



# Mental Health Recovery Star

managing  
mental health

physical health  
& self-care

living skills

Developed by  
Joy MacKeith and Sara Burns  
of Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise with  
the Mental Health Providers Forum

Third Edition (revised)

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The Recovery Star is the intellectual property of Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise and the Mental Health Providers Forum. In order to support effective implementation of the tool, organisations wishing to use the Star are required to buy a licence and train all workers using the Star with service users. Licence holders receive:

- Access to up-to-date documentation for all relevant Stars including Star Charts, User Guides, Organisation Guides, Quizzes and additional resources such as flashcards through the Star Online portal
- Online completion, benchmarking and outcomes reports through the Star Online portal. See [www.staronline.org.uk](http://www.staronline.org.uk) to try the free demo
- Recognised status: services with a licence will be awarded Recognised Star Service status and will be listed as such on the Outcomes Star website.

Please contact [info@triangleconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@triangleconsulting.co.uk) to enquire about buying a licence and training.

Mental Health Providers Forum members can access the tool through MHPF. Please contact [info@mhp.org.uk](mailto:info@mhp.org.uk).

Licences are also available for those wishing to translate the document into other languages.

## The Outcomes Star™

This Star is part of a family of Outcomes Star tools. Each tool includes a Star Chart, User Guide or Quiz and guidance on implementation and some have visual and other resources. For other versions of the Outcomes Star, good practice and further information see [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk).

Triangle was originally commissioned to work on an outcome measurement system by St Mungo's, with financial support from the London Housing Foundation, and recognises St Mungo's vital role in the development of the Outcomes Star.

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And last, but by no means least, thank you to Kate E Flores for bringing the Recovery Star to life with her wonderful illustrations.

# Foreword from the Mental Health Providers Forum

## What could be as important as supporting the journey to recovery?

'No decision about me without me' and 'the right support at the right time' are important statements particularly for those with lived experience, who use services and for the providers who support them who need to ensure that support is effective, evidenced and the basis for learning and reflection.

Evidence helps service providers to improve and become optimistic about what they can achieve, motivates staff and provides proof to commissioners and Government that our services work.

The Mental Health Recovery Star makes it possible to capture evidence while enabling users and workers to discuss important issues and to assess where they are now and where they are going. This exemplifies our values as we work for a society in which all people with mental health concerns have the right to get the support they need from a wide diversity of providers.

The Recovery Star:

- Values service user perspectives and enables empowerment and choice
- Supports recovery and social inclusion
- Is holistic, and covers dimensions linked to recovery

The Mental Health Providers Forum (MHPF) brings together leading voluntary sector providers who are focused on promoting recovery and working collaboratively to improve the lives of people with mental health problems. Working together, MHPF members demonstrate their commitment to collaboration, sharing and partnership, service excellence, innovation, evidence-based practice and continuous improvement.

MHPF worked in partnership to develop, implement and promote widespread use of the Mental Health Recovery Star to creating common language and the opportunity to learn together to improve practice.

The first edition of this guide, published in May 2008, was well received in a wide variety of services and by service users. We then went on to bring in some improvements to highlight stronger concepts around spirituality, community support and communications in order to improve its cultural competency. Illustrations to support understanding of the five journey stages and ten dimensions were commissioned and produced as posters and postcards to complement the service user guide. These facilitate use of the model where there may be language barriers. At the same time, the illustrations provide an additional means for clients to access and engage with the Recovery Star tool in general.

We intend to continue with our development of Recovery focussed resources, tools and development.

For more information please, go to our website [www.mphf.org.uk](http://www.mphf.org.uk).

**Kathy Roberts CEO Mental Health Provider Forum (September 2013)**

## Foreword from Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Ltd

The Recovery Star is one of a large and growing family of sector-wide tools for both supporting and measuring change, known collectively as the Outcomes Stars. Since our early work in homelessness with St. Mungo's and the London Housing Foundation, Triangle has worked with over 50 collaborators from the UK voluntary, statutory and independent sectors to create and publish 16 versions to date, with more being developed, tested and discussed all the time. Uptake is increasingly international and we are also collaborating with a wide variety of organisations internationally to translate to tools and make training available in Australia, Canada, Italy, Denmark and other countries.

Developed in 2008 with MHPF, the Recovery Star is one of the earlier versions. Others include Stars for people with learning disabilities, autism, young people and families, with full details on [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk). Triangle is also continuously working on ways to support the quality of use of the Outcomes Stars through training, our web application on [www.staronline.org.uk](http://www.staronline.org.uk) and development of a Kite Mark and data assurance toolkit to support the accuracy of the data gathered. We are also keen to hear from researchers interested in validation and other work, users of the Outcomes Stars with ideas and others. The history and present of the Outcomes Stars is one of wide collaboration and sharing of learning and we are keen to build on that foundation to make these tools as widely available, well used and helpful as possible.

**Joy MacKeith and Sara Burns, Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise (September 2013)**



# Introduction

## What is the Recovery Star?

The Recovery Star is a tool for supporting and measuring change when working with adults of working age who experience mental health problems.

It is an outcomes tool, which means that it enables organisations to measure and summarise change across a range of service users and projects. It is also a keywork tool which means that it supports the service user's recovery by providing them with a map of the journey to recovery and a way of plotting their progress and planning the actions they need to take.

The Recovery Star focuses on the ten core areas that have been found to be critical to recovery:

- **Managing mental health**
- **Physical health & self-care**
- **Living skills**
- **Social networks**
- **Work**
- **Relationships**
- **Addictive behaviour**
- **Responsibilities**
- **Identity and self-esteem**
- **Trust and hope**

The Recovery Star measures the relationship the service user has with any difficulties they are experiencing in each of these areas and where they are on their journey towards addressing them.

The Recovery Star is a version of the Outcomes Star – a tool developed to support and measure change for homeless adults and those vulnerable to homelessness. Like the Outcomes Star, the Recovery Star is based on a five-stage model of the process by which people make changes in areas of their life that are not working for them. The five stages of this model are Stuck, Accepting Help, Believing, Learning and Self-reliance. The full model, called the Ladder of Change, is set out in the Recovery Star User Guide.

Both the Outcomes Star and the Recovery Star are underpinned by the assumption that positive growth is a possible and realistic goal for all service users and both tools are designed to support as well as measure this growth by focussing on people's potential rather than their problems. In addition, the Recovery Star is rooted in the Recovery Model, which is underpinned by the idea that people with mental health issues can live rich and fulfilling lives and that this is not necessarily reliant upon the elimination of the illness but its effective management.

## How was it developed?

The Outcomes star was originally developed by Triangle Consulting in 2003 for St Mungo's, a London based charity providing a wide range of services to homeless people. Through day-long consultation groups with over 80 staff in a wide range of projects for vulnerable homeless adults, the intended outcomes of the services were identified, together with the journey that service users travelled towards achieving them. The draft Outcomes Star was piloted at St. Mungo's, then adapted and piloted in a range of projects in ten further organisations. The feedback and suggestions for improvement were then used to develop the final version of the Outcomes Star which was published by the London Housing Foundation in 2006.

In 2007, the Mental Health Providers Forum commissioned Triangle Consulting to develop a version of the Outcomes Star for the mental health sector. This was carried out in collaboration with nine projects from five mental health organisations, including a floating support service, a supported housing service, two day centres, two training and employment projects, a residential care home, a residential rehabilitation service and an independent hospital.

Over a six-month period, managers, front-line workers and service users tested the Outcomes Star, identified ways in which it needed to be modified to meet the needs of service users with mental health issues, and piloted a draft version of the Recovery Star. In addition to this participative process, the authors also drew on academic literature describing the process of recovery from mental illness based on service user accounts<sup>1</sup>.

In 2008, the Mental Health Providers Forum received funding from the Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health (DRE) programme to carry out a consultation/information gathering pilot project looking at the cultural relevance and competency of the Recovery Star model for clients from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. The pilot worked with staff and service users from six community and voluntary sector mental health organisation providing services across the country. Clients were drawn from African, Asian, African-Caribbean and Chinese and mixed-heritage communities, with mental health needs from mild to severe. The services represented included day services, outreach, floating support and drop-in centres.

The initial Recovery Star pilot worked with 114 service users and the summary Star readings were fed back to the participating projects for validation. In all cases, the picture painted by the Star of the progress made by clients within a project was found to reflect worker and manager expectations - a finding echoed within the second DRE funded pilot.

This bottom-up process of development for both the original Outcomes Star and the Recovery Star has ensured that the tools are rooted in a real understanding of the nature of recovery and change and are meaningful to both service users and workers as well as providing robust outcomes data which reflects the true aims of services.

**“I felt fully involved; it was clear and easy to understand and focused on me as a whole person, not just as a problem. It was a considerable boost to see how well I am. It felt like a conversation; felt like the first time someone had really listened to me. You can really get to know someone and know things about someone [using the Star] – even though you may think you already know them well.”**

**Service user, Tulip Day Centre**

## Recovery Star Resources

1. The Recovery Star User Guide is published separately. It contains:
  - An introduction to the Recovery Star for service users/staff, including a description of the Ladder of Change which underpins the tool
  - Ladders describing a ten-step journey for each of the ten outcome areas covered by the Star
  - The Star Chart and Star Action Plan are provided as a separate leaflet (Star and Plan) for inclusion in case files and for retention by the service user
2. The Recovery Star Visual Resources are also published separately. These are a set of communication aids to support use of the Recovery Star across any number of key-work settings. They are:
  - The Ladder of Change Visual Resources  
A poster and a set of five postcards illustrating the Ladder of Change – the framework for describing and supporting the mental health recovery journey

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, R. Oades, L. and Caputi, P. (2003) Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, Volume 37, number 5, pp 586-594 'The experience of recovery from schizophrenia: towards an empirically validated stage model'

- The Ten Dimensions of the Recovery Star Visual Resources

A poster and a set of ten postcards illustrating the Ten Dimensions of the Recovery Star – the ten areas of the individual’s life that the Recovery Star focuses on

Produced as part as part of the ‘Recovery Star Model and Cultural Competency’<sup>2</sup> project, funded by the Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health programme, the illustrations facilitate use of the model where there may be language barriers. At the same time, they provide an additional means for clients to access and engage with the Recovery Star tool in general – supporting understanding of the five stages and ten dimensions.

3. The Recovery Star IT system, which can be accessed via the MHPF website, provides online completion of the Star and analysis of data. This Recovery Star System will:
  - Immediately display an individual’s Star Chart which can be printed off for the user and the case file
  - Calculate the change for the individual and collate results for services
  - Allow benchmarking and participation in learning across and within organisations (the data remains confidential as only a client number is used)

See the Mental Health Providers Forum website at [www.mhpf.org.uk](http://www.mhpf.org.uk) for more information about the IT System and all the latest developments.

This guidance document complements the Recovery Star User Guide and the Recovery Star IT System and should be read in conjunction with them. It is divided into two main sections:

1. The first section provides guidance to keyworkers on how to use the Recovery Star with service users
2. The second gives guidance to service managers and senior managers implementing the Recovery Star within a project, a group of projects, or the whole organisation

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<sup>2</sup> ‘The Recovery Star Model and Cultural Competency’ project report can be downloaded from the MHPF website at: [www.mhpf.org.uk](http://www.mhpf.org.uk)



# 1. Using the Recovery Star with service users

The Recovery Star is designed to be used as an integral part of the keywork process and should therefore be completed by the service user and keyworker<sup>3</sup> together. It is not meant to be a quick exercise but a thoughtful, reflective process in which the worker and the service user properly meet each other to pause and reflect together.

People find that it takes anything from 45 minutes to two hours to complete the first Star Chart, depending on how much discussion takes place around each of the ten areas. Follow-up Star Charts are generally quicker to complete because the service user is then familiar with the tool.

If necessary, the first Star Chart can be completed over two sessions, though these should take place within a week or so of each other in order that they combine to provide a snapshot of a particular point in time.

The process of completing the Star is intended to be helpful to the service user<sup>4</sup> as well as providing useful outcomes data for the project. For this reason the process should not be rushed through simply to be able to tick that box and get it out of the way.

The Recovery Star is a flexible tool that keyworkers should use in a way that responds to the needs and preferences of each service user, rather than mechanically following a set of instructions. For this reason the instructions below are guidelines for use rather than a step-by-step manual, and we strongly recommend that all workers receive a one-day training session in the use of the Recovery Star.

## Before you use the Recovery Star

Before you use the Recovery Star you should:

- Have a good understanding of the Ladder of Change described on pages four and five of the Recovery Star User Guide. One of the best ways of doing this is to bring to mind a service user you have seen change substantially over the time you have known them and to see if you can map the stages they went through, as you saw it, on to the ladder
- Be familiar with the ten ladders and the accompanying detailed descriptions. Practise using the ladders by thinking of one or two service users you have worked with and work out in your own mind where you would place them on each ladder. It's best if you can do this together with a colleague who has experience of using the Recovery Star to check your understanding with theirs
- Know how to introduce the Recovery Star to a service user. The introduction at the beginning of the User Guide highlights all the areas that you need to cover. You could try running through it in your head or out loud beforehand. It is really important that the service user understands how the tool works so that they can participate properly and benefit fully
- Know how the Recovery Star is being used in your organisation. When is the Star Chart first completed with new service users and when are second or third Star Chart readings taken? What happens to the form once completed? What should you do if you need help with any aspect of using the Recovery Star? If your organisation is using the Recovery Star IT System to record and store Star data, you should also be familiar with using this

<sup>3</sup> The keyworker could be the project worker or the support worker or may have another name in your project. It is the person who is assigned special responsibility for working with that service user – assessing their needs, agreeing goals and providing support and referrals to help them meet those goals.

<sup>4</sup> We have chosen to use the term service user throughout this document though you may use a different term in your project such as participant, resident, client or customer.

# Introducing the Recovery Star

The Recovery Star can be introduced during the session in which it is completed or some time before (for example a week or a couple of days before). This can be done in a number of ways:

- By giving the service user a copy of the Recovery Star User Guide to read before the session
- By talking the service user through the points in the introduction at the beginning of the Recovery Star User Guide
- If you have a number of new service users starting around the same time or if you are introducing the Recovery Star for the first time to existing service users, you could introduce the Star in a group setting
- By inviting a service user who has already completed the Star and found it a positive experience to describe the process to the new service user

Whichever approach or combination of approaches you use, it is important that you check with each service user individually that they understand the tool and why it is being used.

## Using the ladders

Looking at the ten ladders with the service user is at the heart of the process of completing the Recovery Star. Exactly how this is done is an art rather than a science and will depend on the service user and where they are on their journey of change.

