

Creating a Community Strengths Resource Guide

“Connecting with Family, Peers, and Community” is one of the three important domains of strengths-based practice with youth. In order to make these connections happen, the counselor or staff person needs some knowledge about what resources are available in the youth’s community. As part of the implementation of strengths-based practice and the incorporation of system changes, it is recommended that each county or department develop a community strengths resource guide. This guide is ideally a work in progress that will continually grow as workers identify new and creative resources and other ideas.

What the guide IS: A strengths resource guide is a place (list, box, bulletin board) for recording ideas about programs, services, activities, people, and places that offer safe ways for youth to connect to their communities and create a healthy identity. It will be different for every community, is likely to change over time, and should be open to creative and innovative ideas and nontraditional resources.

What the guide is NOT: A strengths resource guide is not (necessarily) the same as a youth yellow pages, a service directory, or a listing of treatment agencies. While some of the information in these types of materials may overlap, the purpose of the resource guide is to provide suggestions for places youth can go or people youth can interact with to develop interests and competencies, rather than treat problems.

How to get started: Staff members often already have ideas about those community programs that serve youth. Also, many departments and communities have Web sites or resource guides that can be a starting point. It is recommended that a key person or group be given the responsibility of getting the resource guide started, with feedback from as many other staff as possible.

Where to look: While good ideas can come from anywhere and everywhere, here are some tips about where to look to get started.

- ▶ Web sites
 - ☆ Juvenile department, county, city, or other local/state governments
 - ☆ Local agencies or organizations known for providing services, recreational activities, or support to youth
 - ☆ Parks and recreation departments
 - ☆ Arts and entertainment
- ▶ Phone books or directories; yellow pages
- ▶ Newsletters of youth organizations, local museums, zoos, etc.
- ▶ E-mail, call, or visit youth organizations or local services or organizations that serve youth (e.g., YMCA/YWCAs, Boys & Girls clubs, church groups, local sports leagues, school-based activities, libraries).
- ▶ Public television, local cable stations, or other local media sources
- ▶ Local service clubs, civic events organizations, political organizations, health organizations, environmental organizations
- ▶ Local businesses or business organizations
- ▶ Faith-based organizations (i.e., churches, temples, mosques, etc.)

- ▶ Cultural organizations (e.g., dance, art, music, literature, etc. from specific cultures, nations, regions of the world, etc.)
- ▶ Community colleges, universities

Web/directory searching:

- ▶ Keywords:
 - Youth/children/kids
 - Youth activities
 - Youth recreation
 - Mentor/mentoring

- ▶ Where to look once at the site
 - Activities/recreation
 - Events/calendars
 - Scholarships/sponsorships

Other things to keep in mind:

- ☆ Be creative and take risks. Each youth is different, so case planning activities can and should be individualized. Non-traditional resources can be very successful!
- ☆ Include the youth and the youth's natural support people as much as possible in thinking of ideas and looking for resources.
- ☆ Sometimes a youth will have a job or career interest – in these cases, finding a local person in the same or similar position to be a mentor or provide an apprenticeship can be extremely valuable.
- ☆ Keep adding ideas and feedback about things that staff have tried, what worked well, etc. It is helpful to assign this task to a person or work group, to establish a regular time interval for updates to be incorporated or for the material to be organized (e.g., if the guide is an electronic list or database, suggestions could be added monthly or quarterly; if the resources are kept in a drawer or on a bulletin board, someone could periodically organize any new materials by topic). This responsibility can be rotated or shared, or assigned to someone as part of his or her job description.
- ☆ Allow staff to share ideas with each other and foster each other's creativity.