

Coproduction

Principles into practice

Evidence from the Fulfilling Lives programme:
Supporting people experiencing
multiple disadvantage

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**CFE Research and
The Systems Change Action Network**





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This report draws on the experience of the Fulfilling Lives programme to provide practical guidance and learning on how to do coproduction well. It also explores how partnerships have endeavoured to embed coproduction into the day-to-day work of organisations across their locality, thereby creating systemic change.

Since 2014, the Fulfilling Lives programme has supported more than 4,000 people experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage, including homelessness, alcohol and substance misuse, offending, mental ill health, and domestic violence. Coproduction of services and support has been a core element of the Fulfilling Lives programme.

The report will be of interest to:

- Local and national organisations that fund, design and/or deliver services for people experiencing multiple disadvantage, in particular statutory bodies such as local authorities and commissioning groups.
- Organisations and partnerships seeking to achieve systemic change in making coproduction of services the norm.

Key messages

Coproduction has been at the heart of the Fulfilling Lives programme. Genuine coproduction goes beyond consultation and service user involvement; it is a way of working in which professionals and people with lived experience work together as equals, with a shared commitment to service improvement.

The main features of coproduction can be summarised within three underpinning principles: equality of access and contribution; genuine, ongoing involvement; and flexibility and openness throughout. All of which involve creating an environment conducive to working together, breaking down boundaries, and building relationships.

Facilitating equality of access between professionals from hierarchical organisations and people with lived experience can be challenging. Discussing these challenges up front, creating a safe, welcoming environment in which everyone has the opportunity to contribute, using accessible language, and removing labels are key ingredients of success.

Experts (people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage) should be involved at the outset of any coproduced project to help shape it, rather than being consulted once key decisions have already been made. Being open, honest and flexible about the parameters and desired outcomes of a coproduced project are essential. Ask why service users are to be involved and how they can best add value; be clear about roles and time commitments; and don't make promises that will be difficult to keep.

For coproduction to be effective, all participants need support. For experts, a dedicated network with a paid coordinator provides a sense of belonging and peer support, as well as organisational oversight to manage requests.

Experts need adequate time and information to prepare for their involvement, as well as recompense for their time and effort, though this is not necessarily financial — training courses, opportunities to build confidence and experience, and equipment can all be valued. They are motivated most by the opportunity to contribute to positive change.

It is misleading to think that only experts by experience need support and preparation to engage in coproduction. Other participants need to fully understand what coproduction means and the purpose of the exercise, be prepared to listen to and learn from experts, and, above all, have time to fully commit to the process and adapt as necessary.

Fulfilling Lives partnerships have made good progress in raising awareness of the importance of coproduction, and many have established expert groups that will continue beyond the end of the programme funding. However, there is still some way to go to embed coproduction as the usual way in which services are designed, commissioned, delivered and evaluated.

In order to further embed coproduction, partnerships acknowledge that encouraging organisations to try it is the first hurdle. Working on smaller projects with those who are apprehensive can introduce coproduction, build relationships, provide a platform for future collaborative working, and create valuable learning on the way.

Introducing a new way of working takes time, and the cultural shift needed in order to embed coproduction will not happen overnight. Coproduction needs to be well resourced, with adequate time and money built in. This is essential in sending a signal to all of those involved that there is a genuine commitment to the process and it is not tokenistic.

Where coproduced projects have had a positive impact, collating and communicating this evidence can help to convince others to adopt this approach.



Expert groups will continue vital work beyond the Fulfilling Lives programme

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research and their experience of supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantage, the Systems Change Action Network (a group of leaders from across the Fulfilling Lives partnerships) offer the following recommendations. These reflect the collective view of the SCAN members and not of CFE Research, The University of Sheffield or The National Lottery Community Fund.

For the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

1 Embed coproduction throughout national government's work on multiple disadvantage

Coproduction is an effective way to find solutions that work for people, improving lives as well as saving money in the long run. The DLUHC, DHSC and MoJ should develop processes that allow people with lived experience to coproduce central government strategies that affect people facing multiple disadvantage.

The DLUHC, DHSC and MoJ should set out standards for coproduction based on the principles in this report and adhere to these throughout their work.

2 Promote the benefits of coproduction in the design of local services, strategies and solutions for people facing multiple disadvantage

Fulfilling Lives welcomes the emphasis on coproduction and systems change in the Changing Futures prospectus. Building on this, government should embed coproduction as a requirement in specifications for all funding streams made available for supporting people facing multiple disadvantage.

In addition to requiring stakeholders to embed coproduction in their programmes, government should allocate specific resources and support for local coproduction activity.

The DLUHC, DHSC and MoJ should provide guidelines setting out clear expectations for local partnerships regarding how to bring about a culture of coproduction and how to do it well.

3 Ensure that funding programmes and local commissioning cycles provide sufficient time, resources, and flexibility to incorporate true coproduction

Planning and involving people with lived experience when developing services takes time. Timeframes for commissioning and developing applications for funding need to allow adequate time to build relationships with people with lived experience, trial new ideas, and engage a wide range of stakeholders.

For local authorities, the voluntary sector, and other organisations supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantage

4 Produce long-term strategies for coproduction that incorporate the principles of good practice set out in this report

Strategies should consider the role of coproduction across all parts of the system, including bringing the insight of lived experience to operational discussions about frontline services and to strategic discussions about changes to systems.

Local authorities and other organisations should designate someone with senior-level responsibility to embed coproduction across the organisation. Coproduction is everyone's responsibility but requires buy-in from senior leaders.

Approaches to coproduction must include an understanding of intersectionality. The intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and other protected characteristics inform people's experiences

and further marginalise those facing multiple disadvantage. Local partnerships should ensure that they engage with people with lived experience who represent the communities that they serve.

5 Invest sufficient resources — including funding, staffing and time — in embedding coproduction

Organisations should employ involvement coordinator roles, or similar, that can bridge the gap between service design and the voices of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage.

There needs to be a consistent source of support for people with lived experience to ensure that involvement is not adversely affecting their wellbeing.

Plan for all of the practicalities of involving people with lived experience to ensure that there are no barriers to engagement, e.g. finding a suitable location for meetings, covering expenses, and providing training.

6 Monitor progress and commit to continuous improvement

Coproduction is not a one-off activity, but rather a process that should undergo continuous evaluation, review, and subsequent change. Local authorities and other organisations should develop flexible processes to review progress with coproduction and evaluate how beneficial it is for everyone involved.

