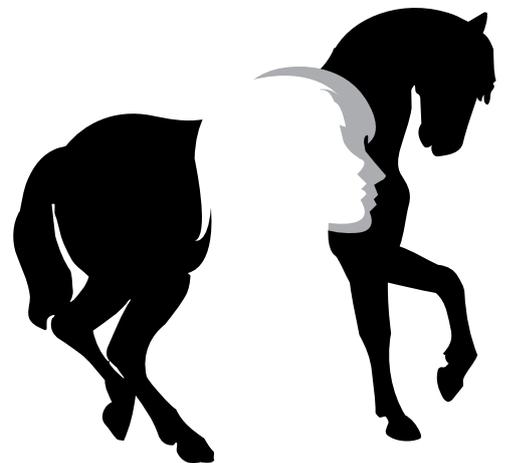


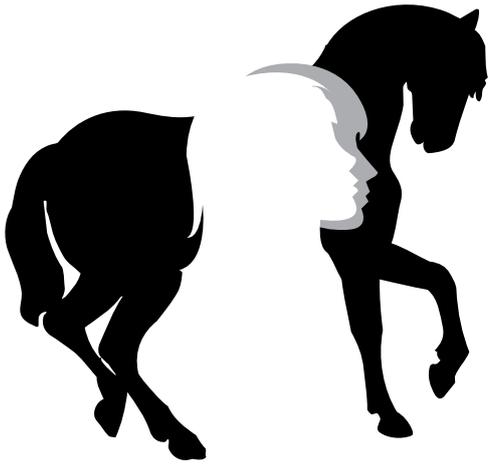


# PILOT REPORT

05/2012



**TRANSITIONS**  
EQUINE ASSISTED GROWTH & LEARNING



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# PROJECT SYNOPSIS

Transitions is Equine Assisted Growth and Learning (EAGAL) is a collaborative process involving a qualified counsellor and an equine specialist working with clients and horses to assist growth and learning goals. This short-term intervention has demonstrated hard outcomes and benefits for a range of clients.

The approach is widely documented in North America and has expanded to Europe in the last five years. Projects are well established in England and Scotland; MACS is breaking new ground as the first organisation to introduce this horse based intervention to Northern Ireland.

Five young people participated in the pilot and the amazing outcomes of their experience are documented in this report

## **CONTENTS OF REPORT**

Pilot Journey

Outcomes - 5 case studies and mental health outcome stars

Conclusion and vision for Transitions

Recommendations

# PILOT JOURNEY



## **05/2011**

Four MACS staff members were identified as ideal candidates to attend an EAGALA level one and two training program being held in Leap Farm Gloucester

## **03/2012**

A referral criteria and form were developed and distributed within MACS three services of Floating Support, Mentoring, and Supported Housing.

Twelve internal referrals were received and paneled. Five young people were selected to participate in the pilot and the remainder were placed on a waiting list.

## **03/2012 - 04/2012**

EAGALA sessions were completed between the 26th March and 23rd April. Sessions usually last between 35 and 50 minutes and the number of sessions was based on the needs of the individual client.

5 young people completed their sessions, and the breakdown was:

- 2 young people had six sessions
- 1 young person had five sessions
- 2 young people had three sessions

Participants agreed to use the Mental Health Outcome Star as a measurement of the impact of the approach. Their project workers facilitated this process.

## **05/2012**

Analysis of the impact of the pilot and the completion of a promotional event at The MAC Theatre, Belfast.

# PROJECT OUTCOMES

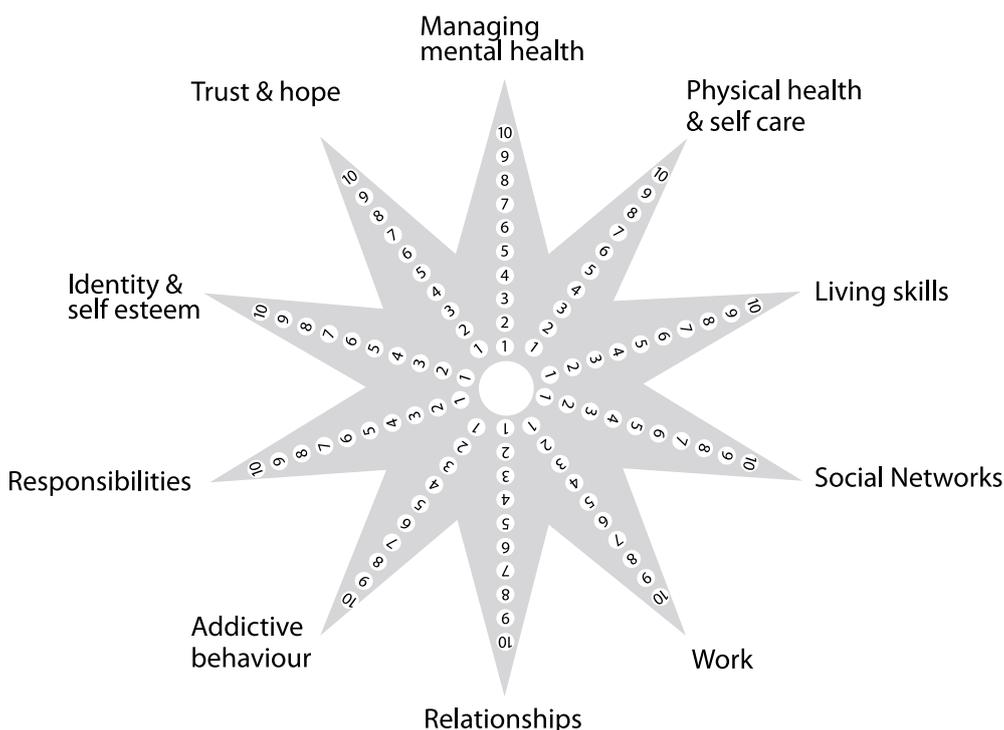
## MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOME STAR

In order to record the distanced travelled by the young people participating in the pilot, the methodology of a case study and Mental Health Outcomes Star have been used to demonstrate the impact of the intervention.

The Mental Health Outcomes Star was used as the measurement tool for the participants to self score on ten different areas which include:

- |                        |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Managing mental health | Relationships            |
| Self care              | Addictive behaviour      |
| Living skills          | Responsibilities         |
| Social networks        | Identity and self esteem |
| Use of time            | Trust & hope             |

Each participant took a measure from 0 to 10 on each of these areas before the sessions began, at mid-point, and at the end of their sessions.



# CASE STUDY

Client 1 has been a part of MACS Supported Housing Service since November 2010 and the Mentoring Service since January 2012. He has been struggling with relationships with his parents since being taken into the care system aged 15. His relationship with his father is particularly strained and in the past there has been physical violence between them. He has a diagnosis of ADHD which affects his concentration, he would also have issues with personal hygiene and self care.

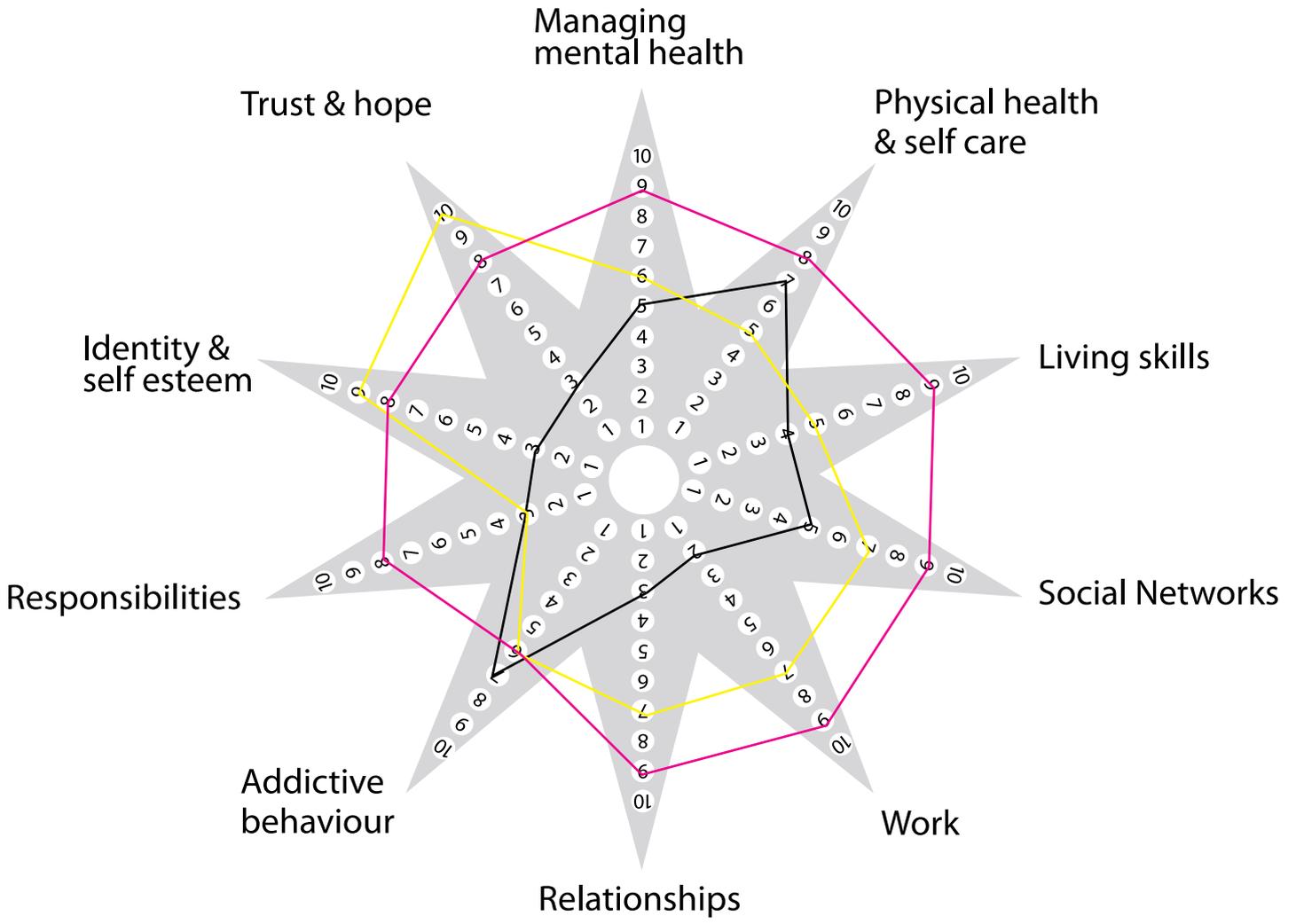
His support worker referred him to the project and he attended the six sessions. We were concerned at the start that he would be easily bored by the sessions. At the start he spent a lot of time grooming the horses. This appeared to have a calming effect on him and during the sessions he was relaxed and focused.

