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Towards a collective understanding of Social Cost Benefit and Value

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to argue that a common understanding of the terms social value, social cost benefit, social return on investment etc. would be useful for those seeking to engage with the topic in the fields of health, wellbeing and early family intervention

Design/method/approach – The article considers a commissioned study delivered by the authors which reviews the literature pertinent to this field.

Findings- The authors suggest that there is considerable confusion with regard to the meaning of terms which are used almost interchangeably in the fields of health, wellbeing and early family intervention.

Originality/value – The authors put forward a model to provide consistency of meaning across three levels of interventions.

Key words Social Value, Family Intervention; Well-being

Paper type Policy

Introduction

In an environment where ‘Social Value’ is arguably an increasingly crucial part of every bid, evaluation or business case what exactly does ‘Social Value’ mean and furthermore, how do we pin it down? This may seem a question with an obvious answer to some but as more and more organisations are required to consider their activities through the lens of Social Value, not least as a result of the Public Services (Social Value) 2012 Act, the possible understanding of the term is as varied as the organisations seeking to gain a grip of it.

The research which is the subject of this paper sought to provide a guide for an organisation bidding for Better Start funding, a funding programme delivered by the Big Lottery Fund UK (2014). It was commissioned by Better Start Bradford (BSB) in order to inform the BSB Programme regarding social value and cost/benefit approaches, the better to enter into discussions with the Preventonomics team

at LSE, the chosen advisers to the Big Lottery Fund UK regarding development of cost/benefit approaches for the funding.

Scope of the research project

The research project sought to identify any cost-benefit analysis information already available for the specific BSB activities proposed in their programme. It further went on to identify options for methodologies for estimating efficiencies e.g. cost-benefit analysis (CBA), Social Return on Investment (SROI), and other 'social value' approaches for the proposed activities.

The project had a further objective, which is not considered as a part of this piece, namely to identify what measures would be needed to meet the needs of the LSE "Preventonomics" approach when activities are being commissioned/set up. Recommendations were made to BSB but do not form part of these considerations.

Context of the research project

BSB is one of five areas in England newly funded through the Big Lottery UK's 'Fulfilling Lives – A Better Start' programme. BSB aims to improve outcomes for babies and children living in the most disadvantaged areas of Bradford. The Programme area comprises of three Local Authority wards, home to a population of 63,375 at the time of the bid submission and approximately one third of the BSB population was under 18 years of age at that time (Bradford Trident, 20114a).

The Executive Summary of the BSB bid to the Big Lottery identified the outcomes of the Programme as follows, *"Our outcomes reflect those of the Big Lottery Fund's Better Start Programme; to improve the life chances of babies and children; to improve social and emotional development, nutrition, language and communication development; and to enact a system change"* p3.

The BSB Programme will run for 10 years. There are five strands to the Programme overall; system change, evidence-based and science-based activities, community capacity, environmental improvements and communications (ibid). The Programme is not one which seeks only to deliver services to beneficiaries, it is rooted in the need to build community capacity and create systemic change for the delivery of services in Bradford, in partnership with Bradford residents.

To that end, the Programme contains 22 evidence based programmes and projects, delivered through four workstreams, designed to improve life chances for direct beneficiaries and also effect wider system change in the longer term. The workstreams are; language and communications; early parenting, health and nutrition and one to one parenting support (Bradford Trident, 2014b).

Rationale for the research

The BSB Programme is seeking to effect change in areas which are subject to multiple issues of deprivation and inequality. The BSB bid summary identified the following range of challenges faced by the BSB communities: Poverty; Lack of jobs; Poor oral health; Domestic violence; Substance misuse; Pollution; Poor language and communication; Poor social and emotional development; Low parental involvement in learning and education; Inactivity and poor access to safe play spaces and Poor diet and nutrition (Bradford Trident, 2014a).

Grint (2005) refers to issues such as these as 'wicked' social problems in that their complexity and inter-connectedness create persistently stubborn challenges which persist over time. Such issues require similarly joined-up responses and as such it is difficult to evidence what interventions have had an impact on improved outcomes for individuals and communities. By addressing issues using an early intervention and prevention approach, the impact of the Programme is likely to be less visible in the short term (Allen, 2011a). It also needs to be acknowledged that, however successful the outcomes of the BSB Programme, the scope of the Programme cannot hope to address the complete fortunes of the communities served.

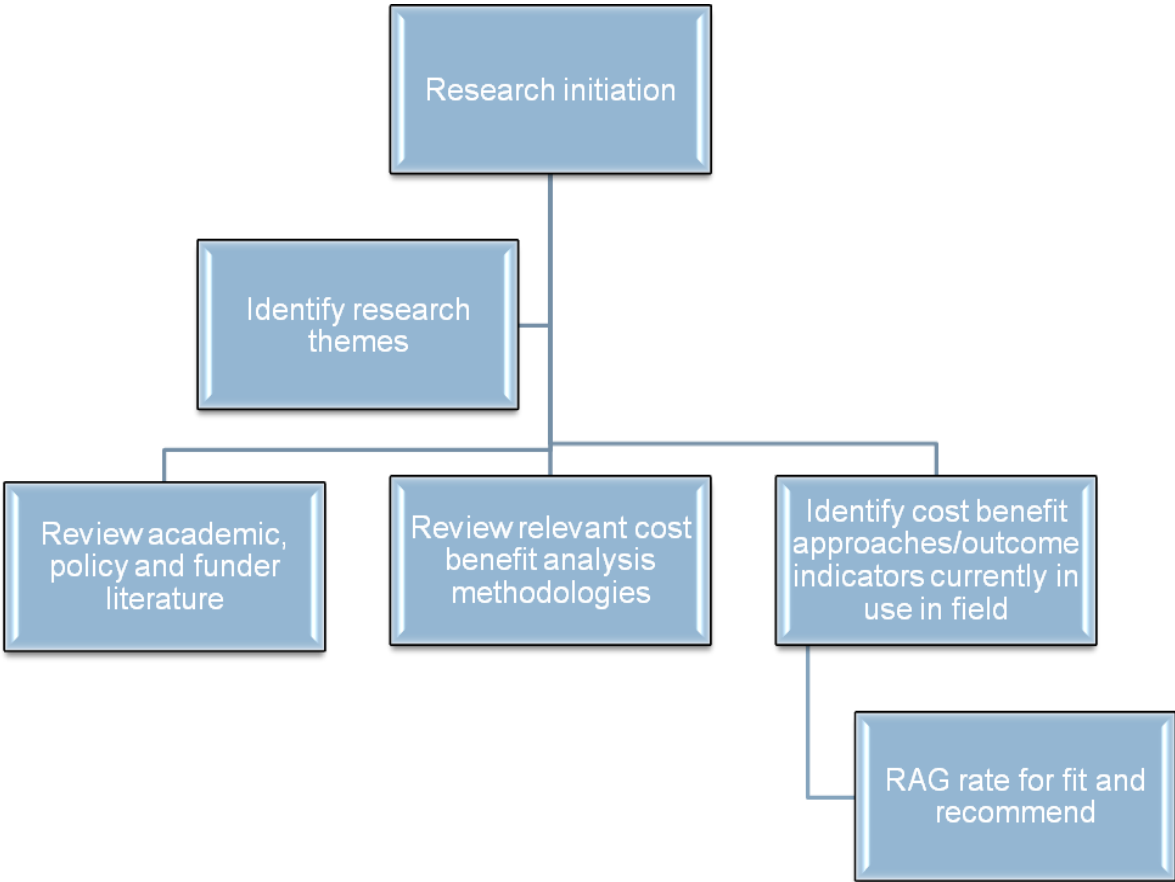
Given these issues, BSB sought an understanding of the mechanisms of measuring the social value created by their activity which would fit with the prevailing approach to be used by the Big Lottery Fund in evaluation of the cost/benefits of the 'Fulfilling Lives – A Better Start' national programme.

Project Methodology

The research was undertaken as an extended literature review. The following flowchart represents the research methodology for the original research project. Themes emerging from the literature base are then discussed.



Diagram 1: Limitation of Research



The research approach was qualitative, almost exclusively using secondary sources. Limited primary research was conducted in personal communications with the Preventonomics team at the London School of Economics

Search Strategy

Four literature search activities were conducted to inform the research. Initial searches (One and Two) - To identify prevailing approaches within the field an initial search of relevant Government policy sites was conducted (Department of Health, Department for Communities and Local Government). This was followed by a search of the Better Start funding organisation site, Big Lottery Fund UK. Search Three - To identify methodologies for estimating efficiencies e.g. cost-benefit analysis (CBA), SROI, social value approaches.

