



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 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 XIII of STAR, programming was offered in collaboration with Aldermere Farm, Café Miranda, Camden Hills Regional High School, the Penobscot Bay YMCA, Peopleplace Cooperative Preschool, Rockport Dance Conservatory, 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, and eight will receive STAR programming for one cycle.
- Two hours of STAR programming will be provided to 75 – 100 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.

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 thirteen cycles that have been completed since 2004, over 350 students have been served, filling 779 program slots. 197 youth have participated in two or more cycles.

58 students registered to participate in Cycle XIII of STAR. 55 of those students came to at least one program session and 50 attended three or more program sessions. 47 of the students participating in Cycle XIII saw the program to completion. Of the eleven students withdrawing from Cycle XIII, seven did so due to being overcommitted to other programs (school plays, dance classes, sports) or had difficulty completing homework assignments, one withdrew due to not enjoying the class or it not being their number one choice, two withdrew due to not feeling challenged by the material (even after working one-on-one with the instructor they chose to not continue with the class), and one withdrew due to transportation issues.

With a goal of serving 20% of fifth through eighth grade students during the 2007 – 2008 school year, 117 out of 613 unique students have participated, equaling 19% of population, or 95% of our goal.

Registered Students

School	Grade	Fifth	Sixth	Seventh	Eighth	School Level Concentration
Appleton Village School		9/18	1/12	0/16	0/21	15%
Camden Rockport Middle School		14/106	8/101	1/108	2/82	6%
Hope Elementary School		6/13	2/18	0/12	1/17	15%
Lincolnton Central School		6/19	4/24	2/22	2/24	16%
Home School		0	0	0	0	
Grade Level Concentrations		22%	10%	2%	3%	

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	0/12
Basketball		5		1	1								
Child Care	3	1	1										
Cooking	3	1	1	1			1		1				
Farm Hands	3	4	1										
Hip Hop		2	1	1		1		1			1		
Rock Climbing	2	1	1	1	1								
Swimming		1											
Youth Fitness			1	1									
Withdrawn						1			1	2	2	2	3

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 joins 4-H after developing animal husbandry skills in Farm Hands. Other times the skill transfer may be more obscure, such as when a student demonstrates more self-confidence and self-respect after taking Hip Hop.

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 XIII, skill training was provided in Animal Husbandry, Basketball, Child Care Education, Cooking, Hip Hop, Rock Climbing, Swimming, and Youth Fitness.

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 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	7	1	8
Basketball	6	1	7
Child Care Education	4	1	5
Cooking	6	2	8
Hip Hop	5	2	5
Rock Climbing	6	2	8
Swimming	1 (advanced 2 levels)	0	1
Youth Fitness	3	0	3

During Cycle XIII 38 of the 47 students (81%) completing skill training had successfully advanced to the next level in their chosen activity. 45 out of 47 students (96%) were able to identify community opportunities for using their new skills.

At the completion of Cycle XIII, parents and students reported that students had begun to use their skills at home or in the community prior to the cycle's completion. 15 parents indicated that their child had already used their new skills in a wide variety of ways, such as playing basketball with friends, being more active outside of school, cooking at home, taking care of pets or babysitting.

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

During Cycle XIII, there were five opportunities for students to come together on Fun Fridays. During the cycle 42 students attended at least one Fun Friday activity. This accounts for 89% of STAR students completing the cycle.

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

Overall, 68% of all potential Fun Fridays were attended. The high rate of attendance indicates that students felt dedicated to the STAR program and enjoyed having time to spend with their peers and using community facilities that may not have otherwise been available to them.

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.

Students took the 2008 MYDAUS during January and it is hoped that results will be available in August 2008. Having a fourth data point will be useful in being able to demonstrate the effectiveness of STAR in regards to decreasing risk factors.

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.

Again, with updated data from the 2008 MYDAUS, it will be easier to determine the influence of programming on increased protective factors.