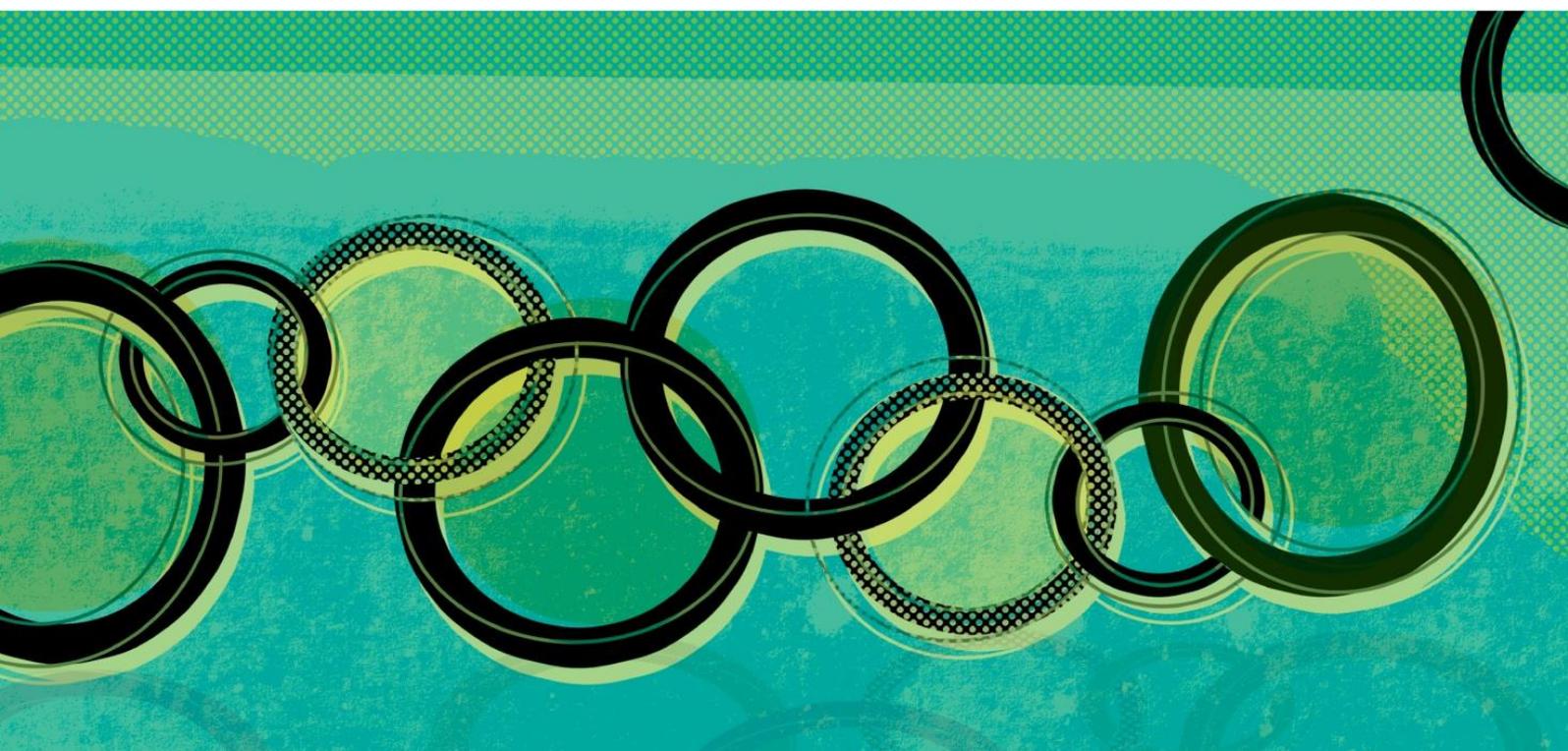


Co-production in the WY-FI programme: activities, experiences and outcomes

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Contents

Executive Summary	i
1. Introduction	1
2. Defining co-production	3
3. The effectiveness of co-production in the WY-FI programme	4
3.1. Co-production Support Workers	4
3.2. The Regional Network and Mini Networks	5
3.3. Influencing service design and delivery	6
3.4. Research and evaluation	7
3.5. Other co-production activities	8
4. Outcomes and impact of co-production	9
4.1. Building individuals' skills and capabilities	9
4.2. Developing peer support through social networks	10
4.3. Improving service capacity and quality	10
5. Factors that enable and constrain co-production	13
5.1. Enablers of co-production.....	13
5.2. Barriers to co-production	15
6. Learning and recommendations	17
6.1. Supporting co-production volunteers and workers	17
6.2. Reviewing the structure of co-production teams	18
6.3. Setting achievable co-production goals that address local need.....	18
7. The legacy of co-production	20
8. Final reflections	21

Executive Summary

Co-production has become an increasingly influential approach within policy and practice, yet there is limited evidence on including people with complex needs in co-production. This report addresses that gap by **exploring how co-production is understood and experienced in the WY-FI programme**. Findings are based on interviews with beneficiaries with lived experience and WY-FI staff.

The evidence presented in this report clearly shows that the WY-FI programme has taken **a bold and ambitious approach that has raised the profile of co-production** within the WY-FI partnership and among wider stakeholders. It has also generated valuable outcomes for individuals and there are examples of co-production activities contributing to service improvements and wider system change. **Ambitions have sometimes fallen short**, however, most notably around the establishment of Mini Networks in Localities. A key lesson is that **co-production goals need to be tailored to local needs and capacities**.

Key findings include:

- Co-production is seen as having **four core functions**:
 - building and developing the assets of individuals with complex needs;
 - developing supportive social networks in and around services;
 - reducing power imbalances in the relationship between paid staff and service users;
 - contributing towards wider system change.
- Some interviewees see co-production as an end in itself, where the process of bringing the voice of lived experience to the fore is a valuable achievement; a minority regard co-production more instrumentally as a means to achieve a set of desired outcomes focussed on service improvements.
- Co-production has been embedded in the WY-FI programme in a number of ways with **mixed results**:
 - **Co-production Support Workers (CPSWs and formerly Co-production Champions)** have played a valuable role in supporting beneficiaries to engage in meaningful activities and in establishing the Wellbeing Group in Bradford. However, staff absence and turnover has limited progress in other localities.
 - The planned structure of **one Regional Network and five Mini Networks** has yet to materialise fully. The Wellbeing group in Bradford is considered highly effective as the first peer-led Mini Network, but attendance at the Regional Network is variable and other Mini Networks have yet to get off the ground.
 - Co-production activities have made some valuable achievements in **influencing the way services are commissioned, designed and delivered** such as: establishing a mental health pilot project in Calderdale; supporting NHS England to evaluate bids for liaison and diversion projects as well as health provision in prison and custodial settings; and working with the Police in Bradford to improve understanding of complex needs and avoid use of the Criminal Justice System where possible.

