Measuring Outcomes in Youth Justice Programmes: A Review of Literature and Practice Evidence

John Reddy, Sean Redmond

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MEASURING OUTCOMES IN YOUTH JUSTICE PROGRAMMES

A review of literature and practice evidence

2022

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

RESEARCH
EVIDENCE INTO
POLICY PROGRAMMES
AND PRACTICE

YOUTH CRIME

Measuring Outcomes in Youth Justice Programmes: A Review of Literature and Practice Evidence

2022

John Reddy and Sean Redmond

The Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes, and Practice (REPPP) Project

As a strategic research partnership between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the School of Law at the University of Limerick, the REPPP extends and improves the evidence-base for policy, programmes, and practice reform in relation to youth crime in Ireland. To this end, the project implements practically-focused research studies which directly link to the policy priorities identified by Irish Youth Justice Service, is informed by multiple evidence sources, and focuses on better outcomes for children. While REPPP emphasises the *policy* relevance of research evidence, it is cognisant of the relevant issues of *programmes* and *practice*, and recognises that reform in the area of human programmes requires change across all three areas to achieve substantial traction.

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For further information, please contact:
Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) Project, School of Law, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland.

Tel: 0035361234829 **Email:** REPPP@ul.ie **Web:** https://ulsites.ul.ie/law/reppp **TW**: @REPPP4

The authors are responsible for the choice and presentation of views expressed in this report and for the opinions expressed herein.

Contents

List of Tables

Table of Figures

Abbreviations

APP	A Mobile Application
ARP	Action Research Project
CBR	Child Observation Record
GYDPs	Garda Youth Diversion Projects
IYJS	Irish Youth Justice Service
JLO	Juvenile Liaison Officer
OBA	Outcomes-Based Accountability questionnaire
PULSE	Police Using Leading Systems Effectively
RRR	Rapid realist review
RCTs	Randomised control trials
REPPP	Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice project
TOC	Theory of Change
VFMPR	Value for Money and Policy Review for Youth Programmes
YJWs	Youth Justice Workers
YLS/CMI	Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory

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Executive Summary

This Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes, and Practice (REPPP) study examined outcome measurement in youth justice programmes, youth work, and human services. Outcomes for young people are the effects or contribution to effects for young people that can reasonably be attributed to their participation in a programme. The research was commissioned by the Department of Justice to support improved measurement in Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs).

Messages from Literature and Practice Reports

The evidence presented indicates that timely information from practice helps to strengthen programmes, improve standards, and provide accountability. Service providers use information collected in their work with young people to measure the impacts of programmes. Programmes collect data about a young person's circumstances, demographics and ethnicity, offence history and likelihood of reoffending, referral and placement information, and their interaction with other services. This data informs case management and intervention planning and service-use evaluations such as the number and costs of programmes delivered, and any gaps in service. To date, there has been a tendency to assess programmes using 'hard' programme input and output data (e.g. programme completion numbers, young people's participation in education/training, school attendance, and rates of offending behaviour) at the expense of harder to measure positive or negative changes in behaviour.

Evidence of change in a young person's social and emotional capabilities (soft outcomes) is increasingly regarded as intrinsic in efforts to effectively evaluate outcomes for young people. Programmes that gather soft data typically do so by embedding observation and recording processes into practice routines. When aligned to policy and programme objectives, data reflective of practice with young people can assist service providers to contextualise the 'hard' data produced by standardised measurement instruments. Data processes that included soft data were suggested as providing programmes with enhanced capacity to evaluate a young person's engagement in the programme, their development, and changes in their behaviours and attitudes. Integrating soft information can help service providers to identify factors that may have shaped a young person's life: identifying the part that a young person played in the changes observed, a practitioner's role in achieving change, and how project activities may have contributed. The following table presents findings from a rapid (realist) review of outcome measurement literature and practice reports:

Outcomes for young people in programmes: 7 step measurement checklist

1. Measure outcomes for young people in programmes:
• To maintain and improve the quality of a programme and demonstrate its impact and value • To ensure accountability and transparency in the delivery of public services • To record what young people describe as important to them and barriers they face in achieving a good life • To improve efficiencies, realign resources, maintain standards, and strengthen practices
2. Things to consider when measuring outcomes for young people in programmes:
• Performance-led data alone rarely produces assessments that reflect a programme's true value • Developing young people's social and emotional capabilities is associated with positive life outcomes • Understanding how participants experience programmes provides a basis for better decision-making • Evidencing improvements in personal development can be difficult due to the many influences impacting on young people's lives
3. What can help the measurement of outcomes for young people in programmes?
• A logic model identifying outcomes can focus programme delivery and measurement practices • Research and practice collaboration on data and monitoring processes • A mix of measures and/or the development of new data processes to suit the task • Active data leadership, specialised data skills, and support and technical assistance
4. Factors influencing outcome measurement:
• Integrating quantitative and qualitative data is associated with comprehensive assessments • Qualitative data improves understanding of the factors contributing to outcomes • Data quality and accuracy is linked to the quality of relationships established between a practitioner and a young person, their families, and other services • Data practices can provide opportunities for young people to contribute to identifying outcomes and working towards these goals
5. It is important that the tools used to measure outcomes:
• Are relevant to the programme, local contexts, and culturally appropriate • Produce quality data that is timely and comparable across groups and programme types • Are comprehensible to practitioners and those completing them • Are sensitive to change, reliable, consistent, and repeatable • Produce useful practice and policy information
6. Challenges in measuring outcomes:
• Measurement can be a lengthy process, from design to collection to analysis and reporting • Tools may not be designed to meet programme needs, be costly, untested, and difficult to adapt • Tools may be difficult for young people to complete and may not differentiate between aspects of youth development
7. Things to consider when analysing data from practice:
• Evidence of a young person's progress can be observed, interpreted, and documented • Data collection and analysis processes should be documented for transparency and credibility • Focus on a particular outcome and identify from the data if an anticipated change has occurred • Time, resources, sample size, practitioner bias, and research expertise all impact the quality of analyses

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Messages from Practice

Outcomes for young people in programmes should align with youth justice policies to reduce offending and improve attitudes and behaviours. GYDPs collate significant volumes of information from young people using routine administrative and assessment procedures. This data is predominantly quantitative (input/output) and details participation in a project, education, health, safety, and risk of offending/re-offending. However, service providers have advocated for greater use and reporting of supplementary data collected through observational processes implemented by practitioners. They suggested that integrating 'soft' data into existing outcome measurement processes would be a welcome and useful addition to efforts to evaluate outcomes for young people and to demonstrate the value of their work.

This research aimed to establish a robust knowledge-base of outcome measurement from literature and practice for practical application by GYDPs. One additional but critical dimension was the challenge to bring scientific evidence of soft outcome measurement to bear on real-world constraints. This is compounded by the complexities of diverse administrative systems within the overall GYDP structure. Of the 105 Projects now operating nationwide, many are national youth organisations providing multiple services and operating well-developed information technology (IT), while others are more local and operate with less IT resources. In acknowledging organisational diversity in GYDPs, the study established a common minimum threshold for applying the scientific evidence of soft outcome monitoring in practice. To this degree, the report has been necessarily pragmatic.

The report provides three data options that balance substantive progress in outcome-based recording practices with the need to ensure implementation with the minimum of disruption and impact on frontline work. REPPP recommends developing and embedding a non-invasive routine *observation and recording process* into GYDP practice to assess a young person's engagement in the programme, their development, and changes in their behaviours and attitudes. A time-efficient evaluation template could record information from practice based on the expected outcomes of the Garda Youth Diversion Programme to address behaviour and offending problems and to facilitate personal development. When combined with existing data processes, this data could yield a more nuanced understanding of the outcomes for young people in GYDPs and inform judgements about the impacts of interventions.

1   Chapter One: Introduction to the Report

This research builds on an earlier REPPP study of data processes in youth justice systems (Reddy and Redmond, 2019) and provides information about outcome measurement in youth justice programmes, youth work, and human services. Following this introductory and study methods chapter, Chapter 2 presents the findings of a rapid realist review of literature relating to outcome measurement in youth programmes. Chapter 3 presents findings from primary research of measurement practices in a sample of youth service providers in Ireland. Lastly, Chapter 3 proposes three data options to enhance outcome measurement in GYDPs.

1.1   The Study

REPPP's Action Research Project (ARP) 2019-2022 is a collaboration with 16 Garda Youth Diversion Projects to examine youth justice worker (YJW) and young person relationships in youth justice settings. This study is to inform the ARP work and the routine collection of data useful in assessing interventions with young people. In particular, the research supports the development of a non-invasive *observation and recording process* to record qualitative 'soft' information from practice.

Research context

In Ireland, youth programmes aim to enhance young people's personal and social development, to reduce risk behaviours, strengthen resilience, and foster positive outcomes and life choices (DCYA, 2019). In youth justice, programmes engage young people 'in a process of learning and development that enables them to make positive lifestyle choices' (IYJS, 2013: 15).

Since 2010, the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) has put in place a number of data collection and programme implementation processes to support GYDPs with assessment and reporting obligations (Reddy and Redmond, 2019).[1] Data processes include (1) GYDP access to criminal offence data from the Garda PULSE system,[2] enabling local analyses of youth crime; (2) intervention logic modelling within annual reporting processes; and (3) the introduction of formal risk assessment and case management procedures. The policy intent has prioritised clarity in terms of overall objectives for GYDPs, while analysis and problem-solving is also undertaken to safeguard national programme coherence and compliance with sufficient reflexivity to accommodate local contexts (Reddy and Redmond, 2019).

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[1] The IYJS is responsible for reducing youth offending and improving the delivery of youth justice services in Ireland (Reddy and Redmond, 2019).

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The data collected, analysed and reported is largely performance-led (programme input/output) and describes young people's participation in a project, education, health, safety, and risk of offending (Reddy and Redmond, 2019). Figure 1 illustrates recent developments in outcome measurement in GYDPs.

