



**West Yorkshire - Finding Independence**  
Delivering Fulfilling Lives:  
Supporting People with Multiple Needs Programme

## Co-Production Champions – reflecting on the first four months

### 1. Context

Embedding this paid progression route for peer mentors has been among the most significant developments at WY-FI in Autumn 2017. Following their induction in August, five Co-production Champions began working in earnest during September, engaging people in the WY-FI Network and building trust through participation in meaningful activities.

The roles are part-time, with a working pattern designed to fit the individual employee's circumstances. Typically, a Co-Production Champion spends between 10 and 15 hours each week attached to one of the local navigator teams, plus five development hours each week at The Hub.

In this paper, the Co-production Champions reflect **in their own words** on those first months. The next iteration of this paper will add testimonies from beneficiaries and colleagues.

### 2. Early positive outcomes

Between September and December, Co-production Champions had meaningful contact with around 35-40 beneficiaries and supported engagement in a range of meaningful activities including:

- Recovery market-place event
- Halloween craft café
- Joining a gym
- Community gardening
- Daytime social events
- Trip to a museum
- 'Cook and Eat' sessions
- Long-term health conditions social group

Consequently, the WY-FI Network has received an influx of new members, including seven beneficiaries and five peer mentors.

*Within the Bradford WY-FI team I have found that my colleagues have been very supportive of my role. Which I have found to be helpful when discussing beneficiaries and meaningful activities. I have been utilising the groups that are already established within the local area to the beneficiaries. For example, Moving Forward groups, Cook and Eat, Living well with a long term health condition etc. I have managed to build up trust and have a good working relationship with at least 4 beneficiaries.*

--

*During my first four months as a co-production worker, no two days have been the same, although during my year as a peer mentor I'd already learned some techniques and approaches that stood me in good stead. I had also developed a supportive relationship with many of the beneficiaries and the navigators who were extremely supportive in giving me enough free reign to use Foundation as a base to arrange groups, trips and activities. After a very successful trip to Manchester's Industrial museum the consensus amongst the group was for our next trip to be The Royal Armouries, which hopefully might be a good opportunity to invite other localities along.*

WY-FI's success in terms of re-engaging people in services, reducing offending and reducing chaotic behaviour was already evident. Co-production, on the other hand, is based on the recognition of a person's assets. The partnership between Navigators, who foster stability and resilience, and Co-Production Champions, who foster curiosity and ambition, is accelerating people's journey towards a fulfilled life. For a small but growing number of beneficiaries, a third equally important partner is the ETE Team. Co-Production Champions have engaged with beneficiaries who are preparing for the Peer Mentoring course, those currently in training and those who have gone on to a work placement.

*The work has included all sorts of support to help bring out those hidden and visible assets that really is the whole point of the work. As Victoria one of our champions put it to find the things that light you up. Beneficiaries involved with activities from gardening to joining the network. It has also been wonderful to hear beneficiaries suddenly begin to voice their hidden passions. One beneficiary who is still leading a chaotic life has through simple time and talk suddenly admitted that what they have always wanted was to be a hairdresser, how great is that. That simple comment is an indication of a person wanting to engage in life again.*

Co-Production Champions have reflected on the value of personalising written communications. For example, the preparation of hand-written invitations required an investment of time which was ultimately justified when around ten beneficiaries came to a Halloween craft session.

*I've found via trial and error that a personal approach works really well with our beneficiaries, after posting handwritten invitations to up and coming network meetings and events; as long as the envelope has a smiley face and cannot be mistaken for a 'nasty' letter.*

Increased beneficiary participation in the WY-FI Network and its projects has been an explicit goal from the outset. It is encouraging to see that this participation has been integral to the progress of individual beneficiaries, rather than the *medicine* to the other activities' *sugar*.

*A goal I always had was to get beneficiaries involved with the network and this has been a success. It gives beneficiaries a real sense of power and a boost to self-esteem to be involved in something that has the potential to change the systems and services. It has also highlighted for the co-production team some of the obstacles and achievements of the work we are doing.*

--

*I've realised, from observing my Co-production colleagues, that there are benefits to building relationships before introducing individuals to the Network.*

### 3. Challenges

Perhaps the most obvious and least surprising challenge has been that WY-FI beneficiaries experience complex barriers to participation. Addressing this central challenge is a fundamental aim of the Co-Production Champions.

*People are of course difficult to predict and confuse the hell out of me at the best of times, to quote Bjork "there is definitely no logic to human behaviour" and I have found working with beneficiaries to have an element of this. The nature of the conditions beneficiaries have mean people relapse or need extra support. One guy I'm working with needed help on trains as he suffers real anxiety around travel so I and a colleague made sure he got this so he could attend network meetings and other workshops.*

This challenge becomes more complex and nuanced when designing group session formats that are inclusive for people with varying needs and experiences, from a raw beneficiary to a seasoned Network member. The team has learned about the best ways to structure meetings and workshops, pairing people of similar/different abilities as appropriate and switching formats between activities to retain people's concentration.

*The WY-FI network meeting as a group has currently being tailored somewhat to try and include (more specifically) our WY-FI beneficiaries recently. As a project we are always looking at new ways to include them. This has being quite challenging to try and accommodate both our new beneficiary members (who can be chaotic at times) as well as our very stable long time serving members within the group setting. It's interesting to see how our longer serving members give incentive, helping along our newer members while*

*encouraging them as much as possible to be included. There's also an element in our team to try and not overwhelm our new members with some quite advanced ongoing projects that older network members regularly get their teeth into. It can also be challenging to give a healthy balance of topic options to keep both new and old members interested in their network as a group from very different perspectives.*

Fitting the new roles in with well-established teams, their space, their processes and existing priorities has been a remarkably smooth process overall. The Co-Production Champions have, however, experienced learning around asserting the needs of their role, at the right time and against the fast-moving priorities of those multi-disciplinary teams. To aid this, the team developed an activity planning checklist (Appendix I), which includes prompts to speak to colleagues at key stages.

*Planning and getting expenses to be able to do activities with beneficiaries has been difficult at times, as it can be difficult to contact the relative people involved to be able to plan activities at short notice as staff may be unavailable due to other work commitments and annual leave etc.*

--

*I've worked with beneficiaries with a view to them joining the Network. Having only spent a limited time as peer mentor I rely on staff to 'pass on' beneficiaries to me. I imagined, when I started, Navigators having lots of people on their caseloads who I could work with. Due to staff shortages co-production and the Network, understandably, have not been priorities.*

Another challenge is the familiar reality of stigma across all services around multiple and complex needs.

*We have also had to contend with negative perceptions from staff which has been a surprise but a good learning curve. But there has also been so much positivity around the work we 5 champions have been involved with.*

Equally familiar is the constantly changing environment in services, including those our teams share buildings with, and the inevitable complications associated with large numbers of staff changing roles.

*Within Bradford there has been a lot of changes with the take-over of the prescribing side from CGL. This has created obstacles for me when trying to engage beneficiaries with the groups and recovery community within the bridge/CGL because there has been a lot of disruption.*

#### **4. Personal and Professional Development**

For all five Co-Production Champions, this was a step back into paid employment. That process alone, specifically navigating the benefits system, is covered in a paper of its own (available on request). For some, it meant working in an unfamiliar office in an unfamiliar area.

*I must admit to feeling a little nervous at starting work in Wakefield. The area was completely new to me as was the staff team. But there was nothing to be worried about, the staff team are lovely and my manager Mel is so supportive. The team got me fully involved from the start and I was soon out and about meeting beneficiaries with the navigators.*

Given the complexity of work undertaken, it could be easy to forget that the Co-Production Champions themselves have rich lived experience and their own support needs. A key part of the role design has been the inclusion of a weekly development meeting. As well as consolidating the team's learning, it is also a space for the team to speak about those support needs and offer peer support to colleagues.