- Co-production in **research and evaluation** has played an important role in engaging participants in street-based survey work although sustaining commitment among volunteers can be challenging.
- Interviewees observed that the **benefits of co-production** activities can take years to materialise but were able to identify some valuable outcomes to date including:
 - improving the health, wellbeing and employability of beneficiaries;
 - generating valuable forms of peer support and recovery capital;
 - improving service capacity and quality within WY-FI and contributing to culture or systems change in services outside the partnership.
- **Effective co-production was attributed to a number of factors** including the nature of support provided to beneficiaries, volunteers and CPSWs to engage in co-production activities; the skills and expertise of co-production workers; organisational commitment to the principles of co-production by senior Programme staff; and engagement with the wider recovery community beyond WY-FI. **The effectiveness of co-production activities are highly context dependent** and what works in one district may not be easily replicated in another.
- There were a number of **factors seen to inhibit effective co-production**. These relate broadly to inflexible and hierarchical organisational cultures and practices, and the high expectations and demands sometimes placed on volunteers.
- **Key learning** for any future co-production activities in WY-FI or legacy programmes includes the need to consider:
 - reviewing the policy of support for volunteers including the possibility of introducing regular, formal supervision;
 - relaxing expectations of recent lived experience when recruiting volunteers and staff for co-production posts;
 - recognising that co-production works best when at least some staff are based in Localities;
 - reviewing the aim of establishing five ‘feeder’ Mini Networks and one central Regional Network and allowing Localities flexibility to pursue other co-production objectives;
 - achieving legacy objectives by supporting WY-FI beneficiaries to engage in wider recovery communities rather than focussing solely on WY-FI networks.

Introduction

This report summarises key findings from the evaluation of the West Yorkshire Finding Independence (WY-FI) project. It specifically focuses on co-production activities and draws upon 14 interviews conducted with paid staff and volunteers in the Programme. Interviews cover three localities (Calderdale, Bradford and Wakefield) as well as the central Hub. Given easily identifiable roles, quotes have simply been attributed to WY-FI 'staff' or 'volunteers' to distinguish between paid and unpaid staff.

The **notion of 'co-production' has become increasingly influential** during the last decade. This has been driven by a range of factors including the public sector's need to utilise the assets of a range of stakeholders within a context of funding constraints. It also reflects an appreciation that 'wicked' policy problems require collaboration across a range of stakeholders and users. In part, this has been driven by an increasing number of policies and laws in England and Wales that have included co-produced commissioning. The Care Act 2014 is one of the first pieces of UK legislation to include the concept of co-production in its statutory guidance.

Co-production can engage a **wide range of stakeholders** at a number of levels. Examples include:

- **Individual level:** service users and support workers co-designing support plans and activities.
- **Service level:** service users, volunteers and paid staff collaborating to design, implement and evaluate strategies and interventions.
- **Systems level:** service users shaping the policies and commissioning practices of funders and policymakers.

Degrees of involvement in co-production vary according to the extent to which users hold power or decision-making authority, and range along a continuum from token consultation to partnership and shared leadership.

Fundamentally, co-production represents an **asset-based approach** that focuses on the skills, resources, knowledge or capacity of individuals, and how these can be used to sustain wellbeing as well as develop positive forms of social capital. This model contrasts with a 'deficit' approach that concentrates on problems, needs and deficiencies. Co-production sees agents as having positive capabilities to bring about change rather than as passive or disempowered beneficiaries.

Despite its growing importance in policy and practice, concerns remain that this shift in focus has been slower to reach those with more complex needs.¹ Moreover, there is limited evidence on including people with complex needs in co-production.² This report plays a potentially useful role, therefore, in exploring how co-production is understood and experienced and the outcomes it generates in a programme committed to involving people with lived experience. It considers the extent which their lived experience can be drawn on as an asset to enhance their access to, and improve the quality of, the services they receive, while also supporting them to engage in prosocial activities and positive recovery networks.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Section 2: Definitions and understanding of co-production in WY-FI.
- Section 3: Mechanisms for co-production and their perceived effectiveness.
- Section 4: Outcomes and impact of co-production activities.
- Section 5: Factors that enable and constrain co-production.
- Section 6: Learning and recommendations.
- Section 7: Legacy of co-production in WY-FI.
- Section 8: Final reflections.

¹ Boelman, V. and Russell, C. (2013) *Together We Can: Exploring asset-based approaches and complex needs service transformation*. The Young Foundation and Spice.

² Boelman and Russell (2013) op cit.

Defining co-production

2

Interviewees were asked to reflect on how they understood co-production and its purpose within the WY-FI project. Responses coalesced around seeing co-production as having some combination of the following four functions:

- **Building and developing the capabilities of individuals** with multiple and complex needs to support their stabilisation and recovery.
- **Developing supportive social networks** including peers in and around services “where the currency is social capital” (WY-FI staff) with structures more akin to those of family and friends rather than traditional service hierarchies.
- Generating cultural change in services **by reducing power imbalances** in the relationship between paid staff and service users: “It’s about all stakeholders having a view...power sharing” (WY-FI volunteer).
- Contributing towards **wider system change** goals in terms of shaping the way services are commissioned and designed for the benefit of service users with complex needs.

Cutting across these four functions was a sense that co-production should be embedded within all WY-FI activities rather than seen as a discrete aim or activity: “It’s everything we have” (WY-FI staff).

3

The effectiveness of co-production in the WY-FI programme

Co-production has been embedded in the WY-FI programme in a number of ways which cut across all potential aspects of co-production identified in a recent National Lottery Fund report³: design of projects and programmes, decision-making (e.g. governance, commissioning and recruitment), delivery of services and activities, research and evaluation, and giving 'voice' (e.g. influencing and advocacy).

This section considers in turn the purpose and perceived effectiveness of WY-FI co-production activities which include:

- Co-production Support Workers (CPSWs);
- The Regional and Mini Networks;
- Influencing service design and delivery;
- Research and evaluation;
- Other co-production activities.

