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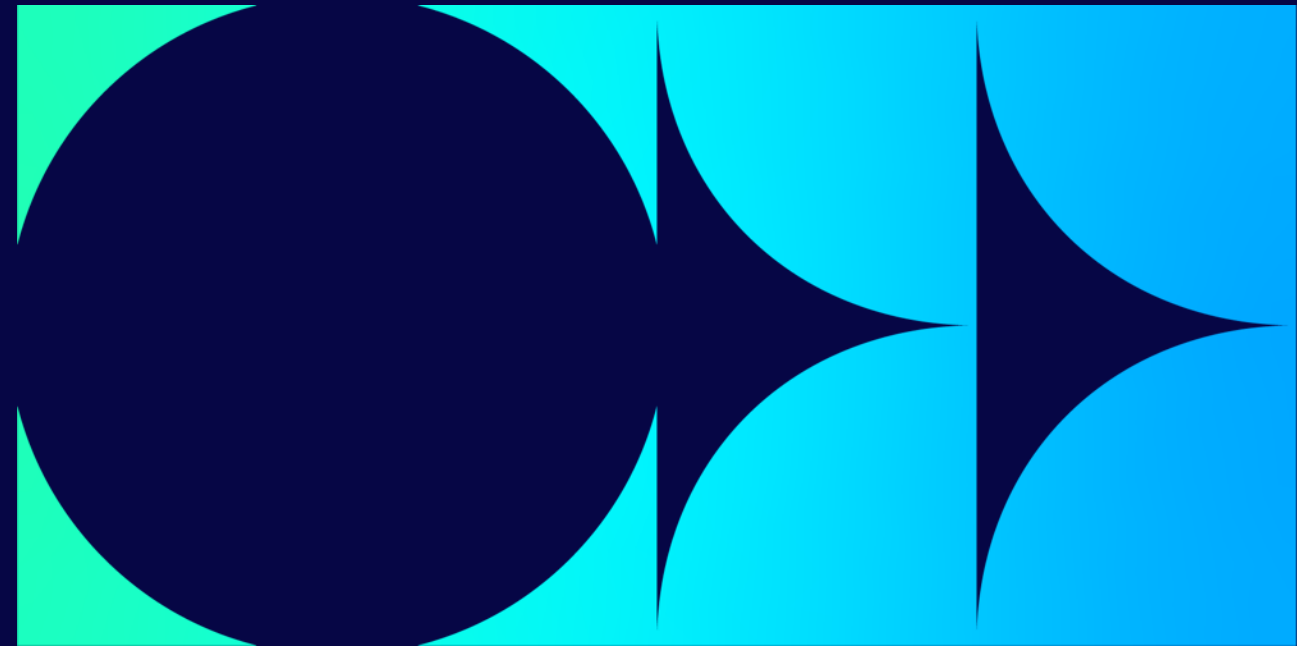
Writing your life – reflections on working together to support social work writing



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ECSWR 2025, Munich



Background and overview

WiSP Project

3-yr ESRC funded

5 Local Authorities

Detailed cases featured in 42 text histories



4608 documents

Detailed cases featured in 42 text histories

71 social workers interviewed

89 interviews

483 daily logs

10 weeks of observation and field notes

1-million-word corpus of written text

Research Team

Professor Theresa Lillis
Dr Maria Leedham
Dr Alison Twiner

Advisory Panel

Dr Lucy Rai (chair)
Members of research team
Service user representatives
Social workers and managers
Students
BASW
HEA
JUC SWEC
HCPC
Unison

Impact Team

Dr Lucy Rai
Dr Gillian Ferguson
Ann Flynn
Lindsay Giddings
Lived experience consultants

Continuing Impact

Publications

Open access resources

Academic and workplace practices

What did the research explore?

