



**Development Report**

# **Pathway Star™**

The Outcomes Star for people overcoming barriers to work

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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 Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Households into Work programme as the collaborator for the development of this version of the Star.

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## Introduction

### The Outcomes Stars suite of 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 suite of 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 co-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 focusing on past experiences which might trigger someone's trauma and put them outside their safe 'window of tolerance'. In addition, the guidance for use emphasises the importance 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 Pathway Star

The Pathway Star has been developed for people who need considerable support to take steps towards work. It can be completed with people facing multiple barriers, including health problems, housing problems, learning disabilities, substance misuse, crime, domestic abuse, family culture (for example, generations of people not in work), or household finances. "Work" is interpreted quite broadly, recognising that paid work may not be realistic or suitable, so this could include coping well in a suitable supported workplace, or a training or volunteering placement.

The Pathway Star includes the following resources:

- The Pathway Star Chart, Notes and Action Plan for use with service users
- The Pathway Star User Guide, with both brief visual scales and detailed scale descriptions, which can be shared with service users as needed
- Short-illustrated Scales and Flashcards to support engagement of service users

- Guidance for Workers, providing guidance on how to use the Pathway Star
- 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 Pathway Star. In addition, there are other supporting resources and briefings including:

- The Star Summary, providing a brief outline of who this version of the Star is suitable for, how it fits with other tools and how it was developed
- A briefing explaining how the Pathway Star relates to other tools and approaches within the sector.

## Development Process for the Pathway 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 need for and scope of 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 Pathway Star.

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

In 2017 Liverpool City Region Combined Authority approached Triangle to develop a suitable assessment tool for use in its new Households into Work (HiW) programme. The aim of HiW is to help people who are long-term unemployed to find employment, or at least help them to overcome the barriers that are preventing them from seeking employment. These barriers may include mental health, homelessness, housing, substance misuse, domestic abuse, crime, caring commitments, finances, family and parenting. The

programme emphasises developing economic resilience and grit, and these aspects are included in the programme's overall evaluation.

The HiW programme works with service users for up to 12 months. To join the programme, service users must be aged 16 or over, unemployed, facing at least one barrier to finding employment and living in a household with at least one other person who meets the same eligibility criteria and who also joins the programme. Employment advocates within the HiW programme provide direct support to service users to overcome the barriers they face. A budget of up to £1,000 is available to households on the programme and can be used to purchase goods or services that can help them become more willing or better able to seek and find work.

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority identified the need for a reliable outcome measurement tool to support their work with service users in the HiW programme and to provide a means to evaluate the impact of this work. They were already familiar with the Outcomes Stars and considered the existing Work Star but concluded that it was not suitable for service users with complex needs who are far from work-ready, and that it would not adequately capture the holistic nature of their support. They therefore approached Triangle to propose a collaboration to develop a variant of the Work Star or a new Outcomes Star for people with multiple barriers to work.

Triangle then carried out a scoping process, involving:

- An exploratory literature review that included considering other tools used in similar employability services (see the "Relationship with other tools" document for further details)
- Mapping the existing service landscape to identify the likely audience and usefulness of the proposed version
- 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 HiW and Triangle to undertake the development within the budget and timescale needed.

Based on this, Triangle's conclusion was to proceed with the development in collaboration with the Liverpool HiW project, but to broaden the scope of the Star beyond those who met the eligibility criteria for HiW. The decision was to create a version of the Star that would be suitable for any adults facing significant barriers to work and in need of support to be able to engage with mainstream employment services.

The scoping process therefore concluded that the scope of the Star needed to be broad enough to embrace the many reasons why someone might need extra support to move towards work. These include physical or mental health issues, inadequate housing, learning disabilities, substance misuse, current or previous involvement in crime, lack of affordable childcare, family conflict or abuse, a culture of worklessness or household finances (the “benefits trap” – people perceiving that they could not afford to work or having no financial incentive to do so). The scoping process also revealed a range of issues around emotional well-being and self-esteem which needed to be considered, including a high incidence of stress and anxiety and a lack of confidence in relation to skills or work.

