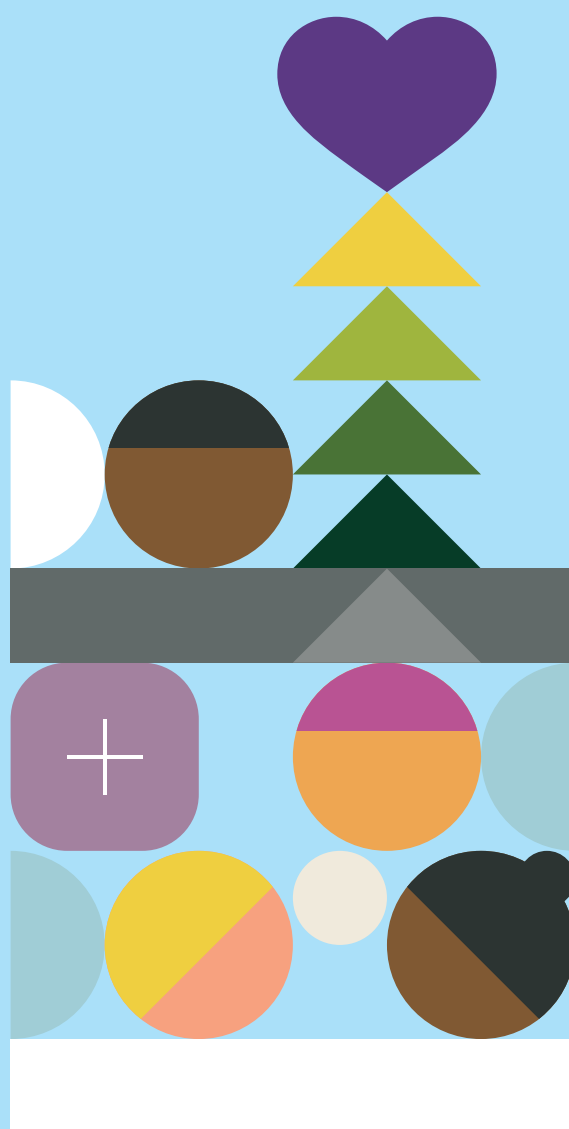


Co-producing with head and heart

How Age Better in Sheffield
has brought people together
to build a city where everyone
is proud to grow older



Welcome

Welcome to Age Better in Sheffield's co-production report. It's been a real privilege to deliver the Age Better programme over the last few years, and to see first-hand the difference and impact that co-production, done well and with heart, can have.

Co-production can be messy, take time, and occasionally feel difficult but we strongly believe it is worth it for the richness it brings. We hope this report inspires you to use co-production in your communities and organisations.

We recognise that good, authentic and sustainable co-production requires time and the will to do it well. In this report we will explore the challenges we've faced as well as celebrating the successes and rewards we have had in using co-production to underpin all elements of Age Better in Sheffield.

Suppose that you woke up tomorrow and you were doing the best ever co-production. What would be different? How would you be different?



ABiS is wholly co-produced by people over 50 with personal or professional experience of loneliness and social isolation, who come together with the shared aim of reducing loneliness and isolation in Sheffield and helping people to stay connected.



Alan Carter
Core partner

I've been on the Core Partnership right from the outset. I'm motivated by the fulfilment I get from being able to share my skills and experience to benefit others. I always carry the Five Ways to Wellbeing card in my wallet and to give and being able to give something back is one of those five.

I see co-production as people coming together to find shared solutions. Those who use a service are the best placed to help develop it. As far as I'm concerned co-production ensures that resources are used to develop the services people actually want. It's linked with better outcomes for the people who use the services, it helps build stronger communities and develop citizenship.

As a core partner I've been most involved in co-governance and co-commissioning. I think we all learned a lot from the first round of commissioning projects which meant that when it came to the second round, we had refined the process which led to better decisions being made.



