

## Introducing Indicators

Proof needs measurement, which can come in the form of indicators. The temptation is always to measure what is measurable, rather than what is important. Measures tend to cover physical change and activities done. It is often harder to measure the effects on those who have taken part. But unless we know how people have been impacted - felt they have benefited or had an improved quality of life they will not engage with the project and the project will not necessarily get stakeholder support.

There are various types of indicators:

- descriptive - measure the state of something
- performance - how well/badly something is doing and probably this will be in relation to a goal
- efficiency - the costs of achieving certain results
- input indicator - what is going into the project
- outcome indicator - the impact of something on e.g. quality of life

Indicators are tools that measure, simplify and communicate.

A key question is who choose the indicators. Can participants and other stakeholders be involved in brainstorming indicators? This is a way to discover more about what is important to different stakeholders. If data collection is done by a range of people this will also generate more buy-in.

Indicators to be helpful should be: (AIMS)

- Action focused - what are you going to do with the data once you have it? Performance indicators are about changes in behaviors etc.
- Important - what are the key features that the project is addressing?
- Measurable - the data for the indicator has to be collectable. Consider resources, invasiveness and what might serve as proxies
- Simple - how does the indicator capture the problem?

## **Indicators in action**

### **1. Indicators and program design**

Using indicators as part of program development can be done in a couple of ways. The AAI professional decides what is important about the program for it to be effective, appropriate and efficient for clients. These are **performance indicators** which will help show the value of the program and where there may need to be program changes. Data may be derived from measures such as client retention; punctuality and completion of sessions; extent of gains of therapeutic or intervention goals; client numbers, client reporting session satisfaction etc. Some of this material will be easy to collect, for example, if the client shows up and stays, this will be part of some type of register or roll. Asking about satisfaction will be a self-completion survey.

Without a control group this will only tell you about these clients not necessarily about the impact of introducing animals.

**Outcome indicators** focus on the impacts on the clients.

Possible tools for collecting outcome indicator data could include:

- Standardized psychological instruments showing any change in client's behavior or inner state
- Observations documenting specific behaviors of the client, for example, greater confidence in approaching and working with an animal, taking a more outward facing interest in the animal and his/her state of well-being
- Surveys and other tools collecting subjective, but specific client impact reports, including the impact of the animal/s on the client's session experience. These will be in-house developed tools and so will not have psychometric properties of standardized tests, but they will provide both quantifiable data e.g Likert scale/Chuff Charts and codable data which can be quantified from the material in the open responses
- Therapists'/professionals' observations on client and animal in the session session. These can include the helpfulness of the animal/s in relation to client engagement, learning, raising and articulation of concerns etc. These type of observations will help make some determination as to the value to the client of the animal.

Depending on shape and scope of the evaluation a range of less formal tools for soliciting outcomes can be used. E.g vlogs, photo solicitations and narratives, walkabouts, testimonials and letters to an animal about the session. This type of data

would likely provide more about the how, as well as the ways, the participant was impacted.

## **2. Indicators and Evaluation**

Ideally the work on evaluation would have been concurrent with developing a program. The use of a theory of change would have flagged the activities that need to be undertaken and the criteria of what needs to be achieved in each activity in order to proceed to the next stage. A planned intervention would therefore provide indicators that would inform the evaluation.

The evaluation would be interested in the extent to which the assumptions about each stage of the intervention had been reached. The evaluation would be interested in the extent of the planned outcomes, by any unintended outcomes that could be both negative and positive. The evaluation would be interested in the extent to which outcomes did address the posed target problem. These would all be under the heading of outcome indicators. Data could be captured from participants, those managing and running the intervention and stakeholders who were a little further away from the immediate delivery and management of the intervention. For example, parents, teachers, social services, care staff etc. to assess the impact of the intervention on the client's well-being, behaviors etc.

The evaluation would be interested in calculations about resources which went into the intervention (input indicators) and how the outcomes that had been realized be balanced against these.

It is likely that the evaluation would move beyond reviewing and assessing indicators and would be interested in the context in which the intervention takes place and the various views of stakeholders.