

Key Achievements

of the Kent Research Partnership

3



Stakeholder Events to
Set Local Priorities

51



'Communities of
Practice' Meetings

4



Media
Appearances

24



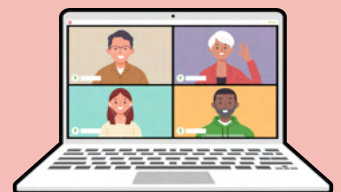
Lived Experience
Group Meetings

3



Awards Received

13



Video-Recorded
Training Sessions

4



Practitioner
Fellowships Funded

65



Talks & Conference
Presentations

£5m



Further
Funding

About the Kent Research Partnership

The Kent Research Partnership is a four-year project which is co-led by the University of Kent and Kent County Council and funded by the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR). It is one of six capacity building, social care partnerships funded by the NIHR Health Services and Delivery (HS&DR) programme in England.

Our four-year programme of work is developing sustainable Kent-based partnerships to support the delivery of high quality social care research on the topics that matter most in our region. Demand for social care in Kent is high. This partnership aims to improve care quality by investing in and valuing the social care workforce, and developing a culture of research and evidence-based practice and innovation.

Foreword from the Partnership Co-Leads

As we near the end of the Kent Research Partnership, we are delighted to present a summary of our research capacity building activities and take this opportunity to showcase just a few of our achievements along the way.

Developing a research culture takes time and requires intervention at the individual, organisational and sector level. Recognising the importance of true embeddedness, we created 'Researcher in Residence' (RiR) roles. Tasked with bridging the gap between the university and local authority, these posts have been pivotal in supporting communication and removing barriers to partnership working.

Together, we have offered a variety of opportunities to build research awareness, engagement, confidence, knowledge and skills across adult social care in Kent. Grounded in the needs and priorities of the workforce and people drawing on care and support, we have held research advice clinics, organised journal clubs, created written and video resources, and supported thriving communities of practice. We have trained and supported people with lived experience to be involved in all aspects of the partnership, including evaluation and reporting. We have funded and supported four Research and Training Fellows, who are already using their newly acquired skills in their own organisations and sharing learning across the sector.

Working with the other social care capacity building partnerships across the country and sector stakeholders, we have submitted evidence to national enquiries, produced policy briefings, and presented at conferences. We will also be supporting a series of online events run by Social Care Wales in 2025.

We hope that the learning from this partnership will be the foundation for future initiatives to support evidence-based practice and practice-relevant research in Kent and beyond.

Ann-Marie Towers and Gina Walton



Stakeholder Events Setting Research Priorities for Adult Social Care in Kent

At the start of the Kent Research Partnership, we brought together more than 300 voices from across Kent to shape the county's research priorities. This included practitioners and managers from local authority, as well as private and voluntary sector service providers, people who are supported by adult social care, family/friend carers, and researchers – a truly diverse and representative group.

Through three large online events, we created space for honest discussion about what matters most in adult social care.

Four key areas emerged:

- Supporting and sustaining the care workforce
- Co-producing services with people who use them
- Empowering under-represented groups (like self-funders and people who self-neglect)
- Improving joined-up working across services.

We then co-designed and launched two Communities of Practice (CoPs): one focused on the adult social care workforce, the other on supporting complex needs across the life-span.

Mature Movers at the Complex Needs Community of Practice



Rosaria from www.maturemovers.uk presented to the May 2024 Complex Needs Community of Practice. A sports scientist, personal trainer, GP referral instructor, and chartered physical activity professional, Rosaria is passionate about helping those who struggle with exercise to stay active and pain-free. She founded Mature Movers in 2020 to connect older adults with suitable, accessible classes. Her YouTube channel offers a wide variety of home-based workouts.



Her presentation explored the accessibility of exercise platforms like Flexr for older people, and how we can improve the experience - especially when working with NHS services, care homes, and retirement villages.

She also shared research ideas focused on balance, mobility, and stability, and on understanding people's habits, perceived value of the platform, and affordability. The potential health impacts - both physical and mental - of engaging with the platform were also discussed, offering promising insights for future work in this area.

This was just one of the 51 Community of Practice meetings, attended by adult social care workers, people with lived experience of adult social care, and researchers.

Sophie Fournel Speaks Out on BBC Radio Kent about Disability and Employment



Sophie Fournel, a Research and Training Fellow at the Kent Research Partnership and CEO of Disability Assist, spoke on BBC Radio Kent about the damaging impact of proposed Personal Independence Payment (PIP) reforms on disabled people.

Drawing from her research on employment barriers for people with multiple sclerosis, Sophie called the changes “a massive blow to disabled people,” stressing that disability is not a lifestyle choice. She explained that PIP covers essential costs and enables independence, warning that cuts could deepen poverty and isolation, despite government assertions that changes will boost employment.

Sophie emphasized that real barriers - like fluctuating conditions and inadequate support - remain unaddressed. *“We have so much to offer, but we need the right support to help us achieve it,”* she said.



Our other media appearances - all featuring Sophie - include a BBC Radio Kent ‘Barriers to Work and Employment Support’ segment, and BBC News South East and Kent Online features on the increase in care costs for disabled residents in Kent.

The Lived Experience Working Group Achievements



The Lived Experience Working Group have achieved a great deal during the project. They have developed as a team and individually, sharing experiences and developing research skills, in particular co-production, together.

Group members have worked as a team, being involved in evaluation activities and keeping track of their own activities and influence on partnership activities. They met regularly (24 times in total) as a means of sharing learning, experiences and updates. They played a significant role reviewing Fellowship applications, sitting on the funding panel and supporting those who were funded.

Members made use of their personal networks for the benefit of the group, their leadership of and contribution to the Communities of Practice being one such example.

You can read more about our Working Group here: <https://research.kent.ac.uk/chss/kent-research-partnership/public-engagement/>



Hannah Kingsford Wins Silver at the Social Worker of the Year Awards

A Kent Research Partnership Fellow, Hannah Kingsford, has been honoured with the Silver Award for Practitioner-led Research at the prestigious Social Worker of the Year Awards in 2024. The ceremony celebrated outstanding contributions to social care, with Hannah recognised for her work on social worker burnout and workforce wellbeing.

Hannah said: *“Winning a silver award was a huge surprise! I am incredibly grateful for the support from Kent Research Partnership, Centre for Health Services Studies and Kent County Council, who have encouraged me and helped me get this far”.*

Other Kent Research Partnership Awards and Nominations include:

- Best Team runners up at the annual Kent County Council Adult Social Care awards and
- Best Poster prize for Hannah Kingsford at the Kent and Medway Research Conference 2024.



Nick Smith's Guide to Research Application Timelines and Costings

In one of the Kent Research Partnership's training videos, Nick Smith walks anyone interested in writing a research application through creating timelines and costings. This practical session includes how to structure a clear project timeline using a Gantt chart, helping applicants break down their activities into manageable phases.

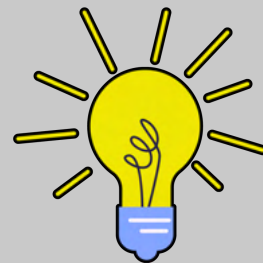
A key takeaway? *“Everything takes longer than you think it will,”* so building in flexibility is crucial. Nick also demystifies costings, showing how to estimate time commitments and calculate funding needs. This includes salary costs, training, travel, and public involvement expenses. Nick recommends applicants speak to their Human Resources or finance and contracting teams to accurately cost their time. It is also important to consider the funding you will need from participant recruitment through to dissemination of your research findings.

With step-by-step guidance and reminders to seek support, this video is a vital tool for anyone preparing a compelling research application.

You can find all Kent Research Partnership's training videos on our YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@kentresearchpartnership5715>

Beth's Fellowship: Building Research Skills from Frontline Care



Bethany Preston is a community carer with Tender Loving Carers.



Through her part-time Kent Research Partnership Fellowship, Beth has focussed on training to build her research and analysis skills. She has a keen interest in evaluating and reporting the impact of care and support, including digital technologies. Beth brings hands-on experience and compassion from frontline care into her research journey, ensuring real-world relevance and insight. Beth's training fellowship, we hope, will open the door to future research opportunities.

