

August 2020

Help through Crisis

Remote Co-production

Learning, Support & Evaluation webinar Summary report

About the Help through Crisis programme

Help through Crisis is a £33 million National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It supports 69 partnerships across England which help people who are experiencing or at risk of hardship crisis to overcome the difficulties they are facing to plan for their futures. The partnerships receiving National Lottery funding through the HtC programme bring together small voluntary groups and established charities to work together locally. Working together, they offer people advice, advocacy and support which matches their personal circumstances. The aim is to look at the issues people face, and the underlying causes, from their basic needs, to their physical and mental health, to skills and employment. People are supported to draw on their personal experiences to build on their skills and strengths, so they are ready to seize the opportunities and challenges ahead.

About the Learning, Support & Evaluation webinars

In April 2020, the Learning, Support and Evaluation (LSE) team interviewed HtC partnerships to understand how can help you during the Covid-19 crisis. These conversations highlighted several specific areas you would like further support with as you adapt to a very different context. Partnerships said that *remote co-production* during the pandemic was an important issue, and this was the focus for our second webinar.

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1. Purpose of the Remote Co-production webinar



HtC remote co-production webinars took place on 15 and 16 July 2020 and involved 18 HtC partnerships. Each session lasted an hour, and started with a 30 minute presentation by Andy Williams from the LSE team. He shared learning from three case study organisations: Revolving Doors (where Andy is Head of Involvement) and Rossendale CAB and Oxford CAB (HtC partnerships Andy has been working with during lockdown). The webinar had four aims, namely to:

- Share knowledge and learning about engaging with beneficiary groups remotely during the pandemic
- Apply learning about remote co-production to a HtC context, including referencing recent Covid-19 factsheets:
 - [Engaging with people online](#)
 - [Digital inclusion](#)
- Give partnerships an opportunity to reflect on successes and challenges during the pandemic – including how they might build co-production in future
- Capture learning for wider dissemination

The presentation was followed by a facilitated discussion giving partnerships an opportunity to reflect on successes and challenges during the pandemic. This summary highlights key themes, ideas and solutions for supporting remote co-production that projects raised during the two discussions.

2. Key themes

2.1 Digital inclusion

'It's challenging isn't it? We don't have laptops to give everyone, we can't hand out free data.'

Lead partner staff

Partnerships are using a variety of tools to keep beneficiaries involved in shaping service planning and delivery, including phone calls, text messages or WhatsApp, and video conferencing platforms such as Zoom. They describe a mixed picture of both successes and challenges when it comes to co-production using digital tools. On the one hand, some services users are unable to engage apart from through telephone calls, due to lack of access to technology or money to pay for internet. Others are incredibly adept at making use of their mobile phones to access services and make contact with others. Still others have internet and access to a laptop or tablet but are either not confident in using video conferencing tools, or have a mental health issue which makes them anxious about having conversations about their lived experience online. A few simply do not trust technology.

2.2 Capacity

'We have had to be kind to ourselves. We are doing the best that we can, that doesn't necessarily mean delivering on co-production, a lot of that has had to go on hold.'

Lead partner staff

Some workshop participants say that co-production has taken a back seat during lockdown as partnerships have prioritised delivering frontline support. This has meant moving staff away from co-production activities. Instead, staff are often 'busier than ever' delivering support to both existing and new clients.

Client needs have also changed during the pandemic, which affects the time staff can dedicate to co-producing with beneficiaries. Some partnerships think their existing clients are in a relatively stable place, in that they know what there is to support them and how to access it. Webinar participants say that this group of clients are feeling, 'settled and safe, almost more than they were before lockdown.' However,

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there are a new set of clients who are not ready or able at this point to engage with co-production activities, including those who were on zero-hour contracts and are accessing Universal Credit for the first time, or have been furloughed and with a loss of 20% of their income and need debt or legal advice, or to gain access to food and other practical support.

Projects say that it is too early to engage these new clients in co-production activities. Added to this, partnerships are delivering support to a wider range of people who need more support. As such, some participants say they have not tried to develop remote co-production as they would have liked. As one put it,

'We haven't had the capacity to look at getting people onto the same online platform. We've been really looking at food in the cupboard, getting the gas and electric on and keeping a roof over the clients' heads.'

Lead partner staff

2.3 Shifting from face-to-face to remote co-production

'Just because it's difficult doesn't mean we shouldn't try.'

