

Notes from the West Midlands Regional Co-Production Practitioners Network meeting

14th July 2011, Priorsfield, Birmingham University

Participants

Jyoti Chauhan:	Community Social Work team, Walsall
Dan Grainger:	Time Broker, Time Bank West Bromwich
Jiri Marek:	Executive Director, Union of Employers' Associations Czech Republic
Catherine Needham:	Senior Lecturer, School of Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary, University of London
Gerry Robinson:	Patient representative, National Co-production Advisory Group
Lorna Reid:	Micro-Services Co-ordinator, Community Catalysts C.I.C
Clare Wightman:	Director, Grapevine

Facilitators/Organisers

Tony Bovaird:	Professor of Public Management and Policy at Birmingham University
Elke Loeffler:	Chief Executive of Governance International
Shahana Ramsden:	Deputy-Chief Executive of Governance International
Julia Slay:	nef (the new economics foundation)

Apologies

Laura Brodrick:	Strategic Manager, Health, Well-being and Carers, Public Health and Wellbeing Unit, West Bromwich
Rabiyah Latifah: Lynne Wealleans:	Manager, RKL Photography Project Co-ordinator, Beth Johnson Foundation

Representatives from the third sector, the University of Birmingham, a local time bank, a local authority, patient health forums and membership organisations came together on the 14th of July to discuss their common interest in co-production, and what they might want from, and offer to, a regional co-production network.

1. Introduction and welcome

Julia Slay, Senior Researcher and Social Policy Programme Co-ordinator, nef

Julia Slay from nef started with a brief overview of the national co-production network, which has been jointly supported by nef and NESTA. The facilitation of the national network is coming to an end, though members will still be connected online at www.coproductiionnetwork.com.

Regional network meetings are taking place over the summer to explore whether local practitioners are interested in coming together and continuing to develop their interest and work on co-production. Meetings are taking place in Birmingham, Manchester, Cardiff and London over the next two months.

2. Overview of the March Co-Production Roadshow in Birmingham

Shahana Ramsden, Deputy Chief Executive, Governance International

Shahana provided an overview of the recent co-production event hosted by Governance International and Birmingham University in Birmingham, and in partnership with nef, NESTA, and the practitioners' network. This report can be found on the practitioners' network, the Governance International Website and is also attached with the notes of this meeting.

3. Discussion and information sharing: Good practices in co-production in the West Midlands

The conversation opened up into a broader discussion about participants' thoughts on co-production. Key points included:

The tensions between the third sector and the statutory sector: co-production has been most obvious within the third sector, who tend to argue that the statutory sector don't 'get it'. The point was made that people tend to be influenced by their peers, and so finding key advocates and existing good practice for co-production within the statutory sector would be critical to taking it forward on a larger scale.

Elke mentioned that Governance International has come across good examples of co-production in local environmental services, such as the Environmental Champions Programme in Solihull (see <http://www.govint.org/english/main-menu/good-practice/case-studies/solihull-council-environment-champions.html>). As demonstrated by many 'before'-'after'-photos, the local council has been able to recruit over 250 local Environmental Champions to work with it to improve their local neighbourhoods – see link to Governance International report: Transforming Communities, Creating Outcomes, Improving Efficiency: Governance International Co-production Roadshows UK 2011 which contains this and other case studies. <http://www.govint.org/english/main-menu/good-practice/publications.html>

The language of co-production was identified as a barrier: some participants who work directly with people and communities said that they would tend to talk about 'working collaboratively', or 'working in partnership' to get around the difficulty of the term. The issue of social inequalities was raised, and the danger was mentioned that personalisation may exacerbate these inequalities unless accompanied by a change in the relationship between people and professionals.

One of the barriers to increasing co-production within mainstream public services is seen as a lack of knowledge about informal community networks and wider activities within the statutory sector. It was suggested that public services tend to refer people directly towards other services known to them, rather than building links into the community. The knowledge about what is actually available is often held by key people within local areas, and a better connection between these people and the statutory sector needs to be made.

The statutory sector is also seen as being unused to 'asking' people to support services. The question 'what does co-production in a time of low funding mean?' was asked, and the narrative of the Big Society is seen as both as a mask for cuts, and an opportunity to develop co-production.

An Information Exchange session was then held, with three participants sharing their experience of co-production.

Dan Grainger discussed 'Time to Trade', a PCT-funded time bank in the West Midlands which is based on a community development model. The time bank aims to address health inequalities and improve well-being, and is well supported by the PCT. The time bank is rooted in social and community networks and is using these relationships to engage the local population in health and well-being service initiatives. They're currently looking at how to use the time bank to 'nudge' people towards positive healthy behaviours. For example, time credits can be used to obtain a discount at local fruit and vegetable shops. Time bank members have also been able to earn credits working as mystery shoppers in the evaluation of local healthy community cafes. Other members are leading local walking sessions, and supporting a befriending service.

Lorna Reid talked about the work she is doing with Community Catalysts, which supports the development of micro-providers of social care services among community groups and statutory services.

Community Catalysts work in conjunction with Local Authorities and other larger organisations to help harness and support the talents of small (micro) organisations, these can be from small businesses to small 3rd sector orgs and community groups, this includes helping to stimulate and shape the micro markets which are often neglected and overshadowed by larger organisations.

The organisation provides practical information advice and guidance for potential and existing micro services who may want to diversify or simply may be struggling with the bureaucracy and red tape that they may come up against when setting up a small organisation. These micro services have 5 or fewer full time equivalent workers, are completely independent of any larger or parent organisation and provide services in social care or community development.