Figure 1: Developments in outcome measurement in the Garda Youth Diversion Programme
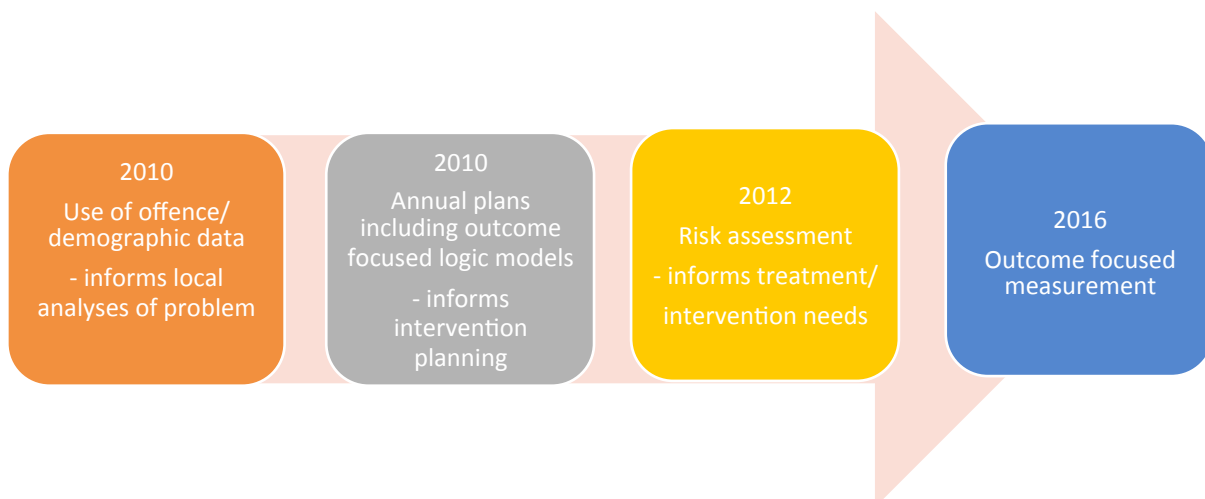
1.2   Methodology and Research Process

Primary and secondary research strategies used to examine outcome measurement in youth programmes:

(1) A rapid realist review (RRR) of literature and practice reports relevant to outcome measurement in youth programmes was conducted. RRRs aim to identify and explain the relationships and interactions between contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes in complex interventions (Wong *et al.*, 2013: 1019). Reviews typically explain why and how certain practices (mechanisms) work and how they lead to particular outcomes in particular contexts (Brown *et al.*, 2018; Ní Shé et al., 2019).

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[2] The Garda PULSE (Police Using Leading Systems Effectively) IT system is used to record crime-related incidents and intelligence reports.

In this study, an RRR was used to examine why and how outcomes for young people in programmes are measured and the contexts and factors that influence measurement, while keeping within the time and resource parameters of the study. The research questions were:

1. What influences the measurement of outcomes for young people in youth programmes?
2. Which approaches and strategies are commonly used to measure outcomes for young people?
3. What are the strengths and challenges in the ways outcomes for young people are measured?

Review search, data management, and analysis strategy

The RRR began with an exploratory background search, following Pawson and colleagues' (2005: 24) recommendation to 'get a feel' for the evidence in the literature. Literature was identified using relevant search terms in both the Scopus and the Glucksman Library Online Collections databases,[3] and included variations of *'outcomes measurement/evidence/assessment in child, youth and family services and programmes', 'performance monitoring in non-profit/voluntary and community organisations'*. The material recovered was screened and included if deemed suitable in helping to answer the review questions. Studies were excluded if they did not focus on routine measurement in youth programmes and interventions and did not provide specific information about how and why outcomes are measured. The screening process afforded the opportunity to further refine the inclusion/exclusion criteria and to identify and locate additional material relevant to the topic (i.e., material cited in research and practice reports deemed suitable in the screening process).

Of the 91 research articles and practice reports screened, a purposive sample of 59 were adjudged consistent with the study's objectives and reviewed. The review identified the contexts, strategies, and processes suggested in the sample as underpinning outcome measurement, the benefits and challenges involved, and the implications for practice. Relevant information was extracted and synthesised into the two Data Extraction Tables, reproduced in Appendix 2. Extraction Table 1 presents the rationale for measuring outcomes for young people in programmes, identifying what is measured and the factors considered important when measuring outcomes (e.g., using tools and instruments). Extraction Table 2 lists outcome measurement strategies, including the processes and methods, data analysis and reporting, and the measurement challenges identified.

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[3] The Glucksman Library online collections and Scopus are comprehensive, curated abstract and citation databases with linked scholarly content and were accessed via the University of Limerick Website from December 2019 to April 2020.

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(2) The RRR informed primary research of measurement practice in a purposive sample of service providers in Ireland. The purpose was to identify and consider measurement processes in youth programmes. Research data was gathered in face-to-face or telephone interviews with practitioners (n=12) with data expertise and responsibilities for information management in their organisation and through analysis of the relevant documentation provided by service providers.[4] The process identified the various ways information is collected from young people in programmes and considered the factors that strengthen or weaken measurement processes and reporting of outcomes.[5] A panel of experts then reviewed the primary and secondary research findings to assess whether the reported judgements were reasonable and potentially transferrable and adaptable across service and practice contexts.[6] Figure 2 illustrates the research process:

Figure 2: Research process
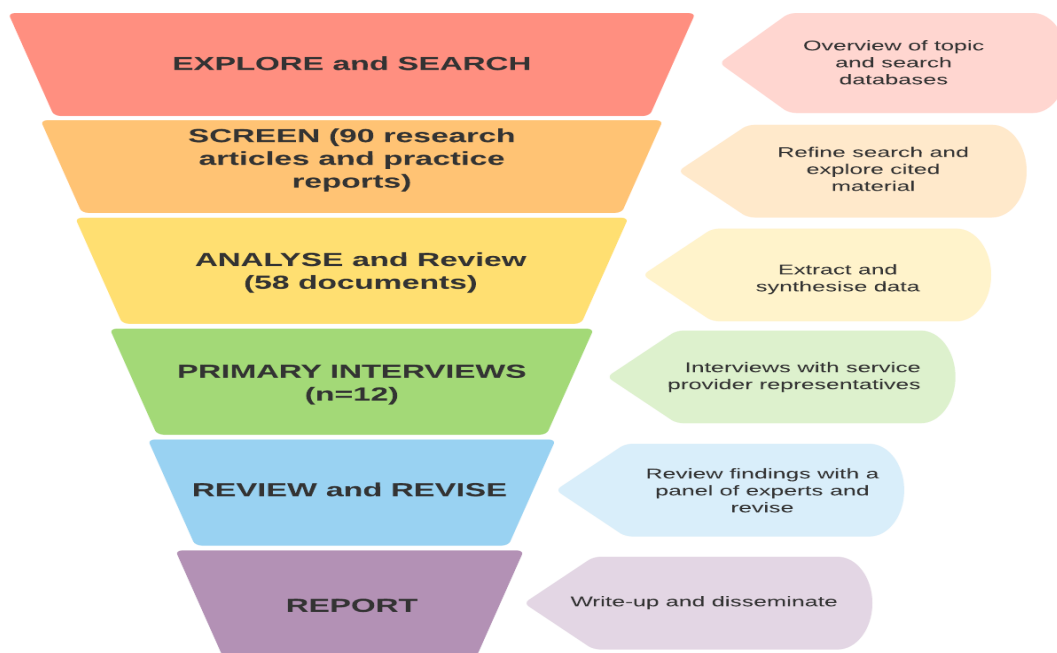
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2   Chapter Two: A Rapid Realist Review of Outcome Measurement in Youth Programmes

This chapter presents the findings of a rapid realist review of literature and practice reports relating to outcome measurement in youth programmes. Following an exploration of why and how outcomes are measured, we then consider factors that enable and/or influence the collection and use of data in programmes.

2.1   Why Measure Outcomes for Young People in Programmes?

The importance of providing evidence of outcomes is well established in both policy and literature. Youth service providers are required by funders, stakeholders, and the public, to demonstrate the impact of their programmes on the lives of young people (Lyon *et al.*, 2017; Bazemore, 2006). Irish policy has consistently recommended greater accountability in the delivery of youth services: for example, in the Value for Money and Policy Review for Youth Programmes (VFMPR, 2014); Tackling Youth Crime: Youth Justice Action Plan, 2014–2018 (IYJS, 2014); and the National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work (DCYA, 2010). In youth justice, research has found that effective and accountable systems require efficient data processes that accurately measure the outcomes of programmes (Reddy and Redmond, 2019). Timely evidence can be used to judge to what extent youth programmes achieve policy goals (VFMPR, 2014) and how well systems follow child welfare and justice standards (Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice, 2010). In essence, measurement should provide information about how a youth justice system operates and what happens to children who offend (Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice, 2010).

Processes producing accurate and timely evidence from practice are judged important components of service delivery (Lee and Clerkin, 2017; Bamber *et al.*, 2016; Hendricks *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, research of non-profit services has suggested that efficient data systems could allow providers to track progress and assess the extent to which targeted outcomes have been achieved for service users more effectively (Lyon et al. 2017; Carnochan et al., 2014; Hendricks et al., 2008). Studies argue that access to accurate and reliable data can help providers to maintain and improve practice standards and to provide accountability and transparency in the delivery of services (Carnochan *et al.*, 2014; MacIndoe and Barman, 2013; O'Brien-Olinger and Bamber, 2013; Hatry, 2007).