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

An expert working group was established comprising managers and workers from HiW to collaborate in the development of the new Star.

This expert group played a central role throughout the development process, providing the in-depth knowledge of the issues faced by service users, 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).

In addition to input from workers and managers as part of the working group, the process included two focus groups with service users, accompanied by workers who knew them to support them to contribute meaningfully.

**Workshop 1** (12<sup>th</sup> September 2017): A one-day workshop was held to identify intended outcomes and processes of change in work supporting people facing significant barriers in moving towards employment.

The key questions explored in Workshop One were:

- What are the main areas in which services and service users 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 service users 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 an individual who has undergone a substantial change and identifying the key steps involved in their process of change
- Hearing feedback about suggested outcome areas and discussing how they would work in different situations and with different service users.

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, and the literature review carried out in Stage 1, a provisional model of change and outcome areas for the Pathway Star were developed. These were then used as an outline or “skeleton”, from which the first draft of the Pathway 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 the client group and 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, a focus group with service users (29<sup>th</sup> November 2017) and a second workshop with the expert working group.

**Workshop 2** (30<sup>th</sup> November 2017): A one-day workshop was held to present the first draft of the Pathway 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 Pathway Star with the Journey of Change and outcome areas listed below:

The pilot Pathway Star  
**Journey of Change**

5. Managing well
4. Trying things out
3. Opening to change
2. Accepting help
1. Not engaging

The pilot Pathway Star  
**Outcome Areas**

1. Skills
2. Stability
3. Money
4. Physical health
5. Emotional well-being
6. Family
7. Social networks
8. Aspiration and motivation

### Stage 3: The pilot

Triangle trained 22 workers from the Households into Work programme to use the Pathway Star on 28<sup>th</sup> February and 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018. They then piloted the Star with 576 of their clients over an eight-month pilot period. Of these, 227 were reviewed once, so had two Star readings, 21 had three Star readings and 5 had four Star readings.

Service users 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.

During the pilot period, workers identified the need for flashcards to help engage service users in discussion. These were drafted and added to the materials.

#### Summary of analysis of client feedback forms

Triangle received 25 completed questionnaires from clients who had used the Pathway Star during the pilot period, of which:

- 83% agreed that the scales helped them to understand what they needed in the way of support
- 79% agreed that it was encouraging to see the progress they had made between one Star reading and the next
- 67% agreed that the scales helped them to describe how life was for them at that moment

- Many provided written responses outlining what they liked about completing the Star. The majority of these responses focused on the Star helping them to identify what they needed to work on and how helpful it was to see their progress and work out their priorities.

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

Triangle received 18 feedback forms from workers completing the Star with clients, of which:

- 94% agreed that using the Star helped them to get an overall picture of a client's situation and needs
- 82% found it encouraging to see the progress that clients had made between Star readings
- 71% agreed that the scale descriptions helped them to understand where to focus next with the client they worked with

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

Analyses of the Star data from the 576 initial Star readings and 227 second Star readings showed the following:

*Distribution.* Readings were well distributed across the Journey of Change, with no serious deviation from normality.

*Item redundancy.* Inter-item correlations were within the expected range of .30 to .70, so there was no indication of item redundancy.

*Internal consistency and factor structure.* Cronbach's alpha was .85, indicating high internal consistency, and factor analysis suggested a unidimensional structure explaining 71% of the real-data variance.

*Responsiveness.* The Pathway Star was responsive to change between the first and second readings. Effect sizes were medium for all outcome areas except for "Physical health", "Family" and "Social networks", where they were small to medium.

See the Appendix for more detail on the service user and worker feedback and the findings from the Star data.

Further research into the psychometric properties of the final published version of the Pathway 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 November 2018, Workshop 3 was held to draw together the learning from the pilot.

**Workshop 3 (21<sup>st</sup> November 2018):** The third and final meeting of the expert working group gathered in-depth feedback on the process of using the tool with a wide range of people in different contexts and 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 Pathway Star and the responses are briefly summarised below.

### *What did you think of the pilot Pathway Star?*

Of the ten attendees who had used the Star during the pilot, four were very happy with it and six had a mixed overall response with some positives and also some reservations or questions.

### *What worked in the pilot Pathway Star?*

Workers reported that the Pathway Star worked well in setting goals with clients and in giving an opportunity to challenge their thinking about where they were on the Journey of Change in each area, and therefore how best to support them. Completing the notes section alongside the Star readings allowed workers to gain a good picture of the needs of people when they first started working with them and at reviews.

Both clients and workers appreciated the flashcards and workers gave examples of how they had helped clients to open up about difficulties in different aspects of their lives for the first time.

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

Workers fed back that several of the bold statements in the Star User Guide (also used in the short illustrated Scales) focused too heavily on work and that as work was not an immediate consideration for clients engaging in the programme, this could feel daunting or the word “work” could be an unhelpful trigger. Several also said that the name of the first stage in the Journey of Change – **not engaging** – was not an accurate or helpful term for clients and could sound overly judgemental. Others fed back that they sometimes found that some of the stages within the Journey of Change appeared to overlap or were not sufficiently distinct. They also suggested simplifying the Journey of Change stage names so that clients could more readily understand them and using simple and accessible language throughout.

Housing was found to need more emphasis in the Star, as it had such a strong effect on whether people could make progress.

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

On the basis of the worker and service user questionnaires, psychometric analyses, post-pilot service user focus group and Workshop 3 feedback, a number of changes were made to the pilot version of the Pathway Star to create the final version.

### ***Overall profile of work and being work- ready***

The focus in the final version of the Star is on whether health and other aspects “hold you back” in life generally, shifting away from the more explicit focus in the pilot version on moving towards work. This is to increase the acceptability and perceived relevance of the tool for people who are a long way from being ready for work and who could be put off by too explicit a work focus at those stages. Explicit references to work still appear in relevant scales in stages 4-5 and this shift did not change the end point or overall aim of the Star.

Explicit references to work were removed from stages 1-2 of a number of scales, including “Healthy lifestyle” and “Emotional well-being”.

### ***New stage names for the Journey of Change***

The final version simplified the stage names in the Journey of Change to better enable clients to understand the stages and more readily recognise where they are on each scale. Specifically, stage 1 was changed from ‘not engaging’ to be expressed from the perspective of the client rather than worker to increase acceptability. **Managing well** was considered too high an aspiration and potentially daunting for most clients, whereas **managing OK** was considered both positive and realistic. The changes were:

Pilot version	Final version
1. Not engaging	1. Not yet ready
2. Accepting help	2. Talking about it
3. Opening to change	3. Giving it a go
4. Trying things out	4. Keeping going
5. Managing well	5. Managing OK

### ***Other changes to Star areas***

- Social skills were added to the “Skills” area on the grounds that these may be major transferable skills that many people don’t recognise in themselves. Soft skills were also added, including teamwork, and the focus on English, maths and work skills was reduced
- “Stability” was changed to “Stability at home”, with the focus entirely on stability in relation to accommodation as this is such a key area
- In the “Money” scale, references to being “worse off in work” were removed from the bold statements, though these were kept in the detailed bullet points. There were also minor tweaks to make the distinctions between the stages of the Journey of Change crisper and clearer in this scale
- “Physical health” was changed to “Healthy lifestyle” and references were added to good sleep hygiene, healthy food and avoiding drugs and alcohol. The focus on health, fitness and mobility as a barrier to work was retained
- “Family” was broadened to “Family and relationships” and more references to “partners, others in the household and close relationships” were added
- “Social skills and networks” was renamed “Friends and connections” and references to social media were added. Social skills were moved to “Skills” (scale 1)
- The “Aspiration and motivation” scale was renamed “Confidence and aspirations”, with an increased focus on wider aspirations and reduced emphasis on aspirations relating to work. Motivation was removed from this scale, as it is an integral part of the underlying Journey of Change
- The “Emotional well-being scale” was not changed significantly as a result of the pilot feedback, as it worked well, with only minor tweaks being made to clarify the distinction between stages.

### **Completion**

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

1. HiW 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 Pathway Star was published on the Star Online in August 2019, two years after the development process had begun.

## References

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research*. London: Falmer Press.

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.

McCall, R. (1983) *Phenomenological psychology*, Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.

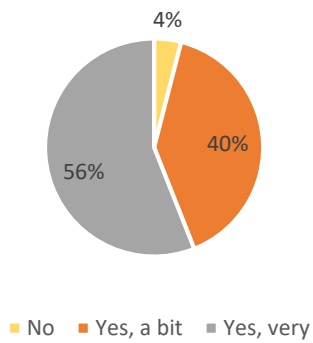
O'Brien, R. (2001). An overview of the methodological approach of Action Research. In Roberto Richardson (ed.) *Theory and Practice of Action Research*, Joao Pessoa, Brazil: Universidade Federal da Paraiba (English version).

## Appendix

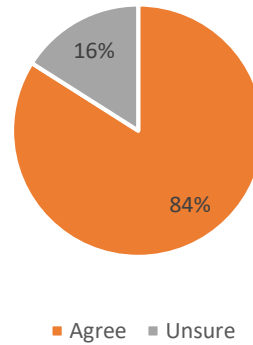
### Worker and service user feedback following the Pathway Star pilot

#### Feedback from 25 service users

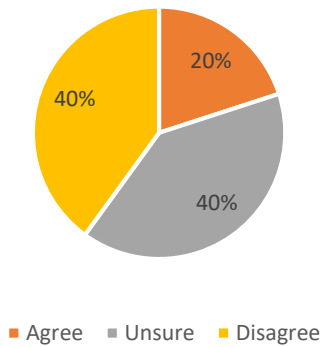
Do you think your completed Pathway Star is a good summary of your life and needs at the moment?



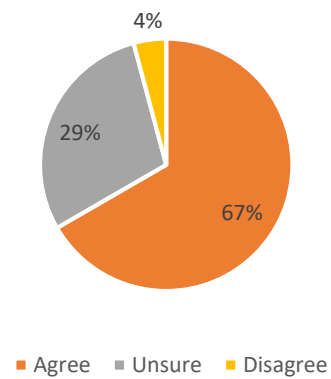
I enjoyed completing the Pathway Star with my worker



I found the process of completing the Star too long

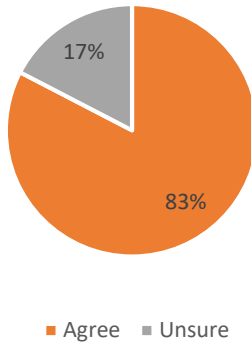


The scales helped me to describe how life is for me at the moment

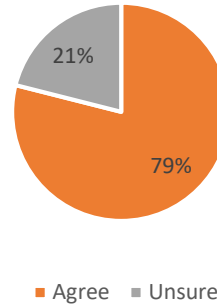




### The scales helped me to understand what I need in the way of support



### The progress I made from the last Star reading to this one is encouraging



## Open-ended responses

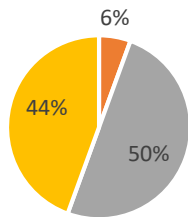
All 25 service users provided written responses to the question “What do you like about the pilot Pathway Star?” Almost all of the responses focused on how well the Star aided the identification of support needs and progress. For example:

- “The Star gave me some ideas about how to change my life”
- “It allowed me to understand what help I need”
- “I could talk about some of the problems that are affecting me”
- “It helped me to see visually where I was up to in my life and what I needed support with”
- “It helped me talk about everything going on in my life and see where I am doing well”
- “I liked that I could see the change in my circumstances. When things change in your life day to day then sometimes you don’t notice”
- “The Star made everything easier to understand and made things less jumbled”
- “It helped me to see that not all areas of my life were bad and we could prioritise what needed attention first”

10 of the 25 service users suggested improvements, with most comments relating to the time taken to complete the Star (for example “It was a bit too long” and “The advocate told me we need to do four. I think one at the start and one at the end is enough”). One service user suggested doing the Star in stages and another to make the explanations simpler to avoid triggering anxiety.

