

WORKING PAPER

A coproduced theory of ‘thriving’ for people experiencing financial hardship

Authors:

Mark Fabian*¹

Anna Alexandrova¹

Yamini Cinamon-Nair¹

Turn2us²

*Corresponding author: Mark Fabian – mf723@cam.ac.uk

¹Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge

²Turn2us refers to both staff and self-employed people with a lived experience of financial hardship, who often work together to advance the work of the charity. The co-production partners in the working group on this project were Toni Coley, James Ryan, Gladys Eyeregba, and Rudi Breakwell Bos.

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ABSTRACT

We report on a process of coproducing a theory of thriving for people living with financial hardship involving collaboration between people with relevant lived experience, practitioners from the UK national charity Turn2us, and academics. We explain why coproduction is desirable for developing legitimate, context-sensitive, and rich understandings of thriving, and how the practice can undergird wellbeing public policy more broadly. We detail the methodology involved, illustrating it with our own practice and the conceptualisation of thriving that it produced, and demonstrating that it is not just desirable but also feasible. While the theory of thriving we arrived at bears similarities to many established theories of wellbeing, it goes beyond them in some ways. It also emphasises specific items that can inform policy for people experiencing financial hardship in a general wellbeing theories could not. Furthermore, coproduction revealed that ‘off-the-shelf’ measures of wellbeing can be rendered ineffective by contextual factors. This highlights the need to involve coproduction not just in conceptualising wellbeing and similar concepts but also in the design of wellbeing metrics.

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Introduction

There is today an accelerating discourse around 'Wellbeing Public Policy'. Much of this discourse has emerged out of the movement to go 'beyond GDP' and take a broader account of what contributes to human flourishing than merely income. Advocates would like to see national statistics and policy evaluation broadened to consider items like health, inequality, sustainability, life satisfaction, and work-life balance. This is a welcome shift, but as Fabian et al. (2021) argue, wellbeing public policy could be more transformative than a simple adjustment in headline indicators of progress. Wellbeing policy advocates often argue that policy should promote not just income but 'what really matters to people'. If this desire is genuine, then wellbeing policy must be grounded in a thoroughly participatory model of policymaking, especially with respect to the objectives of policy. Citizens must be given the opportunity to tell policymakers what matters to them.

How feasible this is and in what ways it can be executed obviously varies depending on scale and policy context (Fung 2015). National statistics, for example, must abstract away from the granularity of individual people's lives and even the lives of local areas to present a picture of the nation as a whole. In countries like the UK, with millions of citizens and enormous heterogeneity, participation in the generation of national statistics can only be of a limited sort. The Office of National Statistics' (ONS) wide ranging consultations with citizens as part of the development of national wellbeing statistics is thus commendable even if limited (Oman 2016). Life satisfaction scales are similarly potentially acceptable in this context. They allow citizens to assess their lives in terms of what matters to them and then communicate this assessment numerically to policymakers. Of course, policy analysts then merely use these numbers to run regressions populated by variables chosen by those analysts rather than citizens, so the extent to which citizens determine priorities here is limited. However, the logistics of national statistics make this sort of thing perhaps unavoidable.

Participatory development of wellbeing public policy is much more feasible in other contexts, such as local government, or at relatively narrow nodes of policymaking like infrastructure projects, national parks, or individual schools. How could this participatory policymaking be done? In this article, we report on a process of coproducing a theory and measures of 'thriving' for use by the UK national anti-poverty charity Turn2us in collaboration with people who have lived experience of financial hardship. Our methodology builds on a large number of similar endeavours in development and indigenous policy in the capabilities tradition, but the theory of thriving that emerged from our work goes well beyond capabilities. We argue that coproduction of this sort can serve as a model for participatory wellbeing public policy. It can also ground a 'bottom-up' approach that contrasts with the 'top-down' style currently driven by national statistical agencies and treasuries. As well as reporting on the theory of thriving that emerged in our work, this paper serves as a blueprint for replication of methodology. We explain the theoretical and practical rationale for coproduction; the process of coproduction, including the selection of participants and both quantitative and qualitative research methods; and how to generalise and scale up outputs in collaboration with adjacent policy actors.

Why contextual theories?

The majority of academic discourse concerning 'wellbeing' and related concepts like thriving and welfare implicitly assumes the existence of what Alexandrova (2017) calls an 'all-things considered' theory of wellbeing. This is a theory of wellbeing that holds for all individuals and all contexts; it is in that sense invariable (Lin 2018). However, there does not seem to be any agreement on what this theory of wellbeing is exactly. Psychologists tend to see wellbeing as a mental state (Diener & Seligman 2004), economists as the satisfaction of rational preferences (Angner 2009), and development practitioners as the ability to translate capabilities into suitable functionings (Alkire 2005). Even within disciplines, there are sharp disagreements. Philosophers have long debated mental state, preference satisfaction, and objective list accounts, and are now also exploring hybrid accounts (Woodard 2015). There seems no end to their debate in sight. In psychology, 'hedonic' accounts of wellbeing emphasising mental states, notably the construct of 'subjective wellbeing', are frequently juxtaposed against 'eudaimonic' accounts defining wellbeing as living in a way that conforms to a human's organismic basis (Ryan et al. 2008). In economics, the very possibility of preferences functioning as a viable welfare criterion has recently been called into question by results in behavioural economics (Sugden 2018).

These definitional debates spill over into the measurement realm. While there is a strong push to develop standardised measures of 'wellbeing' for use in public policy, what 'standard' should be appealed to varies across and within disciplines. For example, happiness economists cleave to life satisfaction because its unidimensionality makes it suitable for microeconomic cost-benefit analysis techniques (Frijters & Krekel 2021). Some psychologists, in contrast, have been highly critical of life satisfaction due to its lack of diagnostic power (Marsh et al. 2020). Development practitioners and scholars, meanwhile, are sceptical of all mental states measures due to their subjectivity (Hirai et al. 2016).

Against this background of seemingly endless debate, Alexandrova (2017) argues for a 'contextualist' approach to wellbeing. This replaces the search for an 'all things considered' theory of wellbeing with an array of 'mid-level' theories that are tailored to their particular domain, such as child wellbeing, consumer wellbeing, environmental wellbeing, etc. The 'context' for which mid-level theories are developed can be extremely broad, such as when designing wellbeing theories to inform national statistical accounts, or relatively narrow, such as when designing a wellbeing framework for a small rural community.

Even if one ultimately subscribes to wellbeing invariabilism, mid-level theories have pragmatic appeal for science and policy (Fabian 2021). What aspects of wellbeing are salient in a given context or relevant to applied work therein are likely to be finer grained than what a general theory can articulate. For example, 'health' is an item that many different accounts of wellbeing agree contributes to wellbeing. Yet what health means for someone in palliative care is likely to be markedly different to what it means for a new-born baby. In the former, we might emphasize pain management whereas in the latter we might focus on brain development. A general notion of 'health' is of limited usefulness to practitioners in either of these spaces because they need to know how health manifests in their context so that they can tailor their efforts at improving it. This logic applies to measurement as well. A general measure of health,

such as life expectancy, is of limited usefulness in palliative care, where a physician could make more use of measures like mental acuity or red blood cell count.

Why coproduction?

An additional point in favour of mid-level theories is that they make it practically feasible for local stakeholders to define wellbeing and how it should be measured. Wellbeing is what philosophers call a 'thick concept' (Anderson 2002). These describe and evaluate (i.e. make a value-judgement). As such, they are both amenable to empirical analysis, which makes them scientifically tractable, and value-laden, which means that their study can never be a value-neutral, purely technical exercise. Liberal democratic norms require that value judgements in policymaking be made with the involvement of affected stakeholders. This is difficult when developing a general theory of wellbeing to inform policy at a high scale, as in national statistics, both because of the generalisability requirements on the theory and because of the logistical challenges of involving so many stakeholders. In contrast, it is both theoretically and logistically more straightforward to involve stakeholders when designing a mid-level theory for a particular policy context.

Coproduction methods are ideally suited to this task (Osborne et al. 2016). These involve bringing together those who design and implement policy, those who are affected by those policies, and scholarly experts in a process of genuine power and sharing and two-way learning (Alexandrova & Fabian 2021). Involving those affected by policy ensures that their lived expertise informs policy and their value judgements are centred. Involving those who make and implement policy ensures that outputs are practical and readily implementable. And involving scholarly experts enhances rigor and ensures connection to existing scholarship. Power sharing and two-way learning encourage a blending of these desirable qualities in a way that strengthens each group's contribution. For example, scholarly experts can push back on the desired metrics of the policymakers if they lack robustness. But equally, practitioners can push back on technical measures if they are not useful in context, for example because they take too long to administer (Coutts et al. 2021 documents this phenomenon with regards mental health surveys administered in jobs centres). In contrast to some deliberative democracy mechanisms (Setälä 2017), coproduction does not involve experts or policymakers sitting outside the process and merely soliciting value judgements from stakeholders. They are instead active participants, learning from others and updating their views accordingly. Similarly, the value judgements of those with lived experience are not taken uncritically by the other participants. They can be debated and deliberated, often evolving into more sophisticated positions. Such deliberative methods were able to overcome NIMBYism¹ in Canada to allow the siting of hazardous waste treatment facilities (Kuhn & Ballard 1998).

Coproduction and deliberative democratic mechanisms are increasingly employed in a range of policy settings to involve stakeholders in making value judgements. For example, the UK's National Institute of Health Care Excellence (NICE) established a 'citizen's council' in the early 2000s to capture the views of the public in shaping the institute's value judgements (Rawlins 2005). In the wellbeing policy space, practitioners in the capabilities tradition, healthcare, and

¹ NIMBY: Not In My Back Yard

service provision have long utilised coproduction and participatory methods to understand what aspects of wellbeing matter to indigenous groups, people in poverty, and other stakeholders.² These exercises have informed the development of surveys that track wellbeing over time as defined by the communities in question (e.g. Yap & Yu 2016). We were inspired by these methods without wishing to pre-commit to any particular approach to wellbeing.

Turn2us

Turn2us is a national charity in the UK providing practical help to people who struggle financially. The charity began as the Distressed Gentlefolk's Aid Association in 1897, set up by Elizabeth Finn. Much of the money put into trust with the organisation in its early days was earmarked for the support of 'Gentlefolk'—people nowadays referred to as having a 'profession' such as nurses, teachers, and social workers—and the charity continues to specialise in aid to such individuals. Poverty is rare among such people, except in the event of 'life changing events' such as death, medical emergencies, accidents, and such like, which is where the charity focuses its grant-giving efforts. However, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the charity has established new funds that provide grants to people of all occupational backgrounds.

The two principle 'products' of Turn2us are grants and the benefits calculator tool. Grants are typically in amounts of £1000 pounds, which is relatively large by the standards of the sector. They come in two forms: long- and short-term. Long term grants are paid annually to an established register of recipients. The charity is phasing out long term grants, but there remain several hundred legacy recipients, typically pensioners. Short term grants are one-off, though the charity very occasionally provides follow up grants and is investigating the potential to do more. Grants are typically for large one-off expenses such as funerals, white goods, and medical expenses. The charity does not provide debt relief, but it does cover short term utility bills provided a one-off reprieve puts the recipient on a stable financial footing. Applications for grants and their assessment is done entirely digitally and handled by a team of case workers. Case workers will often refer both successful and unsuccessful applicants on to other charities for help with debts, housing, drug rehabilitation, mental health services, etc. This referral process is called 'signposting'.

The benefits calculator is an online platform where users can enter their welfare-relevant data, such as income, assets, and number of children, and be informed as to the government benefits payments that they are eligible for. The platform then takes users through to the government's claims portal to lodge their application. An additional part of the benefits calculator platform is assistance claiming back-pay on benefits applications were entitled to in the past but unaware of. The benefits calculator has millions of users annually.

There are two other aspects of Turn2us' operations to which the notion of thriving is relevant. Turn2us has a campaigning and policy arm that advocates for welfare and other reforms. They

² See Sollis et al. 2021 for a systematic review, Daniels et al 2018 for a consultative approach to wellbeing in adult learning, Degeling et al. 2015 for patient participation in healthcare research, Scott and Bell 2019 on wellbeing in local councils, and Robeyns 2017 on the capabilities approach.

also have a safeguarding team that considers how the charity can discharge its duty of care when it suspects service users are experiencing domestic abuse or other harms.

The exercise described in this article is an outcome of two commitments by Turn2us: the centrality of coproduction to most of their activities³ and a desire to embed a positive ideal of thriving into their efforts at poverty relief. Putting these two together, Turn2us invited the participation of Fabian and Alexandrova as specialists in philosophy and science of wellbeing. Wellbeing being a close conceptual relative of thriving, the next task was to devise a process that does justice to the wealth of scholarly knowledge about wellbeing, as well as to the specific circumstances of Turn2us and their stakeholders.

Our coproduction process

Our process for coproducing a theory of thriving was designed to generate data and feedback in a way that balances two sometimes competing needs. The first need is for the sort of rich, qualitative data and discussions that can inform a theory of thriving for people living in financial hardship, which is a complex and nuanced experience. For such a theory to be *coproduced* requires an intimate setting that facilitates genuine power sharing, in depth dialogue, reflexivity, and two-way learning (Clark et al. 2019). The second need is for quantitative data and feedback that ensures some degree of representativeness. Turn2us is a national charity representing a very diverse base of service users. It cannot accept a theory of thriving that only reflects the experience of a narrow subset of these individuals, which is a risk with qualitative methods and intimate settings. To this end, our methodology combined a core of qualitative data collection in an intimate setting with quantitative surveys at the beginning and end of the process. It comprises of five stages

In the **first stage**, we surveyed 1571 people who have previously or currently used Turn2us' services. We sourced these responses using Turn2us' monthly newsletter, which reaches around 5000 former or current service users. This online survey (see appendix 1 for all questions and summary statistics) consisted of demographic questions plus six questions concerning how service users conceived of the notion of thriving. Four of these were ranked-choice questions, such as:

Please rank the following items in terms of how much they resonate with what thriving means to you (leave blank any that do not resonate):

- a) *Being in a positive mental state (good moods, satisfaction with life, happy, etc.)*
- b) *Being able to satisfy your desires and preferences*
- c) *Having income, health, education, and political rights*
- d) *Being free to decide for yourself how you want to live your life, feeling effective in your life, and having supportive social connections*
- e) *Being able to develop and express your unique personality*

³ For more on coproduction at Turn2us see <https://www.Turn2us.org.uk/Working-With-Us/Co-production-and-involvement-at-Turn2us>

These ranked-choice questions were designed to assess the extent to which prominent theories of wellbeing from the academic literature mapped on to service users conceptualisations of thriving. For example, in the question above, (a) corresponds to mental state accounts of wellbeing like subjective wellbeing (Sumner 1996, Frijters & Krekel 2021), (b) to preference satisfaction theories common in economics (Hausman 2015), (c) to the capabilities approach (Robeyns 2017), (d) to the three basic psychological needs of self-determination theory, one of the more prominent psychological accounts of 'eudaimonic' wellbeing (Ryan & Deci 2017), and (e) to nature fulfilment theories of wellbeing, which are common among philosophical accounts of eudaimonia (Haybron 2008, Besser-Jones 2014).

The two remaining wellbeing questions solicited open ended responses. They were:

- *What is the single biggest obstacle to your thriving?*
- *Is there anything that you feel your friends, family, colleagues, community, social workers or the government misunderstand about what would help you thrive?*

The objective of this survey was to get an initial steer for the qualitative portion of the coproduction process. We wanted to ensure that we discussed issues that were of interests to the broad spectrum of Turn2us service users, and that we didn't start off in the wrong direction. We presented findings from the survey in the first meeting of the working group using charts and word clouds. Some key takeaways were as follows:

- Individuals placed a strong priority on mental states, capabilities, and basic psychological needs. Personal expressiveness and preference-satisfaction did not resonate.
- However, being in a good mood was of low importance. Instead, respondents prioritised a sense of meaning and purpose, freedom from anxiety, and overall life satisfaction, in that order.
- Respondents placed strong emphasis on satisfaction with family life, health, and financial situation, in that order, and very little emphasis on satisfaction with community and job.
- The most prominent terms associated with obstacles to thriving were: worry, pay, basic, needs, others, job, and financial.
- The most prominent terms associated with misunderstandings of thriving were lack, work, job, debt, COVID, education, people, stress, and fear.

The **second stage** of the process was the "working group". This consisted of representatives from the three 'expert' groups that we had identified: four people with lived experience, three academics, and five practitioners from Turn2us (more detail on selection criteria and representativeness below). All lived experts involved at any stage of the coproduction process were paid the London Living Wage (£11/hour) for their time, including for reading and administrative tasks. The primary activity of the working group was for members to interview each other one on one to gain an interpersonal understanding of what thriving means to people experiencing financial hardship, what the practical needs Turn2us had from a theory of thriving, and in what ways existing thinking about wellbeing and its measurement could inform the theory of thriving we aimed to produce. These interviews formed the principle source of

qualitative data for the project, and also underwrote discussions of thriving in all-participant working group meetings that further informed the theory.

The working group began with a three-hour meeting to outline the project, to discuss the survey results, to explain the administrative procedures associated with logging interviews, and to consider potential interview questions. Author 3 also provided some simple tips for good interviewing manner, etiquette, and procedure, as requested by some of the participants. Many of the people involved expressed a desire for sample questions, so these were prepared by the academics and sent round in a separate document summarising all the interview tips.

Each working group member then interviewed at least one person from each expert group other than their own e.g. lived experts would interview at least one academic and one Turn2us representative. Author 1 interviewed every member of the working group and also listened to every other interview as part of transcribing them. Author 1 & 2 also interviewed several staff at Turn2us who could represent parts of the organisation, such as safeguarding, that were not present in the working group in order to get a broad sense for the organisation's needs.

At this stage, after a break of 2 weeks, the working group had a second meeting of all participants. This was an opportunity to discuss the process so far. Authors 1 and 3 also presented their preliminary models of thriving (see below) based on their analysis of the data generated to date. The models were very well received, but the working had not managed to make much headway on the question of how to measure thriving. This was put as a point of priority for a second wave of interviews that were conducted group-to-group rather than one-on-one. These meetings did not resolve the measurement issues (see below), but they did lead to refinements of the model to the satisfaction of all working group members. This model was worked up into a preliminary report by authors 1 and 2 with oversight from the project lead at Turn2us before moving on to **stage three** in the process, namely the workshop.

The workshop was conceived as a way to inject greater representativeness into the qualitative side of the project without logistically overburdening it. The idea was to invite an additional 10 individuals with lived experience of financial hardship to a half-day event in which they could offer their thoughts on the preliminary report and deliberate with working group members on how it could be refined. The event was inspired by consensus conferences from the deliberative democracy tradition (Anderson & Jæger 1999). The 10 new participants would be selected primarily from demographics that were not represented in the working group. If their comments were broadly positive and their concerns manageable, they could be used to refine the model ahead of a final report. If their comments were broadly negative or overwhelming, the working group process would basically start over.

The new coproduction partners were sent the preliminary report two weeks ahead of the workshop to read. Three days prior to the event, they were asked to complete a brief 5-question survey gauging their reaction to that report. This allowed the working group to flag some issues for discussion. Participants were asked similar questions in a post-workshop survey alongside questions soliciting their satisfaction with the process. By comparing responses to the two surveys we can see that the deliberative exercise of the workshop, which involved two-way learning between the working group and new participants, served to alter the opinions of the new coproduction partners towards the preliminary report (see appendix A2 for the results from

the pre- and post-workshop surveys). The extent to which new coproduction partners thought the report reflected what thriving means to them rose for all but one participant (who was satisfied once the final online version of the report was produced).

In an effort to empower and centre the people with lived experience from the working group, the academic and practitioner members encouraged them to take a leadership role in the workshop. This did not take the form of administrative tasks. Rather, the members with lived experience took on the role of facilitators, running the breakout rooms in the workshop and leading discussions. Academics and practitioners handled administration, logistics (notably IT), and scribing. Facilitators were sent a schedule and three pages of requested guidance on how to perform this role ahead of the workshop (see appendix A3).

The format of the workshop was as follows. We began with a brief welcome and introduction session. We then moved into breakout rooms of 3–4 individuals to discuss the preliminary model, with new participants given priority to speak. This was followed by a break to avoid zoom fatigue. We returned for an all-in ('plenary') session to pool notes from each breakout room. There was then a presentation from a director at Turn2us on how the charity might use the theory being produced. It was hoped that this would be inspirational and demonstrate to coproduction partners how much the organisation values the work they are doing. After a long break, we again went into breakout rooms and then a plenary session to discuss ways that the model could be improved. We then informed participants of how we would communicate the changes we had made in response to their suggestions before wrapping up.

The **fourth stage** of the coproduction process involved refining the report based on workshop comments to arrive at a 'final report' (Turn2us 2021) that was launched in November 2021 (coproduction partners were invited to the launch events). The **fifth stage** will be to reach out again to all recipients of Turn2us newsletter with a survey asking for their feedback on the now public thriving report. This will allow us to check whether a more representative sample of service users endorse the report. At this stage, we will seek only broad accent/dissent rather than detailed comments, but we will allow for open ended responses. If the broad base of service users is dissatisfied with the report we intend to restart the working group process, potentially with new coproduction partners.

The model of thriving embedded in the report is now being implemented in an organic way across Turn2us' operations. As this process matures we hope to identify ways to refine the model, and also identify applications of it that lend themselves to measurement of thriving. Once we can observe the practical requirements of measurement in greater detail, we will likely commence a second coproduction effort to develop and validate these measures.

Selection of lived experts & practitioners

Selecting people with lived experience for our coproduction exercise was a somewhat delicate balancing act and we were heavily reliant on Turn2us' extensive experience to select people for the project. Lived experts needed, first and foremost, to have personal experience of living with financial hardship and some sensitivity to the experiences of other people in similar circumstances. Ideally, they also needed experience of engaging with Turn2us or a similar

charity. Due to the conditions of the original endowment Turn2us administers, the charity works overwhelmingly with people from 'professional' backgrounds. These include service sector workers, like nurses, lawyers, and bureaucrats, as well as people with trades, such as plumbers or beauticians. As such, our lived experts also needed to have such backgrounds. While we went beyond professionals for the purposes of the workshop, this extension was limited, and so our model should not be seen as speaking to all experiences of thriving under financial hardship. A further difficult selection criteria was that lived experts needed to be capable of handling the intellectual burden of coproducing a theory of thriving in collaboration with Turn2us staff and academics. This requirement meant that the four lived experts in the working group had some higher education. In an attempt to offset any bias in perspectives that might have arisen from this fact, we selected lived experts with more varied educational and intellectual backgrounds for the workshop. Lived experts also needed to have the time and flexibility to participate in the somewhat scattered obligations that came with the project, and have the manners and disposition to participate in a constructive and open manner. Finally, we wanted to ensure a wide variety of demographics were represented.

Recruitment was done through the standard process employed by Turn2us. The charity maintains a roster of people interested in coproduction. Individuals are added to this as they come into the charity's orbit and potentially removed if they participate poorly in a coproduction exercise, such as by being rude or domineering in conversation. New coproduction projects are advertised to the roster by email calls for expressions of interest. Applicants are then shortlisted and selected based on suitability. In our case, almost everyone who volunteered was included either in the working group or the workshop. Lived experts in the working group aged from late 30s to late 60s, 2 men and 2 women, 3 white and 1 black, with and without children, and with experiences of racism, disability, domestic violence, homelessness, and mental health issues. Two lived experts were social/care workers, another was a disability rights campaigner, and the last is extensively involved in campaigning for socially excluded people, particularly the homeless, around London. Workshop participants broadened this group considerably. We brought in several young people aged 19-35, lived experts from across the geography of the UK, both rural and urban, people of varied sexualities, including two trans individuals, more people of colour, more parents, an autistic person, and people who had migrated to the UK from Europe in the past 5 years. New lived experts also had a diverse range of occupational backgrounds.

Participants from within Turn2us were selected primarily to reflect the variety of programmes the charity runs, and varied levels of seniority. The working group was chaired by the head of coproduction, who was joined by a caseworker from the grants team, the chief engineer for the benefits calculator, the director of communications, and a new hire who was consulting across Turn2us' operations. This core group include people of colour and individuals of varied economic backgrounds from across the UK. To gain a deeper understanding of Turn2us needs from the project, authors 1 and 2 also interviewed representatives from the policy team, the head of safeguarding, the director of and a caseworker from the grants team, a member of the helpline and signposting team, and the director of fundraising.

Qualitative methodology

We found few established qualitative research methodologies appropriate to our coproduction ideals. None accommodated at once the two-way learning and genuine power sharing, the nature of our data as a series of interviews, a workshop where the speakers often did not include the researchers, and our highly iterative process. As such, we combined several methodologies, or at least themes from them. We describe our methodologies below in two parts: those we used to generate data, and then those we used to analyse that data.

Data generation

Our emphasis on power sharing and two-way learning was grounded in the paradigm of participatory action research (PAR), which also informs Turn2us' coproduction methods. However, we were not pre-committed to radical politics that typically accompany this paradigm. PAR find its intellectual roots in the Marxist-inspired works of Kurt Lewin (1946) and Paulo Friere (1970) and is normally employed to help communities problematise their situations, raise consciousness of their oppression, and provoke political action. While this can often be valuable, we wanted to avoid embedding a broad political agenda in our work from the outset. What we took from PAR was its research methodology. Minkler (2000, p. 192) lists the following key features:

- PAR emphasis systematic investigation with “the active involvement of the people whose lives are affected by the issue under study”.
- PAR approaches “consciously blur the lines between the researcher and the researched” to achieve a “cooperative, co-learning process”.
- PAR uses “democratic participatory approaches and social learning”.
- PAR is an empowering process by which participants can increase control over their lives by nurturing community strengths and problem-solving abilities
- PAR is driven by community priorities, rather than those of outside experts
- PAR is a “ground up rather than top down approach” that emerges “out of a recognition of the limitations of expert knowledge and narrow single-discipline approaches to complex human problems”.

