

# Co-production In Children's Services

## A think piece

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### What is this think piece about?

This think piece focuses on co-production and its relevance to children's services and community resilience. It explores co-production as a growing method for planning and delivering children's services, with a strengths-based approach at its heart. The paper defines co-production and the different ways it can be used. It provides examples of its use in children's services. It identifies how it can be implemented and the benefits and risks of doing it. Finally, it explores how leaders in children's services might deploy it as part of systems leadership. This is designed to be read alongside the think piece 'Changing Professional Behaviour: What Works', which focuses on how to lead the cultural change required to deliver co-production in an organisation.

### What is co-production in children's services?

Co-production means professionals and users of services producing together. Tony Bovaird of Inlogov defines it as *"the provision of services through regular, long-term relationships between professionalized service providers (in any sector) and service users or other members of the community, where all parties make substantial resource contributions"*<sup>1</sup>. In terms of co-production in children's services, for Aked and Stephens<sup>2</sup>:

*"co-production emphasises doing things 'with children' as opposed to doing things 'to children' or 'for children'. It is a strengths-based approach, which recognises that all children, young people and their families have their own sets of skills, knowledge and experiences which they can bring to the table."*

In one sense co-production is essential in children's services. There is almost no service from parenting support to education that can be delivered without the user contributing a great deal. In another sense it is a profound change, which disturbs many of the fundamental constructs which inform professional identity and differentiate experts from lay people, (Dunston et al, 2009)<sup>3</sup>. Some have gone as far as to state that focusing solely on expert based practice and not using co-production is essentially harmful, in that it creates *"a dependency of a peculiarly corrosive kind: one that convinces patients they have nothing worthwhile to offer"* (Boyle et al 2004)<sup>4</sup>.

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1 Tony Bovaird (2007) Beyond engagement and participation: user and community co-production of public services Public Administration Review. September -October pp 846-860

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2 Jody Aked and Lucie Stephens (2009) Backing the future a guide to co-producing children's services. Nef. London

3 Roger Dunston, Alison Lee, David Boud, Pat Brodie and Mary Chiarella (2009) Co-production and health system reform – from re-imagining to re-making. The Australian Journal of Public Administration, vol. 68, no. 1, pp. 39-52

4 Boyle, D.,M. Conisbee and S. Burns. 2004. Towards an Asset Based NHS. London: New Economics Foundation

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## How does co-production relate to community resilience?

Community resilience refers to the extent to which community members can use community resources to thrive in a changing and precarious environment. The Canadian Centre for Community Renewal (2000) defines a resilient community as *“one that takes intentional action to enhance the personal and collective capacity of its citizens and institutions to respond to and influence the course of social and economic change.”*<sup>5</sup> Co-production fosters this in a number of ways. Firstly, it treats people as a resource. People are seen not just as having needs or problems, or as people who receive services, but instead are seen as the actual resources that can turn public services around. Co-production *“defines and treats clients as capable, responsible, situated, active participants in creating their lives”*, Ryan (2012)<sup>6</sup>. Secondly, where co-production is done well, it has the potential to develop social capital. It requires a mindset that children, young people and families have real strengths to bring to the table, so that trust develops between users, other users and professionals. Thirdly, it transfers some power from professionals to users, as both parties contribute resources and knowledge and have a legitimate voice. Finally, co-production may also mobilise and release community resources not otherwise available, which can build resilience. Community development is a form of co-production that is particularly effective at building community resilience and this is explored in a separate think piece.<sup>7</sup>

## What forms of co-production exist?

Bovaird and Loeffler<sup>8</sup> have identified a number of different levels of co-production and examples are given below of how these might apply to co-production with children or young people:

5 Canadian Centre for Community Renewal. (2000) The community resilience manual. A resource for rural recovery and renewal. Port Alberni, Canada: Centre for Community Enterprise at link

6 Bill Ryan (2012) Co-production: Option or Obligation? Australian Journal of Public Administration, vol. 71, no. 3, pp. 314-324

7 Anna Wright (2013) Building resilience through community development – a think piece. Virtual Staff College

8 Tony Bovaird and Elke Loeffler (2013) We’re all in this together: harnessing user and community co-production of public outcomes. University of Birmingham, INLOGOV

Type of co-production	Example of use with children and young people
Co-commissioning of services	Asking young people to jointly specify the contract for sexual health services in their city
Co-planning of policy	Young people participating on an equal basis in setting the overall priorities for the Children’s Plan
Co-prioritisation of services	Working with a group of young people to agree how the early intervention budget should be distributed across projects
Co-financing of services	Working together with young people to raise money for youth services
Co-design of services	Asking young people to design a school cafeteria, or to plan the next 6 months of youth activities in their area
Co-delivery or co-performing of services	Young people delivering sexual health education in schools, young people mentoring young people at risk of bullying
Co-management of services	Young people sitting on governing bodies as associate governors, or being a full member of health and well-being boards
Co-assessment of services	Young people acting as inspectors to assess the quality of services to young people

## How is co-production currently being used in children's services?

Four case studies of co-production in children's services are given below, three from the UK and one international example. SURREY CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE YOUTH ADVISERS (CYA). Below is a section from the Surrey CAMHS youth advisers website:

CYA stands for CAMHS Youth Advisors, a group of young people with different experiences of accessing CAMHS services, who have a say in what goes on in CAMHS, and take part in a whole variety of projects. Our main aim is to get more users involved with the decisions within the service, because a service aimed at young people should be developed by them too.



A - Z



Jargon buster



CYA works to ensure that children and young people who use CAMHS have a voice, through being involved in recruitment, staff training, service development and lots more. To give you examples, here are some of the things CYA have done recently.

- Held a 'clinic make over' and re-vamp of other clinics
- Created a DVD for other children and young people referred to CAMHS
- Helped create the look and feel of this website, CAMHS leaflets and other publicity.
- Taken part in local and national conferences and events, promoting mental health and service user involvement.
- Facilitated a 'CYA Conference and Awards' Event, fully designed and led by young people, for professionals, parents, children and young people.
- Ran 'UPLOAD!' training for CAMHS staff, a course facilitated by young people where candidates gain a deeper knowledge of the young people's perspective.
- Started our own magazine, Our Voice
- Worked with Eagle Radio to do out podcasts."

Surrey CAMHS youth advisers also take part in training staff in universal services on how to support young people with mental health problems. They also run assemblies for children in schools on the support available to them. This is an excellent example of co-production both in terms of co-delivery and in terms of co-design as they have helped clinics redesign their premises to be more welcoming.



## Peer education to promote community cohesion

The Anne Frank Trust has worked with Bradford Council to promote community cohesion through the use of peer educators for the last 5 years. The programmes train young people as ambassadors to deliver programmes to younger pupils. This is young people involved in co-delivery.

Many authorities e.g. Lambeth, Reading have also successfully involved young people in delivering sex and relationship education in their schools as part of teenage pregnancy reduction strategies. These projects have shown that there is not only benefit to those being educated, the impact on the young people involved in delivery is significant, building their own confidence and resilience.

### Stand up, Speak out, Make a Difference 2013- 14 Peer Education Project, Written by Alina Khan

Friday, 20th September 2013 09.28

Stand up, Speak out, Make a Difference is a peer education project that the Diversity and Cohesion service has run for the last five consecutive years. Building on the overwhelming success of the project, we have decided to offer the Ann Frank + (YOU!) exhibition again, alongside the SUSOMAD programme for 2013- 2014. We are delighted to be working collaboratively with the Anne Frank Trust UK once again this year.

SUSOMAD 2014 is a peer education project that will incorporate Diversity and Cohesion's recent resources, including Identity, Heritage and Belonging, Stand up to Hatred and Kokeshi, in promoting the importance of human rights locally, nationally and internationally as a means of reducing racism, bullying, hate crime, and community tension. In particular, addressing issues relating to cyber-bullying, online protection, and exploitation. The project will encourage young people to engage in challenging issues and use their voices in constructive ways, promoting pupil voice. Like in previous years, the project will be made up of four different parts- training for school-based staff, student-led peer education activities, two interactive exhibitions, and student-led speakers corner events.

The roll-out of the peer education activities has proved to be an extremely effective tool for tackling some of these issues over the last five years, in the classroom and beyond. Building on the success of this model, peer education activities will take place in schools, youth groups, colleges and settings for alternative provision.

Places are limited for this programme and schools will be recruited on a first come first serve basis, priority being given to those schools that have not benefited from the programme previously.

## Co-design of services for looked after children in Derbyshire



Derbyshire's Uni-fi project focuses on developing aspiration amongst children in care. Its starting point was looking at the attainment of those children – only 3% of care leavers go to university and they are over-represented in unemployment, crime and mental illness statistics. They are also more likely to have children that come into the care system.