3.1. Co-production Support Workers

The WY-FI programme has developed a team of paid staff to support co-production. This includes three paid members of the co-production team based centrally in the Hub and three Co-production Support Workers (CPSWs) embedded within localities. The programme originally recruited two paid Service User Engagement Workers with lived experience. When both staff members left or moved on, underspend was used to replace the role with five paid Co-Production Champions. All of these had lived experience and were based in one of the five Localities, with some working under 'Permitted Hours rules' while continuing to claim benefit. These five posts were later consolidated into three more substantive posts and renamed as CPSWs. These three posts covered, respectively, Leeds and, for two of the posts, a pair of Localities (Bradford/Kirklees and Wakefield/Calderdale). However, there is currently only one CPSW in post for Bradford/Kirklees. One of the other CPSWs has recently left and the post remains vacant while the third CPSW is on long-term medical absence.

³ Woodall, J., Davison, E., Parnaby, J. and Hall, A-M. (2019) *A Meeting of Minds: How co-production benefits people, professionals and organisation*. Insights and inspiration from five strategic investments in England. The National Lottery Fund Community Fund. Available at: https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/A-Meeting-of-Minds_How-co-production-benefits-people-professionals-and-organisations.pdf?mtime=20190919092658

CPSWs are seen as a way of “**giving service users a voice**” (WY-FI staff) through two main activities:

- Supporting beneficiaries to engage in ‘**meaningful activities**’ to aid recovery such as leisure and craft activities (e.g. nail painting, spa days, walks and art sessions) and attending support groups (e.g. Mind and Narcotics Anonymous).
- **Developing the Mini Network** in localities and supporting attendance at the Regional Network (see below).

CPSWs also have an advice and advocacy role in terms of working with commissioners and services including Probation and the Police to explore the potential of co-production within their respective roles and organisations.

The **impact of CPSWs’ activities has been mixed**. The work undertaken in Bradford is considered highly effective, with a number of interviewees **identifying the creation of the Wellbeing group as the first ‘Mini Network’ as an exemplar of co-production**. The group was set up in January 2019 by the CPSW with support from the delivery partner (Bridge) to access £1,000 in start-up funding from a voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure organisation. It comprises service users from across the recovery community in Bradford after the initial eligibility criteria restricting participation to WY-FI beneficiaries was revised to increase and stabilise attendance.

The Wellbeing group has since developed into a fully peer-led group that runs regular sessions covering a range of themes chosen by participants. These have included therapeutic Jenga (with questions on mental health on the Jenga blocks), reading sessions, human needs, resilience, Hepatitis C, the WY-FI legacy, and treatment of offenders. The group has also hosted presentations and visits from services including a dual diagnosis service, Jobcentre Plus and a Bradford-based commissioner. The CPSW is now looking to establish a similar Mini Network and suite of activities in Kirklees.

Progress has been slower in the other three districts (Wakefield, Calderdale and Leeds) where there is currently no CPSW or Mini Network in place. Co-production staff based in the Hub have now stepped in to work with Peer Mentors and volunteers to develop Mini Networks in these localities. However, progress as of October 2019 has been limited and there continue to gaps in capacity with co-production staff taking medical leave or resigning. Further detail is provided below.

3.2. The Regional Network and Mini Networks

The WY-FI programme is developing a set of service user groups known as Mini Networks to drive co-production, with the intention that these become self-sustaining once WY-FI funding comes to an end. The aim is to establish five locality-based Mini Networks that feed into the central Regional Network to ensure that each district has a mechanism to influence services at a wider strategic level across West Yorkshire. These Networks were described by beneficiaries as having **a number of functions** including: providing opportunities for peer support; creating a forum for service user ‘voice’; developing a pool of individuals with lived experience who could influence the design and delivery of WY-FI and wider services; and building the confidence, skills and experience of Network members.

To date, WY-FI has established a Regional Network that meets in Leeds and one Mini Network in Bradford (see discussion of the Wellbeing Group above), with a further mini Network currently being developed in Kirklees. The Regional Network is presently only open to WY-FI beneficiaries, although there are discussions about broadening eligibility in line with the Bradford Mini Network to include the wider recovery

community. Regional Network members co-produce the agenda and sessions have covered themes such as its terms of reference, research and evaluation opportunities, and exploring options for becoming a Community Interest Company (CIC). The Regional Network also nominates a member to co-chair the WY-FI Core Partnership Management Board alongside a senior manager from Humankind, the lead partner.

The Regional Network has had **mixed success to date**. Network members were positive about the value of the Network, and the personal benefits in terms of developing skills and experience. At the same time, they observed that **attendance was waning** with numbers dropping recently from an initial cohort of around 30 to approximately 8-10: "It's hit a bit of an impasse" (WY-FI Volunteer). There were concerns that the lack of a fully staffed cohort of CPSWs, as well as the pressures on the time and resources of Hub-based Co-production staff, limited the scope to maximise the full potential of the Network e.g. in supporting members to run workshops or set up sub-groups.

By contrast, the **Mini Network in Bradford is widely seen as a success**. They have approximately 12 attendees at each session, with the network "building nicely" and engaging membership through a range of recovery groups to bring in a "richer number of voices" (WY-FI staff). The plan is to extend this model into other Localities, securing further grant funding to set up Mini Networks. However, progress has been slow as detailed above.

3.3. Influencing service design and delivery

Co-production activities have sought to draw on the lived experience of WY-FI beneficiaries and volunteers to influence the way services are commissioned, designed and delivered in a number of ways. This has included advocating for the retention of existing resources; identifying unmet needs within WY-FI; influencing commissioners; supporting external organisations; and seeking to bring about cultural change in the way services operate.

Taking each in turn, WY-FI beneficiaries in Calderdale played a key role in **advocating to retain a complex needs worker** in the more rural end of the district. When a 12-month WY-FI-funded Navigator outreach post came to an end, beneficiaries organised themselves to lobby commissioners to retain the position to avoid having to travel 13 miles to Halifax to access support. This proved successful with the temporary WY-FI Navigator taken on by another organisation operating in the area in order to continue to provide a complex needs support function.

WY-FI beneficiaries also played an important role in identifying the need for, and inputting into the design of, a mental health service for beneficiaries with substance dependencies. The Calderdale WY-FI project used the Innovation Fund to commission Insight to deliver a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) service that was more flexible than statutory services, both in terms of supporting individuals while still substance dependent and continuing to work with them if appointments were missed. The service was very highly regarded by both WY-FI staff and beneficiaries and seen as a showcase of how mental health practitioners can effectively support individuals with addictions.

