

Item 6

Turning participation into co-production

“Nothing about Us without Us”

This was the message from the Service Users Advisory Group that worked with the Department of Health to develop the White Paper, ‘Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century’, 2001. The group included representatives from People First, Mencap, Change and Speaking Up self-advocacy groups.

This is the first time that people with learning difficulties have been involved in advising the Government on a strategy. New strategies don’t happen very often, so this was a rare opportunity to get involved.

In Hampshire the setting up of a Learning Disability Partnership Board to implement the White Paper with a strong message of inclusion was welcomed by self-advocacy groups across the county, facilitated by Hampshire Advocacy Regional Group (HARG) a consortia of local advocacy organisations working together.

However in 2010, following the publication of “Making the most of Partnership Boards” by the Office of Disability, the Hampshire Board reviewed its membership. The advocacy organisation facilitating the involvement of the one member who had a learning disability, supported them to report that they often felt isolated and not listened to.

All partners agreed that a radical re shaping of the Board was needed, that a co-production model rather than participation was the aim. Co-ordinated by the Local Authority but co-produced by all partners, including self-advocacy groups. To enable co production the structure of the new Board sought to enable people with learning disabilities and their families to have positions of power on the Board. The new had 15 members, 10 are people with a learning disability and 5 family carers; it is chaired by the elected County Councillor with Adult Services responsibility and an elected Board member with a learning disability. Other partners including advocacy organisations attend the Board meetings and make contributions but are not voting members.

HARG applied for a small grant to fund independent facilitation and support for the 10 Board members with a learning disability. As the self-advocacy network had been involved in the development of the new Board self-advocacy groups had discussed and planned how to elect Board representatives, Reps, and their role in contributing to the agenda and work of the Board.



One of the first tasks for the Board was to develop a new Hampshire learning disability strategy. The previous strategy had not been co-produced and had been local authority commissioning led. The vision for the new plan was that it would be co-produced and led by what people with learning disabilities and their families said is important. The process took over a year as co-producing involved the Reps and actions from self-advocacy groups. The first chapter in the plan is “The Right Support” as self-advocacy groups had said this was the most important issue for them. Service providers then worked to state what they would do to provide services in the way people wanted. In 2014 the Hampshire Learning Disability Plan was launched. <http://www.hampshirelearningdisabilitypartnershipboard.org.uk/about/role-of-the-partnership-board/>

Co-production in action

Co-production moves the “nothing about us without us” involvement to a “working together as equal partners” culture. Co-production moves participation from co-design to co-delivering. The Plan has been the first co-production step and putting it into action is increasing the opportunity for people with learning disabilities to co-deliver.

The content of the “Right Support” chapter was used by both the Local Authority and CCGs when they commissioned care and support services for people with learning disabilities. Statements from the plan are also used for the quality monitoring of services and part of the current work of the Board is to monitor the outcomes of the plan. Work is also taking place with people with learning disabilities and family carers to develop a peer quality checking project.

Hampshire has also become one of nine sites nationally for the NHS England Integrated Personal Commissioning (IPC) programme. The application required evidence of co-production and the Plan and members of the Board provided that evidence.

The Board has been working differently for nearly 4 years and although still learning and developing there have been significant changes in how people with learning disabilities report on their role.

Being a Rep has increased my confidence as I am doing new things

I have a big responsibility to represent other people including the ones with complex needs

I have become more powerful and influential

The Rep role helps me to be part of the solution

Independent advocacy's co-production role

As independent advocacy organisations our role in enabling the move from limited involvement to co-production has required us to look at how we work.

Co-production requires a commitment to work in equal partnerships that values all partners. As advocacy organisations we have needed to separate our role and voice as organisations from the role of enabling self-advocates as co-producers. A supporter role description is used to explain the facilitating the co-production opportunity with the self-advocate. A separate role in representing the advocacy organisations participation has to be clear to all partners working together. This systems advocacy role has value as it can draw on the issues that as an organisation issue based and non-instructed advocacy have been witnessed, and as organisations led by member's experiences.

Co-production requires productive partnership relationships, where trust, honesty and mutual respect and value, are established. Well developed communication skills and emotional intelligence is needed. Advocates in the supporter role are required to think through strategy and communicate it to their partners while also ensuring their partner is able to remain involved in the active co-production process. Advocates have had to shape the way co- production is working to ensure everyone can participate. This requires skills in questioning and challenging with positive outcomes for all co production members. These are all advocacy skills that are transferable and enable the supporter role to be effective. We are learning that we need to be clearer in communicating the advocacy skills we have and are using to facilitate co-production.

We have had to think about how current commissioning can affect how we work. The contract culture can have narrow outputs and become process driven and this can affect our advocacy practice culture. We have had think through the value that can be placed on facilitating co-production compared to other forms of advocacy. The financial value is very small, but we believe the advocacy value is huge.

Co-production features throughout the Care Act 2014. It is clear in its guidance that strengths based approaches support wellbeing and prevention work. Advocacy is recognised with a new statutory entitlement, but there is also a role in the development of co-produced services and solutions. Both in enabling people who may find accessing co production challenging and as systems advocates who are independent and can be the critical allies to co-production processes.

The Care Act also expects advocacy organisations to be co-producing its services.

Quality advocacy services are person-centred and developed using a co-production approach that aims to maximise the participation of people who use services and their carers.

SCIE 2015 Care Act 2014: Commissioning independent advocacy

“Quality advocacy services are person-

We are re-evaluating our advocacy approaches including peer and citizen advocacy. As advocacy organisations we work to the principles of co-production, or do we?

- Recognising people as assets.
- Building on people’s capabilities.
- Developing two-way, reciprocal relationships.
- Encouraging peer support.
- Blurring boundaries between delivering and receiving services.
- Facilitating rather than delivering
- Making sure that power is balanced between people getting support, and the people who support them.
Think Local Act Personal.

Co-producing as an organisation, we recognise that we face the same challenges and barriers as others and this is helping us to facilitate co-production that is for everyone. As a process it enables people not to be passive recipients of services, but as reported by one of the Reps, “to be a part of the solution.”

