



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, Lincolnville, 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 showed that *PALS* was 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 XI of STAR, programming was offered in collaboration with Aldermere Farm, Camden Hills Regional High School, Mid-coast Martial Arts, the Mid-coast Recreation Center, the Penobscot Bay YMCA, and the Teen Center. 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).

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 2007 – 2008 are:

- 20% of students in grades five, six, seven, eight, and nine will receive STAR programming for one cycle.
- Two hours of STAR programming will be provided to 75 – 100 students in grades five, six, seven, eight, and nine, 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.

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 eleven cycles that have been completed since 2004, over 300 students have been served. Forty of those students have participated in multiple cycles of STAR.

51 students registered to participate in Cycle XI of STAR. 49 of those students came to at least one program session and 44 attended three or more program sessions. With a goal of serving 20% of fifth through ninth grade students during the 2007 – 2008 school year, Cycle XI served 8% of the fifth through eighth grade population (49 of 613). During Cycle XI there were not any activities available for ninth grade

participation, however they are in the planning stages. 41 of the students participating saw the program to completion. Three of the students withdrawing from Cycle XI attended five or more sessions, indicating an interest in the material being taught during the STAR program.

School	Grade	Fifth	Sixth	Seventh	Eighth
Appleton Village School		10	1	0	1
Camden Rockport Middle School		10	5	1	2
Hope Elementary School		4	2	0	2
Lincolnvill Central School		5	3	2	1

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 the basketball team after learning the basic skills in STAR or a student is cast in a community play after learning skills in the drama class. Other times the skill transfer may be more obscure, such as when a student demonstrates more courtesy and respect at home after taking martial arts.

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 XI, skill training was provided in Animal Husbandry, Art, Basketball, Cooking, Martial Arts, Rock Climbing, and Tennis.

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. Each of the activities offered during Cycle XI were planned for beginners or those with limited knowledge of the skill area. Individual skills are evaluated upon entry and exit of each cycle using a checklist of pre-determined skills. These evaluations are used in determining 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 Husbandry	6	1	7
Art	4	1	5
Basketball	3	1	4
Cooking	4	0	4
Martial Arts	7	0	7
Rock Climbing	8	0	8
Tennis	7	0	7

During Cycle XI 39 of the 41 students completing skill training had successfully advanced to the next level in their chosen activity. Every student completing the cycle was able to identify community opportunities for using their new skills.

At the completion of Cycle XI, parents and students reported that students had begun to use their skills at home or in the community prior to the cycle's completion. Ten parents indicated that their child had already used their new skills in a wide variety of ways, such as helping out during gym class at school or by being more involved in animal care at home. Students (15 of 41, 37%) also reported using their skills outside of program time in a variety of ways such as joining the community basketball league or sharing new art techniques with friends.

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 XI, STAR participants went to the YMCA and the Teen Center for Fun Friday activities.

During Cycle XI, there were five opportunities for students to come together on Fun Fridays. During the cycle 41 students attended at least one Fun Friday activity. This accounts for 84% of STAR students.

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

Overall, 55% of all potential Fun Fridays were attended. This is among the highest rates of Fun Fridays being attended since STAR's inception. The high rate of attendance also demonstrates that students were enjoying the opportunity to use community facilities while spending time with their peers.

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
% Reporting Risk, Grade 8	36	40	41.3

While the percentage of eighth grade students reporting risk has increased since the initial measure in 2002, it has remained consistent after 2004, the year of STAR's inception. As more students have received STAR programming since the 2006 measure, it is anticipated that the percentage of students reporting risk will begin to decrease. The goal of the STAR program is to decrease the risk factor, *rewards for antisocial behavior*, to 25% by 2010.

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
% Reporting Protection, Grade 8	42.7	38	37.3

There has been a decrease in eighth grade students reporting protection. There have not been any statistically significant changes in students reporting protection since STAR's inception in 2004, however, it is anticipated that the percentage will begin to increase as more students receive STAR programming. The goal for students reporting protection is 60% by 2010.

Additional Notes

Cycle XI of STAR had a lower number of students enrolled than in previous fall cycles. This decrease was attributed to an additional after school opportunity becoming available for youth in grade five. Through recruitment for the remaining cycles during the 2007 – 2008 school year, it is hoped that more students will receive skill training through the STAR program.