In order to identify cost benefit methodologies used in similar social investment programmes a search of the academic literature was conducted using the CINAHL (Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature) and ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences and Abstracts) databases. Initial searches were conducted in respect of project activities but this provided a nil return. The search was then widened.

Table 1: Initial Search

Search terms	Limiters (where search returned > 500)
Initial search – 'Nutrition' 'Cooking' 'Cook and eat' AND 'Community' 'Parent' AND 'Cost analysis' 'Cost benefit'	
Wider search – 'Intervention' 'Public programme' 'Project' 'Community support' 'Targeted support' AND 'Cost analysis' 'Cost benefit'	Abstract Available; Published Date: 20010101-20141231; English Language; Peer Reviewed; Research Article

Search four – To identify Better Start Bradford Project-specific cost benefit methodologies, tools and research approaches.

In order to identify any cost-benefit analysis information already available for the BSB activities a fourth search was conducted using a universal search engine. The assumption was made that evaluations of existing and ongoing projects and related activities would be likely to exist in the public domain, on the sites of the projects themselves, their parent or funding organisations.

Table 2: Expand Search

Search term	Inclusion/Exclusion
'X Cost Benefit'	Include exact phrase in title or body Exclude all other returns
'X'	Include exact phrase in title or body Exclude all other returns
Parent organisation name for X, e.g. for 'Bump Buddy App' use 'Best beginnings'	Include only organisation home page and search site for 'cost benefit' 'research', 'monitoring' 'data' 'indicators' Exclude all other returns
Name of funding organisation where available for X	Include only organisation home page and search site for 'X cost benefit' 'X research', 'X monitoring' 'X data' 'indicators for X' Exclude all other returns

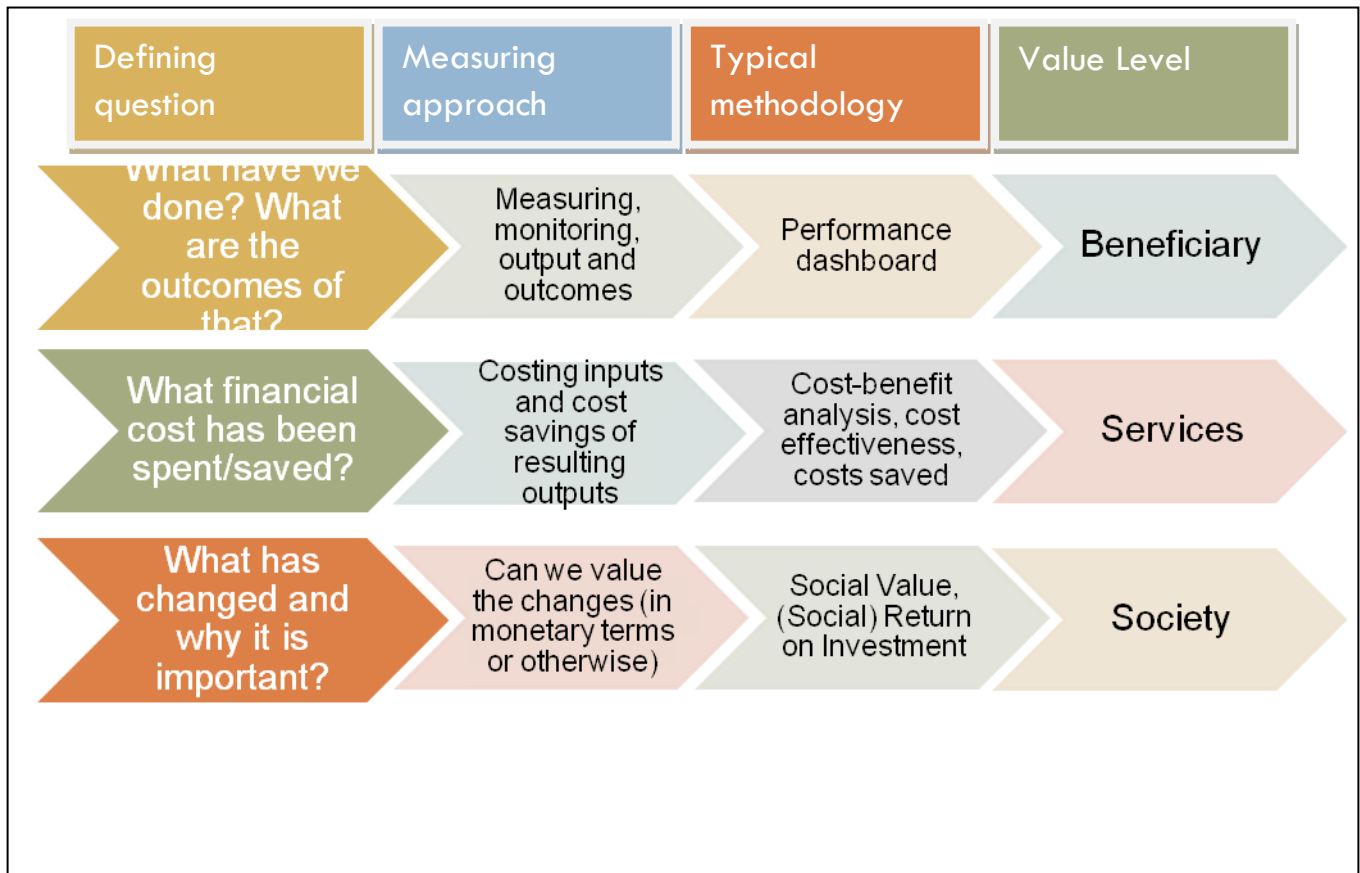
Introducing the Model

This work is an attempt to introduce an understanding of the common methodologies measuring the value of social intervention programmes.

We take the view that there is a continuum of approaches seeking to 'value' the changes which result from social investment. Interchangeable terms are often used for the same, or similar, approaches and there are myriad attempts to provide a standardized approach. This has resulted in a landscape of different methods and models.

In order to marshal these methods and approaches for the purposes of clarity, this work introduces the model below. This will consider value at the following three levels, Beneficiary, Services and Society (Diagram2).

Diagram 2: Social investment value monitoring Continuum



The first level represents the most basic level of measurement for publicly funded projects; a range of output, outcome and perhaps change measures. Typically, results are given as monitoring information often in a 'dashboard' format which shows progress against given measurable targets or stated activity outcomes. We would suggest it is useful to consider this as measuring value at a Beneficiary Level.

The middle level takes Beneficiary Level data and along with other costing of wider services information seeks to put a financial value on the activities put in place; benefits derived; the costs avoided etc. and so find a financial value for the effect of the intervention. We would suggest this reports value at a Services Level.

The third level represents the approach to identify wider social value. This would include not only the stated outcomes of the interventions but also less tangible outcomes, at a wider community level. This model considers that this reports at a Society Level. As Beneficiary Level measures tend to be project activity specific, considering methodologies for collection of that activity data will not form a part of the following discussion. A robust body of management literature exists to support any further interest in that level of data.

Services Level Value

Approaches to determine this level of value typically include cost-benefit analysis, cost effectiveness work etc. **Cost-benefit analysis** is an approach taken to give an assessment of value for money for a given investment. In its simplest form, *“expected costs are weighed against expected benefits to determine whether the latter exceeds the former”* (The Social Research Unit at Dartington, Investing in Children: Overview, 2014: 1)

When the wider outcomes of an activity are less immediately tangible in nature, as is the case with much public sector early intervention investment (Allen, 2011b), this becomes more difficult to create as a monetary value. For this reason social cost-benefit analyses are often formulated using a ‘costs avoided’ principle though even quantifying all costs, including less visible ones such as volunteer time, can be problematic (Boulatoff and Jump, 2007, Van Den Burg et al, 2013)

Cost effectiveness analysis is a method which *“calculates the costs needed to produce a unit change in one measurable outcome indicator”* (The Social Research Unit at Dartington, Investing in Children: Technical Report, 2014). For the purposes of supporting BSB, consideration was given to a number of cost-benefit and cost effectiveness approaches.

Initially, literature pertaining to any cost-benefit and cost effectiveness work published around services and activities in similar social and health fields to that of BSB were reviewed. This showed that there is no one single preferred methodology but that a range of different methodologies have been employed across analyses of similar activities (Simon et al, 2013, Boulatoff and Jump, 2007, Law et al, 2012, Jürgen 2012, Aracena et al 2009, Muller-Riemenschneider et al, 2008, Maracena et al, 2009).

