

**“Good support isn’t just about  
‘services’ – it’s about having a life.”**



# **Direct Payments and People from Black and Asian Minority Ethnic Communities.**

## **Summary Report**

IMPACT Facilitator Project 2022/23 (England)

Marie Dunnion, July 2023

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## Background

IMPACT Facilitators support bottom-up change. They are hosted within a local organisation for a period of one year to deliver an evidence-informed change project, responding to local issues. Drawing on evidence from research, lived experience and practice knowledge, Facilitators co-design a local project, review evidence of what works, and work with diverse stakeholders to implement the project in practice. Findings and outcomes are then shared with others for learning and replication across the sector.

## **Project Rationale**

This specific project aimed to identify experiences of Direct Payments among Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Leicester City Council identified that some community members did not access Direct Payments and, in an attempt to increase uptake, wanted to know why this might be happening and how they may address identified barriers.

## **Terminology**

Leicester City Council Adult Social Care prefer not to use the term Black, Asian and minority, or the abbreviation BAME, as a way of referring to people from the diverse non-white population. We recognise that such terms refer to a diverse range of communities and cultures, which are not a homogenous group. Where used in this report, with agreement from Leicester City Council, it is in reference to those communities collectively, not in replacement for appropriate reference to individuals or specific groups.

## **What did the initial evidence tell us?**

Personalisation is aimed at giving people more choice and control over their lives. This includes Direct Payments which are a cash sum given to people to help them to

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arrange and personalise their own support and services. In advance of the IMPACT Facilitator project, a literature review to investigate evidence on personalisation in Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities was conducted by Obert Tawodzera and Lesley Stevenson (IMPACT Project Officers). Based on this review, there emerged a consensus in terms of a limited choice of culturally appropriate services available.

Evidence from this review points highlights positives such as such as empowering people to purchase social care services that are individualised. Such personalised support enables people to arrange care services that better align with their ethnic, religious and cultural values and preferences. For example, individuals might choose to employ personal assistant/s from the same cultural background or enlist close family members.

Potential barriers to the uptake of personalised support include lack of access to information about personalisation and/or a lack of information on how the Direct Payments system works. This is further compounded by a lack of language support from mainstream services who may not recognise the limited language proficiency of people in different communities.

The review evidence also indicates that services remain culturally biased to western cultural norms and are not sensitive to the lifestyles of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Despite peoples’ aspirations towards employing personal assistants from the same culture, challenges around recruitment and retention, and funding cuts in community organisations, are undermining personalisation in such communities.

Finally, the IMPACT evidence review concludes that whilst there is a growing body of published research on personalisation, this rarely focuses in-depth on the experiences of people from different community groups. However, available evidence available suggests that people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities are generally willing to try personal budgets/Direct Payments once there is an awareness of how they work.

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## What did we do in Leicester?

A local Theory of Change was designed to draw on the evidence and local insights with the aim of identifying barriers in the uptake of Direct Payments for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, then to identify ways how Leicester might address these as part of enabling people to design their own support. To achieve this, it was important to understand what was already being delivered in terms of Direct Payments and to seek the views of individuals and communities within Leicester City.

Leicester City Council were clear from the outset that their focus was on peoples’ qualitative experiences: to understand and value people’s lived experience, and to make sure that choice and control was meaningful and feedback rather than only to the numbers of people in receipt of services.

## **What were the main activities?**

To supplement insights from the underpinning evidence, one-to-one and group meetings were organised and attended to understand the experience of individuals and communities applying for and receiving Direct Payments. This was achieved by the following activities:

- Informal telephone interviews with people from different Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in receipt of Direct Payments (n=14). Ethnicities included the following:
  - Asian or Asian British – Indian
  - Black or Black British – African
  - Black or Black British – Caribbean
  - Black Caribbean and White
  - Asian or Asian British - other Asian origin
- Listening to individuals in a range of group contexts to understand the choices available, and made, across different ethnic groups.

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- Interviews with the Director of Adult Social Care, managers, social workers, care management officers, finance, and other key stakeholders to acquire an understanding of the local context, the Direct Payment service, and the issues that people in receipt of Direct Payments might experience.
- Liaison with third party Direct Payment support agencies. Whilst Leicester City Council operates a Direct Payment system which people can independently manage; individuals can instead choose to receive support from one of the following agencies who are independent of the council, whilst still retaining choice and control over their own care:
  - [Mosaic 1898](#)
  - [Purple Leicester](#)
  - [Rosekel Resourcing](#).
- The Facilitator regularly attended the council’s Direct Payment Working Group and Direct Payment Support Service Mobilisation Task Group meetings. Both groups comprised of social care staff, people with lived experience, social workers, care management officers, and finance officers.
- Desk based evidence gathering to identify additional national (English) and UK context.

### What have we learnt?

- **Choice and control:** Consistent with the IMPACT evidence review, the Facilitator project indicated that Direct Payments give Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people greater choice and control, as confirmed to the Facilitator during conversations with people from different communities in receipt of Direct Payments. However, as an exception to this, one carer (Asian or Asian British – Indian) explained that they did not understand the element of choice and control offered by Direct Payments. This was not initially explained so they assumed that they had no choice. It was only after the appointment of a new social worker that they were able to choose a new care agency and carers.

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- **Lack of Awareness of Direct Payments:** Several individuals mentioned that people in their community were not aware of what was available and/or did not understand how to access the Direct Payments service (confirming what emerged from the IMPACT evidence review). This issue seemed to particularly affect the Somali community and those in the ‘Asian or Asian British – Indian’ community. In relation to the Somali community, the Facilitator learnt that this is an oral society with people generally preferring the spoken over the written word. Talking leaflets or WhatsApp were recommended by one Somali individual as a better way for the Council to reach people. Another factor affecting understanding of Direct Payments was that there was often confusion concerning what Direct Payments can be used to purchase, leading some people to feel “scared” to use their Direct Payment allowance.
- **Lack of Translation:** Leicester City Council routinely provide written information (for example, leaflets, letters and website content) in the English language but the Facilitator project, again consistent with the evidence review, indicated that this could be a barrier to some communities accessing information. The Council’s interpretation and translation policy states that it does not translate or interpret into other languages as a matter of course, but that this should be considered on a case-by-case basis particularly for situations that directly impact people’s lives. The Council do offer the option for translation, but it is not known how many people use this service, nor did any people who spoke to the Facilitator mention using the translation service.
- **Staff Recruitment and Retention:** This can be a barrier to aligning support ethnicity and cultural values. The support agencies (Mosaic 1898, Purple Leicester, and Rosekel Resourcing) highlighted that there can be difficulties recruiting a personal assistant of the same ethnicity as the person in receipt of Direct Payments, largely due to social care staff shortages and retention issues. The following difficulties were also discussed:
- **Personal assistants:** Whilst it is permissible to recruit family members not living in the same house; **only under exceptional circumstances would**

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someone living in the same house be permitted to work as a personal assistant. However, the Facilitator identified confusion around this with several people from different communities explaining it was their understanding that they cannot have family, even at a separate address, as their personal assistant.

- **Recruitment can be a lengthy process:** taking approximately 6-8 weeks, which can put a lot of pressure on Direct Payment support agencies, especially when support is needed for people leaving hospital.
- **There is a lack of information about the personal assistant market:** To address this, in 2023, Leicester City Council started to develop a database to capture personal assistant information such as ethnicity, spoken languages, and geographical area. The Council will be collating and reviewing personal assistant information from the three Direct Payment support agencies on a six-monthly basis. This database might, in the future, help the Council to better understand how people can personalise care and support via their choice of personal assistant/s.
- **Personalisation of Support Plans:** Several people spoken to explained that their support plans did not allocate enough time for carers to help them prepare culturally appropriate meals, explaining that half an hour for this task is not sufficient.
- **Cultural Competency:** The IMPACT evidence review identified the need for equality, diversity and inclusion issues to be taken into account and to avoid assumptions in mainstream services that tend to portray Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people as homogenous or view their care needs as something that can be met by their families. The Facilitator project found evidence of such assumptions, with some individuals from an ‘Asian or Asian British – Indian’ background sharing that they felt that social care staff assumed that their family would take care of them based on their ethnicity. However, in these particular situations, family members were not in a position to offer the level of care needed.

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### What worked well?

**Culture of commitment:** Leicester City Council were felt to be particularly committed to the IMPACT project and played an instrumental role in setting up the main activities. It is anticipated that the council’s strengths based, person-centred approach to Direct Payments would be key to the implementation of evidence, especially in terms of making changes to commissioning.

### What did not work so well?

- **Engagement challenges:** engaging with social care staff and people from different communities presented a challenge. For example, social care staff had limited time to engage with the project and/or offer work shadowing, resulting in less opportunities to learn about lived experiences of Direct Payments. Within certain communities, it was not possible to set up group meetings, despite efforts spanning many months.
- **Co-production:** Whilst IMPACT and Leicester City Council worked hard to understand experiences of individuals and communities, more collective work is needed in the longer term to co-produce future work.

### What Impact have we made?

It is apparent that Direct Payments might work very well for people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, however uptake is often low in practice. A key impact of the IMPACT Facilitator project has been to raise awareness within Leicester City Council of different perspectives about what is working for individuals and communities, and what is not. Based on this improved understanding, Leicester City Council are planning to make the following changes to local practice:

- **Commissioning:** The IMPACT project has reviewed the evidence and undertaken additional work locally to understand the experiences and perspectives of local people, communities and staff. This identified a number of barriers and success factors, that may be transferable to people in other areas too, and the Council is committed to take forward this agenda.



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- **Staff Training:** using evidence to develop staff training on the creativity and flexibility of Direct Payments, including how Direct Payments can be tailored to meet individual needs. While existing social care staff have been recently trained in this area, currently, new staff only receive the Direct Payments Guidance and IT training on Direct Payments. A challenge for implementing evidence in practice lies in the council training resources allocated for improving staff knowledge of Direct Payments in a way that takes account of the values and lifestyles of different communities. This may be supported through the council’s Direct Payment Working Group meetings, which are a positive way of sharing examples of best practice so that staff can share their insights and experiences of implementing Direct Payments locally.
- **Co-production:** Whilst the Facilitator and Leicester City Council hoped to co-produce changes to mainstream services, this a goal which Leicester City Council will continue to aspire towards as part of improving future engagement in order to provide more culturally sensitive services.
- **Accessibility:** Lack of access to translated information about how the Direct Payment system works was an issue identified by both the evidence review and the IMPACT project evidence. Whilst the council offer the option for translation on request, it is not known how many people use this service, nor did anyone who spoke to the Facilitator mention using the translation service. However, a recent positive development has been the recently updated online Direct Payments Guidance which enables individuals to translate into their preferred language using the translation options in the address bar.

IMPACT’s work with Leicester City Council outlines the challenges which exist in terms of achieving personalisation for people in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. However, the main facilitator for implementing evidence in practice is the commitment from the council to developing more culturally sensitive mainstream services; and ensuring that social care staff implement best practice around Direct Payments. This will hopefully lead to future increases in uptake and greater choice and control.