Better Information: Monitoring Across Networks

A learning review with case studies on the approach and processes in place to collect information from across networks.

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Background

LawWorks is the Solicitors Pro Bono Group, a charity working in England and Wales to connect volunteer lawyers with people in need of legal advice, who are not eligible for legal aid and cannot afford to pay, and with the not-for-profit organisations that support them.

LawWorks develops and supports a number of pro bono programmes, including:

- The LawWorks Clinic Programme supports a network of independent pro bono clinics that provides free initial advice to individuals, predominantly in the area of social welfare law.
- The Not-For-Profits Programme connects small not-for-profit organisations in need of legal support with the skills and expertise of volunteer lawyers, strengthening the capacity of those organisations to deliver their services.
- The Secondary Specialisation project is a pilot programme which trains and supports lawyers to provide in-depth advice and representation in under-resourced areas of social welfare law.
- Legal and advice skills training to give volunteers confidence to deliver pro bono advice.

Under the Clinics Programme, LawWorks supports a growing network of over 220 independent pro bono clinics where volunteer legal professionals give free legal advice to members of the public. Approximately 15% of the clinics are based in Wales, 40% are based in London and 45% are based in the English regions.

LawWorks work with stakeholders to develop new clinics across England and Wales in areas of unmet legal need, giving advice on set-up process and practicalities, and making contacts with existing peer organisations. LawWorks also provides services to clinics that are up and running, including provision of an online presence, regular roundtable events, a training programme and access to resources that support the advice-giving process such as factsheets, templates and up-to-date legal information.

LawWorks gathers monitoring information regularly from the network, focusing on information about the clinics and volunteers, and the work delivered. In addition, LawWorks has trialled an impact assessment process in Wales.

This project

LawWorks is currently reviewing the way it collects and uses monitoring information, with the dual goal of making the overall process smoother and more effective, and of increasing the level of client impact data collected. An independent consultant, Milla Gregor, is delivering the work alongside the LawWorks Clinics team and an advisory group of clinic coordinators.

The work is in three stages, as follows:

1. **Research**
   a. Learning about organisations or networks collecting information in a similar way, who have already established their approach and processes, to see what can be learned from others' models and experiences before making design and implementation decisions for the LawWorks Clinics Network.

   b. A learning review of LawWorks' current monitoring practice to understand strengths, opportunities and potential areas for development.

2. **Development and testing**
   a. Creating adaptations to existing tools, systems and processes, and/ or new tools systems and processes, depending on the decisions made at stage 1.

   b. Testing these new or adapted tools, systems and processes with pilot clinics.

3. **Roll out, training and support**
   a. Reflecting on the pilot findings and make changes where appropriate.

   b. Rolling the new approaches out to more clinics, with training and support from LawWorks, the consultant and peer clinics.

This report summarises the learning about other organisations and networks collecting information in a similar way (1a, above). LawWorks is publishing this report to share our learning and it is hoped that this is helpful information to support any other organisations and networks looking to develop their work in this area. LawWorks is grateful to the organisations and individuals that provided information and gave their time to inform this research.

The following report was written by Milla Gregor on behalf of LawWorks.

Methodology

We reached out to organisations and individuals with experience of setting up and running information collection tools, systems and processes across a network. We focused on those who had a few years' experience where possible.

Interviewees were identified through both LawWorks' and the consultant's professional networks, a review of recent publications in the sector, and an online search. In some cases it was not possible to speak with people from an organisation in which case we rely more heavily on these secondary sources. Interviewees and secondary sources are listed in the Appendix.

Interviews were carried out over the phone and ranged from 25 – 60 minutes with an average duration of 38 minutes. A target of six interviews and organisations was set – there was a great response and in the end 14 interviews were carried out with a total of 12 organisations. In some cases it was possible to speak with someone both from the 'centre' and the 'network' regarding their experiences of the same monitoring system. The interview topic guide is given in the Appendix.

A summary of the models and approaches that this review found being used in practice is given below. Possible implications for LawWorks are set out alongside.

This document contains summarised content, as some interviewees preferred their information to be shared anonymously.

The report is organised into the following sections:

- Culture and attitude to monitoring
- Uses of monitoring information
- Monitoring planning and development
- Information collection
- Information sharing, storage and analysis
- Support to the network

Throughout the report 'delivery monitoring' refers to service delivery and quality information such as number of advice sessions delivered. 'Outcomes monitoring' refers to information concerning changes for service users such as improved knowledge or health.

Learning and key points

Culture and attitude to monitoring

Most organisations with successful systems have taken anything from three to five or even 10 years to develop them. Outcomes approaches in particular have required a great deal of development time and consultation with those who would supply the data, as well as other stakeholders such as service users and funders.

A pattern of development for outcomes tools is as follows:

- Framework development and consultation
- Tool development and consultation
- Pilot, consult, review cycle (repeated 2 – 4 times)
- Pilot processes included data systems and analysis as well as collection

The strongest motivations for data providers are:

- Understanding and buy-in to the bigger picture of what the data will be used for, and the (eventual) benefits to service users, for instance potential policy change, or organisational development and learning.
- Having project-specific data returned to them to support their learning, improvement and fundraising.

