Beyond Social Services

Introduction
In this case study, we summarise the impact measurement approach of Beyond Social Services (Beyond). The case study outlines various impact measurement methods Beyond has used in recent years, both at organisation-wide level and for several of its individual programmes.

Three main points stand out about Beyond’s approach:

1. The organisation worked with funder, NCSS to co-develop a Theory of Change.
2. Beyond is currently working with a third party research agency to conduct a formal Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) to measure its impact.
3. The team takes a strongly participatory approach to impact measurement, including reporting back its findings to local communities and actively engaging programme participants in a conversation about the results, learnings and next steps.

About Beyond
Beyond Social Services is a youth charity operating in five different districts in Central Singapore. Its long term strategic goal is to enhance the social mobility and improve the lives of disadvantaged and disengaged youth. Beyond does this by working not just with the youths themselves but with whole communities. The idea is to create profound and lasting improvements to the overall environment in which these young people grow up.

How does Beyond measure its impact?
The diagram below shows a summary of the key steps in Beyond’s impact measurement process:

![Diagram showing steps in Beyond's impact measurement process]

**STEP ONE - Establishing goals: Clear long-term vision and short-term objectives, but the links are complex**

Over the years, Beyond has established a clear long-term goal: to build up communities that are more centred on children and youth. The organisation’s shorter term objectives are also well entrenched within the team’s philosophy and approach: to serve children and youth; to develop communities; and also to add value more broadly to the social sector.
Nevertheless, the organisation shared that it struggles with how to frame its target impact. Even if the longer term vision is shared across all programmes, there is a complex relationship between the shorter term objectives. Short-term goals relating to children and youth versus those relating to community development can even compete with each other. The team therefore realised that it needed a framework to effectively package the interlinkages between its various objectives.

“In terms of doing the work, it is coherent, but you can cut the outcomes in many different ways”

STEP TWO - Developing the impact logic: Mapped out a Theory of Change with support from funder, NCSS

In 2010, Beyond started to think in terms of a “Theory of Change” (TOC) for how its work on the ground fed into the organisation’s short- and longer-term objectives. They reflected on their staff’s own direct experience and observation of the communities where they worked. They also reviewed local and international literature – although they found that international literature did not tend to be so relevant and that there was not a large amount of local literature available to consult. They also considered what they knew about the successes and challenges facing partners and other organisations in the same sector. In this way, Beyond mapped out eight inter-connected objectives that should guide all of its work, for example:

- A culture of learning and education among children and youths.
- A culture of employment among the care-givers of our young people and other adult residents.
- Increased family involvement and competence in resolving their difficulties.

In 2015/16, Beyond worked with NCSS to further clarify and document its TOC. NCSS offered its support to facilitate the process as part of the preparation stage for a proposed programme funding agreement. The process involved a workshop with around ten staff, then the collection of feedback from the different departments, followed by desk work to collate the feedback and refine the model. Overall, it took around five days of time each for the five staff who were heavily involved. The team found that it was not an overly burdensome process and that the work was relatively easy to slot in alongside other tasks.

“Mapping out a TOC is definitely worthwhile, but the philosophy of the top part needs to be strongly articulated before you drill down to the bottom level”

The resulting diagram sets out a long-term target outcome of “enhancing social mobility for disadvantaged young people”. Beneath that outcome, it lists a hierarchy of “pre-conditions” such as family stability and “intermediate outcomes” such as mutual support among neighbours which must be achieved in order to reach the end goal. At the bottom of the diagram, a set of 16 boxes summarise the main activities and resources that Beyond provides – i.e. its “interventions”. This structure loosely

1 For further detail, see Beyond’s 2015 Annual Report: [http://beyond.org.sg/pdf/annual15.pdf](http://beyond.org.sg/pdf/annual15.pdf)
follows that of a widely referenced manual from the Aspen Institute in the US: “The Community Builder’s Approach to Theory of Change: a practical guide to theory development”.  

