

The impact of Iriss

2023/24

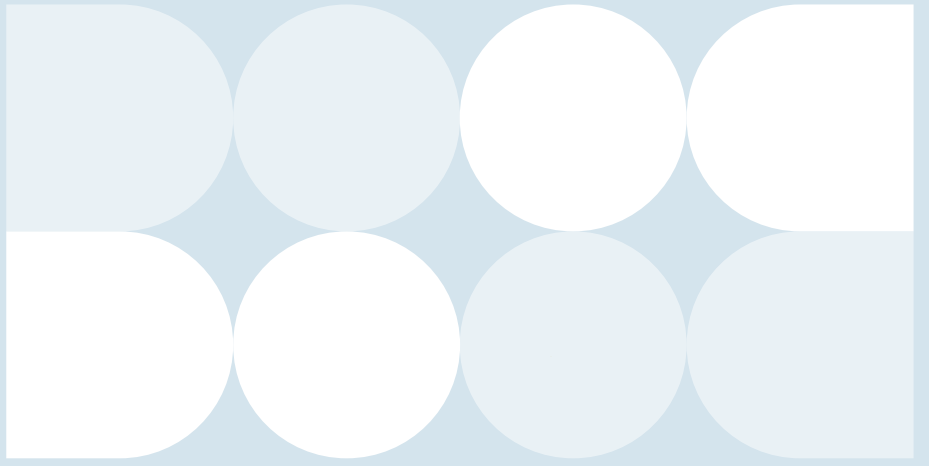


Introduction

While planning the work for 2023/24, we saw that there's plenty of support for improvement (doing something better) in social work and social care support but a lack of dedicated focus on evidence-informed innovation (identifying the right thing to do).

So we invited partners to work with us in three priority areas: day to day dignity, space to practice and foundations for change, alongside our existing programme of improvement support in Adult Support and Protection (ASP). Prospective partners told us what they would like help with, and how ready they were to make the change. We then worked with the shortlisted partners on their priority areas using our model for innovation support.

Our work can't happen without financial support from our funders. We would like to note our thanks to our principal funders the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (OCSWA) and the ASP teams in the Scottish Government as well as our other clients and partners that make our work possible. Your funding allows us to create the conditions for social work and social care support to flourish.



Priority area projects





DAY-TO-DAY DIGNITY

The sector told us that dignity is one of the reasons they got into working in social work and social care and that it is one of the things that are most important to those that receive support. Dignity is one of five core human rights principles, alongside fairness, respect, equality and autonomy. Our stakeholders told us about the constraints and pressures they are under – workloads, expectations, processes and paperwork – and that this noise pulls them away from their core values and motivation, leaving them demotivated and dissatisfied with their work.

Care survivors

Building on our work in 2022/23 we continued working with **Future Pathways**, people with lived experience and **Scottish Recovery Network** to explore [embedding peer support for care survivors](#). This work helped us understand what care survivors wanted and needed, and provides a strong basis for testing ideas for change, which Future Pathways is committed to supporting over the longer term.

Small changes add up

In partnership with **Abbotsford Care** we worked with staff to think through how they capture day to day dignity in care home support and record this in their paperwork. The work highlighted how busy support staff are in a home, working with the people who live there, paying attention to residents, providing support and that completing paperwork can be time consuming and demanding. The home has a real improvement mindset and a number of projects underway but made time to work with us to create an updated Daily Resident Support Sheet which they are now trialling with their team.

We partnered with **Falkirk Council** to continue our past work on centering dignity in how workers write and speak about, and on behalf of, children and their families. Directed by a group of young people 'the Falkirk Young Champs', we heard about the changes needed in case recording and worked with them on small experiments that when brought together are helping staff change their practice.

Practical toolkits

We worked with **Quarriers** to build a [resource](#) to help commission sustainable social support for epilepsy. Based on peer reviewed evidence, policy priorities, practitioner knowledge and, crucially, people's experience of living with epilepsy, the resource aims to improve practitioners' understanding of epilepsy and its impacts as well as show the difference social support can make, complementing and supporting the clinical care provided by the NHS.

