

# A Shared Narrative for Co-production



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# Acknowledgements

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With thanks to the co-production group who worked together to shape the co-production narrative to ensure all information is relevant, useful and easy to digest. A great example of co-production in action!

The following organisations provided further support and expertise to develop this resource, working together as a collective voice to produce this shared narrative for co-production:



# Introduction

This co-production guide is aimed at those working in physical activity or sport. It was developed with the aim of **improving knowledge, guiding action and influencing policy, practice, projects and services.**

Co-production is becoming increasingly expected and is a popular approach in many areas of work. However, lack of understanding and misuse of the word co-production runs the risk of the approach becoming tokenistic. In this guide, we set out what co-production is and what it isn't, to provide direction and ensure clarity in your work.

We have included case studies from a variety of organisations working in the sector so that you can see how others have embedded co-production in practice. There is no roadmap or step by step process to follow for co-production. However, the guide, alongside the information and hints/tips, can be used as a starting point to guide conversations and help support how you might decide to do co-production in ways that fit your work and the people you work with.

# What 'is' co-production?

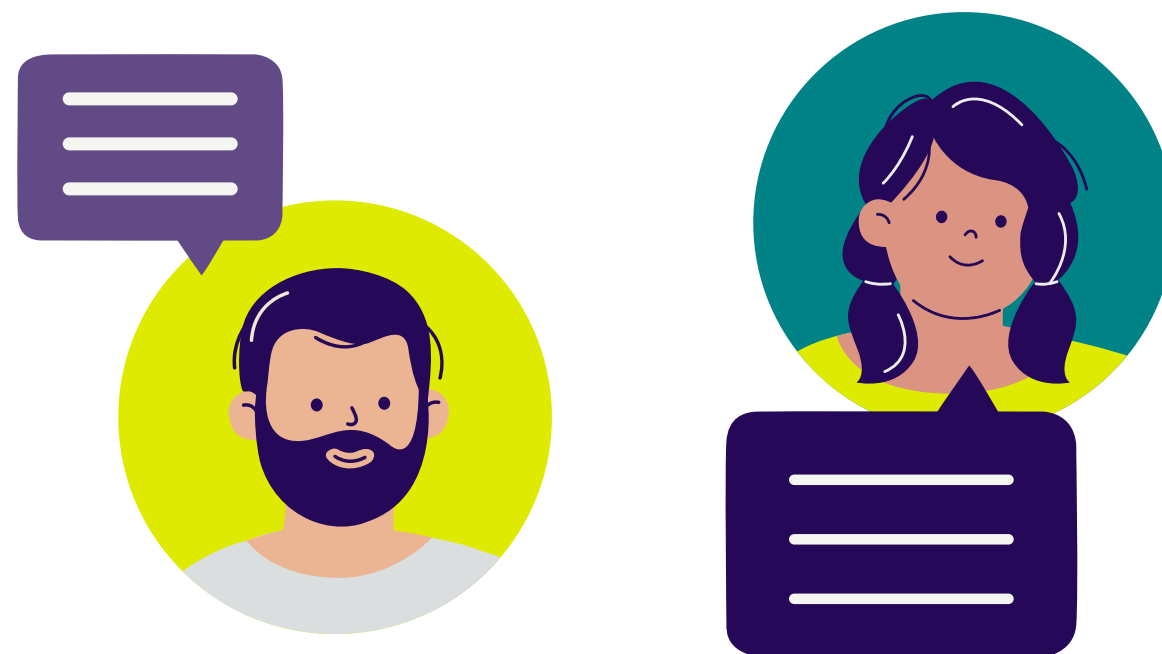
It's a word 'floating' around a lot – but what does it actually mean?



## What 'is' co-production?

Co-production is a **process** in which an organisation or individual **collaborates with** people who have **relevant lived experience** throughout the work, from the **start to the finish**, and **equal relationships** with them are formed and sustained (Smith et al, 2023). No one group or person is more important than any other group or person. Everyone is equal and everyone has assets to bring to the collaborative process.

Involving more people in a project or piece of work as part of the co-production process can lead to much more successful outcomes for everyone. People or communities with lived experience can identify priorities and give a better grasp of the landscape as well as a more up-to-date picture of current needs. For the sport and physical activity sector, this can have so many benefits. It can mean you are able to develop more inclusive activities from the beginning without wasting valuable money or resources, develop better relationships with your local community and therefore improve your reputation, as well as ensuring any work you develop is accessible, relevant and will make a difference.



## What 'is' co-production?

Instead of an organisation making **all of** the decisions about the work, members of the community and people who use services are invited to be involved from the beginning of the project and are involved throughout the process.



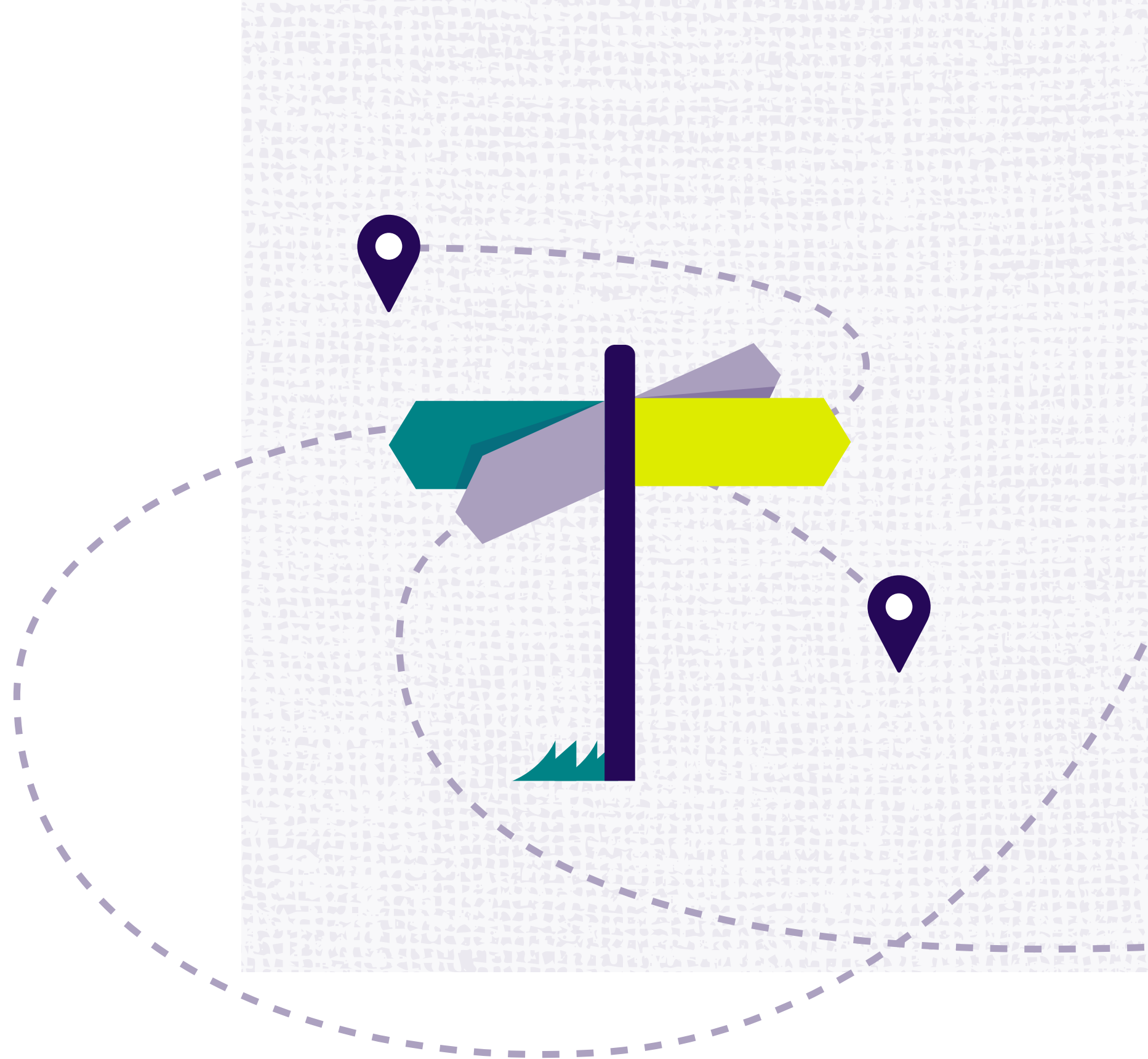
Not only does everyone involved come up with ideas, they also help them come to life alongside the organisation – putting things in place, designing, running sessions, and evaluating outcomes.

Think of it like sitting around the table, together, with a blank sheet of paper – and creating ideas together.

## What 'is' co-production?

There are many different definitions of co-production, which is one reason for misunderstanding what it means in practice. ImROC (2017) suggest that one way to avoid confusion is to think of it as an approach that represents a set of **values and principles** which have common meaning, are easily accessible, and act as a guide for those treading the path of co-production. Within different settings, these principles are **interpreted and brought to life** by those involved within the unique context of each activity. This is why there is no roadmap to simply follow for co-production, because it depends on people involved, the nature of the project/issue, and the process the group decide to take together.

In co-production people with lived experience are essential to a project, not optional. They have significant experience to actively influence work and drive changes. They should not be seen as a 'nice to have' but an essential part of the work.



