

## ***The SOUL Record™ in action: Case study examples***

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### **1. Introduction**

The SOUL Record™ was researched and developed via a Norfolk Voluntary Sector consortium and The Research Centre, City College Norwich. It was launched in February 2006 and is used by more than 800 users across the UK and Republic of Ireland. The toolkit allows the measurement of soft outcome progression and informal learning, such as increases in confidence, self-esteem and motivation and has separate sections relevant to use with children, young people and adults. The sections for children and young people allow the measurement of soft outcome progression against the five outcome areas of Every Child Matters while also being RARPA (*Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement*) compliant (an LSC initiative).

The SOUL Record™ utilises three methodologies to collect data on soft outcome progression; solution focused questionnaires, one-to-one worksheets and observational techniques. Data collected on individuals, or groups of people, could then be collated using the paper based methods or, alternatively, via the Spreadsheet Results Package (SRP) that is supplied as part of The SOUL Record™ package. This allows the calculation of totals and averages, and presents the data easily in graphical form as evidence for funders, trustees, etc. as required.

The Research Centre conducted a review of practices regarding how The SOUL Record™ was being used across a range of organisations, with the potential of identifying areas for improvement in the toolkit, its application and areas where The SOUL Record™ had been used to aid or enhance the objectives of an organisation.

### **2. Research Methods**

This short term project collected information on the practices and experiences from a range of organisations and users who had implemented The SOUL Record™. Whilst identifying each organisation's method of practice, the author was also keen to identify examples of best / most effective practice, common issues / concerns and any other recurring themes.

A range of appropriate organisations were identified and approached. Each organisation was selected using criteria placed on the kinds of client groups each organisation worked with, where their funding was acquired from and how long they had been using The SOUL Record™. Four organisations were approached, all of whom agreed to take part in the study. These being; 1/ Victim Support Norfolk, 2/ Family Action WellFamily Service Swaffham, Norfolk, 3/ St. Michael's Junior School, Norwich, Norfolk and 4/ Red2Green, Cambridge.

The names of appropriate employees from those organisations who had been trained in the use of The SOUL Record™ and / or were in charge of practice were identified and requested to confirm their willingness to take part in the study and permitting themselves to be directly quoted within this article.

The project employed qualitative research methods, with semi-structured, face-to-face interviews conducted in autumn 2008 with those key personnel from within the identified organisations. The interviews lasted approximately forty minutes and were recorded on a digital voice recorder. The recordings were initially transcribed and have been presented as case studies within this report.

### **3. Results**

The method of practice, organisation benefits, best practice and recurrent issues of concern

have been presented in each case study in turn. The overarching themes raised from each case study and key observations relating to the use of The SOUL Record™ have been discussed more generally in the 'Discussion' section. The case studies have been presented the order of, firstly, the organisation with the longest involvement with The SOUL Record™ to, lastly, the organisation with the least involvement time (implemented in June, 2007).

### 3.1 Victim Support Norfolk

Victim Support Norfolk is the local branch of the independent national charity helping both victims and witnesses of crime cope with its effects across the UK. It offered free, confidential support and information to help people deal with their experiences, whether the crime has been reported to the police or not.

Victim Support Norfolk used The SOUL Record™ across three of its services and activities; these were 1/ the Vulnerable and Intimidated Witness Service (both in crown and magistrates courts), 2/ the Young Person's Project and 3/ volunteer training and evaluation.

In late 2006, Victim Support Norfolk received funding from the Office of Criminal Justice Reform (OCJR) to support the implementation and evaluation of the Vulnerable and Intimidated Witness Service. Victim Support Norfolk's Witness Service offers "...information and support to witnesses, victims, their families and friends in every criminal court in Norfolk." (Victim Support, no date).

Part of the funding allowed Victim Support Norfolk to develop a specific version of The SOUL Record™ for assessing the needs of witnesses, tailoring the service to suit individual needs and evidencing the impact of the service. The 'Witness Service SOUL Record questionnaire', was divided into three categories; 1/ 'information', 2/ 'emotional support' and 3/ 'practical help'. This had been developed from the standard SOUL Record package for adults, which contained

categories of 'attitude', 'personal / interpersonal' and 'practical'.

The Project Manager for the Vulnerable and Intimidated Witness Service reported that:

*"We're still using The SOUL Record™ with nearly all, or most, people"*

They also stated that:

*"I find it personally very useful when I'm doing visits myself for extracting information".*

The Project Manager used The SOUL Record™ as early as possible when meeting a witness as it helped her to get to know the person better and understand their individual needs.

