

## Guide Number 11

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### The ILiS Do-It-Yourself Guide to

# Co-production:

## A way of working together for better solutions

This ILiS DIY guide explains what co-production is. It describes how co-production can help disabled people and Disabled People's Organisations and those people who have decision-making or policy roles to work better together. The guide explores the opportunities and responsibilities that come with working in this way. It suggests ways to overcome some of the challenges in doing it effectively. It also provides ideas for where you can get more information and what you personally can do next.

This guide builds on information in the ILiS DIY guide number 7 which looks at 'Getting Involved' more generally. If you haven't read DIY guide number 7 yet, you might want to read this first as an introduction. You can download it at <http://www.ilis.co.uk/get-active/ilis-do-it-yourself-guides/>. ILiS plan to produce a coproduction guidance tool in Autumn 2011. Please visit [www.ilis.co.uk](http://www.ilis.co.uk) to find out more.

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## 1. What's it all about?

At its most simple, co- production is about different people working together in a particular way to create something jointly and to achieve better results or outcomes. It is a word that you are increasingly likely to hear when people talk about developing or making changes to public services. Co-production has been around since the 1980's and has been used to develop better working relationships between many groups of people. It has become more popular and visible in Scotland. As an approach it is important to disabled people and the Independent Living Movement because it supports the social model of disability and results in disabled people having increased choice and control over their own lives.

A short definition identifies three key elements: "Co-production is a partnership between citizens and public services to achieve a valued outcome"

(New Economics Foundation 2009)

A fuller definition starts to explain how this is achieved and why it is of benefit; "Co-production means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change."

(The Challenge of Coproduction;  
Boyle and Harris 2009)



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## 2. How can it help me?

Many disabled people feel that key decisions are made about public services, without proper understanding of what their actual needs are or how the decision will affect them. For example a decision to deliver an in-home support service at a time convenient to the provider might mean that a disabled person can't get to their job on time. Or that disabled people are under-represented in positions of public authority and hold fewer public appointments, or despite delivering an event in an accessible venue, a council overlooks the fact that there is limited public transport to get there and the publicity for the event is not suitable for the people they want to attend.

Co-production is a way for disabled people to be part of developing the right solutions and to change the outcomes for themselves and other disabled people. It allows you to contribute your knowledge and direct experience. By creating the space for disabled people to work as equals alongside public service staff it is possible to develop new approaches to old problems. This means it is more likely that the results will better meet the needs of disabled people and give you greater choice and control. The results will be better for the public service too because they will be right for the people they are there to support.

Sometimes coproduction is at an individual level, to support solutions that benefit the person themselves e.g. self directed support. Other times coproduction is more collective, this is where groups of people, maybe organisations, come together to work on a shared outcome. Where coproduction is collective, it is important to think about how others might feel about decisions and so representation is important. Being part of an organisation such as a Disabled People's Organisation can help with this.

Co-production must be a meaningful process. It is not a 'tick-box' exercise of one-way communication or consultation. Doing co-production properly requires time and energy and it is unlikely that every individual disabled person would want to be involved or can be involved. As an individual you may have other commitments and it just wouldn't be practical to have every single disabled person who is affected by a decision sitting at every meeting. This is where Disabled People's Organisations and activists in the Independent Living Movement have important roles. They can represent and reflect a range of experiences informed by many different individuals. You might already have such a role that represents wider disabled people's views and want to develop this further. Learning more about co-production will be an important part of that.



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### **3. Co-production; what it is and what it is not**

Sometimes people use new words like co-production as trendy ways to describe the same old behaviours. If this is all it is, then it will not bring about better results and improved relationships. Like all ways of working with others, co-production brings both opportunities and responsibilities for all of the partners involved.

Learning to think, behave and work in different ways (as well as to let go of some of the old ways) can be hard for everyone involved; clearly the starting points of each group are different and there is frustration that public service decision-makers have held all of the power and disabled people's input has rarely been understood, valued or taken into account. But for co-production to become a really valuable tool, it is important to keep looking forwards.

We all know that the issues are complex, that there are many competing issues to be considered and that budgets are tight. Co-production will succeed if it is seen as a way of creating a different future through partnership. It will fail if it is only seen as a way of making up for past mistakes and reversing historic power imbalances. The coproduction itself, how people go about working together, also has to be developed as a joint activity.



The following lists help to clarify some of the things that co-production is - alongside some of the things that it definitely is not:

**Co-production is about;**

- ✓ Partners respecting each other and having equal status in the process.
- ✓ Working together from the very start to identify and achieve an end result that you both agree on.
- ✓ Listening to each other and understanding where everyone is coming from and the particular challenges they face.
- ✓ At times, deferring to the other on grounds of practicality, economics, ethics, equality of civic rights, etc.
- ✓ Valuing, learning from and building on the different skills, assets, experience and expertise that different people bring to the process.
- ✓ Working in ways that meet the needs of all partners.
- ✓ Sharing responsibility for developing solutions that work and are deliverable.
- ✓ Breaking down barriers between professionals / service providers and users of public services.
- ✓ Committing jointly to support and develop the capacity and understanding of all people involved in the process.
- ✓ Developing a meaningful and trusting long term relationship

**Co-production is not about:**

- ✗ Just giving people a chance to speak, but not using the information
- ✗ Confrontation and 'winning or losing'.
- ✗ Getting your own back for mistakes or failures in the past.
- ✗ Public services exploiting disabled people for their input and expertise.
- ✗ One partner trying simply to persuade the other to come around to their way of thinking.
- ✗ A new way to get your personal agenda on the table at the expense of someone else's.
- ✗ Listing problems and expecting someone else to solve them.
- ✗ Having a new forum for public service workers to tell disabled people what is going to happen or for disabled people to lobby the public sector.
- ✗ A 'quick fix'.



