



Two Co-production Journeys

ADASS West Midlands and ADASS East of England

Introduction

Co-production happens differently everywhere. When it's done well, key ingredients often include having clear roles for all involved, working together to agree shared goals laid out at the start, a sharing of power and decision-making with staff, and budgets set aside to recognise and reward people for their time and expertise. It's also about involving a variety of people with diverse skills and lived experience.

Think Local Act Personal talk about co-production as people who access services working in equal partnership with staff to design or improve the services they receive. Co-production recognises that people who draw on care and support and their families have knowledge and experience that can be used to help make services better, not only for themselves but for other people who need social care.

ADASS, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, exists to promote higher standards of social care services and influence policies and decision-makers to transform the lives of people needing and providing care - so that all of us needing care and support can live the lives they want regardless of age, disability, status and social background. A commitment to co-production is a key part of making this happen.

This document, created by TLAP, brings together different approaches, ideas, and experimentation around co-production from the East of England and West Midlands ADASS regions. It has been created to share ideas and inspire you to develop your approach to co-production. Inside you'll also find recommendations from the people involved – both people with lived experience and staff – who are working together, trying things out and learning as they go.

The document shows where regions started and the practical steps they took. However, rather than lots of detail on specific activities, we focus on what the impact has been and the difference co-production has made. Voices of people with lived experience – and useful links and resources – are peppered throughout.



A little note on language

Language matters. It reveals and shapes what we think, and can set the tone for relationships and how we work together. When we use the terms 'people with lived experience' and 'people who draw on care and support', we are talking about the same people. These terms describe people who have experience of using care and support services as well as carers who provide unpaid care. It shows people choose to define themselves in different ways. It can help to agree a shared definition of how people describe themselves at the start of a project.

Starting points

East of England ADASS

East of England ADASS had been exploring ways of co-producing for a few years as part of the Building Positive Futures Programme [link](#). However, they recognised they were a long way from truly co-producing. They knew that they needed to address the balance of people and power in the spaces where decisions were being made about people drawing on care and support.

East of England ADASS, in partnership with Curators of Change, had already done previous co-production work on the regional Market Development Priorities, reports from which can be found on their website [link](#). This provided learning and a direction of travel as outlined below:

1. They knew that the available services are often limited, and only in place because the local authority has already decided that they are what is needed. These care markets are not diverse enough, and local authorities cannot always offer as much choice and control as people would want to see.
2. They wanted to learn from what was working well, grow innovation, and improve people's lives.
3. They had identified that co-production meant different things to different people. Existing work had highlighted that 'consultation' or 'engagement' are mistakenly called 'co-production'.
4. They had many different co-production approaches. They needed to learn from one another to grow and be self-aware of their performance.

5. Co-production needed to be grounded in mutuality and human connection. It is relational, not transactional. How it is delivered can be wonderfully creative and variable.
6. Good co-production is dependent on excellent facilitation. This includes creating and holding brave spaces. This means creating spaces with just enough structure to allow for people to speak openly and honestly, and for the agenda to emerge.

In the East of England ADASS region, people said:

"... [there's] frustration that organisations design systems as processes, and not from the human/person who draws on services point of view."

"[We] need to invest time in healing relationships [between parts of the system and people who access services and support] in order to build co-production and better support."

"How dangerous words 'unskilled' can be [when associated with unpaid carers]. We all have lived experiences and we need to share all those unique skills – equality in every voice."

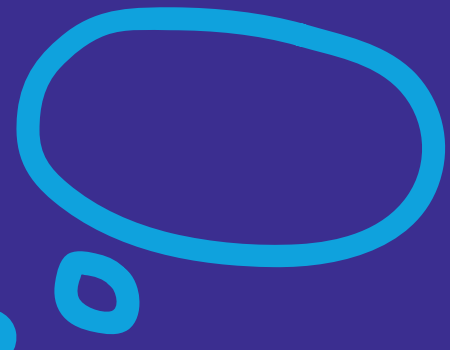
West Midlands ADASS

West Midlands ADASS also had an existing programme on which they chose to build as their starting point. This was the 'Peer Challenge Programme' where teams of peers from a council look at how social care is planned and delivered in another local authority.

