

## Measuring progress through Activity Agreements

Activity Agreements use a person-centred approach, putting the individual at the heart of planning for and monitoring change. Learning to recognise and articulate their progress is crucial to a young person's ability to progress along the skills pipeline.

The Outcomes Star™ is a unique suite of tools for supporting and measuring change when working with people. There are over 15 versions of the Outcomes Star, adapted for different client groups and services, including older people, health, families and work. Each Outcomes Star provides an outcomes scale, arranged in the shape of a star, covering 6 different elements – each represented by a point on the star.

Within Activity Agreements, the Outcomes Star is being used to support the Trusted Professional role, providing a framework to work collaboratively with young people to identify their strengths and needs, to plan their programme and review progress. Outcomes Star enables young people to take control over this process – they decide how to score themselves. Whichever Star is used by a local authority, it covers a wide range of areas, supporting the Activity Agreement approach of working holistically with young people. For example, Fife Council Activity Agreements use Teen Star, which provides scales to measure change in 'drugs and alcohol', 'wellbeing', 'safety and security', 'structure', 'citizenship' and 'family/adults'. This recognises the interdependency between different aspects of a young person's life and their ability to progress. In Moray, Activity Agreements use Work Star with young people. Joe Bodman... Moray Council, feels that, although the Star provides a user-friendly framework to measure soft/employability skills, it is the non-judgemental approach used by the Trusted Professionals that is the key to ensuring that young people feel comfortable with the process and are able to be honest in their self-scores.

Stars are usually completed during one-to-one sessions between a young person and their Trusted Professional, the process starting once a trusting relationship has been established. The Trusted Professional will discuss each point of the star so that the young person understands how to 'score' the point. They can also use pre-set questions, provided by Outcomes Star, to structure the discussion.

Outcomes Star also supports the creation of the individual's Activity Agreement plan. This is a working document that outlines the activities the young person will undertake in response to their identified needs and interests. The plan will be added to as the young person builds their participation during the Activity Agreement. A template action plan is

provided as part of the Outcomes Star resource, allowing scores to be translated into action. Trusted Professionals use the action plan to keep their discussions with the young person future-focused, and involving the whole person, not just the problem's. One Trusted Professional from Fife commented "the action plan is a good tool alongside Teen Star as the young people often like to see a plan mapped out in front of them and the responsibilities they have within that."

During the Activity Agreement a young person is likely to complete several stars and their movement up or down each scale, as compared to the previously completed Star, is recorded as a measure of progress. Comparison of Stars during one-to-one review meetings provides a focus for discussion, encouraging the young person to reflect on their journey. It also provides a shared language for talking about that journey and a visual representation of where they are at. For Trusted Professionals, the framework helps them to highlight a young person's particular strengths or areas of weakness and adjust support accordingly. A final star is completed on exit from the Activity Agreement, at which point the first and exit stars would be compared to illustrate the young person's journey of change.

Taking a young person centred approach to measuring outcomes has many benefits for young people. Outcomes Star helps a young person take ownership and prioritise what they need to work towards an end outcome. This gives the young person a sense that change is possible and helps to develop ideas about what the next step might be. The visual picture of their journey that is built motivates young people to keep going and helps them see where they have already made positive progress.

Trusted Professionals using Outcomes Star have reported that young people who are motivated are more likely to complete their Activity Agreement programme. The Follow-Up Study of Activity Agreement Leavers (2012), showed that young people who complete their Agreement are more likely to progress to learning, training or employment following their Activity Agreement, compared to those who leave early.

In addition, self-reflection reinforces the personal and social development that takes place within the activity-based elements of an Activity Agreement – such as increasing confidence, building resilience and developing communication skills. Young people who have been introduced to the concept of self-assessment at the Activity Agreement stage of the Skills Pipeline are also likely to be better able to articulate their strengths and skills as they progress along the Pipeline.

Activity Agreement partnerships are able to use Outcomes Star at programme level to evidence effective interventions and the impact on participants. This enables provision and support to be developed and reviewed accordingly. Scores can be collated to report at service level or for different sub-groups of young people. For example, in a recent report, Falkirk Council Activity Agreements were able to use Outcomes Star to show that since starting an Activity Agreement, 54% of young people had improved their emotional and mental health and 61% had increased motivation and ability to take responsibility. This level of detail around progress allows Activity Agreements to demonstrate the impact on all young people who participate, not only the 70% who make a hard progression straight after their Agreement ends. For young people who do not go on to participate in anything following their Activity Agreement it is crucial that they are given the tools to recognise and articulate what progress they have made, to continue their journey when they are ready.