Making an Impact: Measuring and encouraging the progress of individuals in voluntary sector youth projects

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1 Introduction

1.1 Northern Rock Foundation aims to tackle disadvantage and improve the quality of life for people living in the North East and Cumbria. As a result, the Foundation is well known for its grant-making to third sector organisations in the fields of social and economic disadvantage and culture.

1.2 Changing Lives is one of three grant programmes run by the Northern Rock Foundation. The largest number of awards funded through the programme has been to support work with disadvantaged young people. Projects take place in a range of settings, sometimes on the street, sometimes in the great outdoors and sometimes in the neighbourhood youth centre.

1.3 It is a condition of every grant that the applicant demonstrates the progress each person makes as a result of the work funded by the Foundation. However, measuring the progress young people make as a result of any intervention is a difficult and complex process, and it is the Foundation's experience that many voluntary sector projects working with young people do not have effective systems in place to achieve this. That places them at a disadvantage when applying not only to the Foundation, but also when seeking grants and contracts from other charitable and public sector bodies because they cannot easily demonstrate the changes that result from their work.

1.4 In August 2009 the Foundation commissioned Dr. Kerry Young of Harrington|Young (organisation development consultants) to undertake a research project to explore the systems for measuring progress that are currently in use by voluntary sector youth work practitioners in the North East and Cumbria and to compare these methods with current best practice. The purpose of this was to research current practice and develop possible models for recording and measuring young people's progress that would be appropriate for the Foundation to promote to its applicants and grant recipients; and also to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of a web-based system of measurement and recording.

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1.5 The initial phase of this work was completed during August to October 2009 and involved:

- Questionnaire survey of voluntary sector youth projects funded under the Changing Lives Programme in the previous 18 months (44 projects in total. See Appendix 1)
- Project visits to seven projects across the North East and Cumbria (see Appendix 2)
- Telephone conversations with managers and practitioners across the North East and Cumbria and other key contributors (see Appendix 3).

1.6 The findings from the questionnaires, project visits and telephone conversations were brought together in an interim report, which addressed the following areas:

- Systems currently in use for recording outcomes and measuring young people's progress
- The benefits of a clear system
- The challenges of systems for recording outcomes and progress
- The key principles that should inform any system for recording outcomes/ measuring progress
- The training and support needed to make any system work
- The advantages and disadvantages of a web-based system.

1.7 The interim report drew on these finding to suggest three models for recording and measuring young people's progress. These models were presented to the project steering group (see Appendix 4) for consideration prior to field testing. The models were:

- Personal Profile
- Personal Development Plans
- Radar Chart.

1.8 This represented Phase 1 of the project.

1.9 Phase 2 of the project involved field testing of the three models in a range of detached and centre-based projects from November 2009 to January 2010. Feedback from the field testing was then used to revise the models and inform the recommendations contained in this final report.

2 Phase 1: Findings

Systems currently in use

2.1 For the most part, systems in use are paper-based using a variety of approaches such as:

- Questionnaires completely by young people (in some instances linked to the ECM outcomes)
- Evaluations completed by young people
- Log books identifying goals, activities and support needed
- Individual action plans/personal development plans/training plans
- Records of achievements and outcomes (recorded and accredited as required by some youth service funders)
- Accredited outcomes include:
  - ASDAN Youth Achievement Awards
  - ASDAN Life Routes
  - Leadership in the Community (LinC)
  - City & Guilds – Learning Power Award
  - Sports Leaders Award
  - AQA (Examples @ 14)
  - John Muir Discovery Award
  - Duke of Edinburgh
  - Mayors Award
  - AALA registered
  - Arts Award
  - OCN
  - NVQ
  - BCU
  - First Aid
  - Food hygiene certificate
  - Health & safety training
  - British Canoe Union – Star Awards
  - British Canoe Union – Paddlepower Awards
  - Community Sports Leadership Awards
  - Practical Housing Units
  - NCFE
  - Northumberland Units Scheme

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- Personal profiles
- Individual progression records (often completed by workers)
- Records of attendance
- Assessment tools – especially involving scaling (e.g. 1–10) on particular areas of personal and social skills. These make use of established tools such as the Rickter scale used by many Connexions services as well as those specifically designed by projects. For example:
  - Helix Arts 'distance travelled' tool lists 11 indicators: self-esteem/ confidence, commitment, negotiation & team work, sharing opinions & listening to others, appropriate behaviour, new skills, making links to external activity, knowledge of cultural sector jobs, engagement, trying new things and attendance.
  - The Fairbridge Self Image Star includes self esteem, communication, managing feelings, getting on with people, understanding social values, accepting different points of view, negotiating, problem solving, planning, and reviewing.
  - The 12 Keyfund skills are: work out what you're good & not so good at, solve problems. Plan your time and energy, cope with stress and tension, negotiate, settle disagreements, search for information and get advice, deal with people in power and authority, evaluate your own performance, communicate, agree your responsibilities & see them through, make decisions.
- In some instances, other assessment tools, such as the CAF (Common Assessment Framework), or those from other agencies (e.g. drug action team), are also used.
- Some workers also use planning and evaluation tools/forms linked to electronic systems such as EYS.

2.2 Some systems are both paper and computer-based, developed either as a bespoke system or linked to systems required by other funders, e.g. Youthbase or the EYS system, as a requirement of funding from some local authority youth services.

2.3 While workers acknowledged the potential benefits of computer-based systems in terms of ready access to information, many also experienced technical difficulties with uploading data, and consequently kept paper-based back up data. Detached workers also reported having to record information twice – once on paper and then inputting data on the computer back in the office where they have access to the system.

2.4 There were also some concerns about security of data with one project mentioning the fact that "to use EYS you need your own password so trainees cannot access it. But with paper they can use the forms for training and planning."

2.5 The benefits of a clear system

These were identified as follows.

Benefits for young people:

- Having access to information – they can see their own development and the stages in that development
- Young people know and have the tools for their own development – and their informed, reasoned decision-making process
- Young people can recognise and value their achievement and progress
- Empowering experience (engagement, achievement with evidence, able to articulate their achievements)
- Reflective process in which they take responsibility for their learning and journey
- There is formality but it opens doors for young people. They are building on their own interests and enthusiasms and learning about things like planning, funding applications, booking venues, transport, negotiating, doing the paperwork etc.

Benefits for practitioners:

- Workers seeing the importance of measuring progress as a central part of their work with young people
- Supports young people's initial engagement and how workers describe their work to them
- Enables workers to develop skills to support young people
- Complements personal relationship skills
- Knowing what youth workers have to deliver
- Raise youth work as a profession and validate their work
- Helps with planning and evaluation
- Able to see progression
- Exchange information with other practitioners
- Professional engagement
- Good evaluation tool.

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Benefits for projects:

- Evidence to provide to funders
- Professionalization of the project
- Access figures and show progression
- Support funding applications
- All workers using the same system provides continuity for young people
- Measure impact and whether we are achieving our goals.

2.6 The challenges of systems for recording outcomes and progress

Whilst recognising the benefits for young people, practitioners and projects, the main challenge for recording individual young people's outcomes and progress appears to be practitioners' understanding of what constitutes an 'outcome' and maintaining a consistent focus on 'progress' as opposed to simply charting 'achievements'.

2.7 Of course, the more formalised the process the easier it is to manage, especially where practitioners work 1-to-1 with individual young people. However, for those practitioners working predominantly with groups in the open access of detached work settings the question of 'formality' is more an issue – the question being how to implement a 'formal' process/system in an informal setting.

2.8 Other challenges identified included:

- Lack of integrated systems to meet the requirements of different funders
- Methods are in place (e.g. assessment, personal profiles, action plans, etc) but they are not consistently revisited and reviewed in order to chart progression
- Processes are time consuming and can be complex
- Measuring young people's progress is conceptually complex and practitioners do not necessarily have the skills to produce 'accurate, intelligent composition'.