From this starting point, they began to involve people with lived experience within review teams. This had a big impact as it led to having less formal, honest, and open discussion between staff and people with lived experience and everyone working together on an equal footing. The University of Birmingham highlighted this in its external evaluation [link](#).

They wanted to focus on developing ways to involve more people with lived experience in the programme to kickstart further co-production.

"We wanted to go bigger, bolder and faster to improve co-production in the region and address recommendations from the [Birmingham University] report."



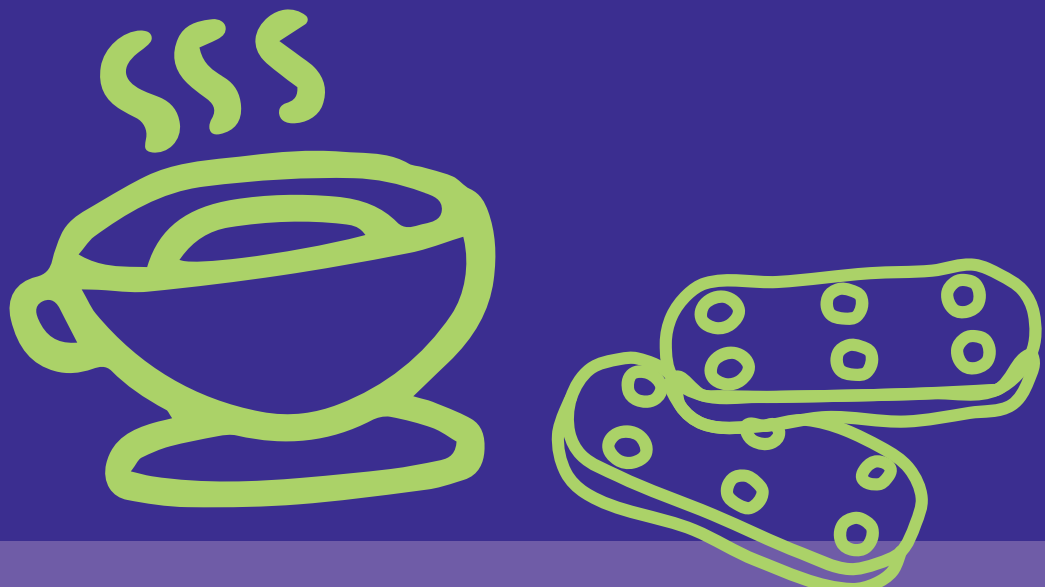
What happened next

East of England ADASS

People felt strongly that the best step the region could take would be to strip away the systems, agendas, and governance structures to create spaces that were open and welcoming to anyone who wanted to participate. As a result, the team worked with their emerging co-production network and Curators of Change to create and test interactive, online co-production sessions, which they called 'Over a Brew' [link](#).

These were intended to tackle the key aim identified at the start – addressing the balance of people and power in the spaces where decisions were being made about people drawing on care and support.

The sessions provide an open, honest space for people who draw on care and support, commissioners, and providers to come together over a cuppa. Here, they were able to talk about how they could work together to improve the experiences and outcomes of care and support for people who were accessing it.



Each 'Over a Brew' includes an activity to spark thinking and conversation in breakout rooms.

Some of these activities were based around Community Reporting stories [link](#). Community Reporting is a storytelling movement that uses digital tools such as portable and pocket technologies to support people to tell their own stories in their own ways.

The 'Over a Brew' sessions are open to all, welcoming, inclusive, and optional. People can come to as many or as few as they like, and staff are encouraged to come along to listen and learn from people's experiences. Everyone is equal, and the sessions act as a trusted space in which people work together to raise awareness of issues and find solutions.