To embed these principles in our data gathering approach, we used Fujii's (2017) technique of 'relational interviewing' within the working group. Fujii emphasises the following features of relational interviewing, which overlap substantially with the concerns of PAR:

- Ensure that power is genuinely shared between researcher and researched, and that dialogue runs in both directions
- Build a working relationship with interviewees that goes beyond 'rapport'
- A culture and atmosphere of respect, dignity, and humanist values is crucial to ensure that people can be open the sensitive topics in question
- Respect different ways of knowing. People's wisdom comes from a variety of sources, such as personal experience, book learning, and learning by doing, and some work might need to be done to translate this wisdom such that it can be understood by others.
- The interview should be 'teller-focused' i.e. learning from the person with the relevant experience, whatever it is that they think is relevant to tell.

- Reflexivity of all parties is crucial: participants must be aware of how their characteristics and behaviour impact the conversations had and the data that emerges.
- Interviews should be based on some semi-structured questions, but active listening is in many ways more important. For two-way learning to take place, parties to the conversation must be able to respond to emotional cues and inhabit each other's perspectives.

What we wanted was a way of thinking about the structure of interviews, both in terms of their questions and manner, that emphasised that both sides were “the researcher” and “the subject”, that both sides thus had equal power and a desire to learn from each other, and that the direction and progress of the interview should thus respond to the whims, intuitions, and needs of both (or all) parties. In practice, however, we found that our coproduction partners were very eager to receive (rather than generate) lists of semi-structured questions and tended not to venture much beyond these. Interviews also typically, perhaps due to nervousness, fell into the form of one party taking on the roll of interviewer and working through the question list, then swapping rolls with their partner. There were few follow-up questions posed and the semi-structured question rarely turned into launch pads for wider ranging discussions. Nonetheless, in discussion at regular working group meetings and in feedback we took at the conclusion of each phase of the process, coproduction partners were emphatic that they felt able to get their points across, felt respected and heard, and did not feel constrained by the sample questions provided. Indeed, they found the suggested questions very helpful for ensuring their interviews generated useful insights.

The workshop employed more straightforward focus-group style methods. We took a pre-workshop survey of new coproduction partners (see supplementary data file 1) that gave them space for open-ended responses to the question of “what is missing from the model?”. The break out rooms provided interview notes. One workshop participant did not want sessions recorded so we could not take full transcriptions. The plenary sessions then provided further notes as well as image-captures of the ‘jam boards’ (a digital board of post-it notes) that we used to share insights from the various break out rooms.

The time constraints facing the workshop made the power sharing ideals of our approach more difficult to implement than in the working group process. The priority for the workshop was to get input from the new coproduction partners, both as a fresh set of eyes and as representatives of demographics that were not present in the working group. To get this input efficiently in the time available, we felt it was necessary to have members of the working group adopting an ‘interviewer’ role. There was limited two-way learning beyond the initial presentation and explanation of the working group’s preliminary report, though we did have several rounds of Q&A. We hoped that putting lived experts in charge of the breakout rooms would emphasise that we wanted them to have ownership of the project and its outputs. In addition, we tried to empower the new coproduction partners by asking working group members to take a strong and explicit stance in favour of listening respectfully to input rather than commentating. Finally, we mailed out a ‘You said, we did’ document to workshop participants once the report was updated outlining how we had amended it in-line with their comments. This is standard practice at Turn2us and upholds our commitment to coproduction and centring lived experts.

Feedback on the workshop process, provided in supplementary data file 2, suggests that participants were broadly satisfied with the experience. Participants gave an average response of 95, on a 1–100 scale, to the question “To what extent were your thoughts, feelings, and perspectives on thriving taken into consideration by the group?”. They gave an average response of 90 to the question: “Did the workshop give everyone the opportunity to share their views and incorporate them into the model of thriving?” And finally, an average response of 80 to the question “Do you feel that the model now reflects what thriving means to you?”. This final average was brought down substantially by one respondent who gave 30/100. They were later quite satisfied with the public-facing version of the thriving report (Turn2us 2021a), which was more accessible and personable than the internal document and supplemented with additional accessibility tools like video interviews and a storyboard presentation (Turn2us 2021b).

Data Analysis

All interviews and group meetings within the working group stage were conducted and recorded over zoom. These recordings were then transcribed using Otter, a machine-learning based speech-to-text app designed for recording office meetings. The machine-generated transcripts were erroneous in many minute ways but readily interpretable by the analysts. The software seemed to struggle with some accents in particular, though its mis-rendering of some words (e.g. driving instead of thriving) were at least consistent and so easy to parse. All quotes reproduced herein and in the report for Turn2us were adjusted by hand to ensure consistency with the exact statements of the speakers. The bulk of the qualitative data analysis was performed on the transcripts of the working group’s interviews. The workshop’s data was used to refine the preliminary model developed out of this analysis, and didn’t require substantial analysis beyond discussion and note-taking at the event itself.

Two analysts (authors 1 and 3) conducted the qualitative analysis of the interviews.⁴ Note that these researchers acted as both interviewers and interviewees, and coded each other’s interviews. This provides some rigor in two regards. First, it means that one analyst can cut through theoretical biases the other brought to their interview practice at the coding stage. Second, it means that in coding interview transcripts the analysts are not simply coding their own words.

The analysts began by using grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), which is the simple idea that theories based on qualitative research should be ‘grounded’ in the associated data. In practice, grounded theory involves using ‘descriptive’ codes to label what is literally said in interviews, returning to earlier data sources iteratively as new codes emerge. A second round of ‘analytical’ codes is then used to organise the descriptive codes into clusters, themes, and ultimately theories.

For us, descriptive codes varied from line-by-line to paragraph-by-paragraph. The analysts discussed whether they were approaching this exercise similarly in terms of label

⁴ Analyst 1 used NVivo to analyse all transcripts and other minor communications such as emails with follow up comments. Analyst 2 started with NVivo but switched to the classical method of printing the data out, marking it up with highlighters and pens, then cutting out coded items to organise by hand into themes. Analyst 1’s codebook and photo images of analyst 2’s cards are available with this paper as supplementary files, as is all raw data from the working group process.

variety/specificity and text-length, but otherwise did not discuss the actual codes they were using to avoid influencing each other's analysis. After coding around half the material (i.e. around 20/39 interviews), both analysts started again from the beginning to reanalyse early interviews with codes that had emerged later in the process. At completion, the analysts compared codebooks and were pleased to discover that their codes were broadly similar. To evidence this, figure 1 shows the top 7 codes across each analyst.

Figure 1: Seven most common descriptive codes

ANALYST 1		ANALYST 2	
Freedom and autonomy	11	Beyond Money	13
People are different	11	Self-realisation	7
Self-expression and self-knowledge	10	Thriving changes over time	6
Family	10	Thriving as family support	6
Cultural expectations	10	Basic needs met	4
Thriving is more than material	10	Beyond the American dream	4
Financial security	9	Thriving as independence	4

Notes: numbers in the right hand column indicated how many times the code occurred in the data)

The next step in the qualitative analysis was to make sense of the descriptive codes in a way that would produce a model or theory of thriving. At this stage, the analysts adopted divergent strategies in an effort to address their own potential biases, check whether different methods yielded different results, and increase the likelihood that we achieved conceptual saturation and organised themes in a neat way. Analyst 1 has a substantial background in wellbeing theory. This allowed him to utilise a theoretical coding approach, applying existing ideas from the interdisciplinary wellbeing literature to try and organise the descriptive codes into a coherent system. In contrast, analyst 2 had no background in wellbeing studies but experience with qualitative research methods. This allowed her to use the more inductive approach of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark 2006). This involves organising descriptive codes into themes that emerge organically during the coding process. Both analysts ended up with similar clusters of themes, though analyst 1's model is noticeably more inspired by existing ideas in wellbeing scholarship.

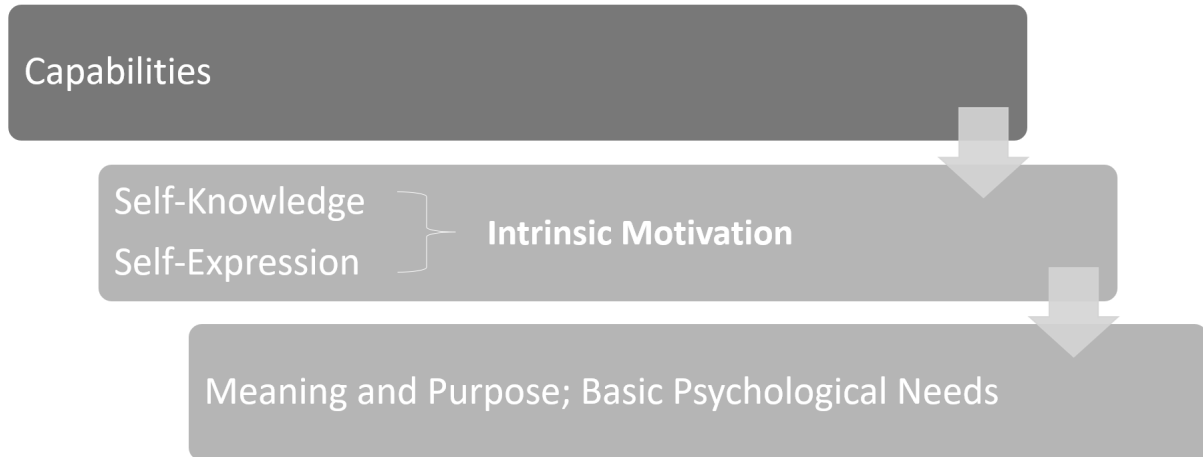
Analyst 2 listed the following 7 themes as organising what thriving meant to working groups members (reproduced verbatim from notes at the time):

- **Physical and mental health**, including access to services and being on a positive trajectory.
- **Freedom to pursue authentic desires**: a combination of what you're good at and what you deem meaningful.
- **Capabilities**: free from financial insecurity, physical or emotional harm, the disabling society, etc.
- **Beyond materialism**: rejection of the American Dream/Rat race
- **Sense of purpose**: volunteering, caring, progression, qualifications
- **Rising consciousness**: awareness/questioning of structural injustices

These themes were well-received by the working group when presented at its first interim meeting. Lived experts in particular commented that the themes resonated well with their

thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding thriving. Each of these themes features in Analyst 1's model, which at this stage in the process took a hierarchical form, presented in figure 2:

Figure 2: Analyst 1's initial model of thriving



Capabilities here refers to the options available to a person in terms of “beings and doings” (Sen 1999, Nussbaum 2000). For example, income would allow someone to go to the cinema: a doing. A wheelchair would give a disabled person mobility: a being. Capabilities in the hierarchical model took in two major themes of the data especially: having your basic needs met, especially financial security, and having the freedom and autonomy to pursue the life best suited to you, especially in terms of freedom from marginalisation, stigma, oppression, and abuse. The “capabilities approach” is one of the most prominent theories of wellbeing (Robeyns 2017), but we found it incapable of making sense of all the themes emerging from our data, hence the other two layers of the hierarchy.

A consistent theme of the qualitative data was that while financial and other means (one could say “capabilities” broadly speaking) were absolutely fundamental to thriving, hence their primacy in the hierarchy, they were insufficient to bring about thriving. You also needed to know what activities and values to pursue that were a good fit for you. This combined self-knowledge—being aware of what suits you—and self-expression, which is actually doing those things. The capabilities approach says nothing on this issue. Intrinsic motivation is a term from the psychological literature on wellbeing, specifically that of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017), that describes these activities that are *subjectively* felt as enjoyable, valuable, or otherwise appealing. A strong theme of the raw data was that thriving is subjective and differs for everyone. The subjectivity and variability of intrinsic motivations across individuals was useful in this regard.

The final component of the hierarchical model was made up of things that indicated or communicated to the individual that they were thriving. In striking contrast to academic discourse (Diener et al. 2009, Frijters & Krekel 2021), the working group placed very little emphasis on pleasure, satisfaction, or happiness. Instead, the two most prominent themes were

a sense of *meaning and purpose*⁵, and nourishing *relationships* with others, especially family, but also friends, community, and intimate partners. Other indicators of thriving were feelings of *autonomy* and a *sense of competence*. Together with relationships, these are the three basic psychological needs identified by self-determination theory in its definition of wellbeing (Ryan & Deci 2017).

The final element of the qualitative data analysis involved iterative discussion of these preliminary models with the working group and workshop participants, leading to refinements. The first round of such refinements was within the working group, with another dozen or so interviews conducted to solicit feedback on the models. This was sufficient to produce the “preliminary report”. The model of the preliminary report was then considered by workshop participants. They gave feedback first in the pre-workshop survey (see appendix A2), then in the workshop itself after hearing an explanation of the preliminary model by analyst 2, and finally in a post-workshop survey (see appendix A2). The model was also presented for feedback to Turn2us twice, first at a lunchtime seminar open to all staff and quite well attended, then at a meeting of the steering committee (i.e. the executives and head of each line area). In the next section, we outline the final model that emerged from this refinement process, with selections from the supporting data.

