



Using the Home Star™

The Home Star is for people who have difficulties with housing or who have other complex needs. This might mean help with finding and keeping a home, improving relationships or learning new skills.

It is a version of the Outcomes Star, a suite of tools for supporting and measuring change when working with people.

The Star is designed as an integral component of one-to-one keywork¹ or support. It consists of:

- The Home Star Chart, Notes and Action Plan
- The Home Star User Guide, with brief visual scales and detailed scale descriptions
- A short Scales document
- An illustrated summary of the Journey of Change
- Flashcards to support the conversation with some service users
- A leaflet explaining the Home Star for service users
- This Guidance for Workers
- The Star Online web application at www.staronline.org.uk

The Home Star was developed by Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise as a new edition of the original Outcomes Star for housing and other needs, often known as the Homelessness Star. We are grateful to the many people and organisations who have collaborated in the development of the original version and this new edition.

Completing the Home Star is intended to be a helpful, engaging and empowering process that stimulates and focuses discussion and provides a useful, shared basis for an action or support plan. It is a flexible tool that relies on the skills of the professionals using it, as well as on a degree of understanding and trust between them and the person they are supporting. The Star is designed to be used one to one; the aim is to have a genuine interaction and complete it collaboratively.

Before using the Home Star, all workers need training.

Background and further information about the Outcomes Star suite of tools can be found at www.outcomesstar.org.uk

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1 Keywork may have another name in your service, but it includes assessing someone's needs, agreeing goals and providing support and referrals to help them meet those goals. The keyworker is the person who is assigned special responsibility for working with that service user.

I felt fully involved; it was clear and easy to understand.

Service user

You can really get to know someone and know things about someone [using the Star] – even though you may think you know them well.

Service user

Before you use the Home Star™

Your service may be the first point of contact for people needing support and may offer a safe space where they feel they will be listened to and understood. Keyworkers can play a vital role in providing a safe environment for people to acknowledge their needs and find appropriate support. As a holistic keywork tool, the Home Star supports the opening up of conversations by providing a framework to explore all aspects of a person's life. However, it needs to be used well.

Make sure that you have received training in using the Home Star and that you are familiar with the materials and know when and how the Star is used in your service. It's vital that you understand and use the Journey of Change underlying the scales – **stuck, getting help, believing and trying, finding what works,** and **self-reliance**. This will ensure consistent and reliable information as a basis for support-planning and for use by your service. You also need to be familiar with all the scale descriptions, so you can unpack and rephrase them as needed, depending on people's culture, understanding, experience and use of English.

It focused on me as a whole person, not just as a problem. It felt like a conversation, like the first time someone had listened to me.

Service user

How to introduce the Home Star™

Before you introduce the Star to someone for the first time:

- Decide how you will introduce the Star in a way that feels natural to you and clear for those you are working with. You may want to write a short script to use
- If you meet with the people you support in groups, it can be useful and save time to explain the Star to the group before starting one-to-one work within individual sessions
- Consider giving people who are interested a copy of the brief scales or even the User Guide to read before the session. Although the User Guide is quite detailed and relies on someone being comfortable with reading in English, the whole document is worded in accessible language, so it can be shared.

When introducing the Star:

- Explain that people may start anywhere on the Journey of Change and can move both up and down on the scale. Point out that 10 is the top of the Star scales and signals that, although life may be far from ideal and there may be more to do, people are able to continue to improve their life without the support of your service (though they may use other specialist services for, say, mental health or addiction recovery or legal issues)
- Be clear that this is about exploring where they are and building up a map of their world and experiences – it is not about being judged or being awarded an overall number

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- The Journey of Change has stage names, colours and numbers in order to meet a range of needs. Choose which to use depending on what works best for each individual then use those words, colours or numbers to refer to where someone is on the scale. Avoid using the term “score” – rather refer to “where you are on the journey/scale” or other alternatives depending on the context
- Encourage people to ask questions so they feel as comfortable as possible about the Home Star and reassure them that they will have choices about the process and pace of completion
- Let people decide which scale to start with or choose one that is concrete and may be easier to discuss or feels natural for you as a worker to be engaging with, such as “Where I’m living”.

We set out to use the Star to measure outcomes. We have ended up with an improved keyword system!

