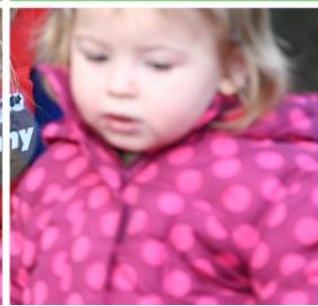
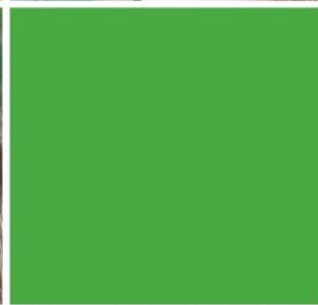
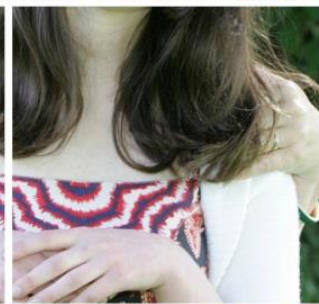


*Making it Work Learning and
Evaluation Briefing 2*

Making the Case for Co-production

July 2015



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Making the case for co-production

This Briefing

This Briefing contains evidence and learning from five Making it Work (MIW) partnerships. It is intended to provide MIW partnerships, and funders and policy makers with useful examples of practice from the programme and to support the sharing of best practice across organisations working with lone parents and supporting vulnerable groups into employment.

Making It Work

MIW is a Big Lottery Fund (BIG) in Scotland programme designed to support lone parents living in complex circumstances. It is being delivered from 2013 to 2017 in five local authority areas where there are high concentrations of lone parent families: Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire.

MIW is supporting lone parents who are living in complex circumstances and who are furthest from the labour market or need additional assistance to access or maintain work. Many of these lone parents are not in contact with mainstream support services, or have infrequent or minimal contact via statutory services.

The Evaluation of MIW, being conducted by Sheffield Hallam and Strathclyde Universities, has highlighted the innovation and ethos of empowerment that is key to the five partnerships' way of working. However, if the MIW approach is to prove sustainable – and if MIW partners wish to influence broader Scottish policy on employability – then it is important to articulate the ideas behind this good practice. To this end, there appear to be clear connections between the ethos of MIW and the concept of '**co-production**', which has emerged as increasingly prominent in debates on the future of public services in Scotland.

Why we need co-production on employability

Public services have come under pressure from resource constraints, increasing demands from citizens, and a consensus around the

value of a 'personalised' approach. It is these pressures that led the Christie Commission to conclude in 2011 that "a radical change in the design and delivery of public services" is required. One emerging response to calls for change has focused on the need for 'co-production' as a model of public services.

"Co-production is the process of active dialogue and engagement between people who use services and those who provide them. It is a process which puts service users on the same level as the service provider. It aims to draw on the knowledge and resources of both to develop solutions and improve interaction between citizens and those who serve them."

Sir Harry Burns, former Chief Medical Officer for Scotland in 'Co-production of Health and Wellbeing in Scotland', 2013

Advocates of co-production argue that effective and efficient services cannot be imposed from the top-down. Rather, the best public services empower users to shape the help that they receive, improving personalisation. Co-production is also an '**assets-based approach**' – individuals and communities are not seen as passive recipients of services, but as collaborators who contribute their own capabilities; community and peer networks provide mutual support; and the third sector adds value to public services.

Drivers of co-production

- Improving public service quality by bringing in the expertise of customers and their networks
- Providing more differentiated services and more choice
- Making public services more responsive to users
- Reducing costs and pooling resources

Tony Boverid and Elke Löffler in 'Co-production of Health and Wellbeing in Scotland', 2013

The practicalities of co-production can play out in a number of ways to improve services for individuals and communities. Co-production might involve processes of co-planning and resource sharing in the delivery of services, drawing on the

resources of different organisations, sectors and stakeholders (including service users). Co-production might also mean empowering individuals to shape the services that they receive and supporting them to develop peer support networks.

