



## Introduction to measuring outcomes

### 3. Outcomes – pros and cons

#### Why are outcomes and their measurement important?

Outcomes:

- Tell you the actual effect of the work you are doing
- Enable you to track gradual change
- Make your work more effective
- Help you to report to funders and attract further funding (helps to show that you are a learning organisation)
- Provide motivation for staff and users
- Enable more useful information systems – can integrate case management/recording systems into your monitoring systems. **This is especially relevant to soft outcomes.**

So, we can see that measuring outcomes can be very useful, but it is not always straightforward and easy, especially when it comes to measuring soft outcomes.

#### Problems with measuring outcomes

Have a look at the following two outcomes for a project:

**Outcome 3:** Reduced violence and abuse and enhanced ability to make safe choices

**Outcome 5:** Enable those affected by domestic violence, rape or sexual abuse to achieve long-term improvements in their lives

There are a number of problems that you might come across when trying to measure these outcomes, such as:

1. How do you demonstrate the effect of prevention work (e.g. reduced violence)?
2. How can you quantify small steps?
3. What if someone goes backwards?
4. What if outcomes take longer than the lifetime of the project to be achieved?
5. Attribution of outcomes – how can we be sure that the positive outcome was down to our work (rather than the work of another organisation)?

N.B. **Proof** is never possible in these kinds of circumstances; we can only use our judgement and what other evidence we have to make a decision about what all of this information represents.

## **1. Prevention work**

You can deal with this challenge by using evidence which shows what would happen to people if they were not able to access your service. For example, in order to demonstrate the effect of a domestic violence outreach service in preventing future violence, you could compare the incidents of domestic violence in your community before your service is up and running with rates after its effects could have been felt ( see <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/soti.html> for statistics for your local area and <http://www.statistics.gov.uk> for national statistics). Alternatively, the client can provide you with a lot of evidence: they might tell you that they have experienced less violence after engaging with your service or they might express concerns about what might have happened to them if they had not engaged with the service. This can all serve as evidence for the impact of the work you do around prevention.

## **2. Small steps**

See intermediate outcomes (below)

## **3. Moving backwards**

This is a common problem, especially with therapeutic work, where clients often feel worse towards the end of their contact with the service, sometimes due to anxiety about the support coming to an end. This can be overcome by measuring progress at a number of different points, not just at the end. This will give a more nuanced picture of progress and any anomalies can be explained when reporting to funders.

## **4. Outcomes take longer than project to achieve**

Intermediate outcomes (below) can be useful in this situation. Even if a client has not reached the final outcome, you can show that they have made some progress towards it.

## **5. Attribution of outcomes**

You can never be sure who is responsible for a positive outcome, but the best way of dealing with it is to acknowledge the other possible influences. Again, it can be beneficial to ask clients who they feel had the biggest influence on their positive change. They might mention something you had not previously thought of!