



# Inspiring Shropshire's young people to realise their potential

A case study May 2013



# The Client

**Shropshire Children and Young People's Strategy sets out how Shropshire Council will ensure that 'All children and young people will be happy, healthy, safe and reach their full potential, supported by their families, friends and the wider community. A range of initiatives, delivered by various agencies and partner organisations, to achieve this vision for Shropshire includes Shropshire Council's Targeted Mental Health in Schools (TaMHS) project.**

**The aim of the TaMHS project is to develop a whole school approach to emotional well-being support for children and young people. Using targeted intervention programmes the project aims to raise awareness in staff, pupils and parents about the importance of supporting our emotional and mental health with the long term objective of improving school attendance and attainment levels for children and young people. These programmes offer additional support to vulnerable children in groups or on a one to one basis to build resilience in young people and to reduce the risk of them developing negative coping strategies. Programmes delivered through the TaMHS project develop young people's social and emotional well-being, encourage self-worth and promote positive behaviour.**

**Having benefited herself from the Windmills No Regrets on Sunday programme, Helen Bayley, a Change Champion, from Shropshire Council's Family Care and Well Being team, quickly recognised how the Windmills principles and approach could also be helpful for the families and young people she was working with in her role as TaMHS Project Manager. Over a coffee break on the Champions' training workshop, Helen discovered that Windmills had already developed an exciting and innovative programme for young people – STAR – and that the STAR programme, delivered in Shropshire secondary schools, would help achieve the aims of the Council's TaMHS project.**

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Shropshire Council  
Children and Young  
People strategy 2013

# The Project

Keen to support and explore this exciting initiative, Windmills agreed that the TaMHS project could pilot the STAR programme in 5 Shropshire schools under the Council's existing license agreement and a STAR champions training programme was arranged.

## What did Windmills do?

Windmills delivered 2 days STAR Champions training on 17th and 18th October 2012. Twelve Shropshire Council staff members attended the training days. In line with the Council's intention to join up more closely on the ground the contribution of respective agencies, the Champions group included a Connexions Advisor, a council staff member from the Education Welfare Service and the Targeted Youth Support team, the TaMHS project manager and a number of teaching and support staff from the pilot schools.

Day one of the champions' training programme provided an opportunity for the participants to experience the STAR programme for themselves and complete their own STAR booklet. This approach means the Champions become familiar with the content of the activities and exercises, experience the facilitation style and gain an insight into the benefits of the STAR programme resources and approach.

The day started with Release Your Potential activity used as an ice-breaker activity and led to a discussion on the roles people expected to play in the pilot programmes. The champions completed the STAR skills cards activity, used props and photographs to identify their Treasures and used the Lottery Balls cards to focus on 6 key ambitions for the future.

Very enlightening training – I enjoyed the two days very much.

3 things I have gained: enthusiasm, new ideas, initiatives for changing negatives to positives

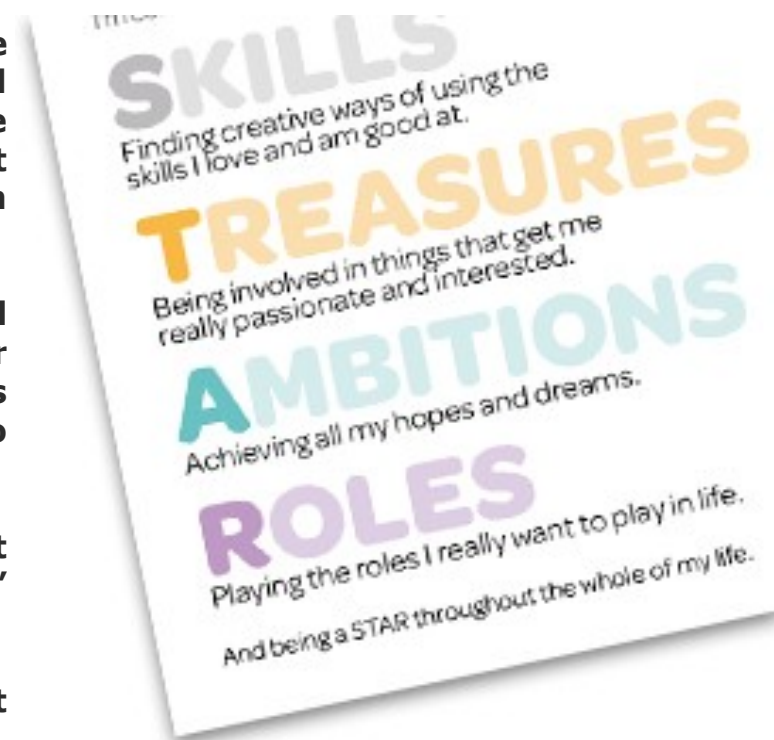
The group considered alternative ways to help young people explore different potential roles that combine their skills, treasures and ambitions and created a personal Golden Ticket. The group enjoyed the STAR DVD and got an insight into the programme in action from a short DVD of young people taking part in STAR made by year 12 pupils from another school.

The focus for day two of the Champions' training was on goals and actions for implementation in the pilot schools and preparation for delivery of the different STAR activities. In small groups the champions examined in more depth each of the STAR activities and the approach to delivery demonstrated and discussed on day one.

The Champions looked at ways to give context for a specific target group of young people, developed creative ideas for 'bringing it alive' and identified relevant curriculum links.

Time was given over to developing a Golden Ticket for the pilot project – identifying what the group wanted to be celebrating in a year's time.

The Champions group agreed that the pilots would target small groups of young people identified by the school as in need of extra support – those disengaging themselves from school teaching and in need of motivation and inspiration.



# The Project

## What did the Champions do?

Ten Champions from the group trained then went on to pilot the STAR programme in 5 different secondary schools, the first starting immediately after the October half term. All of the pilots used existing data on the young people to target the STAR programme at groups of students identified as underachieving in school due to poor attainment, poor attendance or not engaging with school in general. These students are seen as at risk of becoming part of the NEET group (not in employment, education and training).

The objective for the STAR programme was to help them realise their potential, raise their confidence and motivation so that they become more active learners. It was hoped that the STAR programme would help these students to feel more positive about themselves and encourage them to think about what they might need to do to achieve their goals for the future.

Once these pupils had been identified they were assessed using 'PASS'. This measures 'preparedness to learning', attitudes to self and school, and highlights students with very low regard for themselves as learners, low confidence and low response to curriculum demands. This could be used at the start and end of the STAR programme to show any changes in students' attitudes and approach.



**In all of the pilot programmes group size was kept small – 8 students being the maximum number in any cohort. In addition to the group sessions, the Learning Mentor in one school carried out one to one sessions for a female year 8 student. Each of the pilot schools delivered the STAR programme in different ways. For example in one school a series of 45 minute sessions were delivered over an 8 week period, one ran STAR twice a week for 6 weeks and another provided a number of one off 2 hour sessions for different groups.**

**Year groups differed too, with the STAR programme being delivered to students in years 8 through to 12 across the different pilot schools. Most of the programmes were delivered by the school Champions but in one school the pilot was facilitated by Champions from teams external to the school but part of the overall TaMHS project.**

**The experience from these 5 pilot programmes reinforces the flexibility of the STAR programme both in terms of delivery and age range.**

**The  
structure of  
the  
programme  
worked  
well. It  
was both  
active and  
thought  
provoking.**

# Project Impact

Evaluation of the project took place at different levels. At the end of the 2 day workshop participants were asked to complete a feedback and evaluation questionnaire designed to ensure that the objectives of the Champions' training programme were achieved.

To ensure ongoing evaluation of the pilot programmes Windmills asked the champions to provide a reflective summary to review their initial experiences of facilitating the STAR programme sessions. In addition the Champions were required to provide a more in-depth case study with the intention of highlighting the impact of the sessions for the student participants.

On top of that the project lead, Helen Bayley, TaMHS Project Manager, planned in a number of Champions' review meetings to monitor impact and progress with the pilot school programmes.



## Impact of the Champions' training

The Champions' training was a very positive experience for the participants. People enjoyed the 2 days and left feeling very enthusiastic about getting started on their pilot programmes. Champions were looking forward to

- ◆ 'making a difference to young people', and
- ◆ 'taking the message of choice out to the young people we work with.'

Feedback comments suggested that the champions appreciated the practical nature of the training and the opportunity to discuss the application of the STAR activities with the wide range of professionals in the group.

The Champions' training was described as 'very enlightening', 'energising and motivating' and one participant commented that the approach 'role modelled the STAR Champion role superbly.'

# Effectiveness of the Champions training workshops

Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 0 to 5 where '0' is 'not at all' and '5' is 'significantly, the extent to which the Champions' training had

- ◆ increased their knowledge of the STAR programme
- ◆ increased their confidence to deliver the STAR programme
- ◆ given them the skills to deliver the STAR programme.



