STRENGTH-BASED APPROACHES

IMPROVING THE LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Alliance
for Children and Youth
of Waterloo Region

The Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region is an independent organization of members working together to improve well-being for children, youth and families in our community. Our strength lies in the collaboration of our membership – that is, together we can achieve more than any of us could working alone. We believe in sharing responsibility for raising happy, healthy and valued children and youth, and that building on the strengths and capacity already available in our community is an effective approach to do so.

We bring together a wide range of child and youth-serving agencies as well as interested individuals to better the lives of children and youth through collaborative discussions, planning and action. Such a collection of people and perspectives allows us to capture the most complete picture of how well our community is doing at the job of taking care of children and youth. We can then mobilize effective teams to respond to issues that need to be addressed.

Members of the Alliance for Children and Youth are using strength-based approaches to improve the lives of children, youth and families in our community.

WHAT IS A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH?

A strength-based approach is a manner of doing things rooted in the belief:

- that people (and groups of people i.e. organizations, neighbourhoods, communities) have existing competencies;
- that people have resources and are capable of learning new skills and solving problems;
- that people can use existing competencies to identify and address their own concerns; and
- that people can be involved in the process of discovery and learning.

A strength-based approach is a perspective more than a set of hard and fast rules. It strives to leads with the positive and values trust, respect, intentionality and optimism. Using a strength-based approach does not mean:

- you should never say no
- you fabricate strengths
- you should be overly complimentary or insincere
- you can't talk about needs, gaps and concerns

Rather, it is based on the idea that people and environments interact and change each other in the process. Each has the ability to build the other's capacity.

WHY IS THE ALLIANCE INTERESTED IN STRENGTH-BASED APPROACHES?

A core value of the Alliance is the belief in strengths over weaknesses and assets over deficits.

One of the objectives in our work plan is 'to increase community knowledge and practice of strength-based approaches to achieve child wellbeing'. By doing this, we will help our community to be engaged in actions that are known to foster child and youth well-being. Healthy communities promote wellness in young people and young people who are well build healthy communities.

WHAT APPROACHES ARE INCLUDED IN THIS BACKGROUNDER?

- Appreciative Inquiry
- Capacity Building / Asset-based Community Development
- Community Development
- Developmental Assets
- Positive Youth Development
- Resiliency
- Restorative Justice
- Social Determinants of Health
- Social Development
- Solution – Focused Therapy
- Sustainable Livelihoods
- Youth Engagement

HOW DID YOU DECIDE WHICH ONES TO INCLUDE?

All of the strength-based approaches included in this backgrounder have an emphasis on **CAPACITY** and **INTENTIONALITY**. Each approach that was included is also likely to:

- Focus on Personal **Relationships**
- Acknowledge **Contribution**
- Attend to the **Context / Systems**
- Invite Meaningful **Participation**
- Provide Opportunities for **Skill-building/ Learning**
- Recognize **Interrelationships**
- Concentrate on **Solutions / Potential**

HOW DO YOU TELL THE APPROACHES APART?

This is tough. Many of the strength-based approaches are interrelated and it is not always easy to distinguish between them. For example, the boundaries between the Developmental Assets Framework, Resiliency and Positive Youth Development are somewhat fuzzy. In addition, it is not unusual for programming to be based on several approaches at the same time. So long as a program or service is rooted in a set of values it is not likely to be a problem if it draws on multiple approaches.

HOW IS THE BACKGROUNDER ORGANIZED?

The backgrounder gives information on these aspects of each approach:

- Definition
- Theory Base
- Key Principles
- Why it's a Strength-based Approach
- Reading Suggestions
- Internet Resources

HOW DOES THIS FIT WITH THE ALLIANCE'S DEFINITION OF CHILD (AND YOUTH) WELL-BEING?

The Alliance's definition of child well-being describes a desired outcome (i.e. that we want children and youth to be well) and spells out the types of things we need to attend to as a community to see that this outcome is achieved.

It describes the type of communities that are likely to be successful in this aim, and emphasizes the need for shared responsibility.

WHY WASN'T PREVENTION INCLUDED?

