

Using an Outcomes Star™ with people living with dementia

Issues and options for services to consider

1 About this document

Triangle are the social enterprise behind the Outcomes Stars, and we have produced this guide to kick start a conversation around the Star within the context of services supporting people living with dementia.

We welcome input and discussion from organisations or other parties with an interest in these areas to help us to understand and improve our guidance, to showcase best practice examples and to discuss the possibility of developing new tools that are specifically designed for use with people with dementia – contact details for Triangle can be found at the end of the document.

2 The context

Triangle do not have a version of the Outcomes Star that has been designed to work in services focused on supporting people living with dementia. **Therefore, at this point in time we do not recommend that the Star is used in this setting.**

However, we do appreciate there may often be an overlap between services for people living with dementia and services around independent living, supported living and adult care. These broader services may be using or planning to use a number of the Stars with service users who do not have dementia, and so are keen to understand how and why the Stars might or might not work for people with dementia too.

This guide provides some advice for services such as those and sets out some considerations that should be taken into account.

3 Issues and options for services to consider

Available versions of the Outcomes Star

There are two versions of the Star most likely to be suitable for broader support services, although as previously highlighted, neither of these Stars have been designed specifically for dementia-focused settings and support:

- Independent Living Star - large format resources for this Star are available from Triangle for licensed Star users
- Older Persons Star - a 'Short' and simplified version of this Star is available on the Star Online's portal

Completing the Star

The standard methodology for completing the Star is all about a collaborative conversation and understanding how someone thinks and feels about their position.

This approach is not appropriate for people with dementia, who may be less able to reflect on their life today and what is going on for them, and as the condition progresses these conversations might become increasingly difficult, or not possible to have.

In fact, this approach could be detrimental for people with dementia, as it contradicts ‘three golden rules’ highlighted by the Contented Dementia Trust¹ and their SPECAL method, which is to not ask direct questions, and to not focus on facts or someone’s interpretation of reality. The SPECAL method highlights how effective communication with people with dementia requires ‘counter-intuitive’ approaches, rather than the standard “common sense communication styles which are taken for granted when dementia is not an issue”, such as that on which the Star is based.

To work around this barrier, the Star could be completed in a collaborative way through discussion with someone’s circle of support (family and friends) or with the team around the person (other professionals and agencies involved in supporting that individual.) The accessible and non-clinical nature of Stars means they are helpful for people in the circle of support to reflect on the situation of the service user and can help a practitioner build relationships with them.

As the readings would not have been agreed with the service user themselves, the Star would need to be recorded as a ‘Worker Only’ Star, even though the worker has consulted others when deciding on the readings.

A practitioner may choose just to use the Star as their tool as a professional, helping them to consider and assess the situation of a person they are supporting. The benefits of this approach are that the framework of the Star is still helpful as a holistic and person-centred assessment tool for professionals. However, care should be taken to ensure this approach is done in a meaningful way – perhaps through guidance, training, peer support and supervision – and that the information captured is as accurate as possible.

Caution in using the Journey of Change and detailed Scales

Whatever the method used for completing Star readings, care will need to be taken when using the Scales as they have not been written with the specific context of dementia in mind. Whether or not they can be nuanced to meet the needs of services supporting both people with and without dementia will depend on the nature of the service, the values and skills of the workforce in that service, and how advanced the condition is for the people the service is supporting.

For example, the text in the Older Person’s Star puts the emphasis on ‘what is right for me/the individual’. If it is not possible to ascertain what the individual feels is right for them, the emphasis will need to be on what the service or professional feel is right for the individual. Extra guidance, training and support from managers may be needed in order to allow workers to feel comfortable nuancing the Scales in this way.

Another example would be in the Independent Living Star, where the emphasis is put on supporting someone to maximise their independence and to be in control of factors affecting their life. This emphasis may not fit with the goal of a dementia-focused service, which may be more around maintaining comfort and support. Services will need to explore the Scales and decide whether they can be used for the type of support they provide.

Overall, there may be a challenge in using the Scales with people with dementia because the Scales do have a focus on the actions, motivations and decisions of an individual, and these may not be something that can be influenced or changed because of the impact of dementia. However, the Scales do also look at the role of the service and the support the individual is receiving, and this may be more relevant for practitioners to focus on.

¹ <http://www.contenteddementiastrust.org/>

Caution in using Star data

The issues set out above (non-standard completion and Scales not specifically designed for this setting) mean that Star data may not be as accurate and meaningful as when Stars are completed in line with best practice. It may be inevitable that Star data shows a negative decline in the Journey of Change readings for individuals as their illness progresses and the outcome areas on the Star become less relevant for them.

Triangle would advise services to focus on the benefits of the Star as a holistic, person-centred assessment tool and not to expect that Star data can evidence the outcomes being achieved by a service in this setting.

4 More information and next steps

Contact us on info@triangleconsulting.co.uk or +44(0)207 272 8765 to discuss any aspect of using the Outcomes Star. More information about the Star generally can be found on our website www.outcomesstar.org.uk.