

WEST MIDLANDS CO-PRODUCTION PRACTITIONERS' NETWORK

Minutes of the Third Meeting on 12 January 2012 in Coventry

The third meeting of the West Midlands Co-Production Practitioners' Network on 12 January 2012 was hosted by Grapevine at the Welcome Centre in Coventry.

[Click here](#) to see some pictures from the event and download copies of the speakers' slides.

Welcome

Elke Loeffler ([Governance International](#)) welcomed the 22 participants – an encouraging growth in the number of people taking part in these events – and thanked Grapevine for providing an excellent venue. Elke went on to give a brief review of the last event before outlining today's programme and inviting participants to introduce themselves to the group.

Co-production – creating the conditions *Clare Whiteman, Director, [Grapevine](#)*

Co-production is about people working together to solve their own problems, and it existed before we started to use the word. A lot of thought goes into changing systems but we also need to learn to **be** different, which means changing how we think about what matters and what we believe is possible. Grapevine has six ideas to help work this out:

- A life that grows – nobody is stuck where they are
- Connections that matter – build supportive networks
- Everyone's contribution – people are not just needy or deficient
- Learning on the journey – for all concerned, and don't be put off by the risks
- Standing together – professionals don't always know what's best
- Passion

Clare told a couple of stories to bring out some important angles. Both involved taking time to identify what people were interested in and could be good at, and to find settings where they could develop a meaningful role and contribute to other people's lives. There is often pressure to achieve this through training courses, but these can turn out to be just a holding place with nowhere to move onto afterwards; often people just need to find a productive role. In Clare's examples, a young woman with a learning disability demonstrated real skills with young children and developed a role in their care, while a man with a severe physical disability and a passion for sport found a role as recruitment officer for a mainstream hockey club. In both cases the transitions took time but the benefits for all concerned were substantial.

Clare went on to outline three aspects of *Grapevine's* work that help people to achieve this kind of outcome.

1. Help people get into reciprocal relationships - a two-way street with both giving and getting. This applies equally when dealing with professionals at reviews and assessments; treat the person as an expert in their own situation, someone who can be a teacher to professionals who might not be specialists in the particular condition.
2. Develop social networks that support people through change. For instance, to provide more positive influences for parents with a learning disability (thereby reducing the risk of their children being taken into care) or to access job opportunities that are not available through formal support channels.
3. Work in a different way. Grapevine isn't so much a service provider as a facilitator, building and negotiating relationships between the individual and professionals, mainstream organisations, local communities and neighbours.

Some important challenges to co-production are:

- Achieving the culture change to pass control to individuals
- Enabling people to take that control
- Working in new ways, not just with the individual but with the family and the services involved

Clare finished by mentioning a "strengths based approach" called Service Impact Networks which *Grapevine* is about to pilot in two projects: one working with young people in the most disadvantaged families, the other in conjunction with the Law Centre working with young undocumented migrants.

Key points from the general discussion that followed this presentation:

Governance International is currently working with Walsall MBC to develop and pilot a strengths-based assessment process in adult social care. Sandwell Council is moving in a similar direction by focussing on capabilities and not just needs.

The benefits system is problematic. To get benefits it's important to emphasise only the need and not the strengths. Genuine applicants find this hard to do as they may feel this provides an unbalanced (ie dishonest) picture. There was some discussion of how to handle this in an ethical but effective way. It's OK to have both needs and capabilities but perhaps they need to be documented separately.

Traditional commissioning is not flexible enough. Commissioning could do more to develop markets for more appropriate support, with an integrated approach to assessing people in context (social and community) rather than in isolation.

The voluntary sector needs to beware the trap of providing paternalistic services.

Enterprising people – co-producing local solutions *Lorna Reid, [Community Catalysts](#) and Marc Carter, [INSIGHT for Carers](#)*

Community Catalysts is a community interest company whose aim is to put people in control of their own services. This includes promoting choice, giving people control of their budgets and harnessing the talents of people and communities on a very small scale at the local level by supporting micro-providers.

Among other things, services from micro-providers will be personal and tailored, co-produced and flexible. They are good for commissioners because they offer quality, choice and good cost/benefits including the development of social capital.

For local authorities they also offer a route into work for local people through self-employment, direct employment and trickle down into the local economy. They provide options for public sector employees to exercise their “right to provide” at a very small scale, and they offer diversity of supply for public services.

However, micro enterprises do need extra support to develop business acumen, deal with bureaucracy and legislation, and to survive in a market dominated by large providers. Without this extra support, it is estimated that 90% of micro enterprises fail in the first year and around half of micro-providers operate “sub-legally”, largely through being unaware of some requirement.

Community Catalysts has developed a model to find, engage, support and connect local people running a micro enterprise or those with a great idea, and has been working with *Dudley Council’s Enterprise Support Agency*, which aims to shape the market to enable more choice and more opportunity for “real outcomes”. However, this arrangement comes to an end in March 2012.