Prevention is the proactive creation of conditions that reduce the likelihood of harmful outcomes for individuals and communities. It occurs at three different stages:

- Primary prevention puts in place positive conditions universally for all individuals;
- Secondary prevention targets at-risk populations in order to remediate conditions that put them at risk for negative outcomes; and
- Tertiary prevention occurs after certain behaviours or / outcomes have been observed, and attempts to prevent future occurrences or lessen the negative consequences.

Prevention can have an emphasis on capacity and intentionality, and can align with the other characteristics of strength-based approaches. However, prevention differs from the other approaches in that it is more of a point of involvement rather than an approach in and of itself. It is related, but not the same.

ARE THESE APPROACHES JUST ABOUT KIDS?

No. Some of the approaches apply to all ages, and some were developed specifically about children and youth. We believe there's value in knowing about multiple approaches. When someone is developing programming based on an approach, they will likely choose the one that applies best to the population they plan to serve.

DOES WATERLOO REGION HAVE ANY EXAMPLES OF HOW THESE APPROACHES ARE USED?

In Waterloo Region, we are fortunate to have many great programs and initiatives that are rooted in one or more of the approaches identified in this document. Choosing which examples to include proved too difficult a task. Instead, we encourage people to use this document to stimulate dialogue, and to begin to record some local examples of strength-based approaches. Then we will need to work together to find a creative way to showcase the results.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a tool that can be used to determine and explore future possibilities. The purpose of AI is to focus on the positive aspects of people, organizations and systems including the potential for meaningful and valuable change, growth and adaptability. AI is often used for promoting organizational or systems change through group processes involving discussion and narrative sharing. Those involved in a system determine what works best within that system and how the system could be improved. The AI process includes a cycle of four inquiry stages: (1) "discover" what works; (2) "dream" or imagine the ideal system and the potential of the system in the future; (3) "design" a plan to achieve that ideal system, and; (4) "deliver" by putting into action the designed process. AI provides the opportunity, through collaborative group discussion, to explore prior success of individuals, organizations or systems, and envisions future potential and action. The belief that change is likely, positive, and possible is important for the success of this process.

THEORY BASE

Appreciative Inquiry grew out of the notion that systems are in a constant state of change and that in order to have positive change within a system, members of the system must think positively about the future. Further, the idea that discussing and reflecting on previous positive experiences and successes, particularly within a group setting, contributes to a belief in positive future change. In addition, AI stemmed from the notion that individuals and systems can become 'self fulfilling prophecies'; if individuals believe themselves and their future to be successful, promising and hopeful, their beliefs will be made reality.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Improvement in any system is possible and the things needed for improvement are already being used.

- Change is positive.

- Affirmative questions can generate positive beliefs about self, others, change and the future.

- Belief that the future is positive can make it so as people will act in ways to make their beliefs about the future reality.

- Language and beliefs construct reality.

- Inquiry into what should change and the change process should happen simultaneously.

- Sharing positive stories about a system can lead to positive change.

WHY IT'S A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

- Emphasizes Capacity and Intentionality

- Attends to the Context / Systems

- Invites Meaningful Participation

- Recognizes Interrelationships

- Concentrates on Solutions / Potential

READING SUGGESTIONS

Elliot, C. (1999). *Locating the energy for change: An introduction to appreciative inquiry.* International Institute for Sustainable Development: Manitoba. Available at: http://www.iisd.org/pdf/appreciativeinquiry.pdf

Cooperrider, D.L. & Srivastva, S. (1987). *Appreciative inquiry in organizational life.* Research in Organizational Change and Development, 1, 129-169.

Cooperrider, D.L., Whitney, D. & Stavros, J.M. (2003). *Appreciative inquiry handbook: The first in a series of AI workbooks for leaders of change.* Ohio, U.S.A.:Lakeshore Communications, Inc.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Appreciative Inquiry Commons: http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/

CAPACITY BUILDING / ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

'Capacity Building' is about harnessing the gifts, talents and skills of every member of a community, supporting continued skill development, and fostering relationships based on mutual benefit. 'Asset-Based Community Development' is a process that cultivates the capacities of individuals in order to address the needs and issues of the community.

THEORY BASE

The concept of Capacity Building has its roots in the work of many different practitioners in the field of community development (Chaskin et al, 2001). More specifically, the concept of Capacity Building applied in the framework of community development is based on the work of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute, co-directed by John McKnight and John P. Kretzmann. "Challenging the traditional approach to solving urban problems, which focuses service providers and funding agencies on the needs and deficiencies of neighborhoods, Kretzmann and McKnight have demonstrated that community assets are key building blocks in sustainable urban and rural community revitalization efforts" (Asset-Based Community Development Institute, 2007).

KEY PRINCIPLES

Asset-based community development:

- starts where the community is at
- appreciates inquiry and input from all members of the community and proposes that mapping individual resources will identify assets that may not have been known to the community
- identifies and includes the "giftedness" of individuals who are often marginalized in the community
- recognizes that social capital and networking are important assets within a community
- allows members of the community to take a participatory approach and ownership of their own development
- focuses on how to engage people as citizens, rather than clients, and how to make local governance more effective and responsive
- encourages collaboration with local organizations
- gives priority to "local definition, investment, creativity, hope and control" (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993, 9)

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READING SUGGESTIONS

Chaskin, R.J., Brown, P., Venkatesh, S. and Vidal, A. (2001). *Building Community Capacity.* New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

Diers, J. (2004). Neighbor Power: *Building Community the Seattle Way.* Seattle and London: University of   Washington Press.

Kretzmann, J.P. and McKnight, J. (1993). *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets.* Chicago: ACTA Publications.

Baker, I. R. *et al.* (2007). An asset-based community initiative to reduce television viewing in New York state. Preventative Medicine, 44, 437-441

INTERNET RESOURCES

Asset-Based Community Development Institute. (2007). http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/abcd/

Neighbor Power. (2009). http://home.comcast.net/~jimdiers/index.html

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community Development is a grassroots process whereby communities take collective action to create a sustainable and active community to improve conditions and quality of life. This process attempts to influence power structures as citizen's work on common issues towards common solutions. It utilizes local skills and strengths to develop a healthy community.

THEORY BASE

In Canada, Community Development grew out of the movement of cooperatives and intentional communities. However, the international movement of Community Development surged after the development of Grameen Bank microcredits in Bangladesh providing credit as a human right to help the poor improve their quality of life. The movement surfaced from the issues of top down community change brought on by governmental bodies. Community Development is a movement that is bottom-up allowing community members and everyday citizens to influence their community and their futures.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Regardless of the scope of the activity, effective community development should be:

• a long-term endeavor;

• well planned;

• inclusive and equitable;

• holistic and integrated into the bigger picture;

• initiated and supported by community members;

• of benefit to the community; and

• grounded in experience that leads to best practice.

(Flo, F & Smith, A. (1999). *The community development handbook: A tool to build community capacity*. – pg 12)

WHY IT'S A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

• Emphasizes Capacity and Intentionality

• Acknowledges Contribution

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• Invites Meaningful Participation

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READING SUGGESTIONS

Brown, J. (2008). *Community development in Canada.* Pearson: Toronto.

Flo, F & Smith, A. (1999). The Community Development Handbook: A tool to build community capacity.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Community Development Handbook:
http://www1.servicecanada.gc.ca/en/epb/sid/cia/comm_deve/handbook.shtml

Federation for Community Development Learning:
http://www.fcdl.org.uk/about/definition.htm

DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

Developmental Assets are positive qualities and experiences that provide young people with the skills and strengths needed to be positive, healthy and productive citizens. The full list of assets is broken into 8 categories: support, empowerment, boundaries/expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity. The assets function interdependently promoting and influencing each other and frame youth as a resource in the community.

THEORY BASE

Developed by the Search Institute, the 40 developmental assets were created to clarify the positive relationships, youth competencies, self-perceptions and values needed for children and youth to succeed. The research that lead to the creation of this theory involved over 500,000 6th to 12th grade students in over 600 communities in the United States. Research shows there is a cumulative power to the assets; the more assets children and youth have, the more they demonstrate positive behaviours and avoid high-risk behaviours.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Principles for Asset-Building Communities

- Assets are nurtured in all young people.
- Relationships are key.
- Everyone contributes to the vision.
- Asset building never stops.
- The community is filled with consistent messages.
- Duplication and repetition are valued.

(Search Institute, 2008 – http://www.search-institute.org/key-themes-asset-building-communities)

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- Recognizes Interrelationships

READING SUGGESTIONS

Scales, P. C., Benson, P.C., Roehlkepartain, E. C., Sesma Jr., A. & van Dulmen, M. (2006). The role of developmental assets in predicting academic achievement: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Adolescence*, 29, 691-708.

