

## CASE STUDY

# Using the Empowerment Star™

## Women's Refuge New Zealand and the Empowerment Star Roll-out

The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR) is a network of 40+ self-governed Refuges who respond to crisis calls, provide secure accommodation within safe houses and offer longer term support. Together they form an integral part of the solution to New Zealand's family violence problem and directly support nearly 27,000 women and children in 2019/20.



NCIWR's workforce of around 300 workers, plus a similar number of volunteers, accepts referrals from the police and social service organisations as well as self-referrals. The focus is on continually finding and further developing effective ways to protect and support women affected by abuse within intimate partner and family relationships and on preventing this abuse from re-occurring or escalating.

### **NCIWR immediately recognised the Empowerment Star as the right tool for them**

When Dr Ang Jury, Chief Executive of NCIWR, discovered the Empowerment Star, she was immediately drawn to its familiar shape, clear language and user friendliness. As a tool specifically developed for women experiencing family violence, she could see it was a good fit for the work of the NCIWR. She saw its potential to help improve practice by supporting Refuge workers in their interventions. Dr Jury also understood how the Empowerment Star could be embedded within NCIWR's Refuges in a way that would be responsive to the cultural needs of Māori, New Zealand's indigenous peoples, empowering and enabling them.

**The Empowerment Star is designed for use with women who have experienced domestic violence and abuse and by the organisations, refuges and outreach services working to support them.**



### **Initially engaging the interest of member Refuges required strong leadership and relationships**

Rolling out the Empowerment Star to the organisations' 40+ devolved member Refuges required strong leadership, ongoing support and trusting, respectful relationships with each individual refuge. This was facilitated by having a skilled and experienced team who had already successfully introduced a new centralised Case Management System (CMS) across the sites. NCIWR's decision to integrate the Empowerment Star into its CMS early in the roll-out meant the organisation was able to make the most of learning from that rollout in familiarising its member Refuges with this new tool.

An early, key strategic decision was selecting the Refuges that would receive the initial training to use the Empowerment Star. Previous experience had shown that there were certain Refuges with a lot of influence within their regions, and so getting them on board and ensuring their enthusiastic support of the Star early on had a domino effect, sparking interest at sister Refuges in their area.

Even though the aim was that all of NCIWR's member Refuges used the Empowerment Star, support throughout the roll-out

remained focussed on each refuge individually, tailored to their needs and circumstances. This membership focused approach was already central to NCIWR's way of working and helped to ensure wide acceptance of the Star and enthusiastic take-up and integration within its member Refuges.

### **The Empowerment Star is now used in two ways within NCIWR women's Refuges**

Currently the Star is completed with women:

- As an upfront assessment tool that sits alongside the organisation's risk-assessment and other intake procedures and helps to create tailored case-management plans.
- After a period of trust- and rapport- building with the client, to provide insight into where the client is now and, looking retrospectively, into where they were at the start of their journey. This is then used to tailor goals and actions in the case-management plans.

Following the rollout, NCIWR is working with its member Refuges to establish a "Community of Knowledge" from which to further develop its guidelines on using the Empowerment Star across its sites nationwide.

**"Things are very chaotic for women coming into a refuge but the Empowerment Star gives them a structure and helps them think about other things besides getting a roof over their heads and their children. The Star shows them the bigger picture."** – Manager, Eaves









### **NCIWR successfully rolled out the Empowerment Star across the whole of New Zealand**

NCIWR's launch process aimed to build momentum quickly with its member Refuges. They selected a mix of general and Māori Refuges as early adopters and – crucially – translated the Empowerment Star Chart into Te Reo Māori, New Zealand's indigenous Polynesian language, with permission from Triangle. NCIWR invited Unique Outcomes (UO) to New Zealand to run the initial training; UO are providers of the Outcomes Star training and support in Australia and New Zealand and those running the rollout at NCIWR worked with them to identify the person most likely to be compatible and to develop a positive, considerate working relationship with the Refuges. Further, the pilot training was well organised, in comfortable, offsite venues with generous catering, to make the sessions a pleasant and memorable experience for the Refuge staff involved.

These initial pilot training sessions were a huge success and NCIWR took advantage of the momentum this generated to continue the roll-out to other Refuges that had indicated an interest, prioritising their bookings for training sessions. Given the positive experience from the initial pilot, NCIWR continued to organise the materials, venues and catering, making participation in the training sessions as attractive

and accessible as possible for each individual Refuge.

NCIWR decided early in the roll-out process to train a few key NCIWR staff members as Star Licensed Trainers. This allowed the roll-out team to maintain momentum and keep up with the demand for training, ensuring ongoing positive engagement from its member Refuges. The decision to have NCIWR staff running the Empowerment Star training also meant learning and knowledge could be held internally and then built upon as the roll-out continued. It allowed NCIWR to be agile and responsive to feedback and ideas received directly from Refuge staff after training sessions and as they began to introduce the Star. It was also more cost effective, which helped safeguard NCIWR's limited funding and deliver greater value for money.

