

From Surviving to Thriving: ABIL 2025 Conference and AGM

*Radika Barber
Sajida Alam*

On 9 July 2025, the London office of Irwin Mitchell hosted the ABIL (Acquired Brain Injury Forum for London) AGM and Conference under the theme “From Surviving to Thriving.” This year’s event brought together survivors, clinicians, legal professionals, educators, and innovators to explore the multifaceted journey of living with brain injury—and the profound importance of human connection in that journey.

A Person-Centered Agenda

The afternoon opened with a warm welcome from **Sarah Griggs**, Chair of ABIL, setting the tone for a day rooted in compassion and collaboration. The agenda featured a mix of medical knowledge, real-life experiences, and new technology.

- **Frank Chege**, Patient Liaison Nurse with London’s Air Ambulance, delivered a powerful talk on “Bringing the Emergency Department to the Roadside,” highlighting how early interventions impact long-term outcomes.
- **Laura Boubert, Navodya Henadheera, and Sharon Dunbar** of the University of Westminster delivered a presentation entitled “The Importance of Bringing Lived Experience of ABI Expertise in Education,” highlighting how incorporating survivor perspectives can influence curricular development and enhance empathy among emerging professionals.
- **Ellis and Luke Parry**, co-founders of Neumind, presented on “From Hospital to Home,” showcasing their digital platform to support cognitive rehabilitation and independence.
- **Alyson Norman and Alex Bigham**, of UKABIF, presented the findings from the latest report titled “The Cost to the UK Economy of Acquired Brain Injury” showing that brain injury costs the UK economy a staggering £43 billion each year.

AGM

Each year ABIL are required to hold an AGM, which takes place prior to the conference. We said goodbye to our retiring committee members, Su-Lin Yii and Louise Kerr, who have stepped down from the committee this year and we thank them for their dedication and service to ABIL over the years. As required by the constitution, our Vice Chair, Eky Popat also retired, but was re-elected as Vice Chair of ABIL. Also formally elected to the committee, were the previously co-opted members; Dr Laura Boubert and Dr Katie Byard – who have both already made very meaningful contributions to ABIL.

Compassion in Crisis (Frank Chege and the Role of Air Ambulance Services)

As the first speaker, Frank offered a compelling insight into the world of emergency medicine, where every second counts and split-second decisions can mean the difference between life and death. Drawing from his own journey and experiences in the field, he spoke candidly about the challenges he has faced and how they have shaped his approach to care and resilience.

He emphasised the guiding philosophy of air ambulance teams: to “bring the hospital to the patient.” This approach ensures that critical care begins at the scene, not after arrival at the hospital. Beyond the clinical urgency, Frank highlighted the deeply human side of his work. In moments of crisis, paramedics and nurses are not only medical professionals, they are also the vital link between patients and their families.

He shared how, in the most tragic circumstances, the team strives to ensure that no one spends their final moments among strangers. When a patient’s condition is beyond saving, the priority becomes reuniting them with loved ones, so their final moments can be spent in the comfort of family. The empathy shown by medical professionals during such challenging times leaves a lasting impression on families, who recall every word and gesture.

Frank’s message was clear: the role of nurses and paramedics extends far beyond medical intervention. They are the human touch in life’s most vulnerable moments, and their empathy is remembered long after the emergency has passed.



The Power of Lived Experience (Laura Boubert, Navodya Henadheera, and Sharon Dunbar)

Central to the conference was the recognition that lived experience is not just valuable - it is essential. The University of Westminster’s co-creation project involved survivors in the classroom as educators rather than as subjects of study. Panel discussions, small groups, and interviews gave students insight into ABI’s cognitive, emotional, and social effects. As one student reflected, *“It humanised everything we’ve learned. It made it real.”*



- Early access to specialist rehabilitation was highlighted as a critical factor in reducing long-term costs and improving outcomes

A Call to Action

The Conference was more than a series of presentations—it was a call to action. It urged attendees to:

- Recognise the invisible and lasting impacts of brain injury.
- Consider the role of empathy, personal interaction, and real-life experience in education, healthcare, and policy development.
- Appreciate the necessity of lived experience in all matters ABI.

The event concluded with networking and refreshments, bringing likeminded professionals in the brain injury community together.

