

Building resilient communities for co-production

Minutes of the 9th Meeting of the West Midlands Co-Production Network
on 27 June 2013 hosted by Sandwell Council

What resilience is about

The 9th meeting of the West Midlands Co-Production Practitioners' Network took place in Raglan Road Christian Centre in Smethwick, where a few months earlier Sandwell Council had launched the 'Friends and Neighbours' Scheme. The theme of the meeting – "Developing co-production for resilience" - raised a lot of interest with more than 30 network members attending the afternoon event.

After a round of introductions, Elke Loeffler from *Governance International* asked the participants to discuss in small groups what 'resilience' means to them. The definitions suggested by participants included:

- 'Bouncing back'
- Power to see things through to the end
- 'Keep calm, carry on'
- Coping with/despite the knocks
- Durability
- Strengths
- Strong community hubs/relationships
- To work together to deal with adversary cuts

Participants agreed that building resilient communities not only means helping communities to cope with current challenges but also empowering them to improve personal and social outcomes.

How the 'Friends and Neighbours' Scheme in Soho/Victoria works in practice

Sandwell Council and 'Friends and Neighbours CIC'

This innovative scheme brings together people and organisations in the Soho & Victoria neighbourhood to build a stronger sense of community and neighbourliness through a network of volunteer 'community supporters' who work alongside local services to support vulnerable local residents with social care needs to improve their quality of life. What makes this scheme different from traditional community development initiatives is that it is not being managed by the Council but owned and run by the local community with support by the local council. As one participant emphasised: "It will be important to keep this 'non-professional' ethos as the scheme is being scaled up".

Beverley Stevens, Commissioner for Adult Social Care of Sandwell Council, explained the key objectives of the new scheme and the motivation of Sandwell Council for engaging in co-production. The objectives of the 'Friends and Neighbours' Scheme are:

- To strengthen neighbourliness by engaging people in new, meaningful ways
- To improve the quality and cost effectiveness of support for vulnerable residents
- To increase opportunities for work and training for local people
- To build resilience in local communities

The scheme was officially been launched in March 2013, through the mechanism of *Soho/Victoria Friends & Neighbours Community Interest Company*, after 18 months of development work. Beverley was optimistic that the scheme will not only increase social capital and make local communities more resilient but also help the local council manage the demand for social care and support within the context of reducing resources, and the move towards community empowerment and personalisation.

Rohit Mistry, the Friends and Neighbours Scheme Co-ordinator, explained what the slogan of the CIC - 'for the community, by the community, of the community' - means in practice.

He finished off his presentation by reading out the statements of two clients, Sid and June, who very much appreciated the regular visits and help from the volunteers.

Gareth, a board member of the Friends and Neighbours CIC, and Patrick, a community supporter, inspired the participants by their warm support and huge enthusiasm for the scheme. As Patrick said "I get a lot of joy from being part of the scheme and feel good to be able to give something back to the community".

Sandwell Council now intends to roll out the scheme, with an initial target of 40% of the Borough to be covered by March 2016.

A 'Call for Research' on what makes communities sustainable and resilient

James Duggan, Manchester Metropolitan University and Coordinator of the North-West Co-production Network Coprodnet

James started off his very humorous presentation by feeding academic definitions of resilience into the discussion of the participants and critiquing the focus on services in some prominent definitions of co-production. He suggested that co-production is not so much about improving services but creating public value. Or to put it into the words statements by participants in the Soho/Victoria 'Friends and Neighbours' scheme: "While the ironing service provided by the volunteer was appreciated, the company and social contacts from the visit were considered to be much more important."

James offered a public value based definition of co-production:

"Co-production is the reciprocal integration of professionalised and citizen/service user knowledge, skills, resources and capabilities within service systems to co-produce public value."

After discussing various public value concepts James finished off by proposing a number of interesting research questions:

- What is an appropriate way of understanding value, theoretically and practically?
- How do we map this onto the 'dark matter' of service provision and place?
- How can we understand the interactions of public, private and personal dynamics and logics?
- How can we identify and measure capacities on a rolling basis?
- What are the conditions that will support value co-production for community resilience?

Communities Managing Change: Key findings of a new report from the Chamberlain Forum

Paul Slatter, Director of the Chamberlain Forum

Paul briefly presented some recent activities of the Chamberlain Forum which is a neighbourhood think tank based in Birmingham:

- Resident Universities to involve local people reflecting on the implications of the Localism Act and other reforms
- Development of Timebanking
- Research on Community Hubs
- Work on the Co-op Council

His presentation focussed on the research programme 'Communities Managing Change' which has been funded by the Cadbury Barrow Trust. Whereas conventional community development invests a lot of financial resources into 'deprived' neighbourhoods, Paul suggested taking a different perspective on poverty by examining how 'communities can manage change' to improve their quality of life.

Paul identified four success factors:

- (1) Sustainability – having enough resources to ‘survive’ tomorrow
- (2) Localism – the ability to make decisions locally
- (3) Social capital – access to networks which provide support in times of crisis
- (4) Listen to what is going on – this is key for statutory services to identify assets but also needs in the community

For Paul, the key finding of the research was that communities are better able to manage change when there are both good connections between people in an area and with the agencies that serve them. Poverty can, therefore, be seen not as the result of inequality alone but of a lack of connection: a lack of the ability to co-produce. Given connections between communities and agencies, diversity (and inequality) can actually contribute to the resilience of places to change.

Paul finished off his thought-provoking presentation with four recommendations for government:

- (1) Localism implies having a clear idea of what needs to be done at which local level, ranging from district-wide initiatives to neighbourhood-specific actions
- (2) Savings from community-led co-production need to be kept, at least partly, within the community
- (3) Neighbourhood planning can be used to unleash community assets
- (4) The concept of the Co-operative Council reminds us that local councils are just a one of the governance mechanism in an area, and they need to work with all the other stakeholders in their area.

Participants can get in touch with Paul via paul@chamberlainforum.org or on 07904914277.

The new Scrapstore project from Time2Trade and the Gap Centre

Dan Grainger, Development Manager, Time2Trade and Andrew Bent, Manager of the Gap Centre

Time2Trade – a highly innovative timebank based in West Bromwich – has joined forces with the Gap Centre to launch the new scheme Time2BeCreative. This involves collecting useful clean business waste and reusing it for local play groups and other community based groups and schools. Time2becreative is proving to be a supportive network of practitioners.

Dan Grainger talked the participants through a comics strip to explain how timebanking works in practice. Andrew Bent showed an inspiring video clip on scrapstores which gave everybody an idea of the creative potential of scrap material.

The objectives of Time2BeCreative are to:

- increase volunteering opportunities
- to provide preparation for work placements
- to offer apprenticeships
- to open for longer hours to encourage up take from schools, colleges and other agencies
- to deliver training and workshops
- to reclaim furniture for redistribution in the community

The initiative was launched in February, with the marketing campaign going full-scale in June. Andrew encouraged everyone to visit their local scrapstore and support it. Time2bcreative is Sandwell's scrapstore.

Special event for the 10th West Midlands Co-Production Network Meeting

What's the business case for co-production in public services?

The West Midlands Co-Production Network now has more than 100 members and will celebrate its 10th Meeting with a conference on **24 October 2013**. Participants expressed interest in attending and contributing to a one day event (rather than the half days we've had so far), with organised sessions in the morning and a flexible co-production 'bar camp' in the afternoon.

If you are interested in running a workshop during the co-production bar camp in the afternoon please contact elke.loeffler@govint.org