



Evolution & Philanthropy

DECLARATION OF COMMON VISION, UNIFIED VALUE BASES AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR EVALUATION OF SOCIAL RESULTS OF CHILDREN-FOCUSED PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

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Working group of specialists participating in the development of the full version of the document:	Ошибка! Закладка не определена.
Our thanks for participation and assistance:.....	Ошибка! Закладка не определена.

Introduction

1.1. Purposes and goals of the document

In the world today, more attention is being paid to quality of social processes management, optimization of the resources used, improvement of the effectiveness of social programs and their accountability; therefore, the interest to professional evaluation of such programs is constantly increasing. Social program evaluation is an important tool in result analysis, provision of transparency of financial expenditures, and assessment of efficacy of such investments.

Increase of interest to social program evaluation among the developers as well as among a wide range of people who are a part of such programs is mainly determined by the general tendency in the realm of social management: involve interested parties in solving social problems by developing new approaches instead outdated and ineffective ones. This way, project and program evaluation becomes a ground for an open discussion and a tool of societal participation in development of state strategies in social sphere.

Children represent quite a vulnerable and unprotected group of beneficiaries, which makes professional community especially responsible for expert participation in solving ethically questionable issues that deal with child well-being, and also for development, maintenance and advancement of professional and ethical standards in child protection.

The variety of opinions on how to interpret term “in child’s interests” puts professional community in front of the necessity to develop a unified understanding of common grounds and principles of children-focused social program evaluation. Correctly and timely defined basic points in the area of children-focused social program evaluation will allow:

- to minimize risks of dissemination of evaluation approach oriented mainly at the volumes of activities performed within the program;
- to keep the importance of substantial aspects of program activities;
- to reinforce the role of professionals in development and ensuring compliance with the standards of quality of social service.

This text is based on the results of discussions of representatives of professional community, and is a short version of a document¹, developed within the framework of the partnership activity called *Common vision of principles and strategies for evaluation of children-focused projects and programs*². This document outlines a common professional attitude towards approaches to evaluation of socially significant results in children-focused sphere, developed during those discussions by the specialists of different backgrounds involved in social programs and projects evaluation.

The authors of this document had a goal to analyze existing approaches to interpretation of basic principles of protection of children’s rights, proclaimed in international principles of law, description of interdisciplinary bases and methodological recommendations for carrying out

¹ *Declaration of the line of development...*

² The partnership initiative begun in early 2012 with representatives of several organizations, including Children’s Charity Fund “Victoria”, non-profit organization «Evolution&Philanthropy», Charitable Fund “Culture of Childhood”, joining forces to develop common grounds for evaluation of children-focused programs. During the year, multiple organizations, interested in evaluation of their own programs as well as in improvement in overall evaluation sector, have joined this initiative’s activities – representatives of more than 15 organizations working in the social sphere have participated in the development of the document, and overall more than 30 organizations have supported the idea and took part in workshops.

evaluation of children-focused projects and programs basing on existing Russian and international experience³.

The group of authors hopes that bringing out and highlighting the issues offered for discussion in this document, can lead to a further discussion and a deeper understanding of specifics of children-focused program evaluation, and will further promote shaping and sustainable development of expertise in this area.

1.2. Current state of evaluation of children-focused projects and programs

Current state of evaluation of children-related projects and programs is characterized by its fragmentariness and inadequacy from the point of view of use of gained experience, its dissemination, and continuity.

Problems, which exist in the area of evaluation of social results of projects and programs, can be nominally divided into two groups:

a. Problems, determined by the specifics of the professional evaluation and specifics of children-focused sphere.

- Currently, there is a lack of systemic research in the area of children rights as well as lack of the grounds for public discussion regarding approaches to research of childhood and children's rights; also, one cannot discount an overly psychological approach to childhood-related knowledge against nearly non-existent interdisciplinary research.
- Lack of involvement of final beneficiaries and representatives of other interested parties in the evaluation process is a common sign. In the case of evaluation of children-focused programs (when children are the final beneficiaries, and, therefore, the potential participants of evaluation process) this problem becomes more complex and, at the same time, becomes more important.
- Insufficient development of interdisciplinary approach to program evaluation leads to complications in a dialog between specialists of different backgrounds.
- Specialists notice lack of clarity and consistency in contents of key concepts in the area of evaluation of programs that implement social and educational children-focused services (key concepts in the evaluation realm are, in most cases, imported, most of the times - synonymous, and often having no similar concept in Russian practice).

b. Problems, caused by the deficiency in competences of those carrying-out evaluation and using its results.

- One should note that at this time the comprehensive focused development of specialists in the area of social program evaluation (one that features specialized periodicals, workshops and educational courses) is almost non-existent. One of the most wide-spread consequences of this is a simplified understanding, simplification of social problems and approaches to their solution by both people responsible for making programmatic decisions, and for the implementers of such decisions.
- A widespread myth that there is a simple linear relation between the work performed and social effect forms inadequate expectations for program's results. Because every social program, project, or service is integrated into a currently existent multifactor system of social relations, every influence can be considered as being only of a probabilistic nature.
- Lack of understanding of key concepts, goals, and methodology of evaluation lead to inaccurate organization of such program's carryout: programs are evaluated basing on the amount of activities, not by the results; no difference is made between monitoring and evaluation of a program; evaluation results are used for "bringing to accountability" and not for the program development and quality improvement.

³ See. *Declaration*. Part III (full version).

There are very specific Russian features that complicate evaluation of childhood-focused projects: simplification of perception of policies in children-focused areas, lack of clarity in understanding of children's rights, difficulties in understanding the status of modern child, etc. It is obvious that analytical work, conducted under the auspice of development of this document, does not exclusively describe existing issues, and needs expansion and deepening of its matter.

Declaration of common vision, unified value bases and ethical principles for evaluation of social results of children-focused projects and programs

2.1. Common vision for evaluation of socially significant results and value bases for evaluation of children-focused programs

Evaluation of social projects and programs is an interdisciplinary activity that works in the juncture of two professional areas – area of evaluation and area of providing social services, with both having their theoretic basis, practical approaches, history and values.

In social realm, there are limitations for using methods of evaluation from other fields (business, management, production, services, etc.) Social programs evaluation in one of the most complex tasks from both technical point of view (methods, tools) and in a moral and ethical aspect: with people being not a matter or object, but the focal point of social service, subject, which participates in solving his problems. Quite often, this subject risks being alienated and/or stigmatized.

Approach taken for evaluating results in social sphere should be fundamentally different from evaluation in other fields, and be based on the principles that would take into account a key factor of interpersonal interaction between the specialist and the client, especially in children-focused programs. The result of such service depends not only on the level of activity and professionalism of the specialist, but also on the willingness of child to cooperate.

The most important aspect of evaluation of children-focused social services and programs is responsible attitude towards the wholeness of social practice; therefore, during evaluation it is critical to rely upon the clear understanding of the specifics of children-related field, respect of the rights of all the key participants of the evaluation process and implementation of humanistic values during evaluation practice.

Acknowledgement of the individual's right for self-determination, maintaining self-respect and maximal autonomy, and upholding human rights and freedoms declared by international acts and guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, calls for the specialist to treat children with equal respect with regard to their age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, cultural, ethnical or racial belonging, religion, language, socio-economical status, physical abilities and other qualities.

2.2. Protection of the rights of children in evaluation of social programs

If evaluation activity is looked at as an inseparable part of ensuring children's rights, then it also should be regulated by basic legal norms functioning in the children-focused sphere. Relationships that arise between the specialist and the child lay in a professional area of responsibility, which, from the one side, sorely needs a system of external regulation in the form of rules and norms, and, from the other side, is deeply connected with the internal organization and moral beliefs of the specialist. International legal regulations point towards the three main principles of guaranteeing children's rights, which are called a three "P" complex: *Participation*, *Protection* and *Provision*.

- **Children's participation in solving issues that affect their interests**

Child's opinion should be taken into consideration – in any situation that is related to his life. Every person has enough knowledge, experiences, and understanding to be an expert in his own life; every child has a right to be heard and define problems that he is dealing with, and undertake his own steps toward solving those problems. This particular arrangement⁴ defines children's participation in evaluation of projects that are seeking to optimize their life situation.

- **Child protection**

Evaluation should not hurt the child: requirements for confidentiality and specific attention towards child safety define procedures and substance of evaluation. Neither evaluation process nor its consequences should create risks for physical and psychological safety of a child. In the case of disclosure of such risks, evaluation process should be stopped, and additional measures for child protection should be taken.

- **Providing for needs**

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, «In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration»⁵. The Convention also states that children's participation in the research should be also viewed as a contribution towards children development.

2.3. Specifics of evaluating programs with child participation

Program evaluation is a systematic gathering of information about activities within the program, its features and results, performed in order to create an opinion about the program, increase its effectiveness and/or develop plans for the future⁶.

Involving all the interested parties into program evaluation is a sign of respect towards the end beneficiaries. In the last decades, while searching for responses about effectiveness of social changes in the children-focused sphere, researchers more and more turn to children – their participation becomes a practical condition for receiving full information about program activities and its perspective development.

Nonetheless, possibilities of use of the information gathered from children are limited not only by individually and age-defined specifics of their perception, thinking and memory, but also by different goals of adults involved into evaluation process. This set of circumstances brings a significant amount of risks connected with manipulation of the data gathered and with distortion of the information which deals with the nature and results of program's influence, which makes children in program evaluation a very vulnerable target group.

Thus, choosing methodology of evaluation, one should, on the one hand, consider specifics of age, psychological and physical development of children; on the other hand, it is important to decide in advance how much the opinions and stances of the members of the target group will affect the nature of the decisions made. In connection with that, the role children will play in the process of program evaluation, to which degree and how deeply will they be involved in this process, should be defined beforehand⁷.

⁴ Ward and Boeck (Participative method of Evaluation)

⁵ Convention on the Rights of the Child http://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/childcon.shtml

⁶ Patton, Michael, 2008. Program Evaluation: Methodology and Practice./ Ed. A.I. Kuzmina, P. O'Sullivan, N.A. Kosheleva. Moscow: Publishing house «Presto-RK», 2009. – pg. 27 (in Russian)

⁷ Evaluation specialist should first find answers to the next questions: Whether children will be passive subjects of observation or become active and equal participants in generating conclusions and recommendations about the program and for the program? To what extent children' opinions about the program, its influence and the changes it makes to them should be displayed in the report?

Defining the extent of children's participation in evaluation is, in essence, defining the degree of children's influence on managerial decisions made based on the evaluation results; thus, it becomes a separate and important issue. Evaluating programs with child participation, it is critical to consider that, without having previous experience, children, as program beneficiaries, can underestimate their role and ability to affect the results of evaluation.

Children – as final beneficiaries – **should get an opportunity to influence managerial decisions regarding evaluated program**⁸. This requirement bears particular importance when working with social minority children: harassed by gender, children from small ethnic groups, children with physical or mental disabilities. With time, partnership participation of children should become a professional standard in program evaluation in children-focused sphere.

Recognition children's creative power in relation to understanding and solving problems promotes focusing on understanding of child's interests and his rights in shaping up the program and making decisions about it. Child's attitude towards the changes achieved during joint activity is a significant indicator, which allows evaluating how much implementation of the program really stimulates his achievement of well-being.

2.4. Ethical principles of evaluation of social children-focused programs.

Procedure organization requirements

Adherence to ethical norms during program evaluation process is meant to provide security, protection of interests and rights of children, parents and legal guardians, as well as other program participants (implementers, managers, developers). In professional activity, ethical principles bear three functions: declarative, regulative, and preventive. None of the three is a priority during evaluation, but all play their roles.

Declarative function is indicating principal ethical bases of adult's attitude towards the child, which, "by default" is not often followed. Regulative function is representing a specific set of rules and regulations which regulate activities of the specialist, in this case – the process of interaction between an adult and a child. Preventive function promotes prevention of violations and repetition of mistakes and/or abuse.

Humanistic values in the children-focused area are displayed in specific demands to the position and behavior of the adult during interaction with a child. These values appear through the next ethical principles of children-focused programs evaluation:

▪ Avoidance of harm / "Unavoidable harm" measure analysis

Evaluation should be physically and psychologically safe for children – program participants, their parents, and legal guardians both during the evaluation process and during the use of its results. If not, children should be excluded from the evaluation.

If a child has difficulties in describing his condition, evaluation specialist should observe, personally or with the help of the responsible adult, the emotional state of the child and stop questioning at a right time.

Research results should not present a child in distorted or erroneous way, harm the social status of a child and people that are close to him, make them discriminated against on any basis. Every tool of evaluation which rank children, define their behavior using harsh value judgment, and become (or may become) the source of stigmatizing by one or another feature, should be excluded from the study.

Comparison of possible risks with potential benefits calls for a weighted approach, especially when risks, threatening specific children, are taken in the name of the greater social changes.

⁸ If for some reason children cannot participate as sources of information, parents or legal representatives should be involved in the evaluation process. If the evaluation specialist has doubts that child's opinion can be correctly reported by the responsible adult, some third party should be brought into the evaluation – to get the most complete set of information about the situation and life conditions of children participation in the program.

- **Confidentiality and responsible use of child-related information**

Keeping confidentiality during evaluation should become adults' direct responsibility. Uncontrolled storage and use of information gathered during the research can harm both the child in his future life and the people in his closest social circle.

In order not to compromise the child and/or his closest social circle, it is necessary to minimize all references to his participation in evaluation, and also completely hide any signs of authorship of any remarks, opinions, or judgments about the evaluated program or project.

It is allowed to use only such methodologies of research that do not give hints about features, specifics, or details about child's life that are not related to specific and agreed upon goals of research.

Information gathered during the process and based on the trusting relationship, should not be a subject of intentional or accidental disclosure outside of previously agreed conditions. Evaluation specialist is personally responsible for safety of primary documents (protocols, interviews, questionnaires) and non-disclosure of the information from these sources. None of the program participants or evaluators, including the principal of evaluation, should have any access to primary data.

Evaluation process should include guidelines on how to react to confidentiality breaches and on how to interfere (also defining the steps that should be taken following this reaction) for the situations when the information received clearly shows that the child is in danger, or if there is a risk for other children. Children should be informed about the levels of confidentiality and possible interference aimed towards protecting their interests.

- **Voluntary participation in the research**

Participation in evaluation research should be voluntary. Every child should have an ability to independently make a decision to participate, or, if desired, refuse to cooperate. The specialist conducting evaluative research in the children-focused sphere should be informed of the existing precedents of violations of children's rights, including abuse of power and use of emotional pressure on children. Participation in program evaluation is not just a formality; children must be fully informed and understand the outcomes and results created by their opinions. Therefore, children are free not to participate in the research and should not be pressured in regard to that: participation is a right, not an obligation.

Every child participating in the evaluation should be informed in an easy to understand format by whom and what for the evaluation is performed, how the results of evaluation will be used; child should be warned about the possible risks, discomfort and undesirable outcomes.

It is a must to get an informed consent for participation in program evaluation from child himself (considering his age) and from his legal representatives.

The child should have a right to refuse to answer a specific question at any moment, or completely quit the participation in the survey if he feels any discomfort. Evaluation specialist should not pressure to continue the interview.

- **Orientation to subject to subject interaction**

Every participant of the interaction has his own point of view on the situation, own interests and needs, i.e. looks at the situation from his subjective point of view. At the same time, all the subjective points of view are equal and should be considered as having equal value and equally strong reasons. Thus, children should have a right and ability to voice their opinions and expect those opinions to be taken in consideration. An adult should treat child's opinions with respect and not to doubt them. At the same time, in making any decisions, child's opinion should be correlated with the best level of ensuring his interests.

While interacting with the child, adult should not use his authority, status and other advantages to get necessary information.

If presence of a third party (guardian and his representative) can influence child's responses and there is a risk of getting biased answers, evaluation specialist has a right to substitute questioning with another way of information gathering, for example, structured observation.

▪ **Nonjudgmental position of the adult during interaction with the child**

Working with children in social programs and projects can have a strong influence on opinions, mindset and emotional state of the evaluation specialist. Subjective impression, which specialist gets while interacting with the child, and also social status and life history of a child should not influence interaction between an adult and a child during the evaluative research, and, at the same time, should become subjects of professional reflection.

It is necessary to guarantee impartial and unbiased treatment of a child and his closest circle during the process of information gathering.

Contact with a child should be developed taking into account its possible influence on the condition and future life of a child and must exclude judgmental statements of the adult towards the child and his situation or towards his closest social circle.

Practical use of ethical principles has limitations: conducting of evaluative research in real life cannot always assure desired adherence to ethical fundamentals. Nonetheless, it is important to understand that at any moment the specialist who conducts evaluation is choosing between observing evaluation principal's interests and maintaining the rights (security) of program participants, and, by doing so, bears personal responsibility for development of an accurate evaluation procedure and for the outcomes of use of the collected data.

Impossibility to find universal answer to which interests of a child have priority calls for attempts to search for balance in every situation. The key condition of keeping such balance is a variety of interested parties that participate in evaluation, and involving parents and children into it increases capabilities of the expert community, which can justify different positions and prove priority of one or another status of a child in a given situation.

It should also be considered that in most of the cases existing ethical norms become unable to cover all range of practical situations: sooner or later the specialists encounter questions they have no ready answers for. However, these situations become a perspective material for professional reflection and development of new ethical standards.

Conclusion

While working over the full-text version⁹ of the document, many professional groups included in evaluation of social program and projects, have joined the discussion of current issues and search for common vision in children-focused programs evaluation. This text can serve as a starting point, reference, and a basis for development and further institutionalization of professional standards in the area of child-focused program evaluation, promote further improvement in understanding of its specifics for representatives of adjacent professions, and also unification of specialists involved in the process of evaluation, into professional networks.

This document should be viewed as a first step towards development of ethical and professional standards for children-focused program evaluation. In the future, professional standards that comply with current laws and regulations and outlining a system of norms and rules of professional behavior should become practical instruments of realization and maintaining the principles outlined in the document.

At this time, use of this document in the social program evaluation practice is meant to promote:

⁹ *Declaration of the line of development...*

- Quality improvement of programs and their effectiveness for children, and also ensuring security, protection of dignity, interests and rights of the children and other participants of the program during result evaluation as well as in program implementation;
- Increase of the level of trust of all the interested parties and of the society towards the process of project and program evaluation as well as for the results of such evaluation;
- Popularization of the evaluation and building positive opinion of professional area of evaluation and evaluative activities in the society.

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