Lead partner staff

Webinar participants describe co-production being a complex challenge during Covid-19, with social distancing and other Covid-secure measures needing to be in place. The co-production activities planned for 2020 were designed to be delivered face-to-face. Some partnerships have clients who were going to be involved with co-production who are now either having to shield themselves or live with someone else that they do not want to put at risk. Delivering support from a community building is no longer viable either.

Projects describe feeling more settled when it comes to their new ways of delivering support, whether this is happening online or socially distanced. They now feel more confident and comfortable in re-engaging with co-production activities, including finding new ways to include lived experience.

Projects also speak of two specific opportunities within the context of remote co-production:

1. They are noticing clients being more willing to open up about their situation and their lived experience when their case worker is on the phone or speaking to them via a video link. They attribute this to the lack of face-to-face meetings, which can be freeing for some beneficiaries; and to the fact that the client is speaking to them from their own home, a comfortable setting for them to share their thoughts and experiences.
2. Access to support services and potential partners is more readily available via telephone and online than in the physical setting, and appointments are being set up more quickly. They speak of not having to join waiting lists to access accommodation services for example, and that other

voluntary sector projects in the community are keen to share experiences of working remotely, including learning from lived experience.

3. Remote co-production solutions and ideas

In sharing their approaches to co-production in a time of remote working and social distancing, webinar participants emphasise the importance of being adaptable to allow for the involvement of people in different situations including those with no access to technology.

3.1 Tailored approaches

HtC projects stress that tailored approaches are needed to ensure that the voices of lived experience can be involved meaningfully in co-production, including forward planning and shaping the support HtC projects offer within their communities.

Tailored solutions include using the right technology to meet the needs of those involved including socially distanced face-to-face interactions, phone check-ins, WhatsApp group discussions, or online meetings using Zoom or Teams. Being inclusive is a primary motivator for these activities, trying to ensure that people who want to share their lived experience to inform planning and service development are not excluded because of a lack of digital skills or equipment.

Specific solutions being scoped and delivered to support remote co-production by webinar participants include:

- Making grant applications to purchase tablets and training support for service users – which has led to one project offering online courses to the group of 20 people who were given a tablet and training on how to use it in their native language.
- Linking with a local training provider to deliver basic digital skills courses to a co-production group and/ or to individuals to support their involvement in remote co-production.
- Including the beneficiary voice in discussions with an internet provider working with the partnership to provide lower cost broadband and digital tools for those on the lowest incomes.
- Developing partnerships with new groups and projects locally to provide more resources to access those with lived experience and capacity to support their work.

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- Setting up a remote co-production group to specifically inform the development of legacy projects which are starting as HtC projects come to an end.
- Holding socially distanced co-production meetings face-to-face, for example in parks and car-parks, to continue to work with those who are not able to access digital technologies.

3.2 Development of volunteer skills

Projects describe the work they are doing with beneficiaries to co-produce and deliver approaches to volunteering. They speak of learning cascading from each level of lived experience volunteer to another. For some projects, lockdown provided an opportunity to involve people who would not previously have been able to develop their skills as a peer mentor, or to be part of a co-production group. One describes a mother with a new-born baby getting involved as a crisis navigator, which she can now do via Zoom or using phone calls. This would not have been possible if she needed to come to an office or physically attend meetings. Other projects agree that this has provided new opportunities for volunteer involvement and sharing of lived experience to inform planning and shape support activities. For example, a volunteer with multiple health conditions is engaging with co-production activities to a greater extent than ever before in lockdown as she can do so from her own home, even when she is having to take bed rest.

3.3 Partnerships

'None of us included pandemics in our co-production planning.'

/Lead partner staff

Although some projects describe co-production being on-hold and challenges in enabling those with lived experience to inform projects currently, they also stress how much they value partnerships as a route to supporting current and future co-production strategies in this unexpected and unplanned for situation. This includes:

- Reaching out to new groups who are keen to work with their beneficiaries in planning for projects and services in the community.
- Creating partnerships to understand from a variety of sources how client groups are faring, including running surveys in the community to understand what support is needed in the current crisis.

Partnerships do not describe remote co-production as straightforward, but in each of the webinars they express a desire to work closely with those they support to ensure their lived experience is central to forward planning and service design.

For more information

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