

Distance Travelled

Bringing about change and how to measure it

An interim report

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The Background

The Coalition is a group of voluntary organisations working with disadvantaged and disaffected young people primarily in the inner cities. Like the majority of organisations in the voluntary sector they need to demonstrate the effectiveness of their work to both their internal and external audiences. Progress will have been made towards the longer-term objectives to which the organisation, young person and funding agencies aspire. Yet much of the work stops short of a so-called hard outcome such as taking up a training place or job or changing anti social behaviour.

Demonstrating this progress is important to all concerned. The organisation needs to know whether its work is effective and whether some interventions are more successful than others; the young people deserve to know whether the organisation is working effectively on their behalf; the funders wish to know whether the work they are supporting is effective and value for money.

The Coalition secured funding to carry out a study of the means by which this progress could be measured. The objective of the work being to identify a tool that could measure objectively, and credibly, the “soft outcomes” that are valid measures of the progress young people are making towards the quantifiable outcomes the organisation has agreed with the young person and for which funding is received.

In April 1999 the following terms of reference were agreed for the project: -

to search for an existing instrument or devise a new instrument that is objective, reliable and includes generic measure of progress being made by young people towards quantifiable outcomes. The instrument should be robust yet sufficiently sensitive to capture relatively small changes. The soft outcomes measured should if possible be of intrinsic value to individual young people.

A study of existing instruments revealed a number in use in both voluntary and statutory sectors. However, all had characteristics that made it difficult to see how they could be used by the Coalition in the manner desired. The principal difficulties being that most were either specific measures (such as employability) or were measures of “soft skills” (such as interpersonal skills). There was also a question of cost with the commercially available psychometric instruments.

Given the resources available to the Coalition it was clearly preferable to identify an existing instrument that, perhaps with adaptations, would be considered reasonable, plausible, warranted and useful.

The Basic Technical Requirements

A number of basic technical requirements were identified that an instrument would need to meet.

- Sensitivity - the likelihood of correctly selecting those elements that should be included in contrast to those that might also be selected by the conceptual criteria but not be appropriate.
- Specificity - excluding correctly those elements that do not have the relevant characteristic (i.e. false positives).
- Include multiple variables - multiple sources of information and multiple variables for each source of data reduce the likelihood of corrupting variables.
- Avoid reactive measures - focusing attention on a variable can lead to changes of behaviour.
- Have valid measures.
- Reliability: the same results can be reproduced repeatedly so long as the situation does not change.
- Robust: the instrument must be sufficiently robust to withstand reasonable scrutiny.

The Concept

In order to conduct a search of the appropriate literature a conceptual model (sociological, social psychological, biological or medical) of the young people and their behaviour was required. Such a model needed to take into account the immediate social and emotional environments and the wider social and organisational context of social norms and public attitudes.

The young people with whom the Coalition members work and their circumstances may be considered problematic. Their behaviour, lifestyle and attitudes creating a 'social problem'.

Sociological theories of social problems range from the 'social psychology' perspective that originated in the 19th century from theories formulated from Francis Galton, Cesare Lombroso and others, to 'conflict theory' and 'critical theory'. Nevertheless, the working definition of a social problem is that it exists when:

- A group of people recognises or regards something as wrong
- They are concerned about it
- They urge or take steps to correct it.

From the stakeholders' perspective, too, the term 'social problem' is commonly used and understood in everyday life.

A search of recent literature in the field led to several interesting developments including references to “social health”, which some authors describe in terms of the degree to which people function adequately as members of the community. Writers have hypothesised too that socially healthy persons are more able to cope successfully with day to day challenges arising from performance of major social roles. Are more likely to live in families that are stable, integrated and cohesive, more likely to participate in community activities and more likely to conform to societal norms. In fact

“any condition that causes death or disease, which shortens life-expectancy or deteriorates the quality of life on large scale, may be defined as a social problem”.

The Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG) produced a number of references but the most promising was University of Toronto’s Quality of Life Research Unit. The unit has produced several quality of life profiles in recent years and after discussion with the researcher at the unit it was decided to obtain the adult profile, which had been developed over a five-year period, in the course of developing several quality of life instruments. The model is multidimensional and assumes that quality of life is holistic in nature.

The profile appeared to meet not only the basic technical requirements but also to capture data provided by the individual that was unique to that person and was set in the overall context of their lives. The instrument sought information relating not only to the individual’s view of themselves but also their social environment, value base and degree of autonomy.

Piloting

It was agreed to pilot the quality of life (QOL) profile in order to establish whether the instrument could be understood by young people and whether it measured any change in their circumstances over time. Three organisations (Fairbridge in Greater Manchester, The Halton YMCA Foyer in Runcorn and Tomorrow’s People in Liverpool) were chosen to conduct the pilot and the north-west of England was selected in order to provide a regional context.