Where these motivating factors are not in place, it can be difficult to get good quality data back, particularly in the absence of a 'power relationship' (such as funding, or a centralised hierarchy). Where these motivations are in place, organisations will value and even pay for centralised monitoring support.

KEY POINTS

- **Development takes time – at least two years, up to ten**
- **Consultation is essential – with data gatherers, clients and those who will use the data when it's ready**

Uses of monitoring information

Organisations with longer track-records in this type of monitoring are more able to collate and use their centrally held data. Working with end-users of data such as those supporting projects directly, or campaigning, in order to develop specific information for them, helps the data to be used and not simply written up into a report.

Information providers are motivated by seeing the data used, as above.

KEY POINTS

- **Create short feedback loops between those gathering data and summaries of the results, so that they can see the purpose and share the benefits**

- **Share findings and the ways the data has been used, to show that the data collection process is valued and purposeful**

Monitoring planning and development

Many organisations (and all with outcomes collection processes) had developed and consulted on a monitoring framework prior to tools development. This allowed for:

- Discussion of (and agreement on) monitoring priorities and processes
- Drawing in of existing publications and expertise

KEY POINTS

- **Consultation is essential – with data gatherers, clients and those who will use the data when it’s ready**

- **The more the information collection has been shaped by those who will gather, provide and use it, the more meaningful it will be**

Information collection

For delivery information, some collected no or very little information, for instance an online form containing eight questions. Others (e.g. the funders) collected a great deal of information for accountability and their own reporting.

In some cases a shared system was provided that handled case management, in other cases an excel template was shared. Some simply requested an excel summary to be sent, and had less interest in the way information was collected by network members

For client outcomes, different networks took different approaches to key information collection decisions, for instance:

- Pre and post or retrospective only?
    - For casework, pre and post (at least) was common
    - For one-off advice, retrospective only was more common
    - For networks where both are common, options (that matched one another thereby still enabling data aggregation) were available

- When and how many?
    - Some organisations took a ‘snapshot’ approach, with data collection being focused on a certain month or number of months in the year
    - Others took a quantitative sampling approach, randomising within an overall population to reach a target sample
    - Others took a ‘proportion’ approach, e.g. aiming to gather feedback from 25% of service users
    - Others, recognising that feedback is difficult to get, try to reach all users and accept that response rates are likely to be limited

- Who?
    - People working with clients over time tended to record information either for, or with, clients
    - Some doing retrospective feedback carried this out through telephone interviews managed centrally and independently of the individual deliverers, even outsourcing this work

- Paper or online?
    - There was a mix of paper and online recording of information
    - Paper was used where it had been felt the burden for service providers would be reduced in this way
    - Most using paper were keen to move to an online or electronic solution, such as tablets

KEY POINTS

- **Collect only the most essential information that you are sure will be used**
- **Support those gathering information with accessible templates (e.g. in Excel)**
- **For one-off advice or short casework use a retrospective-only telephone approach**
- **Provide options for longer-term case-work (e.g. before and after data collection as well as retrospective)**
- **Consider outsourcing data collection**
- **Treat data collection as a specialist skill and recruit or hire staff, volunteers or outsourced support accordingly**
- **Provide online or paper feedback as an option**

Information sharing, storage and analysis

For delivery monitoring, organisations either:

- Requested little or no information
- Requested an excel template summary
- Sent an online form
- Provided an integrated case management system

For outcomes data sharing, the options reviewed were:

- Paper forms sent by post and then inputted into excel
- Paper forms inputted into an online form
- Direct use of an online form
- Data tables sent directly
- Use of an integrated case management system

Organisations varied widely in the way they used data. For some, reporting to funders was the focus, while for others there were sophisticated and well-supported processes to make, manage and follow-up on recommendations to end data-users for improving delivery. Some intended to use data mainly for raising their voice in the policy context.

Many prioritised feeding back tailored information to data providers, either because they saw this as part of their service, or in order to improve motivation and thereby data timeliness and quality. The feedback process could include:

- Sending an excel summary
- Providing access to excel with macros to enable people to run their own queries
- Providing an integrated case management system with basic or more involved queries and reports built-in
- Providing options for further analysis as an add-on service
- Visiting data providers and then following up

KEY POINTS

- **Create reports for each type of data user (e.g. local managers, national policy team, operational support team)**
- **Communicate findings little and often, not only a big annual report**
- **Where possible, give access to data to local managers**
- **Where possible, provide analysis and data use training and/ or support**

Support to the network and/ or service users

Most organisations provide high levels of support to those sending data. They tended to find that the more support and listening was offered, the higher the levels of data completeness and quality became.

Forms of support include:

- A dedicated website section with guidance materials, tools and training
- Specialised training
- Regular visits
- Data forums
- Specific contact internally for monitoring queries

KEY POINTS

- **Offer a high level of support to local managers**
- **Listen as implementation goes ahead in local teams, and demonstrate in your actions that you are listening**
- **Create and support local networks around monitoring, even if informally**
- **Create a national monitoring forum online or in person for those with responsibility for gathering and using information**
- **Making monitoring support a core part of the service offered to local teams, on-going**

Case studies

Case Study 1: The Alzheimer's Society

Leading the fight against dementia
Alzheimer's Society

> *'Each year we have listened, tweaked, and altered what we're asking and when'*

Background to the organisation and network

The Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading dementia support and research charity for people living with dementia, their families and carers. A wide range of services are delivered to tens of thousands of service users.

