

Evaluation in a New Era

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INTRODUCTION

In a new era of defining disability supports and services, it is critical we have ways of supporting growth, evaluating effectiveness and creating innovation. In particular, we need to have flexible and constructive ways to ensure people with 'lived experience' can lead. This leadership relates to both the supports people are directly involved with and the design and review of the systems that define and accompany these supports. Who is better placed than people with a lived experience of disability to determine value? Also, it is of considerable importance to ensure people's lives and homes are respected during an evaluation process.

Since 1979, Standards and Monitoring Services (SAMS) has been working with people, who have a lived experience of disability, to discover the best ways for Developmental Evaluation to be suited to a personalised approach. Features of the SAMS Developmental Evaluation approach are that it is:

- fully inclusive of people with a lived experience of disability
- focused on being constructive
- easily adapted across a range of settings
- sensitive to different preferences, cultures and living situations
- primarily assists people to review whether they are able to live the life they choose – as well as basic health and safety
- minimises intrusion into people's lives and maximises an opportunity for open and positive discussion
- review of protocols and procedures.

Since 1991, SAMS has routinely conducted at least ninety service evaluations annually. This usually involves discussions with a minimum of six hundred disabled persons, a similar number of family members and often a greater number of support people. It is common for SAMS evaluators to meet with families in their homes and it is fundamental that the people participating in the evaluation are encouraged to talk about what is most important to them (as opposed to being expected to respond to a set list of questions).

Brief Profile of SAMS (Standards and Monitoring Services)

SAMS:

- is an **independent charitable trust** (1991) governed by disabled people and family members. Just over 80% of SAMS experienced evaluators, educators and researchers are people with a disability or family members
- **internationally pioneered** the concept and practice of developmental evaluation within the disability sector. In 1995, in an external review of SAMS conducted by Michael Kendrick, SAMS was described as “a uniquely New Zealand innovation which is of considerable relevance internationally”
- has **extensive experience**, i.e. conducted over 4000 service evaluations since 1985
- **has credibility**, i.e. the practice of ensuring disabled people and families have leadership roles within SAMS and our ‘track record’, with a variety of networks, has enabled SAMS to establish and maintain trust
- **has international networks and experience**, i.e. SAMS personnel have worked in Europe, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, various Pacific nations and Australia.

FINDINGS OF AN EXTERNAL REVIEW OF SAMS

An independent external review of Standards and Monitoring Services (SAMS) was conducted in June of 2009 by Michael Kendrick (PhD) of Kendrick Consulting International.

“The independent review of SAMS indicated that:

1. *SAMS represents some of the most advanced thinking and practice in consumer centered evaluation, and*
2. *SAMS has established itself as credible, ethical and competent in conducting not only basic monitoring of service quality but also in developing a variety of catalysts that are designed to influence and enhance quality....”*

“... For thirty years, SAMS has promoted and practiced:

- *an individual outcome focus to evaluation*
- *the full inclusion of disabled people and families as evaluators*
- *partnership approaches, and*
- *the use of evaluation as a primary strategy for service and sector development”.*

“SAMS:

- *has demonstrated that not only can it “create from scratch”, it can move these creations into implementation and sustain them as ongoing efforts*

- *was described as being positive, encouraging, affirming, supportive and this defines SAMS as being well within a “strengths based” orientation*
- *is seen as a trusted ally and good resource. People with disabilities and their families were distinctly pleased with the supportive attitudes of SAMS*
- *is an initiative that many could identify with as being a positive contributor to the future of the sector in New Zealand and possibly elsewhere*
- *is current and up to date at least in regards to generally accepted practice. It is also obvious that SAMS has been a pioneer in many ways and its views would still be considered by many in New Zealand as being challenging to established practice in terms of service quality. ...”*

SAMS is a values based and principles driven organisation. Statements considered by SAMS to be the foundation of its practice include, but are not limited to:

Equality - All people should be equally valued members of society with the same rights, the same dignity and the same opportunities to enjoy their lives.

Equity - All people are unique and therefore some individuals may require more support or resources to experience the same choices as others.

Service users are the Key People in Quality Assurance - The participation of service users, and where appropriate their family, friends, advocates and involved volunteers, is crucial in an evaluation process.

Respect - No evaluation process should invade the privacy of any individual. Permission will be obtained before visiting homes and looking at personal material.

Partnership - The aim of all evaluation practices is to build trust between the evaluators and the people involved with an agency so that there is an optimum chance for positive development.