Scales, P. C. & Leffert, N. (1999). *Developmental Assets: A synthesis of the scientific research or adolescent development.* Search Institute: Minneapolis.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Alliance for Children & Youth: http://www.allianceforchildrenandyouth.org/assets.html

Thrive! The Canadian Centre for Positive Youth Development: http://www.thrivecanada.ca/section.asp?catid=141

The Search Institute: http://www.search-institute.org/

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is the process of moving beyond the prevention of problem behaviours, and into the sphere of developing positive citizenry. The development process includes social support and strong bonds with positive adults, and opportunities for youth to set goals and contribute to their own growth. This process guides communities in the way they organize programs, opportunities, and supports so that young people can develop to their full potential.

THEORY BASE

Karen Pittman, the Executive Director of the Forum for Youth Investment, has published widely on the concept of PYD. Her belief is that "being problem free is not the same as being fully prepared". This quote delineates the difference between the theory of prevention and PYD, moving to a place where positive attributes and skills are built upon. This is where youth build on their competence and community connections to become positive citizens and healthy individuals. Community context is an important factor as relationships and opportunities are experienced differently within different contextual backgrounds. For example, a community's culture and the availability of youth-targeted resources will change a young person's experience.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Communities that adopt a youth development approach emphasize:

- Positive youth outcomes
- Youth Voice
- Strategies involving all youth
- Community involvement
- Collaboration
- Long-term commitment

(identified by Janis Whitlock, 2001 in *What's So New About Youth Development?* Available at: http://www.actforyouth.net/default.asp?ID=youthDevelopment)

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- Concentrates on Solutions / Potential

READING SUGGESTIONS

Hamilton, S.F., Hamilton, M.A., & Pittman, K. Principles for Youth Development. In S.F. Hamilton & M.A. Hamilton (eds.) 2004, *The Youth Development Handbook: Coming of Age in American Communities* (pp. 3-22). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication, Inc.

Dotterweich, Jutta. (2006), *Act for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence – Positive Youth Development Resource Manual*. Cornell University, Family Life Development Center – Beebe Hall, Ithaca, NY. Available at: http://www.actforyouth.net/default.asp?ydManual

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Canadian Centre for Positive Youth Development: http://www.thrivecanada.ca/index.asp

The Forum for Youth Investment: http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/ACT (Assets Coming Together) for Youth Center of Excellence:

RESILIENCY

Resiliency is the ability of people to successfully adapt and develop positive well-being in the face of chronic stress and adversity. This ability is highly influenced by protective and supportive elements in the wider social environment.

THEORY BASE

Although, there remains no consensus on what pre-conditions are required to allow the development of resiliency, researchers agree that some form of protective factors are required to allow a person to develop in the face of chronic and severe stress. Resiliency can develop out of experiences that promote self-determination and increase participation. Resiliency was first applied to the development of youth in the 1970's by researchers such as Emmy Werner and Norman Garmezy. They began to wonder why some youth who lived in negative conditions were able to thrive and sustain positive outcomes. Researchers dubbed these children "invincible". This term was changed to 'resilient' when the influence of context was identified. Long before the terms "resilience" and "risk" came into common use, Alfred Adler used the words "courage" and "discouragement" to express similar ideas.

Resiliency is a process rather than a static outcome as an individual's resilience can change and develop depending on context and life experiences. Resilience examples may also be called 'buffers'. Risk and Resilience (buffering) occur at various levels. Examples:

- Child (Biological): Risk = low birth weight, Buffer = good prenatal nutrition
- Child (Social): Risk = poor peer relationships, Buffer = ability to elicit positive attention from others
- Family: Risk = child maltreatment, Buffer = time with caring and interested adults
- School: Risk = rigid / exclusively skill-focused curriculum, Buffer = high-quality programs tied to strengths / needs
- Community: Risk = social isolation, Buffer = support from friends / religious groups

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Buffers are more powerful than risks.
- The more risks a child faces, the more buffers are needed.
- The impact of both risk factors and buffers differ in relation to the age of the child.
- In identifying child strengths and needs, the contribution and interplay of risk factors and buffers is often undetermined.

WHY IT'S A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

- Emphasizes Capacity and Intentionality
- Attends to the Context / Systems
- Recognizes Interrelationships
- Concentrates on Solutions / Potential

READING SUGGESTIONS

Maston, A. S., Best, K. M. & Garmezy, N. (1990). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology*, 2, 425-444.

Maston, A. S., Hubbard, J. J., Gest, S. D., Tellegen, A., Garmezy, N & Ramirez, M. (1999). Competence in the context of adversity: Pathways to resilience and maladaptation from childhood to late adolescence. *Development and Psychopathology*, 11, 143-169.

Ungar, M. (Ed.) (2005). *Handbook for working with children and youth: Pathways to resilience across cultures and contexts.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

INTERNET RESOURCES

International Resilience Project: www.resilienceproject.org

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative Justice is a framework within criminal justice that engages all parties involved in a crime, including the victims, perpetrators and the community, with the common purpose of restitution and healing. This process helps build relationships and collaboration to reach a fair resolution for all involved.

THEORY BASE

The first restorative justice program began in the Waterloo Region to address the 'revolving door of crime' - the phenomenon of an offender persistently coming into contact with the law. Because crime hurts individuals and relationships on all sides of a criminal act, the central idea of restorative justice is that repairing the harm caused by criminal behaviour will increase healing for all parties involved. The purpose according to Rodriguez (2007) is not to punish criminals but to work with the community to reintegrate them into a strong and cohesive community. Recent research has shown that restorative justice leads to lower rates of recidivism, especially among females and offenders with minimal criminal histories.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Core Values and Principles related to the **practice** of restorative justice:

- Accountability: Participants take responsibility for the impacts of their words and actions and work toward reparing any resulting harm

- Autonomy: Participants determine and control their own affairs and participate voluntarily

- Confidentiality: Participants determine for themselves what personal information may be shared within the limits of the law.

- Equality: Participants are treated equally.

- Honesty: Participants are truthful, listen and 'speak from the heart'.

- Respect: Participants are valued for who they are. Cultural diversity, values and preferences are honoured.

(From: *Values and Principles of Restorative Justice by the Restorative Justice Task Force of the Waterloo Region*, CS&CPC available at: http://www.preventing crime.net/library/VALUES%20&%20PRINCIPLES.pdf)

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- Emphasizes Capacity and Intentionality
- Focuses on Personal Relationships
- Acknowledges Contribution
- Invites Meaningful Participation
- Concentrates on Solutions / Potential

READING SUGGESTIONS

Rodriguez, N. (2007). Restorative justice at work: Examining the impact of restorative justice resolutions on juvenile recidivism. *Crime and Delinquency*, 53(3), 355-379.

Wilson, R. J., Huculak, B. & McWhinnie, A. (2002). Restorative justice innovations in Canada. *Behavioural Sciences and the Law,* 20, 363-380.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Community Justice Initiatives: http://www.cjiwr.com/about-us-2.htm

Restorative Justice Online: http://www.restorativejustice.org/

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The Determinants of Health are a complex set of factors or conditions that determine the level of health of a population. The Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) are the social factors that influence health and quality of life. Health outcomes of these factors are influenced by public policy. They include: Aboriginal status, early life, education, employment and working conditions, food security, health care services, housing, income and its distribution, social safety net, social exclusion and unemployment/employment security (Raphael, 2004)

THEORY BASE

The importance of the theory of SDOH has begun to resonate through research from different countries demonstrating health inequalities based on the aforementioned social factors. The health of citizens facing issues of poverty, income insecurity and low rates of education for example have been found to have shorter life expectancies, and a lower quality of life. Canada began to conceptualize these social factors in 1974 with the release of the federal government document *A new perspective on the health of Canadians*, first identifying issues outside of health care. Currently, government bodies such as Region of Waterloo Public Health have divisions dedicated to working on the SDOH.

KEY PRINCIPLES

In a population health approach, taking action on the complex interactions between factors that contribute to health requires:

- a focus on the root causes of a problem, with evidence to support the strategy to address the problem;

- efforts to prevent the problem;

- improving aggregate health status of the whole society, while considering the special needs and vulnerabilities of sub-populations;

- a focus on partnerships and intersectoral cooperation;

- finding flexible and multidimensional solutions for complex problems; and

- public involvement and community participation.