# Principles of co-production

Principles can be used **along with** an appropriate definition of co-production to guide the work you do. Or you may decide that principles **alone** are the best way to understand and do co-production. Here are some working principles of co-production for consideration to support positive action (Smith et al, 2023).





## Well resourced

Resources like time and money need dedicating to co-production activities, making sure all participants are, and feel, valued.



## Shared Power

Sharing power means partners with relevant lived experience, knowledge, expertise and assets influence decision-making and outcomes. They play an active role in driving work throughout the project life cycle so that it focuses on issues that are relevant and important to them or the organisations or communities they are part of.



## Varied knowledge and contributions

All partners are important. They have different forms of knowledge to share and contributions to make. These are encouraged, recognised, shared, and valued.



## Relationship management

Building and maintaining relationships needs genuine commitment. Partners need to be open, honest and trusting. It is important that partners have a continued desire to learn from and with each other. Actively listening to each other, appreciating difference, sharing personal stories, talking about failure, and following up on actions in a timely manner go a long way in showing how genuine a partnership is. Relationships should be built and maintained based on mutual respect, dignity and trust.



## Diversity

Co-production should embrace different people and be as inclusive as possible. This means increasing participation of people who are under-represented or more likely to experience exclusion. This can include people from ethnic minority backgrounds, LGBTQ+ communities, people who communicate differently, who have dementia or have a high level of support needs. Every effort should be made to make sure co-production is inclusive and accessible for these groups so that they are able to be involved without experiencing barriers.



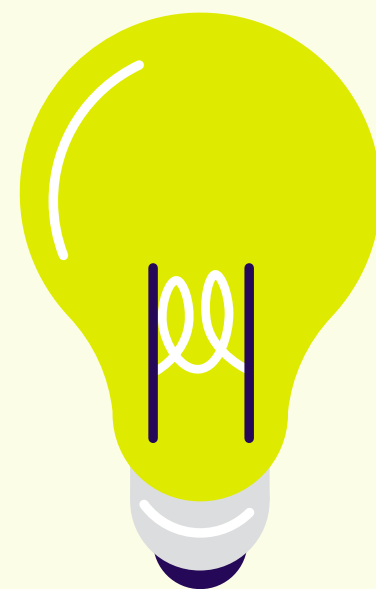
## Debate

It is important to learn from each other and part of that learning means that disagreements between partners are welcomed in the safe space you are working in. It can be good to have ‘critical friends’ when co-producing work. That is because if everyone agrees on everything, then there is no dialogue. Dialogue is important for doing effective and successful co-production.



## Shared benefits

Equal partnerships are about giving and taking. Everybody should benefit in some way from working together. Practically, this might include payment for taking part, providing training and support for co-production, exchanging resources, sharing knowledge, and/or offering certificates and references as evidence of partner expertise, skills, and knowledge.



## Flexibility

Co-production is most effective when being flexible and open to change as the group begins to work together and take work in different directions. Being open to new ideas and approaches is part of the co-production process, so you should not be too rigid or strict with timelines. However, don't forget your original purpose or goal of the work.

# Ways of working together

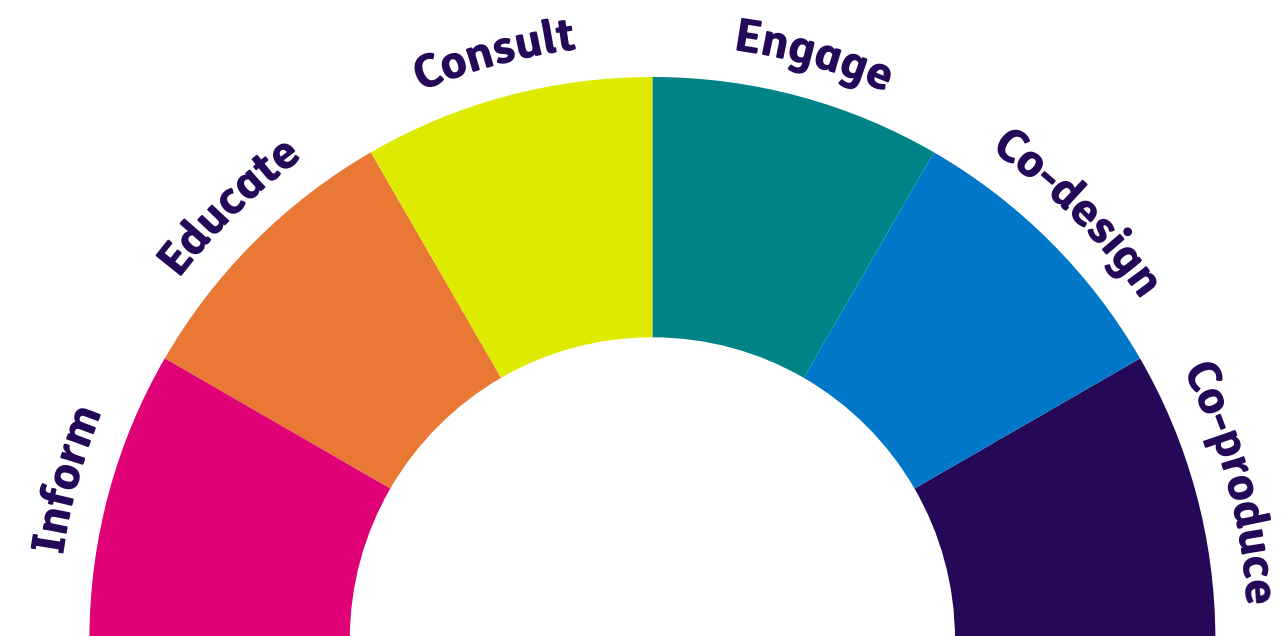
There are ways which many organisations may involve people in their work. In this section we will explain what makes co-production different to other methods.



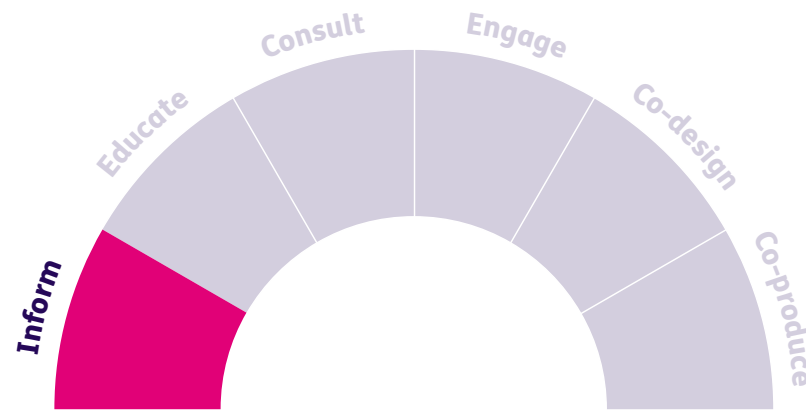
## Ways of working together

Co-production has become a popular buzzword. But co-production is not for everyone. Nor is it useful for every project. If co-production does not meet your needs, or if people are unwilling to commit to doing it genuinely, then be honest, reflect, and don't do it on this occasion. Honesty is good practice. On certain occasions other approaches like consultation or engagement might be more relevant for what you want to achieve. That is fine!

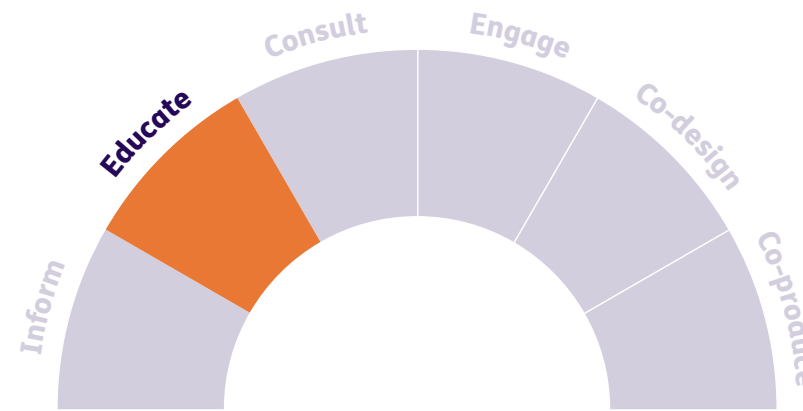
The Spectrum of Co-production, developed by Peoples Hub (2022) is a useful tool to visualise different methods of engagement or participation as you move towards co-production.



# Ways of working together

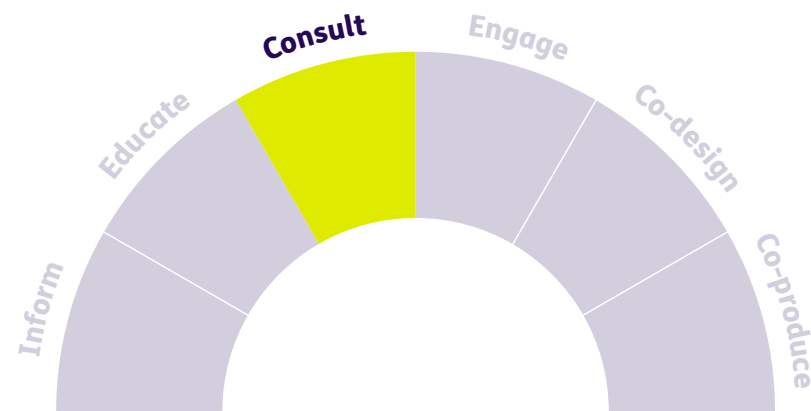


**Informing**, on the left hand side of the spectrum, is about providing accessible information about a topic. Informing usually means people who use services or communities are passive and have no choice or power in decisions that are made. For example, a post on a website sharing some news about a plan to change a service.



