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Outcomes Frameworks (OF) – Redundant, More Noise or Useful Measures? – It all Depends! - Linking Societal and Systemic Concerns into OF
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Presentation to the the Advice Services Alliance (ASA)'s Standing Council on Advice Research and Evaluation, an annual meeting for researchers and practitioners in the advice sector to share research findings and promote evidence-based practice

Biography Dr Liz Curran

Liz has been a legal practitioner for over thirty years working in private and public law practice. Main areas of research access to justice and effective practice. Liz has worked for NGOs, for government, as a consultant, senior adviser and been a director of charities, human rights NGO, legal practices, and a clinical legal education supervising solicitor. She also works in policy, law reform, research, and legal empowerment.

Heavily involved in collaborative development of outcomes frameworks in Australia with legal support services. By using inclusive participatory approaches that document lived experiences and support services for 2 decades what drives positive change and leads to positive impacts on lives particularly those who are often excluded from legal help. Pioneering work on Health Justice Partnerships since 2001 as both practitioner and researcher advising on many start-ups/programs informed by her research/evaluations on effectiveness in Australia Canada, Denmark, and the United Kingdom.

Context Internationally Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

SDGs, poverty (SDG 1), good health and wellbeing (SDG 3) inequality (SDG 10), collaboration (SDG 17) justice and strong institutions (SDG 17).

In 2019 and 2023 the UN identified five pillars for *people-centred justice* which require addressing people's everyday justice and needs through access to effective and efficient dispute resolution mechanisms, the legal protection of human rights and the ability for all people to live in safety and security.

Key Steps in Outcome Management

Harry P. Hatry and Linda M. Lampkin (2003) See Source

<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/key-steps-outcome-management>

‘A nonprofit should have certain characteristics to successfully develop and implement an outcome management process. They include the following: Leadership support. There must be visible support from top management in the organization. Commitment of time and staff resources. Initial development and introduction of the process often requires the time and effort of many staff members. Once the process is in place, the effort required typically decreases, as outcome management becomes part of basic program management. Program stability. Programs that are undergoing major change in mission or personnel are not good candidates for introducing performance measurement. A stable organizational environment is needed. Computer capability. Even if the organization is very small, the capacity to use computers to record data and prepare reports is very desirable. Hardware and software (even if rudimentary) as well as staff with the necessary expertise are needed. ‘

Provocative Question - Here in the UK do we have ‘characteristics to successfully develop and implement an outcome management process’ ?

Summary of Literature - what makes a measurement effective in human services evaluation context such as advice and legal support services:

- **Theory of Change** – what is the change you are looking for, when and how will you get there- enable it to be flexible as things change over time too. A structured description of the characteristics and stages of improvement i.e. to describe what poor, good and great look like. (See Data maturity in references section)
- **Relevant**
- **Realistic**
- **Capable of informing and improving practice**
- **Sustainable**
- **Can enable comparisons and contrasts**
- **Useful**
- **Measures what is measurable** (also Data Maturity is key and not necessarily consistent across the sector in the UK. See References)
- **Measures what is in the service's ability to control •**
- **and for us - low burden and not expensive**

Challenges in the UK – is this being done?

- Set Some Basic Definitions (so all parts of the sector are on the same page)
- Link Outcomes to Outcome Indicators to Strategic Aims and Objectives, Alignment with participating Agency Aims and Objectives will be key – not to set agencies up to fail. This rarely gets consideration in ‘top down’ Government led outcomes frameworks, Link Outcomes to Outcome Indicators to relevant Data Sources – who and what are these sources and are they relevant?
- Select Data Sources and Data Collection Procedures for Each Indicator.
- Training of participating agencies and staff – who is best and most relevant.
- Basic Tasks in Implementing for example who already has a Regular Client Survey Process
- Low Burdensome as sectors already under strain and not currently resourced for this. Do they have the capacity or are they being set up to fail?

Why evaluate and look at outcomes?