Responses to the ladders vary from person to person. Some people like the visual representation and enjoy speaking about themselves with the help of this format. Others consider the material covered by some of the ladders an intimate matter and feel vulnerable and exposed. Yet others may initially find it difficult to engage with the material but gradually find that the ladders prompt them to talk much more fully than they otherwise would have.

Of course all these responses are valid and you will need to be sensitive in adjusting your approach to the person involved. The following are some pointers:

- **Let the service user decide which ladder to start with** or, if they are not sure, choose one you think will be comparatively easy to discuss. People often find that the more practical ladders, like living skills, are easier to start with than the more internally focussed ladders such as trust and hope and identity and self-esteem. It can be encouraging to start with an area where the person has already made progress or has few issues
- You may find it helpful to **have an open discussion about each area** before even looking at the ladder. How does the person feel about this area of their life? Is it working well for them or are there problems? What do they wish was different? Where would they like to be in three or six months time?
- Having had that discussion, you could then **invite the person to look at the ladder and say where they feel they are**. It can be helpful to work out which of the five stages they are in first and then fine tune to a particular score. If they struggle to identify where they are, you could say where you think they are and give your reasons and let them respond to your thoughts
- Once you have agreed a score, **use the Recovery Star Notes sheet (in the Star and Plan) to record any points from your discussion that you want to keep on paper**. You may want to record the reason for the score, or a significant insight the service user had or, if you and the service user had a difference of opinion, the reason for this. These notes are optional but can be useful to look at when reviewing the Star Chart some months down the line, particularly if the member of staff has changed



“Walking through the [Ladder of Change] in the Star was like déjà vu – that is exactly what I went through, what happened to me.”

Former service user, Cricklewood Homeless Concern

## Completing the Star Chart and Star Action Plan

Once you have talked through each of the ladders in turn and agreed where the service user is on their journey in each of those areas the next steps are to:

- **Record each score on the Star Chart or Recovery Star IT System**
- **Look at the overall shape of the Star Chart** – this is the service user’s own individual Star for this particular point in time. You and the service user might want to think about:
  - What does the overall shape tell them?
  - Which aspects of their life are working well?
  - Which are holding them back?
  - What are the areas they would like to address?
- **Agree the areas that they would like to work on and think about**
  - What is their goal in that area?
  - What does the Ladder of Change tell them about what the next step in their journey might be?
  - What needs to happen next?
  - What will they do and what will the keyworker do and by when?
- **Complete the Star Action Plan** (in the Star and Plan) or your organisation’s own action planning documentation

How service users engage with this process and the kinds of actions and interventions that are likely to be most helpful will depend on where the person is on their journey for that area of their life. See the detailed Ladder of Change on page five of the User Guide for suggestions about keywork and action planning at different stages of the Ladder of Change.

“Because the needs of the parents can be so immediate and pressing when we meet with people, we can get sucked into that and not step back and look at the needs of the family as a whole. We find the Star very useful in making sure there are not needs that are just getting lost. Also, support can happen in a quite haphazard way. The Star makes it more systematic and structured, identifying needs and drawing up an action plan.”

Sure Start Kingstanding

## Revisiting the Recovery Star at Reviews

You will need to complete the Star Chart with a client every three to six months, depending on the guidelines developed by your agency. It should be easier after the first time, as the client will already be familiar with the Star. Key steps at review are:

- **Agree where the client is on each ladder.** Do this without reference to the previous readings. This way their previous Star Chart will not influence how you and the client decide where they are at the review point
- **Add the new scores to the previously completed Star Chart** and join them using a different colour to see how the shape has changed
- **Discuss the new Star shape and how it compares to the previous one.** Specific questions for you and the service user at this point include:
  - What has changed – both positively and negatively?
  - How does the client feel about what they see?
  - Does what they see on the Star fit with their own sense of how they have changed?
  - In the light of the changes they have made, what new goals would they like to set themselves for the coming weeks and months?
- **Agree the next areas to work on, complete a new Action Plan, file forms and enter data as required**

When positive change occurs, reviews can be very helpful in encouraging and motivating both the service user and the worker, as the Star makes progress very evident. Change is hard; around the Believing and Learning stages in particular people can get overwhelmed by the challenges or feel low when things go wrong. Seeing progress on the Star Chart can help to encourage people and reinforce change as they start to try out new ways of doing things. You can use your discussions with your client to help point this out.

When negative change occurs, workers are sometimes concerned that seeing this so clearly on the Star Chart will de-motivate the person. Usually, the client is only too aware that they have moved further away from their goal and acknowledging this can be a helpful first step in reversing the trend.

It can be helpful to remind people that change is difficult and that it isn't a linear process – it is normal for people to go backwards as well as forwards on their recovery journey. You could remind them of previous lapses that they have recovered from. It is possible that the client may self-score lower after their initial assessment. This is often a positive step, showing greater self-awareness and trust in their keyworker.

“One of the aspects we have found particularly useful is where people do fluctuate in certain areas.... We have found that being able to see that over time really helps people to take it in and then focus on that area. For example, they may be saying that they manage quite well with something, but the Star gives evidence that actually they do fluctuate a lot and then they can see that and realise they need to address it. It has worked really well for us.”

Hillingdon Housing

“It's so easy, because you can see exactly where you are and where you want to be.”

Service user

“You can feel you are chipping and chipping away and not achieving anything, and this shows you that you are.”

Keyworker

## Guidance for working with people at different stages on their journey

### Stage one: Stuck

People at this stage are unlikely to be interested in or able to talk about this area of their life. You may suggest that they are at points one or two on the ladder and they may say they are at points nine or ten. This is fine, just part of what it is like to be in the Stuck stage. You can explain your reasons and record your different views. The goals for keyworking with someone at this stage are to prevent or minimise harm to the self and others and to contain the person and their situation to avoid things getting any worse. You will also want to build on the occasional moments when the service user has a sense of dissatisfaction with how things are to open up a discussion about change and focus on building trust.

### Stage two: Accepting Help

People in the Accepting Help stage will discuss this area of their life but may not feel very hopeful or have a clear sense of what it is they want to work towards. They just know they don't like how things are.

The goal of keyworking at this stage is to improve their situation in practical ways by taking action on their behalf and by giving them lots of hand-holding and support. This may build their hope that things can be better and they will benefit from the practical improvements.

It is important to have realistic expectations. At this stage people won't be able to take the initiative and do things on their own. It is more appropriate to involve people in activities or services within a mental health setting and the service user will probably need to be accompanied for any external referrals.

### Stage three: Believing

At this stage people are likely to be engaged in discussing this part of their life. There is a feeling that this person is really on board with making changes. They may be quite excited and thinking about goals for the future; they may also be extremely nervous of change.

The goal of keywork at this stage is to support this inner shift and help the person to translate the new momentum into specific goals and small, practical, achievable steps towards them.

Although the person can start to do things on their own initiative now, it is quite likely that they may need even more support because doing new things can be scary as well as exciting. But the support is now more about encouragement and helping them to plan what they are going to do, rather than doing it for them.

### Stage four: Learning

At the Learning stage people are still interested in discussing this part of their life. They have made some progress towards their goals and feel positive about that. However, they have probably had some knock-backs as well and may from time to time get dispirited.