**Educating** is where people are helped to understand a topic, and there is a feedback loop which indicates this has been effective. For example, this might include how plans or proposals to change a service may affect them.

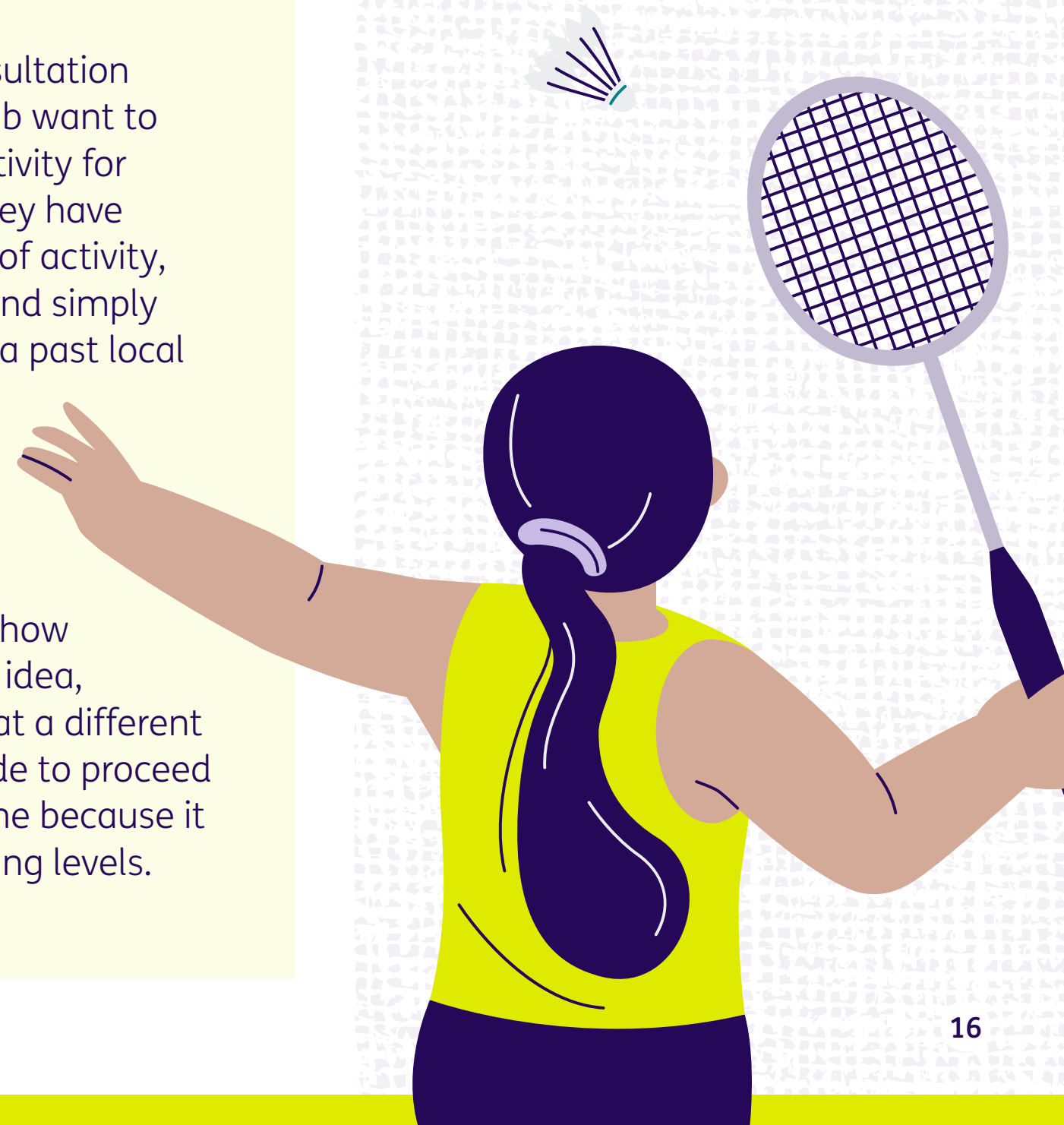
# Ways of working together



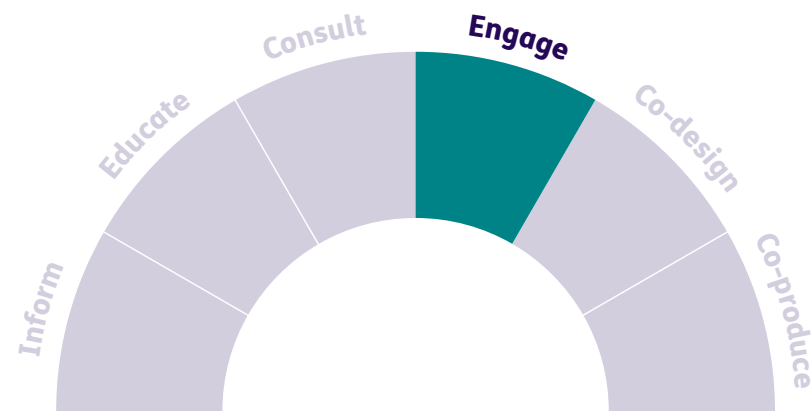
**Consultation** is a popular way of gathering views and insights from a variety of people. It can help organisations to understand whether others are in agreement about a certain project or idea via, for example, a survey or focus group. However, in consultation there is no assurance that people's views will be considered. Consultation often means consulting people with lived experience at **certain stages** of work, however decisions are made by those who **traditionally hold power**. Consultation is not co-production. There should be no pre-decided options in genuine co-production. Options and ideas are developed with service users, residents and professionals from the beginning.

An example of consultation is when a sports club want to introduce a new activity for Disabled people. They have an idea of the type of activity, the time and day, and simply want to run this idea past local Disabled people. They decide to send out a survey to find out more.

The survey results show that people like the idea, but would prefer it at a different time. The club decide to proceed with the original time because it works best for staffing levels.



# Ways of working together



**Engagement** is where people who use services are given more opportunities to express their views and may be able to influence some decisions. However, this depends on what the people responsible for services will accept. This is usually achieved by people who are responsible for services, building a working relationship with targeted groups or individuals. The individual is given more opportunity to express their opinions, but they are not involved in the design or delivery.

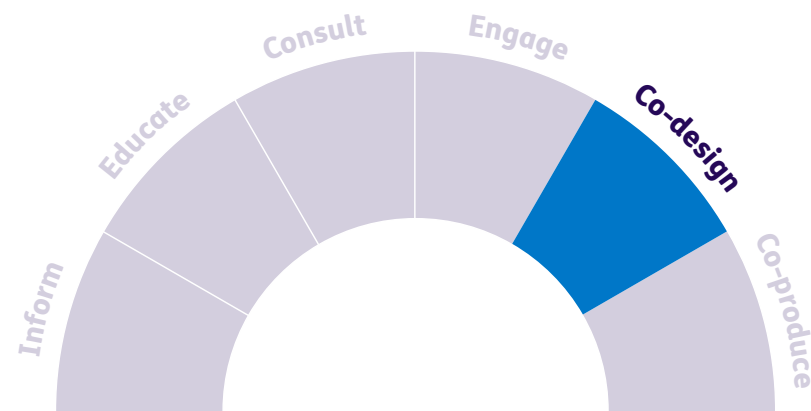


One example of engagement is when an Active Partnership decide to start hosting regular workshops with Disabled people so that they can better understand and cater to their needs. However, most decisions are still made by the organisation rather than everyone deciding together.



Another example is recruiting for a job vacancy. Those involved are asked what qualities a person should have for a job that is to be advertised and these suggestions are included in a job advertisement. However, they are not involved in the recruitment process.