The focus area was relationships. He indicated a 60% improvement in this after the six sessions. The sessions made a big impact on his personal life and relationships. They brought up a lot of issues that he was able to relate to his own life. In the early sessions it was apparent that he was reluctant to take responsibility for the part that he may play in difficulties in his relationships with his family and others. However towards the end there was a marked improvement as he began to use the horses to explore this. Mid way through the sessions he had an altercation with another young person in the Supported Housing Project. He used the sessions to vent his frustration and anger at the situation. The horses behavior almost mirrored this situation. Client 1 also used the horses to talk about how he was feeling which gave him the freedom to explore this without having to say that this situation had left him feeling scared and upset.

Client 1 said:

*It was a really good experience and I would definitely do it again. The sessions made me realise that family is more important than I expected it to be. I was able to relate what was happening in the sessions to problems I was having with my family and it helped me to see things more clearly.*

# OUTCOME STAR



- STAR 1**
- STAR 2**
- STAR 3**

# CASE STUDY



Client 2 has been a part of MACS Supported Housing Service for two years. He was taken into care as a teenager as a result of a difficult childhood; he is observed as a quiet boy who states he would suffer from anxiety and low moods.

When the opportunity came up to take part in the Transitions pilot programme He put his name down only because of his love of animals. He had no interest in accessing counselling. He would state he had bad experiences with counselling in the past where he was forced to speak about issues that he didn't want to. He decided to give this a try as he didn't feel pressured and knew he could leave at any point.

Client 2 spent most of the sessions with the horses in silence. Also he spoke very little throughout the sessions but created a special bond with one of the horses. The horse interacted with him physically in an uncharacteristic but positive way. This made for some very powerful learning around relationships for him. Interestingly in his second outcome star he marked himself lower in the relationship category. By exploring his personal relationships through the horses he gained a greater insight into how he really felt and what relationships meant to him. He stated that he now realised that his relationships weren't easy and acknowledged that he had difficulties that he wanted to address. He has taken major steps towards improving his relationships.

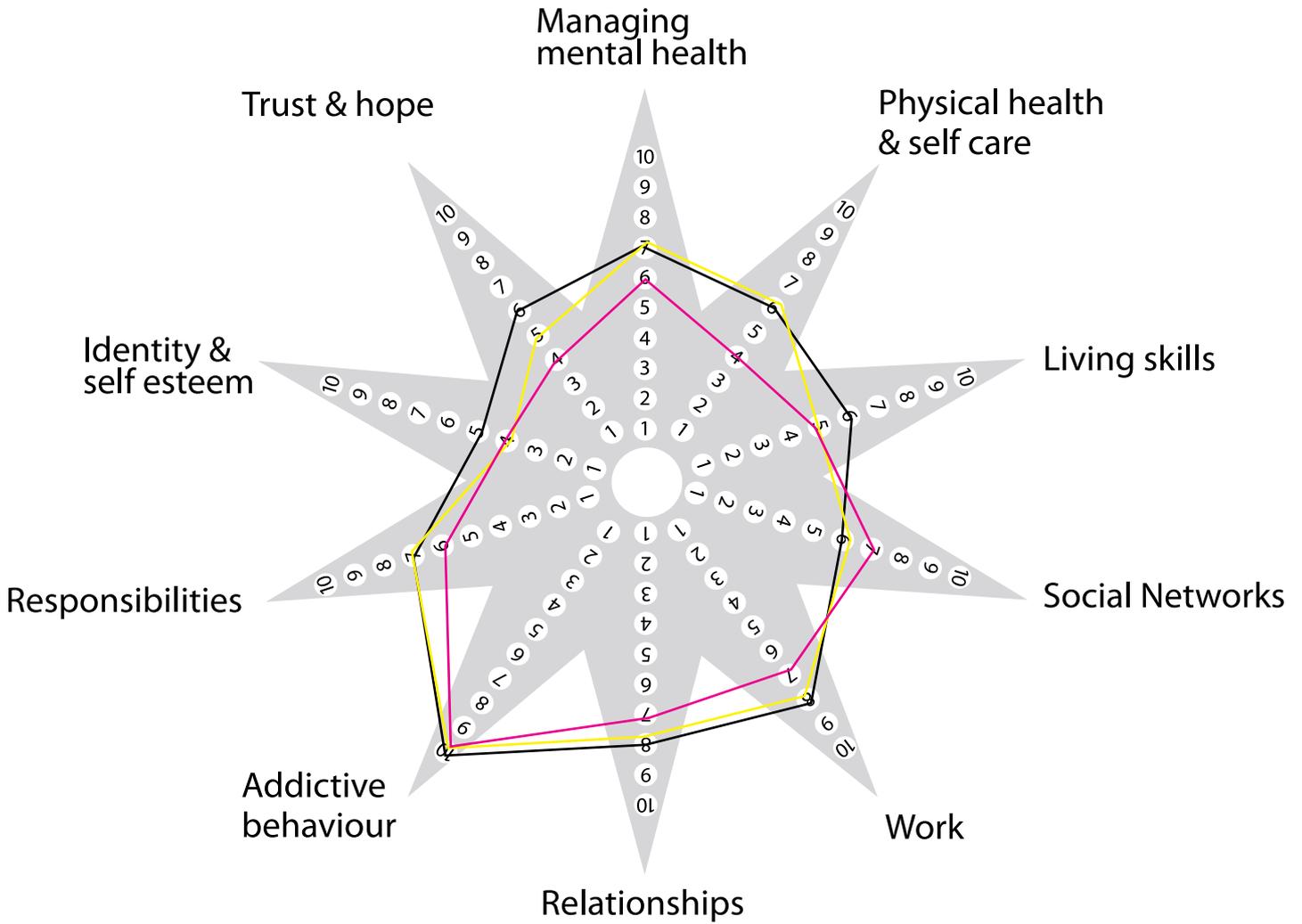
He was prescribed medication in relation to his mental health whilst taking part in the pilot. Comments made by him in the sessions would indicate higher scores on the outcome star than he marked himself. We cannot make assumptions for the reason for this or if this correlates to a change in his mood and medication.

Client 2 described his time at the Transitions as different and enjoyable. He said that he has learnt a lot and was surprised that by working with horses you could find out so much about yourself. Client 2 said:

*It was different and I would definitely recommend it*

# OUTCOME STAR

# 2



- STAR 1**
- STAR 2**
- STAR 3**

# CASE STUDY



Client 3 was a twenty year old female who has been supported by MACS since April 2010. Areas of need which the young person identified included managing mental health, relationships, addictive behaviour, identity and self esteem.

The first session enabled Client 3 to build trust with the horses through completing a leading activity. When using the rope to lead the horses the young person related this to providing a sense of control, leadership and support. Control, leadership and support were areas which the client felt were missing in her life. Through leading the horses and providing them with support and encouragement enabled the client to visualise how she could complete daily tasks through encouragement and taking control.

At the beginning of the second activity we provided her with the opportunity to build her own activity for the horses. She set up a jump and a box shape as part of the activity. She was able to reflect on what this activity represented in her life. The young person was able to relate the jump to a difficult period in her life. She related the box shape to her previous home and horse was resistant and reluctant to stay in the box. The horse's behaviour enabled her to explore the emotions involved in this experience and how relationships with other people in this home deteriorated.

In the final session we set up an activity which was a series of jumps in a path with two posts at the end. She labelled these jumps as difficulties that she had encountered. During this activity she had to lead the horse to each jump (difficulty), the horse's behaviour in this exercise enabled her to explore how she approached these difficulties and how she would approach them differently. As the sessions progressed it enabled the young person to explore how important relationships were to her, how they had deteriorated and how she could change the relationship breakdown. This session enabled her to explore how her addictive behaviours adversely impacted her relationships and how she could stop this from happening in the future.

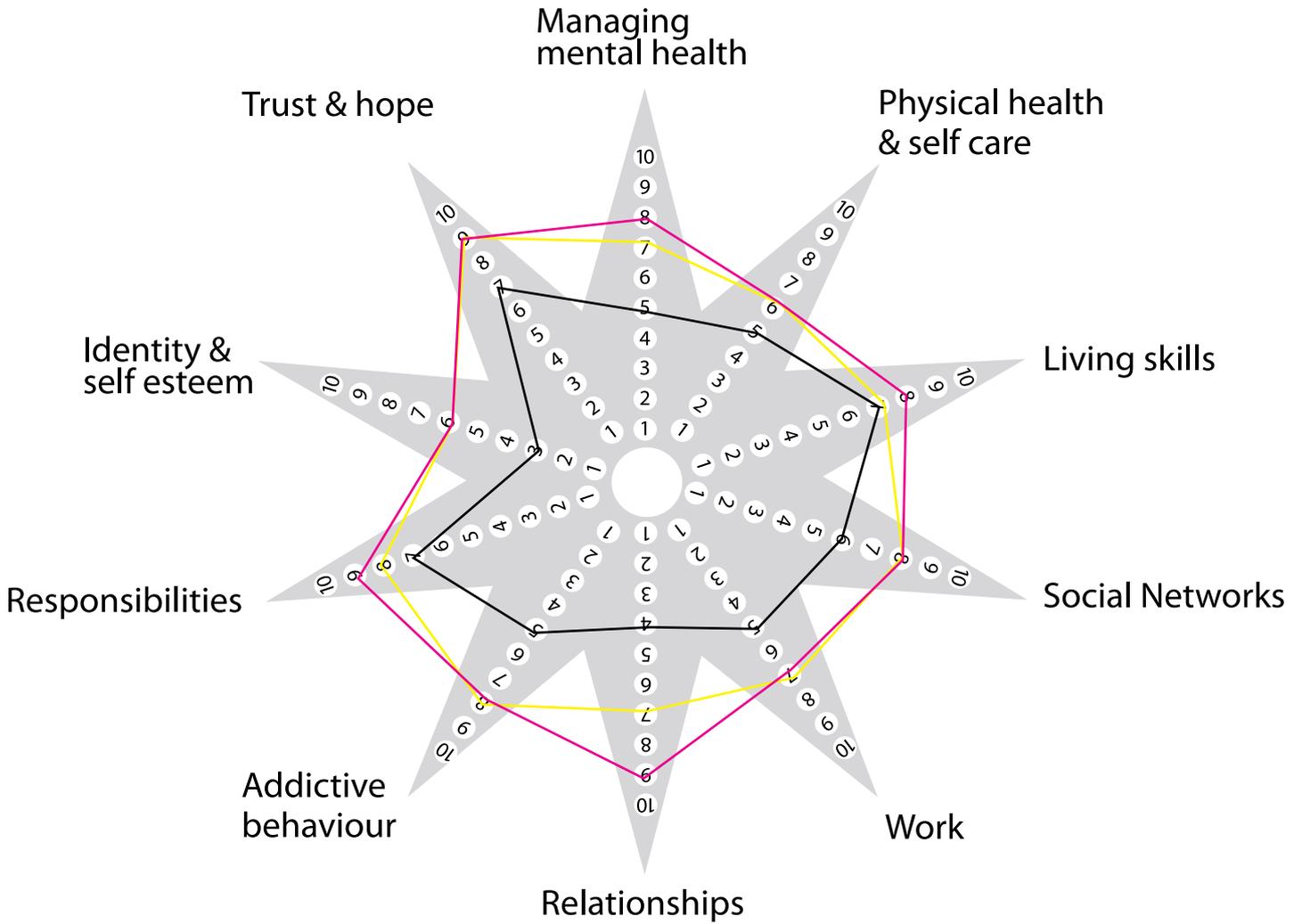
Completing a final mental health outcome star with Client 3 she indicated an improvement in the areas of identified need. In managing mental health there was a 20% improvement, in relationships there was a 30% improvement, in addictive behaviour there was a 30% improvement and in identity and self esteem there was a 30% improvement. Gaining the young person's feedback on her experience of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy she highlighted she felt a sense of being when with the horses and she felt they provided a non-judgemental environment. She felt this was a life changing experience in which the horses enabled her to facilitate change. Client 3 said:

*I do not learn unless I see...& in the horses I saw*



# OUTCOME STAR

# 3



- STAR 1
- STAR 2
- STAR 3

# CASE STUDY

# 4

Client 4 was a twenty two year old female who has been supported by MACS since December 2011. Her Support Worker referred her to the Transition's Project for issues in relation to her mental health, trust, relationships and misuse of prescription drugs. Areas of need which the young person identified included motivation, trust and hope, mental health and relationships.

To begin the first session she groomed her chosen horse. This was beneficial as she was nervous and anxious as she had never worked with horses before. When watching the horses and observing their behaviour she felt she was able to see characteristics of their personalities. When asking her to complete an activity which involved leading a horse of her choice, her chosen horse refused to move. This enabled her to reflect upon her motivation to complete things such as college, she felt that she always needed pushed.

At the second session we completed an activity in relation to personal space. We asked her to bring a horse of her choice into her personal space. When asked how this felt to have something in her personal space, she indicated it was ok and the horse reminded her of herself as she felt it was stubborn. When the small brown horse tried to enter the young person's personal space her chosen horse blocked it. Exploring this with her she indicated that her fiancée always tries to impose his help. She was able to formulate an approach which would benefit her when she feels people are entering her personal space without damaging her relationship with them.

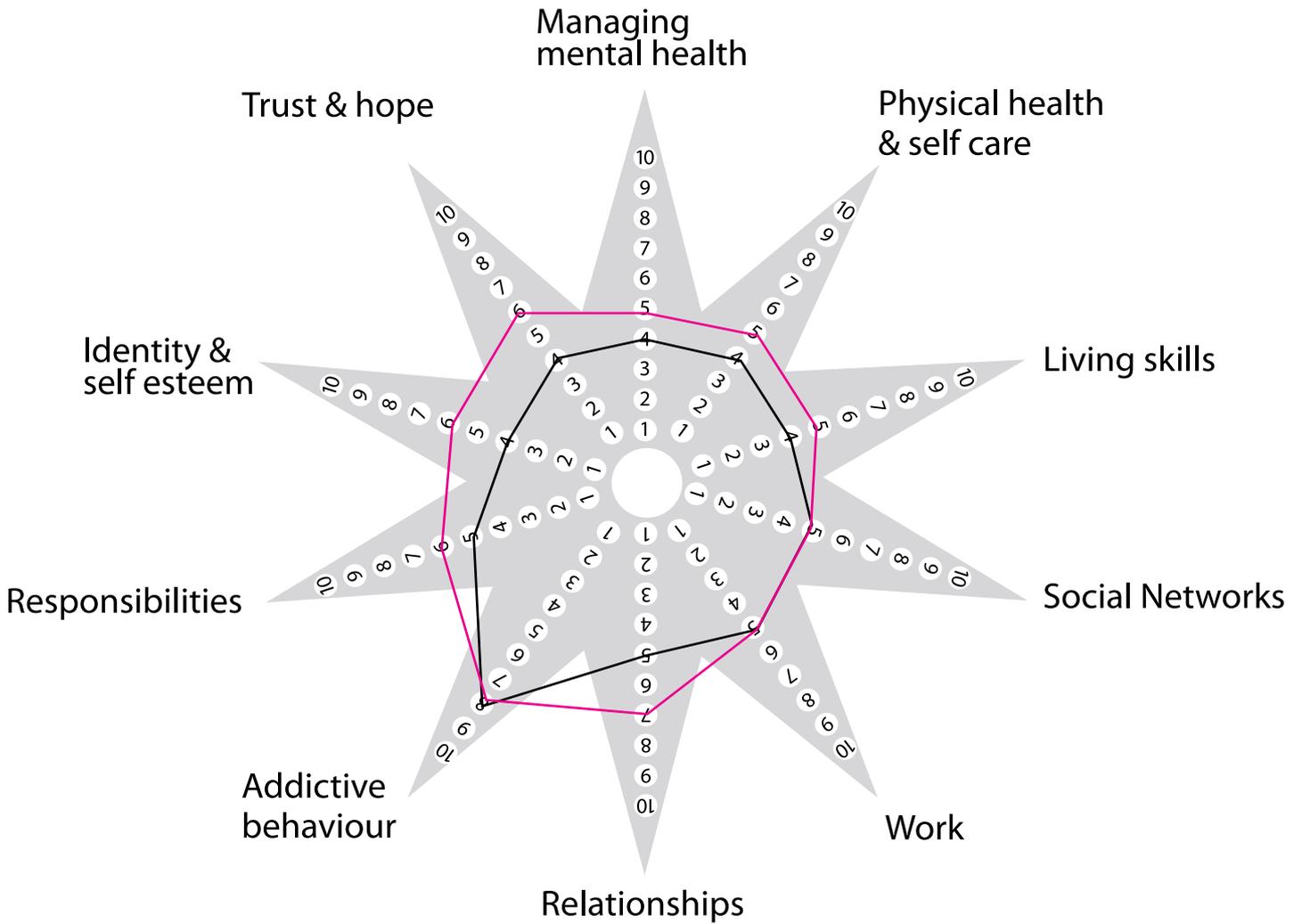
Progressing the session's she built two houses. The first she described as a negative experience. We asked her to bring the horses into this negative experience. All the horses resisted her attempts to bring them to her negative place. This created a lot of frustration for her as she did not want to be alone in that place again and she became emotional. When she became emotional a grey horse entered her negative space and stood beside her. She felt that this horse reminded her of her mother who had passed away and she felt this was comforting. When she left her negative space and entered a positive space which was a house with a garden, all the horses followed her. This enabled the young person to recognise that she needs to move on and in doing so she will always have the spirit of her mother with her. She felt this was beneficial to see with her own eyes as she felt guilty moving on without her mother but now trusted herself to make the move. Client 4 decided that three sessions were beneficial to her, therefore her third session was her final session.