2.9 From the detached youth workers' point of view, some are happy to operate with the flexibility of a laptop and dongle while others, for reasons

of security, prefer the 'portability of a piece of paper in my pocket'; and avoidance of the 'glitches on a computer'. In any case, the process of recording outcomes and measuring progress are not seen as having to be different from processes used by building-based workers. After all, not all detached work takes place on a street corner. In bad weather detached workers make use of various centres, community facilities, and mobile provision (buses etc).

2.10 Key principles

The key principles identified through project visits and telephone conversations included:

- The need to agree with young people the outcomes they want to achieve, how, through what activities/action, what support they want/need (from the project/other agencies)
- The importance of the young person's self-assessment – enabling them to take responsibility and recognise their strengths and development needs
- The need for the process to be a reflective process for the young person – helping them to recognise their starting point and journey (including opening pathways to access other support), and achievements.

2.11 Of the 18 questionnaires received, respondents confirmed the principles underpinning the systems currently used by them as follows.

	✔
1. Identify the young person's starting point, describe what happened and provide evidence of the changes/benefits for the young person as a result of your work	17
2. Provide evidence of how a declared objective of the young person was met	16
3. Provide evidence of the young person's progress and development	17
4. Provide evidence from the young person as well as the practitioner	15
5. Encourage practitioners to reflect on and evaluate the outputs, outcomes and quality of their work (+ young person reflective evaluation)	16
6. Provide a mechanism for the organisation to determine the impact of its work and exercise accountability	16

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2.12 This is achieved through the use of assessments, action plans, log books, evaluations as identified at paragraph 2.1 above, as well as practitioners' engagement in review meetings, team meetings and appraisal.

2.13 Questionnaire respondents also report young people's active involvement as including the following.

	✔
1. Identifying their starting point	16
2. Setting clear goals for themselves	15
3. Planning how to achieve those goals	16
4. Evaluating their progress	16
5. Recording what happened/what they did	16
6. Producing evidence of how they benefited/what they gained or learned/how they have changed as a result	15

2.14 Respondents also identified strengths and further key principles as including:

- Simplicity, confidentiality and accountability
- Central involvement of young people in the entire process (process meaningful to young people)
- Mix of objective and subjective information as well as hard and soft outcomes
- Gathering information that can be used to improve rather than just record the service
- Driven by key concept of planning
- An understanding that young people might not want to complete the process.

2.15 Key gaps/challenges included:

- Paperwork overload
- Hand-written work that later has to be typed and inputted
- Time – practitioners and young people
- Young people not wanting to engage in formal process (especially written)
- Computer-based systems requires skilled staff – complex analysis requires skilled IT staff
- Quality and honesty of the information gathered might not be 100% reliable
- Difficult to process 'open ended' questions and forms
- Difficult to capture 'soft outcomes'.

2.16 The training and support needed to make any system work

In addition to basic issues of continuity and coherence, thinking about improvements highlighted issues of training and support – e.g. better induction, consistent reflective practice. Project visits and questionnaire respondents also identified the need for training to address:

- How to be formal in an informal way
- What is a recorded outcome
- How to measure 'soft' outcomes
- How to use software (e.g. EYS) and other IT support
- How to overcome the fact that 'measuring outcomes' is an off-putting term
- Case studies – examples of how to engage in the process/complete the paperwork.

2.17 Support in the form of project administration, a toolkit of icebreakers and opportunities to learn from other organisations were identified, as well as the possibility of a support/development officer at Northern Rock Foundation with an understanding of the voluntary sector, and outcomes recording and reporting.

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2.18 The advantages and disadvantages of a web-based system

Questionnaire respondents identified the advantages of a web-based system as follows:

- Instant information for all to access
- Information accessible at any time
- Quick, easy and cost effective
- Supporting all project participants by being more easily standardised and fed into email systems; young people being able to respond in more familiar/less formal way; fun; support collation and analysis
- Instant analysis of performance data assuming that system is technically able to provide tools and functionality
- Speed of access to information. Collate different types of information easily. Can be shared quickly with others via web/email. Uniformity of input
- Permanent record – no back up needed.

2.19 Disadvantages were identified as:

- Would discriminate against smaller organisations without access to necessary technology
- Problems with internet, computer and software
- Understanding of how to, and remembering when to, input information
- Web-based system has information going outside of the project – confidentiality is a concern
- Concerns about how young people get access
- Computer is less personal and unable to collate interviews/narrative; difficult to collect feedback if computer not available
- Not everyone has internet access or computers
- Some organisations already have systems in place that work well. Any new system needs to integrate with existing systems
- Lack of personal contact
- Still need paper system as typing on computer while talking to young person is not good practice
- Capacity to input information. Software can be a nightmare. Skills of user
- Confidentiality. Data sharing. Misuse use of information
- One size might not fit all.

2.20 Two questionnaire respondents commented:

"Excellent for those organisations with IT equipment. Not so good if organisation already has computer-based system that is requirement of the organisation even if not necessarily produce everything needed for this specific purpose."

"A web-based system would make a common system available to a large number of people and enable good practice to be effectively spread. However, there would be a danger of having too much of a tick box system and thereby miss the richness of the qualitative aspect of evaluation."

2.21 Practitioners at project visits expressed similar views:

- One size does not fit all. Adaptation would be helpful
- Projects have to report to different funders. It would be better to have software on your own system so you can draw what you need to give to different people
- Need to be clear about what Northern Rock Foundation wants projects to report on
- Operating both paper and web-based system provides better back up. You also need to store evidence in a way that is accessible to young people
- For detached workers it's easier to access e-versions of the recording sheets and email completed forms to the office
- Use own Excel database – young people suspicious of record keeping
- Security would be a possible problem/concern
- Learning how to use the system would require training.

3 Phase 1: Conclusions

3.1 The questionnaire survey was sent to the 44 youth projects receiving Changing Lives grants in the 18 months prior to September 2009. Eighteen completed questionnaires were received. This means that 26 projects did not return questionnaires. Possible reasons for this include:

- Projects are satisfied with their own existing systems and did not find it necessary to participate. Given their relationship with Northern Rock Foundation (as a past/current/future funder), it would seem that projects should have been more positively motivated towards contributing
- Projects felt they had nothing to contribute to the survey
- Projects were facing other, more pressing issues (or were no longer in existence)
- Projects did not consider the survey to be of interest or importance.

3.2 Whatever the combination of reasons, the low proportion of returns would indicate that there is a question to be asked about the extent to which voluntary sector youth projects are engaging with the issue of measuring the progress of individual young people. This, when set against the Foundation's experience that many voluntary sector projects working with young people do not have effective systems in place to achieve this, would suggest that the low response is most likely a consequence of lack of interest, lack of activity and/or lack of development of robust systems.

3.3 In addition, while questionnaire and interview respondents reported a wide range of activity, and responded positively to the key principles (para 2.11 & 2.13), it was not always the case that their narrative descriptions of their practice (or standard forms) matched the principles to which they subscribe. So, while for some projects there is some activity, it is not always the 'right' activity (in terms of key principles); and while some mechanisms are in place (e.g. assessment, personal profiles, action plans, etc), they:

- often fail to focus on 'progress' as opposed to simply charting 'achievements'; and
- are not systematically or consistently revisited and reviewed in order to chart progress and progression.

3.4 All of this points to a 'problem' for voluntary youth sector organisations in measuring the impact of their work with individual young people. Given the Foundation's aim to improve the quality of life of individuals; and also the youth work commitment to understanding the outcomes of its work, then it is entirely legitimate for the Foundation to require that grant recipients are able to show evidence of the impact of their work with young people. Indeed, it would be remiss of the Foundation not to do so since it is a critical part of the youth work process for both workers and young people to be able to evaluate interventions and assess what has been learned or gained as a result.

3.5 However, in so doing it will be important to:

- Understand the issues which support and hinder the development of systematic, consistent and robust practice in measuring individual young people's progress; and
- Provide models for implementing such practice which organisations are able to either adopt or refine to meet their own needs and circumstances.

