

# Co-Production: A Literature Review and Environmental Scan

DURHAM COLLEGE AND THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF DURHAM SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT  
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*Darren Levine, Social Services Department, Region of Durham, Co-Principal Investigator*

*Michelle Garraway, Social Services Department, Region of Durham*

*Laura Stephan, Social Services Department, Region of Durham*

*O'Neal McIntosh, Social Services Department, Region of Durham*

*Christine Murphy, Durham College*

*Rhonda Christian, Durham College*

*Lori Roblin, Durham College*

*Marie Bushie, Student Research Assistant, Durham College*

*Alison Mitchell, Student Research Assistant, Durham College*

*Chloe Ouellette, Student Research Assistant, Durham College*

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*Head of Co-Production, New Economics Foundation (NEF), London, England*

*Allyson Hewitt*

*Director, Social Innovation Generation, MaRS, Toronto, Canada*

*Suzanne Holder*

*Project Coordinator, Office of the Chief Administrative Officer, City of Guelph, Canada*

*Stuart Muirhead,*

*Project Manager, Evidence Informed Practice, The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS), Glasgow, Scotland*

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# Co-Production

Social innovation is transforming the delivery of public services on local, national and international levels. Staff with the Region of Durham Social Services Department, a recognized leader in the development and implementation of new social innovation, and faculty and students in Durham College's Social Service Worker Program, have a vested interest in new and emerging social service work practices. By equipping staff and students with knowledge and competencies in established "best practices" as well as emerging innovations, they are better prepared to meet the needs of the clients they will serve. Together in partnership, we were eager to explore "co-production", an exciting new social innovation that has been transforming the delivery of public services in the United Kingdom over the past decade (Slay & Robinson, 2011).

Through a scan of relevant literature, this work will explore various aspects of co-production. Specifically, we will examine how it is being defined, its history, and the benefits, challenges, and obstacles associated with implementation. Lastly, we will consider how it has been used to facilitate the delivery of social programs, specifically employment programming. Areas for future exploration are also discussed.

Further, through interviews with local, national, and international community leaders, this project gathered insights and perspectives regarding how co-production has been translated into practice in human service delivery. Four interviews were conducted live via video conference with representatives from MaRS Discovery District in Toronto, Canada, the City of Guelph, Canada, The New Economics Foundation in London, England, and The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services in Glasgow, Scotland. These interviews focused on ways in which these organizations have adopted the principles and practices of co-production.

Following approval from the Durham College Research Ethics Board, invitations were sent to organizations that were identified through the literature review as leaders in co-production (see appendix A). Both Principal Investigators took part in each interview, along with members of the project team. Student Research Assistants from Durham College acted as scribes during each interview, documenting the information shared. A script was used to ensure consistency across the four interviews (see appendix B). Each interview was approximately 60 minutes in duration.

## Defining Co-Production

The term co-production was coined by Elinor Ostrum and her academic team at Indiana University in the late 1970s to describe the lack of recognition of service users in service delivery (Realpe & Wallace, 2010). These researchers focused their efforts on how service users can make a difference in the quality of services they receive when they participate in the delivery of the services themselves (Realpe & Wallace, 2010).

*Co-production involves the delivery of public services in an equal and reciprocal manner between professionals, people using the services, their families and their neighbors.*



During the last decade, there have been efforts to explore how client involvement in service delivery can be encouraged and supported by the services themselves. One approach which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between service providers and users is co-production. It may also be referred to as co-creating services, whereby service recipients are involved in different stages of the process, including planning, design, delivery, and audit of a public service (Realpe & Wallace, 2010).

“Co-production involves the delivery of public services in an equal and reciprocal manner between professionals, people using the services, their families and their neighbors” (New Economics Foundation, 2014). Co-production is an approach to service delivery in which service providers and service recipients work together, drawing on each other’s knowledge and experience to co-design services (Slay & Robinson, 2011). This approach challenges the view of service providers as “experts”, and overturns the traditional passive relationships between the users of the service and those that provide them (Cahill & VanAntwerp, 2014).

Research suggests that co-production is often used interchangeably with other related terms and concepts (Boyle & Harris, 2009; Etgar, 2009; Realpe & Wallace, 2010;). It has also been referred to as co-design, co-commissioning, and co-delivery of services (Markovitz, 2014; Stephens & Ryan-Collins, 2008). Some have even argued that as the field of co-production evolves there has been movement away from the meaning of “true” co-production (Etgar, 2009).

However, across the various definitions and forms of co-production, a number of key elements and principles emerge. Slay & Robinson (2011) highlight the following as core principles of co-production:

- Recognizing people as assets
- Transforming perceptions of people from passive recipients and burdens on the system into equal partners in designing and delivering services
- Building on people’s existing capabilities
- Altering delivery model of public services to one that recognizes and grows people’s capabilities and supporting them to put these to use with individuals and communities
- Mutual responsibilities and expectations
- Developing peer support networks
- Breaking down barriers between professionals and recipients
- Facilitating rather than delivering
- Public service agencies become catalysts and facilitators of change rather than central providers of service

Much of the research on defining co-production has focused on the shift in role of the service user and service provider in the provision of services. Ostrum (1996) notes that the term client is a passive term, as this implies one is acted upon. Co-production has been described as “shifting authority flows, empowering marginalized and vulnerable citizens to actively engage with their communities” (Cahill & VanAntwerp, 2014. P.15).

