

Stats & Stories in community settings: a guide to blending different types of evidence in evaluation reports



About this guide

This guide is aimed at third sector organisations. It is a practical guide to reporting on outcomes blending qualitative and quantitative information. We hope that you can use it to reflect upon your own use of stats and stories and take practical steps to improve your reporting. This might be to funders, your board or others.


It is not a full guide on how to set and measure, analyse and report on outcomes.

- We include a quick reminder about outcomes on page 18 at the end of this document
- In relevant sections we outline some basic information about collecting, analysing and reporting on outcomes and signpost you to other resources and support guides that can help.

The guide is set out in sections

- What we mean by stats and stories
- Review the information you collect
- Planning for better stats and story information
- Analysing and combining stats and stories
- Reporting on stats and stories
- Reporting examples

Throughout the guide we use the following icons:

 Questions for you to think about as you read

Exercises For more in-depth reflection on how this relates to your own organisation

Resources We signpost you to ESS support guides and other resources.

What we mean by stats and stories

Stats

Also known as **quantitative data**. **It's the numbers**, what we can count. These may be about

- The overall numbers: how many people are referred and supported
- Demographic information: who those people are
- Activities: how many times you have helped or supported others in different ways
- Outcomes: how many people you have made a difference to or achieved a particular outcome
- Finances: how much it costs to support individuals/ provide the service

Stories

Also known as qualitative data, stories are what people say, see or experience. These may be about

- Their needs
- Their experience or feelings about your service
- What works/ matters for them
- What has changed personally for them or what outcomes have been achieved

Both stats and stories tell you something important and both have limitations.

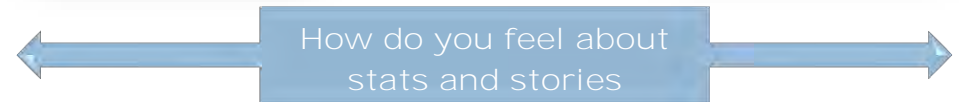
Stats tell you something about the scale: of the need, of your work and impact

Stories tell you the how and why: why your work is important, how you achieved change, why your approach matters.

Whether for reporting or improving, you need a mix of both stats and stories.

Exercise

Are you a stats cat or a shaggy dog storyteller?



Reflect on your own or in a group

1. Where are you on this continuum?
2. What do you like or dislike about stats and stories?

What people might say about stats & stories



Review the information you are collecting

Before you start blending different kinds of information, **it's** good to remind yourself of the different types of data you are collecting and why it might be important for reporting. We have identified four different types.

Service User information: this is information about the characteristics of the people you have worked with.

It's important if you want to understand/report on:

- the overall number of people using your services
- if you are reaching the right people (who could benefit the most)
- how different people engage with your service

What data do you collect about the people who use your services?

Is it qualitative or quantitative?

Activities information: this is information about which particular services individuals use.

It's important if you want to understand/report on:

- The overall use of services and activities
- How different types of people use your services (which, for how long, when)

? What information do you collect about your activities?
Is it qualitative or quantitative?

Feedback data: this is information about what people (service users/ staff/ volunteers) think about your services.

It's important if you want to understand/report on:

- reactions to your activities: enjoyment/usefulness
- ideas for improvement
- **what works and doesn't work for people**

? What feedback do you collect?
Is it qualitative or quantitative?

Outcome information: this is evidence about the change or difference you have made to people through your activities.

It's important if you want to understand/ report on:

- the difference you are making to individuals
- when you have most impact (which activities/types of people/ timing)
- Your overall impact

? What outcome evidence do you collect?
Is it quantitative or qualitative?

Exercise

Reflect on your own or in a group

1. What do you want to report on?
2. Are you collecting the right mix of information?

Planning for better stats and story collection

The basics

When collecting outcome evidence **don't jump to using a method** without first checking it is the right one for you. You need to think about:

- your outcomes and indicators
- when you might see change
- the abilities and preferences of the people you are working with
- existing sources and methods

Resource

Guide [2a Design evidence collection methods](#)

In this guide we include some additional ideas for how you can collect more or better stats and stories as you go along.

Stories into stats: using scales

You can use scales as a way of capturing feelings or views in a way that can be easily quantified.

