

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Improved outcomes in family services following the introduction of the Outcomes Star™

(STŘEP, z.ú., Evaluation Report, Vávrová, 2020)

1. Background

The Outcomes Stars are a suite of evidence-based outcomes measurement and keywork tools. They provide valuable insights into needs and progress as well as facilitating an enabling person-centred, collaborative and holistic approach to service delivery.

There is a substantial body of evidence supporting the keywork benefits of the Star, which includes evaluation reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, feedback from new Star pilots and client survey data. The research study summarised here took this a step further, by directly comparing outcomes achieved with versus without the Star.

2. Context and methodology of the study

This quasi-experimental study used a pre-post intervention design examining outcomes (including 'hard outcomes') before and after the introduction of the Family Star Plus and My Star.

The research, led by Professor Vávrová from the University of Ostrava in the Czech Republic, was conducted within family services provided by the NGO/social services provider 'STŘEP' in close cooperation with the Social and Legal Child Protection Office providing child protection. All families included in the research had children defined as being at high risk of abuse and neglect under section 6 of the Child Protection Act, but did not require highly specialised support (e.g., due to severe learning disabilities).

Twenty-eight families completed the Family Star Plus for 56 children. My Star was also completed as appropriate, and there were social worker only readings as well as collaborative readings to explore differences, and because parents in these services often struggled to acknowledge the level of risk or difficulty. These 56 children were compared to 50 randomly selected matched case files completed before the Star was introduced. The main measures were:

- Number of goals created
- Goal achievement
- Number of children removed by court order

- Length of case management
- Number of services accessed

In addition, there was a process evaluation of the use of the Star and a qualitative impact evaluation involving studying case files, individual interviews and focus groups.

3. Findings

Outcomes before and after introducing the Star

Greater goal achievement: A larger number of more precise goals were created within the individual family plans after the introduction of the Star. Goals set out in individual family plans were more frequently achieved after the Star was introduced, by an average of 9.3 more goals achieved per family within the NGO –and 1.2 (broader) goals per child within state child protection. Within the state-provided child protection, all goals set were achieved in 85% of cases before the introduction of the Star and in 93% of cases when using Star. The report suggests that this improvement may have been a result of the Star facilitating greater collaboration and more open conversations around sensitive issues as well as the creation of small, specific goals that ‘make sense to the family and have a high chance of sustainable impact’.

Fewer court removals of children and more voluntary placements: Over the two-year time period of the project, no children were removed by court order compared to seven children before the introduction of the Star. Three children were temporarily placed in a children’s residential care centre at the request of parents due to the mother having a serious illness (without a court order), compared to none before the introduction of the Star. It was suggested that that this change was because the Star improved parents insight into their situation and their trust in services.

Longer periods of case management: After the introduction of the Star, case management was an average of seven months longer in state child protection and four months longer in the NGO. This increased intervention period was thought to be due to the Star

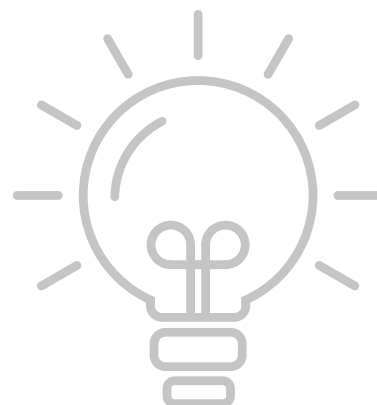
leading to more precise personalised goals that needed to be planned and implemented. In the long-term it was expected that using the Star would lead to an ‘overall reduction in the time needed for the social protection of children’ as families will be better prepared to address situations independently and less likely to repeatedly return to services.

Additional services were accessed: Families accessed an average of 1.6 additional services after the introduction of the Star in state child protection and an average of one service in the NGO. This was thought to be a result of the Star leading to greater motivation and involvement from families and more in-depth support from social workers.

Other findings

Social worker readings tended to be lower than those completed with parents, and interestingly children were more in agreement with social workers than were parents. Readings converged over time, suggesting that over time as the professional relationship and trust was established, families felt more able to open up and gradually gained a more realistic perspective on their own life situation.

