NHS
National Institute for Health Research

NIHR School for Social Care Research

Support planning

Outline of a research project funded by the NIHR School for Social Care Research

Improving the evidence base for adult social care practice

What are the most effective ways to carry out support planning with different groups of older and disabled people with personal budgets?

Not all personal budget holders are in a position to make all the decisions about their budget by themselves. For instance, people with cognitive impairments, those who are unused to social care, and service users with large support packages may need particular support to exercise the autonomy and control that personal budgets have been designed to provide. This type of specialist support planning may be carried out by local authorities, but is increasingly on offer from user-led organisations and voluntary and community bodies.

It is crucial that these support planning mechanisms ensure personal budget holders and carers have clearly informed choices so that they are in control of care packages that successfully meet their needs. Yet there is only limited understanding of the differences in the range and nature of the support planning provided by various types of organisations, and insufficient evidence of what works best for different groups of personal budget holders, including those from BME backgrounds.

This project

- will deliver a practical understanding of effective support planning for different groups of older and disabled people with personal budgets.

It aims to

- examine different models of independent support planning provided by user-led organisations, and voluntary and community-based support bodies
- identify the circumstances in which particular features work well for users and carers
- gain a theoretical and practical understanding of peer identity and the facilitation of choice in support planning, so that different groups of personal budget users are in control of their own plans
- identify how support planning can be sensitive to the cultural and language needs of BME communities
- provide tools to enable the development of support planning.

WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

Social care policy in England offers citizens the opportunity to 'shape their own lives and the services they receive'. To this end, the government is aiming for one million people to be in receipt of personal budgets by 2013. However, recent work has demonstrated that some personal budget holders need particular support in order to benefit from the choice and control provided by personal budgets. This includes people with cognitive impairments, those with large support packages, individuals new to social care, and those with basic skills needs or from BME backgrounds.

The role of support planners is central in situations where personal budget holders require assistance to manage their budgets. If personalisation is to make a difference, then it is important that these personal budget holders experience choice and control, both in the process and outcomes of support planning. This will improve outcomes, resulting in greater community inclusion and participation.

It is therefore important to identify the elements in support planning which best match the requirements of different users. Support planning has to be delivered in a differentiated way which is sensitive to people's needs and circumstances (not just their impairment). Carers also need good information and support.

Previous research for the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) compared support planning by local authorities with that of user-led organisations (ULOs). This work demonstrated that support planning by local authorities often becomes confused with assessment and resource allocation, and that independent sources of support planning are vital.

The current project therefore focuses on support planning delivered by ULOs and that provided by voluntary and community organisations (VCOs). However, it will also investigate how independent support planning fits in with local authority processes, including resource allocation and validation of support plans.

Models of ULO support arguably depend on: identification with a peer group; an understanding of the societal barriers faced by the disabled; and increased self-determination through exposure to role models and peer support. By contrast, support planning by VCOs might provide a source of expertise (such as on dementia, from the Alzheimer's Society), or an understanding of specific cultural issues (from BME community groups). In practice, these models can be mixed. It is thus important to unravel the precise factors which deliver effective support planning, and the circumstances in which those factors are relevant.

Successful support planning

Issues that matter to personal budget holders and their carers include:

- peer support
- information sensitive to culture and language
- specialist knowledge
- partnership with carers
- outcomes

Any support plan must be put into practice. It is therefore necessary also to explore the boundaries and commonalities between support planning and the 'brokerage' involved in arranging the support package.

It appears likely that for personal budgets to deliver the full values of personalisation, major changes will be needed in the attitudes, perceptions and communication skills of support planners and brokers, as well as structural changes.

HOW WILL THE PROJECT WORK?

This project will complement and build on earlier ODI research. It will use observational research to gain a qualitative, practice-related understanding of the actual process of support planning as carried out by ULOs and VCOs. The work specifically covers groups that were under-represented in the ODI research, including those with cognitive impairments, mental health needs or from BME communities. The overall perspective is that of disabled people themselves, both within the research team and through an advisory group. The role of carers in support planning will be included.

The project will select two models of independent support planning led by ULOs, and two led by (or including) VCOs. It will recruit 8 service users in each of the four organisations (32 in total), and includes both rural and urban sites. Participants will all be completing their support plan with assistance from either a ULO or a VCO.

