

CASE STUDY

Making a difference, demonstrating a difference

Why the Carers Trust network is welcoming the Carers Star™

For the Carers Trust, measuring outcomes has become crucial in their mission to improve support for unpaid carers. The difficulty is making sure that a measurement tool also works for hard-pressed carers themselves. But the Carers Trust and its network partners are increasingly finding that the Carers Star does both.

The Care Act

The Care Act of 2014 enshrined new rights for carers in law, with local authority commissioners having to assess them and provide support where needed. This has given rise to bigger, multiple contracts for services helping carers – and a corresponding demand from commissioners for good outcomes measurement.



The challenge: engaging carers while evidencing service impact

"The landscape now is that you need to demonstrate the difference that you're making – it's more and more competitive," says Dr Richard McManus, insight and intelligence manager at the Carers Trust. "There's a big difference in the way services are commissioned and ultimately how they're delivered."

"Having the Carers Star is a really good way of demonstrating that we understand the needs of carers. It's based on lots of research, evidence and testing, as well as engagement for the carers themselves."

Carers are not an easy group to engage – they're overworked, stressed, and often so focused on the person they're looking after that they have no energy left for themselves. But because the Star is a visual tool

that's completed collaboratively, workers find they can quickly get carers on board with it.

"The Star is a good way to spark conversations," says Stephen Taylor, service delivery manager at Carers Leeds, one of the Carers Trust's network partners. "Carers like the visual stuff, they like the scaling, they like to see change. The Star is about a journey – it helps carers to stay focused on the bigger picture, not just a bad week."

Victoria Mellor, lead carer advisor on the CarerLinks project for Crossroads Together, is equally enthusiastic.

"Carers do want to engage," she says. "There's no typical carer and they can definitely keep you on your toes. But that's the great thing about the Star – you're able to use it in different ways. It's very adaptable."

"Having the Carers Star is a really good way of demonstrating that we understand the needs of carers" – Dr Richard McManus



With nearly a third of the Carer Trust's network partners now using the Star, Richard McManus is able to see the individual impact of particular services, but also to gather data on the collective impact across the network. It's proving invaluable in securing bigger contracts, which the Trust bids for jointly with one or more network partners.

"More generic charities might have less robust reporting and measurement in place," says Richard. "But with the Star we can show we have specialist knowledge and real expertise – and also for particular groups, like young carers, carers for people with dementia, or carers who also work."

The process: flexible but focused

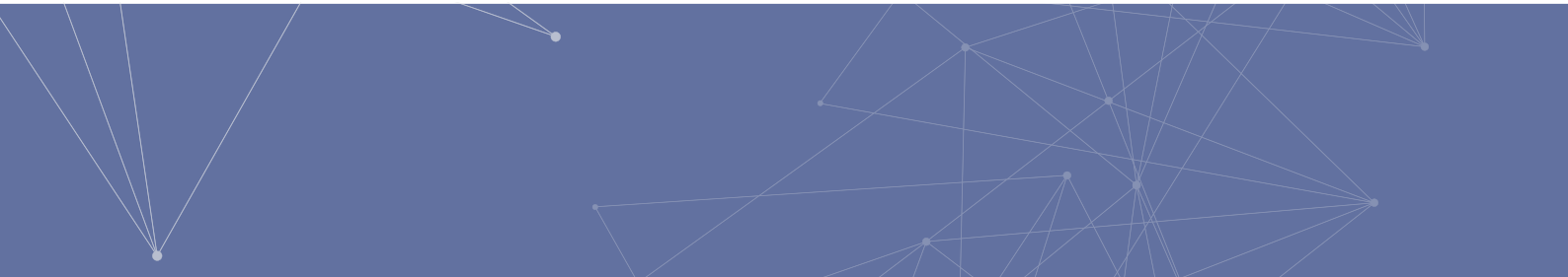
Services use the Star at assessment, review and then a final meeting, usually over a period of three to six months. The first meeting may well be about offloading concerns, but carers can start on any of the seven areas of the Star that feels useful to them, and choose to park others if needed. If a carer is in crisis, a worker may judge that it's not appropriate to use the Star at that time. "Then I just use it as a guide and a prompt to bring things back if they go off at a tangent," says Victoria. "It brings back the focus."

At a later meeting, carers return to the Star to review their progress. "They like to look at back at the

journey," says Victoria. "They ask 'what did I say the first time? I'm in a different place now.'"

Sometimes at review carers may place themselves lower on a scale, perhaps because they are being more open about how things are for them, or just because things have deteriorated for them in that area. "I love being able to see where things are working and where they aren't," says Victoria. "If you see a decrease, you can go back to the drawing board and try something different."

The process is both highly collaborative and highly flexible. "There are lots of different ways to get the carer to engage with it," says Stephen. "Traditional assessments tend to ask what's wrong and then try to deliver a service. The Star is about co-production – it's about carers coming up with their own ideas about what works for them, through good conversations."





The benefits: empowering carers, improving services

For advisers the benefits are clear: genuine collaboration, with the result that carers feel empowered. "People are engaging with their own care plan because the process is collaborative and strengths-based," says Stephen Taylor. "The collaborative approach is a really powerful thing."

Both he and Victoria also feel that the Star is useful with endings. "None of us want to see dependency," says Stephen. "It's helpful in bringing things to a natural end. You want carers to go away feeling resilient as part of a strengths-based approach."