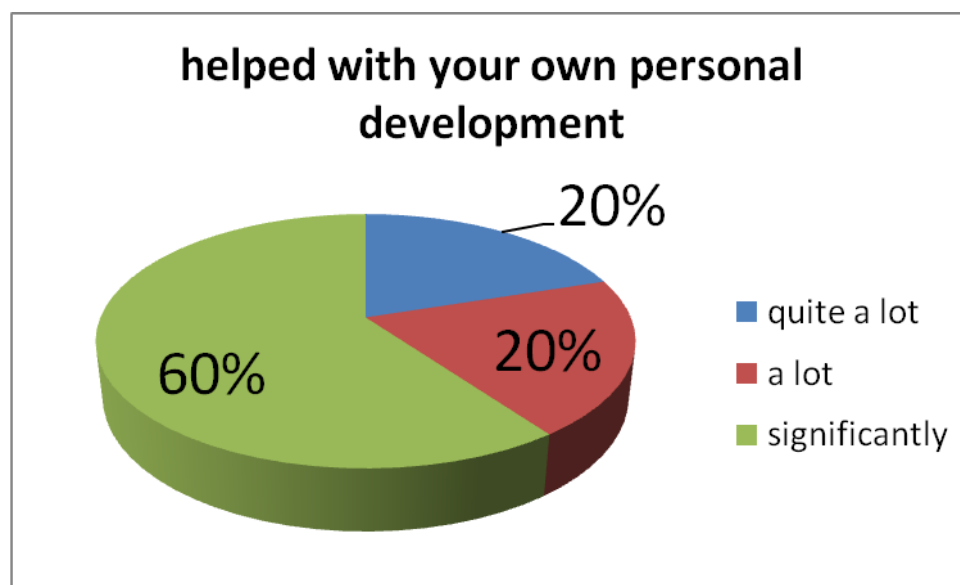
**This table summarises the group responses, confirming high levels of increase across all 3 objectives.**



## Effectiveness of the Champions training workshops

The Champions were also very enthusiastic about the quality and flexibility of the STAR resources and activities, welcoming an approach that would encourage pupils to identify their skills and aspirations. Describing the STAR programme one Champion said it was a 'versatile tool to help motivate young people' while another commented 'great resource/tools that will benefit so many different pupils.'

Interestingly working through the activities from a personal perspective during day 1 of the training had a real impact for the Champions themselves, with 60% reporting that the training had helped them 'significantly' with their own personal development.



This was backed up by feedback comments elsewhere. An action for one Champion was to 'take this into family and personal life', while others reflected that the training had 'made me sit back and look at myself' and 're-focused my personal and professional vision/Golden Ticket.'

## Impact of the pilot programmes

Started at different times and of differing duration, evaluation from the 5 pilot programmes will be ongoing, however 6 months after the Champions' training early indications showed that on the whole the STAR programme was being well received by the target groups and having a positive impact for some individuals.

Reflecting on the programme as a whole one Champion was delighted that the outcomes for the students were 'really good', remarking that through the STAR activities they had 'created some excellent work and they all learnt something new about themselves and their peers'. Similarly in another school the Champion noted the knock on effect for other PHSE sessions confident that the students 'wouldn't have been able to complete the CV or promote themselves the way they did if they had not done STAR.' Another group had learned how their STAR skills might impact on their career choices and the champion believed that the students were 'much more focused about what it is they want to achieve in respect to happiness and self-worth within their lives.'

More specifically the STAR skills cards activity and the Golden Ticket exercise were identified as having a real impact. According to one Champion the students particularly liked the completing the skills cards activity and 'were able to identify strengths and skills they may not otherwise have thought of.' One pupil said " I now believe I am more employable"



Reflecting on her experience of facilitating the Golden Ticket another Champion was delighted that her initial concerns over whether the young people would respond were not realised.

**'Worried the activity might have come across as slightly childish' instead, she reported that *'the activity held their interest and it got their imaginations working really well and what came out of it was quite revealing. We found out far more from doing this activity than we would have if we'd have asked them face to face. Some of them were very shy and would not have verbally told us what they shared with us via this activity.'***

In addition, early evaluations and reflections from the Champions identified impact for individual students and noticed how the activities encouraged peer learning and support in the group. When commenting on working with the skills cards activity one Champion said 'it was lovely to see one girl lean over another's shoulder and add to her strengths list.' Another champion had worked one to one with one girl and had 'noticed small changes with this student in and around school in general even after the first session which was comforting to see.'

One Champion from the TaMHS team reflected that the group of young people she had been working with over a 6 week period had, 'definitely got lots out of it.' For one young year 9 pupil who had been 'a bit apathetic at the start' the STAR experience, and the Treasures activity in particular, proved especially powerful. In deciding on his preferred 'tribe' he began to open up and, although reticent at first, shared his love of cooking. Initially a little embarrassed he was soon encouraged to feel proud of his skill and be confident in choosing to take GCSE in Food Technology.

The broad appeal of the programme surprised and pleased me, each student whatever the level was able to participate and reach the desired outcomes.

These early results were extremely encouraging and led the project team to begin approaching other secondary schools to gauge demand for delivery from the team in the future. The TaMHS team secured an additional half day support from one Champion who was part of the Education Welfare Team who went on to deliver a number of sessions beyond the pilot programme

## What were the challenges?

Despite the real successes from the initial pilot programmes it was acknowledged by the Champions that there had been some challenges - some practical, some more to do with the target group. Getting the students released from lessons and attending on time and regularly did prove difficult for some of the champions. At one review meeting the Champions discussed introducing an agreement with the school, particularly when the sessions were being delivered by 'outside' Champions.