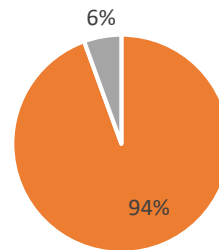
## Worker feedback (18 workers)

How well did you feel the Pathway Star described the situation, strengths and needs of the people you work with?



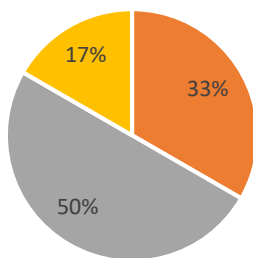
■ Not well ■ Fairly well ■ Very well

Using the Star helped me to get an overall picture of a service users situation and needs



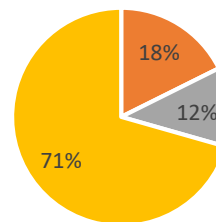
■ Agree ■ Unsure

I found the process of completing the Star with service users too long



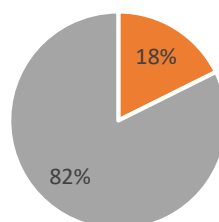
■ Disagree ■ Unsure ■ Agree

The scale descriptions help me to understand where to focus next with the service user I work with



■ Disagree ■ Unsure ■ Agree

I found it encouraging to see the progress that service users had made between Star readings



■ Unsure ■ Agree

## Open-ended responses

17 of the 18 workers provided comments on what they most appreciated about using the Pathway Star as well as suggesting improvements. Most of the workers commented on how well the Star, particularly the visual aspect of it, helps with opening a conversation' and getting an overall picture of the client's circumstances. For example:

- "I like that it can record the milestones achieved and was a visual guide to see what clients are experiencing, good and bad"
- "The Pathway Star allows both worker and client to see the areas that would benefit from support. You can also use this to show progression to the clients as a way of encouragement and motivation"
- "The key to it is the visual aspect, which helps me as an advocate and more importantly the clients themselves see the difference without having to read pages and pages of writing"
- "The Pathway Star is a very useful tool, particularly at the initial part of their journey to establish where the client feels they are and how much progress they can make".

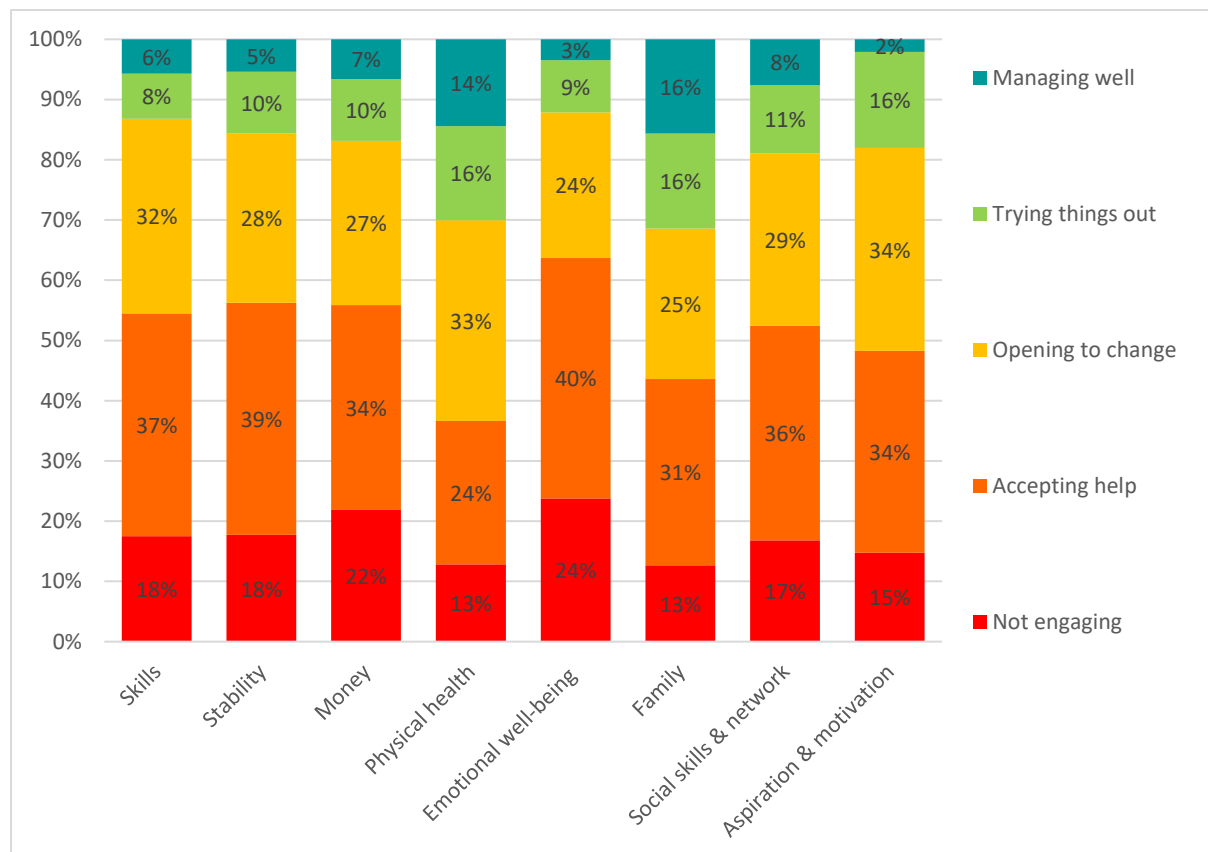
There were also comments on the ease of use, for example, "I was happy with the fact that it didn't take long time to complete with clients", "I enjoyed the simplicity", "That it can be done by hand or on laptop and that it is colourful" and "Good explanation of Star points".

