



Single Homeless Project's Trauma-Informed Co-Production Guidance

Who is this Guidance for?

This Guidance has been created by Single Homeless Project's Co-Production Leads, with input from the Camden Homelessness System Co-Production Team, supported by Single Homeless Project.

The Guidance aims to acknowledge that while co-production can be fulfilling, worthwhile and in some cases essential, it is also a messy, at times undefined, uncertain and sensitive process involving many stakeholders and perspectives.

This Guidance is designed to be **used by anyone involved in commissioning, endorsing, leading, planning, facilitating and participating in any kind of co-production work.** It is for those who want to understand how to enable meaningful and safe collaboration between people with different types of experience and expertise...

...not just for those leading or participating in co-production!



For guidance on how to get started with co-production, see the **Single Homeless Project's Co-Production Toolkit**.

In the guidance, you will find

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Links to other guides and reading around trauma-informed co-production

A snapshot

What is needed for co-production to be trauma-informed?

Senior leaders,
commissioners,
managers

Co-Production
leads, coordinators,
facilitators

Co-Production
groups and
co-producers

- understanding of trauma + its impacts
- understanding of systems + system-induced trauma + discrimination
- able to hold + work with multiple and opposing perspectives and agendas
- able to meet challenging conversations + perspectives with curiosity
- clarity around purpose, roles, responsibilities, level of influence
- reflective, learning approach + mindset
- appreciation of non-linear process of co-production (able to work with uncertainty, flexibly, reflectively)
- understanding + appreciation of group development, dynamics, how to work through interpersonal conflict

- guidance + support, leadership, supervision, reflective practise, peer support
- learning, training + personal development opportunities
- co-created group values, ways of working and process to navigate challenging situations

- a team, co-facilitators, allies, communities of practise
- appreciation of + responsive to diverse needs of group, inc. neurodiversity, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, language

- support networks outside of co-production group



A quick link to Single Homeless Project's resources to support trauma-informed co-production can be found below.

Resources

Why should Co-Production also be Trauma-Informed?

We know that co-production is a values-led way of working that involves creating opportunities for people to have more choice, control, and agency in how they are supported, or in designing and delivering services and in influencing wider systemic change.



We also know co-production involves working alongside people who have experienced relational, and system induced trauma, where: '[People] may have been homeless or insecurely housed, experienced violence, been involved with social services or the criminal justice system.' (Fulfilling Lives South East (Guide to Trauma-Informed Co-Production))

This means...

People are likely to have had experiences of feeling '**powerlessness, of not being heard or believed**' and '**have felt they had to battle against the system for survival**' (Fulfilling Lives South East (Guide to Trauma-Informed Co-Production))

With this might come a lack of trust in institutions and some scepticism about the possibilities for change.

Camden's Trauma & Psychologically Informed Framework, A Resource for Empowering Local Initiatives for Trauma-informed Practice have shared a useful description that highlights the lasting effects of trauma, drawing on SAMHSA's definition:



Trauma is, 'an experience that creates a **sense of fear, helplessness, or horror, and overwhelms our capacity to cope** can have varying impacts. Some of us will recover and move on, while **for others, the effects will be long-lasting,** impacting our sense of safety, our understanding and containment of emotions, our relationships, and whole sense of self'

By getting involved in co-production, people will therefore be required to...

- **reflect on experiences of the system** that have been harmful and negatively impacted people's lives
- **build relationships with new people and in group settings,** including
 - people in positions of leadership and authority who might represent organisations responsible for their care or that have caused harm
 - and others in group settings who are also in recovery and who are bringing their own histories + lasting effects of trauma to the work

This means co-production with people who have experienced trauma requires an understanding of power dynamics, of the need to approach discussions with care, to prioritise the safety of people who could be retriggered by the work, and how trauma may impact a person's ability to stay involved and build relationships with other participants + members..

But, while we can understand that trauma '**robs the victim of a sense of power and control over [their] own life...**'

It is also understood that '**a guiding principle of recovery is to restore power and control to the survivor,**'
(Recovery from Psychological Trauma, Judith Herman, 2002)

This means, when applying the principles of trauma-informed support (see table below), co-production can be an important part (but not the whole part) of a person's healing and recovery, particularly when it creates the space for people to:

- Have choice and control over their care and support
- Have an equal voice alongside those in positions of power
- Build new relationships and peer support networks
- Gain and share knowledge about how systems and services function
- Apply personal experiences of trauma and systemic failure constructively to work towards influencing change

So while **facilitators of co-production are not therapists**, or viewed as support workers, **there are therapeutic elements to the work** and people can require a lot of support to stay involved in the process.

The table below highlights the **shared values and principles of both trauma-informed and co-production practice**. (For a more detailed table, see this article on [Trauma-informed co-production: Collaborating with women with complex needs](#))



Principles of trauma-informed approaches	Co-production principles
Safety	Safety
Trust and transparency	Strengths-based (build on people's capabilities, everyone has equal value, clarity over roles and purpose)
Choice and empowerment	Sharing power
Consideration of gender, cultural and historical issues	Accessibility, diversity and inclusion—Respecting and valuing the knowledge of all
Collaboration and peer support	Reciprocity and mutuality

We hope this Guidance will:


- share what we have learned is important to consider and put in place for safe, meaningful and trauma-informed co-production
- share resources and tools that we have tried and tested at SHP
- be a useful guide for conversations about a way of working that requires the juggling of different elements and needs, and where there are sometimes no clear answers

However, it cannot:

- eliminate the inevitable messiness + uncertainty of this work
- reduce the complexity of people or systems

The poem below, written by Micky ScottBey Jones (a healing and resilience practitioner), speaks to the realities of co-production and the fact that **we shouldn't expect ourselves and others to get it right all the time.**

However, by applying some trauma-informed values and practices, it is **worthwhile to give it a go.**



*Together we will create brave space.
Because there is no such thing as a “safe space” —
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love.
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be.
But It will be our brave space together, and
We will work on it side by side.*



1.

Supporting Co-Production Leads, Coordinators & Facilitators

Questions to consider as a **manager or leader supporting co-production:**

- How will you ensure that co-production coordinators and facilitators have clarity around their roles, their level of influence and responsibilities within the organisation and on co-production projects?
- Have you considered the duty of care involved in supporting co-producers and members of co-production groups? How can this be agreed upon with management and wider teams, particularly safeguarding teams? What support and learning needs to be provided around understanding trauma for people facilitating co-production? What support will you provide facilitators of co-production to manage the emotional demands and impacts of this work?
- How will you support facilitators and coordinators to hold and manage the demands of facilitation, especially when supporting collaboration between people who occupy different positions within and perspectives of the system and agendas?
- Are there certain positions that co-production leads and coordinators will need to take on certain topics? (e.g. around equity + inclusion). Have you considered what processes and current ways of working within your team or organisation might be challenged through co-production, and how to support co-production leads to respond to and navigate this?
- What changes might you need to make in your leadership and management approach to be able to respond with curiosity and flexibility to the new ideas and ways of working that are generated through co-production?



Questions to consider as a **co-production lead, coordinator or facilitator**:

- Who will support you in thinking and talking through difficult situations, challenging group dynamics, and the holding of different perspectives and agendas?
- How might you be supported to make space and advocate for lived experience perspectives that might challenge the culture and practise of the organisation you work for?
- How will you work alongside managers, staff and co-producers to understand what decision-making power and influence you hold as a co-production lead or facilitator? What is your voice and your role throughout the co-production journey?
- How will you be supported to make difficult decisions about the group or about the work? e.g. about inclusivity? For example, how will you make decisions around people's 'readiness' or suitability for getting involved?

Tips and advice for managers and co-production leads

Find allies and people who will be able to relate to the challenges co-production leads and coordinators will have to hold - this could look like peer support groups, communities of practise and joining existing co-production networks

Prioritise reflective practise and supervision – facilitators need proper support to work through the demands of group work, of supporting people with lived experience to navigate co-production work, as well as what it might bring up for facilitators themselves

Training in facilitation, as well as trauma-informed practise can be helpful to develop confidence and skills to hold the complexities of co-production group work, such as understanding group development, dynamics and learning about session planning tools and methods to create a safe and constructive space

Make sure co-production leads and coordinators have clarity in their role and remit

Clarity is very important for co-production leads to feel safe, secure, confident, and to provide the structure and transparency required for those involved to also feel safe

Managers must be ready to hold and sit with the messiness of co-production and what it exposes alongside facilitators of this work, as well as being able to appropriately support co-production leads and coordinators with interpersonal issues and dynamics that arise from group-work

Managers should acknowledge the challenging positionality of the co-production lead, where it involves acting as a bridge or mediator between people with some decision-making power and those without.

