



## From carer to researcher: Abby's journey as an Individual Development Awardee (IDA)

Dr Abby Dunn  
Senior Lecturer, University of Surrey



### How long have you been in this role? What does it involve?

Two years. My role currently combines supervision of ClinPsyD trainee research projects, with some teaching and conducting my own funded research. However, this will change in autumn 2025 when I will start a NIHR Fellowship for which I will solely focus on delivering a 6-year programme of research.

### What made you apply for an Individual Development Award (IDA)?

I had a positive conversation with ARC KSS through which I gained an understanding of the award. It seemed like a beneficial and potentially attainable funding stream for a small exploratory project which would help me develop my research career.

### How easy did you find the process?

It was a relatively straightforward process to put together the application and costings. It was also good practice for subsequent awards I have applied for.

### Where did you find out about it?

Through ARC KSS promotional activities.

### What has this IDA enabled you to do?

To carry out a project to develop an intervention focused on supporting parents receiving psychiatric inpatient care which is described in this [publication](#).

### Do you think this has made an impact in your work? Who is at the receiving end of this research?

The work is focused on adults treated on psychiatric inpatient wards who have dependent children. It sought to support connection between parent and child to minimise some of the distress hospitalisation generates for both. It involved working closely with parents who were admitted to hospital to collaboratively adapt an intervention designed to support parents.



Many of these parents reflected on the lack of engagement with their parenting identity and support needs during treatment and the value they gained from having space to explore this during the programme of work.

The award has been important in the development of my own research career: it was central to two grants I have subsequently been awarded both of which are focused on supporting adults who are treated in inpatient psychiatric units who have dependent children.

### **What have been the highlights of the project?**

Working with parents to develop an intervention which enabled them to maintain connection with their children. Bringing on board ward staff whose initial wariness of the impact of engaging with parenting dissipated following positive feedback from parents involved in the work.

### **What have been the challenges?**

Initially getting traction with ward staff was difficult. There was understandable concern that engaging with the subject of parenting could be distressing and lead to adverse events. This had an impact on recruitment of parents and staff into the project.

### **What kind of support did you get?**

Through ARC I was connected to a range of clinical collaborators. They also provided support around PPI activities and in disseminating the results of the project.

### **What happens next?**

This intervention will be embedded into a ward-level practice development programme which I am developing as part of a NIHR Advanced Fellowship.

### **What advice would you give someone looking to take part in research who has never done research before?**

Don't be afraid to share your ideas with people and ask for input. Critical friendship is a wonderful thing. I have been very fortunate in having support from numerous academics and clinicians and sometimes that was because I summoned up the courage to email and ask for their advice. I am always happy to answer an email with a question about work and I think most other researchers are too.

### **What qualities do you think you need to be a good researcher?**

I think researchers can have such different strengths, but I think curiosity, critical thinking, collaboration and commitment are essential. I'm not sure why they all begin with 'c'.

To read more about Abby's project [click here](#).