Efforts to persuade local commissioners to fund a similar service through research and evaluation activities and learning events appear to be bearing fruit, with one commissioner now in discussions with the NHS and the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) about the possibility of funding a new service. Other examples of effective co-production work using the Innovation Fund include establishing the Sober Living House in Kirklees and the female sex workers Housing First project in Leeds.

Beneficiaries have also been engaged by external organisations in **recognition of the value of lived experience in commissioning services**. Nine regional Network members were invited by NHS England to evaluate bids for liaison and diversion projects in the North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humber regions. This was seen as a valuable exercise both in terms of the experience gained by members and the insight into lived experience provided to NHS England. The organisation regarded the exercise as sufficiently worthwhile to invite members back to evaluate a second round of bids. More instrumentally, it generated income for the WY-FI project which was used to fund further co-production activity to support well-being and social network building e.g. refreshments for meetings, social trips, and arts and crafts activities.

Finally, **the Regional Network has played an important role in seeking to bring about the 'culture change'** in organisations that is the necessary precursor to system change. For example, Network members spoke at a seminar for social work students who, in the longer term, will become the next generation of key workers for those with complex needs.

Research and evaluation

WY-FI Network members and volunteers have also been provided with opportunities to co-produce research and evaluation activities with training and support provided by a full-time paid Research and Evaluation Assistant who has lived experience of the issues under investigation. Activities include questionnaire design and testing to make more it user-friendly; administering the peer-led street-based survey (due to start its third wave soon) at appropriate locations within Localities where individuals with complex needs can be found e.g. on the street and at soup kitchens; and analysing and reporting on data collected.

The first two waves of the peer-led street-based survey have been successfully conducted with a large number of respondents recruited for both (600 in Wave 1 and 270 in Wave 2). One interviewee reflected that the **involvement of members with lived experience has been "fundamental to its success"** (WY-FI staff) because it means they have the "credibility" to approach and engage particular groups such as street drinkers when undertaking surveys. At the same time it was recognised that there have been challenges in co-producing research and evaluation activities. Street-based survey work is not always appropriate for individuals with experience with complex needs as some do not want to return to settings that are "too close to their past". Moreover, it can be challenging to secure the longer-term commitment which evaluation requires compared to, say, one-off events and activities.

One WY-FI staff member observed, however, that these challenges can be overcome. Separate co-produced research⁴ undertaken with the University of Sheffield was successfully completed with on-going beneficiary involvement. Factors identified as contributing to success included: having more people involved than the minimum necessary to achieve the outcome to build in some capacity if individuals dropped out or moved on; directly supporting peer researchers; and providing preparation and training workshops. All those involved in the research highlighted the positive difference that beneficiary involvement made: "If they [the peer researchers] hadn't been involved, it would have been less different, less authentic, less relevant".⁵

⁴ Thomas, S., Ball, E., Flint, J., McNeill, J., Powell, R., Alderdice, J., Allison, S., Broatch, N., Craig, A., Crowe, M., Donnelly, H., Montgomery, A. and Ferrari, E. (2017) *Going Further Back: Earlier action on multiple needs to prevent homelessness*. Available at: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.731737!/file/GoingFurtherBack.pdf

⁵ Thomas et al. (2017), op cit.

3.4. Other co-production activities

Co-production is also evident in the involvement of WY-FI volunteers in meetings both within and outside the project including Locality meetings and Multi-Agency Review Boards (MARBs). In addition, volunteers have also had opportunities to sit on interview panels in some of the Localities, including selection interviews for Navigators. Involvement can extend to volunteers co-chairing strategic meetings of senior stakeholders such as the Core Partnership Management Board and running workshops.

These activities were, in the main, considered **worthwhile and genuine forms of co-production that influenced services through the voice of lived experience**. In Bradford, one Network member sits on the Housing First board and a WY-FI staff member explained how it is “not token. It’s not just, ‘Come and be quiet’. They’re encouraged to speak up”. One volunteer also described a workshop he had led with local services as a “quite powerful” activity that “got people thinking”.

4

Outcomes and impact of co-production

Research on the outcomes of co-production is limited although a review by the New Economics Foundation (NEF)⁶ of existing studies highlights a number of benefits that include building individuals' skills and capabilities; developing peer support and social networks; and improving service quality and capacity. These themes all emerged in interviews with WY-FI staff, beneficiaries, volunteers and partners when asked to identify positive outcomes and impacts and are discussed in turn below.

It should be noted that not everyone was able to articulate clear outcomes from all co-production activities. In one locality, a WY-FI staff member reflected that "it is still early days for it to have had an impact". Rather, it has "raised awareness [of the approach] but we are not there yet". Others also reflected that it was too early to say whether more recent developments such as the Network were leading to systems change. It is important to bear in mind that the complex and long-term nature of co-production work means it should be seen as a **gradual process of change** and is not capable of delivering "overnight success" (WY-FI staff).

There was also a more critical view that challenged the value of co-production per se as leading to more effective interventions and better outcomes. A minority of interviewees suggested there may be **trade-offs in terms of resources being allocated to co-production activities that are ineffective**. This is seen to reduce the scale or scope of other types of support that can be provided.

One WY-FI staff member suggested, for example, that the use of the Innovation Fund for co-production activities had achieved "delivered little" in terms of outcomes for the time and resource invested. This may be specific to their Locality, as other interviewees were more sanguine about the benefits of the Fund, most notably in the example of the CBT project in Calderdale. It may also be the case, as discussed earlier, that the process of co-production remains valuable even if desired outcomes are not achieved. All this suggests it is important to be mindful of, and articulate, the potential trade-offs, so that the benefits of co-production are clear, even if they do not translate into readily identifiable outcomes.

4.1. Building individuals' skills and capabilities

Beneficiaries and volunteers in the WYFI project were seen to gain in a number of ways from co-production activities. Positive impacts on **health and well-being** were identified where engagement provided opportunities for meaningful social activities

⁶ NEF (2013) *Co-production in mental health: A literature review Commissioned by Mind*. London: NEF.

that combatted potential isolation. One WY-FI staff member described how it “gets [beneficiaries] out of a rut and out of the house, out of crime and the revolving door of criminal justice, giving them a purpose. A lot of learning [around the Network] is about learning to socialise”. Another explained how the work of CPSWs to support beneficiaries in social and leisure activities can lead to significant improvements, including the **aspiration and self-belief to consider new opportunities** such as training: “They [the beneficiary and CPSW] go for coffee and the next thing you know they’re looking at courses”.

