

Jeff Banks, Director A Better Start Southend

Speech for 'Who's the Expert?' conference (11th April 2019)

Good morning, and thank you very much for coming to the '**Who's the Expert?' conference**. It's great to have you here on such a lovely day sunny but then again, it's always sunny in Southend. If not in terms of the weather, certainly in terms of our disposition.

So, I'm Jeff Banks and I have the pleasure and the privilege of being the Director of A Better Start Southend.

First off, I wanted to thank the Parent Champions and the children for their fantastic opening to the conference. Parents and carers and their children, really are the very heart of our work here in Southend and they never cease to impress, with their dedication, commitment, boundless enthusiasm and brilliant ideas. I can honestly say that without exception, in every meeting, workshop or conversation we have with parents, they will come up with ideas we haven't thought of, or observations we haven't seen. Actually, just like the idea of a family-friendly conference. For that, we thank you all, from the bottom of our hearts.

Also, keep tweeting your views hashtag **whostheexpert2019**

So, today I'm going to do a very brief introduction to the **A Better Start Southend** programme, and talk about what we mean by co-production and co-design and the opportunities and challenges these new ways of working present - and how we might unlock the potential for this area of work in the future.

But then we're going to do some interactive stuff, and I'll be looking for some volunteers to do some role play. I'm joking, there's no role play.

But we are going to talk about **holidays**.

We're going to talk about **placemaking**, what it feels like to build a den, to make a home.

[Power of conversations Slide]

We're going to talk about the **power of conversations** and what a good conversation does for us.

[Where conversations take place Slide]

And, we're going to talk about **where conversations take place**. And how we set up those conversations.

But first, a little bit about **A Better Start Southend**.

[What is A Better Start Southend Slide]

A Better Start Southend is a ten-year programme, made possible by the generosity of National Lottery players which is seeking to transform the

way services for children and families are delivered in Southend and beyond.

A Better Start Southend isn't an organisation, it's a partnership between a number of key organisations and agencies; the Early Years Alliance, the Borough Council, the local Clinical Commissioning Group (which is responsible for planning and commissioning local health services), Southend Hospital, the University of Essex, and those other good organisations listed on the back page of your programme.

But most importantly it's a partnership with parents and the local community. These folk here, are absolutely in the driving seat of our work.

Our objective is to test out new ways of working and learn what works best, together.

[Our locations Slide]

Our main focus is the six wards of Kursaal, Milton (where you are today), Shoeburyness, Victoria, Westborough and West Shoebury.

Joanna Ruffle will talk a bit later about the difference between, say the wards to the west of our Borough and the east. It's quite stark.

Six diverse, fascinating, amazing places, with brilliant people, doing great things, in many instances against the odds. Because many families and children living in our wards face real challenges -

challenges of poverty, isolation, physical and mental health problems, drug and alcohol dependency, and other things.

These are all issues, which can, at times, make raising a child far more challenging. As a result, we know outcomes for children in these wards are not where they should be. Tim Hobbs will talk later about these challenges and how services can best support families and children.

But we are going to reverse that picture. Our objective is to make Southend be the very best place in the country to be a parent or raise a child – for all families living here.

We have five key outcomes;

- Social and emotional development
- Diet and nutrition
- Communications and language
- Systems change

Which is where A Better Start Southend acts as a catalyst, to help all our partners work better together to become the very best they can be.

And...

- Community resilience

Which is the extent to which we encourage and support the community to become part of the answer.

Co-production and Co-design

The concept of Co-production and Co-design lies at the heart of these two themes - Systems Change and Community Resilience, and indeed across our work.

And it is based upon a very simple idea.

That is that services which are designed and delivered in partnership with the people who use them; will be more effective; more responsive to the needs of parents, carers and children; more welcomed and understood and more widely valued and used.

[What is Co-production and Co-design Slide]

Now, the concept of co-design and co-production is by no means new, and we have expert speakers today who will open up conversations about how and where these ideas have been developed and tested.

Mine is not an academic talk, I'm going to give you a practical view, based on my personal and professional experience working in this field.

For me, co-design happens when we are actively designing services in partnership with the people who will use them.

And co-production is where we implement and deliver those services again, with the people using the services as active partners and collaborators.

As the Local Government Association says, this is about a *relationship* of equals, recognising the *expertise* each brings to the table, and sharing power to design and deliver services to improve outcomes.

Now, don't get me wrong, there is absolutely fantastic Engagement and Consultation work taking place, by wonderfully dedicated public servants, across health, education, social care and community safety, and you will hear about some of this shortly.

- Engagement and Consultation can at times be a little technical, a requirement.
- And it can be more about Communication than partnership.
- And we can have a fixed mind-set about what the solution is.

Sometimes it's like we're offering people a choice between tea, tea or tea. There isn't really a choice as we've already decided it's going to be tea.

If you're not sold on the idea of Co-design and Co-production, I wanted to prove the benefits with a really simple exercise that will do this. I promise there's no role play!

I am going to divide the hall into three sections 1, 2 and 3.

[Divide the room, make sure everyone knows the group they are in]

Now, get yourself into pairs, ideally with someone you don't know that well. If you know the people either side, maybe pair up with someone in front or behind you.

[Get them paired up]

Now, decide in your pairs who is going to be Person A and who is going to be Person B

[Get them to decide A and B]

The sun is shining, so let's talk about holidays!

The challenge here is for Person A to design the absolute ideal, dream holiday for Person B.

Don't speak yet, wait till I say go.

[Exercise Slide]

Group 1

Now, Group 1, here's your challenge.

Person A, you are going to spend a bit of time looking at person B, without speaking, and then you are going to do your best to **guess** what would be their ideal holiday. Then, when you've worked it out, you're going to tell them.

Person B, you are not allowed to speak or react in any way. Just listen.

Person A, you keep telling them what their ideal holiday is, and don't stop. If you don't think you're selling it, just keep going! And remember Person B, no speaking!

Group 2

Group 2, you have a slightly different task.

Now, this group, you will do exactly the same as the Group 1, but when you've finished, you can say, *Have I got it right?* Now this time, Person B, can say which bits of the holiday they do and don't like, but most importantly they must not say what holiday they want.

Person A listens to what they have right and wrong, and then guesses again until you have their perfect holiday.

Group 3

Group 3, here's what you have to do

In your group, Person B starts with the question, *What sort of things do you like in a holiday?* And then you can have a conversation, until person B is able to describe the ideal holiday.

I'll put a timer up here, and the moment Person A has their ideal holiday described to them, put your hand up and check the timer to see how long it took you.

[Ready, steady, go Slide]

Everyone got that? Ready steady GO!

[Run the exercise for a couple of minutes]

[Feedback for a couple of minutes]

So, what have we learnt from that?

[Feedback Slide]

[Take questions]

I just wanted to summarise a few things for this exercise. Firstly, of course, if you try and design a holiday for a person without a proper conversation, it's going to be a disaster. It would be really hard to do, really frustrating, it will take a long time and you will often get it wrong. If any you have done this for your partners, or loved ones, I feel for you! Think of this, how would Person A in the first group have felt, if based on nothing more than guesses, they went to the travel agent, they booked the holiday, paid for it and I handed you the tickets and told you when and where you have to go.

To be honest, the answer is more complex than you might think.

If someone you didn't know bought you a holiday, and handed you the tickets, I think you'd be delighted. You'd be grateful, you'd feel lucky and you'd celebrate. If someone asked you how you felt, I'm pretty confident you would say you were over the moon!

A funny thing happened to me recently that you might think has a bit of a connection to this example. I actually won a week's holiday in Florida

for me and my family. Amazing, I know! I was at an LGBT+ cabaret event on Valentine's Evening, supporting a brilliant charity called the Kite Trust, and I won a holiday to Florida.

I felt grateful, I felt lucky, I celebrated. When asked on the evening how I felt, I was just Wow! This is amazing, I'm over the moon.

But the funny thing is, we're not going.

My two older children are working and my partner and I were planning on a 'stay-cation' (which is where you don't go away - because we haven't got a lot of money at the moment); and here's the clincher, we'd have to pay for our own flights, transfers, food and activities. So really, we just can't go. Does that make sense?

That's the problem, with a fixed mind-set approach to consultation, you limit the scope of responses – the response may be positive. But it's a false positive.

And people may not engage in services, because they are not theirs.

They don't own them; they didn't design them.

And how does that feel. I've invested in this, I have made it for you – we consulted with you, but you don't want it? Why do people not appreciate these services we have to offer?

It's really complex isn't it? There's a complex set of feelings in there.

Second group, you had a much quicker response, more animated conversation, but you are still starting with a guess aren't you. And to be truthful, that just wastes time doesn't it.

The third group, that's the answer isn't it. A proper conversation, between two equals, with a common goal.

But interestingly, do you note that neither of you came at that task as outsiders. We all have knowledge and understanding of what holidays are like and what they mean. We are equals in experience, asking question from a joint place of understanding.

You're not service user and service provider, it's not like one of you is a travel agent, trying to flog a holiday. You're just two people having a conversation. You see, everyone in this room, we're all service users aren't we? We all go to the doctor; we all use the hospital if we need to; if we've had children, we've all been seen by a Health Visitor. So splitting people into professionals and service users - it's quite artificial, isn't it? But the moment we do that, we create a power imbalance. So, why do we not naturally fall into this place where we can have simple, open conversations about the services we use as equals?

[Challenges Slide]

Comfort zones

I think there is something about being outside of our **comfort zone**.

If you've ever built a den as a child, or a camp, you'll know the joy of creating a place that is your own, where you feel safe. It's the same with making a home, you place things around you that make you feel comfortable and secure.

