

# **SCIE report**

## **Independent Social Work Partnership (ISWP)**

### **31 March 2013**

#### **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and the Department of Health (DH) for giving us the opportunity to develop the Independent Social Work Partnership (ISWP) into a professional independent Social Work Practice Pioneer Project (SWPPP), and to Cathie Williams and Gail Tucker for their support and expertise.

#### **Report summary**

This report tells the development story of ISWP following the SCIE and DH grant allocation of £20,000 to develop a SWPPP. It gives examples of how and why clients have contacted ISWP, what improvements we have been able to make to their lives with case studies and recorded testimonies, and how the grant has helped to provide a much needed free Information and Advice Service. We end the report with recommendations for future action for DH and SCIE to consider, and our commitment to continue to meet the need for independent social work in the future.

#### **Introduction**

ISWP is an independent social work-led organisation founded in January 2010, offering independent social work services in the following ways.

##### ***ISWP Information and Advice Service***

ISWP offers free up-to-date advice and information on all care and accommodation options that are available for adults and older people to enable them to make informed choices and decisions about their care needs.

The Information and Advice Service is targeted at adults and older people who fund their own care, those who do not meet current local authority eligibility criteria for services and those who choose not to access statutory services. It is managed by qualified social workers and is available by email, telephone and in special circumstance, via home visits.

For people who fund their own care or who do not meet the local authority eligibility criteria, a wide range of services is offered, including independent assessments, care planning, review and monitoring services to assist adults, older people, their relatives and advisers to make the right choice and decisions about their local care, accommodation and nursing needs. ISWP offers all the necessary support to ensure that each client receives the highest level of care and service.

For private agencies, local authorities and professional bodies, ISWP offers services in independent social work, mental health assessments and best interests reports.

All services provided by ISWP are managed by qualified and experienced social workers, who work with ISWP on a self-employed basis as associate partners.

ISWP is a social purpose company. It works ethically and to social enterprise principles. It reinvests time to provide guidance and help to individuals and to other social care agencies. ISWP is committed to equality and diversity. It takes positive action to ensure that the promotion and marketing of its service is inclusive and seeks to engage hard-to-reach and under-represented groups.

ISWP is a collaborative organisation, and is committed to working in partnership with other organisations, and with its clients, to ensure that information and best practice is shared and that innovation is developed. ISWP meets regularly with both voluntary and statutory organisations in the area to ensure that the services it offers are transparent and clear, and that it does not overlap with existing services provided by other organisations.

ISWP is a sustainable business model. It provides a subsidy to the Information and Advice Service from the surpluses generated from its trading practice.

### ***SWPPP funding***

SWPPP funding has enabled ISWP to:

- **Establish the ISWP virtual office.** All independent social workers who are partners in ISWP are self-employed and work from home. The purchase and installation of a dedicated server means that all partners can access and share documentation which is stored in a secure and safe environment, and which meets the requirements of the Data Protection Act.
- **Develop the ISWP Information and Advice Service and independent social work services** in Chester and Cheshire, and from January 2013, in the Wirral and Liverpool. SWPPP funding has enabled ISWP to grow and expand the information service element of its service to a larger number of people.
- **Link with Decision Tree.** The link between ISWP and Decision Tree, an independent social work-led company, based in Reading, enabled ISWP to develop the Information and Advice Service in London, the Thames Valley and the South East from September 2012.

## **What we are doing and with whom**

### ***Information and Advice Service***

ISWP has developed an inclusive and robust Information and Advice Service aimed at providing advice that allows people to proactively consider and manage their own care needs before reaching 'crisis point' and requiring unnecessary and costly interventions. The provision of free information that empowers people to make informed choices about their own care is aligned to ISWP's core purpose and social enterprise principals.

The aim of the Information and Advice Service is to increase awareness of all care and accommodation options available to enable people to make informed choices and decisions about their care needs. The advice is given by qualified, experienced social workers who produce tailored information and guidance specific to each client or carer using the service. This is either by face-to-face contact, email, telephone or by home visit. ISWP works closely with statutory services to ensure that people are aware of all the services that they may be entitled to receive.

The Information and Advice Service is available seven days a week, including evenings. A preventative service is offered that ISWP hopes will reduce numbers of clients presenting in crisis to statutory services or making application for funding to the local authority in the future.

