



The Legal Representation of Minors Program – “A Lawyer of My Own”: Findings at T₀ and T₁ and Insights Based on Them

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Abstract

Background

The Ministry of Justice's program for providing legal services to minors – A Lawyer of My Own (LOMO) – was established in 2014 to provide independent legal support and representation to minors in civil proceedings. The legal representation, support, and assistance are provided to the minors by approximately 150 LOMO attorneys nationwide.

Objectives

To assist LOMO in constructing a computerized system for ongoing measurement of outcomes and case management in order to improve the program's operations and evaluate the program's effectiveness.

Methodology

1. The LOMO's theory of change was formulated and refined by means of logical models at the service recipient level (the represented minors) and at the organizational-systemic level.
2. Three tools were developed for the planning of legal representation and ongoing measurement of its outcomes – two questionnaires (T_0 , T_1) to be filled out by LOMO attorneys (hereinafter: the attorney questionnaire), and a questionnaire for evaluating the quality of outputs and measuring outcomes to be filled out by the minors represented by the unit (hereinafter: the minor's questionnaire).
3. A measurement pilot was conducted to evaluate the following questionnaires: questionnaire T_0 which was distributed among the attorneys (2022) – a total of 121 questionnaires were filled out (a 39% response rate); questionnaire T_1 which was distributed among the attorneys who participated in the first measurement (2023) – a total of 47 questionnaires were filled out; and an online retrospective self-reported questionnaire which was distributed among the minors aged 12+ who are represented by LOMO (2023) – a total of 116 questionnaires were filled out.
4. A feedback meeting was held with 60 of the unit's attorneys in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the questionnaires for ongoing measurement.

Main Findings

Attorney report: In about half of the cases, the minor was present at the court hearing and spoke during it. In 83% of the cases, the minor's position was either expressed verbally or read out. Between the two measurements

(in 2022 and 2023), there was an increase in the minors' approval of the legal representation, as well as an improvement in the meeting of needs related to the legal proceedings.

Minors report: About 95% of the respondents were satisfied with the work of the attorneys, and 87% felt that the legal representation helped achieve the desired outcomes in court. 84% of respondents reported an improvement in their confidence and their ability to influence decisions that affect them, and 67% reported a reduction in their level of concern about their court case.

The attorney questionnaire and the minor's questionnaire and their modification: Attorneys emphasized that the questionnaire needs to be short, efficient, and easy to use in order to facilitate their work. Many attorneys did not understand the conceptual framework of outcome-oriented thinking that underpinned the questionnaires' development or how they were meant to be used.

In the minors questionnaire, respondents reported a relatively high level of clarity for the questionnaire. 89% of them indicated that they would prefer that communication with them, as well as future surveys, be conducted by means of WhatsApp.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that the attorney questionnaire be simplified and shortened, while prioritizing the aspects important to the attorneys in representing the minors over the needs of the LOMO administrators.
2. Before digitizing the tools in the final computerized system, it is recommended that an in-depth and thorough process be carried out to develop outputs and forms that will suit the ongoing needs of the attorneys, the supervisors, and the managers.
3. After digitizing the questionnaires in the final computerized system and before starting to work with it, comprehensive training should be conducted in order to assimilate it into the program (data entry, queries, and report export). At the same time, it is important to engage the attorneys in the task of documentation within the system, while emphasizing the advantages and benefits of its regular use.
4. As part of the tool's assimilation, it is recommended that attorneys undergo thorough instruction on the application of outcome-oriented thinking in managing the representation of the minors and in using this kind of thinking in the context of the computerized system.
5. The development of the tool for monitoring implementation and measuring outcomes should continue in order to adapt it to day-to-day work in the field and to the knowledge and data collection needs of the program administrators.