*People's needs are better met when they are involved in an equal and reciprocal relationship with professionals and others.*

Various studies have highlighted how co-production recognizes and builds on the skills and abilities of service users (Boyle et. al., 2009; Slay & Robinson, 2011). Freiling et. al., (2012, p.42) report that “a well-known criticism of participatory practices is that citizen input is not taken seriously and that they are symbolic rather than substantive. Branfield et. al., (2015) suggests that one reason for this lack of recognition may be that clients are often experienced and well-trained people which may lead to more equal and potentially more challenging relationships with professionals, and this can sometimes lead to them being dismissed from the helping process. Co-production operates on the belief in the citizen's ability to make a difference in the public service delivery (Yu, 2015), and that people's needs are better met when they are involved in an equal and reciprocal relationship with professionals and others (Boyle et. al., 2010). Furthermore, co-production assumes consumers know things that many professionals do not know (Slay & Robinson, 2011).

Research suggests that involvement of the client as an equal partner in service delivery is motivated by a number of factors. A central belief is that this will make the service better (Boyle et. al., 2006; Boyle et. al., 2010). Wikstrom (1995) proposed that when the customer is conceived as co-producer of a service, the interaction between the parties generates more value than a traditional transaction. Furthermore, he states that this deepened interaction improves the level of creativity on both sides and may give birth to new ideas and new ways of doing business. Brandsen & Pestoff (2006) suggest that involving service recipients transforms the delivery of public services, as it allows for more direct input. These transformative aspects of co-production are captured by Tu (2015, p.3):

*“It is a process of developing citizens' capabilities in making a change in community. To make such a change, it requires citizens to gain more experience and expertise; it also requires citizens to get familiar with their peer citizens and community surroundings. In this regard, fulfilling the role of citizens is associated with learning from each other and seeking support from government agencies” (Tu, 2015, p.3).*

As mentioned previously, research supports the role of the service provider as significantly changed in co-production. Co-produced services are described as being facilitated and supported by professionals, rather than being led by them (Boyle et. al., 2010; Slay & Robinson, 2011). The service provider becomes a catalyst and facilitator of change rather than a central

provider of services (Slay & Robinson, 2011). Boyle et. al., (2010) reports this shift in the role of the service provider requires a different skill set than what was previously practiced. Boyle et. al., (2010) identify the following as essential professional skills of co-production practitioners:

- Co-production practitioners must be able to see and harness the assets that people have and provide the space for people to develop solutions for themselves.
- Co-production practitioners must shift away from culture of “caring for” to a culture of “providing services with”.
- Co-production practitioners must recognize the importance of knowledge that comes from personal experience and that this can be more powerful than professional expertise.

According to Cahill & VanAntwerp (2014, p. 15), “co-production is a social innovation and requires a paradigm shift.” It drastically overturns traditional views of the role of service user and service provider in the provision of services.

Interestingly, across the four interviews that were conducted, co-production was described as a continuum of practices, rather than as a single method of service delivery. All interviewees indicated that there was not a single agreed upon definition of co-production, or a “one size fits all model”. Instead, interviewees described a “messy” and non-linear range of activities that share key features such as seeing those who use services as assets with knowledge, skills, and expertise, and equally including service users in all aspects of service delivery (e.g., planning, design, delivery, and evaluation).

*“While co-production can be easy to use in discussion, it is difficult to put into practice. Begin by identifying differences between co-design and co-production or ‘design’ versus ‘delivery’. Co-design is asking people how they experienced the service and how it can be different – in essence gathering ideas. Co-production, on the other hand, is involving people and together, taking action. Co-production is different because the professionals that are there are assisting and facilitating.”*  
(New Economics Foundation, 2016)

Interviewees also acknowledged that terms such as collaboration, partnership, co-design, co-creation, and co-production may, at times, be used interchangeably. At the same time however, it was noted that each of these terms can mean something different and refer to varying types and degrees of engagement between service providers and service users.

*“Co-production is putting together practitioners and service users. Pulling everyone together so there is representation all the way through the process and that each is valued in the mix. Often people try hard to make co-production a linear process when really it’s messy. The definition needs to be fluid.”*  
(IRISS, 2016)

Further, during the interviews, leadership through influence emerged as a key component of co-production, with the role of service providers being described as influencing change by “facilitating as a partner” rather than “directing

*“Leadership is more about influencing than anything else.”*  
(MaRS, 2016)

as an expert”. Interviewees explained that in a co-production based model, service providers do not lead from their area of expertise, but rather draw on their training to create the conditions within which service users can utilize their own lived experiences, knowledge, and skills to develop their own solutions to the circumstances they are facing.

## History of Co-Production

In tracing its roots, co-production appears to be related to the time banking movement that came about in the 1980’s through the work of Edgar Cahn, and was used as a system where individuals voluntarily both provided and received services in exchange for time credits (Carroll, 2013; Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Individuals were rewarded for the proportion of time spent contributing to a cause, whether this involved a person-to-person service, such as driving another person to an appointment or giving/receiving something such as music lesson (Carroll, 2013).

*Co-production is a social innovation and requires a paradigm shift. It drastically overturns traditional views of the role of service user and service provider in the provision of services.*

A number of key findings emerged from studies on time banking that relate to co-production efforts today. Among these findings included the predominance of excluded populations (e.g., single parents, the unemployed) as active members of time banks, the importance of the time bank “broker” in facilitating exchanges between members and ensuring that there is a sufficient mix of services in the time bank so that members get what they need (Collom, 2007; Seyfang & Smith, 2007).