Alice Mathers

Core partner

I joined the Core Partnership through a personal motivation to be part of developing a city where I, my family and all the people of Sheffield can age well.

I've seen how, through co-production, the lived experiences of local people have shaped Age Better in Sheffield project delivery, learning, evaluation and service improvement, particularly during the pandemic when taking a responsive person-centred approach was most needed.

Project communication and neighbourhood project information have also been made meaningful and accessible through co-design, to ensure they meet different community needs.

Co-production has also been a golden thread, joining the many different perspectives on the Core Partnership, and in this way has also enriched our governance approach as has a commitment to actively utilise the skills and experience of each of the core partners.

I wanted to share my skills and experience around participatory and peer research, programme evaluation and impact, strategic narrative and strategy. I've always felt that my contribution was welcomed and I've been inspired by the expert input and passion of the other core partners.

“It was impossible to tell the difference between ‘professional to professional’ and ‘professional–public’ interactions: in many meetings I attend, there is a qualitative difference in the way ‘public’ members are treated, ie patronising language.”

Dr Liz Philpotts

Clore Fellowship, 2019

Why is co-production important to you?

What exactly do you want to accomplish by using co-production?
What difference will this make?

How will you know when you've achieved this?

What will be different?



Age Better in Sheffield's co-production model

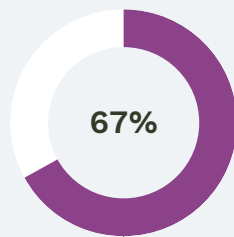
In 2015 we were delighted that Sheffield was named one of only 14 areas in England to be awarded the Ageing Better programme from The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF).

Over the last five years, our core partners and delivery partners have successfully delivered a programme with co-production truly at its heart.

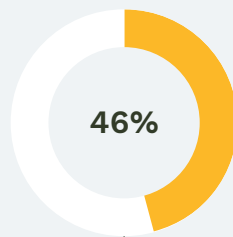
We have much to be proud of. Here are just a few of our highlights.

We tested a total of 26 new interventions to tackle the issue of isolation and loneliness.

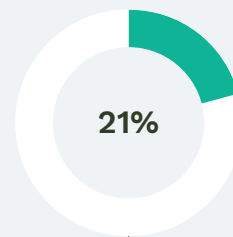
2,174 older people benefitted from these interventions of which:



reported improved mental wellbeing



reported reduction in levels of loneliness



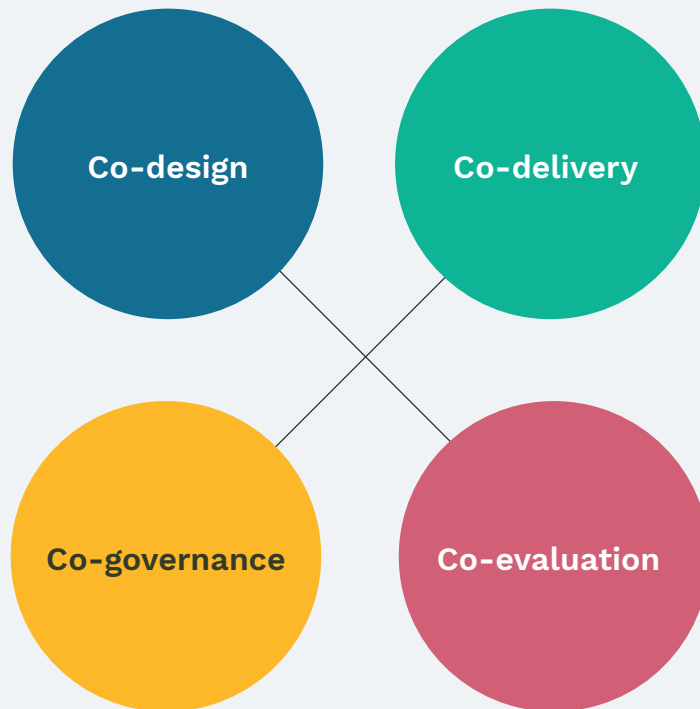
were from BAME communities (compared to 17% within the local authority).