During the period from 1 February 2012 to 31 January 2013:

- ISWP piloted Information and Advice sessions in different locations including running sessions in a GP surgery and at the office of an independent care agency on a weekly basis for trial periods. Evidence has shown that the most cost and time-effective way of providing the service was through leaflet distribution, talks and presentations, rather than fixed-timed sessions in specific locations. ISWP has the use of a GP surgery and other venues for planned appointments when required.
- ISWP distributed leaflets and gave talks and presentations detailing its services to target audiences including Cheshire West and Chester Adult Social Care and Health Access and Social Work Teams, Age UK Cheshire, Age UK Wirral, Alzheimer's Society, Cheshire Carers Centre and other private and voluntary organisations, health professionals including GPs, community matrons and hospital discharge teams and professional organisations including solicitors and accountants.
- ISWP provided stands at carers' workshops organised by Cheshire Carers Centre on a regular basis.
- ISWP is a member of Cheshire West and Chester 'My Life My Choice' Information Consortium. The Consortium is a partnership between Cheshire West and Chester Council and local charities and organisations, working together to raise awareness and guide people through the wide range of local services and support available, including those offered by the council. The 'My

Life My Choice' website brings all of this information together in one place. The Consortium meets bimonthly. ISWP liaises frequently with other members of the Consortium and signposts clients who contact ISWP to other organisations in the Consortium when appropriate.

- ISWP is a member of Wirral Well, an online information resource for wellbeing, health and social care services in Wirral.
- ISWP has established a positive working relationship with the Advice and Contact Team (ACT), Cheshire West and Chester, Department of Adult Services. ISWP has been given the opportunity to spend regular sessions with ACT members to share information, knowledge and referrals when appropriate.
- ISWP gave presentations to professional organisations including Solicitors for the Elderly and STEP (Society of Trusts and Estate Practitioners).
- ISWP placed posters in libraries, golf clubs and local shops to increase awareness of the Information and Advice Service.

Statistical information and data for the period from 1 February 2012 to 31 January 2013 was recorded (statistical data available on request), which show that:

- 127 clients contacted the Advice and Information Service.
- 42 clients contacted Decision Tree for information and advice.
- 66% of those who contacted the Information and Advice Service had no previous contact with statutory services.
- 84% of people who contacted ISWP were family members seeking advice when their relatives had suffered a change in circumstances or who they were helping to plan for the future.
- 67% of people who contacted ISWP were relatives of people who had capital savings in excess of £23,250.
- 26% of people who contacted ISWP were relatives of people who had capital savings in excess of £23,250, who were unaware that they were eligible for assessment for reablement services from social services.
- Others reported that they felt daunted by the huge amount of information that was available and that they found it difficult to extract the information that was relevant to their particular situation.
- ISWP provided ongoing support by telephone or email to 16% of people who contacted the service.
- ISWP spent 180 unpaid hours providing the Information and Advice Service.

ISWP independent social work services include:

- assessment, care planning, reviewing and management of care packages for clients who are self-funding and who wish to maintain their independence in their own homes;
- reviews on self-funding clients in residential and nursing homes to determine if they are receiving appropriate care to meet their needs; ISWP successfully assessed and triggered clients for NHS-funded continuing healthcare;
- assisting and enabling clients to move into alternative accommodation.

### ***Independence matters***

ISWP is in the process of developing a new integrated multidisciplinary service in conjunction with independent physiotherapy and occupational therapy practices.

This inclusive therapy and social care service focuses on enabling clients to regain and maintain independence in their own homes.

This is a preventative and early intervention service that will hopefully avoid the need for crisis interventions in the future for clients who use the service.

## **The difference it has made for people who use services, carers and families**

### ***The difference it has made for clients using the Information and Advice Service***

The Advice and Information Service is targeted at adults and older people, their relatives and advisers, people who have experienced illness or a change in their circumstances that results in a need for care. The service is accessible by telephone at evenings and weekends in addition to normal office hours. Clients or their carer are able to speak directly to a qualified and experienced social worker or, if they leave a message, their call will be responded to quickly.

There is no other organisation in this locality that offers a free consultation service from qualified and experienced social workers for adults and older people and their relatives and advisers, who are unable to or who do not wish to access statutory services.

The introduction of the online element allows ISWP to offer an alternative intervention for people who would not otherwise access the information.

ISWP is able to provide ongoing support by telephone or email for however long the client feels that they need support, which provides reassurance and consistency for each client who uses the service.