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Some research (Brady *et al.*, 2018; Dehart and Shapiro, 2017; Bamber *et al.*, 2016; Coombs *et al.*, 2011) has argued that programmes and, indeed, whole service systems, learn and improve when decisions are informed by timely evidence from practice. When 'measurement' is integrated and systematic, aggregate assessments of programmes and practices are facilitated (Reddy and Redmond, 2019). Some have also suggested that analyses of intervention and programme impact data provide decision-makers a better understanding of what is important to children, the barriers they face, and their hopes for the future (Smith, 2018; Willison et al., 2014; Miller and Daly, 2013). Others (Miller and Daly, 2013; McNeil et al., 2012; Benjamin, 2012) argue that knowing how children have been impacted by certain interventions enables their 'voice' – their views, concerns, and hopes for the future – to influence future programme development and delivery. Table 1 summarises the most commonly cited justification for measuring outcomes.

Table 1: Why measure outcomes?

• To maintain and improve the quality of a programme and demonstrate its impact and value
• To ensure accountability and transparency in the delivery of public services
• To record what young people describe as important to them in life and what they identify as barriers to achieving a good life
• To improve programme efficiencies, realign resources, maintain standards, and strengthen practices

2.1.1 Measuring Outcomes for Young People in Programmes

Measuring outcomes requires programmes are equipped to detect and record changes for young people which are directly attributable to interventions (Smith, 2018; Ton *et al.*, 2019, Roberts *et al.*, 2014). According to Mayne (2012), assessments should evidence observed change and create an understanding of the outcomes for a service user and the role of an intervention, if any, in that change. It is also argued that recorded change should be substantively different from the effects of other events in a young person's life (Smith, 2018; Rhodes, 2009), since such effects are beyond the scope of service providers, and may confound claims made by programmes (Renger *et al.*, 2015).

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Programmes have traditionally measured outcomes by quantitative, numerical means. Typically, an emphasis has been placed on reporting performance-led data, with programme assessments (of input/output data) used to judge service delivery standards (Shaw and Canavan, 2016). For example, an instrument is administered to a young person before and after participation in a programme to evaluate change in a particular attribute (Lee and Clerkin, 2017; Rhodes, 2009). Data is also routinely collected in administrative processes, in regard to finance, admittance, risk and need assessment, and review procedures (Reddy and Redmond, 2019). The resulting data is used to inform case management, treatment and exit planning processes, and to evaluate service use, costs, gaps in service and, in some instances, levels of service user satisfaction (Dehart and Shapiro, 2016; Proctor *et al.*, 2011).

Commentators, however, have argued that performance-led data processes alone rarely produce assessments which reflect the true value of the support provided: at best, they constitute a baseline upon which an appraisal may be constructed (McNeil *et al.*, 2012; Stout *et al.*, 2017; Mears and Butts, 2008; Blazemore, 2006). Raleigh and Foot (2010) caution that performance-led assessments can overlook evidence which is unavailable or difficult to measure, and so analyses may not be a reliable barometer of how outcomes occurred and which interventions worked best. Moreover, before-and-after comparisons do not include the impact of other factors in a young person's life (European Commission, 2014; Stout *et al.*, 2017). In this context, the development of young people's social and emotional capabilities has become increasingly important (McNeil *et al.*, 2012; Bamber *et al.*, 2016).

McNeil *et al.* (2012: 4) maintain that including such aspects as self-control, motivation, esteem, resilience, and confidence when assessing change is required as improvements are linked to the achievement of positive longer-term life outcomes in education, employment, and health (Stout *et al.*, 2017). In youth programmes, changes in social and emotional capabilities are usually demonstrated through 'interpersonal connections and group interactions' (McNeil *et al.*, 2012: 20). However, measurement of softer outcomes for young people is not indicative of traditional practice (McNeil *et al.*, 2012; Miller and Daly, 2013). Where it has been incorporated it has usually involved integrating 'easier' to quantify and monitor performance outcomes – e.g., programme completion, educational achievement, patterns of offending behaviour – with 'soft' evidence of change in the lives of young people observed and documented by practitioners (McNeil et al., 2012; Hendricks et al., 2008).

Attributing change is difficult due to the many influences affecting young people's lives. Behaviour change, for instance, may be influenced by many factors affecting a young person (Gertler et al., 2016). Influences can be varied and interacting and include family, peers, their school, community, and broader society (McNeil et al., 2012; European Commission, 2014; Fischer, 2001). Engagement in other supports and with other practitioners is often a factor (European Commission, 2014). In addition, linking improvements in self-esteem, confidence, and/or problem-solving skills to specific interventions may not occur during the time-frame of an evaluation process (McNeil et al., 2012; Bamber et al., 2016). In addition to a weakened capacity to demonstrate the value of an intervention, a lack of evidence (particularly concerning outcomes) diminishes the potential to learn from practice and improve implementation (Willison et al., 2014).

Acceptable evidence?

There is considerable debate, however, as to what constitutes acceptable evidence. For some, 'evidence' incorporates the findings from research, practitioner expertise, and service user values and needs (Patton, 2012; Gambrill, 2008; Netting and O'Connor, 2008; Regehr *et al*., 2007). Others elevate research evidence above the craft knowledge and wisdom of practitioners and lived experience of service users; particularly studies which apply quantitative methods in experimental designs (see Drake *et al*., 2009). Randomised control trials (RCTs), for example, are often considered the 'gold-standard' of cause-and-effect programme evaluation (Fives *et al.*, 2014). Drake *et al.* (2009: 177, 178) propose a five-level hierarchy:

(5) Randomised control trials at the top

(4) Followed by quasi-experimental methods

(3) Non-experimental but reliable statistical controls

(2) Comparison group but no controls to ensure comparability

(1) Evaluation with no comparison group

In their systematic review of criminal justice interventions, any study rated below 3 was not deemed of a sufficient methodological rigour to warrant inclusion as it 'did not include a comparison group and thus provided no context to judge programme effectiveness' (Drake *et al.*, 2009: 177).

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Other research, however, supports more inclusive and interpretative stances to evidence. Along with RCTs, evidence gathered using a mix of research techniques, including qualitative methodologies, can yield important and valued evidence concerning interventions (Collins-Camargo and Garstka, 2014; Nevo and Slonim-Nevo, 2011). Research data gathered using both quantitative and qualitative methods can enable providers to reasonably triangulate service users' experiences (e.g. what works, for whom, and in what circumstances), and identify how an intervention may have contributed to change (Shlonsky and Mildon, 2014; Axford and Morpeth, 2013). Table 2 summarises a number of key considerations when measuring outcomes in work with young people.

Table 2: Things to consider when measuring outcomes for young people

• Performance-led data alone rarely produces assessments which reflect the true value of an programme
• Developing young people's social and emotional capabilities is associated with the achievement of positive life outcomes
• Understanding how participants experience programmes provides a basis for better decision-making
• Evidencing improvements in personal development can be difficult due to the many influences impacting on young people's lives

2.2   Outcome-focused Measurement

Having considered why and how outcomes for young people in programmes are measured, the following sections discuss the factors which influence the collection and use of data in programmes.

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[7] See Appendix 3 for a reproduction of Fives *et al.*'s (2014) adaptation of NICE's (2005) *Levels of Evidence.*

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Systematically monitoring and evaluating interventions as they are implemented has been recommended as useful and necessary to provide programmes with the capacity to accurately assess change (Carnochan *et al.*, 2014; McNeil *et al.*, 2012). Research of youth in detention (Bamber *et al.* 2016: 25), for example, found that an important aim of service providers should be 'to capture and measure' the intended change at the core of interventions: namely, engagement in programme; improvements in behaviour and attitudes; and personal development. It has been suggested that such evidence in both short- and medium-term outcomes can inform continuous improvements in practice and policy and assist practitioners to modify interventions when and where necessary (Bamber *et al.*, 2016; McNeil *et al.*, 2012). In short, identifying expected outcomes of interventions helps to focus programme delivery and the collection of timely evidence from practice (Bamber *et al.*, 2016; Proctor *et al.*, 2011).

Research has recommended that programmes develop and apply a logical framework of predicted outcomes to underscore what service providers are attempting or expect to achieve e.g. policy objectives (Bamber *et al.*, 2016; McNeil *et al.*, 2012; Proctor *et al.*, 2011). For Bamber *et al.* (2016: 11), interventions 'are more likely to be effective and easier to evaluate' if underpinned by a *theory of change* defining what a programme hopes to achieve and the activities to be implemented to accomplish these objectives (see also Abercrombie *et al.*, 2018; Ton *et al.*, 2019).[8] McNeil *et al.* (2012: 21) similarly argue that formulating a clear and consistent framework is an advantage which allows providers to be 'more specific in attempts to review and demonstrate the impact of services for individual young people'. Accordingly, programmes have the capacity to measure whatever specific changes occur for young people and to produce evidence of how, and to what extent, interventions may have contributed to these outcomes (Ton *et al.*, 2019; VFMPR, 2014). Figure 3 illustrates potential short-, mid-, and longer-term outcomes for young people in youth justice programmes:

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[9] A theory of change describes the assumptions behind what has to happen for outcomes to be realised (Ton *et al.*, 2019).

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Figure 3: Potential outcomes for young people engaged in youth justice programmes[9]

Outcome measurement requires skilled practitioners

Studies suggest that programmes with at-risk youth require data and monitoring processes which are standardised and embedded into practice (Reddy and Redmond, 2019; Smith, 2018; Knight *et al.*, 2017). Smith (2018: 6), for example, claims that 'approaches to capturing evidence on impact need to be embedded in everyday work and capacities and skills built within teams to make sense of and respond to emerging findings'. In her view, when measurement is part of routine delivery, practitioners can assess the needs and the risks faced by young people and how a programme has helped (or not). Moreover, they can adapt interventions if required to address the particular needs of young people (Knight *et al.*, 2017; Bamber *et al.*, 2016).