**"The Empowerment Star is very visual. Women actually participate; they really enjoy doing and it enables them to understand the pattern of abuse. It's a very useful tool."**

– Worker, Bromley Women's Aid



### **NCIWR worked in partnership with its funders from early in the process**

Dr Ang Jury included their funders from early in NCIWR's journey with Outcomes Star. NCIWR's key funders, the Ministry for Social Development (MSD) and Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children (OT) were included in early conversations with Unique Outcomes, ensuring that NCIWR's vision for the use of the Empowerment Star was supported and could be incorporated into future funding frameworks and reporting measures.

During the second half of NCIWR's nationwide roll-out, the organisation organised an event for all its funders, potential funders and key stakeholders to highlight the work that had already been done to incorporate the Empowerment Star into Refuges' routine processes. This event showcased NCIWR's roll-out, presenting early experiences of the Star as it was being used by the Refuges. The presentations focused on how refuges were using the Star, their learning about good implementation and key data insights, as well as feedback from both workers and clients who were using the tool.

Following this event, interest in further understanding and using the Outcomes Star for client work has significantly increased in a range of sectors and NCIWR are having

ongoing conversations with various government and non-governmental organisations about its benefits and value.

### **NCIWR learnt useful lessons from the launch, implementation and roll-out of the Star**

The pace at which NCIWR moved from initial conversations to development and final implementation was rapid and gave rise to several lessons they are able to share for others considering a similar roll-out, especially:

- 1. Previous experience with major rollouts** and a successful model of how to do them was certainly helpful and NCIWR incorporated their prior learnings into the process from the start.
- 2. Monitoring and reviewing the Star data** regularly and carefully was important, including the quality of the data being input into their CMS. This was time intensive and led to challenges with staff capacity, particularly combined with the added work needed to facilitate the Star training, which occasionally posed a challenge to in terms of ensuring the data was up to standard. In response, the team capacity was extended throughout the launch period so that these processes could be incorporated formally into the project team's workload.





### 3. Addressing a tendency for Refuge staff to “over-aspirationalise” their clients’ outcomes;

it became clear after a few training sessions that workers wanted to report their clients’ journeys as more positive than might objectively be the case. This was an interesting observation, as NCIWR noted that their Refuge staff were really invested in highlighting to their clients all the progress they had made, and that it was a reflection of their efforts. Unfortunately, however, this tendency can lead to falsified data readings that display a more favourable reflection of their clients’ circumstances than observed in reality. As this was an observation made early in the roll-out process, this was discussed thoroughly and incorporated with even greater emphasis into the Star training, clearly establishing the need for Refuges not to overstate progress and instead provide a real-time analysis of their clients’ circumstances and their journeys in order to ensure more accurate overall outcome readings, data integrity and case management plans.

### 4. Translation of the Empowerment Star Chart into Te Reo Māori

was an essential step in establishing approval and acknowledgement from those of their member Refuges who specialise in providing services to New Zealand’s indigenous population. This decision played a key role in supporting the organisation’s goal of creating early momentum. However, if NCIWR had the chance to repeat the launch of the Empowerment Star tool, the organisation would approach the process of integrating the Outcomes Star within traditional Māori philosophies and practice modules in a more measured and consultative way with their specialised service providers.

Unfortunately, the global COVID-19 pandemic had its effect on the roll-out’s momentum, with the organisation having to pause their training plans for four months. Furthermore, the pandemic caused NCIWR to lose a large portion of its immediate stakeholder and funder engagement and drive, due to the overarching need to manoeuvre the country through the pandemic.

This could neither be planned for nor avoided. However, fortunately NCIWR had already carried out most of the training sessions with those member Refuges that were located farthest away from the organisation’s Wellington office, and so when New Zealand’s lockdown and travel restrictions started to be lifted from mid-May 2020, the project team at NCIWR was able to complete the remaining training sessions within the parameters of the country’s COVID-19 alert level restrictions. NCIWR explored the option of Zoom-based training sessions during New Zealand’s lockdown period, but found they were not overly effective as the requirement for Refuge staff to focus on their frontline work during the pandemic took precedence.







### Next steps

Following on from their achievements in the initial year of this work, despite the global pandemic and other obstacles, NCIWR have already set their intentions for the next phase in their integration of the Empowerment Star and also other versions of the Outcomes Star.

While NCIWR was rolling out training sessions for the Empowerment Star, they ensured that those Refuges who provided homelessness services received training in the Homelessness Star at the same time. NCIWR has now successfully trained all their relevant Refuges in the Homelessness Star and this Star is now incorporated into the initial assessment phase of this service delivery.

NCIWR's latest development features integrating the Change Star (designed for the perpetrators of family violence and domestic abuse) into the organisation's CMS and has identified a number of male advocates to receive the training once the CMS build has been completed.

In the next year, NCIWR hopes to launch My Star for children across the organisation and train advocates specialised in working with children affected by family violence. Originally, NCIWR had planned to follow a similar roll-out structure and process to that of the Empowerment Star, inviting specialised practitioners from Unique Outcomes to lead the initial training of selected Refuges. However, due to ongoing COVID-19 international travel restrictions, NCIWR may have to re-think how to approach the launch.

