

A better life

Investigations
Work in progress

Start date: July 2009

What needs to change so that older people with high support needs can have 'a better life'?

The funding and future of adult social care is already a major issue, exacerbated by the recession. But by 2050 the number of older people aged over 85 in the UK will have doubled, putting the care system under massive strain.

The Government is therefore focused on providing better choices and quality of support for more older people, for less money.

However, all four main political parties are working on the assumption that almost all older people wish to remain at home. Much less attention has been paid to the half a million individuals who live in residential or nursing care, most with high support needs.

This programme:

- will examine how 'a better life' for the growing number of older people in the UK with high support needs can be achieved now and in the future.

We aim to:

- talk to older people who need a lot of support to discover what 'a better life' means for them;
- look at care settings, alternative approaches to support, and housing with care schemes to determine the best ways of improving housing and services for older people with high support needs; and
- produce clear, costed recommendations as to how these older people can have 'a better life' and promote these to policy-makers, commissioners, providers, practitioners, older people and carers.

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For the latest information, visit:

www.jrf.org.uk/better-life

At a glance

Programme title: A Better Life

Aim: To help ensure older people in the UK with high support needs have a better quality of life

Timescale: 2009 – 2014

Budget: £1.5 million

Contact: Sue Collins (Policy and Research Programme Manager) or Philippa Hare (Policy and Research Programme Manager) via abetterlife@jrf.org.uk

In July 2009, JRF launched a programme of work looking at how older people with high support needs in the UK could have ‘a better life’.

This paper summarises what we are doing, why, and what we hope to achieve through this work, and gives a broad overview of the programme.

However, our programmes of work develop throughout their course. For the most up-to-date information, visit: www.jrf.org.uk/better-life

What is the issue?

So far, policy development has been mainly focused on helping to improve the quality of life for older people in their own homes. Meanwhile, older people with high support needs in residential or nursing care are rarely considered or heard.

Defining ‘high support needs’

Older people of any age who need a lot of support due to physical frailty, chronic conditions and/or multiple impairments (including dementia). Most will be over 85 years old, though some will be younger. Many will be affected by other factors including poverty, disadvantage, ethnicity or lifestyle.

What do we want to achieve?

By gathering evidence and using it to influence policies and practice, we aim to achieve sustainable changes to services and support so older people who need a lot of support can enjoy a better life and greater choice.

We will do this by:

- talking to older people with high support needs about what they want and value;
- building our understanding of how to maximise older people’s choice and quality of life in care settings, so that we can influence policy and practice development;
- informing those involved in policy and practice about how housing with care schemes can support older people who have, or who develop, high support needs;
- exploring other accessible and affordable approaches to support, housing and community for older people who have, or who develop high support needs;
- selecting the strongest ideas and approaches from the above research with the help of older people;
- promoting what needs to happen through clear, costed and credible recommendations.

What are we doing?

This programme has five parts. Each of these is managed by one of two Policy and Research Programme Managers: Sue Collins and Philippa Hare.

Defining what makes 'a better life'

Programme Manager: Sue Collins

JRF will generate an understanding of 'a better life' by:

- consulting older people with high support needs to find out what they want and value;
- creating a demographic profile of this marginalised group in the context of the wider older population; and
- establishing what is already known about equality and diversity.

Improving residential and nursing care

Programme Manager: Philippa Hare

Quality of care and quality of life in residential and nursing homes are highly variable. Some bodies, including the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the Alzheimer's Society, have highlighted and explored this, but there is still a lack of knowledge about *how* to raise quality in care settings.

In partnership with *My Home Life*, a UK-wide charitable venture led by City University and Help the Aged/Age Concern, this programme will focus on:

- promoting voice, choice and control of older people who live in residential and nursing care homes;
- leadership and culture change in care homes;
- generating a new dialogue around funding and pay in care homes; and
- working with Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust care homes.

We will use information gathered during these activities to influence policy and practice development in residential and nursing homes.

Researching housing with care schemes

Programme Manager: Philippa Hare

Housing with care schemes aim to be supportive, stimulating environments where older people may live independently and/or receive care and support that might previously only have been available in a care home. This is a relatively new concept and JRF intends to influence the extent and way it is promoted, commissioned and provided by:

- developing and highlighting evidence on housing with care to policy-makers and practitioners;
- conducting several expert reviews to inform commissioning of research in 2010. These will focus on issues such as the housing with care workforce, access and diversity, capacity and decision-making, and attitudes to frailty and end-of-life;
- undertaking research to discover which interventions might enable older people to enjoy a better quality of life in housing with care schemes if/as they develop high support needs; and what needs to happen for housing with care schemes to become more affordable, accessible and acceptable in the context of diversity, poverty and recession; and
- developing policy and practice, and testing out ideas with service providers.

Identifying alternative approaches

Programme Manager: Sue Collins

We want to increase the range of choices for older people with high support needs, as well as their quality of life.

This programme looks beyond what is commonly available, whilst not assuming that any alternatives might be better than residential/nursing care or housing with care. We will scope out imaginative UK and international practice to learn how it can influence:

- government, commissioners and providers to increase the choice of services and support;
- organisations led by/for older people and carers to promote a wider range of choices; and
- practitioners (care, housing and health) to adopt or adapt alternative approaches within their own work.

Creating a 'Better Life roadmap'

Programme Manager: Sue Collins

Our final aim is to identify and promote what needs to happen to ensure older people with high support needs have a better life by:

- reviewing evidence gathered from the four strands of the programme to decide which ideas or approaches have the most potential. JRF will include older people and others in this process;
- commissioning experts to produce a roadmap of costed, clear and credible recommendations; and
- working in partnership with others, to extend the Foundation's reach and impact, communicating the research findings and roadmap in a targeted way to all relevant stakeholders.

Why is this topic a priority for JRF?

This work has a very strong fit with the Foundation's strategic objectives; plays powerfully to its strengths as an independent funder of research and as a provider of housing and care; tackles one of the significant challenges of our time, our ageing population; and shines a spotlight on the voices and lives of some of the most marginalised people in the UK, at a time when recession and demographic trends give these issues greater urgency.

What has informed our thinking?

This programme was developed through extensive consultation with internal and external experts, including JRF's Empowerment Strategy Group. Feedback has been extremely positive, leaving JRF with no doubt that policy, practice and research in this area is under-developed, and that this work will be influential and timely.

About the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust are two independent charities that work together to understand the root causes of social problems, identify ways of overcoming them, and show how social needs can be met in practice.

Our purpose is to influence policy and practice by searching for evidence and demonstrating solutions to improve:

- the circumstances of people experiencing poverty and disadvantages;
- the quality of their homes and communities;
- the nature of the services and support that foster their well-being and citizenship.

Most of our work centres on the interconnected themes of poverty, place and empowerment.

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