



## Measuring Social Value: The SROI from Family Support Services

Falkirk Council has now tested and applied a relatively new approach to identifying and valuing service outcomes – Social Return on Investment (SROI). This is an approach now being examined by a growing number of Local Authorities, and which has provided a range of new insights into the effectiveness, impact, and social value created by the Grangemouth and Bo’ness Family Support Service. The Council is now beginning to use the learning from this approach to strengthen the delivery of the service, standardise outcome-focused monitoring arrangements, and demonstrate the value of preventative spending in this key service.



### Background

Falkirk Council’s Education Services is committed to improving outcomes for all children and young people, and to innovating in service design and delivery. For example, in 2009 the Council and partners initiated a Public Social Partnership (PSP) approach which brought together public and third sector partners to develop a robust commissioning framework for services for children and families.

Out of this approach a new model of outcomes measurement and valuation was first tested – Social Return on Investment (SROI).

#### About Social Return on Investment

SROI is a framework for measuring and valuing the social, economic and environmental impact of services, programmes and policies. It borrows from many other approaches to evaluation such as cost-benefit analysis and social accounting. It sets out to tell the story of how change is created by identifying and measuring outcomes, and it uses financial proxies of value to represent their importance.

Most recently the SROI approach has been comprehensively applied in Falkirk

Council’s internal evaluation of the **Grangemouth and Bo’ness Family Support Service**.

### Scope and focus

The Council carried out an SROI assessment of the service between September 2010 and June 2011.

#### The Family Support Service

The aims of the service are to:

- Promote the well-being of children and young people.
- Support every child and young person to reach their potential.
- Offer support and advice to parent’s.
- Provide a link between home and school.
- Link with other professionals.

The Service is delivered by three Family Support Workers who interact directly with children, young people and families within the school, community and family home. Support is delivered on a 1-1 basis or within a group setting.

The purpose of the SROI analysis was to:

- Place a realistic value on this important area of preventative Council spending.

- Clearly evidence the outcomes for families and young people who engaged with the service.
- Inform future working methods and strategic planning for the service.
- Enable staff to understand the value of the work that they are doing.

The SROI analysis was designed to be both rigorous and comprehensive. It followed the principles developed by the SROI Network and supported by the Scottish Government:

- The involvement of stakeholders
- A focus on understanding changes
- Valuing the things that matter
- Only including things that are material
- Avoiding over-claiming
- Transparency in the process
- Verification of the result.

This provided a solid basis for examining the changes being brought about by the Family Support Service.

## Implementation

The SROI analysis was undertaken by a Development Officer within Education Services over the course of one full academic year.

The assessment was carried out in six main stages:

- **Stage 1: Establishing scope and identifying key stakeholders.** The process started by agreeing clear boundaries about what the assessment would cover (including which service location), identification of who made the inputs necessary for the service to proceed and who is affected by the service activity under consideration.
- **Stage 2: Mapping outcomes.** The process then involved stakeholders in a series of conversations about what had changed and how it changed for them (including a sample of the 26 families supported by the service). This helped

the Council to develop an impact map<sup>1</sup> for the service which could show the relationship between service inputs, outputs and outcomes.

- **Stage 3: Evidencing outcomes and giving them a value.** This stage involved finding data to show whether outcomes had happened and then giving them a monetary value. To do this the changes evident for each stakeholder were valued using financial proxies.
- **Stage 4: Establishing impact.** Those aspects of change that would have happened anyway or that were shown to have resulted from other factors were then taken out of the analysis.
- **Stage 5: Calculating the SROI.** At this stage the Council adding up all the benefits, subtracted any negatives and comparing the result with its investment in the Family Support Service. The sensitivity of the results to changes in assumptions was also tested.
- **Stage 6: Reporting, using and embedding.** Falkirk Council is now in the final stage of sharing findings with stakeholders and making use of the learning, including embedding good outcomes measurement processes.

## Key challenges

Carrying out the evaluative SROI analysis proved to be a challenging, but ultimately very rewarding, experience for Falkirk Council. Among the challenges evident along the way were:

- **Overcoming early resistance.** The SROI approach was one that was new to those working in the service. This introduced a new way of examining service outcomes and the value created for citizens by the Council. As such it was helpful to actively involve all service staff in the process early on, who quickly got to understand the

<sup>1</sup> Also variously described as a 'theory of change' or 'logic model'.

purpose and usefulness of the approach.

