

Using the Outcomes Star: Impact and good practice

Research Summary

During May and June 2008, Triangle Consulting interviewed managers in 25 organisations that had been using the Outcomes Star (which we will refer to as the Star), with the majority using it for at least two years. The purpose of the research was to find out what the impact of using the Outcomes Star was on service delivery and the lessons that had been learnt about effective implementation of the Star. This is a summary of the key findings, conclusions and learning.

1) Impact of the Star on Service delivery

All 25 organisations reported that keywork had improved as a result of using the Star

Interviewees reported that most workers and clients enjoyed using the Star and that as a result of using the Star the quality of keywork had improved in the following ways:

- It was more focussed on service user change
- It was more systematic and consistent
- It covered a wider range of issues and covered them in greater depth

“The Star helps staff focus on the agreed support plans so they don’t get too entrenched in the day-to-day issues brought in by their clients and lose sight of the bigger picture...”

Croftlands Trust

The reasons given for these benefits were that the Star:

- Hands the process back to the service user
- Focuses on the whole person, not just the problem
- Gives people a sense that change is possible and ideas about what the next step might be
- Gives a visual picture of where someone is and makes progress visible
- Gives a sense of the journey and a shared language for talking about that journey

The overall result was said to be that service users were more motivated and engaged and that “workers talk less and clients talk more”

“We absolutely love it! ... it is a fantastic tool to illustrate, motivate and demonstrate change. We have seen benefits for service users and workers through improved key work, for line managers in supervision, for senior management and in our reputation with our funders.”

Humbercare

Star data helps organisations learn about what works

Only one-third of the 25 organisations interviewed had analysed Star data for a project or service. Even fewer had drawn learning from the data about what was working (and not working) in their service delivery. Those that had used the data in this way found the results invaluable, for example:

- One organisation found that 63% of clients in their substance misuse service showed no improvement in meaningful use of time. As a result managers encouraged workers to create stronger links with structured day services. The project anticipates that this will improve their outcomes in this area
- Another organisation looked at their outcomes across four hostels and found that:
 - 62% of clients made positive progress and another 11% remained stable
 - Performance varied between hostels. One hostel achieved positive change for 92% of clients. On the basis of this key aspects of good practice in this hostel were identified so that they could be applied elsewhere
 - Women in mixed hostels made less progress than men. As a result of this finding, further research was carried out to explore how to serve women clients better.

A key barrier to analysing data and drawing out learning in this way was a lack of IT to carry out the analysis. It was anticipated that the on-line version of the Outcomes Star and database would help in overcoming this barrier.

Commissioners are positive about the Star

Interviewees reported that their commissioners were interested in receiving outcomes data and regarded the Outcomes Star as an example of positive practice. However, very few were specifically requesting Star data.

Interviewees reported little or no concern about the move to National Indicators within Local Area Agreements. Those who were familiar with the NIs locally were confident they could provide the data.

“I have always felt under some pressure to demonstrate that what we do works... Now we can.”

2) Effective implementation of the Outcomes Star

Those motivated by improving keywork and service delivery found implementation more successful than those motivated by external pressures

The most common reason that organisations had chosen to use the Star was to support keywork and/or for organisational learning (internal motivation). A significant but smaller number had implemented that Star because of the need to evidence outcomes to commissioners (external motivation). The organisations that had implemented the Star for internal reasons were much more likely to report that implementation had been successful.

“The Star is one of the few tools that are useful for both clients and staff and helps us demonstrate what we’re doing - it ticks a lot of boxes. It is person-centred and whole life.”

Norwich City Assertive Outreach team

Implementing the Star requires a change management process

Several - particularly large organisations - reported that implementing the Star required more time than initially anticipated that had tried a number of different approaches before realising the scale of what was required to ensure effective rollout of the Outcomes Star. Key aspects were:

- Helping key-workers to integrate the Star into their ways of working - this required training and making links between the Star and other models and approaches being used (e.g. the Cycle of Change and Motivational Interviewing)
- Adapting paperwork so that it didn't duplicate the Star
- Finding ways to inform service users about the Star and involved them in implementation
- Implementing appropriate IT for analysing data and designing reports and deciding what information should be reported and to who (including project managers, board and commissioners).

Many found that running a pilot was invaluable in demonstrating benefits and highlighting issues to be addressed.

My advice is to see implementation as a change management process. It is vital to communicate to key-workers how it will help them to do their job and help the organisation make its case to the outside world. It is also vital to integrate the Star fully into key-work processes and training.

St. Mungo's

Initial resistance from workers was a common challenge but usually overcome quickly

Two-thirds of organisations report a level of initial resistance from keyworkers. Common themes and concerns within this were:

- It will take too long
- The perception of giving people a "score" or "judging" them
- It risks de-motivating some clients
- It is intrusive
- There is already too much paperwork

However in three quarter of the organisations where this was an issue, the resistance had been entirely or mainly overcome. Interviewees reported that the following were key in winning workers over:

- Taking time to allow people to realise the benefits
- Allowing people to express reservations and ask questions
- A flexible approach at first, including encouraging people to 'just give it a try' in their own way and see how it goes
- Involving service users in the process (as they were often more open to the Star approach)
- Being clear that the organisation was committed to using the Star.

Ongoing input is needed to ensure that the Star is used well

Interviewees reported that implementation was an on-going process. Key issues were:

- Ensuring that the Star was used with all service users
- That it was used well
- That the scores chosen accurately reflected the service users current position

In order to address these interviewees reported that it was important that the Stars were discussed in supervision and team-meetings so that the approach was kept alive. In addition regular reviews of how the Star was being used, training for new staff and top-up training for existing staff were seen to be important.

“My advice to anyone who is thinking about doing this would be that it will probably take more time than you think but the investment repays itself... What we now have is better key-work, more client-focussed services and real evidence which we can use with commissioners.”

Single Homeless Project

The full research report contains nine case studies, including good practice examples of implementing the Star, combined with abundant evidence of its effectiveness.