Session themes so far have been influenced by the group members and ADASS East networks. They have included what it feels like to go through an assessment and/or review, and what skills people would like from the people who support them. Their next one is on building the right relationships.

Key findings and themes from each 'Over a Brew' are fed back into regional improvement work and the newly-formed 'Putting People at the Heart of Care and Support working group'. This group is made up of Assistant Directors, Network Chairs, and members of the emerging regional co-production network. More information about Over a Brew, including feedback and actions, as well as short videos and audios, can be found on the ADASS website [link](#).

Attendees of 'Over a Brew' have said:

"The 'Over a Brews' have been a success in bringing people together and opening up the conversation on co-production. It's been eye-opening at various levels to hear what people are doing in their own areas to develop participation and co-production. Sometimes in a good way, sometimes in a difficult way, as it seems for some the power imbalance can act as a stalling point – but we're moving in the right direction."

- Mark Dale, Curators of Change Co-producer

"Recently I had another meeting with a local commissioner who is concerned about the experiences I have been going through. Things aren't perfect, but my examples and experiences can help to bring about change! Being part of the 'Over a Brews' has reassured me that I am not alone and helped me to challenge my local experience more constructively."

- David, Curators Of Change Co-producer



"It was great to be a part of the 'Over a Brew' sessions. It really gave us a way to meet as humans and explore different topics like never before. For me, it gave me a purpose and has helped me to grow confidence and strength and try new things I never thought I'd ever do."

- Nat Clarkson, Curators of Change Co-producer

"The East of England Regional Sector Led Improvement Programme has focused on personalisation and co-production for many years within its improvement programme, but it has focused far too much on trying to perfect the way we co-produce and not enough time getting on and listening to what matters to people. It's time we came together to support and work alongside each other, which is exactly what 'Over a Brew' does. We often repeat what we don't repair, and we need to remember that every lesson shapes a life."

- Natasha Burberry, East of England Regional Sector Led Improvement Programme Manager



West Midlands ADASS

As well as the changes to the Peer Challenge Programme, the West Midlands became the first ADASS region to make a regional commitment to Making it Real [link](#). Making It Real is an approach to improving care and support. It was created by Think Local Act Personal, and centres around a framework developed in co-production with people with lived experience. As part of making their commitment to Making It Real, West Midlands ADASS matched up their regional programme outcomes to this framework. They appointed a Director of Adult Social Care 'Lead Sponsor for Co-production' to help drive and champion their regional work.

West Midlands ADASS also partnered with Think Local Act Personal to set up their new Digital Network, helping to keep their activity grounded in co-production and personalisation. Additionally, they set up a new Regional Co-production Advisory Network, bringing together people who draw on care and support to promote and embed co-production across their 14 councils and shape regional improvement.

The region also partnered with National Voices to pilot a new lived experience coaching programme with senior leaders in adult social care. Through this programme, two senior social care leaders were coached by people with lived experience of care and health services who were trained as coaches. West Midlands ADASS is running the programme again during 23/24. Find out more about the programme and what was gained from participating in this short video [link](#).

Crucially, West Midlands ADASS provided resources for co-production. They did this by having a dedicated lead in the regional West Midlands ADASS team to support this work, as well as developing a Fees and Expenses Policy to recognise and pay people for their time and contributions. This fees and expenses policy is now being used by other councils who are using similar ways to pay people for their time.