Monitoring progress should follow a culture of continuous learning about what has worked and what has not worked, rather than focusing on rigid key performance indicators.

Organisations should develop training for staff to raise awareness of the benefits and practical ways of engaging in coproduction. This should include staff at all levels, including but not limited to frontline staff, commissioners, strategic roles, and executive teams.

**Coproduction
is like baking
a cake – different
ingredients make
that common goal.**

Expert by experience

Introduction

Why this report is needed

Addressing multiple disadvantage is a complex challenge. Organisations and services often recognise that they do not have all of the answers. People with lived experience of multiple disadvantage and of using services have insights which others simply do not, including, for example, why services are difficult to access or people may not wish to use them. Working in partnership with such 'experts by experience' is thus essential in creating services and systems that are effective in supporting those experiencing multiple disadvantage.

There is evidence that coproduction with experts by experience leads to improved outcomes and quality of life for people using services; greater satisfaction with using services; increased job satisfaction for people working in services; and more efficient services with possible cost savings. For society as a whole it means increasing social capital, social cohesion, and reassurance about the availability and quality of services.¹

Evidence from across Fulfilling Lives partnerships indicates that there is growing recognition of the importance and value of coproduction. Yet there is still some way to go to reach the goal of effective coproduction being routine: as coproduction gains profile, there is a risk that it will not be done properly.² There is concern among staff working with people with lived experience that coproduction is becoming a 'buzzword', and a fear that it is referenced in proposals merely to access funding rather than because of a genuine commitment to coproduction. This tokenistic approach was criticised by staff who proposed instead that a better understanding of coproduction and how to do it well is needed.

“ Coproduction is such a buzzword and I think moving it out of being tokenistic is important. Everyone is doing coproduction. If you dig any deeper than that, what does it actually mean to people?

Involvement coordinator³

Furthermore, it was suggested that coproduction can be seen as a ‘nice to have’ optional extra that is too often squeezed out as a result of myriad other pressures on time and resources. The aim of this report is not to present a case for why coproduction is important — further reading on page 42 will help with this — but rather to provide practical advice on doing coproduction and how to embed it as part of ‘business as usual’.

What do we mean by coproduction?

Coproduction is increasingly used as a term to describe any form of engagement with people with lived experience. In practice this can range from one-off consultation to full involvement in a project from start to finish. However, genuine coproduction should move beyond mere consultation towards a situation in which professionals and people with lived experience work together as equals. Whereas consultation might be described as giving a voice to people who are normally not heard, coproduction is a bigger commitment to involving those people in greater depth over a longer period of time. This is often described in terms of a ‘ladder of engagement’, which moves organisations from educating people (‘doing to’ and from engagement and consultation (‘doing for’) towards codesign and coproduction (‘doing with’).⁴ In order to be effective, it is important that everyone involved has a shared understanding of what coproduction means.

There is no shortage of suggested definitions of coproduction. The National Lottery Community Fund propose the following definition:

 **Creating, delivering, improving and evaluating services jointly with people who will use them and stakeholders like local authorities, charities, frontline staff, funders, or academics.⁵**

Fulfilling Lives partnerships also provide a range of descriptions of coproduction in their publications.⁶ While these vary in terms of their length and focus, they share several common features that help to distinguish coproduction from consultation or other more tokenistic forms of involvement. However, coproduction should not be seen as a list of requirements to be ticked off. Instead,

coproduction can be understood as a particular way of working, ‘a practice governed by a set of values’.⁷ It involves creating an environment conducive to cooperation, breaking down boundaries, and building relationships. The main features of coproduction can be summarised within three underpinning principles:

- equality of access and contribution
- genuine, ongoing involvement
- flexibility and openness throughout.

In this report we explore these principles with the aim of understanding what they mean in practical terms. These principles and accompanying examples are not intended to be exhaustive, but provide a starting point to guide coproduction based on learning from Fulfilling Lives.

Finally, it is important that coproduction is linked to action or change. As one expert by experience put it:

“ When we’re talking about coproduction, it’s production. So that has to be something that gets done there, that gets made.

Expert by experience

Doing coproduction

Putting the principles into practice: Challenges and learning

Undertaking coproduction that fully embraces the three key principles is neither easy nor quick. Fulfilling Lives partnerships have acquired a huge amount of learning from their work and used this to refine their approaches to coproduction over the course of the programme. We hope that sharing this will be valuable to others.

Equality of access and contribution – breaking down power imbalances



Talking about
the challenges
helps to address
power imbalances

Fundamental to any coproduction is the need for all participants to be able to get involved and participate equally. When undertaken effectively, coproduction can be a positive way of addressing the unequal distribution of power in service design and delivery.⁸

Breaking down power imbalances can be challenging because organisational structures are often hierarchical, largely based on seniority of roles and professional experience. Professionals and people with lived experience may have polarised views as to how much knowledge each party will bring to a situation. Ensuring that experts, who can be a diverse group in themselves, have the same access to the process as senior managers and other professionals is inherently difficult. However, those working in coproduction have suggestions for helping to equalise power.

Talk about the challenges

Bringing people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse experiences together to work towards a common cause is a challenging process and can seem to be intimidating to those less familiar with working in this way. Whilst challenges cannot be eradicated, staff suggest that talking about them can help. Recognising that there are power imbalances is the first step towards trying to mitigate their impact. By encouraging an open conversation, it may turn out that the power imbalances are not as stark as first thought.

“ I think people tend to shy away from talking about power imbalances. What we’ve found is we need to surface that, and identify where the power is held, and talk about the different power in the room and how that makes people feel. The more you talk about it, the more it dissipates. You find that people you would expect to feel powerful in a space actually feel quite insecure. It humanises everyone and develops trust.

Involvement coordinator

This conversation should happen at the outset of a project, or, if possible, before it starts.

Ensure that everyone has the opportunity to make an impact

People with lived experience who have been involved in consultation and coproduction welcome the opportunity to be able to influence an outcome, as this is a major motivator for them to give their time to projects. Shared decision making can move a project beyond consultation towards something that more closely resembles coproduction.

“ If you ask people what they want and then other people make the decision, that’s consultation.

Involvement coordinator

Therefore, it is important that everyone’s contribution be acknowledged — both during and upon completion of the project. Informing experts of the outcome of the project, regardless of what that is, is essential but does not always happen.

One participant described how suggestions made in meetings were recorded in the minutes and then shared among all members; this made the expert feel that they had made a real contribution and this was evident to all of those involved. Ensuring that actions from meetings are distributed across participants can also help everyone to feel as though they are able to have an impact. If volunteers are not given actions, they may question whether they are equal contributors to the project.

