
The Homelessness Outcomes Star: Response to Johnson and Pleace's Brief Response

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It is helpful that Johnson and Pleace recognize the value of the HOS as a way for workers to track individual progress. We also believe it is helpful for managers to have an overview of progress for all individuals across a service or group of services. This helps services retain a focus on the service user. The availability of collated information about individual progress is also useful in reporting on progress to external stakeholders. Without some way of summarizing what is changing for service users the conversations tend to revolve around costs and savings, leaving the most important aspect – the people the services exist to serve – completely out of the picture. Star data can provide a helpful counterbalance to this. We have never suggested that it was a tool for 'social scientific analysis' or that the data on its own provided a complete picture of service achievements.

Relating to the blaming of the individual for the difficulties they are experiencing, it is worth highlighting that the evidence quoted by Johnson and Pleace is based on independent primary research: Peterson, Ellis, Lorenz and Armbrecht (2014) report a highly structured interventional study involving 10 men who were receiving services at a men's alcohol/drug rehabilitation facility of a mission for homeless persons. Harris and Andrews (2013) report an action research study of the implementation of the Star commissioned by a service provider. These two independent studies and several others focusing on other versions of the Outcomes Star indicate that the impact of using the Star is the opposite. It helps service users and workers to identify goals and harness their strengths to make progress towards them despite the challenging environment that they face (Macdonald & Fugard, 2015; Maguire, Johnson, Vostanis, and Keats, 2010; York Consulting, 2013)

We agree with the point made in Johnson and Pleace's original article that "better outcomes measurement has the potential to benefit governments, commissioners, service providers and the people they serve". The purpose of the HOS and other Stars is to benefit these constituencies, particularly service users. Like all tools it

has the potential to be used in unhelpful ways and to serve agendas not envisaged or supported by their developers. We put an enormous amount of time and attention on supporting organisations to use it well, for its intended purpose in service of the service user.

It is a shame is that Johnson and Pleace imply that Triangle is an opportunist commercial organisation whose primary goal is to make a profit and which will promote its product whether it is fit for purpose or not. Triangle is a social enterprise with a social mission. We develop and support the Outcomes Star suite of tools because we have a strong belief, rooted in experience, that the Star is helpful to many service users. The majority of any surplus is invested in supporting organisations to use the Stars effectively, carrying out research and new tool development. Most of the training for the HOS is delivered by Homeless Link, a charity and the membership body for voluntary sector homelessness organisations. The HOS itself is available free of charge, though other versions of the Star require a license and we strongly encourage HOS users to buy a license too. This enables us to provide the support with implementation which experience shows is very much needed in the high pressure environment that Johnson and Pleace describe.

› References

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