The What Works ProCESs

Evidence-informed improvement for child and family services

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The What Works Tool at a glance

The What Works Tool is divided into six thematic areas. These reflect key dimensions of evidence-based practice and span 18 principles.
See Part 2, pages 25-50 for more information and relevant questions.

Theme A Programme design and content

1   Effective programmes are based on sound theory and focus on improving outcomes for children and families
2   Effective programmes work on multiple aspects of need
3   Effective programmes build on strengths and encourage positive behaviours
4   Effective programmes use active and engaging learning techniques and understand that people learn in different ways
5   Effective programmes are of sufficient intensity in terms of content and duration

Theme B Programme relevance and sensitivity to context

6   Effective programmes take account of the different stages of development
7   Effective programmes are clear about who they seek to reach, and try to reach participants at the point where they are most likely to be receptive to what the programme has to offer
8   Effective programmes are culturally relevant to all those receiving them
9   Effective programmes understand the policy context in which they operate

Theme C Programme delivery and implementation

10   Effective programmes work in partnership with participants, actively engage with young people and families and have a strong commitment to participation
11   Effective programmes are delivered by well-trained, well-supported staff and volunteers
12   Effective programmes recognise the importance of inter-agency working and collaborate and communicate with other services and agencies serving their client group

Theme D Programme documentation, evaluation and quality assurance

13   Effective programmes are well documented and have systems in place to ensure quality is maintained
14   Effective programmes have strategies for using research and evaluation to review and improve their practice

Theme E Knowledge transfer and communication

15   Effective programmes transfer their learning to others who can benefit from their experience

Theme F Organisational capacity and development

16   Effective programmes are based in organisations that have a clearly set out vision and strategic direction
17   Effective organisations have the organisational skills, systems and infrastructure to support the achievement of their goals
18   Effective organisations have strong leadership and an appropriate organisational structure and culture for achieving their goals
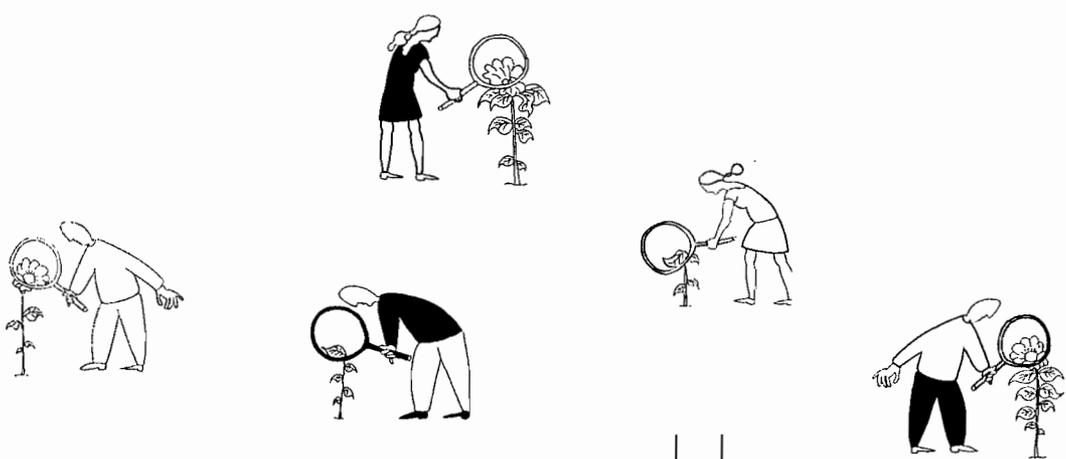
The What Works ProCESs

Evidence-informed improvement for child and family services

Version 1
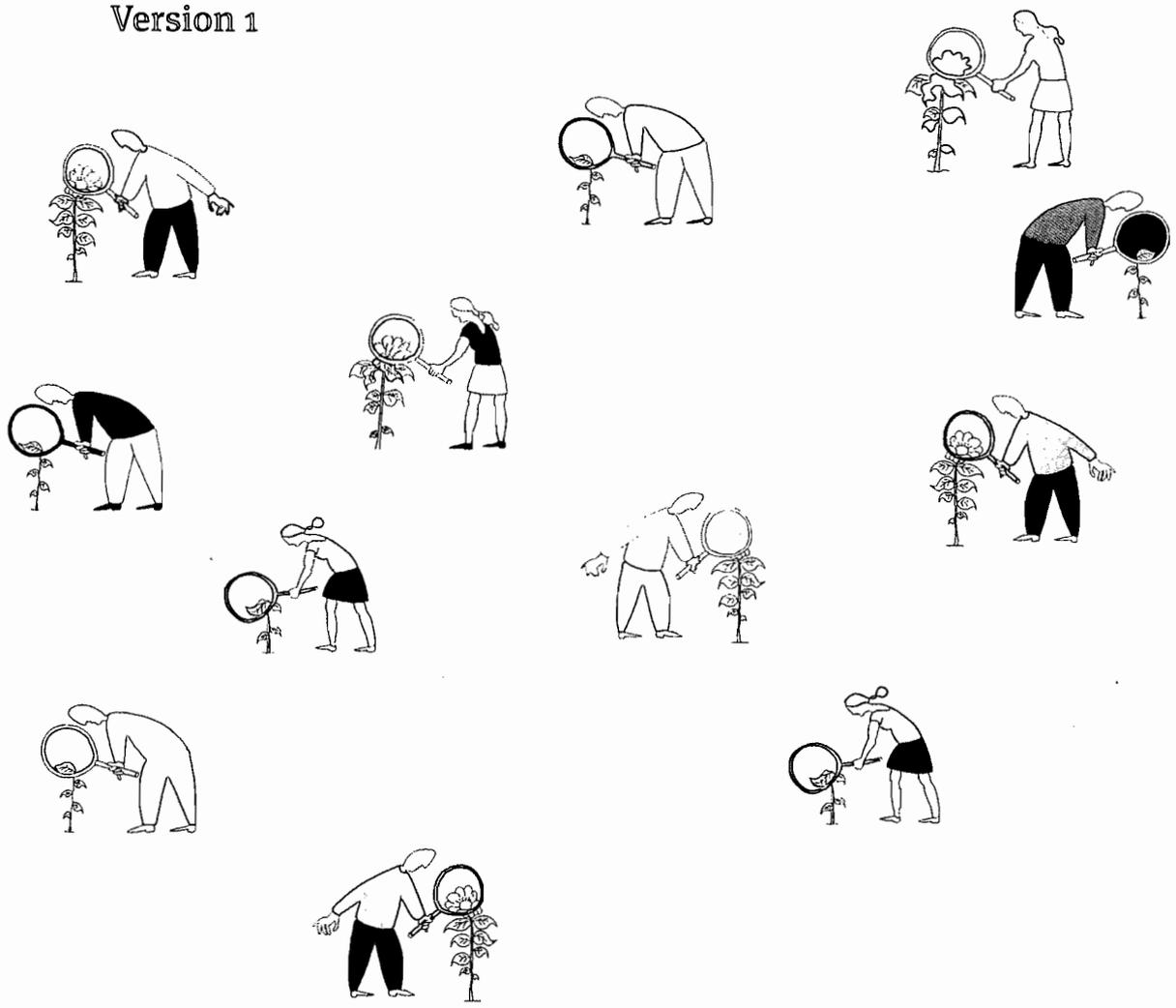
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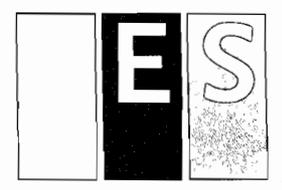
Welcome...

Welcome to the What Works Process and the What Works Tool.

This Guide and Workbook have been designed to support the What Works Process and the accompanying What Works Tool. The Tool was designed by the Practice Development Team at the Centre for Effective Services to be used as part of a facilitated process, involving trained facilitators and staff at the Centre who will work alongside service providers. It is not designed for self-administration without guidance. For the Tool to work effectively, it should be used as part of the Process, assisted by a trained facilitator.

Other materials required for the complete Process and held by the Centre include:

○ Sufficient copies of the Guide and Workbook for all participants to have their own copy

○ The What Works Process Needs Analysis matrix

○ The What Works Process Partnership Agreement template

Further details about these materials can be found in Part 1 of this workbook, and our staff will supply them once we commence work with a service provider.
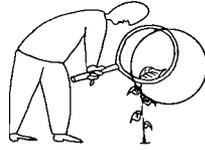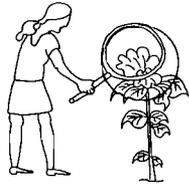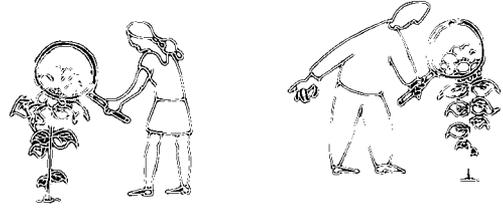
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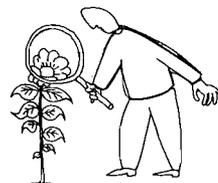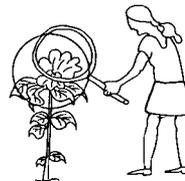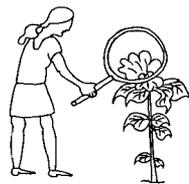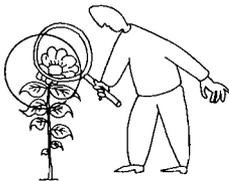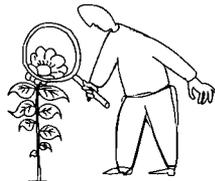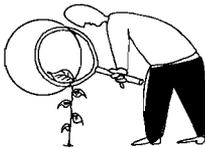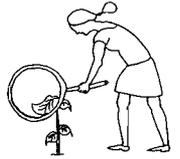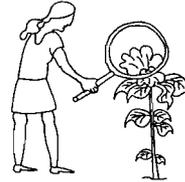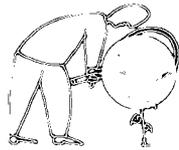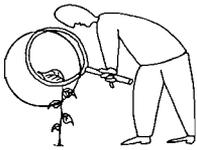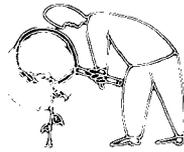
What is the Centre for Effective Services?

Evidence-informed improvement of outcomes

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) was established in 2008 and is funded by a partnership between philanthropy and government. It is part of a new generation of intermediary organisations across the world, supporting service providers and policy-makers to do their work. The organisation is based in Ireland and in Northern Ireland and its mission is to connect the design and delivery of services with scientific and technical knowledge about what works, in order to improve outcomes for children and young people and the families and communities in which they live.

The aims of CES are:

o to promote and support the application of an evidence-informed approach to policy and practice in child, family and community services

o to promote the development of collaborative, joined-up working that is outcomes-focused across research, policy and service-providing organisations

o to build capacity to take this work forward in the longer term by developing knowledge, skills and competencies.

As a result of recent decades of research and evaluation, there is an increasing body of evidence that helps practitioners, policy-makers and academics to understand 'what works' in children's services. With technical and scientific know-how, this evidence of what works can be used to design and deliver services that are more successful in delivering positive changes for children and communities.

Service providers across the world are using this evidence to design and evaluate their services, but they can often benefit from the support of scientific, technical or organisational change expertise in order to do this successfully. CES aims to help bridge the gap between technical and scientific understanding of what works, and the practical development and implementation of children's services in the real world.

Intermediary organisations
Intermediary organisations work across the boundaries of research, policy and practice and help those who plan and deliver services to do their work in more effective, evidence-informed ways.

What is the **What Works Process**?

Providing support and technical assistance to service providers is one of the core activities of the Centre for Effective Services, and this is achieved in various ways. The What Works Process is a set of activities undertaken collaboratively with service-providing organisations ('clients'), that aims to help services understand how effective they are in relation to improving outcomes for children and families, and in terms of the current research and thinking on 'what works'.

Implementation science
The study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence into routine practice, in order to improve the quality of services.

The Process is facilitated by CES staff and associates who are trained in the principles and techniques of **implementation science** – a field concerned with learning how to apply scientific and technical knowledge to support the practical, every-day needs of service-providing organisations.

The diagram on these pages illustrates the eight key stages of the Process, although it will always be tailored to the different needs of individual clients.

From the CES perspective, the most important aspect is that the Process is recognised as a partnership, with learning for both the Centre and the client organisation. Participating in the Process is one of the ways that CES can help an organisation think about what it is doing in practice by linking evidence about 'what works' to results or outcomes. It may include using other more specific Tools, or linking in with other agencies or individuals who may have identifiable and additional expertise.

you are here!

1 familiarisation

what initial meeting, reading key documents
how site visit
who programme CEO/Director and CES project team

2 the What Works Tool

what assembling a multi-dimensional overview of an agency's work,
how self-completed What Works tool and subsequent review
who programme CEO/Director and staff supported by CES project team

3 Needs Analysis

what assessing needs in terms of meeting them from CES or other agencies/individuals
how joint programme/ CES meetings
who programme CEO/Director and staff and CES project team

4 Partnership Agreement

what agreeing partnership process and drafting of partnership agreement
how joint programme/ CES sign off on partnership agreement
who programme CEO/Director and staff and CES Director/project team

Pieces of eight

The What Works Process is the term used to describe Stages 1 to 8, shown on the diagram.

Stage 2 in the diagram, the What Works Tool, is the central part of the Process. Based around six key themes or dimensions of practice, it enables client services, working with a CES facilitator, to reflect on their activities and compare what they do with what is known about 'what works'.

Stage 3 in the diagram, the Needs Analysis, describes the steps taken, firstly, to collect the information provided by the client service, through use of the Tool, and, secondly, to analyse the information and identify, jointly with the client service, current strengths and areas for improvement.

Stage 4 in the diagram, the Partnership Agreement, is the document CES produces in partnership with a client service to agree how to take things forward and respond to identified areas for improvement.

needs analysis
An examination of the existing strengths and deficits within a group, community or organisation. Usually involves gathering views and opinions, and factual data, and should enable those concerned to make an informed judgement about what changes are required in order to achieve better outcomes

5
ongoing review

what continuous and cyclical assessment of progress to agreed outcomes

how partnership agreement monitoring and revision

who programme CEO/Director and staff and CES Director/project team

6
recording achievements

what drafting project learning reports/briefings

how joint programme/ CES meetings to agree and sign off

7
knowledge transfer

what dissemination of results/learning

how agreed formats to fit purpose

who programme CEO/Director and staff, CES project team/Director and key stakeholders

8
conclusion/next steps

what final review of partnership agreement; agree form of ongoing contact

how evaluation of partnership agreement

who programme CEO/Director and CES project team/Director

What is the purpose of the **What Works Process**?

Evidence-based programmes, and evidence-informed practice

Recent years have seen the development of a number of evidence-based programmes aimed at services for children and families – programmes, services or interventions that seek to apply lessons from research about what works to their planning and practice, and that have demonstrated they can achieve measurable improvements for service users. Lists are now available of recommended evidence-based programmes that have been judged to be effective according to specified criteria (e.g. the Blueprints series http://www.colorado.edu/ cspv/blueprints/). Many of these have been developed and refined over a long period and have a large body of research behind them.

Correspondingly, there has been increased pressure on service-providing organisations to use programmes that have already been 'proven', in place of others that they themselves may have developed, or be in the process of developing, but whose effectiveness remains untested. There are many reasons why this makes sense, and if a proven programme with appropriate objectives and results exists, using it can avoid reinventing the wheel.

evidence-based programme
Used to describe a programme that has consistently been shown to produce positive results by independent research studies that have been conducted to a particular degree of scientific quality.

However, implementing an 'off the shelf' evidence-based programme is not always the best or most feasible option for every audience and community. Though growing, the number of proven evidence-based programmes is still not large, and a pre-existing **evidence-based programme** may have been developed overseas in a very different cultural or social context. There may therefore be doubts about how well it would 'transport' to a new context; it may require a much higher level of resources or different resources than are available locally; or it may be designed in such a way that it meets some but not all of the pressing needs of another local community or service provider. In these situations, organisations may decide to develop their own programme or to take an existing programme and adapt it to their needs.

Some experts take the view that science has not yet advanced to the point where we can talk of evidence-based practice, but only evidence-based programmes, because it is specific programmes (and not practice in general) that have been subject to the rigorous evaluations that allow them to be identified as 'effective'. However, it is also true that researchers and practitioners have now begun to distil the shared features of effective programmes that seem to be responsible for their positive effects. These 'in common' characteristics are sometimes called 'principles of effectiveness', 'active ingredients' or 'best practices'. In designing the **What Works Process**, CES has taken the view that identifying some of the common characteristics among effective programmes does offer an opportunity for practitioners to reflect upon their own services. We call this **evidence-informed practice**.

evidence-informed practice
A term used to describe practice based on the integration of experience, judgement and expertise with the best available external evidence from systematic research.

Reflection upon the extent to which their service shares those features can be a useful way for client services to set about 'proofing' their work against the current knowledge about best practice, and offers all services – not just those who are implementing one of a small number of proven evidence-based programmes – the opportunity to consider issues of practice quality and practice improvement. By bringing services more in line with what decades of research has shown to work, we believe a process of comparison and reflection has the potential to lead to substantial improvements in the effectiveness of all services.

The **What Works Process** has been developed by CES for use by organisations involved in either implementing a new service or reviewing existing practice for effectiveness. It has specifically been developed for services working with children and families, though many of the principles will apply to any service seeking to review the extent to which it is evidence-informed.

In cases where a service provider is already implementing a proven programme, it will be appropriate to use the quality assurance materials provided by the programme developer. However, there may be areas of practice or organisational functioning that are not covered by these materials. In such cases, we hope the **What Works Tool** may be a useful addition.

In cases where a proven programme is not being used, the **What Works Tool** is designed to help an organisation obtain a multi-dimensional overview of its work, explore practice in different areas of functioning, and reflect on the extent to which its programme is following agreed principles of effective practice. CES has developed the Tool initially to assist a group of services with whom we work directly (services in Ireland and in Northern Ireland), but many of the principles we highlight would be relevant for other services in other jurisdictions.

Acknowledgments and a note on language

All development proceeds by standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, and the idea of the **What Works Process** and the **What Works Tool** draws on thinking from many different fields and different countries. A list of the sources we have drawn upon in the development of the Process can be found in Appendix 1, Useful Reading. We strongly encourage those who are interested in practice development to familiarise themselves with the key sources (marked with an asterisk*). Also, these sources may be useful when specific issues you want to work on are identified.

CES would particularly like to thank the services in Ireland and in Northern Ireland who pilot-tested earlier drafts of the Process for us in 2010 and gave us helpful feedback on what worked (and didn't work!) for them. We have incorporated this feedback to create Version 1 of the Process and the Tool. We continue to welcome feedback on any aspect of this document.

Throughout, the term 'Programme' is used as shorthand to include a project, a service, an intervention, or a collection of these. We have tried to minimise the use of jargon and technical terms but there are some that are hard to avoid. Key terms are explained in the margin throughout the text and a Glossary of Terms is included (see Appendix 2).

Initiating the What Works Process

The Process needs to be supported by a senior manager in your Programme. Engaging with the Process is a significant undertaking and, for an effective outcome, senior-level leadership is essential.

Before you begin the What Works Process, you will have an initial meeting with your named CES Practice Development contact. He or she will work closely with you from Stage 1 familiarisation to Stage 8 conclusion/next steps. CES will also assign a facilitator to help you with the What Works Tool.

The CES approach attempts to develop a partnership with organisations – one that is based on the principle of shared learning and a style of working that emphasises 'doing with' rather than 'doing for'. The outputs from this work (e.g. responses made by staff or stakeholders in the Tool, and the resulting Needs Analysis and Partnership Agreement) will therefore remain confidential. However, CES is committed to sharing learning that can be generalised and disseminating knowledge about good practice wherever it arises. Therefore, part of the process of working with a client service will almost certainly involve discussion of whether and how any learning can be shared with a wider audience.

Who to involve in the What Works Process

It is advisable to assemble a group of stakeholders who are knowledgeable about and committed to improving your service. The group you assemble will depend on the nature of the project and the stage it is at. While you may want senior managers to lead on initiating the Process and on working with CES to develop the Needs Analysis and Partnership Agreement for action, it is very helpful indeed to have a wide range of well-informed people to take part in completing the What Works Tool. This is what makes the Tool properly multi-dimensional. You may choose to do all of the work in sessions in which everyone takes part, or you may divide up the themes between different sub-groups according to their particular expertise and experience. The following questions may help you reach a decision in this regard:

- Who are the people who are delivering the programme?

- Who are the people receiving the programme?

- Who are the other people in my organisation who need to be involved in any decision-making about the programme and the way it works?

- Who are the people or agencies outside of the programme who have an interest in it or whose actions or roles may affect its outcomes?

- Who are the people or organisations making judgements about whether the programme works or not?

practice development
Practice development is a continuous process of improvement which aims to achieve the best outcomes for service users. This is brought about by helping practitioners develop their knowledge and skills in line with the most up-to-date research on what works.

facilitator
A facilitator's job is to support everyone to do their best thinking and practice. To do this, the facilitator encourages full participation, promotes mutual understanding and cultivates shared responsibility. By supporting everyone to do their best thinking, a facilitator enables group members to search for inclusive solutions and build sustainable agreements.

stakeholder
A person, group, organisation, or system who affects or can be affected by an organisation's actions. Anyone who has a legitimate interest in how the service works and whether it achieves its goals.

How other organisations decided on who to involve

Here are two examples of how other organisations have approached the issue of who to involve.