Work by Collom (2005, 2007) at the University of South Maine found additional support for the social benefits of time banking. In his study of the Portland Maine time bank, the largest neighbor- to-neighbor time bank in the United States, Collom (2005) found that each defined group of participants (e.g., female non-senior, female senior, male senior) tended to statistically “under-transact” with others in their respective groups. However, through involvement in time banking the social networks of these individuals significantly improved (Collom, 2005). Other work by Collom (2007) focused on the motivation of members to become engaged in time banking. Findings confirmed that participants were motivated by “social movement values” that went beyond the benefits of day to day interactions (Collom, 2007).

Throughout the years, time banking has grown, and it is now used by over 25,000 people in North America alone. TimeBanks USA facilitates 276 time banks in North America through 27,000 members, as well as in other countries, including Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Russia, Saint Martin, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, and Vietnam (TimeBanks USA, 2013).

# Benefits of Co-Production

Research centred on the benefits of co-production clearly indicates that co-production is not seen as an alternative to public service, but rather a way of transforming it and making it more effective, affordable, and sustainable (Boyle et al, 2010).

The benefits of co-production have been reported on various levels including individual, organizational, and societal (Boyle et. al., 2012; Callahan 2007; Etgar, 2009; Lyall, 2012).

On an individual level, various studies have shown that service users experience improvements in self-esteem, sense of belonging, social relationships and confidence when a co-production approach is employed (Boyle et al, 2010; Lyall, 2012). By becoming an integral part of the service delivery process, individuals become more empowered, and experience a greater sense of ownership which reflects in more positive attitudes towards the services they require (Callahan, 2007; Lyall, 2012). Boyle et. al., (2006) suggests that these effects may have particular relevance to marginalized, oppressed populations, such as single parents, the young and elderly, those who suffer from mental health issues and low income groups, all of whom may feel they can now participate more equally with others.

*By becoming an integral part of the service delivery process, individuals become more empowered, and experience a greater sense of ownership.*

Many of these aforementioned benefits were highlighted in the “Canny wi’ Cash” study (Callahan, 2007). The project was designed and delivered on a partnership basis, with The Steering Group, City of Edinburgh Council, and involved older people voting for grants that would affect other older people. Among the key findings from the study were that citizens are more likely to support something they had a voice in approving or designing (Callahan, 2007). Reportedly, some of the individuals partaking in this study were very surprised that someone was paying attention to their opinions, as they felt they were normally left unheard (Callahan 2007). In addition to the experiences noted above, study participants reported increased confidence, reduced isolation and improved mental health (Callahan 2007).

Additional research has supported the concept that co-production benefits service users by building on their capabilities and allowing them to use and grow their skills in interactions with others and their communities (Lyall, 2012; Slay & Robinson, 2011). Lyall (2012) and Etgar (2009) suggest that this is particularly important for young people as it helps develop ingenuity, ambition and critical skills, such as decision making, conflict resolution and critical thinking. Etgar (2009) highlights that one of the main benefits of co-production is that it allows service users to become re-involved in activities that have a direct link to their daily lives and desires. He suggests that young people are more likely to engage in activities that offer meaning, include elements of play, and are more similar to their hobbies and free time activities (Etgar, 2009).



Another noteworthy reported benefit of co-production is that it helps individuals to develop peer support networks (Etgar, 2009; Lyall, 2012; Slay & Robinson, 2011). Etgar (2009) suggests that this has particular significance in modern times where individuals may be experiencing increased feelings of alienation and loneliness (Etgar, 2009).

*Co-production shifts the focus to a person-led, community-involved and preventative approach.*

Co-production helps to create social networks of consumers, users, and employees and gives the consumer a sense of belonging (Etgar, 2009). Co-production efforts have also been shown to help break down barriers between different kinds of people helping them to build stronger networks and groups (Boyle et. al., 2010; Slay & Robinson, 2011).

Co-production also benefits the service provider. Due to the client's increased participation in service delivery, co-production reduces the number of responsibilities on the service provider thus, freeing them to spend time on other important tasks (Etgar, 2009). Etgar (2009) explains that the user's involvement is not simply to improve service quality by "bringing them in" but also to cut costs, by supporting the user to do more for themselves.

On an agency level, co-production helps to build capacity by not only lessening the roles and responsibilities of the helping professional but by improving outcomes (Boyle et. al., 2010). This is especially important in the face of shrinking budgets. Brandsen et. al., (2006) note that in the social services, there is a tendency to lean towards more individualized forms of treatment, as one type of treatment may not be suitable for everyone.

*"Solutions are agreed upon between service provider and user". (City of Guelph, 2016)*

Costs associated with providing individualized services however, can become very expensive as this often requires contracting out to specialists (Brandsen et. al., 2006). Research suggests that co-production reduces agency costs in two ways. Firstly, it shifts the focus to a person-led, community-involved and preventative approach. This may in turn alleviate the pressure on the more costly, specialist interventions that could be required further down the road (Boyle et. al., 2010). Secondly, co-production encourages organizations to participate in coalitions which in turn, brings costs down (Bickers, 2007). By working together, key services, such as childcare and human resources management may be shared among organizations which reduces costs (Frieling, et. al., 2012). This change in approach may also better position agencies and organizations to deal with realities of public service delivery such as spending cuts, an ageing society, increasing numbers of those with long-term health conditions and rising public expectations for personalized high quality services (Boyle et. al., 2010).

On a societal level, studies show that co-production improves outcomes for social programs which directly and indirectly reduces costs. Services become more cost-effective not necessarily because they cost less to administer, but because they may produce more effective outcomes, insulate people against ill-health, or help people to achieve better outcomes than most services currently do. (Seyfang & Smith, 2007).

One noteworthy example highlighted in the research of the societal benefits of co-production is the work of Youth Advocate Programs Incorporated (Marks & Lawson, 2005). The primary goal of this organization (YAP Inc.) is to improve outcomes for vulnerable youth and their families by employing residents and engaging participants in community service within their own communities (Marks & Lawson, 2005).

Through the use of intensive case management, advocacy and support from family partners, ancillary funds, and supported employment, the model has demonstrated effectiveness in reducing recidivism in the juvenile court system for high risk youth (Marks & Lawson, 2005). The success of YAP has led to expansion into more than 17 States and 25 major US cities.

## Challenges, Obstacles, and Opportunities: Moving Forward with Co-Production

For all its merits, our research highlighted a number of challenges associated with co-production. These reported challenges are discussed from professional, organizational, and evaluation perspectives.

Branfield et. al., (2015) suggest that many of the challenges associated with traditional models of service delivery are rooted in the relationships between the professionals and the people that use the services. Boyle et. al., (2006), reported that there may be a reluctance for some to hand over and support the work being done by non-professionals. Branfield et. al., (2015) refer to a study in Australia where reportedly tensions in relationships between volunteers and staff in a chronic disease self-management program were based on opposing views of each side's responsibilities. Staff felt that the volunteers were not contributing enough, and affecting the work of the professionals, while volunteers felt that they were not appreciated or heard (Branfield et. al., 2015).

Concerns regarding the perceived competencies of volunteers and non-professionals has also been brought forth. Many professionals have been trained to believe that handing off services to other non-professionals would be irresponsible (Branfield et. al., 2015). There are often second thoughts about handing over responsibility to persons who have traditionally been described by their problems rather than their capabilities (Boyle et. al., 2006). For co-production to be successful, professionals need to be reassured that systems will be in place to safeguard their clients and those they will be working with (Boyle et. al., 2006).

*Many of the challenges associated with traditional models of service delivery are rooted in the relationships between the professionals and the people that use the services.*

The need to address some of the practicalities of work such as hours and locations of services has also been identified as a challenge in implementing co-production. Boyle et. al., (2006) states that in public service, staff are accustomed to leaving at 5 pm. As such, the varying and

atypical working hours that co-production requires may not be favorably received. Furthermore, as co-production often involves working side by side with clients in the community, this arrangement may not be easily accepted by some staff (Boyle et. al., 2006). Working in the community also requires different types of skills, and organizations may need to recruit from different circles to acquire qualified individuals. It is hard for bureaucracies that have traditionally valued one kind of skill to suddenly begin to recruit a different kind, however, it can often help for co-production advocates to work with the agency in the recruitment process (Boyle et. al., 2010).

On an organizational level, numerous researchers have highlighted the complexity of implementing co-production into an agency or organization. Boyle et. al., (2006) states that putting co-production principles into practice will mean significant changes to agency procedures and altering ways of working. Furthermore, this level of adoption may be resisted by large agencies due to conflicts with existing methods, as it involves looking at every aspect of how an organization works, and reworking the operational procedures (Branfield et. al., 2015). Branfield et. al., (2015) report that co-production relies on learning from a wide range of sources to help managers, practitioners, and the people who use services, and that everyone must have an understanding of co-production and its procedures for it to be successful. It is also clear that those interested in adopting co-production need to invest considerable time, effort, and planning into how to best introduce it into their agency or organization (Boyle, 2006; Branfield et.al., 2015).

Timing has also been highlighted as a key to successful adoption of co-production practices. For co-production to be successful, everyone who is partaking in the co-production effort should be involved from the start (Boyle, 2006; Branfield et. al., 2015). Branfield et. al, (2015) note that setting the right pace and ensuring that everyone involved is moving forward together are important for considerations for co-production efforts.

*Putting co-production principles into practice will mean significant changes to agency procedures and altering ways of working.*

Other research has suggested that the main challenge in supporting co-production is to generate evidence of its value (Boyle et. al., 2010; Branfield, 2015). Many have suggested that funders and governing bodies tend to look for specific objectives from a narrow range of anticipated activities (Boyle et. al., 2010). However researchers point out that co-production

*Better outcomes for people who use services are a key aim of co-productive approaches.*

often encompasses a broad range of continuously evolving activities as relationships develop between professionals and people accessing services. (Boyle et. al., 2010). Branfield et. al., (2015) state that co-production should not be seen as a 'one off' activity as it will introduce changes to systems that will necessitate ongoing review, development, and delivery of new forms of support. Therefore, measures of success are often found in broader outcomes and long-term changes, falling across multiple funding streams and not easy to measure with current methods (Boyle et. al., 2010).

These challenges in measuring impact are captured by Branfield et. al., (2015) who assert that “it is important to ‘measure what matters’. Better outcomes for people who use services are a key aim of co-productive approaches, so these should be evaluated – in particular the outcomes that people who use services they actually want” (Branfield et. al., 2015 p.43).

It is noteworthy that organizations such as Nesta and NEF are currently in the process of developing evaluation frameworks and tools that will allow for more comprehensive evidence on co-production and its effects (Boyle et. al., 2010).

Interestingly, across the interviews that were conducted, participants noted that demonstrating impact is not just about end goals, but also about the changes over time in both the practitioner and in the person being supported. Participants highlighted the importance of looking beyond statistics and gathering stories of change from both service providers and service users. Areas of focus such as levels of engagement, collaboration, empowerment, relationships, and ownership were all identified as important indicators of progress.

*“Ownership is an important outcome, with community programs no longer being seen as “the city runs this.” (City of Guelph, 2016)*

Further, interviewees stressed the importance of being open to determining measures of success on a project by project basis and doing so in partnership between service providers and service users. Flexibility to revisit and revise measures of success regularly, as well as participatory appraisal-based approaches were also highlighted as important to sustaining a co-production based approach over time.