3.6 The Issues

The fundamental theme to have emerged from questionnaires, project visits, and particularly telephone conversations with those in national and regional agencies/organisations is the need for practitioners to understand what recording outcomes and measuring progress is all about – i.e. that recording outcomes and measuring progress is a central part of the youth work process. That it is not about chasing numbers (e.g. BVPIs). It is not an administrative task. It is the answer to the question 'What is youth work and what are we trying to achieve for and with these young people?'.

3.7 Central to this, respondents identified three critical factors:

- Practitioners do not necessarily understand or appreciate the idea of 'outcomes' and 'measurement'. They need to emotionally embrace it. They need to keep it real and meaningful, and believe in the values that underpin it – i.e. putting young people first; flexibility towards young people; professional approaches to planning and evaluation; consideration for staff understanding, skills and development needs.

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- How young people see the process and their learning is crucial. They need to understand its purpose and relevance; they need to understand what they are learning from their experiences; and they need to be able to transfer that learning, for example, in answering the questions: What have you learnt? How do you use this? What difference does it make to you and your community?
- To make the process interesting and fun for young people (and not like school which may be experienced as a turn off), practitioners need to develop greater creativity in methods of recording and reporting (including the use of art, music, drama etc; and multimedia methods).

3.8 However, such an approach to work with young people is highly skilled. Practitioners need to be able to conceptualise and engage in high level thinking and critical reflection; and they need the ability to support young people to do the same. This is not easy. Many practitioners feel under confident, and indeed some practitioners may not yet have the conceptual skills. Some may not even recognise the necessity to acquire them if their idea of youth work is that of a diversionary activity to occupy young people off the streets and out of trouble.

3.9 In addition, having systems for measuring progress is based on the assumption that practitioners are motivated towards doing so. This is not always the case. For example, community initiatives which start from a desire to 'do something for our young people' are motivated by a voluntary spirit that evolves from local people's commitment to their own community. What emerges is a kind of youth work, described by one practitioner as 'based on humanistic values', which evolves informally or 'organically' through workers identifying need via observation, informal conversation and relationships with young people. The work may involve a structured youth work process (i.e. identify needs, plan, deliver, evaluate), but this structure is less visible. Consequently, the work is perceived as having a different starting point and is conceptualised differently by the workers involved.

3.10 Whilst acknowledging the importance of making the process visible, workers (especially in the voluntary and community sector) are not necessarily motivated by an outcomes-based model driven by government policy, nor are they necessarily interested in 'professionalising' youth work. The problem is that without the necessary paperwork (providing visible evidence of planning, critical reflection and evaluation) they are unable to demonstrate the rigour of their work and, importantly, how individual young people benefit from it.

3.11 Also, and this is critical, young people are not supported to understand for themselves what they are learning and the benefits of the process for them and their development. So there are two central issues:

- Being able to demonstrate what young people are gaining/benefiting from workers' interventions; and
- Young people being central to their own process and their engagement in, and understanding of, their own learning, development and achievements.

3.12 Consequently, practitioners need training and development which helps them to:

- Overcome any barriers they have to the idea or terminology of 'recording outcomes' or 'measuring impact'
- Develop the skills of reflection and critical thinking that are essential to supporting young people's personal and social development and the youth work process
- Manage the process simply and realistically, and with honesty and integrity
- Find their balance between flexible engagement with the process and the use of structured tools (e.g. assessment tools, questionnaires, checklists, etc)
- Develop creative approaches to recording outcomes and measuring individual progress
- Understand the importance of the administrative side of the task – i.e. completing the paperwork/providing the evidence.

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3.13 The challenge is therefore how to develop an approach that offers structure without either reducing the process to an administrative task or stifling practitioners' creativity.

3.14 The process also needs to reflect the key principles identified by respondents:

- Young people must be at the centre of their own process. They must be able to:
  - identify their own needs
  - set their own objectives
  - participate in designing activities to meet their objectives
  - engage in processes to recognise their own achievements and development
  - decide 'what next' in terms of their own development
  - contribute to what and how information is kept about them.
- There has to be a clear beginning, middle and end to the process.
- There should be a mixture of objective and subjective information/ hard and soft outcomes.
- The process should be driven by the concept of planning.
- Systems must enable recording of progress and provide a structure for reporting progress.
- Methods and systems for recording progress must be simple and not require a great deal of training.
- Systems must prioritise confidentiality and accountability.
- Information gathered should be used to support continuous improvement and not merely to record the service provided.
- There should be an understanding that young people might not want to complete the process.

3.15 Finally, a web-based system does not appear to be favourably viewed, for whilst there is acknowledgement of the advantages of ready access to performance information, there are also concerns about confidentiality and issues relating to problems with software, the level of IT skills needed and the potential of reduced contact with young people.

4 Phase 2: The Models

4.1 A number of resources already exist to support goal setting and the recording of outcomes. For example:

- *Recording Young People's Progress and Accreditation in Youth Work* (Wendy Flint, 2005, National Youth Agency) provides a useful guide to recorded and accredited outcomes – their definitions and answers to frequently asked questions.
- *Capturing the Evidence* (Hilary Comfort, 2006, National Youth Agency) offers a collection of tools and activities for recognising and recording what young people gain from their involvement in youth work.
- Online toolkits also provide useful resources. For example the South West Regional Youth Work Unit *Recorded Outcomes Toolkit* provides definitions and examples of forms for recording outcomes[1].
- Online systems available on subscription include the *SOUL Record* (Soft Outcomes Universal Learning)[2] – an evaluation system developed collaboratively between Norfolk's voluntary sector and The Research Centre at City College Norwich, which focuses on measuring soft outcomes. For young people these are against the five outcome areas of Every Child Matters. *Blue Salmon*[3] is a highly structured system developed by Lemos & Crane with the support of City Bridge Trust and in association with Thames Reach. Not specifically aimed at young people, this provides a process for participants to identify long-term ambitions and short-term goals, and action plan in relation to three themes of identity, relationships, family & friends.

4.2 There is also work in progress (supported by DCFS) to develop outcomes planning frameworks for organisations – for example, as based on Outcomes-Based Accountability models (see Appendix 5) or Outcomes Modelling (see Appendix 6).

4.3 Work on a *Well-being Questionnaire* is also in progress[4]. The developers, New Philanthropy Capital, hope that the questionnaire will become the 'best and most recognised method for capturing subjective outcomes in the voluntary sector'. The questionnaire is now planned to be available online in 2010. In the meantime, it is available for charities to use on a paid consultancy basis.

1 www.learning-southwest.org.uk/page/Recorded-Outcomes-Toolkit
2 soulrecord.org.uk/soul-record
3 www.bluesalmon.org.uk
4 New Philanthropy Capital (July 2009) *Feelings count: measuring children's subjective well-being for charities and funders*

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4.4 The Well-being Questionnaire is based on 'seven aspects of 11 to 16 year olds' subjective well-being':

- Self-esteem
- Resilience
- Emotional well-being
- Peer relationships
- Family relationships
- Satisfaction with school
- Satisfaction with local community.

4.5 Completed by the young person, the questionnaire includes a collection of questions or statements (currently reported as not more than 50) which the young person rates according to how much he or she agrees or disagrees that the statement reflects his or her life at the moment. Analysis of the responses provides a measurement of how the young person feels (their subjective well-being) before and following an intervention.

4.6 However, in attempting to address the key principles identified at paragraph 3.9, a number of issues become clear.

- It is important for young people to actively participate in identifying their own needs, setting their own goals and acknowledging their own achievements. Therefore, preset criteria are not necessarily helpful. The system must have the flexibility to allow young people to set their own criteria.
- The process should not be merely a process of accountability for the organisation but a process that is integral to the work with young people and the improvement of practice. Therefore, it should be driven by the concept of planning.
- The system needs not only to record outcomes and achievements, but also measure progress over time – so that there is a clear picture of how the young person has changed/what he or she has learned/how he or she has benefited over time, or before and after a particular intervention. Therefore, there must be a clear beginning, middle and end.
- Methods and systems need to be flexible to meet the needs of different work settings, be available at low cost or no cost, and independent of particular resources (e.g. specific software) and time-consuming training.