The goal of keywork at this stage is to celebrate the achievements and support them through the setbacks. Another important goal is to help the person reflect on their experiences and support their learning. What can they learn from the things that went well, and from the difficulties they experienced? How will they apply this learning over the coming weeks and months?

Keyworkers should avoid the temptation of stepping in and sorting everything out when things go wrong – at this stage the aim is to help the service user to deal with the difficulties themselves and to build their self-knowledge and resilience.

## Stage five: Self-reliance

At this stage service users need far less support. To all intents and purposes they are able to manage this area of their life on their own. However, at the beginning of this stage it is helpful to keep a ‘watching eye’ just in case a difficulty arises that the person can’t deal with alone.

The goal of keywork at this stage is to continue to reinforce the learning that has taken place, to help the person build support networks outside of the project and ensure that they know how to spot for themselves the warning signs that they might need help in this area.

Some people may find it hard to let go of professional help, even though they don’t really need it any longer. In this case it is important to build self-confidence and give people practice in drawing on other, more informal sources of support.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Using the Recovery Star may mean working with service users in a different way. Some people find it more natural and easy than others. In our experience of training people to use the Star, we find that most workers feel a lot more comfortable with it once they have tried using it, and they warm to it more and more with experience.

The following questions are most frequently asked in training. If they do not answer your questions, or you have concerns, raise them with your manager – it is important that you have the chance to discuss them. The Recovery Star will only work well for you and your clients if you feel comfortable with it.

### What if the service user won’t engage with the Recovery Star?

If the service user is not engaged in keywork, they are unlikely to engage with the Recovery Star. As already discussed, those at points one and two are unlikely by definition to engage meaningfully with workers at all. If this is the case, you have the option of assessing for yourself where the client is on the Star and recording that in the client file and on your information system. You can then use this as a baseline for later sessions when the client is more engaged. You may wish to share your reading with the client at a later date.

If the client is engaging with keywork but does not wish to engage with the Recovery Star, discuss with them why this is. It may be that they haven’t had a full enough introduction to the Star or they may have misunderstood how it works or how the information will be used. Make sure they understand all the points covered in the introduction to the Recovery Star and answer any questions or concerns. If you cannot allay their concerns, discuss with your colleagues and manager what to do next. Using the Recovery Star is a cooperative and collaborative process – it won’t work if someone is coerced into using it.

### What if the service user doesn’t want to discuss certain areas?

It is possible that the person you are working with will feel that some of the ladders are not relevant to them because they do not have an issue in that area. This is most likely to happen with the Addictive behaviour ladder but it may also happen with Responsibilities. If you also feel that this area poses no problems for that person then you can agree that it is not applicable to them. The way this is recorded on the Recovery Star is by giving a score of ten.

If you feel that there are issues in this area that are holding the person back then you can have a discussion about your different perspectives as outlined in the next FAQ. If, after the discussion, the service user still says an area is not an issue for them but you think it is, record ten for the client’s view and also record the score that you feel is appropriate, clearly labelling which score is which.

## What if we don't agree about where the service user is on their journey?

Part of the process of making changes in an area that isn't working for us is developing a realistic picture of how we are doing at the moment. People can be held back both when they think they are further ahead than they really are and when they underestimate their abilities and achievements. So discussing differences of view is an important process that should contribute towards the service user's growth. Here are some pointers for doing this:

- Make sure you listen carefully to what the person has to say – it will help you understand their perceptions and they may have information that you are not aware of, and that may change your view
- Present the reasons why you see things differently. This will work best if you have already built up some trust and understanding in the relationship and if you present them with evidence rather than just general statements. For example “you missed both your appointments last week” rather than “you're not very reliable at the moment”. The same applies if the person is underestimating their progress. It is important to provide them with clear evidence of their achievements. For example, “It was you who decided you wanted to do that course and found out the information”
- Take into account the client's current situation. In the early part of the journey, the person is likely to be less self-aware and this can result in a higher personal rating. There can also be a honeymoon period when a service user joins a new project in which they feel much more positive about their life

If, following discussion, you and your service user still disagree, then both scores can be recorded on the form. Your service should have a policy about which score will be used to analyse the data across the service, though we recommend that it is the workers' scores that are used. The reason for this is that whilst the service user can choose whether to engage or not, the keyworker has a duty of care, which includes assessment, planning and recording actions and change.

## Everyone is different. Surely we can't fit everyone into a few boxes?

We are all different, but there are some well documented common patterns to the way that service users describe the journey of recovery.

The Recovery Star describes the common aspects of recovery but each person will do it in their own particular way. The Star does not assume that people start at the bottom of the ladder or that people will move in only one direction. People may move up and down the ladders many times. Also, each stage may look very different for different people. The Star describes an underlying change of attitudes and approach to different aspects of life, not detailed behaviours.

## I can't work out where this person is on the ladder – they fit into several boxes at once

Sometimes working out where someone is on a ladder can be difficult. It may be that they are doing lots of things for themselves (indicating that they are high up the ladder) but are also unsure of what they want in that area of their life (indicating they are lower down). Or they may change a lot from day to day. Here are some tips for dealing with difficulties:

- Look at the detailed ladder descriptions and see if that helps
- The Star does not measure the severity of a problem but the person's overall relationship with that area of their life so it is possible that someone with a milder problem could be lower on the ladder than someone with a more severe problem. Go back to the description of the Ladder of Change on pages four and five of the Recovery Star User Guide and use this as your guide. It is the person's overall relationship with that area of their life which should be your primary guide as to where they are on the ladder

- If things are very changeable then think about where the person has been at most of the time over the last week or so
- Discuss the issue with a colleague or manager to get another perspective

## Some of these ladders cover very sensitive issues – don't we risk opening up a can of worms?

If you have decided to use the Recovery Star, it is very likely that your agency is aiming to help service users change in all (or most) of the areas covered by the Recovery Star. This means that it is relevant for these areas to be discussed in keywork, and the Star can provide a helpful, focused way to raise issues for discussion. However, it is also the case that keyworkers may want to judge when the right time is to open a discussion on sensitive issues. Your project's policy about when to first use the Star with service users should allow workers some freedom in making this judgement.

## If our clients don't make progress will my performance be in question?

The purpose of the Recovery Star is to help service users see where they have come from and where to go next and to help give your project an overview of where it is helping clients make positive changes and which areas may need further attention. It is not about judging the work of individual members of staff.

When people do not make progress on the Star there are many possible explanations. There are some plateau points for people in their journeys and it may be that it is important for service users to consolidate their progress by staying in the same place – so this could be a successful outcome for that person at that time.

Equally, it could be a useful pointer to the need for a new way of working, different interventions or new environments to enable the service user to move to the next step. In some cases it may indicate that you have a particularly difficult caseload which you may want to discuss with your manager. It could also indicate that the people you are working with are not suitable for the project or that you need further keywork training.



## 2. Implementing the Recovery Star in your Project or Organisation

### Lead the implementation from the top

Our experience of supporting organisations to use the Star and other outcomes measurement tools is that managers usually find it has wide and far-reaching implications for the way the service is delivered and managed. The Recovery Star will:

- Provide service-wide information which can help to demonstrate effectiveness, highlight weaknesses and pave the way for service improvements
- Lead to greater clarity about what the service is trying to achieve
- Help to clarify the process of change for service users and keyworkers, resulting in better, more focussed keywork
- Raise questions about what information is required by whom within the organisation and reveal duplication or unnecessary paperwork
- Provide a focus for discussion with commissioners about the role and contribution of the service

Implementing the Recovery Star has implications for the way that keyworking is carried out, documented and supervised. It has implications for the way that information is recorded and how it is used. Once Star data has been collected and analysed it gives rise to learning which has implications for service development and negotiations with commissioners.

