



Co-Production Policy

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Introduction

Resources for Autism has a rich history of engaging and consulting with people who draw upon its services.

The next step up the ladder to better experiences and better services is Co-production.

What is co-production?

The word **Co** means together, and the word **Produce** means make.

Co-production happens when people who deliver and people who use services come together in equal partnerships to make better services.

It is a new way of working that prioritises involving and including everyone, sharing power and a new focus on people's strengths. It means equal partnerships which engage people who use Resources for Autism services at the earliest stages of service design, development and evaluation.

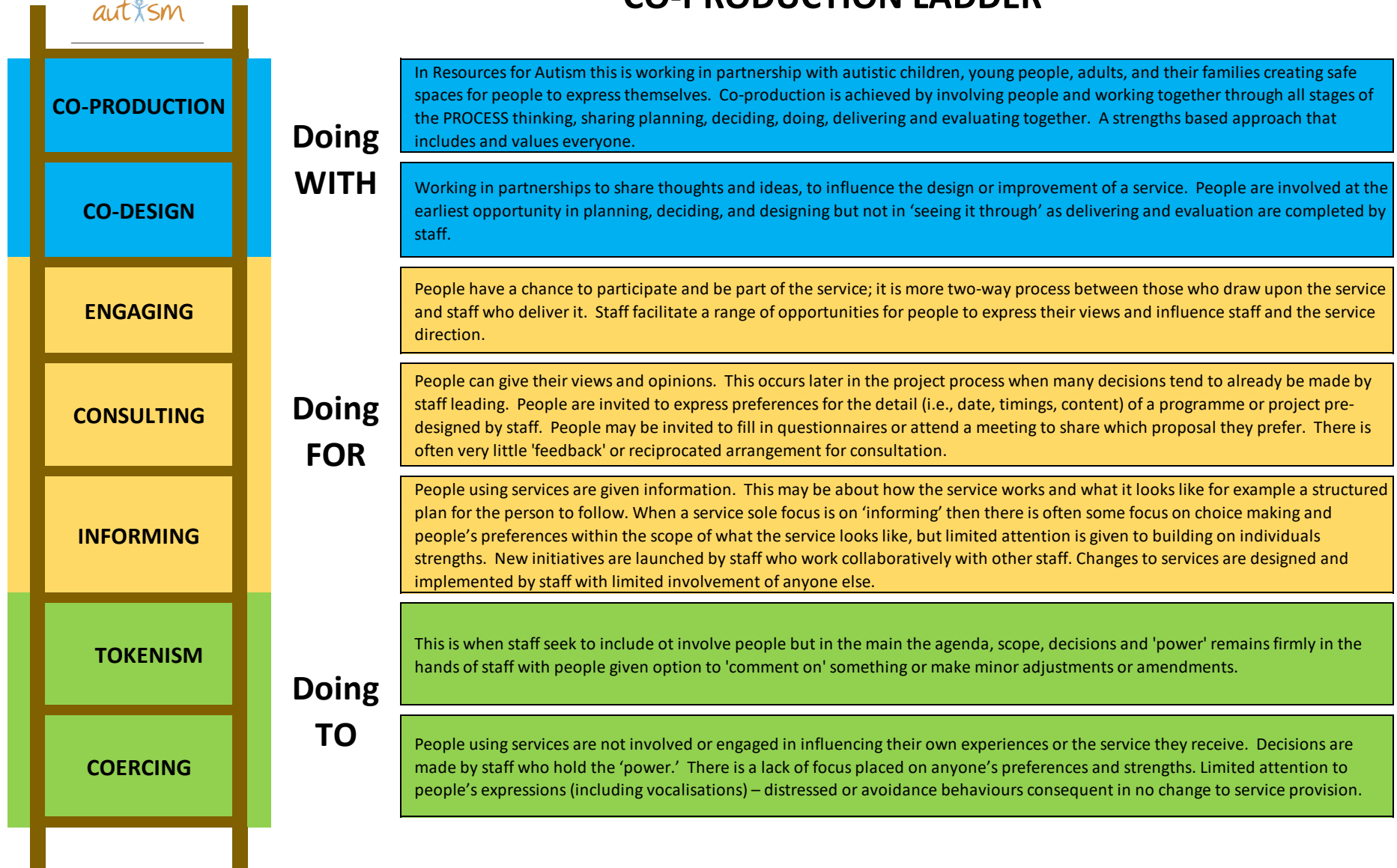
It means 'doing with' not 'doing for or to' and should become part of daily practice.

Co-production recognises that both service recipients and service providers have a vital contribution to make in improving services.

An essential component is the recognition that people who receive a service are best placed to design and improve it.

The ladder of co-production supports greater understanding of the various stages of access and inclusion before full co-production is achieved.

CO-PRODUCTION LADDER



Experts by experience

Experts by experience are people with lived experience of autism. This means autistic children and autistic adults, parents/carers of autistic people or members of families that include autistic people.

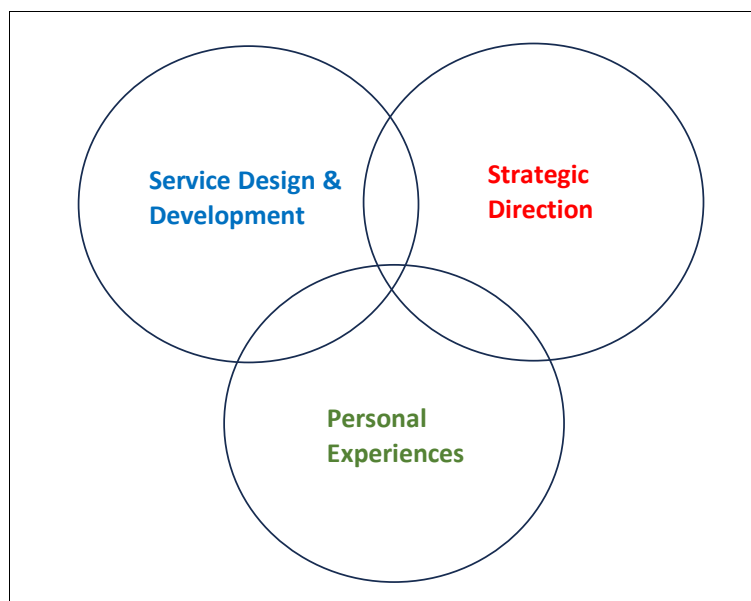
Resources for Autism policy is to work collaboratively with people with lived experience of autism.

Our aim is to work in partnerships to raise awareness and increase understanding of autism, develop effective, practical services and support that delivers the best outcomes for people with lived experience of autism.

Levels of Co-Production

Co-production means engaging, involving, consulting and working collaboratively with people who draw upon services at individual, service and strategic level from the start to the end of any project that affects them.

Resources for Autism believes that people with 'lived experience of autism' are best placed to say (or express) what support and services will make a positive difference to their lives.



Different Levels of Co-Production

Personal level

This means improving experiences by working in partnerships with the individual autistic person (and when relevant their support network). Finding ways to engage, involve and consult with the person. Actively listening to all expressions of needs, wishes and preferences.

Improving the persons own experience by recognising their strengths and building skills and confidence to make choices. Facilitating a sharing of ideas and thoughts and working it out together. Co-production at a personal level means the person is supported to develop their own 'sense of agency' and control over decisions that directly affect them.

Service level

This means people coming together to share ideas and thoughts and find shared solutions. This approach recognising the strengths, skills and assets of people with lived experience of autism (individually and as a group) to work together with Resources for Autism from the start to the end of any project or change process that affects them.

An assets-based approach enhances people's health and wellbeing and promotes resilience and independence.

Resources for Autism Co-Production policy is to recognise and nurture strengths maximising opportunities for autistic people to rightfully be active, equal partners.

Strategic level

Co-production at a strategic level within Resources for Autism means mobilising the skills and capacity of our staff and people with lived experience of autism to co-design, co-deliver and co-evaluate service improvements with wide ranging benefits for everyone. Pooling resources and people's expertise to deliver more effective and sustainable outcomes and an improved experience for all.

Co-production at this level involves a process of reaching out, recruiting, thinking, sharing, decision-making, planning, doing, evaluating and formulating future plans.

This means equal working relationship between people using the service and people responsible for delivering it all coming together at the **beginning** of a project ensuring **early** involvement and genuine partnerships to identify and shape the changes.

Co-Production Principles

The principles of equality, diversity, accessibility and reciprocity are critical values for Resources for Autism policy of putting co-production into practice.

Equality

Traditionally the relationship between service users and providers is not an equal one. Equality does not exist when there is no sharing of power, information, roles and responsibilities or recognition of expertise.

Resources for Autism co-production policy is to recognise people's strengths, nurture and build on people's capabilities, actively listen and to invest in participants developing two-way reciprocal relationships.

Our policy is to 'blur' the boundaries between 'provider' and 'user' to facilitate equal partnerships, sharing power and 'working' together to make positive changes.

Getting to know each other and building a sense of togetherness that steps outside of traditional hierarchical structures to a new culture of 'doing with.'

This means our staff and people using our services will feel equally valued and supported.

Diversity

Co-production cannot happen unless it is an inclusive approach with all participants equally valued. Resources for Autism can and will do more to improve inclusion, equality and diversity.

Intersectionality is the ways in which individuals are often subject to multiple forms of discrimination based on different aspects of their identity. Classifications of identity include race, socioeconomic status, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and immigration status

Developing intersectionality awareness and practices are critical to successful co-production. This means engaging in conversations about discrimination, privilege and oppression, anti-racism training for all, seeing differences as assets, giving autistic people visibility so they don't have to fight to be seen and safe conversations with brave debate to effect change.

Co-production is about including everyone and done well it can be very empowering for those who have been ignored, stigmatized or discriminated against.

Accessibility

Co-production cannot happen unless everyone has equal access. Resources for Autism policy is to create accessible, safe spaces for everyone to join in.

This means facilitating opportunities not making demands or causing pressure or 'stress' for any participant. This means using accessible information and support to predict and prepare for new opportunities. Opportunities made accessible using sensory, communication and interpersonal 'tools' founded on respect, rapport and positive relationships.

Our policy is to use accessible language (including visuals) and to 'actively listen' and act upon all the ways people communicate and express themselves, including non-speaking participants.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is defined as ensuring that people receive something back for putting something in. The concept is closely linked to 'mutuality' within an organisation meaning shared goals, influence, responsibilities and receiving mutual respect and rewards.

Personal level is reciprocated with improved person-centred experiences that promotes individual well-being, engagement and positive person-centred outcomes.

Service level it is reciprocated with increased opportunities to connect, mutually support, engage, develop skills and confidence and participate with the power to influence and jointly decide on the direction of the service that personally impacts.

Co-Production at this level may also be reciprocated with a financial investment for specific events in consultation with Co-Production Lead.

Strategic Level is reciprocated with recognition of the expertise and vital contribution autistic people and people with lived experience of autism can make to improving quality of experiences for everyone connected with RfA.

This may also be reciprocated with a financial payment to individuals when funds permit in consultation with Co-Production Lead.

This is as an acknowledgement of the time invested in the Co-production process and in recognition of people's strengths and expertise.

Payments

RfA can offer a financial payment of between £15 - £25 per hour either paid via BACS (requiring bank details) or via a voucher where funds permit. Out of pocket expenses may also be covered with prior arrangement and agreement with Co-Production Lead.

RfA has a duty to notify any person in receipt of a payment in relation to Co-Production of their personal responsibility for ensuring the correct deductions and notifications i.e., to HMRC or to Department Works and Pensions.

The following information must accompany any Co-Production financial arrangement:

RfA are required to make you aware that if you accept any form of payment for an involvement activity, you are personally responsible for ensuring the correct deductions of tax and National Insurance and information declared with HMRC."

Any payments may be taken as earnings and it is your responsibility to inform HMRC. The Personal Allowance is £12,570 before you start paying tax and NI.

High street or gift vouchers may be treated as earnings and viewed by the benefits authorities in the same way as other forms of payment. These payments need to be declared in the same way as cash, cheques or bank transfers.

Specific information on different benefits and payments for involvement and tax may be accessed here:

www.scoie.org.uk/co-production/supporting/paying-people-who-receive-benefits

[Self Assessment tax returns: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/self-assessment-tax-returns-overview)

Barriers to Co-Production

Not every piece of work, project or initiative should be co-produced.

Not everyone wishes to be involved or included in formal co-production projects.

It is frequently described as “messy” this means everything can take longer to do, it can be difficult to deliver to deadlines no one person has the ‘answer’ and although there are reams of lines written about co-production there is often uncertainty as to ‘how’ to operationalise it.

People are often unsure about the difference between consultation and co-production.

Staff may be keen to forge ahead with a task, new initiative or change process. They may decide to rely solely on one’s own or colleagues’ skills believing this to be the most effective way to get things done.

Some may fear change or wish to avoid potential for unrealistic or conflicting expectations among participants with varying needs, interests and perspectives

Some may question why change when current practices are receiving such high ratings in evaluation feedback surveys.

Staff may feel ‘pressure’ to deliver outputs (get things done) and may not feel fully supported to ‘go with’ the process of co-producing.

Others may resist change viewing co-production as something that happens elsewhere in the organisation or may worry it will compromise the consistency and quality of services.

