



IMPACT

Improving Adult Care Together

IMPACT is the **UK centre for implementing evidence in adult social care**, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Health Foundation.

It is an **implementation centre** not a research centre – helping to get evidence of what works used in practice to make a difference to adult social care services and to people's lives.

In identifying 'what works', IMPACT draws on knowledge from different types of **research**, the **lived experience** of people who draw on care and support and carers, and the **practice knowledge** of social care staff.

Case study 1 - Family Group Decision Making to support people with drug and alcohol issues

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) (sometimes known as Family Group Conferencing or FGC) is a supported way of bringing a person's family, friends, and/or network together. A meeting is arranged by the group to discuss a problem the person is facing or a decision that needs to be made. This way of working means power is held more by the person and their network, offers an inclusive approach in which people can plan for their care and support on their terms, and can mobilise the strengths and resources that may potentially exist within people's family and social networks.

FGDM is well established in children's services, but less so in adult social care. However, evidence suggests that it can work for all adult groups, with possible impacts such as people feeling more in control of their care planning, increased commitment from families/networks, and starting to calm family dynamics.

To support the more general development and extension of FGC, a programme of research has been commissioned by NIHR, with the majority of studies focusing on FGC in children's services. The main [project](#) to consider the implications of FGC in adult services is led by Prof. Jerry Tew at the University of Birmingham along with partners such as the University of Edinburgh, LSE, Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, Cardiff University and Community Catalysts CIC.

The Edinburgh Family Group Decision Making team currently sit within children's services in the Local Authority. In November 2023 the Edinburgh Alcohol & Drug Partnership (EADP) funded a 3-year pilot to offer Family Group Decision Making to adults, and family networks, affected by drug and alcohol use, placing an emphasis on a whole family approach. This IMPACT 'Facilitator' project is building on the evidence from children's services and from previous and current research; gathering experiences from people who have used, referred to, or provided FGDM; and using these insights to co-produce materials to share with others to increase awareness of and referrals to the project. The project means that insights from the research can be directly implemented in practice, so that future services are more evidence-informed, and so that FGDM locally and beyond has as much of an impact as possible.

The IMPACT 'Facilitator' is a social worker with a background in child protection and criminal justice, and has previously been a care worker for disabled adults and worked for a crisis helpline. She is working 50% fte for 12 months in the City Council, helping to draw down insights from the evidence and supporting practical changes in local policy and services.

In Scotland, national drug and alcohol strategy reflects the need for services, as part of their wider commitment to recovery, to take a family-inclusive approach. This project hopes to:

- Promote the use of FGDM in drug and alcohol services, with the goal of it becoming embedded in policy and practice locally and nationally
- Actively promote a whole family approach
- Increase the number of referrals received from adult drug and alcohol services
- Ensure that policy and practice is informed by evidence of what works – including insights from research, lived experience and practice knowledge

This links to SSCR priorities around adult social care needs and prevention; communities and local networks; and diversity, inequality and communities.

For more details, see <https://impact.bham.ac.uk/our-projects/facilitators/family-group-decision-making-to-support-people-with-drug-and-alcohol-issues/>.



Case study 2 - People with learning disabilities and/or autistic people leaving long-stay hospitals

Some 2,000 people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people are patients in hospital and secure settings, often for many years with no sense of when they might be able to leave. Despite lots of policy pledges to end this situation, progress has been painfully slow. Funded by the NIHR HSDR and SSCR programmes, the '[Why are we stuck in hospital](#)' project looked at ways to support more people to leave hospital and lead more ordinary lives in the community. In particular, the study drew on the lived experience of people in hospital and their families, as well as the

practice knowledge of health and social care staff. Alongside the final research report, it produced a national policy guide, sent to every health and social care leader in the country, based on 'ten top tips' from people, families and staff. This was accompanied by a free training video, more accessible versions of the guide and videos for people and families, and an [art exhibition and billboard campaign](#) to promote more of a public debate.