The Theory of Thriving

There were several lines of commentary on the preliminary model of thriving that led to substantive changes. First, the hierarchical nature was confusing. Coproduction partners were uncomfortable with the idea, among other things, that you couldn't have a sense of meaning and purpose without having capabilities. All parties united behind a tree metaphor as a better way of expressing the interrelationships between the various aspects of the model. Second, there was a countervailing concern, particular among the Turn2us executive, that “capabilities” put insufficient emphasis on basic needs, which were widely considered the most common and fundamental element of thriving in Turn2us' work. Relatedly, academic commentators in seminars considered our use of the term capabilities inappropriate as our model clearly went beyond the capabilities paradigm and we confounded means, capabilities, and conversion factors (Robeyns 2017). Third, ‘capabilities’ were considered jargon by workshop attendees, who thought ‘means’ were easier to understand. They also wanted the justice and resources elements of the capabilities paradigm spelt out separately. Fourth, some items were added to the ‘indicators of wellbeing’ section in the workshop, and some means given greater emphasis. Finally, by the end of the coproduction process, the principal themes of analyst 2's qualitative analysis had been refined to the following, which necessitated a revision of the model: health, freedom, self-actualisation/personal development, connectedness, basic needs, household circumstances, discrimination.

⁵ This is a long running theme of humanistic psychology (Frankl 1946/2008, Wong 2010) and more recently of scholarship in the field of subjective wellbeing (King & Hicks 2020).

As a result of these discussions and subsequent refinements, we ended up with a three-part model organised using the metaphor of a tree. The three parts are means, process, and outcomes. We illustrate this model below using quotations from coproduction partners.

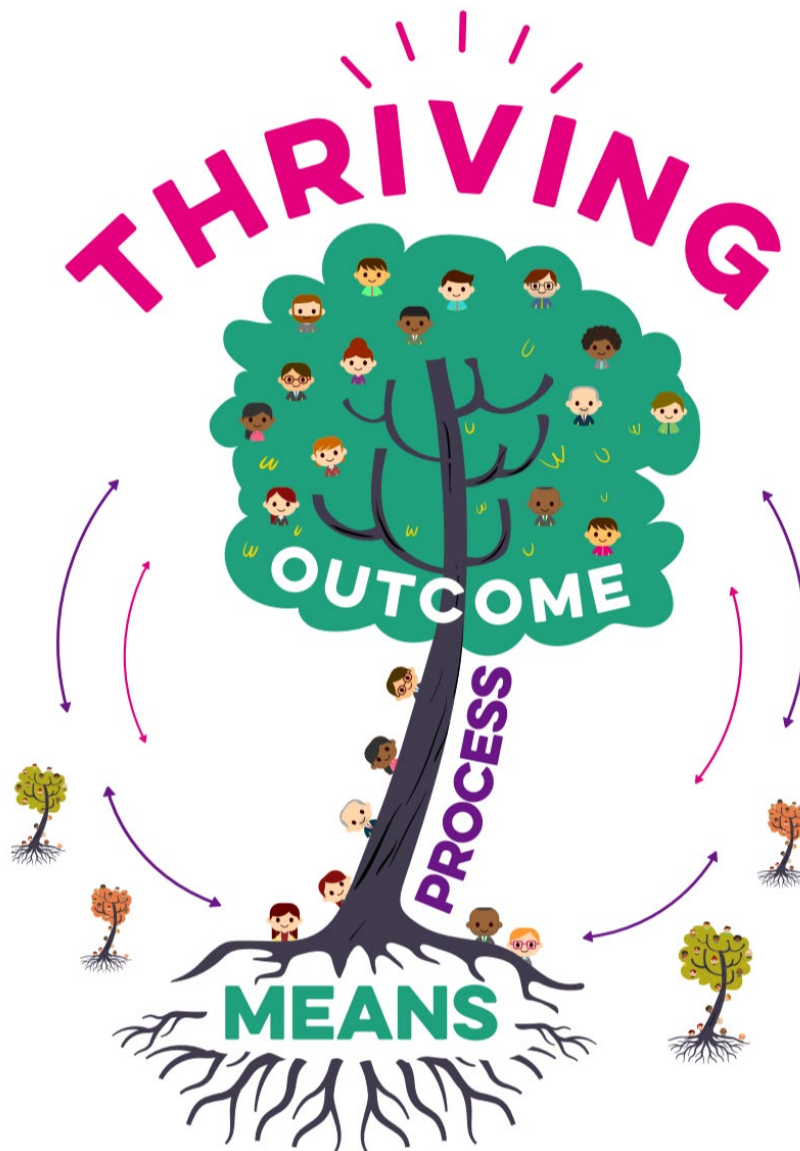


Figure 1: The Tree Metaphor, cite the public report

Means

Your means are the resources that allow you to *be who you want to be* and *do what you want to do*. These means vary from person to person and change over time, but we all have *basic needs* like food and medicine. If our basic needs are not secure then we cannot thrive: “Because if I didn’t have a roof over my head, I can’t even think about any other thing. If I cannot feed myself or my children. I cannot think about studying. So that has to happen first – Gladys”. In our discussions, two *types* of means in particular stood out: *practical means*, and *justice-focused means*. Practical means are specific to you. If your knee hurts when you go for a walk, for example, your thriving will be held back. Justice focused means are about whether social, political, and economic conditions are conducive to thriving. If people frequently disrespect you just because you’re black, for example, it will hurt your thriving:

As a disabled person, just like anybody else I have dreams and aspirations about where to go in my life, and as well as many other people, many of those dreams are not fulfilled. And some of that is related to disability because it is quite difficult to work your way up in the world of business as a disabled person...When I left University with a master's degree, and after my bachelor's degree, and I was looking for work, I was told, because I didn't get any job interviews...answer telephones – Rudi

In the context of Turn2us' work, coproduction partners put an especial emphasis on the following practical means:

- *Financial security*, including housing and bills
- *Health*, both physical and mental
- *Advocates* and allies
- *Access* to the welfare and legal system
- *Support* from friends, family, and the community, and being able to ask for it
- *Education* and skills,
- *Time* to think and plan
- *Resilience* and coping skills

Our discussions of justice focused on

- Freedom from *racism, sexism, classism, domestic violence* and oppression
- Overcoming *marginalisation* and *stigma* from *disability* and *unemployment*
- Challenging *cultural expectations*, like heterosexuality or materialism

We see here a direct illustration of the point made earlier that abstract wellbeing items like freedom need to be specified in more detail to be useful to a specific context. For example, lived experts outlined particular things that curtailed their freedom, such disapproval of their black partners or the lack of disability access to shops. While some of the items emphasised by our coproduction partners are common to coproduction efforts in other contexts, such as financial security, health, and freedom, some appear unique to the context of Turn2us work, notably advocates, access, time, and overcoming the stigma of unemployment.

Process

With the means in place, the individual can start exploring who they are and this is what we label as 'process'. Two frequent themes of our discussions were that *thriving is more than material* and that it is *subjective and different for each person*. Having your basic needs met is the most important thing for thriving, but you also need to discover what thriving means for you individually. What job would you enjoy? Is there a neighbourhood you love living in? Where can you find good friends? *What sort of life would best suit you?* This theme was particularly stark in the experiences of one of our coproduction partners, who only discovered his intrinsic motivation for art (and from there to acting and video production) after being able to dabble in it while staying in a homeless shelter. He had previously been unfulfilled in his otherwise 'successful' life as a sales executive:

I wanted to be a big shot businessman, you know, sales director of the biggest multinational in the world...and I never thought I had a creative side. But in the last

five years, I've pretty much become a painter, I've done loads of acting – commercials and a few other, music videos, and whatever...And it's everywhere in society. So much untapped talent, but there's no resources, and opportunity for people to have the freedom to kind of explore these things that they've got, and so they don't know that they've got necessarily – James

Our research found that you might initially use your means on things that don't suit you, perhaps because of cultural expectations or family pressure. But if you have the time, money, support, and freedom to keep experimenting, you'll find your way. For example, one of our lived experts was unable to see past cultural expectations around family and marriage to break away from her abusive marriage, but she only started thriving once she set out on her own:

I would say thriving is a subjective feeling, because if I had gone with my previous definition of thriving, I think that was like a social construct – what society thinks: you should be in a place [home], you should be married etc.. So my current thriving, as a single mother, is not seen as an ideal; it's being frowned on. But it's my subjective feeling. I am happy within myself. Yesterday, I was having a discussion with one of my classmates and he was feeling sorry for me: "Oh, I know it must have been really difficult for you". I said: "well, it is but don't feel sorry for me because I am in a better place now. I feel much happier than where I was before". So yeah, I would say it is subjective....what I feel within myself not what someone will tell me. – Gladys

The notion of 'process' that emerged in our research is similar to the notion of 'self-actualisation'. This is a frequent theme in the humanistic psychotherapy tradition, particular in the works of Carl Jung (1931), Carl Rogers (1963/2008), and Abraham Maslow (1965), but has featured remarkably little in the contemporary discourse around wellbeing.

Outcomes

Our coproduction partners identified a range of indicators of thriving that let you know that you've found the activities and values that suit you. The most important outcome was *strong relationships* that are mutually supportive and enriching. We are more likely to build these when we're around people who share our values:

I guess, for me, and you mentioned as well, then I see like the word "community" or something that encapsulates being part of something; that's been really important to me in relation to thriving. – James

Lived experts placed a strong emphasis on a sense of *autonomous* and being *in charge of our life*. These arose when they could invest their time, energy, and resources as they wanted, and were free from oppression:

The times in my life when I was thriving is when I finally made the decision to leave my marriage... going through what I went through, my marriage, and after I got to the position of leaving it, I got clear insight now that actually this is me now. I'm actually thriving, being on my own, standing on my feet, and saying no to

putting up with domestic abuse, and being independent really, and being happy. – Gladys

We get *a sense of competence* was also a common outcome associated with thriving. This occurs when we improve our skills and achieve our goals:

But the thriving part of that was when, and it's going to sound terribly cliché but you have to see it from the perspective of being spinal injured, driving along San Francisco Bay, with my newly acquired girlfriend sitting next to me, and feeling really rather magnificent and then my disability didn't seem to be there anymore, because I was sitting in a regular car driving along a regular road with a regular person sitting next to me. - Rudi

Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the three basic psychological needs emphasised by self-determination theory, a prominent account of wellbeing in social and clinical psychology. Self-determination theory has also emphasised the importance of 'self-concordant' values and behaviours. It thus fits some of the themes of our qualitative data. However, it does not speak to the strong theme of basic needs, nor justice. Furthermore, there were other outcomes associated with thriving that feature in only a limited way at most in self-determination theory. The first of these is *a sense of purpose*: that what we're doing is important and, commonly, helping other people:

So, thriving is partly my job, but looking after my mom I was thriving, I felt it wasn't, I didn't have money, and it was difficult, but I found I was thriving because I was doing something where that was, you know, was enriching to me. – Toni

The second was feeling *content* and *at peace with ourselves*, which emerges when our means are secure and we can do the things that suit us we feel.

Strikingly, the lived experts spoke very little of pleasure or life satisfaction. Even happiness barely featured. There was one participant at the workshop who found the day to day suggestions offered by action for happiness helpful in improving their mood during COVID-19 lockdown, and they said that this contributed to their thriving. More broadly though, there was a sense that lived experience with financial hardship and other difficulties made one resilient to issues around mood, which were seen as sort of trivial in the circumstances. Mental health was certainly a strong theme, but again less in terms of bad moods and more in terms of long term periods of depression and debilitating anxiety. Recovering from mental illness was seen in terms of autonomy and being at peace with oneself, not in terms of being happy. Broadly speaking, thriving seemed to be about transcending one's circumstances.

The Tree Metaphor

It was difficult to represent the dynamics of thriving. Coproduction partners saw means as it some sense prior to process, which was in turn prior to outcomes, but were uncomfortable with organising these themes hierarchically. There were too many odd cases that such a model did not fit well. For example, what about an elderly person who has lived a good and long life but is now dying of a terminal illness. They lack the means, notably health, but they seem strong on process and outcomes. We eventually settled on the tree metaphor as a way to express the interrelationships between the themes. The *means* can be represented with the basic

requirements for a healthy tree: roots (material needs) and soil quality (justice). The *process* is the trunk and branches of the tree—we grow in our own unique ways to take the shape we want. And the *outcomes* are the leaves and flowers, which let us know that a tree is really thriving. The tree metaphor helps us apply the model of thriving. If someone has financial security but they're held back by racism or other forms of prejudice, then it is social justice they need. If they've found their calling but they're still struggling to flower, then they're probably lacking the practical means to achieve their goals. The tree metaphor also reflects that thriving is different for each of us and changes over time. We need to be sensitive to how people are growing, and help them adapt to shocks like unemployment just as a tree needs time to adapt to losing a branch. The tree can also handle cases like dying at the end of a life well lived. This is a case of the roots dying out on a big, beautiful, old tree. We can see that this tree has thrived, but it's time is coming to an end.

Measurement

While academic *theories* of wellbeing were well received by coproduction participants and are clearly reflected in our theory of thriving, the same cannot be said for *measures* of wellbeing. Most prominent scientific approaches to the measurement of wellbeing were rejected by participants for one reason or another. Capabilities and surveys were considered far too long. Both lived experts and practitioners stressed that people seeking support from Turn2us were in a desperate situation and would be turned off if required to answer many prepackaged questions before receiving assistance. This problem applied to psychometric surveys as well, such as the 15-item wellbeing profile (Marsh et al. 2020): service users were already expected to answer a host of questions pertaining to their financial and personal situation when applying to Turn2us, and the charity did not want to add a double burden. Both capabilities and psychometric surveys were also seen to miss important aspects of thriving in the case of Turn2us service users. In the first case, the process by which authentic values are discovered. In the second, the basic means necessary to allow for exploration.

Turn2us had previously tried to use life satisfaction scales but found them insufficiently sensitive to the treatment period. Turn2us typically works with an individual for around three months during which they are deeply distressed. While service users report grants and the benefits calculator being very helpful, it is not enough to shift their life satisfaction as many of the other sources of their distress remain. The insensitivity of life satisfaction scales is a well established phenomenon. An additional difficulty is that lived experts explicitly raised the problem of adaptive preferences. This argument was first offered by Amartya Sen (1999) against the use of happiness or other subjective measures of wellbeing in the context of poverty or disenfranchised groups like women. Adaptive preference is where an individual grows accustomed to their condition, either through acclimatisation or false conscious, and thus does not appreciate that their life could be much better. They consequently report high life satisfaction, but after a structural break they look back and recognise that their life was not good. For example, one coproduction partner spoke of how she would have said she was satisfied when she was living with an abusive husband. It was only after a prolonged period of consciousness raising and subsequent divorce that she realised her assessment was biased. Another coproduction partner said that he would have expressed satisfaction even when he

was depressed because by the expectations of society he should have been satisfied with his career success. These personal experiences speak to the unsuitability of life satisfaction scales for measuring Turn2us impact.

During coproduction, we endeavoured to identify how Turn2us might apply the theory of thriving in its work so that we could develop measures in the coproduction process. This ambition was misguided however, as Turn2us needs time to observe where the theory lends itself to application organically. We intend to continue working together over the next year to observe this evolution and return to the issue of measurement in the future.

The peculiar measurement needs of Turn2us raise the issue of generalisability. How useful is coproduction to wellbeing public policy if it always results in idiosyncratic metrics? These are difficult if not impossible to standardise and militate against the comparison of different policies for improving wellbeing. While acknowledging this concern, we think it is overwrought. While coproduction in the capabilities space has thrown up many items unique to particular contexts, many items are shared across contexts. These include obvious items like health and income, but also more nuanced issues like relationships, autonomy, respect, and access to community infrastructure. These shared items can often be effectively measured using standardised instruments. It is thus feasible to develop cross-contextual measures while preserving the need for local theories and measures of wellbeing. Obviously this isn't good enough for some nodes of policymaking like national statistics, but it is perfectly viable in others, notably local governance.

Scaling up and generalisability

The methodology we have outlined holds promise as a means of creating wellbeing public policy from the bottom up. To date, most high profile efforts at wellbeing policy, such as Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) planning tool or New Zealand's Wellbeing budget, have proceeded from the top down. In the GNH tool, for example, wellbeing is defined centrally and measured using standardised metrics. All policy proposals are assessed in terms of how they perform according to this definition and against these measures. Frijters et al. (2020) recommend a similar approach to wellbeing policymaking, with treasury officials allocating funds to policies according to how well they maximise life satisfaction. A bottom up approach instead empowers the end-users of governments services and the lowest levels of policymaking, such as communities and local governments, to determine what wellbeing means and how it should be assessed. These contextualised wellbeing policies are fed back to the centre through a process of scaling up and generalisation. As adjacent nodes of policy all produce wellbeing policy, they can come together in further rounds of coproduction to develop relatively more abstract conceptualisations and measures of wellbeing that work across all of their contexts.

For example, Turn2us intends to collaborate with other charities working with individuals in financial hardship, such as those dealing with debt, housing, mental health, and substance abuse, to develop a theory of thriving that could inform the sector more broadly. This conceptualisation, being at a higher scale of resolution, will necessarily be more abstract than the fine-grained conceptualisation developed for Turn2us. But it will also help the sector articulate

a shared vision. The same is true for whatever measures emerge. A substance abuse charity may want to measure days clean, for example, and this will not be of much use for other charities. But all charities working against financial hardship may endorse a measure of financial security. Further rounds of coproduction could then generalise the theory even further, perhaps into the social policy space. At this stage, representatives from government and the taxpaying public would need to be involved in the coproduction as legitimate stakeholders.

This optimistic view should not be mistaken for naivety. Coproduction is difficult and easily derailed by arrogant experts, intransigent professionals, overbearing lived experts, and a host of other challenges from logistics to drop outs (Oliver et al 2019). We were quite lucky in our project, and certainly benefitted from Turn2us' experience using coproduction in their operations. Efforts to build wellbeing policy or similar endeavours from the bottom up using coproduction should be mindful of the likelihood of mistakes and the need to learn from them. What would be invaluable in this space is an effort by groups involved in similar exercises to pool their knowledge and produce a handbook or other sort of guide to the process. This would improve the success rate of coproduction exercises and facilitate the wider use of the methodology.

Conclusion

Our experience demonstrates that coproducing theories and measures of value-laden concepts is feasible and fruitful in organisational settings, and that coproducing theories of wellbeing and related concepts in particular can transcend the capabilities approach. The thriving of thriving that emerged from our coproduction exercise does not map neatly onto any 'off-the-shelf' academic theory, and such measures were also found to be inappropriate. Genuine power sharing and openness to two way learning can thus lead to richer and more practical conceptualisations and measures of value-laden concepts than academics, practitioners, or individuals working alone. It can also trigger personal growth for participants. For example, author 1 found the experience transformative for his understanding of disability, practitioners from Turn2us learned how to make their public-facing documents less linguistically 'middle class', and lived experts were able to use theories and other inputs from academics to articulate their thoughts and feelings about thriving. The experience was quite meaningful for all parties, exemplified by a poem one lived expert wrote at the conclusion of the project (see Appendix A4). This poem was included in the final report on the project from Turn2us, and underlines that coproduction has the power to bring about wholehearted participation in policymaking. At a time of intense anti-elitism in politics, this is quite an achievement.

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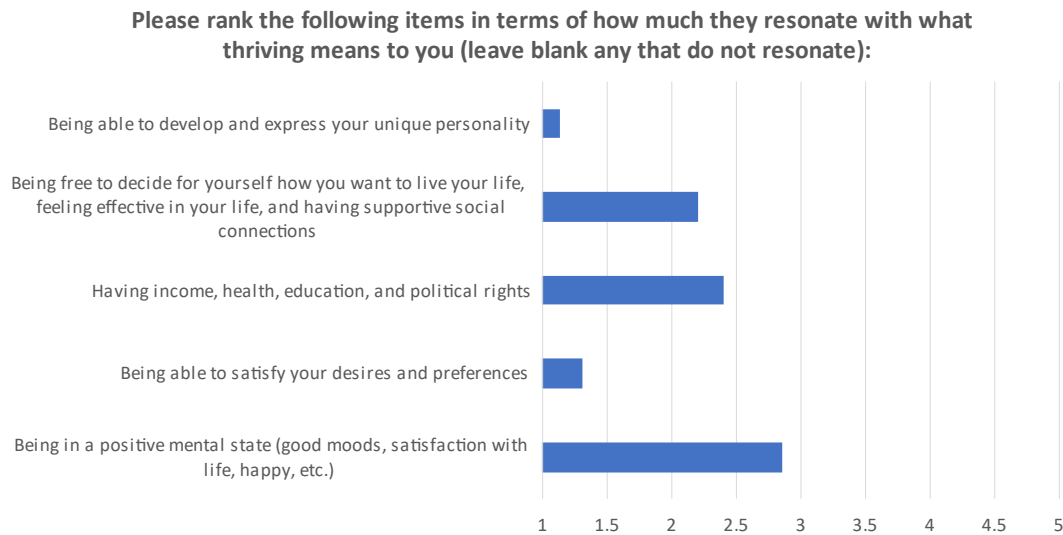
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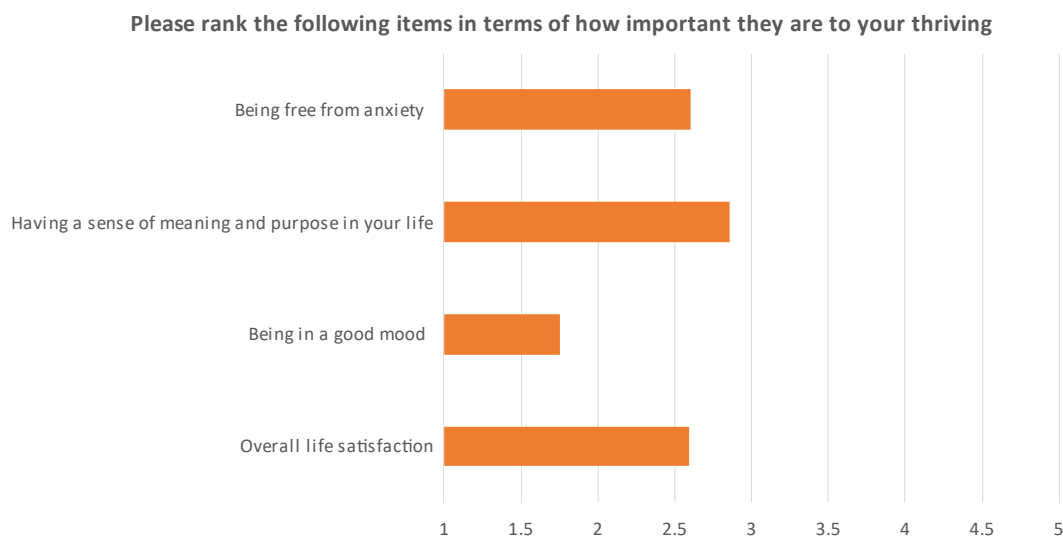
Appendix 1: First online survey through Turn2us newsletter

Fig. A1: result for 1st wellbeing question, initial newsletter survey



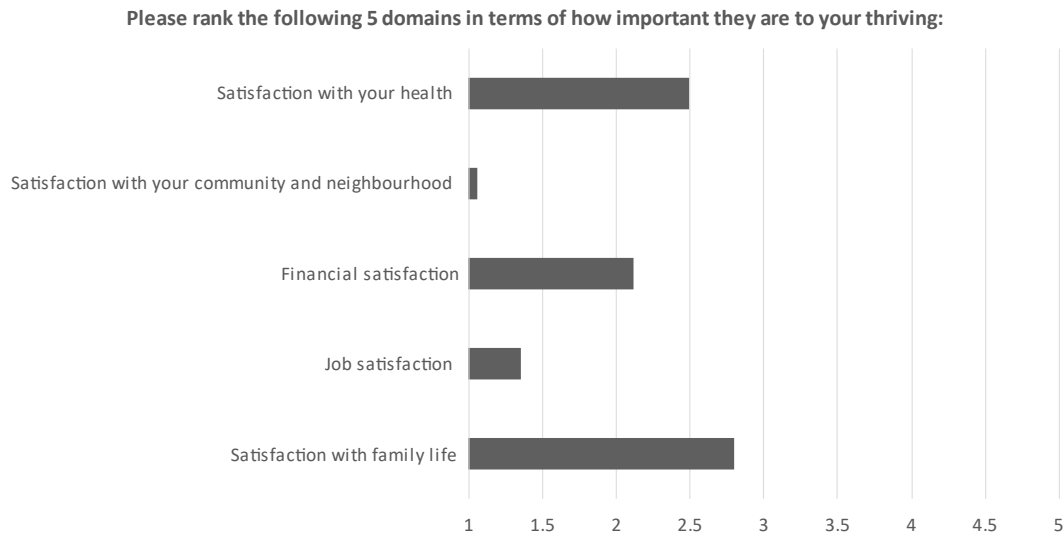
Notes: the bars reflect mean rankings across 1573 respondents.

Figure A2: Results for 2nd wellbeing question, initial newsletter survey



Notes: the bars reflect mean rankings across 1573 respondents.

Figure A3: Results for 3rd wellbeing question, initial newsletter survey



Notes: the bars reflect mean rankings across 1573 respondents.