Clients appreciate the fact that they have one point of contact whom they can speak to at any time and to whom they do not have to repeat their 'story' each time they call. They appreciate being able to get timely advice from a qualified social worker without having to prove eligibility or to await allocation to a suitably qualified professional.

ISWP has had positive feedback from clients who have used the Information and Advice Service.

### **Example 1**

'I wanted to send you a big thanks for the time and information you have given me re my mother. It's all a bit in 'the melting pot' but those are excellent contacts and ideas and it's a lesson to me about the condition of our social care system that it requires a professional person to walk ordinary people through its complexities and seemingly endless tentacles of care, both financial and physical.'

**Outcome:** Carer better informed about social care system and in a position to make better decisions with her mother.

### **Example 2**

The daughter was referred to ISWP by her GP. The initial request was for information about residential care for an 89-year-old lady who would be self-funding. ISWP assisted the family to access reablement services, which has enabled the family to continue to care for her in her own home.

'Thank you so much for your input and discussion with my mum [and grandmother's main carer]. Yes we made a referral to social care and now have a reablement package going in morning and night plus secure key and hot lunch. Things have improved dramatically and my grandmother is less confused and my mum less stressed.'

'The family understand it is only free for six weeks but are keen to continue after that date; next step is financial assessment. It's been a huge learning curve for the family and I'm relieved my faith in "the system" paid off!!!'

**Outcome:** Enabled client to continue to be cared for in own home through access to reablement services, carer support and information on private care.

### Example 3

The son had been given ISWP contact details by a friend who had previously used ISWP services. His father was confused and his son did not feel that he was safe to be left on his own at home.

‘Thanks for the speedy response and brilliant info! My father is now on a course of antibiotics – we are all keeping our fingers crossed that this will clear the problem! My brother is going in to see him tonight – so hopefully with the information provided we can sort out a referral to the social workers team.’

**Outcome:** Prevented need for crisis and multidisciplinary services interventions.

### Example 4

The son was advised to contact ISWP by his solicitor. He had returned to live at home to care for his parents who both suffered from mental health problems and who were resistive to accepting assistance from ‘strangers’. The son was trying to run his own business from home while caring for both parents.

‘Thank you so much for your help and advice, it is much appreciated.’

**Outcome:** Reduced risk of carer breakdown and possible need for crisis intervention in the future.

It is evident that recent publicity in the media following the Dilnot report and the cut-backs in statutory services has raised public awareness of the difficulties that people may face in their advancing years.

Fifty-two per cent of people who contacted ISWP were in need of information and advice about care services to enable them to manage a crisis situation or immediate change in circumstances, but ISWP has also noted a recent increase in referrals from people wishing to plan ahead for their ‘old age’.

### Example 5

A lady in her early sixties contacted the Information and Advice Service after picking up a leaflet in her GP Surgery. She was physically and mentally fit, had modest savings and was due to retire from work in the near future. She owned her own property, which she wanted to sell in order to downsize. She wanted information and advice on alternative forms of accommodation that she would be able to move to now, and where she would be able to live for the rest of her life – without needing to be dependent on social services for assistance if she developed care needs in the future.

**Outcome:** Personal independence maintained and specialist advice offered avoiding the use of state expensive and crisis-focused solutions.

***The difference it has made for clients using ISWP independent social work services***

ISWP and Decision Tree both developed independent social work services because it became evident that people who had savings and independent financial means to pay for their own care had difficulty in obtaining independent professional social work advice when they needed it, and then had equal difficulty in finding and buying appropriate levels and types of care.

With pressures on local social services to provide social work assessments and to manage budgets, an increasing number of people were, and still are, affected. ISWP's contact with clients over the past three years has confirmed this to be the case, and ISWP is pleased to be able to offer a service that is responsive to clients before they reach crisis situations, which will often save them, and the state, money in the long term.

ISWP's ability to respond to an individual's personal circumstances with a personalised and practical response is one of the things that clients say that they really appreciate.

ISWP offers an *assessment, care planning and home options service* for clients who wish to live independently. This combines care planning with an accommodation options review for those who have resources but who are isolated from family and friends. ISWP is able to discuss suitable accommodation options as well as care, and deliver a house moving service to help clients through the practical and emotional stages of moving to more suitable accommodation.

