managing outcomes

a guide for homelessness organisations

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for Charities Evaluation Services

foreword

The London Housing Foundation launched its *Impact through Outcomes* programme in May 2001. Although some parts of the voluntary sector were familiar with the concept of outcomes, outcome management was, at that time, still fairly new within the homelessness sector. Few homelessness organisations were systematically assessing outcomes and many did not fully understand the concept or the benefits of using an outcomes approach. Similarly, there was little in-depth understanding of outcomes among funders.

Two years on, there is a greater understanding of the concept and definition of outcomes and the use of outcome management by agencies tackling homelessness is more accepted. Many more agencies within London have, or are introducing, effective systems to monitor outcomes on a range of interventions.

Many key funders in both the statutory and charitable sectors have developed a strong interest in outcomes. Recent government initiatives have started to shift the emphasis of service provision further towards quality. In particular, the introduction of Supporting People has brought a greater emphasis on the outcomes of interventions for people who are homeless or vulnerable.

Above all, service delivery organisations can see how outcome management can help their organisations develop and be more effective. It is an essential part of review and planning. Outcome management, and particularly the emphasis on a range of outcomes developed by organisations themselves, is part of a move to use evaluation as a tool for learning. It is not an add-on exercise purely for accountability to funders.

For outcome management to be useful, it is essential for service providers themselves to develop outcomes appropriate to their clients and their aims. They need to do so over time and through consultation, rather than either wait for funders to determine them or use an off-the-shelf tool that is inappropriate.

Through the *Impact through Outcomes* programme, large numbers of managers, staff and services have benefited from the training and consultancy on outcomes provided by Charities Evaluation Services. This guide is designed to share the learning from this programme and support homelessness agencies to integrate outcome management into their day-to-day work and build on the effectiveness of their services.

Kevin Ireland
Executive Director, London Housing Foundation
November 2003

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introduction

Outcomes in homelessness

All homelessness organisations are interested in achieving change for their clients. An outcomes approach involves:

- **identifying the changes you hope for**
- **assessing what changes happen**
- **using the information about the results of your work to plan and deliver services so as to make the changes for clients more likely.**

Many organisations are already collecting some information on outcomes, either without realising it or without the systems to use the resulting information. This guide will help you think about what changes you hope for and how to systematically assess whether they occur. It is designed to help you find out what effect you have had on the lives of the homeless people you work with.

The guide

This is a practical guide to the effective use of outcome management within the homelessness field. The advice and recommendations it contains are based on the experience of a wide range of voluntary sector organisations. The guide draws on the following sources:

- **The experience of Charities Evaluation Services (CES) in delivering tailored training and consultancy for London homelessness organisations on outcome management. Funded by London Housing Foundation, the *Impact through Outcomes* programme ran from March 2001 to the end of 2003.**
- **Interviews undertaken with organisations that attended training as part of the programme. Most of the participants were interviewed, all about four to six months after attending.**
- **Interviews conducted with those organisations featured as case studies within this publication.**
- **CES' long experience of training and consultancy on outcomes in the UK voluntary sector.**

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for all those working in the homelessness field, although it is also likely to be helpful to those working in associated areas, such as housing or substance misuse. It is intended for all staff and other stakeholders, whatever their role or previous knowledge or experience of outcomes.

Examples and discussion points are drawn from a range of homelessness services, many of which have substantial experience in implementing and using outcome monitoring systems. The guide will therefore be useful for those who are already familiar with outcomes as well as for those looking at outcomes for the first time.

Understanding outcomes

What are outcomes?

Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your activities. For most homelessness organisations, outcomes will describe a change in their client group, for example, improved confidence or increased skills. In this guide we will focus on outcomes for individuals. However, it is useful to remember that homelessness work may have other outcomes, for example, for communities or in policy change.

What outcomes are not

Outcomes are the changes that occur as a result of the work carried out. They are changes over time: something is different, often for a person or target group, after a week, six months or even later.

Take care not to confuse outcomes with outputs or user satisfaction feedback.

- **Outputs** are all the detailed activities, services and products of your organisation. Outputs might include keywork sessions, groupwork sessions, or advice and information.
- **User satisfaction** usually involves asking clients what they think about different aspects of your service, for example, location, opening hours, or how helpful workers were.

Outputs and user satisfaction are important. They may also be assessed and the information used to help improve services. However, they are not outcomes.

We will look at outcomes in more detail in chapter one.

Why outcomes?

An outcomes approach helps services and organisations to deliver more effectively for their client groups. In particular, it helps make services more client focused and needs led, by identifying what works well in services and what could be improved. Other benefits include:

- **improved and shared clarity of what the organisation is trying to achieve, leading to a greater sense of purpose and teamwork within the organisation**
- **adding structure and focus to client-worker interaction through regular reviews within outcome areas**
- **encouraging staff and clients, through providing evidence of progress**
- **increasing success in fundraising or improving relationships with funders.**

Outcome monitoring and management

Monitoring is the regular and systematic collection of information over a period of time. It allows you to assess changes that have taken place. Outcome monitoring helps an agency to gather and report information such as:

- *45 per cent of our clients moved to more suitable or longer-term accommodation.*
- *70 per cent of clients increased their motivation to find employment.*

Outcome management involves using the information from outcome monitoring to make your service more effective. Outcome management is not limited to monitoring for accountability purposes, but is an integral part of project planning and review.

We will look at outcome monitoring and management in chapters two and three.

Putting outcome work in context

This guide is about how to understand and assess outcomes, and how to use the information collected. However, to make it useful, outcome information needs to be collected together with other information about your work. Many voluntary sector organisations are already collecting this information. It would include:

- **the resources you have used (eg, staffing, budget)**
- **outputs - the actual services, products and activities you have delivered to clients (eg, one-to-one work, training courses, information packs)**
- **the processes involved in delivering your work (eg, how you offer one-to-one work to clients; the way training is delivered).**

Putting outcomes in context will be covered in more detail in chapter four.

Structure of the guide

The guide is divided into four main chapters, each divided into sections. The first three chapters take the reader step-by-step through the process of identifying and assessing outcomes and using outcome information. The fourth chapter looks at some internal issues and the processes that can support an outcomes focus.

The guide gives case examples from leading organisations in London's homelessness sector. At the end of the guide is a glossary and a number of contact details, further reading and links to websites with outcomes tools and other resources. Material to support some processes described in this guide can be downloaded from the London Housing Foundation website, and details for this are also given at the end of the guide.

Chapter one

identifying outcomes

This chapter defines outcomes in detail and describes how to identify outcomes appropriate to your organisation by linking them to your project aims. You are advised to involve key stakeholders in the process. The practical issues to do with assessing outcomes are covered in chapter two of the guide.

1. Outcomes in detail

What outcomes are

Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your activities. Outcomes often describe positive change for your clients. They can also be:

- **About maintenance of the current situation. This involves ensuring things stay the same and don't get worse.**
- **About reduction in something, for example, criminal behaviour.**
- **Welcome or unwelcome for the organisation.**
- **Expected or unexpected. You are likely to be able to anticipate most of your outcomes. However, some things may happen that you did not plan for.**

Where outcomes occur

Outcomes can occur at many levels. They may be for:

- **individual clients**
- **families**
- **the community**
- **the environment**
- **organisations**
- **policy.**

This guide will focus on outcomes for individuals.

Outcomes for individual clients

Client outcomes usually describe a change in one of seven outcome areas.

Outcome area	Examples of outcomes
Circumstances	■ Client housed ■ More appropriate or longer-term housing
Physical or psychological health	■ Reduction in anxiety ■ Improved physical fitness ■ More responsible use of medication or health services
Behaviour	■ Reduced risk taking around drugs, eg, moving from street to prescribed drugs ■ Reduction in offending behaviour
Attitude	■ More motivation to plan a better future ■ Increased awareness of the effects of drugs and alcohol
Self-perception	■ Increased self-confidence ■ Increased self-esteem
Knowledge or skills	■ Increased knowledge of housing rights ■ Improved job search skills ■ Increased ability to budget
Relationships	■ Homeless teenager returns home ■ Less conflict at home

Individual client outcomes **Ashiana**

Ashiana works mainly with women in violent and other abusive domestic situations. The overall aim of its outreach service is defined as *'to empower women to make informed choices for themselves'*. Key agreed outcomes are that women using the outreach service:

- are better able to identify and articulate what they want to do
- are able to acknowledge their experience of domestic violence
- increase their skills or confidence in negotiation
- are more able to resist pressure exerted by their family
- increase their self-esteem
- are able to leave a violent partner or family
- are able to refuse to take part in forced marriage
- can deal with anger and frustration, rather than self-harming
- recognise trigger points and avoid violence
- are more willing to contact the police and other sources of support.

Outcomes in other areas

Some organisations, for example second-tier organisations or those involved in campaigning, may have target groups other than individual clients. They may also intend to achieve change at a number of levels, such as in other agencies or the wider community.

Target group or area	Examples of outcomes
Policy	■ Improved local policy regarding housing homeless people who own dogs ■ Improved local policy regarding housing couples together
Statutory and voluntary housing providers	■ Increased quantity of housing stock available ■ Improved quality of housing available
Other homelessness services	■ Improved quality of service delivery ■ Increased capacity of service ■ Improved knowledge of homelessness
General public	■ More tolerant public attitudes towards vulnerable and homeless people ■ Willingness to integrate clients within the community

Outcomes for other target groups **Crisis SmartMove**

Crisis SmartMove, a partnership programme of rent-guarantee schemes for homeless people, identified landlords as an additional target group. This is because considerable time and resources are dedicated to achieving outcomes with landlords. Identified outcomes were that landlords would:

- stay with the scheme as clients move on
- keep in positive contact with Crisis staff to address difficulties as they arise
- maintain their housing in reasonable condition and undertake repairs as required
- increase their understanding of the client group.

Intermediate outcomes

Some outcomes can take years to achieve, especially for client groups with long-term or entrenched issues. Key outcomes, such as maintaining a tenancy or overcoming a drug habit, are often not easily reached. In this case, it's useful to identify steps along the way. These are intermediate outcomes (also called interim outcomes) that show that progress has occurred. The level of change may not be very great, but the change itself may be significant for the client.

For example, imagine that someone comes to a day centre for homeless people. She has been street homeless for many years. The ultimate goal of the service is to enable her to find and keep a tenancy. However, before she can do that, she may need to improve her confidence, knowledge and skills.

