

Strength-Based Approaches to Work with Youth and Families: An Overview of the Literature and Web-Based Resources

An Annotated Bibliography of Recent Works and Resources Available on the World Wide Web



Compiled by
Dr. Laura B. Nissen
Portland State University
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Introduction

Reclaiming Futures: Building Community Solutions to Substance Abuse and Delinquency

Reclaiming Futures is a five-year, \$21 million initiative funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The initiative addresses the reality that both substance abuse and prosecution for drug-related charges among juvenile offenders has undergone a tremendous surge in the last five years, yet systems of care to address these interrelated issues have been slower to evolve. Reclaiming Futures addresses this problem, by stimulating a new generation of collaborative and integrated community efforts. The goal is to demonstrate that solutions to substance abuse and delinquency are possible through mutuality, commitment, application of evidence-based principles and community partnerships between the courts, substance abuse treatment, mental health, education, vocational development, faith communities, families and other key stakeholders across diverse groups in every neighborhood.

Focusing on Strengths

The strengths perspective demands a different way of looking at individuals, families and communities. All must be seen in the light of their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values and hopes, however dashed and distorted through circumstance, oppression and trauma. The strengths approach requires an accounting of what people know and can do, however inchoate that

may sometimes seem. It requires composing a roster of resources existing within and around the individual, family or community (Saleebey, 2001, p. 184).

The strength-based perspective offers a wide range of philosophical and practical assistance in learning to value and activate strengths in youth who tend to be primarily regarded as “multi-problem” and “high risk.” The strength-based perspective allows practitioner to regard each youth, his/her family and community not only as person in need of support, guidance and opportunity, but also in possession of previously unrealized resources which must be identified and mobilized to successfully resolve presenting problems and circumstances.

The strength-based approach is fueled by a sense of hope and a belief that every youth, every family and every community – no matter how distressed or compromised as they are presented to justice or professional helping systems – have strengths. A strength-based practitioner enters into a relationship with all clients looking for resources to support change, growth and positive development, and carries an abiding senses that such resources are always there, though sometimes obscured by other challenges. He or she is culturally competent and understands that strengths come in an incredibly wide variety of forms and interpretations.

A strength-based program has incorporated the philosophy into all levels of service – from assessment, through service planning, through case management, through discharge – and in the way it views its mission, hires and organizes its staff and engages as a community partner. A strength-based program walks its talk and demonstrates its view that clients are capable, competent and strong beings through giving them relevant and authentic leadership and ownership roles in the operations of the program.

A strength-based approach is a philosophy, but it is also a set of very practical skills and approaches. This resource guide provides a overview for practitioners both in direct practice, as well as program design, development and management roles.

There are unique challenges to operationalizing a strength-based approach in the juvenile justice and substance abuse treatment system. The first system has a tendency to focus on risk and probability of re-offending, the latter on disease models and relapse. Each does not tend to include norms of regularly seeking out, amplifying and maximizing client, family or community positive qualities in the course of service provision. But, all around the United States, in a variety of innovative justice and substance abuse treatment settings, progressive practitioners are finding that their success rates and positive program energy levels all increase as a result of expanding their lenses and incorporating strength-based principles in all components of their programming.

Strength-Based Bill of Rights for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System

1. I have the right to be viewed as a person capable of changing, growing and becoming positively connected to my community no matter what types of delinquent behavior I have committed.
2. I have a right to participation in the selection of services that build on my strengths.
3. I have a right to contribute things I am good at and other strengths in all assessment and diagnostic processes.
4. I have a right to have my resistance viewed as a message that the wrong approach may be being used with me.
5. I have the right to learn from my mistakes and to have support to learn that mistakes don't mean failure. I have the right to view past maladaptive or antisocial behaviors as a lack of skills that I can acquire to change my life for the better.
6. I have the right to experience success and to have support connecting previous successes to future goals.
7. I have the right to have my culture included a strength and services which honor and respect my cultural beliefs.
8. I have the right to have my gender issues recognized as a source of strength in my identity.
9. I have the right to be assured that all written and oral, formal and informal communications about me include my strengths as well as needs.
10. I have a right to surpass any treatment goals which have been set too low for me, or to have treatment goals which are different than those generally applied to all youth in the juvenile justice system.
11. I have a right to be served by professionals who view youth positively, and understand that motivating me is related to successfully accessing my strengths.
12. I have a right to have my family involved in my experience in the juvenile justice system in a way that acknowledges and supports our strengths as well as needs. I have a right to stay connected to my family no matter what types of challenges we face.
13. I have the right to be viewed and treated as more than a statistic, stereotype, risk score, diagnosis, label or pathology unit.
14. I have a right to a future free of institutional or systems involvement and to services which most centrally and positively focus on my successful transition from institutions.
15. I have the right to service providers who coordinate their efforts and who share a united philosophy that the key to my success is through my strengths.
16. I have the right to exercise my developmental tasks as an adolescent; to try out new identities; to learn to be accountable and say I'm sorry for the harm I've caused others – all of which is made even more difficult if I'm labeled a "bad kid."
17. I have the right to be viewed and treated as a redeemable resource and a potential leader and success of the future.

- Developed by Laura Burney Nissen, Ph.D., MSW, CAC III, 1998

Tentative List of Life Strengths Gleaned from Positive Psychology Literature

Strengths of Cognition

1. curiosity/interest
2. love of learning/love of knowledge
3. rationality/judgment
4. originality/ingenuity
5. personal intelligence/emotional intelligence/social intelligence

Strengths of Emotion

6. appreciation of beauty and excellence/awe
wonder/gratitude
7. hope/optimism/future-mindedness/planfulness
8. love of life/zest

Strengths of Will

9. courage/integrity
10. industry/perseverance

Relational and Civic Strengths

11. kindness/generosity/care/nurturance
12. responsibility/justice/tolerance
13. humor/playfulness
14. capacity to love and be loved
15. citizenship/duty/loyalty/teamwork
16. humane leadership

Strengths of Tolerance

17. honesty/authenticity
18. integration/balance/temperance/integration
19. self-control/self-regulation
20. wisdom/prudence
21. spirituality/sense of purpose/faith/religiousness

Excerpted from Seligman, M.E.P. & Peterson, C. (2000)

Printed Resources

Arnold, K.D. (1995). *Lives of promise*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Based on the findings from the Illinois Valedictorian Project, a 14-year longitudinal study of high school valedictorians, this book follows the lives of 81 students identified by their high schools as high achievers. Beginning with the valedictorians' commencement speeches, researchers document their academic and non-academic experiences. These include college, finding a job, changing careers, graduate school, marriage, children, and even divorce. This provocative study probes the ubiquitous question of "What is success?" The valedictorian sample is fascinating because it represents a group that is skilled in translating hard work into achievement – but not surprisingly, the ways in which these individuals view success in relation to life satisfaction changes through the course of their lives. The impact of societal expectations, mentors or lack of mentors, self-discovery, personal setbacks and the search for meaning are explored in relation to the students' life choices. The valedictorian sample is highly diverse, providing additional insight into the post-high school experience of minorities. This book is a unique contribution to the literature on higher education and would be of interest to a wide variety of readers.

Bales, P. B., & Staudinger, U. M. (2000). *Wisdom: A pragmatic to orchestrate mind and virtue toward excellence*. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 122-136.

What is wisdom and how does it relate to success and happiness in life? How can it best be assessed and mobilized in the service of human problems? The primary focus of this article is to present research related to these questions conducted by the authors. Informed by a cultural-historical analysis, wisdom in this paradigm is defined as an expert knowledge system concerning fundamental pragmatics of life. These include knowledge and judgment about the meaning and conduct of life and the orchestration of human development toward excellence while attending jointly to personal and collective well-being. Measurement includes protocols concerning various problems of life associated with life planning, life management, and life review. Responses were evaluated with reference to a family of five criteria: rich factual and procedural knowledge, lifespan contextualism, relativism of values and life priorities, and recognition and management of uncertainty. A series of studies is reported that aim to describe, explain and optimize wisdom. The authors conclude with a new theoretical perspective that characterizes wisdom as cognitive and pragmatic that organizes and orchestrates knowledge toward human excellence in mind and virtue, both individually and collectively.

Bazemore, G. & Terry, W. C. (1997). *Developing delinquent youths: A reintegrative model for rehabilitation and a new role for the juvenile justice system*. *Child Welfare*, 76 (5), 665-716.

This fine article presents logical, theoretical, and empirical arguments for a new rehabilitative agenda for juvenile justice, based on positive principles of youth

development. It offers a critical examination of the dominant intervention paradigms within the juvenile justice system. It compares the underlying theoretical and philosophical assumptions of a competency-based rehabilitative model with the deficit-based individual treatment approach, and highlights the practices and programs that will most fully support the positive development of young people in the juvenile justice system. This article provides the definitive discussion on victim, villain and resources lens theory as operating across the majority of youth-serving systems.

Bazemore, G. & Nissen, L. (2000). *Building relationships, developing competency: Toward a restorative approach to offender reintegration in a balanced juvenile justice system*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Research monograph. Balanced and Restorative Justice Project: Florida Atlantic University.

Balanced and restorative justice provides an entirely new paradigm for work across justice systems and into the communities they serve. This monograph challenges dominant thinking and program structure regarding the “treatment” of juvenile offenders. It suggests that strategies that balance relationships with the community, development of key competencies and accountability simultaneously have the most promise to build a new generation of more effective approaches. It carries a strong message of focusing on the strengths of victims of crime, communities and offender to repair the harm that crime creates. This monograph also offers extensive guidelines for the “rules” of relational rehabilitation and provides practical guidelines for programs wishing to expand in this direction.

Benson, P.L. (1997). *All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

ISBN: 0-7879-1068-6

This book challenges all segments of community, families, neighbors, schools, congregations, youth organizations, local governments, employers and residents to reclaim their capacity and responsibility for raising healthy, successful, and caring children and adolescents. Based on research from the renowned Search Institute, this groundbreaking critique of American culture offers practical strategies for uniting and mobilizing communities around a shared vision of healthy development.

This is the definitive introductory book on the 40 developmental assets – building blocks of healthy development. These assets, such as family support, intergenerational relationships, clear and consistent boundaries and expectations, participation in constructive activities, and community focus on values, are essential for all youth, regardless of background. Yet too few young people have these support structures in their lives. To increase assets among all youth, the

author presents a compelling vision of a healthy community and specific recommendations for individual, family and community action.

This persuasive book demonstrates that building developmental assets is critical for communities and society. When young people experience more of these assets, many forms of high-risk behavior sharply decline, including alcohol and other drug use, too-early sexual activity, violence and school failure. Just as significantly, increasing a young person's developmental asset enhances the competencies and skills necessary for healthy adulthood.