**Example 1**

ISWP received a referral from a solicitor who had a client aged 63 who had been unsafely discharged home from hospital. Isolated and with a deteriorating mental health condition, he had neglected his property and water was pouring through the ceilings. Neighbours who had been supportive were appalled at the condition of his home and were extremely vocal in not wanting him to return. His solicitor first placed him in a hotel and then in a residential care home which was unsuitable for his needs, and expensive.

Once involved ISWP sourced temporary accommodation and moved him into a private flat while his property was refurbished in line with his revised needs and his wishes. With his permission ISWP involved the neighbours in his relocation plan so they were ready to support him again.

ISWP addressed his isolation and found a local housing association that would offer weekly floating support, and also put him in touch with local day activities such as a cooking group for men.

The solicitor commented, “We brought the company in to help a client with long-term housing-related issues. They provided prompt, knowledgeable and practical solutions and always kept the client at the centre of the process.”

**Outcome:** Enabled client to remain living in his own accommodation. Without ISWP’s involvement he would have remained unhappily and unnecessarily in residential care on a permanent basis.

*ISWP and Decision Tree offer a brokerage and support service to younger clients in transition leaving education and setting up packages of care and support where they have personal compensation awards that excludes them from Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) eligible needs. This service identifies and negotiates care packages for clients who have independent financial means.*

ISWP discusses the type of activity the client wants to put in place, sources it and helps the client and carer to put it in place. ISWP also completes a basic benefits review to ensure the client is receiving the correct amount of benefits.

## **Example 2**

The elderly father of a severely disabled young woman contacted ISWP to see if it could help with a support package. The young woman had just left educational services, and because she had a financial settlement from a hospital for being brain damaged at birth, she had the financial means to pay for her own future support package. ISWP discussed with her father the types of support she needed and the type of activities she might enjoy.

Consequently ISWP was able to help her father find home care, day activities for her and link her up with a new type of respite care. In the process ISWP looked at concessions and benefits that might be open to her and were able to help him access these and give him some money.

His response was, ‘Thanks to you I now have some support and professional guidance to buy the right services for my daughter.’

**Outcome:** Enabled main carer to continue to care for his daughter at home.

ISWP offers an *assessment, care planning and monitoring service* for clients who wish to remain in their own homes. This service is not available for self-funding clients in this area. ISWP is able to offer clients innovative and flexible care packages to enable them to continue to live independently at home.

## **Example 3**

ISWP received a referral from relatives for a client who was physically fit and who suffered from memory impairment. She lived on her own and neglected her nutritional requirements – her diet consisted mainly of cigarettes and coffee. She had suffered weight loss, frequent falls and several admissions to hospital with fractures or increased

confusion caused by dehydration. She was resistive to care intervention and her relatives lived a distance away and were unable to visit regularly.

ISWP arranged for her local pub and post office to deliver meals at lunch time and sandwiches at tea time on a daily basis as a 'friendly gesture' because she had 'always been such a good customer'; both invoiced her Power of Attorney direct. Her physical health improved as a result of regular nutrition and daily contact from people from the community. She now accepts overnight carers and is able to continue to live in her own home with minimum risk.

**Outcome:** Enabled client to remain living at home.

Clients who are self-funding in residential or nursing placements or who fund their own care at home in this area do not currently receive reviews of their care. *ISWP offers a reviewing service* to ensure that each client is receiving the appropriate care to meet their needs. Solicitors who act as deputies for the Court of Protection or Powers of Attorney refer clients for this service.

ISWP also receives referrals from relatives who have concerns about the care that their relative is receiving but who feel reluctant to raise their concerns with the management of the home or care agency. They frequently do not know whom they should approach. ISWP provides an *advice service to them about their rights, complaints processes, advocacy support* and the responsibilities of regulators such as the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

When a situation appears to be a serious indicator of neglect or abuse, ISWP advises and assists them to make safeguarding referrals to the appropriate statutory agencies.

Finally, ISWP interfaces with community health by providing a *checklist continuing healthcare referral service*. ISWP has successfully triggered clients for full assessment for NHS-funded continuing healthcare.

#### **Example 4**

The solicitor referred a self-funding client for a review of her care in a residential placement. The manager of the residential home had suggested to the solicitor that this client may need to be moved to the elderly mental ill (EMI) residential section of the home, as she had become more confused and presented with difficult behaviours.

