to: [Sharlene.Taylor@nhs.scot](mailto:Sharlene.Taylor@nhs.scot).

Here are some suggestions on what you might want to share:

What's your goal for this year?

What hobbies do you have?  
How did you get into that hobby?

Is there anything you find more difficult to do living with CKD?

Have you found any groups or resources helpful?  
What are they?

What's one bit of advice about CKD that you'd share?

Is there a skill you'd like to learn? If so, what is it and why?

An activity or event you enjoyed as part of the Renal Young Adult Support Group

Any financial support you have received and how you found the process

What your normal routine looks like – studies, work, volunteering