“ You may end up in a meeting where everybody has actions they’re taking away and [...] you’re the only one who doesn’t take an action away. And I’m always like, ‘Oh, okay’.

Expert by experience

Attempts should be made to ensure that lived experience representation at meetings is as reflective of the target service users as possible. This includes people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, the LGBT community, and other demographics relevant to the locality and project focus. For example, coproduction carried out on services supporting victims of domestic abuse should not only include women with experience of domestic abuse, but also take into account people’s ethnicity and how this affects experiences.

Not all people with lived experience will want or feel able to attend coproduction meetings in person. Experts will be at different stages of their respective recovery journeys, but current service users tend to be underrepresented in expert groups. As a result, an important perspective can often be missing.

One way to address the problem of a lack of representation in groups is for experts to act as peer researchers, collecting insights from more diverse perspectives. Specialist lived experience groups will often gather opinions and contributions on a coproduced project from those who do not attend formal meetings. They use their connections with communities to gather opinions and insights from current service users. It is important to consider alternative ways in which people can contribute to decision making, other than attending formal meetings.

“ We have a couple of network members who are struggling to attend because they are shy or anxious and feel like they can’t speak [out]. It’s about finding a way of including them and that they are still valued, that they attend every week.

Involvement coordinator

It is important to ensure that anyone who contributes from outside of a formal group is also acknowledged and kept in the communication loop throughout the project.

Create a safe, welcoming environment

Environment can make a big difference. If people with lived experience are invited to meetings or workshops at a host organisation — this could be in an office space, boardroom, or other formal setting — they may not feel as comfortable as those who are more used to working in this type of space. Statutory agency and service provider offices can also be associated with negative past experiences. Holding coproduction meetings in this type of environment can make it more difficult to break down power imbalances and encourage equality of contribution. Neutral spaces or asking organisations to a space regularly used by a lived experience group is more likely to achieve this.

“ A lot of the time when we do that type of work, [experts] are invited to a formal or established space. If you establish a new space or space outside of a service or agency structure, it makes things easier. People are in a different mindset, whoever turns up can agree things such as group boundaries, who wants to facilitate different spaces, the agenda, and how we get to the shared purpose.

Involvement coordinator

People with lived experience are repeatedly asked to open up and tell their personal stories, which often involves recalling trauma, yet this is not usually asked or expected of others in the group, creating an instant imbalance in expectations. In one example described to us, a relaxed and safe environment encouraged a professional to share their personal story. This openness can also help to reduce power imbalances.

One simple suggestion to make people feel welcome is to extend the same welcome and introductions to volunteers as would be offered to paid staff when they join meetings or projects.

“ You make [the welcome] inviting, like you would if it was a new colleague walking in. Someone that applied for the job is on £25,000. If he comes into that board meeting, everybody will at least attempt to make you feel comfortable. So why doesn't that happen automatically now that we're recognised as a positive resource? It's just courtesy, isn't it?

Expert by experience

Look for ways to support creativity

During the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face coproduction work was not possible and moved online. As well as the challenges of digital access and exclusion, virtual meetings during the pandemic have highlighted the value of being in the same room as other people. It can be more difficult to create the type of welcoming environment that is conducive to the sharing and creating of ideas in an online space, which some individuals find to be more detached and sterile. Less formal environments can be important in fostering creativity. Some of the best ideas can arise from unplanned sessions or informal discussions. Give experts the space and opportunity to think about how they would approach a problem or research project. Allow for the flexibility for experts to input in ways with which they feel comfortable.

“ I think it's very important that not everything is done on Zoom or online, because quite often the exchange of ideas, different organisations coming together whether it's on a particular project or something more holistic, exchanging ideas, whether in the bar, in the cafe, waiting at the bus stop, whatever, that's how you get the flow of ideas, face-to-face, in a less formal environment.

Expert by experience

Make language accessible to all

Volunteers can worry that being in a discussion with clinicians or professionals will mean that the language used will be complex and not accessible to them. Involvement coordinators emphasise that language needs to be appropriate for a mixed group. This can also be helpful in ensuring that key messages don't get lost. However, it is also important to share information with experts by experience or base communication on assumptions about what people with lived experience will want to know.

“ Sometimes it gets too intellectual, people don't share information because they think it'll be too much for that lived experience to have that bit of paper. But now I'm a co-chair, I get every bit of paper, but I don't read it all because I don't want to know everything. I don't want everything — I just want something really quite simple.

Expert by experience

It is important to understand the needs and capabilities of the group in advance in order to ensure that a balance is achieved between making discussions (and any accompanying documentation) accessible and being patronising and omitting important information that might be considered too much. Avoiding specialist jargon, particularly acronyms, and using plain English will likely help all group members, not just those with lived experience.

Remove labels

In some situations it may be possible to leave job roles and other labels at the door. Fulfilling Lives partnerships have run workshops in which all attendees, be they senior managers, frontline staff, or volunteers, introduce themselves by name only (rather than their job role). Removing these labels gives the opportunity, at least at the start, for all participants to feel equal. The Respond training developed and delivered with the Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead Experts by Experience group (see below) is one example of how this has been put into practice as part of a coproduced programme. Another suggestion is to use only initials when recording minutes.

Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead (FLNG) Respond training

Organisations from across the North East and people with lived experience of mental ill health coproduced Respond, a training package to better prepare frontline emergency responders to support someone in a mental health crisis. Three mental health crisis scenarios (namely on a bridge, in a private dwelling, and on a secure ward) were filmed for the training. Training sessions are held that focus on one of these situations, with the scenario revealed bit by bit throughout the day.

Coproduction has been central to the development and implementation of Respond. The training scenarios were coproduced with the FLNG Experts by Experience group, which ensured that scenarios were authentic. Experts were not merely consulted but were fully involved in the design stage and continue to work with the steering group on the design of scenarios for future use.

Key features of the Respond training that encourage equality of access and contribution include the following:

- People attend the training in plain clothes (so there are no organisational badges) and do not introduce their job roles until the end. As a result, all attendees are unaware of the individuals they are working with. This helps everyone to contribute on an equal basis.
- People with lived experience join the training sessions, again without introducing themselves, and share their story and experiences. This ensures that the lived experience perspective is included in the same way that other voices in the room are included.

Read more about Respond and download evaluation reports [here](#).



Ensure involvement is ongoing rather than a one-off

Ongoing involvement – ensuring commitment to the process

Involve experts from the start

As part of service user consultation, lived experience groups might be asked to attend a meeting to contribute their thoughts on a project. To move on from consultation to coproduction, it is important that people with lived experience are involved from the very start. This enables them to shape the project, or at the very least influence what their contribution might be. Early involvement could result in a shift in direction, or in a very different project from what was originally envisioned. It is important that organisations doing coproduction be open to this and not start with an inflexible idea of what they want to do and how (see sections below).

Agree a shared purpose

All participants need the same understanding and expectations from the start of the project. There are two aspects to this. Firstly, coproduction as a concept needs to be fully understood by all of the people involved so that the principles can be followed and involvement is not tokenistic; secondly, there needs to be a shared understanding of the goals of the particular piece of work being undertaken. Both of these points need to be discussed fully at the outset and it should not be assumed that all partners expect or anticipate the same from a coproduced piece of work.

“ You have to facilitate that conversation. Talk about it. People might be coming into a project with a different idea of what change looks like. All of this is a conversation in a way. Just really well-facilitated conversations about people’s different ideas of change, expertise, and knowledge.

Involvement coordinator

One way to ensure clarity of purpose is to have a written statement of aims and principles for working together to which organisations sign up at the start. This can provide a standard that can be referred to throughout to remind people of their commitment.

“ When people now want to come and ask the [experts] stuff, they have to come to [the expert group], and we have participation standards and it expects them to be very clear about what they're asking and to feed back the results of it and demonstrate to people the impact of their sharing so that it's not meaningless.

Expert by experience

Provide ongoing feedback and updates

One of the most common complaints from experts about their involvement in projects is that feedback or updates are not provided.⁹ This can be particularly disappointing for those who are asked to open up and share their experiences.

“ We've always been concerned that service commissioners come and they want people's views and they take them away and then you never hear anything afterwards, and it's like, 'Well, why did I tell you all my stuff?'.

Expert by experience

It is important to provide regular updates to reassure experts involved that they have not been forgotten. Regular feedback helps to keep people interested and engaged. In particular, experts value knowing the outcome of a project and their contribution to this. Keeping expert groups updated allows them to recognise the results of their time and effort.

“ That's the best bit, I think finding out that [my contribution has] actually gone somewhere and they've done something about it and it's been listened to and it's been printed and it's gone somewhere. It's just great.

Expert by experience

Even if progress is slow or outcomes are not as expected, then as long as experts are kept informed, they will know that they are still involved and that involvement is valued.

Openness, honesty and flexibility

Because there is not a strict definition or way of doing coproduction that fits every project, group or organisation, adaptations may need to be made along the way. Being open and honest about this is vital.

Ask why you want service users to be involved in the process

Openness and honesty need to be in place from the very start. The first thing that an organisation should ask is why they want to involve people with lived experience. This can open the discussion about what experts' roles will be and how their involvement will add value.

“ Asking the organisation that is aiming at establishing coproduction groups, service user involvement, to be clear on the reason, on the purpose of getting service users involved in the work. So a good question to ask is, why would you like to have service users working with you? Because it happened in a number of occasions that their involvement was tokenistic.

Expert by experience

Be clear about roles

Everyone needs to be aware of their roles and responsibilities within the process. This applies to all participants, not just volunteers, as everybody needs to know from the start what is expected of them. It can be helpful to share a timeline with experts so that they know when and how regular their involvement will be. Some believe that without a plan, it can feel chaotic and unsettling.

“ [We need] a timeline — it doesn't have to be an exact one. An idea, we're going to be doing this for the next six months, every three weeks we're going to have a meeting. Rather than, 'Well, it's all we're going to be doing', and then two meetings later, 'Oh, it's finished by the way'. [...] Chaos isn't good in coproduction because, it destroys trust.

Expert by experience

Do not make promises about involvement that cannot be kept

Experts often described pieces of work that left them disappointed. Raising expectations and then not meeting them can be damaging to individuals involved and can negatively impact their relationships with an organisation. This extends to being open and honest about the resources available and other constraints on the project. There may be a place for consultation in some cases, especially where full coproduction is not feasible, but the two should not be confused. If organisations are doing a consultation, it should be very clear to experts that this is the case and what the limits of their input are.

Cocreating a gender-informed pilot in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham

Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham (LSL) recently brought together practitioners, commissioners, and people with lived experience to codesign a gender-informed drug and alcohol service. LSL had identified that women were reporting barriers to accessing drug and alcohol treatment in one area, and wanted to explore how these barriers might be overcome.

A series of six workshops were run using an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, with the aim of cocreating a gender-informed pilot to address barriers to access to treatment for women. AI is a collaborative, strength-based approach designed to create changes in services or systems. It focuses inquiry upon positive aspects — what is working rather than what is not. This contrasts with deficit-based approaches that highlight problems and issues. The workshops were designed to help people to identify what has worked for the women, however small it might seem, using the AI model to develop solutions.

The work concluded with a number of suggestions on how to achieve the best out of a coproduced AI project:

- have a clear and shared purpose
- manage expectations about what is achievable

- acknowledge and explore power dynamics
- create a group agreement
- value lived and learned experiences equally
- allocate enough time to plan, prepare and reflect as well as to undertake workshops
- look for ways to include other voices
- make sure that everyone has the tools to be equal participants
- report back to participants and develop recommendations together
- support wellbeing, both inside and outside of workshops
- embed trauma-, gender- and culturally-informed principles throughout the process

Read more about the project [here](#).

What is needed for effective coproduction?

Support for experts by experience

Build a dedicated network

A dedicated group or network of experts can provide a supportive environment and allow shared responsibility for contributing to coproduction.¹⁰ If the same individuals are repeatedly asked to tell their story or become involved with projects, they can become overburdened and this can have a negative impact on them and their recovery journey. Having a group of trained and supported experts means the responsibility of contributing to coproduction is shared.

“ [Colleague] has done loads of work on training our guys, which has really upped the members’ confidence in things like doing a presentation. This means we have more people in the group who are ready to step in.

Involvement coordinator

A group environment can also help experts to work together to build a positive outlook, especially if some feel frustrated as a result of negative past experiences with services. Being able to discuss these frustrations with others — facilitated by a staff member who can encourage them to channel this into positive action — is more conducive than working individually. One expert discussed how they had been able to develop the skills needed to contribute in a positive way through being part of an expert group.

