

## **Co-producing and co-commissioning Young People's Services Lambeth Council**

The Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) commissioning team at Lambeth Council sought to test the co-production and co-commissioning of services in collaboration with the New Economics Foundation (nef) and the Youth Offending Service. This was in line with the council's cooperative agenda that is about making decisions and designing services in collaboration with residents as well as focusing on outcomes rather than activities, as a way of adding value to the community in an austere environment.

The Youth Offending Service (YOS) had £20,000 of funding that had not yet been allocated. They volunteered to use that funding to trial the new approach and determine whether it could become business-as-usual for commissioning.

### **Trialling the co-production and co-commissioning approach to local services**



Lambeth established a small core team, consisting of a commissioner, two YOS practitioners and three young people who were under supervision orders at the YOS. The group met weekly in a café, a neutral space which did not prejudice any of the group members. The council staff made clear that everyone had an equal role to play and they demonstrated this intention by paying the young people for their time. The team defined the outcomes that they wanted the service to achieve on the basis of the young people's experience. To do this, they used appreciative inquiry approaches. The young people were asked to remember a time in their lives when they had felt proud, whether in childhood or recently.

The team also used visualisation approaches to clarify what the outcomes of the service should be. First, the young people were asked to imagine where they would be in five years' time: what would they be doing, where would they be living and who would they be with. They also had to explain how they thought that they would reach this place. Second, the young people repeated the exercise, but this time for Lambeth council rather than themselves. They explored how the council might look in five years' time and described how they would have helped Lambeth reach this state.

Through this exercise, the team prioritised nine outcomes for the service. These included: young people have more self confidence, are more determined and build

more positive relationships; they have an overall improved mental and emotional well being; they are more autonomous and co-design services for their community.

The outcomes formed the basis of a call for application. All youth service providers in Lambeth were invited to apply for the grant. In line with the outcomes approach advocated by the commissioning team, the successful providers were expected to co-design the activities that would deliver the outcomes with their communities and in particular young people. If successful, they would be managed on the basis of the outcomes-focused performance indicators agreed with the commissioning team at the start of their project.

The applications were evaluated by a panel. Although the young people were offered a place on the panel, they decided not to take part as they did not find this stage of the commissioning process exciting. The criteria for evaluation included:

- Use of co-production with young people at the activity design stage and throughout the delivered project
- Ability to describe why their chosen activities would achieve the desired outcomes
- Innovative character – for example, use of co-production approaches

The final interviews were led by the young people who also decided on the questions with which to evaluate the applicants. They agreed to award the grant to an organisation that wanted to involve their community in leading and delivering a Lambeth wide talent show.

## **Outcomes**

Lambeth council not only aimed to commission a successful service through their approach, it also sought to bring value to the young residents that it involved in this process. The project will complete in February 2014, so it is too early to report on the success of the project itself. However, the co-production approach had an evident, positive impact on the whole commissioning team:

- By the time the young people were chairing the presentations a few months into the project, they were noticeably more confident and self-assured in their knowledge, abilities and decisions.
- The young people found that the appreciative inquiry approaches were vital in helping them think about themselves and their future more positively.
- The young people reported that as a result of their involvement in the project, their drug/alcohol use had become less significant in their lives, their self confidence and belief in their abilities had increased and they felt that they had been given an opportunity to really achieve something and make a difference.

- The practitioners and commissioner from the project group found the approach refreshing and inspiring and they reported coming away at the end of each group session feeling more 'alive'.

### **Lessons learned**

One of the key challenges was establishing relationships with the young people that made them truly feel valued. The team sought to build these relations by regularly taking part in fun and informal activities together and by adapting to the interests of the young people, and the speed at which they were able to progress the work. As a result, the project took longer than usual, but the small size of the grant meant that the team had greater flexibility in managing the project and the benefits far outweighed the impact of the delay.

Another key challenge was the scepticism that some team members had about young people's abilities. By persisting with the coproduction approach however, these practitioners and observers were soon converted as they witnessed the results.

### **For more information**

The New Economics Foundation has written a [blog post](#) about the project. The Guardian wrote an [article](#) about Lambeth's cooperative approach. The full evaluation report is available on request.

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