Assessment by the ISWP social worker concluded that isolation and lack of stimulation had resulted in disorientation and confusion. Along with suggestions for changes to her care plan, ISWP was able to arrange for her to receive a weekly visitor/advocate to provide regular social contact. Her mental state improved and she did not need to be transferred to the EMI section of the home.

**Outcome:** Less intrusive and costly solution worked in the best interests of the client and public funds.

## **The difference it has made for social work and social workers**

### ***The difference it has made for ISWP social work and social workers***

Working with ISWP as independent social workers offers a return to the core values of the social work profession. ISWP adheres to the international definition of social work as being to empower and liberate people to enhance their wellbeing, intervening at the point where people interact with their environments and upholding principles of human rights and social justice.

ISWP's policies and practices are based within these values and comply fully with the standards of conduct, performance and ethics set out by the Health and Care Professions Council. Freedom from unwieldy bureaucratic processes and the constraints of stretched budgets allows ISWP to maintain a focus on values and ethical practice, and this is a regular and key part of supervision and organisational development activities.

ISWP has always believed that it is its responsibility to assist whoever needs help regardless of their circumstances. When employed by the local authority, ISWP felt that people who were assessed as having critical or substantial needs, but who were classed as self-funding, were being disenfranchised because they were given minimal professional help and assistance, or in some cases, simply turned away.

It is evident that many people feel intimidated by the care system and need someone to cast a professional eye over their circumstances and the options that might be available to them.

ISWP is convinced that early intervention, using its independent social work skills, knowledge and experience, allows it to give high quality information and advice to help prevent people from presenting in crisis in the future.

The Information and Advice Service is consistent with one of the key objectives of the vision for adult social care set out in *Putting People First*.

A universal information, advice and advocacy service for people needing services and their carers irrespective of their eligibility for public funding. A first stop shop which could be accessed by telephone, letter, email, internet or any accessible community locations.

ISWP recruits experienced, qualified independent social workers to work on a self-employed basis as associate partners. All partners work from their own homes, they have access to the ISWP virtual office which is stored on a dedicated server that it has been able to develop with SWPPP funding.

### ***Positives***

- Client-centred work central to all that ISWP does.

- Cost-effective and time-efficient for clients.
- Responsive to when clients want the services – no waiting lists and available when clients want to see ISWP, including evenings and weekends.
- Can provide the best service package for clients rather than having to limit choice to what local authorities are prepared to fund.
- Complementary to, and extends the community care assessment services that local authorities offer.
- Relieves pressure from overstretched public services.
- Access to ISWP virtual office – all documentation stored on a dedicated server that complies with DATA Protection Act.
- Client-related training and access to a wide range of training opportunities for professional development.
- Quality supervision available from an experienced independent social work consultant.
- Regular peer supervision and ‘brainstorming sessions’, both online and in person, with ISWP partners.
- Opportunities for peer supervision and joint working with colleagues from other professions.
- Flexibility to adapt documentation and assessment process to suit the needs of the client, not the system.
- The alliance of ISWP with Decision Tree brings a greater diversity of skills and expertise together, which is of mutual benefit to all ISWP partners.

ISWP social workers have the opportunity to carry out thorough detailed assessments over a period of time. ISWP social workers are able to advise the person who instructs them how long they estimate each piece of work will take.

ISWP social workers enjoy the flexibility of working within their own timescales. They can respond quickly and flexibly, and enjoy being able to offer clients consistency, continuity and a truly personalised approach.

ISWP social workers appreciate being able to research innovative, creative and cost-effective care packages to meet clients’ wishes in addition to their needs. They enjoy freedom from bureaucratic processes.

### **Challenges**

There are different challenges arising from working in an independent social work practice. ISWP is aware that ISWP associates can feel isolated and that the pressures of completing reports for instructing solicitors/families can be stressful. ISWP is aware that the success of its practice is interdependent with the success of its individual

associates, and that it needs to ensure that social workers and their professional development are central to the development of its service. Finally, ISWP appreciates that it has to continue to find new routes to raise its profile and become an established resource for colleagues and commissioners in the public health, social services and voluntary sector to access prior to their patient, service user need for crisis intervention.