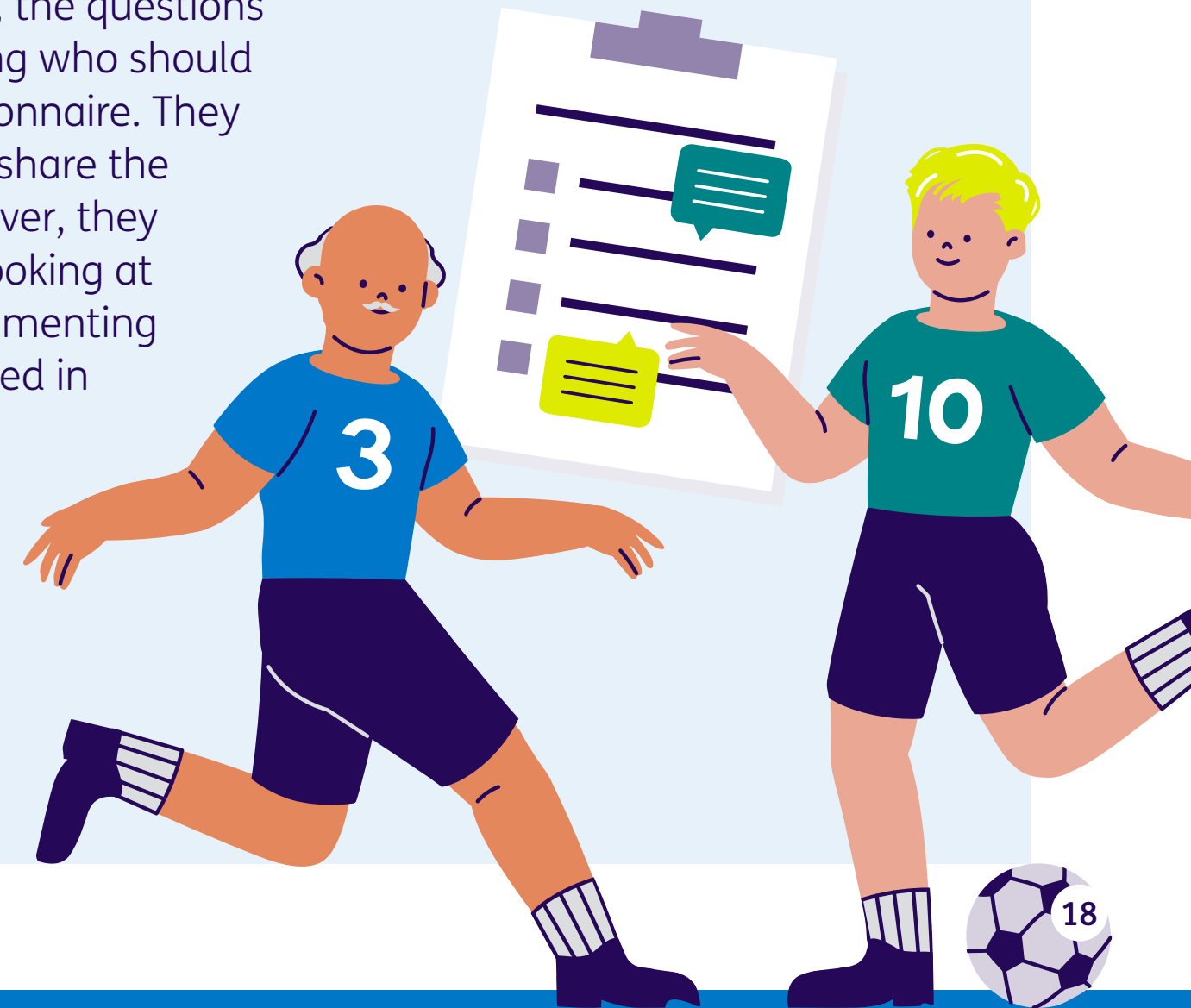
# Ways of working together



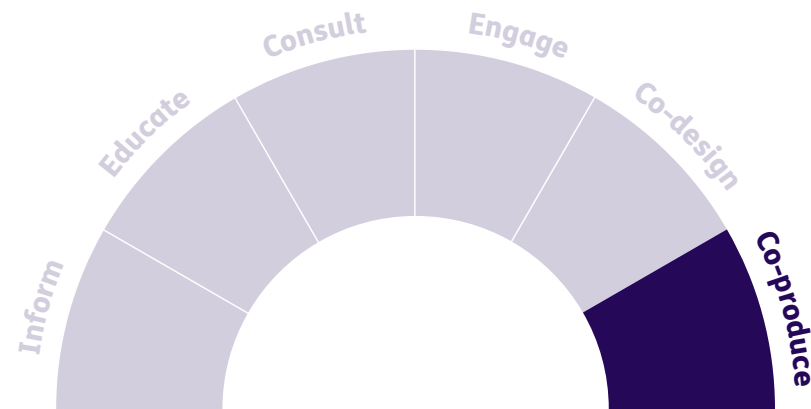
**Co-design** is used to understand experiences and develop interventions with the support of users of programmes or services. This means designing together what an activity, project or service could look and feel like, or designing solutions to a prespecified problem.

People with lived experience can be part of the co-design process, but are neither necessary nor central to it. They have a real influence but are not involved in ‘seeing it through’ or having an ongoing contribution, nor do they have equal ownership of the outcomes.

A sports club wants to make changes to the activities they currently offer to make them more inclusive. They decide to co-design a solution with current members to find out what changes they can make. The group members decide together to co-design a questionnaire. They all have equal involvement in deciding the purpose of the questionnaire, the questions included and deciding who should complete the questionnaire. They all work together to share the questionnaire. However, they are not involved in looking at the findings or implementing the changes requested in the findings of the questionnaire.



## Ways of working together



## Co-production

What differentiates co-production from other forms of engagement mentioned above is that in co-produced work:

- The lived experience of particular people and their knowledge is **essential and an asset**.
- People with lived experience **collaborate** with researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and/or organisations etc.
- Collaboration happens from the **start to the end**.
- Partnerships are formed, and **power shared by all** throughout the process.
- Is not an 'add on' to a certain piece of work or project, but **is a necessary part of it**.
- Everyone involved has **equal involvement and ownership**.



See page 45 for some real examples of how people in the sport and physical activity space have worked in this way and what it has meant for their organisations.

## Ways of working together

### Co-production

Want to co-produce a new physical activity programme?

Want to conduct co-produced research?

People with lived experience need to be part of the work from the beginning so they can direct what is needed to make the programme or research effective, shape how it is produced, and identify the most meaningful outcomes. They can also then, as co-researchers, test the programme or do some of the research.



# Why do co-production?

It is often simpler, quicker and less effort to just get on with projects and tasks without taking a co-production approach. So why do it? What value would it bring?



# Why do co-production?

- The priorities of people or communities with lived experience are identified by them. This can give a better grasp of the landscape and a more up-to-date picture of current needs. The work responds to what people with lived experience determine is necessary.
- Any new activities you develop will therefore be more inclusive and people accessing them will be less likely to experience barriers, because they've been included from the beginning.
- Co-producing work can be very empowering and enables people to use their lived experience in positive ways.
- People with lived experience are active and equal partners in work. This means power imbalances are addressed, and any marginalised or excluded voices become heard and included.
- People with a variety of knowledge work together in partnership, to improve outcomes and learn from each other.
- The assumptions and ideas of those with responsibility for delivering projects or services can be challenged by people with lived experience. This can often result in identifying seemingly little things, often overlooked, that can have big impact in real-life situations.
- Work produced is more likely to be useful, useable and make a difference. Work that is accessible and relevant is more likely to be used in practice and have impact.
- Co-production can also offer better value for money, especially if money and resources are not wasted.

Dance Syndrome, a charity based in the North West of England, told us:



“Our team believes co-production is always worth the investment of time and money because the impact is so significant and rewarding. The impact is not limited to people with learning disabilities, but also extends to their families, the professional artists that they collaborate with and for the audiences and participants who see co-production in action and consequently believe that society can be a more inclusive place in the future.”

Co-production can sometimes be challenging. But not all aspects of co-production are difficult. In fact, you may find that you are doing some elements, based on those principles we mentioned before, in your day-to-day service delivery and activities.

Anyone who is committed to doing genuine co-production can do it as a meaningful mechanism for change and successful development and delivery of their project, activity, or service. There are misconceptions that it is too hard to do or perhaps gatekeepers suggest you must be experts or specialists. If you have a commitment and belief that everyone has equal value and can contribute to change, then you have the opportunity to make co-production a reality and a success.

# What are some of the challenges?

If we want to do co-production well and not in a tokenistic and meaningless way, it can be daunting and sometimes challenging for everyone involved. This is because there is no tick list or a clear set of procedures to neatly follow for achieving co-production. In fact, if we get co-production right, often you will not always be able to predict the direction it will take.



## Some of the main barriers or challenges to co-production are:

- Co-produced work is often time-consuming and requires more dedicated resources and capacity.
- Unsupportive organisational leadership, structures and policies can prevent successful co-production.
- Sharing power can be tough, especially when people or organisations have traditionally taken a 'top down' approach where decision making is limited to senior positions.
- Building and maintaining relationships with and between diverse groups of people can present complex challenges.
- Co-production can lead to difficult conversations and tension building between partners.
- Motivations for doing co-production can differ and may not always be positive, acceptable or aligned.
- The selective process for people with lived experience is not effective and/or limited to the same voices being heard.
- The flexible nature of co-production could mean that the purpose or goal of the work could get lost or the work could go too 'off-track'.



# How might you approach co-production?

Co-production is a way of working that can bring so many benefits to the community, projects and services. In previous sections, we have discussed what co-production is, how it differs from other forms of engagement and why you might take this approach.

In this section, we will provide some practical tips and tools that you can use in practice to co-produce projects and services. These resources can also help you to overcome some of the barriers we mentioned in the previous section. We recommend reading through previous sections before you use the following resources, because it is essential that you are aware of what makes co-production so unique and different to other ways of working.

Effective co-production requires empathy, curiosity, patience, feeling comfortable with being uncomfortable, embracing uncertainty, appreciating you don't have all the answers, and an openness to change and do things differently. But don't worry – you can learn all of this!

There are many ways to practically do co-production and it may look different depending on the setting or projects. This is because different people are involved each time, who all have varying ideas about how to achieve an outcome. We will take you through some practical steps you can take as you begin to plan and implement co-production within your project or service, with some useful tools to use within each 'stage' of co-production.