- To learn and improve service delivery by checking what works well and why and what is not working so well and why not and how to improve – reflective practice and continuous learning and development.
- To gain an evidence base for practice
- To attract funding based on evidence base
- To share the story more broadly and encourage others to see the benefits, complexities and challenges.
- Establish replicable models of care & build and maintain a collaborative relationship between legal & non-legal to better reach and meet the needs of clients/community.
- Increasing demands of funders and in accountabilities for an evidence-based approach to service delivery
- **To see if we are making progress over time in changing lives/policies and administration of policies by our interventions and how and if not what we might need to do to make the change**
- BUT limited funding of sector for services and for such evaluation

To be able to use the right tools for outcomes measurement and find the right questions time needs to be spent in co-design on:

- Take time to understand the real situation (otherwise set up to fail) i.e. analysis of needs, resources, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and/or power analysis.
- Ensure what is agreed to be evaluated for outcome and ensure agreement about it and boundaries as well as resources to be deployed at local and governance levels.
- Realistic timeframes for outcomes to occur as well as attribution and realistic benchmarking that are within control of the agencies.
- What does a 'good outcome' look like? When and in what circumstances did or does it occur? What is the change or outcomes being sought and what will show you are getting there (Short, Short to medium, Medium to long-term)

Outcomes -Causation?

Impact evaluation, which focuses on understanding the long-term results from interventions (projects, programs, policies, networks and organisations), always includes attention to understanding causes. See Rainbow Framework Better Evaluation

<https://www.betterevaluation.org/frameworks-guides/rainbow-framework/understand-causes>

~~Consider the different types of questions that might be asked about cause and effect:~~

- Did the intervention make a difference?
- For whom, in what situations, and in what ways did the intervention make a difference?
- How much of a difference did the intervention make? E.g. Counterfactual what would have happened without the intervention, alternative explanations? Could there be more than one cause?
- To what extent can a specific impact be attributed to the intervention?
- How did the intervention make a difference? Unpack what this looks like.

Examples from Abroad –key lessons

Selected as an example by Dr Curran of how it can be done if its low burdensome on a strained sector.

Federation of Community Legal Services Australia (Victoria) Pilot and roll out (sector wide legal support services)

Victoria Legal Aid 2022-2030

From Federation of Community Legal Centres- Data Management Project

One of our greatest strengths is the diversity of the services offered ...but this also poses a challenge. Even basic demographic information or service details can be reported in a multitude of ways, and many existing case management systems no longer meet the needs...

In 2021, the Federation took significant steps to help our Community Legal Centre Members improve their systems for collecting and using client and case information. We know how important access to detailed data can be. That's why we're developing strategies for using data more effectively within the Victorian community legal sector.

What's been done elsewhere since the pilot

Note different jurisdictions as a 'mixed model' not like UK neo-liberal 'Judicare model'

Post Pilot Outcomes Frameworks Victoria

- [A 10-Year Plan for Community Legal Centres in Victoria - Federation of Community Legal Centres](#)
- [Data Project - Federation of Community Legal Centres](#)
- [Victoria Legal Aid Outcomes Framework 2020-2030](#)

Different Outcomes Measurement – Some selected approaches

- What approach is best including to systematically synthesise and value and choose the best data method there are heaps so think – e.g. [Cost-benefit analysis, Lessons learnt, Social return on investment???](#)
- ‘Outcome Mapping’
- ‘Outcome Mapping + Equity, Gender, and Social Justice’
- ‘Collaborative Outcomes Reporting’
- ‘Transformative Change In Outcome Mapping’

Discussion Prompts – outcomes can be measured and do not need to be hard but need proper frameworks

- Do you want to know if your service is making a difference?
- What do you think is critical in good outcomes that is within your control?
- Despite the challenges do you want to know if you are effective in improving lives and making a difference and what this looks like?
- Do you think we need to also include in core outcomes taking into account system wide factors that impede improved outcomes that until they are addressed impede change for the communities you help?

References

Better Evaluation (2025) Developed by Jess Dart '[Collaborative Outcomes Reporting](#)'

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Heidi Schaeffer and Sonal Zaveri, 'Outcome Mapping + Equity, Gender, and Social Justice' Better Evaluation (2023) <https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Outcome%20mapping%20%2B%20equity%2C%20gender%2C%20and%20social%20justice.pdf>

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References

[Better Evaluation, Cost-benefit analysis](#)

[Better Evaluation Lessons learnt](#)

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Thank you