

How co-production impacts integrated care design and transformation: Library Memory Café

The development of the café

Adult social care and county library services worked together to set up a Memory Café using an intergenerational age-friendly model with links to a local school and Rhyme-Time 0 - 5 group. It was set up following discussions with residents about 'living in lockdown'. People had a say in how they emerged from lockdown, and they focussed on re-socialisation, renewal and recovery. The aim was to 'intergenerate to regenerate' following the impact of the pandemic on increasing levels of loneliness and isolation in our communities in both younger and older population groups.

The café was launched in Dementia Action Week in May 2022, and is a pilot for other successful groups in the area. It is for people living with dementia, their carers and families offering a safe and supportive space to relax, chat, join in activities and receive advice and information.

A conversational 'collaborative enquiry' co-production was used. This method allowed change and improvement based on experiences, interactions, observations, conversations and feedback from people living with dementia, their carers, partner organisations, volunteers and staff. The delivery of the activities, support and resources was adapted on a weekly basis.

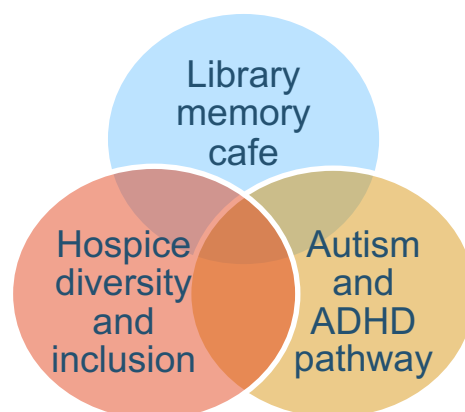
The case study research

Between June and December 2023 seven co-researchers, recruited from the café, explored how the café has been designed in co-production, using Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Co-researcher group:

- Two family carers
- A volunteer who is a family carer
- Library service lead
- Local authority dementia lead
- Voluntary sector provider lead
- Researcher

This forms one of three in a multi-case study:



Our meaning of co-production

The original research definition -

A process where people, including service users and unpaid carers, become actively involved and influence the decisions that design and transform health and care services.

The case study definition agreed by the co-researchers –

A group of people with different perspectives collectively working within a space to network and produce a shared experience and outcome.

The **PAR method** is a collaborative approach incorporating a range of perspectives in jointed learning and decision-making. It is designed to support an ongoing co-production process

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The co-researchers' experience:

"I've found a new way to monitor contact and movement within a group to help identify areas for improvement."
- **Voluntary sector provider lead**

"Interesting, it's given me a lot to think about. I have learned that people who work at the Council are really involved in supporting people here."
- **Family carer**

"An exceptionally insightful and immersive way to connect around activity exploring co-production to inform shared learning."
- **Local authority dementia lead**

The research has clearly had a pathway of its own that evolved over the weeks. It is interesting to be part of a group that didn't necessarily have 'specific' facilitation, as this does give everyone a voice.

I feel that levels of knowledge, experience and confidence impact on how any person contributes to a group. A tricky variable. I liked the fact it was a 'person-centred' approach that encouraged everyone's view."
- **Volunteer and family carer**

The co-researchers' key findings

Co-production impacts:

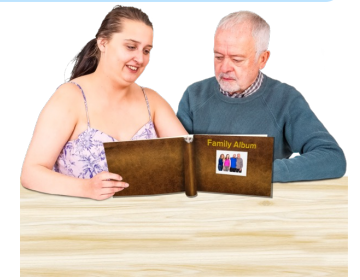
1. 'Keeping it real'
- the life of the group



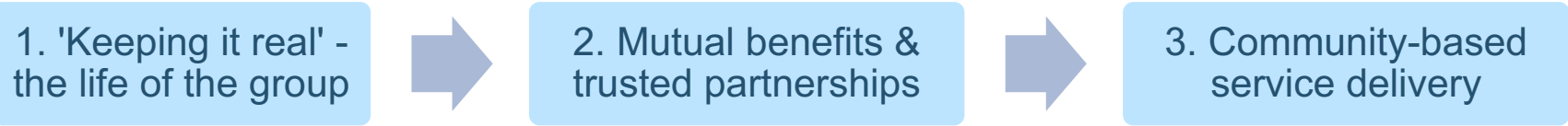
2. Mutual benefits & trusted partnerships



