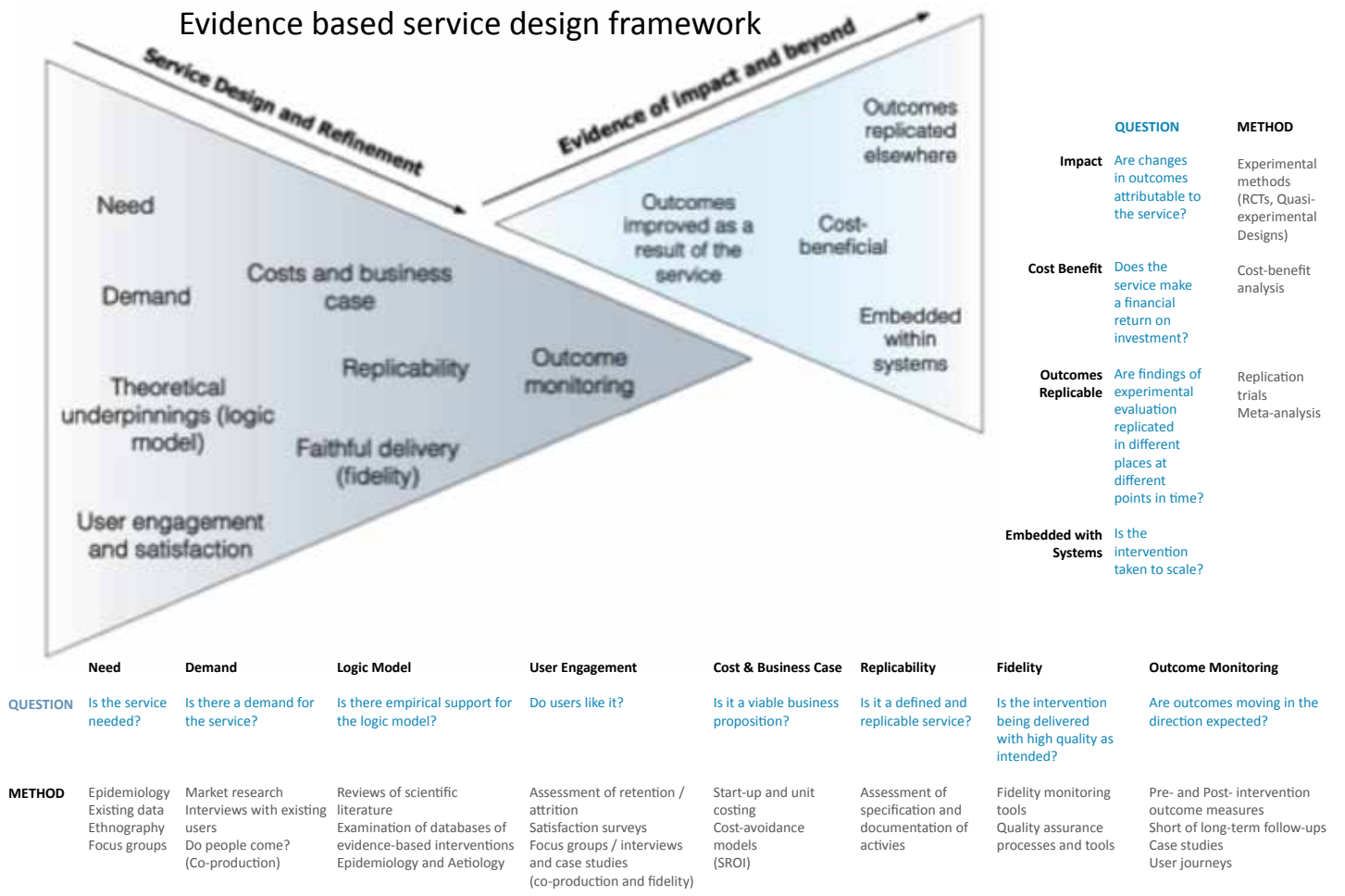


Evidencing the Impact of Youth Work in the Outdoors

by Christy Miles

Helping organisations that work with and for young people to measure and increase the impact of their services.

Evidence based service design framework



In September 2014 the Centre for Youth Impact was launched funded by the Cabinet office. It is a partnership of three organisations: National Council for Voluntary Youth Services, Project Oracle and the Social Research Unit. The Centre for Youth Impact aims to develop as the space where youth sector practitioners, funders and policy makers come together to discuss, generate, validate and reflect on high quality evidence of the impact that good youth services have on the lives of young people. The Cabinet Office believe that the Centre for Youth Impact should be firmly rooted within the youth sector, and work closely with the existing initiatives and organisations involved in the evidence agenda more broadly. Already several groups have attended "Train the Trainer" workshops run by the Centre for Youth Impact and Project Oracle. The workshops focus on developing a good understanding of the Social Research Unit's evidence-based service design framework and they enable attendees to embed this learning

within their own work and organisation with a view to being in a position to share this learning and train others more widely within their networks, The Foyer Federation, The Brathay Trust and London Youth have been chosen by CYI to pilot the work. Their purpose being to help cascade and embed tools and methods for service design and evaluation within their different networks. As part of this Brathay Trust have agreed to work with the Institute for Outdoor Learning to help disseminate the information through our network of practitioners, hence this article.

The journey from innovation to impact:



<http://dartington.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/innovation-to-impact.png>

What do we mean by innovation?