Intermediate outcomes are important in homelessness work, for a number of reasons:

- **They can show your clients' progress towards obtaining the skills, knowledge, behaviour and attitudes necessary for maintaining a tenancy.**
- **Not all your clients will achieve the end outcome. They may never achieve it, or simply not achieve it in the time period you are looking at.**
- **A focus on the end outcome may not do justice to your work. For example, there may be many changes that occur for a client before they are able to maintain a tenancy.**
- **Intermediate outcomes can help identify and acknowledge the different contributions of separate agencies. For example: a contact and assessment team may have engaged the client; a day centre may have built up their skills and confidence; a resettlement team may find them a home; and a tenancy sustainment team may help them to keep the tenancy.**

Outcomes for new or 'hard to reach'[1] target groups:

It is important for projects to be open or accessible to target groups. However, achieving this would not normally be an outcome in itself, as simply attending a service doesn't usually mean a change for clients. An exception would be when a project is in a developmental phase or targeting a particular sector of the population normally considered 'hard to reach'. In this case, an appropriate intermediate outcome would be an increase in the number of people from the specific target group, say, long-term rough sleepers, accessing the service. It would indicate a defined change for the target group – they are now able to benefit from the services offered.

2. Different views of success

Before you start work on your outcomes, you need to consider how to involve others in the process. Key outcomes should reflect the

1 The authors recognise that there are difficulties with the term 'hard to reach', as it implies that those who are labelled hard to reach are responsible. However, for simplicity we use this term, as being one commonly understood.

perceptions that stakeholders have of success, and it is important to avoid having preconceived notions about success and achievement. Clients themselves should have the opportunity to identify the changes that they want. Both they and your funders, as key stakeholders, may hold different opinions from staff or management about what constitutes a successful outcome for a homelessness service. There may also be other relevant stakeholders, such as landlords, the community or the carers and families of vulnerable young people.

Consulting people

It is very helpful to consult different stakeholders about the outcomes they feel are of most importance. First, list all your stakeholders and decide which ones to consult and when. Ideally, stakeholders should be consulted early on. You might do the following:

- **Arrange a discussion through an existing users' forum, or hold a focus group or other consultation with clients. Ask them to talk about what they hope to change about themselves or their situation as a result of involvement with the service. If they are uncomfortable talking about themselves, you could ask them what service users in general might want.**
- **Ask a current funder what results or changes they would consider a good use of funding.**

If it's not possible to gather views in advance, a draft list of outcomes drawn up by workers or management could be distributed to or discussed with clients, funders and other stakeholders. You could place outcomes on the agenda of forthcoming meetings, for example with a management committee or trustee board, a funding review or landlord forum.

When you consult funders about outcomes, it's helpful to emphasise your need to work with outcomes that are appropriate to your service and your clients. Having a good understanding of the outcomes you and your clients want can help you avoid inappropriate outcomes being set for your organisation.

You may find considerable overlap between those outcomes identified as important by

Different stakeholders – different perspectives

These are the possible outcomes that different stakeholders might expect from a project that places homeless young people in private rented accommodation.

The project

- Client maintains tenancy for a minimum of six months
- Positive integration into the community
- Reduced isolation
- Personal development and increased activities
- Existing landlords continue to work in partnership with the organisation

Homeless person using the project

- Own place to live
- Respected and accepted by neighbours and the wider community
- Trusted by workers
- Enough money
- Preparation for training, employment or other interests if wanted

The funder of the project

- High proportion of tenancies sustained
- Where tenancies end, they do so positively
- Increased use of private rented sector to meet obligations under the Housing Act (local authority)
- Reduced risk to vulnerable young people
- Increased housing options available to homeless people

Local community

- No decrease in property prices
- No needles on streets
- Streets safe/no increase in crime rates
- No 'dubious people' hanging around the streets
- Action taken effectively and quickly on any complaints

different stakeholders. These are likely to form the core outcomes identified for the service. With desired outcomes that are specific to particular stakeholder groups, it may be necessary to make a selection of the most relevant, aiming for a balance between those identified by workers, clients, funders and other stakeholders. From the start, ensure that those involved – particularly clients – are clear about who will decide which outcomes should be assessed.

3. Linking outcomes to aims

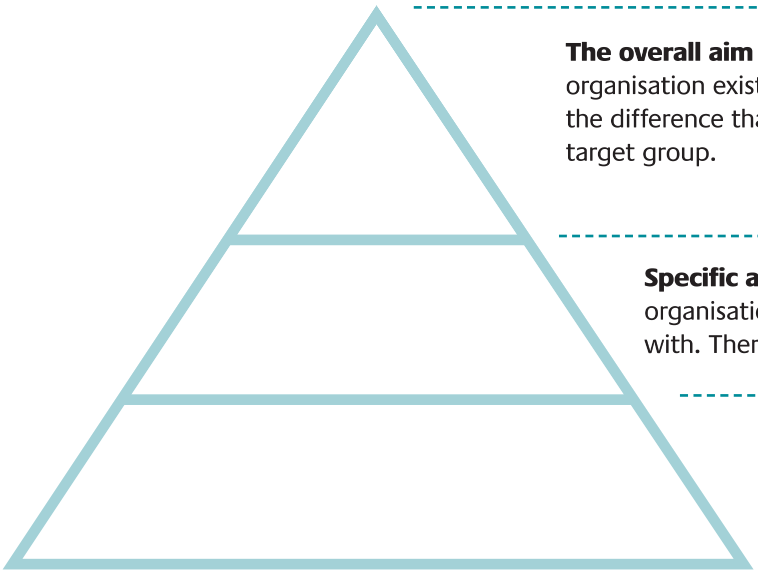
Defining your expected outcomes is part of good project planning. Planned outcomes are linked to your aims, so defining clear aims will help you identify your outcomes. The importance of this approach is explained by the director of The Passage:

'You can't even begin with outcomes until you sort out your mission statement and aims. A mistake people make is to think that outcomes are something that you bolt on to the organisation so that you can satisfy the external world. That is so wrong. They have to arise from your service to be meaningful.'

Aims and objectives are always linked, but are often confused. They are, however, quite distinct:

- **Aims are the changes you hope to achieve as a result of your work.**
- **Objectives are the activities you undertake and the services you offer to bring those changes about.**

The triangle below is a simple but highly effective way to present the aims and objectives of your organisation. CES has used it successfully within training and consultancy over many years to clarify what organisations are trying to do.

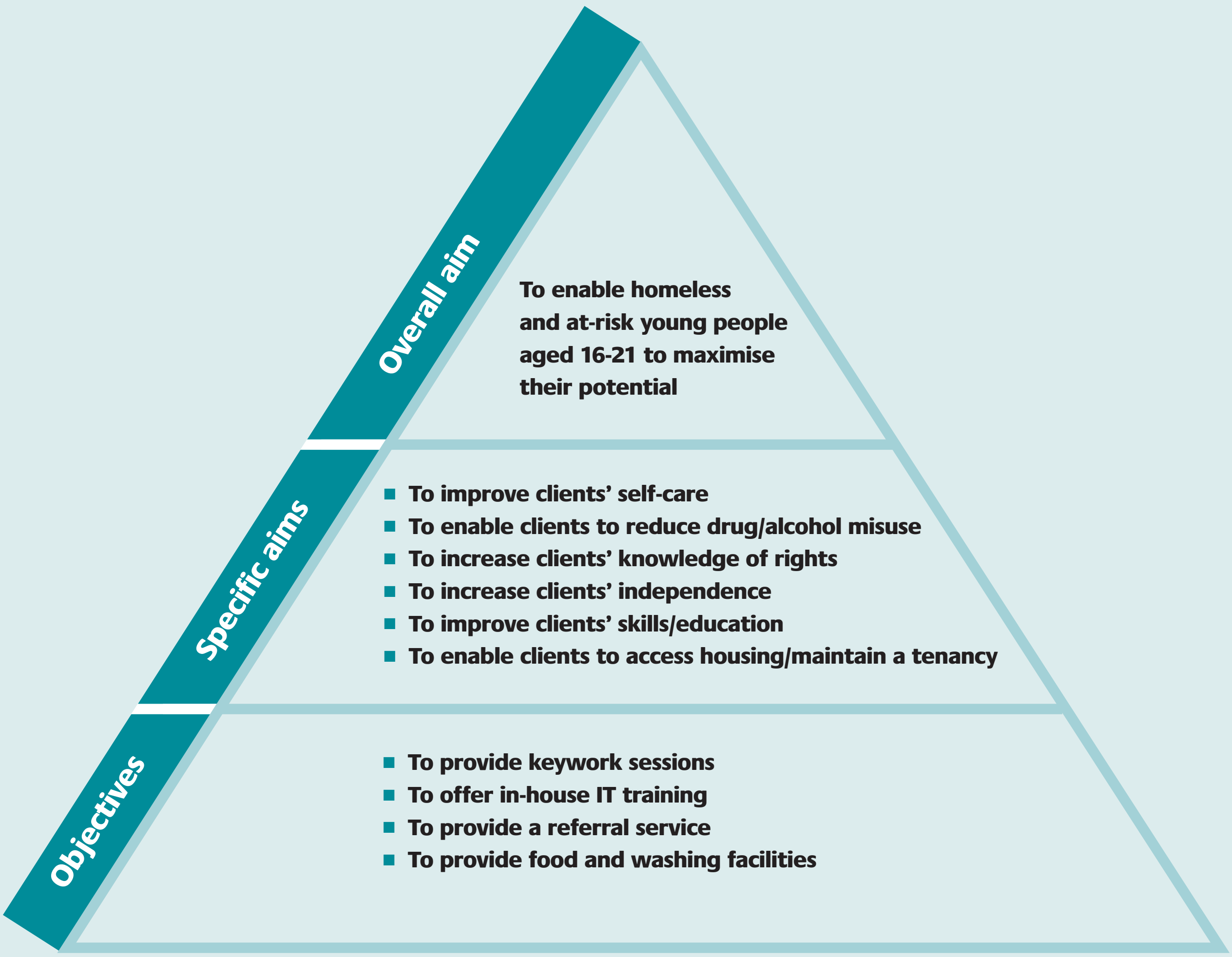


The overall aim is like a mission statement. It tells everyone why your organisation exists and the broad effect it wants to have. It summarises the difference that your organisation wants to make for a specific target group.

