

Co-production in Birmingham - Case Study

Introduction

The Adults and Communities Directorate has made a commitment to working with service users, carers and citizens through co-production – a way of working in partnership to understand and agree the things that need to improve and work together to change things for the better.

The Council recognises that many individuals, communities and organisations will have valuable skills, knowledge and views they can contribute and is committed to working with the public to help make sure it makes the best use of its resources for those most in need.

Citizen-led Quality Boards and Making it Real

Two Citizen-led Quality Boards – one covering the work of Assessment and Support Planning services and one for Commissioning have been set up.

Service users and carers on these Boards work with staff to provide quality assurance based on their experiences and views from a service user and carer perspective. They identify areas of concern, make recommendations for improvement, co-produce new minimum service standards and highlight areas of good practice. This is usually through task and finish groups with wider representation from other service users and organisations.

Much of the Boards work is linked to the national Think Local, Act Personal 'Making it Real' framework www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk

Making it Real sets out what people who use services and carers expect to see and experience if support services are truly personalised. It is helping to check and improve our progress towards transforming adult social care from a service user and carer perspective.

Co-production in practice

Examples of some of Birmingham's co-produced work include the following.

- Developing new minimum standards for our Access service and the way social care workers carry out social care assessments and reviews.
- Introducing a new Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire enabling direct feedback from service users and carers.
- Creating a 'Good Practice Award' for residential care providers delivering personalised service - short-listed by Council staff with final decision by the Citizen-led Quality Board members.

- Citizen-led Quality Board involvement in the development of a Care Home Quality Rating system which will help the citizens and the Council choose the best care.
- Identifying 3 priority areas of work and a resulting Action Plan.
- Working with Direct Payment service users about improving support.
- Organising an Opportunities Fair to showcase opportunities available to the citizens of Birmingham who have learning disabilities; physical disabilities; mental ill health; sensory impairments or are older adults.

What do the people involved in the project think about their experience of co-production?

Volunteers who had been involved in working with us last year told us they wanted things to be done differently this time. They wanted to be more involved all the way through the planning process for the Opportunities Fair, not just at the event. They felt ready to be part of lots more decision making and took an active role in deciding the venue; the structure of day; marketing and defining the role and responsibilities of the volunteers.

Service-user volunteers 'buddied-up' with volunteers from Department of Work (DWP) to ensure they had as much support as they wanted to carry out their role. Feedback from all the volunteers was extremely positive eg. DWP volunteers felt they had grown in confidence working alongside volunteers with learning disabilities, in some cases, for the first time.

Staff have reported a real sense of commitment to working together and have found co-production very energising. Working alongside new people from different backgrounds and organisations who are passionate about co-production has been refreshing. It has given them the opportunity to look at situations from different perspectives, work to a shared goal with everybody committed to working on the same task to achieve a positive outcome. This has been welcomed, particularly in the current climate of severe cutbacks in funding which can sap people's morale and energy.

What has helped in implementing co-production?

- Having a team of people that really believe in the whole ethos of working with people as equals– co-production can't be seen as an add-on; it has to include everyone from the start to the end of the project;
- Agreeing the 'vision' – identifying the shared goal and what it will look like;
- Acknowledging people's qualities and matching tasks and roles to people's skills and preferences;
- Giving people time to be really involved – breaking things down into manageable and measurable chunks;

- Evaluating past co-produced projects and carrying learning forward to improve the next one;
- Using Person Centred Approaches – recognising everyone has a right to equality, to be included in society and to have as much choice and control as possible in their life;
- Inclusive and interactive meetings– making sure everyone is involved in every meeting and that their voice is heard – accessible venues and times – Ground Rules;
- Good clear communication – identify individual's preferred method of communication eg easy read, large print, email;
- Being creative and ambitious but realistic about what is possible; and
- Being honest and acknowledging that there will always be some constraints for example finite budgets, confidentiality and time.

What challenges have there been in implementing co-production?

- So many people wanted to be involved in organising the Opportunities Fair that the planning group became very big and there was a danger of losing the focus of the project;
- Lack of awareness about co-production – if co-production is to work across the organisation, we have to persuade and educate others about what it means; and
- The organisation needs to actively participate and work together to change the culture to one of co-production.

What are the main strengths of co-production?

- Provides opportunities for people from different backgrounds, with different skills and experiences to work together as equals to make a positive difference;
- Enables people to see the same issue from a different perspective;
- Encourages people to take joint responsibility for problem solving and driving improvements;
- People that have been involved in the project have grown in confidence and self esteem and say they are now ready to take on new challenges;
- People sharing their social networks to grow the number of people and groups that the project can reach; and
- Shared rewards of a job well done.

How have we worked to engage different sections of the community?

The Opportunities Fair project reached different sections of the community by:

- Offering opportunities to get involved to people who use services, carers and established user-groups;
- Involving members of Adults and Communities Citizen-led Quality Boards;

- Organised over 90 internal, external and third sector organisations such as the Education Service; Dept Work & Pensions and Autism West Midlands to participate in the event;
- Making sure that the vision and planning of the event considered promoting opportunities that reflected the diversity of the citizens of Birmingham (eg. age, gender, disability, sexuality);
- Using community networks for example: church networks;
- Researching what organisations and groups exist in Birmingham to enable us to reach as many different groups of people and individuals as possible for this project and in the future;
- Advertising the event via a mail-out to all carers and Birmingham schools to target young carers and young people who will shortly be leaving school and may need adult social care services
- Word of mouth / radio / Council website / posters / flyers / local paper
- Social media - Twitter

What advice would you give to others considering using co-production?

- Do it – it'll make you feel good!
- Team work is essential;
- Involving people with skills and expertise in engaging with citizens, service-users and carers is key;
- It is essential to have support for co-production from senior managers;
- Make sure you have resources to support the project, for example: dedicated time, budget;
- Spend time planning and identifying what you want to achieve – break it down;
- Have a vision but be flexible;
- Keep focused on the project – acknowledge any individual difficulties, but deal with these outside the main work;
- Have a core group of experienced facilitators;
- Harness individuals enthusiasm – then the passion will snowball; and
- Have fun and celebrate your successes!
