

Recipient of the
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Disability Sheffield Centre for Independent Living on behalf of Sheffield Individual Employer and PA Development Group

Establishing good practice in the co-production of commissioned services within adult social care

Co-production is a way of working in partnership where everybody works together, on an equal basis, to create a service or come to a decision which works for them all. It is built on the principle that those who use a service are best placed to help design it, thus shifting the power towards users of services. It means recognising the contribution that everyone can make and working with people from the beginning to generate an idea.

Introduction

Disability Sheffield is a disabled people's user-led organisation. The organisation manages several projects, providing information, training and support for individual employers.

Before the creation of this project, Disability Sheffield found themselves regularly discussing problems faced when delivering the Disability Payment Support Service (DPSS). At the same time, Sheffield City Council (SCC) were looking at how best to deal with the many questions and complaints arising because people didn't understand how to access DPSS.

With the shared challenges the two organisations were facing, it became clear there was an opportunity for both to work together to address the problems posed by DPSS while testing best practice for co-production processes.

The premise was that by working in partnership with people who need care and support to design and improve services, you are more likely to get things right first time. Co-production often leads to better use of resources and more effective services. Groups and organisations work better together and by taking a co-production approach, organisations can help meet their statutory obligations under the Care Act.

This project was established to look at how good practice could be used for the co-production of commissioned services within adult social care. It used the DPSS project as an example to illustrate how principles of co-production can be incorporated into a project, and how the process can be evaluated.

It was decided that the two organisations would work as a group to identify the issues people were having with direct payments and develop potential solutions.

What we wanted to achieve

The aim of the project was to apply the principles of co-production to the practical development of a service. The objective was to use the learning to implement co-production as a way of working in the development and delivery of future services across adult social care within Sheffield City Council.

The team wanted to address the challenges of using co-production when commissioning services within the constraints of a large complex organisation. Using the DPSS programme as an example, the group aimed to co-produce a proposal for a Sheffield DPSS which would be approved by senior council officers. This would enable the procurement of a local DPSS, modelled on evidence and responsive to the requirements of everyone who would access it.

By the end of the project, it was intended that several key outputs would have been delivered. These included a set of co-production standards, a co-produced model for the delivery of a DPSS in Sheffield, and a good practice and learning guide.

What we did

The project began with a steering group made up of members of the Individual Employer and PA Development Group.

Throughout the project, the external evaluators - SchARR (The School of Health and Related Research) from the University of Sheffield, supported the group to reflect on how they were working in a co-produced way. This involvement was critical to the project to ensure co-production remained key throughout. Without this, it could have been easy for the team to focus purely on solving the challenges of delivering the DPSS.

The steering group met regularly to identify issues, agree desired outcomes and share experience and knowledge. At the beginning

of the project, the group drew upon their own knowledge and experiences of group working to produce a working definition of co-production.

The group used their collective knowledge to identify people who required DPSS support, so they could be invited to complete an online survey about the service. Over 130 responses were received, and the group shared responsibility for analysing the survey results.

Several people volunteered to take on various tasks with clearly defined responsibilities. The final analysis was presented to the group for reflection, and members were able demonstrate the analysis was co-produced. The experiences of providers and the focus group were also integrated to produce person-centred recommendations for improvement.

Co-production is often misused in organisations as a tick box for user involvement but this piece of work has followed its principles with all parties happy with its progress.

Direct payment user involved in the project

What we achieved

This project has established good practice for the use of co-production, so it can benefit future projects in Sheffield and elsewhere. Next steps have been agreed with senior managers, including a commitment to continue to co-produce procurement of the DPSS service.

The co-production process has led to changes in attitudes, with increased understanding of how different parties can work together to increase openness and collaborate to identify solutions to a particular issue.

For the DPSS programme, the process of co-production has also been successful with 157 responses to the survey and group discussions held with a further 13 people, along with a provider discussion with nine money management providers. This demonstrates

that when community members are involved in research, appropriate tools can be designed to reflect community issues and priorities.

A summary of the responses was used to develop a proposal for what a direct payment support service for Sheffield would look like and this was presented at a meeting between the steering group and senior officers from SCC.

What we learnt

The group quickly identified what they understood by co-production to develop key principles around its implementation. As the project developed, the group used these values to constantly reflect on whether the way they were working was within the principles of co-production. The group used these practical examples to form the basis of a good practice guide on the co-production of commissioned services.

Ongoing evaluation proved to be critical to the success of the project and the involvement of an external organisation was important to keep co-production at the forefront of everyone's minds. Without the involvement of SchARR, it could have been easy to focus purely on the development of the direct payment support model rather than the co-production element. Working with SchARR enabled the group to focus on both the practical development of a direct payment support service for Sheffield while developing the principles of co-production.

The evaluators noted that one of the most challenging aspects of partnership working involves dealing with issues of power and control. Commissioners are ultimately in the position to decide whether to act on recommendations for service improvement and are therefore in positions of authority. Although commissioners in Sheffield City Council sponsored the project, they were not present at the steering group meetings, leading to questions about whether they still had the same will to want to improve things and the same aim to solve the problem. This has been described by people working in co-production as the difference between 'buy in' i.e. agreeing that there is an issue, and 'commitment' – that is being actively involved at various stages to address the problems.

In its final evaluation, SchARR identified 20 points for consideration when applying co-production methods as highlighted by the case of the Disability Payment Support Service. These included the need to involve citizens at the earliest stages when defining the challenges, building contingencies to minimise risks, and the importance of recruiting a range of people with different skills and experience.

For more information please visit:

www.disabilitysheffield.org.uk

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