3. Community-based service delivery



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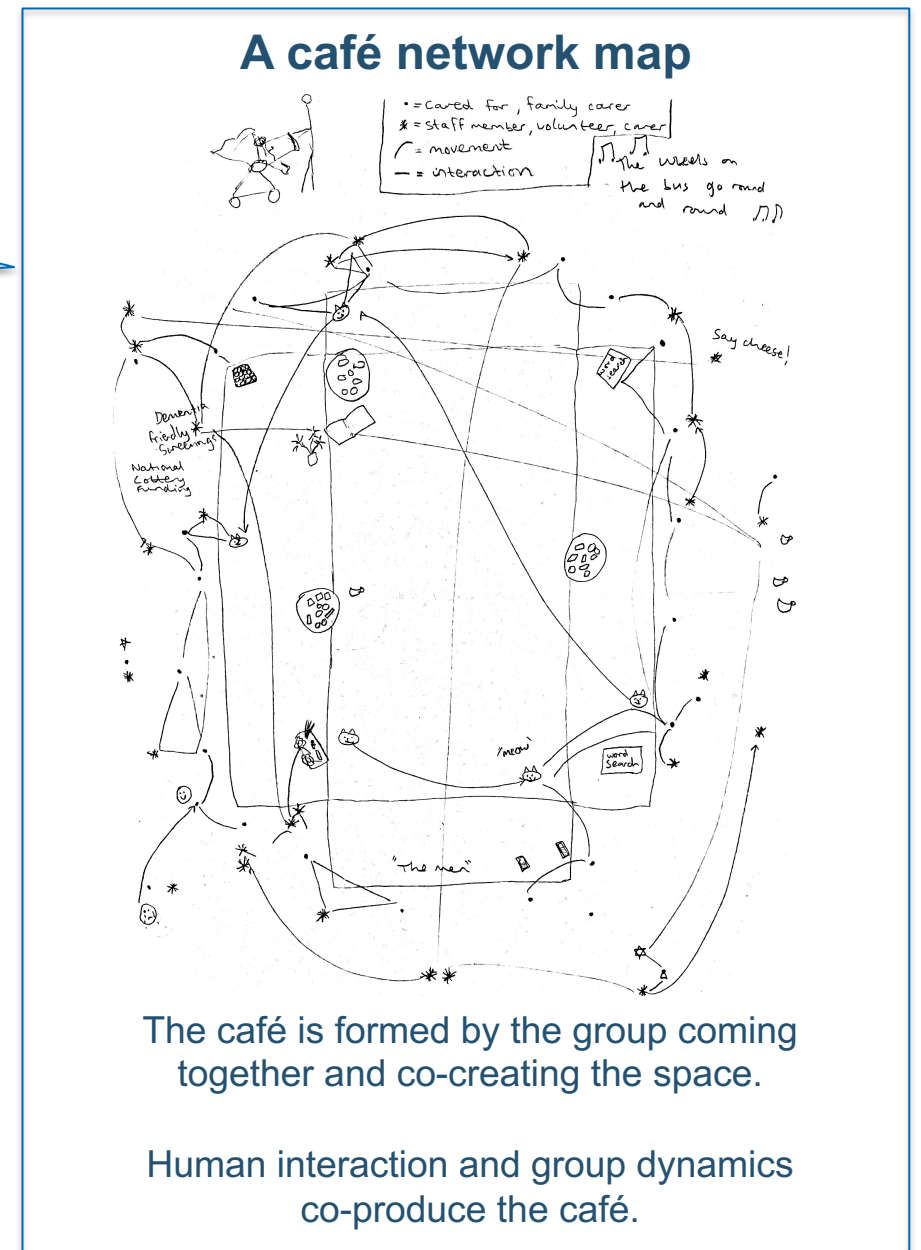
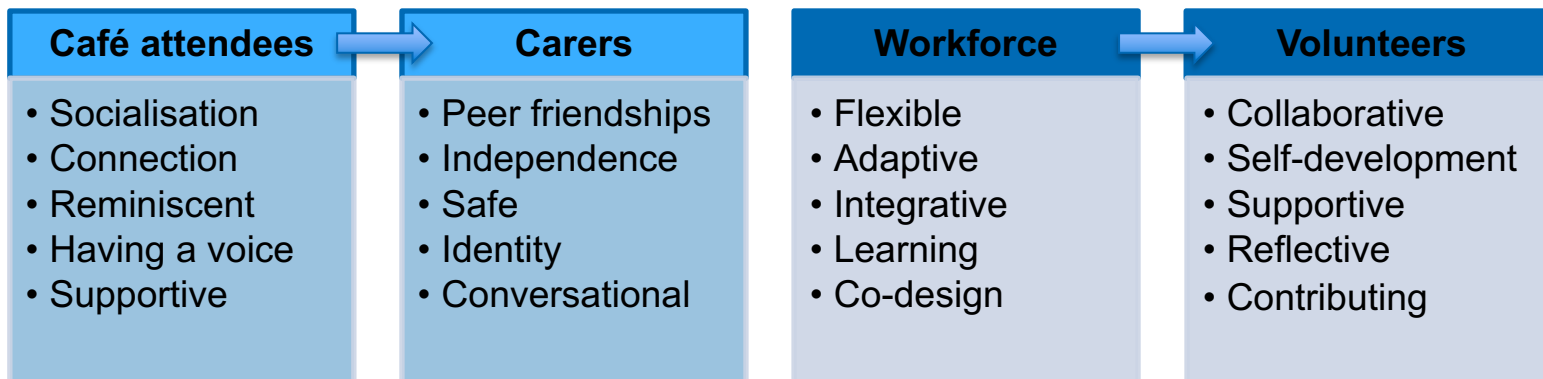
Finding 1 – ‘Keeping it real’ – the life of the group

A ‘collaborative enquiry’ co-production method was used, with the following benefits:

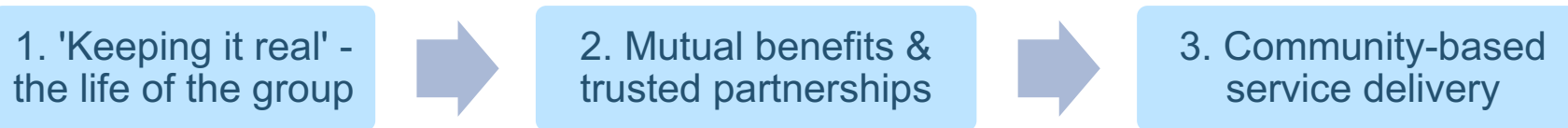
- A simple method
- Captures different voices
- Informal facilitation
- Allows improvements and suggestions week-by-week
- Not intrusive to the café group
- More authenticity
- Informal conversations and observation
- Documents the café’s development over time
- Enables replication and learning for other cafés to be co-produced



The co-production impacted the co-producers in the following ways:



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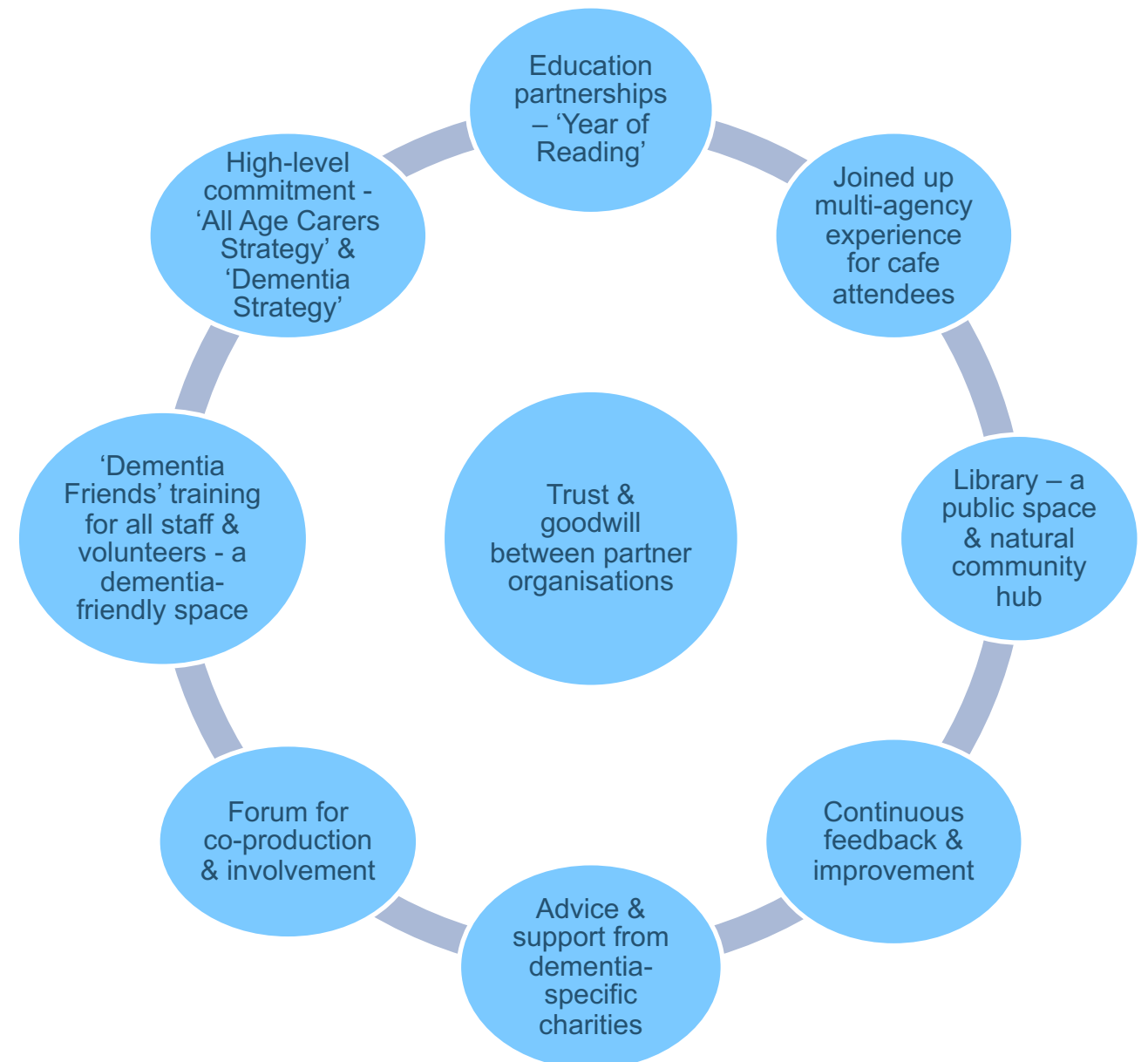


Finding 2 – Mutual benefits and trusted partnerships

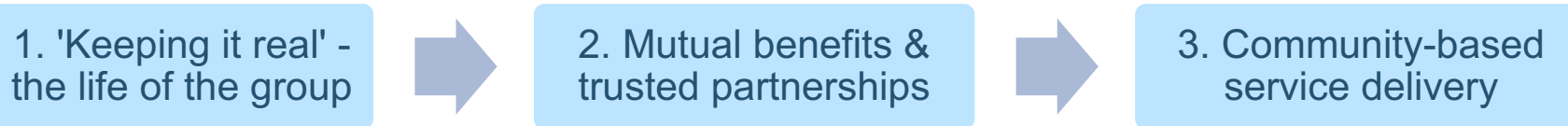
The organisational partnerships formed as part of the café development are built on trust and goodwill, rather than through specified contractual requirements. This creates a mutually beneficial environment that promotes learning, communication and collaboration between organisations and people. Café attendees feel the effects of a joined-up multi-agency supportive environment.

The café being delivered in the library, a community hub and public space, helps to cultivate partnership relationships in the community space alongside the café attendees. These extend beyond the café itself, for example:

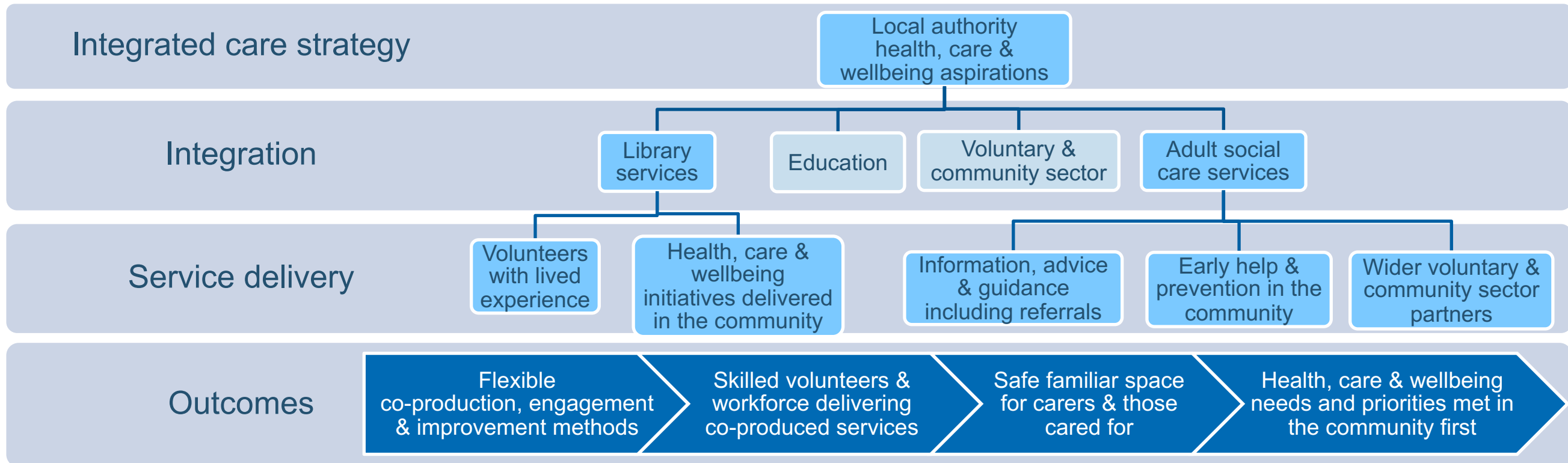
- Promotion of other community activities happening during the week (e.g. dementia-friendly film screening).
- Time for organisations to bring new ideas and get feedback from café attendees.
- A place for school children to visit for inter-generational activities and relationships built with children, parents and wider family members from the Rhyme Time group.
- Connection to county-wide strategies that foster high-level local authority strategic buy-in for co-production and community approaches.



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Finding 3 – Community-focused service delivery



The intergenerational memory café in the library has an important role in meeting the health, care and wellbeing needs of people in the local community, whilst delivering and co-producing services.

The County's aspirations for a healthy and happy place are performed through integration between the library and adult social care services, alongside education and the voluntary and community sector. The support of volunteers who run the memory café, and voluntary and community partners, is key.

The café attendees have a tailored, flexible and safe space to contribute to and benefit from. Although the library team overcome operational challenges as the café grows, they continue to enjoy and reap the rewards.

"Managing the growth of the café is a nice challenge to have"
- Library Service Lead

"What better place than the library, it's the least intimidating place. It's as good as you can get"
- Family carer

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Key learning points

- Service design processes that value lived experience can understand new and different perspectives on people's day-to-day lives. This can provide insightful and innovative solutions to traditionally provided services.
- Building in co-production with residents, volunteers and the workforce as co-producers can lead to support services being more fit for purpose at a local level.
- Co-production can be a dynamic natural process performed using simple person-centered approaches that are not intrusive to, but enhance, the experience of people living with dementia, carers and the workforce.
- Group networks can collaborate in service design and transformation by using an informally facilitated collaborative enquiry method which can be used for evaluation and flexible service growth.
- The simple method gathers real-time views of services in action. It requires being open to change and trusting in what is seen and heard.
- Partnerships between organisations are effective when reliant on their mutual benefits, trusting relationships and goodwill to collaborate.
- Natural community hubs such as the library are safe spaces with multiple uses, including building relationships with people to co-produce service development.
- By aligning with high-level organisational aspirations and strategies, co-production and collaboration form an important part of meeting the health, care and wellbeing needs of residents and communities.
- Volunteers from the community are a vital part of the workforce who support the development and improvement of services through building relationships, having conversations, observation and feedback as part of the co-production process.
- A participatory research process alongside a working service development, provides learning, shared understanding and new insights for service improvement from the perspectives of different stakeholders.

This research was conducted as part of a multi-case study titled 'Co-production within integrated care: participatory action research'. It forms a PhD at the University of Suffolk, due to complete in September 2024. The full write-up of this study will be available in the thesis and findings may be refined. The study received a favourable ethical opinion from the University of Suffolk, the South East Scotland NHS Research Ethics Committee 02, and the Health Research Authority (IRAS project ID: 318552). Please cite the findings accordingly. Su Conquer, the researcher, can be contacted by email: S.Conquer@uos.ac.uk.

The researcher would like to express gratitude to all organisations who took part in this multi-case study.

With very special thanks to the study participants who became co-researchers, giving up their time and space over a period of six months, to shape the research aims, questions, methods, findings and outcomes.