The founder of Decision Tree and ISWP partner Monica Collings says:

*'We are so often told that our services are preferred because they are refreshingly straightforward in getting changes made and do not get caught up in tortuous bureaucratic systems and waiting list delays. Furthermore, we are not drawn into becoming 'gatekeepers' of scarce public resources as local authority social workers do with their assessments. We are simply delivering our service because our clients have asked us to and they trust us to work closely with them, keeping their best interests central. This means, we can and do work across disciplines, taking a holistic approach and including housing needs and benefits checks in our initial assessments. As a consequence we have sourced and helped clients move to more suitable accommodation for their needs, and increased their incomes where it appears they are not claiming their entitlements.'*

ISWP partner Nick Robinson says:

*'Becoming an independent social worker has allowed me the freedom and time which is necessary, to develop genuinely effective individualised support for people, utilising the full range of possible resources available within their community as well as helping people to draw upon the personal strengths and experience they bring to their own situation. Unfettered by bureaucracy and budgetary pressures, independent social work allows personalisation to move from rhetoric to reality.'*

Liz Bruce, ISWP partner, says:

*'I enjoy the freedom and choice which working independently has given me. I particularly enjoy being able to assist people to find their own way through the complexities of the care system and empowering them to make informed choices and decisions about their current or future care before a crisis occurs, when so often, the decision about their care needs, or their relatives' care is taken out of their hands. The SWPPP funding has given us the opportunity to develop a professional and, hopefully sustainable, social work service, which, it is evident, is so desperately needed by this section of our society.'*

Social work outside the town hall: special report, *Community Care*, 23 May 2012:

ISWP associate partner Kay Kent says: 'A lot of people come to us because they are challenging a continuing health care assessment or local authority eligibility criteria; others just want to be signposted to other organisations. I spend a lot more time doing the assessment, speaking to people, meeting family members. It's far more in-depth than if you were working for a local authority. I have no time restrictions so I can treat people as people, listen to them and be more creative.'

### ***The difference it has made for statutory social workers and professional colleagues***

As ISWP has become established, a growing number of professional colleagues from different disciplines make contact for social work advice and support – health colleagues in acute and community services, social services colleagues, solicitors and accountants, and colleagues in both the third sector and the private sector. Every one of them is seeking a quality social work service that can respond quickly and with timely, accurate information tailored to an individual's requirements. They are aware that ISWP can provide a responsive service where there are 'gaps' between statutory health and care services.

Community matron teams have advised that they have found the service to be invaluable to those patients who are self-funding and who have no close relatives, when they experience difficulties with their care packages or when they need information and advice on alternative forms of accommodation and care options.

*'As a mental health nurse, I have approached the ISWP in place of statutory services to work with clients identified as having had either previous poor support from statutory services, or who are not eligible for the services they currently provide. Clients are on the community matron caseload are those living with a long-term physical health condition, mainly older people and including dementia-type illness. Many clients are living alone with a poor support network.'*

*'ISWP have demonstrated a high degree of professionalism and 100% commitment to achieving the best outcome for the client, in particular with regard to allowing the client to maintain their independence in their own home for as long as possible. They have been responsive and available at short notice and have often gone above and beyond their remit.'*

*'Their previous working experiences allow them to give a wealth of knowledge with regards to social difficulties. Accessibility to low-level preventative services often depends on whom older people*

*approach for information and whether they have an existing source of reliable and trusted information such as family, friends, wardens etc. Clients have been able to obtain this information and talk to someone about options through the ISWP. Their input allows clients to access low level preventative services such as welfare rights advice, care networks and services, negotiating and contacting trade services and social activities. In addition, they have provided support for clients wishing to consider moving to a more supported environment such as extra care housing and residential care, often acting as an advocate for the client.'*

*'In addition, the ISWP has not just provided initial information and support, but has continued to monitor and follow up, thereby continually assessing a client's circumstances.'*

*'The community matron team has and will continue to find the input of the ISWP invaluable in providing holistic care packages to their clients.'* (Community Matron Team, Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust)

ISWP works closely with Cheshire West and Chester Council Adult Social Care and Health Advice and Contact Team, who refer clients who do not meet eligibility criteria and who are in need of professional social work support.

*'ISWP are a highly regarded partner in the "My Life My Choice" Information Consortium which is a partnership of organisations and the council working together to guide people through the wide range of local services and support available.'*

*'What you can expect when you see the 'My Life My Choice' logo or get in touch with one of these agencies:*

- *Easy access to information about a wide range of local resources to help live my life.*
- *Support to access specialist support or advice when I need it without repeating my details.*
- *A quality standard of how information and advice is provided.*
- *The information is sensitive to my cultural and communication needs.'*

*'ISWP have consistently fulfilled these criteria and customers have commented to the Advice and Contact Team on the professionalism and quality of ISWP's service.'* (Manager, Advice and Contact Team, Adult Social Care and Health – Prevention and Wellbeing, Cheshire West and Chester Council)

Independent care agencies report that they find ISWP a valued source of information and support for their clients who are self-funding:

*'ISWP have been an invaluable point of contact for Vi-Va and also for our customers. We are able to refer customers to ISWP if we are at all concerned about them and we are confident that they will provide the best advice and support. We have received positive feedback from all the customers whom ISWP have dealt with.'*  
(Manager, Vi-Va Care, Chester)

*'We have dealt with ISWP over a few years since its inception. We find the organisation both proactive and responsive. This is good from a client/service user perspective in that another view is added to the personalised care plan for that particular person. The ISWP helps to add significant value in this sense and also helps us provide more rounded care as we have another valued opinion that helps in the process.'*

*'We have always found our dealings with them to be helpful, prompt and professional.'* (Director, Home Instead)

Solicitors frequently consult ISWP for professional advice and refer clients who are unable to access statutory services:

*'I have instructed ISWP on a number of occasions where I have been appointed as attorney or deputy for a client, or where clients have come to me for help when they have been caring for a loved one. I have asked ISWP to provide a full assessment of care needs to ensure that the correct level of care is being provided by the care home and that this has been correctly assessed against the patient's financial criteria.'*

*'I have found that in each case this has been both helpful and give them or their family peace of mind, knowing that the assessment is correct.'*

*'On one occasion ISWP were able to challenge a finding that a patient was to be self-funded, finding that NHS continuing healthcare was required, giving the patient care fees free at the point of delivery, thus saving her a very large care fee bill.'*  
(Solicitor, Chester)

## **Outcomes and cost-effectiveness**

### ***Satisfaction outcomes: individual level***

Client satisfaction outcomes are evidenced in the snapshot examples presented earlier in this report. However, it is also recorded by the increasing number of first time referrals from clients, colleagues from professional networks and families and the increasing number who choose to return to ISWP for further advice and support.

ISWP has also seen a growing and wider range of health and social care professionals, voluntary organisations and the private sector care market contacting its service. This demonstrates that not only are they actively seeking alternative social work services to the singular local authority social services route, but they have a growing confidence in the services offered, and take the view that ISWP delivers responsive quality professional social work services, that are cost-effective and provide value for money.

### ***Satisfaction outcomes: strategic level***

On a wider, strategic level across social care economy ISWP recognises that it does not work in isolation. Its continuing experience suggests that people are currently significantly under-served for easily accessible, personalised information about care options, and that ISWP is reaching those people who would not normally access information and advice from traditional sources.

A most telling statistic from the data reveals that a majority of the people who contacted the Information and Advice Service had no previous contact with statutory services. Appreciating that social services can only respond to and support a very small number of the total elderly, disabled and mentally ill population, for example, statistics from West Cheshire and Chester Council show that only 12.70% of the total population of over-65s contacted social services in a 12-month period. It is evident that ISWP has become part of a new suite of community resources that clients can choose to access independently.

Strategically, for community and acute health service professionals, ISWP provides a responsive service where there are 'gaps' between statutory health and care services. Community health professionals are often the front line of preventative work and picking up issues.

ISWP's success is measured by supporting clients to make preventative choices and to take preventative actions, thus avoiding the use of expensive public resources such as unnecessary hospital admissions or involving costly emergency response teams. As an example, by providing housing advice and helping older clients move to more suitable accommodation when they are well saves clients' money and helps retain their fitness and independence.

### ***Cost-effectiveness for individual clients***

The existence of means testing within adult social care means that unlike in healthcare, there is no universal access to free social care services. Consequently, self-funders are in the unenviable position where they often have to make their own difficult decisions about care and accommodation at crisis points in their lives. As the examples here show, ISWP's ability to guide and support people to make better informed decisions will

undoubtedly result in long-term cost savings for many of them, through the timely arrangement and provision of effective high-quality support.