Bruner, C. & Rapp, R. C. (2001). Strength-based case management: Individuals' perspectives on strengths and the case manager relationship. *Social Work, 46 (3), 278-288.*

Strengths-based practice in social work has a strong theoretical foundation as an effective helping strategy that builds on a person's successes. Although there is growing empirical evidence on informing outcomes associated with strength-based approaches, missing from the literature is an understanding of how individuals who receive these services view their experiences. Qualitative data collection methods were used to gather individuals' experiences of participating in a strength-based case management program implemented in a substance abuse aftercare project. The research questions that guided the study were "What are individuals' perceptions of strengths-based case management?" and "How do those perceptions compare and contrast to the key principles of strengths-based case management?" The emerging themes centered on individuals' responses to a focus on strengths and to the relationship with the case manager. Implications for social work practice are discussed.

Cicchetti, D., Rappaport, J., Sandler, I., & Weissberg, R. P. (2000). *The promotion of wellness in children and adolescents.* Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

The question "What can be done throughout a child's life to maximize the likelihood that he or she will develop in healthy ways?" serves as the foundation for this book. The contributors untie several subfields of psychology, including community psychology, developmental psychopathology, and an ecological perspective on development in order to elucidate the conceptual underpinnings of psychological wellness. The theory, research and prevention principles presented diverge significantly from the more traditional mental health focus on diagnosis and repair of disorders. Rather, the vast possibilities in fostering positive development, even the absence of risk or disorders is proffered.

This volume is a lasting tribute to Emory L. Cowen's contributions to fostering the well-being of children, families and society. In a fitting, and perhaps the only possible ending to this volume, Cowen puts forth his vision of the future of a wellness enhancement perspective.

Clark, M. (1997). Strength-based practice: A new paradigm. *Corrections Today*, 59 (2), 201-202.

This important article invites the justice community to consider that traditional problem-focused methodologies are fast becoming outdated and decreasing in effectiveness. It suggests that a strength-based approach brings a rich and useful history to the justice field. This author says that many applications and uses can be envisioned for a more strength-based justice system.

Clark, M. (1999). Interviewing for solutions: A strength-based method for juvenile justice. *Corrections Today*, 59 (3), 98-118.

This article offers additional information on practical use of solution-focused interviewing techniques in juvenile justice settings. The author suggests that these approaches can dramatically promote offender motivation and cooperation. The method uses strength-based questions designed to foster a productive conversation called the solution talk. Characterized by miracle questions, scaling questions and coping questions, these solution talks promote positive changes among juvenile mental health clients. Further dissemination of information regarding strength-based work is recommended to improve the approach.

Cowger, C. D. (1994). Assessing client strengths: Clinical assessment for client empowerment. *Social Work*, 39 (3), 262-268.

The proposition that client strengths are central to the helping relationship is simple and seems uncontroversial as an important component of practice. Yet deficit, disease and dysfunction metaphors are deeply rooted in clinical social work, and the emphasis on assessment is diagnosing abnormal and pathological conditions. This article argues that assessment in clinical practice, among other things, is a political activity. Assessment that focuses on deficits provides obstacles to client exercise of personal and social power and reinforces social structures that generate and regulate unequal power, relationships that victimize clients. This article discusses the importance of a client strengths perspective for assessment and proposes 12 practice guidelines that foster a strengths perspective.

Cross, T., Bazron, B. R., Dennis, K. W., & Isaacs, M. R. (1989). *Toward a culturally competent system of care – Volume I. A monograph on effective services for minority children who are severely emotionally disturbed. Volume I.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Child Development Center.

This monograph is a groundbreaking and historical contribution to the advancement of culturally relevant systems. It has become a standard among progressive human service providers. The authors provide a philosophical framework and practical ideas for improving service delivery to children of color who are severely emotionally disturbed. It focuses on groups (African Americans,

Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans) who have historically had limited access to economic or political power, and have, for the most part, been unable or not allowed to influence the structures that plan and administer children's mental health systems. It emphasizes the cultural strengths inherent in all cultures and examines how the system of care can more effectively deal with cultural differences and related treatment issues. The authors define cultural competence as:

...a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. The word "culture" is used because it implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group. The word competence is used because it implies having the capacity to function effectively. A culturally competent system of care acknowledges and incorporates – at all levels – the importance of culture, the assessment of cross-cultural relations, vigilance towards the dynamics that result from cultural differences, the expansion of cultural knowledge, and the adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs (p.13).

The monograph:

- provides a definition for cultural competence
- sets forth a cultural competence continuum along a six-point continuum (cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, cultural competence and cultural proficiency)
- outlines the five elements that contribute to a system's or agency's ability to become more culturally competent including a) value diversity, b) have the capacity or cultural self-assessment, c) be conscious of the dynamics when cultures interact, d) have institutionalized cultural knowledge, and e) have developed adaptations to diversity
- identifies a set of underlying values and principles of a culturally competent system of care
- provides some practical ideas for improving service delivery to children of color who are severely emotionally disturbed at the policymaking, administrative, practitioner, and consumer level
- describes service adaptation as way of delivering effective services cross-culturally
- outlines strategies for implementation.

This monograph is an essential resource for practitioners, researchers, program designers, trainers and policy makers regarding a sensitive, seminal and scholarly foundation for building culturally competent systems of care.