A new programme in its early stages of development

This programme assembled a group that included the project manager, three staff recently recruited to work on delivering the programme, a colleague working on a similar programme in another part of the country, a senior manager from the organisation who has responsibility for the programme, and a researcher who had been employed to undertake an evaluation of the programme.

A programme for disadvantaged children that has been running for a number of years

This programme decided to include two of the staff delivering the programme with different roles within it; the head of the programme; a school principal they worked closely with; two parents whose children used the programme; the CEO of the service; and a health visitor who was responsible for a sister programme with whom they had strong links.

Who to include should be decided after you have reflected on the above questions, and you should talk to your CES contact before making a final decision.

Involving users or participants of the service

Whether and how you do this will depend on the particular programme you deliver and the stage of its development. Some organisations may choose to involve parents and young people (for example) as part of the group working through the What Works Tool, whilst others have a separate meeting with service users, focusing particularly on issues of interest to them. You may also have pre-existing consultations or surveys of service users, which you can draw upon. Either way it is useful to have thought about how the views of service users can be incorporated into the discussions you are having.

How long will it take to complete the What Works Tool?

Completing the What Works Tool is not an instant process, and the time and number of sessions it takes will depend on the size and complexity of the programme and its stage of development. CES has found that, on average, working fully through the What Works Tool with your assigned facilitator will take between two and three half-day sessions. On occasions, however, the Tool has been completed successfully in one single day when there has been sufficient preparation beforehand. Some programmes have taken two or three meetings over a few weeks, but this can result in a feeling of the Process being protracted and in 'losing the thread'. You may decide to divide up responsibility for completing different parts of the Tool amongst smaller sub-groups of participants.

Your CES named contact will discuss with you how you might best organise the Process to suit your needs at the outset, but taking part in the Process is not intended to take up huge amounts of time. The aim is to get a snapshot which will indicate where further work will need to be done.

Each ach member of the group should have a printed copy of the What Works Process Part 1 and 2 and any other relevant materials you have gathered in advance (e.g. programme documentation, business plans, recent evaluation results, research-based information on risk and protective factors or on best practices related to your particular type of programme). Be wary of overwhelming people with advance reading – at the outset it is best to concentrate on overall impressions. Remember this is just one stage in the What Works Process.

Do we need a facilitator to help us?

Yes! The Tool has been designed to be completed with the aid of an independent facilitator who is not attached to the programme, a person who creates the right balance between depth of detail and speed of completion, and ensures that the task is completed. The evidence from programmes that have piloted the Tool is that a facilitator is extremely helpful. The facilitator is not a stakeholder in the programme, and so can take the role of 'critical friend'. Some programmes like to have people known to them, or people who have already been involved with them in facilitating other work.

CES is building a panel of trained people who can provide facilitation support, and your Practice Development contact at CES can assist you to access this help. There is currently no charge for this service. Where a programme is using its own facilitator we strongly advise that the person makes contact with CES and discusses how best to approach the activity before getting started.

Is it necessary to complete all sections of the Tool?

The themes that the What Works Tool invites you to consider are all linked, and programmes undertaking this exercise have found it useful to have thought about all the themes, even if they spend more time on some than others. The research on which the Process is based shows that all the themes are inter-linked, and the Process has been designed around these six themes in order to give a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, 'bird's-eye view' of how a programme is working. Leaving things out may result in missing important insights that can have far-reaching implications for your programme. Sometimes we discover that elements we think are most important are in fact least relevant for achieving better outcomes, and vice versa. The Tool is designed to help you check assumptions and (hopefully) gain new insights.

So, as a general rule, we recommend that you try and consider all the questions in the Tool. Of course you may wish to spend more time on some sections than others, depending on the stage you are at in developing your programme, or what you feel are the major issues.

Completing the **What Works Tool**

The **What Works Tool** is divided into six thematic areas, which span 18 principles of effective practice. Under each thematic area, more information on each principle is outlined, and under each principle is a set of 'reflective questions' for your group to consider. These questions are designed to get you thinking – not to be resolved at the first attempt!

programme design
and content

organisational capacity
and development

programme relevance
and sensitivity to context

knowledge transfer
and communication

programme delivery
and implementation

programme documentation,
evaluation and quality assurance
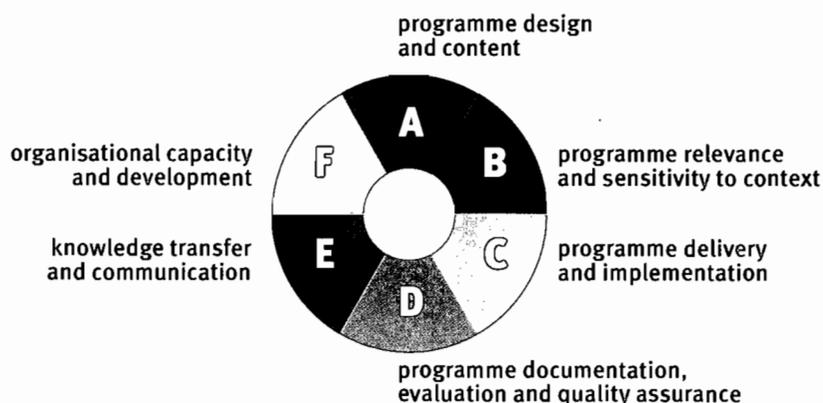
prior to the meeting...

Review the Tool and any other materials that will support the completion of the Tool and send them to the participants at least two weeks in advance. Participants should be encouraged to read the **What Works Tool** and make their own notes.

at the **What Works Tool** *sessions...*

The facilitator will take you through the Tool and ensure that the work is completed. There are no right (or wrong) answers to the reflective questions. You will find some sections easier to complete than others and there may be gaps in your information. Do not spend too much time at this stage in trying to answer every question in great detail, but be as thoughtful and complete as you can be. Your facilitator can help you manage this.

After discussing and reflecting on the questions that are set out under each principle, participants write their responses on to the accompanying table. Individual copies of the Tool are meant to be used as Workbooks rather than as a final document. The purpose is to provide a framework for your conversations and a means of collecting your views in a way that can help identify your strengths as well as areas that may need improvement.

The facilitator and the nominated lead from the programme undertaking the Process will produce a final, collated summary document based on all of the contributions. Hopefully, there will be a considerable degree of agreement about what the collated response should be, but it is acceptable to highlight areas where there has been a difference of opinion (see Worked Example, p.24). The facilitator will then send the final version to your CES contact.

What happens after completing the **What Works Tool**?

Needs Analysis

When the facilitator working with you sends the completed, collated **What Works Tool** to CES, staff at CES, led by your named contact, will begin to compile a Needs Analysis (Stage 3 in the **What Works Process**). During this stage, a multi-disciplinary team at CES will analyse the information provided and will identify, jointly with a nominated contact at the client service, current strengths of the service, areas for improvement and issues for clarification.

Once an initial analysis has been conducted by the CES team, your named contact at CES will contact you to arrange a follow-up meeting. At the meeting, you and your CES contact will discuss the Needs Analysis. You may be asked to clarify some parts of your responses or seek supporting documentation. CES will then, in partnership with the nominated contact at the service, discuss the emerging priorities and what might be the options for activities to address the priority needs.

Partnership Agreement

An action plan which identifies objectives and activities to meet the needs agreed during the Needs Analysis will be drafted by CES. Meeting needs may involve support from CES, or from other organisations, or activities to be conducted by your own service, depending on the issue identified. CES is developing an extensive national and international network of experts and organisations who have experience in helping programmes improve their effectiveness. A draft Partnership Agreement incorporating an action plan will be agreed between the service and CES, if appropriate. The draft agreement will be developed into a formal Partnership Agreement and signed off by CES and your programme manager or CEO at a final meeting.

We are interested in improving the **What Works Tool** and learning from your experience of using it, so we may ask you to complete a short evaluation of it after we have received your completed responses.

The What Works Process key steps for senior managers

1 Talk with a staff member of the CES Practice Development Team. If we agree to go ahead, CES will assign a named member of our team to support you and take you through the What Works Process, including how facilitation of the Process will take place.

2 If you are not leading the Process, nominate another senior person from your team to work with CES.

3 Read the What Works Tool and familiarise yourself with it a few weeks ahead of using it (preparation is essential!)

4 Write a short list of things you hope to achieve.

5 Think about who you need to involve – your staff, colleagues, and other stakeholders – and discuss with your named CES contact. Who you involve is very important and some key people may need quite a lot of notice.

6 Start planning for the time that will be needed. Bank on needing a whole day (with some prior preparation) or three half-days to complete the What Works Tool, which is a central element of the Process.

7 Arrange to meet with your facilitator and CES contact at least a couple of weeks before your first meeting. Make sure that everyone participating in the Process has received a copy of the What Works Tool at least two weeks before your first session.

8 Get prepared. Some prior preparation may help you work more effectively. Are there key members of the team who could undertake to do some background work or summarise or extract information from relevant reports or documents?

Part 2 Guide to the What Works Tool
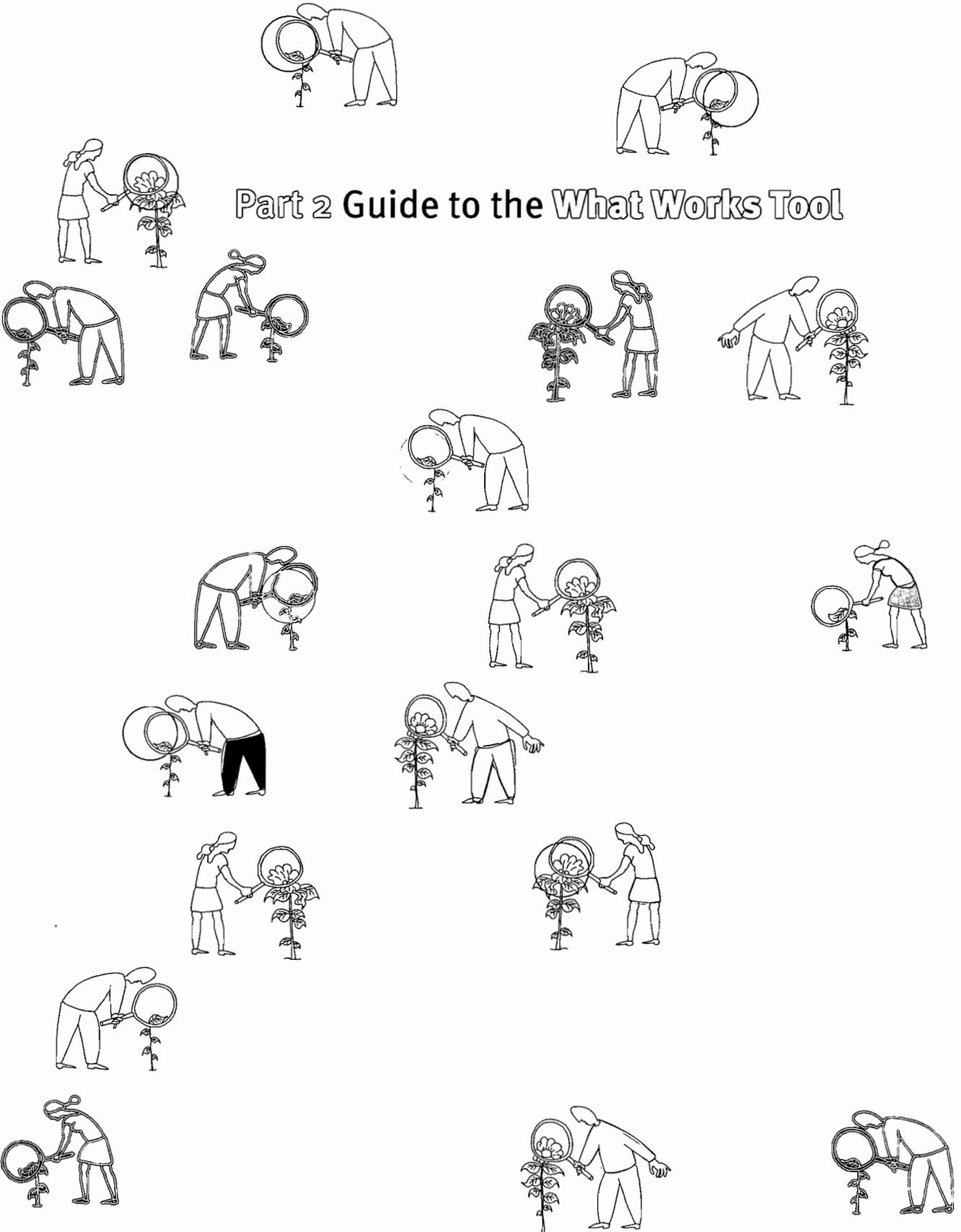
The What Works Tool in close-up