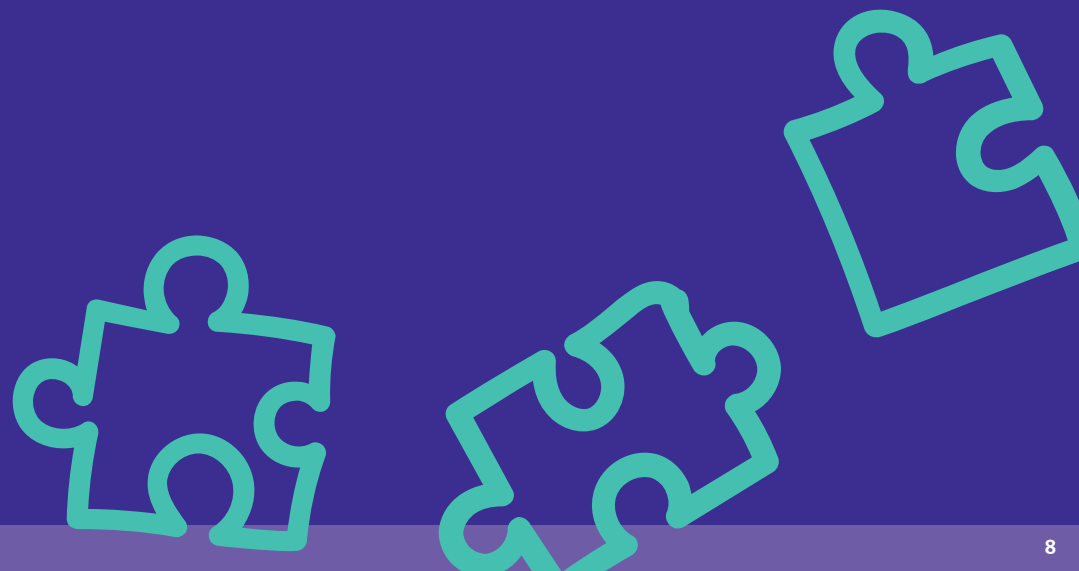
What other co-production work happened as a result?

East of England ADASS

- To grow innovation, the East of England team further developed the **Regional Building Positive Futures Programme** [link](#). This shares learning from expert organisations and people who have benefited from a new model or approach and focuses on growing innovations in community-based and personalised care and support.
- Using **‘Working Together for Change’ co-production methods** [link](#) to easily shape and share different approaches with people, commissioners, and providers. This helped to grow different ways of working, leading by example and growing co-production and personalised care and support at a local level. They created videos and publications [link](#) to share practice.
- Creating two **Peer-to-Peer Support programmes** to test out how well they were doing. Through these, each Local Authority completed a self-assessment of their performance, including a rating of how well they thought they were doing against the **Making it Real** [link](#) framework. The self-assessments were then reviewed in two ways. Firstly, a former Director of social care reviewed each local authority’s self-assessment as a critical friend, feeding back to senior management on ways in which things could be improved, as well as areas of strength. Secondly, they carried out Local Government Association peer reviews in most areas, including case file audit reviews. In the future, they plan to ensure people who access care and support are involved throughout peer support work.

West Midlands ADASS

- Changes to the **Practice Review Programme**. For eight years, this programme was led by the Principal Social Work Network. It worked in a similar way to the Peer Challenge Programme, but with a focus on reviewing and assessing social work practice. A key part of the Practice Review Programme involves looking at social care case files, but until this year nobody with lived experience had been asked for their views about their experiences of care and support. This is now changing, as the Regional Co-production Advisory Network has started to support the Principal Social Workers in the review process. One reflection from this work is that social workers have powerful roles, and staff need to be mindful in Practice Reviews of the power imbalance when they are speaking to people with lived experience. One of the recommendations that West Midlands ADASS are taking forward from this is to include and support people with lived experience to be part of the Practice Review Team, leading conversations with people who have drawn upon social care support for their views on their experiences.



Tips on co-production

East of England ADASS

1. Keep it simple and human – remember there isn't a magic formula!
2. Really listen to people. Notice your own assumptions and judgement and try to step away from them.
3. Have just enough structure so that people are comfortable, but that allows the conversation to flow.
4. Start with a blank piece of paper and no agenda. Be brave and put trust in people.
5. Be mindful of the power of language. People are people, not labels. As one of our participants said, 'labels are for tins (or jars) – not people!'
6. Be comfortable with things being uncomfortable. Push through the difficult moments together to really understand what needs to change.
7. It's ok to fail. Reflect on and adapt things as you go along.
8. Value people's time by making things they talk about happen. Where you can, pay people for their time.
9. Seek out 'moments that matter' and things that are working well. Understand why they work and share them to help everyone learn.
10. Aim for involving people in the way services are designed and evaluated as 'business as usual', not as a series of 'co-production activities'.