Figure A4: Word cloud summary of open-ended responses to 4th wellbeing question

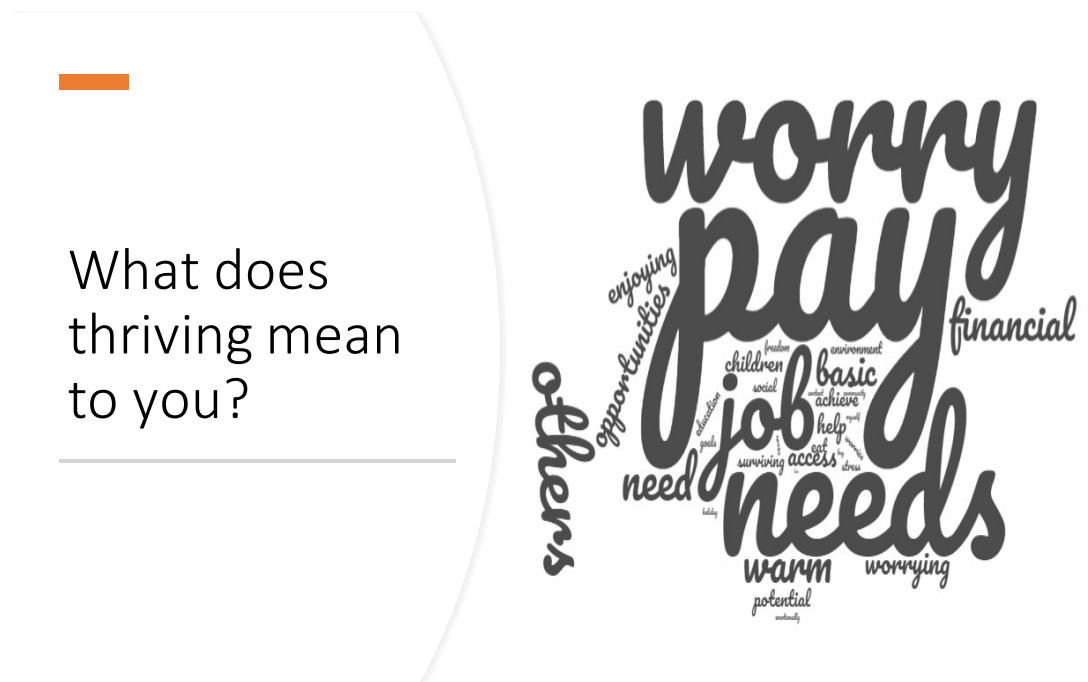


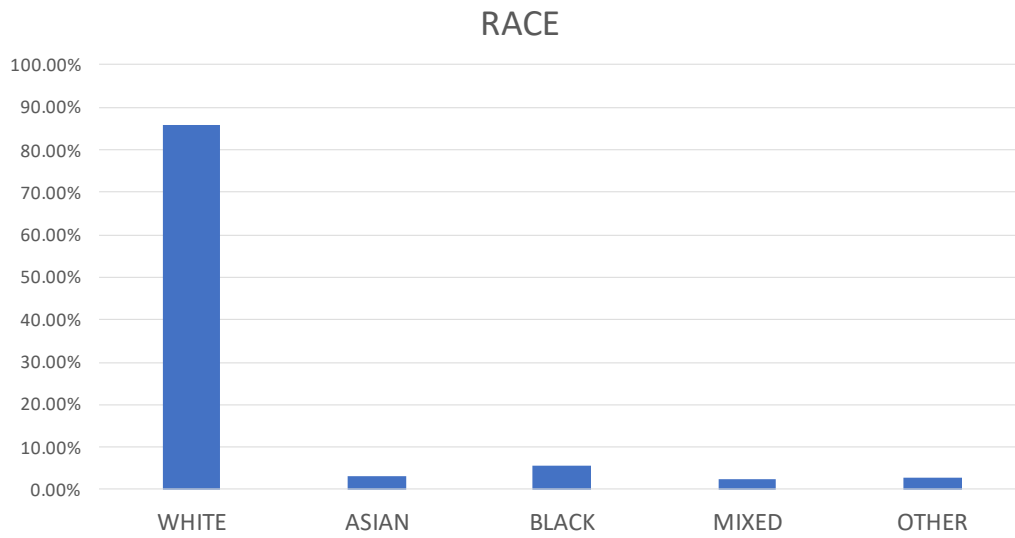
Figure A5: Word cloud summary of open-ended responses to 5th wellbeing question



The final wellbeing question was: “Is there anything that you feel your friends, family, colleagues, community, social workers or the government misunderstand about what would help you thrive? (Please explain in 280 characters)”. Below are some sample responses:

- “Nothing”
- “Having regular psychological support without a huge waiting list”
- “I feel that everyone seems to believe that one’s family is supportive”
- “Yes being branded a scrounger for not being able to work, not getting the help from professionals that I need.”
- “Being diagnosed with depression and finding out 18 years later I have complex ptsd and adhd”
- “They all overlook single people”
- “Yes, the difficulty of finding or knowing about where to find support”

Figure A6: Racial identification of survey respondents



Notes: This response rate by racial category broadly matches UK demographics.

Figure A7: Gender identification of survey respondents

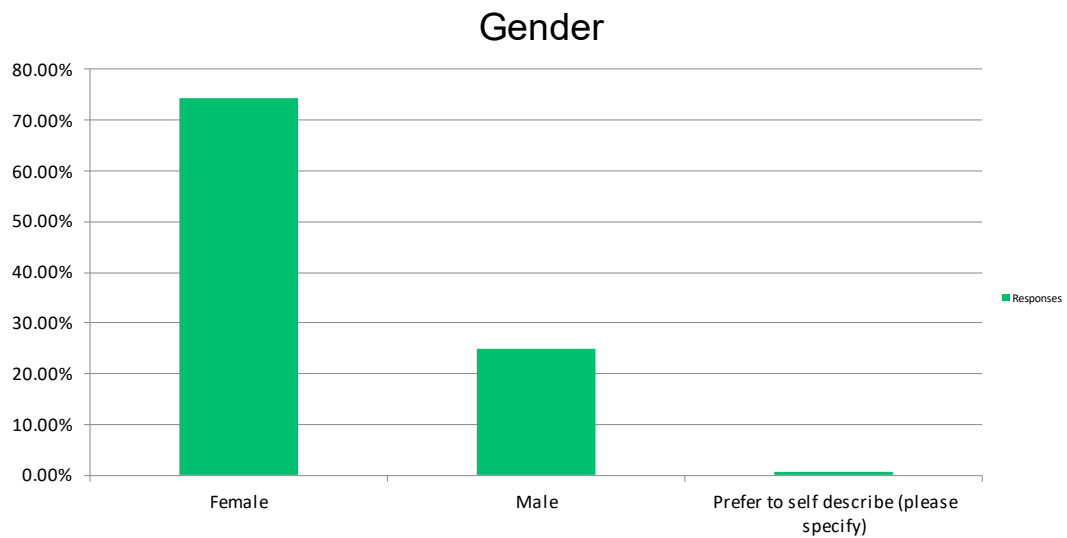


Figure A8: Age of survey respondents

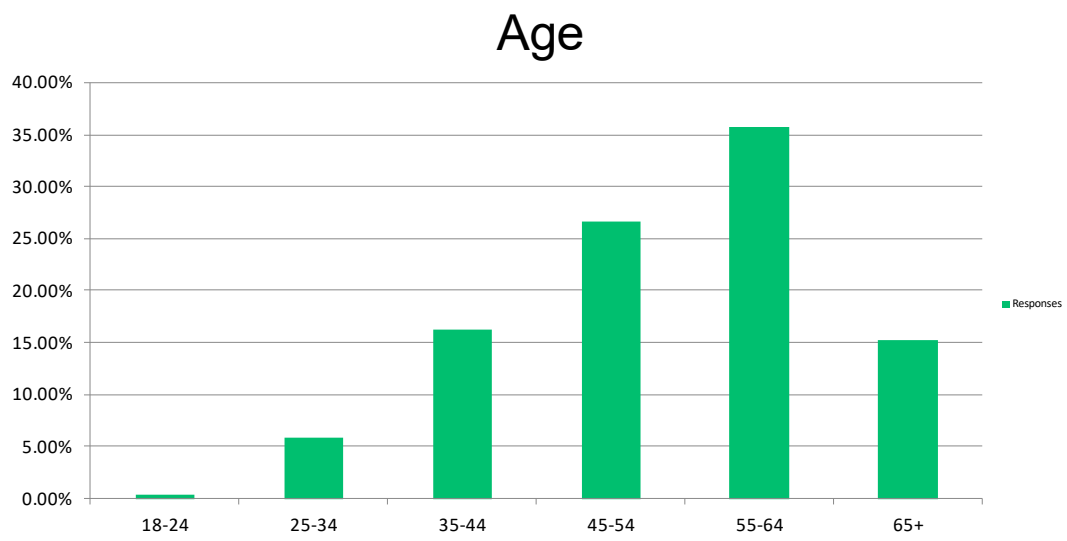


Figure A9: Disability status of survey respondents

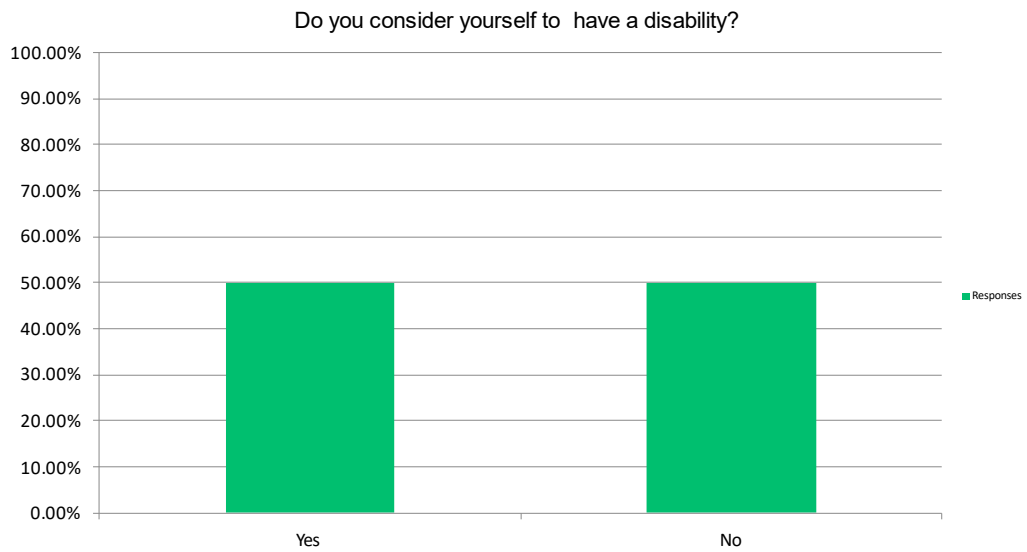


Figure A10: Benefits claimed by survey respondents

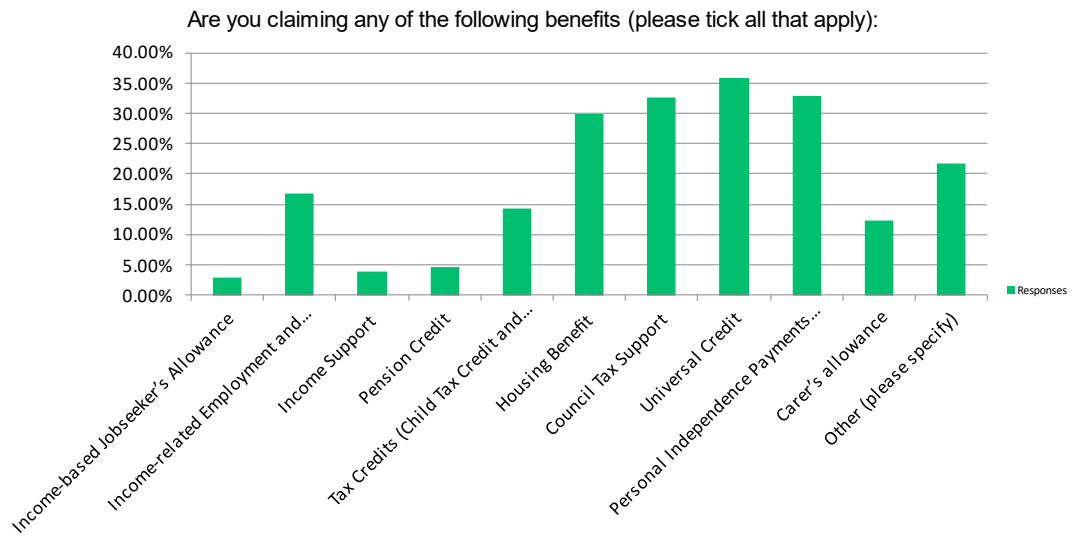


Figure A11: Number of children of survey respondents

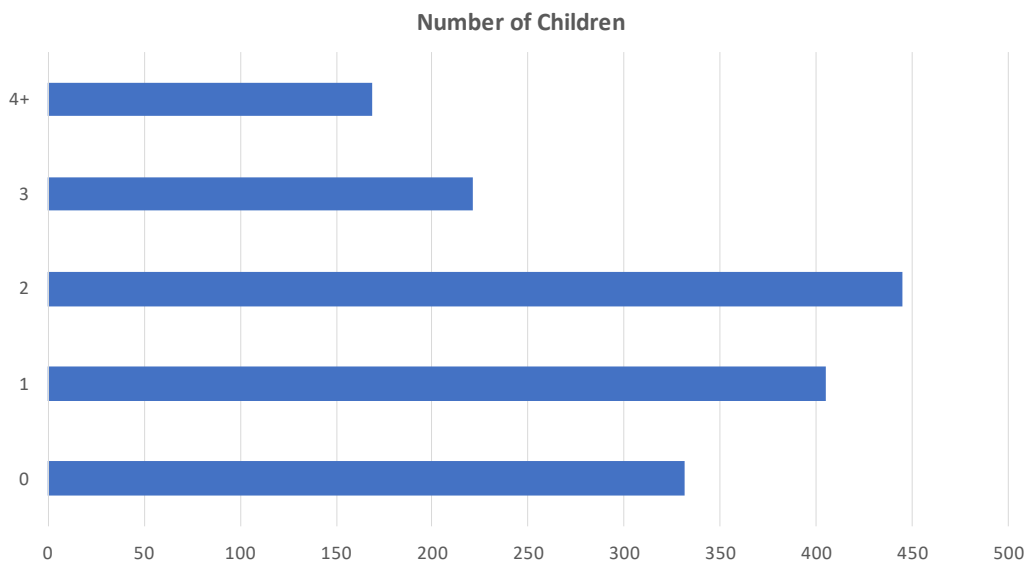
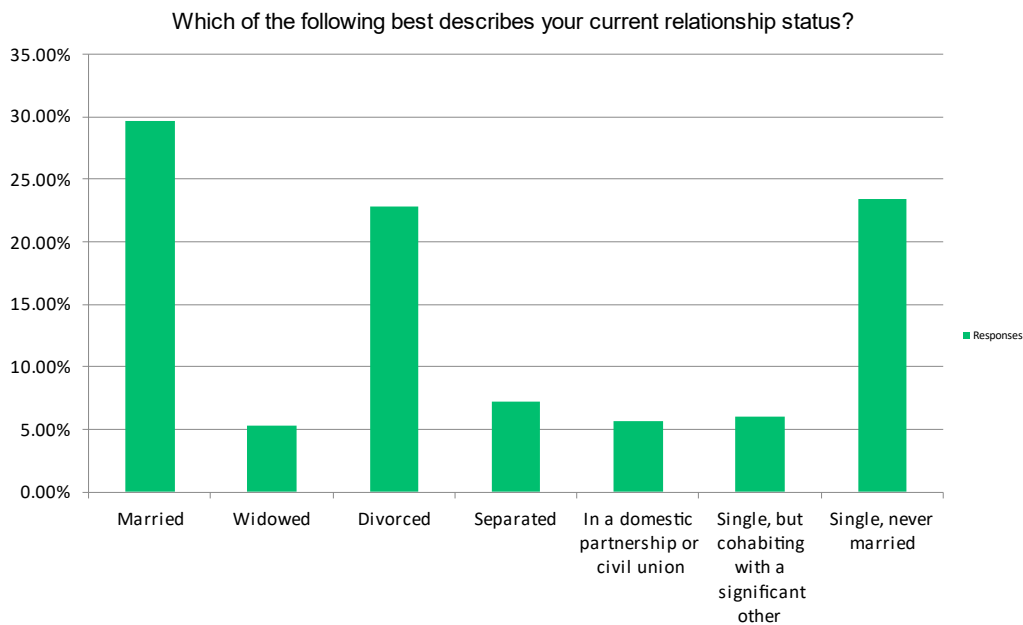


Figure A12: Relationship status of survey respondents



Responses to the wellbeing questions seemed to be broadly similar across different demographic groups. For examples, figure A13-15 show responses for BAME, disabled, and male respondents:

Figure A13: disabled only

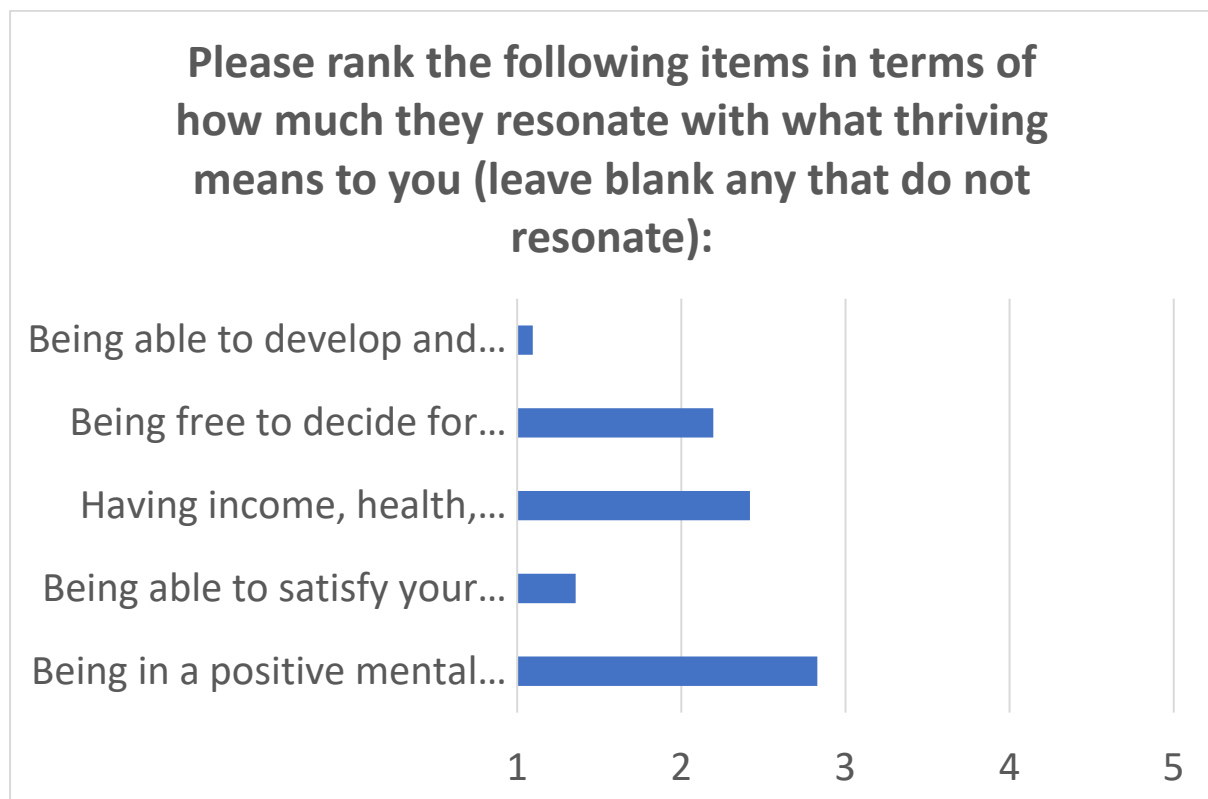


Figure A14: BAME only

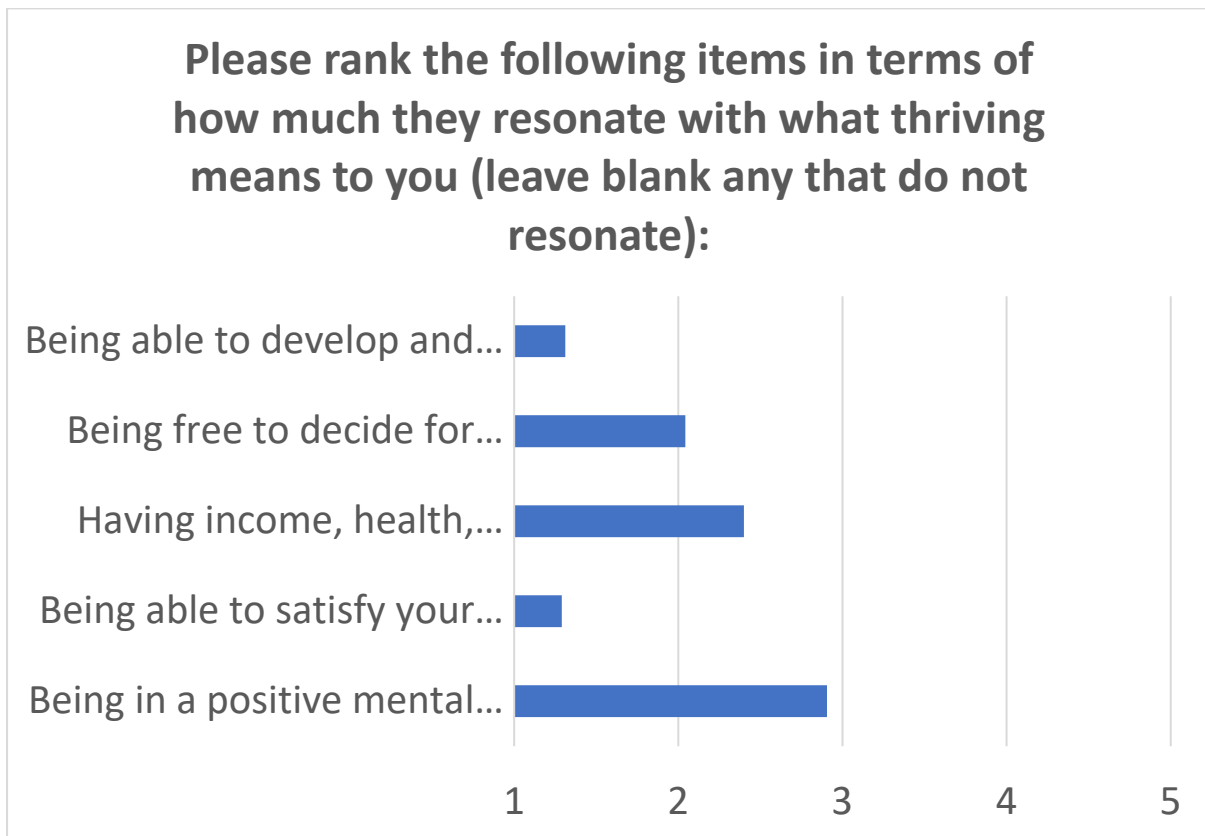
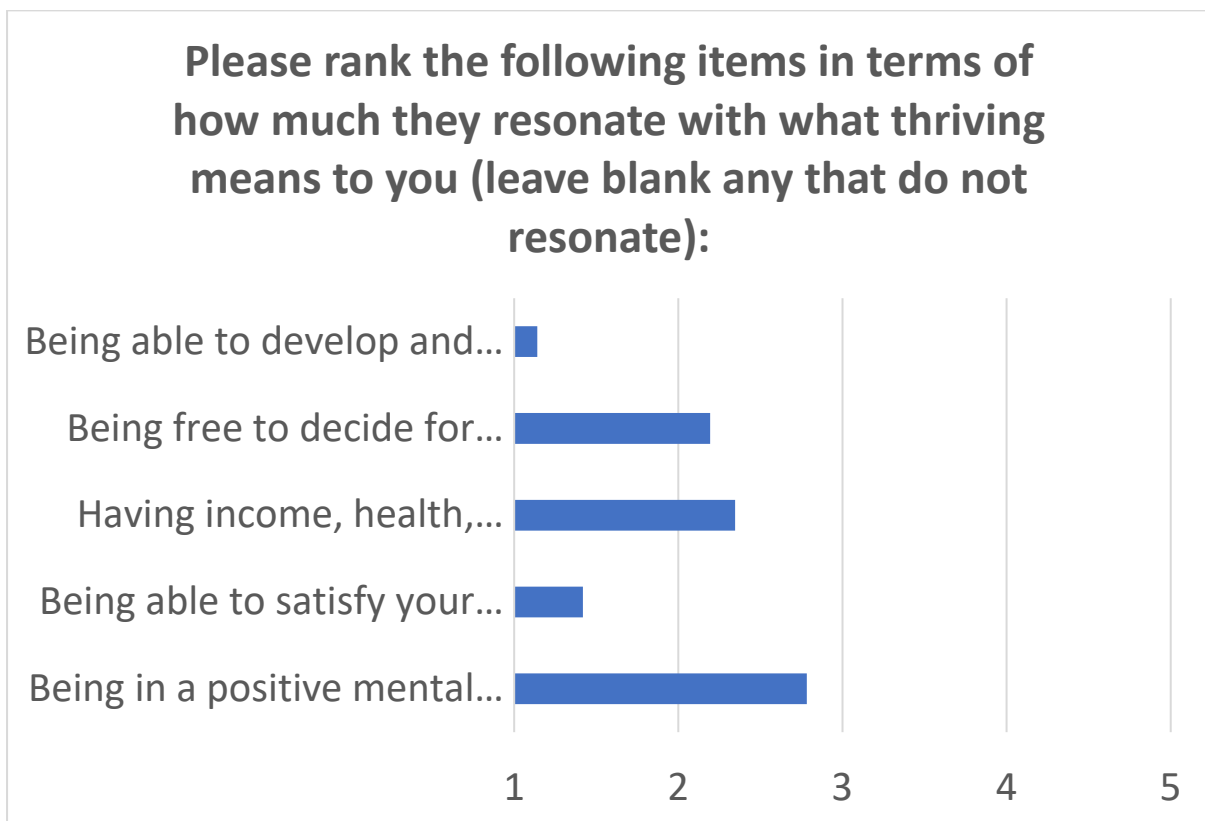


Figure A15: Men only



Appendix A2: Pre- and post-workshop survey results

Pre-Workshop survey questions and responses (note: only 8/10 new lived experts responded)

<i>ID#</i>	<i>To what extent does the model of thriving presented in the draft report capture your own thoughts and experience about what thriving means in the context of financial hardship and life-changing circumstances?</i>	<i>Do you think that the model of thriving reflects the perspectives of the lived experts quoted in the second half?</i>	<i>Does the model and the process by which it was developed seem rigorous to you?</i>	<i>Does the model seem practical to you in the sense that Turn2us can apply it in its work?</i>
1	51	51	No	50
2	100	100	Yes	100
3	80	90	No	85
4	93	81	Yes	90
5	50	75	Unsure	50
6	90	80	Unsure	80
7	77	60	Unsure	70
8	100	99	Yes	100

Notes: Higher numbers are positively coded e.g. 100 in Q1 suggests the preliminary report completely captured the respondent's thoughts what thriving means.