Monitoring information is sent to the central office from 37 localities, all of which are part of the same organisation.

Monitoring development and timeline

The process has developed over about three years. It was initially piloted in six 'evaluation-friendly' localities, 18 the following year, and finally the full group of 37. The support offered to the localities included:

- Face to face training covering:
    - The theory behind and drivers for doing the monitoring
    - Ways of collecting information from people with dementia
    - Recording data, for instance how to take notes effectively from interviews or focus groups

- Follow-up visits to review how data collection and data entry went and to get people's views on how it could be improved.

Collecting information

Local staff collect information from service users on a fixed set of outcomes, usually in face to face meetings. Information is collected retrospectively. Much of the information is qualitative, with some quantitative information being collected, for instance – for each outcome, was this achieved? (answer options: yes, no, don't know, prefer not to answer).

Information can be collected and entered at any time but must meet a minimum requirement at least once per year. The central team set a target of 25% of users in any service and got plenty of responses. Localities fed back that the information burden was too high, so they lowered the minimum requirement.

Staff can collect more data if they would like. Setting a lower level has resulted in a high response rate and reasonable data quality, as well as goodwill from the localities. It may be possible to increase the minimum requirement in the future.

Sharing and storing information

For the first two years, information was shared via an excel spreadsheet. Now, local offices have access to the main organisational database, built in Salesforce. This can manage individual client records.

Information analysis and use

The information comes into the evaluation team. They analyse it thematically, by hand, as it is largely qualitative data. They then share it with other teams including service improvement, business development, fundraising, external affairs and service development.

For the first two years a fairly general national report was produced for external audiences, followed by a more detailed internal report. Now, the team meet with staff to find out what kinds of data they really want, so that it can be more tailored and therefore used more in future.

In addition, localities own the data locally and can do their own analysis and pull off reports. This year, the central team have introduced an action plan so that they can see what use has been made of the data at the local level and what changes have been made as a result, in order to improve data use and accountability further.

Challenges faced

- People ‘on the coal-face’ initially being reluctant to gather some information, for instance feeling ‘I don’t know if I could ask that’ or ‘I’m not sure I could talk about this’
- For people in the later stages of dementia verbal communication often deteriorates, in which case support workers may need to make their best judgement of what the person is communicating
- Getting the outcomes to be appropriate and meaningful for comparison at the national level

Next steps

The central team are looking at different qualitative analysis software options to support their use of the data. They are also working on the reporting flexibility of the database so that more queries and reports can be run without the support of the IT team or external consultants.

Advice to myself, with hindsight…

‘To get more of the operations managers and other key people together at the start and get them to agree what this would look like.’

Top tips

'Literally going out to deliver the training, you just have to put the legwork in.'

'Making sure that you're listening, showing that you've changed things, and keep listening – as you would do in any evaluation work with any group.'

Further information

www.alzheimers.org.uk

Case Study 2: The Childhood Bereavement Network

Childhood
Bereavement
Network

> *'What really helped was that we've taken people with us all the way through, you could absolutely see how children and parents were involved.'*

Background to the organisation and network

The Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN) is the hub for those supporting bereaved children in the UK. It has two part-time staff and is hosted by the National Children's Bureau. It is a membership organisation for organisations and individuals, with about 250 members. Most work in the voluntary sector; some in the NHS. Most are standalone services, with some based in hospices. Varied services are delivered, from group work to individual work, with either individual children or whole families. Membership fees are affordable and include a licence for the outcome questionnaires.

Monitoring development and timeline

The organisation has been working on monitoring and evaluation for nearly 10 years. Some descriptive studies of the sector were carried out in the mid 2000s which found that services were under a high and growing burden of evaluation, with many funders wanting many different reports, and an undue focus on satisfaction over outcomes.

Work then commenced to build a shared outcomes framework, involving consultation with children and young people, parents, practitioners and managers. The tools were developed, tested and piloted and five years later are now complete. They are in the process of being validated through the coordinator's PhD work.

The CBN website has a well-structured dedicated *evaluation area*, covering the purpose of monitoring, the shared outcomes framework, and information about the monitoring development work itself. In addition CBN provide individual support to members starting to use the questionnaires, and recommend training on interviewing, for instance from the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC).

Some attempts have been made to collect information on service type and delivery levels across the network, with limited success. CBN recognise that 'we do not have that kind of relationship with them', and were also anxious about placing an undue burden on members, although they feel that 'activity data would help to make sense of the outcomes data'.

Collecting information

Children and parents both fill in at least two questionnaires – one early in the process, and one at the end. There are a short and a longer version as some services prefer to focus only on outcomes whereas others value a fuller assessment as part of service delivery. There is a balance between gathering outcomes and gathering clinically useful information.

Sharing and storing information

The information is collected on paper and sent to the CBN who input it into Excel. Basic information on services and activity level is also collected via a paper questionnaire at membership renewal.

Most members have some kind of database; relatively few still work using paper and excel. The CBN coordinator understands that most use bespoke databases, for instance those designed by an IT volunteer in Access.

Information analysis and use

Members have found the tool development process useful in their negotiations with funders who might be trying to insist an inappropriate tool is used for their funding. In these cases they have been able to ‘push back’ as an appropriate tool is already in place.

