

Description

Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Sophie Grace Peachey-Rayner

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The midwifery community is mourning the loss of an inspiring and trailblazing colleague, Sophie Peachey-Rayner. Sophie was a passionate and driven student midwife whose influence reached far beyond her own studies. She combined her personal experience as an autistic student midwife with extraordinary determination to create lasting change for the profession.

> Sophie's commitment to improving the lives of others was evident in every project she touched.

Although Sophie was unable to complete her MSci Midwifery with Leadership programme, she will be posthumously awarded her BSc (Hons) in Healthcare from the University of Leicester. This recognition is a testament to her hard work, her academic excellence and the immense contribution she made during her time as a student midwife. Before stepping away from her midwifery course, she had facilitated 26 births and supported countless families through their journeys. Those families will carry her care with them, a living testament to her skill, compassion and dedication to midwifery.

Sophie's commitment to improving the lives of others was evident in every project she touched. She co-authored pioneering articles in The Practising Midwife, which spotlighted the experiences of neurodivergent student midwives and offered vital recommendations for inclusive education. She went on to collaborate on a piece spotlighting the necessity to providing sensitive antenatal care for autistic women and birthing people, an influential piece that challenged services to honour autistic people's human rights and adapt maternity care to their needs. These were not just words on a page; they ignited important conversations across the UK about neurodiversity in midwifery and the responsibility of educators and practitioners to dismantle barriers.

Sophie also made a lasting mark within the Royal College of Midwives. She was one of the authors of the Neurodiversity in the Workplace i-learn module, where she shared her experience in a talking-head video to support others navigating midwifery education and practice. She also contributed to the RCM's Neurodivergence Acceptance Toolkit, working as part of the stakeholder group to help shape resources that continue to influence policy and practice.

> Sophie's reflections on being an autistic student midwife, honest about both challenges and strengths, were a source of inspiration for many.

Her dedication extended into research and innovation. She won the prestigious 2022 Iolanthe Student Award and was accepted into the highly competitive 150 Leaders programme with the Council of Deans of Health. She also secured a Wellcome Trust Biomedical Vacation Scholarship with Wellbeing of Women, during which she completed data collection

for the Optimal Intervals Study. She helped develop the protocol to chart breech specialist midwives, clinics and teams across the UK, contributing to essential research with direct implications for practice.

Her colleagues and peers remember her as a person of immense vision, always brimming with ambitious projects, always striving to make a difference. She brought courage, empathy and authenticity to her work, qualities that resonated deeply within the neurodivergent midwifery community. Sophie's reflections on being an autistic student midwife, honest about both challenges and strengths, were a source of inspiration for many. She showed us that autism is not a deficit but a difference, one that can bring unique strengths such as deep focus, hyper-empathy and creativity to the practice of midwifery.

Sophie's impact will continue to be felt in classrooms, on placements and in maternity services. For those of us continuing the work she championed, her voice remains with us: urging us to listen, to adapt and to ensure that every neurodivergent student, midwife and service user is given the support they need to thrive.

> The midwifery profession is stronger because of Sophie, and her memory will continue to inspire progress in the years to come.

The loss of Sophie is deeply felt. Yet, alongside our grief, we hold immense gratitude for the contributions she made. She changed the conversation around neurodiversity in midwifery and lit a path forward for others to follow. She leaves behind a legacy of passion, advocacy and hope. She will be remembered with admiration and love by her family, friends and all who had the privilege to know her or learn from her work. The midwifery profession is stronger because of Sophie, and her memory will continue to inspire progress in the years to come. **TSM**

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