It can be suggested though that effective cost-benefit and effectiveness approaches share three primary analytical steps described by Lee and Aos (2011) *“reviewing the research literature, computing the economics, and developing portfolios of policy options”*, p682.

Society Level Value

Social Value is currently defined by the Public Services (Social Value) 2012 Act as *“the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area”*², but Social Value does seem to be something of an elusive creature to pin down up to this point. Successive UK Government Departments (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011) and academic institutions, notably York University Health Economics Unit, University of Manchester, University of Warwick and the London School of Economics. (Jacobs et al, 2007) have sought robust and replicable methodologies for defining and assessing Social Value. Without a single agreed definition of Social Value it is difficult for assessment methodologies to gain dominance above what seems to be a plethora of approaches and suggested models.

Standardizing the measurement of social outcomes investment has proved to be particularly difficult in regard to early intervention and prevention as the value of the negative outcome avoided requires that assumptions are made regarding a distant future that will hopefully never be, as a result of the intervention.

The literature suggests there are two overarching methodologies prevailing in the UK at the current time seeking to determine Social Value: Social Return on Investment (SROI) and Return on Investment (ROI).

Social Return on Investment (SROI)

In 2009, the UK Cabinet Office published 'A Guide to Social Return on Investment', subsequently updated in 2012 (Nicholls, J et al, 2012). This approach appears to be favoured by such bodies as the Local Government Association (2012), UK Cabinet Office (Social Enterprise Unit/DH, 2010) and the Scottish Government (EQUAL Social Economy Scotland Development Partnership, 2009).

This form of SROI measures inputs, outputs and outcomes but crucially attempts to measure the added social value delivered by a given investment. The Social Enterprise Unit and Department of Health explained their philosophy in relation to this as follows; *"it is not just about putting a pound sign next to your project, it's about telling the whole story about what you are doing – and the pound sign is part of that"* (Social Enterprise Unit/DH, 2010, p7).

This approach to SROI provides a Social Return Ratio, using financial proxies to value the changes delivered by funded activities (Nicholls, J et al, 2012). An impact map/theory of change is created with the stakeholders of the activity which produces the SROI ratio and a value for costs saved. It is a methodology designed for evaluation or forecasting purposes (Inglis and Nicholls, 2010).

Return on Investment (ROI)

Though the preceding form of SROI appears to be en vogue for many Government Departments and public investment funders it should also be noted that there are credible and well used methodologies which would take issue with key elements of the SROI approach, notably that of assigning a monetary value to intangible social impact derived from proxy measures (Massy, J. and Harrison, J. 2014). The critique suggests that much social value is not able to be monetized and therefore attempts to do so are highly open to question.

Other authors suggest that SROI has a place in terms of perceived financial value but not as methodology for monetized social value (Social research Unit at Dartington, 2014)

Social Value as Wider social change

Leaving aside the question of 'to monetize or not', there are a number of tensions in play with regard to effective social value measurement, not least the emerging need to provide measures of social change alongside robust metrics for measurement of spend for the following reason.

Social change is likely to be described by the wider outcomes, e.g. residents now interact more in the life of their community, residents are healthier etc. These outcomes may take a much longer timescale

to become evident. In the meantime, public money is being spent and there is a need to illustrate that the activities are moving in the right direction, as Knapp et al (2011) suggest there are two perspectives to consider when viewing interventions “*first, pay-offs to society as a whole, and second, budgetary impacts in the NHS and other public sector agencies*”,p2.

In order that the chain of events which lead to that wider social change can attempt to be followed, inclusion of both measures to show transparent intervention spend and ‘downstream’ outcomes may be necessary. It might be useful to consider these as micro and macro approaches, respectively.

Developing a Social Value framework

The MARS Centre for Impact Investing model (2014) which suggests that a number of methodologies can fit into a broad Social Value framework approach.

Any chosen combination of these methodologies can be used to measure across what we are now describing as the three Levels of our model - Society, Services and Beneficiary – resulting in a similarly broad Social Value framework (see Appendix B for descriptions of these, and other, methodologies).

DIAGRAM 3 – METHODOLOGIES WITHIN A SOCIAL VALUE FRAMEWORK, SOURCE: MARS CENTRE FOR IMPACT INVESTING



Table 3: Summary of MARS Social Value Model Methodologies

It should be noted that the information provided here is not exhaustive and does not constitute a systematic options appraisal, rather we provide a series of descriptions that are intended to give a snapshot of prevailing options included in the MARS model.