The evaluators and social workers also identified a number of benefits that the Star had for keyword:



| Keyword benefit | Quotes from social workers and the evaluators |
|--|--|
| General benefit for social work | <p>'The social innovation of the Star can be linked to significant impacts on social work within the system of social and legal protection of children'.</p> <p>'Planning and evaluation of the child at risk and his/her family using the Outcomes Star can be considered a significant innovation towards good practice'.</p> |
| Motivates and involves clients | <p>'Planning and evaluation using the Outcomes Star is more motivating for clients, mainly because of their higher level of involvement in the whole process'.</p> <p>'The visualisation of change positively influences client involvement and motivation to change'.</p> |
| Engages and builds the relationship | <p>'The Outcomes Star has opened the door to families, who in the past felt unable to cooperate and whose children were repeatedly removed. When used competently, the Star helps to connect and engage hard-to-reach families with children at high risk of child abuse and neglect'.</p> <p>'The Star offers a connection-based approach, which is seen as deeper, more natural and therefore easier'.</p> <p>'Clients valued the establishment of a deeper connection based on mutual trust and partnership and the non-evaluative approach'.</p> |
| Tailored action planning that identifies small steps | <p>'The Outcomes Star allows for a more targeted intervention to help the child and family. The structure of the tool breaks down the individual areas of family life into sub-phases and for small steps to be determined according to the needs of the child, and the current insights and capacity of the parents'.</p> <p>'The Star was beneficial in terms of more precise goal setting, greater client participation in this process with clients taking greater responsibility for the goals'.</p> |
| The visual is more understandable and accessible | <p>'The graphical presentation of the Outcomes Star tool appears to be more understandable, visual, and emotionally safe for the clients'.</p> |
| Provides a holistic understanding of clients' situations | <p>'The Star provides holistic picture (an approach where we see the client in the context of their entire life path and in relation to the socio-cultural environment)'.</p> <p>'Clients highly valued the approach to planning offered by the Star, which 'focuses on a wider range of areas of their lives, thus encouraging them to reflect more deeply on their situation, parenting competencies and attitudes'.</p> |
| Strengths-based and empowering | <p>'A non-evaluative approach, in which there is no verbalisation of how things should be, but facts are stated, and strengths are highlighted to build the client's autonomy'.</p> |

4. Discussion

This thorough exploration of the impact of introducing the Outcomes Star greatly strengthens the existing evidence base around the keywork benefits of the Star. Comparing outcomes before and after the introduction of the Star supports the assertion that it acts as an intervention in itself - and supplements what has been found previously in evaluation reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, qualitative and quantitative feedback from new Star pilots and Triangle's client survey.

Other evaluation reports and journal articles summarised in Triangle's Research library have reported the Star to have a similar array of benefits:

- Focuses on strengths
- Supports collaborative care planning
- Identifies issues that might otherwise be missed
- Improves action planning
- Focuses on sustainable outcomes
- Motivates people by identifying and visually depicting change

Qualitative and quantitative data gathered at the end of pilots of new versions of the Star also strongly supports the benefits of implementing the Outcomes Star. For example, 94% of the young people in the My Mind Star pilot agreed that it provided 'a good summary of my life right now' and 'a better idea of support needs'. Responses to pilot survey items as well as a large body of open-ended feedback about the keywork benefits can be found in the **Development reports** on Triangle's website.

In addition, in a 2019 survey of over 120 Star users, more than 90% of clients agreed that the Star 'supports good conversations and collaboration between staff and service users' and 'helps them to get an overview of the situation'. Many reported that they began using the Star for its benefits in one-to-one keywork.

Further information about the keywork and outcomes measurement benefits of the Star, including supporting evidence is provided in our briefing: '**Why should I select the Outcomes Star over other approaches**'.

Conclusions and limitations

The research summarised here showcases the wide-ranging benefits that using the Star can have for service delivery. Vávrová's research is a valuable addition in more directly comparing outcomes with and without the Outcomes Star, though it should be noted that the quasi-experimental design means that it is possible that factors other than the Star account for differences between groups.

We would very much welcome further studies of this type to corroborate the findings.

Please contact Triangle's Research Analyst, Dr Anna Good (anna@triangleconsulting.co.uk) if you are interested in examining links with hard outcomes or differences in outcomes due to the introduction of the Star.

For more general information about the Star and how we can help you, please get in touch on info@triangleconsulting.co.uk or +44(0) 207 272 8765.