

Barriers to relocation across local authority boundaries

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



Improving the evidence base for
adult social care practice

What barriers to employment are experienced by disabled people because of the difficulties of relocating across local authority boundaries?

Employment confers a number of potential benefits to workers, including economic and social inclusion. However, there is evidence that disabled people face significant barriers and disadvantages in employment. These barriers appear to be especially acute for disabled people who need or wish to move across local authority boundaries to access work or opportunities for career development.

Difficulties are reported transferring social care support and/or funding across local authority boundaries, and/or accessing disability related adaptations, for example through occupational therapy. In part, these problems arise because of the geographic variations in assessment processes and the application of eligibility criteria, which affect the ease with which social care support or funding can be accessed or transferred. Better awareness is needed among agencies providing social care support of these barriers and examples of how good practice can provide solutions. Proposals in the draft Care and Support Bill to make social care more 'portable' make this a timely project.

This project

- will investigate the barriers and solutions encountered in social care practice by disabled people when moving across local authority areas for employment and education reasons.

It aims to

- identify the barriers to such relocation and the positive strategies which are being used by disabled people and their families to make movement as easy as possible
- explore the experiences and the strategies used by social care practitioners to support the work-related relocation of disabled people, including maximising the portability of social care support and funding
- produce and disseminate information about effective strategies and good practice that disabled people and social care professionals can use to overcome the barriers to work-related relocation
- identify areas for further development and/or research.

Research project outline

WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

UK government policy emphasises the importance of supporting disabled people to access work and remain in employment. In some instances, disabled individuals who receive state-funded care and support need to move home and relocate to a different local authority area in order to pursue employment or career development opportunities. While this is a relatively unexplored area, there is evidence that considerable barriers and difficulties exist for those who wish to exercise their rights to geographic and work-related mobility.

Some of these barriers are not directly attributable to social care practice or policy, but others involve, or are linked to, social care support. There appear to be four types of barriers:

Employment related barriers: The employment disadvantages faced by disabled people include attitudes of employers, reduced access to educational qualifications and work experience, and financial disincentives. Those who have achieved a degree of professional success, may still encounter a 'glass cliff', where they face barriers to career advancement including lack of opportunity, lack of knowledge, time and resources, and lack of support from their employing organisation and colleagues.

Barriers associated with social care and funding: Disabled people who have support needs may encounter difficulties in relocating across local authority boundaries because their care/support services are not portable. These difficulties may, for example, relate to geographic variation in assessment processes and application of eligibility criteria, affecting the ease with which social care support or funding can be accessed or transferred. This can mean that disabled people moving to a new local authority risk receiving reduced funding or care packages. Problems can also arise accessing disability-related adaptations in the home and the workplace, for example through Occupational Therapy and/or work place adjustments related to social care and disability-related needs.

Growing policy awareness

The need for greater portability of social care assessments to ease geographic mobility has been acknowledged as an area for potential development.

The Draft Care and Support Bill presented to parliament in 2012 highlighted the importance of portability and geographical fairness and consistency. The draft Bill sets out new arrangements to ensure that if a person and / or their carer moves location, the new local authority must continue to meet their care and support needs.

Barriers associated with housing: Disabled people face barriers accessing suitable housing, including housing with (or with links to) support. The evidence suggests that disabled people who wish to move may experience significant challenges obtaining appropriate new housing, whether via a local authority, housing association, private rental or purchase. This can make it challenging to access housing or adaptations sufficiently quickly to take up a new job in another area.

Additional barriers: Other significant barriers to relocation for work include limited accessible transport, and new difficulties in meeting the needs of partners and family members, especially those with disabilities.

Finding solutions to these barriers is challenging because it is relatively infrequently that local authorities and social care practitioners are called upon to support individuals to move across local authority boundaries. When support is required, social care professionals may be uncertain, even anxious, about how to support this process.

HOW WILL THE PROJECT WORK?

Researchers will explore the experiences of disabled people receiving publicly funded social care (in the form of services and/or personal budgets) who have relocated across local authority boundaries for employment, or who have sought to make such a move but have encountered insurmountable barriers.