Research suggests that co-production can have a number of benefits for users and service providers: the buy-in and commitment of users (reflecting their sense of choice and involvement) means that they are more likely to see the services offered as an opportunity, rather than an obligation; as a result, their assets and enthusiasm add value to the efforts of service providers; services are better tailored due to the voice of users in shaping their content; and a broader ethos of collaboration means that funders, service providers and users are empowered to innovate together.

This Briefing now reports some experiences of these forms of co-production within MIW.

Co-managing and co-delivering employability services

Many mainstream UK Government-funded employability services have often relied upon contracting-out and competition between providers as a means of incentivising service providers. The approach encouraged by BIG Lottery Fund in Scotland has been quite different. In all five areas, MIW partners spoke of a collaborative process of partnership-building at the outset of the MIW programme. This has resulted in the co-planning of services so that the expertise and assets of different partners make a contribution.

For example, the Glasgow MIW team described how early 'spotlight' sessions had helped partner organisations understand each other's roles, expertise and added value. Finding the time for such sessions was important to an emergent process of co-planning services (and the roles of partners in delivering those services).

In all five MIW areas, the collaborative partnership-development process had important benefits in the development of multi-agency approaches that can offer a genuine choice of services for users. No one partner organisation made claims to have all

the required expertise or sought to monopolise the resources available. So, across the five partnership areas, there is a genuine mix of expertise that takes in, for example, money advice services delivered by Citizens Advice staff; intensive support delivered by third sector organisations specialising in supporting lone parents; and a range of learning, employability and wellbeing-focused service providers.



The culture of collaboration encouraged by BIG and embraced by partners has also helped to facilitate consensus on the aims of MIW which has ensured the effective targeting of services. Specifically, there is a clear consensus that MIW resources should initially be targeted at lone parents some distance from the labour market (at 'Stages 1 and 2 of the Scottish Government Employability Pipeline'). An MIW Edinburgh Team Member expressed a sense of clarity of purpose that we heard in all areas.

"We are still targeting people at stage one and two... We have got a lot of really difficult situations just now where there are social workers involved... We are trying to attract people who are vulnerable, need support and who don't have anyone else."

This has ensured that MIW resources add value, complement rather than duplicate existing provision, and deliver progression for some of the most vulnerable people in the labour market.

Empowering service users to co-produce

An even more crucial element of co-production promoted under MIW involves the empowerment of service users to shape their own services and employability

journeys. As noted above, this is the essence of co-production – where there is engagement between service users and providers in a way that ‘puts service users on the same level as the service provider’.

The MIW evaluation has consistently found benefits for service users in the way that the programme has made user co-production real. Service users have told us about how they have felt empowered by the programme and the sense of choice and control that defined their MIW journey. One South Lanarkshire service user summed this up.

“She [MIW key worker] is not saying ‘you have to go to college or I’m not helping you’. It’s not like that. It’s never ever been like that. It’s always: ‘Would you like to do this, this or this? You choose’. That’s how it should be. It’s for the person, it’s their life. If they’re making a choice for you you’re going to be less likely to stick at it.”

An Edinburgh service user described the benefits of engaging with her key worker, while also distinguishing the MIW model from her experience of Jobcentre services.

“The Jobcentre is like, ‘Get a job, get a job’, and you’re constantly pressured. I made up my mind to go and see Laura [MIW development worker]... that made all the difference... you don’t feel pressured, which is really good. Every time I see Laura it’s something new, and it’s positive. It’s never, I don’t know, back at the Jobcentre or something. It’s working towards a better future.”

A Glasgow service user similarly described MIW as:

“Very different from the Jobcentre... they are not there to boss you around. It’s in your own time. It’s at your own pace...”

These positive findings are important not merely because of the satisfaction and empowerment reported by service users (although it might be argued that there are lessons for future employability services around the importance of treating users with dignity and respect). But there are also practical benefits for the effectiveness of services – co-production is likely to result in

employability journeys that are better tailored to service user needs (because users have contributed to the design of services); it encourages users to bring their insights and enthusiasm to shape the content of services; and it can tap users’ contributions to help to build peer support networks. These benefits may prove crucial in building sustainable employability journeys for people some distance from the labour market.