Lorna is currently working as a Co-ordinator in partnership with Dudley MBC's Commissioning team. Since the start of the Dudley project in March 2010 several innovative community based micro enterprises

have been created including a Carers Café, which supports carers and service users in an informal atmosphere and is helping to create volunteering and employment opportunities for people with a learning disability and the long term unemployed.

Another example is a creative arts project for people with a Learning disability ... the students are taken on a creative journey from inception to completion and are taught about different artistic concepts, they create art, furniture, ornaments out of recyclable material and they sell goods the profits of which are fed back into the organisation.

The arts project will also be looking at creating job opportunities for their students with a learning disability – both of these orgs demonstrate co-production as they work in partnership with LA's PCT's and other community organisations to ensure the needs of the community and their users are met and exceeded.

Claire Wightman described how Grapevine helps people with individual budgets to plan how they might find and use the best services and activities for their needs, since this doesn't just happen automatically when people find they have been allocated a budget. In particular, it is important to raise people's aspirations about the outcomes they can hope to achieve for themselves. This is only part of Grapevine's work, which also involves supporting people in the community with self-help and self-organising activities, rather than co-production with the public sector.

3a. What can the network do together?

Tony Bovaird, Birmingham University

The conversation focussed on one of the most pressing topics for co-production: how to get into conversations with commissioners and show them the value of co-production and building community capacity. Though unit costs and cost/benefit analyses are often asked for, there are other important social outcomes which need to be valued and included when commissioning decisions are made.

Tony Bovaird facilitated a session on 'what the West Midlands network could do' and 'what its members could do for the network. The aim of the session was to identify what practical themes and work the network might want to explore, and what participants were able to offer to support it.

Questions asked included:

- Should the network look for funding?
- Should there be an executive committee to push forward certain initiatives?
- Should a range of network members be sought from the third, statutory and private sector?
- Should themes for discussion and dates for meeting in the year ahead be set up now?

Summary of thoughts from participants

What can the West Midlands Network do?

Collaboration and information sharing

- Collaborate on co-production projects
- Sharing experience and good practice
- Share – what is co-production? How is it being done? Help with credibility
- Share examples of co-production practice that work well

Working with commissioners

- Get commissioners to understand ethos of co-production and to commission more community-based services
- Emphasise to commissioners the fact that co-production costs but also saves

Influence local policy and practice

- Drive understanding of co-production across all sectors
- Ensure peer review takes place by successful co-producers
- Promote the ethos of 'co-production' over the West Midlands on a wide basis
- Filter the information to fellow workforce/colleagues
- Have community-based workshops/roadshows on co-production

3b. What can network members offer?

Hosting

- | Host network meeting – Lorna?
- | Host and involve local people ('practitioners', not 'employees') – Claire
- | Commission time bank organisational member to host a network meeting (Dan)

Facilitation

- | Help to co-facilitate a session – Julia
- | Facilitate business case session – Catherine
- | Facilitate a future session – Shahana

Communication and information sharing

- | Offer this network the chance to become an organisational member of Time2Trade – Dan
- | Tweet about it! (Need online 'buzz'!)
- | Present on nef's work, including self-reflection tools, evaluation methods, and case studies – Julia
- | Contribute to research establishing a business case for co-production (Catherine)
- | Act as main West Midland access point for time banking development (Dan)
- | A grass-roots perspective of co-production in action by commissioners – Gerry
- | Transfer expertise and knowledge on micro-market development across West Mids – Lorna
- | Share expertise and knowledge about co-production in the UK and in other countries (Elke)
- | Provide a national overview of personalisation and co-production in health and social care (Shahana)
- | Provide a national overview of co-production in local government (Tony)

Further discussions

Everyone at the meeting agreed that their details could be shared with group members.

The business case for co-production was identified as a key area of interest for many participants. We discussed what material people had that could be used to make this case, and Catherine Needham offered to synthesise this if people were able to send information to her.

It was also suggested that the network should try and link into NESTA's work on co-production, and could use the collective experience within the regional network to inform NESTA's People Powered Health programme.

Developing the idea of a peer support charter was also discussed as a possible activity for the regional network.

4. Next steps

Elke Loeffler, Chief Executive, Governance International

Elke offered a summary of the decisions made and agreed for Shahana to pull together a schedule – see below.

It was also agreed that other network members who were not able to attend this meeting would be contacted and given the opportunity to make comments and suggestions.

Proposed schedule for West Midlands Regional Practitioners Network

Date	Venue	Theme	Facilitator
Late Sept/ Early October 2011	Dan Grainger will commission a venue via time bank member. Practitioners network will join the time bank, use time credits and reimburse via network. (Dan, please send available dates/ locations to Shahana)	More about the People Powered Health programme from NESTA and how regional network can inform this.	Shahana Ramsden
January 2012	Lorna to provide a venue. (Please send dates/ location to Shahana)	The Business Case for co-production	Catherine Needham
March/ April 2012	Clare to provide venue (Please send dates/ location to Shahana)	Peer support charter	Julia Slay
Future offers	We are open for suggestions!	TBC	TBC

Jiri Marek, Employers' Federation in the Czech Republic mentioned that the next Conference on Quality Management in the Public Sector will be taking place in Prague in January in 2011 and members of the Co-Production Network may find it interesting to attend.

Meeting closed at 12.30pm