Many barriers to co-production exist and yet there is a strong evidence base that co-production approaches can bring a range of benefits and improvements for all concerned.

Benefits of co-production

Although barriers are widely recognised co-production is increasingly seen as best practice within service delivery.

Co-production recognises, nurtures and values people's strengths and assets.

It respectfully acknowledges the expertise and rightful role people who draw upon services should have in what the services they receive look and feel like.

Co-production can improve self-esteem and help develop new peer-relationships. It enables people to develop new confidences, actively participating in democratic processes that shift the power balance to transform people's experiences of services.

It can help people to achieve positive wellbeing (NHS 5 steps) connecting, being active, learning new skills, engaging and giving to others.

It can improve efficiency and relevance of organisations set up to 'provide' for others.

Co-production can deliver more effective and sustainable outcomes that people value.

The Care Act 2014 includes the concept of co-production in statutory guidance requiring the use of these principles to develop preventative, strength-based services that make the best use of resources.

The Neurodiverse movement, Autism self-advocacy, Autism activists, Local Authorities, Commissioners and Politician recognise the benefits and are spearheading change away from traditional models of care provision.

Future funding requires that applicants demonstrate and evidence best practice in co-producing services.

Resources for Autism recognises the benefits, is fully invested and pledges to have co-production in evidence and integral to the charity's day to day practices.

Co-production in practice

This section is about 'How to put a co-production policy into practice' in Resources for Autism.

There is no single universal model of co-production and the way it is done will need to vary in each situation depending on the focus area, context and the person or people involved.

This means that there is no 'one way' to co-produce better experiences or better services.

A 'formal' meeting style, a 'virtual forum', social event, walk, creative arts project, discussion 'in pictures' cuppa and a chat or adapting or changing an activity in response to a person's changing vocalisations or body language are all positive examples of 'how to' co-produce.

Culture [Environment]

Co-production starts with a culture that enables everyone to be involved.

To Resources for Autism this means starting with 'safe spaces' where everyone can feel 'safe' to be present, safe to express, feel valued and celebrated and experience a sense of belonging and achievement.

There is no single 'designed' space that 'fits' everyone or every co-production scenario. Resources for Autism delivers practical services for autistic children, autistic adults and for families and carers.

Safe spaces exist now, our policy is to continue to adapt and tailor these with the person or people in each co-production scenario.

Current examples include:

- Choice to use webcam or turn it off.
- Choice to talk or if prefer use chat
- Agreed agenda and preparatory information in advance
- A point of contact person available to answer any questions or provide additional information in advance of meeting.
- Option to meet 1:1 via zoom or in person or via telephone call in support of preparation for new 'experience' [i.e., joining a forum for first time]
- Colour coded communication systems to express communication preferences.
- Zoning meeting places with 'quiet' or 'sensory' break out spaces
- Access to room layout plans to reduce uncertainty as to what to expect.
- A point of contact person to receive any ideas or thoughts after a get together (to aid time to process and reflect).
- Accessible information [Leaflet / Frequently Asked Questions] to reduce uncertainty.
- Accessible directions to venue

- Accessible resources [e.g., word searches, colouring, sand art, puzzles, painted stones, dot-to-dot, sudoku] to use as individual prefers.
- Accessible sensory resources [e.g., weighted pockets, rummage and sorting boxes, Rubik cubes, poppit bubbles, pop tubes, decompression caterpillars] to use as individual prefers.
- Warm welcome to bring anything individual chooses or finds comforting [headphones, ear defenders, sensory resources, iPad].
- Visual aids i.e., photos, maps, symbols, schedules and planners, choice boards, power point presentations.

Environmental factors also include sounds, smells, lighting, temperature, crowding and technology.

To make Co-production part of Resources for Autism day-to-day practices our policy is to work in partnerships with people who use our services continuing to adapt and improve environmental factors that enable individuals and groups to feel 'safe' and included.

Culture [People]

Co-production is about relationships and the process of working together. Resources for Autism believes so much can be achieved if we get this right rather than focus or rush to demonstrate an outcome. True inclusion and equality happen when the way we work together is valued and celebrated every bit as much as what we make.

Resources for Autism policy recognises the success of co-production hinges on relationships, valuing each other and people's enjoyment and benefit of coming together.

This means nurturing everyone's strengths, sharing power and making decisions together that shape present experiences and services and the future direction of the charity.

Resources for Autism Co-Production policy is that all staff think and practice co-production in their day-to-day working lives.