Volunteers involved in co-production activities such as research and evaluation as well as developing the Regional Network also reflected on how it had **significantly enhanced confidence and self-esteem**. One described the sense of self-worth and purpose gained from involvement in the Network and chairing strategic meetings: “It made me realise that people see I have something to give”. A WY-FI staff member also described how beneficiaries gain from “being listened to and not written off. It helps with confidence.”

Other benefits identified included **acquiring new skills and experiences that enhanced employability**. One volunteer, for example, had been supported by the Employment, Education and Training (ETE) team to set up a creative business which had seem him paid to perform at co-production events. Benefits experienced were as much about gaining self-belief as practical experience: “If it wasn’t for the WYFI network I wouldn’t have found I was employable...I’ve gained direction, intention and focus”. The volunteer is now “working towards” paid work.

4.2. Developing peer support through social networks

A number of interviewees held up the Wellbeing group established in Bradford as a prime example of how co-production activities can generate valuable forms of peer support and social interaction that lead to improvements in individual well-being and promote recovery. One even suggested that the creation of **social networks** operating largely independently from services that support recovery may, ultimately, be the epitome of what co-production could and should achieve: “Is this enough? Maybe it is. Is co-production tweaking services or replacing them with what people need? Would five [such] wellbeing groups do lots of good? If they provide adequate mental health support, I’d be happy with that”. Other benefits identified as arising out of the group include developing the skills, confidence and self-esteem of participants, and providing training and volunteering opportunities.

It is important to remember, however, that while the Bradford Wellbeing group illustrates the potential for coproduction to create networks of friendship and mutual support, this experience has not been replicated in other Localities to date. There are number of reasons for this, as outlined in Section 5.1 below, which explores how effective co-production depends on a constellation of factors that are not necessarily present everywhere. This may have implications for current plans to establish similar Mini Networks in the other four districts.

4.3. Improving service capacity and quality

Within the WY-FI programme, co-production was seen to **increase service capacity** by offering additional levels and types of support to beneficiaries. One WY-FI staff member described the benefits of CPSWs as having “another member of staff who can do things over and above [what we do] such as meaningful activity, the Network, and [helping beneficiaries attend] meetings.” The CPSW’s role in supporting beneficiaries to move on once Navigators had helped them to stabilise their lives was regarded as a **valuable pathway into the next stage of recovery**.

Drawing on the assets of CPSWs such as the ability to deliver creative activities also provided a new way of engaging with beneficiaries that Navigators valued. In one case, it **opened up new and welcoming spaces for individuals to reflect on, or disclose, needs and experiences**: “People tell you stuff that amazes you when they are in social groups and able to relax” (WY-FI staff). This created a context in which WY-FI could clearly distinguish itself from other services comprising of a “support worker hitting targets...in an interview room doing one-to-one interviews dealing with utilities”.

At the same time, one WY-FI worker noted that the tangible benefits for paid staff have to be set against the backdrop of **volunteers increasingly being used to plug gaps in services in the context of reduced public expenditure**. Expectations of volunteer time and commitment in some roles can be high, as explored below. While this did not emerge as a concern in all interviews, it is important that paid staff remain vigilant that co-production does not simply become a means of increasing unpaid project capacity.

Interviewees also expressed a positive view that WY-FI provided **a forum for beneficiaries and volunteers to articulate views on how services should be designed and delivered** to support individuals with complex needs. Within the project, this included attending MARBs and locality meetings which, as one interviewee observed, enables WY-FI beneficiaries to “feel confident in saying what they need. It provides a forum to be heard”.

This kind of co-production is hardwired into the programme, yet it’s far from routine nature becomes apparent when compared with the level and type of co-production activities in other services. One WY-FI staff member praised the “astounding” level of commitment that WY-FI gets from service users who regular attend meetings. They also contrasted the genuine openness to service user voice within WY-FI with previous services they had worked for “[In other services] you have a contract with the commissioner to do a, b and c in six months...WYFI is different...There is a genuine desire to allow other voices to surface”.

Interviewees were also able to point to a number of examples where co-production activities had contributed to **culture or systems change in services outside the WY-FI partnership**. These included:

- A recent event in Wakefield brought GPs, nurses, commissioners and service users together to discuss the development of a new **mental health service**. This was described as a “real eye opener” (WY-FI staff) for practitioners to hear those with lived experience describe what helped them to recover.
- Engagement with beneficiaries in Bradford **enabled the police to gain a better understanding of how to work with individuals with complex needs**. In some cases, this had led to individuals being taken to hospital rather than processed through the Criminal Justice System.
- One interviewee highlighted the value of session led by a Network member with Jobcentre Plus (JCP) frontline staff to make them aware of the issues facing, and how to work with, individuals with complex needs.
- In Calderdale, the success of the 12-month CBT pilot has seen one local commissioner who is “passionate about it” (WY-FI staff) bring services together to discuss funding a new Calderdale-wide service.
- One volunteer with experience of substance use in prison has been asked by a local support service to help them prepare a related bid and is also working with a national support service to develop their policy position on substance misuse in prison.

- Beneficiaries and volunteers with lived experience have also gone on to work for other services and have “taken the culture with them” (WY-FI staff). Examples include Forward Leeds, Five Ways, BARCA, Beacon Housing and the Housing First project in Bradford.

One view that emerged is that **the process of co-production that brings together service users and agencies can be valuable, even if the desired outcome is not always achieved**. For example, efforts to create a single ‘passport’ of case notes known as ‘The Story of Me’ to avoid beneficiaries having to recount traumatic experiences multiple times did not, ultimately, come to fruition. However, one interviewee felt that it had been an invaluable exercise as a genuine example of co-production that brought beneficiaries and public agencies together to discuss the possibility of improving services.

At the same time, another interviewee reflected that the project to create individual passports had wasted time and resource on a proposal that was completely unworkable. This highlights how there are **competing views within the WY-FI project**. Some see co-production as an end in itself, where the process of bringing the voice of lived experience to the fore is a valuable achievement; while a contrasting minority view views co-production more instrumentally as a means to achieve a set of desired outcomes focussed on service improvements. This has important implications for assessing what constitutes success, which we return to in the discussion below.

5

Factors that enable and constrain co-production

This section explores some of the factors that facilitate and constrain co-production as the basis for identifying learning and recommendations in the section which follows. It shows that effective co-production depends on a combination of factors that are not easily replicable across Localities, and that considerable barriers to co-production remain.

