



**CONNECT  
HACKNEY**  
ageing better



# Co-production with older people

## Connect Hackney Key Messages

**Where has this learning come from?** The recommendations below come from older people and staff from the Connect Hackney<sup>1</sup> programme which works with socially isolated older people in Hackney. Our learning is drawn from the experiences of older people involved in the co-production of the programme, including formal evidence gathered through the evaluation of Connect Hackney by the University of East London.

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1. Connect Hackney is one of 14 programmes in England funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. In operation since 2015, Connect Hackney aims to reduce social isolation, improve the wellbeing of older Hackney residents and to share their learning about what works.

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**How does Connect Hackney approach co-production?** The programme defines co-production as enabling the participation of older people throughout the programme including design, delivery, setting priorities, financial oversight, management and evaluation. The programme understands co-production to be a relational approach, the ambition of which is to operate as a meaningful collaboration between professionals and older people. In pursuit of this goal the programme produced a survey completed by over 800 older people, has run focus groups with over 300 older people and established an Older People's Committee whose members are involved in both strategic and operational work including commissioning, recruitment and setting priorities.

**1. Recognise that co-production often involves training both staff and service users in developing new skills and ways of working**

- Explore different ways of running meetings and making decisions that enable meaningful participation of older people who may not thrive in formal settings such as running workshops rather than holding committee-style meetings
- Create groundrules together e.g. limiting the use of jargon, committing to the accessibility of presentations and papers
- Encourage professionals to learn to engage with different modes of expression such as different cultural norms, pace of talking, the use of idioms etc, and hear the key messages being communicated
- Co-production can have an element of service delivery which should be planned for and adequately resourced e.g. outreach, managing group dynamics, emotional support
- Staff without frontline experience of working with older people may need additional support

to engage with service users and understand this new element of their work

**2. Think about what kind of people need to be involved, where to find them and what their barriers to participation might be e.g. language, literacy, transport**

- Invest in finding ways to involve marginalised communities usually excluded from policy influencing and similar work
- Audit who is involved and keep reaching out to find ways to engage those who are missing, including setting up bespoke mechanisms
- Identify people's skills and interests through conversations, surveys and registration forms
- Recognise why people want to be involved in co-production and build on their motivations, skills and interests

**3. Running co-production activities**

- Offer different kinds of opportunities for people to get involved (commissioning,

project/service design, delivery, evaluation) and different formats – discussions, interviews, surveys, workshops etc

- Allow people to voice frustrations and complaints but work towards solutions
- Be honest about the context you are working in and the limits of what you think can be achieved – but be open to discussing these limits
- Make it fun and accessible – be welcoming, provide refreshments, regularly collect feedback on what's not working so well
- Recognise people's contributions and communicate the impact of their involvement; where their ideas were not acted on, explain why
- Provide support to both professionals/ specialists and older people so that they can meaningfully communicate with each other – limit jargon and create an atmosphere where people aren't embarrassed to admit they aren't clear about what's being said or decided
- Involve older people in the design of the co-production process and work to make it accessible and inclusive
- Hold meetings and events that support people to speak honestly and clearly and encourage people to ask questions
- When staff introduce themselves they often give their job title, but older people may not

have job titles so this can create inequality – find other ways of doing introductions

- Take time to think about the best ways of drawing out people's skills and ideas – re-designing processes that traditionally require a lot of reading and writing (e.g. evaluation or commissioning) so they are delivered more through discussion, interviews, voting or workshops can enable people to contribute more fully

#### **4. Keep focused on the benefits of co-production**

- Co-production can be an opportunity for staff and older people to increase their skills and understanding in a range of areas
- Working closely with a range of older people provides new and varied perspectives and undermines unconscious assumptions about a 'typical' older person
- Issues which staff may only have understood abstractly through desk research can be brought to life and/or seen differently through co-production e.g. problems with transport, the barriers faced by carers
- Co-production can be resource-intensive and its benefits can be difficult to prove through traditional evaluation methods. Plan to measure its impact in the widest sense including how it has increased the skills and knowledge of staff and service users