

CO-PRODUCTION THEORY OF CHANGE

Our shared approach to co-production

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of the national charities Clinks, Homeless Link, Mind and associate member Collective Voice. MEAM was formed in 2009 to improve policy, services and systems for people facing multiple disadvantage. We currently work with 39 local areas across England which are taking a more coordinated approach to tackling multiple disadvantage. We use the learning from this work to influence policy at the local and national level.

At the MEAM coalition we are committed to co-producing our work and to helping the local areas we support to do the same.

Over the last six months, we have worked alongside a group of people with experience of multiple disadvantage to define our shared approach to this work and to agree a theory of change that can help guide our activities.

What we publish here is a work in progress. We hope that it will promote discussion and debate and that we can learn from this to refine our approach in the future. If you would like to offer input, or be a part of our journey in any way, please contact Helen Gavaghan, Involvement Coordinator - helen.gavaghan@meam.org.uk

Our vision for co-production

As a coalition, MEAM recognises that the solutions to complex problems like multiple disadvantage can only come from the people experiencing those problems, working alongside those with the power to ensure that agreed solutions happen. Our co-produced vision for co-production is that:

- The system supports people experiencing multiple disadvantage to be involved in all decisions that affect them at every stage.

- People understand the different types of power they have in any given situation. Damaging power dynamics are recognised and addressed. By working together power is shared and increased.
- The dynamic between 'professional' and 'service user' changes so that support and solutions occur through trusting relationships.
- By co-production occurring a wider group of people see its value and use this approach to create change.

A reflective approach

Our co-produced theory of change sets out how we plan to make this vision a reality. In designing it, we have kept the following points at the centre of our thinking:

- We recognise that power affects everything and that we need to look at this closely if co-production is to be done meaningfully. This includes exploring how power is acquired, shared, used and to what extent its distribution can be influenced.
- We have sought to stay 'open' and to self-check our assumptions. A systems thinking perspective means that we are less likely to miss blind spots or become complacent. This feels particularly necessary when attempting to design an approach to co-production.
- Getting this right is going to be a process. We are learning as we go along and we are willing to re-think approaches where necessary.
- We are committed to co-producing co-production. We need experts by experience helping us decide how to go about co-production from the outset if we are to get it right and not make inaccurate assumptions about what it will look like.
- We recognise that our own structures and behaviours could be more conducive to working in this way, that we will need to embrace significant change and that this probably will not happen overnight.
- We recognise that we are working on certain assumptions and we don't know for certain that this is the right way forward nor exactly how best to do it. We are, however, willing to try to lead the way in the strength of our efforts to embed this approach wholeheartedly, in all that we do.
- The following theory of change is a basic framework within which to begin. We accept that in reality the process is not a linear one. We are very open to reflection and the re-design of the theory of change over time. Indeed we expect that it may look very different in the future.
- There is an important question as to whether co-production is a solution in itself or a process to move us towards something very different. We intend to build a body of evidence to prove that co-production is a sustainable approach that works, as well as being an ethical necessity. This is therefore a work in progress and one we wish to approach as humbly and transparently as possible.

ENABLERS → MEAM ACTIVITIES → OUTCOMES → VISION

MEAM staff and MEAM Approach areas recognise structural inequality and operate with a 'power-aware' culture.

MEAM continually explores what it means to be inclusive and representative and considers whether co-production is a way towards a solution or a solution in itself.

MEAM strives to practice what it preaches and self-check/peer-check.

All MEAM staff strive equally to involve experts by experience in their work.

Experience and expertise is freely shared amongst all.

MEAM and local areas scope work and explore options with experts from the outset.

The distinction between experts/service users and professionals is less defined and all are 'people' seeking a least oppressive way of participating.

Recruit staff with live experience and ensure that experts sit on and co-create recruitment panels.

Recruit and support a team of peer researchers for the MEAM Approach evaluation.

Involve experts in development of MEAM policy work at a local and national level.

Work with experts to develop a shared understanding of power within the system and check assumptions via systems thinking.

Collaborate with specialist expert agencies particularly those representing marginalised groups.

Work with and learn from specialist agencies exploring approaches relevant to good co-production and participation. Understand what it means to be representative of marginalised groups in co-production settings and strive to achieve this.

Work both internally and with areas to understand what experts want from their involvement.

Create a forum to share challenges and learning on co-production that includes MEAM staff and experts.

Develop creative tools to support co-production that require minimal resource.

Support local areas to embed local experts in their partnerships and in their influencing work.

Ensure that there are expert peer mentors, staff and volunteers in the MEAM coalition and local partnerships.

Work with experts to co-create and regularly refresh a reward policy to thank experts for their time and expertise.

Ensure that experts' bespoke participation is agreed in an individual plan if desired. This may sit with MEAM Approach areas or the coalition.

MEAM coalition supports experts to acquire skills, pursue interests and attain their goals.

Everybody working with MEAM is trusted in ability and empowered regardless of position or circumstance.

Experts have agency to challenge and influence all aspects of the MEAM coalition's work.

A culture of co-production is developed across coalition partners.

MEAM staff feel confident in supporting local areas with co-production.

Partnership means experts participating equally, including MEAM beneficiaries along with staff of all levels.

Local areas coproduce the design and delivery of their work.

Experts are supported to acquire skills, pursue interests and attain their goals through their work with local areas.

Local areas see that co-production leads to a more effective system and better outcomes for people.

Local areas have the knowledge and expertise to make co-production meaningful and feel confident doing it.

Experts are involved relevant to their interests, skills, goals and experiences.

Experts feel there is value both personally and to the system as a result of their involvement.

Experts are not excluded from any areas of work regardless of who they are or their particular circumstances.

Experts are involved throughout whole processes and in final decision making, delivery and evaluation.

VISION

The system supports people experiencing multiple disadvantage to be involved in all decisions that affect them at every stage.

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By co-production occurring a wider group of people see its value and use this approach to create change.

MEAM coalition

MEAM Approach areas

Expert experiences

THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM