



Research Based

STAR (Skills Training And Recognition) is an after school program for students in grades five, six, seven, and eight from Appleton, Camden, Hope, Lincolnton, and Rockport. The STAR program focuses on skill development, recognizing youth as they learn these skills, and connecting youth with opportunities in the larger community. STAR is a program of Five Town *Communities That Care* (CTC).

STAR is based on a program called *PALS* (Participate And Learn Skills) studied by Dr. Marshall Jones and Dr. David Offord. The original program was based in Ottawa, Ontario and has also been replicated in Chester, Pennsylvania. Dr. Marshall Jones has generously provided technical assistance to Five Town *Communities That Care* to aid in the effective reproduction of the program. Research has shown that *PALS* is successful in decreasing the incidence of adolescent problem behaviors (such as substance use and abuse, violence, and delinquency).

STAR was piloted in April 2004, based on recommendations contained in the CTC Community Action Plan (CAP). The CAP was drafted in response to an analysis done in the summer and fall of 2003 showing that youth in the Five Town community experience some elevated risk for problem adolescent behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency, violence, dropping out of school, and teen pregnancy. The STAR program is designed to lower the prevalence of the risk factor – *rewards for antisocial behavior* and to increase the protective factor – *community recognition for prosocial involvement*.

The STAR program is based on the idea that youth who 1) are given the opportunity to learn skills in a supportive and pro-social environment, 2) are recognized for their mastery of those skills, and 3) whose individual characteristics are nurtured, are more likely to internalize healthy beliefs and clear standards. Youth who have confidence in their basic skills are apt to become involved in groups where healthy development is fostered.

Community Support

A major component of the STAR program is community involvement. Since its inception in 2004, STAR has worked along side a wide variety of youth serving agencies in the Five Town community. During Cycle XV of STAR, programming was offered in collaboration with Aldermere Farm, Camden Hills Regional High School, Camden-Rockport Animal Rescue League, High Mountain Hall, Merryspring Nature Center, Mid-Coast Martial Arts, Penobscot Bay YMCA, Peopleplace Cooperative Preschool, the Teen Center, and Yokids. Each of the connections made through these partnerships have been beneficial in promoting healthy youth development.

Each agency that has been involved with Five Town CTC and the STAR program has something different to offer. Whether it is technical assistance or program implementation, each link is beneficial in providing the highest level of programming that is available to all participants. Through these partnerships, youth become connected to the organizations that support the activities that they are interested in. In essence, STAR works as a stepping-stone for increased community involvement by bridging the gap between youth looking for prosocial outlets and the organizations that support those interests.

Individual community members also provide support to the STAR program. There are many different levels of individual involvement including skill instruction, support staff, volunteer, and donor. These individuals are highly invested in the healthy development of community youth. They are caring adults who are positive role models for those that they interact with.

Each adult working closely with the STAR program (staff, instructors, regular substitutes and volunteers) receives training prior to working with the students who register to participate in STAR. Topics that are covered with all staff members include community collaborations, risk factors that affect the youth we work with, giving specific recognition to youth, open communication with the parties involved (i.e. school staff, STAR staff, program facility staff, parents/guardians, and supervisors), encouraging positive interactions between students from different schools prior to entering high school, and the Social Development Strategy (providing positive associations with families, schools, communities, and peer groups to encourage healthy behaviors).

Additionally, the STAR program is able to provide programming at no cost to students through grants received from Maine's Juvenile Justice Advisory Group and Safe and Drug Free Schools: Title IV-A.

Goals

The STAR program has several goals that it is working toward. They are broken down into school year specific goals and general program goals.

The school year specific goals for 2008 – 2009 are:

- 20% of students in grades five, six, seven, and eight will receive STAR programming for one cycle.
- Two hours of STAR programming will be provided to 75 students in grades five, six, seven, and eight, three days a week, during each of the three cycles offered during the school year.

The general program goals for the STAR program are:

- STAR participants will be able to articulate existing opportunities in the community where they can use their skills learned during program time.
- STAR participants will be able to demonstrate an increased proficiency in the skill area where they are receiving programming.
- To decrease the number of five-town eighth graders who report *rewards for antisocial behavior* to the MYDAUS from a baseline of 36% (measured in 2002) to 25% by 2010.
- To increase the number of five town eighth graders who report *community recognition for prosocial involvement* to the MYDAUS from a baseline of 42.7% (measured in 2002) to 60% by 2010.

Recommendations

At the completion of each cycle of STAR the Five Town CTC coalition's Program Evaluation Work Group meets to discuss the implementation of the program. During this time suggestions for improving the program are made. At the completion of Cycle XV the following recommendations were made:

- Encourage instructors to incorporate examples that are relevant to their skill set during instruction time. This will allow students to better internalize how they can use their skills outside of program time.
- Have at least two levels of skills prepared for each class that is being offered to students. This will allow students mastering their skill set early on the opportunity to see what the next level of instruction may incorporate and may encourage them to pursue the skill set while their classmates are working on mastering the initial skill set.

- Ask participants to complete the “End of Program Questionnaire” during the last week and a half of the program. When the questionnaires are available for longer more students have the opportunity to share their opinion regarding what they like about the program and what they would change about the program.

Student Participation

Students are the central focus of the STAR program. They are the reason the program continues to succeed year after year. Through the fifteen cycles that have been completed since 2004, over 450 students have been served, filling 1,000 program slots. Many students participate multiple times over the course of their middle school years.

Sixty one students registered to participate in Cycle XV of STAR. Every student attended at least one day of programming and 56 students successfully completed the cycle. Five students withdrew from the program after attending one session; all students were committed to other activities throughout the community and could not commit two days of their schedule to STAR programming.

With a goal of serving 20% of fifth through eighth grade students during the 2008 - 2009 school year, 96 out of 610 unique students have participated, equaling 16% of the targeted population, or 79% of our goal (122 students).

Registered Students – Cycle 15: Attended 5 or more sessions

School	Grade	Fifth	Sixth	Seventh	Eighth	School Level Concentration
Appleton Village School		4/11	7/16	0/11	0/14	21% (11/52)
Camden Rockport Middle School		10/87	9/89	3/119	1/105	6% (23/400)
Hope Elementary School		8/12	2/15	3/19	0/13	22% (13/59)
Lincolnton Central School		6/23	1/24	0/26	2/26	9% (9/99)
Home School						
Grade Level Concentrations		21% (28/133)	13% (19/144)	3% (6/175)	2% (3/158)	9% (56/610) Total

Registered Students – Unique Students: 2008 – 2009 School Year – Attended 5 or more sessions

School	Grade	Fifth	Sixth	Seventh	Eighth	School Level Concentration
Appleton Village School		6/11	8/16	0/11	0/14	27% (14/52)
Camden Rockport Middle School		28/87	12/89	7/119	1/105	12% (48/400)
Hope Elementary School		8/12	5/15	3/19	0/13	27% (16/59)
Lincolnton Central School		13/23	3/24	0/26	2/26	18% (18/99)
Home School						
Grade Level Concentrations		41% (55/133)	19% (28/144)	6% (10/175)	2% (3/158)	16% (96/610) Total

Class Attendance

Class	12/12	11/12	10/12	9/12	8/12	7/12	6/12	5/12	4/12	3/12	2/12	1/12
Animal Antics	2	2		2	1		1					
Childcare Ed.	1		2	2	1							
Cooking	1	3	1	1	1							
Drama		2	3	2			1					
Farm Hands 2		4	2		1			1				
Kundalini Yoga			1	1	1		1					
Martial Arts		1	3	1	2		1					
Snowshoeing		1	2	1	1	1			1			
Withdraw											1	4

Skill Development

Skill development is an important aspect of the STAR program. STAR is designed to advance children to a higher level of skill in a variety of areas and to aid them in discovering where they can continue to use the skill in their personal lives. Sometimes the skill transfer is apparent – a student joins 4-H after developing animal husbandry skills in Farm Hands or they become a regular student at the martial arts studio after taking Martial Arts class. Other times the skill transfer may be more obscure, such as when a student takes a more active role in preparing dinners for their family after participating in the cooking class.

The skill development areas that are offered through STAR are based on the availability of skilled instructors and adequate facilities, the existence of community-based organizations where students could continue to use skills once learned, and student interest. During Cycle XV, skill instruction was provided in Animal Antics, Childcare Education, Cooking, Drama, Farm Hands – Level 2, Kundalini Yoga, Martial Arts – Levels 1 and 2, and Snowshoeing.

Skill levels within each area are organized so that a student should be able to advance to the next level after approximately eight hours of focused instruction and/or practice. Individual skills are evaluated upon entry and exit of each cycle using a checklist of pre-determined skills. These evaluations are used to determine whether or not a student achieved skill mastery in the activity that they participated in. One of the skills that each activity has in common is the ability for students to identify where they can use their skills in the community.

Activity	Advanced to Next Skill Level	Did Not Advance to Next Skill Level	Able to Identify Opportunities in Community
Animal Antics	8	0	8
Childcare Ed.	1	5	6
Cooking	7	0	7
Drama	8	0	6
Farm Hands 2	6	2	8
Kundalini Yoga	2	2	2
Martial Arts	8	0	8
Snowshoeing	7	0	5

During Cycle XV 47 of the 56 students (84%) completing skill training had successfully advanced to the next level in their chosen activity. Fifty out of 56 students (89%) were able to identify community opportunities for using their new skills.

At the completion of Cycle XV, parents and students reported that students had begun to use their skills at home or in the community prior to the cycle's completion. Twenty three parents (77% of those completing questionnaires) indicated that their child had already used their new skills in a wide variety of ways, such as taking care of animals, participating in the school play, snowshoeing to their grandparent's house, and have been more outgoing in social situations.

Fun Fridays

The STAR program was designed to include one day during the week (Fun Friday) where students from the four participating middle schools are combined without a strict agenda. This opportunity allows individuals to develop relationships with students attending different schools. While they may attend different middle schools, they will become classmates upon entering Camden Hills Regional High School. Providing such opportunities may help reduce the stress of the transition to the larger school when students are combined for their ninth grade year. During Cycle XIV, STAR participants had the opportunity to attend three Fun Fridays at both the YMCA and the Teen Center.

During Cycle XV, there were seven opportunities for students to come together on Fun Fridays. During the cycle 47 students attended at least one Fun Friday activity. This accounts for 84% of STAR students completing the cycle.

Number of Fun Fridays Attended School	7/7	6/7	5/7	4/7	3/7	2/7	1/7	0/7
Appleton Village School	0	0	5	1	1	2	0	2
Camden Rockport Middle School	0	6	3	2	3	2	1	6
Hope Elementary School	2	3	4	2	0	1	0	1
Lincolville Central School	2	1	1	1	1	2	0	1

Overall, 52% of all potential Fun Fridays were attended. The high rate of involvement indicates that the students attending Fun Fridays enjoyed the opportunity to spend time at the community facilities and interact with their STAR classmates in a less structured environment.

Decreasing Risk Factors

STAR provides students with a place to go during the time when they are most at risk for becoming involved in destructive behaviors such as drug and alcohol use. The opportunity for involvement in after school activities combined with the positive environment that youth are exposed to during STAR is a combination that can help to decrease the risk factor, *rewards for antisocial behavior*. The STAR program uses the MYDAUS (Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey) to measure students reporting risk.

Year	2002	2004	2006	2008
% Reporting Risk, Grade 8	36	40	41.3	32.1

The goal of the STAR program is to decrease the risk factor, *rewards for antisocial behavior*, to 25% by 2010. The 2008 measure indicates that grade eight students are reporting less risk than they did in the initial evaluation; however, data also demonstrates a reported increase in risk up through 2006. There are several possibly explanations for the decreased rate in 2008. First, there could have been a cohort effect in which grade eight students in 2008 were less likely to engage in antisocial behaviors to begin with. On the

other hand, eighth grade students in 2008 were the first cohort to have had the opportunity to participate in STAR beginning in fifth grade.

While the 2008 data is promising, another data point will be needed to determine if the STAR program has been having an impact on the general population.

Increasing Protective Factors

The STAR program provides students with the opportunity to become prosocial members of the community. One of the methods that STAR uses to promote healthy behaviors is specific individual recognition. Each member of the STAR staff is trained to acknowledge the accomplishments of students in a way that identifies the specific actions that were taken by an individual and praises them for their successes. The STAR program also publicly recognizes students for their accomplishments. This takes place in a variety of ways. Throughout each cycle of STAR student participation is recognized through press releases. At the completion of each cycle, STAR invites all participants and their families to an event at which students receive awards for completing skill training and an incentive to continue using their new skills. The community celebration is also covered in press releases to the local media outlets. STAR uses the MYDAUS to measure students reporting the protective factor, *community recognition for prosocial involvement*.

Year	2002	2004	2006	2008
% Reporting Protection, Grade 8	42.7	38	37.3	53.6

Data from the 2008 MYDAUS indicates an increase in the number of grade eight students reporting protection. When reviewing the data from 2004 and 2006 however, this could also be attributed to a cohort effect. Conversely, as was indicated in risk factors, the 2008 eighth grade students were the first to have been offered STAR programming starting in fifth grade. The goal for the protective factor, *community recognition for prosocial involvement* is 60%.

Additional Notes

STAR is available to all students at no charge – however, the program is not free. In an effort to keep programs available without an associated fee, Cycle XV participants were asked to participate in a fundraiser with Baxter Tea Company. Students were asked to sell tea and coffee products, and in return STAR would receive 40% of the total profits. Three students participated and several other families sent donations after choosing to not sell items. While some profit was made, the fundraiser did not achieve the level of success that was hoped for. Feedback from parents indicates that an appeal letter at mid-cycle may produce better returns.