

# **The release of social workers from local government into the community: The early lessons from the Social Work Practice Pilots with Adults in England**

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**Background:** The Social work practice (SWP) pilots with adults were initiated by the Department of Health in England in November 2010. The purpose of the SWP pilots is to enable social workers to create social enterprise businesses that deliver functions independently of the local authorities (LAs). The authors sought to explore the following: (1) the benefits and disbenefits in terms of outcomes for service users, social workers and other staff; (2) how social work practice was developing when working independently from LAs; and (3) the benefits and disbenefits of professionally-led social enterprise.

**Methods:** Through the use of a co-operative inquiry approach (Heron, 1996), this inquiry sought to identify 'what works', specifically the social work methods being developed in the new practice context and their impact on service users and how the 'values and principles' of social enterprise are evident in the practice. The information was gathered through two, 2-day site visits to each of the seven SWP pilots, and through two, 1-day workshops where all seven SWP pilots were represented. Information was gathered from social workers, service users, and community members/partners through individual interviews, group meetings, home visits, and office-based activities. All information was analyzed using thematic analysis (Greg, 2012).

**Results:** The thematic analysis revealed the following five main themes: (1) Spend more time with individuals – less bureaucracy; (2) Take decisions much closer to their clients – a more responsive service; (3) More control over the day-to-day management; (4) Thinking creatively about resource use; and (5) Enjoy their jobs more. Each theme will be described and supported through pictures, videos, and case studies.

**Conclusion:** This inquiry has revealed that social workers are able to work more creatively, flexibly, and with less bureaucracy within a social enterprise operating independently from LAs. Future research should explore the long-term impact of SWPs on service users and social workers.