Specific aims are single statements about the differences an organisation hopes to make, often in the individuals it works with. There will usually be several specific aims.

Objectives describe what you and the other staff in your organisation will do to help bring about the specific aims, which in turn contribute to achieving the overall aim. Objectives are the services or products you plan to offer.

Aims and objectives **Cricklewood Homeless Concern Youth Work**



Setting your own aims and objectives

Follow these steps to draw up a similar triangle for your work. First, draw the basic triangle shape, if possible on a large paper or board. Agree what the triangle will represent (eg, the whole organisation or a specific project within it) and write that as the title. You may decide that several triangles are required, one for each service and one for the overall organisation.

The triangle should be completed from the top down; project planning should start with clients' needs, translated into aims.

The overall aim

In the top segment of the triangle write the overall aim of the organisation or project. The overall aim should describe the broad change you want to bring about. Ask yourself:

- **Who is our project or service for? Does it cover a particular geographical area?**
- **What broad change do we want to bring about for our clients (eg, improve quality of life)?**

When writing overall aims, use words that describe a change, such as: *to increase, to improve, to reduce, to enable, to prevent.*

While it's useful to refer to the mission statements or other stated aims of your organisation when completing the triangle, be aware that these might be out of date. Further, mission statements often describe the service delivered, client group and values, without clearly describing any actual change.

The triangle needs to have one point – a single overall aim or purpose to the organisation or service – however broad. If you find you have two overall aims, either identify a broader change that encompasses both, or decide which is the primary aim. Two aims might sometimes be in conflict, leading to tension or lack of clarity. The importance of having a single overall aim is shown in the next case example.

Weblink: From February 2004 the London Housing Foundation website www.lhf.org.uk will contain materials that can be downloaded to help you develop your aims and objectives.

Clarity of purpose Streets Alive Theatre Company

Streets Alive use theatre and performance to work with young people. They are clear that although the quality of theatre produced is important, their overall aim is the personal development of young people. The personal development of homeless young people is likely to require different or conflicting ways of working to those required for producing quality theatre, so it is crucial to be clear about the overall aim.

Specific aims

These are the changes needed to help bring about the broad change described by the overall aim. To identify specific aims, imagine one person arriving at your project and ask yourself the following questions:

- **What do you hope will change for this person as a result of working with you?**
- **Why do you offer your particular mix of services? What do you hope the effect will be?**

Specific aims form the basis of outcome management and this is therefore the most important section of the triangle.

As with overall aims, when you write your specific aims use words that describe a change, such as: *to increase, to improve, to reduce, to enable, to prevent*.

Objectives

Objectives describe the areas of activity you will undertake to achieve your aims. These are often the easiest to list and can be done by asking: *What service do we offer (or need to offer) to help achieve the aims identified?*

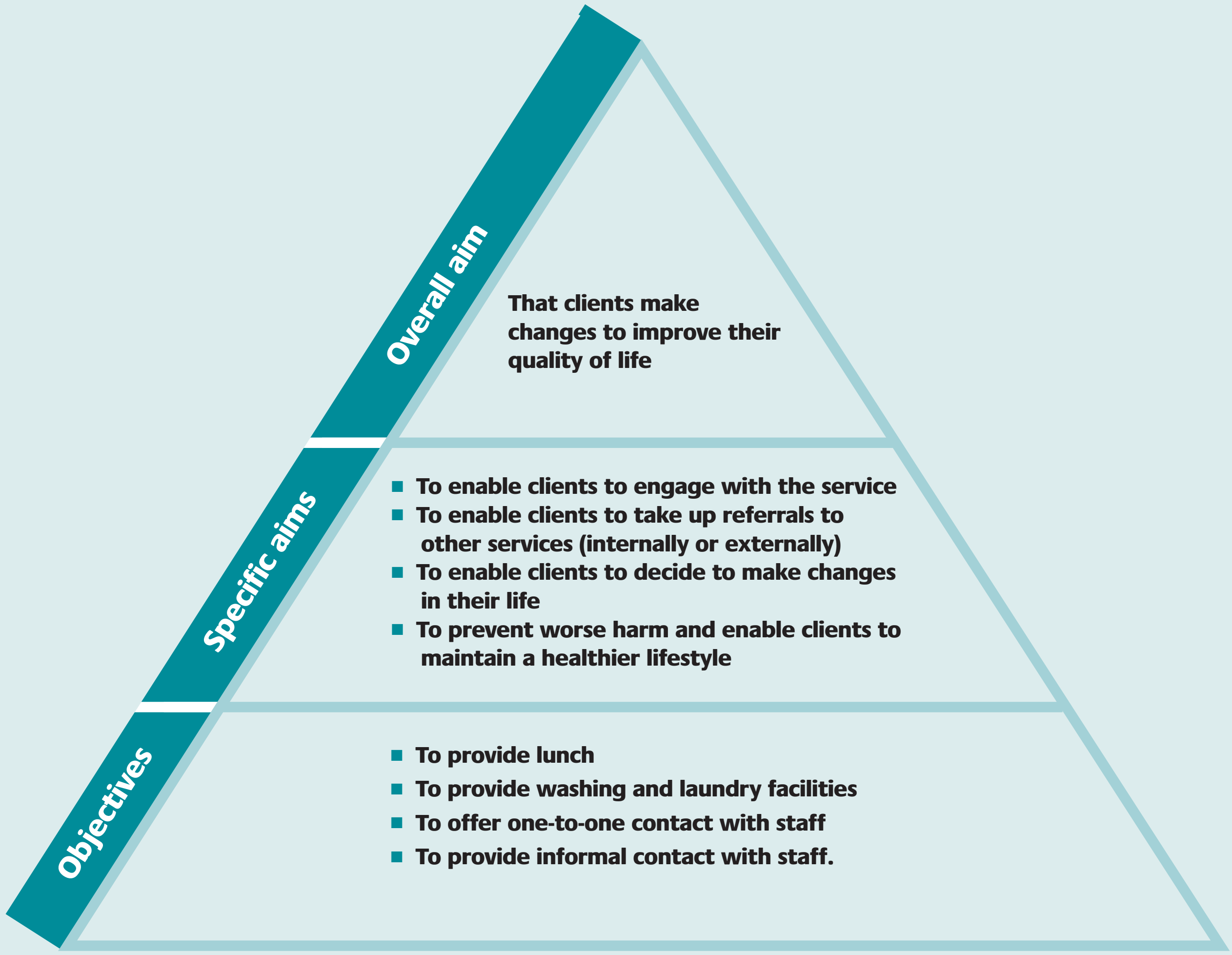
When writing objectives, use words that describe what you *do*, such as: *to run, to provide, to produce, to support, to offer.*

Be realistic

Make sure that the aims identified are changes within the remit or power of your service. Day centres offer a good example of the need to be realistic about achievable aims. Most day centres work with large numbers of people at a low level of intervention. It will probably not be possible to house people or reduce drug misuse, for example, but it may be possible to engage very hard to reach people and open doors for other interventions.

Having realistic aims will help you to identify realistic outcomes.

Realistic aims and objectives **Cricklewood Homeless Concern Day Care Project**



4. From aims to outcomes

Once you have defined your aims and objectives, it will be easier to identify your outcomes. Each of your specific aims can be broken down into outcomes. Usually, specific aims will encompass a few outcomes. Some of them may be intermediate.

Specific aims	Examples of outcomes
To improve life skills	■ Clients are better able to budget ■ Improved communication skills ■ Improved conflict resolution skills
To improve self-care	■ Clients reduce risk-taking around drugs or alcohol ■ Clients reduce level of self-harm ■ Clients access medical services

Identifying your project outcomes

For each of your aims, think about all the changes you would expect to see as part of the aim being met. Remember that outcomes are all the effects of your work; they are usually changes. However, some outcomes are about keeping things the same (maintenance) or reducing an unwanted behaviour or effect (reduction).

Each outcome should represent a significant change for clients, even if the step does not seem very great. The expected change should also be at a level you would want to report on.

Unwelcome outcomes

Your work may have unwelcome, or negative, outcomes. For example, some clients may feel isolated when they are rehoused, and start misusing alcohol again. If you think there may be some negative outcomes of your work, make sure you monitor these. This information will let you find about any problems early on, helping you to deal with the problems where possible.

How many outcomes?

Most organisations have between four and six specific aims. Each of these may encompass several outcomes. This means there are potentially a large number of outcomes you could assess. There may also be additional outcomes for other target groups or areas, which would make the assessment process more complex.

Keep the number of outcomes you will monitor to a minimum by prioritising key outcomes. There is no magic formula for deciding how many outcomes to assess and which to choose. But, in practice, the scope for monitoring outcomes will be determined by a number of factors, such as the length and intensity of an intervention and the stability of the people accessing your services. These will be discussed in chapter two.

Key outcomes should be reasonably practical to monitor. However, if it is difficult to assess an important outcome accurately, you may need to find ways of assessing it more approximately. An approximate assessment of an important outcome is likely to be more useful than accurate measures of unimportant outcomes.

Outcomes for large organisations

Large organisations may wish to set up an outcome monitoring system that covers all their services. A useful approach is to identify outcome areas common to the whole organisation. Single outcomes can then be identified by particular services.

Outcome areas across services St. Mungo's

St Mungo's consulted with managers and keyworkers throughout their organisation. As a result, they identified seven outcome areas relevant to the majority of their client group across their range of services, from shelters, through hostels to resettlement. These were:

- personal responsibility/motivation/self worth
- living skills
- social networks
- substance misuse/risk rating
- managing physical and mental health
- meaningful use of time/employability
- accommodation.

It was acknowledged that desired outcomes within each of these areas would vary between services and between clients, but this process provided the framework to develop outcome management across the whole organisation.

Once you have identified appropriate outcomes for your project, you can consider how to assess them.

Weblink: From February 2004 the London Housing Foundation website www.lhf.org.uk will contain materials that can be downloaded to help you develop your aims and objectives.

Chapter two

monitoring outcomes

Once you have agreed the most appropriate and important outcomes for your service and client group, there are two main steps involved in assessing progress:

1. Decide what information will show that your service has achieved its outcomes. For this you will need to identify outcome indicators.
2. Decide on how to collect the information necessary to monitor outcomes.

