

# Identifying what good care and support looks like for people with complex needs

**This insightful study is finding that people want a key worker who understands complex systems and can liaise with housing, employment and education, pulling packages together across boundaries and funding streams.**

People with complex and severe needs make up a relatively small proportion of adult social care users, but their numbers are gradually increasing. And meeting their needs is expensive and challenging because of the multiple agencies likely to be involved.

But despite the fact that they often need personalised and specialist support, they are in danger of being left out of the personalisation agenda that is taking hold of adult social care, comments Caroline Glendinning, Professor of Social Policy at the University of York.

'An earlier study by the Commission for Social Care Inspection found that the processes set up by local authorities are not always suitable for people with severe and complex needs,' she explains.

That understanding was the prompt for a research project that has just been completed. 'There's a lot of talk about personalising support, but not much in the way of firm evidence on how to go about it,' she says. 'And rather than looking at the bad things, we wanted to focus on what "good" looked like, on the assumption that this would be easier to translate into take-home messages for practice.'

The research team gathered the views of 67 people with complex needs, carers, and members of specialist organisations to find out what made a difference to them on an individual and organisational level, and what they wanted service commissioners to consider.

## **Flexible and responsive services**

The features they valued included some that might seem obvious, such as flexible and responsive services, an holistic approach, and paid carers with good communication skills, but also someone with ongoing responsibility for co-ordinating services and support.

'The key point that people made was that they wanted a key worker – someone experienced who understands complex systems and who can liaise with housing, employment, and education, and pull those packages together across boundaries, including funding streams,' says Professor Glendinning.

Participants, who were drawn from among young adults, adults with brain or spinal injuries, and people with dementia, were also asked to nominate working examples that embodied some of the principles of good practice they had identified, for sharing more widely with practitioners and care providers.



*'If you knew who your point of contact was, that would make it really much easier. Just a simple "this is what I do, this is my number". I think that would be the biggest help in social services. Nothing fancy, just that.'*

Young man with complex needs

And plans are now already afoot to start looking at developing a way of coming up with some realistic costings for some of the good practice examples they highlighted.

An integral part of the project was a comprehensive review of the published research on social care for people with complex needs. But this highlighted a dearth of formal evaluation of the outcomes and costs of services and approaches intended for people with complex needs.

Although it found numerous studies that backed the introduction of personalised approaches to services, including personal

budgets, there was little hard evidence on how well these supported people with complex needs.

#### **Insights into organising services**

The most promising evidence was found for particular ways of organising services, including multidisciplinary specialist teams; intensive case management; specialist social work; and for different groups of professionals training together.

'This was not about the ways in which personal care and other kinds of support are delivered on a day to day basis, but what is needed at organisational level to ensure that the right services are in place,' she says.

**Project:** Care and support for people with complex and severe needs: innovations and practice. A scoping study

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