

Strengths Meeting Toolkit

A strengths-based approach to multi-agency meetings for and with people who experience multiple disadvantages

“

Everyone has strengths.

We have experiences, abilities and knowledge that assist us in our lives. If we are lucky, we also have a variety of people around us who act as a support network for us.

A strengths-based approach allows people to identify and build on their strengths so that they can reach their goals and retain or regain independence in their daily lives.

”

Pulla and Francis (1)

This toolkit has been produced by Golden Key: a partnership between statutory services, commissioners, the voluntary sector and people with lived experience across Bristol. The partnership works together to make change for good and improve services for Bristol citizens with the most complex needs.

The Golden Key Service Coordinator Team works with clients with complex needs, taking a coordination and observation role, identifying blocks and barriers in the system and facilitating collaboration between services and clients to find solutions.

This Strengths Meeting Toolkit has been developed by Sam Wilson (Golden Key Service Coordinator) in collaboration with Golden Key's Service Coordinator Team, clients, carers and partner agencies.

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“ Board members have been able to form **positive and trusting working relationships**. Members feel this meeting is a **very different space** to their other meetings, i.e. more creative and open and positive.

I would attribute both these things to the way we've **incorporated the values of the strengths-based framework** into the meeting.

*Bristol Creative Solutions Board
Senior Project Support Officer*

Introduction

A strengths-based approach to working with people who experience multiple disadvantages¹ can provide opportunities for both professionals and clients to see themselves and specific situations in a new light.

This toolkit outlines the application of this approach to multi-agency meetings, exploring the motivations and benefits for doing this and providing guidance, tips, and tools to support the process.

Why has this strengths-based multi-agency meeting tool been developed?

This strengths-based meeting structure has been developed in response to feedback from practitioners across Bristol who work with people experiencing multiple disadvantages. Practitioners observed that services sometimes focus on managing (perceived) problem behaviours rather than considering what is going well. These observations were supported by the experiences of Golden Key service coordinators whilst working alongside clients and people noticed that this approach doesn't always lead to the most positive outcomes.

Multi-agency meetings are often organised in response to these 'negative' behaviours, incidents or escalating risks, and as such are key leverage points for positive change. They are spaces where multiple stakeholders come together and are therefore opportunities to introduce a different approach in a coordinated and planned way, maximising the potential for positive outcomes and, as part of a whole system approach, helping to expand and develop individual mindsets and organisational and systemic culture.

Points to consider *(for further information see appendices)*

Important points to consider when taking a strengths-based approach to multi-agency meetings:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Focus on strengths: | Strengths-based meetings focus on an individual's resources, achievements, and successes rather than on deficits, problems or perceived negative behaviours. |
| Person-centred: | Maintaining a genuinely person-centred approach will ensure that the client's view, concerns, hopes and expertise are central to the meeting. |
| Equal voices: | Each attendee's views should be considered of equal value. |
| A common language: | The language we use can have a significant impact on our perception of the world. Creating a common language can support shared goals and lead to more positive outcomes. |

An evidence-based approach

The design of this meeting structure is based on various underlying principles and has a strong evidence base across the following areas:

- strengths-based and person-centred approaches
- person-centred safety planning
- positive risk-taking
- language

For a brief outline of each area and suggestions for further reading, see appendix 2.

We have been trialling this model with Golden Key clients and our learning illustrates the effectiveness of both holding a strengths-based mindset and using the meeting tool. We have gathered positive feedback from clients, internal staff and professionals across the system which highlight the benefits for everyone involved.

¹ People who face multiple disadvantages can experience a combination of homelessness, addiction, involvement with the criminal justice system and/or mental ill health at the same time. People facing this complex mix of challenges may also be victims of domestic abuse, are likely to have poor physical health, may be sex-working and may be in debt.

Benefits of taking a strengths-based approach to multi-agency meetings

Taking a strengths-based approach involves, first and foremost, developing and holding a strengths-based mindset. We have observed that the simple act of circulating the strengths-based meeting structure beforehand can create a shift in the tone of meetings, even if it is not actually used on the day.

