Co-producing with carers in health settings: A co-production toolkit for professionals working in and with the health sector

Part 1. Understanding co-production

There are a few key concepts that contribute to a rounded understanding of co-production:

- the definition and the 5 values that underpin the approach;
- where co-production sits along the spectrum of engagement approaches;
- when co-production is the most relevant approach (to address complex challenges).

In this section we share the general framework of co-production, and you will find case studies in Part 2.

1.1. If you have 10 minutes
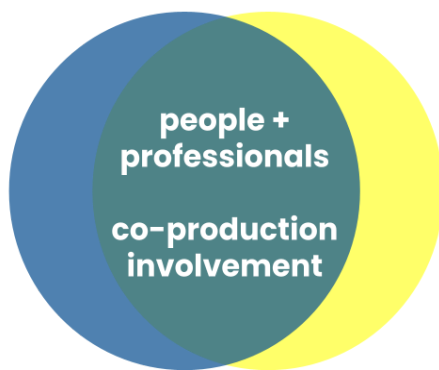
Check out these summary factsheets.

> ## Understanding co-production: What is co-production?
>
> ### Definition of co-production
>
> Co-production (of public services) means that people who provide and deliver services, and people who access and receive services, share power and responsibility, and work together for mutual benefit in equal, reciprocal and caring relationships.
>
> It enables:
> • people to access relevant and meaningful support when they need it;
> • services to be effective and make a positive difference in people's lives; and
> • people, services and communities to become more effective agents of change.

citizens

community organising

people + professionals

co-production involvement

organisations

collaboration

5 values of co-production

1. Value all participants, and build on their **strengths**.
2. Develop **networks** across silos.
3. Do **what matters** for the people involved.
4. Build **relationships** of trust and share power.
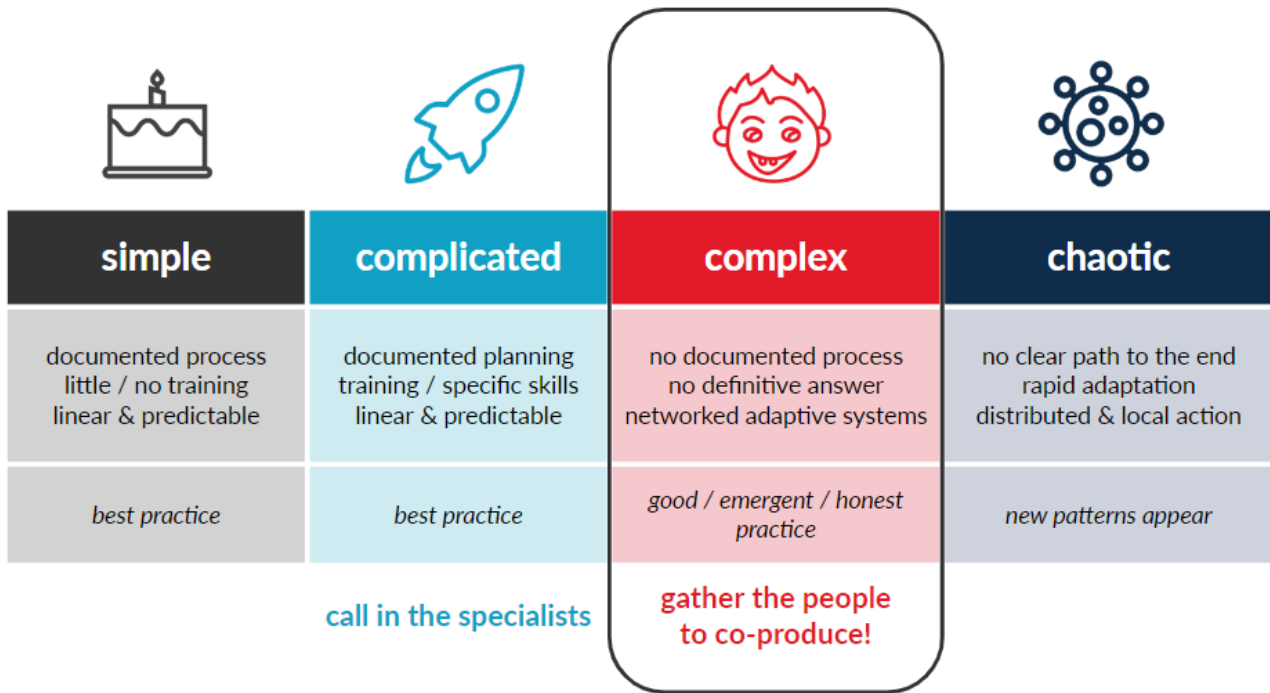5. People can be change makers, and organisations become **enablers**.

Understanding co-production:
A spectrum of engagement

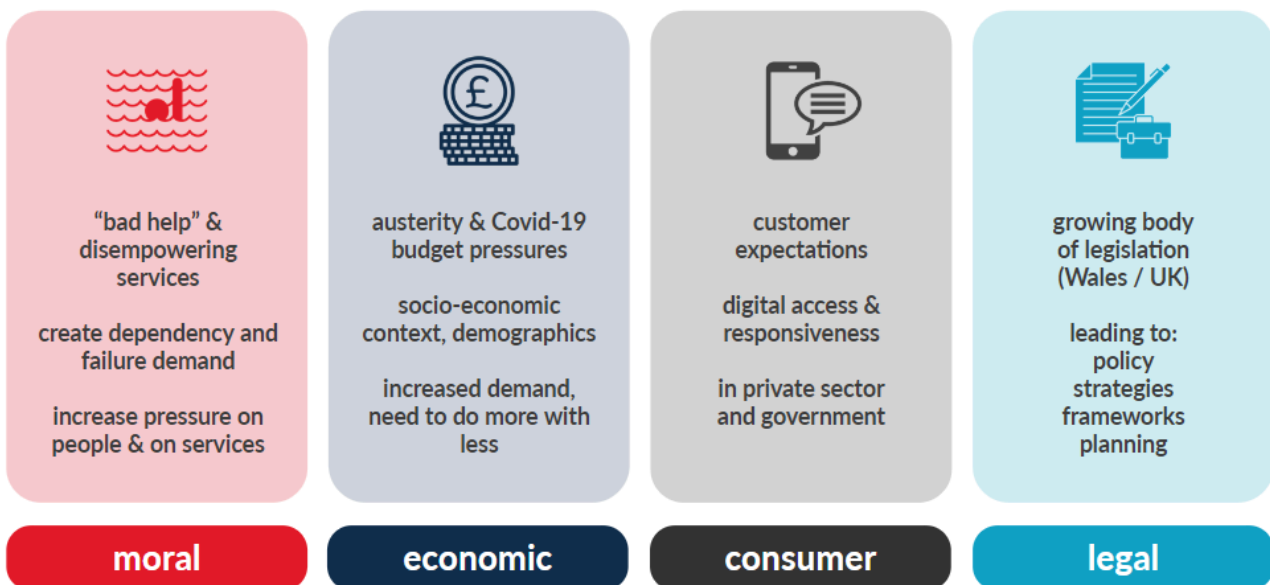| doing to		doing for			doing with
coercion protection	education persuasion	information	consultation	participation	co-production involvement
e.g. criminal justice, safeguarding	e.g. smoking cessation programmes	e.g. Council website info on bin collections	e.g. surveys, urban planning, FixMyStreet	e.g. drop-in events, focus groups	e.g. person-centred care, shared decision making
"We have a duty to act to ensure people's safety."	"We know what people need to do, we need to get them to do it."	"We provide information where /when /how people need it."	"We decide what questions to ask, and collect data to inform our decisions."	"We listen to people's lived experience, to inform our thinking and decisions."	"We listen to people's experience and share ours. There is equal power in our decision making. We value different experiences."
The organisation has the knowledge. The organisation makes the decisions. The organisation enforces the decisions.		The organisation listens to people's knowledge. The organisation makes the decisions. The organisation enacts the decisions.			The organisation and the people listen to each other's knowledge. The organisation and the people make decisions together. The organisation and the people both take actions on the decisions.

To identify which approach is occurring, ask yourself:
- Who **holds the knowledge**: the organisation, the people, or both?
- Who **makes the decisions**: the organisation, the people, or both?
- Who **enacts the decisions**: the organisation, the people, or both?

Understanding co-production:
Complexity theory

simple	complicated	complex	chaotic
documented process little / no training linear & predictable	documented planning training / specific skills linear & predictable	no documented process no definitive answer networked adaptive systems	no clear path to the end rapid adaptation distributed & local action
best practice	*best practice*	*good / emergent / honest practice*	*new patterns appear*
	call in the specialists	gather the people to co-produce!	

Understanding co-production:
The co-production imperative

| "bad help" & disempowering services

create dependency and failure demand

increase pressure on people & on services | austerity & Covid-19 budget pressures

socio-economic context, demographics

increased demand, need to do more with less | customer expectations

digital access & responsiveness

in private sector and government | growing body of legislation (Wales / UK)

leading to: policy strategies frameworks planning |
|---|---|---|---|
| **moral** | **economic** | **consumer** | **legal** |

"Bad help" further info:
https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/good-and-bad-help-how-purpose-and-confidence-transform-lives/

Read through this essay which is based on a conversation with Noreen Blanluet from the Co-production Network for Wales, and covers the four topics above.

Understanding co-production
Reading time: 30 minutes

a) What is co-production?

Can we start with what we mean by co-production?

This is our official definition: co-production is an asset-based approach to public services, that enables people providing and people receiving services to share power and responsibility, and to work together in equal, reciprocal and caring relationships. It creates opportunities for people to access support when they need it, and to contribute to social change.

In a nutshell, co-production is when we've got citizens and professionals together at the table having conversations - usually about what a service could look like - but it fits into a broader philosophical picture: of being active citizens and participating in democracy and shaping our society, not just the services that support us.

If you have just citizens designing things together without the involvement of professionals, it's called community organising or community-led action. And that's great, it's really important. It happened loads with all the mutual aid groups and local volunteering during the Covid pandemic. It's awesome... It's just not co-production. (I'm going to be pernickety about the terms of this stage and then we'll expand from there.)

If you have organisations involving other organisations, it's collaboration or partnership working. It's brilliant. And it's important... but if you don't have the citizens, the people whose lives you're going to touch through the service, being part of the conversation, then it's not co-production. Collaboration is really important because good collaboration leads to great co-production. It's very necessary. But I just want to be clear, if you don't have citizens at the table, it's not co-production.

There's an expression in community organising which says "if you're not at the table, then you're probably on the menu". And that's what we're trying to avoid with co-production: we are making sure that people who have an investment in this, who are stakeholders in this (whether the professionals or the citizens) should be part of the conversation.

Now, this is the "pure" definition of co-production. In practice, you will probably be dancing between all of them: doing some co-production as well as some collaboration, and letting the community get on with community organising for other things.

Okay, so how do we go about doing co-production then?

I wish I could give you a recipe, a 12 step checklist to do co-production with. Unfortunately I cannot, because it's based on a set of values. But what I can do is tell you about these five values and show you how, if you keep coming back to those and bear them in mind at all times, then you can't go far wrong on your co-production journey.

(And I should add: co-production is a journey. It's never going to be black or white, you've "done co-production" or you "haven't done co-production". When you've done some co-production - and even if it's maybe not as much as you had hoped - it all counts, because it sets a precedent which you can build on. So don't be discouraged if it's not as perfect as you'd like it to be straight away. Some co-production is better than none.)

The 5 values are:
- building on everyone's strengths,
- developing networks across silos,
- focusing on outcomes in people's lives,
- working on the basis of great relationships, and
- enabling people to be change makers.

First, building on everyone's strengths

The place to start is with focusing on people. We always say that co-production is an "asset based" approach, and the assets are everything in people's lives that add value: knowledge, experience, things they can do or they know, etc. As well, we have the resources within communities: activities that already happen, tangible resources, buildings, parks, places to meet, sports equipment, allotments, things like that - all these are assets and resources that are a part of people's lives.

We start with the premise that the people we're working with, even though we might think of them as the people who need our support, also have richness and wisdom to offer us. It's a two way relationship. And so we have to begin with what's there for people and what they've already got, build on that.

There's a tendency to think that when people are in difficult situations and have complex issues going on in their lives, that actually, we can't ask them for anything. It's too much, it's rude or disrespectful to ask, or there is nothing that they can do. That's a huge wasted opportunity! Because if nothing else, people have the experience of using the service that we deliver. That wisdom in itself, that experience is valuable because they will see things from the other end of the telescope in a way that we never can see, even if it's just a knowledge of the service from the receiving end. That's valuable in itself. On top of that, they have knowledge of the condition they're living with (if it's a health condition), or the circumstances they're living in, and so on: they bring a wisdom that we can't have as professionals, unless we're in the exact same situation.

Something else to mention here is that it's not just about the people we support. If we want our teams and our frontline people to model these kinds of behaviours, and make the right decision at the right time with the people they support, we need to be able to demonstrate these behaviours within our organisations as well. It's impossible to be in a

really controlling hierarchical organisation, with a narrow focus on key performance indicators, and then expect the people on the front line to be not focused on indicators, and willing to kind, and be flexible, and find the things that work in a very human way! We have to have that quality running all the way through our teams and organisations.

So that's the first thing: start with the people and start with what we all bring as our assets, ourselves, our teams and the people we support.

Second, developing networks across silos

The second value of co-production is about working across silos. As organisations, we are really good at working in silos, each department doing its own thing; and between organisations as well, we work in our own separate silos. Our organisation might be supporting the same people as another organisation, but we don't really talk because we keep ourselves to our separate areas completely. It's a huge wasted opportunity, because if we're not working well with the other professionals who support the same people that we support, then we're probably duplicating and wasting resources. We could do much more with what we have, if only we linked up and understood what the other is doing, and where our different strengths lie.

That is why good collaboration enables good co-production: if you're well linked up with the other departments in your organisation, or with the other organisations that also support the same service users, then you'll get stronger results, and you'll also be able to do better co-production in terms of bringing in citizen voice.

The biggest silo of all, to break down or at least to start blurring the boundaries of, is the silo between professionals and citizens. If we're all working together to solve a challenge, for example to improve a service, then the service users and carers should be part of the team: they also care about having a service that works well, and they have unique knowledge to add to the picture. Making sure that they're as valued as the people who are part of it in their professional role is really important, so that everybody can bring their best to the conversation. So let's build networks, let's build teams that are pluri-disciplinary, and that bring in all the people who have a stake in the solution.

Third, focusing on outcomes in people's lives

The third principle is being outcomes focused, and focusing on what matters to all the people involved. And obviously, that means the people we support, so that means starting with conversations in which, rather than saying "What are you eligible for, which bits of the service do you fit into?" we consider the question "What does a good life look like for you? And how can we help you get there?".

So far in public services, it's become the responsibility of the public service professionals to be all things to all people. But rather than relying on the professionals to do everything, there's a huge bunch of skills and resources within communities. If we leverage those in parallel with the skills of the professionals, we get a whole that is much bigger than the sum of its parts. So it's about that - it's not about saying "it's all up to the community now because we can't afford it", it's saying, there's bits that the community is amazing at doing, that the professional shouldn't be doing. You can't be

paid to be somebody's friend, it would never be the same result as a genuine friendship. You can be paid to support and bring in the extra capacity or the extra skills that the friend circle can't bring in. So the combination of the two is much better than putting the weight of responsibility on each one separately.

But to do that, we've got to start with what matters to people: where they would like their life to be and what they would like it to look like.

And as an additional thought, this also applies to the people in our teams: what matters to us as professionals, as public servants or as civil servants? Why do we do the work that we do? What is the outcome for us in terms of doing good work, because nobody goes into the public service for the fame and the fortune - but we do this because we want to make a difference. And so what are going to be good outcomes for us, not just for the people we support? If we have good outcomes as professionals, we'll be in a better place to support the people that our service supports.

Fourth, working on the basis of great relationships

The fourth principle is about building trusted relationships. I keep talking about relationships all the time in the context of co-production, because they completely underpin what co-production is about. It's about being able to have the conversations between people who care about the outcomes, and finding solutions together, and we need the trust in order to be able to do this work - to bring understanding, and the ability to work together and to design better solutions together, and creativity.

Fifth, enabling people to be change makers

And finally, the fifth principle is specifically for organisations: shifting from just delivering a service to actually enabling people to be the drivers of change. And it could be people in our teams, or it could be the patients and service users and carers that we support: how much can they actually bring their ideas to the table, and make those ideas happen with our support (as opposed to feeding in the ideas to us, and then we take it away and do it. I'll talk about that a bit more shortly.)

So those are the five co-production values: keep coming back and checking your practice against them.

b) Co-production is part of a spectrum of engagement approaches

So we should be aiming to do co-production for everything then?

Well, no. To unpack that, let's talk about all the different kinds of interactions that occur between a public service and its citizens and service users.

You may have come across the "ladder of participation" which was designed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969. Sherry was doing research about citizens and how much they participate in civic life, and the ladder of participation goes from not participating at all, at the bottom, through tokenistic involvement of citizens, all the way to to citizens having complete power without the state having to be involved at the top.

In co-production, we don't quite go into the area where citizens are just completely in control and self determining. That's more of an area for asset based community development. There is space in our public services and in our communities for all of these different types of engagement, but we are interested in the bit where there's a relationship and shared decision making between citizens and state. I really like that model, but there is one thing I don't like about it: because it's stacked like a ladder, it suggests that the top of the ladder is the place where you want to get to, at all costs and in all situations. And I disagree with that, so I have flipped it on its side to turn it onto a spectrum. You still have "doing to", "doing for", and "doing with", but the spectrum indicates that in some cases you will need one approach and in other cases, a different approach.

Under the "doing to" label, and depending on your context, you could be looking at protection (for example safeguarding) or coercion - for situations where there is risk to life for example; and education is also a "doing to" (for example smoking cessation campaigns). In this context the citizen is more passive, and the central agency has the knowledge, the decision-making power, and the power to act. "We know what people need, and we know what needs to happen. We just need to find a way to make it happen."

In the "doing for" category, you find approaches like:
- providing the information that people are looking for (e.g. how do we make it readily available when people come in and ask for it?)
- consultation: let's ask people what they think about this. By the way, consultation gets a really bad rap because quite often It's done badly or inappropriately, in place of another approach that would be more meaningful. But a good consultation done in the right context for the right reasons is a powerful tool to inform decision making.
- participation: there's more interaction between the professionals and the citizens, enabling citizens to shape maybe a new building, or a new service, or something that's going to happen in their community. So we make sure we listen to the voice of citizens. But the question I always ask is: who's holding the decision-making power and the power to act? If we have a really good event, and lots of people share their views and ideas, at the end of the day it's the role and responsibility of the professionals to take away all the data and shape the design based on what people have said (decision making power), and then apply it and make it a reality for the community (power to act).

The key difference between "doing for" approaches and "doing with" (i.e. co-production), is professionals and citizens, patients, service users, carers… working together all the way through. It's not just people feeding into what professionals will do, it's also everyone bringing knowledge and ideas, coming up with solutions together, having a part also in delivering it, and evaluating together. Citizens are able to do things that professionals can't do, and vice versa. When citizens have equal power with professionals, I don't mean it's exactly 50/50 split down the middle, but it's a bit of a dance between the two, sometimes professionals do a bit more, sometimes citizens do, but it averages out to people all having a chance to be part of creating the solution.

I have to add that for professionals, "doing with" is often quite a mindset change, especially at the level of involving people in designing services or in strategic decisions. But it's also a culture change for citizens, who have been taught from previous interactions to look upwards for solutions: "the council should sort this, or the government should fix this". Actually, we need to do all of this together. We need to all have a voice in this, which is also a shift for citizens! It's a shift for all of us in the way of working. Something to bear in mind is, it won't happen overnight; but it's by taking the steps together that we learn how to do co-production together.

The point of the spectrum is that "doing to", doing for" and "doing with" are different approaches appropriate for different situations, so it's about choosing the right one for our situation and purpose.

c) Complexity theory helps us identify where to take a co-production approach

When do we do co-production and when do we choose something else?

To understand how we choose our approach I want to tell you about complexity theory. Bear with me, because this may feel like a tangent, but it is really very relevant to co-production.

Complexity theory is an academic discipline, which is still fairly young and still evolving, but which concerns itself with: how do you classify the types of challenges you're working with? And most importantly, how do you respond to them? What are the different kinds of responses that are appropriate to different kinds of problems?

In most complexity models, there are four categories of challenges.

The first one is called simple (sometimes obvious). It's like making a basic cake: you have a documented process (a recipe), you don't need much training, maybe just a little bit of practice; but if you do all the things in the right order, you will get what you expect (it's predictable). And it's linear: you have to make sure everything happens in the right way and the correct order for it to work.

The next category of problem is called complicated. It's like building a rocket: you also have a documented process (your planning and blueprints). You must plan upfront, allocate all your materials and staff hours, ensure that things happen in the right order. You also need specific training and skills: you either recruit people who have the technical skills so you have them in-house, or you bring in specialist consultants to join your team. Either way, that expertise is available to you. But like baking a cake (just at a very big scale), it's linear and predictable. So if you do all the right actions in the right order, you will complete your rocket, launch it, and put a Rover on Mars.

Simple and complicated processes are both linear and predictable. There is a right way to do things, and if you follow it step by step, you will end up with what you're aiming for.

The next kind of challenge is where the relevance to co-production becomes apparent.

This dimension is that of complex challenges (hence the name, complexity theory). A great analogy for a complex challenge is raising a child: there's no documented process, or rather no definite documented process. (Hundreds of people have written thousands of books about raising children, but not one single person has got the definitive answer, the magic formula that you can apply consistently to return perfect results every time.) And just because you've done it once with your firstborn doesn't mean that the same rules will apply with your second child.

This is because every single human being is what we call a "networked adaptive system". Every one of us is networked, in connection, with our family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, … also our natural environment, our urban environment, and society in general - and all the different factors that make up our lives. And we are adaptive in that every time something changes in our personal ecosystem, we change and adapt in response. So every one of us is in a constant state of dynamic balance, and when you put a bunch of us together in a community or a society, the complexity goes up exponentially.

Complex challenges tend to be about relationships and about people's lives. In public services they are the ones labelled as "wicked problems", like loneliness, substance use, poor health outcomes; whereas broadly speaking, simple and complicated challenges tend to be about building things and fixing things (like surgery, or building an app for patients, or a new hospital).

For the sake of completeness, let me tell you about the last dimension of complexity theory: the chaotic domain. This is what we went through with the COVID emergency response: there wasn't a clear path all the way through, so the government had to take rapid actions, and adapt as things evolved and new data became available. In a chaotic system, the central agency produces guidelines, which enable local distributed systems to make sense of them and apply them locally. (There isn't enough brain power in the world to work out centrally all the different context-specific situations for all the local areas.) Chaotic systems tend to be short-term (even if it might be a few years), and resolve themselves eventually into either a complex or a complicated system.

Okay, so co-production is… for complexity?

Absolutely! When we're trying to design support, or services, or even whole organisations, that are geared towards meeting people's needs and improving their outcomes, there are so many interdependent factors that there can't be a single expert of everything. What we need is a range of perspectives and knowledge around the table, to build one another's understanding, and pool ideas to design and test solutions together.

So whenever we're dealing with a complex challenge, we want to co-produce, and to co-produce, we gather people and work on solutions together. Conversely, when we're in a linear process, dealing with a complicated challenge, we can (and should!) call in the people with specialist training and expertise, to do what they know how to do. They might do some user research (or some consultation or participation) to understand what people need and how they're going to use it, but the technical specialists make the decisions and do the build.

When we're working in complexity and co-producing, we don't know at the start what the final output is going to be; it's pretty impossible to plan that level of detail up front. Lack of clarity doesn't mean lack of a plan however! We know what direction we're pointing ourselves in and how we're going to work, and we'll find out what the solution is as we shape it together. In co-production, we need to learn to work with that uncertainty, because that's where the value lies.

d) The co-production imperative: why we can't afford to not do co-production

It sounds difficult!

The truth is, it kind of is: it's difficult because it's a different way of thinking about things, with a focus on the people and service users, instead of on the mechanics of the system. It's a mindset and culture change for many, although there are also plenty of professionals who are already taking a person-centred approach, and for whom co-production makes complete sense because it's the extension of that thinking from individual to service and organisation level.

There are a few broader factors that are putting co-production on everybody's agenda at the moment. After more than a decade of austerity, and the COVID-19 pandemic, we're in an economic context with drastically less resources available to support people with public services, at the same time as we have a changing and ageing population generating increased demand.

We also have a pattern of public services that can be very disempowering: the message tends to be that service users have nothing to offer while the professionals have the resources, knowledge and power. The way to keep receiving help is to keep coming back with more problems, and this kind of "old school" public service model is actually creating a cycle of disempowerment.

Combining the lack of resources with the dependencies created by the system, we have a organisations under pressure which have no choice but to raise the eligibility thresholds - because we need to be selective about who we can help with the limited resources we have - which means more people falling through the net; and by the time they are able to access services, presenting with more complex problems, with fewer options and more urgency, which in itself adds more strain on the system. The pressures are such that to deliver good services that provide the right support to people when they need it, it's no longer enough to work in the way we have always done.

With a legislative and policy context that is making co-production a statutory duty, and consumers used to interacting digitally with private sector organisations expecting a new kind of responsiveness from our public services, this all adds up to a need for public services to understand and master the co-production approach, and leverage service users and carers' voices.

1.3. If you have an hour

Watch the recording of this co-production introduction training.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rqsmRZVd1Jg

The slides are included below.
(You can open the slides in your browser, or right click and download them.)
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Iwl0VyBKIZB4BeaE8UJBiUDN4xNzZoyr/view

1.4. As a follow-up

You might like to:

- Discuss what you've been reading / hearing with your team
- Listen to these Co-production Network for Wales podcast episodes on
  - the co-production definition and values (39'28")
    https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/copronetwales/episodes/S02E01-What-is-co-production--Part-1-e20m4kk
  - the ladder of participation (27'12")
    https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/copronetwales/episodes/S02E03-The-Ladder-of-Participation-e20msf1
  - simple, complicated and complex (16'46")
    https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/copronetwales/episodes/S02E04-Simple--complicated-and-complex-e20msh6
- Watch (or listen to) this online session about "co-producing with carers in healthcare settings" (59'42"), run as part of the Carer Aware project. https://youtu.be/9JiiDahD218
- Carry out a stocktake of your current co-production practice (individually or as a team) using the Co-production Network for Wales co-production audit tool.
  https://info.copronet.wales/the-self-evaluation-audit-tool/