



Still Listening, Still Learning: Personal Outcomes in 2025 and Beyond

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Story title: Beyond Words: Hearing Every Voice

Overview



In August 2024, we held a self-evaluation session with the staff team at TouchBase Lanarkshire to reflect on what we do well and where we could improve. One key insight was that while we were strong at gathering feedback from families, we could be doing more to capture the views of the people we support—especially those who do not use words to communicate. Given that Sense Scotland have communication at our core, we knew this was an area we wanted to explore. There was however acknowledgement that

this was a tough economic climate for services so we needed to see how we could do more and better with less. We decided to start an improvement project which would closely align to one of Sense Scotland's core aims; **“To be a leader in the provision of specialist services for people with complex communication support needs associated with learning and/or sensory disabilities.”**

What have you had to do differently and what made this possible?

We tried to get a good understanding of the blocks and barriers to achieve our aim so we started off working through an Ishikawa diagram with the team, the people supported in the service and families. This allowed us to plot all the things that were getting in the way of understanding and collecting feedback and having a more systematic way to interpret it. We talked through the main barriers we were encountering and drilled down a little into each one to get a clearer picture of the key areas we needed to tackle.

We started off thinking this might be a project about building staff confidence in communication aids. However it quickly became apparent from our discussions that this was only a small part of the issue. Staff talked about how much easier it was for the people we support who communicate using words, to express their feelings about aspects of the service they love versus areas they are more lukewarm about. Some staff stated that we are so asset focussed in everything we do, it feels almost uncomfortable to be recording the

things people don't particularly like or are less eager to do. Staff felt some of this recording felt quite binary for those people who did not use words. We were recording that people either liked the things they had done that day or not. It felt like we needed to better understand the views of people who don't communicate in words to make sure they are supported to enjoy activities that are meaningful to them.

From our Ishikawa diagram the idea of a simple rating scale emerged—something that could indicate not just whether someone enjoyed an activity, but **how much** and **for how long**. This provided a richer layer of insight without increasing the documentation burden.

Has this helped to keep a focus on what matters to people in face of current challenges?

We needed to find a solution to gather better feedback from the people we support whose communication can be fleeting and subtle. We had to consider the challenging economic climate where we do not have much time for recording or analysing that communication.

Initial feedback from staff has been positive. One commented:

"I feel the new way of recording is a better and more informative way of capturing how people feel about the structure of their day and achieving outcomes. It's less time-consuming but gives more insight."

Other staff said they enjoy using the new recording sheets because some of the people supported complete it themselves, so it felt like they were more in charge of their service.

We feel this is just a first iteration and we will go on to finesse the tool and add more layers and measures so that we can be more sensitive in our understanding of how people feel about their service and how we can be more responsive to that, evolving as we go in response to their voices – in whatever form they take.

What have you noticed in terms of outcomes or impact?

Increased staff motivation and attention to detail

More focus and purpose to recordings

Happier folks attending the service

Better information sharing with families

We are actively monitoring the impact of this approach through a range of measures, including staff motivation and time pressures. So far, the signs are positive. Some team members are even exploring ways to digitise the system, potentially enabling electronic sharing with families and supported individuals.

Our main measure of success for this project will be monitoring whether more people are experiencing more positive outcomes, more of the time. This will be easier to understand as we monitor and track the changes as staff have indicated they can see the relationship more clearly with their recordings and the service evaluations for each person.

How did this make you feel?

The whole team has found the process energising. There's a shared sense that we are taking meaningful steps to elevate the voices of the people we support—and that's exactly why we choose to work with Sense Scotland.

What have you learned through this?

This feels very much like we are just at the start of our learning. We anticipate six months from now we will have developed our understanding enormously. For now, we have seen that the narrative we used to record is only part of the story of how people feel about their service. Adding a couple of ratings of observed behaviour is showing a much fuller picture and allowing us an easier way to use the recording to shape changes in the service.