We will look at these two steps in greater detail in the following four sections.

1. Outcome indicators

Outcome indicators in detail

Outcomes describe a change resulting from your work. Outcome indicators are the things you can monitor to show whether or not outcomes are occurring. Indicators don't in themselves indicate more or less of anything.

They are often expressed as:

- **The extent of...**
- **The level of...**
- **The degree of...**
- **The amount of...**
- **The ability to....and so on.**

Outcome indicators can be:

- **Quantitative: where you count numbers of things that happen, such as the number of people who are rehoused.**
- **Qualitative: where you assess people's views, experiences, or aspirations, for example, someone's hopes for the future.**

Outcome indicators are just that - indicators of change, not proof it has occurred. A number of indicators can build a picture of the extent to which change is occurring, but this may not provide conclusive evidence.

Indicators for client outcomes

The table below gives some case example indicators for client outcomes.

Outcomes and indicators Cricklewood Homeless Concern Day Care Project

Project outcomes	Indicators
Engaged with the service	■ Whether clients engage with any one-to-one service or appointment
Increased motivation to make changes	■ Perceived level of motivation to change or dissatisfaction with current lifestyle ■ Whether client states to worker that wants to change
Healthier lifestyle	■ Whether client eats regularly ■ Whether personal hygiene improves/starts to wash ■ Whether client registers with a doctor ■ Level of reported alcohol consumption
Increased participation in meaningful activity	■ Whether engaged in any activity, work or training internally or externally, eg, IT, cookery, allotment work, team activities
Reduced isolation	■ Level of engagement in new activities

Indicators for non-client outcomes

The table below gives some examples of indicators for outcomes that do not involve clients.

Outcomes	Possible outcome indicators
Policy change regarding housing dog owners	■ Number of local hostels offering places to dog owners ■ Range of hostel types offering places to dog owners
Increased public awareness of an issue	■ How sympathetic the local press is to the service ■ Level of complaints locally about homeless people ■ Number of local people choosing to become volunteers at the service
Improved quality of service delivery organisations	■ Number of voluntary organisations working towards quality standards ■ Level of user satisfaction

Identifying indicators

To monitor outcomes, you must set at least one indicator for each outcome. To help you identify indicators, think about your clients and ask yourself the following questions:

- **What would they be doing differently that would indicate this change was happening or had happened?**
- **What would they tell you?**
- **How would they look different?**
- **What would you see or hear that would encourage you that the individuals were making progress?**

Using indicators

Your indicators will form the basis of your outcome monitoring system. You need to collect information on these to be able to demonstrate that you have made progress towards meeting your outcomes. Make sure your indicators will give you the information you need and can use; beware of adding questions out of interest unless you know how you will use the information.

How many indicators?

For some outcomes, such as maintaining a tenancy or obtaining paid work, one simple indicator reflecting this outcome will be enough. However, for most outcomes, especially those concerned with skills, attitudes and self-perception, you are likely to have several possible indicators. You will need to select the ones you consider to be the best indicators of change.

Indicators should be valid – they should assess what you want to assess and not something else. For example,'whether clients dress appropriately for interviews' may be an indicator of increased motivation to find work. However, it could also be an indicator of being able to afford an appropriate wardrobe. Avoid indicators that may be evidence of something else.

Once you have agreed on your indicators, you need to decide how to collect the necessary information. But before you do that, bear in mind some good practice issues in monitoring outcomes.

Outcome indicators Off the Streets and into Work's Individual Progression System

Off the Streets and into Work (OSW) developed the Individual Progression System (IPS) for assessment and reviews with clients accessing projects across London. OSW identified 11 relevant outcome areas, including accommodation, confidence, motivation and substance misuse. They selected a range of outcome indicators for each outcome. These indicators form the basis of the questions in the IPS form. These are some indicators identified by OSW for three of the 11 outcomes:

OSW outcome indicators

Outcome area	Indicators
Basic skills	■ How easy client finds it to fill out forms ■ Extent of help needed with reading instructions ■ Whether can check change by calculating mentally ■ Level of concern about handwriting or spelling ■ Ability to use a computer
Knowledge of opportunities	■ Level of understanding of own strengths and weaknesses ■ Whether they know what kind of job to look for ■ Whether they know what further training is needed ■ Whether they can think of several ways of finding out about job vacancies ■ Whether they know how to present at interview
Alcohol	■ Whether they use alcohol for confidence ■ Client perception that they are drinking more than is healthy ■ Whether they often drink in the mornings

Weblink: From February 2004 the London Housing Foundation website www.lhf.org.uk will contain materials that can be downloaded to help you develop your aims and objectives.

2. Keeping the task manageable

There are a number of ways to keep the task manageable. You are more likely to get results if you:

- keep your monitoring system simple
- integrate outcome monitoring into your existing monitoring systems
- consider using sampling and snapshots.

Keep it simple

Start with a simple system, making it more complex later, if necessary. Try to collect information that is easy to bring together and to analyse.

Look for the most natural place to record information and keep it user friendly. For example, a folder next to the telephone could be used to record the number and nature of helpline enquiries.

Developing an integrated monitoring system

Aim to have one monitoring system providing all the information you need on your project, including information on your outcomes. Outcome questions are more likely to be completed well if they are part of your overall monitoring systems and not an add-on or parallel system.

Combine outcome monitoring with existing systems wherever possible. Most voluntary sector homelessness organisations already carry out considerable levels of monitoring, particularly of the outputs of their service. Outcome monitoring can be combined with these processes. For example, outcome questions can be asked in an initial needs assessment.

Look at your list of outcome indicators and identify those for which you:

- **are already collecting the information**
- **could easily collect the information within an existing monitoring system, for example by rewording or adding questions**
- **need to find a new way of collecting information.**

Review your current systems

You could use the move to outcome management as an impetus to review your existing monitoring systems. This may be particularly important if you already know your systems are unsatisfactory or if you suspect that adding outcome monitoring will unacceptably increase the overall monitoring burden. Some organisations find that they are currently gathering unnecessary information. Try to bring in outcome monitoring without increasing the number of questions that individuals have to ask, or that clients have to answer.

Using sampling and snapshots

Sampling
You may not be able to collect information on all your clients because it would take too long. You could, however, collect information on a smaller number of people – a sample. A sample can be selected at random, so that the people in the sample are representative of all your clients or target group. A properly selected random sample can be used to generalise. For example, if the sample shows a definite trend, it is likely that this will be reflected in the whole client group. You can draw a random sample by making a list of all your clients, perhaps alphabetically, so that everyone has an equal chance of being chosen. Then choose, for example, every tenth name on the list. This is a random sample.

You may also choose a purposive sample; this means selecting a range of people to speak to who have important experiences to tell you about. For example, you might choose to interview five users who have been 'successful'

Outcome monitoring as part of day-to-day work **Streets Alive Theatre Company**

Streets Alive included outcomes questions in an evaluation form routinely completed with young people who are moving from their open-access to more structured programmes. Further, a 'life plan' is routinely completed by all those starting with the service, then reviewed after six months. The areas raised in the life plan cover the outcome indicators developed, and by comparing the life plan and review information, Streets Alive should be able to assess outcomes for young people over the six-month period.

and five who have not been successful. This kind of sampling is usually used to help you understand a situation rather than to generalise about your whole client group.

To make sure that your sample includes representatives from different groups, you may need to take particular care in choosing your sample. For example, if you only have a few clients who are disabled, random selection may miss them entirely, just by chance. To ensure you have enough disabled people in the sample, you could take separate random samples of both disabled and able-bodied people.

Snapshots

'Snapshots' involve collecting information on an issue at just one point in time. For example, you could decide to carry out surveys or observations in a day centre during one week every quarter. Many people find continuous monitoring easier than snapshots, because it's more readily integrated and less easily forgotten. However, snapshots are a widely accepted technique that could help reduce the burden on staff and clients, while still providing reliable outcome information.

Snapshots Cricklewood Homeless Concern Day Care Project

A core of long-term homeless people have attended the Cricklewood Homeless Concern (CHC) Day Care Project, many over a period of years, without significantly engaging with staff. CHC concluded that routine monitoring was unnecessarily time-consuming and that recording was only required when change took place. It was decided that CHC should do the following:

- Create a spreadsheet with a list of names of the clients regularly using the day care facilities and record initially whether each client regularly came in, whether they ate, washed or took up to one-to-one appointments.
- Revisit the list at the six-weekly meetings of day care staff and only record changes, for example, where someone had started or stopped eating. Where there was no change, no additional recording was needed.
- Carry out periodic snapshot surveys of clients using the Day Care Project to record current lifestyle satisfaction, triggers and motivation to change. This could in itself be a useful intervention for clients in helping them to think about their situation, and also a valuable assessment tool for staff.

3. Assessment tools

There are a number of different ways of collecting information on outcomes. The most frequently used ways to collect outcome information are:

- questionnaires
- observation
- interviews
- record keeping and notes.

Questionnaires and outcome monitoring forms

Questionnaires or forms are a good way of gathering responses from a large number of clients in a format in which information can be analysed relatively easily. They can be repeated, so people can be asked the same questions at different points in time.

Clients or staff can complete questionnaires separately, but usually it's recommended that outcomes questions be discussed in counselling or keywork sessions and answers agreed between clients and staff.

Using scales

Many questionnaires ask people to rate their experience using a scale. This is a particularly appropriate way of asking questions for outcome assessment. As someone's knowledge, behaviour or circumstances change, their rating may go up or down the scale.

Using scales of ability **extract from Streets Alive Theatre Company evaluation form**

Please rate your ability in the following skills, on a scale of 1 to 5:	1 Very good	2 Good	3 Average	4 Not so good	5 Poor
My ability to communicate my feelings and ideas					
My ability to attend regularly and on time					
My ability to concentrate					
My ability to work with other people/in a group					
My ability to handle awkward situations without adding to them					
My ability to value my contribution/achievements					

Building a scale

Most questions can be placed on a scale describing one of the following:

- Frequency: how often something happens
- Severity: how severe a problem is
- Satisfaction: how happy or unhappy a client is about something
- Ability: how good someone is at something (see case example on p. 21)
- Agreement: whether or not a client agrees with a set of statements (see case example below).

Using scales of agreement an extract from Off the Streets and into Work's Individual Progression System

Please show your agreement with these statements by circling the appropriate number.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I find it difficult to motivate myself	1	2	3	4
I drink more than is healthy for me	1	2	3	4
I sometimes need help to read instructions	1	2	3	4

Using the same scale for a number of questions helps to make the questionnaire shorter and easier to complete. However, it's always important to make sure that all the questions listed can be meaningfully answered on the scale given.

Scale points should be labelled with descriptive or numerical values to make analysis easier and so that the answers from individual clients can be compared over time. Provide enough points on the scale for people to feel they have a range of options for their answers, and so that the scale is sensitive enough to demonstrate change. On the other hand, be careful that scales are not so complex that your questionnaire becomes lengthy and confusing. As a general rule, four is a minimum number of scale points and ten a maximum. Five or six points are often about right.

Making questionnaires more user-friendly

Visual tools

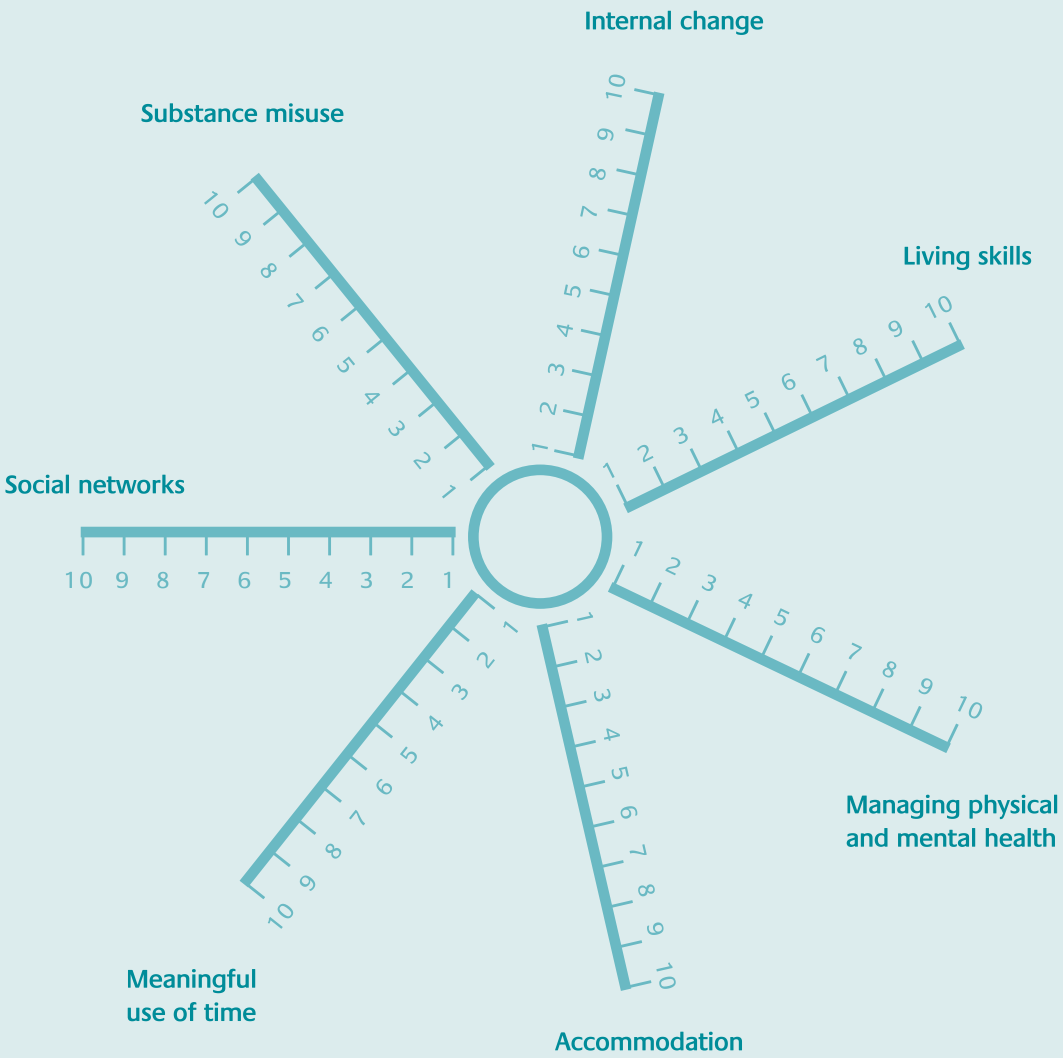
Questionnaires don't have to look boring. Consider using pictures and other visual aids, which can make them more user-friendly for staff and clients.

Quizzes

Quizzes can be an easy way to use a questionnaire and fun to use. Educational events or sessions provide an opportunity to test knowledge, attitudes and awareness before and after an intervention. This can be particularly appropriate for, and popular with, young people and those working with them. The quiz is usually completed twice, testing knowledge and attitudes before and after an intervention.

A visual monitoring tool St Mungo's Outcomes Star

The outcome assessment tool developed at St. Mungo's uses scales represented visually. The six main outcome scales are arranged in a star shape, on scales of one to ten. It is recommended that staff and clients discuss the scale and agree an appropriate score. Clients and staff could also complete the scales alone.



Joining up the scale points gives a size and shape for each person at a given point in time. As clients make positive changes in each of the outcome areas, their 'shape' becomes bigger and more uniform. During testing, this format proved popular with both staff and clients on the grounds that it was holistic and had visual impact:

- Clients who were ready to move on had bigger shapes.
- The bigger the shape, the more control a client had over their lives.
- It illustrated the complexity of people and their lives.

Good practice in questionnaires and outcome monitoring forms

Planning

- Consult clients and staff on format, content and language.
- Consider the literacy of your clients and choose appropriate methods, such as staff reading out questions, where needed.

Format

- Keep the form as short as possible.
- Have a clear and attractive layout.
- Make the questions flow logically, like a conversation.

Content

- Have a clear introduction, including what the questionnaire is for and how the information collected will be used.
- Include a client reference number.
- Only include questions you really need and where you can use the answers.
- Ask questions that relate to key outcome indicators.

Writing questions

- Put sensitive questions near the end.
- Questions should be short and unambiguous.
- Have simple, exact instructions (eg, 'tick one box only').
- Specify the time period you want them to refer to (eg, 'over the past week, how many...').
- Give an 'I don't know' option.

Scales for responses

- Make responses quantifiable by having a box to tick or point to mark.
- Define all scale points, for example: '1=excellent, 2=quite good'.
- Have enough scale points to be sensitive to change, but not too many to be confusing.

Observation

Observation can be carried out by staff. It involves watching how people behave and interact in a given situation and making notes. Done properly, this is a formal process, often involving recording against a scale and completing a short monitoring form or questionnaire.

Examples of outcome indicators on which information could effectively be gathered through observation include:

- **punctuality**
- **appropriate dress for the situation**
- **personal hygiene**
- **ability to deal effectively with stressful situations**
- **ability to describe their own skills or desires and aspirations**
- **interest in participating in a given activity or service.**

Good practice in observation

When you carry out observation:

- **Devise a structure for recording your observation. This will often involve scales against an indicator.**
- **Hold introductory sessions to ensure that all those recording observations are doing so with a similar understanding and in the same way.**
- **Discuss any staff concerns before you start.**
- **Tell clients that they will be observed. Explain why you are doing it and how the information will be used. Reassure people that you will keep the information confidential and give them the opportunity to raise any concerns.**

Interviews

Interviews can be carried out face-to-face or over the telephone. They can be quite informal. For example, an 'interview' could be a ten minute conversation as staff circulate around a day centre. Or they may be more formal, and might involve staff going through a series of questions or topics with a client for up to an hour and a half. You can structure the interview against fixed questions, or allow the discussion to emerge more freely, or do both in the same interview. In a number of voluntary organisations clients carry out interviews with their peers on certain topics.

An interview can be a good way of asking about difficult or sensitive issues. It may help you gather information from people who do not want, or are not able, to write things down. Interviews are also useful for getting information from policy makers, politicians, schools or other organisations. They are particularly appropriate when:

- there is a relatively small number of respondents
- people are unlikely to return a questionnaire
- more in-depth or detailed feedback is required.

Using participatory tools

Exercises, pictures or other tools can be used within interviews to encourage participation and help people express themselves or simply to make the process more interesting. They include:

- Card sort exercises: writing statements or options on cards or post-it notes and physically sorting them into categories.
- 'Chuff charts': where the response is noted with a smiley (or not so smiley) face.
- Timelines: for example, plotting a graph against time of the different events that brought the respondent to their current situation.

Good practice in carrying out interviews

These are some good practice tips for interviewing:

- List a small number of topic areas in advance, clearly focused on gathering essential information, and introduce these to clients either in advance or at the start of the interview.
- Make sure that clients understand why you are interviewing them, and what will be done with the information. Explain whether or not the information is anonymous and confidential.
- Make sure clients understand that their time and participation is valued.
- Open with questions that are factual and relatively straightforward to answer, moving on to more sensitive issues when the respondent is feeling more at ease.
- Ensure that topic areas flow logically.
- Listen actively, keeping eye contact as much as possible rather than looking down at your notes, and probe for more detail or reasons behind answers.
- Don't end the interview too abruptly. Take some responsibility for the effect on the interviewee if sensitive information has been discussed.
- Summarise the key points and check with the client if you have recorded them correctly.
- Always thank people for taking part.

Keeping records and notes

Case files

Many organisations keep case files for their clients. Case files often contain outcome information, although not always in an accessible form. To use case files for outcome management, some organisations use outcome 'summary sheets' on the front of each file, where workers record outcomes as they occur. A very basic outcome monitoring sheet might look like this:

Outcome area: housing			**Outcome area: drug use**		
Date	Staff member	Comments	Date	Staff member	Comments
Outcome area: meaningful occupation			**Outcome area: money**		
Date	Staff member	Comments	Date	Staff member	Comments

Other sources of information

You will probably find that your organisation is already collecting information relevant to your outcome indicators. For example, regular attendance at an employment project may be one indicator of increased motivation to find work. You may have various other sources of outcome information:

- **appointment diaries or attendance logs**
- **centrally filed and compiled anecdotal information on client outcomes after leaving the service**
- **client diaries kept as part of the therapeutic process recording, for example, alcohol or drug use**
- **records and details of appointments made by medical or other professionals visiting a project**
- **for second-tier organisations, records of sales of publications on different topics or numbers attending conferences and training events.**

4. Client issues in monitoring outcomes

Getting consent

Information should always be given voluntarily. Most people are happy to give personal information if you explain clearly and honestly what the information is for and how you will use it. People often enjoy the chance to tell their story.

