

# **Evaluation of the Connecting People Intervention: A Quasi-Experimental Study**

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The concept of social capital is emerging as a way of articulating the social work process of connecting people with other people and resources. Defined as the resources that are embedded within social networks, social capital can lead to greater occupational prestige, income and better health when mobilised. Enhancing the access to social capital of socially isolated people with mental health problems or a learning disability is therefore a priority for mental health social workers.

This paper reports on the piloting of a new social intervention in England – the Connecting People Intervention (CPI) – which aims to support isolated people to develop new social connections. The rationale for the study will be presented in the form of three systematic reviews which all reveal a dearth of rigorous intervention research in this field of social work practice.

The CPI is currently being piloted in 15 health and social care agencies in England in a quasi-experimental study. We are testing the hypothesis that higher fidelity to the CPI will be associated with improved social participation, well-being and increased access to social capital. Up to 240 people with a mental health problem or a learning disability are being recruited for the study and followed up over twelve months. The study also features an economic evaluation and a process evaluation.

This paper will present baseline data of the study participants, which we will compare with similar populations and the general population in the UK. It will report on our experience of training over 100 workers in the intervention, in the context of scepticism about standardising social work practice and ever-increasing time pressures. Finally, it will reflect on how high quality research evidence can both improve social work practice and enhance the access to social capital of socially isolated people with mental health problems.

**Keywords:** Social capital, intervention research, quasi-experimental study.