Embedding rigorous data processes into practice is complex. According to some studies, this can be particularly so as not all practitioners possess the evaluation skills necessary and tend to be primarily focused on the daily demands of service delivery (Knight *et al.*, 2017; VFMPR, 2014). However, research suggests that the complexities inherent in assessing programme impacts may be overcome through focused service provider and researcher collaboration on 'data' (Knight *et al.*, 2017; Drake *et al.*, 2009; Hendricks *et al.*, 2008). Collaborative processes commonly entail locating processes and tools which can accurately measure intervention outcomes, and whose use is appropriate,

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[9] Sources: Youth Justice Assessment Tool – Casey and Day, 2016; Young Foundation Framework for Outcomes for Young People, McNeil *et al.*, 2012, and Bamber *et al.*, 2016.

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POLICY PROGRAMMES
AND PRACTICE

YOUTH CRIME

non-intrusive, and feasible in everyday practice (Reddy and Redmond, 2019). Processes may require stakeholders including policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and service users, to work together to define intervention outcomes (e.g. in a logic-model framework based on a theory of change procedure)[10] and to identify suitable means (e.g. instruments and tools) of gathering data from young people (Knight *et al.*, 2017; Meadowcroft *et al.,* 2018; Miller, 2012). An overall objective is to promote evidence-informed practice and outcome measurement that occurs routinely within programme delivery (Reddy and Redmond, 2019).

Service providers typically employ a range of approaches to capture evidence of programme impact (VFMPR, 2014). This can include tailoring current measures and approaches, and/or developing bespoke measures to address the data needs of individual programmes (DCYA, 2019; Reddy and Redmond, 2019). For example, incorporating *structured observation* of young people engaged in programmes into existing data processes has been identified as a way of helping to evidence change (Casey and Day, 2016; VFMPR, 2014);[11] particularly change related to the development of a young person's social and emotional capabilities (McNeil *et al.*, 2012). Studies have highlighted that when aligned to policy and programme objectives, reflective observations can help service providers to contextualise the quantitative data produced by standardised measurement instruments (Miller and Daly, 2013; Renger *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, the triangulation of data from multiple sources is held to minimise practitioner/evaluator bias and enable evaluators to confidently assess their findings (Renger *et al.,* 2015).

A need for leadership and expertise

It has been suggested that service providers may associate outcome measurement with external accountably than necessary procedures to ensure interventions are meeting the needs of service users (Carnochan *et al.*, 2014; Benjamin, 2012; Miller, 2012). For some, evaluation has tended to be restricted to 'off the shelf' manualised programmes with prescribed, albeit well-researched outcomes, than assessments which are reflective of routine practice with young people (Judge, 2015; Fischer, 2001). Authors have argued that in many instances, service providers are unable, and often unwilling, to justify resourcing expensive evaluation processes; rather focusing on using data

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[10] Logic models are tools used to articulate a programme's theory of change and identify and predict outcomes to be measured (Renger *et al.*, 2015).

[11] Structured observation is an invasive method of gathering data on a young person's behaviour. The process involves using an observation schedule or template to observe young people and their behaviours according to established categories (Becker and Bryman, 2004).

gathered in administrative procedures to document and report year-on-year trends in programme activities and service delivery (Khanna *et al.*, 2014; Mears and Butts, 2008; Fischer, 2001). Studies claim that many programmes only record and analyse programme data. By neglecting to engage with the longer-term impacts of intervention (Lee and Clerkin, 2017; Stout *et al.*, 2017; Casey and Day, 2016), many pivotal aspects of youth development are thus left unmeasured and underreported (Reddy and Redmond, 2019; McNeil *et al.*, 2012; Klein *et al.*, 2006).

Since programme managers, funders, and practitioners all play an integral role in the development and/or reform of data systems (Reddy and Redmond, 2019), studies have urged each to 'champion' outcome measurement by actively supporting and maintaining measurement capacity within organisations (Carnochan *et al.*, 2014; IRISS, 2010). Leadership on 'data' usually involves managing the integration of existing performance assessments (e.g. of services delivered; the extent of youth participation; the safety of the spaces provided, etc.) with methods of measuring outcomes for service users, including practitioner reflective observation (IRISS, 2010; Fischer, 2001). A first step in leading data reform involves articulating 'a common understanding' of what it means to work in 'an outcomes-focused way' (IRISS, 2010: 10). This requires leaders to have a clear vision of agency and policy commitments in terms of accountability, service improvement, and service user outcomes (Carnochan *et al.*, 2014; Benjamin, 2012; Hatry, 2007). Other key elements in data reform include:

- Facilitating and encouraging data training and upskilling among practitioners (including managers);
- Ensuring transparency about the processes involved (e.g. the time consumed collecting/analysing data);
- Specifying how practitioner observation processes inform practice; and
- Addressing resistance among practitioners and/or service users to new data processes.

<div align="right">(Sources: Reddy and Redmond, 2019; IRISS, 2010)</div>

The capacity to access available (local/regional) expertise and resources to comply with measurement best practice also has been highlighted (Smith, 2018; Hendricks *et al.*, 2008). Evaluation consultancy and IT support, the identification of common frameworks and databases, and locating standard and tested instruments and materials is often required (McNeil *et al.*, 2012; Batty *et al., 2013;* Hendricks *et al.*, 2008). Leaders typically source funding to support outcome measurement, promote the accrued benefits of measurement within their organisation/field, and work to foster ownership among practitioners of the approaches adopted

(IRISS, 2010). Table 3 outlines helpful activities and processes involved in effective monitoring processes.

Table 3: Monitoring in practice: What can help?

• A logic model identifying outcomes can focus programme delivery and measurement practices
• Research and practice collaboration on data and monitoring processes
• A mix of measures and/or the development of new data processes to suit the task
• Active data leadership, specialised data skills, and data support and technical assistance

2.2.1 Learning from Practice

As discussed in Section 2.1.1, effective measurement balances a need to assess programme performance and improved outcomes for service users.[12] Before and after questionnaires and service user tick-box satisfaction forms, for example, are commonly used by service providers to derive a basic overview of service outcomes in terms of efficiencies, user satisfaction, and timeliness (MacIndoe and Barman, 2013; Mears and Butts, 2008). While such analyses are undoubtedly useful and practical in managing programme and accountability needs, they are nonetheless limited in terms of demonstrating the value of interventions (in achieving policy and programme goals) and/or the magnitude of the outcomes achieved for young people (Casey and Day, 2016; Miller, 2012; McNeil *et al.*, 2012; Stout *et al*., 2017). Miller (2012), for example, argues that measuring the extent and quality of implementation alone is insufficient to determine the impact of programmes and/or the mechanisms within interventions that may foster change. In her view, implementing a programme in full and on time is no guarantee of positive or hoped-for outcomes and is unlikely to record any unintended effects (Miller, 2012).

Integrating quantitative and qualitative data

Data processes which integrate quantitative[13]and qualitative data[14] have been identified as leading to more comprehensive assessments (Gill *et al.*, 2016; Krohn, 2015; Miller and Daly, 2013; Beinecke

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[12] Performance-focused information may include before and after assessments of participant risk, programme activity and participation, and (re)offending data.

[13] Data collected in administrative processes and using quantitative questionnaires and tools.

[14] Information collected from individuals in interviews/discussions and case studies and analysis of textual data recorded in case files and service user reviews.

et al., 1997). For example, quantitative instruments measure high priority outcomes such as feeling safe and secure, youth risk and need, programme activity and participation, and offending (Reddy and Redmond, 2019). Conversely, qualitative measures extract more nuanced data that allows a deeper exploration of the 'details of the outcome' and explanation of the recorded impact (Miller and Daly, 2013: 15; Gill et al., 2016; Hendricks et al., 2008). Combining both, e.g. quantitative data from administrative assessments and qualitative information from individual interviews, case files, and practitioner observation, was identified as a means of enabling providers to better identify which intervention worked best and why (Reddy and Redmond, 2019; Gill et al., 2016; Miller and Daly, 2013).

Indeed, studies have suggested that data processes should include information about changes in a young person's social and emotional capabilities (McNeil et al., 2012; Hendricks et al., 2008). In Miller and Daly's (2013: 6) view, quantitative and qualitative data 'complement each other'; with qualitative information providing 'meaning and richness' to quantitative data collected in administrative processes. Several studies highlighted the utility of qualitative data in identifying the factors contributing to outcomes; including the young person's contribution, practitioner's role in achieving change, and how interventions may have contributed to the outcomes recorded (O'Brien-Olinger and Bamber, 2013; Miller and Daly, 2013). It also has been suggested (European Commission, 2014: 7) that incorporating qualitative analyses into overall analyses can help ascertain whether programme activities could theoretically be applied in other interventions and transferability to other contexts.

Research (Miller and Daly, 2013; Miller, 2012) maintains that programme assessment is advanced by understanding changes from a service user perspective. Identifying relevant outcomes and planning effective ways to achieve these goals requires an understanding of what is important to an individual in their life and working with them to achieve these goals. The quality and accuracy of the information disclosed has been linked to whether a trusting relationship has been established between a practitioner and a young person and, often, with their families, and other support services (Carnochan et al., 2014; Stout et al., 2017; Farrington et al., 2016). In addition to yielding useful feedback about practice, clear and consistent monitoring and review processes that include qualitative data, also serve to highlight 'the importance of listening to people and relationship building' (Miller and Daly, 2013: 10; Stout et al., 2017; Fives et al., 2014, Farrington et al., 2016). Table 4 lists important factors influencing the use of data in outcome measurement.