*“Each project measures impact differently. At the start of a project they sit down with partners and determine what they want to achieve, all the way down to the short, medium and long term outcomes. These goals are constantly being revisited and changed.” (IRISS, 2016)*

Balancing a range of short term, intermediate, and longer term goals was also noted as

*“Question such as “how is life going?” opposed to “how is this service working for you?” generally yields better results.”(New Economics Foundation, 2016)*

important by the interviewees. While shorter term goals may hold value in setting realistic and attainable objectives, longer term goals can ensure focus is kept on the purpose of embracing co-production. Aligning shorter-term goals to the attainment of longer term outcomes such as improved quality of life, enhanced self-sufficiency, and greater connection to community,

can ensure that the focus remains on long term, sustainable and meaningful solutions, rather than “quick fixes”.



Additionally, across the interviews, themes surrounding safety, relationships, trust, and empowerment were discussed by interviewees as not only key aspects of co-

*“Another key challenge is impact to service providers in terms of their shifting roles from being seen as the expert to being seen as a facilitator. A key question is how this can be introduced in a way that will be well-received, as opposed to being seen as challenging. A challenge is service providers being comfortable with the new role as a sort of coach - supporting people to be enablers opposed to deliverers.” (New Economics Foundation, 2016)*

production, but also as being central to its success. Interviewees discussed the shift required from staff -- moving from “experts” to “facilitator” and “guide” -- and explained how this requires being able to embrace vulnerability and become comfortable with not having all the answers.

Creating safe spaces where service providers and service users can begin to come together and engage as equals was identified during the interviews as an important first step towards creating a culture of co-production. These safe spaces can allow service providers to gradually experiment with their new role as

*“Create safe spaces where we can build trust and relationships and begin to do this work on a small scale.” (MaRS, 2016)*

facilitator, and begin to recognize that this shift is not about discounting their skill sets, but rather is about using their training and skills to enable others to enable themselves.

*“You can’t build relationships when you just give information out or just ask for information through a survey.” (City of Guelph, 2016)*

Further, interviewees explained how these safe spaces can allow service users and service providers to listen and understand one another, and in doing so, can come to see themselves as a valued partner, contributing equally towards an agreed upon goal.

Over time, a common language can begin to develop, as service providers drop the technical, and sometimes isolating, language of business or government and instead engage with service users in a more authentic manner as peers. As relationships and trust slowly begin to develop, each becomes more receptive to the ideas of the other.

Interviewees acknowledged that this process takes time, and stressed the importance of trusting that, with time, solutions will emerge. It was noted however, that as solutions begin to emerge, it is critical that service

providers are empowered to act in partnership with service users, without fear of being shut down by colleagues or supervisors.

*“A big barrier in this co-production process was the professionals feeling they didn’t have the authority and weren’t allowed to take responsibility to make a shift in moving towards a more person centered care approach. Dispersed leadership seemed to be an issue. Staff need to feel empowered to be able to take charge and make a difference.” (IRISS, 2016)*

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of creating an organizational culture of learning - one that begins with the mindset that no one person has all of the answers. This, in turn, then extends to service providers not only being receptive to, but also actively seeking, the knowledge and expertise of each service user.

*I'm only one person, my department is only one department, and there is so much more knowledge out there." (City of Guelph, 2016)*

During the interviews, participants highlighted several examples in which co-production has been put into practice. Some of these examples are included in appendix C.

## Co-Production and Employment

This review of the literature identified a limited number of studies on how co-production has been applied to employment programs (Asquer, 2012; Bickers, 2007; Boyle, 2014). However, several findings from our co-production research support its potential effectiveness in improving employment outcomes.

Specific to the employment sector, with more than 1.3M unemployed Canadians as of Dec. 2013 (Statistics Canada 2014), securing sustainable employment continues to impact society in general. In the last five years, there has been a shift of focus towards pathways to sustainable employment. Emphasis is placed on helping clients build their competencies and life skills such as critical thinking, creativity, education, social and personality attributes (i.e. human capital) so that they may be employable and contribute to society over the long term.

Viewed from this perspective, co-production may hold the key to helping employment programs achieve these outcomes. Successful development of skills and habits such as working independently, demonstrating initiative and self-advocacy, decision-making, finding information, and critical thinking requires a circle of support. Through active engagement and empowerment, co-production may offer pathways within which individuals come to recognize the unique strengths, skills, and knowledge they possess, and in doing so, attain the confidence and hope to envision new possibilities for themselves and their families. Not only will job seekers become more involved and empowered in the search process, but also build on their existing capabilities, enhance their psychological well-being and acquire confidence which can increase the likelihood of obtaining and maintaining employment (Bickers, 2007).

One of the barriers identified by Dale (2013) is that job seekers are often bounced between employment services, processes and assessments and lose motivation in the process. As co-production involves the service user early in the process, valuing their ideas and input and making them feel they are vital contributors to the end result may increase their commitment and follow through with necessary activities in finding work (Boyle et. al., 2006; Branfield et. al., 2015).

Co-production may also provide an effective means of dealing with stigma and other psychological barriers that are often associated with groups with higher rates of unemployment

(Boyle et. al., 2006). Evidence from research conducted by The New Economic Foundations (2014) suggests that aside from caring responsibilities, single parents often have very little confidence in their ability to participate in the formal workplace and lack the self-esteem to consider formal training or further education.