Challenges faced

Two parallel processes can delay progress when developing monitoring systems:

- Reluctance to adopt tools on the basis of specific questions or answer options
- Questioning of the whole idea – why are we capturing this at all and reducing people to tick-boxes?

Next steps

CBN are exploring ways to handle client outcomes data more effectively, which could include developing their own database, or simply data specifications that others then could use to add the fields to their existing system. They would also like to develop an online version of the questionnaire that could be accessed more easily, for instance via a tablet.

Advice to myself, with hindsight…

‘I probably would have tried to develop the questionnaire and technology at the same time.’

Top tips

'Provide suggested wording so you're not saying "sorry, my funder makes me do this, I'm sorry", but, "it's been really helpful finding out more about you and one of the other things that helps us to understand your situation is this questionnaire" – positive framing.'

Further information

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/

Case Study 3: The Law Society of England & Wales

'It used to be about collecting and describing data – now we work with internal sponsors to work through the implications of research findings - "this is relevant to you because of this".'

Background to the organisation and network

The Law Society is the independent professional body for solicitors in England and Wales. They represent and support solicitors, promoting standards and the rule of law, and regulating the profession. There are approximately 133,000 Professional Certificate (PC) Holders split between those in private practice, in-house solicitors, and government. The Law Society is a key funder and partner of LawWorks. The Law Society carries out a range of quantitative and qualitative research throughout a typical year.

Monitoring development and timeline

The Law Society has a long-established practice of gathering information about members (solicitors and firms) and their views. This is done through the registration and renewal process, through relationship managers who meet with members around the country and through large scale telephone surveys carried out on specific topics such as professional indemnity insurance and hours and earnings. In addition, there is an online 'Insights Community', a group of 1,300 members who have agreed to be contacted for research on a regular basis. They respond to short surveys and online-discussions on short-term topical issues.

There have been some attempts to gather information on client outcomes and service quality across the sector but this proved challenging and has not been continued. One significant barrier is the difficulty in securing access to large enough samples of clients with specific issues.

Collecting information

Some qualitative work is carried out in-house with members, for instance a set of in-depth interviews on career progression and barriers. All telephone surveys are conducted by external agencies. The Law Society has a panel of six companies with strengths in different areas. Incentives are not given as the organisation needs to be seen to make best use of members' fees.

Sharing and storing information

Quantitative information is collected from Law Society members by agencies and then sent to the Law Society in the statistical package SPSS. The organisation asks for cleaned data in specific tables with basic statistical tests run, to be submitted.

Information analysis and use

In some cases the agency will carry out the analysis and reporting and in some cases the Law Society prefers to do their own. The research team produces a range of research outputs, from ‘big reports’ to individual data tables to short factsheets.

For these, internal sponsors in other parts of the organisation are involved right from the start on developing questions, and clarifying their areas of interest and how findings will be used. Actual use of and access to research reports is monitored.

Challenges faced

- Building enough time into the research process to create tailored reports for individual audiences and decision-makers – this is a change in approach and culture but is developing well
- Understanding where changes have been made as a result of the insights provided (closing the feedback loop)

Next steps

The Law Society is developing ways of closing the feedback loop, for instance reporting not just research findings but also the impact of those findings, internally.

Top tips

‘Build on what you already know.’

‘Just experiment and try new things, get some thick skins and that’s it!’

Further information

www.lawsociety.org.uk/

Case Study 4: Riding for the Disabled

> *‘Just explaining why we’re doing it, that it’s simple and really for them.’*

Background to the organisation and network

Riding for the Disabled (RDA)’s horses and ponies provide therapy, achievement and enjoyment to people with disabilities all over the UK. 500 volunteer groups provide a wide range of services from riding to driving and show jumping to horse psychotherapy.

RDA groups pay a membership fee to affiliate to the central office although they are all funded and managed independently. The can vary widely in size, focus and range of services delivered.

Monitoring development and timeline

There is an established pattern of sending annual returns, reporting on overall service delivery and number of volunteers (questions are listed in the relevant link, below). In addition, the RDA have developed a client outcomes tool that groups can use, called ‘Tracker’. Tracker’s development was led by their Head of Therapy with extensive consultation; the first pilot was carried out in 2013. Currently, 37 groups are using the outcomes system and a further 61 have registered but are yet to take it up.

Collecting information

Groups collect the information for their annual returns, on their day to day delivery, in a range of ways including paper files and Access. There is no shared or central client database.

Information on Tracker is provided on the website. There is also a flyer explaining the tool – how it works and its purpose – and full guidance notes. Online IT training sessions are available. Use of the Tracker tool is optional at present for existing groups but mandatory for new groups and those applying for RDA grants.

Groups can choose to use the simple quantitative distance travelled tool with some or all clients. They are encouraged to complete it at six-weekly intervals which fits in with school terms. It is completed on paper by instructors at the end of a session and covers six areas (communications, confidence, enjoyment, horsemanship, physical changes and relationships).

Sharing and storing information

Information from Tracker assessments is entered into a specific online database. Clients are given a unique number. So far approximately 500 service users have Tracker records.

