

How to... deliver tangible results through co-operation

What is co-production?

They're talking about it in high places and catching on to it everywhere.

'Co-production' is about working together ('co') to deliver ('production') community cohesion and more effective public services. It's about give and take. Time banking is a way of doing it and it is growing throughout the UK.

Co-production requires us to question the way we deliver public services and recognise that when the users of public services, professional staff and local people act together as valued co-workers we can actually produce long-term solutions to social problems.

Why not stick with the status quo?

These days there is an almost visible gulf between professional helpers, their clients and the local community.

Wherever you look you will find:

- An expanding public sector workforce bravely trying to hold back an ever rising tide of need without the active support of those they are trying to help.
- Clients competing for scarce services and then consuming them in a sort of learned helplessness, taking little responsibility for themselves.
- Disconnected and powerless communities, suspicious of the massive institutions around them and seemingly unaware that they hold the key to the collective efficacy that could change things.

People are complex, individual and wonderfully diverse. They express their personalities through their behaviour and learn about themselves through their relationships with one another.

case study sharing strength

Steven has severe learning difficulties and he is a big strong fellow. He attended a day centre for years. When he joined his local time bank he found that his physical strength was much in demand as elderly residents often needed heavy things shifted, a strong pair of hands to help out. The time bank valued these skills and he has earned a lot of time credits. Being valued for what he can do has transformed him and his confidence has grown so much that he now escorts people from the day centre on train journeys.

The trouble is that if you work for a public service agency you will be meeting people who have already been fitted neatly into boxes, labelled with what is wrong with them. This approach may be businesslike but reflects our national obsession with fixing what is wrong, while letting strengths take care of themselves.

The message that is sent out, albeit inadvertently, is not an empowering one, but 'we are here to help you, but you have nothing we value or need'.

If our public services are to 'co-produce' they need to accept the uncomfortable fact that in order to be truly effective the professional worker needs



the localised knowledge, the enthusiasm and commitment of the user as much as the user needs the specialised skills of the professional.

Principles of co-production

Dr Edgar Cahn and Christine Gray at the Time Dollar Institute have identified four key elements of co-production:

An asset based philosophy. Everyone has the capacity to contribute positively in some way to the wellbeing of those around them. The real wealth of any society is its people and as long as we continue to forget that we will never see again the large scale and enthusiastic participation we need.

Rewards for real work. Bringing up children, caring for the marginalised, being an active citizen, holding officials accountable is real work. When people take up this work it needs to be recorded and their efforts both valued and rewarded. The skills involved may not have a high commercial price, simply because they are in plentiful supply, but this should not stop us finding ways to reward them.

Reciprocity. The impulse to give back is universal.

case study making music

At the Rhymney Time Bank in South Wales the local authority youth workers asked their users to come up with a community development project of their own, for which the young people would earn time credits they could use to buy trips out or driving lessons.

The young people discovered that many years ago there had been a popular jazz band in the village and decided to revive it. Using their vast networking skills they found most of the older people who had played in the band, who are now in their grand old age, and persuaded them to pick up their instruments again.

They begged and borrowed instruments for those who no longer had any and have now booked a local hall, decorated it, sold all the tickets and will act as marshals on the night. The young people have gained a lot, the youth workers have a great project and the village has come alive.

When people receive public services we can ask them to pay back to their local community. Two way transactions of 'give and take' are needed between people, service users and their professional helpers. People want to give back, to make a difference, just as professional helpers do. If you do not ask people to make a contribution they will not feel connected.

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Learning Curve is a New Start resource to help share knowledge of initiatives and approaches that have worked well in regeneration and economic development. If you would like to submit an article, please email an outline of your idea to news@newstartmag.co.uk or call Susan Downer on 0114 221 7264 or 0114 281 6133.

traffic



Building social networks. Public services must assist people directly in creating social networks that are both inclusive and dynamic. This will boost the impact, reach and scale of our efforts to bring about social change. A local culture of mutual self help, much like an extended family, is the only thing that will sustain community life in the long term. New connections and opportunities open up for people, which in turn free up the professionals to focus on their more specialised contributions.

When push comes to shove co-production is all about trust in each other and working together to build the kind of world we want our grandchildren to inherit.

Policy makers have to stop trying to break things down into manageable parts and accept that we cannot always predict what the outcomes of our work will be.