Table 4: Factors influencing outcome measurement

•	Integrating quantitative and qualitative data is associated with comprehensive assessments
•	Qualitative data can improve understanding of the factors contributing to outcomes
•	Data quality and accuracy is linked to the quality of relationships established between a practitioner and a young person, their families, and other services
•	Data practices can provide opportunities for young people to contribute to identifying outcomes and working towards these goals

2.2.2   Tools and Instruments

There is little consensus about how best to measure programme impact and, at present, no definitive standard approach exists (Smith, 2018). In fact, a range of factors influence how outcomes are measured; particularly regarding the instruments and tools to use. In youth justice, for example, service providers require measures which not only are practical and easy to administer, but are also capable of capturing 'the diversity of needs that young offenders present with' (Casey and Day 2016: 1664). Effective tools collect information which is directly relevant to local contexts and groups, culturally appropriate (e.g. the language register included may influence how young people are perceived), and are comprehensible to both the practitioners administering the tool and the young people completing it (DCYA, 2019). At the same time, measures should be sensitive to change, reliable, and consistent (i.e., tested), and produce data which is comparable across groups and programme types (Beinecke *et al.*, 1997).

Service providers reflect on many issues when deciding on appropriate measures. McNeil *et al.* (2012: 21) identified as important considerations, the time it takes to administer a tool, the level of practitioner expertise required, the demands placed on young people, the costs, and the standard of evidence achieved. 'Off the shelf' tools are generally quick to administer, often taking 20/30 minutes to complete (Beinecke *et al.*, 1997). Standard tools typically include a mix of open and closed questions, produce comparable data, and have been tested for validity and reliability (Batty *et al.*, 2013; Bazemore, 2006; Early *et al.*, 2001). Tools should ultimately be equipped to measure change and thereby evaluate whether an intervention works or not. They also often yield valuable diagnostic data; identifying youth risks and needs, and other information for treatment and care planning (Bamber *et al.*, 2016; McNeil *et al.,* 2012). Tools that can benchmark change are repeatable

and are administered with service users at appropriate intervals: i.e. at two or more points in time: baseline, post-intervention, and follow-ups (Kwan and Rickman, 2015; Batty *et al*., 2013; Blazemore, 2006).

According to research in non-profit organisations (Hendricks *et al.*, 2008; Beinecke *et al.*, 1997), measures should be practical, easy to pilot, implement, and amend as necessary. In youth work, it is imperative that tools 'are trialled/reviewed to assess whether they capture what they were intended to capture, and whether their use generates any unintended consequences' (DCYA, 2019: 26). Effective tools produce findings that are both meaningful and accessible (i.e., interpretable) to agencies/practitioners, are relevant to service user's goals, and have the potential to inform practice and policy (Hendricks *et al.,* 2008; Fischer, 2001; Early *et al.,* 2001). Moreover, tools which produce useful practice and policy information tend to encourage continued use and funder support (Beinecke *et al.,* 1997). Table 5 lists important factors to consider when selecting measurement tools.

Table 5: Considerations when selecting measurement tools

It is important that the tools used to measure outcomes:
• Are relevant to the programme, local contexts, and culturally appropriate
• Produce timely data that is comparable across groups and programme types
• Are comprehensible to practitioners and those completing them
• Are sensitive to change, reliable, consistent, and repeatable
• Produce useful practice and policy information

Common challenges encountered when sourcing appropriate measurement tools and instruments

Locating appropriate tools is complex and challenging. A tool may not be designed to meet a particular programme's needs and may be inappropriate, costly, and difficult to adapt (Beinecke *et al.,* 1997).[15] In addition, young people requiring supports are often impacted by multiple risk factors and problem behaviours; e.g. being excluded from education and/or from a disadvantaged area, having experience of the care system, substance misuse, and offending behaviour. In light of such

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[15] Developers of measurement tools and instruments regularly restrict service providers from altering or adapting measures.

complexities, a single measure may not be sufficient to assess all outcomes (Early *et al.*, 2001; Fischer, 2001). In addition, linking progress in youth programmes to quantifiable outcomes is problematic, as outcomes are varied and hard to evaluate. Indeed, valid and reliable tools that lend themselves to measuring change in 'soft' outcomes tend to difficult to design and/or locate (Beinecke *et al.,* 1997; Klein *et al.,* 2006). Soft outcomes are hard to pin down. As Carnochan and colleagues (2014: 1020) explain: 'just being able to connect with people…that's a huge part of that can never be measured'.

In response to such issues, some commentators have argued that service providers should use tools which enable them to measure the outcomes from all practices implemented to achieve programme goals, and resist the urge to focus on recording and reporting easily quantifiable data (Lee and Clerkin, 2017; Casey and Day, 2016). However, a need to balance external accountably with the needs of service users often informs decisions about the measurement processes implemented (Carochan *et al.*, 2014; Renger *et al.*, 2015). According to studies (Casey and Day, 2016; Klein *et al.*, 2006), assessment tools (e.g. risk and need assessments which often are mandated by funders) can be elaborate, difficult to complete, and may not record or allow assessments of aspects of personal development and the outcomes the interventions are seeking to improve. Table 6 outlines a number of challenges to the measurement processes.

Table 6: Challenges in measuring outcomes

• Measurement can be a long process, from design to collection to analysis and reporting
• Tools may not be designed to meet programme needs, be costly, untested, and difficult to adapt
• Tools may be difficult for young people to complete, and may not differentiate between aspects of youth development
• Valid and reliable tools that measure 'soft' outcomes tend to be difficult to locate/design

2.2.3 Analysing Data from Practice

'Making sense' of data from practice is often challenging for service providers (Hendricks *et al.*, 2008). According to Miller and Daly (2013: 17), data analysis 'goes beyond description' to examining and explaining the meaning of what was observed and/or recorded. They recommend focusing on a

particular outcome or policy objective, e.g., greater pro-social behaviour or feeling safe. In this way, practitioners examine data to identify evidence of whether a young person had taken steps towards realising an anticipated outcome. In practice, this often translates into evidence of service user progress as observed and documented by practitioners. Practitioners interpret recorded observations and responses (by a young person) to questions, identify themes in observations/answers, and make links between themes. However, interpreting what was 'meant' or 'implied' in the data demands understanding the young person's life; 'their aspirations and challenges, as well as the risks' and how these converge to influence progress and the changes observed (Miller and Daly, 2013: 17).

A qualitative analysis should be systematic and recorded for transparency and to reinforce the credibility of the findings (European Commission, 2014). Where in-depth analysis is a feature, a clear account of data collection is required: including, the number of young people involved; background or contextual factors that may influence findings; a full description of the analysis process (methods of interpretation and how themes were derived), and details of any data triangulation (Miller and Daly, 2013: 25). Other analysis strategies include coding data to identify themes and patterns within the data. The 'constant comparison' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) method, which entails 'continuous consideration of who is saying what, why and in what context' has been highlighted in this regard (Miller and Daly, 2013: 20).

Bazemore (2006), Klein *et al.* (2006), and Green *et al.* (2004) all recommend analysing data from a strengths-based perspective. Adopting this approach entails focusing on the collection and reporting of evidence of positive change, including whether youth remain crime/drug-free, (re)engagement in education, and so on, rather than concentrating on deficits such as being outside education and recidivism. Other factors influencing the quality of analysis include the time and resources available, sample size, practitioner bias, and analysis expertise (Miller and Daly, 2013; Renger *et al.,* 2015). Table 7 lists factors to consider when analysing data from practice.

Table 7: Things to consider when analysing data from practice

• Evidence of service user progress can be observed, interpreted and documented
• Data collection and analysis processes should be documented for transparency and credibility
• Focus on a particular outcome and identify from the data if an anticipated change has occurred
• Think about data from a strengths-based perspective
• Time, resources, sample size, research expertise, and practitioner bias all impact the quality of analyses

2.3   Summary: Messages from the Research

Service providers evidence the difference their programmes make in the lives of young people. This typically involves:

- Recording and assessing how support is provided (process)
- Quantifying activities delivered and resources used (inputs/outputs)
- Determining the quality of services provided: if, and to what extent, progress has been achieved for young people (impact)
- Establishing whether outcomes for young people can be reasonably attributed to programme

Measure outcomes for young people in programmes:

- To maintain and improve the quality of a programme and demonstrate its impact and value
- To ensure accountability and transparency in the delivery of public services
- To record what young people describe as important to them in life and what they identify as barriers to achieving a good life
- To improve efficiencies, realign resources, maintain standards, and strengthen practices

Things to consider when measuring outcomes for young people in programmes: .

- Performance-led data alone rarely produces assessments which reflect the true value of a programme
- Developing young people's social and emotional capabilities is associated with the achievement of positive life outcomes

- Understanding how participants experience programmes provides a basis for better decision-making

- Evidencing improvements in personal development can be difficult due to the many influences impacting on young people's lives

What can help a programme to measure outcomes?

- A logic model identifying outcomes can focus programme delivery and measurement practices
- Research and practice collaboration on data and monitoring processes
- A mix of measures and/or the development of new data processes appropriate to the task
- Active data leadership, specialised data skills, and data support and technical assistance

Factors influencing outcome measurement:

- Integrating quantitative and qualitative data is associated with comprehensive assessments
- Qualitative data may help improve understanding of the factors contributing to outcomes
- Data quality and accuracy is linked to the quality of relationships established between a practitioner and a young person, their families, and other services
- Data practices can provide opportunities for young people to contribute to identifying outcomes and working towards these goals

It is important that the tools used to measure outcomes:

- Are relevant to the programme, local contexts, and culturally appropriate
- Produce timely data that is comparable across groups and programme types
- Are comprehensible to practitioners and those completing them
- Are sensitive to change, reliable, consistent, and repeatable
- Produce useful practice and policy information

Challenges encountered when measuring outcomes:

- Measurement can be a long process, from design to collection to analysis and reporting
- Tools may not be designed to meet programme needs, be costly, untested, and difficult to adapt
- Tools may be difficult for young people to complete, and may not differentiate between aspects of youth development

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Things to consider when analysing data from practice:

- Evidence of service user progress can be observed, interpreted, and documented

- Data collection and analysis processes should be documented for transparency and credibility

- Focus on a particular outcome to identify whether an anticipated change has occurred

- Think about data from a strengths-based perspective

- Time, resources, sample size, practitioner bias, and research expertise all impact the quality of analyses

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3   Chapter 3: Outcome Measurement in a Sample of Youth Organisations in Ireland

3.1 Introduction

The literature suggests that timely information from practice helps to strengthen programmes, improve standards, and provide accountability. The integration of soft data (i.e., change in a young person's social and emotional capabilities) into data processes is identified as leading to more rounded assessments of the outcomes for young people in programmes; helping to better explain how changes occurred and which interventions worked best in achieving positive change. The Review of Outcome Measurement in Youth Programmes found that routine observation and recording in practice helps service providers to evaluate a young person's engagement in a programme, their development, and any changes in their behaviour and attitudes. Deeper analyses of programme impact data can provide a better understanding of what is important to children, the barriers they face, and their hopes for the future, and what is required from programmes to help realise these goals.