*I've also learned a lot about myself and how big a part Co-production (ie services suggesting I had assets I could offer them) has played in my recovery and development.*

*I've really appreciated the support of the Co-production team. We have differing journeys, strengths and assets etc which help make us a strong and together unit.*

A common point of reflection and learning is around how to fail successfully. The disappointment of a beneficiary cancelling at the last minute, the frustration of having to reset a password, the stern talking-to after a lapse in good

working practices, have all been absorbed as learning opportunities. The team is regularly set tasks, such as preparing this report, that draw them out of their comfort zone and create a safe space to make valuable mistakes.

*The Positive experiences have been many and varied and even when things haven't turned out as I envisaged they too have provided valuable experience and given me a chance to go back to the beneficiaries to find out what could be done to improve the next undertaking.*

## 5. Differences from initial expectations

The roles were originally designed on the assumption that navigator caseloads would be brimming with beneficiaries eager to engage in meaningful activities. In reality, not only were fewer beneficiaries were as 'ready' as we had thought, but it would also require significantly more work in some areas to address the practicalities of bringing several people out of a chaotic environment and into the same room at the same time.

*It has been interesting how the job description had changed over time or to be more precise the methods used to reach the job descriptions goals. I first started with the idea that I would be working with beneficiaries who had progressed somewhat and that was partly true as one beneficiary was on the peer mentor course and already moving forward. However I found that I have also been working with beneficiaries who are at differing stages of need.*

--

*When starting with our new co-production team as a champion I had the idea that we would be working with beneficiaries that were at a very stable stage in their recovery while working with they're Navigator. But as time has gone on I've realized that for the Nav team to be even working with someone they're properly have a more chaotic lifestyle in reality.*

With some notable exceptions, including Calderdale's Halloween craft session and the beneficiary group coalescing at Wakefield's *Socialicious Café*, there has so far been a greater focus than expected on 1:1 support for beneficiaries to attend pre-existing community activities, based on their individual interests rather than attempting to create a one-size-fits-all activity from scratch. Other than those group activities just mentioned, the sessions with the most universal appeal have been those directly related to the work of the WY-FI Network. Covering the duties of the two Engagement and Co-Production Workers, both on long-term leave, the Co-Production Champions facilitated Network working groups including the WY-FI *Story of Me*, research and evaluation, plus a consultation with HMI Probation.

*My pre conceived ideas about what my job role would be was that I would be organising my own groups and that the network would take a back seat. However I have found that I have been able to engage 3 people within the Network not just beneficiaries but Peer mentors that had fallen out of the system. The Network has been beneficial for the beneficiaries as they have felt empowered and listened to. When I first came into the role I was not as passionate about the Network as I feel that I am now.*

--

*I originally thought I would be working in groups rather than one to one but again have found that I am doing a great deal more one to one work than I originally thought. This mind has been a good thing as I have developed strong relationships with people having spent quality time with each person.*

## 6. Future plans

Look ahead, one Co-Production Champion is taking a lead on opportunities for beneficiaries to have a voice and influence, without necessarily joining a group. For some beneficiaries, mobility issues, social anxiety and incontinence are a barrier to attending a group session. One of the team is to explore other options and report on what works.

*I am looking to work with one maybe two beneficiaries on a piece of work that involves them being involved with the network and having their say, without actually having to attend! For those people that struggle to socialise or have health conditions and struggle to venture out of the house. This piece of work will offer the opportunity to look into how we can enable them to have a voice.*

Another member of the team is keen to further raise the profile of the work, both within the local beneficiary community and as something to be celebrated within the Fulfilling Lives network.

