What are outcomes and why collect them?

What do we mean by outcomes?

Outcomes are the changes that an advice agency achieves as a result of its work. There are different types of outcomes.

Advice outcomes

Advice outcomes tend to be practical gains that an agency achieves for a client as a direct result of its work. Advice outcomes include things like:

- Increased income due to a client receiving a benefit
- Retention of housing – so the client is not homeless
- Permission to remain and live in the country

Agencies tend to find it easier to identify and record advice outcomes and this is the data that local authority and other funders often want.
Client outcomes

We define client outcomes as those which relate to the wider aspects of the client’s life such as their physical and mental health and general well-being. They may include things like:

- increased confidence
- greater ability to help yourself

Client outcomes are harder for agencies to identify than advice outcomes as they involve asking clients personal questions about how their problems and the advice received have affected their lives.

Legal and policy outcomes

Sometimes advice work can bring about a change in local or national policy. This may be as a result of taking a single case or of campaigning work. They may include things like:

- changes to a local authority housing allocations policy
- improved administration of the Housing Benefits department

The briefings in this series focus on ways to identify and collect client outcomes.
Why collect outcomes?

The agencies that we worked with had different reasons for collecting outcomes:

- Most of the pilot agencies did not have contact with clients after the advice and so were interested to learn what their advice had achieved - ‘In the past we just collected numbers but now the agency is able to demonstrate its impact on well-being. We didn’t know how to do this before’.

- Several of the pilot agencies were working with their Local Strategic Partnership or local authority and wanted to demonstrate that advice services contribute to strategic aims such as improved health.

- As the pilot progressed the agencies became aware that the outcomes work could provide feedback to advisers and staff about the effects of their work - ‘Our clients were able to express how important the agency was for them. This made the staff feel appreciated’.

- Pilot agencies learnt about the effectiveness of their own delivery and systems – ‘It helped us identify areas for internal quality improvement’.

- Importantly, in an increasingly tough funding environment for advice, the outcomes work provided material to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of advice to existing and potential funders - ‘We now have an evidence base demonstrating the value of advice. We will be able to use this to show funders how we contribute to their aims’.