



**Development Report**

# **Little Star™**

The Outcomes Star for children with motor impairments

### **Published by**

Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Ltd  
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Edition 1.1 published May 2020

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### **The Outcomes Star™**

This Star is part of a family of Outcomes Star tools. For other versions of the Outcomes Star, good practice and further information see [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk).

### **Acknowledgements**

Many people have contributed to the development of the Outcomes Star over its long evolution and we would like to thank all the clients, workers, managers, funders, academics and commissioners who have generously given their time and expertise.

The original commission for an outcome measurement system came from St Mungo's, with financial support from the London Housing Foundation, and Triangle recognises their vital roles in the development of the Outcomes Star. We would also like to acknowledge Kate Graham's important contribution to the development of the suite of Stars as a founding partner of Triangle.

We would particularly like to thank Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity, the collaborators for the development of this version of the Star and Chiltern Music Therapy who also piloted the Star.

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## Introduction

### The Outcomes Star™ tools

The Outcomes Stars are a suite of person-centred tools for supporting and measuring change when working with people. They are both keywork and outcomes tools, supporting effective interventions and giving management data on progress towards the end outcome. Because of this dual role, they bring together measurement and service delivery and can provide a shared language and framework across operations and data management for departments and between commissioners and service providers.

All versions of the Outcomes Star have five- or ten-point scales arranged in a star shape. Each point on each scale has detailed descriptors setting out attitudes, behaviour and sometimes skills or circumstances typical of that point on the scale. Underpinning these scales is a model of change (the Journey of Change) describing the steps towards the end goal that both the service and service user are trying to achieve.

The Outcomes Star tools are different to other approaches to assessment and outcomes measurement<sup>1</sup>. They are designed to empower service users within a collaborative process of assessment and measurement that supports a positive conversation and is integrated with support work, rather than being a separate activity. The Star is closely aligned to person-centred, strengths-based, co-production and trauma-informed approaches and can support people and organisations to put those values into practice:

- Person-centred: the Star encourages and enables workers to listen to the perspective and priorities of service users and to work with them collaboratively. It helps engage service users to develop realistic action plans based on where they are on the Journey of Change
- Strengths-based: The Star is holistic and enables people to focus on aspects of life that are going well rather than have an assessment focused entirely on areas of difficulty. The

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<sup>1</sup> The Outcomes Stars share the core principles of Participatory Action Research (O'Brien, 2001; Carr & Kemmis, 1986) – empowerment, collaboration and integration – extending these beyond research into assessment and outcome measurement. Participatory Action Research seeks to empower the subjects of research, collaborate with them and integrate research into practical action to improve people's lives. The Outcomes Stars seek to empower service users within a collaborative process of assessment and measurement that is integrated with support work rather than being a separate activity.

scales focus on what service users can change, rather than the severity of their problems or circumstances

- Co-production: the collaborative approach to completion means that the service user and worker produce the assessment and measurement together and build a shared perspective as a basis for action. This is in contrast to expert assessment or self-report approaches in which the two perspectives remain separate
- Trauma informed: the collaborative nature of the Star helps to give the service user control, which has been shown to be important in building a sense of safety for people who have experienced trauma. The focus of the tool is primarily on how things are now, rather than past experiences that might trigger someone's trauma and put them outside their safe "window of tolerance". In addition, the guidance for use emphasises the importance of building of a trusting relationship and a shared perspective as an essential foundation to moving forward.

For a fuller description of the values and approach underpinning the Outcomes Stars suite of tools, see MacKeith (2011).

Background and further information about the Outcomes Stars suite of tools can be found at [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk).

## The Little Star™

The Little Star is for use with children with cerebral palsy or other motor impairments who are receiving Conductive Education and/or other therapies.

The Little Star includes the following resources:

- The Little Star Chart, Notes and Action Plan
- The Little Star User Guide, with both brief visual scales and detailed scale descriptions
- Short, illustrated Scales
- Guidance for Workers
- A web application for online completion and analysis at [www.staronline.org.uk](http://www.staronline.org.uk)

This Development Report provides a detailed description of the development process of the Little Star.

## Development process for the Little Star™

### Methodology

The methodology for developing all versions of the Outcomes Star is based on Action Research (O'Brien, 2001) and the Existential Phenomenological research method (McCall, 1983). Action Research is a collaborative process of identifying issues, trying out solutions and assessing what works. This phenomenological method places a strong emphasis on understanding the subjective experience of the person or people being researched and the meaning of the experience for them.

The development process comprises four main stages:

Stage 1: Exploring the scope and need for the tool

Stage 2: Creating the pilot version of the new Star in consultation with the working group

Stage 3: The pilot

Stage 4: Finalising the tool

Below we describe how this process was applied to create the Little Star.