West Midlands ADASS

Abby: "Trust the process, even if it feels uncomfortable (or a little unplanned!). I was unsure of how we'd find people with lived experience to be part of our work, but, nine months on, we've been able to bring together a representative group who are informing improvement practice. We've done this by starting small by using existing channels, like local carer groups or MIR Boards, and seeing where good will and enthusiasm can take us."

Keymn: "My top tip would be to take time to build relationships and understand all members' expertise. Make it a reciprocal relationship where there is shared learning, and those with lived experience can build their knowledge skills and confidence to become leaders within their communities and even nationally. This supports community capacity building."

Rich: "Be aware of what it takes to do co-production well. What lies behind the engagement is the adoption of co-production being understood and embedded in the culture, a co-designed strategy, a budget for paying people, and accepting that it needs to be led by the process rather than deadlines. Consider these aspects with equal importance."



What is planned next

East of England ADASS

The team said:

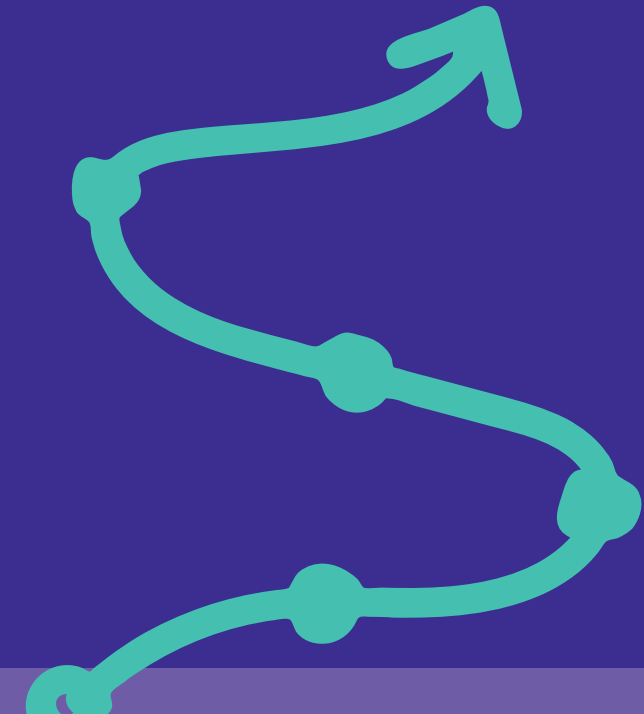
“To continue to build on the work started and grow personalised care and support we will:

- Report back on the “We said, we did approach” to continue to improve together.
- Share good practice through guides, case studies, reports and media showcasing people’s experience of care and support – asking the “so what?” questions to explore the difference that changes are making.
- Continue to hold a mirror up to ensure we are continuously assessing our performance using different approaches such as the Think Local Act Personal Making It Real framework, regular feedback from people and partners including involvement in peer reviews.”

West Midlands ADASS

The team said:

“To build on learning so far, in 2023/24 we’ll continue to provide support for strategic co-production to senior leaders across the region and strengthen membership and activity of their Regional Co-production Network. We are also developing a regional charter for what good co-production looks like for councils which we will be happy to share.”



“I’m excited to be part of a diverse group of experienced and committed people who are passionate about supporting us to think boldly and ambitiously about our approaches to co-production. We’re looking forward to supporting our regional group and seeing how far our thinking can be stretched and challenged.”

Tanya Miles
Director Lead – Co-production, West Midlands ADASS
Executive Director of People at Shropshire Council

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You can hear from the regions directly in two **podcasts** which accompany this document. Find them at thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk.