



Introduction to measuring outcomes

4. Intermediate outcomes

The achievement of an outcome is the achievement of a particular change, whether in individuals, organisations or communities. In order to work out if progress towards the outcome is being made, we need to be able to measure **change**.

In order to measure change, we need to have **at least 2 measurements** – the **baseline** (before the intervention) and at least one afterwards. To tell if something's improved, we need to know what something was like before the intervention and what it's like afterwards.

One of the common problems when measuring outcomes is that progress towards an outcome can be slow and the outcome might not have been reached by a particular client by the end of the project concerned. However, this doesn't mean that no progress has been made, as the client may have benefited greatly from the intervention, even if they haven't yet reached the desired outcome.

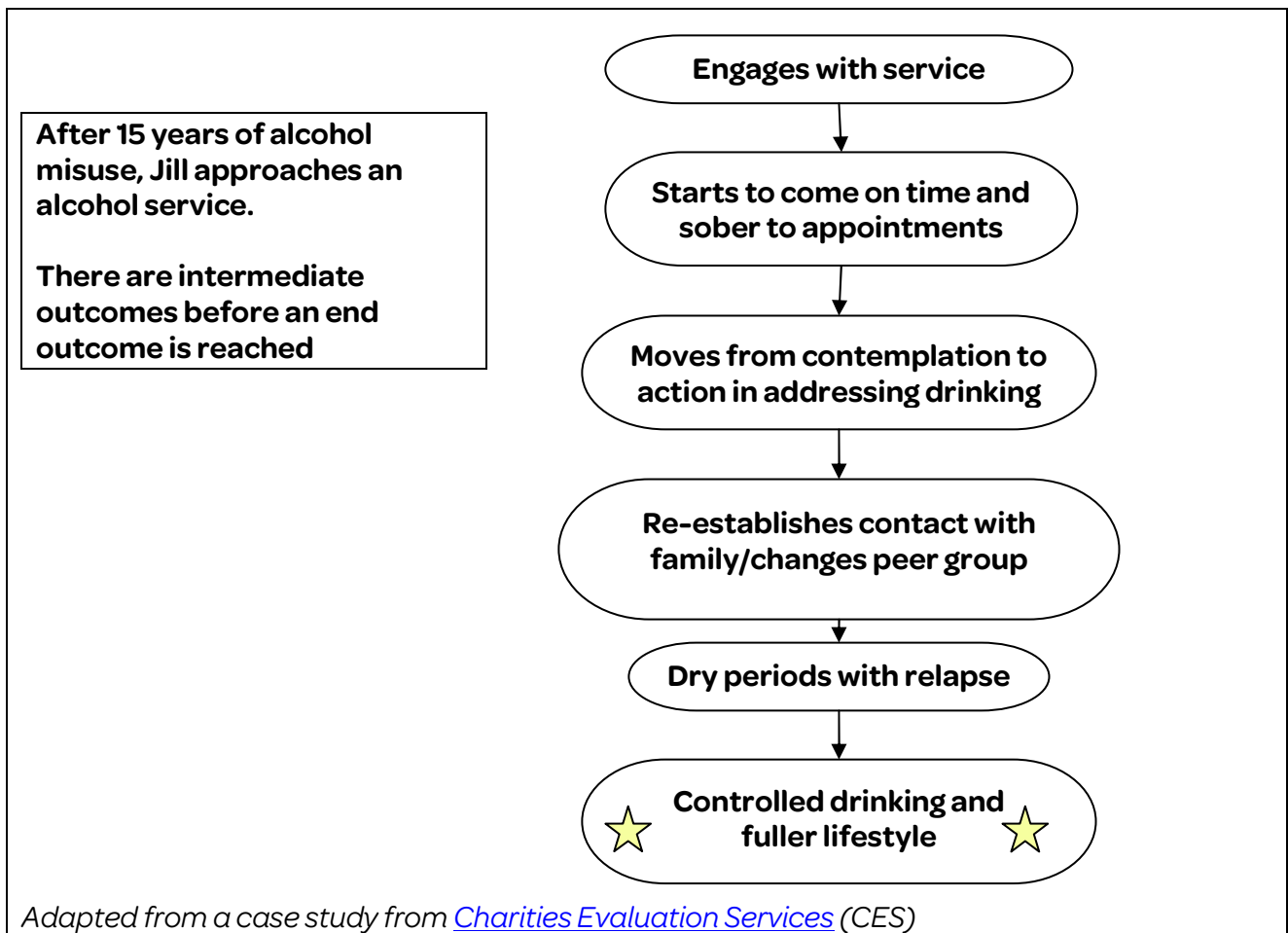
However, the nature of outcomes is that they are often the idealised version of events, the best possible result for a client. This means that achieving the outcome can represent a huge change for service users, a change which can take months, years or a lifetime to achieve, depending on a whole host of factors.

When dealing with this potential problem, the concept of **intermediate outcomes** is key. This concept enables you to decide on the smaller, intermediate steps between the first contact with the client and achieving the final outcome. It means that the progress made on the way to the outcome is not discounted, even if the final outcome is never actually reached. These small steps are sometimes referred to by funders as milestones.

Intermediate outcomes case study

A case study of an alcohol misuse service will help to demonstrate this. One of the outcomes of the alcohol misuse service is that clients control their drinking and lead a fuller lifestyle. However, the rate at which clients achieve this outcome varies dramatically, with some responding very quickly and effectively to the service, while others take years to achieve this outcome, if at all.

However, just because the final, ideal outcome has not been reached, it does not mean that no positive change has occurred in the client's life. There are signs along the way that the service is having a positive effect, in small steps, which means that even in cases of relapse and 'bad weeks' when the service is not engaged with, you can still capture the progress, small or otherwise.



Steps to identifying intermediate outcomes:

- Look at the main outcome and list the stages which form the journey to achieving the outcome
- It can help if you think about what steps you think are key to a clients' progress – what achievements do you see as accomplishments when working with a client?
- Put these into the order in which they usually take place

This approach is perfectly valid and in fact can give much more accurate results, because it takes account of smaller changes. Again, it's very important that you keep an **accurate record** of the process of how you came up with your intermediate outcomes and your reasoning behind your decisions.

Not all outcomes will have intermediate outcomes, so if you're happy to measure your outcomes without any intermediate steps, then move on to deciding on your indicators.