4.7 A number of examples from the current investigation contribute towards a useful starting point. These include:

- **Chat Shop:** Social Skills Individual Profiling questionnaire which asks young people to indicate the extent to which a number of ECM-linked first person statements are applicable to them. E.g. 'I exercise regularly', 'I can recognise when I am in danger', 'I can complete tasks on time', 'I can control my temper', 'I get on well with my tutors'. This is useful because it illustrates the level of description of knowledge, skills and attitudes which might be identified by a young person as incremental stages towards their own specified goal.
- The **North Benwell Youth Project** Outcomes Star (see Appendix 7) illustrates the idea of incremental stages relating to particular areas of life. This is a similar design to the Fairbridge Self-Image Star which identifies particular skills rather than issues or areas – i.e. communicating, managing feelings, getting on with people, understanding social values, accepting different points of view, negotiating, problem solving, planning, reviewing and self-esteem.
- The outcomes wheel from **Helix Arts** also conveys this idea of 'segments' of personal, social and employment skills.
- The 'skills wheel' used by the **Keyfund Federation** also makes use of the incremental stages idea towards the 12 Keyfund skills.
- **Phoenix Detached Youth Project** *Star of Success* builds on an evaluation tool developed by St Mungo's (homelessness charity). It is based again on the idea of incremental stages towards specified goals (relating to employment, family, health, housing and education) and uses a radar/spider chart approach to recording and measuring progress.

4.8 Drawing on these ideas it was possible to envisage three possible systems for measuring outcomes and progress.

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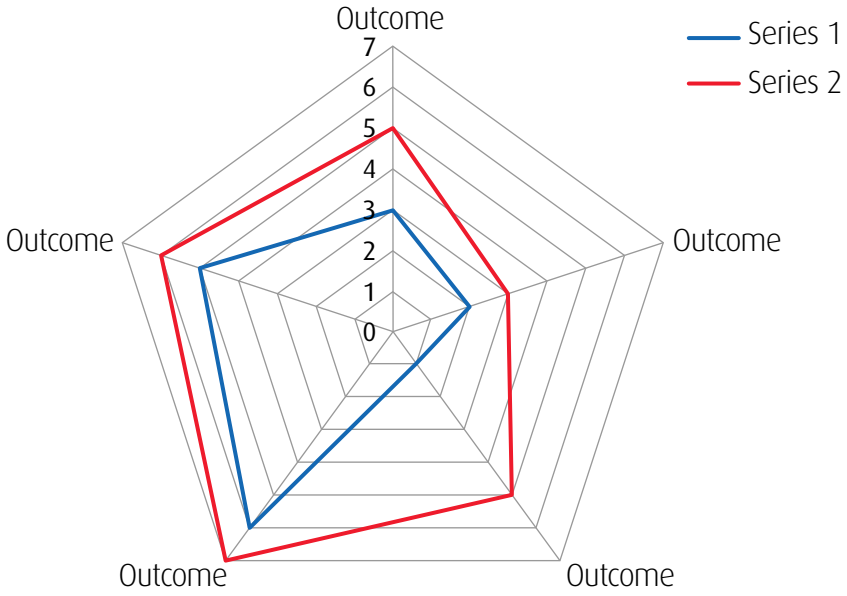
4.9 Radar/Spider Chart

- Young people identify for themselves the particular goals/outcomes they want to achieve. In other words, areas of personal development/skills are not predetermined but identified by young people as a part of the planning process for their group or individual activity/project. These would be the knowledge, skills and attitudes they identify as needing to develop for the successful completion of their project/activity.
- Practitioners work with young people to help them identify incremental stages towards achieving their identified goals/outcomes. These 'incremental stages' would be concrete knowledge, skills or attitudes expressed as SMART objectives in the sense that they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound within the timeframe of the particular activity/project. These could include both 'soft outcomes' (e.g. personal development skills such as confidence and self-esteem) and 'hard outcomes' (e.g. the achievement of accredited awards, changes in behaviour or circumstances).
- Each young person would complete a radar chart at the commencement of a project and again at specified points throughout (e.g. three months, six months) and finally at the end.
- Each individual's collection of radar charts would provide visual evidence of their journey throughout the lifetime of the project.
- Radar charts can be easily produced on A4 or using flip chart paper or on Microsoft Word, providing for flexibility and an easy method for recording and reporting.



4.10 Personal Development Plan

Personal Development Plans are currently used, in different formats, by many projects, a good example of which (mentioned by a number of respondents) is the Personal Development File developed by Tameside Youth Service.

4.11 The basic idea of the format is useful but the content could be further developed by instituting a process whereby young people are supported to identify for themselves (either as individuals or a group) the particular knowledge, skills and attitudes they want to develop – albeit perhaps under a number of broad headings – e.g. understanding who I am; managing my feelings; planning; knowing what is important to me.

4.12 Outcomes-Focused Profile

Individual questionnaires completed at the start and end of projects are also widely used. These include outcome-focused questions to be completed by the young person, supported by a worker, at the commencement of a project or activity, and later used as the basis for ongoing review and evaluation.

4.13 The addition of scaling enables the possibility of visual representation of the extent to which the young person perceives that have changed over time or as a result of the activity/project – i.e. a scaling exercise could enable the young person to rate how much they had changed in respect of goals or targets they had identified, which could then be represented, for example, in the form of a graph.

5 Phase 2: Field Testing

5.1 The three models described above were further developed, following the project steering group meeting, and tested by five organisations.

- Bishop Auckland Community Partnership
- Tow Law Community Association
- Phoenix Detached Youth Project (North Shields)
- The Phoenix Youth Project (Cleator Moor, Cumbria)
- Cumbria Youth Alliance.

5.2 Testing took place between November 2009 and January 2010. The information provided to field testing projects is detailed below along with their feedback.

5.3 Personal Profile

5.3.1 Information

Individual questionnaires completed at the start and end of projects are currently widely used.

The example provided is an outcome-focused questionnaire that a young person, supported by a worker, would complete at the commencement of a project/activity, and then used as the basis for ongoing review and evaluation.

The addition of scaling enables visual representation of the extent to which the young person perceives that they have changed over time or as a result of the project. The results could be plotted and represented in the form of a graph or radar chart.

Objectives/outcomes should identify concrete knowledge, skills or attitudes the young person wants to change, and be SMART in the sense that they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound within the timeframe of the particular activity/project. These could include both 'soft outcomes' (e.g. personal development skills such as confidence and self-esteem) and 'hard outcomes' (e.g. the achievement of accredited awards, changes in behaviour or circumstances).

5.3.2 Feedback

Feedback indicates that the Personal Profile is a useful tool for addressing the key principles identified through this project. Specifically in helping young people to:

- Identify their own needs
- Set their own objectives
- Participate in designing activities to meet their own objectives
- Engage in processes to recognise their own achievements
- Contribute to what and how information is kept about them.

5.3.3 It was also viewed extremely positively in terms of:

- Enabling recognition/recording of objective/subjective and hard/soft outcomes
- Fitting into the planning process when working with young people
- Providing a structure for accountability and reporting (e.g. to funders, management committees, etc)
- How easy it is to use with young people.

5.3.4 The key strengths of the model were identified as:

- Giving young people ownership of the work done with them / engaging young people (in discussion), helping young people feel valued / finding out more about young people / making shared aims / young people seeing their progress and outcomes / young people feeling better about themselves / recognition / young people developing projects / young people helping to plan and contribute to their recording / making young people think about changes they would like to make in their life / allowing them to reflect on and celebrate their achievements
- It is a really useful tool for:
  - Talking to young people to establish relationships with them in first contact
  - Finding out about their needs and aspirations and common ground for motivating key stages
  - Continuing direction so that they get more from the project and activities and feel they are reaching outcomes they want to reach
- Straight-forward and not too wordy (especially helpful for young people with moderate literacy problems)
- Particularly useful for recording soft outcomes which are often hard to measure.