We also worked with **Passion4Fusion**, families, and social workers to develop reciprocal cross-cultural understanding in child protection. Taking time to understand the complex and sometimes competing views of what was needed we created an accessible easy to use toolkit for the social work and social care workforce: [Working with African Diaspora families](#).



SPACE TO PRACTICE

The sector told us that the workforce lacks the space to reflect on and improve practice due to multiple pressures such as caseload levels, increasing demand and decreasing resources. They asked us to focus on practice to support making space to learn, reflect, and build relationships to make social work and social care better.

Co-design

We worked with **Midlothian Council** in a co-design group to explore current practice in their Family Wellbeing Team. The team worked to identify where support for trauma informed practice worked well and to identify and address gaps in emotional support for practitioners.

Using a co-design approach we worked with a group from **Aberdeen City** and **Aberdeenshire Council** to explore how chronologies and analytical writing could be improved to support social workers in their practice, and the way they communicate with people, families and workers. This work focussed on how we can facilitate the actual use of resources and toolkits in busy teams. The writing analysis '[Words of Wisdom](#)' tool was distributed to practitioners and is now in use across Children's social work services alongside our [Writing Analysis course](#) from Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) to senior practitioner level.

Imagination

We partnered with **North Ayrshire Council** to take on a complex question, how to redesign social work services. This covered a range of interventions in the system such as ideas and innovation, change at scale, practitioner research and community social work. Our partners showed motivation and hope for reimagining social work, despite the constraints and challenges of practice. Our [Reimagining Social Work Report](#), published in May 2024, gives an in depth look at this.



FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE

The sector told us about the constraints of the system; the things that get in the way of their best work and are difficult for people to tackle alone or within organisations and teams. Foundations for change focuses on changing the factors in the system to remove barriers such as processes, paperwork, cultures and environments.

Collaboration

We worked with **North Ayrshire HSCP** staff, providers and colleagues to look at collaborative commissioning. Like many other areas they faced complex inter-related pressures and wanted to make ambitious changes across all of these. We worked with them to help them see their system and build the foundations for collaboration. We also helped to get these embedded into practice through agile groups working on developing good provider-commissioner forum meetings to build and maintain relationships and addressing waiting list management.

In **West Dunbartonshire** we were asked to help embed ethical and collaborative commissioning in social care. Again the area faced complex inter-related pressures and significant financial constraints. Here, the group selected the development of an ethical outcomes based procurement framework as the first step to doing this and we supported this through a series of workshops and interviews with the work concluding in 2024/25.

Implementation

The **Scottish Government's Ethical Commissioning & Procurement Principles** are designed to improve the way that social care is planned and purchased. In this project, we worked with the Ethical Commissioning Policy Team to co-produce an implementation plan for getting the principles into practice. We will continue to work with the team into 2024/25 on the specific commitments within the plan.



ADULT SUPPORT AND PROTECTION (ASP)

We continued to deliver our Adult Support and Protection programme in partnership with, and funded by, the ASP team in the Scottish Government. We had a number of interlinked projects in this area, many of which were continuations of previous work.

Collecting and using data

Since 2020, we have collated, analysed and reported on the Scottish Government ASP survey (**ASP annual returns**). This survey explores the demographics of adults at risk of harm, types of harm and level of ASP activities across Scotland. The survey information supports better ASP policy and practice. This is the final year of the survey as it will be replaced by the national minimum dataset.

Since 2021, Iriss has led on developing a **national minimum dataset (NMDS)** co-designing this with the sector to make sure it is useful for all parts of the ASP system. This quarterly information captures details about ASP referrals and inquiries; demographic information, type of harm amongst other data and is aligned with the most recent Code of Practice for ASP. In 2023/24, we rolled out the phase 1 indicator set, supporting practical implementation through drop ins to ensure effective response to sector priorities. Work on this programme will continue into 2024/25 with phase 2 indicator rollout with the first full year data report in autumn 2024.

Supporting practice

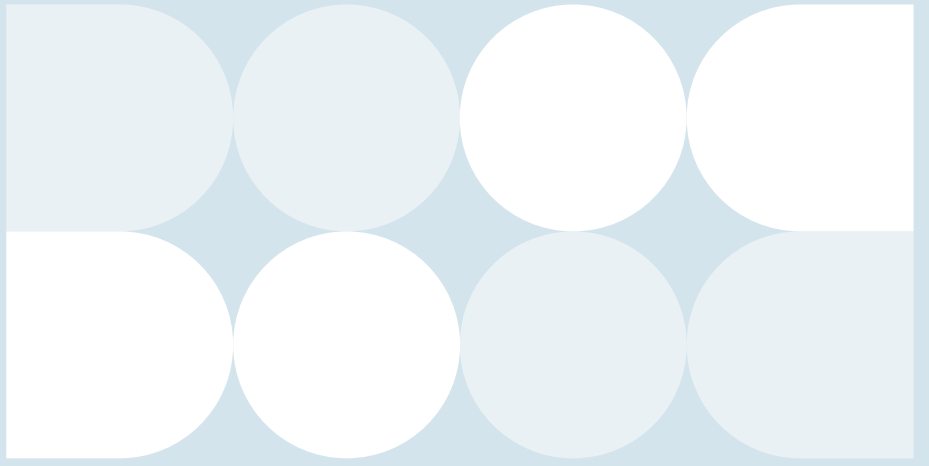
Chronologies are a core component of social work and ASP in particular as they are a key way of recording and understanding the sequence of a person's life, their support and the decisions they and others have taken about them. Building on Iriss's [2023 scoping research](#) and [evidence capture](#) on improving practice, we worked with the ASP National Implementation Subgroup on chronologies to develop a tool to support better practice.

A **large-scale investigation (LSI)** is undertaken when there are two or more adults at risk of harm in a care and support setting. These are comparatively unusual and social workers may not have experience of conducting such an investigation. Building on the 2022/23 guidance, we are supporting a group of people experienced in LSIs to develop clear and useful guidance and processes for these investigations to help make practice better and more consistent.

We created [guidance](#) on understanding age in **Child Protection guidance and ASP legislation** as a practical tool for social workers of all levels, and other professionals working with 16 and 17 year olds, to view the policy and guidance options available to them.

We have also gathered **ASP resources** in a single source, the [ASpire Hub](#), as well as developing [bitesize](#) versions of our key **ASP courses** which get to the heart of the issue in under 50 minutes.

This year we continued to host the **National Adult Support and Protection Coordinator (NASPC)**, Brenda Walker. This year she has focused on growing the ASP community, increasing ASP awareness and understanding amongst adjacent professions and sectors and improving practice through the ASpire event series.



Policy and practice support



Iriss Courses

With more than 1,000 registered users, our [online courses](#) continued to deliver practice support to the sector. This included the launch of a new course on **Child protection planning meetings**, building on our previous Adult Support and Protection and ethical commissioning resources.

235

USERS

**Working together in
Adult Support and Protection**

212

USERS

**Ethical commissioning
in social care**

182

USERS

**Child protection
planning meetings**

181

USERS

**Large scale
investigations**

163

USERS

**Multi-agency Adult Support
and Protection conferences**

*Figures accurate
as of August 2024

Iriss Insights

Through our Insights we continued to provide evidence to the sector:

- [Born into care in Scotland](#)
- [Re-examining child neglect in the changing policy landscape](#)
- [Social work's relationship with the PREVENT duty](#)
- [Supported decision making](#)
- [Understanding the implications of children's rights for Scottish youth justice](#)

Research

We continued to provide responsive research support to colleagues in the Scottish Government, SSSC and Social Work Scotland, this year **focussing on leadership**.

- We created a [summary report](#) of the Chief Social Work Officer Reports for 2022/23 which sets out the current pressures on social work and the work undertaken locally to address these.
- We worked with Social Work Scotland to explore [Leadership in social work](#) which considered the current practice context of social work leadership in Scotland with the aim of better understanding how the sector can support developing and existing leaders.
- On behalf of the Scottish Government we evaluated the effectiveness of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) Postgraduate Diploma in meeting the needs of current and aspiring CSWOs.



Rural Social Work

As part of our work creating and sustaining networks of changemakers, we have continued to support the **Rural Social Work Forum**, a network of social workers with an interest in remote and rural issues. Run in partnership with SASW, SWEP and others this provides a range of webinars and an online conference: [Hidden Issues in Rural Social Work and Communities](#).



Celebrating the sector

This year we were delighted to be asked by the Scottish Government to host the [Scottish Social Services Awards](#) to help recognise the commitment and contribution of those who work in social work and social care support. With 180 guests in attendance this was an excellent opportunity to highlight and celebrate social work and social care support.



Learning

2023/24 was our first full year of innovation portfolio work with partners. We learned a lot about how best to help people and organisations improve and innovate, despite their extremely challenging environment.

A common challenge

Common throughout our work was the desire to put a policy, idea or vision into practice. This ranged from wanting to solve a discrete problem to put an approach into practice or to change an entire system – often borne out of deep frustration at not being able to do the right thing. Across all projects at all levels we saw people grappling with the implementation gap. Integrating a range of theory and practice learning from this year we have used this learning to develop an implementation support course for delivery in 2024/25.

Many of our partners come to us with either an overwhelmingly complex set of interrelated problems or a fixed solution that they want to implement. Both of these require high adaptability from the Iriss team as well as persistence in working with partners to determine the root causes and how best to address this. Our work to make the system visible, supported people to identify and take realistic actions and to be critical about their favoured ideas, analysing these for impact, feasibility and alignment.

Readiness

It takes certain conditions, capacity and capabilities to be ready to improve or innovate. Working with a mix of organisations over the year showed us that projects were most likely to be successful where the following conditions were in place:

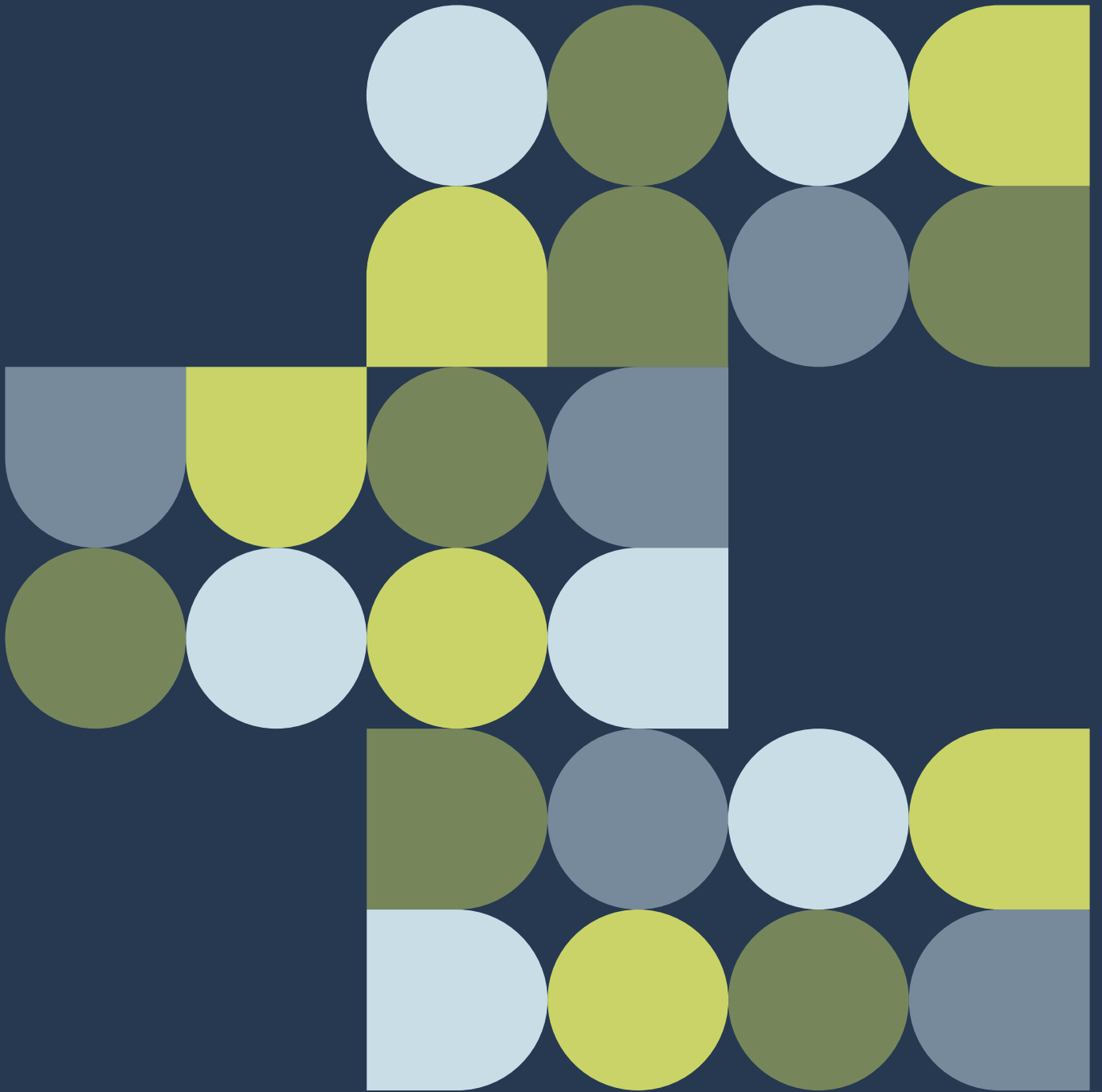
- **Umbrella leadership:** Leaders were bought in and worked to champion the project, giving permission and support.
- **Realistic optimism:** Partners who balanced being hopeful for better but realistic about their scope of action, timelines for change and challenges of embedding ideas.
- **Collaborative approach:** Partners who took a cross-system, collaborative approach that involved relevant people early in discussions were more successful. This was true even where opening relationships were not strong.
- **Pace and problem solving:** Partners who spent enough (but not too much) time understanding the problem(s) (to find the true base problem) and made sure that understanding was shared were more likely to be successful.
- **Balanced persistence:** Innovation and improvement, particularly in the embedding/realisation phase requires persistence. Successful partners were persistent, but not unrealistic, knowing when to keep going and when to close off avenues of work.