“ I thank Fulfilling Lives because [the expert group has] given me the tools to challenge the system but not get shut down because of being too aggressive, or you might have got a bit emotional or something, it’s allowed me to learn skills of self-control so that I can present my argument in a simple way but in a way that people understand.

Expert by experience

Having an independent expert group was seen by Fulfilling Lives partnerships to be a crucial part of sustainability planning, providing potential legacy plans to continue coproduction beyond the end of the programme.

Employ an involvement coordinator

Fulfilling Lives partnerships have had the resources with which to fund a staff member to lead lived experience groups. This is a crucial role: coordinators provide a point of contact for both experts and organisations seeking their input, coordinate requests for work, and support experts. Staff and experts alike highlighted the value of this role.



[The involvement coordinator has] been there for us every step of the way, she's always been approachable. You know, if you're stuck in anything, you've only got to ask. She's checked in with us. I think that's what's worked.

Expert by experience

A coordinator can help to ensure that work is shared appropriately among the group and that individuals are not being stretched to the detriment of their wellbeing. Organisations requesting input directly from experts can be problematic.

Set up a buddying system

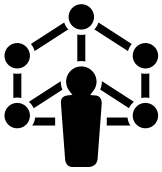
Experts acknowledge that being involved in coproduction activities, particularly being invited to attend and contribute to meetings and workshops, can be daunting. 'Buddying up' experienced and less experienced experts ahead of new situations can help to support newer members and put them at ease.

Enable experts to be prepared

Experts also need to be prepared for coproduction activities. This means having all of the information that they need to review for the project. Experts discussed the need for a balance between giving enough information in advance, so that they know what will be discussed and they will be able to contribute, but not so much that it is overly time-consuming to read or provides unnecessary detail.

Necessary preparation extends to anything else that will help to reduce anxiety around not knowing what to expect at a meeting. This includes providing information on who will be attending, how long the meeting will last, and what contribution is expected of participants.

All preparatory information needs to be shared with experts so that they have adequate time to read and digest it.



Involvement coordinators play a crucial role

“ With organisations who look for our services, there’s a consistent pattern of lateness, they really give us very little notice to work with ... it seems like you’re always winding up the last minute and then, of course, the information is lacking, so there is not enough information for you actually to go in prepared or knowing what is expected of you.

Expert by experience

Identify and manage potential triggers and trauma

Experts are often asked to share personal and traumatic stories to humanise experiences of service use and the challenges of engagement. Experts need to be at an appropriate point in their recovery journey to contribute to coproduction work without it having a negative effect on their wellbeing. This needs careful management in order to avoid experts being retraumatised. One staff member explained how they risk-assess new members.

“ We always try to make sure that when we take an expert on, then they’re in a certain part of their journey. If talking about their experiences will bring on trauma, then we try and ask them if they’ve had support in the past and how far along in their journey they are — it helps to do a risk assessment.

Involvement coordinator

Reward expert time and contributions

There is much debate surrounding how best to recompense experts for their time in contributing to coproduction projects and for the type of contribution that they make. All professionals involved will be paid for their time; therefore, it is difficult to reconcile the expectation that experts should not also be paid for an equal contribution.

There is a difference between an incentive and a reward, and both staff and experts felt that the incentive should be participation itself — the opportunity to be part of positive change and shape the future for others in need. Involvement in coproduction work can bring experts

many benefits: new skills and useful experiences, confidence and feelings of self-worth, and the opportunity to reframe negative past experiences as learning to drive positive change.¹¹ It can also open doors to new opportunities. For many experts, they are making a voluntary commitment to engaging with something about which they care deeply, and the satisfaction gained (if change happens and is communicated to them) is an important incentive.

“ We haven’t really done it for the money, though, to be honest. We did it because we’re interested in it and we wanted to see something good come out of something. That was the main issue for me.

Expert by experience

Staff believe that there should also be some recompense for experts in return for their contribution — a reward rather than an incentive. Partnerships have taken different approaches to this. Vouchers or cash payments to cover time and expenses are used by some. For one-off events, to avoid payment being an incentive, experts may not be told about this in advance. For more prolonged engagement, some offer an hourly rate equivalent to the living wage.

However, payment may not be suitable for all, as it could cause difficulties for experts who are claiming benefits and could be a barrier to engaging a diverse range of experts.

“ A lot of us are on benefits so it would affect our money, giving [us] money. So, I think it would be [better] getting vouchers for doing it.

Expert by experience

Some partnerships offer alternatives to payment not only to avoid any issues with benefits, but also to try to ensure that experts gain value from their contributions in other ways. Some people will value different rewards to others, so a flexible and varied system allows this to be personalised to the individual participating. This can be through training courses, qualifications, participation in conferences, developing skills and confidence that might help with employment (as well as the expert group as a whole), or even equipment such as a laptop.

“ We have a personal development budget. If people attend three or four groups, they have access to a budget and they can choose a laptop, stationery, etc.

Involvement coordinator

Instead of (or as well as) recompensing individual contributions, some expert groups had received funds towards the ongoing costs of maintaining their network, which was also valued highly.

“ It was talked about early on that we were going to be moving into a new building in [city] and some of that work and some of that money that was made available would be used to basically help us get into a new building. That’s something that if that helps to make the network even stronger and get us certain things that are needed, that’s very selfless and it’s a true testament of the people who work and do give time to this across the board.

Expert by experience

Support for other participants

It is misleading to think that only experts need support and preparation to engage in coproduction. Other participants in the process may be unfamiliar with coproduction or unsure of what to expect.

Ensure that participants understand coproduction

Some sectors have particular perspectives on ‘user involvement’ that do not necessarily share the principles of full coproduction. It can take time to develop understanding and overcome resistance to change.

“ In academic medical research over the last 10, 20 years there’s been a push towards involving members of the public in developing grant applications for research studies, that kind of stuff, what we refer to as public and patient involvement and engagement. That’s all very well but it’s a little bit box tick-y, so there’s a tendency not really to coproduce much.

Stakeholder

Fulfilling Lives partnerships have a wealth of knowledge on coproduction and have supported many stakeholders across the country to coproduce, be it through direct support or indirectly through providing guidance on best practice. However, while training on coproduction is useful, stakeholders indicate that real learning begins when coproduction is put into practice.

“ I don’t think training is all that helpful. I think I’m a firm believer you can take the training but if you don’t actually apply that training, you’re never actually going to really understand what the training was teaching you.

Stakeholder

One stakeholder discussed being nervous ahead of working with people with lived experience. She found it most helpful to attend lived experience forums in advance of any project work to speak to experts and check her own language use.