Marc went on to describe the *INSIGHT for Carers* project, launched in 2009 to provide information and support to carers in Dudley. The project sprang from Marc’s own need for information about support in his role as a parent and carer of two children with learning disabilities. The original idea was for a web based service but Marc realised there was a need for somewhere people could go in person for information.

A Carers Café provided a way for people to take control by choosing whether to engage or just browse over a coffee. The project is now run by over 40 volunteers and has about 100 customers a week. Carers have been given help from filling out forms, information or advice, to advocacy, support and befriending, and the project has developed productive links with a number of agencies. The work has also developed to provide support for cared-for people to get into work and is looking to have a Carer Rep in each school in the borough. There are plans to relocate to larger, more modern premises and to expand the range of support provided.

Everyone involved in the project is an unpaid volunteer and it is funded almost entirely through receipts from the café, room hire and contracts for training and advisory services.

The efficiency case of co-production *Catherine Needham, Queen Mary College*

While recognising the many benefits of co-production, decision makers are often mainly interested in whether it can bring about efficiencies and cost savings. In principle, genuinely transformational co-production can save money in a number of ways, by spending on the right things, understanding what people value and how outcomes are actually achieved, accessing the assets of service users

and reducing staff input. Improved service quality, better long-term health and increasingly skilled service users will also tend to reduce total costs in the long term. Some efficiencies (like reduced isolation, enhanced trust or increased social capital) are not readily turned into cash savings, and some initiatives might only produce savings in the very long term (Sure-Start, for example).

Moreover, it costs money to achieve these benefits; staff and service users will need training, and the new way of doing things might itself generate increased demand for service.

Quantified case studies are rare but there are some that provide an indication of the sort of benefits that can be achieved.

Quantified benefits of co-production approaches – the story so far?

Stockport Council saves £300k a year by enabling people to make informed choices, thereby spending money on the right things. [Click here to see case study of this.](#)

User Voice achieves a cashable saving of £2.11 for the Prison Service for every £1 spent on its work to give prisoners a say in prison management. [Click here to see case study of this.](#)

The Key Ring Network saves local authorities £1491 a year for each person they support. [Click here to see case study of this.](#)

Lambeth Teen Pregnancy has achieved a significant drop in conceptions by involving young people as peer advocates to work with other young people, teachers and youth workers. [Click here to see case study of this.](#)

Time banks have been found to save £1300 per member per year, at a cost of only £450, by reducing the input of paid staff. [Click here to read Martin Knapp's work on this.](#)

Personal Care Plans for people with long-term conditions save a typical practice based commissioner £43,000 a year through reduced hospital admissions. [Click For more information.](#)

Camden Council achieves a Social Return on Investment (SRoI) of £5.75 for every £1 spent on a co-produced mental health day care centre run by the Holy Cross Trust. [Click here for more information](#)

Catherine outlined a number of costs and benefits that might need to be included in any economic case. Existing measurement tools such as SRoI or Cost Benefit Analysis might be appropriate but they can be expensive to do - an SRoI assessment is reported to cost around £15k! So perhaps there is a need for a “good enough” evidence base, all the better if it can be developed using a co-production approach.

Catherine closed by suggesting some questions we need to ask ourselves before trying to build a case for any particular proposal.

Discussion focused at first on SRoI: its cost, reliability and the possibility of organisations developing the skills to apply it themselves. Attention then moved to consider who you need to pitch the case to, and what actually drives them. The conclusion was that real stories and descriptive case studies remain very powerful for decision makers but they might nevertheless need hard numbers to get a decision through the system.

Future meetings

The next meeting will be hosted by EC Arts, ([here's their website](#)), and take place in Birmingham on 26 April 2012 from 09.15AM-1.00PM. Presenters are likely to include EC Arts on their [48 Sheets international public art project](#) and *Whose Shoes*, not to mention Rosie Edwards' problem-solving session postponed from the third network meeting.

There will be a further meeting in June, possibly at INSIGHT for Carers' new premises in Dudley. Watch out for details.

Other good stuff

[More info on Community Catalysts Micro-provider project](#)

User Voice – [here's their website](#), and here's the [case study by Governance International with a great video outlining their Prison Council Model](#).

Catalysts for Community Action and Investment: [A Social Return on Investment analysis of community development work based on a common outcomes framework report](#)

A *Guardian* article by Elke Loeffler on the 'Public Service Compact to Revolutionise Services – [click here](#)

Following the discussion it was advised to join this LinkedIn group: *The Personalisation Group to Integrate Social Care, Health & Well-Being* that can be accessed via <http://www.linkedin.com/>

And finally here's a [link to all past presentations and minutes](#)

Notes by Keith Morris

'Any errors are mine alone'

Big thanks to Keith from Alder Advice for taking such excellent and comprehensive minutes. In the spirit of reciprocity, his personal website is (www.thatkeithmorris.net), and Keith can be contacted at keith.morris@alderadvice.co.uk. And keep your eyes peeled for the [Alder Advice website](#) that is being updated as we speak!