- **Agreeing the scope of analysis.** Thorough consideration was required to agree the scope of stakeholder involvement (identifying those stakeholders that were materially affected by the service). Young people, their families, and local schools were identified as the main stakeholders for whom the service created value.
- **Ensuring a robust sample.** There was question about the correct sample of service users to consult with. It was considered too sensitive to ask families still actively engaged with the service to evaluate the changes they were experiencing. A statistically robust 25% sample of completed cases were therefore interviewed and the remaining cases reviewed by the Senior Family Support Worker.
- **Consulting with vulnerable families.** The nature of the client group (young people and families, often with chaotic lifestyles) and the potentially obtrusive line of questioning meant that the consultation was not straightforward. To overcome any issues, interviews were carried out in a 'safe' environment, in the presence of a Senior Family Support Worker, with all possible ethical considerations taken on board.
- **Valuing the outcomes.** The apparent subjectivity and complexity of valuing (monetising) outcomes was a key consideration. The identified outcomes were therefore valued on the basis of HM Treasury Green Book and SROI Network recommended techniques. Robustness in the choice of financial proxies was ensured through internal peer review and through sensitivity analysis (testing the sensitivity of findings to changes in a range of key assumptions).
- **Finding the time for analysis.** The resource-intensive nature of the SROI

analysis proved challenging for the Council officer carrying it out (who was conducting the analysis in addition to normal duties). In hindsight, the release of an additional allocation of time to the work would have been helpful.

These challenges proved to be useful learning for the Council when considering more efficient ways to embed SROI evaluation in service monitoring.

## Outcomes

The SROI evaluation process and its findings fundamentally altered the way that Council staff viewed the service and is leading to some important changes.

The SROI evaluation provided clear evidence of a number of important outcomes from the Service:

- **For young people** the identified outcomes of the service included: better behaviour; greater confidence and emotional wellbeing; improved social networks and relationships; improved family circumstances and better family relationships; and a more positive engagement in education.
- **For families** the identified outcomes of the service included: improved wellbeing and less stress and conflict; and improved relationships and a better family environment.
- **For schools** the identified outcomes of the service included: less disruption in the teaching day and more time for effective teaching; improved pupil attendance and engagement; reduced risk of becoming NEET; and less management time dealing with disruption, behaviour and truancy.

The exercise identified the value of the Council's preventative spending in the Family Support Service (a form of early intervention). For every £1 invested by the Education Service in the service, £12 of social value was created.

The real benefits for the Council, however, arose from the process of conducting the SROI assessment (rather than the findings in themselves).

Described both as 'humbling' and 'powerful' by those involved:

- **Workers** got to understand and value of their contribution to changing the lives of service users. The support workers assigned to the service were given the opportunity to pause and reflect. This enabled workers to better understand and develop their practice, celebrate and take confidence from their achievements, and find more effective ways to capture previously unrecognised service outcomes.
- **Young people and their families** were afforded the opportunity to reflect on their experience and offer feedback that would help to shape the future direction of the service. This process of consultation proved empowering, enabling service users to take stock of their 'distance travelled', i.e. the changes made in their lives as a result of the service. This generated a sense of pride and confidence about the future.
- **The Council** was enabled to build up a clear 'theory of change' for the service. This helped to understand the chain of cause and effect between Council spending and the resulting service outcomes. It also helped to understand those aspects of the service that were most and least valued by service users, and which were most effective in driving service outcomes.

These were powerful effects and provided sound justification for carrying out the SROI analysis.

### Critical success factors

There were a number of critical factors that enabled Falkirk Council to make good use of SROI as a technique for measuring social value.

Critical success factors included:

- **A distinctive service.** The decision to examine the Grangemouth and Bo'ness Family Support Service offered a reasonably distinct and discrete area of service. This made it more straightforward to agree the scope of the analysis and to identify the financial inputs to the service. It also provided a manageable scale of stakeholder consultation.
- **Commitment to understanding and valuing the service.** Those involved in the process held a strong commitment to understanding what made the Family Support Service tick and the outcomes that it gave rise to. The SROI assessment was undertaken as a genuine learning experience without any preconceived ideas of its findings.
- **A supportive environment.** Falkirk Council's Education Services provided an enabling environment within which to test this new approach to valuing outcomes. Managerial staff were supportive and provided a helpful sounding board throughout the SROI assessment.
- **The in-house skills.** The officer carrying out the analysis had an appropriate skill set, familiarity with outcomes planning, and experience working with project management, monitoring and quality assurance systems. This was supplemented by two-day accredited SROI practitioner training. This provided adequate in-house knowledge without having to rely on external expertise.
- **A rigorous method.** The SROI assessment was conducted with great rigour, following the staged model developed by the SROI Network. It was the thoroughness of the approach, and its comprehensive scope, that gave Council officers great confidence in the findings.

## Future ambitions

SROI is arguably the most comprehensive framework for measuring social value, albeit only one of a number of tools that are in widespread use to meet similar aims.

Falkirk Council has used the approach comprehensively and to good effect. The learning from the SROI analysis is now being shared more widely.

Over time it is anticipated that the SROI approach will provide a useful model for gauging the social value arising from Council preventative spending.

More immediately, Education Services are committed to taking forward work in two areas:

- Establishing a more reflective model of evaluation for Family Support Workers, based on the SROI approach, to support professional development and measure future impact.
- Working with the team at Social Value Lab to examine ways to conduct SROI analysis more efficiently (using standardised outcomes scales and supporting technology such as the Value Game and Social E-valuator) and to embed the approach across services.

This work is being developed under the auspices of the Falkirk Public Social Partnership (PSP) Group to ensure that learning is shared widely within the Council and among third sector partners.

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