

# Case study

## Giving young people a voice



Young people with a support worker (middle) at a St Basils project

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**Donna Barrett,  
Service Manager  
for Support,  
St Basils**

### The challenge: a holistic picture of young people’s needs

West Midlands-based charity St Basils provides direct access services and long-term sheltered housing to 16-25 year olds who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In 2011 it introduced the Outcomes Star for Homelessness. The motivation was twofold: to demonstrate to funders that it was delivering an effective service, but also because the Star is a holistic tool that would support keywork.

“For us it’s about having as holistic a picture of young people’s needs as possible,” says Service Manager for Support Donna Barrett. “A lot of the young people we see have complex needs. We help them address any issues that might affect them being able to sustain a tenancy.”

Equally importantly, the charity wanted the young people to have a voice in their own outcomes. “We didn’t want them feel it was us doing something to them – we wanted them to be involved in it,” says Donna. “It was key to us that they have a say in what their future is going to be.”

### The process: championed by the pilots

St Basils carried out a pilot in four different services – a long-stay 24-hour service, a long-stay mother and baby service, and two services staffed only during the day. Right from the beginning there was a strong appetite for the Star. Keyworkers in the pilot were enthusiastic about the Star’s capabilities and the fact that it was so simple to use. But it also went down well with the young people.

“It gelled really well with them because they could see the improvement that was happening,” says Donna. “Quite often when you’re in crisis you don’t see how far you’ve progressed, so it’s really good for us to show young people the original Star they did when they first came to us and let them see how far they’ve come.”

By the end of the pilot, the four services were acting as champions for the Star throughout the organisation, sharing learning and experience with other services that were taking it on for the first time. “I almost didn’t need to sell it – they did that for me,” says Donna. The Star is now used throughout St Basils, with most services using the Star Online.

A Triangle consultant worked closely with the charity to train its 120 keyworkers in using the Star effectively. He now does regular top-up training sessions every three or four months for new staff or newly developing services.

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## The benefits in keyword: breaking big goals into baby steps

One of the biggest benefits of the Star has been the built-in action planning. “It forces you to be smart and work in a structured way,” says Donna. “Our old system could be quite vague. For example, someone might have a long-term goal of getting a flat but there was nothing that told you what to do in between to get to that place. The Star allows you to put in those steps and recognise whether those milestones are being achieved. We can focus on the baby steps – and having those steps as part of the support plan goes a long way to ensuring that people don’t just give up.”

Donna has also found that the Star builds motivation. Young people complete a Star at the beginning of their contact with St Basils, then every three months thereafter in order to give them enough time to show some progress. “If there’s no change, you’ve lost your buy-in,” says Donna. “Young people need instant validation.”

Although starting points differ widely for different services – in direct access services they tend to be much lower – the average young person will see a 3-4 point change in the course of a year on the 10-point scale.

## The benefits of the data: learning how to improve

From a back office point of view, the Star’s reporting mechanism has proved both simple and effective. Managers can pull off a report and see how many Stars have been done, what the average scores are and how effective the organisation is being with young people. In addition the Star can highlight areas that aren’t working so well and give a focus to where the service needs to improve.

“Traditionally we didn’t do particularly well in terms of offending,” says Donna. “So we were able to commission Birmingham Youth Service to do staff training around offending, and also to bring in people for drug and alcohol issues and sexual health. These are areas where staff might have a working knowledge, but they’re not experts. The Star points us in the right direction to get extra help.”

Donna also uses the Star as a basis for supervisions with her service managers. “I print out a summary of Stars over a quarter and we look at whether there are issues in the service that we aren’t addressing. It’s also very useful just in seeing whose Stars are up to date – if there’s a lot of annual leave or sickness there will be gaps. For me it’s a really good supervision tool.”

## The impact: a structured way of working

The Star has proved highly effective at St Basils. “We’ve got a much more structured way of working now,” says Donna. “Services may approach it differently but the structure doesn’t change for anyone.”

The action planning within the Star has also had a huge impact on the way keyworkers carry out goal setting with the service users they work with. “We’re not just giving young people a big bite,” says Donna, “we’re giving them little nibbles along the way, which are a lot more achievable.”

And the quality and effectiveness of the service is evident throughout the homelessness sector. In its last review by Supporting People (the government programme for monitoring housing-related services), St Basils scored straight As across all five sections.

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Service Manager  
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