5.3.5 Key weaknesses were identified as:

- The format does not include section for recording ongoing support
- It relies on the confidence of the worker in using the model; and the willingness of the young person to share and participate.

"I don't think there are weaknesses as such. We found that our 13 and 14 year olds in general didn't take it very seriously but our 15 year olds and older did."

5.3.6 It was suggested that the opening questions could be perceived negatively and also that there needed to be a clearer demarcation between start, middle and end to make these more obvious.

5.3.7 The Personal Profile was seen as a very useful 1-to-1 tool which could be used alongside the Radar Chart when working with a group of young people. It was also seen as a useful supervisory tool with young trainee staff to give renewed direction and clarity.

"In using the personal profiles we had varying results, but these have improved the more we have thought about the purpose for them. Their success is dependent on:

- *Who is doing them*
- *What they feel about them*
- *How the young person is able to respond*
- *Practice and confidence.*

In using these with young people it will be important to find ways, through questions, to prompt conversation where answers are closed."

5.3.8 This observation from one respondent highlights the challenges for workers in successfully implementing not only the Personal Profile approach but all approaches based on 'conversations' with young people.

5.4 Personal Development Record

5.4.1 Information

Personal development plans/records are currently used, in different formats, by many projects.

The basic idea of the format (as widely used) is useful but content is generally predetermined and could therefore be developed by instituting a process whereby young people are supported to identify for themselves (either as individuals or a group) the particular knowledge, skills and attitudes they want to develop – albeit perhaps under a number of broad headings – e.g. knowing who I am; managing my feelings; understanding my values; planning; knowing what is important to me. Alternatively, the five Every Child Matters outcomes might be adopted.

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being.

The process should involve the young person working with a worker to complete the Plan–Do sections of the cycle in terms of identifying their goals/targets, and planning activities to achieve their goals/targets. The worker should then support the young person in undertaking the activities and work with them to review their learning/ achievements and consider how to apply these to their everyday life – i.e. complete the Review-Apply sections of the cycle.

Goals should be SMART in the sense that they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and within the timeframe of the particular activity/ project. These could include both 'soft outcomes' (e.g. personal development skills such as confidence and self-esteem) and 'hard outcomes' (e.g. the achievement of accredited awards, changes in behaviour or circumstances).

5.4.2 Feedback

Feedback on the Personal Development Record ranged from relatively positive to extremely positive – essentially because it was felt that the PDR required more explanation to young people because of its conceptual

complexity (potentially causing problems for young people with literacy problems or learning difficulties). Nonetheless, the PDR was still seen as a useful tool for addressing the key principles (para 5.3.2); as well as providing a clear beginning, middle and end, enabling recording of outcomes, fitting into the planning process, and improving accountability (para 5.3.3). The PDR was also considered to be relatively easy to use, although one organisation, concerned about its length, used it to update and improve its own existing personal development plan.

5.4.3 The key strengths were identified as:

- Helping young people to apply knowledge gained to everyday situations and helping them to think about what they are going to do, how and when
- Allowing young people to express their own thoughts and ideas on what they consider to be their needs – allowing own use of experience and how they want to develop.

"The idea of adopting the ECM outcomes is an excellent one and although more prescriptive it helps young people to identify somewhere to star, something to aim for and to identify steps to achieve their goal."

5.4.4 Key weaknesses were identified as:

- Having to explain each section to the young people so they could understand what was being asked of them
- It is not instantly visual (i.e. unlike the Radar Chart).

5.4.5 No specific changes were suggested for workers, but for young people it was thought that there should be some revision to the wording and also that some basic information about the ECM outcomes would be helpful. This information could be provided by the worker.

5.4.6 The Personal Development Record was seen as a useful 1-to-1 tool but it was also thought that it could be used with groups as a format to obtain group consensus, and as a contract and focus for the objectives of the group. The PDR was also seen as being able to be used in conjunction with the Radar Chart to produce an 'instant visual' of progress towards goals and targets.

"As a progressive tool it allows the young people to communicate their ideas about themselves, where they fit in the project and what they would like to accomplish. It helps them to develop their critical-thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills. It allows them to work collaboratively with each other and the youth worker and organise themselves as an individual within that framework – giving them the skills to be a leader not only of their own lives but also with groups."

5.5 Radar Chart

5.5.1 Information

Information was provided relating to:

- What it is
- How to use it
- Youth work context
- Work with groups. (See Appendix 12)

5.5.2 Feedback

The Radar Chart was very positively regarded in terms of addressing the key principles (para 5.3.2); as well as providing clear beginning, middle and end, enabling recording of outcomes, fitting into the planning process, enabling accountability and ease of use (para 5.3.3).

5.5.3 The key strengths were identified as:

- Young people are able to participate in a monitoring and evaluation process that not only meets their needs but which encourages them to continue with progress
- The visual nature means that this is a positive way for young people to see their 'journey'
- Can be used with both individuals and groups
- It is an effective way to illustrate to funders the nature of our work – that it is often a long-term commitment in order to meet young people's goals, and that because we are often working with young people with complex needs, the effect one setback can have on everything else.

5

5.5.4 The key weaknesses were identified as:

- That it cannot be used immediately with a young person if they are in extreme/immediate crisis. In other words, the Radar Chart is most effective as a medium/long-term tool and once a relationship has been established with the young person.

5.5.5 Some respondents who had not actually tested the Radar Chart commented that: *"When piloting the different recording methods we showed young people the different formats and gave them a choice – none chose the Radar Chart."* It was also observed that:

"Some young people were afraid of the Radar Chart because of the language that it used on how to do the chart – e.g. radii, increment, performance category. It seemed too much like a math lesson and some of the young people are dyslexic and some are not confident with this sort of language."

It was therefore suggested that if the Radar Chart was already drawn for the young people and each spoke already labelled, then it would provide a great visual tool. However, it was suggested, the categories would have to be agreed beforehand. This was always the intention, in the sense that the 'instructions' on how to create the Radar Chart were meant for workers and not young people. The idea was that workers would use the information provided to engage in discussion with individuals or groups to help them identify their 'categories' and chart their progress.

5.5.6 The detached project that actually tested the Radar Chart made no suggestions for change as the approach was considered to be easily adapted to meet any individual or group need.

"We have had positive feedback from young people and find it an innovative way to look at their issues and identify the process they need in order to meet their needs. Young people particularly liked the visual idea of being able to see 'how far they have travelled'. We are in the process of widening the number of individuals and groups who are using the system."

5.6 All Models

Feedback on issues relating to all three models was as follows:

Confidentiality:
- Electronic copies kept on computer accessed by workers via password.
- Paper copies kept in locked filing cabinet.

Safeguarding:
- Policy/procedures explained (including why confidentiality might be breached).

Continuous improvement:
- Through regular reviews with the young person looking at what they have achieved and what they want/need to do next to achieve their goals.
- By analysis of the information they have given and provision of a training needs assessment for personal development skills and the achievement of accredited awards
- Through improvement in measuring accredited and soft outcomes of our work and by the provision of statistical information to funders illustrating the nature of our work and milestones achieved with young people, especially those in crisis or extremely marginalised.

Fit with similar processes:
All three models were considered to be able to 'fit' with, and some cases build on, similar processes for recording young people's needs, aspirations and progress currently used by projects without generating duplication or requiring additional work. However, some projects with already established or developing systems may choose to use their own in-house formats.

6 Recommendations

6.1 The remit of this research was to explore the systems for measuring individual progress currently in use by voluntary sector youth work practitioners in the North East and Cumbria, and to compare these methods with current best practice. Current practice was examined and possible models developed for recording and measuring young people's progress, appropriate for the Foundation to promote to its grant applicants and recipients.