(Public Health Agency of Canada: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/determinants/index-eng.php)

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- Emphasizes Capacity and Intentionality

- Attends to the Context / Systems

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READING SUGGESTIONS

Raphael, D. (2008). *Social determinants of health: Canadian perspective (2nd edition)*. Canadian Scholar's Press Inc: Toronto.

Raphael, D (March, 2003). Addressing the social determinants of health in Canada: Bridging the gap between research findings and public policy. *Public Options*, 35-40. Retrieved Jun, 4 /08 http://www.irpp.org/po/archive/mar03/raphael.pdf

INTERNET RESOURCES

Region of Waterloo Public Health – Health Determinants Planning and Evaluation: http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/DocID/946751DBBDAD355985256F80006CA77C?OpenDocument

Public Health Agency of Canada: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/overview_implications/01_overview.html

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social development is a process that seeks to improve the architecture of human systems – primarily socio-economic and health systems – in a collective effort to reduce undesirable effects of such systems. In the context of systems-based social development, this process is a multi-sectoral collaborative effort by governments, organizations, and others to improve the quality of life for all by reducing the burden of inequality, injustice, indifference and marginalization.

THEORY BASE

Social development has been practised under various disguises for hundreds if not thousands of years. Consider the advent of socio-political systems, the struggle for human rights and Canada's role in international social development. In one form or another, social planning councils have existed in Ontario for most of the 20th century. These councils attempt to address policy issues such as poverty, equality of economic opportunity and outcomes, and family and child development initiatives.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Social Development work:

- should be rooted in evidence;
- works on multiple systemic levels;
- is done in collaboration and partnership wherever possible;
- should start as early as possible;
- is intensive, never ad hoc;
- work builds system capital and capacity; and
- uses approaches that are comprehensive.

(Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council, 2009)

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READING SUGGESTIONS

Clarke, J. (2004b). *Changing welfare changing states: New directions in social policy.* London, England: Sage Publications.

UN. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved June 1, 2006 from http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html

INTERNET RESOURCES

Canadian Council on Social Development: http://www.ccsd.ca/

Caledon Institute of Social Policy: http://www.caledoninst.org/

Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council: http:www.preventingcrime.ca

SOLUTION FOCUSED THERAPY

The defining feature of Solution Focused Therapy (SFT) is its intentional emphasis on constructing solutions rather than resolving problems. The person (child, youth, or adult) is assisted to imagine a preferred future about how things will be different and how to make this happen. The SFT therapist assumes that the person wants to change, has the capacity to do so and, in fact, already has experience with performing elements of the desired change. Working collaboratively, the therapist and person identify those elements of the desired change which are already happening, focus on the person's story, strengths, resources, progress, changes and exceptions to the problem in order to achieve their preferred future (adapted from Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000).

THEORY BASE

Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg developed the specific steps of SFT in the 1980s in Milwaukee. Earlier therapeutic approaches built upon structural philosophy, the thinking of the traditional scientific method and cybernetics using such questions as "What causes the problem?" and "What maintains the problem?" In comparison, SFT asks the question "How do we construct solutions?" (adapted from Walter & Peller, (1992).

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Emphasizes mental health, strengths, resources and abilities rather than deficits and disabilities
- Works with the frame of reference of the person(s), not that of the counsellor or the treatment model
- Emphasizes an a-theoretical and non-normative stance where the person(s) view of the situation is accepted at face value
- Sees change as inevitable
- Provides a present and future orientation where the primary focus is to help the person(s) in their present and future
- Has a pragmatic orientation focusing on doing more of what works
- Sees small changes as generative
- Sees meaning and experience as being interactionally constructed
- Understands that the meaning of the message is in the response one receives

(adapted from Walter & Peller, (1992) and Berg & Miller (1992)

WHY IT'S A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

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- Invites Meaningful Participation
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- Concentrates on Solutions / Potential

READING SUGGESTIONS

Berg, I.K., & Kelly, S. (2000). *Building solutions in child protective services.* New York: Norton.

Berg, I.K., & Miller, S.D. (1992). *Working with the problem drinker: A solution-focused approach*. New York: Norton.

De Jong, P. & Berg, I.K. (2002). *Interviewing for Solutions* (2nd Edition). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

de Shazer, S. (1994). *Words were originally magic.* New York: Norton.

Gingerich, W.J. & Eisengart, S. (2000). Solution focused brief therapy: A review of the outcome research. *Family Process,* 39(4), pp. 477-498.

Walter, J.L. & Peller, J.E. (1992). *Becoming solution-focused in brief therapy.* New York: Bruner/Magel.

INTERNET RESOURCES

http://www.socialconstruction.talkspot.com/

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

This is a people-based framework aiming to eradicate poverty by promoting active participation of people living in poverty in defining their priorities, strengths and assets. This approach strives to establish sustainable processes in order to effect meaningful change by informing policy affecting those living in poverty.

THEORY BASE

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) was first proposed in the Brundtland Commission report in 1987 from the World commission on Environment and Development, and later expanded on by researchers Chambers and Conway from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). The framework was proposed to provide a new model for poverty eradication in developing countries.

KEY PRINCIPLES

One component of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach is the asset pentagon. It visually represents 5 areas or a person's existing strengths that together speak about everyday living. The pentagon includes a person's financial, social, personal, physical and human assets.

- The assets are integral to one another, and action (or inaction) in one may have a serious impact on another.

- All assets need to increase in order to achieve a sustainable livelihood, (although not necessarily at once).

- Poverty reduction therefore is not a matter of plugging gaps or closing cracks, but is a process of building and maintaining the assets that sustain self-sufficiency.

- There is a vast array of actions that we can do to create meaningful opportunities for people and to integrate community action

(adapted from: the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, Opportunities Waterloo Region – http://www.owr.ca/sustainablelivelihoods.htm)

WHY IT'S A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

- Emphasizes Capacity and Intentionality

- Attends to the Context / Systems

- Invites Meaningful Participation

- Recognizes Interrelationships

- Concentrates on Solutions / Potential

READING SUGGESTIONS

Chambers, R. & Conway, G. R. (1992). *Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century.* Brighton: Sussex University Press.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Opportunities Waterloo Region, Sustainable Livelihoods Model: http://www.owr.ca/sustainablelivelihoods.htm

Building on Your Strengths, How to apply the Asset Pentagon: http://www.owr.ca/Building_on_Your_Strengths.pdf

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is the meaningful participation of youth in their communities that links them with their community. It is a sustained involvement in an activity that has a focus outside of themselves, bringing their voice into community dialogue.

THEORY BASE

Research has demonstrated the benefits of youth engagement beyond the scope of the youth themselves and into the realm of community betterment. The benefits for involved youth include increased self-esteem, competence and control as well as decreased risk behaviours and increased positive activities. In addition to this, research has found that communities become stronger due to the involvement and energy of youth. Nakamura (2001) discusses the idea of 'vital engagement' in adulthood to help us understand the path for engaged youth.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Meaningful youth engagement produces benefits to youth and the community in which they live.

- Through engagement, youth gain a sense of empowerment as individuals and make healthy connections with others, which is associated with reduction of risk behaviours and increased participation in positive activities.

- Youth engagement is a cross-cutting, comprehensive, strength-based practice for effective protection, prevention and intervention on multiple issues.

- The community gains from the contributions that youth bring to organizations, activities and their relationships.

(*Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being: Youth Engagement* http://www.engagementcentre.ca/ vision.php)

WHY IT'S A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

- Emphasizes Capacity and Intentionality

- Focuses on Personal Relationships

- Acknowledges Contribution

- Invites Meaningful Participation

- Provides Opportunities for Skill-building/ Learning

READING SUGGESTIONS

Nakamura, J. (2001). The nature of vital engagement in adulthood. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 93, 5-18.

Pancer, S. M., Rose-Krasnor, L. & Loiselle, L.D. (2002). Youth conferences as a context for engagement. *New Directions in Youth Research Journal*, 96, 47-64. Retrieved June 4, 2008. http://www. engagementcentre.ca/detail_e.php?recordid=23

INTERNET RESOURCES

Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement: http:// www.engagementcentre.ca/

Health Canada on Youth Engagement: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/tobac-tabac/youth-jeunes/work-trav/index-eng.php
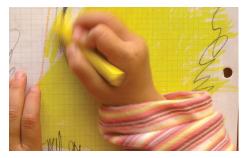
Alliance
for Children and Youth
of Waterloo Region