Outcomes that Matter® for Children & Young People in Out-of-Home Care

by
Leon C. Fulcher and Thom Garfat

Introduction

Outcomes measurement has become a contemporary requirement for non-profit, government and private sector child, youth and family service providers throughout North America (Stuart, 2008) as well as in the United Kingdom, Ireland and elsewhere. An important 21st Century policy imperative that has driven out-of-home care in the UK and Ireland, Canada and the USA, Australia and New Zealand has been an expectation that service providers will demonstrate accountability and achieve outcomes associated with specific funding and policy targets. Cost-effectiveness, care planning, service evaluations and fiscal audits are now commonplace, with multiple efforts geared towards improving out-of-home care, education and treatment outcomes.

Care Outputs and Care Outcomes

This Outcomes Agenda now requires that human services achieve targeted outcomes with clients, customers or end-users. However, care outputs are frequently confused with care outcomes. In their survey of Welfare and Family Service Agencies across Canada, Ferris-Manning and Zandstra (2003) found that

“only 50% have systematic processes for integrating results of their own outcomes evaluation and needs assessments into practice, and only 30% have processes for integrating the results of external research into practice… 39% do not have any process” (Stevenson & Balla, 2003, p.9).

Care outputs are produced by service organisations which are operated by governments or through purchase of service contracts with corporate parents who still retain a duty of care mandate by the judiciary for each child or young person in
out-of-home care (Fulcher, 2002). Corporate parents rarely have direct contact with children and young people in out-of-home care, although some attempts are made to achieve such contact through ‘youth in care’ forums.

By contrast, care outcomes involve developmental achievements that are shaped through relationships with children and young people in out-of-home care during important periods in their lives. This distinction between care outputs and care outcomes is readily illustrated on a daily basis with pre-school children attending child care centres. A care output may require that all children in the centre receive lunch in a timely, nutritional and age-appropriate manner. A care outcome will focus in the same setting on whether this particular child can feed him or herself using a spoon (Fulcher & Garfat, 2008).

Developmental Care Outcomes

Policy outcomes are commonly pursued by politicians and civil servants who represent or report to government bodies seeking annual assurances that public funding is achieving targeted goals and policy objectives. As distinct from policy outcomes, service outcomes are targeted by health, education and welfare professionals – social workers, psychologists, teachers, doctors, nurses and their managers – seeking to show whether particular services are achieving targeted objectives. Fewer attempts are made, however, to monitor developmental care outcomes – outcomes achieved by children and young people in out-of-home care. Increasingly, service organisations are expected to report systematically on developmental care outcomes as a requirement of legislation. These developmental care outcomes are the outcomes that really matter! While tacit recognition is given to the need to monitor and report on developmental care outcomes, most contemporary efforts still tend towards a collection of anecdotal case studies or are
tagged on to service evaluations. In what follows, professionals are introduced to the *Outcomes that Matter*© Recording Instrument which can be used with young people and their families to monitor weekly achievements in out-of-home care. The Recording Instrument is organised around the Circle of Courage development needs of Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1990) and draws from research carried out by the Search Institute with 3+ million young people and then adapted with permission for use with children and young people in out-of-home care (Fulcher, McGladdery & Vicary, 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes that Matter for Children &amp; Young People in Out-of-Home Care ©</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Young Person:</strong> ____________________________________</td>
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<td><strong>DOB:</strong> _____________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Carer Recorder:</strong> ___________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Date of Recording:</strong> Week Ending ___________________________</td>
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**Highlight of the Week:** (Reflecting back on the week, what stands out for you or the young person?)

**Critical Incidents or Significant Events** (Note any that have occurred)

**Any Contact with Birth Family Members and/or Significant Others:** (Who and When?)

**How has the young person participated with completion of this recording?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participated Fully</th>
<th>An Active Interest</th>
<th>Some Participation</th>
<th>Declined Participation</th>
<th>Not Possible</th>
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Read each statement then reflect back over the past week and write 2-3 lines about a particular episode where this outcome was or was not being achieved. Outcomes around the young person are identified with (E) while Internalised Outcomes are identified with (I). Once a comment or note has been entered, then place an ‘X’ beside one of the 6 boxes that reports what you and the young person (if possible) agree happened every day last week (Achieving); most days (Mostly Achieving); about half the time (Some Achieving); not very often (A Little Achieving); or it just wasn’t happening (Not Achieving). Use Not Recorded if there was a reason why that outcome was not recorded this week, and then give the reason.

BELONGING

(E) Safety: __________________ has been safe in a variety of ways where s/he lives, at school and in the local neighbourhood.

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<tr>
<th>Achieving</th>
<th>Mostly Achieving</th>
<th>Some Achieving</th>
<th>A Little Achieving</th>
<th>Not Achieving</th>
<th>Not Recorded</th>
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Each of the Outcomes statements which follow are addressed in a similar fashion to the one above. First the designated Carer provides a 2-3 line narrative that offers a word picture which captures an episode in the daily life approach to caring. This is followed by a reflective judgement using the Likert (Achieving) Scale provided, indicating how often during the past 7 days something may have been noted with each designated outcome. There are 10 External Outcomes designated with (E) and 10 Internal Outcomes that are designated with (I).

(E) Positive Communication: __________________ listened to and talked with his/her carers, sought help, advice, guidance and/or representation as appropriate.

(E) Caring Relationships: __________________ was offered, received and accepted support from birth family members, personal carers and other significant adults.

