

**REPORT TO: CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 17  
FEBRUARY 2010**

**SUBJECT: MORAY PARTICIPATION IN THE AMERICAN EVALUATION  
ASSOCIATION 2009 CONFERENCE 'EVALUATION IN CONTEXT'**

**BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 This report is provided to inform Committee of the outcome of Moray's participation in this conference and its implications for our Realtime Evaluation programme in measuring outcomes and evaluating services for children and families.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to the function of the Council as Social Work Authority under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **It is recommended that Committee considers the outcome of Moray's participation in this conference and its implications for our Realtime Evaluation programme in measuring outcomes and evaluating services for children and families.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Moray Council approved our participation in this conference on 9 September 2009.
- 3.2 The Performance and Strategy Manager for the Children and Families Division of Moray's Community Services Department was invited to co-present at this conference by Professor M. Kazi, of the University of New York State at Buffalo, who has for some years advised us on our implementation of the Realist Evaluation methodology in the Children and Families Social Work Service.
- 3.3 The American Evaluation Association (AEA) is an international professional association of evaluators devoted to the application and exploration of program evaluation, personnel evaluation, technology, and many other forms of evaluation. AEA has approximately 5500 members representing all 50 states in the US as well as over 60 foreign countries.
- 3.4 The conference itself was the 23<sup>rd</sup> in an annual series presented by the Association and included 655 sessions with more than 1200 presenters across over 40 thematic strands, including school and college-based education, community learning, health, social work and international development.

- 3.5 The subject of our joint presentation was the implementation of Realist Evaluation in Practice. A number of examples from services in Moray were used, particularly the Youth Justice Service, Moray Youth Action and the work of the Area Social Work Teams.
- 3.6 Professor Kazi presented the academic background and conceptual models involved in the Realist Evaluation method. The Performance and Strategy Manager presented the model of practice developed in Moray and aspects of its development and implementation. Presenting the academic background and practice implementation at the conference provided an opportunity to expose our approach to constructive criticism from academics and professional evaluators, as well as to provide a learning opportunity for others.
- 3.7 Our model of practice enables practitioners to integrate the reliable measurement of outcomes for individual children, young people and parents with the routine case management processes of assessing needs, planning to meet those needs and reviewing the extent to which services are meeting needs. Most of the measurement instruments that are used measure change on the basis of direct report by service users themselves, and all of these measures have been tested and validated as statistically reliable. Change in relation to a wide range of aspects of service users' lives can be charted in graphs, to inform case management and review.
- 3.8 Our practice method also allows us to measure positive and negative outcomes across the range of individual service users for whom reliable outcome measures have been used, enabling us to see whether we are improving the overall achievement of positive outcomes over time and shows which services, interventions and circumstantial factors are most associated with those outcomes. This provides us with reliable evaluative information that we can use to improve the effectiveness of services and the deployment of resources.
- 3.9 The Council is committed to reporting on outcomes for children subject to Child Protection registration in Moray as part of the Single Outcome Agreement, using this approach. We also use this approach to enable reporting on outcomes for other groups of service users within the Moray Performs framework.
- 3.10 It is therefore encouraging to be able to report that our presentation attracted only positive interest from participants at the conference and no adverse comment in relation to either the methodology or its implementation. Moreover, this approach appeared to be entirely consistent with best practice, as described in other comparable presentations.
- 3.11 Two other benefits arose from participation in this conference. Firstly, there was the opportunity to learn from other presentations and to discuss aspects of methodology with other presenters and participants. For example, Dr Kazi also gave a presentation on how the Realist Evaluation approach could be used to analyse data already routinely recorded on a school's pupil database to show what demographic and social factors had the greatest impact on attainment and therefore which pupils would need the most support.

- 3.12 Secondly there was the opportunity to promote the Evaluation for Practice Conference which the Council is jointly hosting from 9-11 March 2010, with support from the Scottish Changing Lives Programme and the University at Buffalo.
- 3.13 This forthcoming conference, in Elgin, is attracting participants from across the UK, as well as other parts of Europe and the United States. In addition to two highly regarded keynote speakers and a growing number of academic and professional presenters, we are anticipating participation from the Scottish Changing Lives and Getting it Right for Every Child national programmes, the Association of Directors of Social Work for Scotland, Scottish Social Services Council, Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services and the British Association of Social Workers.

#### **4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

##### **(a) Single Outcome Agreement/Service Improvement Plan**

- (i) The subject of this report has direct relevance to the measurement and reporting of our performance in relation to Outcome 8 in the Single Outcome Agreement.
- (ii) Our participation in the conference and our Realtime Evaluation Programme are not specific actions recorded in the department's Service Improvement Plan, but contribute towards our fifth improvement priority of increasing our capacity for self-evaluation, both through generating reliable evidence and supporting reliable analysis and interpretation.

##### **(b) Policy and Legal**

Measuring outcomes for children, young people and parents fits with every current national programme relating to children and young people, particularly Changing Lives, Early Years and Early Intervention and Getting it Right for Every Child. It also contributes to improving our capacity for self-evaluation and performance improvement which feature in a range of national quality improvement frameworks, including those created by SWIA, HMle and Improvement Scotland.

##### **(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)**

None

##### **(d) Consultations**

None

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 **This conference provided a useful opportunity to expose our approach to measuring outcomes and evaluating services to expert academic and professional scrutiny, the outcome of which has been positive and**

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**encourages us to continue in its development and broader implementation.**

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Background Papers:

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