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## **The New Wealth of Time:**

How Timebanking can help people build better public services

Lucie Stephens and Josh Ryan-Collins

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## The New Wealth of Time:

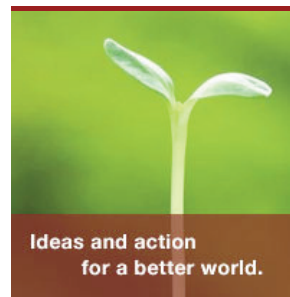
How Timebanking can help people build better public services

Lucie Stephens and Josh Ryan-Collins



“Existing policy prerogatives, however, do not go far enough. We can do much more to foster the kind of environment in which co-production approaches such as timebanking can flourish”

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## The New Wealth of Time: How Timebanking can help people build better public services

Lucie Stephens and Josh Ryan-Collins

### Introduction: the core economy

**W**ith our globalised market economy teetering on the brink of collapse, it is worth remembering that there has always been another, hidden economy on which the market depends. Even though we don't always stop to notice or appreciate it, we take part in this second economy every day of our lives. It is the "core economy" of home, family, neighbourhood and community<sup>1</sup>.

The core economy is also the vast and invisible foundation on which all public services rest. But because it doesn't have a financial value, it isn't counted. The core economy remains all but invisible to the eyes of economists and politicians.

It's worth considering how such an important support system gets so regularly left off the balance sheet. It all has to do with the way the market economy assigns value through price. The price mechanism attaches a high value to skills and activities that are scarce relative to demand or which take time to develop, such as the ability to design websites or perform open heart surgery. But this mechanism attaches absolutely no value to those abilities which are abundant in our society – such the ability to raise children, to care for older people, to protest for social justice and political change, to volunteer in the community or protect the environment. Such activities, vital as they are, are not given any kind of price. The market considers them 'free' services.

But what if we did have to pay for all these things which we currently get for free? Estimates put the economic value of the core economy at no less than 40 per

cent of GDP. To give just a few examples, in the UK, carers and parents provide over £87 billion of unpaid work every year. In 1998, the total household work done in the USA was valued at \$1.9 trillion<sup>2</sup>, while in 2002, the informal care that keeps the elderly out of homes was given a replacement price of \$253 billion<sup>3</sup>. Without these activities, society – and also the market economy – simply couldn't function.

### Timebanking: a tool to build the core economy

To rebalance the system, we need a means of recognising and rewarding the activities which make up the core economy. For the last ten years, the community initiative known as timebanking has done exactly that.

Unlike the market, timebanking values all hours of work equally: one hour of your time pays one time credit, regardless of whether you are a computer technician or an unwaged single mother. Timebanking recognises that everyone, even those defined as disadvantaged or vulnerable, has something worthwhile to contribute. It is based on the premise that giving and receiving are simple and fundamental ways of generating trust between people. It fosters mutual and equitable exchange. Trust, reciprocity and equity are basic building blocks for positive social relationships, strong local networks and healthy communities.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Neva Goodwin and Edgar Cahn, the US Civil Rights Lawyer who founded Timebanking in the USA in the 1980s first made the argument that these activities make up a 'core economy'.

<sup>2</sup> Cahn E (2006) Priceless money: banking time for changing times (Washington DC: TimeBanks USA). Available as an ebook from <http://coreeconomy.com>

<sup>3</sup> Stephens L, Ryan-Collins R, Boyle D (2008) Co-production: a manifesto for growing the core economy (London: nef). Foreword by Edgar Cahn, p 3.

### Aran's Story

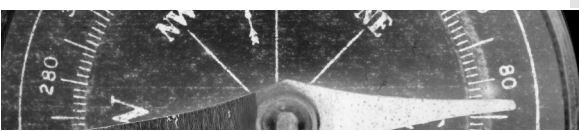
Location: **Clapham Park Timebank, South London**

Clapham Park Timebank in South London came to the rescue of Aran and his mother Anne last year. After their father was sectioned, Anne started suffering from mental health problems. Her son Aran, just 15 did his best to look after her.

South London and Maudsley Hospital, which helps fund Clapham Park Timebank, referred Anne to the timebank where she soon started to give time. In fact she earned over 100 time credits by offering her gardening skills to other members and to a local community garden. Her health improved dramatically and hospital admissions were reduced. Aran, however, no longer feeling he needed to look after his mother, was getting in trouble with the police and had been excluded from school.

Anne asked the timebank for help and used her time credits to buy in the help of local people in the area. They soon identified a positive male role model for Aran in the timebank. The mentor earned credits for ringing Aran twice a day and seeing him regularly. Other timebank members also provided support and dropped in to the house on a regular basis. The timebank also arranged for Aran to attend a local Youth in Crisis project and the Timebank in return for Time credits that he could spend in a local gym and ice skating rink, both organisational members of the timebank. Aran soon started to get his life back on track.

Now Anne has moved to Hastings, has been out of hospital for two years and Aran is in college and has stayed out of trouble.



This year, timebanking is celebrating its tenth anniversary in the UK, with 600,000 hours or 68 years worth of mutual exchange behind it. The movement has already had great success helping people from a range of different backgrounds. Timebanking has been shown to improve mental health, regenerate disadvantaged communities, reduce the isolation and health problems of older people, improve the well-being of young people and create a more effective criminal justice system.

### Co-production as a new model for public services

We now need to replicate these successes across public sector services. At the moment our public services are stuck in one of two models. One is the centralised, top-down model where users are given little to no agency in the service they receive and professionals are constrained by a raft of inflexible targets and indicators. The other is the 'market model' where users are viewed as 'customers' or 'consumers' who choose and purchase their services from a range of agencies, with competition and commissioning between public, private and third sectors assumed to drive up standards of service provision. In both cases, people who use public services are treated like dependents. They are defined by their deficits and needs.

Not surprisingly, this culture of dependency becomes self-fulfilling: it convinces service users that they have nothing worthwhile to offer and undermines any systems of mutual or community support that previously existed. The message that is sent out is that "if you want more attention and more help, come back with another and bigger problem". We shouldn't be surprised to find that people then behave in ways which perpetuate those needs, creating more demand and costing more money.

Timebanking is just one example of a different approach known as 'co-production'.<sup>4</sup> Co-production refuses to

categorise people as 'types' of public service user. Instead it recognises that everyone is a member of a community with a distinct and active role to play. Instead of increasing dependency, it fosters a sense of empowerment and reciprocity. For example, the young people in the Welsh Valleys who used timebanking to help rebuild their community centre became interested in making their area look and feel better, not in seeking help from community workers because they felt disadvantaged. By using a co-production approach, stimulated through time credits, both youth workers and young people have exceeded their initial goals.

### A new recognition of relationships at the frontline

Involving users and frontline staff's knowledge, understanding and energy for what works has the potential to succeed where a simplistic choice agenda has failed. Involving users as collaborators rather than consumers enables them to use frontline professionals' skills alongside other assets to develop services that suit them and bring about positive outcomes. This can also significantly enhance staffs experience of their roles, shifting from reluctant rationing of services into supportive collaborators.

Research into co-production carried out by nef for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2005<sup>5</sup> found that co-production seems to work, where it does work, largely through the efforts and inspiration of a few managers who can see the benefit. The research reflected the central importance of front-line staff in

delivery and empowerment. To these ends, staff need more investment in interpersonal, facilitative and coaching skills – rather than just having a rigid delivery focus. To achieve co-production, staff morale is as important as client morale – in practice, the participation that many staff are asked to extend to clients is often not extended to them.

Despite this, many public service workers, for example in mental and physical health, practice coproduction every day and know only too well that the best outcomes derive from the professional and patient working together. But schemes that place this relationship at their heart and draw on the mutual support that other patients can offer, such as Rushey Green Timebank (see box ) remain the exception to the rule.

### What the doctor says.....

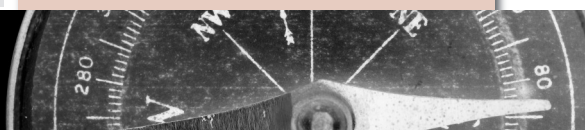
Rushey Green Timebank (RGTB) has a proven record at improving mental and physical well-being amongst our patients by supporting people in their environment, targeting unmet needs, and creating a partnership between patients themselves, health professionals and allied workers. The benefits expand well beyond our patients, for example, to their carers, their relatives, or external agencies.

The benefits of RGTB's presence are mutual. Members support the practice in different ways; for example, arranging mail shots, shredding non-confidential documents, franking, telephoning vulnerable housebound patients, picking up prescriptions, offering lifts to local hospitals, reminding patients of their appointments, etc. The time bank, on the other hand, provides GPs and nurses with a broader array of support options that enhance the care they provide; for example, opening referring opportunities, signposting services such as stop-smoking groups, parents and babies, setting a befriending project, chair based exercises, literacy and language skills.

### Notes:

<sup>4</sup> For more on nef's approach to coproduction, see Stephens, L., Ryan-Collins, J. and Boyle, D. (2008) Coproduction: A Manifesto for growing the Core Economy (London: nef)

<sup>5</sup> Clark, Boyle and Burns, Hidden Work – Co-production by people outside paid employment, JRF 2005.



The plurality of such supporting activities, their tight embodiment within the practices' life and routine, has added and continues to add endless value to the holistic aspirations of the practice. They also contribute to the promotion of the good reputation of the practice, and to the enhancement of its place and role in the local community.

RGTB informally channels the practice's efforts towards breaking down the institutional aspects that may hamper people's care, making it inviting for patients to access services and seek help, particularly the most vulnerable people with mental health problems or the elderly who might struggle with the institutional environment.

**Dr Alberto Febles**, GP Principal and Trainer, Rushey Green Group Practice, April 2008

Co-production aims to foster mutual support systems that can tackle problems before they become acute. It builds social networks that can perform the task that would otherwise burden public services, such as keeping crime down, supporting local enterprise and encouraging healthy living. It is the vital component of any preventative or well being public service agenda.

And, rather than encouraging competition between providers, whether they be from the private, public or third sector, coproduction encourages collaboration and cooperation. Holy Cross Centre Trust in Camden, which has been commissioned to provide a mental day care service by Camden Council, are using time credits as a currency with organisational members – including other statutory agencies and also the local Help the Aged and a local dancehall.

As Holy Cross' Director Sam Hopley explains, this approach is a 'win-win' for both his organisation and statutory services:

*'Camden's services are all chasing the same profile of people. The timebanking model works because it is uncompetitive – services are not competing with each other for same people but collaborating and sharing resources so we can access the groups who wouldn't normally come to some of these classes and access these services. But now they have these time credits, they feel like they have earned the right to attend these classes and they feel they are part of a wider community. So rather than a service paying for a member of staff to go and put posters up, they use the money to subsidize their services for time bank members and get better attendance. In this way we can all work together with the same client and claim outcomes for them.'*

### Policy Implications

There is huge scope for the use of timebanking and co-production. Both speak to a number of agendas currently being pursued by policymakers. For example, the Department of Health has been talking about the 'personalisation' of its services, while local governments are increasingly concerned about 'place shaping'. These may seem like distinct policy strands – one being people-based and the other area-based – but a co-production approach to public services would see them as complementary. If you empower individuals, encouraging them to contribute rather than treating them as passive users, giving them greater responsibility for their own health and well-being, then communities will also become stronger and more sustainable in the future.

There are also several statutory changes which will mean that local services will have to involve people far more than they do today. The 'Duty to Involve' local people in key decisions, which will be extended in April 2009 to include police authorities and key arts, sporting, cultural and environmental organisations, and the Sustainable Communities Act, which came in to force in October 2008, place a stronger obligation on agencies to seek

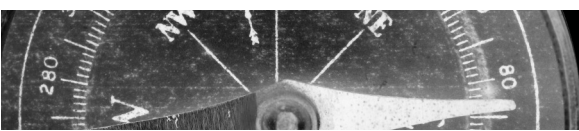
new ways of engaging people, not just as passive service users but as active citizens. In health and social care, local involvement networks (LINks) are – in theory if not yet in practice – an example of the policy drive towards wider community engagement. How far and how effectively local authorities and other agencies involve citizens and service users is increasingly part of their performance assessment – for example, through the new Comprehensive Area Agreement (CAA).

Existing policy prerogatives, however, do not go far enough. We can do much more to foster the kind of environment in which co-production approaches such as timebanking can flourish.

First of all, we need change the way in which public services are funded. Funding regimes should reward reciprocity: a proportion of payments must be reserved to enable people who use public services to play a role in delivering them. A proportion of funding should also be set aside to support preventative measures, such as timebanking. These measures would increase individual resilience in the short term and ultimately reduce reliance on more expensive, intensive services.

We can also change the way in which we assess our services. Auditors should consider the degree to which the service has been co-produced: are service providers listening to their users and trying to understand what they value? Output targets should be replaced by broader measures of well-being – both individual and social – that enable practitioners to demonstrate the value of co-production approaches.

Finally, we need to change the rules governing benefit entitlement so that there is no longer any discrimination against voluntary engagement. At the moment, people on benefit will have their payments suspended if they do too much voluntary work. This rule is motivated by the market logic that says a person can only be of value if they are getting paid for



the work that they do. But as we have argued here, there are plenty of ways in which people contribute to the core economy which are not supported by any sort of wage.

The current policy drive around personalisation and individual budgets – now impacting upon millions of pounds of worth of social care budgets and set to be rolled out in mainstream health budgets – could lead in different directions. The danger is that it may take its lead from the market. The role of public service professionals and commissioners could be reduced to 'market making' or 'ensuring supply' rather than developing the capacities of service users and their communities to work with them to support each other. Rather than building the core economy, this approach could erode it. One dreads to think about a future in which our elderly parents end up using individual budgets to buy people's company because communities and families no longer have the capacity or interest to spend time with their elders.

As we write, the UK is heading into a very deep recession. Here is a timely antidote. Timebanking offers a range of opportunities to grow our core economy, that 'other' economy which we need to foster and cherish as our market economy falters. Martin Simon, Chief Executive of Timebanking UK, comments that, "By actively promoting timebanking public service workers can transform themselves into an inspirational force for social change and invest in community empowerment. In return, they will be able to bank on the co-operation, local knowledge, skills and experience of their service users, their families, friends and wider community. Time banking provides a new framework and a range of incentives for people to reach out to others and to get involved, to use their time for the common good."

Timebanking taps into a complementary currency of human resources: the abundance of relationships, time, energy, knowledge and skills. By embracing a co-production approach to our public

services, we will foster reciprocity, strengthen social networks and develop a truly sustainable sense of well-being. These resources have long been neglected by a welfare system that veers between treating people as passive recipients of top-down services, and expecting them to behave as customers in a market-place.

Now more than ever before, we need a better, brighter and more human alternative.

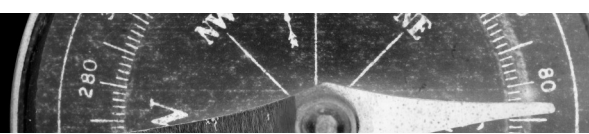
**Lucie Stephens and Josh Ryan-Collins** are co-authors of *The New Wealth of Time* – a new report on timebanking and public services from nef (the new economics foundation).

Download it free from <http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/newwealth121108.aspx>

For more about Timebanking in the UK, visit [www.timebanking.org](http://www.timebanking.org)



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