

Video 3: Demonstrating Impact and Improving Practice

Welcome to video three in this series of bite-size e-learning modules on good data collection, storage and use for frontline services. In video one we talked about good practice and legal considerations when it comes to collecting and storing information, or data, about the clients your service are working with.

Then in video two we looked what you and your colleagues need to think about when using and sharing the data you hold about someone your service is currently working with or has supported in the past.

In both videos we also looked at the practical steps frontline workers can take to ensure that people experiencing homelessness feel confident that information about them is being stored, used and shared wisely.

This video will be a little different as we are going to look at how good quality and well recorded data aren't only used for casework, but can also help organisations to:

- demonstrate the impact of their work to funders and commissioners;
- develop frontline practice; and
- contribute to a better picture of the state of homelessness and rough sleeping locally, regionally and nationally, and where support and resources need to be targeted

Funders and Commissioners

Thinking first about funders and commissioners; you're probably familiar with service managers producing quarterly, six-monthly or annual monitoring or project evaluation reports. Indeed, it is usual for funders and commissioners to require projects to provide [quantitative and qualitative information](#), for example about how money is being spent, how many clients are being served and how effectively. This is often measured against key performance indicators or KPIs. Further funding or on-going commissioning can rely on these types of reports evidencing the effectiveness of the service being provided.

While these reports might feel removed from day-to-day frontline client support work, being able to demonstrate outcomes is dependent on sufficient good quality, accurate information being collected and being accurately recorded by frontline teams.

To help you better understand this relationship, you could ask your team leader or service manager to bring an example of the reporting they complete for funders or commissioners to a team meeting and explain how the information you and your colleagues collect and input to your organisations systems becomes to the data that's included in that reporting.

Developing Frontline Practice

Let's now think about developing practice. As we've just seen, every time accurate information about clients and their casework journey through your service is collected and recorded, it contributes to a bigger picture.

This picture can show you how well you are reaching and serving your intended client group. And based on this, you can identify what, if anything, you need to do to extend the reach of your service or to better meet the needs of those you are already reaching.

But to do this, you need to ensure your data picture is accurate, and one way of doing this is to develop an internal framework through which you, your colleagues and managers can spend time reviewing your data picture to identify areas where your objectives are being met or exceeded, and any areas for development, including in data collection itself.

For example, [The Connection at St Martin's](#) in London hold a monthly learning space for frontline managers where the purpose is to improve the overall quality of data collection and, as a result, improve service delivery across the organisation. Each month the learning space focuses on a topic linked to service delivery, such as risk assessment or responding to accidents and incidents.

Managers review the available, relevant data held on their [In-Form case management database](#) against current KPIs and casework practice guidelines, and they discuss:

- Whether they feel the available data reflect the reality on the ground
- If not, where is the data incomplete, inaccurate or irrelevant?
- What are the main causes of data quality issues for this topic?
- What do they need to do to make their data better – and by extension improve how their frontline staff are working?

Based on the discussion, the frontline managers then formulate an action plan that includes the most impactful steps they can take to resolve the issues they have identified. This could be, for example,

- an improvement to the system design to make data capture easier or more relevant,
- increasing staff capacity so that more time can be dedicated to properly recording information, or
- staff training on that particular casework area and how to record their work correctly on In-Form.

EDI

Another way you can use good quality data within your organisation to improve practice is around [Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity \(or EDI\) monitoring](#). If your service is intended to serve the entire community, you can use good quality data, recorded over time to see whether you are reaching all demographics.

For example, we know that mixed gender services that default to a one-size fits all approach unintentionally exclude women as they have different physical and psychological safety needs to men. The aim of your service may be to work with women as well as men experiencing homelessness, however, your data may show that your service is reaching very few women, or that those women who are being reached don't remain in the service for long enough for a positive outcome. You will only be able to see this if you collect accurate EDI data on those accessing your service.

In this example, a solution could be to apply [Homeless Link's Gendered Lens Framework](#), which was developed in collaboration with women with lived experience of homelessness and provides a comprehensive toolkit for making a service safe and inclusive for women. By using the framework to apply a gendered lens to various elements of your service design and delivery and changing certain elements of the way you work to be more inclusive to women, you could increase the number of women accessing your service and their positive outcomes.

Further data collection and monitoring could then demonstrate internally to you and your colleagues, and externally to funders and commissioners, for example, that the number of women the service is reaching, and the ratio of positive outcomes have increased.

Monitoring and learning over time

Let's think now about the usefulness of good quality information or data that's collected in standardised ways and consistently over longer periods of time.

Good quality data collected consistently over time can be used to draw more wide-reaching conclusions about how best to support people experiencing homelessness, and where needs are still not being met.

This is something that [Homeless Link's research team](#), in partnership with [Expert Link](#) sought to do in order to understand the long-term [impact of Housing First on holistic outcomes](#), including physical and mental health, substance misuse, offending behaviour, and so on.