Client 4 said:

*I mean I have thought about things before but I've never seen them so clearly*

# OUTCOME STAR

# 4



— STAR1  
— STAR2

# CASE 5 STUDY

Client 5 has been with MACS Floating Support since February 2011. She has anxieties around self image and identity which make it hard for her to form and maintain relationships with others. There are issues around gender confusion; she believes that she may be transgender. At times she feels neither male nor female. She is currently being treated for Depression and is attending a psychosexual clinic to explore transgender issues with a psychologist.

Her Support Worker referred her to the project and she attended for four sessions before making a decision to leave the project. She informed her support worker that she did not want to return as it brought up issues for her and she could not deal with this. She believed that the sessions did not work for her because she felt uncomfortable and that it was constantly bringing up transgender issues for her which she was not ready to address in the sessions.

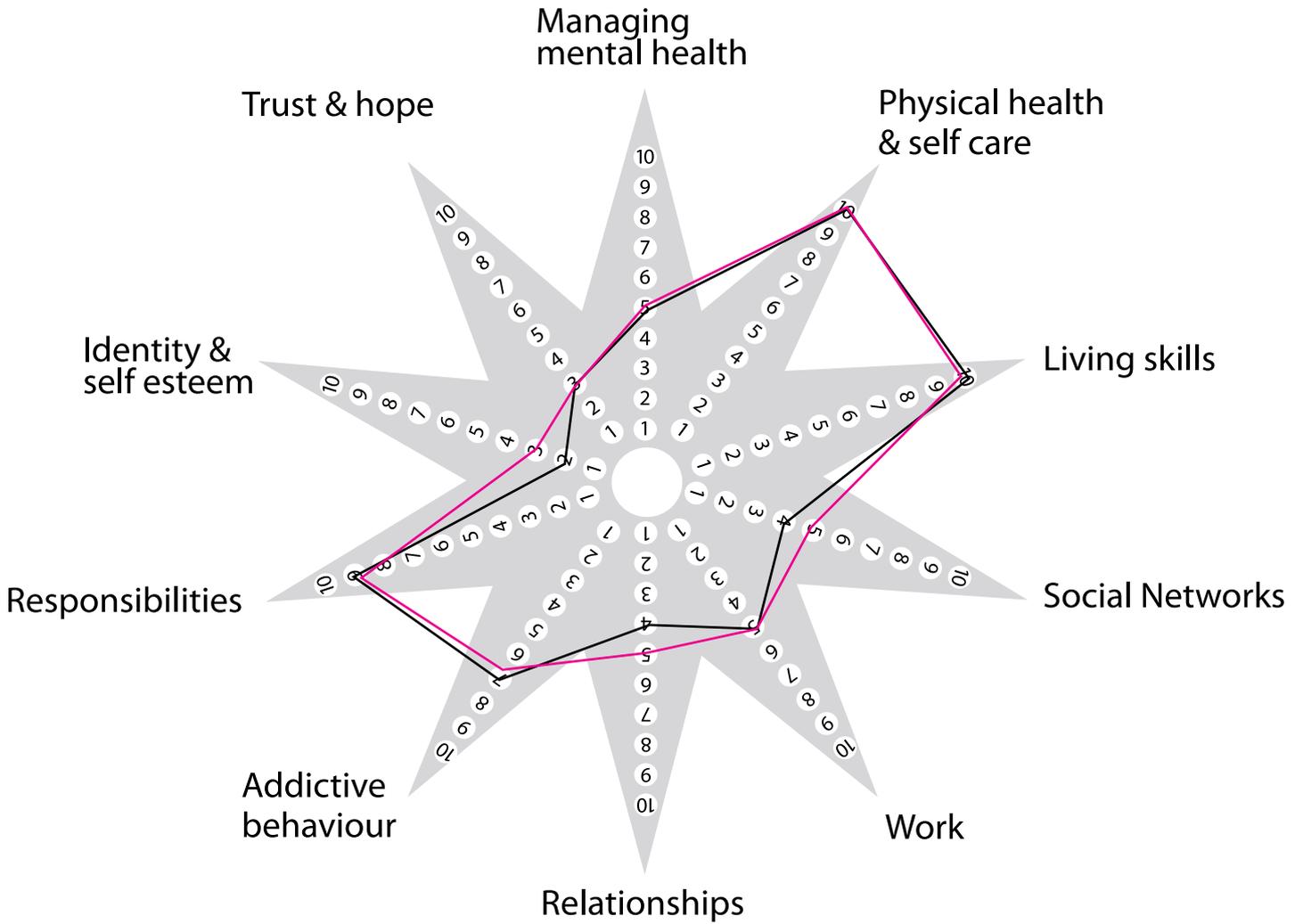
Key areas for her were trust and hope, identity and self esteem, relationships and social networks. Under relationships, she indicated a 10% improvement and under social networks she indicated a 10% improvement. The remaining two issues remained the same. She would not view these improvements as being solely related to the sessions but is aware that the sessions may have influenced the change.

The sessions brought up a lot of issues for her that she was able to relate to difficulties that she was having in her own life. She did not feel ready to address these issues at this time in this type of setting. She advised her Support worker and the equine therapists that she did not feel ready to address these issues in this type of setting and did not want to continue. Since the end of the sessions there has been some improvement in two of the key areas that Client 5 wanted to focus on in her life. Her project worker said :

***She found that the sessions brought up issues that she was not ready to deal with. I feel that it may benefit her down the line but she is just not ready at this stage***

# OUTCOME STAR

# 5



— STAR1  
— STAR2

# CONCLUSION

All through the pilot the horses have facilitated self awareness in a deep and profound way because the horse has no expectations, prejudices, or motives. Each moment during this process the young people have been able to open up and reveal themselves in a safe manner, observe their behavior, and receive direct and immediate feedback while uniting unconditionally with another living being. The self discovery young people experienced has in some aspects been life changing.

It is evident through the case studies the power of Equine Assisted Growth and Learning is in its experiential quality which has enabled impactful change in a short time for our young people. We are encouraged by the outcomes indicated by the young people who took part in the pilot and believe this is a brilliant “jump start” to positive change in their lives.

A young person who took part in the pilot said “ No one has ever hung out with me like this before” He left the arena with shining eyes - so did we.

# VISION

MACS vision for Transitions is that it will available on regional basis supporting up to 100-200 young people annually.

We have secured funding for a 1 year development post to explore opportunities to secure funding for a viable project.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Time focused “pop up” sessions to meet identified need.
- Explore other venues.
- Workbook to be created for project workers young people including info, outcome stars, SPUDS, ideas for next sessions.
- Team currently developing new activities for sessions which can be individualised for young people.
- Information sessions to be offered enabling young people to gain a better insight to Transitions.