DeJong, P. & Berg, I. K. (1998). *Interviewing for solutions*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing.

This classic text regarding strength-based solution-focused interviewing approaches is an essential read for practitioners wishing to become well-versed in the building blocks of “solution-building” work with clients and their families. This view includes a vision of clients as competent, helps them to visualize the changes they want, and builds on what they already know is working. The book offers:

- a step-by-step description of how to build solutions with clients collaboratively
- generous excerpts from actual interviews that illustrate solution-focused techniques
- interviewing protocols and other tools for use with clients
- a new way for practitioners to express their deep respect for clients’ dignity and diversity
- outcome data about the usefulness of the approach with a wide range of clients.

DeJong, P. & Miller, S. D. (1995). *How to interview for client strengths*. *Social Work*, 40(6), 729-736.

Interest is growing among practitioners and educators in finding ways to discover and mobilize client strengths in social work. This article describes, explains and illustrates several interviewing questions that a worker can use to uncover client strengths related to the goals of clients. The questions, drawn from a solution-focused approach to interviewing, include the “miracle” question, exception-finding questions, scaling questions, coping questions, and “what’s better?” questions. The fit between these questions and the key concepts of the emerging strengths perspective is examined.

Gillham, J. E. (2000). *The science of optimism and hope*. Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

ISBN: 1-890151-26-2

Optimism and hope are not random feelings; they can be conscious choices. Martin E. P. Seligman, Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, is one of the world’s leading authorities on learned helplessness and its relationship to optimism and hope. In recognition of his contributions to the field, the John Templeton Foundation hosted a symposium to honor his work and to document its tremendous influence on the world of psychological research.

This volume brings together eminent psychologists and professionals whose work has been greatly influenced by Seligman’s innovative approach. The contributors focus on several concepts related to optimism and hope including expectancies, explanatory style, goal setting, future mindedness, control and choice. They

address the areas of optimism and well being in individuals, neurobiology or optimism and hope, and optimism in families, faith and cultures.

Over the past ten years, Seligman has demonstrated that pessimists can be taught the skills of optimism. Adults and children who acquire these skills are less vulnerable to depression. Although his work in positive psychology is still in its early stages, it suggests that we may be able to improve our lives by changing the way we think. The research by such prominent professionals is testimony to the tremendous influence of Martin Seligman has had and will continue to have in shaping the field of positive psychology. Articles in this volume include psychological resilience, promoting optimism and hope, optimism and faith, optimism and culture and many others including robust overviews of research gaps and future directions of the field of positive psychology.

Guajardo Lucero, M. (2001). *The spirit of culture*. Denver, Colorado: Assets for Colorado Youth.

This important book celebrates cultural strengths among youth, families and communities. Showing readers how the 40 developmental asset model, youth and community development and cultural competence ideas converge to produce new ways of thinking about, designing programs and policies, and involving youth, families and communities in diverse community settings. Individual essays examining personal cultural identity are included, as well as worksheets and training materials to use in workshops on cultural competency. This book can be ordered by calling (303) 832-1587.

Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., Jr., & Associates. (1992). *Communities that care: Action for drug abuse prevention*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

ISBN: 1-55542-471-6.

The two lead authors of this book direct the Social Development Research Group, affiliated with the School of Social Work at the University of Washington, Seattle. The focus of both the book and the Group is youth and how to promote their healthy and positive development. *Communities That Care* integrates and builds upon decades of research done by leaders in a number of disciplines, resulting in a book that goes far beyond the simplistic and irresponsible “just say no” attitudes and analysis.

The book is one in a series of psycho-educational guidebooks for practitioners intervening at the level of schools, but the authors clearly state that this volume is intended for anyone who is invested in fostering the drug-free growth of children in their homes and communities and is willing to undertake proactive, campaigns to realize this goal. This means that few pages are spent introducing the reader to

drug use allowing for the energy of the book to be spent carefully guiding the reader through community mobilization strategies and effective program practices.

The text's premise is that drug use is related to a community's economy, cohesiveness, and social norm. Therefore addressing it is a community responsibility, with community-based programs needed to lessen the risk factors involved and increase the protective factors. Chapters 5 through 12 succinctly describe such programs for every stage of a youth and family's development, with categories ranging from media mobilization to parent empowerment to policy creation. This book is valuable for anyone wanting field-tested, goal-oriented, clear-headed knowledge as they work with youth, communities, and drugs that devastate them both.

Henderson, N., Benard, B. & Sharp-Light, N. (Eds.) (1999). *Resiliency in action: Practical ideas for overcoming risks and building strengths in youth, families and communities*. San Diego, CA: Resiliency in Action.

ISBN: 0-9660394-0-9

These editors describe resiliency as the ability rebound and adapt to adversity. An increasing body of research from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, sociology, social work, and education shows that the majority of children, youth and adults can bounce back and experience life success and that resiliency is an innate self-righting and transcending ability within people, organizations, and communities.

The book is filled with information and ideas to put resilience philosophy and science into full swing. Based on the first two years of the journal *Resiliency in Action* it includes research findings on how individuals bounce back with an emphasis on practical application, interviews and advice from leading researchers in the area. It presents how families, schools, and communities are using resiliency information to make positive changes, stories of youth who have been gang involved, drug involved, pregnant, or failing school who have bounced back, the connection between risk research, asset development and the resiliency framework This work also contains book reviews and other resources.

Hodge, D. R. (2001). *Spiritual assessment: A review of major qualitative methods and a new framework for assessing spirituality*. *Social Work*, 46 (3), 203-214.

This article introduces a new qualitative spiritual assessment instrument. It reviews existing qualitative assessment tools and presents a new multidimensional spiritual assessment framework. The instrument consists of two components: a spiritual history in which consumers relate their spiritual life story in a manner analogous to a family history and an interpretive framework to assist practitioners in eliciting and synthesizing the full potentiality of strengths in clients' spiritual lives. Common spiritual strengths discussed include relationship with a higher power, use of

positive rituals, participation in faith-based communities, and intuition among others. A variety of interventions are then suggested, all of that seek to acknowledge any spiritual strengths that a client notes as central components of his/her plan for change and resolution.

Kaplan, L. & Girard, J. L. (1994). *Strengthening high risk families: A handbook for practitioners*. New York: Lexington Books.

The family preservation movement is the fulcrum for this comprehensive overview of how strength-based approaches work with families. Focusing on key goals such as child safety, keeping families together as much as possible, proving home based services and others, these authors suggest that success is only possible when family strengths are effectively identified, mobilized and directed. The book describes the potential source of conflict between families and agencies designed to serve them. It provides an overview of a variety of treatment strategies proven successful with high-risk families including a) addressing concrete needs, b) developing relationships with families, c) putting parents in charge and d) building on strengths to create hope in families, and termination. Special family issues such as physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and homeless family circumstances are all discussed with specific practice guidelines. Other sections of this volume discuss cultural competency and sexual orientation among families, qualities of effective strength-based family service practitioner staff, and how systems reform and more strength-focused evaluation strategies must accompany shifts in practice to create lasting improvements in the service delivery system. The book includes a good bibliography with other family-oriented resources.

Katz, M. (1997). *On playing a poor hand well: Insights from the lives of those who have overcome childhood risks and adversities*. New York: WW Norton & Company.

ISBN: 0-393-70232-4

Robert Louis Stevenson said “Life is not so much a matter of holding good cards, but sometimes of playing a poor hand well.” Many adults who now enjoy happy and productive lives grew up under emotionally and environmentally difficult conditions. As children they were clearly at risk of developing serious problems in later life. Yet they never did. Why not? What was the secret of their strength, their resilience? How did they turn their lives around? Others who were exposed to similar adverse childhood conditions were less fortunate and continued to struggle with serious difficulties into their adult years. Yet many eventually successfully turned their lives around. How did they do it? What were the turning points in their lives?

On Playing a Poor Hand Well sets out to answer these questions. The book begins with insights into childhood risks and adversities – enduring inescapable stressful experiences such as growing up under violent, dangerous or abusive

conditions, or experiencing years of school failure as a result of serious learning disabilities or attention problems. The author then explores the latest research into life's trajectories and culls the lessons to provide avenues through which turning point experiences and second-chance opportunities can occur. This book focuses on how people overcome different adversities, not simply on the effects these stresses had on their lives. It will enable disadvantaged individuals and their families to validate their pain and to celebrate their resilience.

Kennedy Chapin, R. (1995). Strength-based social policy development. *Social Work, 40(4)*, 506-514.

Methods of social policy development, like methods of social work intervention at the direct interpersonal level, have typically been problem focused and pathology oriented. The strengths perspective posits that the strengths and resource of people and their environment rather than their problems and pathologies should be the central focus of the helping process in social work, can be used to reformulate problem-focused, pathology-centered approaches to social policy development. This article makes the argument that integration of the strengths perspective into the social policy-making process can provide policy practitioners with new tools for conceptualizing social needs or problems. It can provide a more inclusive approach to problem formulation, and an expanded array of empowering policy options. Methods for initiating this integration are also discussed.

Kretzman, J. P. & McKnight, J. L. (1997). *Building communities from the inside out: A path towards finding and mobilizing community assets*. City: ACTA Publications.

ISBN: 087946108X

As an antidote to books that guide readers to organize and analyze the risks, problems and deficits in their communities, this book celebrates the best of what every community in America has to offer: its strengths. The book guides readers to a new asset-based approach to community building. The book offers practical advice, helpful tools and powerful stories that present communities in new ways, as treasure troves of talent. Kretzman and McKnight's front-line experience of working with neighborhoods across America has created a vital tool for transforming city blocks into neighborhoods and isolated residents into change agents. As a resource for practical application, the book contains diagrams, ideas for activities and methods for investigating, inventorying and developing action plans directly from the generally untapped resources within every community.

Larson, R. W. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American Psychologist, 55 (1)*, 170-183.

This article analyzes the development of initiative as an exemplar of one of the many learning experiences that should be studied as part of positive youth development. The capacity for initiative is essential for adults in our society and

will become more important in the 21st century, yet adolescents have few opportunities to learn it. Their typical experiences during schoolwork and unstructured leisure do not reflect conditions for learning initiative. The context best suited to learning initiative is structured voluntary activities, such as sports, arts and participation in organizations, in which youths experience the rare combination of intrinsic motivation in combination with deep attention. An incomplete body of outcome research suggests that such activities are associated with positive development, but the developmental processes involved are only beginning to be understood. One is to acquire a new operating language that corresponds to the development of initiative.

Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic. *American Psychologist*, 56, (3), 227-238.

The study of resilience in development has overturned many negative assumptions about deficit-based models of children growing up under the threat of disadvantage and adversity. The most surprising conclusion emerging from studies of these children is the ordinariness of resilience. An examination of converging findings from variable-focused and person-focused investigations of these phenomena suggests that resilience is common and that it usually arises from the normative functions of human adaptational systems, with the greatest threats to human development being those that compromise these protective systems. The conclusion that resilience is made of ordinary rather than extraordinary processes offers a more positive outlook on human development and adaptation. It provides a direction for policy and practice aimed at enhancing the development of children at risk for problems and psychopathology.

Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research and practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

The author examines the role of religion in coping and behavior from a logical and scientific standpoint. Based on the author's belief that "both science and religion are built upon a desire to expand our understanding of the vast but largely unrecognized order of the universe," (p.13), this book attempts to integrate the opposing and clearly different perspectives and approaches to human beings' search for meaning. In investigating how religion functions in people's lives, the author recognizes that in times of stress or difficulty, religion can be comforting because it allows people to make sense of events, and it allows people feel as if they are part of something larger than themselves. Central to all religions is the idea that each individual's experience part of a larger universal framework. The author explores the definitions of religion. He provides extensive empirical literature in addressing whether religion is helpful or harmful to peoples' lives. Since religion plays an important role in many people's lives, an understanding of the function of religion may prove fruitful in the advancement of human welfare.

Rapp, C. (1998). *The strengths model: Case management with people suffering from severe and persistent mental illness*. New York: Oxford University Press.

ISBN: 0-19-511444-2

Traditional protocol among the helping professions, including social work, involves identifying and labeling particular pathologies and weaknesses of clients and then prescribing treatment to correct the functioning deficits. Nowhere has this tradition been stronger than in the mental health services for adults with severe and persistent mental illness. Too often, as a result of this pathology paradigm, the achievements and options of patients are seriously constricted, and quality of life for people suffering from mental illness is inadequate. Unemployment and loneliness dominate many patients' lives, and most find themselves segregated from society.

The Strengths Model is the first text to focus exclusively on the alternative – the strengths model of practice, which focuses on helping people, not as patients or clients, but as individuals. Empirical testing of this model and its results has consistently shown that it is superior to traditional approaches for serving people with mental illness. This book presents the theory, values and principles on which the model was founded, as well as explicit practice methods that have been developed and refined over the past 15 years. The text includes detailed discussions of practice techniques such as engagement, strengths assessment, personal planning, and resource acquisition. Adopting a user-friendly style, each chapter includes short case vignettes that demonstrate the use of these methods and first-person perspectives of clients.

Ryan, R. M. & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and well-being. *American Psychologist* 55 (4), 69-78.

Human beings can be proactive and engaged or, alternatively, passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function. Accordingly, research guided by self-determination theory has focused on the social-contextual conditions that facilitate versus forestall the natural processes of self-motivation and healthy psychological development. Specifically, factors have been examined that enhance versus undermine intrinsic motivation, self-regulation and well-being. The findings have led to the postulate of three innate psychological needs – competence, autonomy and relatedness. When satisfied these needs yield enhanced self-motivation and mental health and when thwarted lead to diminished motivation and well-being. The significance of these psychological needs and processes is also considered within domains such as health care, education, work, sport, religion, and psychotherapy.

Saleebey, D. (2001). The diagnostic strengths manual? *Social Work, 46(2)*, 183-187.

This brief but powerful article posits that an alternative worldview to the dominant DSM-IV oriented lens of the human service delivery system might be that of a strengths diagnostic system that, rather than focusing on human problems, shortcomings and difficulties, might be focused on positive qualities and attributes. The author suggests that while the DSM continues to gain acceptance and stature as a norm-setting cornerstone of the profession, our understanding of positive human experiences has not kept pace. A pathology focus continues to persist and dominate human services. He suggests:

The DSM-IV and long-standing diagnostic habits make it virtually impossible to consider or make an accounting of the assets, talent, capacities, knowledge, survival skill, personal virtues, or the environmental resources and cultural treasures such as healing rituals and celebrations of life transitions that a person might possess—despite or, in some cases, because of their difficulties and trauma. To ignore these things is to disregard the most important resources in helping a person recover, adapt to stressful situations, confront environmental challenges, improve the quality of life, or simply adjust to or meliorate the effects of a devastating, chronic condition (p. 184).

The article concludes with an interesting attempt at a diagnostic and statistical model-type overview of four “estimable personal qualities” with their attendant diagnostic markers and indicators. The qualities include trustworthiness, patience, initiative, and insight.

Saleebey, D. (1996) The strengths perspective in social work practice: Extensions and cautions. *Social Work, 41(3)*, 296-305.

This article provides a holistic introduction and analysis of the strengths perspective. It offers a justification for its contemporary growth and development, and describes current challenges to full implementation of the approach across human services delivery systems. The author describes current conceptual development of the model, and describes the degree to which it is being expanded from its original areas of focus with chronically mentally ill clients to new populations and service areas. Saleebey describes the need for theoretical convergence between theory, research and practice between developmental resilience, healing and wellness and other areas of contemporary human service work. He challenges providers to begin more seriously considering and utilizing the reality that personal strengths are frequently forged in client traumas, sickness, abuse and oppression, yet are seldom utilized by practitioners as sources of energy and direction in the helping relationships. He goes on to suggest that such qualities as a sense of humor, loyalty, insight and other virtues should be viewed as primary sources of fuel and momentum as clients work to improve their lives. Saleebey describes that these very qualities exist within a wide variety of cultural

variations and that a strength-based approach is inherently a more culturally competent and relevant approach.

