The practice of a theory-based approach

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Four Scottish Health Demonstration Projects

- Identify and adopt best practice
- Add value through multi-disciplinary working
- Address life circumstances
- Maximise community involvement
Scottish Health Demonstration Projects

Focus on two

- CHD “Have a Heart Paisley”
- Child Health “Starting Well”
  - Theory-based approach is only one part of larger external evaluation
  - Similarities and differences
Have a Heart Paisley overview

Work Themes (activities and outcomes)

**Problems**
- Significant social and economic deprivation
- CHD rates higher than the Scottish average

**Goal**
- Hope, healthier, longer lives and reduced CHD amongst the residents of Paisley

- Improved primary & secondary prevention
- Improved use and sharing of IMT
- Improved opportunities for healthier lifestyles
- Improved community involvement
- Decreased inequalities in health
- Improved Partnership working
Starting Well

Problem: Poor child health outcomes within a context of social and economic deprivation

Activities:

• Organisational development
  B. Improved Health visitor home-intervention and the development of a health support worker programme
  C. Improved community support

Goal: Reduced child morbidity and increase in number of healthy, functioning families
Reasons to use a Theory of Change approach

“Nothing as practical as a good theory”
Carol Weiss 1995

- Sharpening planning and implementation
- Facilitating the measurement and data collection elements of the evaluation process
- Reducing problems associated with casual attribution

(Connell & Kubisch 1998)
Sharpening planning and implementation

- Use and reception by implementation team
  - Useful to clarify stakeholder expectations
  - Highlight individual projects and overall links
  - Good reception to process and product
Sharpening planning and implementation

- Use and reception by commissioners
  - Catalyst for performance management input
  - Specification of expectations of internal evaluation
  - Identification of national demonstration lessons
  - Scottish Executive open to process of articulating ToC
Facilitating measurement and data collection for the evaluation

- Clarity of evaluation framework
  - Different responses re prioritising
  - Focus of external evaluation on cross cutting themes or strands
  - No agreed criteria for internal focus
Facilitating measurement and data collection for the evaluation

- Conflict
  - Lead to resolution?

- Evaluator dilemmas
  - Degree of involvement
  - Ethics
Reducing problems associated with causal attribution

- Specificity of ToC
  - Plausibility
  - Testability
  - Do-ability
  - Meaningfulness
Reducing problems associated with causal attribution

- Barriers to achieving a well specified ToC
  - Time
  - Problems articulating theories and lack of tools
  - Strategic versus operational theories
  - Lack of baselines and evidence base
  - Inadequate procedures for monitoring
  - The inadequacy of linearity in a complex world
Attempted solutions

- Dedicated time
- Range of methods
- Tools from performance management
- Strategic & operational level change
Remaining questions

- Sharpening planning and implementation? The emperor’s new clothes?
- Facilitating the measurement and data collection elements of the evaluation process? Necessary but not sufficient?
- Reducing problems associated with casual attribution? Will the attribution question ever adequately answered by a Theory of Change?