



## Support Providers exploring Co-production

A WAIS resource pack to support organisations to explore and introduce the principles and practices of Co-production.

Includes:

- Overview information
- Organisation Exploration Worksheets

**WAIS Resource Pack**  
**Sector Development**

# Support Providers exploring Co-production

## Overview Information

This resource pack supports any organisation to explore the principles of Co-production. It has been informed by people with a disability, families and allies all of whom have impacted on WAIS over the years. All of these people have one thing in common - a desire to explore how we can use the strengths, capacities and wealth of all of us to build richer organisations and communities.

### Our Inspiration

Edgar Cahn<sup>1</sup> is the founder of Time banking and creator of the Co-production principle. Edgar has worked for many years pushing our thinking to think deeper and harder about what it really means to work together and indeed what we mean by work. This resource draws on the 4 principles that Edgar Cahn developed and has continued to promote through the work of Time banking.

*'We have what we need, if we use what we have'*

*Edgar Cahn*

It has taken many years for Human Services to recognise and value the contributions of people they exist to serve. This can be seen in various movements across the world where people and families have campaigned and fought to not just 'get a seat at the table' but to be considered as a valued contributor and an expert by experience.

However, some might say that we have not progressed enough and still have some way to go.

*'I am central to planning and organising supports for myself, however I am still amazed that the Support Organisation has not invited the experts in, to teach them what we are looking for'*

*Cathy*

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<sup>1</sup> No more throw away people, The Co- Production Imperative, Edgar Cahn 2004

## **Support Providers exploring Co-production**

### **Overview Information cont.**

WAIS is passionate about promoting the genuine inclusion of people and families not only in our communities, but in the fabric of organisational design and practice, particularly in those organisations whose mission is to serve people with a disability or people who require support due to their mental health and or aging / frailty. We have seen the movement of user-led or peer led networks - people and families connecting and leading initiatives including organisations to serve people with similar experiences.

Movements and Organisations led by people with disabilities, for people with disabilities.

However, to do this well, it is not enough to invite people for consultation or feedback. We must think a little deeper than that.

## **Methodology – How can this resource be used?**

This resource supports anyone working in organisations to explore how the Co-production principles are alive in their organisation and what needs to develop to move this work deeper and further into the organisation.

We recommend a small team use this resource to explore the current picture for an organisation and then consult more widely across the organisation alongside people and families to develop a plan on how the principles could be further developed.

## Working together, Co-production – do the words matter?

Human Services have a long tradition of developing its own language – be-it in new terms entirely such as Social Role Valorisation (meaning people with disabilities having the opportunities as other citizens to live life in a way that includes roles that society values) or acronyms that mean little outside of service land such as PCP's (Person Centred Planning - for those who are interested).

Our language can be a major barrier to people contributing – after all how can I contribute if I'm not privy to the 'special language' that everyone is using.

We believe that when language is used exclusively by a small group of people it can exclude the rest of us.

We also believe that often terms or approaches that begin with respectful intent often get misused and overused to a point where they lose their original intent and meaning. It is because of this, this resource has tried to avoid any special language and where we have, you can be sure we have given a decent explanation.

**'Co-production = Co** Means 'together' or 'with' and **Produce** Means to make something or bring something into existence'

When we use the word 'Co-production' we mean how Organisations are designed to serve people, work together with people and families in a genuine partnership to design and deliver, supports and services. Never has the need been greater for Organisations to find ways to really work in partnership with people and families as now.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is radically changing the way that people can secure resources and purchase supports and services – but these supports and services need to be what people actually want. The only way to design services and supports that people really want is to listen to the experts and work in partnership.

However we also understand the significant shift in understanding and attitudes that is required to respect and value a contribution that may not come in the role of a Professional.

## Cont. Working together, Co-production – do the words matter?

Lawrence Clark<sup>2</sup> a man with a disability who is comedian in the UK made a brilliant statement about what it means to really work together and not work together in a way that is tokenistic. He described it as the difference between a one-night stand and a long-term relationship. Think about the differences – he is onto something!

Here are some of things we explored;

- A one-night stand - Interesting, no responsibility, meets a need, little investment, can be superficial, limited and short term
- A long-term relationship - Committed, investment, reciprocal, trust, meaningful, reliability, compromise and connection

So, we think what Laurence is getting at is the difference in the relationship of co-production as a meaningful partnership that is respectful and long term.

The New Economics Foundation<sup>3</sup> describe co-production as,

*“A **relationship** where professionals and citizens share power to plan and deliver support together, recognising that both partners have vital contributions to make in order to improve quality of life for people and communities.”*

There are a number of ways we can work together both at an individual level and a community level.

