



Frontline agencies in partnership

Widening the availability of outcomes measurement tools: Validation of the Outcomes Star for the homelessness sector

Research specification for academic partners - 31 March 2009

Background

Homeless Link is the national membership organisation for frontline homelessness agencies in England. Since June 2008 we have run an Outcomes Programme for the homelessness sector. This Programme includes the widely used Outcomes Star tool and the online Outcomes Star System. For detailed information on these visit the homeless outcomes website at <http://www.homelessoutcomes.org.uk>. Following a successful initial proposal to the Big Lottery Fund, we now have funding available to validate, through research, the effectiveness of the Outcomes Star as a data collection tool. This validation will allow us to encourage further take-up of the tool across the homelessness sector.

The Outcomes Star

Homelessness organisations work with socially excluded people supporting their housing needs, physical and mental health, offending behaviour and a range of other needs. In today's funding climate, organisations have to be increasingly professional and able to demonstrate their strategic importance and show the impact they have on individuals. This can be a challenge in busy and often under funded organisations.

The Outcomes Star is a comprehensive tool for measuring the outcomes of work with homeless people. It was developed by Triangle Consulting, originally for the homelessness charity, St Mungo's, and has subsequently been widely tested and revised with funding from the London Housing Foundation. Homeless Link is now managing the development and dissemination of the Outcomes Star tools and resources and last year republished the Outcomes Star guidance manuals.

The Outcomes Star focuses on ten core areas that have been found to be critical to supporting people in the move away from homelessness. It measures the attitude a client has towards the difficulties they are experiencing in each area and where they are on the journey towards addressing them. For this reason, it is said that it measures 'soft outcomes.'

The Outcomes Star System is a free web tool that allows organisations to create and store Outcomes Star data online. It also allows for reporting on outcomes for individuals, for projects or for the organisation as a whole. Organisations can learn about the effects of what they do and use the data for service improvement and to demonstrate their impact. There are currently 60 organisations signed up and adding data on the Outcomes Star System for 2520 clients.

The aim of this research

The Outcomes Star tool has a high level of practical validity; users state that it is useful in their work and that it demonstrates change in a meaningful way. It is widely used and has been developed through extensive testing across the sector. We are less certain about the validity of the tool in terms of data collection and therefore this will be the focus of our research. Proving its validity in this regard is important in supporting the tool's dissemination to organisations that wish to compare data. We are looking to investigate the consistency of its use between different projects and indeed different workers, and also seek to establish the predictive validity of data collected by the tool by investigating its correlation to hard outcomes.

We are seeking an academic partner with experience in public policy evaluation to assist us with this research.

Key tasks of the research

The research will look at two aspects of data collection, as outlined above, which are:

- The consistency of the tool
- The correlation of the data collected to hard outcomes

The key tasks of our academic partner will be as follows:

1. To agree to support our work
2. To work with us to design the study
3. To assist with development of a detailed research plan
4. To assist with undertaking the research
5. To assist with analysis of the findings of the research

Timetable and reporting

The following timetable has been agreed with the Big Lottery Fund.

Action	Deadline
Business Plan written	31 st March 2009
University partner contacted and agreement in place to support the work	10 th April 2009
Research sample agreed*	30 th April 2009
Organisations contacted to be taking part in the research	13 th May 2009
Research variables agreed with University partner and detailed research plan is in place*	29 th May
1st Interim report to Big Lottery Fund	29th May
Research with organisations is carried out to ascertain the validity of the Outcomes Star*	1 st - 30 th June 2009
Research findings written up*	1 st -23 rd July 2009
2nd Interim report to Big Lottery fund and findings	23rd July 2009
Full dissemination of findings to the sector, to include marketing information on the Outcomes Star tools, system, training and consultancy	27 th July - 16 th August 2009

Final report to Big Lottery Fund on research and extent of dissemination across the homelessness sector
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16 th August 2009

* These areas would require the support of the academic partner

Cost

There is a budget of around £6,000 for this piece of work.

Proposals

If you are interested in this piece of work please contact me for an informal discussion (details below). We will require a short written proposal to be submitted by 10 April 2009. As part of your proposal, please detail your experience of public policy or voluntary sector evaluation.

Your proposal will also need to detail the number of days work you anticipate will be involved, the key tasks you will undertake, timescales for key milestones and the cost for this work.

Contact

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