Co-production leads are involved in elevating the voices of those who want to challenge systemic or organisational ways of working, which can be confusing when co-production leads are also employed by that organisation or system

Managers should therefore support co-production leads during situations where they are required to act against the needs and wants of the co-production group.



2.

Trauma-Informed Group Work

Setting up a group and building relationships

Things to consider

- How will you explore and agree on group values and ways of working that allow all members to participate and feel comfortable, safe, and included? How will you ensure that any agreed-upon group ways of working can be put into practice?
- How will you support members in understanding and communicating their needs, such as preferred ways of working, learning styles, their capacity, expertise and boundaries with each other and the work?
- How will you support members in understanding and appreciating the diverse needs of each other that might relate to neurodiversity, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, language...How will you explore what inclusivity really means and looks like in practise?
- How will you be responsive to the diverse needs of the group/participants?
- How will you communicate and be clear on the purpose of the group, explore expectations and possible limitations and boundaries of the work?
- How will you navigate building relationships between people representing services and co-producers who might have had negative or traumatic experiences whilst accessing these services?
- How will you enable everyone to feel psychologically safe to express challenges, ideas, and barriers without criticism in an environment where all types of expertise are valued?



Tips and advice for setting up a group and building relationships

1

Work with group members to understand what support might be needed to manage the demands of co-production work and to feel safe and supported - this could involve initial conversations with people before joining a group or project.

This could also involve providing learning opportunities for the group throughout people's involvement, e.g. on equity, diversity and inclusion, self-containment strategies, managing triggers, regulating emotions, and setting and communicating boundaries.

2

Clarity of purpose is important – be clear about the point of coming together, this will help make conversations more meaningful, constructive and safe

Prioritise creating a group agreement (or term of reference, group values, ways of working) - spend more than one session on this if you need to and keep referring to and reviewing it where needed

3

Make time regularly for everyone involved to reflect on the process or the experience of being involved in co-production

e.g. if groups involve a mix of professionals and lived experience, could you carve out a lived experience only space, if needed? - this could be done through peer support or reflective practise sessions

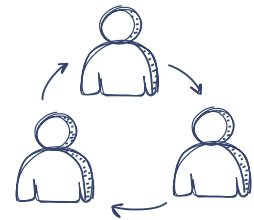
It is also worth bringing in reflection and relationship building activities when facilitating co-production groups involving both staff and people with lived experiences

3.

Facilitating the process, navigating challenging situations

Things to consider for facilitating the process and navigating challenging situations

- Sometimes, the rules and boundaries you put in place aren't met, and sometimes, people will be triggered or stirred up by the work or discussions. How will you navigate and support the group to resolve any fallout, distress, or conflict that emerges in a trauma-informed way?
- What processes could you put in place? How will you talk about and agree on this process with the group? How will you involve any group members or participants in resolving conflict and deciding how to do this?
- How will you support the group to reflect on the group's culture, dynamics, and development?



Tips and advice for facilitating the process

- Create a group agreement that also considers what happens when people are struggling to meet the values and ways of working the group has outlined, and be as consistent as possible with how you use this.
 - Make sure there is ongoing reflection of the group agreement – change as you go, if necessary
 - Are there tools you could try out to aid this process? (e.g. non-violent communication methods? Or, see SHP's 'when things get challenging' reflection tool below).
- Conflict will happen, it is important to give people involved a chance to reflect and respond together (avoid making decisions about a person's involvement on behalf of that person)
 - Provide ongoing supervision for individual co-producers, peer support or reflective practise sessions for the group (*see resources in 'Supporting co-producers - wellbeing and self-care'*)
 - Encourage people to bring a support worker or trusted person if agreed that a member might need some extra support during sessions

4.

Sharing and disclosing lived experiences



Things to consider

- How will you communicate and be clear on the purpose of the group in relation to sharing of lived experience? (e.g. is it a peer support group? Is it a space where what is shared can be held therapeutically? is there a broader purpose and task which requires the sharing of lived experience to be contained?).
 - Are there positions you need to take on certain topics, beliefs and perspectives? (e.g. discriminatory and prejudiced language, beliefs).
- Is there a possibility that discussions could move into emotionally difficult or distressing topics?
 - If so, how will you create space for what is shared to be safely held and understood, or contained if it needs to be? How will you support people to understand what is safe and appropriate to share?

Tips and advice for sharing and disclosing lived experience

- 1 • Create space to share stories and experiences that people want to share but that aren't appropriate for or can't be held during group work (e.g. through additional sessions, running creative workshops, meeting people 1-1).
- 2 • Make time before meetings to check-in with people, check people understand the aims and purpose of the session, what the space is used for, who else will be there and to talk through any concerns, potentially difficult topics. You could explore what people feel comfortable discussing and sharing when creating a group agreement, or this can be discussed during 1-1 meeting.
- 3 • Signpost people towards support that means they are resourced outside of the co-production work, e.g. if people need somewhere to take the issues or things that are being brought up in co-production work.
- 4 • Provide training and learning so people can develop skills and knowledge to contribute beyond their 'lived experience' (e.g. learning about the system, how change happens, developing skills such as presenting and facilitating)

5.

Trauma-Informed Group Work Resources

Understanding trauma

[Camden's Trauma & Psychologically Informed Framework, A Resource for Empowering Local Initiatives for Trauma-informed Practice](#)

- Understandings of trauma, examples of how to implement and work with the impacts of trauma

Group agreements, ways of working

[Group agreements](#)

- How to create a group agreement or set of values
- Existing examples

Facilitation tools

- [Facilitation Tools](#) (for relationship building, methods for discussion, structuring sessions, constructive and interactive discussions).
- [Relationship building, starter and check-in exercises](#)
- [Single Homeless Project Co-Production Toolkit](#) – group building activity ideas (+ general ideas + tools for group work + links to other sites): Page 25, and pages 51 – 60
- Decision-making tools – see [Sociocracy for All](#)

Sharing power

[Sharing power and building relationships between staff and co-producers](#)

- Link to Single Homeless Project's Co-Production Toolkit; see page 89 onwards for a 'sharing power checklist.'

Navigating conflict and challenging situations

[Navigating conflict and challenging situations](#)

- Single Homeless Project's Co-Production 'When Things Get Challenging' reflection tool (can be used by everyone involved, including facilitators, staff and co-producers)

Resources continued

Learning and training ideas

Learning and Training for Co-Production Groups

Includes:

- Exploring Learning + Training Needs for the Group
- Drama tools to understand different perspectives (by Change Act Theatre)
- Systems Thinking (by Making Every Adult Matter)
- Communication Styles (by Annie's Training Company)
- Storytelling (for lived experience sharing)

Sharing lived experiences safely, constructively, meaningfully

Sharing lived experience (safely, constructively, meaningfully).

- Opening statement on safety + sharing for Camden Homelessness System Transformation Programme Partnership Event - can be adapted for different purposes to set ground rules around sharing of personal information
- Lived experience storytelling session plan with Camden Stories in the Street
- Co-Producer 'About Me' profiles – helps to learn about topics people might find challenging to talk about
- Trauma informed storytelling webinar: disclosing and sharing experiences of trauma in training and learning environments - Trauma Informed Storytelling
- SHP's Co-Production Toolkit: p.68 onwards explores ways to be flexible so that people who might experience barriers to getting involved in co-production groups can still get involved

Supporting people's wellbeing

Things to consider for supporting people's wellbeing and self-care

- What are the demands of the co-production opportunity? (potentially challenging situations, pressures on people's safety and wellbeing).
- Are there concerns about the impact of the work on those involved? How will you discuss and navigate these with members? (e.g. risks around people's safety; the safety of others).
- What will you provide throughout the co-production experience to support people to reflect on, process, and navigate challenges associated with co-production? (both personal and interpersonal or group challenges). What can and should you provide? Where do people need to be signposted?



Tips and advice for facilitating the process

- Support people to give things a go and to have a chance to try co-production out, but be mindful of putting people in a position where they feel unsafe – meet people first, explore concerns about getting involved together. Agree what people could try out at their own pace.
 - If people are unable to make sessions or have missed out, they may feel like they're letting you or themselves down or have 'failed'. Be clear that nothing is compulsory and that taking a break or leaving a session is okay.
 - It also worth thinking about how you will keep people up to date and involved if they can't make sessions
- Find ways to be flexible if you can, such as meet people 1-1 until people feel ready to get involved; offer alternative times to run sessions; run workshops in neutral spaces (e.g. community venues); run separate groups, if necessary, e.g. for women
 - If possible, offer 1-1 supervision, regular check-ins, reflective practise, and support people to set up their own peer support groups or join co-production support networks and communities of practise
- Provide opportunities to learn strategies for self-care, self-containment, understanding and managing triggers, regulating emotions, setting and communicating boundaries
 - Signpost people towards support that means they are resourced outside of the co-production work, especially if co-production brings up unresolved emotions or experiences