*"Actually going through it with someone, it makes sure that you don't forget anything, that you've covered everything and, and just for trying to assess the needs, put together a plan on what you're going to work on together".*

They also described The SOUL Record™ as being able to be used as a diagnostic tool, stating:

*"It brings out the things that they're most worried about and when you know what to talk about as well and where to focus your support with them".*

Representatives from other organisations had exhibited pre-training concerns about the methods, suggesting that the approach was too structured. However, the Vulnerable and Intimidated Witness Service Project Manager alleviated such concerns when addressing this issue and stated:

*"I don't think the questionnaire is a hindrance, I think it depends how you do it because if I think there's certain things that come up in conversation anyway then I just do them [the statements on the questionnaire] in a slightly different order".*

The Project Manager valued greatly the conversational method adopted when using The SOUL Record™ and how they “...wouldn’t just ever pass it to them and say can you just circle yourself on this...”, in part, because “I think a lot of the young people, or elderly people, would not know where to start, so would just circle fairly randomly”.

It was also reported that witnesses responded to The SOUL Record™ positively because it “...helps them get across what they are feeling and get across what they want to say”. The more honest an individual was about how they felt the better the results would be, and it would simplify the process of completing a questionnaire also. Concerns have previously been raised about how honest a person would be, but were defended by the Project Manager when they stated that:

*“...with a one-on-one setting, especially with vulnerable people, they don’t mind about the lack of anonymity because they’re telling you anyway and you’ve already explained confidentiality to them and that it goes no further than Victim Support”.*

SOUL Record data were analysed regularly to “...review how things are going and whether we need to change”. The data collected by the Witness Service was currently only used for internal purposes, but the Regional Manager for Victim Support suggested that this may change:

*“There will come a time when we will have to report because the money now funding the scheme comes from the Department of the Home Office through our national centre”.*

Although no other national Victim Support Witness Services were presently using The SOUL Record™, the Eastern Regional Manager spoke of a new ‘Service Review Regime’ or inspection where use of The SOUL Record™ had been recorded as “...an example of good practice...” because “...everyone is still struggling with the same issue of how do you demonstrate you’ve achieved some impact?”. The Eastern Region

Manager was confident when saying “...we will continue to say in funding bids we will use this as a methodology” because it meets both the needs of the client and addresses Victim Supports business model.

The Youth Development Worker for the Young Person’s project at Victim Support Norfolk, and their volunteers also use The SOUL Record™ with “...all of the young victims”. The Youth Development Worker used the ‘Young Persons’ questionnaire as a getting to know you exercise and reported that:

*“It puts us in good stead of talking and getting our young victim to open up without asking questions directly”.*

Also as part of the Young Person’s Project, a Victim Activity Break had been put together. The break was a two day and one night residential break for young victims of crime. The SOUL Record™ was used at the beginning of the break, before the young people have had the opportunity to speak to many people or make friends, and again at the end of the break. The Youth Development Worker reported the questionnaire to be useful because “It shows us the distance travelled over the period of time they’re at the camp”.

Funding for the Victim Activity Breaks was not sourced from mainstream finances, so had to be raised separately. The evidence collected from The SOUL Record™ questionnaires “...shows what we are doing is helping the young people and it’s the evidence we need to obtain the funding”. The evidence was also used as part of evaluative and quality control measures:

*“It also shows us what’s worked, what’s not, and which bit of the camp we either need to adapt or work a bit harder on”.*

After collating the results from one activity break, the Youth Development Worker gave the results to other members of staff who took part in the break and asked if they could match the overall scores from the questionnaires to the young people who were

at the camp. After working with a group of young people over two days, and learning the young people's characteristics, "We could name eight out of the ten people who were on that break and match the scores up to that person; it worked that well".

When asked about funding for Victim Support Norfolk and what prospective funders felt about organisations using The SOUL Record™, the regional manager stated "It's perfectly acceptable". The SOUL Record™ was detailed in the original bid for the Vulnerable and Intimidated Witness Service, which was successful and the use of The SOUL Record™ "...was picked up when we had to bid for the continuation money, not direct to the Home Office, but to the national funding panel for Victim Support".

One major tip from Victim Support Norfolk's use of The SOUL Record™ was from a volunteer perspective. Although the issue of funding was important to Victim Support's management, it doesn't register as being of importance to a volunteer. Trying to explain the use of The SOUL Record™ as a tool to provide evidence for funding alone could have a negative effect on its use by volunteers. The regional manager suggested that:

*"If you try and persuade volunteers that you need to do this because we need to have some evidence to get some money for this project, it's of less benefit than if you say this will actually help you deliver the service and it will actually help you find out where this young person or elderly witness is".*

When speaking of the voluntary sector in broader terms, the regional manager felt that the recording of soft outcomes and the provision of evidence was:

*"...a long term process about culture change in so many ways because what you're actually doing in the voluntary sector is moving people into an evidence based practice, and they're not used to it. They're not used to being asked to say well what are we*

*getting for our money?"*

The culture change was not an unfamiliar one to Victim Support Norfolk, as the regional manager reminisced when stating:

*"In the past, Victim Support haven't been able to tell them [the funder] what they're getting for their money. You give your output, well we've had that number of referrals and we've had that number of contacts, we've sent that number of letters, I mean, they're all outputs, no outcome".*

Although the outputs, processes or hard outcomes tell funders something about the level of activity an organisation has had, it doesn't evidence if that activity was of any quality. The questions that should be asked were not 'How many referrals have we had?', but rather, as the regional manager recommended, "What good did they do?" The SOUL Record™ could help to measure that gap and aid the evidence based culture change across the voluntary sector and beyond.

The quality evidence that The SOUL Record™ provided had been identified as good practice in the most recent Victim Support Norfolk Area Inspection Report from the Quality & Standards Department at Victim Support National Office. The report stated that Victim Support Norfolk was:

*"...commended for the development of an innovative approach to evaluating the effectiveness of its services".* (Victim Support, 2006).

When trying to identify if Victim Support Norfolk was making a difference, the report concluded that:

*"...initial findings from the SOUL evaluations were indicating that the intervention of Victim Support Norfolk was making a tangible qualitative difference to people's lives" (Victim Support, 2006).*

In the future, when Victim Support Norfolk had increased funds from the Home Office,

there was the belief that the use of The SOUL Record™ would expand across other projects within the organisation. The organisation had recently been successful in securing £107,000 of Government funding to expand the current Young Victim Project and the bid for funding "...naturally included the intended use of SOUL methodology" stated the Regional Manager.

When discussing if The SOUL Record™ worked for the different projects, the Project Manager for the Vulnerable and Intimidated Witness Service summarised by stating:

*"I think as a tool to meet the requirements of a service which is dealing with a lot of different ranges of people, I think it works very well".*

They continued:

*"It's easy. It can be used in any setting as well".*

The Regional Manager hoped that in the future The SOUL Record™ would "...not move from being a simple, easy to use, and cheap way..." to evidence an organisation's work and measure soft outcomes because "The value to the voluntary sector is anyone can use it".

### **3.2 Family Action WellFamily Service Swaffham**

Family Action, formerly Family Welfare Association, is England's leading family charity and had supported families since 1869. Family Action (Family Action, 2008a) claimed to support "...over 45,000 families every year" and tackle complex and difficult issues, which included "...domestic abuse, mental health problems, learning disabilities and severe financial hardship". Family Action had identified that the issues mentioned could "...have a huge impact on the wellbeing and development of children; and on the ability of parents and carers to make a positive contribution to their community". Family Action work with the whole family and help them find solutions to their problems enabling them to "...become safer, stronger and more optimistic about their future".

During the research and development phase of The SOUL Project, the Swaffham WellFamily Service took part to help the researcher and the other voluntary sector organisations to create what was to become The SOUL Record™. Family Action defined their WellFamily Service as a health based service that worked "...to improve whole family wellbeing by reducing stress, improving health, providing support to individuals to end abusive relationships and improving family relationships" (Family Action, 2008b).

The WellFamily Service Project Manager recalled how they and the service were involved with The SOUL Record™ from its inception, in 2004/05, during the action research process:

*"We were going to the meetings where we were developing the questionnaire and then we took it away, used it, and came back to adapt the questionnaire further".*

The SOUL Record™ questionnaires had been used on the 'Strengthening Families' programme. Both parents and their children attended the programme together, with the parents having completed the 'Parenting' questionnaire and the children the 'Young Persons Getting to Know You' questionnaire. The Project Manager recalled:

*"We had quite a small group, there was about five maybe six, and two issues came up really".*

When completing the final questionnaire one of the young people who attended was "...in an absolutely foul mood". They completed the questionnaire but because they were 'feeling down' and had completed the questionnaire in a 'negative way', the Project Manager felt "...it skewed all their results... [and] ...because it was a small group" that it had severely impacted on the average scores that were used as evidence of progression. However, on an individual level, progression could still be evidenced for other participants in the group. The second issue identified was that a few of the statements on the questionnaire used were not appropriate for

all participants in the group. The 'Parenting' questionnaire had statements about 'being happy in relationships'. It was a generic statement that permitted discussion and conversation to be pursued in to areas relevant to that participant you were talking to. However, this could lead to awkward scenarios, such as:

*"One mum was recently widowed so she got upset, and today we had a young girl who's in the refuge, fleeing domestic violence and she got quite hot under the collar".*

The SOUL Record™ was also used as part of the Webster Stratton Parenting group, which the organisation also ran. The Project Manager enthused that:

*"For Webster Stratton, it always works well because it always shows some change in the right direction. It might only be a little bit, but that doesn't matter does it? It's just showing some movement and progress in a very simple way".*

A project worker for the WellFamily Service had recently attended SOUL Record User training and considered that it "...was a very good tool for getting conversations going". The project worker went on to state:

*"It was a very good tool for breaking the ice and getting into conversations about different aspects of their lives".*

The project worker explained how clients would present one problem, for example anger, when joining a group, but as they worked with the client it became evident that anger wasn't the core problem but rather separation or family issues were. Working with clients over longer time periods often raised deep rooted / embedded conditions, such as obsessive compulsive disorder. The project worker thought they couldn't use a tool like The SOUL Record™ in these scenarios because one was "...measuring different things at the start and end of working with the person". However, the Project Manager countered and explained that:

*"If it's 'just' about emotional wellbeing,*

*which that main questionnaire is just really around ... no matter what the problem is, you hope they're going to feel happier at the end. It's looking at the bigger picture rather than that specific problem that they've come with".*

The Project Manager and their team used The SOUL Record™ with some young carers but recalled "...we approached it all wrong because we left them to it, so they were making patterns!" The SOUL Record™ was best used as a conversational tool and the Project Manager identified that:

*"We should have spent longer with them, but you live and learn don't you?!"*

A case was cited by the Project Manager when working with a young boy over a period of time, where after completing the first questionnaire they were, apparently, "...quite honest...". The Project Manager had also taken a SOUL Record 'Progress Sheet' to the meeting and used this to track the individual's progress. When the boy asked what the progress sheet was for, it was explained and the score was summed by both. On seeing a score of 75, the boy was reported as saying; "I got seventy five! I've never had seventy five for anything!" Although the Project Manager hadn't planned to use the Progress Sheet in that way, the project worker considered "...that's achieved something! It increased his self esteem!" The Project Manager agreed that "It did do him good because his self esteem was rock bottom and he was pleased he had seventy five".

When asked how service users responded to completing The SOUL Record™, a second project worker with the WellFamily Service stated; "They were ok. They didn't seem to mind at all". The Project Manager added: "We always explain to them why we're doing it as well. We say we've got to evidence that what we're doing is useful". The Project Manager thought that the honest explanation was useful "...because otherwise I think they wonder what they're doing it for".

The second project worker felt that as with any data collection, "...confidentiality is a big issue". They commented as soon as you give someone a questionnaire, it was picked up straight away by clients who would state: "If you're asking me these questions, why, who for and where does it go". Issues of culture within the sector where the WellFamily service operated were raised by the Project Manager and agreed by the second project worker:

*"I would've been in that camp, but it's not the reality of the world we're in, that's the unfortunate bit. If we want funding to carry on helping, we've got to play the game".*

The Project Manager had received comments from various WellFamily service funders that:

*"We are ahead of the game in we're not only acknowledging that we need to evidence our work, but we have some process for doing it".*

The Project Manager also spoke of the Service Level Agreements that WellFamily Swaffham had with the Children's Fund, Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). They stated that in all documentation about funding, The SOUL Record™ would be used to form part of the evidence for projects. Specifically referring to the Children's Fund, the Project Manager stated:

*"When it comes to the Parenting course, I just say we're using SOUL and that's it. Children's Fund are happy with that".*

One feature of The SOUL Record™ that the Project Manager was particularly keen on was the graphs produced by the Spreadsheet Results Package, stating:

*"Once you get the graphs they are so exciting. ... They're just brilliant for the evidence that you need. They're a picture of what's happened".*

Family Action Swaffham asked their clients to complete a 'Satisfaction Questionnaire', and the idea and benchmarking for graphs from

the data and using them for funders actually "...comes from SOUL". When discussing how they felt graphs created from The SOUL Record™ Spreadsheet Results Package were received by funders, the Project Manager said:

*"You don't really have to read the numbers. You can see the comparisons and it's quick".*

Family Action had recently conducted a national survey across all of its services about how different projects had evaluated their work and with which tools. The Project Manager stated:

*"The SOUL Record™ was on there as one of the options to choose and actually it scored quite highly".*

It was not only WellFamily Swaffham that were using The SOUL Record™. From The SOUL Record™ user database, multiple projects run by Family Action from across the country were identified and had received The SOUL Record™ User training and were actively using it to evaluate projects and evidence their clients progression.

### 3.3 St. Michael's Junior School

St. Michael's Junior School serves Bowthorpe, an area on the suburbs of Norwich, Norfolk, with approximately 300 pupils aged from 7 to 11. The school had been recognised as being in an area of "...considerable social and economic disadvantages." (Ofsted, 2008). The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals was high while the percentage of pupils identified with learning difficulties and / or disabilities or who need social or emotional support was over twice the national average (Norfolk Schools, 2007). Some classes were made up almost entirely by pupils with additional needs. It was also reported that "...approximately 15% of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and about half of these are at an early stage of learning to speak English" (Norfolk Schools, 2007). Pupils were transferred to the school upon commencement of Year 3 from several infant feeder schools in the area. It was not uncommon for a large number of pupils to be

admitted to the school part way through years and key stage. The school, which was formally a middle school, became a junior school from September 2007. The Headteacher of the school, stated the school was in "...an area of considerable social deprivation". When describing the pupils and the families of pupils who were admitted into the school, the Headteacher explained that many of the families were "...very, very needy, with children bringing a huge amount of extra baggage to school, which can be a barrier to learning".

The Headteacher and their staff had recorded a considerable amount of extra work in order to raise the schools overall standards. Included within the staff team was the appointment of a Senior Learning Mentor / Family support worker at the school. This Senior Learning Mentor had previously worked with pupils within the Earlham area of Norwich and had been trained to use The SOUL Record™ as part of a previous project conducted by The Research Centre (see Frere-Smith, 2006). The Senior Learning Mentor introduced The SOUL Record™ to the Headteacher of St. Michael's Junior School, which recorded an instant impact with the Headteacher being impressed by the toolkit:

*"... [Headteacher] was very surprised and very keen because a lot of the work that we do with children is difficult to monitor and measure and the actual package was easier for people to actually comprehend the areas we were looking at to try and improve and help the children on".*

The Headteacher was described as being enthusiastic about the potential use of The SOUL Record™ in the school as:

*"...nothing else really seemed to fit. You do the Boxall profile for example but it didn't really fit what we needed it to fit and the areas that [Senior Learning Mentor] was working on whereas this is more specific and you can actually show that." (Senior learning mentor, 2008).*

The Senior Learning Mentor used The SOUL Record™, initially, as a means of getting to know children. Referrals to the Senior Learning Mentor could either come from the school, from the parent or from the child themselves. On describing the child's initial contact with The SOUL Record™, and the use of the 'Getting to Know You' questionnaire, the Senior Learning Mentor observed that children were:

*"...quite often aware of an area they may need help with but perhaps haven't expressed it at school or to their parents as an individual, so that has certainly helped to try and identify areas".*

When using The SOUL Record™, it could be applied to look at a child's attainment level but the Senior Learning Mentor had used the package, predominantly, to investigate pupils social and emotional difficulties. Its effectiveness in this role was confirmed by the Senior Learning Mentor when they stated that it "...fits in really, really well". Because The SOUL Record™ was constructed upon solution focused therapy techniques, it meant that "...for a lot of the children, they, for the first time, actually start to look at themselves and think about themselves because of the type of questioning". (Senior learning mentor, 2008). It was also stated by the Senior Learning Mentor that the children were keen to complete the questionnaires because:

*"...they like the types of questions as it's showing that I [Senior Learning Mentor] am interested in them, and they get a degree of opportunity to talk and extend from those apart from just using it as a scaling".*

The individual children also liked to see their own progression over time. The questionnaires were completed, usually, on three occasions, after which a graph would be produced illustrating the progress made by each child. The Senior Learning Mentor added:

*"Our children do like to see themselves make progress. They also like the colour side of it I think. They*



*see this lovely colour display and the next time you do it they like to look at it and say I have improved in that and that and that, and that's the way in which we talk about all things, so it sort of fits in across the curriculum as well. We all know how well the child is doing and that's a huge thing for the child."*

Both the Senior Learning Mentor and Headteacher went on to agree that before implementing The SOUL Record™ questionnaire, for those children with poor behavior, "...you would always address the behavior side whereas actually it's their self esteem or perhaps because they don't feel safe or whatever, so it helps you be more focused on your support".

An extended use of The SOUL Record™ was the ability to monitor carefully individual children they worked with, such as in one particular case that was cited:

*"It did lead me to a child who was self harming having started, and then revisiting, and finding out why they were feeling less positive about themselves ... therefore intervention was able to be put in place" (Senior learning mentor, 2008).*

Any concerns with children would be raised with supporting evidence provided from The SOUL Record™. This could be reported directly to the Headteacher, if any action was required. Regularly the Senior Learning Mentor utilised The SOUL Record™ evidence during case meetings for guidance about the child, which would be reported back to social services for them to decide on any future actions.

The evidence produced had also been presented to Ofsted during inspections at the school in April 2008.

*"It was good to be able to have that material to show an Ofsted inspection that we are meeting the criteria of Every Child Matters and that we are, as a school, trying our best to address the needs of the child and what they*

*need" (Senior learning mentor, 2008).*

Post the Ofsted inspection, the school was rated in all areas as either Grade 1 (Outstanding) or 2 (Good). Considering the school had been placed into special measures, in 2001, this was a massive improvement. The Headteacher explained how the use of The SOUL Record™ had had an impact in the latest Ofsted inspection, stating:

*"I think that to get an Ofsted report like that a number of things have to happen and this was evidence that we know the school and our children really well. That is very, very important in any school but particularly that's what the Ofsted inspectors look for, and if you can prove that you know your children, that you've got all that evidence there, and you are using what you have found. The assessment is only one part of it but what it means is that you can then identify how to work from there and which intervention you need to put in place so that then shows how targeted your support is and that is obviously what was effective evidencing the need for Ofsted and we're using SOUL to that purpose." (Headteacher, 2008).*

Before the Ofsted inspectors arrived, the school had completed their Self Evaluation Form (SEF). SOUL Record data were used to help complete the form and was considered particularly useful for the 'Care, Guidance and Support' section, where the school had graded themselves 'Outstanding'. The Ofsted inspectorate concurred with the school in grading the school as 'Outstanding' in this area. Ofsted officially stated in their report that:

*"The arrangements to care for, guide and support pupils are a significant strength in this school ...[and stated that the role of the Senior Learning Mentor as being]... pivotal in these aspects of the school's work..." (Ofsted, 2008).*

The report went on to highlight:

*"The support for vulnerable pupils and their families is exemplary. The provision for pupils who need extra help of any kind is managed very well"* (Ofsted, 2008).

The Headteacher stated that "Frequently, you have to look at things in terms of the impact of your resources, whether that's human or otherwise, and some things are quite hard to evidence; to be able to see, well actually, that was a worthwhile appointment or a worthwhile spend". The use of The SOUL Record™ within the school, especially in the role of the Senior learning mentor, allowed the Headteacher to track the progress of children in relation to their intervention as well as confirming the need for the post of Senior Learning Mentor within the school. It was stated that The SOUL Record™:

*"...shows us that, yes, we have a high level of need because obviously that comes out at the initial assessments, and that because of [Senior Learning Mentor] work, she actually has a huge impact, because all these children then go on from this point, up to this high point, so you can see the value and it's a measurable form of somebody's impact on a number of fronts so that's particularly beneficial"* (Headteacher, 2008).

During times when both educational and voluntary sector organisations were being asked to provide ever more evidence of the impacts from their work, the Headteacher recalled how previously they simply used anecdotal notes as evidence. Now, however, they had 'hard' evidence, with The SOUL Record™ providing a:

*"...huge bulk of evidence to say our children do come in very low, it's not just a feeling, it's not just a gut feeling, but you've actually got that data to provide"* (Headteacher, 2008).

It was stated that from a school management perspective, being able to provide evidence:

*"...has been the most significant*

*aspect that actually we can now prove it we now have this data and we can now see the impact of what we are doing at the school"*. (Headteacher, 2008).

When asked if external agencies other than Ofsted were interested in the schools SOUL Record data, the Headteacher responded positively. Since the commencement of the Senior learning mentor, the school had received £60,000 plus the salary costs for the Senior Learning Mentor post from the Neighborhood Renewal Fund (NRF). The Headteacher defended the award of these funds when stating:

*"It's quite a large amount of funding we've been awarded from NRF and of course they need to see the impact of their work and the value, so The SOUL Record™ has been used for that. I've taken it along to the assessors who monitor the work that we're doing and they were really interested in that"*.

In the future, the school hoped to be able to provide more support and extend their work utilising The SOUL Record™ to include parents / families. The Senior Learning Mentor stating that:

*"I've not tackled that area yet, but I'm looking forward to it and quite often I find that the need of the children is just a spin off from the need of the parents"*.

The Headteacher supported the statement by identifying working with parents as:

*"...such a needy area and once you've started to address one issue, and through addressing that, you realise actually that there is more, there is always more and we now see what else we need to do and that's huge amounts of work with parents."*

### **3.4 Red2Green**

Established as a registered charity, in 1997, Red2Green were "...to increase opportunities in leisure, education and work for people with

a wide range of disabilities in Cambridgeshire” (Red2Green, no date). Red2Green work with people aged 14+ who have learning disabilities, mental health problems, physical disabilities, sensory impairments, dementia or social communication disorders. They aim to “...raise awareness of the potential of people with disabilities to make a positive and valuable contribution to society” (Red2Green, no date). The organisation’s website reported that approximately 600 people with disabilities attend various Red2Green projects each week. The organisation recorded approximately 50 employees, 70 volunteers and had a board with 10 trustees. Red2Green was involved in a range of projects / activities, which included:

- *Aspirations*: Clients with communication disorders, such as Aspergers Syndrome, learn skills and strategies to help them gain employment and further their independent living skills.
- *Options*: A day service where adults with learning difficulties take part in a range of activities from drumming to gardening.
- *Red2Greenhouse*: a garden based project for adults with disabilities and children at risk of exclusion from school.

With such a diverse range of activities and client groups, the acting Chief Executive of Red2Green stated:

*“...projects are very different, the client groups are very different, the way you interact with the client groups is very different and the level of time that we work with them is very different. ...it’s made for interesting comparisons in how the different managers have got on with it”.*

The managers of each project had all implemented The SOUL Record™ with varying degrees of success. A volunteer at Red2Green, who had been brought in to ensure The SOUL Record™ was used and

implemented correctly supported the view of the Chief Executive when stating:

*“We’ve got results from various projects but there is only one that could be used for example in writing to funders saying about progression”.*

The Red2Greenhouse project was identified as having the most success with Red2Green being pleased with the results post implementation of The SOUL Record™. The volunteer stated:

*“Looking at the whole group, we got some reasonable results that made a lovely bar chart”.*

Red2Greenhouse was partly funded by Cambridge Regional College, with clients undertaking a range of horticultural, health and safety and team work qualifications. The Chief Executive remarked how The SOUL Record™ “...goes very well with all the portfolio building” that clients have to do to achieve their qualifications, and went on to state that the SOUL Record™ evidence fitted well “...with the whole RARPA [Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement] compliance we need to do for the contracts with Cambridge Regional College”. It was also stated, enthusiastically, that “...the two dovetail together so well”. The Chief Executive explained that with the RARPA process “...we have to set a series of goals that they [the client] have to meet each term”. The course documentation and The SOUL Record™ “...literally could be the same piece of paper”, as the two systems overlap closely. Red2Green were encouraging staff to use The SOUL Record™ rather than alternative documentation.

The Aspirations project worked with people with Aspergers Syndrome. The clients completed a standard SOUL Record ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaire on at least two, sometimes three, occasions. The volunteer stated that “...there are certain issues of how the manager managed it”. One of the problems identified by the Aspirations group was how the Project Manager used “...the same sheets on both occasions ... once they did it in red pen, once they did it in blue pen”.

The problem with this system was that the client would tick the same boxes on the second occasion as they had the first time they completed the questionnaire. Therefore, no progression was measured. The clients were also left to complete the sheets on their own, which, in this scenario, was not best practice for utilising The SOUL Record™. After this incorrect use had been identified, the Aspirations Project Manager was advised that the next time the questionnaire was completed by clients different sheets should be used between the first and second surveys, and that the clients should be supported while completing the questionnaires.

The SOUL Record™ questionnaire had been adapted for use with the Aspirations group previously. Rather than using a scoring scale from one to six, weather symbols were used; a thunder storm to depict a 'strongly disagree' through to bright sunshine for 'strongly agree'. In terms of assessment, the Chief Executive spoke of the client group as being "...tricky ... particularly with Aspergers Syndrome, they don't manifest their social difficulties in the same way". The Aspirations Project Manager and staff believed that the change from numbers to weather symbols had benefited the client group by permitting them to complete questionnaires. The Chief Executive reported that they had spoken with the Aspirations Project Manager and were "...certainly not planning to change" how they used the questionnaires in terms of scoring in the future.

The Options project group used The SOUL Record™ observation sheets to identify client progression. The users of the observer sheets found the statements "...that were around things like 'arrives punctually'; they all scored very highly on because they all come here by taxis ... they don't have any control over that". Other observation sheets were available in The SOUL Record™ and a consultancy service was also available that allowed organisations to create sheets tailored to their own needs. This was suggested to Red2Green as an area of development but not taken up. Goals were set by the observers for an in-house system,

but were not consistent and it was not identified in most cases if a client had achieved their goal. With the goals that had been set, the volunteer observed that some "...weren't SMART" and that they needed "...to do some thinking about what constitutes a good goal to set, because in some cases it was 'so and so needs to increase their confidence'. We're like, ok, yes, that's lovely, but how are you going to know that they've increased one notch rather than now they're super confident". Hence, there was a need to show that "...there was a slight difference, something between 47 points on average and 49 points on average but not a significant difference for the size of the group".

Red2Green also get some of their clients to run a shop. The volunteer explained that:

*"I've just had the results back this morning from the shop but they've only done two of the 'Getting to Know You' questionnaires; one the basic one and one Raising Aspirations so there is two questionnaires for each person, but there's no second of each".*

No progression had been measured yet. Staff and volunteers in the shop had been asked to ensure that a second questionnaire for one or both subject areas was completed as soon as possible.

