

The BBC Children in Need Story

‘ To positively change the lives of disadvantaged children and young people in the UK’

... this was the new mission of BBC Children in Need in 1995, when they asked Charities Evaluation Services to help their funded organisations develop self-evaluation skills.

Simple and accessible training

Sheila Jane Malley, Director of Grants and Policy, explains that CES has been providing ‘consistent and sympathetic training, accessible to all, from small to large organisations’.

So far CES has delivered the training to over 2,000 people across 11 cities. Participants value the CES approach and being able to apply their learning directly to their own area of work.



A sharper grasp of outcomes

The training has helped BBC Children in Need (CiN) get better information on what their funded organisations achieve – the outcomes. Organisations that receive funding now know how to sort out and measure their outcomes. They become more user-focused and are better able to provide credible information on the improvements in the lives of children and young people.

Moreover, CiN funded organisations find that learning about self-evaluation also sharpens up their planning. Self-evaluation skills can be used directly as a planning tool.

Increased trust and credibility

CES' self-evaluation approach encourages organisations to look at the 'why' questions: what has worked and what has not worked, so encouraging communication and increasing trust between the funder and the funded organisation.

Sheila comments that organisations also become very aware of who their stakeholders are and develop stronger links with their stakeholders.

What does the CES self-evaluation training achieve?

Sheila particularly identifies the following benefits:

- organisations that say 'we know that we are making a difference' can now really show how
- organisations understand that measuring quality is as important as measuring quantity
- a better base for decision making
- instilling a culture of learning – organisations become better at adapting to change.

These benefits and achievements were very much what CiN wanted from their work with CES.

However, something did surprise them: the big demand for training about outcomes, and the sheer enthusiasm of the participants in the training.

As one training participant commented: 'A positive experience – precious time well spent'.

What messages does BBC Children in Need offer to other funders?



One training participant commented:

'...very useful and informative training – more funders should do this to help groups get the best information back to funders'.

Indeed CiN is finding that there is considerable interest among other funders wanting to take a similar approach. The first message is that a fundamental change in mindset may be needed.

Sheila comments:

'It is important for funders to understand the challenges in self-evaluation, that it is not always easy making it mainstream and it should not be seen as an add-on or something to be undertaken towards the end of the work. A real fundamental change of mindset is needed, with monitoring and evaluation at the core and embedded into the whole organisation, not just one or two projects'.

Practical tips for funders

Here are her practical tips for funders wanting to encourage their funded organisations to self-evaluate:

- talk to your funded organisations, consult them to find out their constraints
- encourage them to do self-evaluation
- embed self-evaluation into the grant making process
- provide training as a resource, make it mandatory but free
- make it clear to grantees that the learning from the failures is as valuable as that from their successes, (perhaps even more) and you are interested in hearing about both. But you need to create an environment where they feel safe in sharing this with you.
- make grant officers available to support.

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