

A Wellspring Settlement Community Inclusion Resource 2021

AN INTRODUCTION TO CO-PRODUCED RESEARCH

A Community Perspective

This leaflet is rooted in experience from the SPAN History Group (2019 - 2021) which co-produced research and creative outputs through a collaboration between Wellspring Settlement, the University of Bristol and a group of Community Researchers.



THE SINGLE PARENT ACTION NETWORK

Hands On History Project

Twelve mothers from predominately inner-city Bristol looking to build confidence, skills, knowledge, friendships and opportunities met with an Academic Researcher, Historian and Community Worker for over a year.

They set a research question together to learn more about the context, achievements and culture of the **Single Parent Action Network (1990 – 2016)** - a grassroots project which started in someone's bedroom and grew into a European network influencing social policy and supporting thousands of families.

They analysed an archive of the organisation's work (narrowly saved from the bin!) and collected oral histories of those who had been involved. A Steering Group of community and academic supporters reflected on progress and a separate evaluation team interviewed participants, observed sessions to feed into the process as well as reported in detail afterwards. A mural featuring archival material, a short film of group members reflecting on a group reminiscence by former SPAN employees and a set of commemorative mugs designed with quotes from interviews and archive images were created to share the research with the general public. After the group, members were supported for 6 months to apply for work and start training programs which built upon their skills and ambitions. Academic articles were written, with input from the Researchers, about the co-production process, outputs and history of SPAN.

The archive has been installed into the Feminist Archive South, University of Bristol. And this leaflet was generated to support anyone considering co-producing research – from a community perspective.

To find out more about SPAN, the research project, its outputs and the team:

www.thespanproject.org.uk

What is **CO-PRODUCED** RESEARCH?

Co — means together or that more than one party is involved.

Production — means something is produced, e.g. research, activities, artwork.

Co-produced (or collaborative) **research** combines community expertise with academic process to learn more about a topic by gathering and analysing data (information) together. When the community and academics work together they bring research skills and theory together with local expertise and the skills and perspectives from lived experience of the topic being researched. What is discovered is also held within the community and can be used to apply for funds or set up services which deal with the issues as well as contributing to academic understanding and potentially social policy.

The **Research Question** or topic could be about something experienced in the community, such as poverty, shopping or parenting, which is complicated and needs to be understood better. Finding out more can help decide how to deal with the issues. The process of research could include a program of group work with people who have relevant experience, community consultation events, oral history interviews, mapping neighbourhoods or analysing privately owned documents or public archives.

Outputs — are how the findings of the research are communicated outside the group. This might include academic papers, conference presentations and policy briefings as well as creative public engagement such as murals, workshops, performances, exhibitions, talks, guided walks, animations etc.

Outcomes — are the impact of the program on participants, the community and universities. Take the example of a project that interviews young people to explore the reasons for anti-social behaviour in a park, concluding that there is a lack of youth activities. An event presenting these findings could persuade policy makers to fund new services. The process of working as a group, learning new skills, exploring new ideas and places and having the opportunity to work with the university might increase participants' confidence, connections in the community, employability and ambition to pursue further education.

As Co-production is a growing practice seeking to learn and improve all the time, documentation of the process and evaluation of the outcomes are very important.

What's so good about **CO-PRODUCED RESEARCH?**

- Through working with universities, communities and individuals can gain greater voice, confidence, skills, build new networks as well as access academic funds to develop understanding of their world, describe it to others and develop informed responses to important social problems.
- The community gets to learn from a university as well as influence its opinions and working practice, from a position of greater equality.
- Knowledge produced through research has greater authority and relevance when it is informed by the community's lived experience.
- Evidence about people, behaviour and places can be used to change public opinion and lobby for change at governmental levels as well as evidence the need for funding local projects.
- Participants are offered an opportunity to develop research and analysis skills as well as experience collaborating with a valued institution - experience which may not have been available through their own educational journey.
- The process can increase participants' employability, knowledge, community connections, commitment to a cause, personal confidence and skills.
- Working with the university demonstrates a model for progression via further education, inspiring participants, peers and even future generations.
- The community has the opportunity to influence the understanding and practise of Co-production as it develops.
- The process can lead to new community groups being established as well as long term relationships with universities for future research projects.

Good Questions When Considering **CO-PRODUCED RESEARCH:**

- Where has the need for this research come from?
- What is the community's interest in this?
- What do we expect to achieve through this research?
- How might it benefit the community and individuals involved?
- Which individuals in the community would grow through this process?
- How will we reach those who do not normally participate?
- What budget is required to support inclusion?
- How will we ensure that the community's demographics are represented?
- Is there any risk that the process or topic of research could be disruptive or have a negative impact on participants or the community?
- Are participants going to be paid for their time?
- Can we employ a community worker to support individuals outside group work?
- Do we feel confident at managing conflict and delivering group work? What support is there to help us?
- Who will get to decide the outputs?
- How do we ensure the widest reach and biggest impact when we present our findings?
- Who could be invited to join the Steering Group?
- How will we gain feedback, monitor progress and evaluate the work?
- Will we be able to influence the understanding of how co-production worked and its contribution to the development of the practise?
- How can we support individuals in the writing-up process?
- How will participants progress after the conclusion of the project?

- What will the legacy of the project activities and the research be for the community?
- What time is available after the project for the community organisation to reflect and share it with others?
- Is funding available to measure the impact in 6/12 months from the end of the project?

Interested to read more?

**Contact Community Inclusion at Wellspring Settlement
to request the full document:**

*Aiming Towards Successful Co-production - From A Community
Perspective*

by Jude Hutchen and Annie Oliver

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