Chapter 3 now presents findings from research with a sample of youth organisations in Ireland. It first describes data practices implemented by service providers. Three data options are then proposed and assessed in regard to the research findings and the data capacities of GYDPs.

3.2 Selected Youth Services

A nationwide network of 105 GYDPs supports approximately 3,500 to 4,000 young people annually. GYDPs provide education and youth development programmes and engage young people in interventions to improve self-esteem and social skills and address behavioural problems (Reddy and Redmond, 2019). Practitioners (n=12) from 10 youth organisations contributed to the study and were a cross-section of GYDP service providers of varying size: five were national providers and five were independent locally-based organisations.

3.3 Measurement Practices in Selected Child and Youth Services

The organisations sampled routinely collect data about service provision; including service user demographics and ethnicity; a young person's circumstances and offence history; referral and placement information; case and intervention decisions; service interaction history; and programme costs. Providers use administrative and risk assessment procedures to gather demographic and

service-use data from young people engaged in programmes. Administrative forms include admission and referral forms, consent forms, management assessment and report forms, and annual review forms. This data is recorded in youth case files and stored in a data management system,[16] and informs monthly progress reports, case review reports, and external annual plans and reports for the Department of Justice.[17]

The Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI 2.0) risk assessment instrument is the primary method used by service providers to collect data from young people (eight of the 10 agencies studied). Risk assessment tools measure both static (factors that cannot be changed, including gender, ethnicity, offence history and offence type, intelligence, and neuropsychological characteristics) and dynamic factors (factors that can be changed, including association with negative peers/groups, substance misuse, education, training and employment) which are likely to influence a young person's reoffending (Andrews and Dowden, 2007). According to the tool's developers (Hoge and Andrews, 2002, 2011), the purpose of the YLS/CMI is to determine the risk that a young person will offend/re-offend, target their dynamic criminogenic needs, and provide interventions/treatments which are unique to that young person's needs.

YLS/CMI assessments concern eight areas of criminogenic need identified in research as the most significant risk factors in offending behaviour: specifically, offence history; attitudes and beliefs about crime; personality; peer associations; family/parenting; education/employment; use of leisure time; and substance misuse (Bonta and Andrews, 2017). The data are then used to guide case management and intervention planning decision-making. In GYDPs, individual case plans are reviewed bi-annually or sooner if required.[18]

Logic models are intervention-planning tools. Several service providers implement models that include an evaluation template affording the capacity to collect quantitative and qualitative data based on the expected outcomes of programmes. In addition to programme completion data, evidence of progress in social and emotional change is recorded as interventions proceed. According to one practitioner, the evaluation template included in logic models collects qualitative data about outcomes based on observations of practitioners and feedback from young people.

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[16] Five of the 10 service providers included in the study, use electronic/online data management systems.

[17] The IYJS was responsible for the oversight of GYDPs until 2019.

[18] GYDP Best Practice Development Team, 2020 (Unpublished document).

In addition to the YLS/CMI, some providers implement other processes to collect data and monitor outcomes for young people. For example, an Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA) questionnaire is used by one to collect data about changes in a young person's school and community behaviours, family home and parenting circumstances, education and training, peer relations, substance misuse, leisure and recreation, attitudes and orientation, and impulsivity, and pro-social behaviours. The OBA is administered with young people on admission to a programme and at follow-up intervals.

The Outcome Star tool is used by four service providers to measure outcomes for young people. The Star is underpinned by the values of empowerment, collaboration, and integration and provides the opportunity to collect data about 'complexity factors' in a young person's life; such as, well-being, safety and security, structure and education/employment, behaviour and citizenship, family/adults, and drugs and alcohol. The tool is administered at admission and at other intervals during the intervention period and has several versions, including the Carer Star, the Youth Star, and the Justice Star. One provider is currently adapting the youth and justice versions to accommodate the outcome assessment requirements particular to their organisation.

The Child Observation Record (CBR) is used to assess progress in early year's interventions. The CBR gathers narrative data about a child's progress based on practitioner observation and aligns with the assessment processes recommended in early childhood national frameworks.[19] Other measurement processes implemented by service providers include an 'Achievement Passport' tracking programme completion by young people (one agency), practitioner diaries (one agency), and periodic case studies of outcomes for young people (two agencies).

3.3.1   Using Data

Service providers currently operate or are in the process of introducing web-based data systems.[20] Web-based systems are mainly used to record and manage case data collected in service delivery (i.e., input/output data). The information inputted is typically quantitative (i.e., tick box) with some additional textual information. In one service agency, practitioners use an 'Activities' mobile APP to

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[19] The *Aistear* and *Síolta* early childhood national frameworks.
[20] National service providers had or were intending to introduce electronic data systems across their organisations. Whereas in smaller community-based providers data recording is paper-based initially and generally recorded in electronic format at a later stage.

record programme data. Web-based case management systems (e.g., Salesforce, SharePoint, or the One Drive System software platforms) provide agency-wide access to programme data and the capacity to produce regular service use updates to inform programme delivery, the management of resources, and external reporting.

Overall, service providers collect significant volumes of data about young people using administrative forms and measures, particularly the YLS/CMI 2.0 tool. This data is predominantly quantitative in nature and details a young person's participation in a project, education, health, safety, and risk of offending/reoffending, and primarily is used to inform case management and case reviews. Providers identified a need for the greater use and reporting of data collected in observational processes implemented by practitioners. They suggested that integrating soft data into existing measurement processes could be useful in evidencing outcomes for young people and determining the value of their work.

3.4 An Outcomes Collection Framework in GYDPs

This research has identified best practices in outcome measurement that are of practical value to GYDPs. We now suggest three data options which balance substantive progress in outcome-based recording practices which ensure that choices can be implemented with minimum disruption to front-line work. The options were considered in regard to measurement best practice standards and the monitoring capacity of service providers. REPPP recommends developing and embedding a non-invasive routine observation and recording process into practice to support GYDPs to assess young people's engagement in activities, their personal development, and changes in their behaviours and attitudes (Option 3).

Option 1: Risk assessment and administrative processes

(A) Existing administrative processes

(B) The Youth Level of Service / Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI 2.0)

Option 1 involves no change to existing administrative processes. It is clear from the study that extensive outcome measurement takes place in GYDPs. For example, the primary measurement tool of the YLS/CMI 2.0, is an internationally verified and widely used risk assessment tool, administering a 42-item checklist to produce a detailed evaluation of the risks, needs, responsivity factors and

strengths of a young person, and links them to a case management plan. Within this assessment process, data is collected about personal development and behaviours across a range of topic areas and there is a degree of contextual explanation of risk factors.[21]

The YLS/CMI was considered useful and appropriate for use in programmes by service providers. However, some reservations were expressed as to the utility of the tool in providing certain information for programmes with high-risk youth. Two interviewees, for example, suggested the YLS/CMI did not fully fulfil their outcome measurement requirements. In their view, the tool did not record Garda cautions or intelligence data, included no mental-health measures, and did not allow practice expertise to be recorded. One commented that the assessment tool was 'not representative' of referred youth in their programme and had to be supplemented with an additional measure, the OBA questionnaire or the Outcome Star tool.

Option 2 – Addition of Outcomes Star tool

(A) Existing administrative processes

(B) The Youth Level of Service Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI 2.00)

(C) The Outcomes Star tool

Option 2 involves the addition of the Outcomes Star tool to existing administrative processes. The larger agencies in the study already implement the Outcomes Star. According to one, the tool provides a base upon which to compare factors in a young person's life and enables practitioners to identify whether there are patterns and links within the data. In the analysis process, practitioners assess qualitative data (gathered in review processes) and convert them into numerical/quantitative format (i.e., grade). An interviewee described the Outcome Star as a 'collaborative tool' which affords practitioners the capacity to discuss findings with young people.

Outcome measurement often is a long, time-consuming, and costly process, with data expertise and skills shortages common in programmes. Indeed, time, resources, sample size, and practitioner bias all significantly impact the quality of analyses (see Chapter 2 Section 2.2). GYDPs are provided by youth organisations in partnership with a Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer and, typically include a

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[21] GYDP Best Practice Development Team, 2020 (Unpublished document).

1:10 practitioner/youth working ratio (IYJS, 2018).[22] The addition of the Outcome Star to existing measurement processes comprising admission forms, the YLS/CMI 2.0, case review processes, logic modelling, and annual reporting, could be onerous in terms of generating extra workloads and costs (in practitioner time, training, and tool purchase). Moreover, excessive data processes in programmes are known to adversely affect practice and practitioner support for data collection and use, and the overall quality of measurement.

Option 3 – Addition of an *observation and recording process* to record soft outcomes

(A) Existing administrative processes

(B) The Youth Level of Service / Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI 2.0)

(C) Testing a new method to Identify relationship-attributed changes for young people in GYDPs. REPPP's ARP and the GYDPs will co-design and develop methods to measure the outcomes of relational practice for young people in GYDPs.

Option 3 is a trial 'conversations with young people' process conducted to help to evaluate selected young people's experience of GYDPs. In conversations, practitioners and a young person identify and discuss any personal changes the young person has experienced because of participation. In particular, the process explores what a young person may have gained through their relationship with their youth justice worker. Conversations are informal and conducted in individual and in small group discussions, face-to-face, by phone, and in video calls. In advance, the researchers provide practitioners with an information pack that includes a description of the data gathering process and tips and prompts for conducting discussions with young people. A summary template to capture the key elements of each young person's feedback is shared with practitioners in advance of the trial process.[23]

Anonymised findings from the conversations were shared with GYDPs in a series of workshops. The workshops drew out the important learning from the process and support efforts to co-design a simple time-efficient method of recording the 'soft' outcomes being achieved for young people. The resulting tool complements existing measurement processes by providing a low cost and practical means of documenting practitioner observation of the outcomes for young people.

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[22] The ratio of Youth Justice Workers (YWJ) to young people can vary depending on youth risk levels.

[23] The ARP's 'summary template' provided practitioners with opportunities not only to summarize changes identified by a young person but any soft outcomes they felt were significant. The Template is reproduced in Appendix 1.

Summary: Service providers identified greater capacity to measure soft outcomes for young people in programmes as an important need. The rapid review findings indicate that assessments of changes in social and emotional capabilities are integral to a comprehensive analyses of the impacts of services for young people. Co-designed data processes (e.g., ARP/GYDP work to record soft outcomes for young people) also are identified in the literature as useful ways to address assessment needs in complex interventions with young people.

Table 8 grades each of the three data options in terms of capacity to correspond to with the outcome measurement best practice outlined in Chapter 2, and in terms of service provider capacity and programme implementation commitments discussed in this chapter.

Table 8: Outcome Measurement: Messages from research and practice:

Proposals	1	2	3
Measure impact and demonstrate value	✗	✓	✓
Inform case management and review practices	✓	✓	✓
Produce performance-led assessments – input/output data	✓	✓	✓
Include a young person's voice	✗	✓	✓
Provide evidence of personal development – soft outcomes	✓	✓	✓
Include logic, theory-informed assessment	✓	✓	✓
Combine quantitative and qualitative data	✗	✓	✓
Use integrated IT data platforms	✓	✓	✗
Ensure all tools used are tested for validity and reliability	✓	✓	✗
Use tools that are repeatable and produce comparable data	✓	✓	✓
Use tools that are adaptable	✗	✓	✓
Use a mix of open and closed questions	✓	✓	✓
Employ a strengths-based perspective	✗	✓	✓
Include practitioner analyses of data	✗	✓	✓
Practice findings: additional data processes should:			
Be easy to implement in terms of training and upskilling	✓	✗	✓
Inexpensive to implement (tool and technical costs)	✓	✗	✓
Add little extra workload onto practitioners	✓	✗	✓
	11	14	15

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5 Appendices

5.1 Appendix 1: ARP Feedback Summary Sheet

Feedback Summary Sheet

GYDP: _____

Worker name: _____

Young person: Age _____ Past or current participant? _____ Gender: _____

Please summarise the main points from your conversation with the young person. What changes have happened for them as a result of the relationship?

•

•

•

Any other changes that you have noticed, that the young person may not have mentioned or recognised in themselves?

•

•

•

Description of how you completed the task? (e.g. conversation, artwork, etc)

•

•

•

Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary. When done, send to your regional researcher.

ES · OUTCOMES · IMPACT · INPUTS · ACTIVITIES · OUTCOMES · IMPACT · INPUTS · ACTIVITIES · OUTCOMES · IMPACT · INPUTS · ACTIVITIES · OUTCOMES · IMPACT · INPUTS
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5.2 Appendix 2: Rapid Realist Review Data Extraction Tables

5.2.1 Data Extraction Table 1: measuring outcomes in programmes for young people

Sources	Reasons for measuring	What is measured	Approaches to measurement	What is important
Knight et al., 2017 Carnochan et al., 2014 Roberts et al., 2014 Coombs et al., 2011 Hendricks et al., 2008 Proctor et al., 2011 Beinecke et al., 1997; Early et al., 2001 Fischer, 2001 Cross & McDonald, 1995	Tools used: □ To measure client outcomes □ To help staff to understand why children did or did not improve □ To assess outcomes of interventions □ Flag potential problems, manage/plan exit process □ Intervention planning, determine treatment outcome □ Examine change in service systems □ Compete for resources	□ Outcomes for children (not for programme/family) □ Outcome data will only document the changes, positive and negative; □ Simple pre/post studies will not support claims that a programme produced change (unlike randomised experiments)	□ Link outcome measures to management information systems is critical – to meet the multiple needs of stakeholders □ Examine specific changes, directly attributable or partly attributable to an intervention □ Repeat measurement at appropriate intervals □ Combine/adapt outcome measures or develop new instruments (to record quant as well as qualitative data) □ Strengths-based approaches	Tools/instruments should be: □ Valid reliable, consistent (easy to verify, piloted and revised) □ Timely (20/30 minutes) and balanced (open/close questions) □ Meaningful, practical and understandable to practitioners/YP □ Culturally appropriate and with realistic questions □ Sensitive to change - non-complex model - evolves as needs change □ Comparable across client groups and service types
Meadowcroft et al., 2018 Shaw Canavan, 2016 MacIndoe and Barman, 2013 Lyon et al., 2017	□ Evidence informed/Outcomes agenda: greater accountability in the delivery of public services and public services □ Transparency: evidence for public/taxpayer/funders/clients of the outcomes achieved □ Trust - lack of information leads to distrust, suspicion and at times unwarranted criticism □ Maintain and improve programme	□ Individual personal development □ Competence □ Empowerment □ Education, employment □ Health, crime and crime prevention	□ Youth work lacks solid, standardised instruments to assess positive youth development constructs □ Measures often lengthy, difficult to complete, and do not differentiate between aspects of youth development (that programmes are focusing	□ Use of a single measure may not assess all outcomes - problem behaviours tend to cluster □ Indicators of performance should reflect relevant goals and give greater weight to those considered most important □ Fine tuning measures so they

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UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK / OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH — School of Law

RESEARCH EVIDENCE INTO POLICY PROGRAMMES AND PRACTICE — YOUTH CRIME

References	Content		
Batty *et al.*, 2013; Benjamin, 2012; McNeil *et al.*, 2012, 2013; Hendricks *et al.*, 2008; Mears & Butts, 2008; Lee and Clerkin, 2017; Carnochan *et al.*, 2014; Hatry, 2007; Bazemore, 2006	□ effectiveness □ Adherence to standards of quality in service delivery □ Clarify programme purpose □ Professionalism is positively associated with the adoption of outcome measurement	□ on) □ Data processes should include all practitioners in a service □ Need systematic and thoughtful data collection and avoid goal displacement (focusing on generating easily measurable data that may please stakeholders)	□ balance the needs of funders with those of service users □ Different types of tools will produce very different types of evidence □ Tools can be used for evaluation (whether or not a programme 'works') and others for monitoring (collecting, analysing and learning from information) □ Risk assessment tools are limited in assessing change over time and practitioners often find them impracticable or unwieldly to use □ Meaningful measures record information about what youth describes as being important to them in life, and any barriers they are facing to achieving a good life
Smith, 2018; Lee & Clerkin, 2017; Stout *et al.*, 2017; Casey and Day, 2016; Miller & Daly, 2013; Klein *et al.*, 2006; Kwan & Rickman, 2015; Bazemore, 2006; Fischer, 2001	□ The use of recidivism as the only measure of success increases the possibility that other important outcomes may be overlooked □ Outcome measures send signals to practitioners about what is important, establish priorities for practice and reinforce mission statements	□ Outputs - provision of information, access to services, availability of activities, attendance □ Mid-term outcomes - engagement, participation, changes in attitudes and behaviours, move towards self-sufficiency □ Long-term – reduced recidivism, increased resilience, independence and preparedness for adulthood, family and social connectedness, and economic participation □ Tools can be used for understanding the needs of youth, others for performance measurement	□ Measure not only recidivism but also the outcomes from all practices to achieve goals □ Need measures that are practical and also capture the diversity of needs of youth □ Consider the time involved in using a tool, the level of expertise required, the demands placed on young people, cost and the standard of evidence achieved

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Knight *et al.*, 2017 Shaw and Canavan, 2016 Van Dop, *et al.*, 2016 Roberts *et al.*, 2014 McNeil *et al.*, 2012 Rhodes, 2009 Bazemore, 2006 Kwan and Rickwood, 2015	☐ Improve quality of programme and demonstrate its impact and value ☐ Measurement drives practice: tracking progress and improvement, realigning resources, fine tuning and strengthening practice ☐ Being able to recognise change, and that the change is attributable in the main to an intervention, rather than other events or things simply improving by themselves ☐ Organisational capacity is linked to successful performance measurement	☐ Process indicators measure ways in which services are provided; ☐ Output indicators measure the quantity of services'/interventions produced – may fail to capture value added by services e.g. social and emotional capabilities ☐ Outcome indicators measure the value for service users and society ☐ Human capital (intrinsic) – happiness, well-being, self-esteem and confidence, problem solving/ resilience ☐ Social capital (extrinsic) - educational achievement, literacy and numeracy, good health, civic participation	☐ Researchers and service providers collaborate to embed evaluation in routine delivery of services. ☐ Integrating best-evidence measures' into routine data collection processes ☐ Assessing the impact of services requires recognition of the complexity of young people's lives, ☐ Includes family backgrounds, the influence of school, and risk and protective factors (such as exposure to drugs or the existence of a strong social network)	☐ To be aware of the weaknesses and gaps in measurement, and the challenges and assumptions made interpreting measures ☐ A lack of consensus exists around the outcomes identified by programmes and which they are able to deliver, and a lack of consistency in measuring outcomes ☐ Social and emotional capabilities or 'soft skills' - self-control, persistence and self-motivation, etc. - are not measured by standard cognitive tests (quantitative instruments) ☐ A lack of consensus around data language and definitions exists