For example: I feel /understand [statement]

Scaled answer

Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot	Completely
1	2	3	4	5

This allows you to:

- compare the average
- look at the range of responses at the beginning and end of a project
- see the extent of change.

This can be particularly helpful when you have been working with a client group for a while and know what kinds of responses to expect.

You can make your scale more creative or more accessible by using symbols or a wheel.

If you want some qualitative information, include an open comments box so people can say more.

Resources

Methods sheets

[Questionnaire](#)

[Evaluation wheel](#)

Stories into stats: code as you go

Qualitative evidence can come from a range of sources:

- creative methods feedback
- casual conversation
- photos
- open comments boxes on surveys or forms
- case notes
- diaries or journals
- group discussions

One trick is to code this evidence against outcomes and indicators list. For example:

Note of what happened in advice session				
Tick the relevant box	None	A bit	A lot	Fully
• Understanding of entitlements				
• Ability to organise finances				
• Levels of stress				

This makes it easier to go through past evidence and add up the number of times an individual has achieved an outcome.

Be careful of double counting, i.e. one person has evidence of achieving an outcome five times is not the same as five people achieving an outcome.

Resource

Method sheet

[Using case records](#)

Stats into stories: include a comment box

Make sure you have a space on your form or survey for an open question or comments.

For example:

What did we do well? What could we do better?
Answer: Great workshop, trainer very informative, room a bit cold, could we have more worked examples.

This can be helpful

- to understand why people have given the scaled answers they have
- to understand what helped or hindered
- to get some good quotes for your report

Richer stories: capture casual conversations

We often get the most authentic stories as part of ongoing conversations. Make sure you have a place to capture what people say to you.

For example:

Brief context:
Peter (aged 13) said when **he'd** just arrived for the group session

What was said
I got a detention for being late at school, but I had to get my two sisters to school.
Worker: Did you tell the school that?
No (shrugs)

You don't need to capture the whole story but do make a note of the context, so it makes sense later. Try to capture the actual language used.

Resource

Method sheet

[Capturing casual moments](#)

Richer stories: go beyond "fine"

Use methods that encourage people to tell you more about what matters to them. The methods listed below prompt or trigger people to have deeper conversations.

Resources

[Appreciative questions](#)

Asking two simple questions can give you feedback about what works for people and how to make it even better.

[Choosing pictures](#)

This can be used with a group or as a one to one activity. People are invited to pick a card in response to a specific question or idea.

[Emotional touchpoints](#)

Emotional touchpoints are used to identify key points in **people's experiences of services. It is then used to prompt** feedback or stories from service users. It can also act as a framework for collecting stories.

[Stretch or Positive statements](#)

Simple statements which act as prompts for discussion or sharing experiences.

[Relationship Map](#)

Relationship maps are a way of understanding friendship networks and relationships. They could be used to evaluate outcomes such as: (service users) are less isolated OR have wider peer support networks.

Analysing and combining stats and stories

The basics

Analysis is about identifying evidence, piecing it together and coming to conclusions about what happened and why. It involves doing some or all of the following:

1. Identifying the question you are trying to answer
2. Identifying the different types of evidence you have
3. Identifying what each type of evidence is telling you
4. Combining the different types of evidence
5. Asking what the evidence is telling you overall
6. Identifying and noting any gaps in evidence

Resource

Guide [3.1 Analysing information for Evaluation](#)

In this guide we focus on steps 3 and 4 (above) about analysing stats and stories separately then combining them. This involves:

Identifying the stories behind the stats

Identifying the stats behind the stories

Quantitative analysis

This involves

- Checking the numbers of people you have evidence for
- Looking for the range of responses (least and most)
- Looking for groups or clusters of responses
- Looking for factors that seem to influence those responses

Example from cooking classes

Using a scaled assessment, 10 people at the cookery class said they had increased their cooking skills.

5 had increased their skills a lot, 3 a little, 2 not at all.

Those who changed a lot had done little cooking before, **those who didn't change at all were experienced cooks.**

Qualitative analysis

This involves

- Looking for themes and giving them a code or label
- Marking your evidence against these codes
- Counting the number of times the themes occurs
- Looking for relationships to other factors
- Searching for useful quotes

Analysis example from cooking classes

Analysis of comments identified themes around: the types of dishes people felt confident in cooking, the impact on other family members and the impact on weight and other health factors (such as blood pressure or cholesterol), the importance of peer support.

They concluded that

- A third had started to cook simple dishes (mostly had not cooked before)
- A third had started to cook a wider variety of dishes (mostly cooked simple dishes before)
- A third were already confident cooks, but enjoyed the social aspects of the class
- Half had started to eat healthier meals
- A few (3 mentioned this had impacted on their health)
- A few felt they were feeding their family better
- Several people said it was helpful to check with each other if they were unsure.

Quotes

- “We dinnae get so many carry outs now”
- “Me and the whole family are losing inches”
- “The doctor says my cholesterol has gone down”
- “M and P (class members) are great at giving support”

Combining different types of evidence

To see if, and when, you have made a difference, map the different kinds of evidence against your outcomes and indicators, using the template below or a similar one. **Don't** worry about combining different types of evidence. This creates a richer picture so long as you set it out clearly.

Evidence from cooking class

Outcome	Indicator	Evidence achieved	Learning
Increased cooking skills	Frequency of cooking	Scaled questions 8/10 more skilled	8 people increased skills 2 were already good cooks. Although not target audience they helped others to feel enthusiastic about cooking.
	Complexity of dishes	5/10 a lot more skilled Comments 1/3 cooking simple dishes 1/3 cooking more complex dishes Casual feedback They are learning from each other	

Note: other evidence might be marked against other outcomes such as making healthier choices and better health.

Reporting using stats and stories

The basics

Evaluation results can be shared in a range of ways for different purposes and different audiences. The key to this is understanding who the audience is, what they want to know and why they want to know that. This means some reports will have more, or less detail than others and include different quantities of stats or stories.

In a **funder's report** your job is to tell the story:

- What you did
- What difference you made
- What you learnt

Resources

Guides

[3.3 Report writing](#)

[3.1 Case studies](#)

[Harmonising Report Template](#)

In this guide we focus on how you combine your stats and stories together to paint a picture of your work and learning for funders.

Some principles for reporting stats and stories

Stats and stories need to make sense together

They don't have to be side by side, but it should be obvious how they connect. You might explain this in a simple sentence (or two) or use clear headings.

Give the stories behind the stats

Show the scale of your impact (the stats) then give real life examples or quotes that help explain what this means in real life (the stories)

For example:

24 out of the 30 families we worked with increased their parenting skills

- Mary is now getting to school on time
- Bobby says there are fewer arguments at home
- Javade says they are having regular meals and a set bedtime

Give the stats behind the stories

If you use a case study, explain how typical it is. It's fine to use your most successful example, as long as you say **that's what it is**. Your aim is to paint a realistic picture about the extent and type of impact your work is making.

Be wary of only giving your best stories or funders might expect your best impact all the time (or even worse, not believe you!)

Don't be afraid to give more typical examples or even examples where you haven't been so successful.

For example:

A very positive example is Mary. She was always late for school but now has 100% record for punctuality. She's doing very well in school and getting fantastic grades.

More typically punctuality improves, with occasional lapses.

Be aware of the ethics of sharing stories

- Anonymise or get permission to share
- Think through potential implications for the person
- Think about whose voices you are showcasing; **don't** forget the lesser heard voices.

Use statistics transparently

Avoid percentages for small numbers. For example, say 8 out of 11 service users were unemployed not 72.7%

Make sure graphs are readable and make sense

Check they are clearly labelled and consider summarising what the graph is telling the reader in a couple of sentences.

Exercise

In groups or on your own, look at the examples on pages 14-17.

- What do you like?
- Why?
- What would your readers like?
- What ideas do these give you for your reports?

Exercise

Review your last or a draft evaluation report by working through the questions below. You could do this on your own, in a group, or ask someone else who wasn't involved in writing it.

1. Is the report painting a clear and realistic picture?
 - o Are the outcomes clear?
 - o Does it take into account the needs of the audience?
2. Does it explain what the stats mean?
3. Are the case studies or quotes set in context, i.e. does it explain if they are typical or atypical examples?
4. Is information clear and engaging?
5. Is the learning clear?

Report examples

Pages 14-17 are extracts from third sector reports that showcase how stats and stories can be blended effectively in a visual and eye-catching way while also providing relevant information.

1. Leap Confronting Conflict 2017 Impact report - Community Evidence: This infographic sets out how evidence was collected and who it came from for three different strands of work. Both stats and stories for each strand are then linked to different outcomes, so readers can see how the outcomes are achieved through a variety of activities. Numbers of participants behind **each** percentage are also labelled clearly. Full report: <https://bit.ly/2TCq1td>

2. Canal & River Trust: Waterways & Wellbeing Outcomes Report 2017: **The extract 'Bringing our Outcomes Measurement Framework alive' is an example of** how stats and stories link to a specific outcome and activity. The longer report provides more essential information about the outcomes measurement framework and findings. Full report: <https://bit.ly/2TNI6ol>

3. Streetwise Opera 2017/18 Impact Infographic: This extract shows how the organisation contributed to improving the wellbeing of participants. The infographic layout clearly connects short, medium and long term outcomes with stats and stories. Including the number of

people behind each percentage helps the reader understand the scale of impact and makes the evidence base transparent. Full infographic: <https://bit.ly/2Ch228O>

4. 'Andrew's Story' case study from The Junction: A case study can be presented in a visual format combining both stats and stories. In this example The Junction connects lived experience to national stats and a personal outcome for a young person. As well as providing evidence of how a personal outcome has been achieved, the **infographic also puts the cost of the Junction's counselling service into a wider context.**

Full references to these reports can be found on page 19.

We also recommend looking at:

Active Communities (Scotland) used the Harmonising Reporting template to structure their [Hearty Lives Renfrewshire](#) report. Pages 4-7 are impact snapshots showing evidence for each project outcome. Pages 8-9 then extend this through three longer case studies showing outcomes for young people who participated in Hearty Lives activities.

Shared Care Scotland produces snapshot publications for each of their Short Breaks Fund projects. These short publications are around four pages long. The [Better Breaks snapshot](#) uses clearly titled subheadings to create a flow through the report linking activity stats, outcomes, stories and learning for the organisation.

How we collect our evidence

Improving Prospects (IP)

We survey graduates before and after each course. In 2017 an independent long-term evaluation by Brathay Research Hub assessed 35 of the 92 graduates from our 2016-2017 programme.

Power Up! and Leadership and Enterprise (L&E)

We survey graduates before and after each course, and will carry out independent longitudinal evaluations as the programmes progress.

Please note, Power Up! is still in the early stages of development. We will share lessons learned as it progresses in 2018.

Training for professionals who work with young people

We evaluate participants at the end of each course and will review and improve the measurement of our work with professionals. We will also consider other ways to embed and refresh the skills they learn through new technologies and closer partnerships.

Gaining conflict management skills

Improving Prospects (IP)



85%

(29 out of 35) agreed that IP helped them to learn to resolve conflict, and they had put that knowledge into practice since graduation

91%

(31 out of 34) were continuing to use what they had learned

71%

(25 out of 35) had helped others involved in conflict since graduation

Leadership and Enterprise (L&E):

"It helped me to see different perspectives regarding people and conflict."

"This course has helped me to manage conflict in different ways. [...] It's helped me to learn more on how conflict can be triggered."

Improving relationships

Improving Prospects (IP)



78%

(25 out of 32) agreed that IP helped them to make positive choices about their relationships, friendships and networks

69%

(24 out of 35) agreed IP had helped them to have less to do with relationships, friendships and networks that have a negative impact on their life

Leadership and Enterprise (L&E):

"The course helped me to see I have self-worth. I feel like I have more control over myself and I feel better and I understand people's red flags."

"I keep myself away from people who negatively impact me, identify those people by noting if they are capable of helping me to achieve. If they can't help themselves they can't help me. If they are messing around, I know they are a bad influence."

Reducing offending, taking responsibility

Improving Prospects (IP)



86%

6 of the 7 graduates involved in offending before the programme had not offended since (of the 35 who took part in the longitudinal evaluation)

Leadership and Enterprise (L&E):

"I feel like I have more power and choices when I come into trouble as I can choose to get involved or not."

"It made me think about how conflict affects everyone and that I can prevent a lot of things from happening if I take responsibility for myself and actions."

"... the thing is I'm not afraid to ask for help anymore. My behaviour has also changed a lot as I haven't been in isolation for a long while."

Achieving goals

Improving Prospects (IP)



80%

(28 out of 35) agreed IP had helped them progress towards achieving their goals

66%

(23 out of 35) said that IP helped them to participate in employment, education and training

In 2017 we:

- Supported 83 young people through our progressions work
- Supported six young people to facilitate sessions at the youth involvement group
- Created action plans with 30 young people
- Signposted 24 young people to other organisations
- Improved job-readiness for 29 young people by bringing them to job fairs, through corporate trips, and by helping them with job applications and CV writing.

Leadership and Enterprise (L&E):

"Same way Leap taught me to break down the conflict in my life it was the same as my life goals. Don't allow myself to limit my options but manage properly."

Evidence from our work with community professionals:



88%

(78 out of 89) felt that they were more aware of their own feelings around conflict and challenging behaviour

83%

(89 out of 107) felt that they were able to use what they had learned

"The most significant learning was to think about the way I behave in a group. Changing my way to think. Challenging my thought process."

Bringing our Outcomes Measurement Framework alive

Health, Wellbeing & Happiness



Outcomes ambitions

- providing an accessible environment to encourage more people to become physically active and meeting recommended levels of physical activity
- providing an environment which contributes to improving mental health and 'Wellbeing' as part of wider public policy agenda

Sport Participation Pilot Programme funded by Sport England & People's Postcode Lottery

- two-year pilot project 2015–17 to test the effectiveness of utilising waterways to increase community sport and physical activity
- over 1,100 people participated in the pilot which included the 'Two Arm Two Legs' half-marathon or 10 kilometre race in 2016
 - 30% of participants increased their activity levels, compared to pre-event training
 - 34% had never used the canal for exercise before the event but 73% of participants said they would use it for exercise in the future
 - One in ten of the participants described themselves as only slightly active or were inactive before the event

Two Arms on Two Legs Running Festival, along the Wendover and Aylesbury Arms of the Grand Union Canal



"Running and walking along the canal is such a joy; so many lovely things to see"



"I now know that when there is a canal nearby it is a safe, scenic place to run."

Engaged People & Cohesive Communities



Outcomes ambitions

- contributing to the involvement and resilience of local communities
- broadening participation by people from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, age groups and abilities and improving community cohesion
- providing a platform for preventative and / or rehabilitation programmes
- providing an environment that positively contributes to the perceived safety and security of the locality

Coast-to-Coast Desmond Family Canoe Trail 2015–20

The vision behind this project is to create England's first coast-to-coast canoe trail, running over 240 kilometres (150 miles) from Liverpool to Goole, connecting some of the most deprived communities along its route.

Highlights over the first two years of the project:

- 857 young people and 4,524 local people actively involved
- 1,139 volunteer hours
- 97% of young people felt their confidence had improved
- 92% of young people stated their wellbeing and happiness had improved
- 92% of local people said they felt more connected to their local community
- 95% said they were more likely to visit their local canal

"I am thinking about volunteering again in the future in my local area and I have enjoyed making a difference."



Desmond Family Canoe Trail, connecting communities and providing opportunities for young people to engage in healthier active lifestyles along the Leeds & Liverpool Canal



"Being involved in the project, along with other groups, has helped me to be more confident and this has helped me in starting a job."



"I have learnt new skills and gained knowledge about the habitats and history of my local canal."



IMPROVED WELLBEING

“It’s something I look forward to every week. It’s the highlight of my week. It gives me a purpose in the morning, to get up, and say ‘I’m going to go singing and acting today.’”

*There are more people than ever with complex and multiple needs... Mental health services are overstretched and unable to cope.**

“On a day like today, when I do counselling in the afternoon, it really relaxes me and I get to have some fun, before I deal with serious issues later in the day, I find that really good.”

“Dorothy is a real success story of rehabilitation. She looks glowing with health and is always healthy eating.”

“The amazing thing is how much stronger I am, physically and psychologically, and even emotionally. You don’t notice it over a period of time, but when you look back...I couldn’t sustain a note I was so weak.”

“When you’ve been in recovery and for a lot of years you’ve been feeling negative, you don’t know much about love but I think this has helped. I can take it back home and deliver it to my family now. I’m a new mam, a nice mam, not a negative mam.”

“It makes you feel proud, when you do a performance. It makes me feel as though, yes, fair enough, I’ve got a learning disability, I can do this and I’m going to achieve this.”

“This is a good start for me. When I go home tonight I know I’ll be thinking about this. At night time when you review your day and think ‘what have I done today?’ This will probably come right up the top.”

“I’m making my own music and I’m finding that I’m not so scared of singing the high notes. Also, if I want to be expressive in a conversation and wave my arms about, I’m not so shy of doing it, it seems to be happening in my daily life.”

92% felt that their **mental health had improved** (n=38)

82% felt **healthier** as a result of coming to Streetwise Opera (n=49)

89% felt that attending Streetwise Opera had helped them **cope with physical health issues** (n=35)

85% had improved or maintained a sense of **optimism about the future** (n=53)

88% had improved or maintained their **self-confidence** (n=77)

94% had improved or maintained their **self-esteem** (n=80)

90% were **enjoying life more** / continuing to enjoy life (n=50)

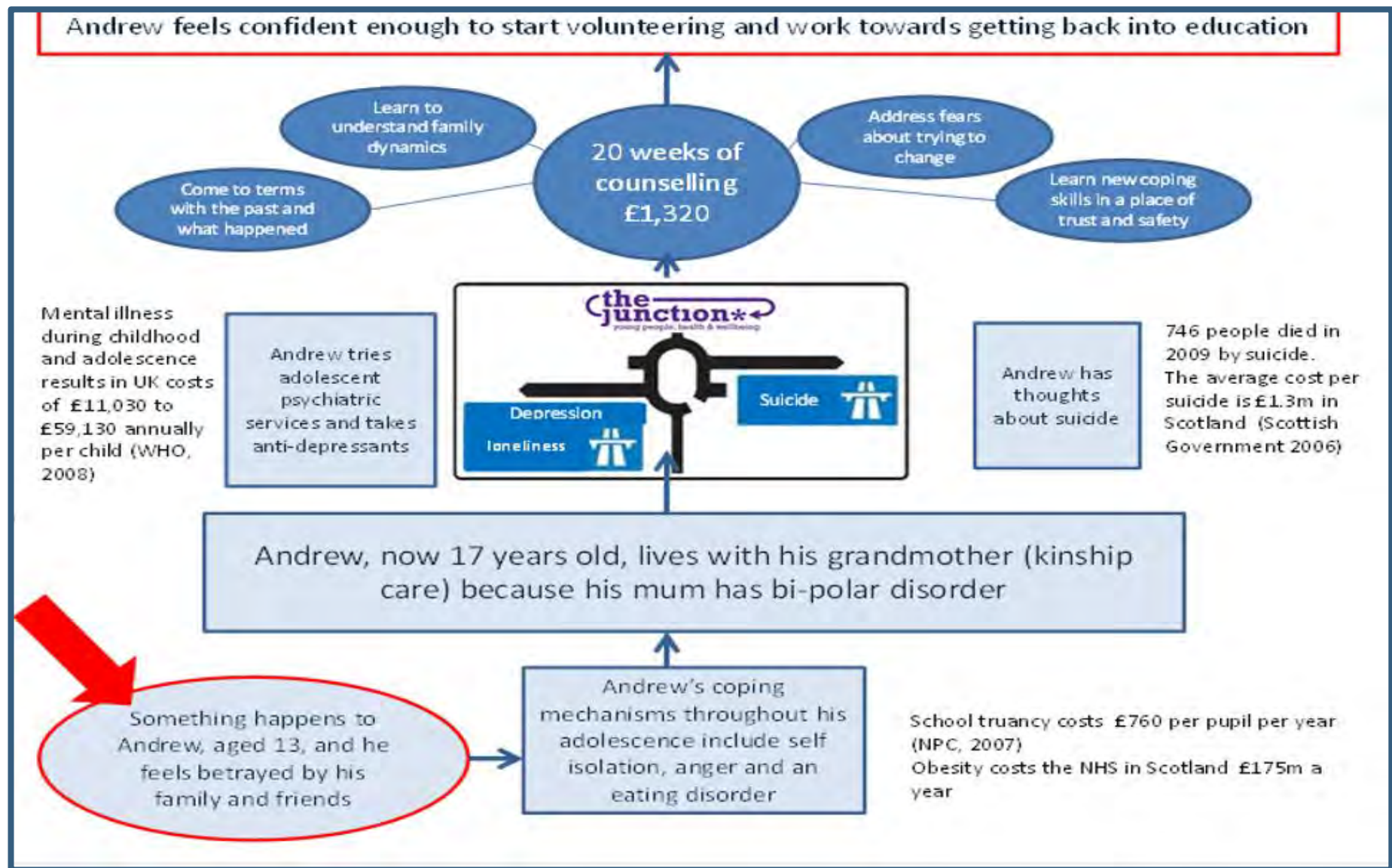
91% felt they had improved or maintained their **creative skills** (n=81)