Good innovation is more than having smart ideas, it is an incremental and intensive process of theorising and designing, testing to find out if something is needed/ wanted/ liked/ effective/ used and scalable. Innovation can be inventing something brand new but could also be about adjusting something that already exists. It is rarely a big step forwards but more likely to be smaller steps built on previous evidence. Organisations often want to move their work further along the journey from Innovation to Impact but sometimes don't know how. The Social Research Units evidence based service design framework below looks at how to take a service from Innovation to Impact and examines each individual stage looking at them through a science based service design model to improve the impact of the work. (Evidence based service design framework above...)

Why evidence matters

Evidence matters because:

- Young people are assets to society, and deserve investment in their potential.
- Good evidence can help organisations that work with young people to design and deliver better services, and to become more sustainable.
- Organisations that develop on the basis of quality evidence, representing reflective and high quality practice, are most likely to make the best investments in young people and improve their life chances.

<http://www.youth-impact.uk/about/why-evidence-matters/>

Standards of Evidence

The Standards of Evidence are a framework used to help understand what constitutes good evidence. Originally developed by academic experts for the Greater London Authority, they consist of five levels which reflect how an organisation is currently gathering and using evidence, and then identifying how they can improve over time. It is an exercise to help improve evidence gathering which in turn can improve the services that are provided. The Standards of Evidence are not only useful for youth organisations, but also for commissioners. They help commissioners to identify which organisations and projects have the greatest potential to make a difference. The Standards of Evidence can be used to develop an evidence hub that both commissioners and youth organisations can use.

Creating a Theory of Change

There are five steps to creating a theory of change for a project:

1: Identifying your **aim(s)**

2: Identifying your **outcomes**

3: Identifying your **activities**

4: Showing the **causal links**

5: Examining your **assumptions**

Project Oracle believes that a theory of change which provides a clear, concise and convincing explanation of what your project does, what impact you aim to have and how you believe you will have it is a vital foundation of any project, and a prerequisite for effective evaluation. For this reason, producing a Theory of Change is an obligatory requirement for achieving Standard 1 on Project Oracle's Standards of Evidence.

Evaluation

To evaluate something means to gather, make sense of and use evidence about the impact of our work which helps us to understand the value or worth of a project. When developing an evaluation plan you will need to have a description of how you plan to gather evidence about what the project does.

For each outcome you should state:

- **WHAT** you will measure (indicators)
- **HOW** you will measure it (what tools you will use – for example questionnaires)
- **WHEN** you will measure it
- **WHO** will be responsible for measuring it
- **HOW MANY** What proportion of people will you gather this from, and how will they be selected

Your indicator should be a specific observable feature that lets you know an outcome has happened. Outcomes or the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your project. These can be immediate or long term. They should be specific and measurable, typically using language such as 'greater', 'improved' or 'increased'. They should be phrased as if they have already been achieved.

The end result should be "An evaluation that answers the right questions and helps inform decisions".

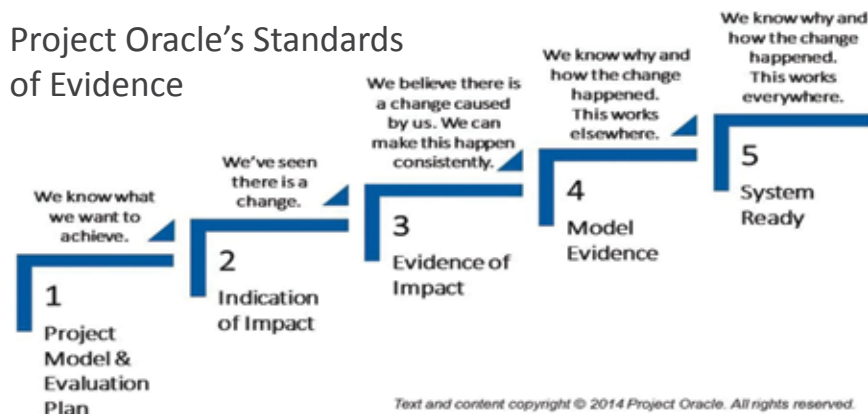
What now?

The above article is only an introduction to and the tip of the iceberg of the processes involved with helping organisations that work with and for young people to measure and increase the impact of their services.

Interested in finding out more?

If you want to find out more information please follow the online resource links below, or email either Christy Miles at Christy.Miles@inspiring-learning.com or Caroline Carr at outdoorlearningconsultancy@gmail.com. ■

Project Oracle's Standards of Evidence



Theory of Change & Evaluation Planning

During the workshop with Project Oracle they looked at theory of change and evaluation planning. A theory of change is a diagram that explains how your project has an impact on young people. It is a practical model that allows an organisation to articulate how they will achieve their aim and what assumptions they are making. A theory of change should not refer to the scale, growth plan or operational details instead it should effectively describe and explain the impact of your project from a beneficiary's point of view.

Links to online resources

<http://www.youth-impact.uk>
<http://dartington.org.uk/>
<http://project-oracle.com/about-us/>
<http://www.ncvys.org.uk/>
<http://www.brathay.org.uk/events/centre-youth-impact-evidencing-youth-work-2/>

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About the Author

Christy Miles is an Accredited Practitioner with the Institute of Outdoor Learning and currently sits on the IOL NW Regional Committee. Christy has been working in the outdoor industry in the field of youth work and personal development

training for over 12 years. Graduating from Liverpool John Moores University in 2005 with a Bsc Honours in Outdoor & Environmental Education, Christy is passionate about the power and benefits of Outdoor Learning. Currently working for Inspiring Learning as a Development Trainer Christy is helping to develop the next generation of Activity Leaders to facilitate inspiring and powerful learning experiences using the outdoor environment.