5.1. Enablers of co-production

Effective co-production was attributed to a number of factors including the nature of support provided to beneficiaries, volunteers and CPSWs to engage in co-production activities; organisational commitment to the principles of co-production by senior Programme staff; and engagement with the wider recovery community beyond WY-FI. The section concludes by reflecting that there is no ‘silver bullet’ to good co-production work, using the Wellbeing group established in Bradford as a case study of how a constellation of factors need to be in place to make activities bear fruit.

Supporting beneficiaries, volunteers and CPSWs

Beneficiaries, volunteers and paid staff were all involved in co-production activities, and the nature of support provided to each was regarded as a key factor contributing to effective co-production work.

In terms of CPSWs’ work with beneficiaries, one WY-FI staff member emphasised the **importance of building trust**, which can be fostered through group-based or social activities such as art classes or bowling trips. Having CPSWs with **lived experience** can also help as they share recovery goals and can empathise with beneficiaries. One interviewee also observed that having **an appropriate space** that Network members can meet and feel comfortable in is important: “[So it’s not like] going straight into a scary boardroom, somewhere they can get together and form a collective view” (WY-FI staff).

In terms of supporting volunteers, one WY-FI staff member outlined the **importance of recognising that volunteers receive “little money and reward”, and that time needs to be invested in them “as a person”** rather than simply viewing them instrumentally in terms of how their co-production activities benefit the project. Key to this recognition was building social relationships based on **trust and reciprocity**. Examples given of investing this time included helping Network members to realise creative talents and aspirations, and supporting them to deal with personal issues.

One important component of support for both beneficiaries and volunteers was the **time available to paid staff** to facilitate co-production activities. Staff benefitted from having more flexibility and being less driven by short-term pressures and targets than standard service contract delivery environments: “It takes time to build relationships and confidence. WY-FI feels different, it doesn’t have the same pressures. You can’t make a lasting change in six months. [WY-FI is not] process driven. [It allows time] to go and explore and learn and develop and grow” (WY-FI staff).

In relation to supporting **paid CPSWs**, one WY-FI member of staff emphasised the importance of taking a different approach that recognises their lived experience and their potential need for additional support and guidance: “You need to be alert to things like boundaries.”

Organisational commitment

There was a strong sense that **passion and commitment from senior Programme staff** in the Hub had been important in ensuring that the principles of co-production had been embraced by Localities. While co-production is by definition not a top-down endeavour and requires support for local level activities, the Hub’s work in prioritising co-production has been crucial in securing buy-in from Navigation teams. There were isolated examples of senior managers outside of frontline teams in delivery organisations being less committed to, or aware of, the principles of co-production. However, the overwhelming view was that staff across the programme saw co-production as an integral part of their activities.

Engaging the wider recovery community

The effectiveness of the Wellbeing group in Bradford was partially attributed to the way it had expanded its eligibility criteria beyond WY-FI beneficiaries to engage service users from other groups and services in the district. This change was made in recognition that there were insufficient WY-FI beneficiaries at an appropriate stage in recovery to make the Network viable. It resulted in higher and more consistent attendance and shows **the value of embedding co-production activities in broader social recovery networks**, and of avoiding organisationally inward-looking approaches to co-production. Moreover, it provides important learning for the remainder of the project as WY-FI seeks to invigorate the Regional Network and set up Mini Networks in the other Localities. It shows the value of what the social scientist Robert Putnam⁷ would call 'bridging capital' in terms of making links across different social networks rather than just fostering narrower forms of 'bonding capital' within smaller, inward looking groups.

Effective co-production in practice: the Bradford Wellbeing group

A number of interviewees held up the Bradford Well-being group as an exemplar of effective co-production (see description above). Interviewees suggested a number of factors combined to make this possible that relate to the skills and networks of the CPSW, the support and ethos of the Locality team including senior management, wider networks of recovery support that could be harnessed to generate attendees for the group, and the geography of the district that facilitated easy access to the group.

The CPSW was seen as **highly effective in the role** in terms of having the right social and professional skills, as well as a clear understanding of how to establish and maintain the Wellbeing group. The latter included recognising the importance of having

⁷ Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Shuster.

clear themes for discussion; maintaining contact with attendees; making meetings social occasions e.g. by providing food; and promoting it as widely as possible e.g. using Facebook. The CPSW was also well networked in the Locality and able to tap into these networks to generate support and attendance for the group.

At the same time, the Bradford WY-FI team were seen as particularly effective, both in terms of their ability to support the CPSW and their commitment to co-production. This extended right up to the Chief Executive of the delivery organisation who supported the Mini Network to access grant funding. Staff were described as a “well-trained and professional” team who “really get” co-production (WY-FI volunteer).

A further contributing factor was the existence of well-established recovery groups in Bradford that the WY-FI project could harness into as a source of attendees, once the decision had been made to extend eligibility beyond WY-FI beneficiaries. Finally, the availability of appropriate local facilities that were readily accessible by public transport to attendees living near the city centre made the group more accessible.

In summary, what this shows is that **a distinct and, perhaps, fairly unique set of factors combined to facilitate effective co-production** in getting the Mini Network established. One possibility is that these are not necessarily present in other localities, which means that the prospect of setting up a similarly successful Mini Networks may be fewer. Certainly, some areas seem to lack at least some of the key enabling factors such as a CPSW with the necessary skills and networks; a pool of beneficiaries and well-established recovery communities to draw attendees from; and a more urban geography that makes travelling to central locations relatively easy to reach.

5.2. Barriers to co-production

There were a number of factors seen to inhibit effective coproduction. These related to inflexible and hierarchical organisational cultures and practices; and the high expectations and demands sometimes placed on volunteers.

Organisational culture

Co-production can be seen on a spectrum which ranges from genuine partnership in designing services through to tokenistic involvement. A number of interviewees suggested that services outside the WY-FI were located at the tokenistic end and **only paid “lip service”** (WY-FI worker) to co-production. Senior managers reportedly found **it difficult to change entrenched organisational cultures** and, indeed, their own professional practices. Behaviours that have contributed to their own career progression such as being authoritative and using “service lingo” (WY-FI staff) were all too often inimical to effective co-production. Moreover, there was sometimes an expectation that service users “jump the gap” (WY-FI staff) to meet professionals on their own terrain rather than the other way around. These findings are perhaps not surprising given that research shows it can take up to ten years to establish a recovery-oriented system of care.⁸

Within the WY-FI partnership, the majority of interviewees suggested that programme staff had **embraced co-production to a degree that was unique**, at least when compared with statutory services and even other VCS organisations. Nevertheless, there was still a view that a commitment to the principles of co-production did not always translate into practice that was fully consistent with these values. As one WY-

⁸ Kelly, J.F. and White, W.L. (2011) 'Recovery Management: What If We Really Believed That Addiction Was a Chronic Disorder?' In: Kelly, J. and White, W. (Eds., 2011) (eds.) *Addiction Recovery Management: Theory, Research and Practice*, Current Clinical Psychiatry. New York: Springer Science.

