

## **Editorial**

Welcome to edition 2 of Volume 32 of *Research, Policy and Planning*. The editorial team would also like to offer all our readers best wishes for the New Year 2017.

This edition contains four papers which we hope you will find interesting and useful. The first of these, by **Field and Naick**, is an account of a small scale evaluation of the use made of electronic assistive technology for people who live with those who care for them: in this case, among people taking part in a Shared Lives (<http://sharedlivesplus.org.uk/>) initiative in Kent. Telecare and electronic assistive technology has become a mainstream service in most local authorities and is seen as an important way in which contradictory pressures of rising demand and shrinking resources can be reconciled. Though there is now a considerable body of research evidence, the use of telecare to support resident carers in Shared Lives type settings has attracted less attention to date, and though the size of the study and shortcomings in its design mean their findings are not generalisable, Field and Naick's work does offer valuable insights for practitioners and managers who may be supporting similar schemes elsewhere.

The second paper, by **Woolham, Stevens and Rainey** offers a rather bleak assessment of research capacity and research governance in local authority settings in England. Based on findings from a national survey of local authorities carried out in 2014, commissioned by the School for Social Care Research (<http://www.sscr.nihr.ac.uk/>), the authors suggest that though research is still valued in local government settings, research capacity and access to evidence appear to have been badly affected by continuing Government public sector austerity policies. The authors conclude that the further weakening of research 'infrastructure' in local government settings directly challenges the repeated emphases in reports and inquiries that social work and social care practice be based as far as possible on sound evidence. Their full report is available from: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/scwru/pubs/2015/reports/Rainey-et-al-2015-SCEiP-Research-capacity-report-web.pdf>.

The third paper by **Bell, Gandy and Roe** reports on an evaluation of a Big Lottery funded project designed to promote 'active living' for older people in the North West of England. 'Active Living' is now widely recognised as an important means by which older people can maintain their quality of life, and this evaluation, which took place over three years, offers a descriptive account of the experiences of older participants. Their findings suggest that participants highly valued their involvement in the programme and reported improvements in physical health, wellbeing and overall quality of life. The authors also offer some clear suggestions for ways in which Active Living services could be improved.

The fourth paper by **Munn-Giddings, Avis, Boyce, Chaudhary and Seebohm** is also based on a Big Lottery funded study, this time focusing on the roles that community practitioners can adopt in supporting self-help groups. This insightful study considers ways in which social work practitioners can support self-help groups without being overly prescriptive. As responsibility for service delivery has moved decisively away from the public sector toward third sector organisations, this paper offers valuable insights for practitioners about how their skills and experience can be appropriately utilised.

The final part of this edition offers a selection of carefully considered and assessed reviews.

Readers may be aware that the Social Services Research Group, which sponsors RPP, is currently engaged in developing arrangements to enable a merger of SSRG with the Local Area Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) (<http://laria.org.uk/>) later this year. The merger is being pursued by both organisations because it offers advantages to each: SSRG because it can take advantage of LARIA's well developed marketing and conference organisation arrangements, and LARIA because it recognises the value of social care research expertise within its organisation. LARIA does not support an equivalent peer review journal and the editorial team therefore believe that RPP will be seen as a valuable additional resource to LARIA members. The journal will continue to be made immediately available to SSRG members and freely available a year after publication. After the merger, LARIA members will also get access to the journal as soon as it is published. However, the current Editorial Board will continue reviewing whether to make current editions of RPP immediately available to the public rather than just to members of SSRG or LARIA, which would comply with the recommendations of the Finch Report (<https://www.acu.ac.uk/research-information-network/finch-report-final>).

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