# Planning

Before you begin your co-production journey, you need to plan out what you already have in place and anything you may need to make co-production a reality. Effective planning means co-production is more likely to be successful.

Pre-planning is essential because you should ensure you have the time to think through the issues and barriers that you need to address. Of course, this does not mean that people should be excluded from the planning stage of the actual co-production process. Instead, it means that you need to have thought through in advance how it might work to make sure that timescales and resources reflect the need. You should then ensure to be flexible when the work takes place because the direction can often change during the co-production process.




## Is co-production suitable?

We suggest that one of the first steps you should take in the planning process is defining what you mean by co-production and then working out whether it is appropriate. If co-production is not clearly defined or communicated there is a risk that its meaning will be diluted and therefore its potential to transform services, local communities, and people's lives will be reduced. As mentioned in earlier sections, there is no 'one true definition' of co-production. Even so, it is good practice to do the following:

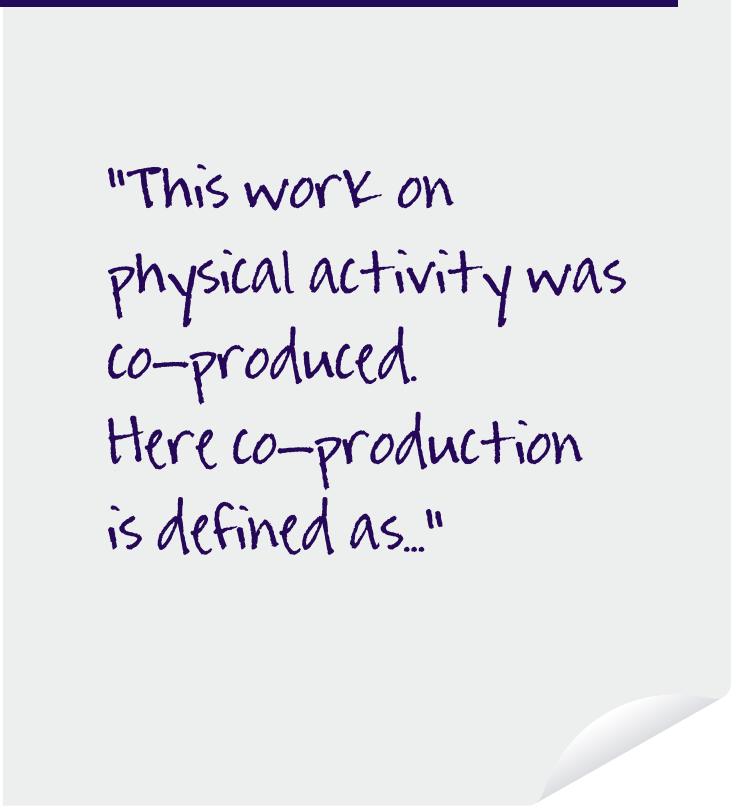
- Agree with staff and/or partners on what you understand co-production to be and the principles that will guide its development.
- Clearly communicate the definition and principles you have agreed to use to staff and partners.
- When using the term co-production in reports, strategies, and websites be transparent by clearly stating what you mean by co-production and the principles used.

If co-production is right for the work you plan to do, agreeing on what it means and communicating this clearly and transparently is good practice because it helps guide the work. It can also:

- Guide how to work with partners.
- Provide direction for genuine, rather than tokenistic, co-production.
- Give you some minimum expectations and standards for co-production.
- Helps you to understand if the work was really co-produced and, if not, to label the work differently and correctly.



One example of good practice is writing in a report



"This work on physical activity was co-produced. Here co-production is defined as..."

## Managing resources

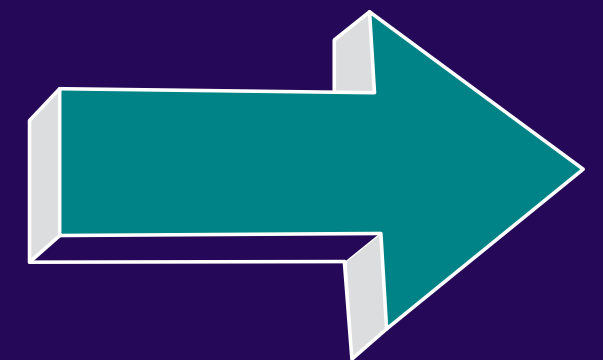
Another significant challenge for supporting and maintaining co-production is managing resources. Co-production requires resources to support it, so it is essential that you map out what you need and have available as part of the work you are planning to undertake.

Some of the resources co-production may require are:

- Staff members who are planning/ supporting co-production.
- Support, training and development opportunities for those getting involved.
- Funds available so that people involved can be re-imbursed for their time, as well as to pay for venues and accessibility needs (e.g. interpreters).
- Advertising and marketing resources to find people to get involved in co-production activities.
- Access to venues if hosting in person workshops.



On the next page is a guidance checklist that you can work through to help support you through the planning stage of co-production.



# Co-production planning checklist



## Policies and culture

- Do you have relevant policies in place for co-production to be a success? E.g. Safeguarding policy, payment policy, etc.
- Does your organisation have a culture that is accepting of co-production and power sharing?
- Are management supportive around co-producing this project?
- Are management open to the flexible nature of co-production?

## Budget and timing

- Do you have a budget in place to pay for people's expenses and time?
- Are you considering other ways people can be compensated for their work – e.g. training, certificates etc.
- Do you have a budget in place to pay for accessibility needs e.g. interpreters or easy read documents?
- Have you built in the time for co-production within all stages of your project?

# Engagement and Communication

- Have you considered the values that will underpin your work and how you will put them in practice?
- Do you know who you will involve in the co-production process and how to reach them?
- Do you have a plan for how you will ensure all partners are empowered in decision making?
- Are you able to provide clear information in a range of formats?
- Do you have the skills and materials to make the co-production workshops accessible and engaging?
- Do you have a plan for how everyone can contribute in the work and are you flexible with this? E.g. sharing ideas, drafting of documents, evaluation design etc.
- Are you engaging with people from a diverse range of backgrounds?
- Have you considered barriers people involved may face and how to overcome these?
- Do you have a way of reporting on progress and providing feedback?
- Do you have a plan for how the outputs and impact will be communicated to the people involved?

## Notes

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It's also important to connect with other organisations who work in this way during the planning process. Dance Syndrome suggest – **'Learn from the experiences of those who are already doing co-production by working collaboratively and not being afraid to ask for advice from other organisations.'**

# Recruitment

To begin to embed co-production within a project or a service, you need to recruit a co-production group. This is a collection of people that represent everyone in the project.

## We suggest considering these four key questions:

- Who do you need involved?
- What skills, experience and knowledge are needed?
- How are you going to reach them?
- How are you going to support them?

Who is in your group can look different depending on the service. It could include:

- Individuals.
- People already using existing services.
- Local community members.
- Families, friends and carers of people who use services.
- Professionals within organisations (e.g. voluntary sector, Disabled People's Organisations, NHS, health and social care).
- Government departments.
- Local businesses such as care homes.
- Researchers.



**International Mixed Ability Sports suggest that you should engage key individuals early on, including sports clubs, SEND schools, healthcare providers, universities, and advocacy groups. This allows each partner to share their insights, needs, and expectations from the outset.**

When planning for how many people you have in the group, it depends on the aims and purpose of the project and what you hope to achieve. You also need to think about the right balance of skills and experience within the group, because co-production can only happen successfully if you have the right people in the room. A co-production group might then need to change and new people be invited throughout the process, with the co-production group themselves deciding if anyone is missing.



**When co-producing this document, we had a small group of 5 as we believed any more people would have been overwhelming and created difficulties, due to the complexities of editing a large amount of writing and information. However, we involved others in reviewing the document when as a co-production group, we were happy with the document.**

Other projects may need more people to ensure they have the right mix of knowledge and skills, as well as ensuring representation. However, too large a group – for example 20 people, would be overwhelming and difficult to manage.



## Being inclusive of under-represented groups

It is important to reach out to groups and people who may be under-represented or less likely to take part in co-production, for example people on lower incomes, Disabled people, people from diverse cultural backgrounds, different age groups and/or LGBT+ communities. Working in solidarity with each other then starts to form trust early on during the co-production process.

It is essential to identify barriers that people with lived experience can face when it comes to getting involved in co-production and identify what you can do to overcome these barriers, taking into account multiple identities. For example, this may mean trying different avenues to recruit people and ‘thinking outside the box’. You also want to make sure what you send out is accessible and inclusive for different people, for example this may mean translating documents into different languages.



The guidance checklist on the next page can help to support you during the recruitment stage of co-production:



# Recruitment & Involvement checklist

## Recruitment planning

- Do you have a budget in place to pay for people's expenses and time?
- Have you considered how people may be compensated in other ways? – e.g. training opportunities, certificates, acknowledgements etc.
- Do you have a budget in place to pay for accessibility needs? - e.g. interpreters or easy read documents.
- Do you know how many people you will involve in the co-production process?
- Have you considered the skills, knowledge and experience needed by different members of the co-production group?
- Have you considered the commitment and expectations of getting involved and how you will communicate this?



# Delivery

So far you've planned for your co-production work, you've recruited your co-production group, and now it's time to work together!