Near the end of the Empowerment Star roll-out, NCIWR realised that in order to fully establish this tool as part of the organisation's service-delivery model, a second phase of training would be needed, one that was orientated around embedding the tool into practice principles.

This training is going to be critical in ensuring the Empowerment Star is fully embedded as a tool to enhance and inform practice within NCIWR's member Refuges and to continue the work in collecting outcomes data for NCIWR's clients journeying through their service. Further, NCIWR is starting to integrate the language of the Outcomes Stars into its other training packages, ensuring consistent use of both the intentional language and the model of practice that are such strong features of the Outcomes Star tools.

**"We must never assume that workers can use the Star without training. This is about worker confidence, support, training and about taking the Star seriously as an organisation, not just putting it on the table." – Manager, Eaves**

## The Empowerment Star™ in overview

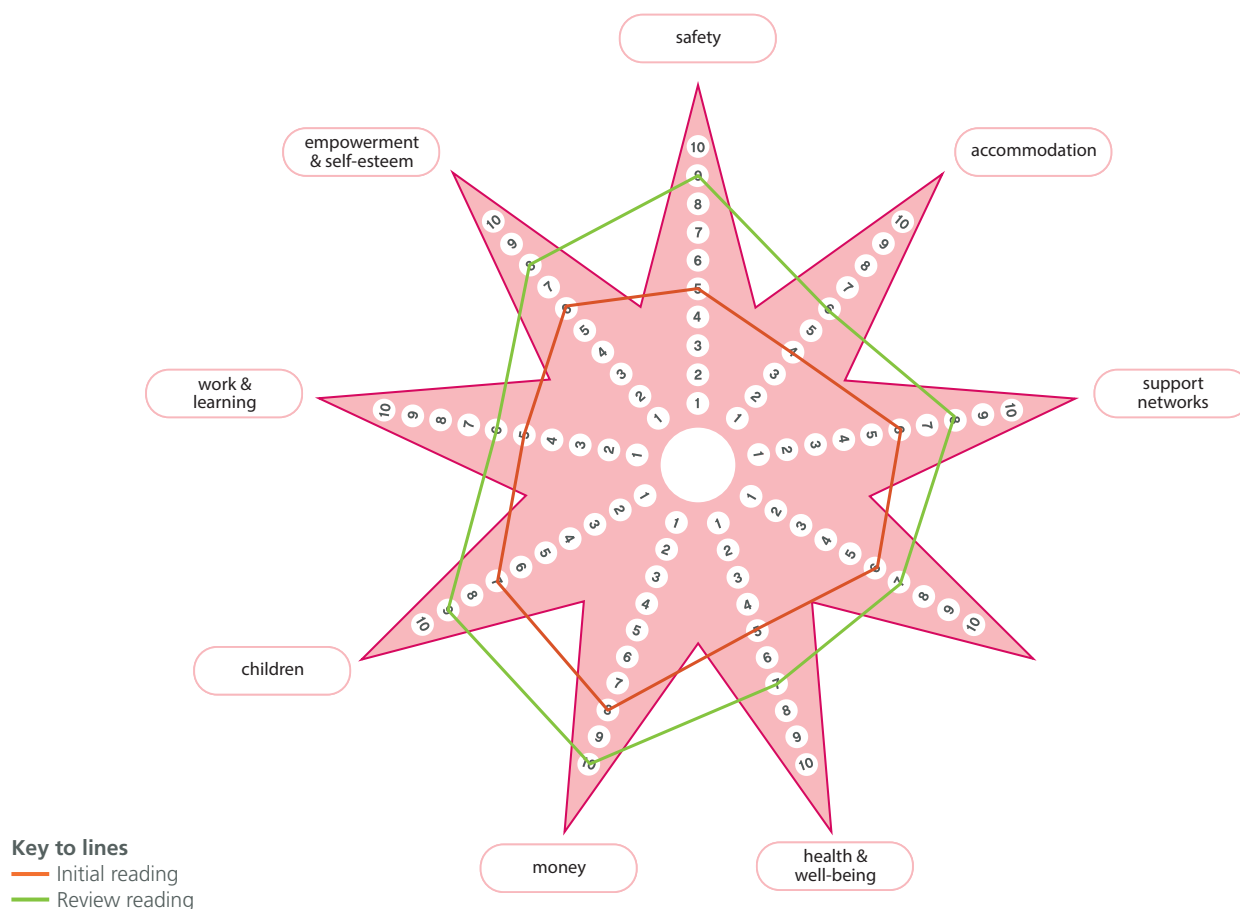
The Empowerment Star is a holistic, person-centred, outcomes focused and strengths-based tool which empowers women and the services supporting them.

The Empowerment Star is suitable for use in women's refuge or outreach services, where:

- Domestic abuse is the main factor in women using the service
- There is an ongoing support or relationship between a keyworker and the women using the service

- The service is holistic and the aim of the service is to empower women to live a life free from abuse, independently of the service.

The Empowerment Star was developed by Triangle in collaboration with Eaves Housing and funding from London Councils.



### More information and next steps

Visit our website for previews of the Star, guidance and information:  
[www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://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

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**Visit us:** [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk)

The Empowerment 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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