The council decided that this pattern was morally wrong and decided to fundamentally change its approach to corporate parenting. They are doing this in three main ways:

- Changing the culture of the council in relation to young people so that they always start from the perspective of 'if this was my own child, what would I do?' rather than treating them as a service recipient. This involves training whole cohorts of staff in a new model of professional practice which came from adapting an approach first adopted in Sweden
- Creating a financial entitlement for children in care, up to the value of a medical degree, for them to direct towards their key life goals. They have worked with a cohort of looked after young people to develop and test their ideas, co-producing the young people
- Establishing a network of mentors to support them to develop and achieve these life goals.

Critical to this work has been both their willingness to explore and deeply understand the childrens' experiences from the childrens' perspective and tier commitment to co-producing the solutions. Derbyshire passion to change childrens lives has remained steadfast despite the challenges involved in radically transforming practice and their efforts are being rewarded. Less children are missing from care, more young people are in education and training, numbers of children in care getting 5 or more GCSEs is up from 6 to 17% and young people are reporting things are changing.

## Time dollar youth courts

Time dollar youth courts are an international example of co-production. Edgar Cahn and Christine Gray<sup>9</sup> describe the way these work:

*“Since 1996, non-violent first offenders in Washington, D.C., have been diverted to youth court, where a teen jury is empowered to impose sanctions that include community service, an apology restitution, a curfew, and writing an essay. When jurors compile fifty “time dollars” (fifty hours), they receive a recycled computer. Those serving longer also earn savings bonds and other incentives. Youth offenders are also required to serve eight weeks as a youth court juror. They earn time dollars for time on the jury but not for the community service hours to which they are sentenced.”*

In 2004 the youth courts handled 40% of non-violent offenders. As an example of the sorts of sanctions the youth jury imposed, young people charged with truancy were often sentenced to community service hours tutoring primary school students. As a result of this work recidivism rates have significantly reduced from around 30-35% to 7% in the first 6 months after arrest and 14% in the first 12 months after arrest.

## What existing ideas does co-production challenge?

Co-production challenges a number of concepts as set out below. The first three of these are referred to as Ostrom’s myths after Elinor Ostrom who challenged the way professionals and others viewed service production<sup>10</sup>:

There should be no doubt that co-production involves a very profound change in the relationship between professionals and citizens using services, and that co-production can generate strong resistance from some professionals as it may challenge their sense of their professional identity as experts or rescuers.

Prevailing discourse	Counter narrative
Professionals produce the service and users use it	Any service from health to education involves the user in some sort of co-production if the service is to work
Consumers are passive recipients of services and cannot be meaningfully engaged in their production	Consumers can bring other knowledge to the table and can become specialists as a result of their experience and learning
Professionals implement the services as they are required to by policy and procedures	Professionals interpret, influence and translate policy directives and procedures when they deliver services.
Residents are vulnerable and have problems and deficits that they need help with	Users have considerable strengths and resources to bring to the table
Professionals are the experts and users need to learn knowledge and skills from professionals	Users have a great deal they can teach professionals and other users
Scientifically produced or evidence based knowledge should take precedent over other knowledge	Experiential evidence of the lived experience of children, young people and families is vital to an understanding of how to improve outcomes
The best way of helping people is to support and look after them	The best way of helping people is to enlist them as contributors to support themselves and each other alongside professionals and provide incentives to honour that contribution

<sup>9</sup> Edgar S. Cahn and Christine Gray (2005) Using the co-production principle: No more throwaway kids New directions for youth development, No. 106, Summer pp27–37

<sup>10</sup> Ostrom, E. 1996. ‘Crossing the Great Divide: Co-production, Synergy, and Development.’ World Development 24(6):1073–1087



## What are the benefits of co-production?

Voorberg et al (Op. cit) summarise a number of studies, which evaluated the impact of co-production in a wide range of areas. They found it quite difficult to examine outcomes as not all of the 67 studies defined co-production in the same way or linked specific outcomes to their goals. This is not surprising as the very nature of co-production means that the journey that you start out on may not be the one you end up on! So positive outcomes from co-production included:

- More co-operative ways of communication, interaction and learning
- An increase in new knowledge and experience
- The development of new forms of support, mobilising community resources not otherwise available
- Increased satisfaction with services
- Increased social capital and
- Greater trust, self-recognition and development of new identities.

Bovaird (Op. cit) also highlights the potential of co-production to transfer some power from professionals to users.

