Measuring Child Welfare Outcomes: Safety, Well-Being, and Permanency

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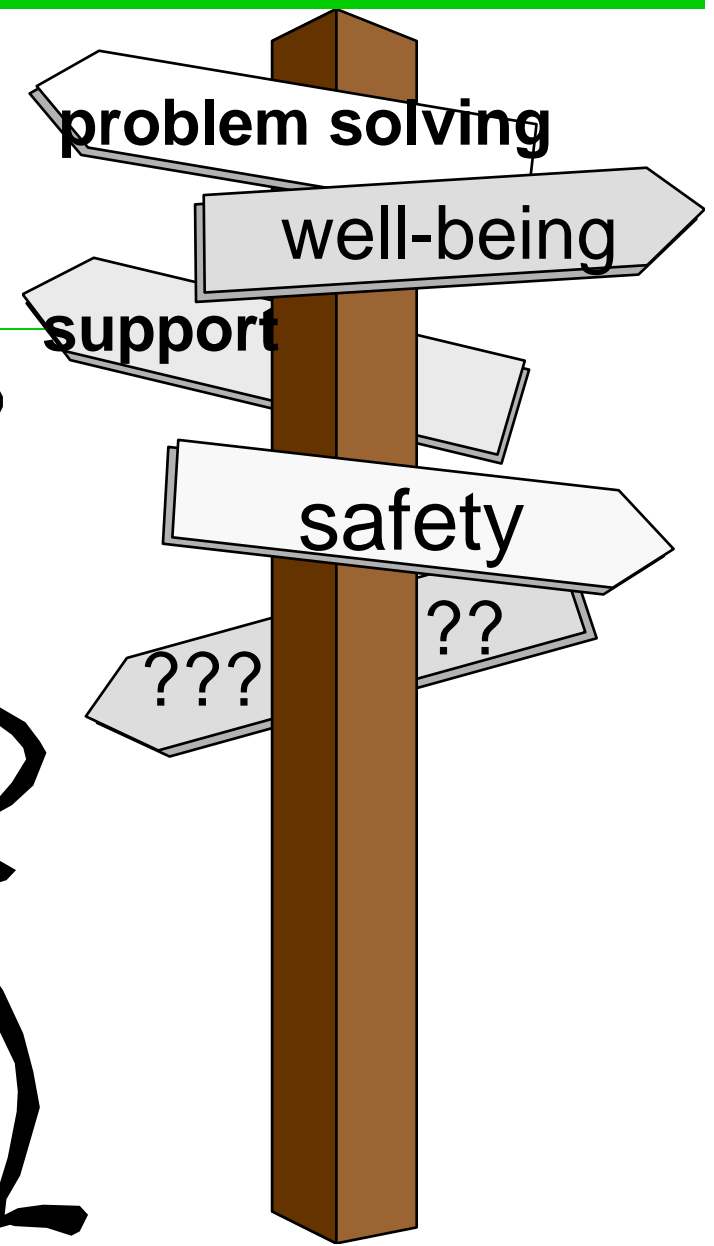University of Maryland School of Social Work

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Why is measuring outcomes important?

- If we don't know where we are going, how will we know when we get there?

problem solving

well-being

support

safety

???

??

Why else is this important?

- The focus on outcomes helps us select the most appropriate assessment and intervention strategies.

- It is easier to demonstrate our successes to others.

Agenda

- **Introductions & expectations**
- **ASFA outcomes**
- **Definitions**
  - Outcomes measurement
  - Inputs/outputs
  - Outcomes & outcome Indicators
- **Program versus Client Outcomes**
- **Using an outcomes measurement framework**

Adoption Safe Family Act (ASFA) Outcomes

- CHILD SAFETY: Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect; Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care;

- PERMANECY: Increase permanency for children in foster care; Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing re-entry; Reduce time in foster care to adoption; Increase placement stability; and Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions.

http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cwo98/Sec1/sec1.html

How does this relate to me?

- My work (output) affects these outcomes.

- IF my work with children, parents, and families is directed toward client level outcomes, THEN the likelihood of achieving program outcomes is increased.
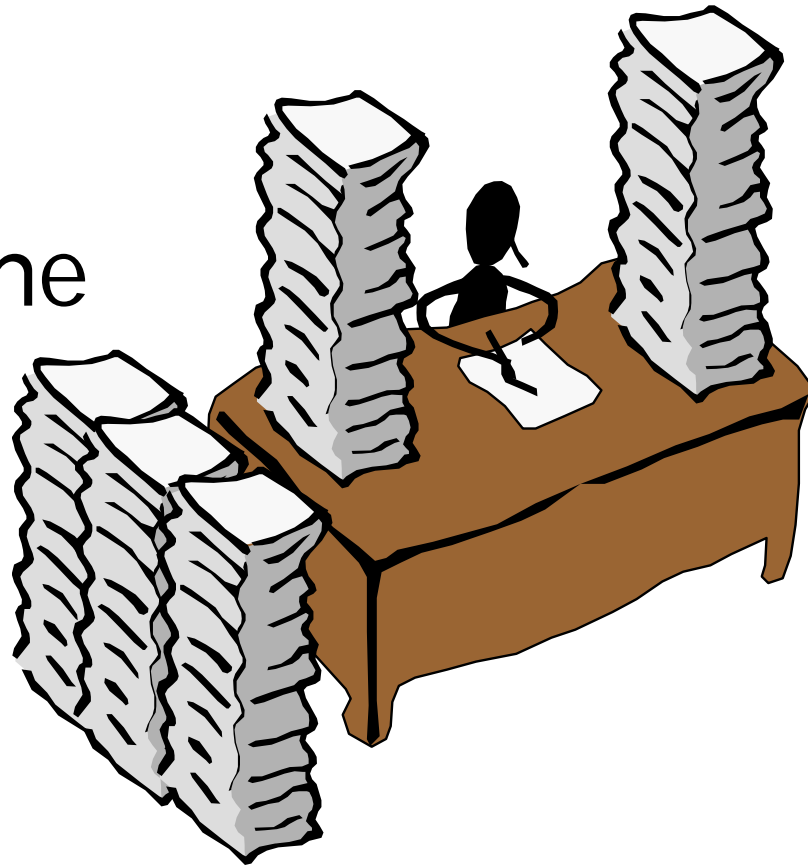
Importance of Assessment

- Faulty decision making at assessment can lead to targeting disjointed outcomes and interventions.
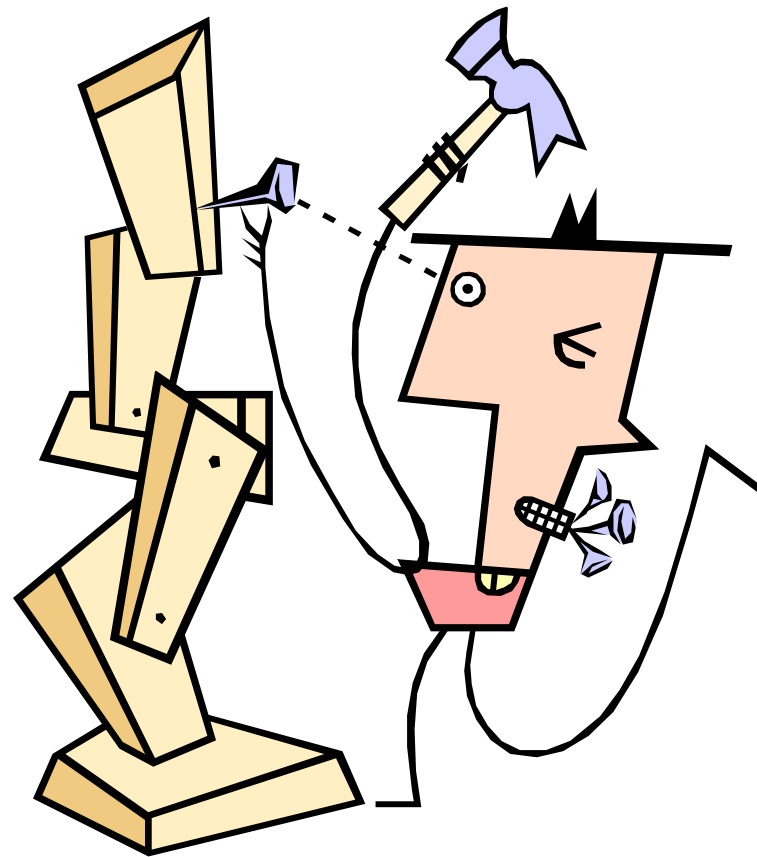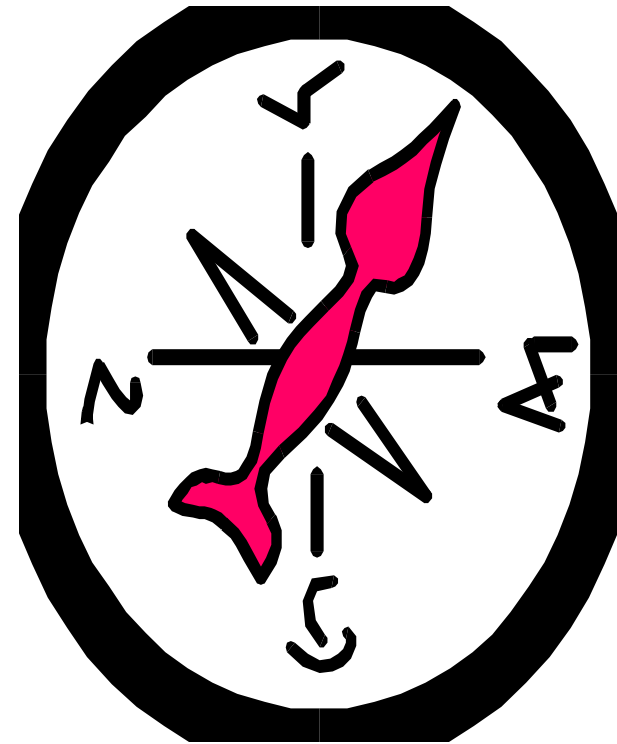
If we don't individualize our assessments