Some staff members may express reservations about the ethics of outcome monitoring, or be reluctant to 'make judgements' about clients. It is helpful for staff to understand the benefits of getting outcome information and to know that their observations complement information given by clients. Chapter four explains ways to encourage and reassure staff.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Collecting information more than once and comparing the findings for an individual client means that you can't collect information anonymously. However, client numbers or codes can be used instead of names and you can reassure people that the information will be stored securely and reported anonymously, so that they will not be identified in any report or other documents. You may want to check with clients about their concerns. However, some projects find that staff need more reassurance than clients about confidentiality.

Confidentiality Ashiana

Ashiana works with women who are experiencing domestic violence. Many women will be meeting staff without telling family members, so staff are particularly cautious about contacting them at home. This difficulty is overcome by checking with the clients individually about how they can be contacted and by using mobile phones wherever possible.

If you are recording information about people, you will need to comply with the Data Protection Act[2].

Encouraging participation

Try to make the monitoring session as attractive as possible to encourage participation. It will be unrealistic to offer incentives for routine monitoring, although you may wish to for a one-off exercise. Incentives may include money, tokens, raffle prizes or trips.

Dealing with drop-out

In organisations working with clients with erratic or chaotic lives, some may drop out from the service and it may not be possible to carry out final monitoring. In this case, routinely monitor against your outcome indicators. Then, if a client drops out, you can use their most recent outcome form to calculate change during the time they were with you.

2 You can call the Data Protection Information Line on 01625 545745 for advice.

Dealing with drop-out New Horizon Youth Centre

New Horizon's Youth Centre has a very transient client group of young people and they were worried about drop-out rates for the sample selected to test their new outcome monitoring forms. They approached this by drawing a larger sample than they actually needed, to accommodate any drop-out.

Feed back results to clients

Give feedback to clients on your outcome findings. You could share the information relating to them, and share anonymous information on the whole client group, perhaps in summary form. This can help motivate and encourage people to continue giving you outcome information.

Length of client monitoring sessions

Try not to ask clients to spend more than an hour answering questions. With infrequent client-staff sessions, where monitoring is not integrated into regular casework, it's recommended that you develop quick tools that can be completed in a short period of time, usually five to 15 minutes.

There are a number of factors that could influence a shorter or longer monitoring form.

A longer process Off the Streets and into Work's Individual Progression System

The Individual Progression System (IPS) developed by Off the Streets and into Work is a lengthy form covering a range of indicators within 11 outcome areas. However, it's also a standard assessment tool and a basis for drawing up an action plan with a client. When the IPS was first reviewed, there was some staff resistance to its length, but 90 per cent of clients were happy to complete it. The review concluded that clients appreciated the attention paid to them and their lives.

Monitor for up to an hour when:	Develop short forms when:
■ Outcome questions are integrated into the routine review process ■ Outcome questions support a therapeutic process ■ You have an intensive intervention with a client (eg, all day or every day) ■ Clients are longer term.	■ Monitoring is an additional aspect of a session ■ You are monitoring a few, simple outcomes ■ Clients are short term.

5. The practicalities of assessing outcomes

Using more than one method

You can collect information on the same outcome in more than one way, for example, through a combination of client self-assessment and worker observation. Using more than one method can increase the strength of your findings.

Observation can provide a useful addition to self-reported information from clients and can be more accurate than recording clients' views of their behaviour. This can be particularly true of clients who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, those who have mental health issues or have low self-awareness or little insight into their own behaviour. In such circumstances, clients may either over-estimate or under-estimate their difficulties.

A combination of observation and client self-assessment can show more reliably whether an outcome has been achieved. For example, improved communication skills could be assessed through bringing the following information together:

- **The client says she feels more confident saying what she thinks to people.**
- **The client reports fewer difficulties in talking to people in the past week.**
- **Staff observe that the client is speaking up more in group sessions.**
- **Staff observe that the client is more able to put her point across without getting angry.**

Increasing the accuracy of self-reporting Streets Alive Theatre Company

The staff and young person separately complete scales about the young person on six outcome areas in the Streets Alive evaluation forms (eg, communication, concentration, ability to work in a group). They then compare the findings. This has proved a valuable basis for discussion. As some young people under-score themselves through lack of confidence and others over-estimate through low self-awareness, completion of scales by both groups helps validate the findings.

Interviews are another method providing more in-depth, qualitative information to complement questionnaires. For example, an organisation may regularly collect outcome information through questionnaires. They may also wish to carry out interviews with a small number of clients to try to explain some of the findings from the questionnaires.

When to collect information

Before and after

To assess change over time, you need information on your outcome indicators at two or more points in time. For example, you might look at the change from initial assessment to review. Information should be collected at least twice. Ideally, this should be:

- **as early as possible, usually when clients first present at your service. This will provide you with a starting point against which you can assess change.**
- **as late as possible, usually when clients leave your service.**

Many services collect information before and after an intervention. But they may ask questions in different ways at each stage, making it difficult to compare the answers and provide outcome information. Questions at initial monitoring must be repeated in the same way at later monitoring stages, so that results can be compared.

How often to monitor

Collecting information regularly

A good rule of thumb is that you should be collecting outcome information not less than every four weeks and usually not more than every three months. A balance is necessary between getting regular, and usually more accurate, information, and collecting too much or alienating people from the process.

The timing and level of monitoring needs to fit with the length and intensity of contact with clients and your service ethos. There are a number of factors that may influence the length of the monitoring cycle:

Monitor every four to six weeks if you have:	Monitor less frequently if you have:
■ Short-term clients ■ A high drop-out rate or more chaotic clients ■ Clients seen fairly frequently or if you offer an intensive intervention ■ Some clients likely to change quite rapidly.	■ Long-term services ■ Low drop-out rate ■ Infrequent or low level interventions ■ Slow rates of change.

Length of monitoring time St Mungo's

St. Mungo's tested their outcomes star across four different service areas, with a variety of client groups. They found that a four to six week monitoring cycle was appropriate in a first stage hostel - a gap of more than six weeks meant that some clients who moved on quickly were lost. In a long-stay hostel for men with diagnosed mental health issues, at first staff considered every three months to be too frequent to show change. However, they were later encouraged when the findings revealed a degree of change that had been too subtle for them to realise without formal recording.

Unexpected outcomes

Indicators will help you to assess progress towards your expected outcomes. However, there may be effects of your work that you did not anticipate - unexpected outcomes. Your outcome system needs to be flexible enough to capture these changes too. Whatever method you use to record outcomes, you will be focusing on your expected outcomes, and recording whether or not these are occurring. However, make sure you also ask an extra question – *has anything else happened?* What other changes have there been?

Quantifying change – the role of numbers

Quantitative information is given as numbers and qualitative information is expressed in words or sentences. Some outcomes are easily quantified, such as people being rehoused. However, you can also express qualitative outcomes as numbers. For example:

- *Eight of the 15 people interviewed said that they felt more confident.*
- *22 per cent of the sample felt able to communicate better.*

Outcome targets

Some organisations set targets for outcomes. This may be because they have chosen them or because they have been required by funders. Outcome targets specify the level or extent of outcomes you hope to achieve and give you something to measure progress against. As a general rule, set targets only if they help improve or develop your work.

Testing your new system

Any new system should be tested out first - this involves making sure that it works over a short period, say three months. It is good practice to tell clients about the test period.

It is essential to give staff clear guidance on how to use the system to make sure that they all use the same approach, particularly on how to use scores or scales. You may also need to clarify who will take part in the test period. Brief all those involved in the test period on what they should look for and comment on. These might include:

- overall perceptions about how comfortable they feel with the system
- how they can integrate it within key working or other sessions
- how long it takes to use the tools with clients
- clients' responses, with both positive feedback and objections

- **any confusion over interpretation of questions**
- **detailed feedback, for example on the wording of questions**
- **positive feedback on areas not needing change.**

While the test is underway, have a feedback mechanism for both staff and clients. This could be a folder or suggestion box, or a person responsible for receiving ongoing comments during the test period. At the end of the test period, arrange a meeting or other feedback process for people to comment on what it was like to use the forms, for both those asking and answering the questions.

Look at the information you have collected during the test period. Analyse it to make sure you can get the information you need from it. You will also need to check that the people filling out the forms understand the questions and understand them in the same way. Check that they understood all the instructions, and that there was enough space for answers.

Where necessary, revise the system in response to the findings of the test period, and plan the next stage of implementation.

Chapter three

using outcome information well

Outcome management is about using the outcome information gathered through monitoring. Outcome information can be very useful internally for planning and for organisational development. It can also help you be more accountable, whether to your clients, your funders or to the general public. This chapter describes ways in which you can most effectively use outcome management.

1. Analysing and reporting outcome information

Once you have collected information on outcomes, you need to summarise and organise your findings in a logical, ordered way. This will help you to make sense of the information – to analyse and interpret it. When you have done this, you can report on your findings.

Processing outcome information

For small numbers of clients, or during a test period, information may be stored on paper and analysed manually. However, most homelessness organisations undertaking outcome management use computers.

Organisations use a wide range of software to analyse information. We cannot look at the application of that software here. However, it is useful to note some general points about storing and accessing information.

You can type or scan information from completed outcome monitoring questionnaires or other forms into a computer and store it in a database. All forms should have a client code or name so that two or more forms completed by each client can be placed in the same section and compared by the analysis system used. With quantitative information, you can ask the database to calculate the change from one form to the next. It is then possible to produce a total number of clients showing change in each of the different outcome areas.

Once you have set up your monitoring framework, you should be able to set up a computer system to produce standard reports for set time-periods (eg, the financial year). It will be helpful for IT people to be involved throughout the process of developing outcome monitoring, so that any limitations of the computer system are taken into account when designing the monitoring tools.

Qualitative information can also be stored in the computer. Either type in clients' answers in full, or summarise them first. This can be done using specialist computer packages, but many people use Excel or Word.