The following pages describe eighteen principles of effective programmes, grouped within six broad themes that refer to aspects of programme functioning. The eighteen principles were derived both from previously published research and from CES's experience of working with evidence-informed programmes.

Each principle is followed by a set of questions to reflect upon and discuss regarding your own programme or service and how it might be improved. It is important to note that not all of these principles will be equally relevant for every service. In fact, it would be rare to find a single programme or service that embodied all of these characteristics. For any given programme, some principles will be more important than others.

The six What Works Tool thematic areas are:

A programme design and content

B programme relevance and sensitivity to context

C programme delivery and implementation

D programme documentation, evaluation and quality assurance

E knowledge transfer and communication

F organisational capacity and development

The six themes, whilst separate, are all linked as the following sequence of diagrams shows.

programme design and content

organisational capacity and development

programme relevance and sensitivity to context

knowledge transfer and communication

programme delivery and implementation

programme documentation, evaluation and quality assurance
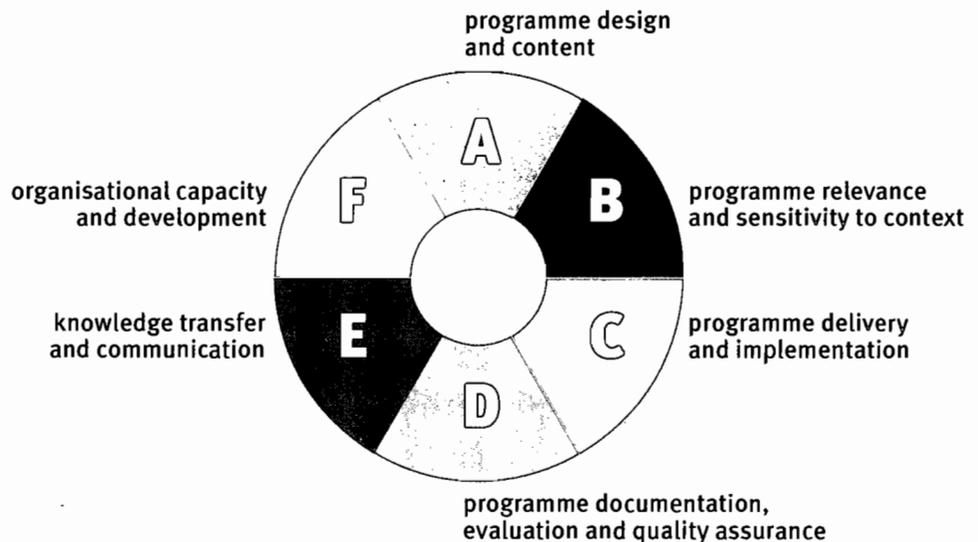
Here we show the principles included under each of the six thematic areas. (See pages 19-50 for more detailed information.)
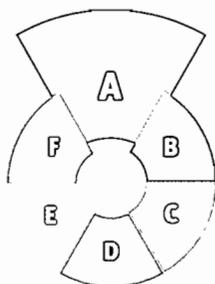
Programme design and content

The first thematic group of principles is about the way a programme is designed, and what it actually does. They are asking:

Who is this programme for, what are we trying to achieve, why are we doing it like this, are we doing enough of it, and do we have a sufficient evidence base for what we are doing?
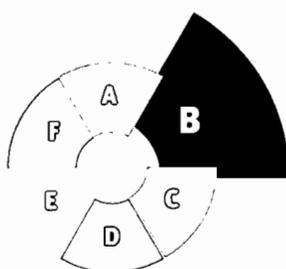
Programme relevance and sensitivity to context

This thematic group of principles of effective programmes is about the activities and materials the programme uses, and whether these adequately reflect the characteristics and needs of the people they are supposed to help. It is also about whether and how the programme 'fits' into current social and policy priorities. They are asking:

Does the programme meet the needs of the children and families we are trying to help, and how does it relate to national and local priorities in terms of the groups we work with?
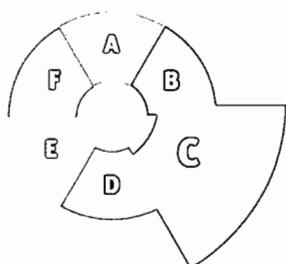
Programme delivery and implementation

The effectiveness of a programme is often as much a function of how it is delivered as much as what is delivered. This group of principles state that effective programmes understand that how a programme is implemented will impact on the outcomes of the programme. They are asking:

To what extent are we working in partnership with clients and communities who have well-trained and motivated staff, on a programme that collaborates with other relevant services and organisations?

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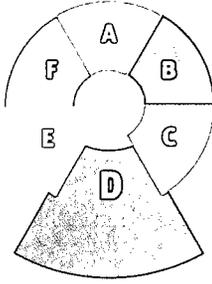
Programme documentation, evaluation and quality assurance

The principles outlined in this section state that effective programmes 'capture' what they do by documenting their activities, are efficient in their use of resources, and are able to demonstrate their outcomes. They are asking:

Are we keeping a record of what we did, are we doing things consistently, how do we know we are achieving, and how do we keep informed about new research and ensure we integrate it into our programme?

A F B E C D
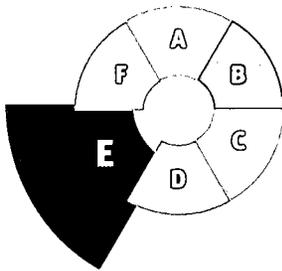
Knowledge transfer and communication

These principles state that effective programmes can demonstrate that they transfer their learning and communicate effectively.

How do we let others know about the things we do that work well, and how do we communicate with individuals and organisations about what we are doing?

A F B E C D
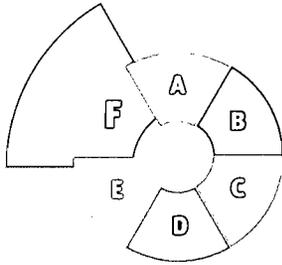
Organisational capacity and development

The next principles reflect the evidence that a programme will be more effective if the organisation and structure is fit for purpose.

To what extent is our organisation arranged to achieve the outcome we want and is it fit for the purpose we have set ourselves?

Under each principle (a) is a statement that explains why it is included in the Tool (b).

In the column to the right is a set of questions (c) relating to the statement and the principle. To the left is an explanation (d) of some of the more technical terms used.

After discussing and reflecting on the questions set out under each principle, write your responses into the table underneath (e). Participants will have seen the Tool in advance and may have made their own notes. Later on in the process the facilitator will help to produce a collated version of all the responses for the final version, but it is quite okay (in fact, important) to highlight areas where people did not agree.

You may find some sections easier to complete than others and there may be gaps in your information. Do not expend too much energy at this stage in trying to answer every question in great detail, but be as thoughtful and complete as you can.

You may find that you cannot fully answer all the questions, but finding this out is often a useful exercise in itself. It may indicate areas for subsequent work that we, or others, may do with you.

On the next page, to give a flavour of the response we are hoping for, we show sample answers to another set of questions from the sequence.

dissemination
The deliberate attempt to spread information and encourage its use.

knowledge transfer
The process by which knowledge and ideas move from the source of knowledge to other potential users of that knowledge.

communications/ dissemination strategy
A plan that sets out who you need to communicate with, the messages you want (or need) to communicate, and what methods you propose to use to achieve this.

15 Effective programmes transfer their learning to others who can benefit from their experience

One of the key reasons that evidence does not always get into practice is the failure to communicate learning from effective programmes to others who may benefit from it. This is linked to dissemination and knowledge transfer. Effective programmes have well-developed strategies for delivering the messages with their participants and key stakeholders including funders. These strategies include the identification of relevant objectives, audiences and evaluation criteria. Many promising programmes have never emerged beyond a pilot basis in part because of a failure to do this. Effective programmes can demonstrate that they disseminate their learning and communicate effectively.

15.1 Do you have a communications/ dissemination/knowledge transfer strategy?

13.2 What does the programme do, or plan to do, to ensure that learning from the programme is disseminated in forms that can potentially benefit participants or other programmes?

15.3 What forms of communication do you currently use and are they effective for the given audiences?

15.4 Do your information and communication systems facilitate or hinder dialogue and appropriate information-sharing with stakeholders and with other agencies working with the same individuals, families, or communities?

15.5 What methods do you use to assess the effectiveness of your communication?

(e)

where we are strong...   ...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...

The What Works Tool in action: sample answers

11 Effective programmes are delivered by well-trained, well-supported staff and volunteers

Programmes are more likely to be effective if they have well-qualified, well-trained, well-supported and committed staff and volunteers. The effectiveness of staff (or volunteers) is in turn affected by receiving supervision, support and recognition from managers, boards, and each other. In addition, many successful programmes have what is referred to as a 'champion' – someone who is enthusiastic about the programme and possesses enough organisational authority to influence decisions and make things happen.

11.1 Are staff members (and volunteers, if relevant) given training before implementing the programme? How adequate is the training? What areas could benefit from more attention?

11.2 Do staff members receive guidance and feedback from supervisors on a regular basis?

11.3 Are the staff and volunteers enthusiastic about and committed to the programme?

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where we are strong...

General feeling that staff are well supported and have plenty of opportunities for reflection. Most staff have been offered opportunities for further education and development.