*This year I'm hoping to put together a montage of the what Calderdale has achieved so far to promote our services and create a regular timetable of events such as Fridays mindful meditation and healthy at the local world peace café and revamp the noticeboard in the office so its updated regularly and current.*

Another idea from the team is to make beneficiary assets more visible to navigator colleagues in written form, either as part of the *Story of Me* or a related resource.

*Forming a profile of the beneficiaries I'm working with and to share with the navigators based on 'The things that Light me up; 'a list of someone's interests, passions and attributes that we could help them to realise.*

## **7. Joining the conversation about co-production**

Co-Production is still not defined consistently between the various people who use the phrase. The Fulfilling Lives programme itself has not yet settled on an agreed definition, let alone any favoured routes towards achieving it. WY-FI, together with the South East Partnership, is leading on Co-Production as one of the strategic priorities for the programme's National System Change Action Network (SCAN). One of the Co-Production Champions is leading a Network Co-Production Subgroup, to feed lived experience into the development of that national priority, both in terms of its practical implementation and the underpinning principles.

*Involvement with the new Co-Production Sub group should keep me busy. I'm excited about what we potentially can achieve and change by open, honest and focussed discussion.*

The new team members have also taken up opportunities to develop good practice around co-production in the region, by leading workshops, presenting at conferences and contributing to the development of a kite-mark.

*As a team we have also been involved in a selection of conferences and meetings to spread the word of what co-production is and how valuable people with lived experience can be. In four months we've achieved a fair bit and hopefully we can make a real difference in the future*

--

*I sometimes feel that most of my time has been spent learning about and promoting Co-production rather than 'doing it'. Time well spent preparing for workshops and presentations eg Locality event, Sober Living Project, Peer Mentor Support, MHPF and MARB etc. Also, in recent weeks, thinking about, researching and discussing the setting up of a Co-Production Sub Group and a project with Community Links to support Service Users and Beneficiaries to realise their potential and assets (and practice using them!).*

This final quote articulates the value of the Co-Production Champion role and the approaches they take towards amplifying the voices of beneficiaries on the journey to a fulfilled life.

*The thing that I have found time and time again, is that if you invest both time and trust in people; I've never found yet anyone who has been disruptive or caused a problem within their group, despite the level of chaos their lives may be in. I've also found working on an activity, craft or just having some food together cannot be underestimated in the way it gives people a safe space to open up about what is currently going on in their lives, far more than a professional directly asking them ever does. Working on a project, however big or small can also provide some much needed self-esteem that comes from having created something rather than consuming.*

Prepared on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2018 by the WY-FI Co-Production Team  
Edmund Abbott, Victoria Ashington, Rachel Boardman, Jon Mills, Darren Pedley  
and Joseph Alderdice

## Appendix I - Co-production Champion Activity Check List

Activity description:	Date:	Beneficiary ID(s):	Navigator(s):
-----------------------	-------	--------------------	---------------

Area	Task	Schedule					Who do I need to speak to?	Done (tick)
		Initial idea	Weeks before	Days before	On day	After		
<b>Communication with Beneficiaries</b>	General conversation about interests, support needs etc							
	Reminders, planning practicalities							
	Ongoing motivation							
<b>Venue/activity</b>	Find out about accessibility, size, costs, risk assessments, facilities, smoking/vaping, H&S, time out space, locality							
	Activity risk assessment							
	Book the room and equipment if necessary							
	Set up room if necessary							
<b>Expenses</b>	Calculate how much needed for refreshments, travel, rent for room, equipment, incentives, reward card							
	Request cash (from appropriate budget)							
	Get cash							
	Print off expenses forms							
	Return completed forms							
<b>Organisation and communication with colleagues</b>	Communicate details, purpose and intended outcomes to Navigator/Lead Navigator							
	Make sure beneficiary support requirements and risks are understood and planned for							
	Invite others as appropriate (eg volunteers, peer mentors)							
	Be sure there are no clashes with other appointments or events							
	Prepare any resources needed							
	Check-in and feed back to Navigator/Lead Navigator							
	Write-up notes and email							