FI staff member reflected, **the programme remains centred on a transactional model of services.**

Delivery pressures can also constrain the ability of senior managers to commit to co-production activities, as evidenced by the limited attendance of Core Management Partnership Board (CPMB) members invited to join Regional Network members for lunchtime discussions. There was a sense that genuine, non-hierarchical forms of co-production in the sense of “bridging the cultural chasm between formal meetings and real-life social networks of people helping each other” (WY-FI staff) may be hard to attain. This was seen as difficult to achieve in a competitive contract and service delivery environment: ‘It can’t compete with pressures...with services defending themselves and competing it is difficult to create on-going friendships’ (WY-FI staff). One volunteer also noted that his role sometimes felt “ever so slightly tokenistic”, especially when key decisions were made without consulting him.

Support for co-production volunteers and staff

A clear view emerged that **engagement in co-productive activity as a beneficiary, volunteer or paid member of staff can be challenging for individuals with lived experience** who still may be in recovery and vulnerable to relapse or a deterioration in health.

Where this happened, it left **gaps in capacity** that could not easily be plugged. One Locality reflected, for example, that they had been left “in limbo...a huge gap which the Hub haven’t really done enough to fill” after a CPSW went on long-term absence. Navigators were able to cover already planned co-production activities but have since been unable to co-ordinate new events. One further consequence was that beneficiaries previously supported by the CPSW to engage in meaningful activities such as creative classes were no longer able to attend.

While support for those engaged in co-production was often praised, other interviewees suggested that it had not always been adequate, particularly in the case of volunteers. There was a view that expectations were sometimes too high for a complex role that is not always well-defined and requires creativity and resilience. **Expectations of more engaged volunteers were sometimes experienced as pressure without due reward and recognition**, particularly when combined with a perception of poor communication by paid staff: “Sometimes I have a lot going on and feel shit. I don’t need to be spoken to like that. Paid workers don’t give the support they should” (WY-FI volunteer). There were also concerns that expense policies had been bureaucratic and insufficiently flexible e.g. in not allowing for volunteers travelling daily to have a weekly travel pass rather than separate day tickets.

These findings suggest that **the model of using volunteers or paid staff with recent lived experience is precarious** given the risk of relapse or worsening health, particularly if adequate support is not provided. And since the consolidation of five Co-production Champions into three CPSW roles, any absence only leaves a bigger gap in provision. Co-production is also regarded as **working best when at least some staff or volunteers are locally embedded** and networked and able to develop durable networks of peer support. The current shortfalls of CPSW within localities, therefore, leaves a vacuum of local support, despite the best efforts of co-production staff in the Hub to cover gaps.

Learning and recommendations

This section reviews key learning from co-production activities and presents recommendations for future activities. Evidently, funding for WY-FI programme will end shortly so recommendations may not be realisable within that timeframe. However, they remain salient for any future legacy project or alternative form of complex needs provision developed by organisations within Localities. Learning and recommendations fall under three core themes: supporting co-production volunteers and workers; reviewing the structure of co-production teams; and setting achievable and co-production goals that meet local need.

6.1. Supporting co-production volunteers and workers

There were concerns outlined above that co-production volunteers were not always treated or supported appropriately with issues emerging around poor communication, a lack of recognition and reward, an inflexible expenses policy, and high expectations experienced as pressure. There also challenges with co-production workers taking long-term medical leave because of ill-health or relapse. Getting the right support in place is clearly important if co-production is to achieve its objectives.

It seems appropriate, therefore, that the Programme management team **review the policy of support for volunteers**. One suggestion made is to offer **regular, formal supervision** to volunteers. This could provide an early mechanism to identify issues and challenges and seek to resolve them before they escalated into deeper resentments, declining health or well-being, or even relapse. As one interviewee reflected: “You can’t afford to put people in a place where they are going to get ill” (WY-FI staff). Realistic and clear expectations about the role are also important, with some interviewees suggesting it had not always been clear to CPSWs what they should be doing. Given the dispersed geography of West Yorkshire and the variety of sites WY-FI is delivered from, 'virtual' supervision via web-based videoconferencing apps may help to minimise the capacity implications of supervision across multiple locations.

It was also suggested that **communication issues** could be addressed by paid staff acknowledging where communication has not been good and working to resolve this in meetings with volunteers, reviewing rewards and recognition, and by encouraging staff to work on communication skills.

More broadly, there were suggestions made about how long-term absence of Co-production Support Workers could be managed. One suggestion was to **ensure that Peer Mentors work more closely with CPSWs** rather than just with Navigators, so that they are in a position to cover some of their activities. More fundamentally, it was

suggested that the programme should **consider its long-standing policy of insisting that co-production should be driven by people with recent lived experience**. This is a valid point. While the principle may be sound, it does not always work in practice and, indeed, may actually put some people whose lives are characterised by fragility and vulnerability at greater risk. It can also increase pressures on other paid staff and volunteers to meet support needs and cover absences.

One option would be to **relax expectations of recent lived experience** when recruiting volunteers and staff for co-production posts. This would open up positions to individuals who may have completed recovery journeys some time ago, but are still able to draw on past experiences to inform their work. This would not preclude engaging those with recent lived experience, but only if their lives were sufficiently stable to undertake a potentially demanding role. There could also be value in employing more workers with expertise in convening and sustaining service user groups, even if they had no prior lived experience. A greater balance of staff with and without lived experience could help to put co-production activities on a more sustainable footing, and provide more support for staff and volunteers who experience health issues or relapse. There also needs to be clear processes and procedures in place to manage situations where staff go on unplanned leave to ensure that beneficiaries are not suddenly left without support.

It is also important that there is clarity about the role of CPSWs and the support they receive from the central Hub and local Navigation teams. One CPSW was reported to feel “torn loyalties” between the two, highlighting the need for clearer demarcation of the role and support structure.

6.2. Reviewing the structure of co-production teams

There was a strong view that the existing structure of co-production activities in terms of a central team and three CPSWs within localities was not necessarily the right model. It was felt that co-production worked best when workers were embedded and well supported in districts, and able to harness their local knowledge, experience and networks to drive activities. Critical here is identifying the 'community connectors'⁹ who are able to make links and build trust within communities. For this reason, many questioned the decision to reduce the overall number of locality-based paid co-production workers from five to three, even though the number of working hours were actually increased.