The most commonly cited challenge though was 'getting this group of students to engage.' However part of the rationale behind the pilots was to identify a target group of 'at risk' students – those the school were most concerned about in relation to expectations and levels of attainment - so it is not surprising that

overcoming their negative attitudes' was going to be challenging. As one Champion put it 'with issues of low self esteem and negativity these students 'rarely think positively about themselves' and the purpose behind the STAR programme activities is to encourage and develop a very positive self perception.

Another challenge was behaviour. One Champion described their experience with a group of 5 boys, all on report for behaviour. 'Each wanted to be the class clown. Sitting on tables, not at them, talking over me and generally misbehaving and being unruly'. However the Champion's perseverance paid off and the group responded well to the sessions on Ambitions and Roles – 'the boys were keen to engage and a great debate was had about local jobs and what they could do.' The young people themselves recognised that the STAR programme had some relevance and value.

Arguably if experiences in the pilot schools show that the STAR programme could engage and inspire this group of students then it would have the potential to be even more powerful with other less disaffected young people.

## After the pilot programme

**A key lesson learned from the pilot programmes was the importance of support and engagement from the school. Firstly from a practical point of view to ensure rooms and students were available when required and parental permission given and secondly to provide additional staff to support the STAR Champion during the session.**

**The immediate benefit of involvement from Teaching Assistants and Family Support Workers was behaviour management for what was often challenging groups, however Champions also noted that this meant the STAR activities could be followed up where necessary by those support staff. In some instances when the student missed a session through illness for example or in one particular case where there was a real need for additional support.**

**During the Treasures exercise one young person identified themselves as sharing the values and skills of the 'carer' tribe and shared with the group their experiences of caring for a disabled family member. Not only did this encourage the young person to think of a possible career as a paramedic in the future when working on the Roles activity; the Family Support Worker who had attended the STAR sessions made**

**arrangements to discuss with that young person further support that could be sourced to help out with their present carer role.**



**This really highlights the real impact STAR can have for young people and the value of integrating the STAR programme into the range of provision and support offered to this target group.**

Similarly one Champion described a huge breakthrough with one young person who at the start of the programme had refused to complete a 'Be the STAR you are' exercise. Asked to draw or write words to describe how he saw himself in the 'mirror' he became angry and questioned the purpose of the activity.

However 5 weeks later, when he was feeling more comfortable about being on the programme, reflecting on the initial session he explained his reaction was because 'I didn't like myself much then'. He shared with the group that he 'didn't want to be the bad guy' and wanted to do well and make his mum proud. Since joining the STAR programme he had not been on report for 2 weeks or been late in school and confirmed that he was 'making a choice to behave in lessons.'



With further individual support from the school staff involved in STAR it is more likely that this kind of success and change noted during the STAR programme will persist and have a lasting impact for individual young people.

# For the Future

**Shropshire Council now has in place a three year STAR license agreement that will allow this group of 10 Champions to continue to deliver the STAR programme in the 5 pilot secondary schools and to extend the programme to other schools across the region.**

**Impact evaluation will continue with those champions who used the PASS assessment planning to administer the test again and compare the pre and post results.**

**The project team have been exploring the links between the learning outcomes from STAR to existing qualification frameworks. At the last review meeting discussions had taken place regarding National Open College Network (NOCN) qualification accreditation already in use at the Council.**

**In individual schools the Champions have been considering how to approach the delivery of the STAR programme next time. Several commenting that offering the programme to earlier year groups might make a difference to levels of engagement and positivity and would mean they could revisit aspects of the programme again in year 11.**

**One champion in particular was convinced of the value of a 'whole school' approach with the STAR programme and saw STAR fitting in really well with the vertical tutoring system used at her school.**

**She remarked 'I truly feel that to get the best from this programme, the whole of the pastoral team as well as the attendance officer and EWO would need to be trained to deliver the sessions.'**

**Similarly other champions did recognise the need for – at least - greater levels of awareness of the principles and approach of the STAR programme amongst other school staff. This coupled with the goal of providing the STAR programme for more schools in the Shropshire Council area may mean that more school and/ or council staff will need to become trained Champions in the future.**



**In developing its Children and Young People's strategy for 2013, Shropshire council asked young people what they wanted the Council's priorities to be. Three of those identified under the heading unemployment/ education are particularly relevant for the STAR programme activities and approach.**

**Young people in Shropshire wanted**

- **more praise for young people and more help and knowledge for the young re jobs and careers**
- **more help to achieve full potential in schools and focus on students who want to do well not just the high achievers.**

**Delivered effectively through a 'whole school approach' by trained Champions the STAR programme would help deliver those outcomes for the young people of Shropshire.**



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