



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

Lucinda Kalupka
Owner/Director of Home Counties Carers
(Homecare company)



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

Fourteen years ago, my husband and I founded Home Counties Carers. With his background in recruitment and my experience as a Ward Sister at University College Hospital in London, we combined our skills to build the business from the ground up. Over the years, I have taken on a wide range of roles within the company, including Carer, Care Coordinator, Care Manager, Registered Manager, and Audit and Compliance Lead and the Infection Control Lead and Manager during the Covid pandemic.

Today, we have a strong and capable management team in place who oversee the day-to-day operations of the company. We've supported and developed these managers over time, and they have a solid understanding of the business, how it operates with a strong commitment to provide the best to our clients and our team of carers.

At Home Counties Carers, we support people in their own homes to live safely, happily, and in the way they choose.

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

At Home Counties Carers, we've always recognised the value of research in helping us reflect on and improve our practice. Understanding what we do, how we do it, the impact it has, and where we can make positive changes is essential – not only for our organisation but for the wider social care sector. While research is well embedded in healthcare, it is less so in social care, and we've actively sought out opportunities to be involved in available projects.

Through my ongoing work with the Regional Research Delivery Network (RRDN) in the South East, funded by NIHR, I was introduced to the Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) and the opportunity to apply for an Individual Development Award.



Recently, we've been piloting a new model of social care support aimed at individuals who do not require personal care or regulated support needs. This service focuses on supporting people with the everyday challenges of life and household tasks. We've created a new role: the Hatha Helper – “a trusted personal assistant who supports daily activities, manages appointments, household tasks, and errands, helping clients to feel less anxious and more in control.”

The IDA has been a great opportunity for me to understand research methods and processes whilst providing an excellent opportunity for me to evaluate this service using structured research methods and validated tools, with guidance and mentorship from ARC.

How easy did you find the process?

I've received excellent support throughout the process, including mentorship and training. At first, it felt quite daunting, as I don't come from an academic background, and the language and resources used in research felt unfamiliar and at times complex.

Where did you find out about it?

As mentioned earlier, my work with the RRDN led to my introduction to the ARC and the opportunity to apply for an IDA.

What has this IDA enabled you to do?

I came to understand that my role was to contribute as a “lay” person – bringing a practical, non-academic perspective to the process. I was encouraged to embrace not being a research expert and instead focus on the value of my frontline experience. With support, I developed a Service Evaluation plan, explored a range of tools, and selected the one most appropriate for evaluating the service we offer.

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

This opportunity has already had a positive impact on our work and is expected to continue doing so. I plan to incorporate the evaluation tool into our homecare service to provide validated, evidence-based insights into the impact of the support we offer. I am hopeful that future research programs will explore the impact of the Hatha Helper role and help promote this model of social care. The goal is to enhance the value of our existing homecare carer roles and support the broader, often strained, social care sector.

The Hatha Helper serves as a preventative intervention, helping individuals stay safe, less stressed, and healthier at home, thereby delaying the need for regulated care.



What have been the highlights of the project?

I've greatly valued becoming part of the ARC Social Care Capacity Building community and learning about the wide range of research projects taking place. Connecting with other award holders has also been a highlight, offering valuable insights into different areas of the social care sector and there have been many opportunities for shared learning.

What have been the challenges?

One of the main challenges has been time – the project has taken longer than I initially expected and required more time and commitment than I had originally planned for.

What kind of support did you get?

I've received excellent support throughout the entire process – from help with writing my application to training on the evaluation tools and guidance on how to use them effectively. I've also benefited from having a consistent and supportive mentor along the way.

What happens next?

Next, I plan to share my experience and findings with local social care networks and relevant research forums. Looking ahead, we're committed to continuing our involvement in future research opportunities.

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

I would encourage you to give it a try. Even if you don't think research is your area, it's fascinating to gain insight into what's happening, and you might be surprised by how much you learn—and how much **you** have to offer and share. And it is so important for the social care sector to get more involved in research from the frontline so we can drive real impact.

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

Definitely an interest in the details and the ability to cogitate!

[Positively impacting social care through research presentation](#)
[Positively impacting social care through research poster](#)