Learn from experts

Stakeholders recognise that those who have used a service are often best placed to comment on its efficacy. They are well placed to discuss how to do coproduction, as many experts have had negative past experiences of involvement in coproduction. This extends to training, where experts should be involved in the design and delivery of coproduction training provided to stakeholders.

“ With coproduction especially, it becomes even more important that you do sit there and you think, ‘Could I have done this differently?’, and ask the people you’re working with or that you’re coproducing with, ‘Did I respond to that right?’.

Stakeholder

Fulfilling Lives South East Partnership's Mystery Shopping Toolkit

In 2019, Fulfilling Lives South East began working with Brighton Jobcentre to improve the experience of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage with respect to using the service. Project staff, experts, and Brighton Jobcentre management worked together to design a mystery shopping exercise to evaluate how staff engaged with customers and assess the environment.

Experts worked alongside Fulfilling Lives staff to plan the mystery shops, write character biographies, and undertake the visits in these roles. Once the visits had been completed, experts again worked with the team to run a series of workshops to discuss the findings with Jobcentre staff, make recommendations, and consider how these could be translated into real change. In total, workshops and webinars were delivered to more than 350 Jobcentre staff to support them in working more effectively with customers experiencing multiple complex needs.


Learning from this exercise was used to develop a mystery shopping toolkit, coproduced by Fulfilling Lives staff and experts, to help other services to organise their own similar exercises.

Read more about the toolkit and the Fulfilling Lives and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) partnership work [here](#) and [here](#), and download the toolkit [here](#).

Be willing to share ownership and expect things to change

Organisations and participants need to approach coproduction with an open mind as to the outcome. Experts are critical of projects where they felt that the outcome was anticipated or planned before they had chance to contribute.

Effective coproduction is reliant on stakeholders having the willingness and ability to share ownership of decisions with experts. This could be as basic as making meeting locations more amenable to experts' needs, or as fundamental as accepting that decisions should be made jointly. One researcher, for example, discussed how their work had shifted as it became a shared project with experts.

 **We need to find ways for people to become comfortable with the idea of coproduction and comfortable with being uncomfortable, and comfortable with losing that almost power over your research. I think that was something that was really important for me.**

Stakeholder

Allow staff time to fully commit to the process

Professional staff also need time to properly plan and prepare for coproduction and, importantly, to take action. In line with the notion that coproduction is a way of working (rather than a set of processes), everyone needs to be able to commit the time needed to adapt and flex to the demands of the work as they arise. Simply scheduling time for meetings is likely to be inadequate. One researcher estimated that the average amount of time that they spent on coproduction over the life of their project was around one day per week, which included things like spending time with each expert to build a relationship with them. This level of time commitment may be atypical for a coproduced piece of work but, nevertheless, demonstrates the importance of including a dedicated budget for coproduction, rather than it being an afterthought.

Whilst newly commissioned projects might be able to build in resources for staff time to coproduce, others will have to find time to do this within their wider role. Stakeholders who had experienced coproduction felt that this was an ongoing challenge in a system where everyone is under pressure, organisations may be understaffed, and time is precious, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resource requirements

Time

As indicated above, doing coproduction well takes time. Establishing relationships with experts is an important element of coproduction and should be an ongoing process. Specific projects may introduce experts to new concepts or introduce contexts to experts/service users. In these circumstances, time needs to be assigned for either formal training or providing briefings. If coproduction is seen to be an add-on to a project, this is unlikely to allow for the time needed both for professionals to engage properly with the process and for experts to be supported. It is important not to underestimate how long might be needed for everyone involved to feel heard, particularly if there is much interest and enthusiasm for a project.

“ Every meeting I have is scheduled for an hour-and-a-half and I have to walk out two hours afterwards because someone always wants to stay afterwards and ask questions, or have a chat, or someone wants to chat beforehand, and I think if I’m really trying to make people feel like they have that autonomy and that their opinion is important, I have to have space for them to do that.

Stakeholder

For people used to working to tight deadlines, this might mean a reassessment of what is an appropriate pace for a project.

“ I’m always feeling like I’m on the back foot and should be going faster, and just wanting to deliver quality and speed because you’re working for charities, it’s charity money... We sometimes had to wait a while before people were ready to even book in the next project team meeting. And I guess some organisations would have said, ‘Well, just get on with it without talking to the project team’.

Stakeholder



Coproduction needs dedicated funding

Funding

Supporting coproduction requires sufficient resources, both human and financial. This should cover providing adequate recompense to experts, expenses (travel, childcare, subsistence, etc.), training and personal development, and access to emotional support (such as a counsellor or psychologist).¹² As described above, a paid coordinator who manages requests for expert contributions is invaluable.

Stakeholders also discussed 'hidden' costs of coproduction, which, although sometimes inexpensive in isolation, can be significant when added up. These costs can include buying pens and paper for experts, and printing and mailing out documents to those who have no internet access. To ensure that meetings are held in accessible locations, the cost of external venue hire may also be necessary. Good refreshments are always appreciated and help people to feel welcome.


The National Lottery Community Fund has made significant, long-term strategic investments in five programmes aimed at addressing some key social challenges — Fulfilling Lives is one of these programmes. Across all five programmes, there is a commitment to coproduction through working closely with the people at whom the services are targeted. Whilst the programmes work with different target groups, there has been some common learning around doing coproduction well:

- ensure that the process is fluid and ongoing
- be reflective and committed to a mindset of continuous improvement
- remain fresh, open and welcoming
- recognise that there is a role for everyone
- develop a culture open to challenge, asking difficult questions, and discussing contrasting views and experiences
- get buy-in from top to bottom, and set out with the right mindset and behaviours.

Read more [here](#).

Embedding coproduction

One of the core strategic aims shared by Fulfilling Lives partnerships is to develop and expand the role of coproduction in creating systems change.¹³ The consensus across partnerships appears to be that while good progress has been made in raising awareness of the importance of coproduction, and while successfully coproduced projects have been undertaken, there is still some way to go to embed coproduction as the usual way in which the services are designed, commissioned, delivered and evaluated. Stakeholders recognise that on some occasions, coproduction can still be tokenistic. Attempts to involve service users can be well meaning but without substance.

 Having people who are using our services coming to the board meetings, sometimes it can feel a little bit tokenistic. People will come and present and then they'll ask a few questions, but it's like, 'What's the impact? What's going to change as a result? How does that drive forward change?'

Stakeholder

In this final section of the report we summarise some key lessons on how coproduction can be developed and embedded across the sector, and some of the challenges of doing so.