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5.2.2   Data Extraction Table 2: measurement processes in programmes for young people

Sources	Measurement requirements	Processes & Methods	Analysis & Reporting	Measurement Challenges
Dehart and Shapiro, 2017 Abercrombie et al., 2018 Ton et al., 2019 Renger et al., 2015 Carnochan et al., 2014 Gill et al., 2016 Krohn, 2014 Miller, 2012 Rhodes, 2009 Hendricks et al., 2008 Hatry, 2007 Fischer, 2001 Knight et al., 2017 Meadowcroft et al., 2018 Bamber et al., 2016 Reddy and Redmond, 2019	☐ Specialised skills needed – for collecting, analysing, interpreting, and using outcome data, requires specialised combination of analysis and management-oriented skills ☐ Staff training and outside help e.g. evaluators/researchers/consultants ☐ Coordination with funders, grants, agency leadership and clear vision of goals (e.g. accountability, service improvement)	Logic modelling (1) clear identification of programme goals (2) outcomes are defined – e.g. 'behaviour, skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, condition, other attributes (3) indicators are selected – data that will register change on the outcomes of the programme (4) identify/develop outcome measuring instruments and (5) design data collection process (6) analysis, reporting, and use of findings, and (7) improvement of measurement system	☐ Most outcome measures emphasise numerical evidence of programme performance (however, qualitative data may help in design and in understanding/responding to findings) ☐ Use narrative explain quantitative findings – e.g. vignettes taken from service users ☐ Outcomes are defined as the benefits or changes for programme participants	☐ Developing, testing, and refining outcome measurement systems is a relatively long period – 2 to 4 years ☐ Time heavy – pre, post and follow up data collection needed with standardised tools (Quant) ☐ Time to analyse and report ☐ Funders distrust qualitative data – only stats, numbers count ☐ Developing an integrated data system is challenging as outcomes, goals, populations served, vary across programs
Meadowcroft, et al., 2018 Smith, 2018 Abercrombie et al., 2018 Ton et al., 2019	☐ Avoid only using output data to measure effectiveness, neglecting the longer-term performance measured by outcomes ☐ Effective data monitoring/mining practices	☐ An outcomes framework requires specific benchmarks which can be used to identify to what extent interventions have achieved specific goals	☐ Analysing and reporting youth case data provides a standardised format to allow assessment of meeting goals – efficiency, user satisfaction, timeliness	☐ Finding methods for measuring change that are appropriate for a diverse array of youth ☐ Clear indicators of outcomes are often diverse so hard to assess ☐ Linking youth progress to

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References				Challenges
2019 Lee and Clerkin, 2017 Carnochan et al., 2014 Proctor et al., 2011 Mears and Butts, 2008 European Commission, 2014 Stout et al., 2017 Reddy and Redmond, 2019 McNeil et al., 2012 Klein et al., 2006 Khanna et al., 2014 Fischer, 2001	☐ Need staff buy-in and a sense of ownership of the agency data system ☐ Use methods that capture service user perspectives - focus groups, planning committees, and staff surveys, as well as informal communications ☐ Ensure appropriate access to data systems for all staff ☐ Rethink staff roles in relationship to technology – training and support ☐ Effective data systems need 'champions' - leadership ☐ Trust between YP and practitioner needed for valid data - disclosure	☐ Wide input needed in identifying appropriate client outcomes ☐ Identify goals that are specific and logically linked to metrics that measure progress toward those goals ☐ Service user and staff input into design of measurement process ☐ Ongoing assessment – use surveys, interviews staff/youth and analysis of administrative institutional data ☐ Case studies - useful in providing illustrations or for questioning routine ways of thinking about services	☐ Specific client progress could be observed, documented, and interpreted by a case manager (soft outcomes) ☐ Tensions between the need for aggregated quantitative data and case-specific data - positive outcomes may be captured in client case notes, but excluded from formal reporting of outcomes ☐ Reporting - approach taken will depend on the audience and purpose of communicating findings ☐ Analysis - be systematic and record process – for transparency, add credibility ☐ Assessing the impact of services requires recognition of the complexity of young people's lives	☐ quantifiable outcomes difficult ☐ Gaps evident in how outcomes are measured ☐ Pressure to respond to funder-defined measures, while seeking to develop outcome measures to inform staff/case decision making ☐ Balancing the needs of funders with those of service users ☐ Standardised measures can be difficult to apply ☐ Common to see outcome measures specified and mandated by funders ☐ Staff skills shortages - in using systems/processes/instruments and analysing data ☐ Lack of software licencing, lack of regular training
Knight et al., 2017 Dehart and Shapiro, 2017 Willison et al., (OJJDP) 2014; Roberts et al., 2014 Van Dop, et al., 2016 Carnochan et	☐ Evidence-informed strategy - The justice system will continually learn and improve when professionals make decisions based on the collection, analysis, and use of data information ☐ Researchers and service providers collaborating to embed evaluation in routine delivery of services.	☐ Combine/adapt established outcome measures or develop new instruments (mix quant and qual data) ☐ Mixing both can help address concerns that qualitative data is 'just anecdotal' ☐ Many providers use bespoke tools or approaches they have developed in-house ☐ Measures often lengthy,	☐ Dissemination processes: policymakers / practitioners need to learn about research in order to incorporate evidence into practices ☐ Strengths-based analysis needed (e.g. remaining crime of drug free, improvement in education) rather that deficit focused	☐ Developing valid and reliable measures that can capture the effect of interventions on user outcomes is challenging ☐ Providers struggle to provide 'harder' quantitative evidence of the difference that their services make, and value that they produce for young people and for society more broadly ☐ The reporting/sharing of data are

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RESEARCH EVIDENCE INTO POLICY PROGRAMMES AND PRACTICE

YOUTH CRIME

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al., 2014 Batty *et al.*, 2013 Miller and Daly 2013 Proctor *et al.*, 2013 McNeil *et al.*, 2011 McNeil *et al.*, 2012 Bazemore, 2006 Green *et al.* 2004 Early *et al.* 2001	impeded by resource constraints, turf considerations, and a lack of integrated data systems that cross organisational boundaries difficult to complete, and do not differentiate between aspects of youth development (that programmes are focusing on)	☐ (school failure, recidivism) ☐ An outcome indicator must be clear about the unit of analysis (e.g. all cases closed in the last year) and about the baseline for comparison (e.g. pre vs. post intervention)	☐ Attribution - measuring impact is challenging, the difficulty lies in the wide variety of outcomes that are impacted through the process of personal and social development ☐ A wide variety of influences on young people's lives, including school, youth projects, family, friends, possibly mentors or specialist professionals, and the wider community. ☐ Quant data is only a snapshot of trends in outcomes ☐ Practitioners often lack skills/confidence required in undertaking qualitative analysis – learning comes from doing
Smith, 2018 Miller and Daly, 2013 McNeil *et al.*, 2012	☐ Effective use of resources - understanding what a programme does, how it works and the difference it makes to outcomes, are good practices in public service delivery ☐ External evaluation valuable but not enough - if an organisation is to learn and improve. ☐ Approaches to capturing evidence on impact need to be embedded in everyday work and capacity and skills built to make sense of and respond to emerging findings ☐ Selecting tools or approaches: consider the time involved in using the tool, the level of expertise required, the demands placed on young people, the cost and the standard of evidence achieved	☐ Outcomes-based working – e.g. processes including - focused assessment and planning, recording and monitoring, outcomes focused review, collation of information, analysis ☐ Conversation approach – YP actively involved in identifying and working towards outcomes ☐ Scale measures produces data on high level outcomes such as 'feeling safe and secure' ☐ Measures using narrative detail of the outcome from the individuals perspective - provide more specific information ☐ Outcomes should be clear	☐ Easier to quantify and monitor 'harder' outcomes e.g. educational achievement, offending behaviour – than 'softer' social and emotional capabilities ☐ Assessment involves investigation, working with the young person, their family and others to capture their story, and the outcomes important to them ☐ Analysis is process of examination and explanation (goes beyond description) – highlighting links, making themes, interpretation – what was meant, referred or implied

and consistent, consider all outcomes, not just those in the plan, allows new outcomes to be identified	in responses Requires understanding of a YPs life, the component parts, their aspirations and challenges, as well as the risks □ Focus on a particular outcome or service e.g. feeling safe – are there examples where the YP has taken action towards achieving their own outcome □

5.3   Appendix 3: National Institute for Clinical Excellence: Levels of Evidence

Level of evidence	Type of evidence
1++	High quality meta-analyses, systematic reviews of RCTs, or RCTs with a very low risk of bias
1+	Well-conducted meta-analyses, systematic reviews of RCTs, or RCTs with a low risk of bias
1-	Meta-analyses, systematic reviews of RCTs, or RCTs with a high risk of bias*
2++	High-quality systematic reviews of case-control or cohort studies High-quality case-control or cohort studies with a very low risk of confounding, bias, or chance and a high probability that the relationship is causal
2+	Well-conducted case-control of cohort studies with a low risk of confounding, bias, or chance and a moderate probability that the relationship is causal
2-	Case-control or cohort studies with a high risk of confounding, bias, or chance and a significant risk that the relationship is no causal*
3	Non-analytic studies (e.g. case reports, case series)
4	Expert opinion, formal consensus

Source: Reproduction of Fives *et al.*'s (2014) adaptation of NICE's (2005) *Levels of Evidence*

The overall assessment of each study is graded using a code '++', '+' or '–', based on the extent to which the potential biases have been minimized. *Studies with a level of evidence '–' should not be used as a basis for making a recommendation.