LONG TERM OUTCOMES

MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES

SHORT TERM OUTCOMES

Andrew's Story: Case study from The Junction, Young People, Health & Wellbeing



A quick reminder on setting outcomes

The first step to evaluating the difference you make is to be clear about your outcomes.

1. **Outcomes** are the changes or differences a project makes through your activities (what you do)
2. **To write about outcomes** projects should use change words like:
improve decrease reduce
expand develop sustain

How to write an outcome:

WHAT change + **WHO** for + **How** change (direction)

For example:

Young people have **increased confidence**

Families' **financial planning skills** improve


3. **Outcomes** link to our understanding of the situation/ need we are trying to address:

Situation or need: Mothers lack the confidence and skills to parent their children effectively → →

Outcome: Mothers have increased parenting skills

4. Project activities must link logically and realistically to planned outcomes:

Activity: Provide business planning advice to social enterprises

 Leads logically to

Outcome: Social enterprises are more sustainable

Resources

See [ESS guides to setting outcomes](#)

Additional resources

NCVO: How to use your evaluation findings to engage your external audience <https://knowhownonprofit.org/how-to/how-to-use-your-evaluation-findings-to-engage-external-audiences>

NCVO: How to communicate your impact <https://knowhownonprofit.org/how-to/how-to-communicate-your-impact>

Inclusive communications: A comprehensive guide to making reports accessible and inclusive: [http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/000/020/EF_DS_Inclusive_comms_guide_accessible_PDF_APRIL_2014_FINAL\(1\)_original.pdf?1456915910](http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/000/020/EF_DS_Inclusive_comms_guide_accessible_PDF_APRIL_2014_FINAL(1)_original.pdf?1456915910)

Plain English [Free guides from the Campaign for Plain English](#) to support with writing clearly and effectively

TREBL evidence quality checklist. See the Knowledge Translation Network publication, Evidence from Elsewhere (2017) p. 26. (Adapted from Levitt et al, 2010) <https://bit.ly/2yNbG3X>

Alliance for Useful Evidence: Evidence Transparency Framework <https://bit.ly/2tywUxt>

Bond: NGO evidence quality assessment framework: <https://bit.ly/2rUIr6w>

References

Extracts from reports have been reproduced with kind permission from organisations for use in this publication.

1. Streetwise Opera 2017 Impact Infographic. Extract page 3
© Streetwise Opera, 2017/18 impact infographic
2. Canal & River Trust: Waterways & Wellbeing Outcomes Measurement Report 2017. Extract pages 18 and 19
3. Leap Confronting Conflict 2017 Impact Report. Extract pages 8 & 9 (Community Evidence).



Leap is an award-winning national youth charity that provides conflict management programmes and support to young people and the professionals working with them.

4. **Andrew's Story, created by** The Junction, Young People, Health & Wellbeing
5. Cover picture: Before the Town, Paul Klee (1915) Under Creative Commons Zero Licence.



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