Acknowledge that coproduction might not be perfect, then get stuck in

Stakeholders can be apprehensive about doing coproduction correctly which then inhibits them from making a start. As indicated in the previous section, learning by doing coproduction is invaluable. Stakeholders who coproduce readily accept that whilst they strive to do things as well as they can, there is often much learning from mistakes involved. Coproduction is something for which stakeholders can prepare, but learning how to coproduce well is an iterative process.

“ I think maybe there needs to be a bit more of the dialogue about no coproduction is ever going to be perfect, and although people laugh, like, ‘Oh, you did such a great coproduction’, I constantly sit there and go, ‘Oh, no, it could’ve been better, there are loads of ways it could’ve improved.’

Stakeholder

Allow time for cultural change

Unusually, Fulfilling Lives partnerships received relatively long-term funding (up to eight years). This gave them the scope to learn from doing coproduction and establish and embed coproduction practices. Similarly, stakeholders who have worked with Fulfilling Lives partnerships and expert networks over a longer period of time have developed lasting relationships and learnt how to coproduce well.

Set up a dedicated, independent lived experience network

A key legacy of Fulfilling Lives is the networks of experts created. In many areas these will continue beyond the lifetime of the programme, either as independent groups with their own funding (e.g. the Expert Citizens CIC in Stoke) or by being taken on by other voluntary sector organisations (e.g. Empowerment in Blackpool).

As we have indicated previously in this report, there is benefit to having resources dedicated to supporting experts and coordinating and managing requests for contributions to projects. Fulfilling Lives lived experience groups have become sources of expertise and champions for coproduction. Wider stakeholders acknowledged how partnerships had managed to grow these groups and a structure in which everyone has a clear role.

Top-down commitment is needed, as well as from the bottom up

Service commissioners and programme funders can play an important role in supporting and advocating coproduction. Stakeholders involved in commissioning highlighted the importance of asking potential suppliers to provide details on how services will be coproduced, rather than just paying lip service to the idea. However, for plans to be realistic they also need to be backed up by appropriate resourcing, and commissioners, funders and suppliers all need to allocate budget for this. Without a full understanding of coproduction and what is required in order to do it well, commissioners may be less likely to commit the required resources.

“ Having a funder that just fundamentally supports [coproduction] makes a world of difference.

Stakeholder


While there might be an appetite for coproduction among staff teams, if the wider administrative and management structures of an organisation are not supportive, this can be a barrier. Statutory services are often stretched for time and resource, so if coproduction is not of sufficiently high priority, the quality will be affected. However, Fulfilling Lives staff and experts argue that the cost of not coproducing is services that are ineffective and poor outcomes for people.

“ So you’ve got an enormously, very, very pressured system across statutory functions where doing this right is really important, and you’ve got to have the resource, you’ve got to have the structures, you’ve got to have the time, because if you don’t do it right, I think it’s potentially damaging, actually, to everybody and, most importantly, for me, for people with lived experience.

Stakeholder

Communicate coproduction successes and good practice

The initial outlay needed to do coproduction effectively may put stakeholders off. It is important to highlight evidence of the benefits of coproduction to help make a case for investment. Stakeholders perceive that a 'carrot rather than stick' approach is more positive in getting buy-in. Showing stakeholders evidence of positive impact is an incentive that allows them to make their own choices regarding coproduction.

 I think maybe disseminating findings of coproduced research and talking about the benefits, how it's enhanced projects, how it's contributed to finding the examples of successful outcomes from it ... I think that's a start. I think something that does maybe put researchers off is the initial time needed to do it.

Stakeholder

Over the lifetime of the programme, Fulfilling Lives partnerships have built an evidence base on the positive impact of coproduction programmes, as well as a wealth of learning on doing coproduction. It is vital that this learning be made widely available and that other areas continue to use and build on this expertise. One way to embed the concept of coproduction as usual practice is to introduce future professionals to the concept early. There are currently plans to introduce an optional module on coproduction for medical students at the University of Nottingham. The aim is to make future medical professionals, such as doctors, more aware of the benefits of coproduction and best practice so that it is ingrained in their practice.

Use champions to influence and support others

As Fulfilling Lives partnerships come to an end, staff are moving on to positions in other organisations that support people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Some staff who have done so are already championing coproduction and influencing practice and policy within their workplaces.

Humankind's Working Together Strategy¹⁴

Humankind, the lead organisation for the West Yorkshire Fulfilling Lives partnership (WY-FL), has a Working Together Strategy. This is a policy commitment to coproduction which will support local services through a suite of resources including best practice guides and individualised support.



What we chose to do last year was include [coproduction] within one of our strategic objectives because what we don't want... is something that's sat to the side that is just done by the people that do the work, we want everybody to recognise their part to play.

Each service that Humankind works with now has a Working Together Champion who shares examples of coproduction with colleagues and helps to build confidence in coproducing within their organisation. Having at least one expert within an organisation is important for driving the coproduction agenda and guiding those who currently have little awareness of coproduction.

Read the Working Together Strategy [here](#).

Concluding thoughts



Barriers to coproduction can be overcome through willingness to try, learn and improve

In undertaking this study we found great examples of creative and impactful coproduced projects. However, there were also disappointing and frustrating experiences of coproduction. While there is an increasing interest in and willingness to coproduce, this does not always translate into effective practice. Staff perceive that a fear of getting coproduction wrong can hold people back from taking the plunge and having a go. Yet it is through practice that we learn and improve.

As the examples in this report show, small things can often make a big difference. But embedding coproduction as part of business as usual is not easy and will take time. It requires a cultural change at all levels of an organisation. Commitments need to be backed up with resourcing. If the contribution of experts by experience is of equal value to that of those whose expertise comes from learning through their job role, then we need to treat them accordingly. As one Fulfilling Lives partnership leader pointed out, statutory organisations regularly engage professionals as specialist consultants, and pay them handsomely too. An investment in lived experience expert groups can provide a source of unique and vital insight.

Fulfilling Lives partnerships have had the space, time and funding with which to explore coproduction and have learnt a great deal along the way. They have demonstrated why coproduction is important and gathered evidence on the impact that it can have when done well.¹⁵ The hope is now that other organisations and programmes doing coproduction, including the Changing Futures programme,¹⁶ will not have to begin from the same starting point and learn the same lessons.

The best bit of coproduction is finding out that my input has actually gone somewhere and it's been listened to. It's just great.