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- We came first in the [2019 Eurhonet CSR Awards](#).
 - We were invited by TNLCF to host the first co-produced Ageing Better national event in Sheffield attended by 150+ people.
Read the end of event evaluation.
 - We produced **a guide for housing associations** who want to get involved in this work in their local communities.
 - We developed a robust method of co-production which has been the backbone of our programme. We co-governed, co-designed, co-commissioned, co-delivered and co-evaluated our programme from beginning to end.



We delivered more than 40,000 neighbourhood toolkits in local communities, as well as over 2,500 'Hello Sheffield Neighbour' activity packs during lockdown.





Our co-production model

● Co-design

We work alongside local people to design interventions and solutions.

● Co-delivery

Close collaboration with the programme's delivery partners who are testing new interventions to reduce isolation and loneliness.

● Co-governance

Representatives have equal voice and influence in how the programme is delivered.

● Co-evaluation

We invite people with lived experience to evaluate the quality and impact of the programme.

1. Co-design

Those with lived experience co-design what will be delivered and how. They drive co-design at different levels – at a project/system level and a personal level. For example, people with lived experience are involved in designing programme strategy, models of service delivery, and the way that individuals are involved.

2. Co-delivery

People with lived experience play an active role in service provision, as funded delivery partners, mentors, paid employees or volunteers. For example, activities are co-facilitated by someone with lived experience.

3. Co-governance

Those with lived experience are involved in programme oversight and decision-making. For example, those with lived experience are recruited to our core partnership so that they have strategic influence with equal voice.

4. Co-evaluation

We support people with lived experience to help evaluate quality and impact. For example, we train people with lived experience as peer evaluators.

There are more examples of these four strands in action to follow in this report, showcasing different ways to bring co-production to life.

What makes you nervous when you think about co-production?

What's the biggest challenge to developing co-production in your work?

What are you already doing well in terms of co-production?

Where are your strengths?

1. Co-design

Co-designing the bid

From the beginning we set out to put co-design at the heart of Sheffield's bid to the National Lottery Community Fund. To achieve this, we developed a campaign to collect stories from isolated older people across Sheffield.

In just six weeks, a team of community journalists (led by local organisation Silent Cities) delivered tea parties in old people's homes, took an older people's theatre group on tour around extra care schemes, and brought an infamous spoken word night 'Words Aloud' back for one more time.

The night was entitled 'Growing Old Disgracefully.'





Our approach to co-designing the campaign and the stories collected by our community journalists were cited by The National Lottery Community Fund as being critical to Sheffield being awarded the full £6 million.

**When did you last listen to somebody's story?
What did it tell you?**

Would the other person report back that they felt heard?

How could you create more space to listen?

When did you last have a good conversation with someone using your service?
How well did you listen?

**Was it an open conversation?
Was there a sense of equality in the conversation?**

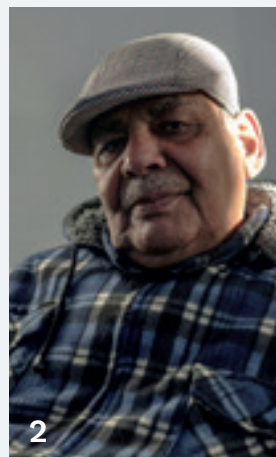
Did you value the conversation?

2. Co-delivery

Since 2015, Age Better in Sheffield has worked in partnership with 26 organisations across Sheffield to deliver innovative approaches to reduce social isolation and loneliness and support people to build meaningful connections to family and friends, and within their local communities.

We used a test-and-learn approach to offer delivery organisations the flexibility to adapt and improve how they supported participants in their projects in response to the insight, data and learning they were gathering on the ground. By using test and learn, we hoped that delivery partners had greater flexibility and autonomy to co-produce the support in line with the needs of the people they were working alongside.

We understood early on that taking an approach like this doesn't happen by accident. It requires a mutual desire to do things differently, and a strong level of trust between the lead provider and the respective delivery partner organisations. In this section, we outline some of the key activities we delivered to create the right conditions for test and learn to be implemented successfully.



1. PWLC, Better Journeys Project,
2. SOAR, A Better Life Project,
3. Sheffield Mind, Wellbeing Practitioners Project,
4. Lai Yin, Smartphone Friends Project

1. Co-produced tenders

We delivered two distinct phases of commissioning, one in 2015 and then in 2018.

Prior to developing tenders, we undertook a period of co-design for approximately three months to understand the strengths, challenges and need in Sheffield to help us to design interventions.

We invited input from a diverse range of people and partners and undertook a range of activities, shown in the co-design section of this report.

This process was integral to the success of our tender because instead of prescribing what activities we wanted organisations to deliver, we instead outlined the need that we identified during the co-design phase. See example in Table 1 (p23).

2. Co-commissioned interventions

Every service that we commissioned through the programme went through a robust co-commissioning process made up of a range of members of the Age Better in Sheffield Core Partnership.

We were able to take learning from the early days of co-commissioning to make improvements later in the programme.

Table 1: Example of how Age Better in Sheffield used co-production to inform requirements when tendering for new services

8. Service Description, Purpose & Specific Requirements

The Wellbeing Practitioners intervention has been commissioned to develop a project that provides intensive counselling to socially isolated people aged 50+ who are experiencing low mental wellbeing.

When carrying our co-production events, older people told us that:

- Their level of isolation increased as a result of not feeling any motivation to do anything. We were told by one participant “you have to force yourself to get up and get dressed some days.”
- Some older people felt their isolation had increased due to a sense of not feeling useful following a significant change in their life and had lost the confidence to address this.
- Making the first move to reduce their level of social isolation seemed an impossible task to some participants of the co-production events unless there was the help available to overcome this.

3. Invest in relationships

The success of Age Better in Sheffield has rested on the relationships we have been able to foster.

From the outset of the programme, we wanted test and learn to be an underlying principle within each of the interventions we have delivered through partnership.

For delivery partners to be able to do this effectively with the people they engage and support on the ground, they have had to feel supported to be able to take this approach, and know that if things don't work we will support them to make the necessary changes to their delivery models.

To build strong relationships we have tested out a number of different approaches, including each delivery partner having a dedicated Age Better in Sheffield lead worker, delivery partner group meetings, co-location and many more.



4. Focus on learning

Age Better in Sheffield is part of the national Ageing Better, Fulfilling Lives project funded by TNLCF.



A primary aim of the project is to gather learning through test and learn to understand what works well, how, why, with whom, as well as what doesn't work so well and why that is the case.

For this reason, a focus on learning has been woven through the programme from the start. Delivery partners were asked at tender stage to outline what they wanted to learn from their project and we collaborated throughout the delivery period to capture, analyse and share learning.

Throughout this process we have been supported by CRESR, our local evaluation partner based at Sheffield Hallam University.

What makes co-delivery meaningful?

What co-delivered way of working could you introduce that's new to your organisation/service?

What excites you about co-delivery?

What small step could you take to do more co-delivery?

3. Co-governance

The Core Partnership is made up of older people, professionals, and representatives from organisations across the city. Core partner meetings have evolved and developed as the members inspired creativity.

The meetings featured appreciative enquiries, round robins and show and tell, creating a vibrant environment in which everyone's individuality is celebrated, and creative results are born. When it was time to commission new projects in 2018, ABiS got out into the community to hold melting pot lunches, an innovative way of bringing together a diverse group of skills and experiences, all with a shared goal.

Some quotes from Core Partnership members:

“I joined the Core Partnership of Age Better in Sheffield in 2018 with a particular interest in helping the programme understand and communicate its impact and legacy through evaluation. I am passionate about Sheffield being a place to age well and being inclusive of all people in its future design.”

