Evidencing outcomes, measuring Impact

Professor Chris Pascal
drchrispascal@crec.co.uk

Centre for Research in Early Childhood St Thomas Children Centre Birmingham

Presentation covers:

- Clarifying terminology and requirements
- Identifying what counts as rigorous evidence
- Exploring types of evidence
- Using the evidence wisely

Clarifying terminology

OUTCOMES: developmental progress of children in 5 ECM areas and families on the National Indicator set

IMPACT: difference services have made to these outcomes

Why do we need to evidence impact and outcomes?

- To check we are making progress on achieving appropriate outcomes for our service users
- To reveal whether our work has made a difference
- To meet accountability demands and sustain funding streams (demonstrate value for money which commissioning requires)
- To be able to share more widely what works
- To be a responsible, reflective practitioner/provider

What counts as evidence?

- Quantitative, statistical evidence (monitoring evidence)
- Qualitative, narrative evidence (evaluative evidence)

Both kinds of evidence are important and complement each other in demonstrating impact and outcomes of practice

No one perfect measure or instrument – need a tool box of quantitative and qualitative instruments to reflect the complexity of the work

BUT focus on more narrative evidence which can better inform practice and also generate statistics!

Why rigour matters

- Qualitative or narrative evidence gathering must be a systematic, replicable and rigorous process NOT anecdotal, partial and imprecise
- Need to ensure evidence is trustworthy, authentic and credible which gives confidence to both funders and users of services (as well as valuable feedback to practitioners and providers)
- Accurate, reliable, fine grain information is needed if wise choices are to be made
- Sector needs robust, fine grain, qualitative evidence to complement quantitative, statistical evidence

Types of evaluation

There are many tools or instruments which can assess outcomes and impact of services on families and children:

- Some focus on measuring or rating a child or family against a set of certain behaviours, relationships, beliefs
- Some have pre and post intervention measuring
- Some have control groups and random samples
- Some focus on trying to capturing the 'lived reality' of complex interventions with complex family lives with complex and intermittent service use and complex and longer term outcomes

All of these types have a value as long as they are rigorously executed

A word of caution:

In all types of evaluation we should remember that families do not exist in a vacuum and are affected by all kinds of factors, some of which you know and some you don't.

No tool can ever claim that any one intervention has made a difference, but only that the intervention has been part of a positive change.

Using the evidence

REMEMBER:

Assessing and evaluating outcomes and impact (evidencing practice) in itself will not make things better. Constant assessment and evaluation with no reflection or feed through into service planning can interfere with service delivery and user satisfaction

BUT regular and well managed evaluation which is reflected upon and used to plan for improvement can inform both policy and practice and ensure our families receive the services they really need and that will make a difference to their lives.