Creating Meaningful Evaluations that Serve the People and Communities that Need Them Most

Katya Fels Smyth
The Full Frame Initiative
308 Main Street, Suite 2A, Greenfield, MA 01301
katya@fullframeinitiative.org
O: (413) 773-3400  C: (617) 620-6718

Futures Without Violence National Conference on Health and Domestic Violence
San Francisco, CA  March 29, 2012
Starting points about evaluation

0 < what we’re doing & what we know < enough

there is no such thing as a neutral intervention
OK. I’m ready to talk about evaluation. Just so we’re clear, when I say “evaluation” I mean,• external accountability• internal accountability• documenting effectiveness• documenting process• documenting activities• quality improvement• proof• monitoring

OK. As long as you know the difference between outputs, outcomes, objectives, goals, indicators, impact and benchmarks. Let’s get counting!

Remind me how this helps when we don’t even have enough staff to do the stuff we think actually makes a difference...

What exactly are we supposed to be counting?
A suggestion about our shared responsibility:

- work within and throughout our systems to help survivors be better off.

- employ tools that tell us whether what we are doing is actually helping, and make changes if it’s not.

- be literate about the tools others are impressing on us, so that we can be part of informing whether these are the right tools (and what the questions are) before we see the results.

Being accountable to our communities requires that we actively seek out and employ rigorous and relevant means to assess impact and adjust our course.
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Different cells hold different answers to the question, “Does it work?”

Shaded: Poor fit for experimental methods

Purpose:
Proving
Improving/learning
Legitimizing

Level of analysis:
Individual
Family
Community
Institution/policy

Concepts of scope, focus, method matrix: after Murray and Cutt, 1998

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Are we fitting the model to the question, or finding questions that fit our models?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good fit for experimental methods and linear, rational models</th>
<th>Intervention characteristics</th>
<th>Require a systemic approach and models designed for complexity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homogeneous</td>
<td>POPULATION</td>
<td>Heterogeneous and multiply challenged; highly influenced by other systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly transferable, relatively independent of other systems</td>
<td>SETTING</td>
<td>Community-embedded and context-specific, may depend on other interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/family</td>
<td>LEVEL OF IMPACT</td>
<td>Multiple, including community-change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defined model</td>
<td>STASIS</td>
<td>Dynamic and evolving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empower individuals to help themselves (SERVICES)</td>
<td>POWER</td>
<td>Empower individuals to help themselves and change their communities (MOVEMENT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear pathways through model</td>
<td>ELEMENTS</td>
<td>Host of elements drawn on without a recipe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Over-reliance on experimental design is a validity and social justice issue we are risking:

1. Further marginalization of and harm to marginalized populations
2. Reinforcing socially unjust policies and practices
3. Distortion of practice and policy
4. Irrelevance
5. Missing what we’re not looking for
6. Not differentiating between necessary and sufficient
Not evaluating is also a validity and social justice issue we are risking:

1. Further marginalization of and harm to marginalized populations
2. Reinforcing socially unjust policies and practices
3. Distortion of practice and policy
4. Irrelevance
5. Missing what we’re not looking for
6. Not differentiating between necessary and sufficient
A more complete approach to evidence and evaluation

- Pays attention to systems and context
- Employs a philosophy of "enough"
- Incorporates multiple wisdoms
- Attends to interactions and amplifications
- Allows for complexity and change
- Uses mixed methods

Right-sized
This is about whether survivors are better off…. What if they’re not?

- If evaluation indicated that a program in another state doesn’t work, isn’t helping, or made things worse for survivors, what should happen?

- If evaluation indicated my program doesn’t work, isn’t helping, or made things worse for survivors, what should happen?
Wait a minute…

Maybe with all the hoopla about methodology we’re missing something really important….  

Content!

What does it mean to be successful?

(No, silly cartoon lady. Successful is not about your program— that’s about being effective. Survivors and their families are successful. Hopefully programs help with this.)
What we all need

domains of wellbeing

Breaking inter-generational cycles of poverty, violence and trauma requires we simultaneously support progress in these five domains – at the individual, family and community levels.

- Decreased social isolation and exclusion
- Meaningful access to /use of relevant mainstream resources
- Conditions for healthy people, families and communities
- Increased, maintained safety
- Increased, maintained stability

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Paying attention to five domains at multiple levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct services</th>
<th>System partners (community, police, employers, schools)</th>
<th>Government and institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Family*</td>
<td>Organization/Agency</td>
<td>Community/Context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Highly tailored to context— not entirely predetermined
- Ambitious, meaningful, predictive of long-term wellbeing, valid for comparative purposes, plastic enough to respond to major external forces

| Decreased social isolation and exclusion | Meaningful use of relevant mainstream resources | Increased mastery/self-efficacy | Increased, maintained stability | Increased, maintained safety |

* What is best for the individual may not be best for the family, of course.

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integrated content and method

Pays attention to systems and context

Employs a philosophy of “enough”

Decreased social isolation and exclusion

Attends to interactions and amplifications

Meaningful access to /use of relevant mainstream resources

Conditions for healthy people, families and communities

Increased, maintained safety

Incorporates multiple wisdoms

Increased, maintained stability

Uses mixed methods

Increased mastery/self-efficacy

Allows for complexity and change

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So now that we’ve got that evidence-based thing squared away, let’s have one more cup of tea and go evaluate our amazing program to show it’s making a difference!

Sounds great! Except... who’s going to pay for it? Do you think we have to cut program staff to fund data staff?

Wait a minute.... You could really be hurting someone (truly)! Why not just implement one of these handy dandy pre-proven evidence-based practices?
(Sigh). Seems like I’ve got to have it all figured out and be ready to show the world with data what a difference we’re making, or else I should just import something someone else has done. I wish I could figure out whether I’m making a difference (and not bankrupt my program in the process), but also learn from and figure out how to adapt pieces of other interventions to do better...