

Themes and principles of strengths-based working

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The four themes of strengths-based working

There are four themes of strengths-based working; strengths, relationships, consistency and community.



These four themes cover the key ideas that form part of strengths-based and/or asset-based ways of working and are outlined in brief detail below.

STRENGTHS : we focus on strengths, potential and goals

Strengths-based working involves working alongside people as they identify their own strengths, interests and goals. The focus of an organisation shifts towards recognising the strengths of people who are accessing the service and maximising their potential. Over time, people are encouraged to identify their own strengths and interests and to outline the goals they would like to work towards. In this way, people are placed at the heart of their own journey.

Encouraging people to set their own goals enables them to be the director of their own support. People's goals will vary widely with some focused on support and others on interests and activities. By following their own goals people begin to feel more in control and can start to build self-esteem and a positive lifestyle.

To work in a strengths-based way organisations and the people who work and volunteer there, need to have positive regard for the people who access the service. A starting point is having a true belief in everyone accessing the service including those who may seem furthest away from a positive future. It also involves being ambitious for people and believing in their true potential to lead positive and fulfilled lives.

“Strengths-based practice is the concept that every individual we work with at any point with comes with certain strengths. SBP is not only about recognizing and appreciating those strengths but also about trying to work with an individual to develop their wider strengths and to harness those in their lives” Colin Falconer, Inspire Chili

RELATIONSHIPS: building good relationships is our key priority

The most important element of strengths-based working is developing an equal relationship between the worker and person accessing the service based on trust and listening. This relationship is the key priority. Typically, strengths-based relationships are given time to develop and are based on asking open questions rather than undertaking formal assessments on set timescales.

Developing an equal relationship requires consideration of the power dynamic and how to create balance. All relationships contain a balance of power and usually a person employed in a professional capacity has more perceived power than the person accessing the service. The power dynamic can be balanced by meeting in locations and at times that are chosen by the person accessing services. Allowing the person to decide the direction of the conversation and to reveal personal information if and when they choose, also helps to create a more equal relationship.

Strengths-based relationships value the capability of both parties. They are founded on the idea of 'doing with' rather than 'doing for' or 'doing to' people. Where possible people should be encouraged to do things for themselves (with support if necessary) to build self-esteem and encourage independence. This is another way in which the power dynamic becomes more balanced.

Strengths-based working also emphasises the importance of positive social connections for people and supports the development of new connections where necessary. Having good friends, family or other known contacts provides a vital source of support, development and positivity. Valuing these connections is an important part of working in a strengths-based way.

“Strengths-based practice is a collaborative process between the person and those supporting them, allowing them to work together to determine an outcome that draws on the person's strengths and assets. As such, it concerns itself principally with the quality of the relationship that develops between those providing and being supported, as well as the elements that the person seeking support brings to the process.” Iriss, Strengths-based approaches for working with individuals

<https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/strengths-based-approaches-working-individuals>

CONSISTENCY: everything about our organisation reflects our commitment to a strengths-based approach

In order to apply a strengths-based approach, the whole organisation should work consistently. This means that all staff should be working in a strengths-based way and that structures, policies, procedures and governance need to reflect this way of working. This will be a significant and ongoing piece of work and should not prevent organisations from taking the first steps towards applying a strengths-based approach. Organisations may test the water by starting with small steps but will need to have the ambition of transforming the organisation as a whole.

On further examination, it quickly becomes clear why the organisation will need to shift its approach. Workers need to be given the flexibility to meet in a range of locations and to allow relationships to develop at different paces. This may mean adjusting any procedures that require assessments to be done at set times. In order to facilitate person-led activities and experiences, referral routes may need to be altered. If organisations work towards self-identified goals, overall outcomes may be impacted.

Organisational change is a big piece of work that requires reflection from every level of the organisation. A key part of working in a strengths-based way is being reflective including the individual work each person undertakes and the work of the team and organisation. One part of this is reflective practice which is key to embedding a new approach and to continually deepening the understanding of the team. However, reflective practice does not replace the need for broader reflection that needs to take place about the work and organisation as a whole.

Another key aspect of this is reflection on the language used by the organisation. Many organisations within the homelessness sector have tended to use negative and deficit-based language and some of the jargon that we all use regularly can serve to perpetuate negative images and self-images of people accessing services. Strengths-based working requires organisations to reflect and, if necessary, change the language used both verbally and across written media. There is no blueprint for this but in general organisations would seek to avoid anything that takes away individuality or that describes people by the challenges they may have faced.

Organisations working in a strengths-based way should also apply the principles of co-production. Involving people accessing the service in the design and delivery of the service transforms organisations as well as building self-esteem for those involved. Co-

production should involve including people in decision-making as well as the day-to-day running of a service. You can [read more about co-production](#) here or on the [Expert Link website](#).

COMMUNITY: we play an active role in the wider community

Strengths-based approaches value the participation of both the organisation and people accessing services in the wider community. Typically, strengths-based services look for opportunities for people within the local community rather than solely within support services. For example, if someone is interested in attending an art class could they attend one in the local community rather than within a day centre for people experiencing homelessness? If the day centre is the best fit for that person, then could that class be outwards facing and have a final exhibition in the community? Becoming involved in the wider community helps build esteem, create a sense of belonging and develop new positive social connections.

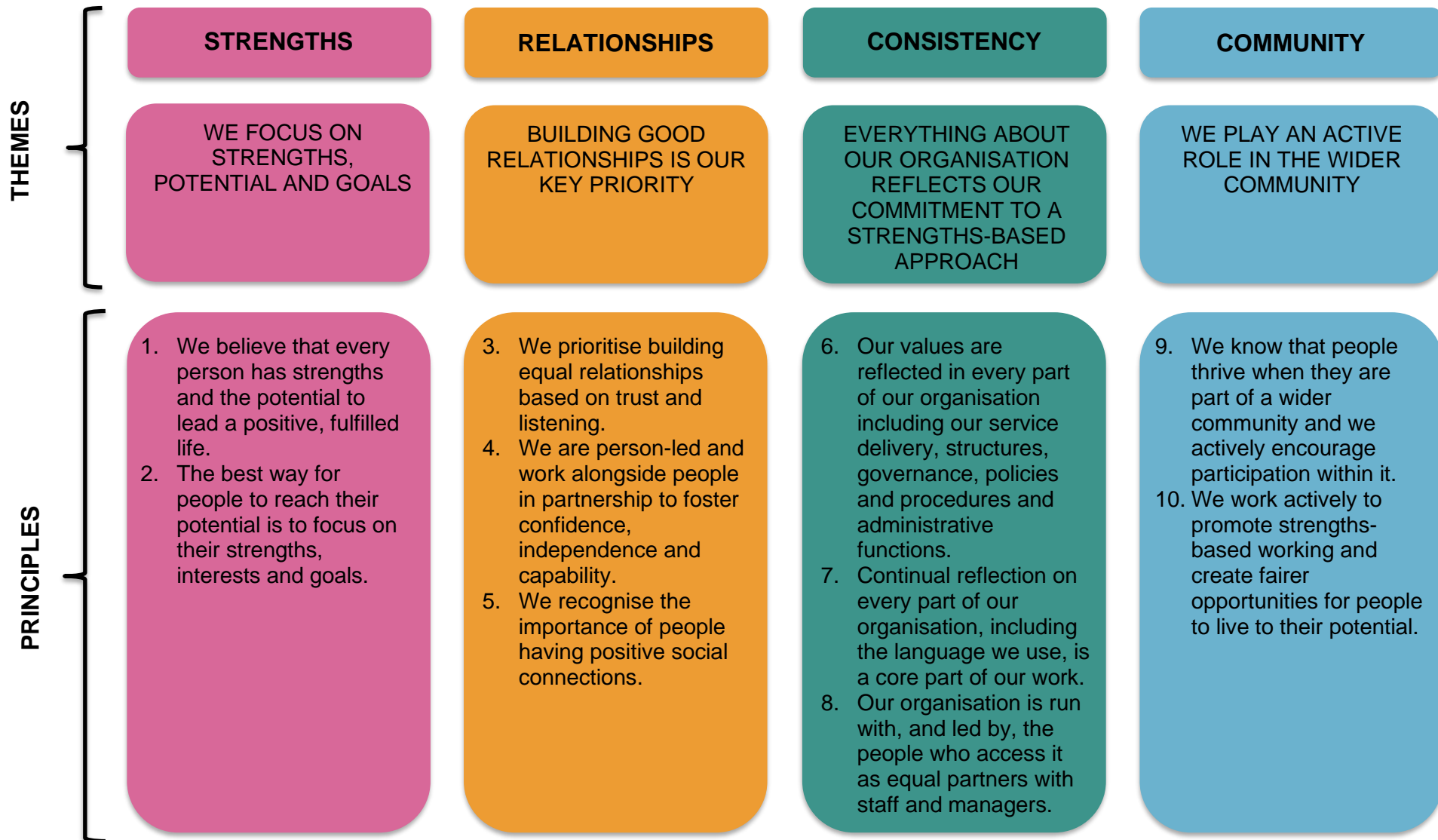
Strengths-based organisations also seek to be good partners to other agencies and organisations. This helps to ensure smooth transitions for people accessing multiple services. It is also a key aim to talk to others about the approach and encourage other agencies to adopt similar ideas and principles. If more organisations work in this way then there will be more consistency of experience across different services. It is also an essential part of creating more opportunities for people.

Watch these four principles in practice in our [animation](#).



The principles of strengths-based working

There are 10 key principles of strengths-based working that can be grouped underneath the four themes. These can be seen in the diagram below.



What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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