Annual returns of basic delivery information are sent via an online form. The questions are listed online so that groups can prepare their information. In addition a list of reasons why the RDA requires this information (and the fact that it is listed in the membership agreement) are set out clearly for members. Data returns guidance is published with clarifications around data specifications and definitions.

Information analysis and use

Once some data has been collected, groups can print out a ‘rosette’ for the client showing their progress, and can also collate basic statistics on overall progress. If they would like to run more sophisticated queries, they can pay for an enhanced version of the system. This information can then be shared with family, carers, schools (Ofsted) and be used as evidence for grants and fundraising to demonstrate the value of riding.

The RDA national office are starting to explore different ways to use the data as that part of the programme is still in its early stages.

Challenges faced

- Some volunteers, particularly older ones, have been put off by the idea that there is an IT system involved
- In some rural areas broadband access is patchy
- As groups are largely volunteer-led they can struggle with time issues

Next steps

Over the next year RDA are planning to roll the system out more fully. In the longer term they may support other charities/organisations to adapt it for their own needs.

Top tips

‘Trying to be their friend, not just someone at head office who says you’ve got to do this!’

‘People don’t like change, that’s been the main feedback.’

Further information

www.rda.org.uk/
www.rda.org.uk/runningyourgroup/tracker/
www.rda.org.uk/runningyourgroup/group-annual-returns-2016/

Copies of the Tracker tool and example reports are also available and can be shared on request.

Case Study 5: SafeLives

> *‘I often hear people say, ‘It’s good to see what the point of it is!’ Caseworkers do a lot of monitoring – but with Insights we’re able to reflect on the positive impact of their work and make recommendations for service improvement.’*

Background to the organisation and network

SafeLives (previously CAADA) is a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse. They provide training, information and support to frontline services as well as carrying out research and policy work.

They can seem unusual, being a sector infrastructure organisation without a federated or membership structure. They are funded by grants and donations from charitable organisations and trusts, and by fees for services such as training and the Leading Lights quality mark. SafeLives also provide a national impact monitoring and benchmarking system, Insights. This is a paid-for service used by 42 services across the UK.

Monitoring development and timeline

SafeLives developed Insights in 2008. It has been through several iterations since then, as people have learned more about what works for services, service users and those using the data centrally. It was conceived as a tool to help services to understand who is accessing their service and identify gaps, to tailor support to meet the needs of their clients, and to evidence the impact of their work on improving clients’ safety and wellbeing. Aggregate data is used to influence public policy and improve the understanding of domestic abuse in the UK.

Insights is designed to support services and service delivery, as well as to generate this data. Three forms are used– intake, when a new case starts, and then the exit and criminal and civil justice forms at the end of a client’s case. Caseworkers use Insights forms to gather information on needs and risks, the service provided and client safety and well-being outcomes.

Collecting information

When organisations start using Insights they have an initial training visit to go through the tools and process. As they start, they are sent a spreadsheet with a set of unique hyperlinks. One link is used per case; it automatically opens all three forms in a web browser.

Workers can either complete the forms online, or on paper, filling in the online form later. Some organisations use it alongside their existing case management system as Insights does not have this functionality. Others are using paper and Excel to manage their workflow, so Insights is the main way they capture the outcomes of their work.

Sharing and storing information

The information is gathered online through Snap Surveys, and then managed and accessed by SafeLives. Individual services are not able to manipulate the data or run reports independently, although they can request their raw data in excel.

Information analysis and use

SafeLives use the collective data to carry out research and make policy statements at the national level, for instance a recent report to the Home Office on unmet need amongst older victims of domestic abuse. Individual organisations also receive a reporting service consisting of quarterly data reports and an annual visit and presentation alongside a fuller narrative report. These reports are detailed and provide information about the organisation’s activity and outcomes, benchmarked against national data and their previous year’s work (if available).

At the visits, points of best practice and areas for development discussed based on SafeLives’ practice expertise and recommendations made by SafeLives’ training team. SafeLives are acting as consultants in this sense, or as an outsourced service improvement department. Service managers value that the information is independently provided and the analysis is verified by experienced researchers.

Challenges faced

- Snap Surveys has restricted presentational capabilities, so for reporting there is an extra step to go through in Excel
- Many services are overstretched and find it hard to carry out monitoring
- Not all services respond to recommendations for changes to their ways of working
- Providing a full reporting service to many organisations is very resource-intensive

Next steps

SafeLives are exploring better uses of technology for Insights, for instance the potential development of a case management system (or links with a case management system) and the ability to enter data on smartphones or tablets. They are also exploring ways to make data available online, so that people have greater access to their own data.

Advice to myself, with hindsight…

‘Where the data collection works really well is where the caseworkers are really engaged… where it doesn’t work well is where they are just being told to fill out the forms, and haven’t been told what the benefits of using Insights are.’

Top tips

‘We’re able to say [to caseworkers], “This many people feel much safer because of the work you’ve done!” - it’s motivating for caseworkers to get that sort of feedback.’

Further information

http://www.safelives.org.uk/
http://www.safelives.org.uk/practice-support/resources-domestic-abuse-and-idva-service-managers/insights

A demonstration Insights report is also available and can be shared on request.