The volunteer summarised overall about the implementation of The SOUL Record™ within Red2Green, stating:

*"there's one good area and some practice that we can improve and then we might get some better results!"*

Drawing from these experiences, the Chief Executive considered that although staff were happy to use The SOUL Record™ with their clients, they were not completing any of the goal setting exercises. The Chief Executive accepted some responsibility for the varying success of implementation, stating:

*"I hadn't been following it up with them until [the volunteer] was actually checking that things were going*

*according to plan”.*

To resolve the varying levels of success, the volunteer was preparing a report on each project / activity, identifying what issues / problems were encountered when implementing or maintaining The SOUL Record™ in each area. They were also to provide recommendations and suggestions for improving use. The volunteer and Chief Executive were to feed this information back into the different projects / activities to ensure a better and more consistent use of The SOUL Record™ to improve evidence gathering in the future. The Chief Executive concluded that:

*“I think doing analysis has given us some pointers about how we implemented it not quite as well as we could have done and making sure that the managers, when it's redone, do it better, and that should give us better results”.*

The use of The SOUL Record™ by Red2Green would continue to be highlighted in all funding applications that the organisation submitted, because funders “...want to know how you're going to involve clients in their own development”. The Chief Executive confirmed that “It's gone in everything from ESF applications through to individual trusts”.

#### **4. Discussion**

Conclusions could be drawn from the experiences and discussion points raised from each of the four case studies presented. However, it was the key, recurring themes present across case studies that have been identified and discussed here.

Both Victim Support Norfolk and Family Action WellFamily Service Swaffham identified The SOUL Record™ as a useful icebreaker, initiating conversations and maintaining them. By using The SOUL Record™ as a conversational tool, as it was designed, rather than a questionnaire completed by unsupported individuals, its

value as a diagnostic tool and a method for focusing tailored support to clients / pupils was highlighted by Victim Support Norfolk, Family Action WellFamily Service Swaffham and St. Michaels Junior School. Also reported by St. Michaels Junior School was how the reflective, solution focused nature of the statements used within The SOUL Record™ had really helped children to think about themselves and how they were feeling.

All the organisations spoke of how The SOUL Record™ evidenced the progress their clients / pupils had made and how they were able to utilise this evidence. Both Family Action WellFamily Service Swaffham and St. Michaels Junior School had recorded increases in self esteem in their clients / pupils, especially when the results from questionnaires were fed back to those individuals and they were able to see the progress they had made too. Victim Support Norfolk, in particular, had used results and evidence from The SOUL Record™ to establish where their programmes were working and, potentially, where they needed adaptation to address the needs of client's as part of a quality control process. St. Michael's Junior School used SOUL evidence to measure the impact of a particular post and the impact that intervention had had on pupils to inform their decision as to whether it was worth continuing to finance those actions. The SOUL evidence had also been used in reports for Ofsted inspectors and to report on individual children's welfare to Social Services.

The SOUL Record™ had been used by organisations to successfully identify progress for, or against, one or multiples of Every Child Matters, Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA), Self Evaluation Form (SEF) or Ofsted inspections. Outputs from the results package had been used or discussed with a multitude of funders, which included the Home Office, Victim Support National Office, Children's Fund, Cambridge Regional College, European Social Fund, Primary Care Trust and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. These funders, via the four organisations, were accepting of the evidence presented to

them from The SOUL Record™.

However, to gain robust data and maximum benefits, it was important that The SOUL Record™ was correctly used and managed by organisation, which may require a tailored version of some data collection sheets. The implementation process had been handled and managed with varying degrees of success across the four organisations. It was evident from those organisations where thorough training had been received by staff, and where support / mentoring had been followed up by management on a regular basis, the best use of The SOUL Record™ had taken place and the most useful and clear evidence was able to be produced.

With those organisations working across the voluntary sector, a degree of culture change was identified, as people who were not used to having to evidence the impact of their work were now having to. Ground level staff and volunteers, in particular, were of the mind set that they were employed to help and support people, not provide evidence for funders. Victim Support Norfolk highlighted how they had “sold” The SOUL Record™ to their staff and volunteers as a tool that was implemented to help them support individuals. The case studies had shown that it was important to ensure staff and volunteers understood that utilising The SOUL Record™ served dual purposes. Firstly, an organisational need to gather evidence for funders; secondly, and potentially more importantly, it provided multiple advantages to their work, either as a semi-structured, solution focused conversational aid to facilitate their

interventions or its use as a diagnostic tool to tailor their support for individuals. The results could also be highly motivational for their clients / pupils as well as staff and volunteers as it was possible to see for themselves the progress or impact they had made.

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