

Brief History and Example of use of the SSM

Dr. Diana Pearce from the University of Washington developed a “self-sufficiency standard” to help families out of poverty.¹ Based on this work, stakeholders of Snohomish County created the Self-Sufficiency Matrix (SSM), incorporating principles of “Results Oriented Management and Accountability” (ROMA)² which places the focus on measuring outcomes in provision of human services. Then the Arizona Homeless Evaluation Project for homeless services originally validated the SSM for use with the homeless population, but the tool has been the subject of a variety of studies and was found to be generally internally consistent as a “decision support tools for public mental health care and housing services” (Cummings & Brown, 2019, p. 981)³.

The tool is used across a variety of target populations including adolescents in a vocational education program (Bannink, Broeren, Heydelberg, et al., 2015⁴); family support programs (Richmond, Pampel, Zarcula, Howey & McChesney, 2017⁵), youth transitioning from foster care to independent living (Scannapicco, Smith & Strong, 2016⁶) and a version was created and utilized in the Netherlands with “patients who experience multiple interlinked problems (Fassaert et al., 2012⁷, p. 583).

Since 2018, The Office of Victim Services Justice Grants (OVSJG) funded a number of community-based organizations to provide reentry services (the DC Reentry Coalition – DCRC). The DCRC used the SSM tool until 2024 for those returning from a period of incarceration and jail. DCRC tracks both direct services (actions taken the case manager such as provision of a food gift card or completing an application for housing) as well as referrals to other services by agency name and reason for referral (e.g., clothing, life skills, employment readiness). Consequently, these contacts and referrals provide a measure of “dosage” of services provided which can then be used in the analysis of change in the SSM scores by individual domain or aggregate at intake and follow-up.

The SSM is generally conducted at intake and then again, every 90 days. We think it is best to administer the tool as part as a conversation with the individual – systematically but informally (and within the flow of conversation) covering all the domains of the tool. We do not recommend giving out a copy and asking the person to self-score, nor do we recommend scoring the SSM based on a file/chart review. The scale for the 19 domains is between 1 and 5, where 1=In crisis, 2=Vulnerable, 3=Safe, 4=Building Capacity, and 5=Empowered. See the SSM descriptive matrix below.

¹ <https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/>

² <https://www.roma-nptp.org/>

³Psychometric properties of the self-sufficiency matrix among homeless and vulnerably housed individuals and families. *J Community Psychol*. 2019 May;47(4):979-994. doi: 10.1002/jcop.22167. Epub 2019 Feb 16. PMID: 30771279.

⁴ Bannink, R., Broeren, S., Heydelberg, J. *et al.* Psychometric properties of self-sufficiency assessment tools in adolescents in vocational education. *BMC Psychol* **3**, 33 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-015-0091-2>

⁵ Richmond, M. K., Pampel, F. C., Zarcula, F., Howey, V., & McChesney, B. (2017). Reliability of the Colorado Family Support Assessment: A Self-Sufficiency Matrix for Families. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 27(6), 695-703. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731515596072>

⁶ Scannapicco, M., Smith, M. & Blakeney-Strong, A. Transition from Foster Care to Independent Living: Ecological Predictors Associated with Outcomes. *Child Adolesc Soc Work J* **33**, 293–302 (2016). <https://doi-org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/10.1007/s10560-015-0426-0>

⁷ Fassaert, T., Lauriks, S., van de Weerd, S., Theunissen, J., Kikkert, M., Dekker, J., Buster, M., & de Wit, M. (2014). Psychometric properties of the dutch version of the self-sufficiency matrix (ssm-d). *Community Mental Health Journal*, 50(5), 583–590. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-013-9683-6>

Self-Sufficiency Matrix

Participant Name _____ DOB __/__/____ Assessment Date __/__/____ Initial Interim Exit