As individuals **most** of us want to be needed, to have our contributions acknowledged and valued, to be part of something that is beyond ourselves and to have the opportunity to ‘give back’. At a community level focusing on the contributions of all members of the community, not only those with professional paid roles, means we are using the strength of all of us, not only a few.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.lawrenceclark.co.uk](http://www.lawrenceclark.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)

## **Support Providers exploring Co-production Overview and Exploration Worksheets**

### **The foundation of Co-production:**

1. Recognising an asset-based perspective - everyone has something to contribute
2. Promoting reciprocity – we help each other
3. Building Social Networks – building relationships and networks
4. Valuing work differently – all kinds of work matters

## 1. Recognising an asset-based perspective - Everyone has something to contribute

What if we believed that all people are real assets and have skills, strengths and ideas about how to design and deliver supports and services?

Many people have designed their supports to make sense to them in their own unique context, so we have real hard evidence that people do this every day.

### - People are assets

All of us have skills, strengths, knowledge and a perspective that is entirely our own. For some of us we have learnt skills and knowledge in school or college and for others we have learnt skills through real practical experiences.

If we valued people's strengths and unique perspectives, we would understand the value of having all of these perspectives to influence our thinking.

Think of one thing you have done to help a neighbour, family member or friend. The lists will be endless – there is so much to tap into, but often these skills are not recognised.

### - There is always a way to use these assets

If people are valued as people who bring valuable assets, there is always a way to use their assets.

The challenge is starting in a different place – instead of asking what is the job and who has the skills to fill it, what if we asked “**what do you bring and how can we best use these skills, experiences and perspectives**”? Person centred working draws on this thinking by focusing on the strengths, gifts and capacities a person is contributing in their life.

## Cont. Recognising an asset-based perspective - Everyone has something to contribute

### - We have enough if we use what we have

Many organisations are connected to lots of people, including people they are providing a service to, family members and employees. Imagine if we really looked at people's assets and supported people to contribute them – all of them, not just the ones defined in job roles or consultations.

In the context of the NDIS, organisations looking to develop their services into the future have a rich network of people who have direct experience of purchasing their services who will undoubtedly be able to give a perspective on what the organisations need to pay attention to. The critical aspect here though is to listen.

### - Invest in people

Building capacity is a term introduced by the NDIS<sup>4</sup> promoting the need for people to be recognised as assets **AND** people who require investment to develop their skills, knowledge and contributions.

Investing in people is essential, not only for people's own development, but also for the overall gain of our communities. Supporting people to develop and grow invests in people and gains more contributions from people – of which we all benefit.

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<sup>4</sup> Building Capacity – NDIS

**1. Recognising an asset-based perspective - Everyone has something to contribute**

**What could this look like in your context  
Exploration Worksheet**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Examples of this already supported in our organisation</b>	<b>What could we do to further develop this area?</b>
People are assets		
There is always a way to use these assets		
We have enough if we use what we have		
Invest in people		

## 2. Promoting reciprocity - We help each other

A pervading issue in Human services is the consumerist perspective, **'We provide, you consume'** this theme can result in many people not being invited to help others or to give their contribution.

*'The central assumption is that service is a unilateral process. I, the professional produce. You the client, consume!'*  
*John McKnight*

An example of how this assumption can impact on how well we facilitate reciprocity can be found in Pass it on Parents.

'Pass it on Parents' is a network of family members of disabled children who determined that the experiences of other families can be invaluable to their own journey. There had been many attempts to create a group that families could come together with limited success.

A group of families created a network of parents with the intention to 'pass on their experiences and knowledge to assist other families'. Pass it on Parents was born. They worked with Government Planners to enable them to invite people to share their experiences with other parents, one family at a time. So they asked families if they were willing to share their experiences to help one other family – the response rate was 95% yes, a clear indicator that people want to assist others by offering their expertise. '

What if we believed that everyone wants to 'give' as well as 'receive'? Few people only want to consume.

## **Cont. Promoting reciprocity - We help each other**

### **- Reciprocity builds self esteem**

Being expected to give back is a clear signal that what you have to give, is valuable and worthwhile. This in itself has an impact on how you and others see your worth.

Time banking, an initiative developed by Edgar Cahn in America, supports citizens to offer time to each other and bank credits to claim later down the line, as and when needed. So, I may offer three hours of babysitting in return for three hours of gardening. Time banking is based on the premise that we all have something to give and at times will need support ourselves. There is no one contribution deemed more valuable than others – we all have something to offer. Thriving time banks across the world have people contributing everything from cooking, to legal advice.

### **- Reciprocity challenges the paradigm of ‘you provide, and I consume’**

As the NDIS rolls out people are being supported to be active shoppers or consumers of services and support. This in itself is not bad, – but it denies people the opportunity to co-produce supports and services. Is choosing from a predetermined menu the same as exploring what would make sense to this person uniquely? For too long people connected to Human Services, are seen as the recipients of those services, not necessarily the co-creator. Expecting a partnership can challenge this view.

