

CASE STUDY

Using Family Star Plus™ data

A case study of Outcomes Star data with Staffordshire County Council in children and family services

The Family Star Plus is designed for use with families, to support effective parenting by focusing on the parents and their abilities to help their children thrive. Staffordshire County Council have used the Family Star Plus since 2012, when the UK Government and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's (MHCLG's) Troubled Families Programme began.



The Troubled Families programme was developed to improve multi-agency responses to the needs of families who are causing a high cost to the public purse. It includes families affected by poor school attendance, youth crime, anti-social behaviour and unemployment.

As part of Staffordshire's Troubled Families work, referred to as 'Building Resilient Families and Communities' (BRFC), the Council has nearly 400 practitioners using the Star*. The Family Star Plus is used in a wide range of family support services, across the Council's eight districts, including:

- Voluntary and community service providers
- In-house social care providers
- Family intervention teams, with partners such as the police, housing and domestic violence teams.

Barbara Hine, the BRFC Co-ordinator, is involved with commissioning services across the eight districts. This case study sets out five key lessons Barbara has learnt about using the Family Star Plus and Star data.

1. Linking 'exit' Star readings to the funding framework provides focus

Until recently, alongside reporting on 'hard' outcomes like reductions in convictions, BRFC was partly funded by payments received when families reached step seven in three specific outcome areas on the Star which are aligned to outcomes for the Troubled Families Programme (Progress to work, Keeping your children safe, and Boundaries and behaviour). For Barbara, this means that more reflective and qualitative data and insight is embedded into the 'payments by results' submission alongside simpler 'black and white' statistics.

* Figures and statistics correct as of 2018.



There were challenges to using the Star in payment by results, including the time taken to claim funding for individual families on a case by case basis.

For BRFC, their use of the Star in these individual claims and successful spot checks from MHCLG enables them to demonstrate that they can produce valid claims for families. This and other Family Star Plus data has been central to their success in becoming one of only 11 English authorities to be awarded Earned Autonomy Funding to deliver the Troubled Families programme.

2. Forecasting expected Star readings at the start of support helps BRFC to provide appropriate interventions and use resources more effectively

Barbara explains that “we look at start readings to see if we have families in the right level of service. For example, if families in our Family Intervention Service have readings of five (5), I look a bit deeper to see if we’re really using our resources correctly.”

The expected start points have been identified by Barbara and her team, linked to how intensive or specialist the intervention is

and therefore the level of risk presented by a family.

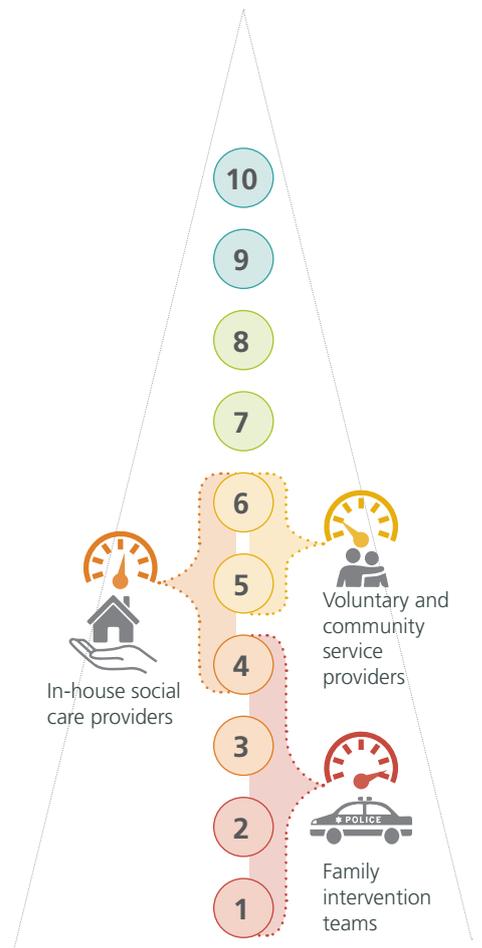
For example, the expected start points for three different services are:

- Voluntary and community service providers (least intensive) – steps five or six
- In-house social care providers – steps four, five or six
- Family intervention teams, with partners such as the police, housing and domestic violence teams (most intensive) – steps one to four

Using Star data to be more focused about where people start and end with BRFC, has helped to “promote whole family work and to reduce re-referrals after a case has been closed to some critical parts of early help services from 38% to 19%.”

3. Combining Star completion with capturing other data has operational benefits

Embedding the Star in operational practices has multiple benefits including ensuring that the Star is used well whilst also supporting staff to complete other procedures. For example, as well as the outcomes information captured by the Star, the BRFC also needs to understand about



Expected start points for three services

“We run reports using the Star Online and drill down further. With the Star Online, we use ‘Service user and Star’ reports to give us the data to show a summary of service users, their Star readings and the progress they are making, in order to support work being undertaken within districts.” — Barbara Hine, BRFC Co-ordinator and commissioner, Staffordshire County Council



housing tenure. However, although that data can't be collated centrally, Barbara explains that the Star helps to gather the information holistically:

"when practitioners have a discussion about the Home and money scale during the completion of their Star, it's about asking the housing tenure question at that point, as part of the conversation, rather than as a separate, disconnected tick-box exercise".

These additional data needs can be incorporated into their in-house case management system, an approved software system which also provides the Outcomes Star.

4. Ensuring managers understand the Star as well as practitioners do focuses case management discussions, improves supervision and practitioner impact

BRFC have a number of Licensed Star Trainers, who champion the Star across the organisation and its partners. For example, in order to support accurate Star data and consistent application of the Journey of Change when completing Stars, Barbara "worked with our Licensed Trainers and created some case studies so that a discussion around

Star readings and how to use the Journey of Change could be included in group supervision meetings".

For Barbara a key learning for effective Star implementation, and capturing meaningful Star data, is to engage with operational managers: "we'd got strategic buy-in from the wider partnership and we'd trained the operational frontline practitioners, but we missed the middle managers – but the implementation plan needs to be embedded at the level of operational managers so that they can integrate it into case management discussions and crucially into supervision. Some of the feedback we received from practitioners was that their direct operational managers didn't understand the Star, so we ran training for operational managers as well".

5. Using Star data informs commissioning needs

Looking at Star data by outcome area helps BRFC to understand what is going on across the cohort of people being supported and the impact the support is achieving.

"For example, in one district, Star data shows that we had a high number of families in which adult

emotional health and well-being were problematic, with a high percentage of people starting with high levels of need (low Star readings) and relatively little positive change. Practitioners were struggling to find the right resources, so the collective partnership in this district pulled together all the partners and looked at what services already existed and where the gaps were. They then identified ways that the emotional health support could be improved. Star data and practitioner intelligence informed that discussion".

Looking forward

Staffordshire County Council continue to invest in the Family Star Plus and to embed it as part of their transformation of children's services. In addition to exploring how the Star might be used by more Police Community Support Officers as part of their service reform, Barbara states that one "next development is to embed the Star in early development statutory services as part of our in-house children's service early help offer. We are integrating the Outcomes Star usage into our Early Help assessment, which is owned by the child safeguarding board".