This is often the part where people get worried or want a step-by-step guide of what to do next. However, this is where the group come together and steer the direction of the work. The different people involved and their skills and knowledge, as well as how they work together, all create a different result in the end. Think of it like making a cake – the different ingredients and method all create a different output, or cake!

This part of co-production is all about bringing everyone together, building positive relationships and working together in partnership to steer the direction of the work. Ensuring you are planning how you are working together, that everything is accessible, and that you are managing the resources you planned out earlier is essential here.



## Accessibility

To make things more accessible for people you are working with, you should:

- Consider whether it is more accessible for a meeting to be held in person or remotely.
- Check that the timing and length of the event and/or involvement is appropriate to the needs and lifestyle of the people you want to reach.
- Choose an accessible venue that is also served by good public transport.
- Choose accessible online platforms and forms of communication suitable for the group.
- Have regular refreshment/rest breaks at any events you are holding.
- Invite people to bring someone with them if they feel anxious about participating for the first time or about travelling.
- Offer training for anything that people might be unsure about (e.g. using Zoom).
- Provide a British Sign Language interpreter, captioning and/or induction loop facility for those with a hearing impairment.
- Offer to provide documents in large print or Easy Read format.
- Use plain language and avoid unnecessary jargon.

There are a lot of useful resources out there to help with the delivery of co-production workshops, which we link to later in this document. This includes tools and templates to help you to plan, as well as engaging ideas for the delivery of workshops themselves.



**Our guidance checklist on the next page can help you to consider important points in the delivery of your work:**



# Delivery checklist

## Before the first meeting

- What activities or areas of work are people involved in co-producing?
- Do you know how often the group are meeting?
- Do you know where the group will meet? (online, in person).
- Do you know what roles people will have within the group and what the expectations will be?
- Have you considered the level and type of commitment and involvement of individuals?
- How and when will the level of commitment be communicated to individuals?
- Do you have staff members/colleagues who are supporting you with co-production meetings?
- Have you considered the budget for people's time which includes pre-reading and any other additional pieces of work?
- Have you completed a terms of reference which includes who is in the group and the aims of the group?

## The first meeting

- How will you set up a collaborative way of working or ground rules with the group? (e.g. respect and confidentiality, raising hand before speaking, making sure everyone is heard).
- Have you planned how you will meet accessibility needs? (e.g. interpreters, easy read documents etc)
- Do you have creative ideas for engagement and relationship building within meetings? E.g. fun ice breakers or activities.
- Have you considered what paperwork you may need? e.g. – copies of the agenda and previous minutes, remunerations policy, consent forms, feedback forms.
- Will you send the group pre-reading or tasks for different meetings?

## Continued collaboration

- How will you ensure everyone is supported and has a positive experience?
- Do you have a plan for how to manage any conflict or disagreements?
- How will you make sure all decisions are made together and collaboratively?
- Are you able to work flexibly as ideas change and evolve?
- Are you able to be flexible with how people engage e.g. 1:1 phone calls, email engagement etc.
- Are you open to the group evolving as you continue with the work? e.g. inviting more people to attend whose voices may be missing.

The Voices for Inclusive Activity Project advise

**‘don’t be afraid of uncertainty - embrace it and try to think about the end goal. Clarity will be reached over time’.**

### Notes

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# Review and Reflection

As mentioned in previous sections, true co-production means involving people from the start to the end of a project and that includes including people in the evaluation process. People involved should be included in the ending of the project and understand the impact that their involvement and contributions has had on the project and outputs. This helps people to feel valued and included as part of the process.

As well as evaluating the project itself, it is also vital that you assess how well you are co-producing and the impact that co-production has for people involved. The questions below suggest some areas to consider when assessing the impact of co-production:

- Who was involved? Were the right people involved?
- Were there any barriers? Did you overcome them? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- Why did you involve the particular group of people? What is their relevant lived experience, skills/abilities?

- Could you have involved any other people?
- Can you give any examples of how you were flexible and responsive to people's needs in the co-production process?
- How do you know the co-production processes were effective?
- What changed or was influenced as a result of co-production?

Evaluating the impact of co-production is essential, not only so you can learn how to improve for next time, but also to demonstrate to funders the importance of co-production and working in this way. For co-production to work well, it should be built into funding bids to ensure you have the time, budget and resources available. Funders are more likely to accept working in this way if they can see the impact that co-production has had and the benefits for the project itself.



**On the next page is a guidance checklist to help you to consider important points when you come towards the end of a project:**





## Review and Reflection checklist

- How will the group be involved in measuring the impact of the project?
- Are you capturing what went well or not so well as part of the process?
- Do you have a way of capturing individual experiences of co-production?
- How will you use the co-production feedback?
- Do you have a plan to share the final resource/output with the group?
- Do you know how people will be involved in the end result (e.g. webinar, blog).
- How will you share the impact of the work with the group?
- Do you have a plan for maintaining involvement after the project?
- Is there anything that needs developing or anything you would do differently in future projects?



# Do's and Don'ts

Now you've worked through the different 'stages' of co-production, below are some pointers to guide you when doing co-production.

<b>Don't</b> 	<b>Do</b> 
Rush when it comes to building relationships – trust takes time.	Be patient and listen properly, allowing all voices to be heard.
Use jargon or acronyms that not everyone will understand.	All communication should be in plain English. Make sure to develop and provide accessible resources e.g. interpreters, easy read.
Set too much of a strict timescale, because co-production means things can change or go in different directions.	Be flexible and open to new ideas and approaches. You may be surprised where it takes you!
Allow professionals to lead or always answer questions.	Let the group collectively solve problems and make decisions together. Remember, co-production is about sharing power!
Prepare a completely pre planned agenda.	You can prepare a list of thoughts and topics instead to aid with facilitation. However, let the group develop ideas over time. Ideas will evolve naturally with everyone's input.
Be too hard on yourself if things go wrong or don't go to plan.	Be prepared to do things differently. In co-production you must have a willingness to learn from mistakes and keep trying!
Lose sight of your purpose and goal.	Ensure flexibility but remind the group of the common goal and purpose of the work to ensure productivity, keep motivation high and ensure impact is made.

## Further resources to support the co-production process

**Involve** have various ideas for activities or methods of conversation which are really useful for hosting co-production meetings and keeping things creative  
[involve.org.uk/resources/methods](https://involve.org.uk/resources/methods)

**IRISS** have different tools and creative activity ideas for co-producing sessions  
[iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-05/iriss-coproduction-project-planner-tools.pdf](https://iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-05/iriss-coproduction-project-planner-tools.pdf)

**SHP** have created this co-production toolkit, which is useful for thinking as a team during the co-production planning process, with some great ideas for conversations  
[shp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/FL-Co-Production-Toolkit-May-2022.pdf](https://shp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/FL-Co-Production-Toolkit-May-2022.pdf)

**Mind** have some great resources and tools available to use during the co-production process, which are especially useful during the planning process  
[mind.org.uk/workplace/influence-and-participation-toolkit/tools-case-studies-and-other-resources](https://mind.org.uk/workplace/influence-and-participation-toolkit/tools-case-studies-and-other-resources)

**Oxfordshire's Working Together** handbook has more useful information about co-production, including creative tools to use during sessions  
[healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/CoproHandbook\\_Full-Oxford-CC.pdf](https://healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/CoproHandbook_Full-Oxford-CC.pdf)

**TLAP** have case studies and resources available to help to guide the co-production process  
[thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/resource\\_category/co-production](https://thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/resource_category/co-production)

**The Co-production Collective** have various tools, resources and case studies available that are easily searchable on their website  
[resources.coproductioncollective.co.uk](https://resources.coproductioncollective.co.uk)

# Case studies

Examples of sport and physical activity services or projects which have been co-produced.

# International Mixed Ability Sport (IMAS) Inclusion in Sport Co-production Group case study

## About the project

The IMAS Inclusion in Sport Co-production Group produces materials and delivers training to grassroots sports clubs, SEND schools, and to health and social care professionals. Delivering training to grassroots sports clubs the group promotes equal participation and membership within the clubs by introducing Mixed Ability sport. The group are a fundamental part of university placements for health and care students with IMAS (including student doctors, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and social workers). These student placements equip future health and care professionals with the knowledge, skills and confidence to work with disabled patients or clients and involve them in their own care as well as encouraging them to get active by taking part in sport or physical activity.

## Who was involved

The Inclusion in Sports Co-production group is an ongoing group that meet for about two hours on a weekly basis and consists of around 20 individuals with lived experience of disability and/or autism.

## Key learning & outcomes

- **Resource Development:** The Co-Production Group creates educational materials, such as guides, videos, and case studies, to provide sports clubs and SEND schools with clear guidelines and strategies for Mixed Ability integration.
- **Training Workshops:** The group conducts workshops for grassroots sports clubs, school staff, and healthcare professionals, covering topics like mixed ability team structures, inclusive communication, and safe, adaptive coaching techniques.
- **Student Placements:** Through university partnerships, health and care students participate in placements at IMAS, where they gain practical experience working with disabled people in sports settings, learning valuable skills in empathy, communication, and inclusion.
- **Ongoing Support and Feedback:** IMAS provides continuous support to participating clubs, schools, and professionals, helping them implement and refine Mixed Ability practices based on feedback from both participants and trainers.