Briefly, could you tell us what, if anything, is missing from the model of thriving in the draft report in terms of capturing your thoughts and experiences about thriving?

- Material Deprivation, simpler language
- Education, especially now the government want to offer lifetime learning, if you have had a bad experience in education this could/will impact on someone wanting to upskill.
- In the process of balancing the intrinsic (self-actualisation, self-knowledge...) and the external factors that allow us to thrive, I would point out the importance of coping skills and the support that is available, the significance of understanding and supportive relationships.
- It's almost touched upon but I feel there should be more emphasis on the significant impact that the discovery of one's gender/sexuality etc. can have on one's self-esteem and feeling of authenticity in day-to-day life
- Thriving is about building a wall, or a set of endless steps. Your model seems to be based on thriving being the need to get everything right and things never going wrong. Surely thriving must involve the skill of dealing with failure and set-back?
- Perhaps what is missing is a spiritual or transcendent aspect to thriving. After all, we are not in this world forever...

- To me, it was a bit jargony in places, and would have liked maybe a few more stories of real life people to put it more in context. I know there were some, but unfortunately they had gone over the actual text so couldn't read them all.
- It doesn't seem to mention lack of time as a barrier to thriving, which I know can be an easy excuse, but genuinely if you are juggling dealing with children and working and a relationship there may not be a lot of time for anything else, or even for thinking about your situation. Also some people may not have the self-awareness to know how to think about whether they are thriving, and if not what they might do about it. So education may have a place in a model of thriving.

Post-workshop survey results (note: only 8/10 new lived experts responded)

<i>ID#</i>	<i>Overall, how satisfied were you with the workshop?</i>	<i>To what extent did you have opportunities to share your thoughts, feelings, and perspectives about what thriving means?</i>	<i>To what extent were your thoughts, feelings, and perspectives on thriving taken into consideration by the group?</i>	<i>Did the workshop give everyone the opportunity to share their views and incorporate them into the model of thriving?</i>	<i>Do you feel that the model now reflects what thriving means to you?</i>	<i>Did the workshop change your mind at all about what thriving means?</i>
1	Completely satisfied	I got to share enough	100	100	90	20
2	Completely satisfied	I got to share enough	95	99	99	7
3	Fairly satisfied	I got to share a good amount	100	100	70	80
4	Completely satisfied	I got to share enough	70	52	77	27
5	Completely satisfied	I got to share a good amount	100	90	85	56
6	Completely satisfied	I got to share enough	100	100	99	0

7	Completely satisfied	I got to share enough	100	100	33	30
8	Completely satisfied	I got to share a good amount	91	76	85	5

Notes: Higher numbers are positively coded e.g. 100 in Q3 suggests the respondent's thoughts we taken completely into consideration by the group. 0 in question 6 means the workshop did not change their mind at all.

Do you think that the model of thriving reflects the views of everyone involved in the workshop?

- Hard to say... probably most people
- Yes
- No. It needs to be further extended to take into people of different backgrounds.
- Yes
- I am excited to see the final model to fully answer this question but I do believe the discussions we had raised many important points that will contribute towards a more inclusive, complex model of thriving
- I think it will once it is adjusted in accordance with the discussion
- Not yet. And you will never please all of the people all of the time. No matter how hard you try.
- I think as much as could be done in the time. Pretty well considering the time we had. Everyone had a chance to speak.

Appendix A3: Guidance for workshop facilitators

Workshop Schedule

ITEM	NOTES/RESPONSIBILITY
10:00am – welcome and introductions (15 minutes)	
<p>10:15am – breakout rooms of 4 to discuss thriving (20 minutes)</p> <p>These rooms will give us an opportunity to build some genuine rapport in a slightly more intimate setting than the whole group. Hopefully they'll be conducive to sharing deep thoughts and feeling about what thriving means to each of us.</p>	<p>Facilitators (note takers): Mark (notes: Mark) Abby (notes: Abby) Toni (notes: Ollie) Yamini (notes: Sara) James (notes: Anna/?)</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were there times in your life when you were thriving? What characterised those periods? • What made you aware that you were thriving? Was it a subjective feeling or were there objective indicators, or both? • Were there any times in your life where you struggled to thrive? What was holding you back? • Have you come across someone who you thought was thriving or not thriving? What characterised their situation? What gave you the impression of thriving?
10:35am – short break (10 minutes)	
<p>10:45am – Jam board session to share what thriving means (20 minutes)</p> <p>Abby will moderate a whole-group discussion to share what we discovered in the breakout groups.</p> <p>All of our ideas will go on a 'jam board', which is basically a screen covered in little post it notes that helps us keep track of what we're saying.</p>	<p>Moderator: Abby Jam board operator: Mark</p>
11:05am – Presentation from Turn2us about how theory might be used (10 mins)	TBC
11:15am – Long break (30 minutes)	
11:45am – Presentation of the model w/reference to Jam board (20 minutes)	<p>Moderator: Abby Presenter: Mark</p>

<p>Mark will present the model of thriving that appears in the draft report. Hopefully everyone will already have read the report, so this presentation will focus on explaining how the model can and cannot make sense of things that we have on our jam board.</p>	
<p>12:05noon – Discussion of model, especially clarifications (15 minutes)</p> <p>A opportunity to clarify any misunderstanding or confusions about the model, offer constructive criticisms, and discuss how we could improve the model so that it better reflects our lived experiences of thriving and the practical needs of Turn2us.</p>	<p>Moderator: Abby</p>
<p>12:20pm – short break (10 minutes)</p>	
<p>12:30pm – breakout rooms of 4 to discuss thoughts on model and what might be missing (15 minutes)</p>	<p>Facilitators (note takers): Mark (notes: Mark) Abby (notes: Abby) Toni (notes: Ollie) Yamini (notes: Sara) James (notes: Anna/?)</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any initial reactions to the model? • How does it reflect your thoughts and feelings about thriving (or not)? • Are there any aspects of thriving that need to be given more emphasis? • Does the model make sense? Is it clear and understandable? • Are their ways to tweak the model to make it clearer, deeper, or more thorough?
<p>12:45pm – plenary session to Jam board refinements to the model (15 minutes)</p> <p>As in the first session, we'll come back into one big group to share what we came up with in the break out rooms.</p>	<p>Moderator: Abby Jam board operator: Mark</p>
<p>1:00pm – thank yous and goodbyes</p>	<p>Make sure you mention the follow-up survey</p>

A note on Zoom technology

The breakout rooms will be activated by Abby with a timer, so facilitators do not need to start nor end the breakout room. They will open automatically, with people sorted into their appropriate rooms. They will then end automatically 20 minutes later and the software will bring everything back into the main room. A 1 minute warning will pop up after 19 minutes, but you don't have to do anything. Just wrap up your conversation and the software will take care of the rest.

When we return to the big group we will call on facilitators and note takers to present ideas from their breakout rooms to the group. If someone had a very personal or nuanced story and you think it would be best for them to tell it, simply call on them verbally. You don't need to use the technology at all, just say something like, "Clive, I thought your point about [thing] was really powerful. Would you mind sharing it with the group please?", and then they can unmute themselves and talk.

Abby will be moderating the big group sessions and Mark will be taking notes. Everything will also be recorded, so you don't need to worry about administration. Just participate in the conversation like you would in person.

GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATORS

Thanks for offering to facilitate the breakout rooms in the workshop. We hope that having people operate in small groups will make them feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and stimulate deeper discussions. The facilitators can then share the main takeaways from these small group discussions with everyone when we reconvene as a big group. This will allow us to have meaningful conversations that build rapport and make people feel included. It will also allow us to get a lot of ideas out quickly and onto the jam board.

There are two break out room sessions. The first is about what thriving means to people, and the second is about people's reactions to the model and what refinements we could make. I have a few pointers for each below, but first, some general tips.

General tips for facilitating

- Be considerate, empathetic, genuine, and open. You are all amazing at this so I won't go into any more detail, but I think it's the most important thing.
- Having working group members act as facilitators helps us to stay out of the conversation and adopt a listening position. This should hopefully make it clear that we really want to hear the perspectives of the new people joining us for the workshop.
- Help everyone to speak. The delicate part of this is when there is one person who speaks a bit too much or too long. Great to have that sort of enthusiasm, but we also need to hear from everyone. No need to interrupt someone when they're having a raw moment and that's making them a bit slow to get their point across. But if someone is starting to go on a bit maybe offer a summary of their point to try and wrap it up.
- Ideally people will bounce off each other, with one person's comments stimulating someone else to share their own thoughts. This is rare though, and if it's not happening

you'll need to prod the next speaker, e.g.: "thanks [name]. What about you [name], do you have any thoughts on this question?"

- Try to keep the conversation moving, especially in the first break out session. If people have sounded off their main thoughts to a question, move on rather than dwelling there.
- Be mindful that some speakers in the small groups will not want to share everything they say with the big group. If you're unsure, just pass the mic to them in the big group and they can tell it how they feel comfortable. You can also stick to reporting takeaway points rather than detailed personal stories.
- We should have enough people to have one facilitator and one note taker in each group. Try to make sure someone is making notes so that everything comes back to the main group smoothly. We will be sticking ideas from each breakout room onto a jam board so short summaries of points will be helpful, but stories are good too.

First facilitation

There are four sample questions for this session that you might recognise:

- Were there times in your life when you were thriving? What characterised those periods?
- What made you aware that you were thriving? Was it a subjective feeling or were there objective indicators, or both?
- Were there any times in your life where you struggled to thrive? What was holding you back?
- Have you come across someone who you thought was thriving or not thriving? What characterised their situation? What gave you the impression of thriving?

These are the questions we discussed in our early interviews. *We have 20 minutes to get 4 people through a process the working group went through over 3 hours.* It may not be possible for everyone to answer each question. So my suggestion is that rather than take each question one at a time, you instead ask anyone who has an answer to any question that they feel passionate about to speak up. That way we triage our time based on what people think are their most meaningful experiences and insights, rather than the question order.

All participants in the workshop were sent these questions ahead of time and asked to ponder them, so they should be ready with answers.

Second facilitation

This session is on the model that we developed through our interviews. We want to gauge how people feel about it and discover whether there are things we missed or improvements that can be made. Some sample questions:

- Do you have any initial reactions to the model?
- How does it reflect your thoughts and feelings about thriving (or not)?
- Are there any aspects of thriving that need to be given more emphasis?

- Does the model make sense? Is it clear and understandable?
- Are there ways to tweak the model to make it clearer, deeper, or more thorough?

Here it might make more sense to take the questions one at a time, but hopefully we can just have open conversations that range across all of these questions.

A tricky part of facilitating this session is that you will need to both defend the model in a sense and take criticism of it. The workshop is meant to be a *two-way learning process*. Members of the working group can explain our thinking and help new participants understand our perspectives. Equally, new participants will help us identify things we missed and help us to improve our thinking. So if someone mischaracterises the model, make a note of their point, but also push back politely and clarify things. We want to be open to criticisms but feel confident in our work.

Appendix A4: Poem from Toni Coley (Lived Expert)

To Thrive in Co- Production

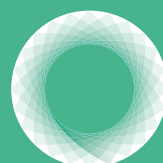
I fell from my life of security ,
Did not see it coming, looking the other way,
Caring role required , loved ones are so ill,
The need to leave work,
To fall so far , it was a crash and burn.
Reached the depths of a feeling, embracing despair,
Lost myself in there, my identify shifted so fast.
I became invisible,
Looking back, money, food, shelter in abundance,
Feeling great, active in the community, grounded.
Tasting life's comforts, never reflecting, or feeling scared,
The warm hug of providence and abundance,
Loss hits like a brick wall, cemented my fate.
Then, out of the blue, a connection reached out ,
It was Turn2us wrapping around me like a guardian angel,
Mindful and present, tolerant, and accepting.
Nourishing me quietly and without pressure,
Helpful , the benefits calculator allowed improved access,
Then grant giving , volunteers like guardians of hope on the phone,
Relevant and embracing, improving outcomes,
Turn2us are outward facing, transparent , a philosophy rooted in hope,
Improving lives,
An agenda of giving and empowerment.
Values I cherished all my life,
I was invited in,

Assisted to raise my voice again in co-production vibes,
No longer communities without a voice,
Enabling my lost voice to resonate again,
Central to structural change ,
Shaping innovative service provision,
A voice once lost in the translation of poverty and despair,
Hear my lions roar in whispers of confidence ,
A radical acceptance,
Rooted in reality,
Validated and valued, shaping our welfare state
Bridging the wealth gaps unseen,
Co-production brings hope of an everyday voice in the world,
It affirms, through quiet acceptance, enabling me to rise again in dignity,
I am seen in plain sight and heard, to tell you my back story
To thrive again , to have meaning, a plenty.



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