The Outcomes

- The pilots provided several valuable results and a number of indicators for future development of the instrument's use.
- Firstly, the instrument demonstrated value as a diagnostic tool enabling organisations' staff to gain valuable information that improved their ability to work with young people.
- The overall QOL scores (expressed quantitatively) did change and changes could be linked to qualitative data such as interventions by the organisation, life events or actions taken by individuals.
- The amount of control a young person has over the important aspects of his or her life proved significant to improvements in their QOL.
- The instrument proved itself to be robust.
- The profile is of intrinsic value to the individuals.
- The instrument has generic value with results from all pilot projects generating data relevant across the organisations.
- A problem, however, was some young people's inability to read the questions owing primarily to very low levels of literacy in a number of cases.
- Some young people found the fact that the instrument is a paper exercise off-putting. They associated it with a test and were concerned which were the "right and wrong" answers.
- The short duration of work undertaken in some cases made the instrument appear too demanding and too detailed.

Conclusion

The pilots demonstrated the instrument meets the terms of reference set for the project.

- It is objective: the instrument captures each individual's view of reality and does so within a framework that is 'presupposition-less'.
- The instrument is reliable: the University of Toronto when developing the instrument calculated internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's α) for Importance, Enjoyment and QOL scores within each domain and sub-domain.
- It is sufficiently robust to detect a respondent's unwillingness to engage properly with the exercise and to identify when answers follow a pattern.

- It demonstrated it is sufficiently sensitive to record relatively small changes in an individual's quality of life.
- The instrument proved its intrinsic value with young people curious to know the results and their implications.
- The instrument worked equally well in all three organisations demonstrating its generic qualities.
- The instrument provides a valuable indication of important changes in a person's circumstances and the impact on the individual.
- Quality control is critical and requires a commitment from the organisations using the instrument to train and support staff in its use and to ensure scores are properly entered and interpreted.

It is proposed, therefore, to continue the project and seek to establish whether, if a young person's quality of life improves, an individual is more likely to achieve agreed objectives such as obtaining employment, training or education or the pursuit of a more socially responsible and inclusive lifestyle.

It will then be possible to say whether an improvement in quality of life leads directly to individuals achieving agreed outcomes and to calibrate what degree of improvement is needed to bring this about.

A larger number of organisations throughout the United Kingdom will need to be involved and a larger number of young people. The work will also need to be conducted over a period of between nine and twelve months and be rigorously monitored and evaluated. Each young person will need to agree with the project a personal work-plan and one or more hard outcomes. The project will use the QOL instrument to create an initial profile of the individual at the outset and will create further profiles over the following 6 to 9 months recording the improvements made. If the hypothesis is correct, at the conclusion of the project young people whose quality of life has improved significantly will have achieved one or more of the hard outcomes agreed at the outset. The profiles will need to be complemented by evidence such as attendance at interviews and other appropriate indicators.

It will then be possible to say whether an improvement in quality of life leads directly to individuals achieving agreed outcomes and to calibrate what degree of improvement is needed to bring this about. In other words that the QOL instrument is a valid measure of "distance travelled".

Distance Travelled Instruments Considered

Wakefield Youth Service, Youthtrain 2000 award

The Rickter Scale

CORE (Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation System)

University of Leeds

The Client Progress Grid

The Employment Service

HARP (Holistic Assessment and Reinsertion Procedure)

Bishop Auckland College

The Skill Evaluation Toolkit

LAWTEC - Lancashire Area West Training & Enterprise Council

The GOAL project

University of Nottingham/NEWLINK Project Ltd

Youth Choices Soft Indicators Pack

John Wheatley College, Strathclyde

The STEPS Programme

The Pacific Institute

Global Gordon's Personal Profile Inventory & Gordon's Surveys of Personal and Interpersonal Values

The Quality of Life Profile

University of Toronto

The Individual Progression System

Off The Streets & Into Work

The Quality of Life Profile

The profile consists of 54 items, six in each of nine sub-domains. The respondent provides importance and Enjoyment ratings along a five-point scale. A profile for each individual is created based on domain and sub-domain scores.

Being Domain

Sub-domains

- Important aspects of physical being including physical health, nutrition, personal hygiene and overall appearance.
- Important aspects of psychological being including self-acceptance, freedom from stress and thinking and acting independently.
- Important aspects of spiritual being including having personal values, personal standards to live by and spiritual beliefs.

Belonging Domain

Sub-domains

- Important aspects of physical belonging including privacy, feelings of safety and the neighbourhood.
- Important aspects of social belonging including relationships with a special person, family members, friends and social groups.
- Important aspects of community belonging including having access to education, employment, social and medical services, financial resources, community places and events.

Becoming Domain

Sub-domains

- Important aspects of practical becoming including work around the home, paid work, going to school, helping others, volunteer activities and seeking out services.
- Important aspects of leisure becoming including engaging in a hobby, taking part in a sport or recreational event or participating in a holiday.
- Important aspects of growth becoming including learning new things, improving or maintaining physical skills and relationships with others, trying out new ideas and adjusting to change.

The extent of a person's quality of life in the domains of Being, Belonging and Becoming and their sub-domains is determined by two factors: importance and enjoyment. Thus quality of life consists of the relative importance or meaning attached to each particular dimension. In this way quality of life is adapted to the lives of all humans, at any time, and from their individual perspectives. Which is critical when one considers the key characteristics of the young people concerned.

