

**“Whatever is right with you is
more powerful than whatever is
wrong with you”**

(Nan Henderson-Resiliency in Action)

Presenters

Barbara Spencer MSW., RSW
Darryl MacNeil H.B.A., M.A. Psych.

Sister Margaret Smith Center
2008

Agenda

- Video
- Who we are and what we do
- Definition of strengths
- Our Challenges as a team
- Intake
- Programming
- Strategies
- Video
- Q&A

**“I learned I have strong
courage and bravery with
situations that come my way. I
never knew this about myself.”
- Kyle (17)**

*How have you come to
discover and develop
your strengths while in
treatment?*

Defining Strengths

- Key Figures: Saleebey/Epstein/
- Strengths reflect the competencies and characteristics that reside in an individual that are valued by both the individual and society (Epstein).
- What are people good at? What are some of those positive characteristics and experiences that all people have at sometime or another? Can be both external, or internal.

Defining Strengths

- The strength-based approach “honors” the innate wisdom of the human spirit, the inherent capacity for transformation of even the most humbled and abused” (Saleebey, 1997).
- When assessments and treatments are based on strengths, children and families are more likely to become full participants in the therapeutic process (Brendtro and Shabazian, 2004)

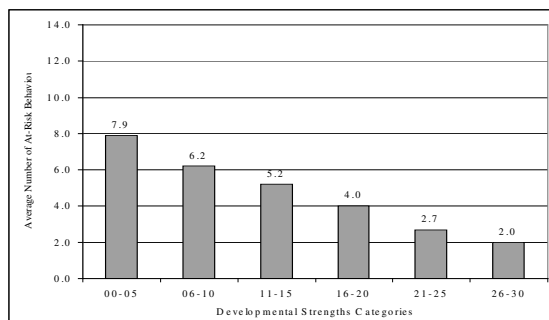
Defining Strengths

- The basic premise of this approach is “that people possess inherent strengths or assets that hold the key to their ability to cope with stress and trauma. Instead of diagnosing deficits and prescribing treatment to address them, strength-based therapists help clients identify and build on their capacities” (Barton, 2005).

Strength Based & Resiliency

- Strengths-based practice and resiliency literature is interconnected and similar in many ways. Both emphasize assets and resources of the person seeking help rather than symptomatology and problems (Saleeb, 1997).
- They both understand that people do the best that they can with the resources available to them (Saleeb 1997; Wolin and Wolin, 1993).

Developmental Strengths & At Risk Behaviors



Change

- **Change** does not come from special powers from professionals
- **Change** happens when a person uses their inherent strengths and resources and are supported by relationships that take your innate goodness as a given
- **Change** happens when you create a plan that is tailored to the person's ideas and therefore inspires the hope necessary for action

Components of Change

An analysis of 40 years of research found the best predictor of successful change are two factors:

- 1) engagement in meaningful relationships
- 2) engagement in meaningful activities

83% of change involves these two factors

17% is a result of technique

People and Places Make a Difference

- A common finding in resilience research is the power of one person, often unbeknownst to him or her, to tip the scale from risk to resilience. Werner and Smith (1989) found that these “turnaround” people played many roles: neighbors, friends, minister, youth workers, extended family members, siblings, a parent, a teacher.

Turnaround Relationships

- Having a person “acknowledge us, see us for who we are, as their equal in value and importance” also counts critically in turnaround relationships and places (Meier, 1995, p. 120). Acceptance is paramount in the ability to more readily identify the youths strengths. They see the youth as they are with all their strengths readily acknowledged and helps to amplify these for the youth to show them how to use them to overcome.

Turnaround Relationships

- Chances are that if you are seeing youth in a professional capacity they are already exhibiting many strengths before you even meet them: honesty (admitting they are struggling and need assistance), social coping, courage, bravery, willingness to change, etc.

Turnaround Relationships

- A description commonly used for such professionals is that **“they [hold] visions of us that we could not imagine for ourselves”** (Delpit, 1996).

“Every contact with a person can be an opportunity for building hope, increasing confidence, and taking steps to create a better life.”

Turnaround Relationships

Programs do not necessarily require any special add-on programs but rather requires adults to let go of their control orientation, to see youth as a valuable resource, to willingly share power with youth, to create a system based on reciprocity and collaboration rather than on control and competition.

Our challenges as a team....

Being on the same page

Team work

Differing Theoretical
backgrounds



SMITH CENTRE - YOUTH SERVICES- Our Team

- Counselors
- Youth Workers
- Consulting Psychologist
- Consulting Psychiatrist
- Therapeutic Recreationist
- Management
- Gambling Counselor
- Native Spiritual Advisor
- Non Denominational Advisor

Teamwork Challenges

- Risk focus has encouraged social service providers and other helping professionals to see children and families only through a deficit lens. This “glass-as-half-empty” perspective blocks our vision to see the whole person and hear the “real story”—often one filled with strengths and capacity.

Teamwork Challenges

- Kral (1989) stated, “if we ask people to look for deficits, they will usually find them, and their view of the situation will be colored by this. If we ask people to look for successes, they will usually find it, and their view of the situation will be colored by this”.

Expectations

- Expectations can have a powerful influence on whether an individual's strengths will be mobilized to overcome adversity. In 1968, Jane Elliott, a Riceville, Iowa teacher, discovered this through a lesson on bigotry. She divided her class of all white students into two groups, those with brown eyes and those with blue eyes. She would alternate telling one group they were “superior” and the other group they were “inferior”. The “superior” group would receive special treatment that the “inferior” group did not. She repeated the same lesson every year, and every year the result was the same. The “superior” group was confident and performed better academically than they had prior to the lesson. The “inferior” group was sullen and withdrawn, performing lower academically (Ferguson, 1998).

Our challenges as a team....

Assessment/interventions



Assessment Challenges

Problem

Child has attendance problems at school
Child runs away from home
Child hangs out with negative peers
Daughter is sexually active

Family is in perpetual crisis

Family is dysfunctional

Family resists agency intervention

Parents fight

Strength

Child still attends school
Child has "street smarts", survival skills
Child can make friends
Daughter is not pregnant, practices safer sex

Family has continued to exist under stress

Family is overwhelmed and is in need of support

Family believes in taking care of their own

Parents are still married /still communicate



Our challenges as a team....

Language



Language Challenges

Hyperactive ~~Energetic~~ Impulsive ~~Spontaneous~~
Stubborn ~~Persistent~~ Willful ~~Independent~~
Angry ~~Activist~~ Defiant ~~Bold~~
Withdrawn ~~Reflective~~ Aggressive ~~Assertive~~

“WOW! No one ever wrote anything good about me before, it was all about what I did wrong”

Natasha (14)

Our challenges as a team....



We Continue to
Learn
Grow
And be challenged



Perception is Everything

- As this philosophy works with our clients, it also works for us, when your looking for strengths, they become amplified and appear to be exhibited constantly by youth. Since the youth we work with live with us, we can spot strengths routinely as the youth react and respond to the treatment environment, then highlight them and shine a “spotlight” onto them, and then put them into coping constructs.

Strengths Practice:

- Listen to their story
- Acknowledge and validate the pain
- Look for **strengths**
- Ask questions about survival, support, positive times, interests, dreams, goals, and pride
- Point out **strengths**
- Link **strengths** to client's goals and dreams
- Link client to resources to achieve goals and dreams
- Find opportunities for client to be teacher/paraprofessional

Case Example: Josh (16)



Adding a Strength's Perspective

Intake: "looking for themes"
"matching youth to CM"
"What brings you to treatment; how will you know its working"
"what would be helpful from my counsellor"



What would be helpful from my counsellor?

