

Monitoring and evaluating your peer support project: a simple guide

Why should your project be monitored and evaluated?

If anyone asks what a peer support project is doing, is the information available to tell them? For instance:

those who fund the project (or those who are thinking of funding it) want to know what their money is paying for;

those who are thinking of becoming peer supporters want to know how worthwhile the project is;

the project's workers want to see how their individual work and concerns fit into the whole project; and

the project itself needs to know whether or not it is meeting its aims and whether there need to be any improvements.

Monitoring and evaluation means you will be able to answer these questions.

Who does the monitoring and evaluating?

At the very least, your project should be regularly monitoring its activities. Documenting what the project does means you have the means to improve the quality of the work as the monitoring will identify successes and problems.

An evaluation provides greater detail than monitoring, is more time-consuming and may be conducted by the project itself or by 'outsiders' such as researchers (who may be paid for their work) appointed by the project or by the funders.

Your project can, of course, commission an external evaluation itself: you could pay for this by investigating organisations that fund evaluations and research and contacting any that may help. It's also a good idea to have contact with a university department (one that's concerned with the same issues as your project, such as health, drug use or migrants), as they may be able to help you to apply for funding for an evaluation.

Statutory health and social services keep information (data) on patients in electronic files. The analysis and reporting of this information is usually done by specially-appointed staff. In smaller organisations, the manager or team leader usually does the analysis and reporting themselves. In terms of regular, straightforward counting (of users of your services, for instance) and putting together information from your project's workers, for internal or funder purposes, no external expertise is needed.

There are more details below of the sorts of questions monitoring and evaluation should consider and a reading list if you want to know even more.

What's the difference between monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring and evaluation are closely related but not the same. The main aim of monitoring is to assess whether or not things are going as planned and whether any change is necessary.

Evaluation goes further and deeper than monitoring: it is a more formal, systematic assessment of whether the project's aims have been met, how and why certain outcomes were achieved (or not), and what has been the value and significance of the project to those it was intended to affect (and others who have been affected). An evaluation may also identify additional and unanticipated outcomes of the project.

The information collected during monitoring can also be used as part of an evaluation.

One way of making the distinction between monitoring and evaluation is to think of them in the context of a car journey:

Monitoring collects information on matters such as average speed, distance travelled, fuel consumption and whether the journey is following the pre-planned route and is on time.

Evaluation addresses questions such as whether the route followed was the best one, whether it might have been better by train and whether the journey was worth undertaking in the first place.

Monitoring

The main aim of monitoring is to assess whether or not things are going as planned and whether any change is necessary.

Monitoring is an ongoing process. It collects key information about what happens in your project, such as the number of peer supporters it has, the hours they work, the number of people they support, and what that support consists of. Finances are also monitored, of course, although we will not go into detail on this issue here.

Monitoring should either be continuous (that is, daily) or conducted regularly, such as once a week or once a month.

Whatever your project is, you have workers and service users and you probably already collect information such as the number of workers, what they do, the number service users, and so on. Monitoring includes this information and adds more, so that it can be analysed to give an overview of your project.

Carefully planned monitoring means that the project's workers spend as little time as possible doing paperwork and that they know why they are doing it. Therefore, all workers should know the reason they are being asked to fill out forms, what will happen to the information, and what the results are.

Monitoring can be conducted by each peer support worker, by filling in a form such as this one:

Monitoring form (or logbook) for a worker whose job is to talk to homeless people who are sleeping rough (on the street) and tell them about a drop-in centre, where they can get food, medical care, a shower, their clothes washed, and so on.