The three other Kent Research Partnership Fellowships were:

- **Hannah Kingsford** (Social Worker) - researching burnout in the social work workforce
- **Sophie Fournel** (CEO, Disability Assist) - investigating barriers to employment experienced by working-age individuals with multiple sclerosis
- **Lisa Richey** (Social Worker) - exploring neurodiversity within social workers and their wellbeing.

To hear more about the work and experiences of our fellows, visit the Kent Research Partnership's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@kentresearchpartnership5715>



Lisa Richey Champions Neurodiversity in the Social Work Workforce

Lisa Richey is a registered social worker with experience across health and social care settings since the age of 16. As a practitioner-researcher funded by the Kent Research Partnership, Lisa is exploring how social work managers can better support neurodivergent social workers. Her work focuses on developing practical workplace adjustments within local authorities to improve wellbeing, support retention, and build a more inclusive workforce.



Lisa is currently identifying useful strategies and tips for managers to support neurodivergent social workers, and is developing high-quality training materials informed by real-life experiences of neurodiversity in the workforce. She will be presenting her research at the British Association of Social Work Conference and the NIHR School for Social Care Research Conference in 2025.

With more impact and success to come, Lisa's work is set to make a lasting difference for both the social care workforce and the people they support. Lisa said, *"Kent Research Partnership has been so supportive with the fellowship and has helped me raise awareness for neurodiversity within social work practitioners."*

Further Funding Success: The Care Work Partnership



Building on its achievements, the Kent Research Partnership has contributed to securing a major £5m investment from the NIHR Health and Social Care Delivery Research programme. The new Adult Social Care Workforce Research Partnership - "Care Work" - will run from 2025 to 2030 and is co-led by Professor Ann-Marie Towers and Professor Karen Spilsbury.

This national collaboration brings together researchers, sector organisations, and local authorities to address critical challenges facing the social care workforce. Key areas of focus include labour market dynamics, staff well-being, innovation in work conditions, and the use of data and technology. Strong community involvement is central to the partnership, ensuring that lived experience shapes research priorities and delivery. **Contact carework@kcl.ac.uk to be added to the mailing list or if you would like information about a new online Community of Practice.**

In part due to support from the Kent Research Partnership, additional funding was secured through two ARC KSS Adult Social Care Fellowships, together worth £116k. These were awarded to:

- Dr Alison Charles - Themed Project Fellow on the 'well-being in older adult care homes' project'
- Lilly Trapp - undertaking research on improving the recruitment and retention of asylum-seeking care workers.

Key to Success: Researchers in Residence

The Kent Research Partnership's Researchers in Residence (RiRs) have played a pivotal role in all of the achievements listed in this booklet, along with doing so many other things to help enhance research capacity within Kent's adult social care sector. They have actively engaged in activities like workshops and our Communities of Practice, the Lived Experience Working Group, and supporting our fellows at every stage of their research journey, ensuring that research is grounded in real-world needs.

They are a remarkable group of individuals whose personal qualities are as vital as their professional expertise. Passionate, curious, and committed to making a tangible difference, they bring empathy, creativity, and resilience to every activity they undertake. Whether facilitating a workshop or supporting a research bid, the RiRs demonstrate integrity, adaptability, and a deep respect for the lived experiences of those in adult social care. Their presence not only drives the partnership but also inspires others to engage with research.

Through their dedication and warmth, they are creating a lasting legacy of partnership, learning, and improved outcomes across Kent's adult social care sector. Thank you, Lilly, Rasa, Vanessa, and Wenjing.





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<https://research.kent.ac.uk/chss/kent-research-partnership/>



<https://www.youtube.com/@kentresearchpartnership5715>

The achievements of the Kent Research Partnership are a testament to the commitment and collaboration of many individuals. We are grateful to our core and wider teams, the Research and Training Fellows, and the Lived Experience Working Group. We also thank all those who engaged with our Communities of Practice, training, talks, and events — including adult social care staff across the sector, individuals drawing on care and their families and friends, and social care researchers. The progress we have made would not have been possible without your dedication, insight, and support.

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