Top Tips for Resources for Autism staff:

1. Before forging ahead with change or new dynamic initiative think co-production!
2. Ask are you 'doing to' are you 'doing without' or are you 'doing with?'
3. Remember Co-production starts with an idea or a thought not a solution.
4. This may be an idea to improve 'snack time' or improve communication resources or how to support someone to join a group.
5. It may be your 'idea' or come about by a communication with another person.
6. Whatever the initial idea – think co-production
7. If you do most of the work and make most of the decisions, then invite people to engage it sounds like consultation not co-production.
8. Co-production is ensuring early involvement and genuine partnerships to identify and shape change.
9. Co-production partnerships start with an idea or a thought –
10. Think about how you may 'reach out' to people with lived experience of autism
11. Who else may you include and involve?
12. Think about how you can create a 'safe space' to come together.
13. This may be as part of an existing group, or it may be as a short series of sessions that you set up separately.
14. It can happen in a range of informal, social, and creative ways with people to enjoy sharing and communicating together.
15. Ensure people have the information they need to support their involvement.
16. Use Resources for Autism 'tools' to facilitate people engaging.
17. This includes using visual aids in a way that works for the individual or group.
18. Facilitate 'sharing thoughts and ideas' together.
19. Don't worry if you are not sure how things will turn out.
20. Don't worry if you have not got all the answers or solutions.
21. Focus on creating a safe experience where people can enjoy coming together.

22. Actively listen to all communications including people who are non-speaking
23. Make it easy for people to contribute.
24. Value all perspectives and respect everyone's inputs.
25. Give yourself and everyone time to [plan together](#)
26. Co-production is not about generating stress.
27. It is not about creating a business style formal meeting.
28. It is not about placing people under pressure.
29. Remember co-production can be fun and rewarding.
30. Now its time to work together on [doing](#) the change
31. Think about roles and responsibilities
32. Remember this is an opportunity to nurture and build on strengths.
33. The focus is what everyone can do, not what people can't.
34. No one has all the answers to co-production.
35. Partnerships are built on positive relationships
36. This is about sharing your power to make decisions to effect change.
37. Keep focused on 'doing with' not 'doing for'
38. Recognise and reward people as you work together.
39. Capture and share examples of your co-production work.
40. Good communicate across Resources for Autism is important.
41. It helps to ensure co-production translates into organisational change.
42. Find ways to improve and continuously learn together.
43. Remember to Invest in participants
44. Nurture confidence and strengths to co-design and deliver improvements
45. Think about opportunities in your day-to-day work to involve others

46. Maximise opportunities for everyone to learn, practice or develop new skills
47. Maximise opportunities to develop new confidences – all with your support.
48. Celebrate and enjoy the process of working together
49. Celebrate achievements

Evaluation

Evaluation is an essential part of co-production and done well, it can help solve problems, inform decision making and develop a deeper understanding of how to best improve experiences and services.

Everyone involved in the process of creating a co-produced experience or service should be involved in its review and evaluation. This helps determine what works well and what could be improved

Evaluation tools come in many shapes and sizes all should be accessible, relevant to and led by the concerns and priorities of everyone involved.

Co-produced evaluations can be a useful, inclusive process of reflection, learning and developing.

These helps question assumptions about what is working and what needs to improve so together we can ensure that everything is going as planned, learn from any challenges and celebrate any achievements.

Co-production Pledge

“Nothing about us, without us.”

Resources for Autism pledge is

- to have the voices and non-speaking communications of autistic people and their families at the heart of all its activities.
- ensure co-production is part of everyday practice in our services.
- making better experiences working in equal partnerships with the autistic experts by experience and those with lived experience who draw upon our services.

- continue to invest in co-production with co-production leads [autistic adult and person with lived experience of autism] facilitating our continued organisational growth.
- Continue our work embedding co-production training programmes, systems and structures and developing our co-production projects.
- keep stepping up the co-production ladder, learning and improving together on our co-production journey.

Useful Links:

[Co-Production Framework and Charter Published - Local Offer Birmingham](#)

[NHS England » Co-production and quality improvement – a resource guide](#)

[Co-production: what it is and how to do it | SCIE](#)

[A Co-production Model - Coalition for Personalised Care](#)

[Co-production - Social Work England](#)

[Co-production: The benefits for people and organisations | The National Lottery Community Fund \(tnlcommunityfund.org.uk\)](#)

[Co-production | Involve](#)

[A guide to Coproduction - NDTi](#)

[NHS England » Co-production](#)

[Downloads and publications for Five ways to wellbeing | DPT](#)