Beyond’s Theory of Change (2016)

“The benefit of TOC is in reminding us of our purpose – why do we really do what we do”

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2 It is particularly notable that this approach favours the term “pre-conditions” over “outcomes” and can result – as is the case with Beyond – in a set of “pre-conditions” that describe a state of being but not an explicit change. For example, a “pre-condition” in this context could be: “The young person must have family stability (amongst other things) so that they can in turn experience social mobility”. The same point phrased as an outcome would be: “if the young person experiences increased family stability (amongst other things), then we assume they will experience increased social mobility in turn”. Whilst either approach is equally valid, one key benefit of using the preconditions terminology is that it can be easier for some people to grasp the concept. Meanwhile a benefit of using the outcomes terminology is that it can be easier to translate the TOC into a clearly specified set of target outcomes, indicators and targets.
STEP THREE - Selecting tools and metrics: A range of qualitative and quantitative approaches to layer up the overall picture

The TOC acts as the basis for Beyond’s reporting to one of its main funders, NCSS, as well as for its internal impact tracking. Indicators and corresponding data collection tools have been developed to align with the outcomes articulated in the TOC. The organisation emphasises that no one individual indicator can tell the full story – and so it uses a range of both qualitative and quantitative indicators to “layer up” a picture of short- and longer- term impact.

The main tools that it uses are:

- Simple stakeholder surveys: Beyond’s Research Executive and community workers have developed four short surveys – one for each main stakeholder group – to track outcomes in relation to the organisation’s objectives and funding requirements.

Sample survey questionnaires provided by Beyond

Survey A – Regular Children and Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you currently attending school?</td>
<td>Yes/ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many days a week do you attend school?</td>
<td>Days/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like school?</td>
<td>Yes/ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you like about school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you dislike about school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Applicable to those aged 13 & above] Are you currently working? Yes/ No

If yes,

How many days a week do you work? Days/week

What is the reason you decided to work?

If no,

Do you intend to work in the future? Yes/ No

Why or why not?
• **Pre- and post-interviews conducted by an external research agency:** In 2016, Beyond secured funding from Tote Board and the National Youth Council to contract an external research agency to conduct an RCT to assess longer-term impact. The external researchers have developed a set of indicators and interview scripts for direct data collection from stakeholders.

• **Retrospective interviews:** Beyond has previously carried out interviews with alumni youth several years after they graduated from Beyond’s programmes. To determine the current socio-economic status of its past beneficiaries (30 respondents), Beyond determined four quantitative parameters to be measured, namely education achievement, employment, conflicts with the law and household income. The research team also carried out qualitative interviews using questions such as “What difference did Beyond make in your life?” to form a richer picture of impact.

• **Beneficiary focus groups:** ongoing dialogue with communities is an integral part of Beyond’s way of working. The team commented that this is often their preferred tool.

• **Staff observations and reflection:** Beyond has found that staff reflection can be very informative and constructive and may be easier to arrange than a complex research project.

**STEP FOUR - Collecting data: Supported by community volunteers and an external research agency**

Beyond reported that it faces significant resource constraints for data collection, especially since research is an area that is not typically included in programme grant allocations. One way in which the organisation overcomes this challenge is by using community volunteers to support staff in collecting some of its survey data.

Meanwhile, in recent years, Beyond spent considerable efforts to strengthen its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This has helped to provide staff with a user-friendly and reliable system to capture data on clients’ demographic details and pattern of programme participation.