## What are the dangers of co-production?

Fotaki identifies the danger that co-production is seen as a tool for greater efficiency and a means of reducing service costs. She is concerned that vulnerable young people and families may be forced into co-production arrangements where public services are cut down and not replaced. She says, *"In this case, the co-producer could easily turn into a responsabilised agent. In an absence of options to choose from, such a user has little control of their destiny despite freedom of choice. The choices open to users may be also restricted, if they perceive themselves to be involuntary service users."* Forcing users to provide services for themselves does not necessarily empower them. She makes the point that in many of the current reforms responsibilities are increasingly emphasised – the responsibility of parents to get work, the responsibilities of young people to get skills, the responsibilities of parents to choose the right school. In effect the discourse is that individuals are now responsible for their destiny and not the state. So co-production can blur the boundaries of public, private and voluntary accountability.

Practical problems can arise in terms of conflicts between the values of different co-producers, a lack of clarity around the role of the user and professional, the problem of user burnout, the problem of 'free riders' who do not co-produce but benefit from the co-production and the issue of what incentives are appropriate and necessary. In some cases the co-production has been so successful in empowering users that they have gone on to train and get jobs no longer being available to co-produce the service. Of course this is also a huge achievement for the individuals involved.

Co-production carries with it the risks of professional resistance when professionals worry that gains in status of co-producing residents might come at their expense or the expense of their jobs. They may also lack facilitative skills to work with users in this way.

Finally governance issues may be problematic and politicians may need considerable reassurance as co-production done well also develops the political voice of those involved.



## How do you implement co-production in children's services

A key issue to think through with lead councillors is the extent to which a local authority or children's service directorate wants to initiate co-production. Some options are:

- A. To pilot co-production in a specific service area and learn from it
- B. To adopt co-production as an overall strategy with the intention that all services should be co-produced over time

C. To take an incremental approach, setting co-production as a direction to work towards, but accepting different services will progress at different speeds through a ladder of involvement. Reading Borough Council has adopted Voice, influence and participation guidance with a self assessment for all services, setting out co-production as the gold standard that services could aim for. The general approach to developing co-production is as follows:

1. Ensure you have political support for your journey towards co-production. The resource on working with the political system provides a very useful background to the groundwork that is needed when adopting co-production or community development as a policy
2. Identify a senior member of staff who is enthusiastic about the approach to lead on it strategically. Many co-production projects succeed because of the drive and energy of individuals committed to the approach
3. Secure a project lead with co-production or community development experience. There are also a very wide range of organisations offering consultancy on co-production with much experience in this field
4. Ensure you start with an open mind about the challenges and issues co-production is to address. This decision should be made with the children, young people and families you engage, not in advance
5. Undertake culture change with the professionals to be involved in the co-production work. The think piece 'Changing professional behaviour: what works' and the resource 'Working with the political system' provide a very useful background to the groundwork that organisations need to do when adopting co-production as a policy

6. Select resources from the toolkits for ethnographic and observational research and for designing, developing and prototyping services with residents as they provide a step by step approach to developing co-production with an open mind
7. Set up governance for the project ideally requiring at least equal representation from residents for the group to be quorate.

Voorberg et al (2013)<sup>11</sup> have identified the following critical success factors for co-production to work within the organisation:

- A positive culture in the organisation, for example one that supports strengths based working
- A positive attitude by staff towards the engagement and participation of children, young people and families
- Clear incentives towards co-production
- Policies that support co-production e.g. in performance management, staff competences
- Having a lead who is an entrepreneur
- Financial support
- Good information sharing
- Having residents involved at all levels including governance
- Allowing professionals more discretion

A final point to make is that co-production will only lead to benefits if it is not deployed in a cynical way. For it to work, it needs the authentic intention to collaborate with residents and the willingness to shift policy as a result of what has been learned. The leadership needs to ensure that the voice of children, young people and families does not become a token contribution and remains central to decision making. Those initiating it have to believe that young people and families are not problems but assets, not 'at risk' but 'at promise' of success<sup>12</sup> and they need to communicate this in every interaction they engage in for co-production to deliver on its potential.

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11 William Voorberg, Victor Bekkers and Lars Tummens (2013) Embarking on the social innovation journey: a systematic review regarding the potential of co-creation with citizens. Paper for the IRSPM Conference, Prague 10-12 April.

12 Beth Blue Swadener (2010) "At Risk" or "At Promise"? From Deficit Constructions of the "Other Childhood" to Possibilities for Authentic Alliances with Children and Families International Critical Childhood Policy Studies, (2010) 3(1) 7-29

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