...the supporting evidence

Weekly staff meetings are usually well attended. Staff appraisal meetings quarterly and personal development plans are meant to be agreed with all staff – Three staff completed training in facilitation skills this year – Special training away day for all staff on domestic violence last year.

where we can do better...

Some new staff not as well-supported as initial recruits – Staff training – Staff appraisal (see above) – No formal collation of staff views (no regular staff survey etc) – volunteers could be better supported.

Some new staff who joined this year did not receive formal induction programme – No staff training event held – no money available – Sometimes there isn't time to complete these for all staff – Summary of key issues is yet to be distilled from staff appraisals – No formal training for volunteers to date – High rate of turnover and a lot of volunteers have been lost in the last six months.

what needs more discussion or better information...

We had a debate as to how well aware new staff were of the evidence underpinning the programme. Differences of opinion as to the integration of volunteer and paid staff – some thought we could do better – Differences between team members as to how effectively staff views were taken on board. Some said it was not clear as to how you accessed training opportunities and how requests from staff were prioritised.
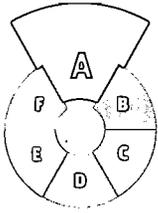
Programme design and content

Who is this programme for, what are we trying to achieve, why are we doing it like this, are we doing enough of it, do we have a sufficient evidence base for what we are doing?
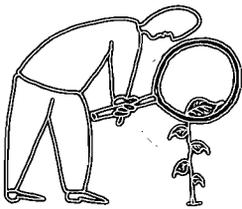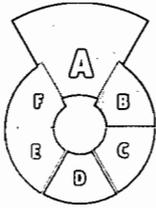
1 Effective programmes are based on sound theory and focus on improving outcomes for children and families

outcomes
Changes that occur as a result of interventions. Outcomes may be short-term or immediate; medium-term or intermediate; long-term or 'end'. (Longer-term outcomes are also sometimes referred to as 'impact', especially where they relate to changes in a wider system).

theory of change
A set of assumptions ('hypotheses'), usually based on research, about a pathway of change, which forms the basis of the programme's design. It outlines a causal pathway, from where things are now, to where they will be, by specifying what has to happen along the path for goals to be achieved.

Effective programmes, informed by sound research, are based on a good understanding of how people develop and how change can be achieved. They understand what risk and protective factors (or strengths) are most closely related to the **outcomes** the programme is trying to achieve, and they target their activities very precisely on those specific factors (This is sometimes referred to as having a **theory of change**).

In addition, an effective programme's design and delivery is guided by clear and logical descriptions of the process by which the programme's activities are expected to lead to its intended goals (sometimes called the **mechanisms of change**).

Ideally, there is practical evidence that the specific activities undertaken as part of the programme can be effective in bringing about the desired changes.

1.1 What is the theory (or theories) under-pinning the programme? Is the theory backed up by research? (In other words, why do you believe that what you are doing in the programme is likely to be effective?)

1.2 Do your programme activities target particular risk and protective factors? How were these identified in the first place? (Was a 'needs analysis' carried out before the programme was designed? Will this require updating at some point?)

1.3 Have you created a model that diagram-matically illustrates your programme's theory of change? (This is sometimes called a **logic model**.)

1.4 Are there any activities that are not closely related to the programme's objectives or goals? If so, can you justify your reasons for undertaking them?

1.5 Are there programme goals or objectives that are not fully addressed by the exist-ing programme activities? If so, do you need to add other kinds of activities?

1.6 Do you have a plan for how, specifically, the programme will operate to achieve its intended outcomes (i.e. a plan that spells out the mechanisms of change)?

where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...
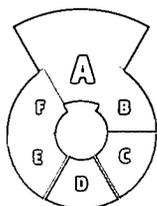
mechanisms of change
The specific processes by which a given activity is thought to lead to a particular change or outcome.

logic model
A series of logical connections that link problems and/or needs with the actions taken to achieve change. Involves spelling out key assumptions about how actions are related to outcomes. Usually expressed in a diagrammatic form.

multi-dimensional
Having several levels or aspects.

The most effective rogrammes are **multi-dimensional**. They recognise that people develop within many settings such as school, family, peer group, programmes, workplace and neighbourhood. They also recognise that no single programme can tackle all issues for all people, but that successful approaches work at a number of levels. Therefore, effective programmes often work within more than one setting or location, or partner with other programmes that reach the same groups but in different settings. For example, many effective preventative programmes for children work with families and schools as well as directly with children.

In addition, effective programmes often simultaneously address more than one development issue. For example, a programme for children with severe behavioural problems might address the child's ability to manage their emotions, how parents manage their children's behaviour, and the quality of the relationship between parents and children.

2.1 Which issues, in which settings, does the programme address? Does the programme address a wide enough range of issues and settings to bring about the changes desired?

2.2 What other behaviours or activities, people/groups, or settings could be targeted to strengthen the programme and increase the likelihood of achieving the desired outcomes?

A PROGRAMME DESIGN AND CONTENT

where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...

3 Effective programmes build on strengths and encourage positive behaviours
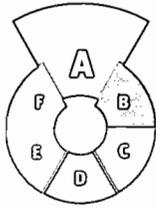
Intervention
An activity conducted with an individual or group, or within a community, in order to change people's circumstances, behaviour or thinking and prevent or bring about improvement to a problem.

Effective programmes promote confidence and build on participants' strengths as a way to influence thinking or behaviour. Many years of research have shown that **intervention** methods that are fear-based or punitive, or that make people feel judged or shamed, are generally ineffective. Effective programmes focus on building confidence and skills that improve people's ability to cope with the challenges they face. This allows participants to be successful at achieving positive change for themselves.

Programmes can contribute to this by providing people with specific skills, by the use of rewards and incentives that make them feel good about themselves, by identifying good role models, and by creating opportunities for personally valuable, positive experiences.

3.1 What positive strengths and skill sets does the programme try to promote? How does it do this?

3.2 Are there other strategies that could be used to promote positive behaviour and develop coping skills? What evidence is there that these strategies are effective?

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where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...
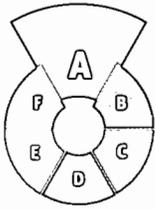
4 Effective programmes use active and engaging learning techniques and understand that people learn in different ways

Most people learn best when they are actively engaged and have opportunities to practise new skills. Programmes that use active and varied methods and keep participants interested tend to be most successful. Effective programmes engage participants in the materials they use (where this is relevant) and encourage them to practise and apply new behaviours, rather than just presenting information.

Programmes that are enjoyable and fun have better attendance rates and are less likely to be affected by people dropping out early. Enjoyment and fun are critical for services that work directly with children or young people, but are also important for adults!

4.1 Do the programme activities require active rather than passive participation? How do you know this?

4.2 If poor or sporadic attendance is an issue, are there any ways in which the programme could be made more engaging and enjoyable?

4.3 If the programme aims to change people's behaviour, are there opportunities for participants to practise and try out new skills and behaviours?

where we are strong...

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...
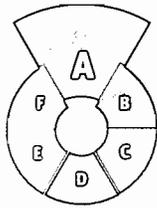
dosage
The degree of exposure by an individual or group to an activity or set of activities run as part of a service or programme. Dosage can be measured by the number of contact hours, including the number of sessions, and the length of each session.

5 Effective programmes are of sufficient intensity in terms of content and duration. They 'get the dosage right'

Participants need to get enough of a service for it to have an effect. The effectiveness of many well-designed programmes can be undermined by simply not offering enough of it to make a difference. This is sometimes called the **dosage** (or 'programme intensity'). It can be measured in terms of the number of contact hours (how many hours staff spend with each service user), the frequency of contact and the duration of the total programme (how often participants attend and for how long), and the participants' level of involvement (are people merely attending, or are they actively taking part?).

Generally, the more difficult or complex the problem or issue being addressed (i.e. the more ambitious the outcomes), the greater the dosage and intensity need to be. Many effective programmes also include booster or follow-up sessions after the main programme has finished, to help reinforce learning that might have faded over time. Research suggests that the good effects of interventions often do not last once the programme is finished, and we are still learning how to tackle this.

5.1 How does the programme dosage or intensity compare to that of proven evidence-based programmes that work in this area? Are the number of programme contact hours and sessions sufficient for the outcomes you wish to achieve?

5.2 Do participants attend long enough for the desired learning and changes to occur, or do they tend to drop out early?

5.3 Are the programme activities intense and multi-dimensional enough to bring about the changes desired? Does the dosage received vary from one service user to the next, and if so, what are the implications for achieving the desired outcomes?

5.4 Are the changes addressed by the programme likely to be sustained by participants after the programme is over?

5.5 Does the programme include any booster sessions or other on-going contact with participants to help them maintain changes in their behaviour after the programme is over?

where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...

Programme relevance and sensitivity to context

Does the programme meet the needs of the children and families we are trying to help, and how does it relate to national and local priorities in terms of the groups we work with?

6 Effective programmes take account of the different stages of development

risk factor
A characteristic or circumstance that increases the likelihood of a particular problem occurring, or leads to the worsening of a pre-existing problem. Risk factors can exist at a variety of levels: in the characteristics of the individual child; their family; peers; school; neighbourhood or community; and the wider society.

protective factor
A characteristic or circumstance that acts as a 'buffer' in the presence of risk factors. Like risk factors, protective factors can occur at a variety of levels.

Effective programmes are specifically tailored to particular stages of human development and the life cycle, and are usually delivered to carefully targeted participants. Rather than trying to address the widest possible group of individuals or families, they acknowledge the developmental differences that often characterise children and young people of even slightly different ages.

For example, effective programmes for adolescents will usually take into account the very powerful influence of peers at this stage of life, and recognise that this influence can be both a positive and negative force. For parents, a programme that addresses their child's current developmental stage will typically be more attractive, engaging, and effective than a programme about parenting more generally. It is also important that information and support is delivered at the right time (so, for example, new parents will need different kinds of information than parents bringing up teenagers).

6.1 How does the programme target the specific risk and protective factors that are relevant for the participants' ages and developmental needs?

6.2 Does the programme use materials and activities that are appropriate for the targeted age group? If the programme targets a wide age group, how well does this work?

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where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...

7 Effective programmes are clear about whom they seek to reach, and try to reach participants at the point where they are most likely to be receptive to what the programme has to offer

The effectiveness of some otherwise well-designed programmes may be undermined by lack of clarity about who they are trying to reach. The most effective programmes have clearly set-out selection criteria and careful screening and referral processes to make sure they get exactly the people their service is designed to help.

High-impact programmes also intervene when participants are most receptive to change. This can mean reaching out to families or individuals as they go through a key transition (e.g. birth of a first child) or when a problem first becomes apparent.

In addition, effective programmes try to do some preparation with participants before they begin more intensive work, so that they are able to take best advantage of the resources, support and learning activities that the programme provides (sometimes referred to as making participants 'programme ready'). This might mean connecting people to other programmes and resources to help them first meet more immediate needs such as safety, housing, or treatment for substance abuse.