### Stage 1. Exploring the scope and need for the tool

Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity approached Triangle to develop a new version of the Outcomes Star that would help them with measuring holistic outcomes and with their work supporting young children with cerebral palsy and other conditions leading to motor impairments to develop gross and fine movement, communication and other skills.

Triangle then carried out a scoping process, involving:

- An exploratory literature review of possible outcome areas
- Reviewing existing measures relevant in this context
- Checking prior interest and enquiries from other services for a similar or the same version.

As with any new version of the Star, this phase also included scoping the capacity for both the collaborator and Triangle to undertake the development within the budget and timescale needed. Based on this, Triangle's conclusion was to proceed with a version of the Star specifically for children with motor impairments receiving Conductive Education and/or other therapies.

## Stage 2: Creating the pilot version of the new Star in consultation with the expert working group

An expert working group was established comprising therapists, outreach workers and managers from Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity to collaborate in the development of the new Star.

This expert group played a central role throughout the development process, providing in-depth knowledge of the issues faced by children with cerebral palsy or other motor impairments, the intended outcomes of service delivery and the process of change towards those outcomes. The working group's input was organised around three workshops. The first two contributed to the creation of the pilot version of the tool, and the third and final workshop reviewed the results of the pilot and contributed to refining the tool to create a final version (see Stage 4).

**Workshop 1** (June 2018): A one-day workshop with a series of small focus groups was held to identify intended outcomes and processes of change in work with children with motor impairments.

The key questions explored in Workshop 1 were:

- What are the main areas in which services and parents/carers are seeking to create change? *These areas become the points of the Star*
- What is the desired outcome of the change process? *This becomes the end point on the Journey of Change that underpins all the scales*
- What model of change describes the steps that children take on the journey towards that end point? *This is described in a series of steps – the Journey of Change – showing a clearly discernible, qualitative difference between each step of the journey.*

A range of techniques were used to draw out participants' subjective experience and knowledge including:

- Using the "outcome triangle" tool to identify the overall aim of services, the specific outcomes they are trying to achieve and the activities they carry out to achieve these changes
- Bringing to mind a child who has undergone a substantial change and identifying the key steps in their process of change
- Hearing feedback about suggested outcome areas and discussing how they would work in different situations and with different children.

Triangle compiled all the material gathered from the working group at Workshop 1 and reviewed it to allow meaning and common strands to emerge. On the basis of this, combined with the literature review carried out in Stage 1, a provisional model of change and outcome areas for the Little Star were developed. These were then used as an outline or “skeleton”, from which the first draft of the Little Star was created.

Once the first draft was completed there was an iterative process of sharing, listening, refining and sharing again to hone the outcome areas, Journey of Change and descriptions of the steps towards change in each outcome area until they resonated with workers participating in the development process. The process included checking that the first draft took into account key themes that emerged from the literature review, and a second workshop with the expert working group.

**Workshop 2** (October 2018): A one-day workshop was held to present the first draft of the Little Star to the expert working group and to hear feedback to inform the pilot version of the Star. On the basis of this feedback and the other activities listed above, the early draft was refined to create a pilot version of the Little Star with the Journey of Change and outcome areas listed below:

The pilot Little Star <b>Journey of Change</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Progressing well</li> <li>4. Actively exploring</li> <li>3. Responding</li> <li>2. Settling</li> <li>1. Not yet settling</li> </ol>
The pilot Little Star <b>Outcome Areas</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gross motor skills</li> <li>2. Fine motor skills</li> <li>3. Communication</li> <li>4. Social skills</li> <li>5. Self-care skills</li> <li>6. Emotional well-being</li> <li>7. Resources</li> <li>8. Support at home</li> </ol>

### Stage 3: The pilot



Triangle trained seven workers from Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity and Chiltern Music Therapy to use the Little Star in January 2019. These workers then piloted the Star with 54 children over an eight-month pilot period. Of these, 45 had at least one review Star reading.

Parents/carers and workers were asked to complete brief feedback forms on their experience of using the Star and to submit the Star data to Triangle for analysis of the psychometric properties of the pilot Star.

### **Summary of analysis of parent/carer feedback forms**

Triangle received seven completed questionnaires from parents/carers who had used the Little Star during the pilot period, of which:

- All said that using the Little Star was a good summary of their child's life
- All said that the Little Star highlighted their child's support needs.