Benefits for clients:

- Person-centred
- Encourages a trauma informed approach
- Increase self-belief and self-confidence
- Build resilience
- Emotionally regulating
- Engaging and empowering
- Inclusive: we all have strengths based on our experiences, even if we don't recognise them as such

Benefits for all attending:

We have observed multiple benefits for all who participate. Firstly, there are immediate benefits and positive outcomes specific to individual situations. Secondly, we have observed a wider cultural shift: individuals develop their perspective and mindset, and this leads to a different approach across the system.

Achieving immediate positive outcomes:

- Increasing motivation and hope
- Helping to 'unstick' stuck situations
- Promoting opportunities
- Strengthening relationships
- Creating clear and meaningful actions

Developing a new mindset and culture (for clients, practitioners, organisations and system-wide):

- Promoting openness and shared understanding
- Improving and inspiring more meaningful engagement in meetings
- Increasing creative thinking
- Creating a more unified, collaborative and coproduced approach

“ I'm very positive about the strengths-based model used in this meeting and this has challenged the way I would approach meetings in the future. ”

Social worker
Multi-agency meeting attendee

The toolkit

This toolkit includes:

- A suggested structure for a strengths-based multi-agency meeting
- A suggested process to follow
- Guidance and tips
- Some useful tools that we have found sometimes help individuals
- A case study to help illustrate the benefits of taking this approach

Multi-agency meeting structure/checklist

This structure can be adapted to suit the situation. It can be used as a meeting plan and/or as a checklist to ensure you've thought about everything when planning your strengths-based meeting. It can be a live document – adapt it to fit the situation. There are examples of adapted versions in appendices 3 - 4.

1	Check in	<p>Language. Are there any words or terms which the client (or others) find stigmatising or unhelpful, which could be avoided? Can the meeting agree on common language?</p> <p>A visual approach. Would it be helpful to visually represent meeting discussions, eg by mapping on wall, or using emotions cards to communicate?</p>	
2	Introductions	<p>Strengths-based approach. Introduce ethos/principles of meeting structure. Allow time for questions/clarifications.</p> <p>Client. Explain each person's role/relationship to client, how long they've known the client, any recent contact.</p> <p>Hopes. What are everyone's hopes for the meeting?</p>	
3	Ground rules	Agree ground rules: eg not talking over, option of time out, how conflict is managed, encourage honesty and openness	
4	What are your strengths, abilities, skills, resources?	<p><i>("What would someone who knows you well say you're good at?")</i></p> <p>Consider strengths and resources of others involved eg carers, family/friends, professionals, community resources. (The client may prefer to receive this as feedback from others in the meeting)</p>	
5	What's going well? 360° perspective	<p><i>(eg achievements and successes)</i></p> <p>Give the client choice around the order feedback is given – they may not wish be first to speak.</p> <p>Consider the views of: client, carer(s), family/friends, professionals</p>	
Comfort break			
6	What's been happening? 360° perspective	<p><i>(Are there any identified triggers, cycles or systemic barriers to learn from?)</i></p> <p>Consider the views of: client, carer(s), family/friends, professionals</p>	
7	Goals and what could help moving forwards 360° perspective	<p><i>(Consider what could help in the context of identified strengths, what's on offer, aspirations and hopes for the future, use of psychological formulations)</i></p> <p>Consider the views of: client, carer(s), family/friends, professionals</p>	
8	Keeping safe 360° perspective	<p><i>(Can the meeting agree common language around safety?)</i></p> <p>Consider positive risk-taking, strengths, resources, systemic risks, back-up plans</p> <p>Consider the views of: client, carer(s), family/friends, professionals</p>	
9	Anything else?	Is there anything that's not been covered? - check against meeting hopes	
10	Agree actions	For client, carer(s), family/friends, professionals	
11	Next meeting date	Agree date for review meeting	

Process

We have learned that one of the most significant factors contributing to a successful strengths-based multi-agency meeting is good preparation, as illustrated below.



Guidance

This section includes some things to think about when planning and facilitating your own strengths-based multi-agency meeting.

A strengths-based mind-set

The use of structures and tools can be helpful, but the greatest impact for clients, teams, organisations and systems comes from developing and embedding a strengths-based mindset.

