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Improving care for people with dementia: development and initial feasibility study for evaluation of life story work in dementia care

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

Improving care for people with dementia

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Plain English summary

Life story work (LSW) is used to support people with dementia to communicate their life stories. Until now there have been no large-scale, rigorous studies of LSW to see whether or not it works and why.

This research involved:

1. searching for existing evidence
2. asking people with dementia, their carers and professionals about LSW and how to do it well
3. two surveys (of service providers and family carers) to find out where LSW is being done and how
4. two small studies to measure the costs and outcomes of LSW, and to see how feasible LSW is to introduce.

We involved people with dementia on our advisory group and worked with partner organisations to make sure we included as many people with dementia as possible in the research.

We identified what good practice might look like and found that many services now use LSW, but not always to inform care. We found some improvements in staff attitudes towards people with dementia in care homes and some improvements in quality of life for some people with dementia, although we had only small numbers in the study.

The cost of delivering LSW was relatively small, and staff felt that doing LSW encouraged interactions with family and helped staff to get to know the person with dementia.

We therefore think that LSW has potential to help people with dementia and that a full study is needed to judge whether or not this is really so.

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