MEASURING OUTCOMES IN CHILDREN'S CENTRE FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES : MAKING THE TASK WORK FOR YOU

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In an era dominated by a culture of *outcome theology* how do managers reclaim the concept for policy and practice development ?

O.T. developed from three key (potentially helpful **<u>or</u>** unhelpful sources) :

- Evidence based practice

- Fiscal trade-off between early and late intervention

- Stress on inter-agency provision for children

Reclaiming the concept of outcome for day- to-day service delivery/workforce development ?

- Emphasis in guidance on self-evaluation by OFSTED '*encourage centres to evaluate their performance in line with the centre's review process, including the system for performance monitoring by the local authority …..*
- has to be a cheap/very low cost process
- Should be able to relate to /inform individual practice
- Must be compatible with statutory requirements for data collection
- Must sit in/alongside existing local authority data sets

Challenges in policy context

- The economy and public spending cuts---->targetting service access
- High levels of community stress from poverty& lack of housing
- Danger of stigma and demonization for vulnerable families
- Fragmentation in policy and practice, e.g. introduction of the *Troubled Families Programme*
- Payment by results pilot……wider roll out?
- Rising care population+ emphasis on adoption can deflect from role/ effectiveness of family support services?

Challenges in research /methodology context

- *Whose* study ? *Whose* definition of outcome ?
- Outcome or output?
- Timescale-especially crucial with time-limited intervention
- Tension between family and child level outcomes
- Ethical issues/working in partnership with service users and ensuring their views are captured

Why so important to capture family support outcomes ?

- Family support activity underpins everything else – and especially engagement of families with complex needs……
- Sensitively configured/delivered family support activity can minimise stigma attaching to service use for some families
- Understanding the outcomes achieved empowers managers and front line
- It facilitates joined up working across agencies
- It builds research literacy by demystifying, for staff on the front line , the concept of ‘what works’

The crucial role of interim outcomes ?

- Interim outcomes receive little attention, even though common acknowledgement that not all service outcomes are equally easy to capture
- In context of ‘preventive work’ demonstrably linear solutions are rare – hard to evidence ‘something has been prevented’…….
- Can capture *steady state* /maintenance
- Ensuring healthy child well-being is a journey in which small steps on the way are crucial , and may stop *something worse from* happening but in themselves be “*undramatic”*

A possible approach ?

- In use in a participating borough in the children's centre PBR pilot
- Designed to be worker- friendly and easy to use
- Fits with on-going agency monitoring
- Informs practice development in the short – not long term
- Is *evidence- based* as it incorporates validated research instruments

Four Components

- A scoring tool for recording level of family need at allocation
- A scoring tool for workers to measure outcome at a specified period , including for 12 week slots
- An adapted version of the Parenting Daily Hassles Schedule
- A customised service evaluation before & after evaluation form