



Alberta
Mentoring
Partnership

Strength-Based Community Mentoring

WORKBOOK





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What is involved in a strength-based organizational review?

Living a strength-based approach, as described on page 4 and 5 of the **Strength-Based Community Mentoring Guidebook**, involves thorough self-reflection and assessment. A strength-based organizational review means examining programming, decision-making, planning, supervision, communication, marketing, evaluation/tools, administration and training/orientation. The following self-reflection questions are a good starting point to gauge where your organization is at:

Reflection Questions

Administration:

- When people contact us for the first time, do they experience being acknowledged and valued for their strengths?
- Does our policy manual reflect a strength-based philosophy and practice?

Decision Making:

- Do we include staff prior to decisions being made in areas that affect them? Do we provide other stakeholders with an opportunity to weigh in on decisions that will impact them?

Communication Processes:

- When we send out an e-mail or memo to all staff, do we acknowledge strengths, contributions, milestones and successes? What about our other internal and external communication processes?
- Do we have a system to gather, acknowledge and implement feedback whenever possible and appropriate?

Evaluation/tools:

- Do our evaluation protocols and assessment tools acknowledge and give precedence to strengths, capacities and potential while avoiding unnecessary labeling?

Marketing:

- Does our pamphlets, brochures and other marketing and branding materials present our clients in a positive, respectful light?

Programming:

- When looking at engaging clients into our programs, are we taking the opportunity to hear their story and inquire about their successes or are we focusing on needs and/or problems?
- What do we spend most of our time talking about and working on with our clients... strengths, interests, gifts, potential or deficits, challenges, needs etc?

Supervision:

- When supervising staff and evaluating work, do we focus on the deficit areas and where there are skills lacking or do we emphasis identifying the strengths of our staff and use that to elevate their success in the work that they do?

*See appendices A for examples of strength based and deficit based supervision structures.

Training/orientation:

- Does our training and orientation of all staff, volunteers and clients emphasize strengths, capacity and potential over challenges and do we give people additional tools to enhance their capacity?



Examples of Strength-based Organizational Practice

A true test of an organization's strength-based practice is in dealing with conflict or challenging/unethical behaviour. Apart from extreme cases (i.e. where one or more people are in imminent danger that requires an immediate, directive approach), being strength-based means addressing conflict and performance concerns using a respectful, inquisitive, forthright, clear and open-minded, solution focused approach.

The following are two scenarios to work through in order to practice your strength-based knowledge and skills (review and record your answers to the questions at the end):

Scenario 1: Organization Notes:

Staff can feel frustrated in situations when it appears a child's best interests are not being honoured. This frustration can sometimes shift staff away from thinking from a strength-based perspective. As a result, situations occur where staff respond to mentors in a way that does not foster a strength based perspective and does not allow for them to learn about how to find a balance in a mentoring relationship. A staff person who knows how to bring out the good in difficult situations with both children and with mentors will have more success in their mentoring matches.

The following is an e-mail that one staff sent to a supervisor about a mentor they were working with and the letter they drafted to address the concerns with the mentor.

Hey Supervisor

I am having some difficulty with a mentor here. She is 19 yrs old and has been matched with "Brenda" since October. The first 3 months of monitoring have been like pulling teeth. Each month I had attempted contact up to 14 times before I got a response. I did talk with Ashley (Mentor) about the importance of keeping up with the monitoring, and each time she assured me that she would be better in the future. She has now let the Mentee down (on numerous occasions) and I recommended to the parent last month that maybe Ashley is not ready for a Mentee in her life. The parent said that she would like to give Ashley one last try, as Brenda is quite taken with her. Ashley then let the little and family down once again. So I am sending a letter of disapproval. I am wondering if it is too harsh and if and what we do in a situation like this? Please provide feedback. Thanks so much. Letter is below...



Dear Ashley:

This letter is in regards to the status of yours and Brenda's match with our agency. We have talked on numerous occasions about the importance of consistency in a match, and unfortunately Brenda, the mother and I have found that you are not being consistent in your relationship with Brenda.

Because our agency is a child centred agency, it is disappointing to hear this from parents and see the frustration and sadness from a little when the mentor is not fulfilling their role as a positive role model.

It is definitely disheartening to hear that a mentor makes plans to meet a little and frequently does not follow through with those plans. The situation is compounded when the staff, little and the parent phone, and e-mail the mentor to try and get a hold of them to find out what is indeed going on, and those phone calls and e-mails are not returned.