## 4. What makes co-production work well?

A successful result from co-production will usually mean that;

- both partners have moved from their original starting point
- they understand that this movement is a result of learning new things from each other
- they have created together a realistic and deliverable solution that takes into account any external limitations and opportunities
- they have a shared understanding of how the approach will be delivered, how progress will be measured and their individual responsibility for its success.

Just as a house needs good foundations to be stable, so too does good co-production have to be built on a firm base. The three key foundations of successful co-production are: trust, support and information-sharing. If you imagine that successful co-production is like a well-built house, it must be firmly constructed for the long-term. If good foundations are not in place, the house will be unstable, cracks could appear and it may even fall down. Similarly if trust, information and support are not properly in place before co-production progresses, it may not be a successful working relationship.



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## TRUST

**TRUST** means developing a relationship where you believe your partner is trying to achieve the best they can for you and you in return are trying to achieve the best you can for them. You feedback to them if you have concerns about the way the process is working and you accept the feedback they give to you. Partners don't 'play games' to try and gain advantage. Together you agree how problems can be solved.

**INFORMATION-SHARING** means clearly communicating the things you know and listening carefully to benefit from the knowledge of others. Neither partner should hold on to important information just because they think it might give them additional power. This would undermine trust. On occasion, to show trust, there people should feel free to share confidential information within the group to help make decisions transparent and open, as well as helping the group get to an agreed outcome. When giving information it is important to think through what is most relevant. If describing problems or failures, it is also good to have ideas on possible ways forward. When listening to information it is important to understand why this is important for the other partner.

## INFORMATION-SHARING

## SUPPORT

**SUPPORT** means partners helping each other to develop their knowledge and skills so that their contributions can become even more valuable and informed. It means agreeing ways of working that meet people's different needs and recognising that there are practical and cultural barriers that need to be overcome.



## 5. Overcoming some of the barriers to successful co-production

Like any new or unfamiliar activity, we won't get co-production right immediately. Done well it has enormous

potential to achieve better results but it requires learning and commitment from all partners. Some of the most common problems that can occur when trying to build co-production relationships are listed below along with ways to recognise and address these.

The co-production problem	How to recognise it	What to do about it
Too much complexity	Partners raise many issues. Co-production being used to address too many issues at once. Partners stuck on things that are outside the influence of the group.	Focus on where most progress can be made. Build from small successes. Make sure actions can be delivered.
No shared understanding of what coproduction is	Partners have their own interpretation of co-production, what it looks like and how to make it happen	Explore what co-production is at the start of the process and build in regular 'health-check' to give your group space to check that things are working well and to make any changes necessary.

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The co-production problem	How to recognise it	What to do about it
No shared understanding of the problem	Partners express their own views but do not listen to what others need and why.	Accept that co-production is about joint solutions to shared challenges. Focus on what partners have in common.
No shared understanding of the desired result	Partners express their own desired result early in the process and try to persuade others that their perspective is the only 'right one'. Little flexibility.	Need to identify mutual benefits. Recognise that each partner has both aspirations and constraints. Seek to innovate.
Lack of responsibility for the solution	Partners bring problems expecting someone else to fix them	Agree how responsibility can be shared and focus on ways to measure successful delivery.
Lack of trust	Sense of confrontation or exploitation. Partners want to win – or at least not lose. There may be an atmosphere of anger, tension or disengagement.	Ensure partners share understanding and expectations of what makes co-production work. Focus on some team-development activity. Accept there may be valid reasons why co-production is not possible in all situations.



## 6. What can I do now? - Checklist for action

The first thing that you as a disabled person or a Disabled People's Organisation can do, is identify the areas where you think better approaches could be developed. Think about what expertise and information you could bring through your own experience and that of your members. Work out who might be involved as public service providers – e.g. your social work department, the health board, a local school or college. You may seek to improve a very local service or you may want to influence the national policy that shapes that service.

Although co-production is increasingly seen as a valuable approach to service change and development, it doesn't just happen because one partner wants it to. You may need to start talking to other disabled people who are affected or work with a local or national Disabled Person's Organisation to build wider support. It may take a while to get the service provider interested or they may quickly be glad of your interest and expertise. In either case you will need to build trust from the start. Remember approaching service providers with a focus on finding solutions and ideas for improvements makes it easier for them to get involved than going to them with a long list of problems or complaints.

### Checklist of things to remember if I become part of a co-production relationship. I need to:

1. Accept from the start that I have a shared responsibility for the process and the results
2. Work with my co-production partners to make sure we all have a clear understanding of what we are trying to achieve
3. Make an appropriate amount available of time to participate properly or feed my expertise in via another individual or a Disabled Person's Organisation.
4. If I am representing other people or a Disabled People's Organisation, I need to make time to talk to them about the issues so that I can represent wider views
5. Share information, build trust and help support others in achieving good results
6. Focus on things we can deliver not on things that are beyond the influence of the partners



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## 7. Where can I get more information?

- To get involved in a wide range of campaigns and action on issues that affect disabled people, make contact with a Disabled People's Organisation at a local or national level. Inclusion Scotland is a good starting place  
<http://www.inclusionScotland.org>  
You can also find information that could help you to 'get active' on the issues, at [www.ilis.co.uk](http://www.ilis.co.uk)
- The New Economics Foundation has done a lot of work on co-production. They have produced some discussion papers that explore it in more detail. The most recent report 'Right Here, Right Now' gives good examples of co-production in action.  
<http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/right-here-right-now>

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