What works in innovation support

Over the year we analysed what worked in terms of the support Iriss gives organisations and teams and found for our own practice that it was important to be:

- **Led by the partner's priorities:** One of the key factors in implementation failure is where a solution is imposed from the outside, that doesn't map to the way a team or organisation sees the problem. However the system we work in includes national priorities, framework, legislation and directives that also seek to shape solutions to agreed problems. Iriss' staffs' role is to bridge these two views of the problems in the system, listening to, and understanding in detail partners perspectives and aligning these with the broader picture.

- **Early problem analysis and idea workup:** We discovered many projects spent a lot of time in the problem analysis phase, longer than anticipated or planned for. From this we developed the successful [Ideas Lab](#) approach. This takes partners through an intensive structured development day, accelerating this phase, helping them make connections with other changemakers and build relationships with the Iriss team.
- **Evidence based and practical:** Making use of evidence within innovation and improvement is a key challenge. Evidence, particularly formal research, can seem out of reach to busy practitioners. We learned that successful projects were built on the integration of functional and topic knowledge with people's practice experience.
- **Just enough structure:** Improvement and innovation is often characterised by commitment to a single method, despite the evidence that there is no 'silver bullet' scalable solution to problems in complex, contextual practice areas such as social work. Equally, where support has no method or parameters, energy is dissipated and projects stay stuck at the discussion stage. We learned over the year to bring just enough structure through using our staged innovation model to keep projects on track as well as coaching style support for local leads.
- **Persistence and flexibility:** The operating context for our work has changed considerably since COVID-19. Organisations and workers are under additional pressure; the system is under-resourced and many partners describe themselves as overwhelmed and burnt out. Successful project facilitation therefore needed to be far more flexible to recognise and work with these pressures. To do this successfully we moved to a mixed methods approach of online and in-person workshops, 1:1 calls, surveys and calls, working with who is available while keeping all interested and relevant people up to date with the project.
- **Celebrating work done well:** When people are under pressure they can find it hard to see the progress they have made. This year we built in end-of-project activities where we celebrated progress and planned for the future-framing these as 'handovers' rather than endings.
- **Building a movement/network:** This year included our first national conference ([Iriss Evolve](#)) designed to start building a community of people amongst the sector who are committed to making social work and social care better.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Iriss is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered in Scotland: No 313740. Scottish Charity No: SC037882. Iriss is part funded by the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (OCSWA) in the Scottish Government.