Its charged-for services are affordable and fair for the quality professional service provided, and are comparable to those of independent community health professionals. ISWP's ethos is to maintain its social purpose principles through continuing to provide its time for free to the Information and Advice Service. Everyone who contacts ISWP benefits from this service and charged-for services are only offered to those whose situations would benefit from them. It is encouraging and validating that enough clients choose to use the 'charged-for' services to enable ISWP to continue to reinvest its unpaid time in the Information and Advice Service. Unlike the health sector, there is currently no private insurance provision in social care, and it is a completely free choice for people as to whether they use the charged-for services. ISWP's clients therefore determine its cost-effectiveness for them, and the fact that many of its satisfied clients recommend ISWP to others reinforces the value placed on its services by those who use them.

### ***Cost-effectiveness for the wider community***

Prevention measures have always been challenging to quantify and measure, and it is difficult to determine the cost-effectiveness of ISWP's services to existing statutory services.

The statistical data shows that the majority of people who contacted ISWP for information and advice about care at home advise ISWP that their relatives are still being cared for at home at the three-month follow-up. This results in long-term funding benefits to local authorities through delaying people being placed in residential or nursing care, many of whom would eventually need financial support from the state.

Statistics from the Disability Living Foundation show that the numbers of people who need care, together with the costs of care, are increasing annually. Research indicates that as people live longer their resources will become depleted, and increasing numbers of people will become dependent on statutory services. The Dilnot enquiry reported that the cost of residential/nursing home care has risen to an average of £50,000 per annum. By focusing on early intervention, ISWP services are designed to prevent higher cost implications for statutory services in the future.

It is also difficult to determine precisely the number of clients who would have presented in crisis situations and required interventions from multidisciplinary services if they had not received advice and information from ISWP, but it is evident that ISWP has supported people to put in place timely and appropriate preventative services that have and will continue to avert crises.

Prevention and early intervention are at the very heart of the vision for social care set out in *Putting People First*, and further endorsed in the *Care and support* Green Paper. *Putting People First* says that there needs to be 'a locally agreed approach ... utilising all relevant community resources so that prevention and early intervention and enablement become the norm.'

In the SCIE report *Reablement: A cost effective route to better outcomes* (April 2011) Jennifer Francis, Mike Fisher and Deborah Rutter reported that ‘among reablement users, up to 60% savings had been demonstrated in the cost of subsequent care provision’ and ‘that one robust evaluation found a high probability that from a social care perspective, reablement is cost effective.’

The statistical data shows that 26% of people who contacted ISWP were relatives of people who had capital savings in excess of £23,250, who were unaware that they were eligible for assessment for reablement services from social services.

While ISWP continues to provide the Information and Advice Service, and while its clients continue to pay fees for its services that are unsupported by other sources of government funding, it is saving government funds, avoiding costly emergency admissions or care. This must be a saving to the local health and social care economy.

## **Future plans and challenges**

### ***What next?***

As a start-up company, trading in a recession, in the most difficult and often contentious care market economy, ISWP has learned (and is still learning) to be efficient and effective in the way it operates. Its overheads are deliberately low, and its method of expansion organic and measured to maintain quality and integrity to its service delivery.

Unfortunately ISWP does not currently have the resources to develop the Information and Advice Service to its full potential. ISWP is aware that it needs to maintain a balance between the free information and advice given and its fee-paying services in order to continue to maintain the financial viability and sustainability of ISWP and the professional standards and ethics which it adheres to.

While the last year has taught ISWP how to create a sustainable partnership and develop sound business systems, the next year will require more focused activity, developing ISWP’s skills in marketing and recruiting more skilled and competent social workers to meet demand.

ISWP has started this work but now needs to refine the ways it markets its services. Many clients have said, “if only I had known about your services earlier.” Thus ISWP is very aware it still has a lot of explaining and publicising to do before it can be confident it is reaching clients at a time when its responsive social work help immediately improves the quality of their lives, reduces carer stress and saves them and the government from the more costly options of hospitalisation or full-time residential care.

ISWP has evidenced in this report that it has been successful in developing innovative social work practice and improving the lives of a particular group of people who use services.

However, the wider care economy is shifting and changing and will continue to do so until the government has implemented the new funding arrangements for care, following the Dilnot report. It seems imperative that the current generation of vulnerable adults and carers who are unable to access traditional social work services are not lost in the noise of the change agenda, and that the DH continues to ensure that they have choice and opportunity.

ISWP would welcome being included in that debate in the future.

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