



RESEARCH NEWS 5

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Recent publications, reports and on-going research in the Making Research Count Universities

Making Research Count is a collaborative national research dissemination network based regionally in the social work departments of the Universities of Bedfordshire, Brighton, Central Lancashire (UCLAN), East Anglia (UEA), Keele, King's College London, Northumbria in association with Teesside, Salford, York and The Open University.

All eleven social work departments are actively engaged in research activity, generating research publications, reports and journal articles, as well as in the education of social work professionals, both at qualifying and post-qualifying level. This *RESEARCH NEWS* highlights some recent or current research undertaken in the departments in our network. There are electronic links to the published reports or departmental resources.

Individual Budgets – experiences and implications for practitioners

As part of the Department of Health's pilot programme to implement Individual Budgets (IBs), an evaluation was undertaken which examined different perspectives – including issues for practitioners involved in putting IBs into practice. The evaluation's methods included a randomised control trial examining costs, 1,000 interviews with service users, 130 in-depth interviews with staff, and analysis of support plans for people in receipt of IBs.

The evaluation found that, whilst many frontline care management staff welcomed the aims and introduction of IBs, there were a range of challenges involved in their implementation. The challenges include concerns about managing the potential financial and other risks at the same time as maintaining responsibility for adult safeguarding; the need for more training and support, particularly in support planning and brokerage; and, the significant number of legal and accountability barriers which remained despite the move to IBs.

The evaluation team comprised academics & researchers from the **Universities of York, King's College London**, Kent, Manchester and from the London School of Economics. For further information and reports see: <http://php.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/summs/ibsen.php>

Older People and Well-being (University of Brighton)

The University of Brighton is currently half way through an innovative research project about older people and well-being. The partnership project with Age Concern Brighton, Hove and Portslade has developed a research team of older people, and places older people's experiences at the centre of the project.

A unique aspect of the partnership is the way the project has been able to involve older people directly in the research. The research team now includes ten older volunteer co-researchers who have been working with the researchers to develop the research design and to carry out the research with older people. The project team has presented at a number of conferences and events, and feedback received indicates that the model of participation being developed is a useful example of how involving older people works 'in practice' which could be used in other contexts.

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www.brighton.ac.uk/sass/research/mrc/events_bulletin.htm

Evaluation of Innovations in Mental Health

**Commissioned by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA)
David Pilgrim (UCLan), Helen Cording (UCLan) and Anne Rogers University of Manchester**

This evaluation was completed in late 2009 about lessons learnt across 11 mental health innovation projects commissioned by NESTA in 2007. At the end, the evaluators offered their views about the potential applicability and generalisability of the 11 projects. Transferable lessons imply complex and dynamic formulations about 'good bets' in open systems, which attend to policy drivers (demands), conducive and impeding factors in local systems (the innovations themselves) as well as to supply side forces (in both statutory and non-statutory services) that may enable or impede the prospects of success, when innovations are attempted.

Conducive factors include:

- * External drivers for motivation
- * Determination of innovative individuals
- * Innovation supporters
- * Innovative organisation

Impeding factors include:

- * Limited resources
- * Systemic resistance to change; strength of status quo
- * Poor communication and poor sharing of best practice
- * Lack of links between services
- * Lack of links with academia

www.nesta.org.uk/news_events/articles/assets/features/evaluating_innovations_in_mental_health

Research News 5

SPRING 2010



Rural Social Work: An International Perspective **Richard Pugh (Keele University) and Brian Cheers (University of South Australia)**

The concerns of rural people are marginalised and rural issues are often neglected. This book presents a comprehensive review of international research and provides an accessible introduction to the challenges of rural practice.

The first part of the book focuses upon the diversity of rural contexts, the social dynamics of small communities, and then examines experiences of difference and discrimination in small communities.

The second part turns to the development of rural practice, reviewing different ways of working from casework through to community development, and provides practical suggestions for recruiting and supporting rural practitioners.

www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781861347206

Social Work with Older People **Ann McDonald (UEA)**

Published in January 2010, this book provides a practical guide to working with older people, and discusses the diversity in experiences of ageing across society, and the range of issues which confront older people and those who wish to work proactively with them. Published by Polity; available through John Wiley.
www.polity.co.uk/book.asp?ref=9780745639550

Social Work and Social Policy: an introduction **Jonathan Dickens (UEA)**

In this further book from the Social Work department at UEA, published in November 2009, the author analyses current policies and policy themes relevant to social work, and locates them in the context of fundamental social policy principles and debates. Political and ethical questions about responsibility, rights and 'the good society' are discussed. Published by Routledge.

www.routledge.com/books/Social-Work-and-Social-Policy-isbn9780415454131

Major Centre for Evidence Based Social Work at the University of Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire have succeeded in obtaining a grant of £1.1 million to set up the Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social Care. The Centre is focussed on:

- * Carrying out excellent research into what works in social work and social care
- * Supporting the development of capacity to carry out such research across the UK
- * Working closely with practitioners and agencies on putting findings into practice

The Centre is initially focussing on substance misuse across social care settings, but plans to develop a broader interest in evaluating social work interventions. The Centre is funded to carry out a programme of research about what works in relation to social work and substance misuse, including studies on the use of promising interventions from the substance misuse field in child and family settings. It is already heavily involved in the reform of social services in Wales toward the use of evidence based interventions. In coming months a variety of resources will be made available on the Centre's website: <http://www.beds.ac.uk/goldbergcentre>

If you want to know more about the Centre or be sent occasional updates contact: Donald.Forrester@beds.ac.uk

Linking and Matching: A Survey of Adoption Agency Practice in England and Wales **Cherilyn Dance, Danielle Ouwejan, Jennifer Beecham and Elaine Farmer**

Cherilyn Dance at the **University of Bedfordshire** has been working with colleagues at Universities of Bristol and Kent on a study of Linking and Matching in adoption - part of the DCSF funded Adoption Research Initiative.

Placing children, many of whom have complex needs, with an unrelated adoptive family is one of the most important decisions in child care, and potentially one of the most difficult. The first part of the adoption puzzle has always been how best to make judgements about which families may be right for which children – making a good match. But a “balancing act” of factors must be considered by those responsible for these matches: the needs of the child, avoiding delay, adopters' parenting skills, meeting placement targets, and financial considerations, particularly around inter-agency fees. There is little research to date on how decisions are made about which family to choose for a child, and whether particular practice approaches reduce delay and have better outcomes.

This first stage of a larger research study, 'An Investigation of Family Finding and Matching in Adoption', captures a snapshot of current linking and matching practice, revealing varying costs and outcomes for children, innovative practice and diametrically opposed views about this subject amongst practitioners.

This book is available from British Association for Adopting and Fostering: www.baaf.org.uk.

For the DCSF summary of the research see: www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RBX-16-08.pdf.