Analysing outcome information

Quantitative analysis

Most information from outcome monitoring forms will be quantitative, involving a series of numbers. Most voluntary sector organisations only need simple analyses of quantitative information; these include frequencies, averages and percentages.

To help you analyse your outcome information, try to think in terms of asking questions of the information you have collected. What do you want to find out about your work? For example:

- **What percentage of clients over the past year stayed more than six months in their tenancy?**
- **What proportion showed an improvement in independent living skills?**

It is also possible to look at smaller groups of clients by asking questions such as:

- **What percentage of those with substance misuse issues at assessment then showed some improvement by the review?**
- **Of those with diagnosed mental health problems, how many improved their ability to manage their illness?**

Extracting information St Mungo's

St. Mungo's outcomes test period generated a very large amount of information. St Mungo's 'asked' questions of this information. These included the following:

- Were clients of different services at different points on a scale when they arrived and at follow-up? For example, did those in hostels have further to go to achieve changes than those in resettlement?
- Did people improve at all?
- If so, did they show more change in any particular outcomes?

Qualitative analysis

If you have collected qualitative information, you will need to summarise and group the information collected. Qualitative analysis can be very complex, often involving looking at the themes and ideas that emerge from people's comments.

However, many organisations can do a simple analysis that deals with qualitative information quantitatively, by turning it into numbers. For example, in an interview you may have asked clients: *'What things helped you improve your skills in looking after your flat?'* A simple analysis of all your clients' answers is likely to reveal a list of the main responses. You can then add up the number of people who said each of those responses. Once you have done this, you can treat your qualitative information as you would quantitative information. You might be able to say:

- **how many people said that their improved skills was due to your service**
- **how many felt it was due to another factor, like their own efforts, or to another organisation.**

Interpretation

Interpretation involves looking at what the findings mean. Doing this will highlight what is going well and show whether change or improvements are needed.

Outcome information often needs to be put into context and related to other aspects of your organisation before you can interpret it; without this, you may not be able to make judgements about your work. For example, your outcome information will tell you whether an outcome has occurred, and to what extent. It may not tell you why an outcome has not occurred. In this case, you may need to ask the following questions to help you understand why they did not occur:

- **Did the level of resources, for example, the level of money or staffing devoted to the project, affect the outcome?**
- **Was the outcome affected by the way you delivered your service? (See case example below.)**
- **Did external factors, such as lack of housing stock, prevent you achieving your outcome?**
- **Were the aims as originally stated realistic or appropriate, given the nature of the client group or the services delivered?**

Putting outcome information in context Cricklewood Homeless Concern Welfare Project

When Cricklewood Homeless Concern monitored the outcomes of the Welfare Project, they found that, while 100 per cent of clients completed benefit applications, the rate of success for other core outcomes was nearer 20 per cent. On closer examination, this was found to be due to the staff practice of completing applications on behalf of all clients, leaving little time for other work. This practice was gradually changed, using referral to literacy classes or the day programme to build basic skills or confidence, as required, and freeing staff time for other tasks.

Proving your role

Even if you have collected evidence of changes in your clients, it's very hard to demonstrate that it was your project that caused the change. Your clients come into contact with many organisations and other influences that may have contributed to the outcome. Getting information from more than one source can be helpful. For example, if both staff and users think the change was due to your service, that will help build a strong case. Quantitative information may be limited in what it can tell you, whereas asking clients to tell their stories may explain more about the changes in their lives and what caused them.

Writing outcome reports and applications

Outcome information should be an integral part of a funding application or report. The following points will help you when you report outcomes.

Keep it simple

- Focus on the knowledge and information needs of those reading the report, not the information collected. It can be helpful to imagine presenting the main outcomes verbally to someone not working in the homelessness field, to ensure that the outcomes presented are clear.
- Keep it brief. Key outcomes can be summarised on a couple of pages.

Make the meaning clear

- Present your outcomes in context. Where relevant, refer to the services you offer, how you deliver them, and the resources needed by the service. Where they are available and relevant, make reference to national or local statistics.
- Where numerical scores are used to indicate the severity of a problem or the extent of change, set them in context and explain them, so that you give the numbers more meaning.
- Include a comment about the accuracy of the information collected. For example, if it relies entirely on client self-assessment, a note about the likely level of honesty or accuracy would be appropriate.
- All outcome information should relate to a specified time period, such as the financial year or quarter.

Make it user friendly

- Try to tell a story, from when the clients arrive and are assessed to when they leave, focusing on the changes for clients over time. If most outcomes are intermediate, say in the case of short-term funding, you may need to specify how they link to progress towards key outcomes and why they are positive steps along the way.
- Layout and presentation are important. Graphs and charts can add clarity and help break up text. Short sentences are easier to read. Simple binding of a report is inexpensive and can make a difference to its impact.
- Case examples are a good way of providing information about the range of problems experienced by clients and the process of move-on. They may explain the interventions or link the intervention and the outcome - or just add human interest, bringing your work to life.

2. Using outcome information

Using outcome information to help planning and decision making

Outcomes provide a valuable framework for planning, as they place the focus firmly on your clients or target group and on the changes that you aim to bring about. Managers in a number of leading organisations in the homelessness sector routinely use an outcomes approach in planning. For example, the chief executive of Homeless Link used an outcome-focused approach in drawing up the strategic plan. Managers in The Passage, St. Botolph's, St. Giles and Crisis routinely approach planning from this perspective.

The information you collect should be fed back into your planning systems. This was the experience of the director of Cricklewood

Homeless Concern:

'To make it really effective we found we needed an improved 'loop' system to ensure that learning from outcomes was effectively fed back into making organisational and service changes'.

Outcome information can show the extent to which your organisation is achieving its stated aims. If the information shows that outcomes are being achieved, this can help support, or validate, the way you work.

You may find that you are not achieving all your expected outcomes. It is important to be realistic about the extent to which outcomes will be achieved – you won't achieve all your outcomes for all your clients, all of the time. However, your analysis will have shown why the outcomes you expected have not occurred. This could be due to a number of reasons, each indicating a possible course of action. For example:

- If your aims were over-ambitious, perhaps now is the time to look at them again.
- If there was inadequate funding to achieve the outcomes, you may need to rethink your service or to seek further funding.
- You may have identified something about how you deliver your service that could be changed, perhaps only slightly, to improve the outcomes.
- If an external factor affected your outcomes, you may identify a need to campaign or you may need to review what can realistically be achieved within that external context.

Using an outcomes approach to redefine services
St Giles Trust

The St. Giles Day Centre initially identified outcomes that included changes in accommodation and benefits. Initial monitoring showed that these outcomes were not being achieved for most of the client group. Analysis quickly revealed that these desired outcomes were not realistic for an open-access day centre, where staff had little time to focus one-to-one on clients' individual needs. St. Giles had two options: they could change their way of working to help them to achieve these outcomes or set more realistic outcomes for an open-access day centre. They chose to redefine their service and change their ways of working.

Link monitoring with the planning timetable

Time your information collection to feed into your planning timetables. In this way your outcome information can be collated and analysed and used as a basis for decision making and planning. Outcome information is most likely to be used effectively if it's available when decisions are being made about services and when reports are due to management committees or funders.

Using outcome monitoring to improve work with clients

Outcome monitoring can be used to increase the effectiveness of work with clients in a number of ways:

- It can provide a useful structure for a regular, holistic, review of progress. This can encourage clients and staff with evidence of progress and highlight new areas in need of attention.
- It can help increase understanding of how change happens in the target group.
- Frequent collection of outcome information helps make sure that staff regularly examine the progress and needs of their clients.

Using outcome information to improve knowledge of clients
St Mungo's

Following the testing of their new outcome tool, St. Mungo's concluded that the process helped them learn more about their clients. They found that the process made them look into clients' needs more holistically and in more detail. Further, they felt that the tool described how change happened for clients. They have started to explore the use of the tool in the induction of new staff members, to help illustrate and increase understanding of the client group and the process of change.

Using outcomes to improve communication with funders

Outcome management can help voluntary sector providers to communicate better with funders by making funding applications and reports more clear and effective. It can give fundraisers and managers good information for funding applications and help answer questions about whether they have used funding effectively.

Outcome management can also increase understanding between funders and service providers about the nature of the client group and the process of change. It can help set realistic expectations, particularly for client groups with entrenched problems and where funding is for a limited period of time.

Funders increasingly want to know about the outcomes of the services and projects they fund. More funders are also supporting the use of outcome management as an effective tool for increasing the clarity of purpose and effectiveness of the organisations they fund. Most funders want to see organisations take up outcome management because of those benefits, rather than simply because they are requesting it.

Remember that if you consult with funders early on, when you are identifying outcomes, you are more likely to collect information you both value.

Using outcome information to improve funding relationships

Crisis has a number of private sector funders. The fundraising director is delighted by the move towards an outcomes approach as the outcome information enables them to give potential and current funders the information they want to know about the effective use of their money.

Streets Alive described funding as ‘less of a struggle’ in the year following the introduction of outcome monitoring across their services. The director attributed this at least in part to the ready availability of outcome information.

Ashiana found that after their first year of outcome assessment, they were able to provide the information requested by their funders with relative ease.

The benefits of outcomes work Cricklewood Homeless Concern

Those running each of the Cricklewood Homeless Concern projects complete short summary forms on outcomes at the end of each day or week. The system takes five to ten minutes to record daily, or 30 to 45 minutes weekly. Most of the workers are positive about the outcomes approach because:

- it helps keep a focus on why they are working with the clients
- they are encouraged to see that they are achieving change
- it reduces anxiety about trying to do all things for all people. It reinforces for staff that it’s acceptable to work within the terms of the job description, rather than responding to all the (often multiple) needs of the user.

‘I quite like the system. It tells me what I’m doing, what I focus on and am good at and what needs work. It’s simple – 10 to 15 minutes at the end of each day.’ CHC staff member.

Chapter four

making it work

The experience of voluntary sector homelessness agencies introducing outcome management has been mixed - changing ways of working or thinking takes time and can lead to both positive changes and difficulties. Often organisations have benefited from increased clarity and focus and informed decision making. They have also encountered pitfalls, resistance or barriers. This chapter draws on the experience of those agencies to describe good practice and ways to avoid difficulties.

When planning your outcomes work, consider speaking to other organisations that have implemented outcomes systems. They may be able to advise on strengths or weaknesses of different systems or give tips on what to look out for.