Date	Hours worked	Time	Location(s)	Number of people talked to	Number of the people who talked to who you think may visit the drop-in	Comments and observations
18 November	4	20.00-24.00	City centre	10	2	Very cold – I got a lot of inquiries about where people could get blankets. This seemed to be all they wanted to talk about. Is there any way we could supply these?
19 November	6	12.00-18.00	Smith Street City Centre Under bridge on Kors Street	5	3	One man under the bridge was unconscious, so I called an ambulance. I didn't know what else to do. I heard that he later died in hospital – could I have done something to save him?
20 November	4	24.00-04.00	Central Park Under bridge on Kors Street	1	0	Very cold – not many people sleeping outside in the places I went to.
21 November	8	17.00-05.00	City Centre Marketplace Derelict factory on Hedrich Street	27	18	I was lucky to find a lot of homeless people in the marketplace between midnight and 1am, as a van giving out food to them was there. No-one was in the factory as the police raided it yesterday.
22 November	4	10.00-14.00	Project office: meeting with outreach team, service user group and project management	6 service users, 4 outreach workers	not applicable	All the workers and service users thought distributing blankets was a good idea in this cold weather, but management says there is no money for them. However, they have promised to approach blanket-makers to see if they will donate some to the project. First aid training will be given at the next workers' meeting.

It is important to stress that the results completed monitoring forms should not just sit in a drawer: they should be analysed in order to highlight what is going well and what is not. Results should also be available to, and discussed with all the project's workers. Because of their close contact with the target group, peer support workers are in an especially good position to add their knowledge to discussions on how the project could develop and improve to address any new issues that arise.

For instance, in the example above:

The cold weather is mentioned and the worker asks if there is any way that the project can supply blankets. This was discussed at a meeting and the project management said they would ask blanket-makers to donate some blankets.

The worker says that a lot of homeless people were at a van giving out food between midnight and 1am. The drop-in closes at 6pm but clearly there is a need for food after that. Issues that need addressing here include whether or not the drop-in stays open later and whether the drop-in should work in some way with the organisation giving out food from the van.

The worker also says that they found someone unconscious and called an ambulance. Does the project have a policy on what workers should do in such circumstances? Are all the workers aware of it? Is training in first aid needed? Again, this was discussed at a meeting and a training session was organised.

Note that the last column in the table above (comments and observations) is important. Peer support workers have frequent and direct contact with the target group and have firsthand knowledge of what is happening on a day-to-day basis among them and of any changes in their behaviour. Comments on things that happened during a workers' day, along with the statistics, can help the project decide what issues need addressing and how they should be addressed.

Monitoring forms should also be completed by managers and supervisors, and (to continue with the example of the drop-in centre for homeless people) could include information on :

- how many workers have worked in the week/month and the hours they worked;
- workers' sickness days and how long they stay working for the project;
- how many people came to the drop-in centre each day;
- what services they used at the drop-in centre;
- details (particularly action that needs to be taken) of any staff meetings, training and support sessions; and
- details of service users' meetings – particularly their current concerns and action that needs to be taken.

Again, the results of managers' and supervisors' monitoring should be analysed and distributed, especially to the project's workers. For example:

- Is there a particular day every week when more people come to the drop-in centre? If so, why?
- How often are training and support sessions for staff offered and what proportion attend them?

- How many days a week are 'lost' because workers are ill and, if this seems to be too many, why? If workers stay with the project for a short period of time, why do they leave so quickly? Do they have too much to do and are getting over-stressed? Are they underpaid? Do they need more support?
- Is there any service offered at the drop-in that is underused? Why?

Evaluation

An evaluation is a systematic assessment of whether the project's aims have been met. It may be conducted by the project's workers, or, for a more objective view, by an outside evaluator/researcher. A thorough evaluation will talk to all those involved in the project, including peer support workers, management and clients.

Information that can be used to inform an evaluation includes:

- Results of the project's monitoring exercises.
- Documents about the project, such as those detailing its aims and objectives and workers' job descriptions.
- Results of interviews, questionnaires and/or focus groups with the project's workers, management, funders, service users and any other stakeholders (such as members of the local community who may be affected by the project).

When complete, the results of an evaluation can answer questions such as:

- How well are we doing?
- Are we doing the right things to meet our aims?
- What difference are we making?
- Does what we do need to be changed and if so, how?

There are two types of evaluation:

- A process evaluation describes to what extent a project has been implemented as planned, and identifies successes and problems.
- An impact evaluation looks at how the project's work has affected the target group. This type of evaluation focuses on the outcomes of the project.