*“Almost every co-production intervention has led to significant changes in people’s aspirations. Opportunities exist to develop peer support models and fully involve employers in process of co-design and co-production.”*  
(New Economics Foundation, 2016)

Furthermore, co-production may help shift some of society’s negative stereotypes of particular groups of job seekers. It has been discovered that groups of unemployed individuals who may be viewed as a “drain on society” such as single mothers, refugees, people with mental health issues and those too young or old for conventional jobs, are participating in important unacknowledged work within their communities (New Economics Foundation, 2014). It has been suggested that governments should explore ways of valuing the work that these individuals are doing outside of paid employment – looking after children, looking after each other, and helping to reduce crime, as this work contributes to the well-being of our society (Boyle et. al., 2006).

Across all of the interviews, participants noted a paucity of examples in which co-production based approaches have been applied directly to employment programs. At the same time, it was highlighted that in many applications of co-production, employment is an additional, indirect outcome, as service users move towards improving their quality of life and self-sufficiency.

Interviewees did acknowledge opportunities to explore specific applications of co-production to employment programs, suggesting that emphasis be placed on areas such as job retention and mental health supports. The lack of literature and examples surrounding applications of co-production specifically to employment programs offers tremendous opportunity for leading-edge human services innovation in the years ahead.

## Future Research and Exploration

Many questions have emerged through this exploration of co-production that lead to recommendations for future study. As co-production has increasingly been applied to a range of public services, some have suggested that additional research is needed for the sake of gaining a better conceptualization of co-production especially as the field of co-production has evolved to incorporate a range of disciplines each of which may work from different theoretical orientations (Pestoff et. al., 2012).

Researchers have highlighted the need to better understand the circumstances under which people co-produce (Asquer, 2012; Pestoff et. al., 2012). It has been found that some of the best examples of successful co-production have occurred in the most challenging circumstances and when used with the most disadvantaged groups (Freiling et. al., 2012; Jakobsen & Anderson, 2013). Asquer (2012) as well as Etgar (2008) found that clients may be less inclined to co-

produce when they are required to invest time or other resources into preparatory efforts before engaging in co-production and consumption of the services. Furthermore, he suggests that when a client enters into a co-production transaction with a public service provider, there could be concern that disclosing private information may be used against them later on (Asquer 2012). Therefore, it is important that research strive to better understand the motives that drive individuals to engage in co-production and the personal attributes that increase the likelihood of successful collaboration (Asquer 2012; Pestoff & Brandsen, 2012).

In Durham Region, the principles of co-production also fit in very well with the Region's commitment towards "servant leadership" (Drouin, 2013) which is reflected in the Department's 2012 – 2015 Strategic Plan. These factors combined make The Region of Durham Social Services Department an ideal site for a future pilot project focused on co-production. Further, all of the organizations interviewed – New Economics Foundation, The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services, MaRS, and the City of Guelph -- indicated an interest in exploring opportunities for collaboration with Durham College and The Region of Durham Social Services Department in the months ahead to develop and pilot test an application of co-production in Durham Region, Ontario. This offers a network of expertise to inform and guide the transformation of the information gathered in this project into new possibilities for communities across Durham Region.

## **Research Impact: Mobilizing Knowledge for Change**

On May 11<sup>th</sup> 2016, an innovation lab was held to share the findings of this project with faculty from Durham College and staff from the Durham Region Social Services Department and together, begin to identify opportunities to apply co-production in Durham Region. Twenty-five participants attended this half-day event, engaging in facilitated discussion and development of ideas for the application of co-production principles and practices in the local community context. This event was held at the Centre for Food at Durham College.

Introduced in the Durham Region Social Services Department in 2014, innovation labs, or i-labs, provide opportunities for groups of staff across multiple disciplines and work areas to come together to collaboratively explore, grow, and shape new, emerging ideas for service delivery, policy, and research. As a "lab" these sessions provide participants with an opportunity to work 'hands-on' with their ideas while obtaining feedback and support from colleagues. It also provides access to resources that help grow their ideas and foster new possibilities for their teams, their workplaces, and the services they provide. Innovation labs offer a guided journey through exploration, ideation, and the prototyping phases of idea development while strengthening cross-discipline collaboration and partnerships.



During the May 11<sup>th</sup> 2016 innovation lab exploring co-production, three ideas emerged through the collaborative creativity of those in attendance:

- ✓ How might a co-production based approach be used to create a community of support at Durham College focused on supporting students' mental health and well-being?
- ✓ How might a co-production based approach be used to increase access to services and neighbourhood communities of support (e.g., improve transportation to and from community services, increase the presence / availability of services in neighbourhoods, use of technology to connect service providers and service users, use of technology to connect service users with one another)?
- ✓ How might a co-production based approach be used to foster individualized service planning and delivery, for example, within employment programs and other human services?

These ideas, co-created by faculty from Durham College and staff from the Durham Region Social Services Department, offer concrete opportunities to apply the principles and practices of co- production to address local challenges. Further, all of the organizations interviewed as part of this environmental scan indicated an interest in working together with Durham College and the Durham Region Social Services Department in the months ahead to develop and pilot test an application of co-production in Durham Region, Ontario, offering a panel of experts from which to learn and to support the next phases of this work.

## Conclusions:

Co-production has been gaining momentum in social service delivery in the United Kingdom, but is a relatively new concept in Canada and more specifically in Ontario's public service sector.

Durham College and Durham Region's Social Services Department are striving to create cultures of innovation within which academic faculty and students, social service professionals, and residents of local communities work together to enhance services to improve individual and community outcomes.