1. Get everyone on board

'If you do not create your outcomes framework consultatively with all your staff, then it will not work.' Director, The Passage.

It is important to make sure that all your staff understand the value of outcome management and its relevance to their jobs. Staff should be brought on board early on, rather than be presented with a monitoring tool and required to gather information. There are a number of reasons for this:

- To make sure that the outcomes identified reflect the reality of the process of change of clients, and that tools are of use to staff
- To make sure that monitoring systems and methods don't take up too much time
- To encourage use of the system and a sense of ownership
- To help you get good quality, comprehensive information
- So that outcome information is understood and used for review and planning throughout the organisation.

Involving staff in outcome management New Horizons Youth Centre

The director at New Horizons Youth Centre was enthusiastic about outcome management and its benefits, and understood the need for developing 'bottom-up' outcomes rather than imposing them. Following initial consultation, a group of workers came together to develop a draft outcomes tool. Funding from the London Housing Foundation provided cover for workers while they were doing it. The group met approximately monthly for over a year, sometimes with the director, and sometimes with an external consultant. Members also took part in CES' outcomes training. Following this development phase, the group launched a three-month outcome monitoring test period in the day centre, and enthusiastically championed an outcomes approach internally and externally.

There are a number of ways you can involve front-line workers in the process of introducing outcome management. These include staff taking part in consultation sessions, helping to design a tool or giving feedback during a test period.

Staff motivated by outcomes findings Ashiana

Ashiana's management and front-line staff were very encouraged by their first outcome information. It showed that good progress was being made towards meeting the needs of the majority of their clients and achieving Ashiana's stated outcomes.

Commitment from the top

The need to bring people on board does not stop at front-line workers. You are more likely to be successful if management are strongly committed to the process. At the very least, your managing body will probably need to agree the changes involved.

A session exploring management perceptions of outcomes can be a useful forum to look again at the aims and make sure that there is clarity and shared vision about those aims. This discussion can help introduce a greater attention to and understanding of the clients.

An ongoing process

You will need to continue to consult and communicate with staff about outcome management. Staff turnover and short-term projects can mean you need to introduce new staff to outcomes. People who have been involved from the start may also want to update or refresh their knowledge.

Interest in outcome management may increase over time. The director of The Passage, which had just begun work on an outcomes approach, commented:

> *'[Staff] now have the motivation to see what they are achieving and see their own results and want to know [more] and to get better. The sense of the need for outcome management is now much more keen.'*

Dealing with reluctance

If staff raise objections to asking outcome questions, explore and address these concerns at the outset. Some reluctance is often based on anticipated resistance from clients. However, clients are often happy to be involved, if the purpose of the exercise is clearly explained.

Unfounded concerns for clients Ashiana

Although committed to assessing outcomes, the management and staff of Ashiana were concerned about asking women in vulnerable and difficult situations to answer questions, particularly covering areas that touched on their experience. They first tested outcome monitoring by post and received low responses. They then tried gathering information by telephone and were surprised to find that their clients and ex-clients raised no objections to the interview, were happy to talk and to hear from them. This feedback helped reassure workers about continuing to monitor outcomes.

Staff may be reluctant to ask too many questions. This may be the case when people arrive distressed, in a chaotic state or under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or for people that have previously resisted engaging in services - staff may not want to risk putting them off with questions. If this is the case, gather the initial information as soon as clients are able to be involved. It may also help to discuss staff fears around questioning clients.

There are a number of ways you can reassure or encourage staff:

- **Ask clients directly about their experience of the outcomes tool.**
- **Provide outcomes training for staff, and include discussion of the benefits of outcome management.**
- **Feed back the findings of outcome monitoring to staff. This can encourage staff by showing that their work is leading to positive outcomes for clients.**
- **Give support or training to lessen fears about questioning clients. Change structures or systems of key working so that the outcomes system can easily be adopted.**

Weblink: From February 2004 the London Housing Foundation website www.lhf.org.uk will contain materials that can be downloaded to help you develop your aims and objectives.

Overcoming reluctance St Mungo's

St. Mungo's tested the use of an outcomes assessment tool, aiming to integrate it into the keyworking system. In practice, they found that this worked well where there were structured keywork sessions. However, in the street-level services, keyworking could be informal and focused on immediate presenting problems, so completing the outcomes tool required a separate session. Some workers were reluctant to do this with certain clients, especially those less well known to them, or those more volatile or withdrawn. However, once a separate session was arranged, it had additional benefits of giving keyworkers the structure and focus to engage with clients more holistically or to discuss aspects of their lives they had not covered in any depth before.

2. Tips for implementation

Implementing outcome management is easily postponed. Most organisations are busy and under-resourced and their priority is responding to a client's immediate needs. This tendency to delay adopting a new approach is increased when people are confused about outcomes, or are resistant because they think there will be large changes and an increased workload. The following steps can help develop momentum in your move to an outcomes approach.

Someone to lead

Identify one person responsible for developing outcome management at the outset. Otherwise you may find outcome management falls outside or between different job descriptions. The person identified will need:

- **clarity about the task**
- **appropriate training and information**
- **time to do the job**
- **support from colleagues.**

Set a programme for consultation and development

It is essential to allow enough time to develop, test and implement a system, including allowing enough time to get the support of workers and management.

Deadlines can help provide a focus and momentum. Timetable in different dates, to cover:

- **presenting the reasons for an outcomes approach, and a discussion of concerns**
- **work on developing outcomes**
- **discussing proposed outcomes and assessment tools**
- **training or sessions to present and explain the draft system**
- **testing of the draft system**
- **reviewing**
- **final implementation.**

Most organisations in the homelessness field have needed about a year from the start to the final implementation of a fully tested system. For smaller organisations or simple outcome systems, it may take less time, say six to eight months. For larger organisations, or those with more complex systems, it could take 15 to 18 months.

Using consultants

Homelessness organisations using outcome management have found that external consultants can be helpful in maintaining a momentum and to carry out specific tasks. Using consultants is unlikely to shorten the time needed, as you still need to consult widely and test the system. However, consultants can bring in skills, help with planning and reduce the number of staff days dedicated to the development of a system.

Consider resource implications

Outcome management can have resource implications, and this should be part of early planning. Resource implications can include the costs of:

- **staff time, including cover where necessary**
- **external training**
- **external consultancy**
- **alterations to existing IT systems.**

Funders need to be aware of, and sympathetic to, these resource implications. Include the costs of moving towards an outcome-focused approach in funding proposals or seek separate funding for it.

Outcome management presents a real challenge to homelessness organisations. It is not always easy, but it doesn’t need to be very complex. The effort you put in will be worthwhile. Clients will be able to see how far they have come. The results you get will help you to improve and develop your services and will help staff to focus on the benefits of their work and why they are working with clients.

Glossary

Intermediate outcomes Intermediate outcomes, also called interim outcomes, are steps along the way to end outcomes. They are often smaller changes that happen before the final, desired outcome can be reached.

Monitoring Monitoring is the regular and systematic collection of information.

Objectives Objectives describe how your organisation is going to achieve your aims; they are the services or products you plan to offer.

Outcome management Outcome management involves using the information from outcome monitoring to make your service more effective.

Outcome targets Outcome targets express the degree, or extent, to which you hope to achieve your outcomes.

Outcomes Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your services and activities.

Outputs Outputs are all the detailed activities, services and products you actually do or provide.

Overall aim The overall aim tells everyone why the organisation exists and the broad effect it wants to have. It summarises the difference that your organisation wants to make.

Qualitative Qualitative information is descriptive, and is presented in words.

Quantitative Quantitative information is given as numbers.

Second-tier organisations Second-tier organisations work with other organisations, to help them do their work better.

Soft and hard outcomes The term ‘soft outcomes’ is commonly used for changes in attitudes, self-perception or certain skills areas. These are often, but not always, intermediate outcomes. ‘Hard outcomes’ are often more easily assessed, such as getting a house. While ‘soft’ outcomes are emphasised in this guide, this phrase is not used because it can reduce the importance attached to so-called ‘soft’ outcomes and can lead to confusion with intermediate outcomes.

Specific aim Specific aims are statements about the differences an organisation hopes to make, often in the individuals it works with.

Stakeholders Stakeholders are people with an interest in your organisation, and may include clients, staff or the local community.

User satisfaction feedback Getting user satisfaction feedback involves finding out what your users think of your services, for example, their location, opening hours or how helpful workers were.

Further resources

Organisations offering support

Charities Evaluation Services

Charities Evaluation Services provides training, consultancy and publications on quality and evaluation systems, including outcome management.

Charities Evaluation Services
4 Coldbath Square
London, EC1R 5HL
020 7713 5722
enquiries@ces-vol.org.uk
www.ces-vol.org.uk

London Housing Foundation

The London Housing Foundation provides a range of support to voluntary agencies tackling homelessness, including grants, training and development opportunities through its IMPACT programme. The London Housing Foundation is keen to help agencies improve their ability to set, assess and achieve outcomes.

London Housing Foundation
Gem House
122-126 Back Church Lane
London, E1 1ND
Tel: 020 7702 5651
kevin.ireland@lhf.org.uk
www.lhf.org.uk

Other resources

The London Housing Foundation website
www.lhf.org.uk

CES is developing materials to complement this guide, to be accessed from the London Housing Foundation Website. From February 2004 you will be able to download a range of resources, including:

- the *Impact through Outcomes* training course materials
- a presentation explaining the outcomes approach for you to give to, for example, your management committee
- links to other resources
- case studies
- a blank triangle for people to fill in with their organisation's aims and objectives.

United Way, an American website, offers useful resources on outcomes:
www.unitedway.org/outcomes

Further reading

Burns, S (2001) *Outcome monitoring*, Evaluation discussion paper 7, Charities Evaluation Services, London

Burns, S (2000) *A DIY guide to implementing outcome monitoring,* second edition, Alcohol Concern, London

Cupitt, S (2003) *Your project and its outcomes*, Community Fund
This free booklet is available from the Community Fund, or can be downloaded from the web using following link:
http://www.c-f.org.uk/funding-your-project/forms-and-guidance/outcomes/your-project-and-its-outcomes.html

Ellis, J (2002) *Practical monitoring and evaluation: a guide for voluntary organisations*, Charities Evaluation Services, London