6.2 The conclusion of this investigation is that there is an issue for voluntary youth sector organisations in measuring the impact of their work with individual young people. Given the Foundation's aim to improve the quality of life of individuals, and the youth work commitment to understanding the outcomes of its work, then it is entirely legitimate for the Foundation to require that grant recipients are able to show evidence of the impact of their work with young people. Indeed, it would be remiss of the Foundation not to do so since it is a critical part of the youth work process for both workers and young people to be able to evaluate interventions and assess what has be learned or gained as a result.

6.3 In so doing it will be important for the Foundation to:

- Understand the issues which support and hinder the development of systematic, consistent and robust practice in measuring individual young people's progress; and
- Provide models for implementing such practice that organisations can either adopt or refine to meet their own needs and circumstances.

Recommendation 1:

6.4 This report, therefore, recommends that the Foundation supports the implementation of the principles identified in this report through working with partners to:

- Disseminate the report's findings; and
- Promote to grant applicants and recipients the three models developed through the project.

6.5 This should be regarded as an offer, not a requirement, in the sense that projects will be free to use any system they choose, not necessarily one of these three. If they do not have such a system already in place for measuring individual progress, they will be free to adopt (or adapt) one or more of the models provided here. Specifically:

- Personal Profile (Appendix 9)
- Personal Development Record (Appendix 10)
- Radar Chart (Appendix 11).

Recommendation 2:

6.6 To support implementation and broader rollout of the underlying principles, a programme of training and development should be devised by the North East Regional Youth Work Unit in association with Cumbria Youth Alliance that enables practitioners to:

- Overcome any barriers they may have to the idea or terminology of 'recording outcomes' or 'measuring impact'
- Develop the conceptual skills, critical thinking and reflection that are essential to supporting and recording young people's personal and social development and the youth work process
- Manage the process simply and realistically, and with honesty and integrity
- Find a balance between flexible engagement with the process and the use of structured tools (e.g. assessment tools, questionnaires, checklists, etc)
- Develop creative approaches to recording outcomes, and measuring impact and individual progress
- Manage the relative 'formality' of measuring impact/progress within the context of the informal settings in which they work
- Develop skills in measuring impact and progress working with both individual young people and groups
- Understand the importance of the administrative side of the task – i.e. completing the paperwork/providing the evidence.

6

Recommendation 3:

6.7 Developmental support will also be critical to implementation in order to:

- Support projects' processes and procedures (especially in relation to recording outcomes and measuring progress/impact)
- Develop and facilitate opportunities for projects to learn from each other
- Develop resource materials.

6.8 Such support is critical since, as one respondent commented, the successful rollout of the models for measuring impact relies on the confidence of the worker in using the models, and their ability to engage with young people and win their willingness to share and participate.

Recommendation 4:

6.9 Given that a web-based system does not appear to be favourably viewed by respondents to this investigation (para 3.15), further research should be undertaken to investigate how such a system could be developed to both address projects' concerns about confidentiality and issues relating to problems with software, as well as to make best use of technology to promote young people's engagement in systematic and robust approaches to recording and measuring their progress.

Appendix 1: Questionnaires Returned

Cumbria Youth Alliance
Depaul UK
Doorways (Saltburn Christian Projects)
Fairbridge Teesside
Fairbridge Tyne & Wear
Gateshead Citizens Advice Bureau
Gateshead International Business Centre (Media 19)
Gateshead Young Women's Outreach Project
Helix Arts
Kids Kabin
Mobex Network
Northern Learning Trust
Project Northumberland
Sans Street Youth & Community Centre
SHAID Single Homeless Action Initiative
Silx Teen Bar
Streetwise (Newcastle)
The Rothbury & Coquetdale Youth Project

Appendix 2: Projects Visited

Hemlington Detached Youth Project (Middlesbrough)	Patrick Estall John Burns Becky Roberts Andy Clark Garry Robinson Hazel Thomas
Consett Churches Detached Youth Project (Consett)	Trevor Coulson Karen McNeill
Tow Law Community Association (Tow Law)	Jenny Mountain Christine Emerson Jordon Anderson
Young Cumbria (Penrith)	Caroline Bestwick Sharon Clegg
Keyfund Federation (Newcastle)	Hannah Eyres
Phoenix Detached Youth Project (North Shields)	Mike Burgess Sid Scrase Becky Rowe Steve Barrigan
The Chat Shop (Newcastle)	Caroline Emmerson Tim Hutchinson

Appendix 3: Telephone Conversations

Tracy Blandford	Barnard Castle YMCA
John Derisi	North Benwell Youth Project
Susan Elms	Bishop Auckland Community Partnership
Chris Wise	West View Project
Graham Bassett	Cumbria Youth Support Service
Claire Crawte	Federation of Detached Youth Work
Sharallee Turner-Birchall	Young Lancashire
Wendy Flint & Heather Stevens	National Youth Agency
Tessa Hibbert	South West Regional Youth Work Unit
Mary Kenny	North West Regional Youth Work Unit
Rob Hutchinson & Alison Painter	Independent consultants focusing on outcomes-based accountability approaches
Simon Vanden	Pace Change Management

The project was also supported by:	
Liz Harding	North West Regional Youth Work Unit
Leon Mexter	North East Regional Youth Work Unit

6 Appendix 4: Project Steering Group

Mike Burgess	Phoenix Detached Youth Project	Project Manager
Cath Clarke	Cumbria Youth Alliance	Chief Officer
Mike Johnson	Barnardo's North East	Assistant Director of Children's Services
Leon Mexter	Regional Youth Work Unit	Chief Executive
Penny Vowles	Northern Rock Foundation	Programme Manager
Richard Walton	Northern Rock Foundation	Programme Manager
Cullagh Warnock	Northern Rock Foundation	Programme Manager

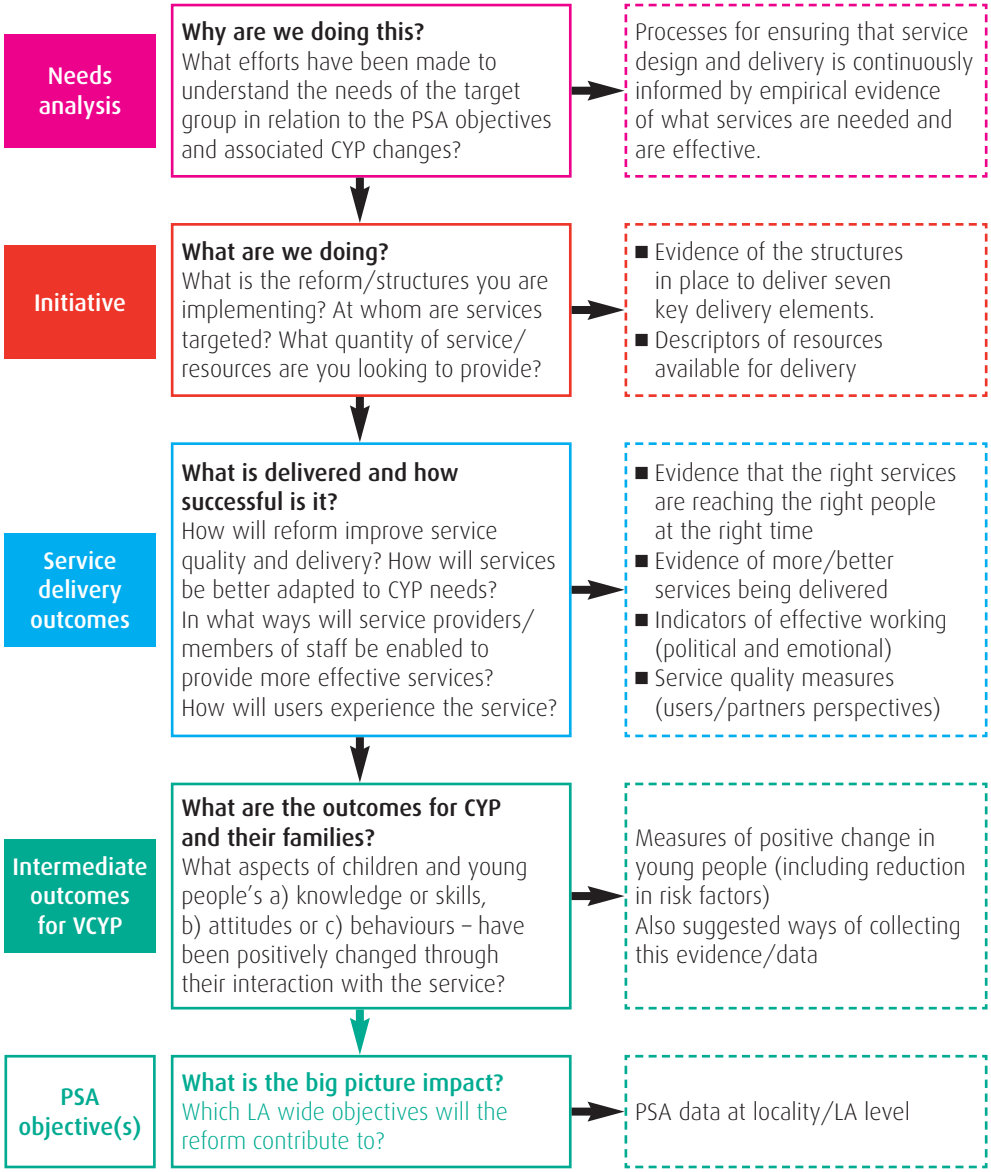
Appendix 5: Outcomes-based Accountability

