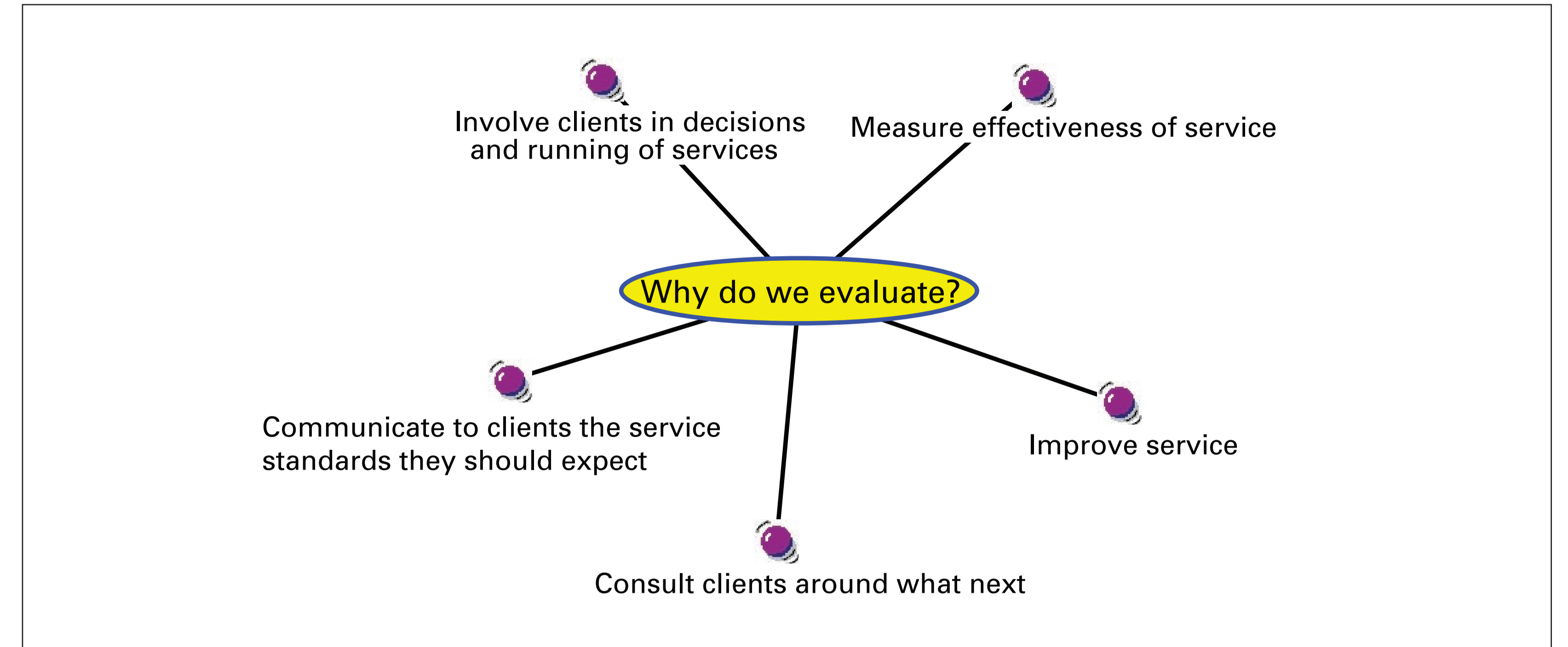


A Participatory Model of Evaluation of Services

The research study 'Client Participation in the Evaluation of Counselling' was conducted by The Benevolent Society's Centre for Women's Health (Jessica Lopez), Canberra University (Ione Lewis) and a client reference group (The Feedback and Research Group). The research answered the question, 'How can women's experiences as clients contribute to a more effective evaluation of individual services offered in women's health centres?' The research paints a picture of what women say they need and what they say works in counselling. We have used these perceptions and descriptions to develop reliable and user-friendly counselling evaluation tools, grounded in women's own language. The research is a continuation of a study analysing women's qualitative evaluations of group work at the centre. After years of collecting saturated data from qualitative evaluation methods, the centre moved towards analyzing this saturated data to develop quantitative evaluation tools. The study aimed to develop a participatory, innovative model of evaluation able to be used by other health centres in the ongoing evaluation and improvement of individual services. The model has fundamentally relied on the participation and training of clients and community members in the process of developing user-friendly evaluations.

Research Methods

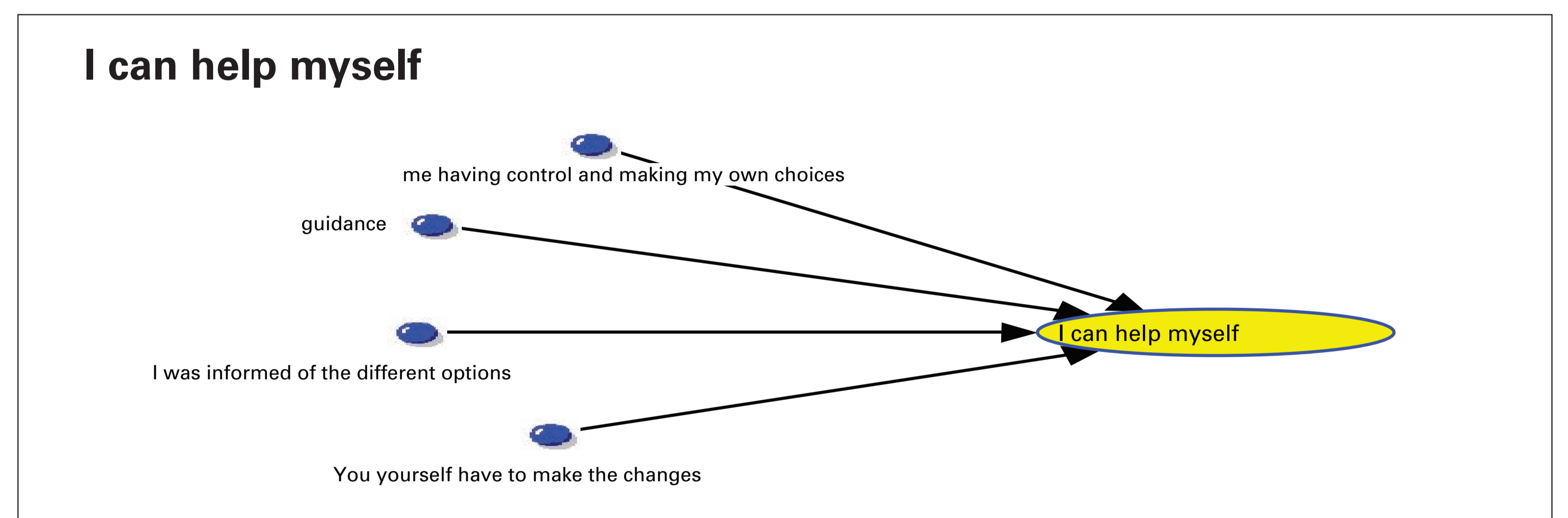
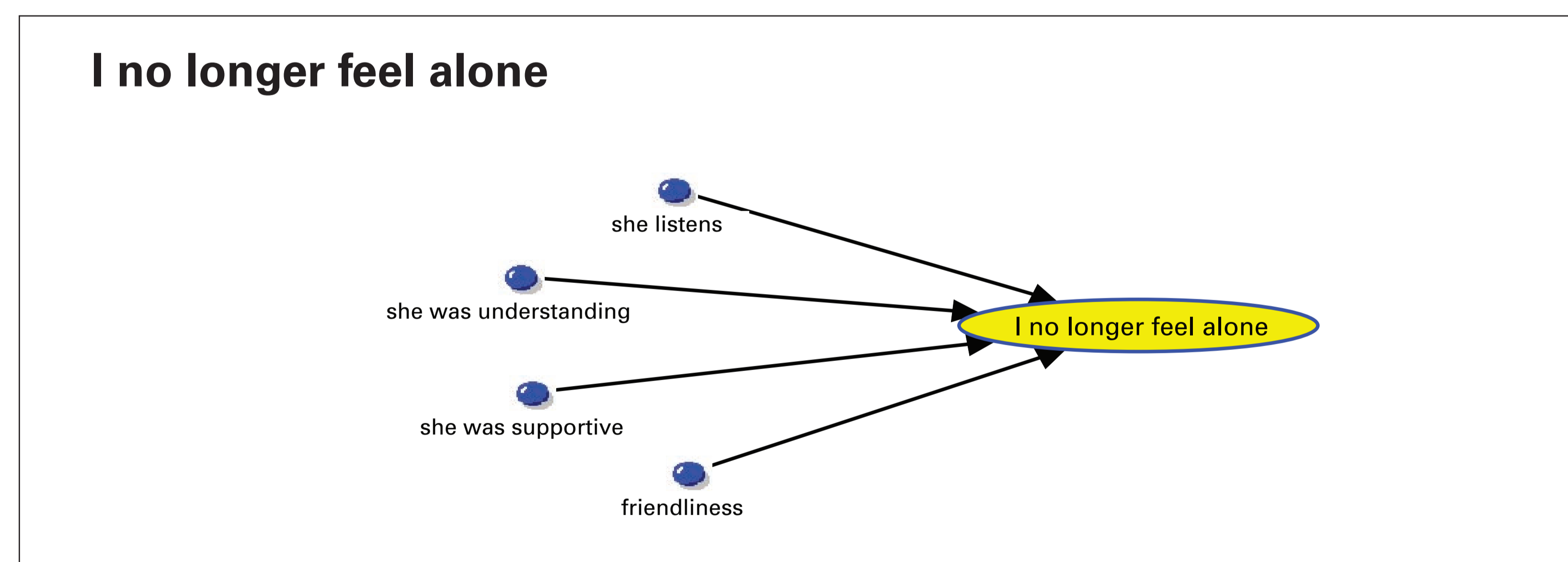
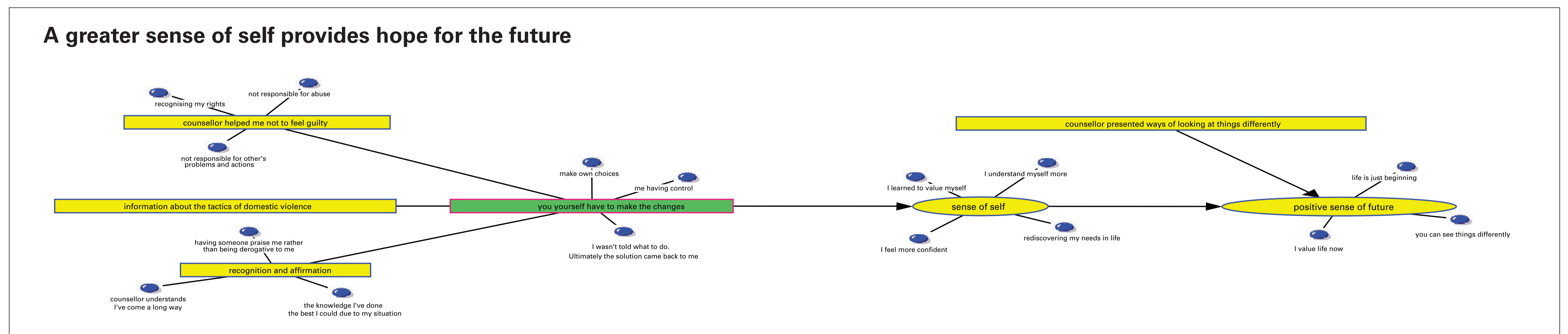
- A total of 61 clients attending counselling and natural therapies services participated in the study either through qualitative surveys conducted in 1999 and 2005 or through interviews and a focus group conducted in 2005.
- Researchers used a grounded theory approach to capture what clients saw as effective service, adding a unique perspective to much of the counselling literature which concentrates on the counsellor's point of view.
- Researchers used Nvivo, a qualitative research software when coding the data and relied on consultation with a client reference group in the coding process. This meant several frameworks were applied to the data, increasing the rigour of the analysis process.



Client and Community Reference Group

Key to the research process was The Feedback and Research Group, a reference group of clients and community members who were trained in various aspects of the research process, including data collection, data analysis and the development of evaluation tools. The reference group participated in all aspects of the research study. This study drew on the philosophy of capacity building in the reference group's active participation in evaluation and service planning.

What Women say Works in Counselling: Research Findings



Developing Evaluation Tools

- Researchers developed the tools based on the themes and categories that emerged from the research. Questions are grounded in women's own language about the services. In effect, these themes are now used as measures of service effectiveness, a mechanism to ensure client values about services are heeded.
- The client reference group assisted in developing a combination of tick box categories and open ended questions presented in a user-friendly format.
- Centre's health workers were consulted about the tools and suggestions were incorporated where they did not conflict with research findings.
- Final focus groups with clients were used to 'pilot' and refine the tools. The client reference group was trained in cognitive interviewing techniques and helped facilitate focus groups.