7.1 Do you have clear referral criteria? Do you have a method for determining who meets these criteria? Does everyone understand and apply the criteria in the same way?

7.2 Are the referral or inclusion criteria selected to identify the people for whom the programme is most appropriate? Is anyone being missed? What can be done about this?

7.3 What is the best time or life stage for people to participate in the programme? (You might consider developmental stages or key time points on which proven programmes in this field focus.)

7.4 What does 'programme ready' mean in the context of your programme? Do you have a method for assessing if new participants are programme ready?

7.5 Do some participants experience obstacles in their personal situations that keep them from fully benefiting from the programme? What can or does the programme do to tackle these?

B PROGRAMME RELEVANCE AND SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT

where we are strong...

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...

...the supporting evidence

8 Effective programmes are culturally relevant to all those receiving them

Tailoring a programme to the social and cultural traditions of participants is important for encouraging people to attend and to get the best out of what is provided. This means taking account not only of race or ethnic background, but also of socio-economic status; whether people are from an urban, suburban or rural community; religious traditions and beliefs; parents' levels of education; and, for some, length of residency in the country. Gender and sexuality may also be relevant factors in programme design and delivery.

A programme is likely to be effective only as long as it is relevant to the participants' lives. At the very least, programme materials and activities should be presented in a way that participants can relate to. In addition, programme staff should feel comfortable working with the targeted cultural group and have a good understanding of their cultural traditions. Effective programmes do, however, apply a consistent consideration of children's rights and the conditions that foster good child development, regardless of cultural background.

8.1 Are programme staff comfortable working with the targeted group? Are staff members familiar with the culture(s) of the targeted group?

8.2 Have representatives from the targeted group reviewed the programme materials for their appropriateness and acceptability in terms of the different social and cultural traditions of the participants, taking account of language, images and representation?

8.3 Are there ways that the programme activities and materials could be made more consistent with the participants' culture(s)?

where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...

9 Effective programmes understand the policy context in which they operate

Programmes do not exist in a vacuum and are inevitably affected by the social and policy context in which they operate. National or local policy priorities will influence many aspects of a programme's work, ranging from funding, to how the programme collaborates with other agencies, to procedures for child protection. Effective programmes have a good understanding of how national policy impacts on their work and the ways that their work may influence national policy.

9.1 What are the key national and local policies that impact on your programme? Do these help or hinder what the programme is trying to do?

9.2 What methods do you use to keep informed about relevant national and local policy developments?

9.3 What methods do you use to influence the development of local and national policies that impact on your programme?

where we are strong...

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...

...the supporting evidence

Programme delivery and implementation

To what extent are we working in partnership with clients and communities who have well-trained and motivated staff, on a programme that collaborates with other relevant services and organisations?

participation
Meaningful participation involves recognising and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of people being worked with, through the provision of real opportunities for people to become involved in decisions that affect them at individual and organisational levels.

10 Effective programmes work in partnership with participants, actively engage with young people and families and have a strong commitment to participation

The idea of partnership between service providers and participants is now well established as a core principle of good practice. Positive change most often happens in the context of supportive relationships where individuals feel respected and safe and trust one another. Effective programmes are structured to foster trusting relationships over time among participants, staff, and volunteers. Thoughtful programme planning takes account of the fact that trusting relationships can take time to develop.

Effective programmes for children and youth develop ways to allow children and young people to actively participate, and use a range of methods to support their involvement. Evidence shows that the 'token' involvement of participants may actually decrease effectiveness and affect outcomes in a negative way.

10.1 Is the **participation** of children and young people and their families a visible commitment that is properly resourced?

10.2 Is the participation of children and young people and their families supported in the organisation by effective policies and systems?

10.3 What are the benefits for participants themselves from participation? Can these be further enhanced?

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where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...

11 Effective programmes are delivered by well-trained, well-supported staff and volunteers

Programmes are more likely to be effective if they have well-qualified, well-trained, well-supported and committed staff and volunteers. The effectiveness of staff (or volunteers) is in turn affected by receiving supervision, support and recognition from managers, boards, and each other. In addition, many successful programmes have what is referred to as a 'champion' – someone who is enthusiastic about the programme and possesses enough organisational authority to influence decisions and make things happen. Champions can be internal or external to the programme.

11.1 Are staff members (and volunteers, if relevant) given training before implementing the programme? How adequate is the training? What areas could benefit from more attention?

11.2 Do staff members receive guidance and feedback from supervisors on a regular basis?

11.3 Are the staff and volunteers enthusiastic about and committed to the programme?

11.4 Does or might the programme benefit from having one or more champions either within or external to your service?

C PROGRAMME DELIVERY AND IMPLEMENTATION

where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...
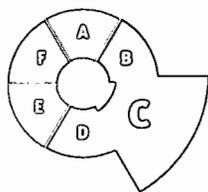
12 Effective programmes recognise the importance of inter-agency working and collaborate and communicate with other services and agencies serving their client group

Building and maintaining relationships with key external stakeholders is essential for an effective organisation. External stake-holders could include funders, policy-makers, related service providers and local communities. Effective programmes rarely work in isolation but have a good grasp of their local and national land-scape in terms of other programmes and services that may be helpful to their clients. Effective services work with others in a way that reduces duplication or conflict and helps participants 'navigate' between services that may benefit them. They also understand how their programme sits in relation to other programmes or services or community organisations, and how best to exploit this to achieve better outcomes.

Programmes rarely if ever operate in isolation from the communities that surround them. They have systems for communicating with participants and key community stakeholders that give them timely and appropriate information about their work and allow their partners to share relevant information with them.

12.1 Do you have a good knowledge of other local services that may complement what you provide? Are there things that could be done to improve understanding between your programme and other providers, in terms of what you do?

12.2 If you work in partnership with other agencies, are there lead agencies or staff identified to deal with key issues that emerge?

12.3 Do you have procedures for inter-agency referrals between your service and others?

12.3 Do you have systems for protecting confidential or sensitive data, and a data protection policy? If not, what are the barriers to doing this and how may they be overcome?

12.4 Are there external stakeholders with whom the organisation should seek to develop stronger relationships?

12.5 Does the organisation have strong working relationships with a range of funders/funding agencies and with policy-makers at a local and national level?

where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...
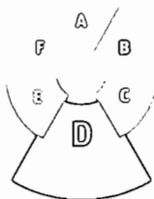
Programme documentation, evaluation and quality assurance

Are we keeping a record of what we did, are we doing things consistently, how do we know we are achieving, and how do we keep informed about new research and ensure we integrate it into our programme?
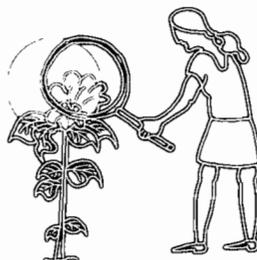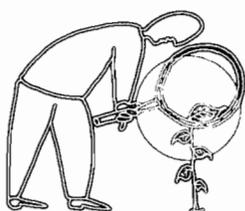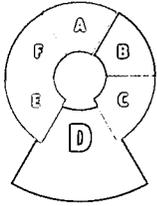
13 Effective programmes are well documented and have systems in place to ensure quality is maintained

Written documentation of what happens in a programme (what is done, how it is done) is key to demonstrating and maintaining its effectiveness. When working with a locally developed programme, it is important to document details about the programme so that it will be consistent from one session to the next. Staff need to know what the programme is designed to accomplish and the details of the programme's components in order to successfully implement it. This is sometimes called having a 'manual' for the programme. Programmes that are not written down cannot be replicated, no matter how good they are.

In addition, when implementing an evidence-based programme or a programme that has shown promising results in the past, it is important to track how well implementation 'on the ground' matches the original programme design. 'Faithfulness' or **fidelity** of implementation is one determinant of whether programmes are equally effective in multiple locations. It is important that the activities of the programme are monitored so that progress in reaching targets can be gauged and corrective action taken when problems arise. Finally, in order for a programme to be evaluated for effectiveness, staff and evaluators need to have a clear understanding of what the programme is all about.

13.1 Do staff delivering the programme to service users know what it is supposed to accomplish and what each session or component involves?

13.2 Is the programme adequately documented so that others could implement or replicate the programme?

13.3 Do you have a system for assessing how well the programme is implemented and for obtaining feedback about how various parts of it are operating? (This might use session outlines, checklists, practice/session logs or other materials)

13.4 What additional types of documentation does the programme need in order to be well-understood, replicable and ready for evaluation?

fidelity
The degree to which the activities undertaken in a programme are true to the design of the original programme on which it is based.

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where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...
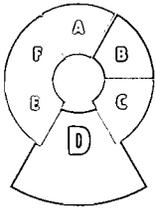
14 Effective programmes have strategies for using research and evaluation to review and improve their practice

New research is continually emerging, and effective programmes keep abreast of the latest research evidence that is relevant to their work and have systems in place to help them relate emerging evidence to their own programme improvement. In addition, monitoring of programme implementation and outputs and evaluation of programme outcomes are important tools for learning about how well a programme is doing and for developing ways to improve it.

While a common type of evaluation involves assessing whether or not a programme has an impact on participants, evaluation can take many forms. It can include assessing a programme's quality, identifying problem areas, monitoring users' participation, tracking implementation and guiding programme improvement.

14.1 What systems do you have in place for learning about research that is relevant to your programme? What methods do you use to put new evidence into your own practice?

14.2 Do you track participants' attendance and engagement and monitor the 'dosage' they receive?

14.3 Do you collect basic demographic data (age, sex, ethnicity, whether working, etc)? If not, have you considered doing so and whether this might be useful? What other information about participants could potentially be useful?

14.4 What evidence do you have that your programme really works in achieving its goals? Are you happy with the quality of this evidence? If not, what other kinds of evidence would be useful to your programme's development? How might it be possible to gather this kind of evidence?

D PROGRAMME DOCUMENTATION, EVALUATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

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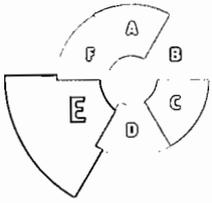
Knowledge transfer and communication

How do we let others know about the things we do that work well, and how do we communicate with individuals and organisations about what we are doing?

15 Effective programmes transfer their learning to others who can benefit from their experience

dissemination
The deliberate attempt to spread information and encourage its use.

knowledge transfer
The process by which knowledge and ideas move from the source of knowledge to other potential users of that knowledge.

communications/ dissemination strategy
A plan that sets out who you need to communicate with, the messages you want (or need) to communicate, and what methods you propose to use to achieve this.

One of the key reasons that evidence does not always get into practice is the failure to communicate learning from effective programmes to others who may benefit from it. This is linked to **dissemination** and **knowledge transfer**. Effective programmes have well-developed strategies for delivering the messages with their participants and key stakeholders including funders. These strategies include the identification of relevant objectives, audiences and evaluation criteria. Many promising programmes have never emerged beyond a pilot basis in part because of a failure to do this. Effective programmes can demonstrate that they disseminate their learning and communicate effectively.