Because of this, implementing the Recovery Star effectively and achieving the full benefits of using it can take some time. It requires on-going attention and a commitment to follow the process through and address issues and blocks as they arise. For these reasons we strongly recommend that the implementation of the Recovery Star is led from the top of the organisation – by the Chief Executive and Senior Management. Only in this way will the Star receive the profile and backing it requires and the necessary developments be co-ordinated across the organisation.

“Normally when we introduce something new to people there is a silent groan – it means more paperwork.....[But with the Star] the real test came when support officers sat down with some service users and completed the Star for where they started in red pen, and where they are now in black pen. Immediately, I could feed back to my head office some really impressive results. Support officers said it was good. Service users really enjoyed the interaction – and there were [statistical] results! The feedback was excellent and there was no resistance – quite the opposite.”

Christopher's Charity, Greenwich

There are eight steps to introducing the Recovery Star in your organisation:

1. Review your reasons for introducing the Recovery Star
2. Assess the suitability of the Recovery Star for your service
3. Run a pilot
4. Integrate the Recovery Star into your current systems and paperwork
5. Train staff to use the Recovery Star
6. Ensure quality and consistency in the use of the Recovery Star
7. Analyse and interpret the data
8. Share and act on the learning

## 1. Review your reasons for introducing the Recovery Star

Organisations may decide to introduce the Recovery Star for a number of reasons:

For internal reasons:

1. Because they want to take an outcomes approach to their work. They may want to be able to measure success for individual service users, for projects and for the organisation as a whole, to use this to inform their service delivery
2. Because they feel it will improve keywork

In response to external pressures:

3. Because they are under pressure from funders or commissioners or others to demonstrate their outcomes
4. Because a funder or commissioner is requiring that they use the Recovery Star as a condition of contract

In the current environment, you may, at least in part, be considering using the Recovery Star in response to external pressures. If this is the case, we strongly recommend that you recognise and capitalise on the internal benefits as well, as these are only realised if your organisations adopts the tool in the spirit of learning and service improvement. If you use the tool in a superficial way, you will get superficial results.

**“We wanted to know where we were succeeding and why. We wanted to be able to show real change – not just the statistics of how many people went through our accommodation.”**

**St Mungo’s Housing Association**

**“We will be able to undertake comparative analysis of outcomes by ethnicity.”**

**Mental health organisation**

## 2. Assess the suitability of the Recovery Star for your project

How do you know if the Recovery Star is suitable for assessing the outcomes of the service you provide? The following checklist is designed to help you to decide.

### Do you have an on-going keywork relationship with service users?

The Recovery Star is designed to be used in situations where a service user and worker are engaged in a keyworking relationship over a period of time. We would suggest at least six weeks as a guide. If you only see a service user once or twice over a short period of time or have a drop-in service with little or no one-to-one contact, then it is probably not suitable for your service.

Are you aiming to help service users to make changes in their attitudes and behaviour?

The Recovery Star is designed to help you and your service user assess changes that they are making in their attitudes and behaviour that will move them towards recovery. If this is not a goal of your service then the Recovery Star is not suitable for you.

### Do you work holistically with service users?

If your project only works on one or two aspects of a person's life, for example just employment or just living skills, the Recovery Star will not be suitable as it is a holistic tool covering many aspects of a person's life. However, it may be suitable if you are aiming to help service users with most but not all the areas described in the Star. For example, your project may not accept anyone who has an addiction problem. If this is the case, you can simply score all clients as a ten on that scale.

It is also possible that you are aiming to help your service users make changes in areas that are not included in the Recovery Star – for example parenting skills. If this is the case you may wish to assess service users' progress towards this goal in another way, or look on the Mental Health Providers Forum website for links to other versions of the Star that might meet your needs.

**“We set out to use the Outcomes Star to measure outcomes because we wanted to gather outcomes data. We have ended up with an improved keywork system!”**

**Simon Community, Dublin**

### Does the Ladder of Change describe the journey your project helps its service users to take?

The Ladder of Change described on pages four and five in the Recovery Star User Guide is a key feature of the Star and underpins the ladders for each outcome area. If this journey does not fit with your understanding of the steps you are helping people to take towards recovery, the Star is not suitable for your service.

Some services concentrate on one or two parts of the journey. For example, hospitals may focus on the Stuck and Accepting help stages and refer people to other kinds of service when they move into the Believing and Learning parts of the journey.

It is helpful to have a sense of which part of the journey your project or organisation focuses on. If you only work with service users on a very small part of the journey, say at the Learning and Self-reliance stages, you may find that the Recovery Star doesn't pick up the small and subtle changes people make within one stage. In this case, you may want to supplement the Recovery Star with some additional measures.

If you have answered yes to these four questions, it is likely that the Recovery Star will be appropriate for your service. If you have answered no to one or more it may not be. You may wish to contact the Mental Health Providers Forum or Triangle Consulting to discuss how to proceed.

### 3. Run a pilot

Even if you have answered yes to all the questions, it is often advisable to pilot the Recovery Star in one or more services before rolling it out through the whole organisation. This has a number of benefits:

- It enables you to test how the Star works for you in practice
- It helps you to answer the practical questions set out below about how to integrate the Star into your ways of working prior to full implementation
- If it goes well, it creates a demonstration project and staff with experience of using the Star who can enthuse and train others
- If there are problems, these can be addressed before it is rolled out across the organisation

### 4. Integrate the Recovery Star into your current systems and paperwork

The Recovery Star should be used as an integral part of the keywork process with Star readings taking place at the point when assessment and action planning would normally take place in your service. It is important that the Star is fully incorporated into this process so that it does not duplicate other discussions or paperwork.

#### When to use the Recovery Star

We recommend that you use the Recovery Star for the first time at the point when you would normally work with the service user to develop a support plan. For most organisations this means using it within the first four weeks of the person entering the service. However, it is up to you to decide exactly when a new service user should complete the Star. There is a balance between getting to know the service user and allowing the service user to settle in, and the need to record an accurate picture of where the service user is at the start of their time with you. If the service user has already made progress before the Star is used, this progress will not be recorded.

If the service user does not want to or is not able to engage in keywork or with the Recovery Star in their first month with the service, you may decide to ask keyworkers to complete a Star without the service user in order to have a clear base-line for when they began with the service. This is something each organisation can decide.

You should use the Recovery Star a second time at the point when you would normally review the person's action plan and draw up a new one. This usually depends on how long service users stay with your service and how quickly they change. If stays are relatively short and change happens quickly, the second reading and action plan could be carried out after six weeks. Most organisations leave three months and some with more long-term service users leave six months or even up to a year between readings.

You may also want to complete a Star Chart when the service user leaves the service. Comparing the first and last Star will give the best picture of the outcomes for that person. As with the first Star, if it is not possible to complete the final star with the service user you may want the keyworker to do this on their own in order to complete your record of outcomes for that client.

#### Can it replace other paperwork?

Services may find that the Star Chart and Star Action Plan can replace their existing Needs Assessment and Action or Support Plans, although separate Risk Assessments are usually still needed. If you need to continue to use your existing Action Plans it is not necessary to complete the Star Action Plan as well. The Star is not intended to increase the amount of paperwork an organisation requires service users and keyworkers to complete.

## How will the information be recorded and summarised?

You will probably want to keep a copy of each Recovery Star reading and Star notes in the service user's keywork file. Service users may also want their own copy. It is also necessary to enter the star readings onto some kind of database so that they information can be summarised and analysed for a whole project or group of projects.

We strongly recommend that you use the Recovery Star System for this. This is a specially designed system for recording and analysing and presenting data from the Star. It produces an individual Star chart for each service user (which you may want to print out and give to them rather than producing a hand drawn star) and also summarises the data for all service users within the project and allows benchmarking and participation in learning across and within organisations.

## 5. Train staff to use the Recovery Star

The Recovery Star will only be as good as the keyworkers who use it, so it is vital that all members of staff are trained to use the tool. The Mental Health Providers Forum offer a range of training packages that can be tailored to your organisation's needs, as well as running open training courses for individuals throughout the year. Full details of the range of courses available can be found on the MHPF website at [www.mhpf.org.uk](http://www.mhpf.org.uk).

Before training takes place, use your usual communication channels (for instance team meetings and newsletters) to keep staff informed about why the Recovery Star is being implemented, when it will happen and how it will affect them. You might find it helpful to set up a Steering Group made up of managers, keyworkers, and in some cases service users, to oversee the introduction of the Star.

It is also important to make it clear how it fits with other initiatives and training that they have received. For example if your organisation promotes the recovery model it is important that workers know that the Star is based on this model. Also if you use motivational interviewing and the cycle of change it will help workers if you can show how this links to the Star.

To use the Star well requires that keyworkers have well developed keywork skills. Introducing the Star may be an opportunity to review the training needs of your staff in this area and address any outstanding concerns.

## 6. Ensure quality and consistency in the use of the Recovery Star

Star data will only provide an accurate picture of the progress of service users if the staff have a good understanding of the Star and apply the ladders consistently. We recommend that you ensure this happens in the following ways:

### Staff supervision

When discussing a worker's caseload, review each service users' Star Chart. This will help managers to ensure that readings are being carried out when they should be and that they are appropriate for that service user. It can also help the supervision process by providing the manager with a quick overview of the worker's caseload.

### File auditing

As part of the normal process of auditing files, managers should ensure that star records are present and accurate.

### Team meetings

When discussing service users in team meetings, look at their Recovery Star Charts and couch your discussion in terms of where they are on the Ladder of Change. This enables the team to develop a shared understanding of how to use the ladders and the Ladder of Change and will help staff to become familiar with using this framework.

## 7. Analyse and interpret the data

“The Outcomes Star measurement system has generated a considerable amount of interest within the sector and we view it as an example of positive practice in relation to tracking individual development and progress against multiple vulnerabilities.”

Audit Commission March 2006

You can draw on your Star data in two ways:

- As part of the routine monitoring of the service
- To carry out in-depth research into the effectiveness of services

### Routine monitoring

We recommend that for routine monitoring purposes you compare the initial service user reading with their most recent reading, or the first and second readings, or the most recent reading and the one taken immediately before that. The following table provides mock data for a fictional residential service. It shows the data for the first and most recent readings on current service users.

**Table 1: Average increase and decrease in scores**

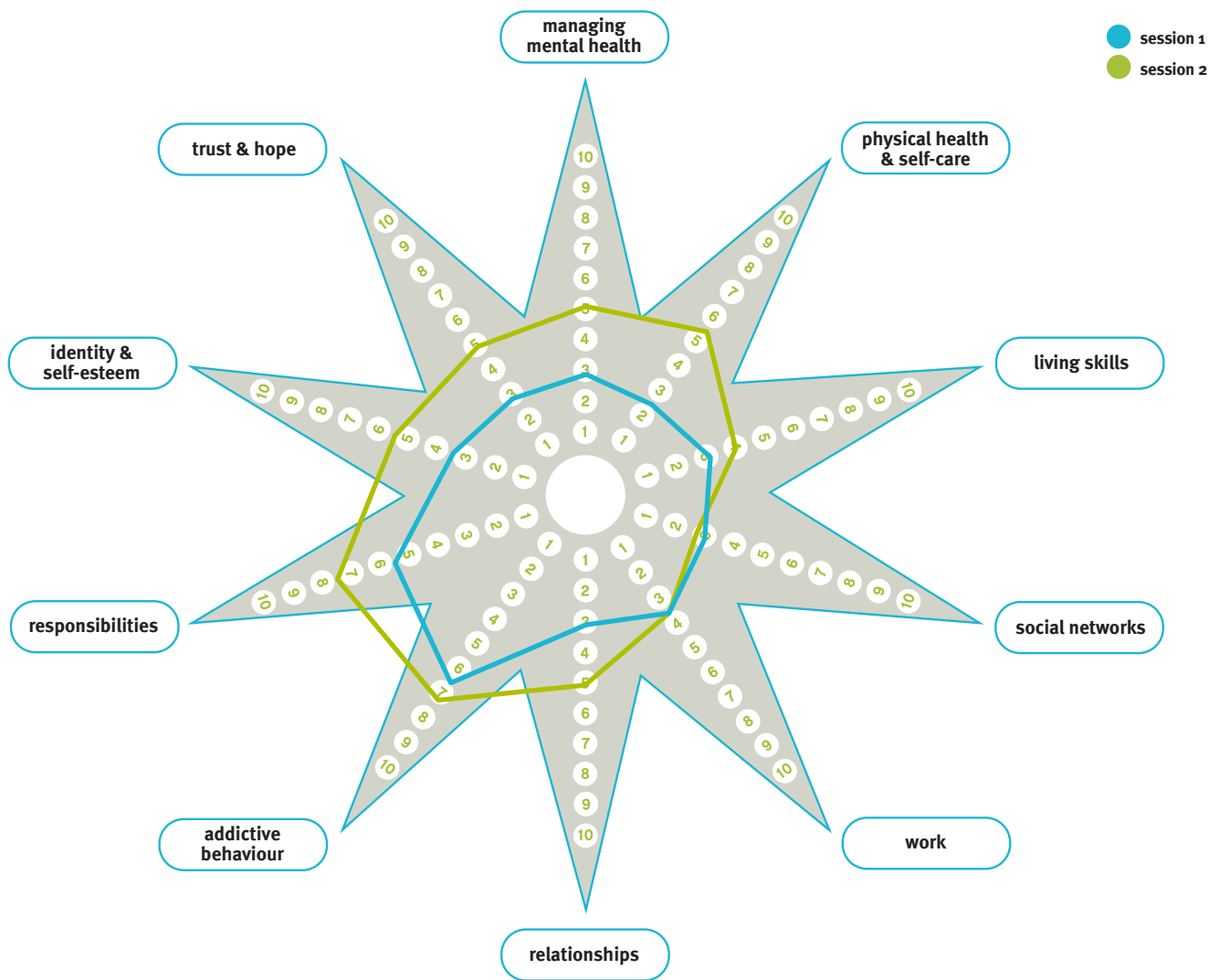
This table shows the average level of need of the service users as recorded on the Recovery Star during their first month in the project (column one) and their most recent reading (column two). Column three shows the difference between the two scores – the outcome of the project for those service users at this point in time.

|                               | First reading | Most recent reading | Difference |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|------------|
| Managing mental health        | 2.9           | 5.1                 | 2.2        |
| Physical health and self-care | 2.4           | 5.5                 | 3.1        |
| Living skills                 | 3.1           | 3.9                 | 0.8        |
| Social networks               | 2.8           | 2.6                 | -0.2       |
| Work                          | 3.3           | 3.5                 | 0.2        |
| Relationships                 | 3.1           | 5.0                 | 1.9        |
| Addictive behaviour           | 6.6           | 7.2                 | 0.6        |
| Responsibilities              | 5.7           | 7.3                 | 1.6        |
| Identity and self-esteem      | 3.4           | 5.4                 | 2.0        |
| Trust and hope                | 2.8           | 5.2                 | 2.4        |

In the figure on the next page, the same data is presented as a Star reading for the whole project. The blue line shows the first reading and the green line the most recent reading. The Star Chart shows very graphically the progress service users at this project have made and in which areas most and least progress is made.