Expert by experience

Useful resources

Further reading on coproduction

A meeting of minds: How coproduction benefits people, professionals and organisations. *The National Lottery Community Fund (2019)*

An appreciative model to coproduction. *Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham (2021)*

What is coproduction? *Fulfilling Lives South East Partnership (2021)*

Coproducing research with people who have experienced severe and multiple disadvantages. *Fulfilling Lives South East Partnership (2020)*

My experiences of coproduction with FLNG. *Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead (2021)*

Learning and resources

Inspiring Change Manchester's coproduction journey. *Inspiring Change Manchester & Groundswell (2021)*

Embedding coproduction part 1: Learning and insights from Fulfilling Lives Lambeth Southwark Lewisham. *Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham (2021)*

Coproduction: Working together every time. *Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead (2018)*

Mystery shopping toolkit. *Fulfilling Lives South East Partnership (2021)*

Working together strategy 2021–23. *Humankind (2021)*

Examples of coproduced projects

Coproduction week 2021: Reflections on a coproduced comms campaign.

Single Homeless Project (2021)

Our journey so far: Coproducing a project about people's experiences of being assessed for risk of suicide by their General Practitioners.

VOICES (2020)

Coproduction champions: reflecting on the first four months. *West Yorkshire*

Finding Independence (2015)

Working with the DWP (not against them). *Fulfilling Lives South East*

Partnership (2021)

Solutions to women's access to drug and alcohol treatment. *Fulfilling Lives*

Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham (2022)

References and notes

1. Slade, M., McDaid, D., Shepherd, G., Williams, S. and Repper, J. (2017) *Recovery: The business case*. Nottingham: ImROC
2. [What makes co-production different?](#)
3. All partnerships have (or have had) a staff member responsible for coordinating their lived experience groups and projects. This could be a full-time role or combined with other responsibilities. Partnerships had various names for this role, including coproduction lead, community development coordinator, peer programme lead, service user engagement lead, lived experience team manager, etc. Some also had responsibility for engaging minority voices in this work, such as a women's involvement officer. To streamline the reporting of staff quotes, we use the term 'involvement coordinator' to refer to anyone in a paid role with oversight of a lived experience group.
4. See Think Local, Act Personal for further explanation of the ladder of coproduction and examples of this in practice [here](#). Fulfilling Lives South East Partnership also used [this model](#)
5. Woodall, J., Davison, E., Parnaby, J. and Hall, A.M. (2019) *A meeting of minds: How co-production benefits people, professionals and organisations*. The National Lottery Community Fund
6. Blackpool Fulfilling Lives (2020) *Report on the year five evaluation*; Fulfilling Lives South East (2020) *Co-producing research with people who have experienced severe and multiple disadvantages*; Ipsos MORI (2019) *Liverpool Waves of Hope evaluation final report*; Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham (2021) *Embedding co-production: Part 1*; Groundswell (2021) *Inspiring Change Manchester's co-production journey*
7. Co-production Collective (2020) [Co-pro stories: Exploring lived experiences of co-production](#)
8. Groundswell (2021) *Embedding co-production: Part 1*
9. CFE Research (2020) [The role of lived experience in creating systems change](#)
10. Broadridge, A. and Blatchford, S. (2018) *Views and experiences of local mental health services for people with experience of homelessness or insecure housing*. Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead
11. CFE Research (2020) *The role of lived experience in creating systems change*
12. CFE Research (2020) *The role of lived experience in creating systems change*

13. The National Lottery Community Fund, Fulfilling Lives partnerships and Making Every Adult Matter Coalition (MEAM) (2019) [Fulfilling Lives – Changing systems for people facing multiple disadvantage](#). MEAM
14. Humankind's Working Together Strategy can be read in full [here](#)
15. See for example, the Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham work on the codesign of a gender-informed drug and alcohol service [here](#)
16. [Changing futures](#)

Method

The background of the page is composed of several overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes, primarily triangles. The colors range from deep navy blue to light teal and a touch of purple. The shapes are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, with some shapes appearing to be in front of others. The overall aesthetic is modern and minimalist.

Research questions

We sought to answer the following research questions with this study:

- What capabilities, resources and attitudes are needed to do coproduction well? What are the key ingredients of successful coproduction of services and support? What can be learned from the experiences of Fulfilling Lives partnerships?
- How can coproduction become the norm when it comes to the design and delivery of services for people experiencing multiple disadvantage? To what extent has the Fulfilling Lives programme successfully achieved this? What can be learned from the experience?

Desk review of documentation

We reviewed local evaluation reports and case studies provided by Fulfilling Lives partnerships and The National Lottery Community Fund on the topic of coproduction, from which we collated and compared definitions of coproduction. We used this material to help identify common principles, approaches, challenges and learning from across the programme.

Qualitative primary research

Primary fieldwork was undertaken between August 2021 and January 2022 with staff, stakeholders, and people with lived experience from across the nine Fulfilling Lives partnerships that were still active at the time. Involvement coordinators who had previously worked at two partnerships that were no longer active also contributed, meaning that 11 of the 12 partnerships were represented in the fieldwork.

Five focus groups were conducted with:

- Involvement coordinators (or similar) from across the 11 partnerships (two groups with 14 individuals in total)
- Expert groups from three of the partnerships (three groups with nine individuals in total).

The involvement coordinator focus groups took place virtually via Zoom; two expert group focus groups took place via Zoom and one was in person.

The focus groups explored participants' perceptions of the key principles of doing coproduction well, the challenges that they have faced, and learning from experience, particularly when things have not gone so well.

We also facilitated online group discussions with members of the Systems Change Action Network (SCAN – a group of Fulfilling Lives partnership leaders) regarding the extent to which coproduction has become embedded in their areas and the contribution of the programme to this.

Group discussions were followed up with interviews with 14 stakeholders, who were interviewed remotely (video or telephone) either individually or in pairs. Partnership staff provided contact details for suggested interviewees, external to the programme, with whom they had coproduced work. The organisations represented comprised:

- four local authority senior staff (including two commissioners)
- three academic researchers
- one healthcare consultant
- two staff from private sector companies
- four staff from voluntary organisations.

All focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed in full. Transcripts were reviewed by research staff and coded using specialist qualitative data analysis software (NVivo). Codes were built around the research questions, and data from all respondents synthesised into themes.

While the qualitative research provides valuable insights into experiences of coproduction and the approaches that people have found to be useful, the results are not necessarily generalisable beyond the Fulfilling Lives programme. In particular, the sample of interviews undertaken for this research was relatively small.



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