The QOL profile provides not just an overall score, that is expressed quantitatively, but also provides a diagnosis of where improvements may be made to a person's quality of life and where obstacles may exist which prevent the individual improving their QOL. Equally, the diagnostic properties enable the organisation to see not only where it should focus its support for the individual but also where the young person may need to be challenged if their behaviour or aspirations are obstacles. An overall QOL score of 4.5 or higher would be considered excellent and a score of 1.5 to 4.5 very acceptable. Scores of -1.5 to +1.5 indicate an adequate situation and -1.5 to -4.5 problematic. A score of less than -4.5 would be very problematic. The control and opportunities scores provide an important context in which to interpret QOL scores. Providing an indication of the opportunities each person has for change and the control they have over important aspects of their life

Profile Summary Sheet

Being

Quality of Life

	Imp	Sat	Score	Con	Opps
Physical Being					
1. My appearance - how I look	_____	_____	_____		
2. My exercising and being fit	_____	_____	_____		
3. My hygiene - caring for myself	_____	_____	_____		
4. My nutrition and the food I eat	_____	_____	_____		
5. My physical health	_____	_____	_____		
6. My sex life	_____	_____	_____		
	Physical being score		_____	_____	_____
				#1 from control score	#1 from opps score
Psychological Being					
7. Accepting the way I am	_____	_____	_____		
8. Being free of worry and stress	_____	_____	_____		
9. How I feel about myself	_____	_____	_____		
10. My mental health	_____	_____	_____		
11. The mood I am usually in	_____	_____	_____		
12. Thinking and acting independently	_____	_____	_____		
	Psychological being score		_____	_____	_____
				#2 from control score	#2 from opps score
Spiritual Being					
13. Celebrating special events in my life	_____	_____	_____		
14. Feeling that life has meaning	_____	_____	_____		
15. Having hope for the future	_____	_____	_____		
16. Having religious or spiritual beliefs	_____	_____	_____		
17. Helping others in need	_____	_____	_____		
18. My own ideas of right and wrong	_____	_____	_____		
	Spiritual being score		_____	_____	_____
				#3 from control score	#3 from opps score
	Being Score		_____		

Profile Summary Sheet

Belonging

Quality of Life

	Imp	Sat	Score	Con	Opps
Physical Belonging					
19. Feeling safe where I live	_____	_____	_____		
20. Having a space for privacy	_____	_____	_____		
21. Having my own personal things	_____	_____	_____		
22. The house or apartment I live in	_____	_____	_____		
23. What neighbourhood I live in	_____	_____	_____		
24. What part of the country I live in	_____	_____	_____		
Physical belonging score			_____	_____	_____
				#4 from control score	#4 from opps score
Social Belonging					
25. Being close to people in my family	_____	_____	_____		
26. Having a spouse or special person	_____	_____	_____		
27. Having friends	_____	_____	_____		
28. Speaking with acquaintances	_____	_____	_____		
29. Socialising within small groups	_____	_____	_____		
30. Part of a larger social group	_____	_____	_____		
Social belonging score			_____	_____	_____
				#5 from control score	#5 from opps score
Community Belonging					
31. Going to places in my community	_____	_____	_____		
32. Attending events in my community	_____	_____	_____		
33. Having access to education	_____	_____	_____		
34. Having access to meaningful work	_____	_____	_____		
35. Having access to professional services	_____	_____	_____		
36. Having my own money to spend	_____	_____	_____		
Community belonging score			_____	_____	_____
				#6 from control score	#6 from opps score
Belonging Score			_____		

Profile Summary Sheet

Becoming

Quality of Life

	Imp	Sat	Score	Con	Opps
Practical Becoming					
37. Doing work around my home	_____	_____	_____		
38. Helping other people do things	_____	_____	_____		
39. Going places (errands, etc)	_____	_____	_____		
40. Looking after myself	_____	_____	_____		
41. Looking after other people and pets	_____	_____	_____		
42. Working at a job or attending school	_____	_____	_____		
	Practical becoming score		_____	_____	_____
				#4 from control score	#4 from opps score
Leisure Becoming					
43. Attending public entertainment	_____	_____	_____		
44. Doing casual leisure activities	_____	_____	_____		
45. Sports and recreation activities	_____	_____	_____		
46. Having hobbies	_____	_____	_____		
47. Taking vacations and holidays	_____	_____	_____		
48. Visiting and socialising	_____	_____	_____		
	Leisure becoming score		_____	_____	_____
				#5 from control score	#5 from opps score
Growth Becoming					
49. Coping with changes in life	_____	_____	_____		
50. Improving my physical skills	_____	_____	_____		
51. Learning about new things	_____	_____	_____		
52. Resolving conflicts with others	_____	_____	_____		
53. Solving my problems	_____	_____	_____		
54. Trying out new thing	_____	_____	_____		
	Growth becoming score		_____	_____	_____
				#6 from control score	#6 from opps score
	Becoming Score		_____		