Using the results

The information obtained from monitoring and evaluation should not only be used to assess the quality of your project and identify any necessary changes that need to be made: it should also be used to tell others what your project is doing. We have already mentioned that these should include current and potential funders, the project's workers and potential peer supporters, but there are others to whom you should publicise your activities, such as service users, other relevant projects, those living in the areas where the project operates and in newspapers and on TV, radio and the internet.

How you publicise your monitoring and evaluation information depends on the target audience. For instance, funders probably want a detailed annual report, whereas a newspaper may want only the basic facts and figures, in a press release. Other methods of publicising your project include a regular newsletter, internal memos for staff, and updates on social networking websites such as Facebook.

What details you publicise from your monitoring and evaluation information also depends on the target audience. Some will only want 'headline' results, others will want personal stories such as 'a day in the life of a peer support worker/service user', others will want to know how they can help, still others will want a detailed report of your project's activities, and so on – and don't forget that pictures are an extremely effective way to communicate a message.

Want to know more?

This has been only a very brief introduction to monitoring and evaluation. If you want to know more, here are some further sources of information: they will give you plenty of ideas of how to take your monitoring and evaluation processes further.

- Do you know of any other peer support projects? If so, contact them and ask them if they have any examples of the monitoring they do, and whether you can have a copy of any evaluations that they have conducted. Even evaluations from peer support projects that are not addressing the same issues or target group will give you an idea of how monitoring and evaluation are carried out.
- The **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** has lots of publications on monitoring and evaluation. For example:

Evaluation: a key tool for improving drug prevention

This publication contains over a dozen expert contributions demonstrating how evaluation theory and knowledge can be implemented to improve drug prevention practice in the European Union.

The monograph looks at both the practical and political aspects of evaluation and presents an array of tools, techniques and recommendations to improve drug prevention programmes and assess needs, processes and outcomes. Also demonstrated are ways to overcome obstacles that may weaken the evaluation process, such as poor communication between evaluators and policy-makers or conflicts between political agendas and poor evaluation results.

<http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/html.cfm/index34013EN.html>

Jim Sherval, Michelle Rostant, Peggy Dwyer Heleen Riper and Dirk Korf (2001) **Guidelines for the evaluation of outreach work. A manual for outreach practitioners.**


http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att_34031_EN_Manual2.pdf

To access other EMCDDA publications on monitoring and evaluation:


go to <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/>
click on 'publications' at the top of the page
type 'evaluat' in the search box and select 'in title', as shown below

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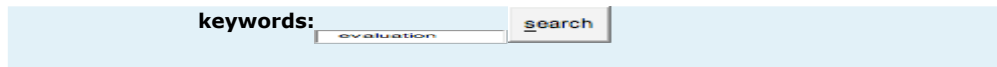


in summary or chapter titles

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- The **Correlation document centre** also has useful resources, as shown below. To access them:

Go to: http://www.correlation-net.org/index.php?option=com_wrapper&view=wrapper&Itemid=24

Ignore the first 3 search boxes, scroll down to the 'keywords' box and enter 'evaluation', as shown below



keywords:

This will give you access to the following:

Monitoring and Evaluation: principles and challenges

Author: Frank Zobel

Abstract: This presentation answered the following questions: what is monitoring and evaluation (M&E) ? Why and when could/should it be done ? Moreover it gave some typologies of evaluation and provided information on how to do it.

Evidence Based Programmes

Author: Janine Plaisier

Abstract: this presentation discusses the governments' wish to know whether interventions in the health care and justice systems are effective. Some Ministries have established Accreditation Panels with general criteria, such as a clear theoretical model and use of evidence-based methods. Both the method and the general results are covered in this presentation.

Monitoring and Evaluation of data in NGO Odysseus

Author: Katarína Jirešová M.S.W, Eva Melková M.S.W

Abstract: in this presentation information was given on what work is done by Odysseus as well as the forms they use in their work and the challenges that lie ahead.

Skill building session: 'Davay-Davay!'

Author: Foundation Mainline NL / Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, HU

Abstract: This report starts of by giving information on the basic concept and definitions of monitoring and evaluation. Then the report mentions the evaluation types and models and the different methods and tools for monitoring and evaluation. For this report "Davay! Davay!" is used as a case study.