Catalyst for Change - The ultimate objective of an evaluation is to bring about an improvement in the quality of life for the service users of a service.

Inclusion - People with a disability, and where appropriate their families and advocates, will be involved at all levels of managing and actioning evaluations.

Multi-perspective Approach - The outcome of an evaluation will be balanced and will reflect the views of all the parties/people involved.

Cultural Sensitivity/Safety - The evaluation practices developed will ensure that the cultures of the people involved are honoured.

The SAMS approach uses qualitative methods and a partnership model.

The methodology has at its core:

- Consumer focus
- Partnership
- Inclusion
- Flexibility
- Equity.

The SAMS evaluation approach (i.e. developmental and ‘multi-perspective’) enables both a process and outcome focus. This allows the evaluation team to equitably represent the different views of defined groups and compare the outcomes for the differing groups.

Evaluations are conducted by teams and typically each team includes at least one disabled person or family member as a full team member. All SAMS Evaluation team leaders and team members receive comprehensive training. Typically, this begins with intensive training related to evaluation approaches, techniques and core SAMS philosophy, processes and practices. This is followed by a supervised practicum. It is then usual for SAMS evaluators to both map out their own professional development as well as attend regular SAMS facilitated workshops. SAMS believes it is critical that all evaluators are equipped with both the skills associated with developmental evaluation and emerging good practice within the disability field.

It is important to note that while the majority of SAMS evaluations have traditionally focused on “services” and provider organisations, this has begun to change in the past five years. Increasingly, SAMS evaluations are involved with approaches that are considerably more ‘flexible’. This has included evaluations associated with Individualised Funding arrangements, Self Directed supports and other more “personalised” approaches. SAMS evaluations are suited to these situations as they have always heavily relied on a negotiated approach (rather than a prescribed format). However, it is critical from SAMS perspective, that additional attention is given to ensuring not just that an evaluation is ‘negotiated’ but that evaluators are sensitised to important privacy, cultural and ‘family dynamic’ issues.

SAMS believes that an effective evaluation processes will:

- a) be proactive, i.e. it will constructively address emerging issues before they mature into significant challenges
- b) provide leadership opportunities, i.e. people with a lived experience of disability, who become evaluators, will gather the insights, skills, experiences and evidence to enhance their involvement in peer support and other leadership roles
- c) enable the gathering of information to form a solid evidence base for further innovation
- d) identify particular approaches/strategies that appear to ‘work well’ for individuals and families, i.e. collating real time success stories to inform others

- e) ensure there is an effective on-going review of the impact of government policies, i.e. information on the results/outcomes experienced by individuals and families that can assist government in refining policies and provide feedback to relevance, effectiveness, practicality and innovations
- f) gather information that can be used to measure change over time
- g) provide an appropriate safeguard, i.e. the usefulness of evaluation is reflected in its ability (or not) to contribute to the development of supports that facilitate increased quality of life for individuals, families and communities. A byproduct (sub-component) of the evaluation process is gathering information related to the degree to which legislative and contractual obligations are met. The approach taken varies depending on the type of evaluation undertaken. For services, this may include evaluators gathering information on their effectiveness in meeting contracted obligations. For more 'personalised' approaches, this can relate to gathering information related to how well a person's "plan" is being implemented and/or perceptions on how effectively a support system is assisting an individual to create good lives for themselves. It is common in all evaluation approaches to explore the degree to which core values, principles and aspirations are being met.

SAMS Developmental Evaluation is concerned with providing an environment where individuals, families, support people and others can express their experiences. It examines the effectiveness of approaches and it values flexible and creative responses to individual preference, aspiration and circumstance.

Essentially, SAMS Developmental Evaluation asks the question: "How's it going?" This question (or a similar question) assists people to explore what is working well for them, what the challenges are and encourages people to reflect on their experience. It would be common to also ask the question: "How could things be done in a better way?" Again, this invites people to think about ideas for improving their experience.

SAMS has discovered two things that often determine the depth and breadth of responses to these questions, i.e. 'who is asking' and 'how the questions are asked'. An evaluation approach must have certain approaches that maximise:

- Trust, e.g., that information will be treated in a respectful manner or that differences will not be judged or exploited.
- Safety, e.g. that contributors will not lose a service by complaining.
- Confidence, e.g. the evaluation process is designed to ensure an equitable and accurate representation of participants' perspectives.

First, SAMS considers it is a great advantage if the evaluators include people who have a lived experience of disability, i.e. disabled people and their families.