STAGE 1: Professional perspectives

Workshop-style focus groups will collect the viewpoints of support planners and hands-on local authority social work staff. This phase aims to identify the key organisational themes of the four selected ULO and VCO models, and to understand the constraints and solutions involved in working within the social care system. The practices involved in assessment, support planning and validation will be discussed in joint sessions with participants, as these processes tend to pass between support planners and local authorities. The common parts of the workshops will also consider participants' shared goals and visions, and perceptions of what constitutes successful practice as well as barriers. Separate break-out groups will explore the differing viewpoints of the two groups on these issues, including the problems support planners' face on validation and eligibility.

STAGE 2: Support planning in practice

The goal for this stage is to collect in-depth, observational data, which are as 'close' as possible to the support planning process. A three-stage approach will be adopted that allows researchers to build trust by engaging personally with each participant through: a preparatory meeting shortly after the self-assessment process; an observation (or audio-recording) of a support planning meeting; and a reflective interview to discuss the wider process of support planning and to explore the user's view of the timeliness, sensitivity, information and empathy of the support planner and the level of satisfaction with the outcomes of the support plan.

STAGE 3: Support planning in review

After a three month period, the project will host separate focus groups for service users/carers and support planners/local authority staff to explore:

- from the point of view of personal budget holders and their carers, the factors which were problematic
- from the support planners' and local authority points of view, the factors in the organisation of support planning which helped and hindered the process.

Personal budget holders will also be able to review how the support plan was implemented and how it has affected their lives. The project team will visit participants lacking the capacity to take part in focus groups. For all participants, a printed questionnaire will follow up on the focus groups to collect personal responses to issues raised.

STAGE 4: Analysis

The analysis will provide a narrative of the lives of the 32 participants, covering the experience of the process and outcomes of support planning. This will identify both the differences between ULO and VCO support planning, and the features which are important to services users in particular circumstances. Audio data from the various focus groups discussions (both professionals and service users) will be analysed to identify the themes and issues of different viewpoints, the participants' interactional strategies and practices in support planning, and outcomes.

Project publications

Dissemination will start during the project itself. Three newsletters, reflecting emerging findings and models of practice, will be distributed to staff and participants in the project. Interim and final findings will be widely circulated through a network of organisations representing user groups and other stakeholders. Theoretical papers and findings will be submitted to journals such as *Disability and Society* and the *Journal for Integrated Care*. Practical summaries of findings for support planners and organisations, and a user-friendly guide to support planning for service users will be produced. All outputs will be disseminated via a final seminar.

HOW DOES THE PROJECT FIT THE AIMS OF THE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH?

This study will help senior managers at local authority level who need to ensure that a full range of choices is available to personal budget holders to develop their support plans. Practical strategies for the good facilitation of support planning will influence local and national development of support planners within user-led organisations and voluntary and community bodies. It will result in a better trained work-force who understand the key elements of the support planning role.

The project will provide differentiated evidence for support planners who are delivering personalised support planning to different types of service users. The findings will be of central relevance to the policy of personalisation, presenting the voices of a wide range of service users and carers and this should contribute to shaping practice and policy. All this will result in better outcomes for service users and their carers .

The research also aims to influence national social care policy makers; it is in line with the drive towards delivering cost neutral social care, by means of maximising the use of ordinary community resources.

The NIHR School for Social Care Research

The School for Social Care Research was set up by the National Institute for Health Research to develop and improve the evidence base for adult social care practice in England. It officially launched on 1 May 2009 with funding of £15 million over five years.

The School conducts and commissions high-quality research across five overlapping programme areas:

Prevention and reduction – How can we best prevent or reduce the development or exacerbation of the circumstances that lead to the need for social care?

Empowerment and safeguarding – How can we best empower and safeguard people who use social care services?

Care and work – How can we best equip and support people – practitioners, volunteers, informal carers – to provide optimum social care? How can we ensure that people who use social care and their carers are enabled and supported in paid work and other types of meaningful activity?

Service interventions, commissioning and change – What interventions, commissioning and delivery arrangements best achieve social care outcomes?

Resources and interfaces – How can social care and other public resources best be deployed and combined to achieve social care outcomes?

Further information about the NIHR School for Social Care Research is available at www.sscr.nihr.ac.uk

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