**Signs of Safety
Quality Assurance System**

Core Data Set

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Core Data Set

Children's services organisations collect, report and assess substantial quantities of data. All of it is of some relevance and reflects to some extent how organisations are operating and the outcomes they are achieving. Organisations tend to analyse the data in limited sections of the organisation, at various management forums and in specialist quality assurance or data and performance sections. It is commonly reported that organisations feel overwhelmed by their data collection and reporting requirement, either externally or internally imposed. On the other hand, it is unusual for data to inform the assessment of the activities of individual workers and teams.

A number of local authorities in the England Innovation Project developed a core data set, having concluded when assessing their data collection both for national reporting and internal monitoring, that the extent of time, effort and resources expended in data collection does not provide value for money. Moreover, the sheer amount of data collected could also create distraction on to items being counted that may not necessarily be important to outcomes and so distort the focus away from practice and its impact. A disconnection for practitioners who do not see the value in the data they collect and so are less careful in its recording was also considered.

Local authorities recognised that an emphasis on quantitative, computer-based data is not sufficient on its own to evaluate the quality of services to children and families. They also hoped that a focus on core data could reconnect practitioners with their data through its relevance and usefulness to them.

Prior to this development in the Signs of Safety England Innovations Project, Munro (2011), Turnell and Murphy (2014) and Percora (2016) have all proposed core data sets, with a very contained number of data items, that can be used to monitor case flows and outcomes, over time, for internal monitoring, external reporting and to contribute to the evaluation of the impact of practice. Based on this work, a core data set that reflects the items that agencies and overseers most frequently focus on is:

- Cases referred to children's services
- Cases progressed and managed through family support (early help)
- Cases progressed for child protection assessment
- Cases subject to child protection intervention
- Children brought into care
- Children reunified with parents
- Children in out of home care
    - kinship care
    - foster care
    - special guardianship
- Children adopted (as relevant to jurisdictions)
- Re-substantiation (or re-referral) rates
- Staff separation rates

The England Innovations Project developed a core data set that can be adjusted to be suitable for, on the one hand, compulsory national reporting, and on the other, as part of the Signs of Safety Quality Assurance System.

By focusing on a limited number of key data items that are already collected by organisations, the core data set for the Signs of Safety Quality Assurance System is designed to be collectable and informative at the levels of individual practitioner, teams, localities and services, as well as the organisation as a whole, to monitor their case flows and outcomes, over time.

Core data set for monitoring case flows and outcomes (England Innovations Project)

- **Activity**
  - Referral per 10,000
  - % referred by who
  - % of referrals leading to no further action / early help (EH) / child in need (CIN) / child protection (CP) / looked after (LAC)
  - Assessments and Section 47 enquiries (child protection) per 10,000
- **Plans**
  - Number of children EH / CIN / CP / LAC (per 10,000)
  - % EH / CIN / CP / LAC plans lasting over 6 months / 1 year / 2 years
  - % becoming subject to EH / CIN / CP / LAC again within 12 and 24 months
  - % where children seen in accordance with plan
- **Outcomes**
  - Re-referral rates per 10,000
  - % of children having three or more placements in the year
  - % of children in the same placement over two years
  - % of LAC moving to adoption and special guardianship order (SGO)
  - % of potential LAC seen for after care
- **Workforce**
  - Vacancy / Turnover / Sickness / Agency Rate

References

Munro, E. (2011) The Munro review of child protection, final report; a child-centred system. London: Department for Education. Available at www.education.gov.uk

Turnell, A and Murphy, T. (2014) Signs of Safety Comprehensive Briefing Paper. 3rd Edition. Resolutions Consultancy, Perth

Percora, P. Evaluation findings related to Signs of Safety (2016), preliminary draft. Unpublished