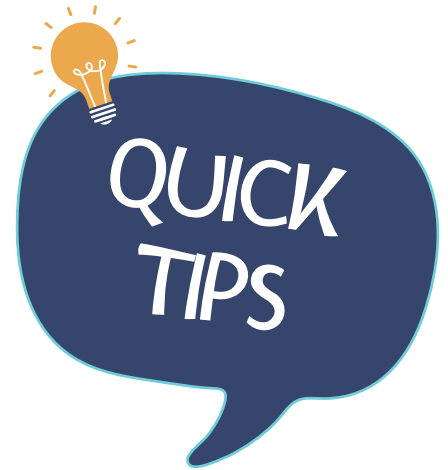
Supporting people's personal development

Things to consider...

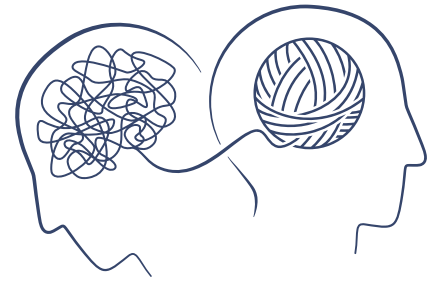
- How will you support people in developing and building skills beyond their lived experience and expertise?
- How will you support people to explore and develop new understandings and perspectives on the issue or topic you might be working on?

Advice and tips

- Offer 1-1 supervision or regular check-ins
- Make time to explore peoples' ideas and interests for personal development and learning that might be separate from the whole group.
- Offer initial and ongoing training and learning (based on the group's needs and wants). This can help people validate their experiences whilst considering the bigger picture and purpose or task (e.g., learning about the system, how change happens, and developing skills around presenting + facilitating).



Resources - supporting personal development and wellbeing



Reflective practise, wellbeing and self-care tools

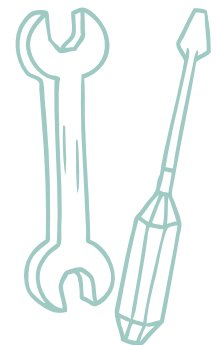
Includes:

- Wellbeing for Co-Producers session plan: how do we practise self-care during co-production activities so that we can all stay involved?
- Reflection session plan - what are we learning about ourselves by participating in systems change? (Co-designed session plan by Camden Co-Producers)
- Self-Advocacy Tools, co-produced by FLIC Co-Production Team - [FLIC Co-Production Group](#)
- [Thrive LDN Conflict Resolution and Personal Awareness resources](#)
- [Homeless Link - reflective practise webinar](#)

Supervision tools

Includes:

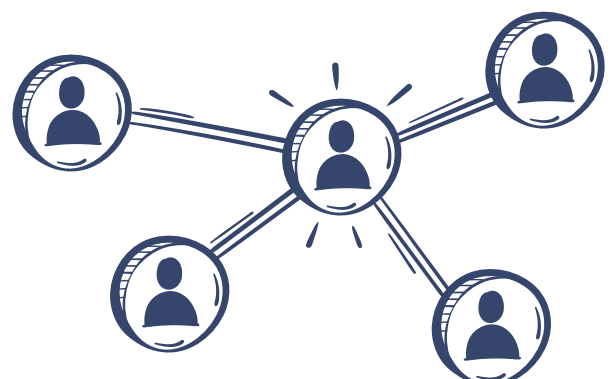
- Co-Producer 'About Me' profiles – tool to explore people's needs, strengths, areas for personal development and topics that might be difficult or distressing to talk about



Learning and Training for Co-Production Groups

Includes:

- Exploring Learning and Training Needs for the Group



Links to other Guides and Toolkits on Trauma-Informed Co-Production

- [Camden's Trauma & Psychologically Informed Framework, A Resource for Empowering Local Initiatives for Trauma-informed Practice](#)
- [Fulfilling Lives South East \(Guide to Trauma-Informed Co-Production\)](#)
- [West Yorkshire Trauma-Informed Co-Production Guidance](#)
- [Article - Trauma informed co-production: Improving Access to primary care with women with complex needs](#)