Name	Focus	Resource availability
SROI	As discussed	
Demonstrating Value	Uses 'Performance snapshots' to illustrate social value for specific projects.	The home website includes a wealth of snapshots, workbooks and tools which are freely available.
GRI (Global Reporting Initiative)	Very much an international focus on sustainability and impact assessment	Freely available online resources.
GIIRS – (Global Impact Investing Rating System)	Directed towards impact investing for business and venture funding, focused towards business investment rather than social outcomes measures per se.	Unable to access metrics.
IRIS	Directed towards impact investment	Home website contains a freely accessible catalogue of metrics across a range of relevant themes including 'health' and 'social performance'.
Sustainable Livelihoods	International focus, originally derived from work delivered for the UK Department for International Development.	More of a macro focus than an attempt at metrics or measures

Developing the framework with beneficiaries

In order to develop a social value framework that includes both macro social change measures and micro transparency metrics, the literature suggests that the framework must be developed in partnership with intended beneficiaries and communities to be served, at the very least in regard to wider social outcome measures.

The macro social outcome measures need to be context relevant and developed with the beneficiaries/stakeholders of the Programme (Local Government Improvement and Development, 2010). Grint and Holt (2011) maintain that this is particularly so for a Programme with social change at its heart. In their review of large scale intervention Programmes, such as Total Place, they suggest that the benefits that come from communities developing and owning the questions to be answered – i.e. what needs to change - are evident (ibid).

MacDonald and Barnes, 2010, also echo that measures and indicators need to be relevant and make sense for those experiencing the change. This needs to be balanced against the need to ensure measures are valid. The SROI Network (2011) suggests that measures to assess beneficiaries’ feelings about an intervention, e.g. ‘I feel safer’ can be supported by a quantitative measure, perhaps criminal reporting statistics in that instance.

Cost-benefit analyses of BSB work stream activities

In order to provide details of any existing cost-benefit analysis work specific to the BSB evidence based workstream activities, e.g. Incredible Years Parenting Programme etc., a review of the existing published literature and web based information was undertaken.

Table 1, pp 15-18, illustrates cost-benefit analyses identified in regard to the specific evidence-based intervention projects and programmes to be delivered within the BSB Programme. The table does NOT contain documents or sources related to the individual evidence base of the efficacy of the projects, it is an attempt to identify cost benefit analysis work only. Though there is a great deal of published effectiveness data around many of the activities, there is evidence to suggest little work has been done to provide effectiveness data linked to cost data in some activity areas, notably speech and language work (Law, Zeng, Lindsay & Beecham, 2012).

Contact details and web contacts have been included wherever possible, in order that the information contained at Table 1 can be made use of by BSB in any subsequent cost-benefit development work. A RAG rating (red/amber/green) has been given where existing cost-benefit work has been identified, using the following criteria: Ease of accessing researchers (contact information etc.); Fit to project (relevance of indicators); Published date of research (how recent) and ability to drill down to useable measures/ indicators. Again, it should be noted that this is not a systematic options appraisal and has been undertaken simply as a means of providing BSB with a place to start on their journey.

TABLE 4 AUDIT OF EXISTING COST BENEFIT SOURCES RELATIVE TO BSB EVIDENCE BASED INTERVENTION

<i>Project</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Case studies and relevant cost benefit research approaches, with full reference, web contact or published lead contact details</i>	<i>RAG rating</i>
Family Links Antenatal Programme	Payment by results approach	www.familylinks.org.uk/work-with-families/evaluation-and-case-studies/our-evidence sarah.darton@familylinks.org.uk	
Baby Steps Antenatal Programme	—		