Case Study 6: The Scottish Legal Aid Board

> *‘We try to only capture the things we want to report on – trying to keep to the principle that if we’re not going to use the data, projects shouldn’t be asked to collect it.’*

Background to the organisation and network

The Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB) manages the legal aid system in Scotland. Legal aid allows people who would otherwise not be able to afford it, to get help for their legal problems

As part of this work, SLAB funds approximately 100 advice projects under three main programmes. Project holders include Law Centres, Housing Associations and a wide range of voluntary sector organisations.

Funded projects send monitoring information as part of their grant agreement. The information has been designed to be consistent across a wide range of project and delivery types.

Monitoring development and timeline

The overall service delivery monitoring approach in its current form has been in development since 2009. More recently, SLAB have also introduced a client outcomes data collection process based on the Money Advice Service approach and tools.

Collecting information

Funded projects report back to SLAB quarterly on client needs, services delivered, some immediate or short-term outcomes (such as which ‘recommended course of action’ was offered, or whether someone avoided eviction), and financial information. Projects also send a narrative report and case studies.

Information about each client (without identifying details) and client problems is collected via an Excel spreadsheet developed by the funder. This is mainly a data collection and not a case management tool – many projects will have their own case management system.

In addition, projects record some equalities information and ask for permission for future contact for follow-up evaluation. This information is passed to a third party for telephone fieldwork for programme evaluation. The calls take approximately 20 minutes and no incentive is offered. The raw data is then sent back to SLAB for analysis.

Sharing and storing information

The quarterly reports are sent over email in a mix of Excel and Word documents. They are then combined in Excel by the SLAB Policy and Development team for further analysis and reporting.

Information analysis and use

SLAB uses the information from projects for a range of purposes, including:

- Reporting to their own funders
- Reporting to their Board and the Scottish Government
- To assess achievement against planned programme outcomes
- To see where demand is higher or lower than expected so that funding and strategy can be adjusted accordingly
- To support projects to reflect on their work, particularly with regards to demand, so that more effective plans can be developed

The more recent client feedback work has proved valuable, providing insight into client well-being as well as the more immediate casework outcomes.

Challenges faced

- For some forms of casework such as housing, key outcomes can take place during the case itself and therefore be easier to record. For others such as social security benefits, resolution may take place after the intervention, and clients do not always feed back
- Some organisations are reporting the same data in different forms to different funders which creates an undue burden
- Where there is a lead agency collecting information for a range of partners it can be challenging to harmonise client ID numbers to support effective reporting
- Projects can have different understanding of outcomes and how to record them, making data consistency tricky to maintain until project workers fully understand what is being collected, and why

Next steps

SLAB are continuing to refine the monitoring of client outcome data to encourage good quality reporting. They are also involved in a new project coordinated by Citizens Advice Scotland to create shared definitions and indicators across funders (the Harmonising Indicators Project) and thereby reduce the reporting burden on funded projects.

Advice to myself, with hindsight…

‘Probably getting organisations engaged with what we were looking for at an earlier point.’

Top tips

‘Address questions around data definitions – outcomes can be fluid – you might keep a person in their home, but then they might move on.’

Further information

http://www.slab.org.uk/

The client data collection spreadsheet is also available and can be shared on request.

Case Study 7: Women's Aid

women's aid
until women & children are safe

'A project like this involves a lot of writing by committee – it has to work for everybody and not just for you – that's why it takes so long!'

Background to the organisation and network

Women's Aid is a grassroots federation working together in England to provide services and build a future where domestic violence is not tolerated. Those providing direct services can join as full members, accessing the brand as well as receiving a range of services and support. Women's Aid has over 200 full members.

One of the services offered to members is use of the On Track monitoring system, which improves their ability to evidence the work they do, as well as using data for learning. On Track is a database and set of resources which were developed to enable members to evidence outcomes against the National Outcomes Framework. This was developed jointly with Imkaan, another women's sector infrastructure organisation (see page 34).

Monitoring development and timeline

The On Track system development began in 2011 when Imkaan and Women's Aid took some existing case management forms and discussed how they could be made more universal and outcomes-focused so that they could be shared more widely and collect improved information. Seven sites piloted different parts of these forms.

Detailed feedback from members as well as funders and commissioners enabled the forms' redevelopment and led to a second national pilot in eight sites in 2014-15. This included the use of an existing validated well-being tool (the Warwick-Edinburgh scale). The teams visited pilot sites at 8 week and 12 weeks, gathering in-depth feedback in person from over 60 caseworkers and managers. Alongside, the software to manage the data was being developed and tested. At this point the On Track programme is in full roll-out with 20 members using the system.

Collecting information

The On Track forms are designed to be used at referral, assessment, review and service exit. They relate directly to the software. There are options to use the tools in different ways for short or one-off support, and for fuller casework. The forms have been designed to support the process of casework as well as collect data; feedback from workers has been positive.

Sharing and storing information

Information can be put into the shared case management system (Oasis OT). Licensing arrangements mean that the On Track information cannot be put into other case management systems.

Individual organisations own and can manage their information. Women's Aid can see the national picture with access to anonymous overall data.

Information analysis and use

The software comes with a wide range of built-in reports and members can pay for additional support for specific queries. Now that data is starting to come in, Women's Aid is developing its use of shared information centrally, including national, local and organisation type–specific benchmarking, training based on shared insights, as well as lobbying and campaigning work.