1. It would be helpful to have a counsellor who _____
2. When I'm feeling really troubled I would like my counsellor to _____
3. It is important that my counselor doesn't _____
4. I think the most important quality of a good counsellor is _____
5. I'll know my counsellor is really helping me when _____
6. My counsellor must be willing to _____
7. I'm afraid that my counsellor will _____
8. Sometimes professional people can be too _____
9. When I'm feeling really low or depressed, its important that my counsellor _____
10. When I'm angry, the best thing my counsellor could do is _____

Adding a Strength's Perspective

- Programming: "Collages"
"Strength's Group"
"reflection sheets"



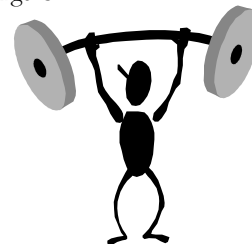
Strengths Group

Most High-Risk youth make it.

- at least 50% and usually closer to 70% of these children and youth from high-risk environments grow up to be not only successful by societal indicators but have personal strengths usually falling into the following categories: social competence and connectedness, problem-solving and metacognition skills, a sense of autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future.

Strength's Checklist

- Thinking Strengths
- Coping & Emotional Strengths
- Motivational Strengths
- Social Strengths



Strength's & Progress

- What strength can help you cope with being away from home?
- Share a strength that you think will assist you most in preventing relapse
- Comment on making it this far in treatment.
- What did you do well in treatment?
- What was most challenging?
- What progress did you make this week that you feel most proud of?
- Which people will be most proud of what you've accomplished?
- What is going well?
- Share a strength about the person to your right.
- When "I get home sometimes I think I might struggle with _____"
- But these strengths _____ can help me with that.
- I feel proud when I think of _____
- It's really fun to _____
- My first step in being successful with my goals will be _____

Strategies we used.....

- Behaviours that impact treatment:



"The Graffiti wall"



"The Conversation box"



"The Reflection sheet"

Peer Relationships

- Peer groups are the most influential factor during the years of adolescence and can be effective in helping adolescents become strong. Peer group therapy can offer teens a place where they have more say over labels and greater opportunities to explore personal competencies through personal relationships.

Peer Relationships

- While strength-based group work does not deny problems, it stresses the identification of group members' resiliencies. Encouraging group members to discuss their strengths often results in increased self disclosure, communication, and cohesion among the members (Vorrath and Brendtro, 1985).

Strategies and Implementation

- Mapping Capacities - Assess strengths and challenges – internal and external
- Determine Meaningful Starting Points – look for practical ways to practice and participate
- Start With Small Successes – gradually build confidence and help rewriting of stories
- Support Relationship Building – peers, adults, school, community
- Always Assess Progress – Resiliency Questionnaire and /or Scott Miller's Scale
- Start Transition Preparation

Indicators of Strength Development

- Feel special and appreciated
- Have learned to set realistic goals and expectations for themselves
- Rely on productive coping strategies that are growth-fostering rather than self-defeating
- View obstacles as challenges to confront – not avoid
- Are aware of their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, but build on strengths
- Strong self-esteem and sense of competence
- Have effective interpersonal skills and can seek out assistance and nurturance
- Know what they can and cannot control in their lives

In Conclusion

- The strength-based approach recognizes that if complex needs are to be addressed effectively, interventions must be based on preferences, strengths, and what works for the family. In times of need, it is people's friendships, family ties, faith, hope, and interests that help them survive and go on with their lives (VanDenberg and Grealish, 1997).

In Conclusion

- What communities may need is a paradigm balance, in which deficit reduction efforts are matched in intensity and power with asset-building efforts (Benson, 1997). Strength-based interventions recognize that problems need to be addressed, but as Duchnowski and Kurtash (1996) show, evidence indicates that "strengths and capacities are the building blocks for change and should receive primary emphasis."

Story of "The Bridge Builder"

- Lisa Marie Brackin

