



## Using the Life Star™

The Life Star is designed to be used as an integral component of keywork or support. Depending on the abilities of individual service users, the process of completing the Life Star may be carried out either by the service user and keyworker<sup>1</sup> together; by a number of professionals with family or other carers; or by a single worker, alone.

Completing the Star is intended to be positive and helpful, to stimulate and focus discussion, and to provide a useful basis for action planning and review. It is a flexible tool that consists of:

- The Star Chart and Action Plan
- The User Guide with easy-read and detailed scales for each of the ten outcome areas
- Flashcards for the Star areas and the stages of the Journey of Change
- An Organisation Guide
- This Guidance for Workers.

The Life Star terminology has helped me explain and discuss the outcome areas at the right level for each individual.

**Worker,  
Partnerships in  
Care**

**Make sure that you have received training in using the Life Star** and that you are familiar with the materials and know when and how it is used in your service. It is vital that workers using the Life Star understand and use the Life Star Journey of Change as this will ensure consistent results and reliable information for use by your service.

The Journey of Change can be summarised as five main stages: **it is not working**, **it is difficult but I am getting help**, **it is OK**, **it is more how I like it** and **it is right for me**. The final stage on the journey represents maximum independence, choice and well-being.

**Introduce the Life Star to service users.** Where service users have the potential to complete the Star collaboratively, draw on the resources flexibly, including:

- Talk through the points in the introduction to the Life Star in the User Guide, choosing relevant words and examples. Use the flash cards for the Journey of Change and outcome areas if they are helpful
- Use the service user's personal experience as a basis for explaining the Journey of Change, focusing on one of the scales as an example
- Use the illustrated version with photo symbols to enhance understanding and engagement. Alternatively, use the scale wording and colours or consider adding relevant photographs, pictures or symbols to the un-illustrated version
- Introduce the Star to a user group or within another group setting first. Perhaps invite a service user who has already completed the Star and found it a positive experience to describe the process to new service users.

<sup>1</sup> The keyworker could be a project worker or support worker, or the role may have another name in your service. It is the person who is assigned special responsibility for working with that service user – assessing their needs, agreeing goals and providing support and referrals to help them meet those goals.

**Discuss each area.** Let the service user decide which scale to start with or choose one that is concrete and may be easier to discuss, for instance, Your Health. Then either:

- **Start with one of the scales** as a basis for discussion about that area or
- **Have an open discussion** about the area then, if appropriate, use the scale to place the service user on one of the Journey of Change stages
- For service users who can engage in the process but for whom written words and numbers are not helpful, just **have the Star Chart and flash cards on the table** and verbally explain the outcome areas and underlying Journey of Change.

**Use the Journey of Change when deciding where a service user is on their journey.** Without referring to the Journey of Change, one person's 3 could be another person's 8 and your service will not be able to treat collated Star data as reliable for reporting purposes. There are two versions of each of the ten Star scales; the brief visual scales include easy-read text, colours and numbers to support using the Star collaboratively with people with a range of abilities and preferences. The detailed scales are intended as a resource for workers so feel free to refer to specific points for clarification with service users if it is useful but avoid reading through the detailed scales with service users because of their length.

**If you don't agree, have a discussion** – this can help you learn about the service user and help them to arrive at a more realistic view. This is true when using the Star with the service user directly or when a team of workers from a range of disciplines (and possibly family members) complete the Star collaboratively. If a service user is able to meaningfully engage and is at 7 or above for most of the Life Star areas, encourage them to take the lead in placing themselves on the scales. You may need to be more directive in arriving at a scale point for service users near the start of their journey.

This process requires good keyworking skills and some knowledge of the person and a relationship with them. You will need to encourage those people with low confidence to see their strengths, others to be more realistic and use your professional judgement if further discussion is not helpful.

**If you cannot reach agreement, record both readings on the Star**, labelling which is the worker's view and which is the service user's. Use the Star notes to record points from your discussion.

**When you have completed all of the scales, join the points to create a shape.** If working on paper, mark each scale point on the Star Chart and join the points. If the service user is directly involved, encourage them to do this and create the shape. If working on the Star Online, select the scale points and when all are entered a button will appear asking you to generate a completed Star.

**Use the completed Star as the basis for an action plan** whether the service user is directly involved or whether professionals, family and other carers create the plan on their behalf. Look at the shape together and prompt the service user, if they are directly involved, or the team, if not, to comment on it as a basis for agreeing what to do next. Depending on the service user, their understanding, and the approach used within your service, potential questions are:

The Life Star imagery is a real positive. For the more profoundly disabled clients, a great deal of effort was made to ensure that enlarged versions, including pictures and information, were provided to make the process as inclusive as possible.

**Residential care worker, Warrington Borough Council**

Working together can improve insight and understanding for both the person and their worker.

**Consultant, Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust**