EMPOWER Dementia Network+

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Dear EMPOWER Colleagues,

We hope you are well. It has been an active and productive year for EMPOWER, and we are pleased to share updates on our collective progress.

In this issue, we highlight key developments from across the network including the close of the Co-production Support Fund, our growing partnerships, conference presentations, and progress on our sub-project, Bridging Gaps in Dementia Care with South Asian Communities.

Our Year in Review

Over the past year, we have deepened our engagement with community partners and researchers across England to advance inclusive, co-produced dementia research.

Co-creation Work and Engagement

We have worked with 38 community partner representatives and researchers to test creative and inclusive ways of involving people affected by dementia in shaping our shared vision.

We have facilitated 11 co-creation workshops across the UK, reaching over 170 participants, around half of whom were people affected by dementia. Together, we co-produced a vision for excellent and inclusive dementia care. You can read more in our blog **here**.

Policy Lab

In March 2025, we partnered with the Policy Institute at King's College London to host a Policy Lab exploring how we can reduce inequalities in care for people living with dementia, and their families, who need greater support. The 26 attendees represented primary, social, palliative, and dementia care sectors, alongside lived experts, community partners, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. The forthcoming Policy Lab report will inform recommendations for the NHS Long Term Plan.

You can read more on the Policy Lab **here**.

Small Research Project Fund

Following this work, we co-produced the Small Research Project Fund, designed to support small, collaborative projects that address inequalities in dementia care. The fund enables partnerships between community organisations, lived experts, and researchers to co-produce work with lasting impact. You can read more and apply here.

We identified **four** priority areas for funding:

1. Raising public awareness and tackling stigma and social exclusion
2. Supporting families, friends, and unpaid carers
3. Building a compassionate, skilled, and supported workforce
4. Inclusive uses of technology (digital tools, online platforms, VR, AI)

The entire funding process, from criteria to training and support, was co-produced. Two working groups shaped the fund:

- **Small Research Project Fund:** Thirteen lived experts, community partners, and researchers came together between April and August 2025 to review the Small Research Project Fund criteria, provide advice, and shape the process before launch.
- **Co-production Training Webinar:** Ten lived experts, community partners, and researchers worked together between May and June 2025 to co-develop a training video on how to do co-production in practice. You can watch the video here.
- **Co-production Support Fund:** This was to enable teams to build partnerships and co-produce full applications for the EMPOWER Small Research Project Fund, fostering meaningful collaboration between lived experts, researchers, and community organisations. We awarded funding for twenty projects, running from 8 October 2025 to 7 January 2026.
- **Co-production Toolkit:** This was developed collaboratively with a lived expert, community partner, and researcher. The toolkit is designed to help applicants and others embed co-production confidently and effectively in their work. You can download the Toolkit here. We are also grateful to Dementia Researcher and the Co-production Collective for hosting the toolkit on their platforms.

Community Partnerships

We welcomed 14 news Community Partners, bringing us to a total of 28.

Their commitment, time, and insight are essential to EMPOWER's progress and we are deeply thankful for their continued support and expertise. You can view and connect with our Community Partners here.

Find out more by clicking on the logos.

We have secured more funding

- **Seed funding** (£5000) for our Small Research Project Fund Sandpit event, enabling collaboration between researchers, lived experts, and community organisations.
- **King's Undergraduate Research Fellowships** (£1500) supported two students, Nusaibah Hasan and Tazca Levitt, to develop case studies of best practice of supporting people affected by dementia by our community partners and a scoping review on inclusive co-production with ethnically diverse groups. You can read Nusaibah's blog **here** and Tazca's blog **here**.
- **King's Impact Fund** (£50000) to co-create culturally appropriate resources and engagement strategies with South Asian communities affected by dementia. You can read more **here**.

Research Outputs

- A narrative review on on what gold standard co-production looks like from the outset when working with people with dementia (completed).
- A methodological paper on how EMPOWER have been advancing inclusive research approaches by involving underserved groups in shaping dementia care and research and how we came together to co-create the EMPOWER Network (in preparation).

Conferences and Dissemination

Our work has been shared across seven conferences in 2025, including:

- European Association of Palliative Care, Helsinki (May)
- Health Services Research UK, Newcastle (June)
- Alzheimer's Society Annual Conference, London (September)
- Alzheimer's Europe, Bologna (October)
- Scottish Health Research and Innovation Conference, Edinburgh (October)
- Welsh Virtual Dementia Care Conference (November, online)
- UK Dementia Congress, Manchester (November)

We were also pleased to see our lived experience panel member Ronald Amanze contribute to Only Connect, an international symposium in Cornwall hosted by community partner Ellie Robinson-Carter. Ronald led the Box of Smiles workshop, which encouraged participants to reflect on what brings joy and connection in their daily lives - a powerful reminder of the importance of creativity and wellbeing in dementia work.

PALLDEM-Homecare

We are pleased to share that members of the EMPOWER Dementia Network are contributing to the Marie Curie Research Programme, developed in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society, which focuses on improving end-of-life experiences for people with dementia.

Despite dementia being the leading cause of death in the UK, many people and their carers do not receive adequate support at the end of life. This programme seeks to address that gap through new research that strengthens the quality and coordination of care.

One of the funded studies, PALLDEM-Homecare, is led by Dr Lesley Williamson and Professor Catherine Evans at King's College London, with Home Instead as a community partner and support from the EMPOWER Network. The study aims to help homecare workers identify symptoms, assess needs, and improve communication across care teams to deliver more consistent, person-centred care for people with dementia at the end of life. You can read more about the project **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. This group represents a diversity of cultures, genders, generations, and religions across South Asian groups. Over a series of four workshops, our CAB are helping to adapt community engagement resources and strategies developed through the EMPOWER Dementia Network+ to ensure cultural relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness.

On 20th October, we held our second CAB workshop in Wolverhampton where we were warmly welcomed by our community partners on Diwali, beginning with a (very tasty) shared lunch of South Asian food to celebrate the festival and our coming together. In this session, we explored how we can use this project to build on extensive co-production work led by **Dr Karan Jutlla** and our community partner DOSTIA in Wolverhampton. We then explored how we may adapt this approach to local contexts in Croydon, working with our community partner **Manju-Shahul Hameed Foundation** to draw on the strengths of intergenerational dementia cafes and community networks to shape what excellent, inclusive dementia care looks like for South Asian communities there.

Thank you, Martin

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Martin Robertson, one of our lived experts, who has now stepped down from the EMPOWER Network to concentrate on his mental health. Martin's voice has been instrumental in shaping the network and helping us stay true to our commitment to co-production. His insight, honesty, and generosity have influenced how we work and collaborate across the network.

We are truly grateful for all that Martin has contributed and for the lasting impact he has made in ensuring that lived experience remains at the heart of what we do

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 socioeconomically deprived communities. If you, or someone you know, would like to be involved, please reach out! We would love to hear from you.

Register interest in our Special Interest Groups

At EMPOWER, we are launching Special Interest Groups. These groups aim to bring together individuals and organisations with a shared interest in specific topics in dementia. In 2026 we are planning to launch two Special Interest Groups on:

1. **Creative Methods of Co-Production in Dementia Research**
2. **Palliative and End-of-Life Care in Dementia**

These groups will meet online to share experiences and expertise, explore opportunities for collaboration (including future research), and exchange learning. As part of these groups, we will host webinars and other knowledge-sharing events.

All are welcome to join including researchers, lived experts, practitioners, and community groups. If you want to register interest in joining either of these groups, please email us at **EMPOWER_Dementia_Network@kcl.ac.uk**

Spotlighting best practice in dementia care

We will be including accounts of best practice in dementia care on our website to highlight the important work being done by our community partners. You can read the first account **here**, which is about the Photobook Project, an initiative led by Ellie Robinson-Carter.

Other News and Opportunities to Get Involved

My Choice ARC KSS - Evidence based guide on the most up-to-date evidence available on treatments, interventions and activities that aim to help people to live well with dementia. You can download it **here.**

Join Dementia Research (JDR) - Join Dementia Research is a service which enables people to register their interest in national dementia research. It helps people with dementia, their carers or those who support them, and anyone over 18 interested in dementia research to make a difference and take part in vital research studies.
Once signed up, you will receive email notifications about studies you can take part in. There is no obligation to take part in any of the studies you are matched to.
Watch **this video** to find out more about how the service works and sign up on the **Join Dementia Research website**. Alternatively, you can click the 'Register by phone' button on the website.

Dementia Wikipedia Page - The Wikipedia page for Dementia is now live, and mentioned the EMPOWER Network in the section titled 'Research Directions'. You can read about this **here.** The page highlights the co-production aspect of the Network in achieving our objective of engaging and including people from underrepresented communities to tackle inequalities in dementia care and research.

The Creative Dementia Practice Handbook - Full of expert information and clear practical guidance, this handbook examines why, how and where creative arts can help meet the social, psychological and occupational needs of people living with dementia and their family carers. Use code **CREATIVE20% for 20% off** **here**

Developing Our Hearts: A Playful & Philosophical Conversation About Care, Caring, Creativity and Community - Guided by the discoveries of those reimagining aging, dementia, end-of-life, wellness, healing, spirituality and community, we invite you to join us in a playful, philosophical exploration of care and caring as something we create together. We invite everyone, including professionals in the field, to explore how we might step outside our comfort zones and create environments that support us to:

- More fully express our humanity
- Listen in ways that promote intimacy and discovery
- Embrace unknowability with as much curiosity as fear
- Care in ways less bound by the pull to fix or to return to "normal,"

For more information on how to register for this event on 31st Jan 2026, click **here**.

Co-design Workshop on Digital Innovations for Dementia - This workshop will bring together clinicians, healthcare professionals, and family carers of people with dementia to explore and prioritise digital innovations that could help improve dementia care pathways and reduce acute care usage. Please find more details regarding the workshop below:

Eligibility criteria:

- Lived experience of caring for a person with dementia
- Clinicians with experience of caring for people with dementia
- Clinicians/healthcare professionals involved in hospital care, discharge, or digital transformation

Reimbursements:

- Lived experts participants will receive £75 in recognition of their time.
- Healthcare professionals will receive a £20 voucher as a thank you for their time.

Participants will be invited to share their views on early findings in this research area and help prioritise potential innovations based on their potential impact and feasibility for implementation by 2029.

If you are interested in taking part, please email Emilia Delaney at **emelia.2.delaney@kcl.ac.uk** for further information.

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

Wishing you all Seasons Greetings and a happy New Year.

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