What we do	How well we do it
■ Activities by type, duration, etc ■ Number of young people participating ■ 1-2-1 ■ Groupwork	**% Common measures – e.g.** ■ % of young people per staff member ■ % of staff trained ■ % staff turnover **% Activity specific measures – e.g.** ■ % young people completing activity ■ % activities meeting established standards ■ % target group(s) reached
Is Anyone Better Off?	
E.g. ■ Number of young people with improved outcomes ■ Number of young people who say the intervention made a difference ■ Number of other stakeholders (e.g. parents/carers/community members) who say the intervention made a difference	Changes: ■ % Skills/Knowledge ■ % Attitudes ■ % Behaviour ■ % Circumstance

Fiscal Policy Studies Institute
www.resultsaccountability.com

Appendix 6: Applying outcomes modelling to the TYS reforms at national and regional level

This approach is based on the Outcomes Planning Tool

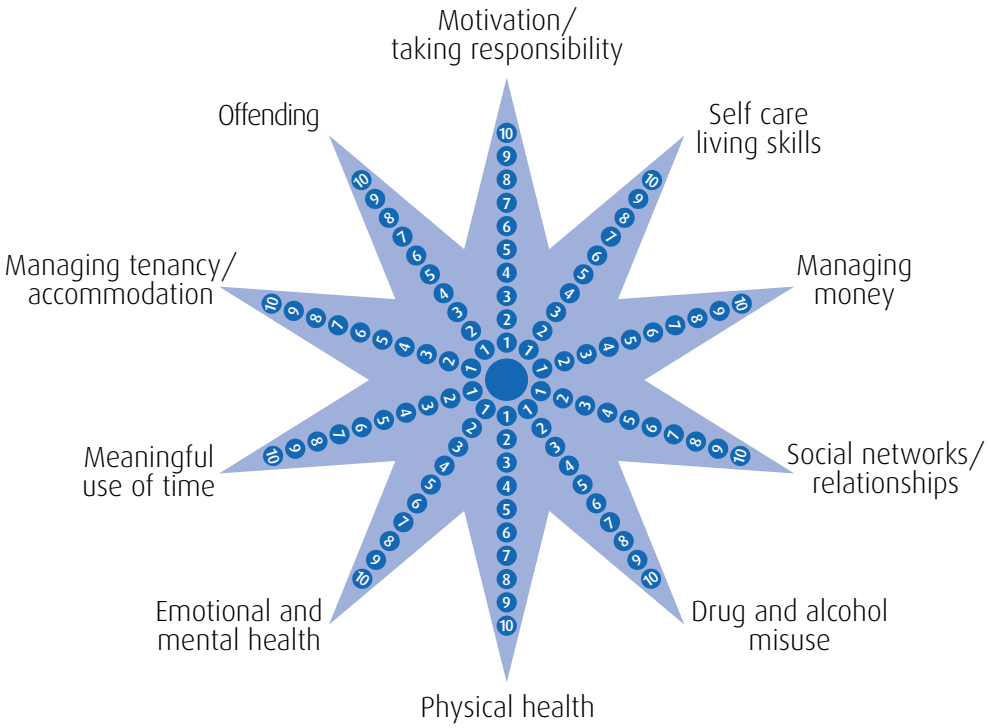


Appendix 7: North Benwell Youth Project – Outcomes Star

Name:

Gender:

Age:

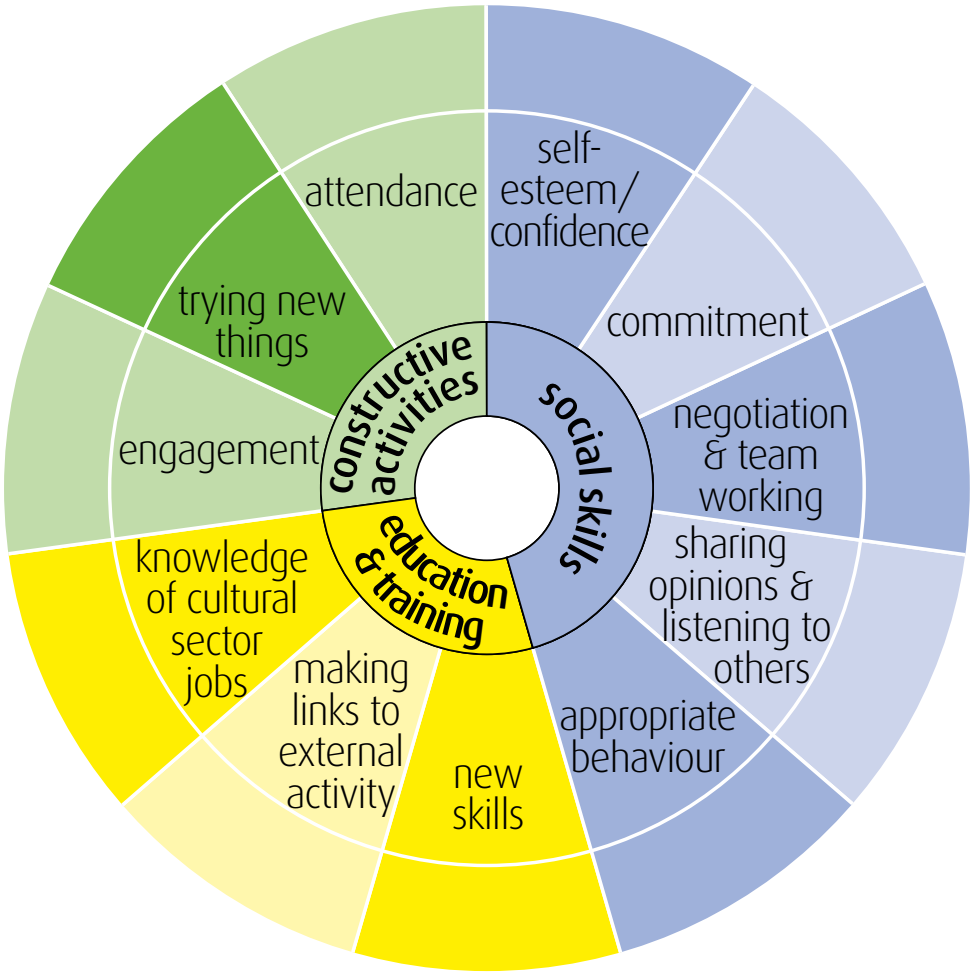


Original star
Date:

1st review
Date:

2nd review
Date:

Appendix 8:
Helix Arts – Outcomes Wheel



Appendix 9: Personal Profile

Name:

Date:

1. What is good about my life at the moment?	
2. What would I like to be different about my life?	
3. What would I like to be different about me?	
4. What could I do to make those differences happen?	
5. What specifically do I want to achieve? (outcomes)	
6. What activities would help me to get there?	
7. What support would help me to get there?	