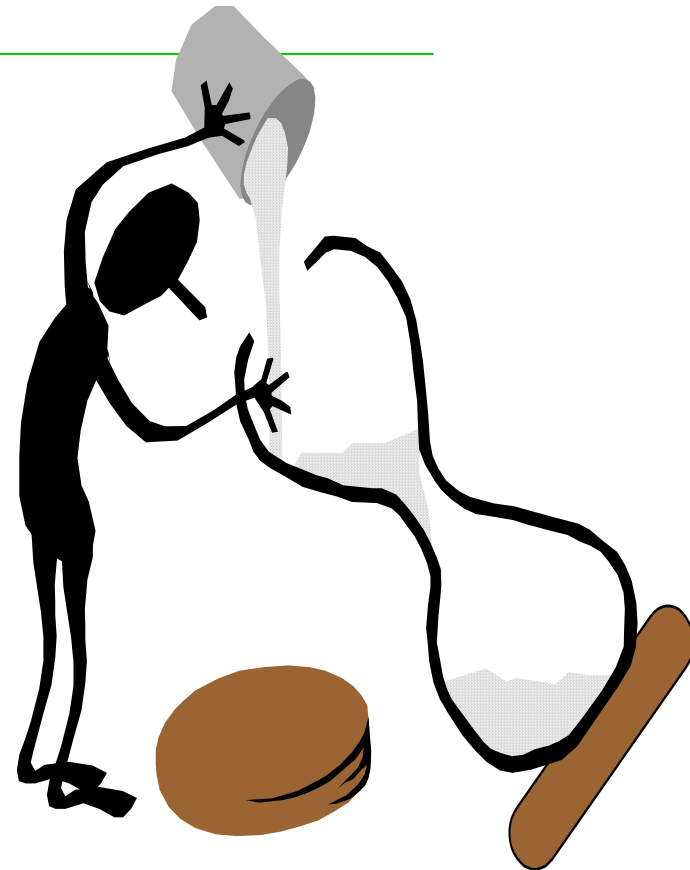- All case plans tend to look the same.

And then what happens?

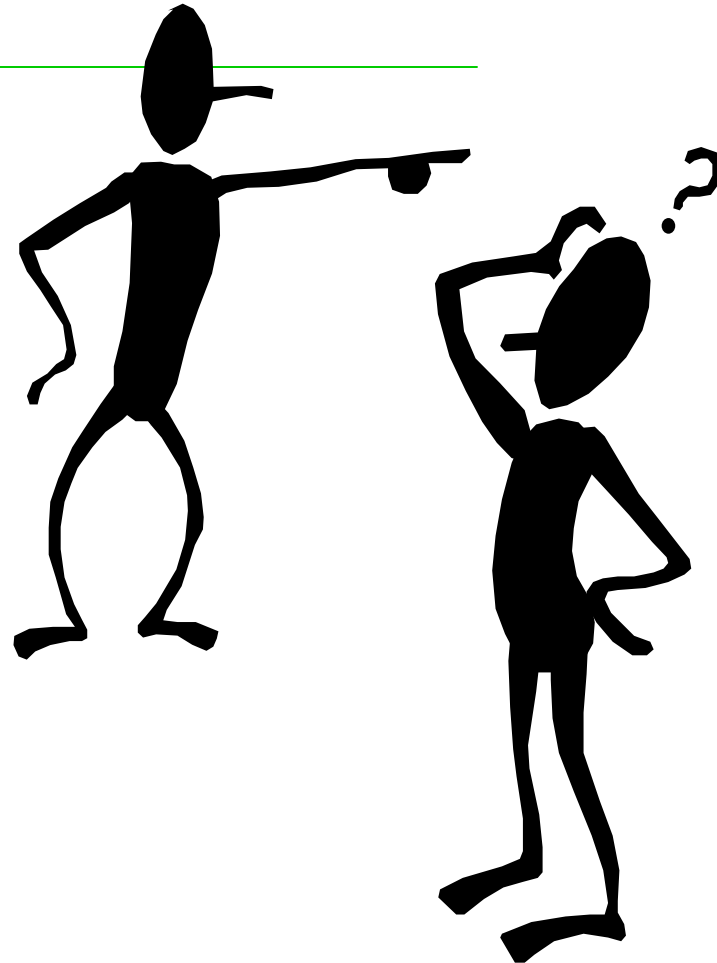- Clients can be lead in the wrong direction.

What are the consequences?

- Precious time is lost toward achieving the right outcomes and reducing risk.

How do clients feel?

- Clients are very confused and may appear "resistant" to intervention.

How does this affect children?

- Children may be extremely vulnerable and unsafe.

What is outcomes measurement?

- Regular collection and reporting of information about the efficiency, quality, and effectiveness of human service programs as well as the use of such information to further improve the program.

Purposes of Outcomes Measurement

- Outcomes Measurement focuses upon performance AND the result of services.
- Outcomes Measurement provides information on
  - How programs are performing
  - What results are achieved
  - What can be improved
  - Future allocation of resources

Effectiveness perspective*

INPUTS $\rightarrow$

| HUMAN SERVICE |
| PROGRAM |

$\rightarrow$ OUTPUTS

QUALITY
OUTPUTS

OUTCOMES $\leftarrow$
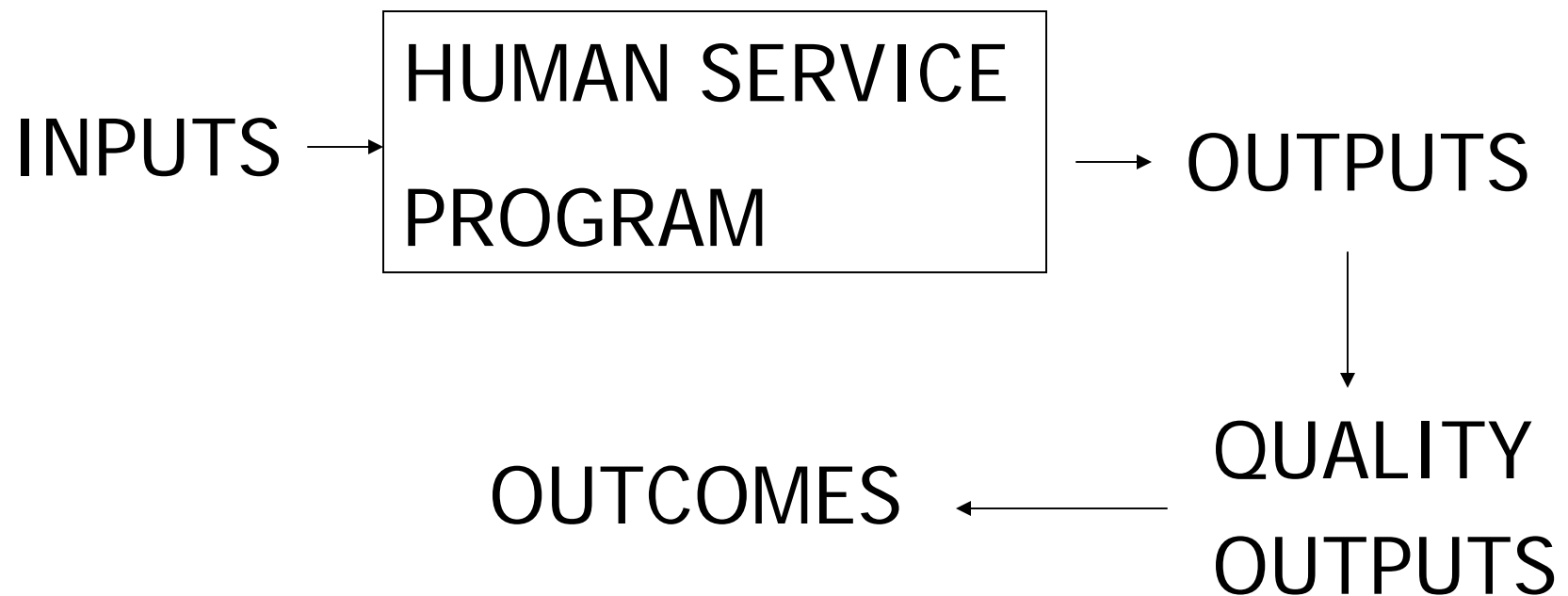
*Martin & Kettner (1996)