“Good governance is important to ensure the robust delivery of such an important programme.”

**What kind of power do people with lived experience have in your organisation/service?
In what ways are they powerless?
What could you do to change this?**

Would people with lived experience come to the same conclusions as you about their power in your service? How do you know?

**Will you use your power differently as a result of this reflection? How?
What will be different?**

Age Better and co-governance: chair's perspective

I can honestly say that being the Chair of the Age Better Core Partnership has been one of the greatest privileges and learning experiences of my career. Our work together has reinforced for me the enormous power of co-production when it is done well and with deep personal commitment. It has reminded me that when we fail to co-produce in our organisations and our major systems, we rob ourselves and others of a great deal of impact, joy and learning.

It is difficult to describe what makes our approach to co-governance work so effective and engaging. Our impact as a partnership has been shaped by a mix of tangible, method-driven steps we took to instil ongoing improvement in co-governance and a more intangible spirit of the partnership.

I will turn first to the more intangible spirit of the partnership.

What can you do or use to encourage yourself when co-governance feels hard?

How can you remain hopeful about co-governance when there are challenges? What will make you stick at it?

What do you need to get better at, to do co-governance well? Where could you refresh your practice?

Great co-production is not just driven by 'method' but by deep-seated 'will' and heart for true collaboration. I think that one of the defining features of our partnership has been that the people involved have had this will.

We are each very different in our expertise, areas of interest and our style of collaboration, but there has been a consistency in the commitment to true collaboration, respect for each other and the wider co-production of our programme. This for me has been the defining factor.

A further important factor has been the maturity of our relationship as a partnership. True co-governance, if working well, should feel uncomfortable at points, there should be challenges and disagreements as well as affiliation and joy. This has been certainly true of our partnership. I think that lots of great attempts at co-governance and co-design are stymied through shying away from uncomfortable territory, or lack of ability to navigate the inevitable bumps that any relationship will experience.

There are a number of more tangible factors which I think have benefitted our model of co-governance.

One is having reverence for ‘the basics’ – by this I mean investing time in preparing for our meetings and facilitating them well. This seems like an insignificant point but is actually one of the most important building blocks. Badly organised time together is a wasted opportunity, and poorly structured meetings lead to inequity of voice and influence. I’ve witnessed many failed attempts at effective co-production because the time together wasn’t honoured by proper planning.

We have also continually applied the principle of test and learn to our co-governance. Our standard review of the meeting has allowed us to gather ongoing insight on how effectively we feel we are working together.

This means that our meetings have evolved over time and we have experimented with different formats, eg the legacy-focused meeting with wider partners. These reviews of the meeting have often generated challenge which has caused us to stop, take stock and change course.

A final point I would make is that our co-governance has benefitted by having a core of ‘founding’ members who have remained with the programme over time alongside a changing membership.

It is important to have both. As a test-and-learn programme it has been important that we could bring in new individuals and expertise over the course of the programme. Having some core members remain from the start of the programme has meant that the programme ‘history’ has not been lost and there has been a thread of continuity from start to finish, albeit in the context of the evolution that a programme like this demands.



Juliann Hall
Chair of Age Better in Sheffield

How do you feel about giving away some of your voice and influence?

Where would the conversation go if you did this?

4. Co-evaluation

Co-evaluation has been central to the delivery of Age Better in Sheffield. We have been lucky to work with CRESR at Sheffield Hallam University who have been our evaluation partner for the duration of the programme.

Our partners at CRESR have worked closely within our Core Partnership and across our delivery partners to embed a mixed-methods approach to evaluation. As part of this, CRESR has supported the co-evaluation of Age Better in Sheffield.

When did you last intentionally value someone else's experiences?
How could you listen more and listen better?
How could you pay more attention to the stories you hear in your work?
If you listened more to people's stories, what difference would that make?