### **- Reciprocity turns an isolated exchange into a longer-term relationship**

An organisation called Keyring<sup>5</sup> is founded on reciprocity. People who require support live in a neighbourhood often within walking distance of each other and a central person, usually a local citizen, facilitates support amongst the network members or the keyring members. The key difference is all keyring members are invited to join the network based on the expectation that they will receive support but are expected to offer support to fellow keyring members. Its growing success is clear an indicator that there are people who want to give as well as receive and whose relationships are growing in a meaningful and respectful way.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.keyring.org>

## 2. Promoting reciprocity - We help each other

### What could this look like in your context? Exploration Worksheet

Theme	Examples of this already supported in our organisation	What could we do to further develop this area?
Using reciprocity to build self esteem		
Using reciprocity to challenge the paradigm of 'you provide, and I (people) consume'		
Using reciprocity to turn isolated exchanges into longer term relationship		

### 3. Building Social Networks - Building relationships and networks

What if we believed that we all make up community and by us all being part of it – we build a better place for us all?

Support Organizations need to play an active role in building and sustaining communities, networks and support. They need to build and strengthen communities, not work on top of community – but in it and be driven by it.

- **Social Connections increase your wellbeing, safety and life satisfaction**

Research shows<sup>6</sup> that human beings need to be connected to others, as much as a need for food, water and shelter. In fact, some of the recent findings teach us that people's lives literally depend on it. Our health is boosted and extended when we are well connected. Our levels of happiness, satisfaction and sense of purpose is significantly impacted when connected to others.

- **People need to be included not simply invited**

*'Inclusion is a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best.'*

*Miller and Katz*

As organisations explore how people are really included in the leadership, governance and practice of their organisations, a commitment to inclusion is necessary – not tokenistic involvement. Being part of something and working together is more than simply being there – it is about respect, connection and recognising everyone's contribution.

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<sup>6</sup> Happiness Advantage

## Cont. Building Social Networks - Building relationships and networks

It is essential that organisations work to:

- **NOT** make people **more dependent** and **less resilient**
- **NOT** limit people's opportunities to learn and take calculated risks and to build and strengthen their own communities
- **NOT** take people away from their communities and connections

One of the main roles for organisations is to help people get much **better connected**.

We know that the **services can't get people a life**, so we work hard to make sure that we get to **know and use the local communities** and networks.

If we can help people make friends, and relationships then that's **better for everyone**.

*'We encourage **staff to use their own networks** to help people make new connections. One of the things we ask staff when they apply for a job is what their real-life skills are'*

***Beyond Limits***

### 3. Building Social Networks - Building relationships and networks

What could this look like in your context?  
Exploration Worksheet

Theme	Examples of this already supported in our organisation	What could we do to further develop this area?
Social Connections - increasing people's wellbeing, safety and life satisfaction		
Including people in the work of the organisation		
Investing in people's capacity and capability		
Supporting people to spot opportunities to learn and take calculated risks		
Building and strengthening people's own communities		

## 4. Valuing work differently - All kinds of work matters

What if we believed that work is more than those activities that earn us money, but all activities that we need to live a good life?

*'We are operating on a strange definition of work. If it earns us money, it is work. If it doesn't earn us money it isn't work.'* Edgar Cahn

Edgar Cahn helps us see that the notion of 'work' is more than those activities that earn us money. If we redefined work to capture and reward the activities that we need, day to day what might we class as work?

### - **If it matters and we need it – its work**

Thinking of the contributions of everyone within an organisation or network, we can see that their contributions are often way more than those things listed in their job descriptions. However often what people are contributing is so much more valuable.

Trevor is a real critical thinker. Trevor has purchased supports for many years and has a sharp perspective on what makes a difference. Trevor's contribution can often be seen as a critic – a person who complains loudly when supports and services are not right. Trevor's contribution to the organisation has most definitely had an impact – because once we really start to listen, we can see how we need to change what we do. We can see in this example how Trevor's contribution to the development and practice of this organisation is crucial to its long-term success.

### - **If we need it, we need to compensate it**

Money is often the compensation for a person's contribution, but we know, and research helps us understand that for many of us – money is only one part of the compensation or reward. Psychological benefits can be twice as important as money.

What we get from our contributions can have a significant impact on how we feel i.e. I feel good contributing to the board of my local church, I get to contribute my perspective as a long-time local community member and know I am making a difference in my community - they get my expertise. Win, win!

Without denying the importance of money – we do need to explore compensation as more than just money.

## 5. Valuing work differently - All kinds of work matters

### What could this look like in your context? Exploration Worksheet

Theme	Examples of this already supported in our organisation	What could we do to further develop this area?
Identifying people's contribution and valuing it like we do work – its work		
Understanding that people's contribution matters and should be compensated - If we need it, we need to compensate it		

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