# A Strength-Based Lens with Young People in Substance Abuse Treatment and Juvenile Justice: Fundamentals and New Possibilities



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# Acknowledging Challenges in Our Youth System

- Climates of futility – professional pessimism

- Loss of purpose - misery of unimportance

- Depersonalization of services

(Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002)

# Positive disruptive dialogue – focusing on strengths as a way to bring attention towards reform and reinvention of our youth-serving infrastructure

# Strengths-Related Discourse

- Resilience

- Assets

- Protective factors

- Coping mechanisms

- Competencies

- Healthy development

- Resistance

# Goals of the Webinar

- Define strength-based philosophy and practice
- Describe related youth-development conceptual frameworks
- Relate these concepts to an anti-oppressive foundation
- Connect the dots to the importance of a growing evidence base
- Review necessary ingredients of change
- Reflect on these ideas with examples and experiences in Dayton, Ohio

# A strength-based approach is one that asserts that...

- Every individual, group, family and community has strengths.

- Trauma, abuse, illness and struggle may be injurious, but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity

- Assume that you do not know the upper limits of the capacity to grow and change – takes individual, group, and community aspirations seriously.

# Defining Strength-Based Approaches Continued

- We best serve clients by collaborating with them.
- Every environment is full of resources.

Saleebey, 1997

# Reclaiming Futures

Overarching questions that guide community change

1. What do youth struggling with substance use disorders and overlapping life challenges need to be successful?

2. What would community-institutional partnerships look like if they were able to provide that?

3. How can we move the system in this direction

# Three Major Goals of the Juvenile Justice System

- Offender accountability for illegal behavior

- Public safety protection

- Development of competencies among individual youth

# Goals of the Alcohol and Drug Treatment System

- Decrease destructive use of substances
- Decrease related high risk behaviors
- Increase healthy life skills and options
- Increase healthy life trajectory

# An Opportunity

- Bringing these two types of systems together and "refashioning" them, meant we had the opportunity to update them with a variety of new approaches.

- Every youth-serving system has a stated goal of being more "developmentally appropriate" but few can clearly point to how they do this.

- Strength-based work provides a philosophy, set of principles, and practices to make this possible.

- Refreshing missions and professional identities – renewing relationships in communities.

- Challenge a combination of dominant discourses regarding youth identity across systems in a positive (and hopefully disruptive) manner

# A Strength-based Approach is Unapologetically Hopeful About the Abilities of…

- Youth to change and grow
- Family to regain direction and improve functioning
- Systems (and cross-systems) to engage in constructive self-improvement
- Community to respond in creative and constructive ways

# Lenses and Barriers to Strength-Based Practice

- Bazemore and Terry (1998) model suggests that as long as we've had a juvenile justice system - it has been dominated by two primary lenses.

- In fact, many of our problems stem from the fact that our "rehabilitative" efforts are inadequate because of a lens problem - that a third lens is needed.

- Rehabilitative models (I.e. treatment models and approaches) are needed that  build youth not just control/contain and heal them...

# Victim Lens

- Dysfunctional
- Mentally Ill
- Abused - sexually, physically, emotionally
- Damaged, diseased
- Ignored, neglected
- Victim of indifferent systems: school, health, community
- Learning disabled
- Sick, incapable, weak
- Cultural issues misinterpreted as sickness

- Vulnerable, inevitably victimized over and over again
- Will inevitably fall back into old patterns and be unable to resist old temptations
- Dependent - needing to heal - to restore health over a long period of intensive therapy
- Broken but repairable
- Lost, without direction

# Villain Lens

- Evil, bad seed
- Predatory
- Without conscience or empathy
- Highly intelligent
- Selfish, arrogant, victimizer, manipulator
- Untrustworthy, unreachable
- Therapy/treatment a waste of time
- Resistant and defiant

- Dangerous/bloodthirsty
- Not interested in changing -- satisfied with antisocial lifestyle and approach
- Conduct disordered - also paranoid, etc.
- Needs to be controlled and contained
- Fundamentally different than other youth
- Cultural dynamics misinterpreted as manipulation

# Resource Lens

- Leaders
- Capable, competent
- Willing and interested in improving life pro-socially
- Positive and fun
- Open to positive leadership - looking for positive mentorship
- Can make and persist towards positive goals

- Able to bond - accessible to positive influences
- Interested in learning from mistakes - capable of insight, growth and restitution
- Developmentally off track
- Caring about family - but able to detach appropriately
- Culture generally viewed as a resource

# A Strength-Based Approach Defined

- Every individual, group, family and community has strengths

- Life challenges can damage, but they can also make people stronger

- There is no upper limit on what human beings can overcome

- Hope and aspiration are primary fuel

# A Postmodern Moment...

- There is more than one way to be a successful young person
- There is more than one way to be strong, to be healthy, to be engaged
- All models are flawed and likely biased
- Everyone is still learning despite all efforts to sound like we know all the answers
- Many perspectives not yet included

# An Anti-Oppressive Moment

- Culture
- Race and racism
- Oppression
- Multiple identities
- Power
- Whiteness and privilege
- Historical context
- Social change

# Positive Youth Development

- A natural process
- A set of principles
- A set of practices

Youth develop whether we do anything about it or not.

# The Five C's

- Competence
- Character
- Connections
- Confidence
- Contribution

(Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem & Ferber, 2002)

# Personal and Social Assets that Facilitate Positive Youth Development

- Physical development
- Intellectual development
- Psychological and emotional development
- Social development

(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2002)

# To "program" in positive youth development, we must have:

- Physical and psychological safety
- Appropriate structure
- Supportive relationships
- Opportunities to belong
- Positive social norms
- Support for efficacy and mattering
- Opportunities for skill building
- Integration of family, school, and community efforts

(Eccles and Gootman, 2002)

# Resilience Model

- Based on systems and ecological theory
- Emphasize predictable relationships between risk and protective factors
- Health despite adversity
- Goal of all programs is to "innoculate" youth with range of strengthening opportunities

(Masten, 2001)

# Reclaiming Children and Youth Model

- Creating an environment that is both good for young people and good for the community

- Based on Native American principles of child-rearing

# Reclaiming Children and Youth Model: Circle of Courage

- Significance:  acceptance, attention and affection of others.  To lack significance is to be rejected, ignored, and not to belong.

- Competence:  develops as one masters the environment.  Success brings innate satisfaction and a sense of efficacy, while chronic failure stifles motivation.

# Reclaiming Children and Youth Model: Circle of Courage (continued)

- Power:  is shown in the ability to control one's behavior and gain the respect of others.  Those lacking power feel helpless and without influence.

- Virtue:  is worthiness judged by values of one's own culture and of significant others.  Without feelings of worthiness, life is not spiritually fulfilling.

(Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002, p. 45)

# Youth Voice and Empowerment Model

Youth voice:  The ideas, opinions, involvement and initiative of people considered to be "young."  These voices often go unheard and/or involvement of this group has often been marginalized.  Places where youth voice can take place include:  organizations, schools, government, faith based institutions, businesses, etc.

(Pittman, 2002)

# Cycle of Youth Engagement

- Listen to young people
- Validate young people
- Authorize young people
- Mobilize young people
- Reflection about young people

(Fletcher & Vavrus, 2006)

# Examples of Youth Voice Movement in Action

- Youth as researchers
- Student-led school reform
- Youth organizing and youth as grantmakers
- Youth as advocates

(Fletcher, 2004)

# Youth Leadership Model

- Working
- Learning
- Thriving
- Connecting
- Leading

(National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, 2005)

# To be an effective adult ally…

- Tell the truth about power
- Tell the truth about violence
- Provide lots of options
- Support healing
- Interrupt adultism
- Interrupt internalized adultism
- Promote true history
- Do not rescue young people

# To be an adult ally…. (continued)

- Be a partner
- Model strength, openness, respect, trust and cooperation
- Make mistakes openly
- Don't do it alone
- Respect the intelligence of everyone at all times
- Trust them to be powerful
- Celebrate their successes

(Kivel, 2006)

# Hope Models

- Hope theory/research increasing
- Defined as the perceived capability to derive pathways toward desired goals and the motivate oneself via agency to use those pathways
- Related to learned optimism, optimism, self-efficacy and self-esteem
- Interrupted hope associated with poor outcomes in a variety of life challenge

(Snyder, 2000)

# Hope as seen through the eyes of homeless children...

- Connectedness
- Internal resources
- Cognitive strategies
- Energy
- Hope objects

(Herth, 1998)

# Hope in Professionals

- Receiving increasing attention in the literature

- Assumed to be present via our roles but can be complicated and depleted – burnout squared

- Increasing focus needed on the front lines and among middle and upper leadership for relative presence/absence in practice

# Constructionist Model

- Alternative to traditional resilience model – postmodern

- Resilience as the outcome from negotiations between individuals and their environments for the resources to define themselves as healthy amidst conditions collectively viewed as adverse.

- Describe relationships between risk and protective factors across global cultures and diverse social and political settings as chaotic, complex, relative, and contextural.

(Ungar 2004)

# Unique Pathways to Resilience Across Cultures

- Access to material resources
- Relationships
- Identity
- Power and control
- Cultural adherence
- Social justice
- Cohesion

(Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Othman, Kwong, Armstrong, & Gilgun, 2007)

# The Importance of Diverse Perspectives on the Notion of Positive Youth Development

- Understanding strengths, positive youth development, youth voice and empowerment, youth leadership, and hope are all incomplete to the degree we universalize concepts.

- There is always variation, exception, unfolding truth in individuals, families and communities.

- Importance of acknowledging context and embracing complexity – strengths detective.

# On the Ground…

- A strength-based approach involves the everyday practices, policies and opportunities that communicate our high expectations for the success of every youth that we interact with.

- It recognizes untapped potential in every youth – even in the most challenging circumstances.

- It is unapologetic with regard to its commitment to the power of hope and aspiration to fuel successful youth behavior change.

- The twin-locus of activity needs to be in the community and in deep reform to systems who by their nature seek to streamline, systematize, standardize, etc. in such a way to lose much focus on key elements of strength-based approach.

# Community Strength-Based Capacities Include the Ability to:

- Mentor youth
- Educate youth
- Employ youth
- Engage youth as leaders
- Build accountability in youth through corrective action when necessary
- Deliver youth to higher education
- Harness youth energy and idealism to tackle community challenges
- Allow youth to feel safe

# Relational Rehabilitation

- Think about the idea that it is not programs, ultimately, which change people...

- It is relationships...

- Successful programs build relationships - and not exclusively within the program but across the community as a whole

- See Bazemore, 1999 for more information on this concept.

# Relational Rehabilitation Goals

- Building communities
- Institutional reform to promote youth development
- Changing public image of young people in trouble
- Building connections between young offenders and community residents

(Bazemore, 1999)

# How Strength Based Are We?

- Do we look for strengths in youth and families in our screening and assessment process or only problems and risks?

- If we do look for strengths, what do we do with them when we find them? Do they show up in service plans in a relevant way?

- Do we regularly inventory communities in terms of what kinds of resources and opportunities are available and how do we use this information?

- Do we regularly track and celebrate successes in the young people that we work with?

# The Evidence-Base for Strength-Based Approaches

- Implicit to many key interventions that are extensively evaluated – degree to which strengths play a role not as carefully observed (yet).

- Emerging base of study – needs to be broadened both quantitatively and qualitatively.

- Challenges many dominant constructs, assumptions and frameworks

# Challenges – Back to Our Systems

- Are strength-based approaches possible in juvenile justice and substance abuse treatment?

- What is necessary to achieve this?

- What is required by way of revision/refreshing of professional identity?

- What is required by way of sharing power in new ways with clients and communities?

- What is required by way of program revision?

# Parallel Movements...

- Family strengths

- Organizational strengths

- Community strengths

# Possible Ingredients for Change

- Hope
- Tools
- Training
- Organizational commitment
- Embedded into quality improvement, disparities, and evaluation activities
- Youth voice

# Critical Strength-Based Shifts

1) Assess for client strengths

2) Case plan and take action based on client strengths

3) View community as an untapped reservoir of strengths

# Keep Learning, Advocating and Experimenting

- Justice, child welfare, substance abuse and mental health treatment and education have all explored how to apply these concepts systematically (bibliography will guide you through some terrific resources…!)

- Your input and contributions are needed to continue to "trouble" systems to acknowledge the lack of this focus and to re-energize and advocate for their inclusion.

# Imagine a system...

- Where the positive development of youth was our first and most important concern.

- Where youth development principles guided all decision making.

- Where professionals in systems were demonstrably hopeful and positive with youth, their families and among themselves.

- Where successful cases were used as a gauge for how to organize practice.

- Where youth success principles and practices reflected the diversity of communities in which they were utilized.

There are many wonderful and important things that will not be done if we do not do them.

- Charles D. Gill

# Dayton, OH on integrating Strength-Based Practices...

- How did you get started integrating strength-based practices?

- What changes has Dayton made in the way services are provided since integrating strength-based practices?

- What difference has this made?

- What advice can you offer other communities?

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