Definition - Inputs

- Anything a system uses to accomplish its purposes.

- Resources & raw materials (e.g., funding, staff, facilities, equipment, clients, presenting problems) that go into a human service program.

Definition - Outputs

- Anything a system produces (time, contact units, material units).

- Examples:
  - # of hours spent by staff in court this month
  - # of home visits held this month
  - # of parenting group sessions provided this month
  - # of bus tokens provided to clients

Definition - quality outputs*

- Outputs that meet a specified quality standard.
- Examples:
  - % of clients seen within 24 hours of referral.
  - % of interviews conducted by trained interviewers.

(Also described as performance measures)

Quality Dimensions

- Accessibility
- Assurance
- Communication
- Competency
- Conformity
- Courtesy
- Deficiency
- Durability

- Empathy
- Humaneness
- Performance
- Reliability
- Responsiveness
- Security
- Tangibles

Martin and Kettner (1996)

OUTCOME: a condition of well being for children, families, communities

- Program level
  - **child safety**
  - **child well being**
  - **family well being**
  - **permanency**

- Child or Family Level
  - **household safety**
  - **behavioral control**
  - **conflict management skills**
  - **communication skills**

Definition - Indicator

- A measure, for which data is available, which helps quantify the achievement of an outcome.

  - Child safety: % without another substantiated or indicated report of child maltreatment within a 12-month period

  - Child well-being: % of children who graduate from high school

Connection between program outcomes and client outcomes

- Achievement of client level outcomes should increase achievement of program level outcomes

- For example, improved family functioning & increased social support should increase child safety as measured by recurrences of child maltreatment.

Defining Outcomes at the Client Level

- **Constructs within a broader outcome**
- **Could be focused on changes in attitudes, behavior, perceptions, conditions, mental health status, skills, functioning**
- **Related to program outcomes but more precise**
- **Need to match to specific risks**

Sample Outcomes - Child Safety

- **Risk/Problem**
  - Condemned housing (e.g., no heat or running water, children diagnosed with lead poisoning, safety hazards for young children)

- **Possible Outcomes**
  - household safety
  - financial management skills
  - problem solving skills

Sample Outcomes - Child Well Being

- **Risk/Problem**
  - Acting out behavior (e.g., refusing to listen, throwing temper tantrums, fights with peers)

- **Possible Client Outcomes**
  - behavioral control
  - social skills
  - impulse control

Sample Outcomes - Family Well Being

- **Risk/Problem**
  - Communication problems or conflict (e.g.,domestic violence, parent/child conflict)

- **Possible Client Outcomes**
  - conflict management skills
  - decision making skills
  - impulse control

Sample Outcomes - Permanency

- **Risk/Problem**
  - Frequent moves, in and out of placement, numerous schools, numerous caregivers

- **Possible Client Outcomes**
  - Recovery from addiction
  - Financial management
  - Problem solving skills

Contrast of Indicators

- **Program level**
  - % of children without recurrence of maltreatment within one year of case closure
  - % of children reunified without a new placement within 12 months

- **Client level**
  - Improvement of family functioning
  - Increased social support
  - Improvement in child behavior
  - Increased problem solving skills

Contrast of measures

- Program level
  - Numeric counts
  - Rely on existing data
  - Use of information systems
  - Consistent data across all cases

- **Client level**
  - Self report clinical assessment instruments
  - Observational measures
  - Integration of new data collection with practice
  - May have different data across cases dependent on assessment

Primary FOCUS today

- Applying an outcomes measurement framework – at program or client level

- Identifying examples inputs, outputs and outcomes that apply to our program(s)
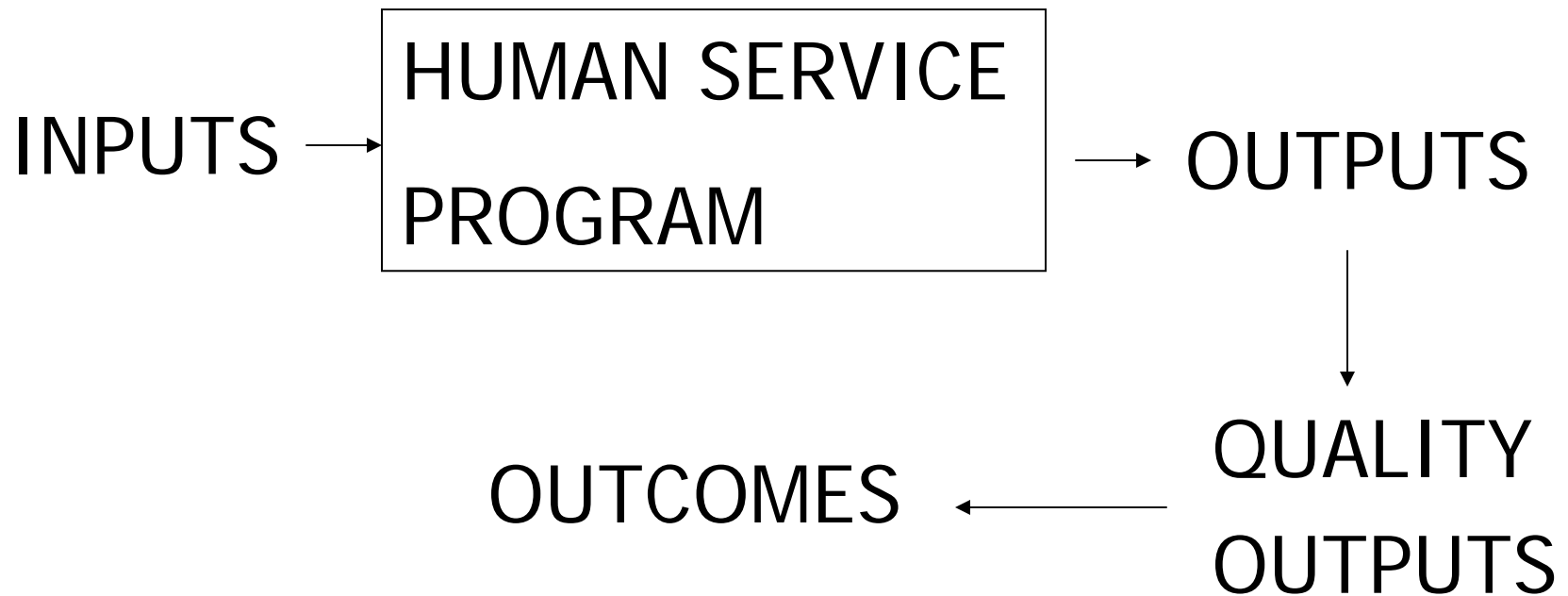
Time for practice
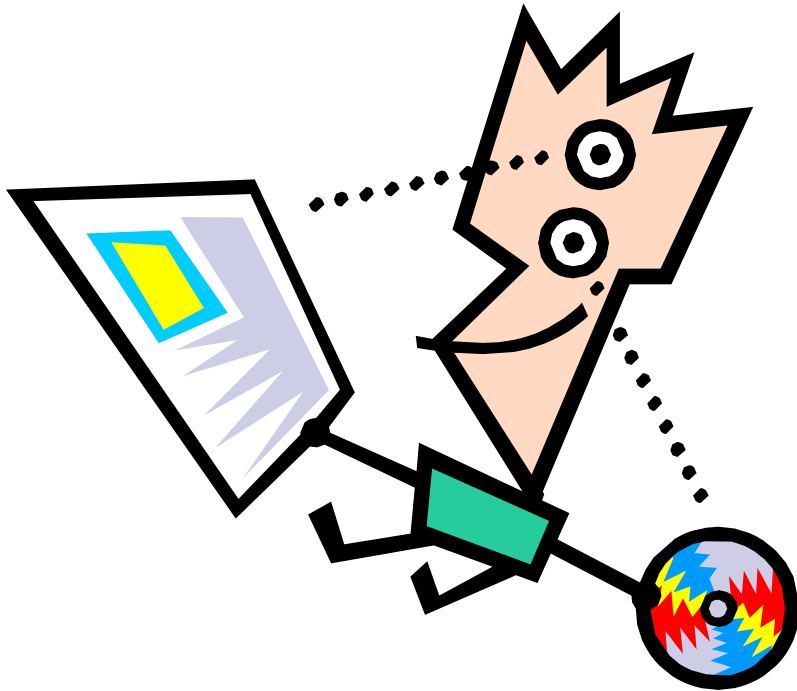
- We will work together to complete your program's effectiveness chart

Your Program's Effectiveness

INPUTS $\longrightarrow$ | HUMAN SERVICE PROGRAM | $\longrightarrow$ OUTPUTS

OUTCOMES $\longleftarrow$ QUALITY OUTPUTS

List your own examples on the pages that follow

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Start with Defining your Program Outcomes

- What is a primary purpose of your program?

  - _____

- What condition of client well-being will indicate success? (define it)

  _____

  _____

Identify examples of inputs essential for your program.

- Examples:
  - _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

Identify examples of outputs of your program:

- Examples:

  - _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

Identify examples of quality outputs of your program:

■ Examples:

■ _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Your Program's Effectiveness

INPUTS →

HUMAN SERVICE PROGRAM → OUTPUTS

_____

_____

_____

QUALITY OUTPUTS

OUTCOME: ←

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____
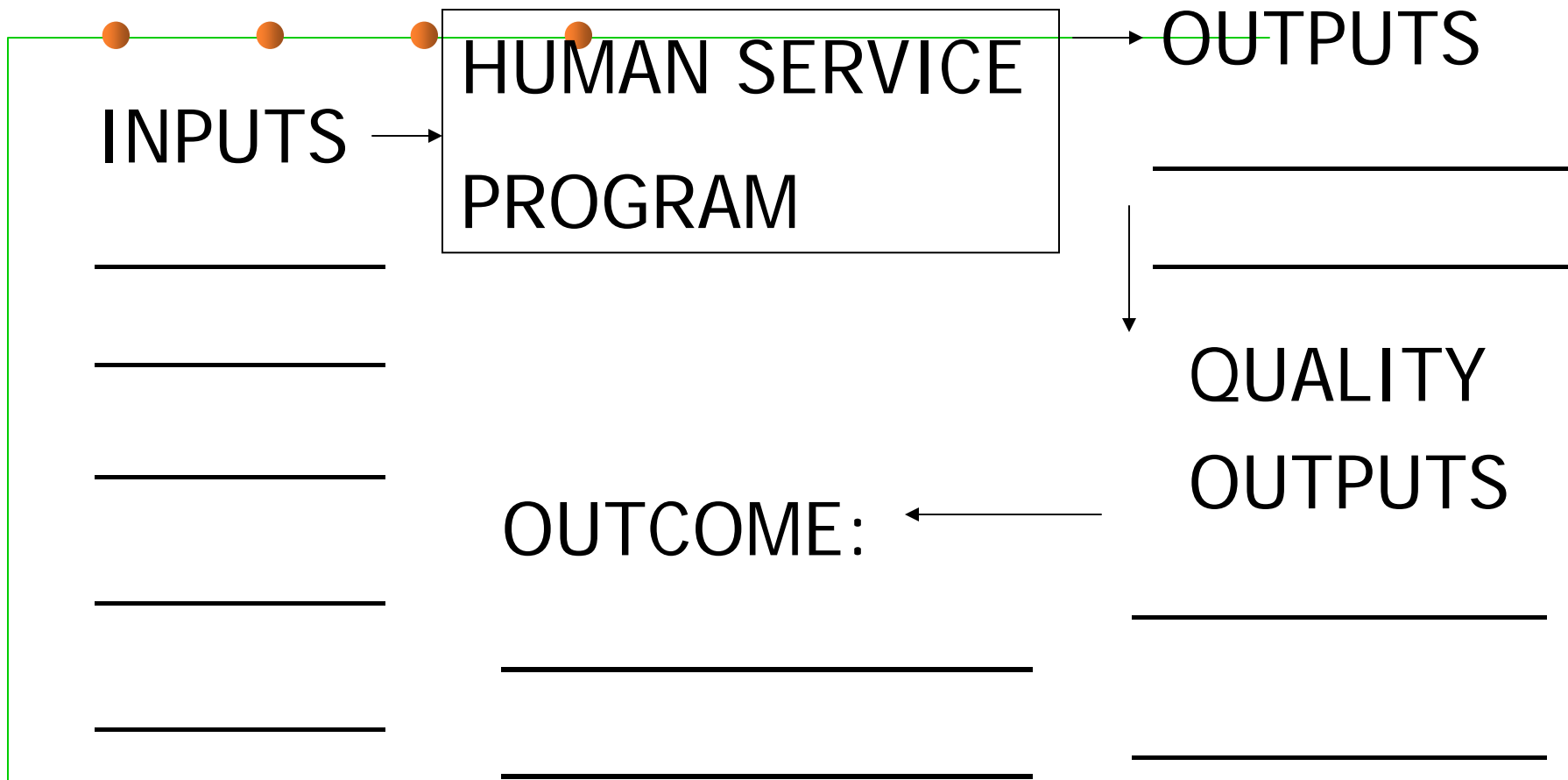
Fill in examples

Selecting Indicators for Program Outcomes

- **Usually select data that is already available or can be made readily available.**

- **Numeric counts most often used as indicators at a program level**

  - e.g., % of children who are placed in safe circumstances without a new incident of child maltreatment within 12 months.

Identify examples of indicators for your program outcome:

- Examples:

  - _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

Assessment of Numeric Counts

- Utility   High
- Validity   Low to Medium
- Reliability   High
- Precision   Low
- Feasibility   High
- Cost   Low to Medium

Assess your indicators against criteria

- Utility - how useful to stakeholders?
- Validity - measures the right outcome?
- Reliability - how consistent?
- Precision - level of measurement?
- Feasibility - how likely that you can obtain this information?
- Cost - how much effort or resources will it take to track this indicator?

Select any outcome

- What inputs will be essential to successfully achieve this outcome?

- What outputs will relate to this outcome?

- What quality outputs will relate to this outcome?

Review points

- Outcomes should be results oriented and relate to the primary purposes of your program

- Numeric counts more easily measure child safety and permanency than child or family well being.

- Your program services (outputs) must have the capacity to influence achievement of outcomes.

Types of clinical measures

- Standardized self-report
- Observation
- Client satisfaction (with respect to outcomes not just outputs)

Criteria for selection

- Utility - relevance to stakeholders
- Validity - measures the right outcome
- Reliability - consistency of results
- Precision - level of measurement
- Feasibility - practicality of use, training, costs, amount of time, receptivity of staff and clients, helpful to clinical process

Use of Self-Report Measures

- Validity - high
- Reliability - high
- Precision - medium to high
- Client receptivity can be high if there is a good match between problem and outcome

- Utility - low to high
- Feasibility - can be low due to training, scoring issues
- Cost can be high
- Client receptivity can be low if there is not a good match with focus of intervention

Observational measures

- Utility can be high
- Validity - medium to high
- Reliability - medium to high
- Precision - medium
- Feasibility - don't have to rely on client's participation

- Utility can be low
- Validity can be low if it doesn't match focus of intervention
- Reliability can be low if definitions are not clear
- Can be time consuming for practitioner

Client satisfaction

- Reliability - medium
- Feasibility - medium
- Feasibility - medium
- Cost - low

- Utility - medium
- Validity - low to medium
- Precision - low - many focus on outputs not outcomes
- Feasibility - may get a low return

Types of Reliability

- **Test-Retest**

- **Alternate Form**

- **Internal Consistency**
  - Split half
  - Coefficient alpha
- **Inter-observer**

- **Correspondence at 2 points in time**
- **Similar scores with 2 forms**
- **Scores**
  - similar-2 halves
  - single concept
- **Equivalency by raters**

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Types of Validity

- Content
- Face
- Concurrent

- Predictive
- Convergent

- Discriminant

- Major dimensions
- Appear relevant
- Predict score on other instrument
- Predict future event
- Measures all concepts
- Does not measure irrelevant concepts

Take home points

- Clearly define your program's purpose and/or purpose of your work with a specific client

- Define outcomes that are "true" measures of your program's success or your client's success

- Select measures or indicators of your outcomes

- Assess whether your program has sufficient inputs to achieve the quality of outputs that will lead to achievement of outcomes.

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KEY Reference

- Martin, L. L., & Kettner, P. M. (1996). Measuring the performance of human service programs. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.

- Also see reference list provided.

Copies of slides

- Copies of the Power Point slides of this presentation can be obtained by going to: http://family.umaryland.edu

- Click on Research

- Look for APSAC Colloquium 6/20-23/01

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American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children

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- **Promoting research and guidelines to inform professional practice**
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- **Ensuring that America's public policy regarding child maltreatment is well-informed and constructive.**

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