It can also be useful to present the data for a whole project in terms of the percentage of clients making positive progress, negative progress or staying the same. Table 2 presents this data.





**Table 2: Percentage of service users showing change**

This table shows the percentage of service users who have made a positive or a negative change or stayed the same in each of the outcome areas covered by the Recovery Star.

|                                      | Positive change | Negative change | No change  |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------|
| <b>Managing mental health</b>        | 78%             | 10%             | 12%        |
| <b>Physical health and self-care</b> | 76%             | 15%             | 9%         |
| <b>Living skills</b>                 | 51%             | 15%             | 34%        |
| <b>Social networks</b>               | 43%             | 29%             | 28%        |
| <b>Work</b>                          | 42%             | 30%             | 28%        |
| <b>Relationships</b>                 | 70%             | 4%              | 26%        |
| <b>Addictive behaviour</b>           | 40%             | 5%              | 55%        |
| <b>Responsibilities</b>              | 36%             | 4%              | 60%        |
| <b>Identity and self-esteem</b>      | 69%             | 7%              | 24%        |
| <b>Trust and hope</b>                | 90%             | 6%              | 4%         |
| <b>Overall</b>                       | <b>74%</b>      | <b>10%</b>      | <b>16%</b> |

## What does the data show?

Level of need when service users arrive

- Does the data show that people are entering the project with an appropriate level of need?
- If service users have fewer needs or more needs than your project was intended to meet, then it might be necessary to review your referral routes and selection project. Alternatively, you might decide to review your ideas about who the project is intended for

The data presented above indicates that most people enter the project at around point three on the ladders – the Accepting Help stage. This may well be appropriate for a residential project. The exceptions are addictive behaviour and responsibilities. This is probably because a significant number of service users do not have issues in these two areas and hence have a starting score of ten. This would then raise the overall average.

Level of progress service users make

- What does the data show about the progress service users make whilst they are with the project?
- Are they making the level of progress you would expect? They are likely to be making more progress in some areas than others
- Does the data show a pattern you would expect or are there any figures that concern you?
- Does the data show negative outcomes? Why might that be?

The data presented above indicates that service users are progressing well at the project. The overall picture is of people moving from the Accepting Help stage to the Believing stage – a significant step to take.

The amount of change taking place is somewhat lower in the areas of work, living skills and addictive behaviour. In view of the higher starting score for addictive behaviour, it is likely that the overall change is low because many service users do not have a problem in this area and so cannot increase their score. This hypothesis is supported by the data in Table 2 which shows that 55% of people show no change in that area.

However, there is no simple explanation for the lower outcomes in the area of work and living skills. It may be the case that this project does not focus on these areas and would benefit from giving them more attention. Of particular concern is the fact that 30% of clients have a negative outcome in the area of work while another 28% show no change in this area. Is the project setting its aspirations for clients high enough in this area? It may be that implicit assumptions from workers that service users are unlikely to be able to be employed again are affecting service user hopes and motivation. This is something that could be explored by the service manager with staff and service users.

## Comparing projects

If your organisation has a number of different projects providing a similar service, you might want to compare the outcomes they achieve. This kind of comparison raises interesting questions for further exploration.

- Why does one project consistently achieve more positive change than another?
- Why is one project taking in service users at an earlier stage on the Ladder of Change?
- Why does one project help service users make significant improvements in their self-care whilst others do not?

Many factors contribute to the outcomes a project achieves. Some of them, such as the quality of keywork and management and, to an extent, appropriateness of referrals, are within the control of the project. Others, like the quality of the accommodation, the availability of specialist services such as addiction specialists or counselling are outside the project's control. For this reason, outcomes information from the Recovery Star should not be used on its own to judge a project as successful or unsuccessful, but should be used as a basis for discussion and further exploration.

## Benchmarking with other organisations

This can be very useful in identifying areas where you have good practice to share and also areas where you could learn from others to improve your performance. The Mental Health Providers Forum are developing learning sets and benchmarking to enable development of the use and understanding of the Recovery Star and to enable improvements in how we help service users to recover. Using the Recovery Star System will enable you to contribute to and access this work.

## Staff performance

We **do not** recommend that you use the Recovery Star to assess the performance of workers. This is partly because many factors outside the worker's control affect client progress and also because it could distort their relationship with the service user and introduce incentives to manipulate the scoring system.

However, as outlined in the section on ensuring quality and consistency of Recovery Star data, we do recommend that the Star is used within staff supervision. Reviewing service users' Star Charts can provide managers and their staff with a simple way of reviewing a case load. How are service users progressing? Does the keyworker have a manageable case load or do they have a very high proportion of service users at an early stage in the Ladder of Change? Are they making good assessments of where a service user is on each of the ladders based on observable behaviour?

## In-depth research

As well as routine monitoring, experience indicates that it is very valuable to take an in-depth look at the data you have collected – say every one or two years. When looking in depth you can:

- Identify particular groups of clients, for example women or people under the age of 25 or a particular minority ethnic group and look at whether their outcomes are any different from the service user population as a whole
- Explore whether certain kinds of starting need link with positive or negative progress. For example do people with low scores on the addictive behaviour ladder do less well than the service user population as a whole?
- Look at service users' typical journey in different projects. For example do people tend to make rapid progress in the first six months and then plateau?
- Benchmark your projects outcomes with those of similar projects in other organisations
- There are many other ways to analyse the data. The best way to start is to develop some hypotheses about the factors affecting your service user outcomes and then use the data to put them to the test

Look at the Mental Health Providers Forum website at [www.mhpf.org.uk](http://www.mhpf.org.uk) to find out more about how the Recovery Star System can help with this kind of in-depth analysis.