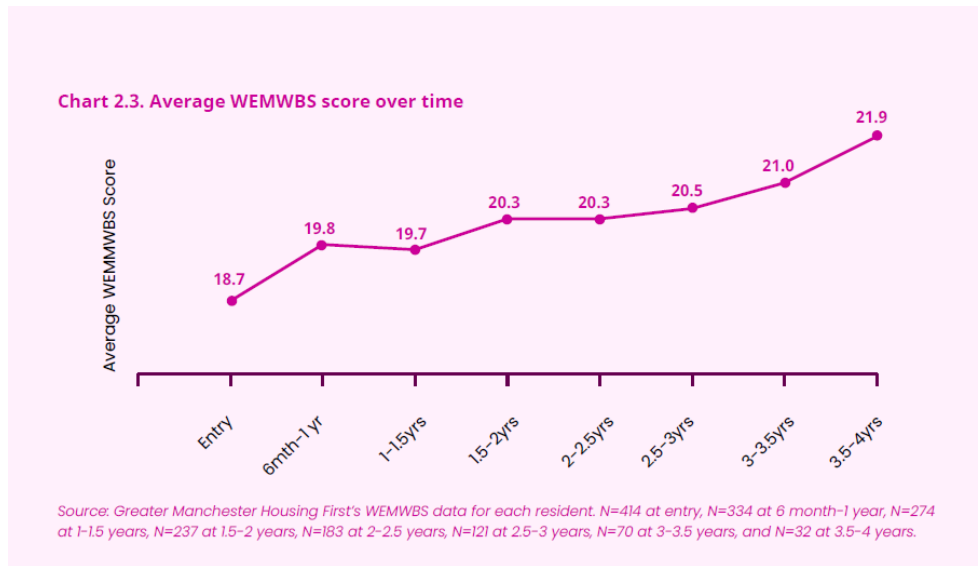
The most effective way to illustrate long-term impact is to use individual data collected at standard points in time, using standardised measures or tools such as [outcome stars](#), [NDT Assessments](#), or even service risk assessment.

When the research team started looking for data on the impact of Housing First on holistic outcomes, they realised there weren't many organisations using these or similar standard data collection methods on an ongoing basis.

An exception to this was the [Greater Manchester Housing First](#) project who were using the standardised [WEMWBS](#) tool (or Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales) across all their services.

WEMWBS is a tool that was devised by a team led by professors from the universities of Warwick and Edinburgh to enable the measuring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing.

Using the WEMWEBS data collected by the Manchester Housing First project over a 4-year period, the Homeless Link research team was able demonstrate the overwhelmingly positive impact of Housing First in Greater Manchester on the mental health and wellbeing of those being supported by the service.



As a result, Homeless Link's research team was able to produce a hugely impactful report that is now a core part of Homeless Link's Housing First policy influencing work.

Ending Rough Sleeping Data Framework

Another type of standardised data set designed to be collected over time is the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government's ([MHCLG](#)) [Ending Rough Sleeping Data Framework](#).

This was developed over two years in collaboration with Centre for Homelessness Impact ([CHI](#)) and early adopter local authorities and was first launched in 2023.

The purpose of collecting this standardised data is to demonstrate progress towards the goal of ending rough sleeping in England for good, which is defined as rough sleeping being prevented wherever possible, and where it cannot be prevented it must be a rare, brief and non-recurrent experience.

The Framework is broken down into eight indicators and these are:

1. The total number of people sleeping rough
2. The number of new people sleeping rough
3. People sleeping rough after being discharged institutions, such as prisons, hospitals, the armed forces, asylum accommodation, and care leavers
4. The number of people experiencing long-term rough sleeping
5. The number of people returning to rough sleeping

6. the number of people moving into accommodation every month,
7. the number of nights each person sleeping rough nationwide was known to spend out, and
8. how many people are returning to the streets having previously moved into accommodation

Each month, local authorities and their frontline services in England collate information or data about their areas that relate to each of the indicators and submit this data online to MHCLG.

To support local authorities to be able to provide data that are standardised and high quality, MHCLG also provide guidance on the principles of good data collection, collation and quality assurance.

What this wealth of data is able to do over time is show the progress local authorities are making in their area towards the goal of ending rough sleeping, identify the challenges local authorities and their rough sleeper teams are facing, see where interventions are working, and scale successes England-wide.

You can find more information on the Ending Rough Sleeping Data Framework and it's indicators on the [CHI website](#), and progress reports are [published online](#), usually quarterly, by MHCLG.

Suggested Activities

Ask your team leader or service manager to bring an example of the reporting they complete for funders or commissioners to a team meeting and explain how the information you and you colleagues collect and input to your organisations systems becomes to the data that's included in that reporting.

Does your organisation have a research team, or if not do you contribute to research carried out by other organisations? If you do, ask someone involved in research in your organisations to attend a team meeting to talk about what they are currently working on or work that is already published, and what data was used to produce that work.