Challenges faced

- A push to make quick progress early on led to some quick early structural decisions which turned out to be unhelpful and cause delays in the longer-term
- The initial tools were too long (approximately 20 questions), the final tools are far shorter

Next steps

Women's Aid is now developing the use of the shared data.

Advice to myself, with hindsight…

'It will take a lot longer than anticipated.'

Top tips

'Take time to assess the right provider, because that's absolutely pivotal.'

Further information

www.womensaid.org.uk/
www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/ontrack/

Copies of the On Track tools and FAQs can be shared on request.

Case Study 8: The Money Advice Service

> *‘Sell the bigger picture to get buy-in – no matter how sophisticated your model, you need good data going in to get good stuff coming out.’*

Background to the organisation and network

The Money Advice Service (MAS) is an independent service, set up by government and funded by a levy on the financial services industry. MAS helps people manage their money through free and impartial advice and information. Some advice is provided directly and some through partnerships with other organisations.

MAS is a key funder of debt advice in the UK. They fund a number of lead organisations, each of which manages a network of other providers with a diverse range of services including face to face, web-chat, email and phone advice. In total MAS funds more than 300 individual organisations across the country.

Monitoring development and timeline

MAS have been developing their approach to monitoring both service delivery and client outcomes over several years. This case study focuses on the collection of monitoring data from their funded debt advice projects.

Service delivery monitoring has evolved gradually as the programme has grown, particularly with the role of the lead organisations developing. On the outcomes side, two major projects have taken place – the development of an evaluation toolkit and a national outcomes survey.

The toolkit was developed over three years, in collaboration with academics and the advice sector, and was published in 2013. The MAS website contains full guidance as well as the outcomes framework, survey and Excel analysis tools that any debt advice provider or funder can use, alongside guidance on relevant topics including client engagement, sampling and data analysis.

The outcomes survey is conducted quarterly by an independent research agency and interviews clients 3-6 months after receiving debt advice, in order to assess its effectiveness in terms of client outcomes. The data is analysed to identify where innovation and development should be focused – for example, to identify which client groups or advice outcomes should be prioritised.

Collecting information

The lead organisations collect monitoring data on service delivery from their networks and then feed it back to MAS. Information is collected during the course of an advice session or piece of casework on the clients' demographic characteristics and needs, the service delivered and immediate outcomes such as which debt management option has been chosen.

Funded agencies do not have to collect longer term feedback on outcomes themselves. Clients are given the option to participate in the outcomes survey referred to above, which is then carried out by an external agency on behalf of the Money Advice Service.

Sharing and storing information

Lead organisations submit their monitoring data (on demographics, needs, service delivered and immediate outcomes) in an Excel document via a secure portal. This is then analysed by MAS.

A data forum of people managing the monitoring meets every quarter to discuss technical issues. In addition, MAS provide as much tailored information back to lead organisations as possible, to support their management and delivery. This takes the form of an Excel document with macros so that organisations can do some of their own data analysis. Each lead organisation also receives a quarterly Power Point report on their performance in the client outcomes survey.

MAS see this as part of their wider support package to debt advice providers, alongside the funding itself, to provide relevant support to lead organisations and enable intelligence to be drawn from the data.

Information analysis and use

MAS use their monitoring data in three main ways:

- To check service quality and adherence to funding agreements
- To direct funding to where it has the greatest effect
- To understand patterns of delivery and gaps in the sector

Challenges faced

Data quality has improved with the data forum's work

Next steps

MAS are exploring ways to use their data to predict future trends and needs for debt advice. As more outcomes data comes through from the feedback surveys it will refine their ability to spot trends and further increase the effectiveness of their funding.

Advice to myself, with hindsight…

‘Communications – building rapport is the way forward.’

Top tips

‘With any kind of data analysis, always look to draw critical insights and identify trends, and share this intelligence with organisations in a way that allows them to make decisions.’

Further information

https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk
https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/corporate/debt-advice-evaluation-toolkit

Case Study 9: Imkaan

imkaan

> *'Women are already so short-changed, at least stuff that is about them should be truly survivor-informed. Anything recorded, particularly outcomes-based, should be meaningful first and foremost for the survivor.'*

Background to the organisation and network

Imkaan is a UK-based, black feminist organisation dedicated to addressing violence against women and girls. As a second-tier, human rights organisation, with national membership, Imkaan represents the expertise and perspectives of frontline specialist women's services that work to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. Imkaan has 37 member organisations who receive a broad range of service development, quality and policy support.

Imkaan members can use a set of monitoring tools (framework, forms, database and guidance) called Synthesis. These were developed in collaboration with another women's organisation, Women's Aid, although now each provides their own form of roll-out in the sector.

Monitoring development and timeline

Synthesis system development began in 2011. Imkaan and Women's Aid reviewed forms and systems being used by their members, as well as gathering feedback on their pros and cons. A framework was developed alongside focus groups of service providers and survivors, to ensure that all the outcomes were true priorities for those at the core of the work – which turned out to be quite different from many funders' priorities.

Once the framework was in place, a set of tools were developed and piloted, followed by another extensive round of consultation. Insight from a previous research project into 180 case files ('Vital Statistics') was also built in. In 2015, Imkaan chose a system provider (Lamplight) to host the outcomes tools. Each member organisation can arrange their own implementation and tailoring of this off-the-shelf online system so that it fits their ways of working while retaining the shared outcomes tools.