*Through active engagement and empowerment, co-production may offer pathways within which individuals come to recognize the unique strengths, skills, and knowledge they already possess, and in doing so, attain the confidence and hope to envision new possibilities for themselves and their families.*

Vulnerable populations often need services that span beyond the mandates of individual social programs, and that require inter-organizational and multi-disciplinary perspectives and coordination. As such, the findings from this literature review support the potential benefits of adopting a co- production approach in Ontario's public service sector.

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# Appendix A

## **Interview Invitation Letter**

Dear colleague,

We are writing to ask for your participation in a research project to explore applications of co-production in human service delivery. This project, entitled *“Improving Employment Outcomes through Co-Production”*, involves the global exploration of co-production principles and practices, and the gathering of examples of how co-production is being translated into practice to improve employment outcomes and social participation for disadvantaged groups. Co- Production is an approach to service delivery in which service providers and service recipients work together in an equal and reciprocal manner, drawing on each other’s knowledge and lived experience to co-design and deliver services.

This research is being conducted through a collaboration between Durham College and The Regional Municipality of Durham Social Services Department, and is supported through a grant from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. Please read through the information provided and consider your participation in this project. This study has received ethical approval from the Durham College Research Ethics Board (application # 105-1516). If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact [reb@durhamcollege.ca](mailto:reb@durhamcollege.ca).

If you are interested in participating, please contact the Principal Investigator Randy Uyenaka, Professor and Program Coordinator in the Social Service Worker Program at Durham College at [Randy.Uyenaka@durhamcollege.ca](mailto:Randy.Uyenaka@durhamcollege.ca).

### **What is this research about and how will participants be selected?**

The purpose of this project is to gather and synthesize local, national, and international examples of how co-production is being applied to employment programs. The findings will be used to inform the development of co-production-based approaches to service delivery in Durham Region, Ontario, Canada.

Participants will include human service organizations that have adopted co-production-based approaches to service delivery. Invitation letters have been sent to organizations listed on co-production networks as well as organizations that have publicly acknowledged their adoption of co-production practices (e.g., on their website, brochures...).

Organizations interested in taking part in this project are asked to please contact the Principal Investigator Randy Uyenaka at [Randy.Uyenaka@durhamcollege.ca](mailto:Randy.Uyenaka@durhamcollege.ca).

### **What will participants be expected to do?**

Participants will be asked to take part in a 60 – 90 minute interview with the investigators. This interview will be conducted through a live web-based video conference. During the interview, participants will be asked several questions about their organization’s adoption of co-production principles and practices. Questions will explore why co-production approaches were adopted,

how co-production principles have been translated into practice, and any impact and outcomes associated with this approach to service delivery

### **What are the potential benefits of participating in this project?**

While co-production has been gaining momentum, it is still a relatively new concept in Ontario's public service sector. As such, through participation in this project, participants will be informing, shaping, and influencing the future development of co-production policies and practices in Ontario.

Following the completion of this research, all participants will be provided with a copy of the final report that will offer a review of current literature surrounding co-production, as well as a comprehensive synthesis of co-production practices globally. This report may be a valuable resource for participant organizations to inform the continued development and enhancement of co-production based services.

### **Is my participation voluntary and are there any risks involved?**

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and you may change your mind and withdraw your participation at any time. Should you wish to withdraw, any information you may have provided will be immediately deleted. Further, participants will only be asked to share information that they are comfortable disclosing, and are free to decline to respond to any questions asked during the interview.

At the start of the interview, participants will be asked to verbally confirm their voluntary consent to participate in this project. By indicating consent, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

We do not anticipate any risks with participation in this project.

### **Will the information collected about me and my organization be treated as confidential?**

Yes. The information gathered will be accessible only to the investigators listed at the end of this letter as well as several research assistants supporting this project.

During the interview, Research Assistants will be taking notes to document the experiences, perspectives and insights that are shared regarding co-production.

Information and data provided by participants will remain confidential and will be stored on a secure, password protected computer or server in the Durham College Registrar's Office and will be destroyed on or before April 30, 2016 once the final report has been completed.

The final report, as well as any publications and presentations stemming from this project will include only key themes that emerge across the information gathered from participant organizations.

In all papers, reports, or presentations we will make sure that the names of the individuals that took part in the interviews, as well as their organizations, are not associated with specific content within the report. Upon completion of the interview, participants will be asked if their organization will consent to being listed in the acknowledgements section of the final report as a contributor to the research findings. If this consent is not provided, the organization's name will not be included.

**Am I, or is my organization, being evaluated in anyway?**

No. There is no evaluation of participants or participating organizations as part of this research. Any information gathered will be used only for the purposes of this project - that is to gather global examples of how co-production is being translated into practice in public services.

If you have any questions about this project, or would like to discuss any aspect of this project in greater detail, please contact the Principal Investigator Randy Uyenaka at [Randy.Uyenaka@durhamcollege.ca](mailto:Randy.Uyenaka@durhamcollege.ca). Please also feel free to contact the Office of Research Services, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship at Durham College at [Jane.Hilton@durhamcollege.ca](mailto:Jane.Hilton@durhamcollege.ca), as well as the Durham College Research Ethics Board at [reb@durhamcollege.ca](mailto:reb@durhamcollege.ca) if you have any questions about your rights as participants in this project.