8. How are the activities making a difference?	
9. How is the support making a difference?	
10. How much are things changing?	Make a list and put a ✔ in the box A little A lot

	1	2	3	4	5

11. How are these changes affecting me?	
12. How are these changes affecting others around me?	
13. What, if anything, should I change in terms of activities or support?	

Date:

14. How much have things changed?	Make a list and put a ✔ in the box A little A lot				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
15. What helped me to change?					
16. What do I want to do next?					

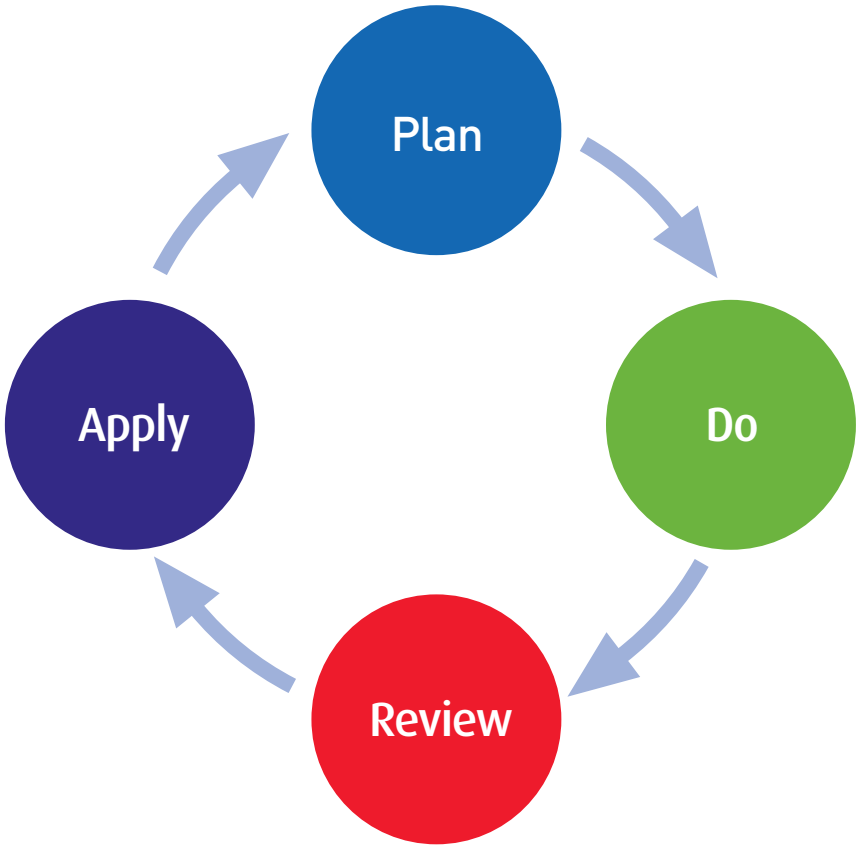
Date:

Signed (Young person)

Signed (Worker)

Appendix 10:
Personal Development Record

Name:



PLAN

What do I want to achieve?

What goals or targets do I want to set for myself?
My list of personal development goals and targets
By when can I achieve my goals and targets?

DO

What (activities) will I do to help me to achieve my goals/targets?
When will I review how I am doing?

Signed (Young person)

Signed (Worker)

Date:

REVIEW

What have I learned or achieved?					
How well am I doing with each goal/target?					
My list of personal development goals and targets	Put a ✔ in the box 1 = Not very well 5 = Very well				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

APPLY

How do I, or could I, apply this learning to my everyday life?
What new goals or targets can I set now? ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Signed (Young person) _____

Signed (Worker) _____

Date: _____

Appendix 11: Radar Chart

Information for Practitioners

What it is:

A radar chart displays the categories of performance and makes visible relative strengths and weaknesses.

How to use it:

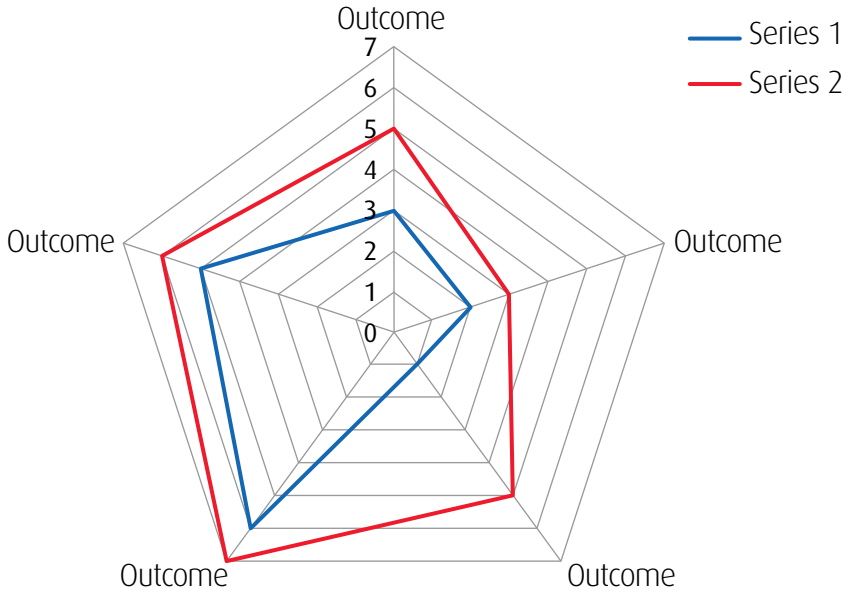
- Create categories. Normally 5–10 categories.
- Standardise performance definitions of both full performance and non-performance in each category so that ratings are performed consistently. Define the scoring range (e.g. 0 to 10 with 10 being full performance).
- Each individual rates each performance category.
- Construct the chart:
  1. Draw a large circle and insert as many spokes or radii as there are performance categories.
  2. Around the perimeter of the circle, label each spoke with the title of a performance category.
  3. Subdivide each spoke into the number of increments established in the rating scale. Label the centre of the circle where spokes join as 0 (no performance) and place the highest rating number (full or exceptional performance) at the end of the spoke at the outer ring. (You may want to draw additional concentric circles linking equal values on each spoke.)
- Plot the ratings.
- For each performance category, plot on the chart the associated rating. Then connect the plotted points on all the spokes. Highlight the enclosed central shape as necessary for ease in viewing.
- Interpret the result. The resulting radar chart will graphically show areas of relative strength and relative weakness, as well as depicting general overall performance.

Youth work context:

- Young people identify for themselves the particular goals/outcomes they want to achieve. That is areas of personal development/skills are not predetermined but identified by young people as a part of the planning process for their group or individual activity/project. These would be the

knowledge, skills and attitudes they identify as needing to develop for the successful completion of their project/activity.

- Practitioners work with young people to help them identify incremental stages towards achieving their identified goals/outcomes. These 'incremental stages' would be concrete knowledge, skills or attitudes expressed as SMART objectives in the sense that they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound within the timeframe of the particular activity/project. These could include both 'soft outcomes' (e.g. personal development skills such as confidence and self-esteem) and 'hard outcomes' (e.g. the achievement of accredited awards, changes in behaviour or circumstances).
- Each young person would complete a radar chart at the commencement of a project and again at specified points throughout (e.g. three months, six months) and finally at the end.
- Each individual's collection of radar charts would provide visual evidence of their journey throughout the lifetime of the project.
- Radar charts can be easily produced on A4 or using flip chart paper or on Microsoft Word (Charts) providing for flexibility and an easy method for recording and reporting.



Groups

A radar chart could also be completed as a group exercise at the commencement of a project, followed by each young person completing an individual chart to show their particular strengths and areas for development in respect of the outcomes identified.

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