Research project outline

STAGE 1: Scoping review

This is an unexplored area, therefore the literature review underpinning the research will be a scoping study to provide information about the subject, gaps in the evidence base and key concerns that arise in social care practice and for people using social care. The anticipated themes likely to emerge include:

- background and current policy
- barriers associated with social care and social care funding
- social care related housing and equipment
- employment and workplace issues related to social care
- transport and social care
- other barriers and facilitators, such as information.

STAGE 2: Research with disabled people

Interviews will be conducted with 15–20 disabled people who have within the past three years either moved across local authority boundaries for work-related reasons or have actively attempted, but failed, to make such a move. The latter group will include individuals who have secured employment, but who have been unable to secure existing levels of social care provision and/or funding within their new authority. All participants must be, or have been at the time of their decision to relocate, in receipt of social care support and/or funding, including direct payments/personal budgets.

Interviews will cover participants' experiences including: negotiating care packages, funding or personal budgets in a new authority; securing employment and work place adaptations; accessing housing; and transport. Participants will be asked about the support they received or desired from social care practitioners, and what worked well and less well in assessment, support planning, review and monitoring.

STAGE 3: Research with practitioners

Concurrently with Stage 2, research will also be carried out with 15 social care practitioners in three English local authorities. Practitioners will be presented with realistic vignettes (fictional

case studies based on real life accounts) concerning disabled people who wish to move for work. The vignettes will be used to prompt discussion regarding the actions they would take as a social worker or care worker to support such individuals; their experience and knowledge in this area; the difficulties and challenges they anticipate; and the resources and strategies they would employ to address these.

The project will seek to include practitioners who have experience of supporting disabled people to move across local authority boundaries alongside those who may not have such experiences.

STAGE 4: Data analysis and outputs

The interviews with disabled people and social care practitioners will be analysed to identify the key themes and sub-themes within the two sets of data. For practitioners, these will include any gaps in skills or knowledge, plus indications of how personal budgets might be used to create opportunities and flexibility. Draft information produced by the project for disabled people will be reviewed at a focus group of disabled people who did not take part in the research. Similarly draft information for social care practitioners will be discussed with practitioners, including some not previously involved in the research.

The revised drafts and project findings will be presented at a stakeholder event with disabled people's organisations, social care practitioners and other relevant groups.

Project publications

The project will produce: a summary report for all participating individuals and organisations; information for disabled people who wish to move across local authority boundaries for employment; information for social care practitioners; one or more papers for academic, peer reviewed journals; a brief 'Findings' document; a report regarding the methods used within the study; and a brief administrative report. In addition the researchers will present the findings at two conferences for social care practitioners and disability groups.

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

Through this project, barriers and good practice with regard to relocation across local authority boundaries will be identified.

The research findings and information about supportive practice will be disseminated among agencies which provide social care support and information to disabled people, thus also increasing awareness of barriers and good practice. Such increased awareness is expected to reduce barriers and facilitate opportunities to achieve positive outcomes of employment and social participation.

The project findings can be anticipated to help increase the confidence and ability of social care practitioners to offer meaningful, timely and helpful support.

Disabled people will benefit from the advice produced from the findings as it will help them to plan and successfully navigate employment-related relocation.

At present there is no existing practice evidence covering this subject, and the research findings will therefore have the potential to influence the development of social care policy.

The Research Team.

Dave Marsland is a Lecturer in Social Work and Director of the Centre for Applied Research and Evaluation at the University of Hull. Mr Marsland will assume overall responsibility for the project. He will oversee and manage the production of the information produced for disabled people and for social care practitioners.

Caroline White is a Research Associate at the Centre. She will be responsible for a number of activities including the main part of the scoping review; interviewing the research participants; analysing interview data; and working with the steering group to produce information for disabled people and for social care practitioners.

Jill Manthorpe, Professor of Social Work at King's College London, will support the development of the study. She will advise on the conduct of the scoping review, on the selection of research sites, the data collection tool and the interpretation of findings.

Project title:
Relocation, portability and social care practice

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Budget:
£76,534

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