There were a number of positive comments about the Little Star:

"It is a really easy to understand system that covers many areas"

"The Little Star tool has been very helpful in identifying the areas that my child needs support in, as well as celebrating what he has achieved"

"We are early in the process but so far, we've been very well supported and found the plan and progress very encouraging"

"I liked the formal format it was presented in"

"Good to see the breakdown of different areas working on"

"It was easy to measure my daughter's development and see what else we could improve for her, and easy to see"

"It's good that we can see my child's emotional wellbeing encapsulated in such a way that reflects all the positive things. With this number we can see what she is good at and where she needs support".

### **Summary of analysis of worker feedback forms**

Triangle received five feedback forms from workers completing the Star with clients, of which:

- All said that using the Star helped them to get a better overall picture of children's situations
- Four out of five reported that the Little Star helped them to get a better picture of children's needs
- Only one did not find it easy to see where children were on the Journey of Change.

In the open-ended feedback, workers reported that they liked the holistic outcome areas:

"It gives a clear representation of how the client is doing in each area"

"It focussed my thinking about the client into definable areas"

"I liked most of the areas covered and the holistic approach".

There were several comments relating to the difficulty in completing the last two outcome areas in the pilot version. For example:

"I was unable to answer the 'Resources' and 'Support at home' sections as I don't have access to this information".

"We don't work with all families in the home environment, so we were reliant on parents to score these areas".

There were also some specific suggestions about the outcome areas:

"The 'Social skills' section only mentions relating to other children, which I do not see in my 1:1 sessions. It would be useful for this to include interaction with myself or carers"

"No section on cognition to include things such as attention to task, divided and sustained attention, choice-making, communicating understanding, processing, sequencing and planning"

### **Psychometric analyses of the pilot Star data**

Analyses of the Star data from the 54 initial Star readings and 45 second Star readings (for the six outcome areas that were completed) showed the following:

*Distribution:* Readings were well distributed across the Journey of Change, with the exception of the "Social skills" area, which was skewed towards the bottom of the Journey of Change (not restricting responsiveness).

*Item redundancy:* Some inter-item correlations were just above .70, but it was felt that it was important to include each area from a keyword perspective.

*Internal consistency:* Cronbach's alpha was .94, well above the .70 threshold, indicating good internal consistency.

*Responsiveness:* There was statistically significant change for all areas ( $p < .001$ ) and effect sizes were medium-large for five outcome areas and medium for the "Emotional well-being" area.

See the Appendix for more detail on the findings from the Star data.

Further research into the psychometric properties of the final published version of the Little Star was initiated following publication. For the latest information on this, please contact [info@triangleconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@triangleconsulting.co.uk).

## Stage 4: Finalising the new Star

After the end of the pilot in October 2019, Workshop 3 was held to draw together the learning from the pilot.

**Workshop 3 (November 2019):** The third and final meeting of the expert working group gathered in-depth feedback on the process of using the tool. It also focused on the detail of the tool itself – the areas covered, Journey of Change, scale descriptions and range of materials.

The working group was asked some specific questions about the Little Star and the responses are briefly summarised below.

*What worked in the pilot Little Star?*

The Little Star was deemed useful for fundraising and grant applications:

"Useful for fundraising; good in terms of what we can show to funders"

It was also seen as a useful part of monitoring and providing the service:

"Helps identify gaps – for example, we saw communication wasn't progressing far and have recruited a speech and language therapist"

"Helpful to have the holistic picture"

“Means we’re not skimming over other areas beyond gross and fine motor skills”

“Shows we’re grouping well on age and ability”.

### *What didn't work in the pilot Little Star?*

The two things that did not work well were as follows:

- 1) The “Resources” and “Support at home” outcome areas – because workers did not have enough information about this and it was hard to engage parents in completing these areas
- 2) The lack of an area covering cognitive skills to show change in level of understanding.

### **Changes made to finalise the Star based on learning from the pilot**

On the basis of the worker and parent/carer questionnaires, psychometric analyses and Workshop 3 feedback, a number of changes were made to the pilot version of the Little Star to create the final version. The main changes are summarised below:

- Two scales – “Resources” and “Support at home” were removed after the pilot, as workers in the pilot were mostly unable to complete them with families. This was because they only have a small outreach capacity and parents don’t have time (or don’t see this as the charity’s role).
- The “Cognitive skills” scale was added after the pilot as workers had found it a significant gap. It focuses on paying sustained attention, information processing, remembering, categorising and reasoning.
- The “Self-care skills ” scale was adjusted to have less emphasis on feeding and more on other self-care skills such as removing clothes
- In the “Emotional well-being” scale, references to play at each Journey of Change were removed at the lower end of the scale and appear only from the third stage onwards
- The end bullets at each stage of the detailed scales were adjusted to make it clear that workers knew how to proceed at each stage

- Changes were made throughout to make meaning clearer and to include more appropriate examples where necessary.