Ashley, I am at a loss of what to do in this situation. You have become an unreliable, unsupportive and negative influence in Brenda's life. She was so excited to have you in her life and now due to either your lack of maturity or your complete indifference to other people's feelings, she is deeply hurt.

As a parent myself, I know that what you have done is appalling! Children are affected by the smallest change, and now due to your callousness Brenda's feelings have been hurt.

I have tried to reach you several times to discuss this matter. Mom and Brenda have also tried numerous times as well. Unfortunately, we have not been successful in reaching you.

Due to the magnitude of the situation, it is imperative that you get a hold of me so that we can discuss details of your match with Brenda.

Please call me at 780-123-4567 as soon as you receive this letter so that we can complete the required follow-up, or email me.

Sincerely,

Staff

QUESTIONS

Using the Strength Based Community Mentoring Guidebook as a reference, please answer the following questions:

1. How could you re-write this letter or deliver this message with a strength based focus?
2. What would you encourage a staff person to do?
3. What would be one of the first things you would support the staff person to say to this Mentor?
4. What are the key strength based messages to convey to the Mentor?

Examples of Strength-based Organizational Practice (Continued)

Scenario 2:

You are a supervisor of a frontline staff working in a mentoring organization. You are meeting with them as part of regular supervision, but this time you have a number of concerns related to their performance that have been brought to your attention this past month. The concerns are the following;

- **Case files are incomplete according to standards and a recent audit**
- **There has been a complaint from a mother whose child is a part of their caseload**
- **They are late in handing in their monthly statistical report**



This staff is well liked by the children who they work with and overall their performance has appeared to be good and no major concerns outside of this have been brought forward to date.

On a separate piece of paper, think about and write down your responses to the following questions:

- 1. How you would approach this situation with this staff person.*
- 2. How would you start the meeting? What questions would you ask?*
- 3. What further action would you take?*
- 4. What would you leave the staff person with?*

The following outlines how a strength based approach was used in working through this situation. Compare how your own answers relate to the ones below.

Step 1

Set the stage and make the conversation relaxed. For example, “Hey, how was your camping trip this past weekend?”

Step 2

Find out from them how they see things. Ask questions like:

- What is working for you?
- What is going well on your caseload?
- Tell me about a positive result you have had with a client?
- Are there any areas that you are currently struggling in or need extra support?

As the staff shares these, acknowledge their successes and willingness to be open about areas of struggle while offering to provide support.

This is the place where they may open the door to share more about what is going on for them and again talk about their “story.”

If the staff does not share anything about the concerns above, use the following questions to assist them in elaborating:

- *“There are a few other things that we need to discuss and decide how to address together. As you know there was an audit done on your caseload. There are some positives to share as well as some areas for growth.” During this review it is important to note successes, positives and the challenges. Allow for the staff to also find both successes and challenges in what you are looking at.*
- *‘Also, I recently had a conversation with a mother on your caseload and want to share with you her perspective of the work you have been doing with her and her child. I want to give you the opportunity to share your perspective with me as well so that we can figure out how to best support the mom and child’.*
- *‘Lastly, I know there are a number of monthly deadlines and you have provided all the requirements so far except the monthly statistical report. Could you tell me where you are at with this? What type of supports do you need to complete this and are there any ongoing barriers we can work through?’*

Step 3

Summary and Follow-up

- Finish your meeting by letting them know what you appreciated hearing.
- Highlight any commitments they made to any outstanding work
- Highlight any commitments you made in supporting them to be successful
- Reinforce that they are valued and that you appreciate having them on the team
- Set a date to meet again to review the work and success.

Excercise: A Strength-based Organizational Review

A thorough review of your organization’s current strength-based practice requires a framework to understand the scope of this process. The Strength-based Organization Self-Evaluation Framework was devised for just this purpose. The following worksheet gives an example of how to assess each of the processes, tools and training considerations identified:

Internal Process:	Tool: Job Posting	Implementation: Contact Process	Implementation: Interview Process	Process Outcome
Hiring	<p>Mentoring Coordinator:</p> <p>This position is designed to assist unemployed and at-risk youth to gain insights into occupational choices and explore positive community reinforcements by connecting them with mentors who will provide practical advice, guidance and coaching; leading to improved workplace readiness and community inclusion.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Only contact candidates chosen for an interview 2. Do not inform candidates who are not chosen for interview (ad states “only those chosen for an interview will be contacted”) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain program and position 2. Explain hiring process and timeline 3. Ask questions related to experience and skills. 4. Thank interviewee 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offer successful candidate the position and summarize why they were chosen 2. Inform un-successful interviewees by phone and invite them to apply again.
Notes:	<p>Capacity building is a major focus.</p> <p>The job posting identifies our clients as “at risk” as opposed to “at potential”.</p> <p>Mentor role does not emphasize engagement and relationship building critical to successful mentoring.</p>	<p>This practice does not engage or make a positive first impression on those who apply and are not chosen for an interview. We may be turning off good candidates for other or future positions..</p>	<p>We provide good informational context and allow the candidate to settle in.</p> <p>We don’t allow candidates to ask us questions which can tell us much about their interests, skills, strengths and motivation.</p>	<p>We do a good job identifying the strengths we see in successful candidates but once again may be turning off candidates for other or future positions by not giving them feedback about ways they could enhance their knowledge and skill sets.</p>

As recommended on page 9 of the Strength-Based Community Mentoring Guidebook, creating committees of organizational representatives chosen based on their experience and expertise in the focus area (hiring, policies, training etc.) is a good practice. Small groups of people with a good understanding of the focus area can accomplish a great deal in a short period of time. Be careful though not to exclude someone who wants to learn and specialize.

See Appendix B for a blank template to use in your own Organization Review...

Strength-Based Organizational Review Process: A Case Summary

The following captures some of the key aspects of one organization's strength-based review process:

1. As part of the initial three day process, the “agency” selected staff to participate in committees related to their areas of strength, expertise and interest. For instance, intake workers and their supervisors participated in a committee responsible for reviewing policies, practices and training related to information packages, mentee interview/meeting processes, meeting agendas, scripts etc.
2. The agency hired a strength-based consulting and evaluation company to support initial steps in the strength-based review and enhancement process. Three days of intensive work started with a presentation to all agency staff on strength-based philosophy and best practice.
3. Following the presentation, each committee met to review key processes (i.e. interviews, meeting processes, marketing strategies), tools (i.e. meeting agendas, evaluation instruments) and training related to their focus area. Priority items were identified on the basis of what would have the biggest and most immediate impact. Also, committee roles were clarified and established (Chairperson, Secretary etc.).
4. At the end of each meeting, the committee developed a plan for next steps, timeline for completion and which committee member(s) were responsible for each task.
5. Agency leaders/Committee Chairpersons set aside time during subsequent management meetings to discuss progress made by the committees and to clarify what key messages and strategies were to be embedded throughout. For example, the agency realized the importance of making a strength-based first impression. This led to revisions to their marketing material, how office and intake staff shared information during phone conversations etc., as well as changes to the ordering and focus of intake questions/ protocols etc.
6. As processes, tools and training were revised, agency leaders and committee members set up feedback processes to assess what impact the changes were having. For example, after the intake protocol was revised, office staff called new clients to get a sense of their experience. Further revisions were made based on the feedback of clients and agency staff.
7. In addition to revisions made to existing staff and volunteer training, additional training modules were developed around the use of the revised tools and processes.
8. As part of the agency's ongoing commitment to strength-based practice, feedback from clients, staff, volunteers and other community members was gathered and used to assess the organizations progress and set direction for further growth.

Appendix A - Case Consultation and Supervision Notes
(deficit weighted)

Staff member : _____

Date of meeting : _____

Case review: _____

Concerns: _____

Action Taken: _____

Action Required: _____

Major tasks achieved since last meeting: _____

Outstanding tasks: (Note due date) _____

Upcoming major tasks until next meeting: _____

Meetings attended: _____

Training needs and professional development: _____

Team environment: _____

Other issues raised and follow up required: _____

Appendix A - Case Consultation and Supervision Notes (strength weighted)

Staff member : _____

Date of meeting : _____

Check-In (i.e. How are you?):

Case review: _____

Client Successes: _____

Strengths Utilized: _____

Remaining Goals Meaningful to Clients: _____

Strengths that can be utilized to overcome barriers and achieve goal: _____

Additional resources required, available and amenable to client: _____

Staff goals and tasks achieved since last meeting: _____

New and ongoing staff goals and tasks for review next supervision: _____

Existing strengths to be engaged and additional support/resources required: _____