Thank you for considering your participation. Sincerely,

***Randy Uyenaka***

Co-Principal Investigator  
Professor and Program Coordinator  
Social Service Worker Program  
School of Health and Community Services  
College

***Darren Levine***

Co-Principal Investigator  
Manager, Innovation and Research Unit  
Social Services Department  
The Regional Municipality of Durham Durham

# Appendix B

## **Interview Guide / Script**

### **Introduction:**

*Thank you for taking time to speak with us today. Let me begin by introducing myself and my colleagues.*

*The purpose of this project is to gather and synthesize local, national, and international examples of how co-production is being applied to employment programs. The findings will be used to inform the development of co-production based approaches to service delivery in Durham Region, Ontario, Canada.*

*Before we begin our interview, I want to confirm that you have read the project description, have had all of your questions answered, and that your participation is completely voluntary. Can you please confirm your voluntary consent to participate?*

- **If asks questions, interviewer will answer questions before proceeding any further.**
- **If states “no” to voluntary consent, interviewer will thank participant for his/her time and end the interview.**
- **If confirms “yes”, interviewer will proceed to:**

*I want to remind you that you may choose to withdraw your participation at any time.*

*During the interview, we will be asking you several questions about your organization’s adoption of co-production based practices. Please only share information you are comfortable disclosing and know that you may choose to decline to answer any of the questions we will be asking you. We also ask that, in your responses, please do not include any identifying information about any colleagues or clients.*

*Please know that we have a student research assistant with us today who will be acting as scribe throughout our interview. He / she will be taking notes while you are responding to our questions. In the final report, as well as any publications and presentations stemming from this project, we will include only key themes that emerge across the information gathered from participant organizations. As well, in all papers, reports, or presentations we will make sure that the names of the individuals that took part in the interviews, as well as their organizations, are not associated with specific content within the report.*

*Do you have any additional questions before we begin?*



- If asks questions, interviewer will answer questions before proceeding any further.
- If states “no”, interviewer will begin to ask the following questions: Question #1:

*Please tell us a little bit about your organization and the work you do. Probe: Can you tell us a little more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Probe: Can you share a specific example that illustrates \_\_\_\_\_?*

#### **Question #2:**

*How does your organization define co-production? Probe: Can you tell us a little more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Probe: Can you share a specific example that illustrates \_\_\_\_\_?*

#### **Question #3:**

*Can you share with us any successes and challenges your organization has experienced since adopting a co-production based approach?*

*Probe: Can you tell us a little more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Probe: Can you share a specific example that illustrates \_\_\_\_\_?*

#### **Question #4:**

*Has adopting a co-production based approach improved your service capacity? If so, how? Can you share an example?*

*If not, can you share any insights into why not? Probe: Can you tell us a little more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Probe: Can you share a specific example that illustrates \_\_\_\_\_?*

#### **Question #5:**

*What steps did your organization take to implement a co-production based approach, and how did your staff respond to this change?*

*Probe: Can you tell us a little more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Probe: Can you share a specific example that illustrates \_\_\_\_\_?*

#### **Question #6:**

*How were your services delivered before the adoption of a co-production based approach, and why did you shift your services towards co-production?*

*Probe: Can you tell us a little more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Probe: Can you share a specific example that illustrates \_\_\_\_\_?*

#### **Question #7:**

*How have you engaged clients in co-production, and what assessments, tools, and practices are you using to guide and support clients through this process?*

*Probe: Can you tell us a little more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Probe: Can you share a specific example that illustrates \_\_\_\_\_?*

**Question #8:**

*What policies are supporting your co-production approach? Probe: Can you tell us a little more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Probe: Can you share a specific example that illustrates \_\_\_\_\_?*

**Question #9**

*How do you measure or capture impact? For example, how do you document the impact of your co-production approach on clients, staff, your organization, and your community?*

*Probe: Can you tell us a little more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Probe: Can you share a specific example that illustrates \_\_\_\_\_?*

**Question #10**

*Has your adoption of co-production based approaches enhanced the social participation of those you serve? Has it improved employment outcomes?*

*Probe: Can you tell us a little more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Probe: Can you share a specific example that illustrates \_\_\_\_\_?*

**Question #11**

*In our final report, would you be comfortable if we listed your organization in the acknowledgments section?*

**Question #12**

*Can we connect with you again as a resource for any future endeavors centered around co-production?*

*Those are all of the questions that we have. Thank you again for taking part in this interview. We greatly appreciate you sharing your experience and insights.*

*Do you any questions for us?*

- **If asks questions, interviewer will answer questions before proceeding any further.**
- **If states “no”, interviewer will conclude interview.**

*Thank you again. We will send you a copy of our final report as soon as it is ready.*

## Appendix C

### **Examples of co-production in practice discussed by interviewees**

- ✓ “People Powered Health Project” by NESTA supporting the design and delivery of services for people living with health conditions (<http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/people-powered-health> )
- ✓ Time banking (<http://www.timebanking.org/>). Time banking is still common in universities in the UK, with students performing activities in the community and receiving benefit in return (e.g., course credit). For example, international students in London are spending time with the elderly and being able to both practice their English and help embed the international students within the community, while the elderly benefit by the companionship.
- ✓ Living Well Network (<http://www.lambethccg.nhs.uk/our-plans/mental-health-services/lambeth-living-well-network/Pages/default.aspx>). This is a strong network of community based support to increase access to mental health services.
- ✓ SkillNet in Kent, England (<http://skillnetgroup.co.uk/greatcitizens/index.php>)
- ✓ MaRS Studio Y: Youth Leadership Program in Toronto (<https://www.marsdd.com/systems-change/studio-y/studio-y-fellowship/>)
- ✓ Hospital to Home (<http://content.iriss.org.uk/hospitaltohome/>). This program focused on changing the experience of the elderly being discharged from the hospital and returning home by raising awareness of the importance of patients, their families, and professionals (doctors, OTs, discharge managers, nurses) working together in partnership.
- ✓ Guelph city summer camp. A team made up of neighbourhood leaders work in partnership with the city to plan and deliver a local camp program.