“Co-production changes the dynamics between individuals and communities, creating more collaborative relationships. Frontline staff are more able and confident in sharing power and are more ready to accept user expertise. Co-produced services work with individuals in a way that treats individuals as people with unique needs, assets and aspirations, but also as people that want support tailored to their needs. Services learn to work *with* people, not do things *to* them.”

Sir Harry Burns, former Chief Medical Officer for Scotland in ‘Co-production of Health and Wellbeing in Scotland’, 2013

Critical success factors

Our evaluation research has consistently reported considerable success for MIW in engaging and empowering users to co-produce. A number of factors appear to have been important here. First, well-resourced community engagement activities at the outset of MIW appear to have helped to build trust within communities and among lone parents. In all areas, MIW teams have worked hard to reach out beyond mainstream employability services and to connect with the community hubs, services and areas where lone parents can be engaged.

The partnership-based approach supported by BIG also facilitated the inclusion of some third sector organisations, which are run for and by lone parents, but which would not find a role in the delivery of mainstream contracted-out employability services – for example, Fife Gingerbread leads the Fife MIW partnership, while One Parent Families Scotland delivers engagement services at areas-based hubs in Glasgow (as well as contributing to most other MIW partnerships). These organisations bring both expertise and credibility to attempts to gain the buy-in and co-production efforts of lone parents.

Crucially, however, *user co-production* is central to the ethos promoted by BIG and each local MIW partnership. Key stakeholders interviewed for our evaluation repeatedly highlighted the importance of users taking control of their own employability journeys. As an MIW South Lanarkshire noted:

“The service is one-to-one support based around them [MIW clients]. The whole conversation is based around, ‘This is your journey, what do you want to do?’ We don’t have maps and plans of: ‘This is what’s going to happen to you’.”

An MIW Edinburgh key worker noted both the importance of user voice during initial ‘action planning’, and how clients found the MIW approach to be novel.

“The action plan that we do at the very beginning with them is the biggest part of it. When I meet with somebody... I ask them what they want. ‘What do you want? How would you get there?’ So it is about spending a wee bit of quality time with them, chatting and finding out what they really want and taking it from there. Some of them have never been asked that before.”

Another important feature of MIW partnerships appears to be the same sense of empowerment and collaboration among individuals and organisations delivering services for lone parents. The combination of BIG’s flexible funding package and a collaborative ethos means that staff and partners are willing to challenge and change things that are not working.

Furthermore, the culture and governance regime facilitated by BIG and lead partners has led to a shared understanding that the aim was to help users to progress towards fair and productive work, rather than forcing inappropriate transitions in order to meet targets. An MIW Edinburgh key worker expressed a common concern that the programme should be seen as helping lone parents toward good quality outcomes.

“We could probably put ten of them in a cleaning job tomorrow... we could do that but... I don’t want a reputation of putting people into work and it failing, we want a

reputation of putting them into work when they’re prepared and ready to go. They’re skilled and they know what they’re doing...”

Finally, from a user perspective, many international studies have identified the link between ‘self-efficacy’ and effective co-production – i.e. users are more engaged in co-production if they believe that they can genuinely make a difference. Our research concurs that this is a critical success factor.

Learning outcomes

- MIW partnerships offer valuable insights into co-production in action in employability services.
- Many of the sought benefits of co-production have been realised in MIW – users have been empowered, helped to bring their assets and resources to the programme, and their buy-in has been secured through an approach that seeks to work *with* people, not do things *to* them.
- MIW’s successful co-production is no accident – it is the product of a funder that encourages collaboration and flexibility; the inclusion of a diverse range of expert partners; and the emergence of a consensus that MIW can add value by empowering vulnerable lone parents.

“The ‘Scottish Approach to Government’ has evolved and developed over time. This approach places considerable importance on partnership working, involving a focus on assets-based approaches and co-production underpinned by improvement.”

Scottish Government Office of the Chief Social Policy Adviser, ‘Analytical Paper on Co-production’, Scottish Government, 2015

In 2015, the Scottish Government launched an engagement exercise on the future of employability services. Ideas around assets-based approaches and co-production are likely to be prominent in discussions of how to manage and deliver future services. The experience of MIW partnerships has the potential to help to inform future services.

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