EMPOWER Dementia Network+

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SEPTEMBER 2025
VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

Dear EMPOWER Colleagues,

We hope you are well. Lots has been happening at EMPOWER since our last newsletter, and we are excited to share some of the latest developments and progress we have made together.

In this issue, we bring you updates on several key activities such as the launch of our Small Research Project Fund, the Sandpit event, and the commencement of our sub-project on bridging gaps in dementia care with South Asian communities.

Since Last Time...

Sandpit Event

In August 2025, the Network hosted a Sandpit event at the University of West London. The event brought together around 100 participants, both in person and online, including lived experts, researchers, practitioners, and community partners.

Professor Emma Wolverson welcomed attendees, and opening speeches by people living with dementia set a collaborative and inclusive tone. The Sandpit provided space for participants to connect, share ideas, and begin shaping project proposals. The event supported the development of cross-sector partnerships and fostered a creative environment for generating innovative approaches to dementia research.

Opening of Funds

The Sandpit also marked the opening of two new funding opportunities. The Co-production Support Fund was introduced to strengthen collaborative project development and ensure meaningful involvement of lived experts. In parallel, the Small Research Project Fund was launched to support projects that bring people together and focus on long-term impact. Our aim is to fund work that creates real, positive change for people affected by dementia, across the UK and beyond, with the potential to grow and benefit even more communities over time.

You can read more and apply for the Small Research Project Fund here.

Co-production Training & Toolkit

Recognising that co-production requires specific skills and confidence, the Network partnered with Ellie Robinson-Carter and Rachael Litherland to deliver a co-production training webinar in June 2025. This training is now available online as a resource to support applicants and others interested in embedding co-production in research.

You can watch the Co-production Training Video **here**

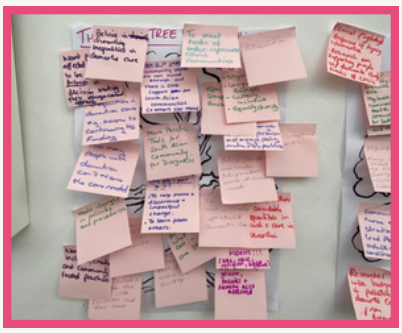
Alongside this, we are excited to share the Co-production Toolkit. The toolkit provides practical guidance, tools, and resources to embed co-production at every stage of a project; from planning and delivery through to outcomes and dissemination.

You can access the toolkit **here**.

Click here!

EMPOWER Sub-Project: Bridging Gaps in Dementia Care with South Asian Communities

We have launched our EMPOWER sub-project, **Bridging Gaps in Dementia Care: Co-producing Culturally Appropriate Solutions with South Asian Communities**. At the heart of this work is our Community Advisory Board (CAB), which brings together researchers, clinicians, community engagement professionals, lived experts, students, and community leaders from diverse backgrounds.



On 8 September, we held the first CAB workshop, where members introduced themselves, reflected on their motivations for joining the project, and co-produced a roadmap for achieving our goals. Over the next six months, the CAB will meet three more times to help refine the EMPOWER Dementia Network's approach to co-production and to co-develop culturally appropriate engagement strategies and resources for South Asian communities affected by dementia.

Welcome to Ankita

We are delighted to welcome Ankita Bhojwani as EMPOWER's researcher. Ankita brings rich experience in dementia research and a strong commitment to working with diverse communities. She has kindly shared her profile with us:

"Hello, my name is Ankita, and I am a Research Assistant for the EMPOWER Dementia Network. I have a strong interest in dementia research and am particularly passionate about addressing inequalities in dementia care. Since graduating, I have had the privilege of working across three dementia-focused studies (EMBED-Care, DREAMS:START, and VC Dementia). What I love most about this work is the chance to engage with people living with dementia and their families, and to make sure their voices guide the direction of our projects. I am especially enthusiastic about approaches that involve co-production and collaboration across diverse communities, as I am from an ethnic minority background myself. I always aim to create an inclusive and supportive environment for everyone, and I will bring this same spirit of collaboration to the EMPOWER network."

Co-creation Work

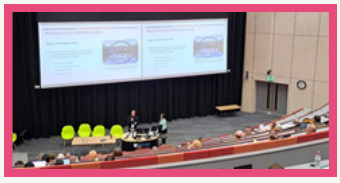
We have facilitated additional co-creation workshops with ~50 more people:

1. In **June 2025**, we collaborated with Nicola Fishman from Bromley Dementia Friendly Community to facilitate a workshop.
2. In **July 2025**, we collaborated with Kemi Browne from Home Instead to facilitate a workshop.

These workshops brought together people with dementia, their carers, and professionals to build the vision of our Network and discuss what excellent and inclusive dementia care looks like to them. Thank you to everyone who planned and attended these events.

Conferences

- **Health Services Research Conference (July, Newcastle):** EMPOWER's network manager and research fellow, Andy Bradshaw, along with our lived experience panel member, Chandrika Kaviraj, presented at the Health Services Conference. You can read the blog they co-wrote here.



- **Alzheimer's Society conference (September, London):** Network co-lead, Catherine Evans, Andy Bradshaw, and our lived experience panel member, Eric Deeson, attended the event. Catherine contributed to the panel "Working across networks to tackle dementia inequalities through research: Network Plus" highlighting the work of EMPOWER over the last year and speaking on the importance of collaborating across Networks in addressing inequalities.

Growing Our Lived Experience Panel

We are looking to expand our lived experience panel. This group includes people directly affected by dementia, including people living with dementia, carers, family members, and friends, all who provide steer and direction for the Network. We particularly welcome people who often do not get a chance to take part in shaping dementia care and research - including those who live alone, and people from ethnically diverse, rural, and socio-economically deprived communities. If you, or someone you know, would like to be involved, please reach out! We would love to hear from you.

Events, Opportunities and Developments

These are events, opportunities and developments that members of our network have asked us to share.

Mental Health Programme Online Seminar

Topic: What should emotionally safe coproduced research with lived experience researchers on sensitive topics look like?

Date: Wednesday 22 October 2025, 12 to 1pm
Location: Microsoft Teams

Find out more and register **here**.

Only Connect! International Community Symposium

We are delighted to support the upcoming Only Connect! symposium in Cornwall this October. Our PLEDGE member Ronald and enabler David will be running their infamous Box of Smiles session as part of the event.

Join for two days of talks and workshops celebrating the power of intergenerational and inclusive practice and research.

Date: 22 - 23 October 2025
Location: Newlyn Art Gallery and The Exchange
Registration: £95 (20% off with code EMPOWER20)

Find out more and book tickets **here**.

Please get in touch with Ellie on **info@the-photobook-project.com** if you have any questions or would like to discuss any barriers to attending.

Thank you for being part of EMPOWER.
Catherine, Emma, Andy, & Laiba

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