- This can immediately create a shared point of reference that is useful in building the connection and trust that is often needed for people to explore important issues.
- Secondly, evaluators are equipped with the skills required of a respectful and skilled listener.
- Thirdly, the evaluation process (i.e. how it is done) is open, personal and flexible.

WHAT IT WILL LOOK LIKE

There are a number of key evaluation principles and practices. These practices create an environment more likely to result in a successful evaluation. These are summarised as follows:

- ensuring evaluation practice is built on the foundation of clear principles, e.g. full participation of disabled people and families in key roles
- clarity of intent, i.e. assisting development, not compliance
- awareness that an important aspect of developmental evaluation is to prepare an environment that is likely to result in some people discovering new (and hopefully better) ways of doing things
- ensuring the integrity of the evaluation organisation, e.g. to increase credibility it is important to demonstrate that you, as an evaluation organisation, are practising the things you will evaluate others on, e.g. partnership, flexibility, openness etc
- an understanding of personal development
- an appropriate outcome based framework
- flexible, fair, constructive and inclusive approaches
- approaches that are culturally appropriate.

What Developmental Evaluation Covers

Attitudes

Evaluation can place people in an environment where there is temporary heightened awareness. Evaluation assists people to explore the values they have and whether their experiences and actions match them.

Aspirations

Central to evaluation is discovering the preferences, strengths and aspirations of individuals and families. As the evaluation process unfolds the people's stated aspirations are then matched with their experience of supports. This process either becomes self affirming or naturally highlights areas for further exploration and development.

Potential

Developmental evaluation is focused on making it easier for people to experience a good life. Some questions, for example: “what does a good life look like for you?”, generally result in increased awareness of potential.

Priorities

Examining the things individuals, families, support people and organisations choose to prioritise is a fundamental building block to raising awareness. Thoughtful attention to what is seen as “most important” can be lost in day to day life. Developmental evaluation highlights which priorities are determining the shape of what people are doing.

Processes

In this context “process” refers to a series of steps that are taken to achieve a desired outcome. A process is a journey where the destination is anticipated but not always certain. Increased awareness involves attention to the steps individuals/families are taking and where they may lead.

Practices

Practices are the actions that make up the processes with which we are involved. Developmental evaluation provides an opportunity to explore whether what is actually done is consistent with stated values, preferences and aspiration. As mentioned, it has been central to the SAMS approach, for three decades, to place an individual’s or family’s “plan” at the centre of the evaluation process. Evaluations will explore whether the “plan” accurately reflects people’s strengths, preferences and objectives. The evaluation then examines whether the actions of the support systems or services are aligned with the “plan” in an optimal way and whether adaptations or improvements can be made. The individual’s or family’s “plan” is a core document.

HOW DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION WORKS

SAMS has discovered that the most effective approach is to create a relaxed, personal and informal environment. Discussions and conversations replace interviews, and participants are invited (not expected) to engage. As discussions progress, the art of a good developmental evaluation is to bring to the surface new ideas.

Developmental evaluation enables individuals and organisations to:

- Pay attention
- Take responsibility
- Seek new knowledge
- Commit to change
- Discover allies
- Share power and authority

- Build trusting relationships.

Paying attention

Simply having “outsiders” (i.e. evaluators) observing and initiating discussions generally results in people paying additional attention. Increased attention is given to what is done, why it is done and how it is done. Increased attentiveness can lead to insight.

Taking responsibility

If evaluators are seen as open and constructive then individuals are able to more easily take ownership of their attitude and behaviour. Developmental evaluation makes efforts to identify and describe strengths in order to encourage personal responsibility in a supportive environment. Developmental evaluation encourages positive change by recognising that everything is on a continuum. Constructive change simply begins with the willingness to take responsibility and initiate positive movement on the continuum.

Seeking new knowledge

As an evaluation unfolds, connections are made and areas requiring further development are identified. Individuals now look at “what to do about any things that need to change/improve”. There is substantial value in a ‘developmental’ approach. “Red tape” is minimised and “values” can be more fully experienced as a living reality as participants in the evaluation discover new ways of working together.

Committing to change

Evaluations can provide a map of the territory in which people find themselves. A desire to implement change is more likely because strengths have been identified and future steps have been clarified. The evaluation has begun to create an inventory of assets and possibilities. Ideally, people have recognised that everyone’s quality of life can improve and that change can be exciting and rewarding.