The final Little Star  
**Journey of Change**

5. Progressing well
4. Actively exploring
3. Responding
2. Settling
1. Not yet settling

The final Little Star  
**Outcome Areas**

1. Gross motor skills
2. Fine motor skills
3. Cognitive skills
4. Communication
5. Social skills
6. Self-care skills
7. Emotional well-being

## Completion

Once these changes had been made, the draft final version of the Star went through final checks:

1. Dame Vera Lynn Children’s Charity was invited to review and comment on the final draft
2. It was reviewed again by Triangle to ensure clarity of descriptions and distinctions between each stage of each scale
3. It was edited and proofed before being typeset

The Little Star was published in May 2020, around two years after the development process had begun.

## References

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MacKeith, J. (2011). The development of the Outcomes Star: A participatory approach to assessment and outcome measurement. *Housing, Care and Support*, 14(3), 98-106.

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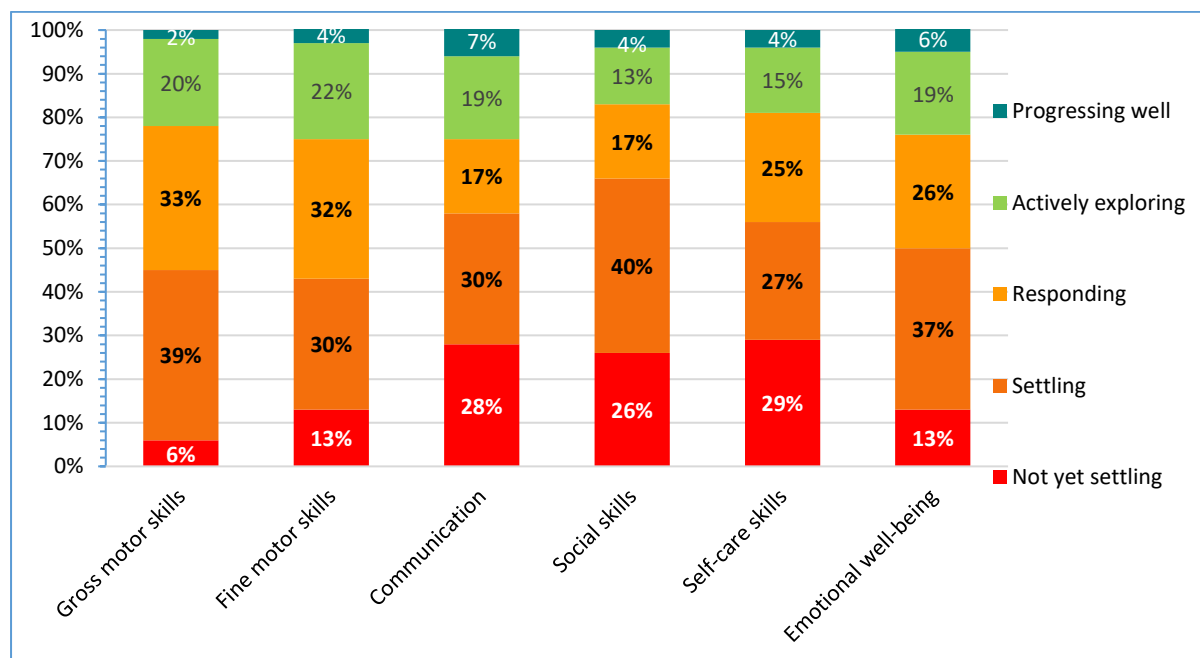
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## Appendix

### Details of the psychometric analyses of the pilot Little Star

Two scales (“Resources” and “Support at home”) were not included because most workers were unable to complete them. This was because they only have a small outreach capacity and parents don’t have time (or don’t see this as the charity’s role).

#### The distribution of initial Star readings across the Journey of Change stages during the pilot of the Little Star



	Skewness statistic	Result
Gross motor skills	.24	Approximately symmetric
Fine motor skills	.06	Approximately symmetric
Communication	.46	Approximately symmetric
Social skills	.70	Moderately skewed
Self-care skills	.40	Approximately symmetric
Emotional well-being	.35	Approximately symmetric

**Correlation matrix showing relationships between outcome areas (N = 69)**

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Gross motor skills					
2 Fine motor skills	.66				
3 Communication	.59	.73			
4 Social skills	.48	.56	.75		
5 Self-care skills	.74	.78	.79	.72	
6 Emotional well-being	.63	.65	.70	.78	.67



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