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Exploring loneliness and co-designing improvements in support:

outline of the AEBCD research study

**What is the background to the study?**

It is important to find good ways to include the views and experiences of people who use social care and support in the design of Local Authority offers and those of their partners.

**What is the purpose of the study?**

This study is focusing on loneliness and related support. It is testing out a promising co-design approach from health care called Accelerated Experience-Based Co-Design. The AEBCD approach uses national evidence as a starting-point for discussion. Providers and users of support share their experiences and ideas before agreeing improvement priorities to take forward. They then work together as equal partners in designing the detailed changes.

**Who is running the study?**

The study is being led by the University of Oxford, in collaboration with the Universities of York and Aberdeen and supported by Doncaster Council. The AEBCD approach is being tested in Doncaster, where combating loneliness is a local priority. The study is funded by the National Institute for Health Research.

What happens in AEBCD?

The study will follow the two distinct phases of the AEBCD approach: Discovery and Co-design.

Phase 1 - Discovery: this is a national phase in which the research team will gather evidence on how loneliness is experienced and understood, and people’s views regarding current support and ideas for improvement.

* Filmed interviews with people who identify as lonely*:* researchers from the University of Oxford will carry out 40-50 interviews. Clips from these will then be used to create a 20 minute ‘catalyst film’, showing touch points which demonstrate both positive support and where it could be improved. The film will be used in Phase 2.
* Interviews with staff:researchers from the University of York will interview 20 staff from local authorities and other organisations whose work involves loneliness support. These interviews will include, but not be restricted to, staff working in Doncaster. Findings will be summarised for Phase 2.

Phase 2 - Co-Design*:* this is a local phase in Doncaster, to test the AEBCD approach for improving loneliness support. Around 30 people will be involved in the co-design, split roughly equally between local staff and people using loneliness support. There are two stages:

1. **Three workshops:**

*Workshops 1 & 2:* these are separate half-day events, one for staff and the other for local people who have used loneliness support. Both workshops will use the Phase 1 findings about loneliness as a starting-point to discuss their own experiences of (providing or using) related support and to identify ideas for making improvements.

*Workshop 3:* isa joint workshop, all participants coming together to discuss potential improvements and agree 5-6 priority ideas to take forward in smaller co-design groups.

1. **Small co-design groups:** each group will take an improvement idea to work up in practical detail. Each group will include a mix of staff and local people, members self-selecting according to their interest in the topic. The format for doing the work (for example, how often to meet) might vary between groups, as might the length of time needed, but typically this stage would take a few months.

**Co-design evaluation:** throughout Phase 2, Jane Maddison, a researcher from the University of York will be evaluating the AEBCD process. She will observe the workshops and meetings, review documents, have informal conversations and conduct research interviews to ask for people’s views on AEBCD. The evaluation is about the AEBCD *approach*, not to check on the participants or make judgements about the decisions made by the co-design groups. Questions guiding the evaluation are: Was the process acceptable to the people taking part? What suggestions might participants have for improving the process? What adaptations to the AEBCD approach might be needed for its more widespread use in social care and support?

**What will be produced from the study?**

As well as academic papers and conference presentations, we will:

* produce **the ‘catalyst film’ documenting touchpoints in loneliness support** and a themed set of film clips called ***Addressing Loneliness*** showing how people experience loneliness and how support services and other people can address this. Both will be published on a new website called [*Socialcaretalk.org*](http://socialcaretalk.org)which is currently under preparation.It is aimed at people experiencing loneliness, their family and friends, the wider public, media, social and healthcare staff and students, researchers and policymakers.
* add the interviews with people who have experienced loneliness to the University of Oxford’s Health Experiences Research Group **data** **archive for future use**, for example inteaching, publication, or further research.
* provide **recommendations for the use (or adaptation of) AEBCD** in service improvement for social care and support.
* hold a **half-day event to showcase the study findings** and generate discussion around service improvement approaches in social care and support.

**For more information, please contact Jane Maddison at the University of York.**

**email: jane.maddison@york.ac.uk**