



Developing Outcomes in Early Childhood Intervention Services: the process so far.

Poster presented by
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INTRODUCTION

An Outcome Statement is a 'clear statement of intent' listing the impacts and changes that are expected as a result of accessing a service. If parents and professionals are clear about what services are aiming to achieve, there is more chance of designing and implementing successful programs and activities that result in those outcomes. This clarity can result in a better use of resources, as well as greater consistency and accountability in the sector.

This paper summarises the consultation and writing process undertaken over a fourteen month period (May 2004 to August 2005) in developing and reaching agreement on a list of desired outcomes for Victorian early childhood intervention services.

A series of consultation forums with professionals and parents was conducted, with the aim of developing a robust Outcome Statement. The viewpoint of '*starting with the end in mind*', that is, considering services as outcome-driven (rather than process driven), guided the project.

Each forum reviewed and considered different aspects of an Outcome Statement, with feedback being incorporated into the production of the final document. The project aimed to produce a list of ultimate intentions that

- (a) was written in clear, plain language,
- (b) was relevant and applicable to the great range of family and professional circumstances, and
- (c) provided links to evaluation and measurement.

This process of sequential forums informed the writing process, resulting in the official launch of the *ECIA(VC) Outcome Statement* in August 2005.

DEVELOPING AN OUTCOME STATEMENT

Table 1: THE CONSULTATION SEQUENCE

May 2004

First Victorian Statewide Forum about Developing Outcomes

Presentations reviewed the theoretical and historical context to the development of outcomes, and local and international examples of Outcome Statements were considered. The parameters of the *ECIA(VC) Outcome Statement* were defined to include *Outcomes for Children, Outcomes for Families and Outcomes for Communities*. Sample desirable outcomes were generated and listed by those attending the forum.

September 2004

Second Victorian Statewide Forum about Developing Outcomes

The 'draft 1' Outcome Statement was discussed and refined with regard to:

- evidence of best practice tenets, strategies and service standards;
- encompassing the various roles of professionals;
- professional ethics and the rights of children and families.
- identifying gaps or missing components;
- readability and refinement of the text.

February 2005

Parent Focus Group

Parents listed their own list of desirable outcomes, and these outcomes compared favorably with the proposed text.

Refer to the paper:

"I refuse not to have quality of life" What parents expect from early childhood intervention services on the website.

March 2005

Third Statewide forum about developing Outcomes

This forum considered the revised 'draft 2' statements with regard to evaluation, considering:

- general evaluation issues;
- current practice, resources and the range of methods;
- the distinction between evaluating process and evaluating impact and outcomes of services;
- how the proposed statements could be measured.

DEVELOPING AN OUTCOME STATEMENT

Table 2: THE WRITING SEQUENCE

Draft 1

The 'draft 1' Outcome Statement combined information from the literature review, Victorian policy directions, local examples and suggestions from the May 2004 forum.

The *Format of the Statement* was set as a table matrix of Outcomes and Objectives for Children, Families and Communities. The Outcome boxes indicate primary intentions and the Objective boxes indicate illustrations and examples to qualify those umbrella intentions.

A further distinction was adapted from the *World Health Organisation(2002)* definition of disability in that statements covered both Outcomes in Functioning (skill and knowledge) and Outcomes in Participating.

Draft 2

'Draft 1' text underwent extensive revision following the September 2004 forum. The 'draft 2' statements were improved to better reflect the nurturing role of parents, the strength based approach, partnerships reflecting parent choice and preferences, and a more integrated approach for the community.

Following feedback, a major change was withdrawing quantifiable references to measurable changes (*eg: 'will be more able to' changed to 'will be able to'*). While statements aim to be measurable, the majority feedback was that the 'draft 1' text was overwhelming, with a demanding and imposing quality. On the other hand less objective concepts such as levels of confidence, enjoyment and happiness were retained as vital outcomes for children and families.

Draft 3

Parent representatives continued to be involved in refining the 'draft 3' text for readability and ensuring the concepts and expectations were realistic, not too academic in nature, and not overwhelming.

Agencies across the state also conducted their own team and family discussions regarding the proposed statements, providing feedback for the final revision. The final document was confined to 12 pages to cover an introduction, present the statements in 3 tables, and a brief discussion of overall context and development of the statements.

August 2005

Starting with the End in Mind: Outcome Statements for Early Childhood Intervention Services.

Official Launch of the ECIA(VC) Outcome Statement by Gill Callister, Executive Officer, Office for Children, Department of Human Services.

What next in the process?

The process of developing outcomes in early childhood intervention continues - the document is seen as one part of developing outcomes in the ECI field in Victoria. A further consultation forum occurred in October 2005, considering the underlying principles and implementation strategies to achieve a stronger common vision and pathway towards the desired outcomes for children, family and communities. Further forums are planned, and a companion document to assist agencies implement 'outcome-driven' procedures is being developed.

CONCLUSION

There is a current international interest in outcome focused services, linking services, procedures and evaluation. This interest is also seen locally where human services are expected to demonstrate practices that are overtly evidence based and outcome driven.

In Victoria, the consultation and development of the *ECIA(VC) Outcome Statement* was rigorous and allowed an increasing 'comfort and ownership' as different aspects were considered. The wealth of experience and opinions of parents and professionals was vital to the process. Gaining common agreement on desired service outcomes in a field with disparate history and perspectives is an important achievement. The *ECIA(VC) Outcome Statement* forms a solid foundation to tackle funding and resource issues in the field, and provides a framework to justify and sustain service planning and development.

Final reflections concern the amount of time needed for the consultation sequence to take its course, allowing consideration of outcomes from a number of perspectives, and involvement of parents and professionals over time, so all could appreciate the process. The writing style evolved - statements needed to be in plain language that was not overwhelming. Statements needed to be specific but also broad enough to apply to the range of professional roles and the diversity of family circumstances.

The general principle of 'starting with the end in mind' (being outcome-driven) is an important and ongoing strategy that has the potential to move early childhood intervention services forward.

More information:

The presentations, literature reviews and resource discussion papers used at the forums, and the full text of the final document are available at:

www.eciavic.org.au