Since 2016, the organisation has also been working with an external research agency to conduct a more rigorous RCT study assessing longer-term impact. RCTs are widely considered as the “gold standard” for impact measurement in terms of rigour, but they are also the most resource-intensive. With funding from Tote Board and the National Youth Council (NYC), the external researchers are collecting longitudinal interview data from a sample of Beyond’s clients as well as from a control group sample (i.e. people with similar characteristics as the client group, but who have not participated in the programmes). Over time, Beyond aims to be able to adopt this research process in-house.
STEP FIVE - Analysing data: triangulating a range of quantitative and qualitative data to form a nuanced understanding of the change that took place

As mentioned above, Beyond’s overall approach to impact measurement involves layering up a nuanced picture of the change that has taken place over time and the context for that change. Analysis involves interpreting and triangulating both quantitative and qualitative data, often in close discussion with staff and the local communities themselves. For example, analysis of the retrospective interviews conducted with programme alumni helped Beyond to recognise more clearly the myriad of factors which affect the lives of its clients, and to acknowledge that Beyond’s own influence is only part of a much bigger picture.

“KPI tracking may tell you that something is not right, but it won’t tell you why”

For the current longitudinal RCT study, a key element in the analysis involves merging the dataset from the researchers’ client interviews with client data from the CRM system. The data is then analysed by the external researchers to understand the correlation between participation patterns and client outcomes. Beyond noted that having the robust and well-populated CRM database was critical for the longitudinal study.

STEP SIX - Using the Findings: very open approach to sharing and discussing results with beneficiaries and the public

Beyond stands out for its high level of engagement with clients and other stakeholders in terms of sharing and discussing its results. The organisation’s annual report is particularly open and reflective: for example, the 2015 report includes a significant amount of discussion about not only the successes but also the challenges and lessons learned by the organisation. It is also one of very few non-profit organisations in Singapore to publicly share its Theory of Change in its annual report.

In addition to its open public reporting, the organisation also runs events to share and discuss results directly with the local communities in which it works. Known as Annual General Meetings (AGMs), these events involve information booths and discussion sessions, allowing Beyond and its clients to have a two-way dialogue around what has worked well with the programme and areas of future need.
Sharing of Beyond’s Impact Framework at Henderson Community AGM

Local community members registering for AGM
What can we learn from Beyond’s impact measurement approach?

Main challenges

Resources for robust data collection and analysis
As with many other organisations, a key challenge for Beyond over the years has been the lack of resources to carry out robust data collection, especially for longer-term outcome measurement. In 2011, the organisation worked with volunteers to carry out phone interviews with programme alumni as a gauge of longer-term impact, but they were conscious that the methodology was not particularly rigorous.

Nevertheless, Beyond has managed to allocate resources for a Research Executive, who has played a critical role in anchoring and driving the organisation’s research and outcome measurement work. Also, more recently, Beyond succeeded in securing Tote Board and NYC funding for their external evaluation of longer-term impact.

“The Tote Board and NYC funding is the only reason we can do the longitudinal study”

Nurturing a culture where staff feel safe and encouraged to reflect on successes and challenges
Beyond places a strong emphasis on reflective practice at all levels of the organisation. Staff are regularly encouraged to review their results and discuss what worked well and areas for improvement. From the outcome measurement point of view, these reflections are also an important source of information to complement more formal stakeholder feedback and outcome measurement.

However, it can be difficult to create an environment where staff feel safe in openly sharing their thoughts. In particular, many people feel uncomfortable to acknowledge and confront areas where programmes are not doing as well as expected. Beyond addresses this challenge by supporting groups of frontline staff to reflect on their practice within the context of a peer discussion, without the presence of senior management and facilitated neutrally by the Research Executive.

What worked well

A participatory approach
Beyond takes a notably participatory approach to impact measurement, in particular through the way that it shares and discusses findings with local communities and other stakeholders. The organisation has found that through sharing impact data during the AGM meetings, it was able to access immediate ground-up feedback from local stakeholders which staff could use immediately to improve their programme. Moreover, the AGM provided an avenue to achieve buy-in from the local community members and provoke local response.

Establishing a strong CRM system
The organisation recently invested in strengthening its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database, so that it has the processes and software to collect regular and robust data on client attendance and demographics. Now that this database is in place, it can act as the anchor for more robust and long-term impact studies.
“The first thing was to get the CRM. This was critical for the longitudinal study”