Some workers fed back that the scales needed to be simplified, or more visual resources provided for service users with poor literacy:

- "The Pathway Star written User Guide was too complicated and needs simplifying especially for clients who do not have the capacity to understand long sentences or have a limited vocabulary"
  - "I would like a simple diagram for all areas put in one. Descriptions in writing for clients can be too confusing"
  - "Change the wording in the User Guide and make it easier to read"
  - "Visually the Journey of Change pictures are a good way to start the Star. However, the language used in the scale descriptors is not relevant to our client groups"
- "I would like more visual resources"
- "If clients don't take it as a working tool, they don't see what the point is"

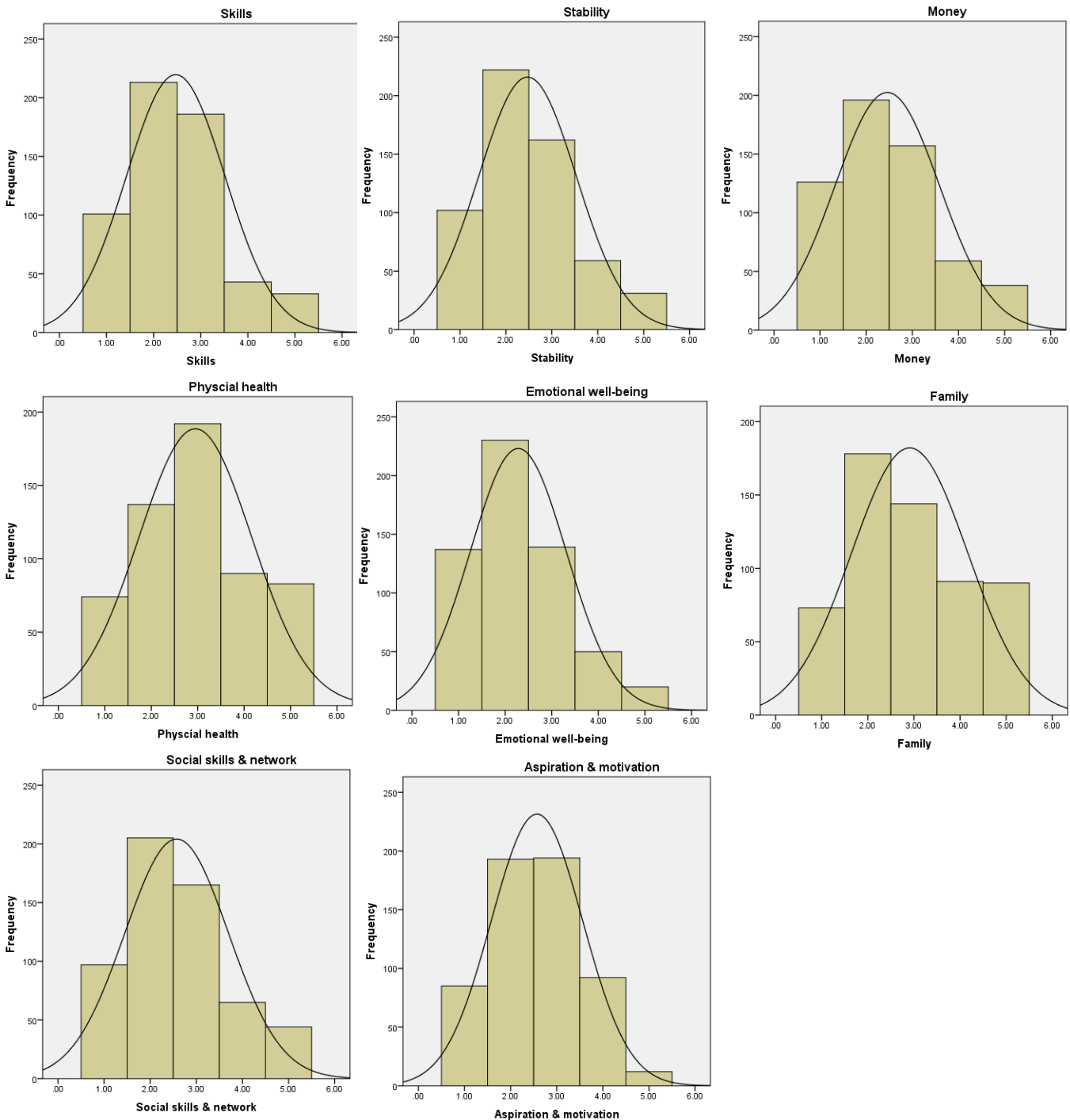
## Details of the psychometric analyses of the pilot Pathway Star

Graphs showing the distribution of initial Star readings across the Journey of Change stages during the pilot of the Pathway Star



## Skew

The skewness statistic ranged from 0.15 to 0.66. Skewness lower than -1.0 is taken to mean it is indicating a serious deviation from normal distribution and this was not the case for any of the outcomes areas. As a rule of thumb, if more than 20% of readings fall into