



Specialist Personality Disorder and Complex Needs Service User Network

Who we are

The Specialist Personality Disorder and Complex Needs Service User Network (SUN) is open to adults who live in Essex who have a formal diagnosis of Personality Disorder and/or have complex emotional needs that may meet diagnostic criteria. We help to deliver peer-led support and promote staying well in the community, and collaboration with service users and carers.

Membership is voluntary. Members can get involved as much or as little as they like.

What we do

We run several groups which:

- Offer a space for learning and growth.
- Foster connection and support with people who may be in a similar position.
- Increase understanding of Personality Disorder and associated difficulties.
- Create opportunities for supported engagement and meaningful involvement.

Our groups complement the tailored clinical care and support that people are receiving from elsewhere, or to provide light touch support for those who are generally coping but would like to learn more about their diagnosis and skills to manage it.

They are not clinical or therapy groups. They do not include care co-ordination, risk management or 1:1 support. Groups are not a substitute for clinical intervention.

Expressions of interest, rather than referrals, are invited to reflect this.

Regretfully, EPUT staff are unable to join the SUN Support Groups (excluding the Service Development Collaborative).

What groups do we run?

Personality Disorder and CompNeeds Awareness & Support Group (21+)
Young Adult Complex Emotional Needs Awareness & Support Group (18+)

These groups run fortnightly online on MS Teams. Guest speakers deliver talks on different topics such as services available within the community, benefits and employment, emotions, advocacy, sleep hygiene, practical activities, etc. Members usually suggest topics and we tailor sessions to their needs. Members are encouraged to share their own experience and knowledge

Note: Members of the young adult group can stay until they are 25, depending on individual circumstances.

How to join: A health and care professional must complete an expression of interest form, and send it to: epunft.pd.cnsun@nhs.net

Peer Support Group (18+)

This group runs weekly online on MS Teams. It is led by members, who are invited to share how they are feeling and support each other through their lived and learned experience. This group has a limit of 12 service users, who will meet for a maximum of 12 months. This means there may be a waiting list.

How to join: The service user must complete an expression of interest form, and send it to: epunft.pd.cnsun@nhs.net

Personality Disorder and Complex Needs Service Development Collaborative (SDC) (18+)

The SDC offers people the opportunity to work alongside staff and be more actively involved in shaping and developing services, using their lived experience to make positive change. This could include contributing thoughts and ideas to a specific project, interviewing for new staff, co-delivering training, and being a Peer Support Worker.

How to join: The service user, or a health and care professional, can email epunft.pd.cnsun@nhs.net

I Care: Supporting adult carers of loved ones living with Personality Disorder and Complex Emotional Needs

The group is for carers and loved ones to meet other people in a similar situation and offer support to each other through sharing their experiences and resources, and by simply listening. It meets on the first Tuesday of the month online on MS Teams. It is open to people who are aged 18+, are registered with a GP in Essex, and caring for a loved one who has a formal diagnosis of Personality Disorder and/or have complex emotional needs that meet diagnostic criteria for a Personality Disorder.

How to join: The carer must complete an expression of interest form and send it to: epunft.pd.cnsuncarers@nhs.net

Skills for Carers

This 7-week training programme helps carers to learn more about Personality Disorder and skills to support themselves and their loved ones. It is open to any carer who is registered with a GP in Essex, and caring for a loved one who has a formal diagnosis of Personality Disorder and/or have complex emotional needs that meet diagnostic criteria for a Personality Disorder. Sessions are face-to-face.

How to join: The carer must complete an expression of interest form and send it to: epunft.pd.cnsuncarers@nhs.net

Coffee and Connect social group

You need to be a member of another SUN group to attend. Coffee and Connect offers a welcoming space for informal, supportive conversations with others who share similar diagnoses and experiences. It aims to reduce isolation and foster a sense of community and support. Groups are held face-to-face in Colchester, Epping and Southend. We plan to hold more at other locations across Essex.

Is the SUN right for me/my service user?

Our groups may benefit people who:

- Have had a recent Personality Disorder diagnosis or are undergoing assessment for a potential diagnosis.
- Are exploring a potential diagnosis and 'working out' what is going on for them.
- Have finished a tailored intervention (eg. STEPPS or DBT).
- Are receiving 1:1 therapy and/or have been accessing secondary mental health services for a period of time and their risk is being managed within these teams.
- No longer require secondary mental health services but would benefit from light touch continued support, in addition to that which is offered by their GP or PCN.

Our groups might be considered inappropriate when someone:

- Does not meet diagnostic criteria for Personality Disorder.
- Is experiencing active psychosis and/or another psychotic disorder.
- Expresses risk which is not being managed within community mental health services.
- Is currently an inpatient.
- Has experienced a life event which is influencing their current presentation, eg. loss, divorce, parenting challenges, etc., and would benefit from a service that can help with those specific circumstances.

If you are unsure, you can always reach out to discuss individual cases at epunft.pd.cnsun@nhs.net

Who can join a SUN group?

Service users aged 18+ within Essex who have a formal diagnosis of Personality Disorder and/or have complex emotional needs that may meet diagnostic criteria. Service users without a diagnosis must display at least 4-5 traits of personality disorder, which may include:

- Intense anger and difficulty managing this.
- Mood instability (rapid mood changes, intensity of emotion disproportionate to trigger).
- Feelings of emptiness.
- Lack of identity (confusion as to who they are, goals, beliefs etc.,)
- Dissociation, or paranoia when stressed (feelings of unreality and/or detachment)
- Frantic efforts to avoid abandonment (behaviours to avoid abandonment, often without evidence).
- Thoughts of self-harm and/or suicide. If current self-harm or suicidal behaviour is present they must be under the care of a service which can support risk management.
- Impulsivity in other areas.
- Unstable and intense relationships (often alternating between love and hate)

The above criteria does not apply to families and carers.

What happens after we receive an expression of interest?

If we accept an individual onto a group, we will send them an invitation by email. They will need to opt-in to join and be added to a mailing list. They will be asked to sign a group agreement form. We will hold their information on a database. If they opt in, we keep a register of attendance. If they miss 3 sessions in a row, we will make contact to check if they want to stay involved and remain on our mailing list. If there are reasons preventing them from taking part in groups, we can provide signposting support where possible. We will remove their data if they do not want to be involved or we do not hear back after 2 weeks.

There is an option to opt back in at any point after they have been removed without completing a new form. We do not routinely add notes to clinical records. We encourage and empower all members to refer to support available from GPs, local crisis services, 111, and a wide range of support services and resources listed on our group forum that others have found to be useful. If we have a significant concern about an individual, we will raise this with the necessary parties. If you require any information about how or if a service user is engaged in the SUN, you can raise this with the team. Please direct any questions or queries to

epunft.pd.cnsun@nhs.net