Next/ongoing professional development goals: _____

How can I support you?: _____

Appendix B - Worksheet

Appendix C - Strength-Based versus Deficit-Based Mentoring Language

Strength-Based	Deficit-Based
"I appreciate your interest in finding your child a mentor. How do you feel your child will benefit from having a mentor?"	"Tell me why your child needs a mentor?"
"What do you see as your and your child's strengths and growth areas?"	"What problems and issues is your child having?"
"What is working well in your relationship with your child?"	"What problems do you have in your relationship with your child?"
"What qualities are you and your child looking for in a mentor?"	Don't ask for child or parents preferences
"Mentors are caring, supportive and friendly people who will spend time with you doing things you enjoy and learn from."	"Mentors will teach you how to overcome your problems and stop getting into trouble."
Mentees are young people with strengths, interests and great potential who are matched with a mentor who shares or compliments their strengths and interests.	Mentees are at risk, delinquent, disordered, deviant, resistant and non-compliant youth who need help.
"I appreciate that you called to cancel our meeting. Is there any way you could give me more notice next time?"	"There will be consequences for cancelling."
"It seems you are really upset right now. Let's spend some time together so I can understand what's going on for you."	"You've got a 20 minute time out and if you're not calm by that time, you'll get another one."
"I'm sorry. You don't like it when I tease you. I'll stop doing that."	"You need to learn to deal with people teasing you."
"I know you are frustrated right now but I really believe you can do this. How can I support you?"	"Here, give it to me."
"You really have your own creative way of doing things."	"You are so weird!"
"Here are your resiliency survey results. What scores stand out for you?"	"Look at all of these low scores!"
"An A in art! Great work. What is it that you do in art that you could also apply to math?"	"Look at this D in math. An A in art isn't going to help you get a decent job."
"What is meaningful to you?"	"You need to (_____)."
"Starting from scratch means you have so much more potential and room to grow!"	"You have a long way to go."
"I chose to believe they didn't intend to be mean."	"People are lazy and only look out for themselves."
"Who else can we connect with."	"We can handle this ourselves."

Appendix D - Glossary of Strength Based Terminology

Glossary of Strength Based Terminology

At-Potential: The human potential for growth, development and/or change. Meant to counter the still popular focus on deficits and risk, this term re-orient focus on the great potential of children and youth, including those viewed as “at-risk”.

Collaborative: A philosophy and practice of working together toward a common goal.

Community: A group of people who share a common territory and/or characteristics (i.e. age, culture, religion, sexual orientation, language, interests).

Capacity-building: An approach focused on the enhancement of individual and/or community capacity.

Core competencies: Essential skills, abilities and knowledge that are central to health, well-being and success in life.

Developmental Strengths: The 31 research validated child and youth developmental sub-factors related to resilience and core competencies.

Empathy: The ability to accurately understand the experience and perspectives of others.

Empower: To give power and/or authority to another through insight and opportunity.

Engagement: The degree to which one bonds and builds rapport with another. Research supports this as the most important factor in developing relationships that influence positive growth and change. It also counters the traditional expert driven model of intervention.

Inclusiveness: A philosophy and practice of being non-discriminatory. To include all.

Influence: The degree to which one affects the thoughts and actions of another. A positive outcome of meaningful engagement and relationship.

Participatory-approach: A philosophy and practice of inclusiveness and collaboration with individuals, families, groups other “community” stakeholders.

Persistent: Diligence and determination toward the object or activity of focus. Countering the

traditional deficit based perspective as seeing others as resistant, this is seen as a strength that can be engaged in constructive ways through meaningful relationship and activities.

Person-centred: An evidence informed approach first developed by humanistic psychologists to engage people in positive development through authentic relationships and client-directed activities.

Positive Youth Development: An approach that strives to provide opportunities for all young people, regardless of resilience or risk, to improve skills, knowledge and experience as well as develop character and caring relationships that results in successful transition into adulthood.

Process-focused: An approach that honours human growth and development as a process that may not appear to be linear in nature.

Protective Factors: The positive relationships, resources, activities and internal characteristics that enhance well-being and insulate individuals and/or communities from harm.

Relationship-based: A research validated approach that holds the quality of relationship and engagement as central to positive growth, development and/or change.

Resilience: Traditionally viewed as the ability to overcome adversity, research links the development of resilience with internal characteristics and the presence of important relationships, resources and activities.

Resiliency Factors: The 10 research validated child and youth factors related to resilience and core competencies.

Strengths: Inner characteristics, virtues and external relationships, activities and connections to resources that contribute to resilience and core competencies.

Strength-based approach: Focus on individual and/or community strengths that place emphasis on meaningful relationships and activities.

Sustainability: The ability to maintain the positive benefits, growth, development and capacity of an initiative when the temporary components of the project have expired/been removed.

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