

Family Development Matrix Outcomes Model for Measuring Family Progress

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Outcomes are an important element in family-centered practice. The measurement of outcomes is now required by the Federal Government Performance and Reporting Act for agencies receiving federal funding, such as through the Adoption and Safe Families Act and Family Preservation and Support Services Program. Outcome accountability challenges family-centered agencies to think differently about the way they do business and this impacts their delivery of services. The impact is felt in how they relate to the families they serve, how they communicate to funders, and how they collaborate and partner with other organizations, and affects their unique service role to families within the community. This paradigm shift cannot occur successfully without development of reliable and valid outcome measurement models, or without family support workers seeing and appreciating the benefits of using the outcomes approach. Receiving training and technical assistance and understanding collaborative implementation and evaluation are also critical for successful implementation. In addition, the field of outcomes is in its infancy and little research is available as to the relative success of any one model within the context of integrated, comprehensive human services and planning for healthy communities.

A Client-Focused Evaluation

The shift in focus from agency and service to family outcomes benefits everyone because it:

- Puts resources where they are the most efficient and effective-- within a family focus.
- Contributes to program evaluation that is useful to all aspects of client and agency planning, and
- Gives the family a central, active role in program-related decision-making.

In developing outcomes, the family-centered question becomes, "What change do we want to see?" The response must be a specific, measurable assessment of the changes we do see.

A realistic timeframe is important--too short or too long a timeframe for outcomes can lead to a perception of failure when, in fact, positive change has occurred.

The larger question asked by families, funders, and policymakers---- "How do you know that the people you helped became self-sufficient?"-- can be answered easily when family progress is measured over realistic periods of time using specific indicators of measurable outcomes.

1. **What is an outcome?** An outcome is a determination of the extent to which a goal or objective has been achieved or accomplished. Outcomes are stated and measured in terms of changes that take place in family status.

2. **What is an indicator?** An indicator is some type of information that can be used to evaluate the extent to which something has occurred. Family indicators are usually either measurements or observations of a situation in which the family found itself.

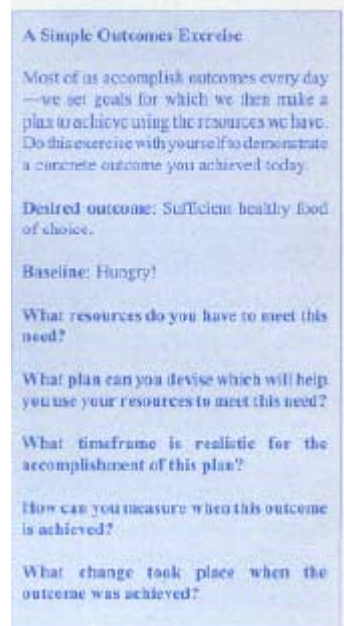
3. **What are the two most important characteristics of an indicator?** To be useful in evaluating the extent to which something has occurred, an indicator must be:

Reliable - measurements or observations taken under the same conditions yield the same results; and

Valid - accurate measurements or observations that reflect the actual changes in the family's situation.

What is the Family Outcomes Matrix?

The Family Development Outcomes Matrix is one of three matrices that make up the California Matrix Outcomes Model. The other two are called the Agency Development Matrix and the Community Scaling Tool. The Family Development Outcomes Matrix is a tool to help families recognize their strengths and assist advocates and family-centered workers with accurate information in terms of outcomes based on a family's progress over a period of time. This model is being closely studied by the Federal Health and Human Service Task Force on Monitoring and Assessment Scales Committee. Variations of this model are in use throughout the nation.



A Simple Outcomes Exercise

Most of us accomplish outcomes every day --we set goals for which we then make a plan to achieve using the resources we have. Do this exercise with yourself to demonstrate a concrete outcome you achieved today.

Desired outcome: Sufficient healthy food of choice.

Baseline: Hungry!

What resources do you have to meet this need?

