Why Use Strength-Based Assessment?

* Benefits to Youth and Staff *

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Reclaiming Futures Webinar
October 27, 2009
Objectives of this session

• Develop an understanding of the strength-based perspective and why it is appropriate for juvenile justice and adolescent treatment settings
• Explore the benefits of adopting strength-based practices, including assessment and service planning
• Gain a tool for identifying strengths in youth (and families)
Introductions

• Name of individual or team
• Agency/where you work
• Job title(s) or role(s)
Why do youth come to us?

- Why do youth
  - commit crime,
  - violate probation,
  - use alcohol & other drugs,
  - and otherwise end up on an unhealthy path?
What can (or do) we do about it?

- How do we prevent (or intervene to reduce) drug use and criminality in youth?
- How do we intervene to facilitate change?
How do we facilitate change?

• Find out what strengths are present that we can build on (at all levels – individual, family, community, etc.)
• Add & affirm (replacement behaviors)
• Decrease access to negative influences
• Use resources in the natural environment (sustainability)
• Clearly describe what behaviors we want to see
Why focus on competencies?

• Improves service systems
  ▪ Augments assessment
  ▪ Increases creativity
  ▪ Increases service integration
  ▪ Improves staff morale
  ▪ Improves sustainability of changes
Benefits of a strength-based approach to programming

- Builds engagement: requires active participation by youth and families
- Builds relationships
- Makes our work fun (prevents staff burn-out)
- Increases accountability
- Increases optimism and builds hope
Strengths approaches are:

- Based on research
  - Assets/protective factors
  - Behavioral science
  - Adolescent development
- Ecological
- Attentive to diversity
Protection From High-Risk Behaviors

- Violence
- Problem Alcohol Use
- Illicit Drug Use
- Sexual Activity

Categories of Assets:
- 0-10 Assets
- 10-20 Assets
- 20-30 Assets
- 30-40 Assets
Promoting Positive Attitudes and Behaviors

- Exhibits Leadership
- Maintains Good Health
- Values Diversity
- Succeeds in School

Assets Categories:
- 0-10 Assets
- 10-20 Assets
- 20-30 Assets
- 30-40 Assets
The Youth Competency Assessment (YCA)
Youth Competency Assessment (YCA) Model

A. Repairing Harm
What personal strengths does the youth have that she/he can use to make up for past mistakes?

B. Creating a Healthy Identity
What positive skills & qualities does the youth have that will help her/him succeed?

C. Connecting with Family, Peers, and Community
Are there positive people in the youth’s life who can serve as a resource for her/him?
Creating a Healthy Identity

- Identity development is a central task of adolescence
- Identification of skills, competencies, interests, and goals for the future
- Identification of resources to support this growth
- Help others in youth’s environment recognize and confirm youth’s positive identity
Connecting to Family, Peers, and Community

• Strong connections with families, positive peers, and community are protective:
  ▪ Less likely to commit crimes and more respectful of others
  ▪ Greater health
  ▪ Increased positive social control

• There may be a need to advocate for community support for juvenile justice involved youth
Repairing Harm, Developing Pro-Social Norms and Values

- Learn important lessons from their behavior/choices
- Facilitate moral development
- Reduce antisocial attitude: a major risk factor for juvenile justice involvement
- Increase public safety and restitution for victims
- Modify behavior
Summary of Research Findings
Staff reported:

- Improved rapport with and increased buy-in from youth and their parents/guardians
- Increased job satisfaction and staff morale
- Cases ending more quickly
- Decreased need for sanctions
- Helps identify ideas and resources
Youth/Family benefits

- Youth and families reported:
  - Meetings were more positive
  - Counselor cared about their point of view
  - Counselor more likely to ask about strengths & less likely to talk about what they did wrong
  - Felt counselor was helpful and fair
Differences are visible

• Based on ratings of videotaped interviews:
  ▪ Increased use of strength-based practice (*compared to non-YCA interviews*)
  ▪ Improved use of positive non-verbal cues and more positive interview atmosphere (*compared to non-YCA interviews*)
Assessments have more information

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PILOT SITES</th>
<th>COMPARISON</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a healthy identity</td>
<td>83% (0%)</td>
<td>52% (10%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecting with family, peers, community</td>
<td>77% (0%)</td>
<td>0% (61%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repairing harm, developing pro-social norms/values</td>
<td>49% (10%)</td>
<td>0% (23%)</td>
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Service plans have more information

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>PILOT SITES</th>
<th>COMPARISON</th>
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<tr>
<td>Creating a healthy identity</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecting with family, peers, community</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repairing harm, developing pro-social norms/values</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>67%</td>
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## Social climate improves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESIDENTS</th>
<th>STAFF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressiveness</td>
<td>Expressiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical Orientation</td>
<td>Practical Orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Problem Orientation</td>
<td>Personal Problem Orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Order and Organization</td>
<td>Order and Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>Clarity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff Control</td>
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Critical incidents decrease

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<tr>
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<th>PRE-YCA</th>
<th>POST-YCA</th>
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<td>Critical incidents per month</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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How the tool is used

• Integrate with risk and needs assessment
• Create case/service plans
• Write court reports
• Establish documentation
• Share information with other service providers working with the youth/family
Casework

• Write an assessment summary
• Create strength-based goals
• Keep coming back to strengths
• Plan for the end of service from the beginning
Supplemental materials and resources

• Training manual, including exercises and handouts
• Training, technical assistance, and consultation
Review Session Objectives

- Develop an understanding of the strength-based perspective and why it is appropriate for juvenile justice and adolescent treatment settings
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Questions?
How can I get more information or assistance?

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