We cannot control what will happen if we unleash the potential of real people in real communities, but we have to do it.

A friend reminded me of a line from a John Lennon song: 'There's always something happening but nothing going on.' Without co-production this will become the reality behind many of the inclusion, civil renewal and regeneration aspirations of the hardworking people in the public, voluntary and community sectors today.

This article was written by **Martin Simon**, executive director of Time Banks UK.

► find out more

Time banks are a way to link people locally to share their time and skills. Everyone's time is equal: one hour of your time earns you one time credit to spend when you need a helping hand. So far, there are over 76 active time banks with 39 in development, involving more than 5,000 participants across the UK who have traded over 260,000 hours. See www.timebanks.co.uk In May 2006 there will be a national time banking conference in Cardiff to mark the publication of a research project into co-production by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. For more details phone Time Banks UK, 01452 541439.

career ladder



Helen Ward is a tenant participation adviser at William Sutton Housing Association. Having brought up a family and worked in a variety of jobs, she gradually became involved in tenant activities and secured a post at the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (Tpas) where she became a development worker. She now combines that experience with 30 years as a council tenant to help William Sutton's residents get involved in their communities.

Most important lesson learned? Be honest in everything you do. If you are not you will be letting everybody down, and tenants can spot a lie a mile off.

Any advice to others starting out in regeneration? Don't promise what you cannot deliver.

Most useful training course/seminar/workshop? A workshop I attended in Oxford in about 1989 entitled 'How to be a consultant'. It demonstrated how to set up clear frameworks for everything you do and how to negotiate with your clients. That really inspired me.

Most useful resource for information or personal development? A manual

called 'Community organisations advisors' by Community Matters. It tells you everything you need to know about community organisations and community buildings in terms of best practice and legal responsibilities.

Career highs and lows? William Sutton Housing Association being awarded three stars by the Audit Commission. The report said that resident involvement was embedded in the culture of the organisation and owned by local staff. That meant I had done my job properly. The low points were, during my time with Tpas, dealing with old fashioned councillors.

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Diary

North of England education conference

Conference organised by the north east's 12 local authorities
Venue: Gateshead
4-6 January
Details: www.neec2006.org.uk

Choice and neighbourhoods – what does it mean for service providers?

Apse conference
Venue: Leeds
11 January
Details: enquiries@apse.org.uk

Wraparound services for children and young people – the role of schools

Event looking at joined up services for children and young people
Venue: London
17 January
Details: 020 7324 4330

Barker and beyond

NHF conference on affordable homes
Venue: London
17 January
Details: 0870 010 7676, www.housing.org.uk

Branding cities – why image means investment

Bura conference
Venue: Hull
17-18 January
Details: 020 7539 4030

Don't miss out

Legal essentials

Want to know how to make the law work for you, not against you? **New Start** has teamed up with Anthony Collins Solicitors to stage a practical conference for regeneration practitioners, particularly those without access to an in-house legal team. A range of workshops in everything from charity law to mounting a legal challenge will be available to allow delegates to tailor the event to their needs.
Venue: Birmingham, 26 January
Details: 0114 281 6133, legal@newstartmag.co.uk

Delivering a new agenda for local government

NLGN conference
Venue: London
18 January
Details: 020 7324 4330

Sustainable building expo

Northampton Council showcase for sustainable urban extension
Venue: Northampton
18-19 January
Details: 01604 838000, swright@northampton.gov.uk

Evaluating projects

Cles training event
Venue: Manchester
19 January
Details: 0161 236 7036, www.cles.org.uk

Diverting young people from antisocial behaviour and crime through positive activities

The impact of arts, sports and cultural activities
Venue: London
24 January
Details: 020 7324 4330

Local area agreements

Cles training event
Venue: Manchester
24 January
Details: 0161 236 7036, www.cles.org.uk

Engaging families in services

ContinYou conference
Venue: Coventry
25 January
Details: 02476 588467

Getting down to business

Social Enterprise Coalition conference
Venue: Manchester
25 January
Details: 01454 200016, www.socialenterprise.org.uk

Clean neighbourhoods and environment act masterclass

Session run by Walker Morris Solicitors for Apse
Venue: Leeds
26 January
Details: 0161 772 1810