15.1 Do you have a **communications/ dissemination/knowledge transfer strategy?**

13.2 What does the programme do, or plan to do, to ensure that learning from the programme is disseminated in forms that can potentially benefit participants or other programmes?

15.3 What forms of communication do you currently use and are they effective for the given audiences?

15.4 Do your information and communication systems facilitate or hinder dialogue and appropriate information-sharing with stakeholders and with other agencies working with the same individuals, families, or communities?

15.5 What methods do you use to assess the effectiveness of your communication?

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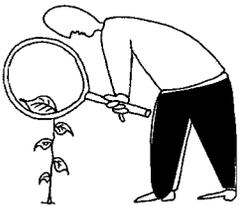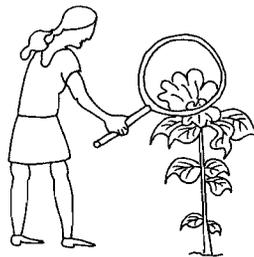
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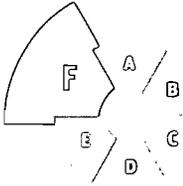
To what extent is our organisation arranged to achieve the outcome we want and is it fit for the purpose we have set ourselves?
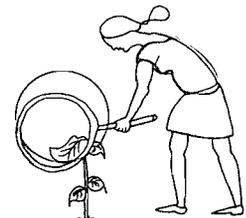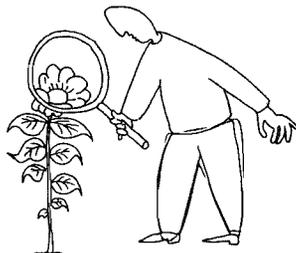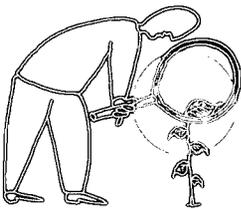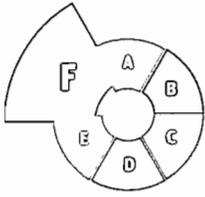
mission statement
A statement which
defines the fundamental
purpose of an
organisation or service,
succinctly describing why
it exists and what it does.
It is sometimes used to
set out a 'picture' of the
organisation in the future.
A mission statement
provides details of what is
done and answers the
question: 'What do we
exist to do?'

16 Effective programmes are based in organisations that have a clearly set out vision and strategic direction

Effective organisations have a clearly articulated mission or vision that sets out their purpose and direction, and have a strategy for achieving their goals.

16.1 Does the organisation have a clearly set out purpose and direction (often in the form of a vision or **mission statement**)?

16.2 Does the organisation have a written strategy or plan for achieving its goals? Is it shared with and understood by programme participants, staff members and key stakeholders?

where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...
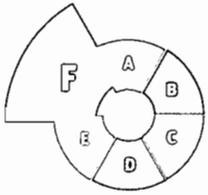
17 Effective organisations have the organisational skills, systems and infrastructure to support the achievement of their goals

For an organisation to deliver on its goals, it needs to have appropriate skills, systems and infrastructure in place. The range of skills needed is likely to include technical skills, professional training, management skills, planning skills and fundraising skills. The systems required may include information technology (IT), human resources (HR), financial management, and performance management, and the infrastructure includes its physical buildings and facilities.

17.1 Does the organisation's staff, management, board and volunteers have the organisational skills needed to achieve its goals, or a plan to acquire what is needed? (Skills needed are likely to include technical skills, professional training, management skills, planning skills and fundraising skills)

17.2 Has the organisation appropriate systems – such as IT, HR, financial management, performance management and planning – to support the achievement of its goals?

17.3 Has the organisation appropriate infrastructure – physical buildings and facilities – to support the achievement of its goals?

F ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY AND DEVELOPMENT

where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...
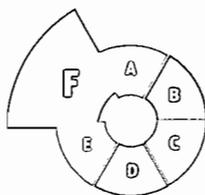
18 Effective organisations have strong leadership and an appropriate structure and culture for achieving their goals

Effective programmes are based in organisations that have strong leadership which provides strategic direction for the organisation and supports the development of evidence-informed practice. The leadership for the organisation or service can be provided by an individual senior manager, director or CEO, or by a senior management team collectively. Effective organisations combine strong leadership with good governance arrangements and a suitable organisation structure. Governance arrangements include legal structures for the organisation, board skills and scrutiny of management, and reporting arrangements to board and funders.

Effective organisations have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, clear reporting lines and an organisation chart that is complete and reflects current reality. They have a shared set of values within the organisation and a culture that facilitates continuous improvement and encourages good performance at all levels in the organisation.

18.1 Does the organisation have strong leadership which provides strategic direction for the organisation and supports the development of evidence-informed practice?

18.2 Has the organisation the appropriate governance arrangements (legal structure, board skills and scrutiny of management, reporting arrangements to board/funders) in place to enable it to deliver on its goals?

18.3 Is the organisation structure 'fit for purpose'? In other words, are roles and responsibilities clearly defined and are there clear reporting lines and an organisation chart which is complete and reflects current reality?

18.4 Does the organisation have a shared set of core values?

18.5 Does the culture of the organisation facilitate continuous improvement and encourage good performance among management, staff and volunteers?

where we are strong...

...the supporting evidence

where we can do better...

what needs more discussion or better information...

next steps

Congratulations on completing the What Works Tool!
We look forward to working with you and supporting you to improving outcomes for children and families and the communities in which they live.

In the next stage of the What Works Process, we will help you to compile a Needs Analysis from your responses. The CES team will analyse the data provided by you in the completed What Works Tool. The Needs Analysis will identify areas of good practice, issues for clarification, and emerging objectives for further development. We will also draw up an Action Plan which will develop our joint thinking with you about what needs to be done, who will do it, timeframes and responsibilities.

We will meet with you to agree the content of the Needs Analysis and the Action Plan, and together they will form the basis of your Partnership Agreement with us. Our aim will be to work with you to add value to the expertise that already exists within your programme. See overleaf for a sample Partnership Agreement.
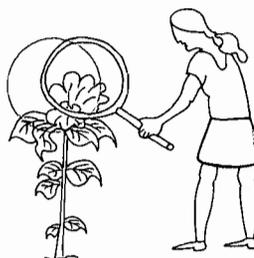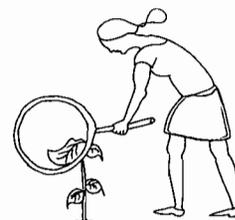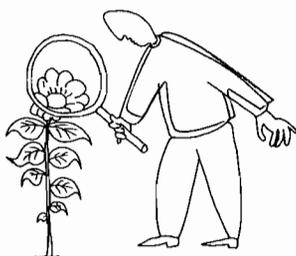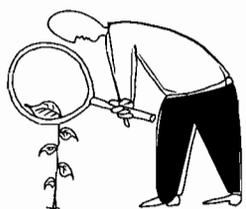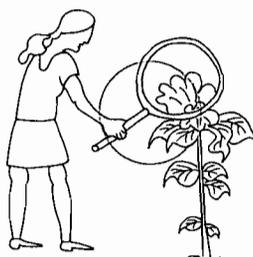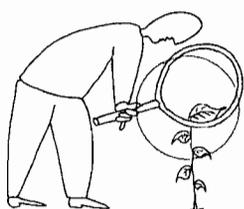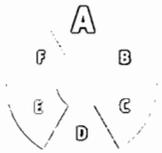
programme
design and content

Effective programmes are based on sound theory and focus on improving outcomes for children and families

Effective programmes work on multiple aspects of need

Effective programmes build on strengths and encourage positive behaviours

Effective programmes use active and engaging learning techniques and under-stand that people learn in different ways

Effective programmes are of sufficient intensity in terms of content and duration

areas of good practice	potential needs	issues for clarification

action plan

objectives	activities	outputs	who will do it

Appendix 1 Useful reading

* sources that particularly influence our thinking

Asked, J. and Stephens, L. (2009) *A guide to co-producing children's services.* London, Action for Children and New Economics Foundation

Badham, B. and Wade, H. (2008) *Hear by right. Standards framework for the participation of children and young people.* The National Youth Agency

Barnardos (2000) *'What Works?' Making connections: Linking research and practice. A review.* Barnardo's Research and Development Team. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Buckley, H. and Whelan, S. (2009) *Putting research evidence to work: key issues for research utilisation in Irish children's services.* Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin, and the Children Acts Advisory Board

Cameron, A. and Lart, R. (2003) Factors promoting and obstacles hindering joint working: a systematic review of the research evidence. *Journal of Integrated Care,* Vol 11. No 2, pp 9-17

*Chinman, M., Imm, P. and Wandersman, A. (2004) *Getting to Outcomes™ 2004. Promoting Accountability through Methods and Tools for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation.* RAND Health

*Friedman, M. (2005) *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough: How to produce measurable improvements for customers and communities.* Trafford Publishing

Fixsen, D.L., Naoom, S.F., Blase, K.A., Freidman, R.M and Wallace, F. (2005) *Implementation Research: A synthesis of the literature.* Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louise de la Parte Mental Health Institute, The National Implementation Research Network (FMHI Publication #231)

Kirby, P. and Bryson, S. (2002). *Measuring the magic: Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision making.* The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust

Lewig, K., Arney, F. and Scott, D. (2006) Closing the research-policy and research-practice gaps: Ideas for Child and Family Services. *Family Matters,* Vol 74, pp 12-19

McDonnell, F. and Murphy, R. (2009) *Interagency co-operation in Irish children's services: the views of some stakeholders.* Dublin, Children Acts Advisory Board

McKinsey and Company (2001) *Effective Capacity Building in Nonprofit Organisations.* Venture Philanthropy Partners

Mayeske, G.W. and Lambur, M.T. (2001) *How to Design Better Programs: A Staff Centered Stakeholder Approach to Program Logic Modeling.* The Program Design Institute

Moran, P., Ghate, D. and van der Merwe, A. (2004) *What works in Parenting Support? A Review of the International Evidence.* Research report no 574. Department for Education and Skills, United Kingdom

Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland *The National Children's Strategy: Our Children – Their Lives* (2000). Irish Government

Publications

Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland (2007) The Agenda for Children's Service. Dublin, OMCYA

Portsmouth Children's Trust Development Team (2006) *Turning the Curve Toolkit: From Talk to Action – Making a Difference to Children, Young People and Families' Lives.* Portsmouth Children's Trust

Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Siraj-Blatchford, J. (2009) *Improving development outcomes through effective practice in integrating early years services.* London, C4EO

*Small, S., O'Connor, C. and Cooney, S. (2008) *Evidence informed program improvement. What Works. Wisconsin Program Improvement Manual.* University of Wisconsin-Madison-Extension

Taylor-Powell, E. and Henert, E. (2008) *Developing a logic model: teaching and training guide.* University of Wisconsin-Madison-Extension

Utting D. (2009) *Assessing and meeting the need for parenting support services: A literature review.* London, Family and Parenting Institute

Utting, D., Monteiro, H. and Ghate, D. (2007) *Interventions for children at risk of developing anti-social personality disorder.* London, Policy Research Bureau
http://www.prb.org.uk/publications/P182%20and%20P188%20Report.pdf

What Works for Children Group (2003) *Evidence guide: An introduction to finding, judging and using research findings on what works for children and young people.* London, Economic and Social Research Council

W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2001) W.K. Kellogg Foundation *Logic Model: Using Logic Models to Bring Together Planning, Evaluation, and Action Development Guide.* W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Willow, C. (2004). *Participation in Practice: children and young people as partners in change.* London, The Children's Society

Accountability
The ability to demonstrate to key stakeholders that a programme works and that it uses its resources effectively to achieve and sustain projected goals and outcomes

Activities
What programmes develop and implement to produce desired outcomes

Best practice
New ideas or lessons learned about effective activities that have been developed and implemented in the field and are considered to produce positive outcomes

Communications/dissemination strategy
A plan that sets out who you need to communicate with, the messages you want (or need) to communicate, and what methods you propose to use to achieve this.