SSCR has since commissioned a follow-up study – 'What happens next?' – to explore how quality of life, community connections and service use change after hospital, and what sorts of support help people lead their chosen lives.

After the initial research, a UK-wide IMPACT 'Network' took the 'ten top tips' and helped a series of local and national participants to translate these insights into direct practice. Network members included BILD, St Andrews Healthcare, the Compass Advocacy Network (Northern Ireland), InControl Scotland and MacIntyre (Wales), with each group meeting locally to take forward an agreed action plan, as well as sharing learning with each other and nationally. Actions included work to build the ten top tips into local processes, paperwork and policies, as well as ongoing joint work across Network members to launch an awareness-raising campaign across the four nations. This is based on four key messages identified during Network meetings:

- Human rights violations have, and continue to occur in long-stay hospital settings
- The human impact on people's lives and their families
- The importance of language when talking about 'patients' in hospital
- Sharing examples of good practice alternatives to ineffective ways of working

One of the outputs was a [video](#) facilitated by the Restraint Reduction Network and the British Institute of Learning Disabilities in collaboration with Network members from across the four nations, to highlight the human cost of missed opportunities – launched at a national online webinar with over 450 people in attendance, and inputs from people with lived experience, IMPACT and the British Institute of Human Rights.

This links to SSCR priorities such as supporting choice and control for people to live flourishing lives; care systems and markets; and adult social care at the interface with other systems.

For more details, see <https://impact.bham.ac.uk/our-projects/networks/learning-disability-autistic-long-stay/>.

Case study 3 - Social work with older people

Social workers supporting adults spend the bulk of their time with older people, yet we know very little about what workers actually do, what they're good at and the difference they make. In settings such as children's services, previous research has spent in-depth time alongside front-line staff, observing what actually happens in practice and shedding light on the realities of social work.

Commissioned by SSCR, the '[Social work with older people](#)' project followed social workers across two local authorities between Autumn 2022 and Spring 2023. The research team conducted observations and interviews with social workers, older people, carers and other professionals, and looked at records. They asked: what do social workers do; what impact do they have; and how does their context affect their work?

The research demonstrated the [positive difference](#) that social workers make to the lives of older people, carers and families – ensuring that older people came home from hospital with support to manage risk and received dignified care; that families had advice and reassurance when planning or paying for care and therapeutic support when faced with huge life changes; and that rights were upheld, including older people being protected from financial abuse or loss of liberty when they were unable to make decisions themselves. The research also led to recommendations about how social workers can be supported, developed and deployed so that they are able to do more of what older people and families value.

The original study included a series of [resources](#) created by the research team in conjunction with partners such as BASW and Research in Practice. The resources include a practice tool and practice briefing, a policy briefing, podcasts, reports and animations for others wanting to work on these issues. Lots of research projects produce helpful resources, but this only goes so far unless there's support and a mechanism by which the resources can be shared and used in practice.

Following their involvement in the research, Walsall Council applied to host an IMPACT 'Demonstrator' to support the implementation of the findings in practice. This 'Demonstrator' project is supporting the local authority to explore different ways of working so that social workers can have more time for relationship-based work and deliver better outcomes for older people across Walsall. The project started in early 2025, and with the support of an IMPACT Strategic Improvement Coach, it has drawn on insights from people who draw on care and support, carers, social workers, service leaders and colleagues in commissioning and health to identify three improvement priorities:

- Adopting a named social worker approach for older people with complex needs
- Linking carer's needs assessments with older person's needs assessment
- Improving processes, systems and communication

Walsall Council will develop small-scale pilot projects in these areas which will be underpinned by the establishment of an older people coproduction group and the design and delivery of workforce development initiatives.

This links to SSCR priorities around the adult social care workforce; care resources management and allocation; and supporting carers.

For more details, see <https://impact.bham.ac.uk/our-projects/demonstrators/social-work-with-older-people/>.

