

Monitoring the Impact of Family Groups

Members of family groups often report that their participation in the family movement has led to their life changing for the better - whether that is making them feel less alone, providing peer support, allowing them to access referrals for services and supports, building them an inclusive vision, or helping them to build knowledge that led to their family member with an intellectual disability being more included in the community.

Family groups don't only make change for the family members who are part of their group, they have an impact in their community - from advocating for inclusive education and getting more children enrolled in schools to influencing community leaders and making policy change.

For family groups, this work to support transforming systems and improving the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and their families is at the core of what we do. Family groups are busy doing the work of building inclusion at the community level and are working towards a big goal, so often don't stop to

think about how to track the changes they are making and their impact on their community.

To capture the way that family groups have had a positive impact in their community, they can use simple monitoring and impact tools to understand their successes. The "Most Significant Change" strategy is one way to do that which family groups can use without having a background in monitoring or experience with data collections.

The Most Significant Change methodology designed by Rick Daves and Jess Dart was originally created to help identify the changes generated by the programs, projects and initiatives carried out by governments and civil organisations. For family groups, this strategy for collecting information about impact allows them to identify, through the voices of the people with intellectual disabilities and their families, what changes have occurred in their community and which changes are considered most significant, relevant, and important to family members.

Being able to track the impact and changes that are resulting from their actions can be a big asset to family groups - doing some monitoring of impact at the community level can help family groups to:

- ✓ **Build legitimacy with other stakeholders** - by monitoring how the group's actions have resulted in real change in people's lives, family groups can demonstrate their impact and experience and use that to take their place in advocacy spaces.
- ✓ **Access funding** - in places where family groups have access to funding to support their work, whether through grants from their local government or through their national federation, being able to demonstrate the impact the group has had helps build the case for funding community-level work.
- ✓ **Share knowledge with other family groups** - by showing how the group's actions have led to a positive change for people, this helps to build up the knowledge of what works to share with other local family groups trying to achieve the same successes.

Family groups can start using this exercise after three planning steps:

Choose what type of changes you want to learn more about

Family groups then need to define what kind of changes they want to identify. For example, the group might want to track personal changes, such as increased self-esteem, autonomy, ability to participate in family or community decisions, or attitude changes of either family members themselves or decision-makers. The group could also choose to track institutional changes, such as a change in quality of or access to public services for people with intellectual disabilities as a result of their advocacy.

Define the timeframe for the changes being tracked

Family groups must clearly state the period of time in which the changes they are identifying occurred, for example, limiting the discussion to changes that have occurred in the last year.

Choose participants

The Most Significant Change is identified through holding a workshop with a group of people who are directly involved in the program, project or initiative being monitored and asking them what changes have occurred in their lives as a result of the work. For family groups, this likely means inviting a small group of family members to come together and talk about how the work of the group has impacted their lives - this could be an existing peer support group, or a variety of family members involved in different areas of the family group's work. It could also mean bringing together other stakeholders like teachers or government officials who the family group's work has been trying to influence.

To apply the Most Significant Change methodology, family groups can:

- 1** Gather a group of up to 15 people who have participated in or benefited from a program, project, or initiative that the family group has led.
- 2** Frame the conversation - facilitators should create a safe space based on mutual respect where family members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. Remind participants that there are no wrong answers, and everyone's opinion is valued.
- 3** Invite each participant to write on an index card what the most significant change in their life has been as a result of being involved in that work - it can be a change in attitude, vision, access, material circumstances, etc.
- 4** Encourage each participant to place their index card on a wall so that everyone can read the changes they have written.

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Ask each participant to read their change out loud and explain it, while the others listen carefully.

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Ask the participants to think about the changes they have identified together, and the group agrees to choose from among the index cards which change or result they consider to be the most significant or important. Together, the group will choose a change that everyone identifies with and feels reflected in.

The result is a clear consensus from the group about the most significant impact of the group's work, identified by the group themselves. The Most Significant Change method not only tells family groups what their biggest impacts are, but also helps to show the leaders of the family group and other stakeholders what the group values and sees as most important about their work.

Family groups can then share the stories of changes that the group shared and share what they learned about the group's values to help demonstrate not only how the family group has a positive impact, but also how its work is built on the values of family members themselves.

Your turn: Monitoring the Impact of Family Groups

What type of changes do you want to learn more about and track?

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What is the timeframe for changes to be tracked?

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Who will participate?

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Reflecting on outcomes

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