Midwifery Caseloading Pilot	Interesting cost benefit analysis of Midwifery Caseloading but unable to drill down to datasets	Blais, R and Joubert P. (2000) Evaluation of the midwifery pilot projects in Quebec: an overview. <i>Canadian Journal of Public Health</i> . 2000 Jan-Feb; 91(1):11-4.	
ESOL+	–		
HAPPY (Healthy and Active Parenting Programme for the Early Years)	In trials	http://www.borninbradford.nhs.uk/parentstudies/131/StudyDetails/happy-healthy-and-active-parenting-programme-for-early-years/	
Family Nurse Partnership	Return on Investment FNP research base	http://www.fnp.nhs.uk/research-and-development/proven-results/significant-economic-returns-on-investment	
Homestart – Better Start	Overarching impact research, technical summary	Ghate, D and Moran, P (2013) Development of an overarching measure of impact for Home-Start UK: a feasibility study. Technical summary for researchers. Home-Start and the Centre for Effective Services. Available at http://www.home-start.org.uk/about_us/moran_and_ghate_tech_summary_	
Bump Buddy App	–		
Better Start Doulas	Modelling potential cost savings against calculated cost	Kozhimannil, K. B., Hardeman R. R, Attanasio, L. B , Blauer-Peterson, C. and O’Brien, M. (2013) Doula Care, Birth Outcomes and Costs Among Medicaid Beneficiaries, <i>American Journal of Public Health</i> . Apr 2013; 103(4): e113–e121.	
Pregnancy and Breastfeeding	CG37 NICE guidance (Postnatal Care) identified as cost saving	http://www.nice.org.uk/usingguidance/benefitsofimplementation/costsavingguidance.jsp	
Incredible Years Parenting Programme	Service utilization informed RCT	O’Neill, D., McGilloway, S., Donnelly, M., Bywater, T. and Kelly, P. (2010) A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Early Childhood Intervention: Evidence from an Experimental Evaluation of the Incredible Years Parenting Program. Contact author: Economics Department, NUI Maynooth: correspondence donal.oneill@nuim.ie	

Family Links Nurturing	Summary of research with useful links to individual reports	https://www.familylinks.org.uk/our-evidence	
HENRY (Healthy Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young)	Summary of research base with links to validated evidence measures	http://www.henry.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/HENRY-Evaluation-Evidence-Base.pdf	
Community Nutrition Skills (Cook and Eat for parents)	Compendium of nutrition project evaluation resources	McGlone, P., Dallison, J. and Caraher, M (2005) HDA Evaluation resources for community food projects NHS (2005) Available at http://www.physicalactivityandnutritionwales.org.uk/page.cfm?orgid=740&pid=29587	
ICAN Early Language Development Programme	Costed comparison between provision in universal and Early Years settings	Law, J., Dockrell, J. E., Castelnuovo, E., Williams, K., Seeff, B and Normand, C. (2006) Early Years Centres for pre-school children with primary language difficulties: what do they cost and are they cost-effective? <i>International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders</i> , Vol. 41, No. 1: pp67-81	
Language Development Programme	World Bank Early Child Development Cost/Benefit page	http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTCY/EXTECD/0,,contentMDK:20259111~menuPK:524452~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:344939,00.html#Cost	
Imagination library	–		
Perinatal support Programme	Perinatal Positive Practice Guide. No metrics but could be used to develop outcome indicators	http://www.iapt.nhs.uk/silo/files/perinatal-positive-practice-guide.pdf	
Northamptonshire Baby Room	Includes mainly research methodology but links to potentially useful data sets	Richer, S (no date) <i>An Evaluation of the Northamptonshire Baby Room Project© Parents' Course – Impact on Parents</i> Submitted to The University of Birmingham in part fulfillment for the degree of Doctorate in Applied	

		Educational and Child Psychology School of Education The University of Birmingham	
Infant Mental Health Programme	Perinatal and infant mental health tools and data section of the Child and Maternal Health Intelligence Network	http://www.chimat.org.uk/default.aspx?QN=PIMH_TOOLS	
Better Start Better Place	*	Only BSB Programme level outcomes would be appropriate – suggest review work of Social Research Unit at Dartington http://dartington.org.uk/about/	
PiP (Preschoolers in the Playground)	Currently in ongoing trial but trial registration contains relevant outcome measures	http://www.controlled-trials.com/ISRCTN54165860 http://www.trialsjournal.com/content/14/1/326	
Born in Bradford Better Start Innovation Hub	*	Only BSB Programme level outcomes would be appropriate – suggest review work of Social Research Unit at Dartington http://dartington.org.uk/about/	

Notes

A dash indicates that no useful sources were returned for this activity.

An asterisk indicates that these programmes will be Programme Level outcomes and a such have included in searches for cost-benefit analyses

N.B. all links active at time of writing

Conclusion

We have tried to provide a broad review of the prevailing methodologies for calculating the value of social investment in early intervention and prevention programmes. To that end we have presented a model of value which we believe will help to identify which cost benefit and/or social value approaches can be brought together to provide a broad social value framework

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