What plan can you devise which will help you use your resources to meet this need?

What timeframe is realistic for the accomplishment of this plan?

How can you measure when this outcome is achieved?

What change took place when the outcome was achieved?

A Measure of Family Process and Outcomes

In our field, we constantly struggle. We know what we do helps families, but how do we show others? How do we structure the way we help so it is best for the families with whom we work? How do we document, for ourselves, for the families, and for policymakers and funders, the outcomes of our work?

There's no way to truly put on paper the complex realities of the families with whom we work, but the Family Development Outcomes Matrix, by helping to quantify the qualitative, is a tool that brings us closer to this goal. The Family Development Outcomes Matrix combines both a process that encourages skill-building for family members and the development of outcomes that enable the measuring of family progress. The most recent evaluation research shows that both are important in achieving change.

In the Family Development Outcomes Matrix, eleven Outcome-Categories run across the top, referring to areas of family life-shelter, food and clothing, transportation and mobility, health and safety, social and emotional health, finances, family relations, community relations, adult education and development, child education and development, and immigration and resettlement (see chart below).

Shelter	Food/Clothing	Transportation/ Mobility	Health/Safety
Security of housing over time; Safety of housing; Stability of housing over time; Condition of housing; Income and resources for housing	Ability to afford adequate food and clothing; Quality of diet; Adequacy of clothing; Nutritional value of meals; Conditions of food preparation resources (utensils, space, appliances, sanitation)	Access to transportation based on level of need; Safety, condition of transportation; Legal status of driver, vehicle (license, insurance, etc.)	Environmental conditions; Health habits; Access to health resources; Status of physical health; Ability to afford health care
Social/Emotional Health	Finances	Family Relations	Community Relations
Quality of social support system; Presence, degree of substance abuse; Sense of personal responsibility; Quality of mental health; Ability and willingness to identify needs and access resources	Income level in context of living; Long and short-term financial goals; Budgeting skills and financial discipline; Knowledge and understanding of financial institutions and resources	Family health; Ability to resolve conflict; Intrafamily communication skills; Parenting skills; Extended family relationships	Knowledge of and access to community resources; Participation in the community (i.e., school, church, clubs, etc.); Social conditions in the neighborhood; Ability to communicate with others; Type of relationship with family, friends and neighbors
Adult Education/ Employment	Children's Education/ Development	Immigration/ Resettlement	
Employed or not; Presence or absence of career goals, appropriateness of goals; Level of education, job skills, work history; Employment in field of choice; Income, hours, benefits; Availability and affordability of child care and other supportive services to support employment	Age-appropriate development—physical, cognitive, emotional; Age-appropriate behavior, social skills; Verbal communication; Parents value child's education; Parent/child interaction; School behavior; attendance and readiness to learn	Immigration status; Language skills based on needs; Maintaining cultural identity	

A Strengths-Based Approach to Case Management

The Family Development Outcomes Matrix is based on a strengths model rather than a "deficit" model. It documents where a family is thriving as well as where it needs support, and allows those using it to easily identify strengths from which to start addressing needs.

A Scales-and-Ladders Tool

The Family Development Outcomes Matrix is a scales-and-ladders instrument that helps service providers assign scores to document family progress. These scores are based on an understanding shared with others who assign them and those who read and use them regarding what the numbers mean. A scale is simply a continuum that describes different states or conditions of status. It has a beginning point and an ending point, with increments in between. Sometimes the

increments are equal, like a thermometer, or uneven, like a Richter scale that measures earthquakes. The scale simply provides you with inflation. It is a means to collect information. Another commonly used example of a scales and ladders tool is a mileage chart on a map. When you find one city going across the top, a second city down the side, and find the box where the column and the row intersect, you are using a scales-and-ladders tool.

General Guidelines for Defining Matrix Status Levels

In-Crisis: Family cannot meet its needs. Family is unwilling or unable to work toward positive change. Family systems have collapsed or are in immediate danger of collapse. Strong outside intervention needed to move family to "At-Risk" level.

At-Risk or Vulnerable: Family is secure from immediate threats to health and safety, but has not yet developed or committed to plans for long-term growth and change. Continuing safety-net intervention provides platform on which the family can build its plans for improving its circumstances.

Stable: Family is no longer in danger, is ready and willing to change and is planning for its future. Supportive services provided to assist family members in implementing their plans.

Safe/Self-Sufficient: Family is strong and has made significant progress in proving its circumstances; it is generally secure as a result of its own efforts. Family is economically self-sufficient, and has a clear vision of its ultimate goals. Intervention is resource-oriented.

Thriving: Family systems are strong and healthy, fully functional. Family is achieving its goals and is independent of all government assistance. Family has achieved commonly accepted standards of family well-being.

Example of Shelter Category and Indicators by Status Level.

General Indicators:

- Security of housing over time
- Safety of housing
- Stability of housing over time
- Condition of housing
- Income and resources for housing

THRIVING

- Owns home or has long-term tenancy
- Able to comfortably afford housing costs
- Feels housing is safe and appropriate for their needs
- Savings are sufficient to cover two months housing costs

SAFE/SELF-SUFFICIENT

- Owns home or tenancy is secure for at least a year
- Able to pay rent or mortgage each month and have enough income for other expenses
- Housing is safe and not overcrowded
- Savings available for occasional unexpected expenses

STABLE

- Living in permanent housing, or temporary situation that will last at least six months
- Able to pay rent each month
- Housing is not hazardous, unhealthy, overcrowded
- Some savings or resources to draw on in an emergency

AT-RISK

- Living in temporary or transitional housing and not certain where next shelter is to be found
- Unable to pay rent on time every month
- Housing is unsafe or seriously overcrowded

IN-CRISIS

- Homeless or on the verge of homelessness
- Primary source of income has ceased, no resources to cover housing
- Living in dangerous conditions

A Family-Centered, Multicultural Agency Case Example Using The Family Development Outcomes Approach

During the last five years, Resources for Families and Communities Agency (RFC) in Santa Clara County, the "Home of Silicon Valley," has moved from being a new agency to setting new **nomis** for bringing together services for a multicultural community. RFC has become a multi-service agency that its low-income communities and ethnic groups see as being on their side. Its **cadre** of 13 family advocates relates to families the way other agencies do not; they cross categorical funding limitations and solve problems. RFC develops its

programs in response to what its communities say they need in their families. Jesus Orasco, RFC Executive Director, explains, "We act as technical advisors between community- based cultural connections and traditional social service models." He adds, "There is a difference between respecting one's culture and being one's culture."

With 85% of its budget from federal Family Preservation funding via County Social Services and 15% from local grants and fund raising, RFC acts as a bridge between family and community needs and social services throughout the county. RFC provides grants to 50 groups each year to assist families and organizes an annual, week-long multicultural festival of community groups that include African, Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Cambodian/Vietnamese, Central American, Ethiopian, Mexican, Persian, Somali, and Spanish where thousands of community members come to celebrate their diversity. "We respect their ability to solve problems facing families like shelter/housing, food/ clothing, immigration, truancy, violence and abuse. We act as a catalyst to avoid tunnel vision to race, gender, and religion. We bring together groups that usually don't talk and help them see their combined energy and ability to solve family and community problems," says Orasco.

A Foundation for Accountability and A Tool for Agency Strategic Planning

More than ever before, service providers are being asked to account for how funds are spent and **what is used to accomplish it**. Strategic planning is a must if a family-centered agency is going to be effective and proactive. Family and agency outcomes play an important role in the development of this plan, in that they help structure the plan and clarify the focus of its discussion. Agencies that document client progress toward specific outcomes over time have the information they need to show progress on their goals; for example, cost avoidance-how much money was saved by providing services that would have been spent if the services had not been received.