It may be a mess, but it's your mess.

And what we experience in our personal spaces, we also experience in our professional spaces.

The structures and systems, roles, job titles, lines of accountability, all the things we build around ourselves that allow us to feel safe and secure and to work effectively and efficiently. As professionals, it's hard to open up, to open up our spaces to other people, because we can then feel unsafe.

Similarly, people coming into professional, corporate spaces, can feel out of place, disconnected, unwelcome. If you have ever lived, as I have, in a place where you don't feel secure or safe, because of the environment, or the people around you, you'll know how challenging that can be. It's ever present.

This can all feel very threatening, on all sides.

Managing risk and accountability

These structures we create are about **managing risk**. System leaders are ultimately responsible for the services that are delivered and

accountable to politicians, answerable to the Boards or Committees and inspectors from government agencies.

They need to maintain control. If we open up the design and delivery of service to service users and the community, who is ultimately responsible for those services, if they go wrong? How can we manage the risks, how can we maintain quality?

'The way things are done'

Also, we are rarely designing services afresh, we're not starting from a blank page are we? Services have developed and evolved over time - in some instances over many decades. As one Health Visitor once said to me, our services were mainly designed by history.

We can't just start afresh, and even if we wanted to, there are statutory responsibilities that need to be delivered, whether, and I use this phrase carefully, whether we like it or not.

Managing expectations

Also, if we invite parents and carers into the space where we are commissioning or re-commissioning services, how do we **manage expectations**? If we ask parents what they consider their needs to be and what services they want to see developed to meet these needs, what happens if they do not identify the services we have to offer? What

if they say they don't like or don't want services we have a duty to provide to them with?

Budget constraints

And, at the end of the day, we are working in extremely challenging times, where **budget constraints** mean we can never develop all of the services and supports we would ideally wish to offer.

Set against this backdrop, it is actually pretty amazing that any co-production and co-design happens, but it does, because good people are out there championing it, going the extra mile.

So, what are the opportunities?

[Opportunities 1 Slide]

I have unashamedly stolen an image here from my good colleague Kristina Jackson from Southend Association for Voluntary Services, from a joint presentation we did with system leaders here in Southend. She may have stolen it herself, I don't know.

Our aim is to move into a new space, where citizens, parents and carers, are at the heart of the decision making process, designing and delivering services with professionals playing an enabling role.

And what is the place where we come together?

[Opportunities 2 Slide]

Firstly, we need to develop a culture where those who are expert by *qualification or profession*, and those who *expert by experience* are equally valued and respected.

Secondly, we need to identify the problems, together. What are the challenges we see and where do our views differ? We also need to be absolutely honest and open about what we can and cannot do. We are patronising people if we think that's too hard for them to hear, it really isn't. The challenges are on **both sides**.

Thirdly, we need to value the power of the conversation. Not just as a catchphrase, but as a genuine commitment to a two-way dialogue, respecting the unique qualifications and expertise which each party brings.

Fourthly, and this is a challenging one – we need to look at new forms of advocacy. We talk at length about parents and carers, but what about the voice of children themselves? You will hear later about some excellent work, here in Southend, where young people are coming together to advocate for their peers and challenge services to do better in the area of mental health.

Well, who is speaking for our *very young* children? Who is speaking for children with special educational needs and disabilities who may face challenges expressing themselves? Can we hear the voice of children,

not only through their parents and carers, but also through their older siblings or young people who grew up in similar circumstances and had similar challenges, just a few short years ago?

Who is the expert, eh?

Next, we need to all commit to genuine co-design and co-production.

We need to look at our commissioning strategies and ask ourselves at what point service users, parents and carers (and children) are involved and how? If we are bringing them in seven, eight, nine, ten stages down the process, is it really true co-design? If once the service is commissioned, there is no further involvement of parents and carers, no report back to them on progress and no opportunity for ongoing involvement and leadership, is that really co-production?

Then, we need to cherish community assets, physical, financial, human, technological, different ways of communicating with people - as these are all a fundamental part of the solution. How can we invest in communities to be part of the change they want to see, not just customers for our services?

Finally, we need to look at user-led services and new spaces and vehicles for delivering this. By vehicles, we are not talking about physical vehicles, with wheels, but new structures, social enterprises, community interest companies, supported with new models of

investment, which will see us transferring ownership and control of particularly, preventative services, to the people families and children who are the experts in what they need.

[Where conversations take place Slide]

And finally, I want us to look at new spaces. If we always conduct our businesses in spaces and places where service providers feel comfortable and safe, but parents and children feel like strangers, we will not create the level playing field we are looking for.

At A Better Start Southend, we are challenging parents and carers, and system leaders and service providers, to look afresh at the way we design and deliver services - and we have exciting times ahead of us. We very much welcome you to join us on the journey with us and to be part of the conversations about where we go from here.

Thank you.