the highest category (5) there is a ceiling effect – making it harder to demonstrate change – and this was not the case for any of the outcome areas. The histograms below show the spread of first Star readings against a normal distribution curve.



## Table showing the pilot Pathway Star inter-item correlations

### Polychoric correlation matrix for outcome areas (N = 576)

	Skills	Stability	Money	Physical health	Emotional well-being	Family	Social skills & networks	Aspiration & motivation
Skills								
Stability	.36							
Money	.31	.61						
Physical health	.37	.49	.41					
Emotional well-being	.43	.59	.52	.56				
Family	.32	.53	.45	.38	.48			
Social skills & network	.47	.57	.49	.53	.59	.53		
Aspiration & motivation	.58	.51	.45	.53	.58	.40	.58	

## Table showing the results of Wilcoxon signed-rank test to test the responsiveness of the Pathway Star

Scale	Time 1 Median	Time 2 Median	Wilcoxon statistic Z	Effect size r	N
Skills	2	3	-7.464***	.37	207
Stability	2	3	-6.950***	.34	211
Money	2	3	-6.468***	.32	204
Physical health	3	3	-2.999**	.15	194
Emotional well-being	2	3	-7.006***	.34	218
Family	2	3	-4.298***	.23	178
Social skills & network	2	3	-4.880***	.24	203
Skills	3	3	-7.321***	.35	220

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .005$

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