| Domain | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Score | Participant goal? (✓) |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|-------|-----------------------|
| Housing | Homeless or threatened with eviction. | In transitional, temporary or substandard housing; and/or current rent/mortgage payment is unaffordable (over 30% of income). | In stable housing that is safe but only marginally adequate. | Household is in safe, adequate subsidized housing. | Household is safe, adequate, unsubsidized housing. | | |
| Employment | No job. | Temporary, part-time or seasonal; inadequate pay, no benefits. | Employed full time; inadequate pay; few or no benefits. | Employed full time with adequate pay and benefits. | Maintains permanent employment with adequate income and benefits. | | |
| Income | No income. | Inadequate income and/or spontaneous or inappropriate spending. | Can meet basic needs with subsidy; appropriate spending. | Can meet basic needs and manage debt without assistance. | Income is sufficient, well managed; has discretionary income and is able to save. | | |
| Food | No food or means to prepare it. Relies to a significant degree on other sources of free or low-cost food. | Household is on food stamps. | Can meet basic food needs, but requires occasional assistance. | Can meet basic food needs without assistance. | Can choose to purchase any food household desires. | | |
| Child Care | Needs childcare, but none is available/accessible and/or child is not eligible. | Childcare is unreliable or unaffordable, inadequate supervision is a problem for childcare that is available. | Affordable subsidized childcare is available, but limited. | Reliable, affordable childcare is available, no need for subsidies. | Able to select quality childcare of choice. | | |
| Children's Education | One or more school-aged children not enrolled in school. | One or more school-aged children enrolled in school, but not attending classes. | Enrolled in school, but one or more children only occasionally attending classes. | Enrolled in school and attending classes most of the time. | All school-aged children enrolled and attending on a regular basis. | | |
| Adult Education | Literacy problems and/or no high school diploma/GED are serious barriers to employment. | Enrolled in literacy and/or GED program and/or has sufficient command of English to where language is not a barrier to employment. | Has high school diploma/GED. | Needs additional education/training to improve employment situation and/or to resolve literacy problems to where they are able to function effectively in society. | Has completed education/training needed to become employable. No literacy problems. | | |
| Health Care Coverage | No medical coverage with immediate need. | No medical coverage and great difficulty accessing medical care when needed. Some household members may be in poor health. | Some members (e.g. Children) have medical coverage. | All members can get medical care when needed, but may strain budget. | All members are covered by affordable, adequate health insurance. | | |
| Life Skills | Unable to meet basic needs such as hygiene, food, activities of daily living. | Can meet a few but not all needs of daily living without assistance. | Can meet most but not all daily living needs without assistance. | Able to meet all basic needs of daily living without assistance. | Able to provide beyond basic needs of daily living for self and family. | | |
| Family /Social Relations | Lack of necessary support form family or friends; abuse (DV, child) is present or there is child neglect. | Family/friends may be supportive, but lack ability or resources to help; family members do not relate well with one another; potential for abuse or neglect. | Some support from family/friends; family members acknowledge and seek to change negative behaviors; are learning to communicate and support. | Strong support from family or friends. Household members support each other's efforts. | Has healthy/expanding support network; household is stable and communication is consistently open. | | |

| Domain | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Score | Participant goal? (✓) |
|------------------------------|---|---|--|--|---|-------|-----------------------|
| Mobility | No access to transportation, public or private; may have car that is inoperable. | Transportation is available, but unreliable, unpredictable, unaffordable; may have care but no insurance, license, etc. | Transportation is available and reliable, but limited and/or inconvenient; drivers are licensed and minimally insured. | Transportation is generally accessible to meet basic travel needs. | Transportation is readily available and affordable; car is adequately insured. | | |
| Community Involvement | Not applicable due to crisis situation; in "survival" mode. | Socially isolated and/or no social skills and/or lacks motivation to become involved. | Lacks knowledge of ways to become involved. | Some community involvement (advisory group, support group), but has barriers such as transportation, childcare issues. | Actively involved in community. | | |
| Parenting Skills | There are safety concerns regarding parenting skills. | Parenting skills are minimal. | Parenting skills are apparent but not adequate. | Parenting skills are adequate. | Parenting skills are well developed. | | |
| Legal | Current outstanding tickets or warrants. | Current charges/trial pending, noncompliance with probation/parole. | Fully compliant with probation/parole terms. | Has successfully completed probation/parole within past 12 months, no new charges filed. | No active criminal justice involvement in more than 12 months and/or no felony criminal history. | | |
| Mental Health | Danger to self or others; recurring suicidal ideation; experiencing severe difficulty in day-to-day life due to psychological problems. | Recurrent mental health symptoms that may affect behavior, but not a danger to self/others; persistent problems with functioning due to mental health symptoms. | Mild symptoms may be present but are transient; only moderate difficulty in functioning due to mental health problems. | Minimal symptoms that are expectable responses to life stressors; only slight impairment in functioning. | Symptoms are absent or rare; good or superior functioning in wide range of activities; no more than every day problems or concerns. | | |
| Substance Abuse | Meets criteria for severe abuse/dependence; resulting problems so severe that institutional living or hospitalization may be necessary. | Meets criteria for dependence; preoccupation with use and/or obtaining drugs/alcohol; withdrawal or withdrawal avoidance behaviors evident; use results in avoidance or neglect of essential life activities. | Use within last 6 months; evidence of persistent or recurrent social, occupational, emotional or physical problems related to use (such as disruptive behavior or housing problems); problems have persisted for at least one month. | Client has used during last 6 months, but no evidence of persistent or recurrent social, occupational, emotional, or physical problems related to use; no evidence of recurrent dangerous use. | No drug use/alcohol abuse in last 6 months. | | |
| Safety | Home or residence is not safe; immediate level of lethality is extremely high; possible CPS involvement. | Safety is threatened/temporary protection is available; level of lethality is high. | Current level of safety is minimally adequate; ongoing safety planning is essential. | Environment is safe, however, future of such is uncertain; safety planning is important. | Environment is apparently safe and stable. | | |
| Disabilities | In crisis – acute or chronic symptoms affecting housing, employment, social interactions, etc. | Vulnerable – sometimes or periodically has acute or chronic symptoms affecting housing, employment, social interactions, etc. | Safe – rarely has acute or chronic symptoms affecting housing, employment, social interactions, etc. | Building Capacity – asymptomatic – condition controlled by services or medication | Thriving – no identified disability. | | |
| Credit Score | Outstanding judgments, or bankruptcy/foreclosure/eviction with no credit repair plan. | Outstanding judgments, or bankruptcy/foreclosure with a credit repair plan or debt in collections with no credit repair plan | No credit history or debt in collections with a credit repair plan. | Moderate credit rating/ Moderate budgeting skills. | Good credit/manageable debt ratio. | | |