Outcomes intended for children and young people

The Children’s Home (England) Regulations 2015 focus sharply on outcomes and expect children’s homes staff to ‘understand the children’s home’s overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children;’ and to ‘use this understanding to deliver care that meets children’s needs and supports them to fulfil their potential.’ (The quality and purpose of care standard - Regulation 6).

Audience

This paper is aimed at managers and staff of children’s homes.

Background

The Children’s Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and Ofsted require children’s homes to show how the care they provide makes a difference to children’s outcomes. Setting outcomes that respond to individual children and young people’s (CYP) needs and reviewing them regularly makes it possible to measure change, demonstrate progress or draw attention to setbacks or lack of progress. Children’s home managers and staff need to show what action has been taken to respond to individual needs and to help children make progress towards positive outcomes.

Outcomes are the changes, benefits or learning that make a difference – the ‘conditions of well-being’ for children and families (Friedman, 2009: 19). All services should aim to support children and young people to make positive progress – to achieve in their education, to build their mental and physical health and form positive relationships with peers and others. A focus on outcomes helps to keep our attention focused on what has changed in a child’s life, rather than on services, activities or processes that have been undertaken (Munro, 2011).

It is not how many worms the bird feeds its young but how well the fledgling flies (United Way of America, 1999)

Ofsted pays great attention to the quality of experiences for the CYP in children’s homes and the ‘distance travelled’ for each of them. The starting point and needs will be different for each child and each will make progress at different rates. Progress should be recognised and recorded in relevant plans, records, reviews and meetings, and in discussions with the child or young person.

Practice Paper 10: Outcomes for Children and Young People

Outcome: CYP to be engaged in learning and able to fulfil their aspirations.

Ask: What do we need to do to help this child to achieve this outcome?

Activities: Consider their current attendance and attainment; ask what the difficulties are from the child’s view/school view; discuss their strengths and aspirations; draw on research and theory about what works in helping children engage with education; ask who can support the child/the school/the residential home?

Interim outcomes: CYP understand why educational attainment is important; CYP participate in education; CYP making educational progress.

Record: Build all of this into your plan and share it with the child and school. Gather evidence and map progress.

Outcomes need to be realistic yet ambitious, and can be broken into short or medium term steps. Outcomes should be measureable, in order to demonstrate progress over time and to help to review activity, do things differently if outcomes are not being achieved and to build on success when they are.

Legal Context

Children’s Homes (England) Regulations 2015

Each of the quality standards for children’s homes in the Regulations describe outcomes that all children must be supported to achieve while living in the children’s home. Evidence must be provided about children and young people’s progress and experiences around these outcomes.

For example, Regulation 6, the quality and purpose of care standard, details how staff are expected to set and monitor outcomes in order to demonstrate that they are ‘providing personalised care that meets each child’s needs, as recorded in the child’s relevant plans, taking account of the child’s background.’
Ofsted Inspection Framework

Ofsted inspections of residential homes look at how managers and staff know whether they are making a positive difference to children’s lives, how well they understand the child’s starting point, and how they are measuring success in achieving outcomes.

Inspectors take account of the extent to which service providers have asked for and acted on the views of children and young people, and their parents or carers, in reviewing and improving services and outcomes.

Evidence of proactive and positive multi-agency working to secure positive outcomes for CYP will contribute towards a ‘good’ judgement of the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers.

For secure children's homes, there is also a judgement of ‘Outcomes in education and related learning activities’.

Other Regulations and Statutory Guidance

Children Act 1989:

- Volume 2 – Children Act 1989: Care planning, placement and case review

Care planning, placement and case review (England) Regulations 2010 brings together all provisions about the way local authorities plan and review the care of looked after children. The regulations aim to improve outcomes for looked after children by improving the quality of care planning processes.


A child’s care plan should set out how services will work together to achieve positive outcomes for the child, including the role of the children’s home. This will be accompanied by a Personal Education Plan and Health Plan, based on the child’s assessed needs. Some children will have other plans that set out outcomes to be achieved, such as the Education, Health and Care Plan for children with special needs and disabilities.

Practice issues

1. Outcomes are changes, benefits or learning

Activities that are intended to help achieve an outcome are sometimes incorrectly described as the outcome. For example, ‘positive activities with new friends’ contributes to progress towards a longer term outcome of ‘developing positive social skills’. Going on a trip or taking part in a club is not in itself an outcome; it is something the CYP does to help them make friends and practice social skills. Keep this distinction in mind or you end up with a list of activities and no sense of how useful they have been or how to build on these to further support a child or young person.

2. Measure outcomes to show progress made or ‘distance travelled’

Measuring outcomes and recording progress is essential to understanding a child or young person’s journey in your children’s home. Think about this at the start of a placement so that you can establish a ‘base line’ and have a clear picture of how things are for that child or young person at the start. Use the same method at a later date to see how things have changed for the child.

There are methods and measures designed for use with children with communication difficulties or special educational needs. When supporting CYP to complete questionnaires or other measures always explain what it is, why it is being used, how their information will be used, and offer to share the results with them (wherever possible).

There are many ‘standardised measures’ available which can be used at regular intervals to track progress. These are tools (often in the form of questionnaires) that have been tested (or standardised) to ensure that they accurately measure what they say they do. One familiar example is the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which is completed annually for all looked after CYP. SDQ data can be very useful in setting and monitoring outcomes.

3. Record progress

If you are to monitor outcomes effectively you need to keep relevant plans and records up to date. Ofsted inspectors will use case records to evaluate the experience and progress of children and young people and, importantly, these will allow you, the child and others to see when change has happened (or not).

Quantitative feedback - Scores from standardised measures, such as the SDQ, give quantitative feedback. School success trackers over an academic year show progress in educational achievement and monitor attendance. A simple smiley face scale showing the mood of a CYP could be used by tracking responses over a period of time and would be helpful for use with CYP with SEN or communication difficulties. Recording data such as incidents of running away or self-harm, or the use of rewards and sanctions could also be used.

Theory of change and logic modelling

A theory of change (or logic modelling) is one method for clarifying how to achieve outcomes effectively because it takes a logical view of how best to achieve change.

A theory of change works backwards from the outcomes you want to achieve so rather than looking at what you do already and what that helps you to achieve, it looks instead at what you want to achieve and how best to do that. Use evidence from research about what works and successful interventions to identify activities that improve specific outcomes. Devising a theory of change also challenges you to identify how you will know change has happened and so can help you to collect evidence of progress.

Theories of change usually have a one page diagram to explain simply what they do and why they do it, plus a short written explanation but it is the diagram that often captures people’s attention. The process of developing a theory of change challenges you to clarify what you want to achieve, to think through the steps needed and the resources and skills required to help you.
Qualitative feedback – children and young people’s own descriptions of their experience - provides rich qualitative information and evidence of progress. Think creatively to engage CYP to record their experiences in ways they will enjoy – examples used in children’s homes include photography, video, scrapbooks, graffiti walls, drama and many other methods. Ask other important people in CYP’s lives to write down achievements or barriers and to explain how they feel the CYP is engaging and progressing – parents or family members (if appropriate), club organisers and leaders for example, as well as teachers, youth workers or health professionals.

Include both quantitative measures and qualitative evidence in the child’s case records (ensure you have a child or young person’s permission to include personal materials). Record what children say about the support they receive and the progress that they are making (eg ‘I feel more confident making friends because of attending the youth club’).

Annex A, section 5 of the Ofsted Inspection Framework can also be used to record/highlight notable achievements for individual CYP.

4. Learn from negative or neutral outcomes

Given the complex challenges that many CYP in residential care have experienced there may be setbacks in their progress towards positive outcomes. They may encounter negative experiences or interim outcomes, such as being a victim of violence or committing a criminal offence. When this happens, focus on what can be learnt and what you might do differently as a result:

• Do you understand why setbacks happen?
• Have you talked with the child or young person to find out his or her views and what he or she wants to happen?
• Is additional - or different - support needed for the child or young person?
• Can the outcome be broken into smaller steps? For example, can you work towards reducing the frequency or severity of offending as a step towards achieving a positive behaviour outcome?
• What went well despite the negative experience (eg a young person left his placement without authorisation, but contacted the home to tell them where he was)?

For example, running away can result in many negative outcomes for young people. One home looked at what happened before a young person ran away in addition to talking about it with them on their return, this identified triggers which staff could be aware of and try to prevent through more targeted support. This home turned a potentially negative outcome into learning about what led to a young person running away and supporting them to resist this (Example from residential care staff at Children’s Homes Quality Standards workshop, 2015).

5. Work with children and young people on outcomes that are important to them

I never felt like people explained enough to me when I was in care. It left me feeling lost and like no-one understood where I was coming from. It means so much when people take the time to sit down with you and make sure you understand and ask your opinion.4

Setting and achieving meaningful aims requires the input and participation of children and young people. The adverse experiences that led to their placement may well impact on CYPs’ confidence, self-esteem, sense of self-efficacy (belief they can succeed) and their willingness to trust adults, even those trying to help them.

Talking to children about their hopes and aspirations, fears and worries can help you to understand what is important to the child, and help the child to understand why they should be motivated to engage with support to improve outcomes.

Conversations to identify realistic outcomes and plan how you will work together to achieve them are an opportunity to build relationships of trust - the essential element for supporting positive change for children in care.

Research and Resources

Practical tools


A briefing providing evidence-informed and practical guidance on using local authority datasets and augmenting these with SMART measures to develop meaningful understanding of well-being outcomes for looked after children. https://www.rip.org.uk/resources/

Action for Children (2014) Outcomes Arrow

Developed for a short breaks programme, this tool is easily adaptable for use in a residential home. The arrow breaks progress towards a goal into ten steps with guidance on how to support the CYP with each step. http://www.childrenshomesqualitystandards.org.uk/resources/sharing-practice/examples-of-systems-for-measuring-children%E2%80%99s-experience,-progress-and-outcomes/


Step by step guide on creating a theory of change to visually evidence outcomes, describe the needs you want to address, the changes (outcomes) you want to make and your plans to achieve them. http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/creating-your-theory-of-change/


The report outlines an outcomes framework for young people that can be used in any service based on evidence about what works in building social and emotional capabilities. It shows how these are linked to outcomes such as improved educational attainment and healthier life styles as well as personal outcomes such as feeling happier and more confident. http://youngfoundation.org/publications/framework-of-outcomes-for-young-people/


A discussion of tools that can help to track progress in achieving outcomes for children in children’s homes with links to resources, some of which are available for free. http://www.childrenshomesqualitystandards.org.uk/resources/outcomes/

Further reading


A printed guide and CD-ROM of practical resources to support professionals in giving children a voice; packed with ideas for trying new and creative methods involving art, play, music and drama. The accompanying guide shows how to keep children at the heart of the assessment process.

Written specifically for young people, this guide offers practical tips for children on how they can have a say in how they are cared for, including their review meetings. The guide was written following extensive consultation with children and young people in care. http://www.jkp.com/catalogue/book/9781904787396

References

2. Regulation 6.2 b 1V.
6. Research in Practice (2015) Scoring standardised measures - All Measures and Guidance (Compilation of standardised measures used for assessing parental capacity to change, some of which may also be used with young people).
7. Research in Practice (2013) Children and young people missing from care and vulnerable to sexual exploitation; CHQSP Practice Paper 5: Children who go missing