It may be too late to change this structure in the time remaining, but it is important to convey the message that **co-production works best when delivered and supported at source**. The central Hub team has an important role to play in setting objectives, policies and processes but at locality level there is clear case for having one co-production worker per district.

6.3. Setting achievable co-production goals that address local need

There was some discussion about the need to review the overarching objectives for co-production activities. One view was that the aim of establishing five 'feeder' Mini Networks and one central Regional Network as reference groups and legacy vehicles was perhaps **too ambitious** given mixed success to date. This vision of the Network structure is not necessarily achievable and, for some, had become a restrictive

⁹ See McKnight, J. and Block P. (2010) *The abundant community: Awakening the power of families and neighbourhoods*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

objective that arguably prevented Localities from engaging in different, and potentially more effective, forms of co-production that meet local need.

One alternative would be to pursue the option of setting up Mini Networks where the right resources, capacity and skills were in place, while allowing **localities flexibility to pursue other objectives** where conditions are less conducive. This might be a way of addressing other identified local needs such as creating a social recovery hub in Wakefield or capacity building among existing support groups in Leeds so they can welcome and support high need WY-FI beneficiaries. The important point is to recognise the diversity of skills and capacity in each locality and allow each area to set appropriate and context-sensitive aims and objectives. This includes identifying the 'community connectors' who already networked and respected and providing them with meaningful organisational support at a local level. In the time remaining, this may support a shift away from a milestone-driven approach to co-production that focusses on outcomes towards efforts to build durable networks of friendship and peer support across WY-FI and wider services.

One interviewee also reflected that, given the complexity of systems change, it is **important to build in “quick wins”** to give those involved a sense of progress and achievement. Examples given included securing funding for, and setting up, the Wellbeing group in Bradford; putting on a photography exhibition; developing a performance with Leeds Beckett University drama students; and Network members creating a video about experiences of recovery.

This is **not to suggest that co-production should be reduced to a series of short, discrete events and activities alone**. Rather, it is to highlight how WY-FI can usefully encourage and support a range of co-production activities of varying scope and ambition. This may prove more successful than a rigid emphasis on establishing Mini Networks in each Locality that may not work in all districts.

The legacy of co-production

There was a clear recognition that **WY-FI has raised the profile of co-production**, both within the partnership itself and among wider stakeholders. At the same time, it was recognised that this **this was just the start of the change process** as it was unrealistic to expect co-production to have a major impact on service delivery in the time available: 'If we had another six years we might get there' (WY-FI staff). Changing the mind-set of statutory organisations would be a longer-term process, although progress made to date should not be understated.

The WY-FI programme is already seeking to ensure the legacy of co-production through efforts to establish five Mini Networks feeding into the central Regional Network. There has been some **discussion about whether it would be possible to turn the network into a constituted entity** e.g. a Community Interest Company (CIC) or a charity, but these plans have been put on hold to focus on building up the Network structure first. The current structure is not considered sufficiently mature and stable to support the legal responsibilities that go with becoming a constituted group. There are also challenges in expecting a group with complex needs to set up and run a constituted organisation by themselves.

Another possibility is that **WY-FI will seek to transfer the Network as a non-constituted group into an existing consortium** that would assume legal responsibilities and to review the possibility of changing status to a CIC or similar entity at a later point. However, it is important that the Network maintains its identity in the event of such a transfer. One volunteer noted how early discussions with a potential host consortium had highlighted the risk of being “swallowed up” by an organisation that was not fully aligned and supportive of its objectives.

These are ambitious aims but, given the difficulties already highlighted, it is important that there is a 'Plan B' if they do not fully come to fruition. One parallel option identified above is to **think about how WY-FI beneficiaries can be integrated into existing recovery groups** once funding comes to an end. In other words, legacy does not necessarily need to be sustained solely through dedicated vehicles created through WY-FI. The culture and ethos of co-production can also be usefully transferred into other groups and contexts as part of a wider process of building recovery capital in and across social networks within districts.

Final reflections

The evidence presented in this report clearly shows that the WY-FI programme has taken **a bold and ambitious approach to co-production**. The commitment to the principles of co-production is evident, not least in the way that the ethos of co-production has clearly been adopted and embedded across all levels of staffing in localities. There is a unanimous view that WY-FI's work around co-production makes it look and feel different to other services working with individuals with complex needs.

There is also clear evidence that co-production activities have been **successful in a number of ways** including enhancing the health, well-being and employability of volunteers and paid staff; developing valuable forms of peer support and social networks; and improving the quality and capacity of both WY-FI and wider services. In many cases, the **process of co-production is as important as the outcomes** which may, anyway, only fully materialise in the longer term. It is also vital that co-production is maintained beyond the lifetime of WY-FI to avoid a cliff-edge where those involved with, and supported through, co-production do not suddenly find themselves cut adrift.

The research provides a clear indication of the factors that are important for effective co-production. The right support for both paid staff and volunteers; the skills and expertise of co-production workers; genuine organisational commitment to the principles of co-production; and the ability to tap into wider networks of recovery capital are all vital. It is also clear that **the effectiveness of co-production activities are highly context dependent** and what works in one district may not be easily replicated in another. This illustrates **the importance of setting locally sensitive goals** appropriate to the level of resource, skills and experience available. A centrally imposed 'hub and spoke' model of Networks, for example, may not necessarily be the right approach for each area.

Co-production does not always work well, however, and **ambitions have sometimes fallen short**, most notably around the planned establishment of the Mini Networks. It is important that the WY-FI programme learns from this and seeks to review the milestones it has set. At times it feels like the ethos of co-production has been compromised as it became translated into a set of inflexible organisational objectives around developing the Network and influencing services. This sometimes placed undue pressure on volunteers without sufficient recompense and reward. A more fluid model where central co-production staff have the flexibility to steer and support Locality teams to realise their own vision and approach to co-production could work better. As many interviewees reflected, this could simply be a focus on supporting beneficiaries and volunteers to engage in positive social

networks – inside or outside of WY-FI – that promote recovery. The lack of CPSW capacity in some Localities make these more modest goals even more appropriate in the time remaining.

As the experience of the Bradford Wellbeing group works, **co-production works best when working across organisational boundaries to embrace wider recovery communities**. Promoting this focus on building broad, positive social networks as a forum for mutual support and a vehicle for advocating change in the way services operate could become one of the most powerful and enduring legacies of WY-FI co-production work.

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