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SUII KNOWLEDGE
EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES

SUMMARY REPORT

COLLABORATION IN CARE

**The Interface Between Unpaid
(Informal) and Paid (Formal) Carers**



MAIN OBJECTIVES AND CONTEXT

A psychologist from the US, Barry Schwartz, likens good care workers to jazz musicians. Jazz musicians need some notes and some rules, but too many rules stifle their ability to improvise, and they stop playing. (researcher Wales)

This project provided a timely opportunity to bring people together to consider the question: how do we promote collaboration rather than competition between informal and formal carers despite enduring structural limitations? Diverse partners working to improve support to unpaid carers in Scotland, Wales and the EU (via Eurocarers) wanted to work together to promote collaboration in practice and policy ([see website](#)). Recognising escalating international challenges from poverty and inequality, climate change and shortages of staff in key jobs, the purpose was to explore how to mitigate increasing tensions emerging in relationships on the frontline of services. “Collaboration for Care: the Interface between unpaid (informal) and paid (formal) carers,” was a knowledge exchange project which ran for 7 months until April 2024.

This project was led by the Universities of Strathclyde with Dundee, and diverse European partners. Recent research by Eurocarers identified a classification of countries according to levels of provision of social care, from universalist through to selectivist. Our partners initially include one country from each of the four categories, namely Finland, Ireland, Spain and Portugal, as well as Scotland and Wales, to enable comparisons and exchange of learning, to sustain caring relationships. Slovenia also joined the project throughout and Sweden made a significant contribution. In addition, Eurocarers co-sponsored the first workshop in Glasgow, for their annual in-country study visit. The latter study visit meant that we had an additional 4 countries participate, including Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany and Northern Ireland. This project was warmly welcomed by UK delegates, given reduced European connections due to Brexit.

The project theme is also identified as a priority in the EU Care Strategy (2022) which highlights the need for cooperation and finding the right balance between informal and formal carers, ensuring that informal carers have choices in caring, with a concern to improve outcomes for both carers and care receivers.

The aim of the project was to inform more effective strategies to improve carer outcomes, through exchanging knowledge about changing relationships and integration between formal and informal care.

The objectives were to:

- Provide an opportunity for participants to hear a range of types of evidence, including diverse stakeholder perspectives on the nature of caring and systems of care
- Use story and dialogue as tools to challenge normative assumptions about caring, and co-create new knowledge and insights
- Produce briefings and stories from different perspectives to influence and inform decision-making about caring in partner countries
- Develop further research questions and identify opportunities for further collaborative research



AN ACCOUNT OF THE INSIGHTS RESULTING FROM THE PROGRAMME

The project involved 4 workshops, each prioritising one set of voices. Workshops included diverse participants including paid and unpaid carers, commissioners, regulators, policy makers, researchers and others. We used methods from Developing Evidence Enriched Practice ([DEEP](#)), prioritising story and dialogue. Participating countries contributed a magic and/or tragic moment (story) to each workshop:

- Glasgow: October 2023, research perspectives
- Online: December 2023, unpaid/informal carer perspectives
- Online: February 2024, paid/formal carer perspectives
- Glasgow: April 2024, policy perspectives

We then used dialogic methods to exchange ideas, and reach new understandings. In a longer report to be published slightly later, we have set out our findings under 3 themes: Valuing care and making it visible, relationship-based practice (including support planning) and relationship-based policy making and implementation. Each theme contains a principle, practices and points for discussion along with key findings. Here, we only have space for the principles. There is a strong focus on practice in the longer report, at the request of our partners. You can also see [interim project outputs here](#).

Valuing care and making it visible

Caring is a distinctly human activity that can be complemented but not replaced by machines. Caring (informal & formal) forms the glue that holds societies together. Yet, caring is undervalued and needs to be made more visible.

Relationship Based Practice

*The importance of relationships to both formal and informal carers, as well as people being cared for, is clear. These relationships can become strained in the face of financial and structural pressures. A focus on developing shared purpose and collaboration can help, whether at the individual or collective level. Policy has a role in **creating the conditions** for relationship-based care rather than being prescriptive or adding more tick boxes*

Support planning

Support planning is viewed as a key component of relationship-based practice. This should value all perspectives, include a whole family focus and enable flexibility and responsiveness rather than being driven by rigid guidelines

Policy making AND implementation

Putting social policy into practice effectively and consistently requires continuous knowledge exchange, based on a relational and responsive approach. This should be based on honesty about the challenges and draw on the resources of all partners. Further, in implementing policy, there is a need to balance the relationships and outcomes that people value, which are less amenable to quantification than task and time, which currently predominate in policy making and evaluation



MAIN OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Continuing conversations with partners and the last words collected from all who attended F2F events indicate that everyone left with something new in terms of knowledge/understanding/ideas.

Several people reported they had previously thought of unpaid and paid carers as two distinct workstreams and were no longer thinking this way, with implications for continuing policy and practice development.

Some delegates reported their intention to replicate the methods used by this project, which were designed to promote collaboration, to promote collaboration in their settings.

The director of Eurocarers, who was a great contributor to the project, reported feeling more confident due to the project being “a first very positive step in considering this novel topic,” which is also a priority in the EU care strategy. A next step will be to finalise clearer questions for follow on research.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR END USER / POLICY / PRACTICE COMMUNITIES

The use of stories and dialogue in promoting good practice and policy were identified as essential, reinforced by feedback from this project stating that what people remember are the stories. Stories used as a stimulus for dialogue invite others to share their stories, thus building a broader picture from different perspectives.

The need to use story carefully was emphasised. For people sharing lived experiences (at all levels) there was a need to ensure that they were given time to prepare and to reflect on how much they wanted to share. In all cases, story should be used not to manipulate but to open up reflection and conversation.

Blending stories and statistics may be effective in engaging media attention, painting a broader picture of the phenomenon and raising awareness of caring to a wider audience. Stories are needed to bring the phenomenon to the everyday level/individual level. Many of the research and informal carer organisations participating in our project are well placed in blending different types of evidence. Importantly, this includes skills in analysing qualitative data; that is to say carefully analysing multiple stories to tell a bigger story.

A range of knowledge exchange projects and networks exist amongst members with a focus on promoting relational practice and policy (identified in policy section/full report). They all use story and dialogue, with examples shared in our report.

Outcome focused support planning can help to ensure that the carer perspective is included (alongside that of the family if desired). Work from the multi-disciplinary meaningful and measurable project identified 5 criteria that can be used to develop a good outcomes plan, again included in our full report.

We spent time debating whether Relationship-Based Practice (RBP) should be better defined. The discussion increasingly leaned away from a prescriptive approach towards the role of policy and organisations in **creating the conditions** for RBP, including allowing time to talk. Practitioners also need to be able to reflect on their practice to enable informal carers to reflect on their situation, with many informal carers often lost in intensive caring roles. Reflexivity is also important in navigating the emotions involved in caring. There is



also a need to acknowledge and work through tensions between standards/rules and the flexibility and responsiveness advocated by care ethicists and advocates of RBP.

PLANNED OFFSHOOT AND FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

We have already shared information about the project and preliminary findings at Eurocarers events in Ancona in November 2023 and at the AGM in Brussels on 23rd May 2024

We made a presentation to the Welsh outcome focused care at home community of practice 4.6.24

We are taking the learning directly to a project on relationship-based practice funded by Social Work Scotland, starting July 2024. Stories and examples from our project are the starting point for this collaborative project which will produce resources for practice

We are linking directly with the EU Horizon funded Wellcare project (2024-27) which focuses on the mental health of both informal and formal carers

Our partner in Portugal in particular wants to continue to develop the theme of support planning to revitalise implementation of new carer support legislation in that country and discussions are continuing on this.

July 2024