

# “Good Help” and the Outcomes Star™

## How the Outcomes Star can help put “good help” into practice

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[A report published earlier this year by NESTA and OSCA](#) proposes a simple but powerful distinction between good help – which builds confidence, motivation and ability to take action and bad help – which undermines confidence, creates dependency and inaction.

*“The Star made a massive difference to me because it showed me that there were things I could do to become the person I wanted to be: a more rounded person with a more rounded Star. The Outcomes Star showed me that there were goals I could achieve. When you’re ill, the thought that you can be well seems very daunting but the Star breaks it down into baby steps and you start to feel yes, I can do this. That really built my confidence and gave me hope.”*  
– Person using the Star

The report harvests the best of current practice in behaviour change programmes alongside a description of the historical development of behaviour change, from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and Badura’s work on self-efficacy to motivational interviewing and Susan Michie’s contemporary COB-B model.

Based on 60 interviews, workshops and a survey, it draws out seven essential ingredients for ‘good help’:

1. Power-sharing
2. Enabling conversations
3. Tailoring
4. Scaffolding
5. Role models and peer support
6. Opportunity making
7. Transparency

Interestingly, many of them are ‘hard-wired’ into the Outcomes Stars.

### **1 Power-sharing: Recognising and building upon the influence and control that each person brings**

Unlike traditional assessment tools which are completed by the professional, the Outcomes Stars are collaborative tools through which the worker and the service

user share perspectives and expertise and come to a joint assessment of where the person is at that point in time. In the words of one person using the Star:

*“Whereas before it had felt like the keyworker was telling me what to do: this felt like a joint process. For the first time, it felt like they were seeing me as a person rather than a problem and that really built my confidence.”*

### **2 Enabling Conversations: Conversations that enable people to feel safe, hopeful and able to take action for themselves**

The Stars are designed to support conversations and to build a sense that change is achievable. The Journey of Change shows how change can happen one step at a time and the graphical presentation helps present complex ideas quickly and inspires dialogue. Once all the scales have been discussed, presenting the readings on the Star graphic helps worker and service user talk about the whole picture and what happens next “The sense of progressive momentum and optimism that seems to be



possible with this tool is just so lovely to hear about, and such a privilege to see in action" (Mental health tribunal worker).

We often hear workers say that they have fuller conversations and learn more about service users when using the Star, even people they have been working with for some time, because the Star opens the conversation up and can make it easier to cover difficult topics.

### **3 Tailoring: Helping people to find their own purpose and plans and responding to their individual needs**

The Star graphic gives a personal picture of this person at this time and provides a good foundation for talking about priorities and goals. In addition the Journey of Change helps the worker to think about the kind of help that is likely to be most effective for this person at this stage of their journey (see below for more on this)

*"The language is very plain and simple – there was no medical jargon for me to get my head around – and because it's so visual, I could see where I was and where I was going. You just can't do that with a traditional support plan."*  
– Person using the Star

In addition to this the fact that the Stars are holistic and strengths based means that people have an opportunity to talk about aspects of their lives that are working well. This often proves invaluable in boosting morale and enabling people to draw learning from their successes and apply them to the challenges they are facing.

### **4 Scaffolding: Offering practical and emotional support that helps people take action, then stepping back as they build confidence to continue taking action on their own**

Because each scale on each version of the Outcomes Star breaks change down into manageable steps, the Stars helps identify small, do-able actions whilst keeping bigger goals in sight. The Journey of

Change helps workers to make fine-tuned judgements about when to help and when to step back.

### **5 Role models and peer support: Helping people develop relationships that inspire and sustain action over time**

The Stars are holistic tools which focus not just on the areas of life where difficulties are evident, but also on areas which are working well and areas which may link to difficulties but often do not receive so much attention. Support from family and friends is one of those areas that can be key to achieving goals but often does not receive attention because it is not part of the presenting problem. By having a 'spoke' on this area, the Stars ensure that it gets the focus it deserves.

### **6 Opportunity making: Increasing opportunities and decreasing barriers for people to take Action**

As a tool for conversation, reflection and planning the Star itself does not create opportunities. However the Journeys of Change that underpin the Stars always emphasise taking action and overcoming barriers.

### **7 Transparency: Sharing information and data between people and practitioners**

When a service assesses as service user it can be a very 'extractive' process in which the service user provides information which is recorded by the service and used in ways that are never shared with or understood by the service user. In contrast, workers are trained to explain to the service user how the Star works and to give them the lead in the conversation. The Star readings are discussed and agreed collaboratively and the final assessment, in the form of the completed Star graphic, is something that sits between worker and service user, rather than being hidden from view in the worker's folder. The result is full transparency and data that is co-created and shared. In fact we often hear that service users display their Star prominently at home because they feel ownership and pride in what they have achieved.

*"The Star is helpful. It shows me how far I have come – it's a very different shape now. It has helped to motivate me and give me a sense of direction – I can do it!"*

– Person using the Star

In addition, the Journey of Change that underpins each Star provides another important ingredient. It offers a framework for understanding that the kind of help that people need changes as they progress along their journey. Someone who is 'stuck' on the journey, not recognizing that things could be much better, or not willing or able to discuss their difficulties, needs a different kind of help to someone who wants and believes in change and now needs opportunities and support to translate that motivation into action. So good help is not a static thing, it looks different for different people at different times. Sometimes it means taking someone by the hand, showing them what is possible and taking action on their behalf. Sometimes it means stepping back, allowing them to set the goals and set the pace and being there in the background to support them through the ups and downs of change. This is an important aspect to the tailoring of support that the report identifies as key ingredient of good help.

## Translating ideas into practice

As the report itself acknowledges, the ideas behind good help have been around a long time. So why is the reality sometimes so far from these ideals?

According to the report: "Doing things differently requires a considerable shift in culture for the many services and social programmes that are still attempting to 'fix' people" It is unlikely that this failure to deliver 'good help' is deliberate. Many organisations have an ambition to work differently, but translating it into practice isn't always easy."

Our experience is that is where the Outcomes Star can make the difference – because the training to use the Star and the design of the tool itself helps key-workers to operationalise these values in practice. Academics Lisa Harris and Sharon Andrews of RMIT University in Australia carried out an in-depth study of the implementation of three versions of the Outcomes Star in a Crisis intervention service in Melbourne. They identified twenty benefits of using the Outcomes Star at the level of the organisation, the manager, the practitioner and the service user including, for the service user "the opportunity to define their own reality, identify their own priorities and be accountable to them in the case-management process" and "the opportunity to understand their journey in a holistic way, beyond their presenting need, and the interrelationship between different domains in their life, across time."

They conclude that

*"implementing the Outcomes Star has been an invigorating and renewing experience... It has required them to examine the power dynamics in their current practice and to engage afresh with the idea that, provided with the right support, people really are the best authors of their own lives"*  
– Harris and Andrews 2013

We very much welcome this report and believe that the powerful concept of 'good help' could help to focus a cross sectoral movement for change which recognises that the most important ingredient in the change recipe is the goals, capabilities and motivation of service user themselves. We would like to add our voice to the Good Help movement and hope that the Outcomes Stars can be part of the toolkit that enables organisations to make that vision a reality.

### References

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