Collecting information

Imkaan have developed a Black Feminist approach to data collection – these principles include making sure that all information collected serves the woman as well as others, that she remains in control of her own data, truly understanding the consent she is giving, and that no unnecessary data is collected.

With Synthesis, the majority of information is recorded by case workers following discussions with women, to avoid asking women to fill in forms as far as possible. Women are asked to complete one short outcomes form towards the end of the casework process.

Imkaan provides specialist training on implementing and using Synthesis, which includes ways to ask questions and use forms without adding to a woman's experience of trauma and separation. This includes not asking questions at times when trauma is acute, and building any questioning into an existing process of reflection and learning with each woman – so that it's about her, not just about data collection.

Sharing and storing information

Member organisations can store information collected using the Synthesis approach on paper or Excel, or via the Lamplight system. Individual organisations can manage their own information, and Imkaan prefer not to be able to access anything – instead opting to receive separate reports from members using the same types of data so that they can be aggregated relatively simply, later.

Information analysis and use

Organisations can analyse their information on paper, Excel or through the reports and queries available through Lamplight. As data starts to come in, Imkaan plan to produce a report on women's experiences of services and trends in the sector each year that can be used for education, awareness, policy and lobbying.

Challenges faced

- The biggest barrier for services is time
- A lot of anti-violence work is about building relationships, and a relationship can be changed by asking someone to fill in a form

Next steps

Imkaan are working on rolling the system out more fully, and developing the use of the shared data.

Advice to myself, with hindsight…

'I wish we had acknowledged it was a bigger project and had some more specialist support brought in early on – an evaluation expert at the beginning.'

Top tips

'Be patient, it's going to take ages!'

Further information

http://imkaan.org.uk/

Additional information

Citizens Advice uses a shared outcomes and case management software and tools package called PETRA. This has been developed over the past seven years – since its early days as the CASE system. Its costs are covered by membership fees. It is available online and contains approximately 700 standard outcomes codes, to reflect the wide diversity of issues covered and work delivered. There is very wide take-up of the system, so Citizens Advice can see the pattern of work nationally.

There is also an online process for CABs to submit information on cases that have policy or wider legal implications. In this way such cases are 'fast-tracked' through the monitoring system for campaigning purposes.

In addition, Citizens Advice run their own research into the outcomes of their advice. A short report with details of the methodology can be found *here*. Clients are called back by phone 3-4 months after their advice session. The sample is drawn from all clients seen in a specific month.

Home-Start, a national family support charity, have developed a shared monitoring system called MESH. It uses a set of shared outcomes. Workers and volunteers record a baseline and then follow-ups into a dedicated software system. Home-Start's first policy manifesto was informed by MESH data, focusing on maternal mental health. Their strong data-set is felt to give them the ability to get the attention of policy-makers.

The **Child Outcomes Research Consortium** (CORC) based at the Anna Freud Centre looks particularly at outcomes and client data for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Members pay a fee to submit their data, CORC then analyses it for them. It can be submitted in a range of formats although they insist on a set of data specifications (outlined on their website) and recommend a few preferred databases, some of which are built in Access and free to download.

Guides to the process of developing shared or collaborative approaches to measurement and further information are available through:

Collaboration for Impact

Inspiring Impact

Appendix

External interview topic guide

- Your work and your role
- A brief overview of your monitoring - such as (if relevant) what the system/s is/are called, where/how it is hosted, how information is collected, stored and then used centrally and/ or fed back to the network (including client impact data)
- How (and when) the system was developed or chosen
- What it was like getting people on board and getting the information coming in well
- What works well for you, and for those feeding information in
- Any barriers or challenges for you, and for those providing information
- Good practice you've seen or heard about in similarly structured networks or organisations, and anything I should read
- Any advice you'd give yourself, looking back, when you were getting started with this work

External interviewees

Name	**Organisation**
Eve Blair	Women's Aid
Emma Bayliss	Riding for the Disabled (central)
Lisa Millman	Riding for the Disabled (Hereford)
Anna Williams	SafeLives
Alison Penny	Childhood Bereavement Network
Jane Tooke	Alzheimer's Society (Side by Side)
Cathy Gallagher	Law Centres Network
Raphael Bleakley	Scottish Legal Aid Board
Joanne Cox	Law Society
Camille Kumar	Imkaan
Monsur Ahmed	Money Advice Service
Sarah Little	Money Advice Service

Publications reviewed

FSG Social Impact Advisors (2009) *Breakthroughs in Shared Measurement and Social Impact*.
NPC for Inspiring Impact (2013) *Blueprint for shared measurement.*
NPC for Inspiring Impact (2014) *The future of shared measurement.*
NPC for Inspiring Impact (2016) *Shared measurement: Greater than the sum of its parts.*

Websites reviewed

https://www.alzheimers.org.uk
https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk
http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk
http://www.collaborationforimpact.com
http://www.corc.uk.net
http://www.home-start.org.uk
http://www.inspiringimpact.org
http://www.imkaan.org.uk
http://www.lawsociety.org.uk
https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en
http://www.thinknpc.org
http://www.rda.org.uk
http://www.safelives.org.uk
http://www.slab.org.uk
https://www.womensaid.org.uk