## An example of in-depth research: Southside Partnership

Following the development of the Recovery Star, Southside Partnership approached MHPF to carry out in-depth implementation and research work for the organisation<sup>5</sup>. This included: training/support in use of the Recovery Star; evaluation of the impact of its implementation on organisational procedures; and research into the outcomes of clients (for example what areas the most progress was shown on). The research found that:

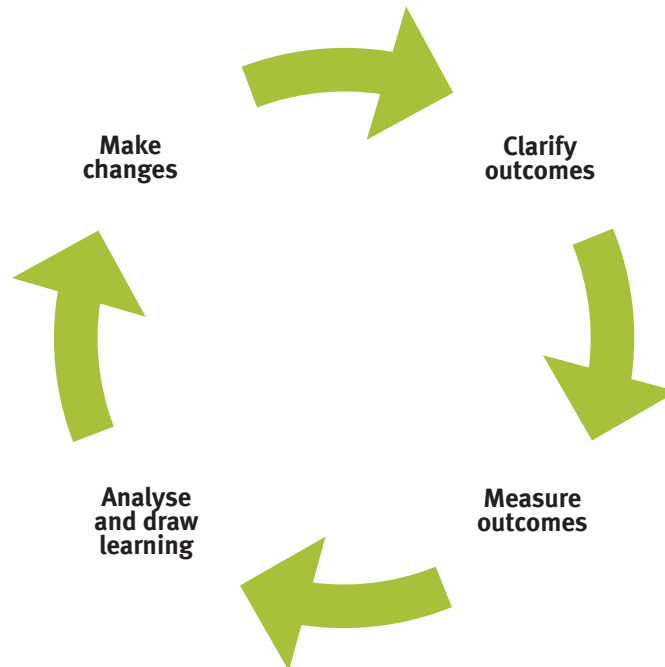
- By **ethnicity** – from the first to the second readings, across all dimensions aside from two, clients from white backgrounds showed more progress on their recovery journey
- By **gender** – whilst initial readings tended to show males clients as having slightly lower scores than female clients, by reading two, male clients showed the most progress across all dimensions
- By **age** – across all the dimensions, service users demonstrating the most positive outcomes following reading two were those in the 18-25 years old age bracket

<sup>5</sup> The 'Implementing the Mental Health Recovery Star with Southside Partnership' report can be downloaded from the MHPF website at: [www.mhpf.org.uk](http://www.mhpf.org.uk)

## 8. Share and act on the data

The Recovery Star is designed to be used as part of an on-going process of measurement, learning and service improvement as illustrated in the Outcomes Learning Cycle diagram.

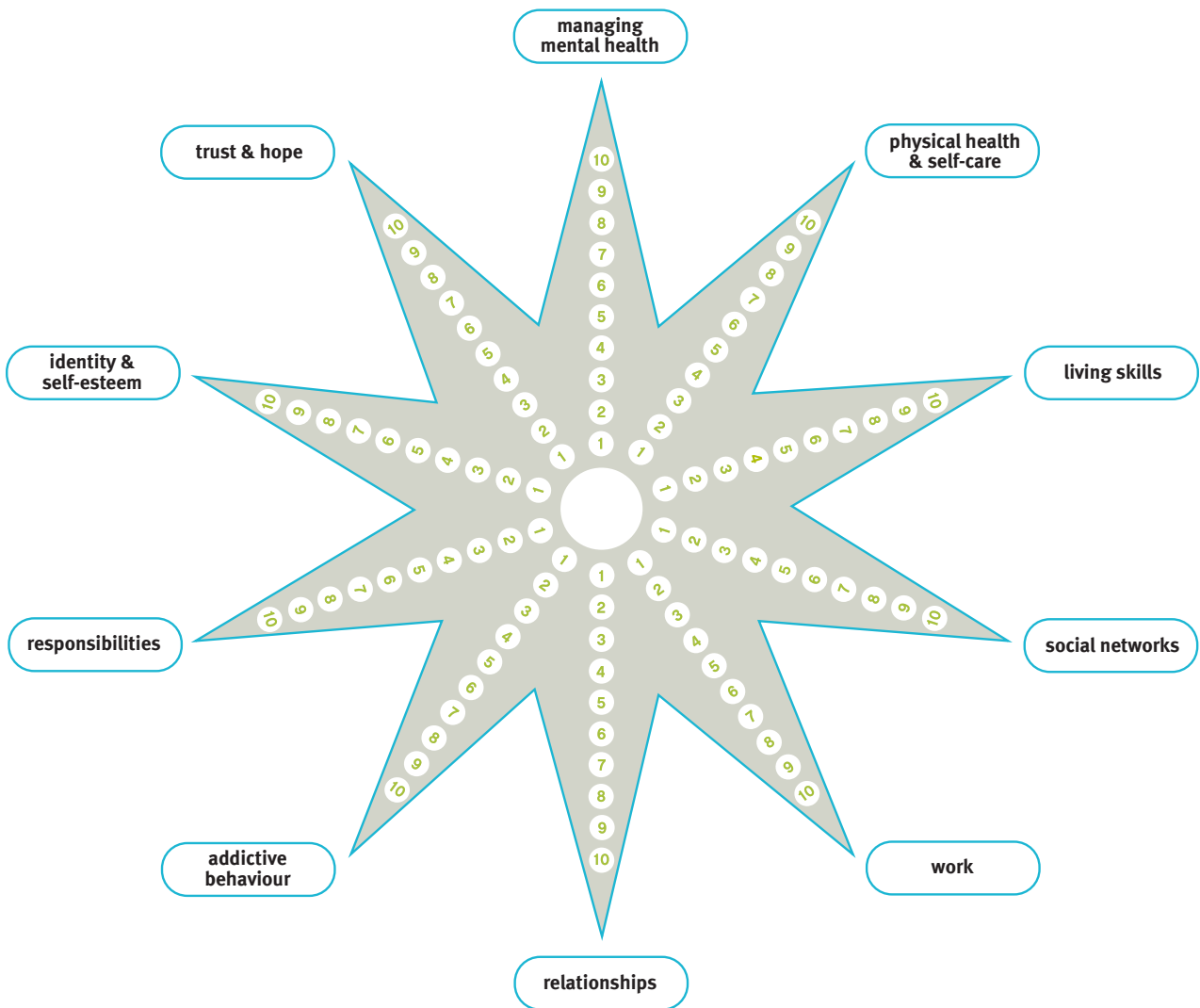
Figure 2: The Outcomes Learning Cycle



This means that it is vital that once you have analysed your data you share it with others and make changes in the light of it. There are a number of different audiences to share the information with:

- The data will be a useful tool for your **management team**, providing a means of reviewing service effectiveness and highlighting possible difficulties. Once the Recovery Star is fully implemented you might want to review the data on a three or six monthly basis
- Make sure that the **keyworkers** who collect the data have a summary fed back to them at regular intervals. This will keep them motivated to collect the information and should provide a boost to morale if it shows positive change. If the data shows that there are areas of weakness, then change will be easier to implement if keyworkers have evidence of the problem themselves
- **Management Committees** receive regular financial reports but often get only anecdotal information about services. You might want to present them with information on service outcomes on a six or twelve monthly basis
- The Recovery Star will help you demonstrate your outcomes to **commissioners** in a way that really
- captures the heart of what you do. You may want to draw on it when putting in a bid, use it as part of your routine reporting or as a one-off exercise to demonstrate the value of your service. It should add to your credibility and show them that you are taking the initiative when it comes to measuring your outcomes

Some commissioners may initially be sceptical of a tool that is based on ‘soft’ outcomes. You may need to show them what kind of information the tool will give and suggest ways in which you can share it with them. It is important to demonstrate to them that the data you will be collecting is robust and gives very ‘hard’ information about what you are achieving



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An official version of



The Recovery Star is an official version of the Outcomes Star, a suite of tools developed by Triangle Consulting for measuring outcomes in social care. For more information see [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk).



**National Mental Health**  
 Development Unit



policy, training & consultancy  
 for housing with care and support



london housing  
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 tackling homelessness together

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