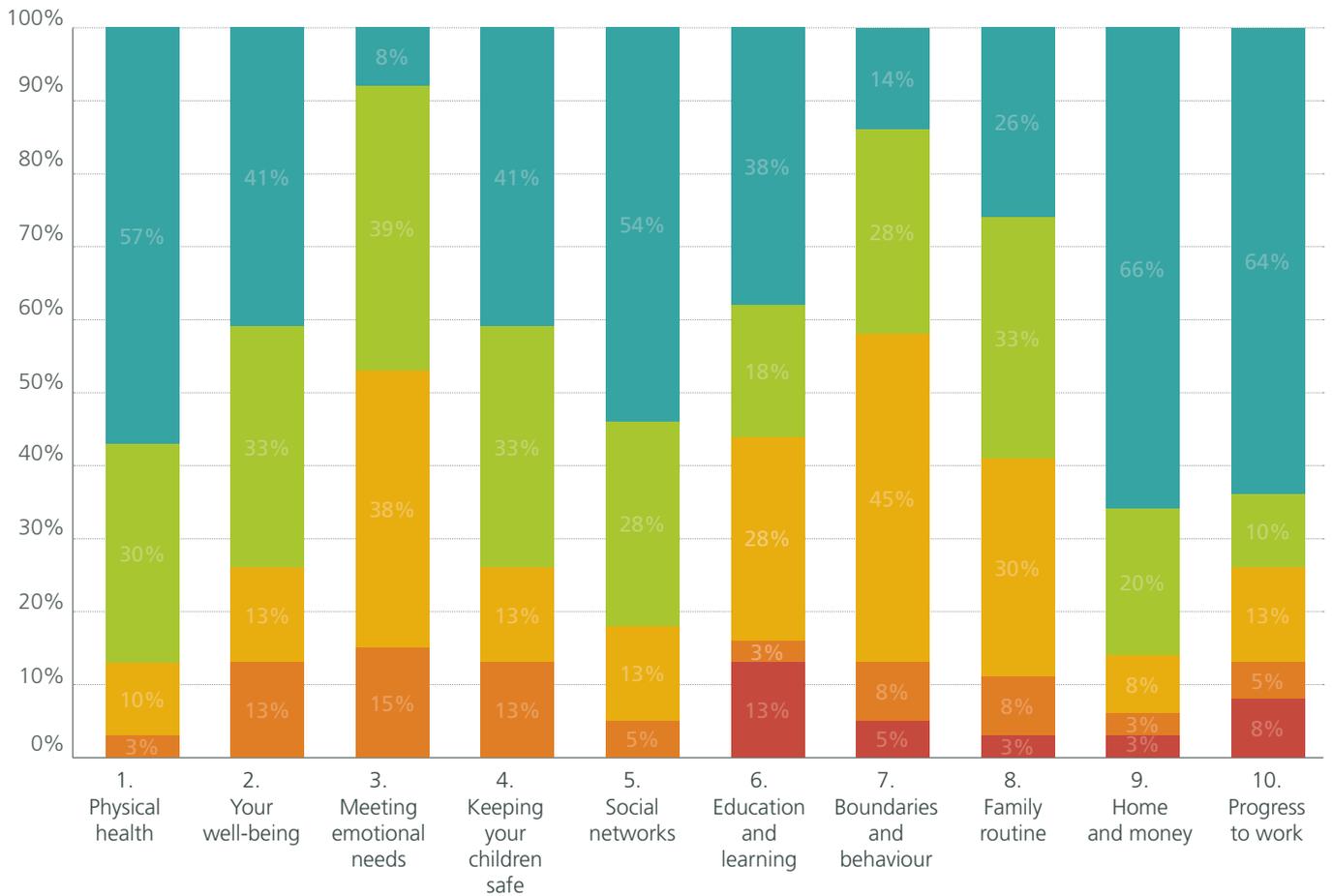
"We look at start readings to see if we have families in the right level of service... [and then we can use the data to] look a bit deeper to see if we're really using our resources correctly."

— Barbara Hine, BRFC Co-ordinator and commissioner, Staffordshire County Council

Example of Family Star Plus data analysis at Building Resilient Families and Communities (BRFC)

One of the key reports that Staffordshire use includes:

Stacked bar charts showing the distribution of service users across the Journey of Change for each outcome area on entering the service.



Stacked bar chart showing distribution of service users across the Journey of Change at starting point

Key: ■ Stuck ■ Accepting help ■ Trying ■ Finding what works ■ Effective Parenting



More information and next steps

Visit our website for previews of the Star, guidance and information:
www.outcomesstar.org.uk

Triangle are the social enterprise behind the Outcomes Star, based in the UK. If you are not based in the UK, please visit our website for the contact details of organisations supporting the Outcomes Star internationally.

Find out more

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Visit us: www.outcomesstar.org.uk

The Family Star Plus is a version of the Outcomes Star: a family of tools copyrighted and developed by Triangle for supporting and measuring change when working with people.



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