## Challenges

- **Cultural and Social Barriers to Inclusion:** One of the biggest challenges is overcoming social and cultural stigmas around disability and inclusion. In many sports clubs and communities, there can be resistance to integrating disabled people into mainstream sports, thinking they may get hurt or lack the ability to play certain sports. Often due to lack of experience, misconceptions, or fear of not having the right skills to support mixed ability players.
- **Limited Resources and Funding:** Mixed ability sport may require specific resources, such as adapted equipment, accessible facilities, and training for coaches and volunteers. Ensuring that clubs, schools, and healthcare professionals have access to these resources is challenging, especially in regions with limited funding or support for these areas, therefore it is important to encourage clubs that they will greatly benefit from these changes.
- **Preparing Health and Care Students for Inclusive Practice:** While university placements are valuable, training students to work with disabled individuals requires specific skills in empathy and patience. The students may be unwilling to learn from individuals with learning disabilities and/or autism.

## Advice to others

- Engage key individuals early on, including sports clubs, SEND schools, healthcare providers, universities, and advocacy groups. This allows each partner to share their insights, needs, and expectations from the outset.
- Listen to everyone equally individuals with lived experiences can provide essential insight.
- Value everyone's expertise and recognising the unique contributions of each individual.
- Make resources accessible for example materials that can be adapted (i.e. in easy read format)

# DanceSyndrome

## About the project

DanceSyndrome delivers all their inclusive dance activity in line with a unique co-production model – a Dance Leader with a learning disability works in equal partnership, side by side with a professional Dance Artist to offer high quality dance provision.



Primarily, DanceSyndrome offers “Everybody Dance” inclusive dance workshops in local communities and online via Zoom. These dance workshops are open to people of all ages, abilities, and experience levels.

Dance Leaders who co-deliver Everybody Dance have all completed DanceSyndrome’s own unique training course “Dance by Example” which helps them to develop transferrable skills including communication, teamwork, self-belief, self-management, and problem solving. Dance By Example has been designed and developed in-house by the DanceSyndrome team and is now accredited at Level 1 and Level 2 by Leadership Skills Foundation. DanceSyndrome believes that if you support people to be who they want to be and do what they want to do in life, then everybody in society benefits. That ethos is at the heart of everything that DanceSyndrome does, and it strongly underpins the co-delivery model.

DanceSyndrome also has the “DS Collective” performance company, who travel to events across the UK, including performing at high-profile events like the prestigious Edinburgh Fringe Festival, performing high-quality, co-produced inclusive dance pieces which challenge audience members to think about what people with learning disabilities can achieve when given the right support.

## **Who was involved**

DanceSyndrome aims to be inclusive in all aspects of their work and is open to anyone who wants to join in. They work primarily with adults (with and without learning disabilities) but have recently started to offer provision for Children and Young People too, including a new DS Youth collective.

In 2023 – 24 they delivered over 300 Everybody Dance sessions and 180 technique sessions (Street Dance, Ballet, Contemporary and Musical Jazz) to over 300 participants.

Community outreach work at conferences, festivals and performance events (all co-delivered) reached over 3,000 people, raising awareness of co-production and demonstrating what people with learning disabilities can achieve with the right support.

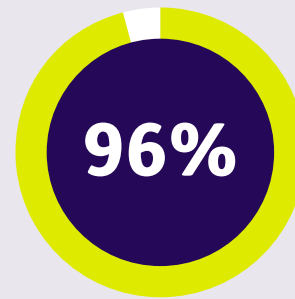
## **Key learning & outcomes**

In recent years, the value of DanceSyndrome’s co-delivery model has been recognised by respected organisations such as Arts Council England, the NHS and other national social care providers, all of whom recognise that this approach to co-production is ground-breaking in the way it puts real inclusion into practise and makes an impact on participants, trainees, parents/carers and audiences alike.

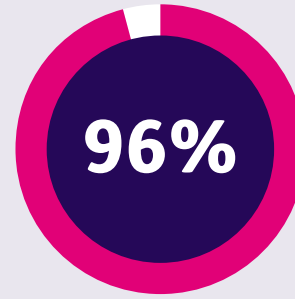
John Burrow is a great example of someone who has benefitted from DanceSyndrome’s approach to co-production. John has become a talented leader, progressing through DanceSyndrome’s training course to go on to eventually support the delivery of that same training. John joined DanceSyndrome as a workshop participant in 2019. He has mental health challenges and learning difficulties and he found that dance helped him to channel his feelings, particularly during the difficult months of the pandemic. When face to face dance activities returned in 2021, John was able to complete his Level 2 Dance by Example training and was given DanceSyndrome’s Christine Doolan Award in 2022 after being nominated by his Dance Leader peers because of his kind, caring and supportive nature.

John said “DanceSyndrome has helped me so much in meeting inspiring and amazing friends who are so supportive. It has helped me push myself to be better with both my mental and physical health. It means the world to me. I’ve gained a social life; I’ve gained friends and a new outlook on my life. I’m now a Dance by Example Level 2 qualified Dance Leader. I have helped to co-deliver the Level 1 Dance by Example course this year. I’ve gained a lot of confidence in myself so that, now, when there’s moments of self-doubt, I’m now able to kind of go “no, I can do this.”

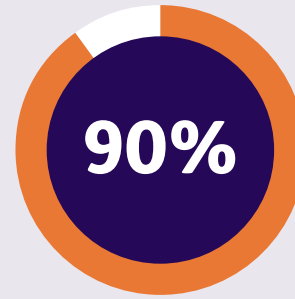
John is not alone in seeing the impact of DanceSyndrome’s work. In a survey conducted in September 2023, participants reported that as a direct result of participating with DanceSyndrome:



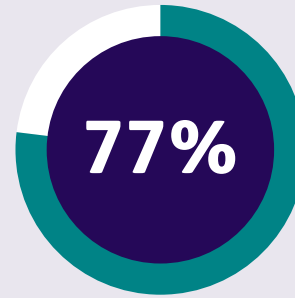
feel better about their future



have more friends



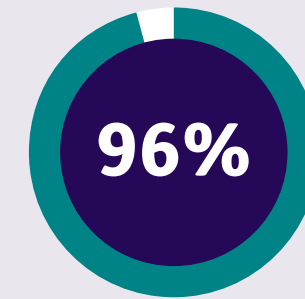
like DanceSyndrome because they make everyone welcome



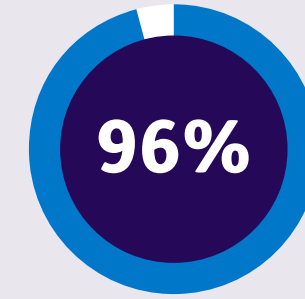
are more able to do more things independently without support



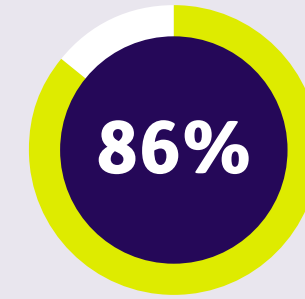
have started volunteering



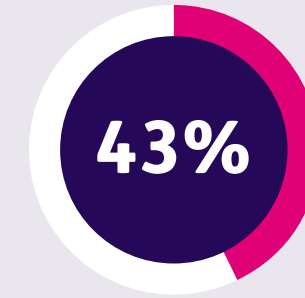
feel more confident



are doing more exercise and physical activity



are more involved in their community



have started other social activities

## Any challenges

Co-production needs an investment of time so that Dance Leaders and Dance Artists can get to know each other and adapt ways of working. Dance Artist David Darcy said “You have to find new and different ways of working. It’s important to understand everybody’s individual needs. When sharing your ideas you need to make sure you give time to allow your partner to understand why you’re approaching things the way that you are and give past experiences. You need to allow time and space for development and it’s crucial that you get feedback on what is working for each of you. The highlight is always the end product when you see your partner’s face light up and they realise they have potential that they didn’t know that they had.”

Providing the right level of support to achieve the best outcomes also comes at a cost. To co-deliver activities, you have at least double the delivery cost of only having a Dance Artist delivering. For performances and touring, people with learning disabilities often also need a parent or carer to travel and stay with them, meaning that a co-production can be a very expensive delivery model, and this isn’t always understood when other organisations are booking co-produced services.

DanceSyndrome acknowledges that co-production is not always the easiest or most cost-effective delivery model, but their team believes that it is always worth the investment of time and money because the impact is so significant and rewarding. The impact is not limited to people with learning disabilities, but also extends to their families, the professional Artists that they collaborate with and for the audiences and participants who see co-production in action and consequently believe that society can be a more inclusive place in the future.

## Advice to others

DanceSyndrome invests a lot of time in partnership working and strongly believes in sharing knowledge, experience and best practice so that everyone in society can learn how to be more inclusive. For organisations that are interesting in exploring co-production, DanceSyndrome’s advice is to learn from the experiences of those who are already doing it by working collaboratively and not being afraid to ask for advice from other organisations.

DanceSyndrome can also offer training, workshops and performances to other organisations who would like to know more about co-production.

# **The Voices for Inclusive Activity Project:** working together to co-produce our research project

## **About the project**

Voices for Inclusive Activity is a co-produced research project involving a group of disabled co-researchers who all have lived experience and a vested interest in making sport and physical activity accessible for all. The project is facilitated by Bev Goodman, an occupational therapist, and the project sits at the heart of the PhD she is doing at the University of Essex. For the past four years we have been working together to explore more accessible and inclusive ways of evaluating disability sport and physical activity.

## **Who was involved**

We originally began with five disabled people and one family carer, facilitated by Bev. Although our membership has changed in the four years since we started meeting, four disabled people have been involved throughout: Karen Oldale, Vanessa Wallace, Tom Horey and Fiona Montgomery.

## **Key learning & outcomes**

- At the moment, there are not the tools available to capture disabled people's views of taking part in sport and physical activity, because there isn't one method that would work for everybody.
- Collaboration is needed for a solution - evaluation tools that come out of this need to be developed with others to ensure they are appropriate and can be adapted.
- Collaboration has been extremely useful to help us gather a range of viewpoints, information, and to discuss topics in detail.
- Disabled people are often asked for their assistance and expected to give their expertise on projects for free. They should be recognised for the value they add to any project and reimbursed accordingly. Co-researchers in this project have been offered involvement payments as vouchers or charity donations.
- It has been a good way to bring people together and enabled us to bring the project different skills, experience levels and contacts.

## Challenges

- Co-production can be difficult logistically to organise getting everyone together; especially when we started in the pandemic. The use of Zoom as a tool helps to make sure that disabled people can be involved with the project and removes any barriers associated with travel and distance. This has meant that momentum within the project has kept going.
- Involving people with different types of impairments, e.g. learning needs. Although we tried to include everyone, the topic was difficult to maintain engagement and perhaps was a little too academic for some. It's vital to ensure the process is enjoyable, engaging and that people's contributions feel valued.
- Time constraints can mean that some people may be put off from being involved with the project. Support workers may be unsure/wary of getting involved. Some people can support participation, others may have different requirements. The right person, who gives the right support, can be vital to maintaining engagement.
- Having a big group, finding convenient times for everyone to get together can be challenging. Picking a regular time and sticking to it worked for us.
- Motivation: payment, reward, reimbursing - more like a job.

## Advice to others

- We worked with a community gatekeeper to ensure there was a mixed group of service users to gain their views.
- Listen to others and encourage people to give opinions.
- Make use of everyone's contacts built up in chosen subject area.
- Allow an adequate amount of time (and prepare for it to be extended).
- Don't be afraid of uncertainty - embrace it and try to think about the end goal. Clarity will be reached over time.
- Try and look around for different co-production activities throughout the research process, it's not just a 'tick box' exercise.
- Richness of insight and bonds you make with others (sense of belonging) illuminate the projects.

# Activity Alliance's Annual Disability and Activity Survey

## About the project

This research project has been conducted annually since 2019 and aims to track changes in disabled people's perceptions and experiences of sport and physical activity. The research involves a representative survey of disabled and non-disabled people, through working with a research agency, and then builds on this with focus group workshops with disabled people. With each year of the project disabled people have increasingly been involved, with the aim of enhancing the quality, value and impact of the project.

**Year 3 (2021-22):** We held online focus groups for disabled people to react to the data and influence the development of recommendations. Videos of recommendations in own words helped get recommendations across in the event and for stakeholders. We also compiled blogs with disabled people, who shared experiences and thoughts on what needs to change.

## What did we learn?

- We developed workshop tools to show data and develop recommendations, with positive engagement and feedback from participants.
- A useful way to develop more meaningful recommendations broadly. People have different areas of interest where they can contribute to individual topics.

## What could we improve?

- Bring colleagues and member organisations together with disabled people at the same time.
- More time for communications and planning.
- Increase diversity, especially people from ethnically diverse backgrounds, with learning impairments and young people.
- Specific and measurable recommendations, shared actions and ongoing involvement. Apply people's interest and skills to topics where they want to make a difference.

**Year 4 (2022-23):** We sent a survey to participants to decide on which questions and topics to include in the next version of the project. We shared the results back to participants to keep them engaged in the outcome.

## What did we learn?

- Many people are keen to be involved in our work. Surveys can be a quick and effective way to make decisions.
- This is more a consultation, than co-production, approach to involving disabled people.

## What could we improve?

- Quicker communication between the co-production and informing results; more discussion of actions and how we are using the research.
- Invite more organisations or colleagues to the meetings.

**Year 5 (2023-24):** We sent a consultation survey to disabled people and wider sector stakeholders on new survey topic areas and questions to inform survey changes. We took a co-design approach by working with two disabled people, skilled in qualitative research, as co-researchers, to support with facilitating workshops. We also worked with a co-researcher to support with qualitative analysis and report writing.

## What did we learn?

- Consultation surveys are a quick and effective method to inform and direct changes that are most important and relevant to disabled people and stakeholders.
- Through working with co-researchers, we learnt the importance of understanding why we use co-production and co-design within projects.
- When working with co-facilitators it is important to have enough time and clear preparation for focus group workshops.
- Disabled people, participating in the focus group workshops, valued the involvement of disabled co-facilitators.

## What could we improve?

- Involving co-researchers at an earlier stage in the project, where possible, could be beneficial.
- We evolved our initial approach from co-production to co-design, to reflect the needs of the project and level of involvement and collaboration.
- Consider working more with disabled people, who are not researchers, as well as those skilled and trained in research, so involving a combination of lived experience and relevant skills.
- Aim to reach a more diverse range of people, how can we reach new individuals who we haven't previously engaged with.

# Co-producing messages surrounding physical activity with Disability Rights UK in collaboration with Durham University.

Rachel Hill discusses her involvement as a co-producer within a project led by Disability Rights UK and Durham University.

## How you got involved with the project

I am a regular contributor as a person with lived experience of mental health disability with Disability Rights UK (DR UK), where I have had opportunities to use my lived experience in diverse and positive ways. I am involved in the Get Yourself Active ‘Sounding Board’ group led by DR UK, where myself and others with lived experience help to steer the Get Yourself Active programme with the aim of reducing barriers that Disabled people face when accessing physical activity. The group initially developed an idea of doing more to influence the wording and messaging around physical

activity, which is not often inclusive for Disabled people. This then led to DR UK linking up with Durham University on new research project to co-produce messages around physical activity.

I was invited to take part in the new project, although there was no pressure or expectation. The details given were clear which enabled me to make an informed decision. Once confirming my desire to be involved, an initial online call was set up with all potential participants to thoroughly go through the project and ask questions about what involvement would entail.

In our first meeting, we worked together with Durham University to plan how many meetings we were going to have and whether we would meet online or in person. Further opportunities to engage were offered and involvement was not limited to the meetings, which is always encouraging as it provides the chance to see how a co-produced project can have impact and to its potential for further work. We also discussed timelines, types of involvement, contracts if needed, terms of reference, what roles people have, who makes decisions, what involvement members of the group would have, ways of working - e.g. attending meetings, reading, training to develop skills,

pre-reading for different meetings. Thus, expectations and any benefits or potential barriers were clear from start. As well as this, there was also consideration of how we would navigate what to share from personal experience in the work and how we would manage the impact of this.

Every meeting was followed up with clear minutes and the opportunity to personally connect if anything unclear. We were able to feedback any comments via the group email or on a 1-1 basis. Of particular merit was always the involvement of our partially sighted member who was able to share her own perspectives such as commenting on suitability with screen readers. We also had a closing ceremony to celebrate our hard work and perhaps share contact details. This was so important given the close connections we had made over this journey and prevented any feelings of 'loss/what now'. There was no expectation to remain in contact but being offered this was really appreciated.

## **Any challenges**

The biggest challenge was arranging meetings because it is often difficult to get a date that everyone could attend. However, we always went with the majority and if we

had missed one had the chance to have a 1-1 to catch up. When I missed a meeting, this was really helpful and reassuring in being brought up to speed and not feeling uninformed at the next meeting. With regards to timings, I am slower to perhaps write my findings and thoughts down, but this was respected and accommodated at all times, with allowances made for my needs and extensions given to deadlines originally suggested.

## **Further involvement**

As well as attending co-production meetings, I have also had other opportunities to be involved in this work. For example, I was involved in a day workshop at Durham University highlighting the benefits of using lived experience in co-production and research. I accepted and was one of four people giving a talk on a panel speaking on my experiences of carrying out co-production with lived experience. Opportunities to run through and make the day as easy as possible for me were given, plus meeting with facilitators the night before, early on the day and staying to debrief after which were so helpful and reassuring. Despite the other three speakers holding Doctorate roles I genuinely experienced the respect of being viewed in the same esteem and value as others and by no means

was a tokenistic participant. My contributions were met most positively, and I received huge support and thanks for my valuable work from the audience who hope to co-produce in similar ways. The day was wholly satisfying and productive and such a positive in showcasing the collaborative work we had done.

I've also had the opportunity to co-write a paper about our experiences of being part of this group. The paper will be published with myself as a co-author which again proves how I am viewed as an equal not in any way less important to other contributors.

In summary, my experiences of being part of such a group alongside Durham University has been a model example of how to do co-production ethically, honestly and with full respect to the participants with lived experience that are indeed the audience we want the work to reach.

## **Advice to others**

Please do consider involving those with lived experience in your work and co-producing where possible. My contributions to the work gave a new, raw, alternative angle which had not been thought about before. My perspective only enhanced the work and enabled a more inclusive and authentic process with better outcomes, not only for the organisation carrying out the work, but more importantly for the people who would be affected by the work.

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