On the data side, managers employ the Star in supervisions, running a report to understand a worker's caseload. "If an adviser has a really successful Star, we use it as an example in a team meeting," says Victoria. She also uses it to compare services in different places and to share learning from one site to another. "It helps to show what's working, say in Liverpool, that we might want to duplicate it in Shropshire."

The Carers Trust is seeing benefits right across the network. "The network partners that use the Star really value it," says Richard McManus. "It helps them with improving their services and transforming the way they deliver those services, based on real evidence and feedback from carers."

"And of course, because of its robust design and methodology it's highly appealing to commissioners."

The impact: building resilience

For carers themselves, the impact of understanding their strengths and bringing these to bear in other areas of their lives can be profound, helping to build resilience for the future.

"Carers have loads of responsibility but they don't necessarily focus on what they're doing or realise how much they matter," says Victoria. "They often feel unappreciated, so it's great for them to see their strengths. If they don't feel able to go on, we're all in trouble, so it's really important they can see it."

More information and next steps

The Carers Star was developed for use with a wide range of carers, both full time and part time. 'Carer' can refer to anyone who is providing unpaid care for a relative or other person, whether they live with the person they care for or not.

The Carers Star is available to all organisations with a Star licence, and full training can be given for workers and managers. If you would like more information, contact us on info@triangleconsulting.co.uk or +44 (0) 207 272 8765.

Carers Trust network partners get a discount for Carers Star training and licences. Find out more on our website.

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– Stephen Taylor

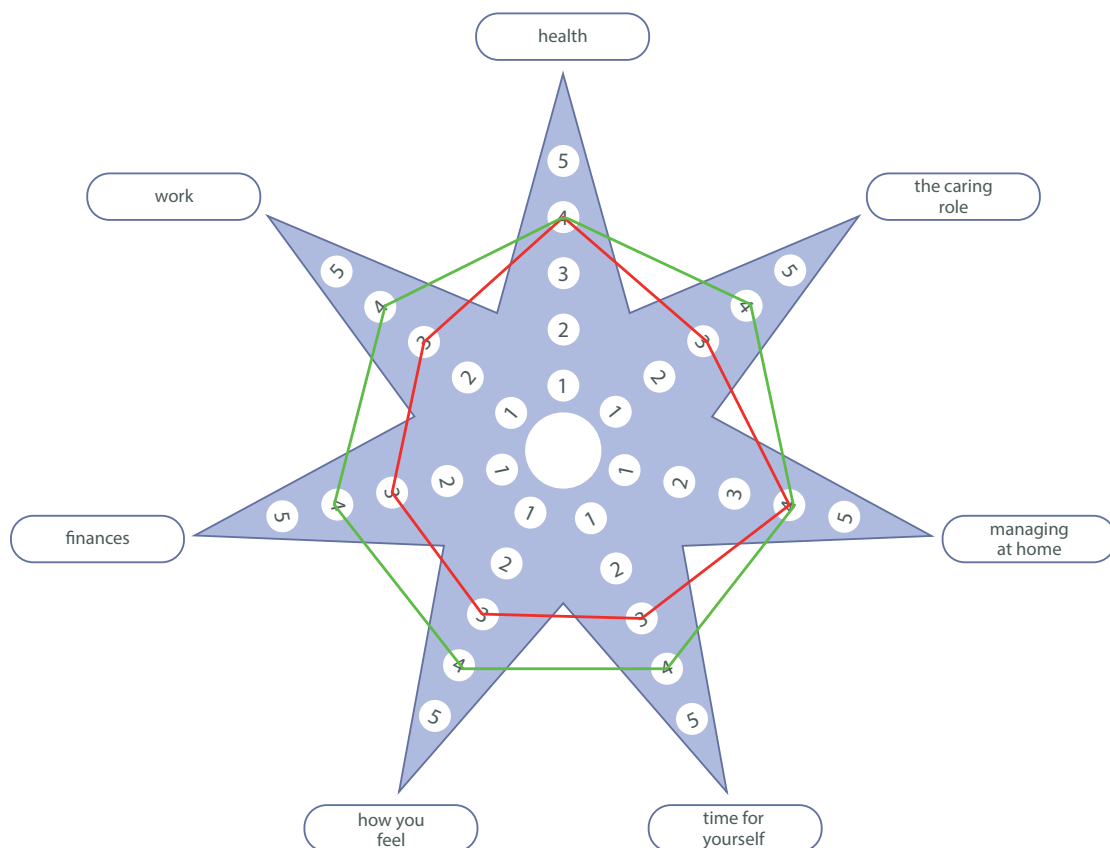
The Carers Star is a tool that both worker and carer can see. Its visual form makes it instantly clear what is working and not working in each of seven areas of a carer's life. Worker and carer fill it in together, in any order, led by the carer's immediate concerns.

The Carers Star™ in overview

The Carers Star is a holistic, person-centred, outcomes focused and strengths-based tool which supports self-management and measures engagement.

The Carers Star was developed by Triangle in collaboration with the Carers Trust and SEEL (Social Enterprise of East Lothian) with part-funding through the Scottish Government Change Fund.

Each scale has five stages, with each stage described with 'I' statements and supporting definitions – the Journey of Change. It is to be completed collaboratively at assessment and review to inform support plans.



Key to lines

- Initial reading
- Review reading



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

Call us: +44 (0)20 7272 8765

Email us: info@triangleconsulting.co.uk

Visit us: www.outcomesstar.org.uk

The Carers Star 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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