Most valuable about this article is the analysis that Saleebey provides regarding frequent criticisms of the strengths approach and how these should be comprehensively addressed. He describes the approach as positive thinking in disguise, reframing misery, pollyannaism, ignoring reality and the yes, but phenomenon in which providers agree with the strengths philosophy, but offer up a myriad of excuses why using it is impractical or impossible. Seasoned strength-based practitioners will recognize many of these criticisms but will find Saleebey's responses focused and effective in clarifying these common misconceptions.

Saleebey, D. (2000). Power in the people: Strengths and hope. *Advances in Social Work, 1 (2)*, 127-136.

The strengths perspective and resiliency literature suggest that social workers may learn from those people who survive and in some cases flourish in the face of oppression, illness, demoralization, and abuse. Social workers need to know what steps these natural survivors have taken, what processes they have adopted and what resources they have used.

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

ISBN: 1-57482-338-8

These authors review more than 800 scientific articles and reports that relate to Search Institute's conceptual framework of developmental assets – positive relationships, opportunities, skills, values, and self-perceptions that all young people need to be healthy, caring, and productive. A chapter is dedicated to each category of developmental assets (support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity). Each chapter shows

- How the scientific literature defines the category of assets
- Research findings on the impact of the assets on young people's behaviors, including variations in findings among different populations of youth
- In-depth information on how each asset works
- Data on young people's experiences of the assets from Search Institute surveys of almost 100,000 6th- to 12th-grade youth
- Areas in the scientific literature that may not be adequately reflected in the current framework of developmental assets
- What the literature says about how assets can be built in young people's lives.

This book provides information for scholars and leaders who seek to understand the rich traditions of scientific research that undergird the asset model. By

highlighting what research has learned about how the assets are built and with different populations of youth, it also serves as an invaluable reference for people who seek to build assets for youth in their organizations and communities.

Seligman, M. E. P. (1991). *Learned optimism*. New York: A. A. Knopf.

ISBN: 0-671-01911-2

In this influential book, Seligman draws on his long-term program of human and animal research on learned helplessness and depression to examine a flip side of this question – how does optimism work, and can it be learned? He examines why optimists fare better in politics, sports, sales, and other life areas. He further examines several specific ways in which pessimists can learn optimistic ways of thinking, such as learning to view setbacks as temporary, not taking everything personally, recognizing that beliefs are not facts and can thus be challenged and changed, and focusing on problem-solving actions. Interventions derived from this work have been used to successfully prevent depression in children and adults.

Seligman, M. E. P. (1995). *The optimistic child: A proven program to safeguard children against depression and build lifelong resilience*. New York: Harper Perennial.

ISBN: 0-06-097709-04

Based on groundbreaking long-term study at the University of Pennsylvania, this book reports on findings that depression in children can be prevented. It offers parents, teachers and other caregivers concrete tools to understand the causes of childhood pessimism. It explains how to identify danger signs in children, and outlines how to foster true self-esteem by teaching children to play, think, argue and express their feelings more effectively. Most important, the book shows that learning skills of optimism not only reduces the risk of depression in children but also boosts school performance, improves physical health, and provides them with the self-reliance they need as they approach the teenage years and adulthood.

Seligman, M. E. P. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology. *American Psychologist*, (55)1, 5-14.

A science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions promises to improve the quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless. The exclusive focus on pathology that has dominated so much of our discipline results in a model of humans lacking the positive features that makes life worth living. Hope, wisdom, creativity, future-mindedness, courage, spirituality, responsibility, and perseverance are ignored or explained as transformations of more authentic negative impulses. The authors outline a framework for a science of positive psychology, point to gaps in our knowledge and predict that the next century will see a science and a profession

that will come to understand and build on the factors that allow individuals, communities and societies to flourish.

Snyder, C. R. (1994). *The psychology of hope: You can get there from here*. New York: Free Press.

Snyder's "wills and ways" theory of hope defines hope as a two-dimensional construct. One dimension is agency (the will), the sense of successful determination in meeting goals in the past, present and future. The second dimension is pathways (the ways), the sense of being able to generate successful plans to meet goals. Snyder and his colleagues postulate that these two aspects of hope are reciprocally derived, additive, and positively related, but they are not identical. For example, one could conceivably generate multiple avenues of goal attainment, yet not believe that he/she has the ability to accomplish the goal. Conversely, one could believe that one is capable of goal attainment, yet not be able to conjure up the necessary means of achieving the goal. Snyder and his colleagues have shown that hope is related to superior outcomes life.

Taylor, S. E., Kemeny, M. E. & Reed, G. M. (2000). Psychological resources, positive illusions, and health. *American Psychologist*, (55)1, 99-109.

Psychological beliefs such as optimism, personal control, and a sense of meaning are known to be protective of mental health. Are they protective of physical health as well? The authors present research that has tested the implications of cognitive adaptation theory and the relation of positive beliefs to disease progression among men infected with HIV. The investigations have revealed that even unrealistically optimistic beliefs about the future may be health protective. The ability to find meaning in the experience is also associated with a less rapid course of illness. The research suggests that psychological beliefs such as meaning, control, and optimism act as resources, that may not only preserve mental health in the context of traumatic or life-threatening events but be protective of physical health as well.

