

## More about strengths based practice

People's strengths and capacities can be used to meet life challenges, solve problems and even transform their lives and circumstances. Identifying and appreciating our strengths and capacities exposes stories that counter negative and unhelpful beliefs. These 'strengths stories' change the way we see problems, create positive expectations and give ideas about how to bring the changes we want.

The strengths approach treats people as experts on their own situation, focusing on their strengths and potential as a means of enabling growth, learning, empowerment and change. Focusing on deficits - what people are believed to lack – does not provide the insights, learning and hopefulness that a focus on strengths and capacities does. When people act as experts on other people's problems and try to fix them, those who are facing the problem can be denied the opportunity to participate, take control and learn. An inadvertent process of disempowerment takes place!

Strengths include people's skills and the resources in their environment. They also include people's hopes, dreams and aspirations. Exposing and articulating our aspirations and the meaning they hold for us helps increase motivation, provides inspiration and gives a meaningful context for the articulation of goals.

The strengths approach does not simply involve an emphasis on strengths and aspirations however. It takes place within the context of *just practice* which integrates principles of inclusion, collaboration, transparency, respect, the sharing of power and resources and regard for human rights. Just practice also respects the right to self-determination where people own and drive the processes of change they engage in. These principles are essential to the strengths approach because they reflect belief in human dignity and potential.

### THE STRENGTHS APPROACH:

- Avoids the reinforcement of hopelessness that results from stigmatisation, stereotyping, labelling and classification
- Counters oppressive and debilitating ideas and practices that keep people stuck or lead them to spiral down into worse circumstances
- Leads to increased motivation and feelings of respect and worth by honouring people's rights, knowledge, skills and aspirations
- Reduces power imbalances between human service workers and those they provide services to by enabling a high degree of transparency and ownership of change processes
- Finds foundations for change that already exist in people's lives and environments
- Generates hope by eliciting positive stories of strengths
- Builds confidence and autonomy by focusing on people's expertness regarding their strengths, aspirations and knowledge about what does and doesn't work in their lives and circumstances

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