Discovering and creating allies

The evaluation process is likely to highlight allies that currently exist. People may discover more willing “friends” than they anticipated. Rather than polarise individuals and groups, developmental evaluation is more likely to connect people with a shared frame of reference and desire for improvement.

Sharing Power and Authority

As systems seek to find ways to personalise supports and services, developmental evaluations can explore and encourage disabled people, families and organisations to design new ways of doing things that are empowering, risk aware and aid the shift towards ‘the person’ (with support as necessary) rather than the ‘the system’ having the choice and control over what and how things are done. It is important to note that SAMS not only believes that people should be “at the centre” of the supports they use, but they should actively direct them.

Building Trusting Relationships

Being principles and values based, developmental evaluation encourages disabled people and the support networks or organisations in their lives to align and focus on what is right for the individual. This can also be of assistance when things go wrong so issues can be addressed in a timely and open manner rather than in crisis or without firm foundations to fall back on.

Essentially, SAMS has discovered that Developmental Evaluation is about providing an environment where people can explore their experiences, imagine what could be done differently and express how positive change could take form. A significant aspect to this is enabling people to appreciate things from a different perspective.

Four Awareness Raising Aspects of Developmental Evaluation:

1. An opportunity to order what is known
2. Creating focused introspection
3. Revealing what was previously unknown
4. Providing an environment likely to promote insight.

1. An opportunity to order what is already known is provided when people consider their experience in the light of an evaluation frame of reference. Typically, in the lead up to an evaluation, people will think about what they do in the context of what is about to happen, i.e. the evaluation. This personal review occurs in anticipation of the evaluation. This attention to detail can reveal issues that were previously blurred.

Consideration of the evaluation can assist people to visualise what is possible with increased clarity, depth and colour. Many people are deeply absorbed in day to day life. An evaluation, based on a conversation regarding outcomes, can make it easier for people to explore what is (or is not) working well. New challenges and opportunities are presented as a result of looking at the same situation from a different angle.

2. Creating focused introspection. Exposure to a constructive process can open the door to people recognising unrealised potential. People can dig deeper into their creativity when the evaluation is imminent.

The “open questions”, associated with developmental evaluation, assist individuals to explore areas not considered in usual day to day life. It is not uncommon for evaluators to be told “during these discussions I have realised”. This realisation has occurred as the result of the individual's increased self analysis. It is often associated with the evaluation environment and is not the outcome of direct feedback from evaluators.

3. Revealing what was unknown to others. The SAMS approach ensures that the views of individuals, families and support people are equitably gathered and represented in the

evaluation. People may discover that despite their desire for regular feedback they are presented with previously unknown information.

Developmental evaluation provides an environment that can be safe, self directed and supportive. Rather than requiring answers to a series of predetermined questions, developmental evaluation invites people to talk. The opportunity to talk with independent and credible people, who are interested in their experience, is sufficient to encourage many people to talk openly. This new information offers a greater insight into existing strengths and challenges.

4. Providing an environment likely to promote insight (previously unknown information). Positive reframing encourages individuals to see potential – rather than a problem. Sometime people appear trapped in self defeating perceptions and scripts. Developmental evaluation can assist individuals to see the opportunity where previously they saw impossibility. If careful attention is paid by the evaluators, then information can be repackaged in a manner detailing positive action, when previously only an insurmountable problem was recognised.

SAMS ensures its evaluation approach remains effective and appropriate by:

- Working with evaluation teams – at least one person in the team has a lived experience of disability and it is usual for at least one team member to have some personal experience of the supports or services being evaluated, e.g. self managing. It is critical to note that SAMS has internationally pioneered the practice of disabled persons and family members being not only “full” members of an evaluation team, but also leaders in the evaluation process. Research, conducted by SAMS, has demonstrated that there are no significant difference in evaluation outcomes related to whether the evaluation is conducted by trained evaluators who have a lived experience of disability or “professionals”.
- Ensuring all evaluators have training related to evaluation techniques and sector developments.
- Placing an individual's and family's strengths, preferences and aspirations at the centre of our evaluation process.
- Negotiating the best way to do things on a person by person and family by family basis.

CONCLUSION

SAMS Developmental Evaluation is ideally suited as a process to review self directed supports. The evaluation process is personal, flexible, constructive and has stood the test of time. Hundreds of disabled people and families see these evaluations as a great opportunity to take a moment and constructively reflect on “how things are going”. Rather than an invasion of privacy or personal space, this approach to evaluation enables

thoughtful reflection as well as equipping people, with a lived experience of disability, to effectively contribute to system design and innovation.