Who is involved in
creating social
work writing

Who writes
documents

Who reads
documents

What social work
writing is

How social workers
experience writing

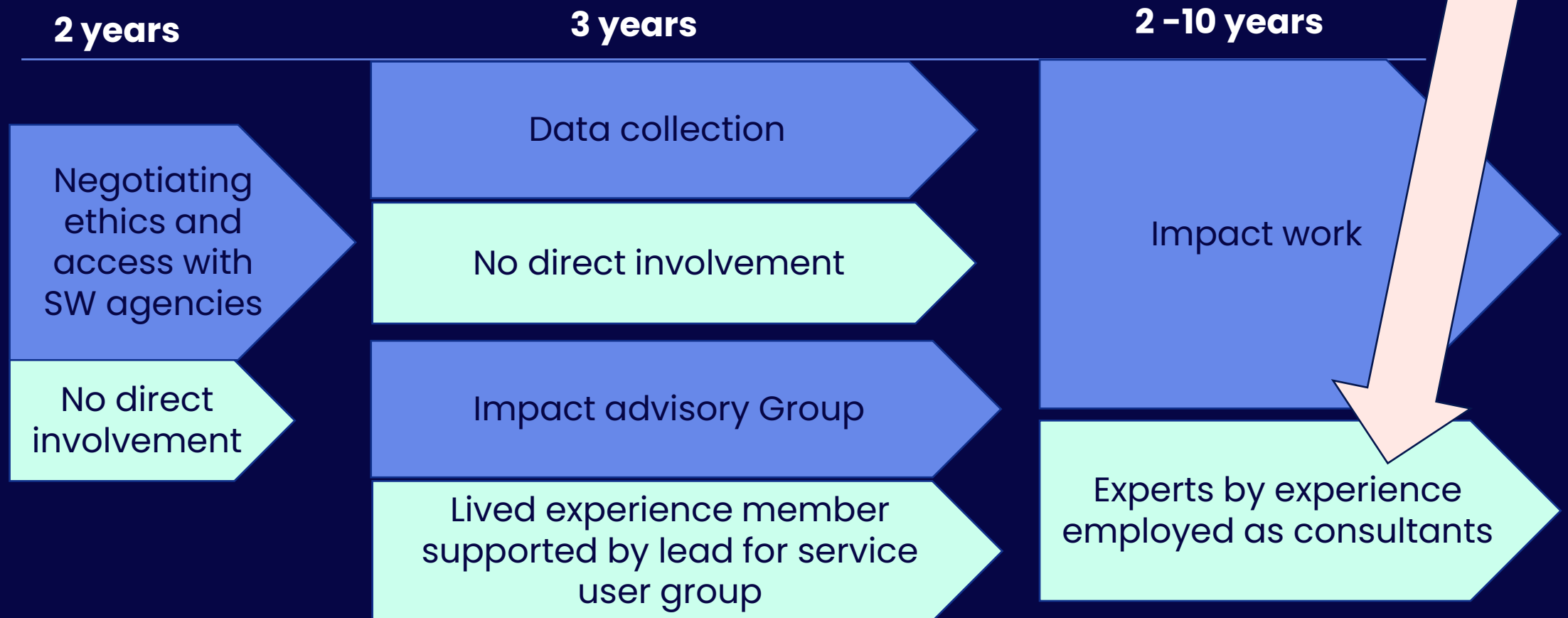
Developing impact

Social work
curriculum

Workplace
practices

Open
educational
resources

Involving experts with lived experience of social work services





Everything about social work writing should reflect the views, voices and experiences of the people who are being written about. Writing should be respectful, and respect peoples' differences including any protected characteristics, preferences, interests and identities.

Written products should be usable and understandable by all relevant stakeholders that need to access it. 'Nothing about us without us' is applicable to all aspects of social work writing.



WiSP Impact Team Mission Statement June 2023

Reflections and feedback

What was your overall experience of being part of the WiSP Impact Team?

Inclusive, working collaboratively, valued by contribution and great learning experience Excellent relationship with colleagues

I have enjoyed it so far, however, as acknowledged, the brief was too large so it has been somewhat unrealistic

Positive :)

Interesting and rewarding. Potential to influence change in social work writing

Reflections and feedback

Can you suggest any ways in which the WISP team could have worked more effectively to enable you to participate?

Bring our perspectives
in earlier

You did great

More time. Reflecting, I
would have found weekly
meeting very helpful.
Important existing articles,
documents as
attachments would have
helped me.

Challenges

- Funding challenges
- Needing time and space to develop shared understanding of the starting point with consideration of the volume of reading and preparation that was required
- The earlier part of the project had limited involvement of experts by experience (ethics)

Opportunities

- Opportunity to keep the mission statement at the fore – ‘nothing about us without us’
- Able to consider the empirical phase of the project from a different perspective
- Ensuring that outputs are accessible
- New solutions and innovations that enable continued development of the impact phase of the work

What next?

- The team are currently working on a paper which explores the ethical participation of service users in research into writing in social work
- Continued exploration of the impact of the empirical work on social work education and social work practice
- Further development of more open access resources to ensure the learning from the project is accessible to all

A tiny snapshot of literature available from the project:

Lillis, T, Leedham, M. and Twiner, A (2017). 'If it's not written down it didn't happen': Contemporary social work as a writing intensive profession *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice*, 14(1): 29–52

Lillis, Theresa (2017). Writing in professional social work practice in a changing communicative landscape (WISP). *Impact* 2017(9) pp.61–63, Science Impact Ltd

Lillis et al (2020) "Time, the Written Record, and Professional Practice: The Case of Contemporary Social Work" *Written Communication* 37(4): 431 –486

Lillis, Theresa (2021). Professional written voice 'in flux': the case of social work. *Applied Linguistics Review*

Rai, L., Ferguson, G. and Giddings, L. (2025) Writing as Social Work: Thematic Review of the Literature, *The British Journal of Social Work*, 55(1): 25–44 <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcae124>

Writing for Social Work (Lucy Rai) Learning Matters series

Writing Analysis in Social Care (Iriss) <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/online-learning-materials/writing-analysis-social-care>



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