(E) Carer Support: __________________ received personal time, physical care, encouragement and demonstrated a sense of belonging with others in the living environment.

(E) Boundaries for Daily Living: __________________ received consistent supervision and his/her whereabouts were monitored according to reasonable behaviour guidelines.
MASTERY

(I) **Actively Engaged in Learning**: ___________________________ got personally involved in learning activities at school, in work experiences or in other activities which further developed her/his life skills.

(E) **Supportive Environments**: Relationships with teachers, activity leaders and peers offered __________________________ security, encouragement and nurturing that stimulated his/her learning and achievements.

(E) **Carer’s Involvement in Learning**: Carers actively supported ________________________ to succeed in school, in work experiences and with other learning opportunities at home or elsewhere.

(I) **Motivation to Achieve**: ________________________ did his/her best to learn and to master new life skills or to realise personal goals.

(I) **Making Use of Learning Opportunities and Homework**: ______________________ participated in learning activities at home or elsewhere and also completed and submitted school homework on time.

INDEPENDENCE

(I) **Planning and Decision-Making**: ___________________________ exercised positive planning, chose from a number of options and attempted to solve his/her problems.

(I) **Personal Power**: ___________________________ expressed her/his feelings in a manner that took account of others and was able to have a say over things that happened in her/his life.

(I) **Responsibility**: ____________________________ demonstrated age appropriate self care, awareness of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and accepted personal responsibility for his/her actions.

(E) **Activity Programmes**: ________________________ participated in two or more structured community activities, hobbies, interests, clubs or societies during the past week.

(I) **Positive View of Personal Future**: ________________________ demonstrated a positive awareness of his/her culture or spiritual identity, found the world interesting and enjoyable, showed that he/she has a place in it and demonstrated optimism about their future.

GENEROSITY

(E) **Service to Others**: ____________________________ engaged in specific opportunities to help others in his/her daily living environment, in his/her neighbourhood or in the wider community.

(I) **Peaceful Conflict Resolution**: ________________________ sought to resolve potential conflicts through compromise without physical aggression or resorting to hurtful action or language.

(I) **Caring**: ________________________ demonstrated the extent to which she/he places high value on helping others and considering the needs of others.

(I) **Honesty**: _________ showed that he/she can tell the truth even when it’s not easy.
(E) **High Expectations**: Carer(s) and others encouraged __________________ to do her/his best at school, at work or in other activities, and offered her/him recognition for doing so.

**Overall Development**

*Hauora* is a Maori philosophy of health and wellbeing that originated in New Zealand. It comprises *taha whanau* (wider family connections), *taha hinengaro* (capacity to learn and to communicate thoughts and feelings), *taha tinana* (physical growth and development towards autonomy) & *taha wairua* (capacity for happiness, faith, a sense of purpose and considering the needs of others). Each dimension of *hauora* (health and wellbeing) influences and supports the others.

Dr Mason Durie’s *Whare Tapawha Model* symbolically represents *hauora* as the four walls of a *whare* or ancestral house, with each wall representing a different dimension. All four dimensions are deemed essential for strength and longevity. (Adapted from Durie, M. (1994) Whaiora: Maori Health Development. p. 70).

**Reflecting back over the past week, what might be added about each dimension of this young person’s developing health and wellbeing, and about his/her developing sense of Belonging, Mastery, Independence & Generosity?**

**Caring and Sharing within Wider Family Connections** (Belonging)
Capacity to Learn & Communicate Thoughts and Feelings (Mastery)

Physical Growth & Development towards Self Care and Autonomy, including Health & Dental Care (Independence)

Capacity for Happiness, Faith, a Sense of Purpose & Attending to the Needs of Others (Generosity)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completed By:</th>
<th>Seen and reviewed by:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Designated Carer(s) name (print name)</td>
<td>Care Supervisor or Social Worker’s name (print name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature(s)</td>
<td>Signature(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
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Outcomes that Matter® Achievement Profiles
Weekly Outcomes that Matter Recordings make it possible to plot visual Achievement Profiles for each young person in out-of-home care. A young person’s profile might look, for example, like the following Achievement Profile generated for a 12 year-old young man over the course of 20 weeks in out-of-home placement.

![Achievement Profile Chart](image)

**Belonging**

**Outcomes that Matter® Achievement Profile for 12 year-old young man:** Developmental Outcomes for Week Ending 21st November 2010 – 10th April 2011
The word-picture accounts provided by designated carers for each developmental care outcome assist in identifying patterns of stability, continuity or erratic movement around each outcome. In the above, one can see how Safety became compromised for this young man from Week 13 and his sense of Belonging diminished through disrupted Communication, Relationships, Support and Boundary issues. At Week 20, the foster placement ended. These recordings also assist carers in their direct work with young people and family members, as well as with care supervisors and external consultants. The Outcomes that Matter recordings inform and facilitate working together with purpose. They encourage closer exploration of links between outcomes, especially External and Internal Outcomes. Better Care Plans are thus facilitated and the quality of developmental care provided is enhanced.

References


1 This outcomes recording instrument is organized around the Circle of Courage (Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity) domains using some of the developmental assets identified by the Search Institute as published in Fulcher, L. C., McGladdery, S. & Vicary, D. (2011) Key Developmental Assets for Children and Young People in Foster Care, The International Journal of Child and Family Welfare (forthcoming).