Co-production in adult social care: Shared insights on values and behaviours

Skills for Care held a series of roundtable conversations between adult social care commissioners and people with lived experience, to share insights on the values and behaviours underpinning good co-production. Our conversations also explored how co-production can be 'lived and breathed' within organisations, and in developing broader relationships across local groups and communities.

This guidance for adult social care staff shares the insights we gathered, including the values and behaviours needed for delivering co-production in adult social care.

Theme 1: Values and culture

- It's important to realise shared care principles and values, including supporting people's dignity, being respectful, being person-centred and supporting people's empowerment, when working with others to co-produce services.
- Support a change in culture where shared care values are 'lived and breathed' rather then just treating co-production as a process, and being tokenistic.
- A combination of leadership and team-level responsibility is essential to help embed and shape a culture of co-production.

> **Having a universal set of values that applies to everyone, regardless of role, is really powerful. What matters is that commissioners adopt these genuinely, not just in name.**

Theme 2: Co-production as a way of working

- Co-production should be mutual, open and honest from the outset. Set clear expectations and timescales around the outcomes being achieved and what will happen with everyone's contributions. It's important to initially set out what is appropriate and possible to co-produce and what isn't.
- Support efforts to embed co-production across your teams and wider organisation as a 'default' way of working, rather than it being pocketed in particular areas of work.
- Ensure that people with lived experience are empowered in conversations, and that power is shared across groups of people contributing.

> **You will earn more respect and trust by being honest on what can be done and achieved, not through trying to badge everything as co-production.**

Theme 3: Planning co-production

- Identify and explore what relationships, networks and partnerships exist already with local community, faith and voluntary organisations, to support local involvement. They can have greater knowledge and insights of your local area and support as allies.
- Ensure the right work processes or documents are in place to show how people have been involved, including experts by experience, and their impact on people, places and communities in co-producing services.

Theme 4: Inclusion, representation and equity

- Proactively and equitably engage with a diverse range of people to support inclusion and to understand a broadness of perspectives.
- Be mindful of how to engage with people who are less connected and engaged with local networks and groups.
- Challenge exclusion, racism and tokenism, and become a champion for equity in adult social care.
- Support people who may be highly vocal and show frustration; they may have not had their voices heard, been stigmatised or had bad experiences with others.

Theme 5: Practical accessibility

- Make sure you consider ways to support people with their accessibility requirements, so they are not unfairly excluded from being involved. This could include supporting people with easy-read materials, sign language or interpreters.
- Ensure people receive clear and accessible information. Set expectations in advance of conversations.
- It may be appropriate to have flexible and thoughtful conversations with people or groups separately. This may sometimes work better for people than all having to follow the same arrangements and come together as one large group.

It's important that locations you choose for co-production conversations are accessible for different people. Think about when and where to host conversations, available transport links for people, room layouts, quiet or sensory spaces, disabled access, and availability of interpreters.

Theme 6: Payment and benefits

- Communicate clear guidance for people around payments and remuneration for taking part in co-production. This provides reassurance and helps to make sure that they feel safe to participate.
- Consider different or flexible methods and models of payment that support people's preferences.

It's important to support people with guidelines and assurances where they are receiving benefits alongside being paid for their contributions to co-production activities.

Theme 7: Safety, respect and language

- Create safe and welcoming environments centred around trust, where people feel psychologically safe.
- There is a duty of care to people involved in co-production, and to be mindful that they may be sharing traumatic experiences, and to avoid any pressures to share more than what they are comfortable with.
- Carefully consider language, as the term 'service user' could be considered as othering compared to alternatives such as 'people', 'participants' or 'experts by experience'. The word 'co-production' can also be triggering for some.

"See the whole person… be curious and listen carefully to understand the unique person that they are."

Theme 8: Transparency, recognition and feedback

- Be transparent around what decisions are being made, what will or will not change for people.
- Give reassurance and support to people to help them share and speak out. Some people may worry about any consequences of contributing and may wish to share confidentially.
- Approach co-production with an open mind, rather than to affirm existing assumptions and biases in what is being shared.
- Recognise people for their contributions. For example, adopt the 'you said, we did' approach, or engage with people over whether they feel they have been heard and recognised during co-production activities.
- It's important to identify any conflicts of interest that people may have when contributing to conversations.

"How do we communicate that we have listened? And what difference it's going to make?"