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Gridley, Kate orcid.org/0000-0003-1488-4516, Brooks, Jennifer Carole orcid.org/0000-0001-7735-3718, Birks, Yvonne Frances orcid.org/0000-0002-4235-5307 et al. (2 more authors) (2016) *Improving Care for People with Dementia:development and initial feasibility study for evaluation of life story work in dementia care (final report)*. Health Services and Delivery Research. i-300. ISSN: 2050-4357

<https://doi.org/10.3310/hsdr04230>

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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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Declared competing interests of authors: none

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

Published August 2016

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr04230

Plain English summary

Improving care for people with dementia

Health Services and Delivery Research 2016; Vol. 4: No. 23

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr04230

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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.

Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

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Editorial contact: nihredit@southampton.ac.uk

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The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number 11/2000/11. The contractual start date was in July 2012. The final report began editorial review in April 2015 and was accepted for publication in October 2015. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

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