

How to define the intended outcomes of your organisation or service

Top tips to help you choose the right Outcomes Star™ and be more outcomes focused

1 Why define your outcomes?

For frontline organisations choosing which version of the Outcomes Star to use, it can be helpful to first define, clarify or articulate your intended outcomes. This will help you to match your outcomes to those covered by a published version of the Outcomes Star. In addition, clarifying the changes you aim to achieve with and for your service users can enhance your focus as an organisation, and measuring the extent to which they are occurring (perhaps through using an Outcomes Star) can help you to learn about what works and what doesn't for the people you support.

This document sets out a process for defining your intended outcomes – if you have any queries or need support with any aspect, please contact Triangle using the details on page 4.

2 What are outcomes?

Outcomes are changes made by the people who use your service – how they change during their time with your service. These are distinct from your *outputs* - what you do as an organisation.

Please note: This document focuses on articulating outcomes for direct work with service users. Many organisations also aim to bring about wider changes, such as changing attitudes in society or increasing funding from government. While these are also intended outcomes, and you may want to measure progress towards achieving them, they are beyond the scope of this document.

3 Introducing the outcomes triangle

This is a simple concept and tool, originally developed by CES¹. It is widely used across the sector, including by the Big Lottery Fund. At Triangle, we use it within the initial process of developing a new version of the Outcomes Star.

The outcomes planning triangle has three sections:

- Overall aim – the broad, long term change for your client group (top)
- Intended outcomes – the positive changes you aim to enable your service users to achieve (middle)
- Activities/outputs – the work done by your workers (bottom)



¹ Charities Evaluation Service (now part of NCVO). For more information, see the NCVO CES [KnowHow Non Profit website](https://knowhownonprofit.org/how-to/copy_of_how-to-create-a-planning-triangle): https://knowhownonprofit.org/how-to/copy_of_how-to-create-a-planning-triangle

4 Completing the outcomes triangle

It's best to start at the top and work your way down the triangle, especially when this process is part of planning. That way, your overall aim informs the intended outcomes and your activities are planned to achieve those outcomes. However, for an existing service, you might find it more straightforward to start from the bottom – first listing the activities and then articulating the changes for service users that they are intended to achieve, then the broad change towards which they contribute. For inspiration, see the example planning triangle on page 5.

Step 1. Get your triangle template ready

Use the worksheet on page 6 or create your own triangle separated into three sections, either on paper or electronically.

Decide whether the task is to articulate the outcomes for your whole organisation or a specific service, perhaps depending on where the Outcomes Star is being considered. Large organisations may find it easier to create an outcomes triangle for each service.

Step 2. Write your overall aim

This is a short sentence, which needs to include (in any order):

- Who your service is for (your target group or population) - who you want to create change for in the longer term:
 - This could be defined by age sex, ethnicity, need, circumstance, attitude and/or behaviour
 - Your geographic reach as a service, whether local or wider
- The broad, overall change for those people to which you contribute
 - One way to approach this is to start with the long-term problem or issue those people face, then turn this into a positive statement about what you are working to resolve or improve

Overall aim example:

“To improve the quality of life for older people living alone in Derbyshire”

Tips:

- Draw on your organisation's mission statement. Be aware that mission statements often combine purpose or aim with values and activities – your overall aim needs to simply state *who* you work with and the *change* you aim to achieve with them
- Try asking 'why?' in response to your first articulation of the overall aim, to reach a higher or broader aspiration, or perhaps to be relevant to why you're funded for the work. For example, a group providing positive activities for young people on a local estate could express their aim as: 'to reduce antisocial behaviour on the local estate' or, if pushed further, as to 'enable young people on the estate to achieve their full potential'
- The overall aim and the change you seek to make can be very broad, for example 'to achieve their full potential'. This is the broader outcome you contribute to, without being responsible for achieving it alone. For some services the overall aim will be quite specific or narrow. This can be helpful in focusing the rest of the triangle. What is important is that it is real and expressed as a change.

Step 3. Write your specific aims/intended outcomes

These are the *changes* that need to happen for the *people* you support to bring out the broad change described above. The middle of your outcomes triangle may have 5-10 intended outcomes that:

- Use words that describe change, such as: to increase, to improve, to reduce, to prevent
- May include changes in behaviour, health, attitudes, skills and/or circumstances
- Are clear and concise – could someone outside your organisation understand them?

One approach is to imagine an individual who arrives at your service and ask yourself:

- What do we hope will change for this person from when they first come through the door to when they leave, or to six months or a year later?
- For example, are there changes we try to bring about in aspects of their circumstances, physical or emotional health, behaviour, knowledge, skills or motivation?
- Looking at the services we offer (advice, classes etc.), why do we provide those services? What is the intended effect in enabling people to improve their lives?

Another approach is to list the barriers people face in making progress towards the overall aim of your service, and then express the flip-side of those – the positive changes of overcoming the barriers. For example, if one of the barriers to independence is not managing money, the intended outcome may be to enable people to better manage their money.

Whichever approach you use, remember outcomes are about *change* and *people* – about what changes for the people you support. It may take a few goes to get it right.

Step 4. Write your activities

In the bottom of the outcomes triangle, write what you do – the activities you deliver to help bring out the outcomes described in the middle of the triangle. This is often the easiest section to fill in! List your main activities:

- Use words for doing, such as ‘to provide’, ‘to run’, ‘to offer’ or ‘to support’
- The term ‘outputs’ is often used when recording this information
- For example, the number of women attending a weekly group, the number of one to one sessions provided in a month, the number of calls to a helpline each day

Example of specific aims/outcomes:

- “To reduce isolation and loneliness”
- “To enable older people to live at home as long as possible”
- “To reduce avoidable hospital stays”

Examples of activities:

- “Run a Befriending service with local volunteers”
- “Provide Information and advice around home adaptations and domiciliary care”
- “Offer training on fall prevention to carers and older people”

Tips

- You can find information about your activities in:
 - Contracts or tenders where you have set out exactly what you will deliver
 - Lists of services, interventions or support available from your service, such as on your website, in leaflets or on posters
 - Job roles and job descriptions
- Listing your activities may raise questions about inputs or internal processes needed to deliver your activities, such as fundraising, staff training, recruitment or marketing. However, these are beyond the outcomes triangle so will need to be listed elsewhere.

Step 5. Review your triangle

Look over all the information you have entered. Check:

- **Is it clear?** Can someone outside of your organisation can understand it. Try showing it to someone external to you, if you can, and see what they think.
- **Is it realistic?** Check that the outcomes expressed are realistic given the level of support you can offer and given any factors outside of your control.
- **Can you join the dots?** Are there logical connections? Can you see how the activities you do contribute to achieving your outcomes and how your outcomes contribute towards your overall aim? It may be that one activity contributes to many outcomes and another to only one. See the finished example on page X to see what we mean.

5 Using the outcomes triangle to choose an Outcomes Star

To help you identify the most appropriate version of the Outcomes Star:

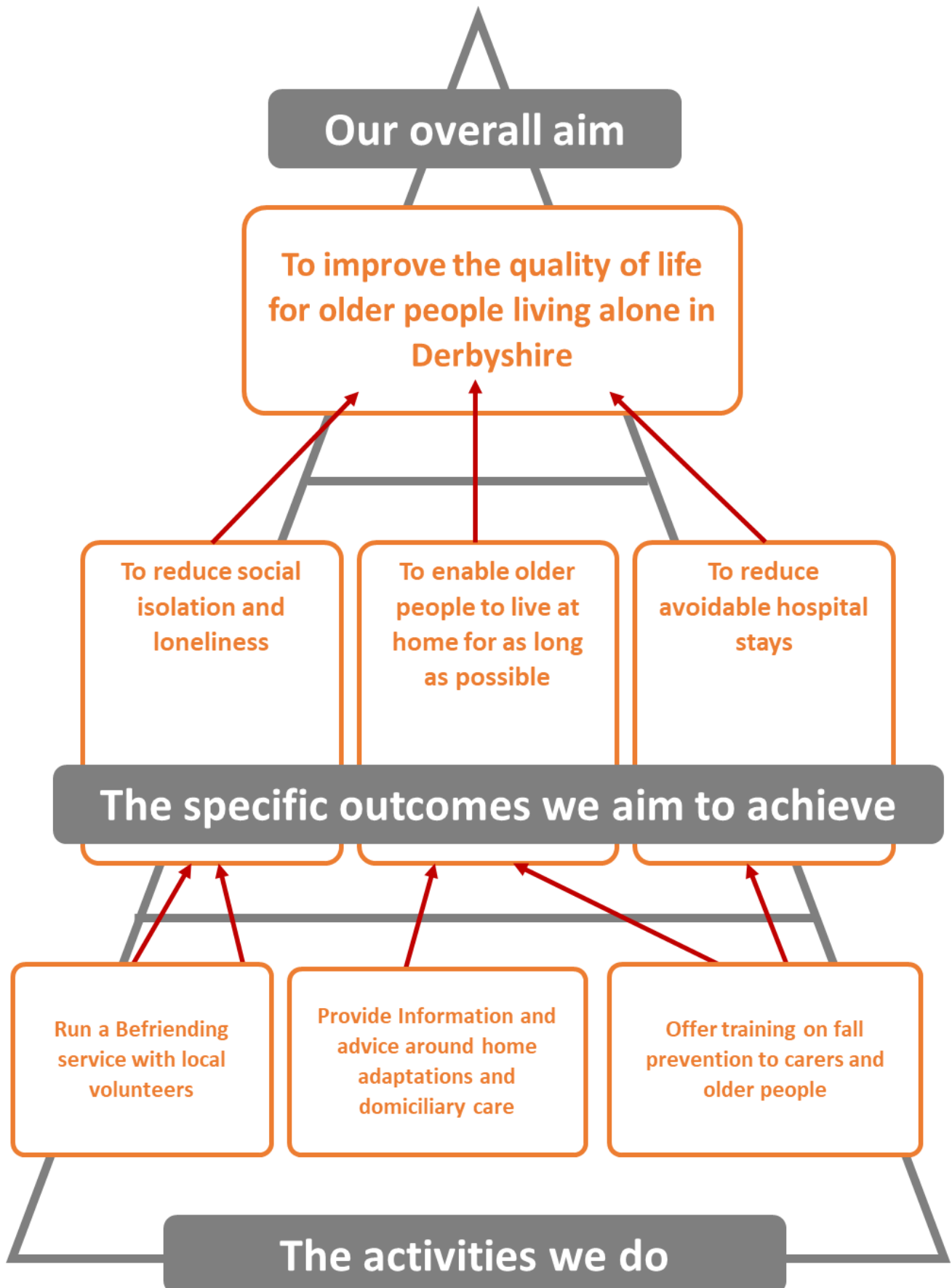
- Overall aim (top): Is there a Star for your target group? Does the end point of the Journey of Change fit with your overall aim?
- Outcomes (middle): Is there a good fit between your intended outcomes and the points of the Star? (it doesn't need to be exact but ideally there will be no more than 1-2 areas that aren't a good fit)
- Activities (bottom): Do you provide on-going keywork or other one to one support within which the Star can be integrated and completed as part of action planning and review?

Feel free to share your outcomes triangle with Triangle for support with making this choice. Our website also contains a full list of all available versions of the Outcomes Stars and more advice with how to choose the right Star for you.

6 Contacting Triangle

For support and further information, contact us on info@triangleconsulting.co.uk or +44(0)207 272 8765, or visit our website www.outcomesstar.org.uk.

7 An example of a completed outcomes triangle



8 Outcomes triangle worksheet