What interests you about co-governance?
What are you curious about?
What questions do you have?

Who leads evaluation in your work?
Who directs the conversations about evaluation?
Who decides what matters in evaluation, what is covered?
Who decides what happens next?

Reflections of a story catcher on co-evaluation/peer evaluation

Story Catchers was a longitudinal study that was developed in partnership with Dr Alice Mathers, Age Better in Sheffield core partner, and Chris Dayson of CRESR.

Our Story Catchers project began in May 2019 with a series of training workshops run by Sheffield Hallam University which prepared us volunteers (all aged 50 or over) to be able to carry out our research safely, ethically, and effectively. At the end of the training, we were equipped with digital recording devices (two in fact, in case of a failure of one machine to record) and assigned our research subjects.

The project would be evaluating two of Age Better in Sheffield's initiatives: A Better Life, which was a financial inclusion and social café project based in an area of Sheffield with a number of ethnically diverse communities, and Start Up, which provided microgrants for individuals to set up a social activity in their community. I was assigned a beneficiary from each, and dates were arranged for the first interviews to take place.

Story Catchers was a longitudinal study, meaning it was intended to track beneficiaries across the course of their involvement with a project and capture their unfolding stories.

After each round of research interviews, we would meet up with the research associate who was leading on this to discuss our findings, looking at the transcribed interviews for key themes and messages which would then be flagged up for further exploration in the following interview. In this way I was involved not only in gathering data but in co-designing how the research would proceed.

We began with little idea of the stories we would hear, but it soon became clear that as a peer-evaluators we were very privileged.

The relationship I built with Sal over the course of four visits allowed me to capture a story that began with an impoverished childhood in Yemen followed by eventual emigration to the UK and a life of hard work in the Sheffield steel industry, and economic responsibility for a large extended family back in Yemen. This responsibility continues even though he is now in his eighties and lives on his pension.

Working alongside an academic to interpret the findings and design the next steps was empowering. By having an input into the final report and knowing that I had been able to do justice to Sal's life experiences through my involvement in co-evaluation, I feel that I have helped turn the spotlight onto a story that could otherwise have remained untold.

What alternative questions could you ask?

What alternative perspectives or outside thinking could you bring in?

What might these alternatives lead to?

The Stronger Together Co-Production toolkit

A key part of the legacy has been the development of the Co-Production Toolkit – a one-stop, user-friendly and interactive space where collective experiences from across six years of programme delivery is shared.

This extensive learning is brought to co-production audiences through a beautifully illustrated PDF document which sets the scene, linking to hundreds of stories, tools and resources.









The toolkit offers an abundance of information and resources and is available to any organisation, service, group, or individual.

It is hosted on SYHA's website with a portal into the resource and will also sit on the websites of all programme areas, as well as some of the key partners.

**The toolkit is organised into
12 distinct co-production themes:**

- Creating a co-production culture
- Community development through micro-funding
- Tackling ageism through co-production and age-friendly communities
- Co-production within coastal and rural communities
- Tackling loneliness through co-commissioning
- Empowering communities through partnership working
- Co-researching within the community
- Growing sustainable groups
- Diversity and inclusion
- Creativity in co-production
- Asset-based community development
- Co-production in a crisis

**What's stopping
you from opening
the toolkit?**



The overall aim of the toolkit was to bring to life the work of the Ageing Better programme in a way that could be accessed by anyone wanting to work with people in their communities, whether at a strategic, operational or grassroots level.

What's next?

What assumptions had you made about co-production before reading this report?

What will you be doing differently now? When will you start?



Please join us in our movement
to put co-production at the heart
of all decision-making in Sheffield!

Go to the [Age-friendly Sheffield website](#) and find out how you can
get in touch – and get involved.



Vic Stirling

Programme Lead, Age Better in Sheffield
and now Age-friendly Sheffield

v.stirling@syha.co.uk
agefriendlysheffield.org.uk