RFC uses grassroots information gathered from the families and community groups it serves, providing the Department of Social Services monthly reports on its family advocacy results and periodic reports on its grants to communities. The Family Advocates complete a Family Development Outcomes Matrix assessment on each of their families at least every three months. This data describing their work with 500 families each year will be used to show the RFC Board of

Directors how well their hypothesis is progressing-that families will seek to achieve a safe level of self- sufficiency when provided a measure of advocacy and community support.

How RFC uses an Outcomes Approach

With RFC's connections to cultural communities throughout Santa Clara County, most family members come to the RFC agency location only a short distance from the Department of Social Services. After using an intake form to gather demographic information, the advocate talks with the family member, reviewing the categories of the Family Matrix. Based on this baseline assessment, each category is given a score next to the appropriate status level:

- 4 - Safe/Self-Sufficient**
- 3 - Stable**
- 2 - At Risk**
- 1 - In-Crisis**

RFC does not use "Thriving" as their goal is to assist families to reach the safe and self- sufficient level. Moreover, family advocates report that they seldom encounter families at that level.

Using his or her knowledge of community resources and advocacy skills, the advocate guides the family in areas of need. On each subsequent visit they re-**asses** the family's status levels and after three-months they routinely re-**asses** the case and close it unless issues they are addressing take longer. Case conferences take place between advocates who share information on resources.

The Family Matrix helps the advocates see how they have accomplished positive results. The positive change in the status level of any outcome category is an opportunity to give empowering feedback to the family. It also shows which resources were effective in a three-month period. A negative status change alerts the advocate to needs for further contacts with resources. The accuracy of the family situation is easily displayed on the Matrix. Both the advocate and the family member are motivated to improve the status levels.

Built-In Program Evaluation

Documenting and aggregating client progress (or lack of progress) toward outcomes over time can provide a foundation and structure that can both simplify and streamline every aspect of program evaluation. RFC is currently building a data system that will contain client demographic as well as Matrix data and will be easily aggregated

and charted.

- Valuable assessment data will be available for reports and proposal writing.
- Trends and patterns will be identifiable, to use in the planning of program activities.
- Client data and secondary data from county sources can be linked to evaluate services.
- One evaluation model can be used for reporting to multiple funders.
- Over time, accumulated information can be used to advocate for system changes with policymakers and funding bodies.

Collaboration Works

The Institute for Community Collaborative Studies (ICCS) and RFC are adapting the Family Development Outcomes Matrix so it is integrated into the functions and operations of this multicultural, multi-service agency. We began with the advocates redesigning the indicators for each status level in each outcome category. During this exercise they selected the categories they would use and with their family clients' review we reformatted the indicators to reflect the actual conditions of the local area. Second, we began the training to use the Matrix as a case management tool by developing a protocol so each case is routinely assessed and recorded. Training and technical assistance has continued over a year while data is gathered, new advocates are retrained, and most recently, an access model for data is being constructed.

ICCS developed a Matrix Design Group that serves the Matrix users through periodic training workshops and research activities. RFC is a member of that group of regional stakeholders and contributes its family and community indicators to the ICCS web site, an electronic clearinghouse for the California Matrix model.

Due to the newness of the model, ICCS, in collaboration with the Packard Foundation and members of the Matrix Design Group, sought technical assistance from the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice (NRCFCP). The NRCFCP is testing the Family Development Outcomes Matrix for reliability and validity. This evaluative activity is essential for continued use of the model, particularly as best practices for human services can demonstrate cost effectiveness of prevention and early intervention. On a micro level, reliable assessment can assist families in achieving self-sufficiency.

Assuring a reliable model and valid measures will also help to move forward our understanding of family resiliency. On a macro level, policy makers and community planners can use the matrix model of developing and measuring outcomes for strategic planning , and funding priorities.

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