# Working towards Co-production

## The A Better Start Southend approach

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30 June 2025

A Better Start Southend
our children our community our future

early years alliance

COMMUNITY FUND

# Introduction

**Co-production is a bridge between the decision makers and the people in the community with real life experience of living with those decisions in action. Lived experience is at the heart of ABSS Co-Production – with a recognition that decision makers are often too remote to really understand normally.**

When decision makers come together with people with lived experience, and listen to many different voices, they learn something very valuable indeed.

Don't be intimidated by the 'dictionary definition' of co-production –
It does not have to be perfection. It is much more about human beings working well together – if you have the right values and the right chemistry, you can do it.

If you do manage to have the right chemistry, then the rewards are immense and the outcomes invaluable.

## Working towards Co-Production

**A video exploring A Better Start Southend's approach to enabling successful co-production.**

https://youtu.be/BVBiRoDumYE

# Tips for achieving successful co-production

**Go in open-minded**

People need to be determined to engage and learn from each other from the start.

It's not a textbook thing – it is determined y the people you engage and embrace into the process.

Be prepared for bumps in the road and things not working some of the time.

**Do it for the right reasons**

Don't do it because someone things it's a 'good idea' or to tick a box

Internalise what is really means, want to do it, and figure out how to make it work.

Everyone comes into it for a different reason, but hte ability to stay the course will depend on how much they are personally invested.

**Be open to others' perspectives, experiences and needs**

We all think we know what is needed by the community/situation, but we need to speak to lots of different people from lots of different backgrounds.

You need a full awareness of the whole community – not just a small portion of it – parents/community members are all so very different.

Be aware of being 'tokenistic' -ensure representation across the community you are supporting and working within - you need different perspectives. You are not just 'ticking a box'.

One parent can't speak for all parents –

Ensuring that  you capture as wide a range of experiences as well as perspectives – this in turn will give you something really strong and really suitable for meeting parents' needs.

# Tips for achieving successful co-production (continued)

**Ensure capacity for commitment to change**

This commitment needs to be throughout the whole organisation from the top down to be able to bring about real change through co-production.

Ensure there is genuine organisational capacity to commit the time, resources and energy necessary to make real changes.

There needs to be a real demonstrable desire to bring about change.

There also needs to be senior commitment to the process of change – in order to demonstrate that things can and will change and will be done differently.

This is about sharing power equally.

**Working with people with many different views can be challenging**

It requires time, it requires patience.

Things will be misunderstood, somethings will not be done well – accept that sometimes you won't get it right – just say sorry and ask about the best way to fix it.

People have to feel they can say 'you didn't get this right' and know they will be listened to, and something will be done to fix it.

You need to keep going, and have tenacity to work through problems together.

**Ensure staff are trained as well as parents or community members**

Professionals involved in co-production need training and support too.

It was useful to train staff around Asset Based Community Development (ABCD).

Staff may not be used to challenge and scrutiny in this way, so need supported to view it as a positive and constructive thing.

## A Better Start Southend

A Better Start Southend (ABSS) was at the heart of early years support for families in Southend from 2015 until March 2025.

**ABSS delivered services that helped families:**

- improve how they communicate with their little ones
- build social and emotional skills
- live healthier lives

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As part of the legacy from ABSS, local partner organisations and parents worked closely with ABSS to assemble a range of resource packs for families and for practitioners who support families. This Information Sheet forms part of those resources.

Learn more about the ABSS Family Resource Packs
www.abetterstartsouthend.co.uk/family-resources