Comparison group
A group of people whose outcomes can be measured against those of another group who are taking part in a specific service or intervention. Comparison group members have characteristics and profiles similar to those of the service group, but do not receive the same service

Control group
A more rigorous form of comparison group: members of a control group are systematically and randomly assigned to the group from the same population receiving an intervention, but they do not receive that intervention themselves. Comparison of outcomes in the control group with outcomes for those who have received the intervention allows researchers to determine whether the intervention being studied was responsible for any changes that are observed

Cultural competency
Understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities within, among, and between groups

Data
Information collected and used for reasoning, discussion, and decision making. In programme evaluation, both quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (views, opinions and experiences) data may be used

Data analysis
The process of systematically examining, studying, and interpreting collected information

Dissemination
The deliberate attempt to spread information and encourage its use

Dosage
The amount of interaction or participation by an individual or group in an activity or set of activities run as part of a service or programme. Dosage can be measured by the number of contact hours, including the number of sessions, and the length of each session.

Effectiveness
The ability of a programme to achieve its stated goals and produce measurable outcomes

Experimental design
The set of specific procedures by which a theory about the relationship of programme activities to measurable outcomes will be tested. This allows conclusions to be made about how strongly the programme's activities influenced the outcomes that have occurred. Experimental methods always include the use of a control or a comparison group

Evaluation
A process of systematic investigation, preferably done using scientifically robust research methods, and used to assess the processes, outcomes and impacts associated with a programme, service or intervention

Evidence-based programme
A programme that has consistently been shown to produce positive results by independent research studies that have been conducted to a particular degree of scientific quality

Evidence-informed practice
Practice based on the integration of experience, judgement and expertise with the best available external evidence from systematic research

External (or 'independent') evaluation
Evaluation by an individual or team independent of the organisation or programme that is being evaluated

Facilitator
A facilitator's job is to support everyone to do their best thinking and practice. The facilitator encourages full participation, promotes mutual understanding and cultivates shared responsibility. By supporting everyone to do their best thinking, a facilitator enables group members to search for inclusive solutions and build sustainable agreements

Fidelity
The degree to which the activities undertaken in a programme are true to the design of the original programme on which it is based

Focus group
A small group of people with shared characteristics who participate, under the direction of a facilitator, in a focused discussion designed to identify perceptions and opinions about a specific topic. Focus groups may be used to collect background information, create new ideas and hypotheses, assess how a programme is working, or help to interpret results from other data sources

Goal
A broad statement that describes the desired impact of a specific programme

Impact
A statement of long-term, global or overarching effects of a programme or intervention (See also Outcomes)

Implementation science
The study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence into routine practice, in order to improve the quality of services

Incidence
The number of people within a given population who have acquired a particular characteristic or status within a specific time period, often expressed as a rate per year (See also Prevalence)

Inputs
Resources made available to a service or programme to help it achieve its goals, e.g. funding, staff, training, consultancy, premises or equipment

Intermediary organisations
These work across the boundaries of research, policy and practice and help those who plan and deliver services to do their work in more effective, evidence-informed ways

Internal evaluation
Evaluation by an individual or team from within the organisation or programme that is being evaluated

Intervention
An activity conducted with an individual or group, or within a community, in order to change behaviour and prevent or bring about improvement to a problem

Knowledge transfer
The process by which knowledge and ideas move from the source of knowledge to potential users of that knowledge

Logic model
A series of logical connections that link problems and/or needs with the actions taken to achieve change. Involves spelling out key assumptions about how actions are related to outcomes. Usually expressed in diagrammatic form

Manualisation
The process whereby written manuals or guidelines are developed which state the objectives for each activity/session and the recommended structure, organisation, sequence, and duration of each session/programme. Helps to ensure that programmes are consistent with the original programme

Mechanism of change
The specific process by which a given activity is thought to lead to a particular change or outcome

Methodology
A particular procedure or set of procedures used for achieving a desired outcome, including the collection of research or evaluation data

Mission statement
Defines the fundamental purpose of an organisation or service, describing why it exists and what it does to achieve its vision. It is sometimes used to set out a 'picture' of the organisation in the future. A mission statement provides details of what is done and answers the question: 'What do we exist to do?'

Monitoring
A counting process concerned with assessing whether agreed inputs have been made and whether key targets for service uptake have been achieved (for example, counting how many people use a service over a given period of time)

Multi-dimensional
Having several levels or aspects

Needs analysis
An examination of the existing strengths and deficits within a group, community or organisation. Usually involves gathering views and opinions, and factual data, and should enable those concerned to make an informed judgement about what changes are required in order to achieve better outcomes

Outcomes
Changes that occur as a result of interventions. Outcomes may be short-term or immediate, medium-term or intermediate, long-term or end. Short-term outcomes may include changes in knowledge, attitudes or simple behaviours; long-term or end outcomes are likely to be the result of many or sustained interventions and include changes in complex behaviours, conditions (e.g. risk factors), and status (e.g. poverty rates)

Outcome evaluation
Systematic process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting data to assess what results a programme has achieved

Outcome indicators
The measurement that will be used to determine whether the intended effect of a programme has occurred. (For example, an indicator of the desired outcome 'improved maternal mental health' from a service offering post-natal support might be a reduction in symptoms of depression amongst women using the service, measured using a standardised scale, over a specified period)

Outputs
Number of units of service provided, such as the number of parent education classes or number of client contact hours

Participation
Meaningful participation involves recognising and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of people being worked with, through the provision of real opportunities for people to become involved in decisions that affect them at individual and organisational levels

Practice development
A continuous process of improvement which aims to achieve the best outcomes for service users. This is brought about by helping practitioners to develop their knowledge and skills in line with the most up-to-date research on what works

Prevalence
The total number of people within a population who have a particular characteristic at a given point (often expressed as a 'lifetime' rate i.e. people who have 'ever had' a particular experience or characteristic)

Process evaluation
Assessing what activities were implemented, the quality of the implementation, and the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation. Is used to produce useful feedback for programme refinement, to determine which activities were more successful than others, to document successful processes for future replication, and to demonstrate programme activities before demonstrating outcomes

Process indicators
Signs that an intended process or plan is 'on track'. For example, one process indicator showing success in developing a collaborative effort may be the development of an interagency agreement.

Programme
A set of activities that has clearly stated goals from which all activities – as well as specific, observable, and measurable outcomes – are derived. A programme sometimes may incorporate a number of different services

Protective factor
An attribute, situation, condition, or environmental context that works to buffer an individual from the likelihood of adverse effects of a particular problem

Qualitative data
Information gathered in narrative form by talking to or observing people. Often presented as text, qualitative data can serve to illuminate evaluation findings derived from quantitative methods

Quality assurance
A system or set of systems in which the delivery of a service or the quality of a product is assessed, and compared with that which is required

Quantitative data
Information gathered in numeric form. Quantitative methods deal most often with numbers that are analysed with statistics to test hypotheses and track the strength and direction of relationships between variables (relevant factors)

Random assignment
A systematic but arbitrary process used in experimental research design through which eligible study participants are assigned to either a 'control group' or to the group of people who receive the intervention being tested

Randomised controlled trial
A type of evaluation study where people are allocated randomly to a group receiving a particular intervention, or to a group that is receiving a different intervention, or not receiving an intervention at all. This is the best type of study design to determine whether an intervention is effective in causing change

Replicate
To implement a programme in a setting other than the one for which it originally was designed and implemented, with attention to the faithful transfer of its core elements to the new setting

Resource assessment
A systematic examination of existing structures, programmes, and other activities potentially available to assist in addressing identified needs

Risk factors
An attribute, situation, condition, or environmental context that increases the likelihood of a particular problem or set of problems, or that may lead to a worsening of a current problem or problems

Sample
In evaluation research, used to describe a fraction or sub-group of a larger population and intended to represent the larger population to a greater or lesser extent. Samples may be selected to be statistically representative (as in robust quantitative research), or they may be selected purposively (as in qualitative research) to reflect particular characteristics or issues of interest

Stakeholder
An individual or organisation with a direct or indirect interest or investment in a project or programme (e.g. a funder, programme champion, or community leader)

Standardised tests
Instruments of examination, observation, or evaluation that share a standard set of instructions for their administration, use, scoring, and interpretation, and have been pre-tested for various 'psychometric' properties that make them robust

Statistical significance
A situation in which a relationship between different variables occurs so frequently that it is unlikely to be attributable to chance or coincidence. The likelihood of statistically significant findings is closely related to the size of the sample being used, so that even small degrees of relationships between variables are likely to be statistically significant in very large samples, whilst comparatively large relationships may not be statistically significant in small samples (this is known as 'statistical power')

Strategic plan
A comprehensive plan for accomplishment in relation to stated goals and
objectives. Ideally, the plan should cover multiple years; include targets for
expected accomplishments; and propose specific performance measures used
to evaluate progress towards those targets

Target population
The individuals or group of individuals for whom a prevention programme has
been designed and for whom the programme is intended to have an impact

Targeted prevention
Prevention efforts that most effectively address the specific risk and protective
factors of a particular population, and that are most likely to have the greatest
positive impact on that specific population

Theory of change
A set of assumptions ('hypotheses'), usually based on research, about a
pathway of change, which forms the basis of the programme's design. It
outlines a causal pathway, from where things are now, to where they will be, by
specifying what has to happen along the path for goals to be achieved

Universal prevention
Prevention efforts for the general population, or a population that has not been
identified on the basis of individual risk or need. Universal prevention
interventions are not designed in response to an assessment of the risk and
protective factors of a specific population, but are in theory open to anyone
who wants to access them

Vision statement
A statement giving a broad, aspirational image of the future that an
organisation is aiming to achieve

price €12 euros or £8
further copies of this resource can be ordered from
office@effectiveservices.org
please quote reference P202