**Manager, Simon
Community, Dublin**

Some suggested phrases for introducing the Star include:

“The Home Star is a way of finding out about where you are now and understanding your strengths and needs, then showing how things change.”

“The Star tells us how things are for you now and what needs to happen next, and it helps you and me plan our work together.”

Overall, the skills and approach needed to introduce and use the Home Star well are likely to be in keeping with good practice in your service, including being person-centred and trauma-informed.

For example, when responding to people who might be experiencing emotional distress:

- Listen and allow the person to settle – give them space and time and don’t pressurise them into talking
- Be empathetic and demonstrate a caring approach
- Provide reassurance that emotional distress and the symptoms they are experiencing are normal and to be expected after traumatic experiences.

How to complete the Home Star™

Complete the Star collaboratively with people in a way that responds to their needs and abilities. The aim is to engage them in meaningful discussion, and to listen to and learn about them, rather than to complete the Star as quickly as possible. It is sometimes best to introduce the Star once you have already started building a working relationship with someone, rather than in a first meeting.

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Use the scale descriptors as a basis for discussion about the chosen area, or have an open discussion about the area, and then use the scale to place the person on the Journey of Change. The brief visual scales in the User Guide are designed to be used directly with people.

Although the detailed scales are intended primarily as a resource for workers, they are written to be accessible, so feel free to refer to specific points for clarification with people. Avoid reading them out in their entirety because of their length.

There are also Flashcards for each of the ten Star areas and each of the five stages of the Journey of Change. People who struggle with English or reading may prefer to use the Flashcards to support the conversation.

When placing someone on the scales, always be aware of the Journey of Change and of the detailed scale descriptions. These are designed to reduce subjectivity. Otherwise one person's 7 could be another person's 5, in which case the completed Star may not be a useful basis for completing the support plan, and your service won't be able to treat collated Star data as reliable for reporting purposes.

If you don't agree, have a discussion – this can help you learn about the person you are supporting and may help them reflect on their situation and see it in new ways. If someone is able to engage meaningfully (usually from point 5), encourage them to take the lead in placing themselves on the scales.

This process requires good keyworking skills, some knowledge of the person and a relationship with them. You may need to ask different questions, particularly if there is emotional distress or someone is reluctant to talk about difficulties in that area.

If you can't reach agreement, record both views on the Star, labelling which is the worker's view and which is the view of the person you are supporting. Use the Star Notes to record points from your discussion. Use your professional judgement to decide when further discussion isn't helpful.

Recognise external factors. Making progress on the Journey of Change will rely on a combination of the work done by a service and the person doing what they can to make changes for themselves. However, there will also be factors and conditions beyond their control – and beyond the control of your service – which make it harder for things to improve.

External factors that may have a big impact on people are likely to include limited availability of suitable housing, lack of work opportunities or issues with close family members. Others may include the lack of suitable mental health provision or drug or alcohol misuse services. These need to be acknowledged and recorded when using the Star, for example in the Notes section. Your service may then be able to use this information to identify gaps in provision, plan future developments or raise issues with policy-makers.

Recognise other factors. While the emphasis in the Home Star is on where someone is now and how they can be supported to make progress, there may also be trauma, emotional distress or other factors that make things more difficult. As with external factors, these need to be acknowledged and noted, and they may affect how you work with someone, in line with good practice in your service.

When you have completed all the scales, join the points to create a shape. Mark each reading on the Star Chart and join the points. Encourage the person you are supporting to do this themselves and to create the shape.

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How to use the completed Star as the basis for a support plan

Look at the shape of the completed Star together and prompt the person to comment on it as a basis for agreeing what to do next. Ask questions such as:

- Is the shape of the Star an accurate picture of how things are for you now?
- What does it tell you about what is and isn't going well?
- What are the strengths that you bring to the areas that are going well? How might you apply those strengths in other areas of your life?
- What does your Star tell you about areas where you can make changes yourself or where you need support?
- What is most important to address first?

Once you have chosen the areas to be included in the support plan, further questions for each area include:

- Where on the scale do you want to get to and by when?
- What needs to be done to bring about that change?
- Who is responsible for these actions? When can they be completed?

Complete the Home Star Action Plan or use your organisation's action planning documentation. The Journey of Change provides valuable pointers for thinking about the goals of support at each stage and achievable, realistic actions.

It helps to visually see that I am changing, that things are happening, that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Service user

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