Trickett, E. J. & Birman, D. (2000). Interventions with diverse children and adolescents: Contextualizing a wellness orientation. In Cicchetti, D., Rappaport, J., Sandler, I. & Weissberg, R. P. (Eds.) *The promotion of wellness in children and adolescents*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

This book chapter tackles a particularly interesting and challenging topic: how should a service delivery system aimed at promoting wellness do so fairly, responsively, and competently across a wide variety of cultural groups? These authors suggest that the concept of wellness, is quite culturally anchored in countless variations once basic human needs are established. They suggest that attending to the local cultural context of any wellness aimed intervention is essential for its successful implementation. They conclude that "the study of culture in childhood and adolescence is central rather than peripheral, the importance of

environmental assessment as a prelude to the development of interventions in contrasting sociocultural communities, and the value of a long-range developmental time perspective on the individual and community-level effects of interventions.” (p.386).

Ulrich Tobias, C. & Funk, C. (1997). *Bringing out the best in your child: 80 ways to focus on every kid's strengths*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications.

Sometimes the traits and behaviors that seem most frustrating and annoying in our children are indicators of positive strengths and future success. Stubbornness can be steadfastness. A strong will may exhibit leadership. Arguing may indicate negotiating skills. When we identify our child's behavior, and see beyond it to the positive strength it contains, we will then be able to help him/her succeed by working with the child's learning style.

These authors suggest

- Parents who know and understand their children can design strategies that truly motivate their kids to succeed.
- Understanding how children learn will help dealing with the frustrations of parenthood.
- Each child is uniquely created, gifted and special.
- Children cannot use their learning style as an excuse to do wrong. They must be held accountable for their actions.
- Even children who have severe neurological, medical or psychological problems still have learning strengths to be valued.

Web Resources

America's Promise

www.americaspromise.org

America's Promise was founded after the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, April 27-29, 1997 in Philadelphia. Presidents Clinton, Bush, Carter and Ford, with First Lady Nancy Reagan, challenged the nation to make youth a national priority. Their call to action included a commitment on the part of the nation to fulfill the Five Promises. Also attending were nearly 30 governors, 100 mayors, 145 community delegations, dozens of prominent business leaders and several thousand concerned citizens. The Summit was co-sponsored by the Points of Light Foundation and the Corporation for National Service.

Mission

To mobilize people from every sector of American life to build the character and competence of our nation's youth by fulfilling [Five Promises](#) for young people:

1. Ongoing relationships with caring adults in their lives - parents, mentors, tutors, or coaches;
2. Safe places with structured activities during nonschool hours;

3. Healthy start and future;
4. Marketable skills through effective education; and
5. Opportunities to give back through community service.

National Organizations

America's Promise has created a diverse and growing alliance of nearly 500 national organizations called Partners, which make large-scale national commitments to fulfill one or more of the Five Promises. These organizations agree to expand existing youth programs or create new ones and hold themselves accountable by measuring their progress. Spanning all sectors of society, these groups include corporations, not-for-profits, higher education and faith-based groups, associations and federal agencies, and arts and culture organizations. Most Partners expand the scale and impact of their efforts by collaborating with other groups, such as direct youth service providers.

Communities of Promise

More than 550 community and state partners across the nation have united to fulfill the Five Promises. These communities have formed grassroots coalitions among the public, private and not-for-profit sectors to generate more resources for young people who need them. Those who build community-wide alliances to fulfill all Five Promises for youth are known as Communities of Promise.

Organization

America's Promise is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization funded by public and private grants and contributions. The Alliance provides information and publishes progress reports by its partners.

Information regarding Strength-Based Assessment in Child Welfare and Mental Health Settings

<http://www.air.org/cecp/interact/expertonline/strength/sba.htm>

Strength-based assessment is a new way of thinking about special education and mental health. Rather than focus on "what's wrong," a strengths-based approach identifies the positive resources and abilities that children and families have. Dr. Michael Epstein at the University of Nebraska has pioneered work in strength-based assessment, including developing a norm-referenced instrument, the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS): A Strength-Based Approach to Assessment that can be used in planning and evaluation.

Kids at Hope

www.kidsathope.org

KIDS AT HOPE® goes beyond prevention to promotion. It is a "winning" strategy. Prevention programs, by definition, are designed to stop something from happening (in a "tie" you neither win nor lose). When working with children--even those children who live in our most threatened and vulnerable environments--our approach must

be to make something positive happen in their lives (to "win") rather than just stop inappropriate behavior.

Search Institute

www.search-institute.org

Search Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization with a mission to advance the well-being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application. To accomplish this mission, the institute generates, synthesizes, and communicates new knowledge, convenes organizational and community leaders, and works with state and national organizations. At the heart of the institute's work is the framework of [40 developmental assets](#), that are positive experiences, relationships, opportunities, and personal qualities that young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. Created in 1990, the framework is grounded in research on child and adolescent development, risk prevention, and resiliency. Surveys of more than one million 6th to 12th-grade youth in communities across the United States consistently show that young people who experience more of these assets are more likely to make healthy choices and avoid a wide range of high-risk behaviors. The relative absence of these assets in the lives of young people in every community studied has prompted hundreds of communities to mobilize on behalf of young people.