We have learned about the importance of applying a strengths-based thread through all aspects of client work: from initial referrals through to endings, transitions and onwards. This includes within:

- processes and paperwork (eg referral forms, snapshots, safety plans)
- external communications
- reflective spaces
- supervision spaces
- language in both formal and informal settings

The below example illustrates a situation where a strengths-based approach was used effectively and resulted in more positive outcomes for all involved:

Example: a strengths-based mindset

“During a recent multi-agency meeting it was clear the discussion was escalating into a cyclical pattern of negative reflections and observations regarding a cohort of clients who were experiencing similar blocks and who hold similar needs. The meeting soon became stuck.

“I decided to intervene with a strengths-based approach and I asked questions based on the strengths-based template. This seemed to have a good effect on the meeting.

“Discussion became more fluid: mindsets changed to be more collaborative and creative and less defensive and dismissive. People became more open to new ideas and - although it was hard to identify strengths - the things identified enabled a new client focused and co-produced angle on the plan.”

Golden Key Service Coordinator

Identifying strengths with clients can be challenging. It's not uncommon to meet resistance or you may feel anxious yourself. It is worth reflecting on potential issues:

- Why might there be barriers? Eg new relationship, lack of trust
- Is the idea of thinking about strengths an alien concept? How could this be made relevant and accessible to the client?
- Is the client unable to see beyond an overwhelming sense of “*life is terrible/pointless*”?
- Are immediate priorities, needs, stressors or emotions too powerful at this time?
- Does the process feel genuine?
- Is there a sense that help might be withdrawn if the client is seen to have strengths?

The following ‘tips’ section has been developed in response to some of these barriers and questions.

Tips

Whilst trialling the strengths-based approach we made note of things that we have found helpful. This section outlines some tips and ideas that you might find useful to inform your practice.

Tips for facilitating a strengths-based meeting

Time	Allow more time than you usually would, both for preparation and the meeting itself, especially for the first meeting or two whilst people become accustomed to a new approach. It is a worthwhile investment.
Facilitator	Identify someone to facilitate the meeting other than the client's key worker. This will enable the facilitator to support the meeting in maintaining a strengths-based focus (which can easily be lost) throughout, leaving the key worker to contribute their perspectives/support the client.
Overview	The facilitator should give a brief overview of the meeting structure and underlying principles at the start of the meeting, especially the first time the structure is used. This should ensure everyone has a shared understanding/expectations. There should be opportunity for questions and feedback.
Hold focus	The facilitator may need to gently bring focus back from problems (or solutions) to strengths as people become accustomed to this new approach. Take care to validate concerns raised and note them down so they can be considered at the appropriate stage of the meeting.
Structure	It may be helpful to merge the 'what are your strengths' section with 'what's going well' if the discussion feels uncomfortable or if there is resistance or a sense of reverting to problems. Those who know the client best should be prepared to initiate strengths-based feedback; the client may initially prefer to be passive during this section.
Workers' reflections	Space could be included for professionals to reflect honestly about any reactions or emotions arising from the client's presentation or behaviour. This can lead to a shared understanding of challenges faced, support reflective decision-making, and facilitate a more consistent and contained approach. <i>(This may only be appropriate in professional-only meetings)</i>

Tip for using the approach flexibly

Adjust structure in advance	If a meeting is being facilitated by a statutory agency, you could share the strengths-based meeting structure/checklist with the relevant professional in advance. Our experience has shown that colleagues are willing to adapt their agenda to incorporate a strengths-based approach.
Structure meeting around themes	If appropriate or useful, structure the meeting (<i>what are your strengths - what's going well - what's been happening - goals - keeping safe</i>) under specific relevant themes (eg <i>housing, mental health, relationships, substance use, money etc</i>). This has been demonstrated to work well with clients who experience difficulties with concentration, restlessness or agitation.
A wider mindset	Even if attending a meeting which doesn't have an explicit strengths focus, holding a strengths-based mindset or asking strengths-based questions can positively affect a meeting's focus and outcomes.

Example: using the strengths-based approach flexibly

Bristol Creative Solutions Board (CSB) reviews cases of individuals who struggle to make progress through traditional support routes. Board members have authority and influence across the system: members address systemic blocks in order to improve outcomes both for the individual clients and for the wider group of people who face multiple disadvantages.

The CSB adapted this strengths-based approach to suit the context. The board applies the approach in the following areas: referral form and process; meeting structure and professionals' presentations; and the meeting facilitation/chairing.

“Having a resource based on Golden Key learning, and with all your research behind it, gave us the confidence to do things differently. The strengths-based meeting structure provided the backbone of what the Creative Solutions Board has become.

“Members have fed back that the meeting has changed the way they have conversations between services.”

Senior Project Support Officer

Tips for supporting people to recognise their strengths

There are a range of tools which can support someone to recognize their strengths. These can be found in appendices 5-7. Below are some things to think about during this process:

- A trusting relationship** Establishing a trusting relationship with the person and understanding their narrative are both essential components in effective collaboration around strengths.
- Timing** Timing is important – understanding whether someone is/is not in a good place to introduce the concept of a strengths-based approach.
- Professional feedback** Sometimes a good starting place can be for an individual to receive positive feedback (external perspective), with the person playing a more passive role.
- Feedback from others** Another effective strategy is to ask *“What would your best friend or family members say if we asked them what your strengths are?”* – encourage the person to take a step back and hold a more objective view
- Use strengths-based questions** Strengths-based questions can be woven into a relational approach so that conversation feels more informal or organic.
Strengths-based questions could also be used in supervision, reflective practice etc with colleagues, especially if a worker is feeling stuck with a particular situation.
- Mental map** It may be appropriate for practitioners to hold a mental map of the individual's strengths, building a picture of strengths over time, which could be then be shared and/or built on explicitly or implicitly at appropriate times.

Tips for supporting people to keep safe whilst taking positive risks

Positive risk-taking describes a way of working that enables practitioners to support people in taking risks as a route to positive outcomes.

Positive outcomes	The term 'positive' is attached to the desired <u>outcome</u> , not to the risk.
Language	Language and attitude are important. Remain grounded and factual rather than anxious or alarmist.
Systemic Foundations	Consider systemic risks e.g. gaps, transitions, barriers to accessing support etc.
Pros/cons	Consider resources or strengths identified as foundation to build upon.
Back-up plans	Discuss pros and cons around goals or wishes.
	Consider mitigating actions and back-up plans for actions which may be perceived to be 'risky' (promoting possibilities and opportunities, rather than limiting them).

Useful tools

It is important that the focus of taking a strengths-based approach is on the relationship with the client, your knowledge of them as an individual, and having a strengths-based mindset. The tools in this section are here to support this approach only when relevant and appropriate for the individual circumstance. You don't have to use any of them but they're here if needed.

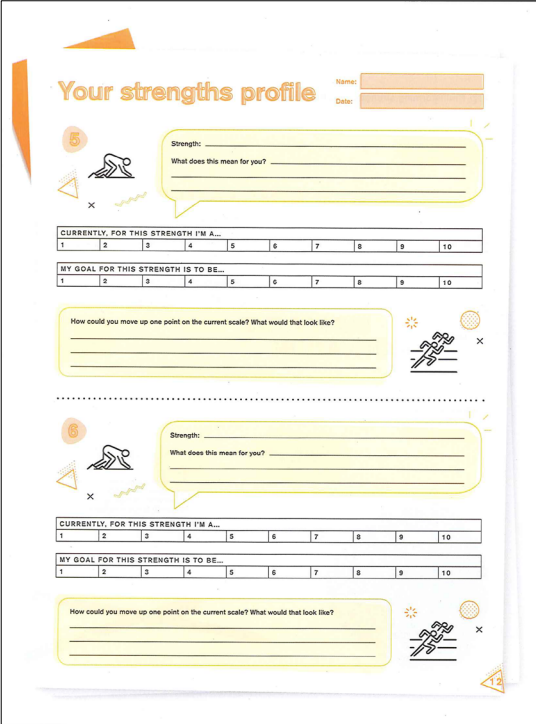
There are many tools that we have found to be useful: some we have designed ourselves, some are from third-party organisations, and some are tools that we have further developed from other sources.

Developed by us

- **Strengths map** (appendix 5)
The map can help someone to identify their personal, social and community resources.
- **Strengths based plan** (appendix 6)
Helps identify current support, goals and dreams, what has worked in the past, experiences of the system, safety, positive risk-taking, crisis survival strategies and key support people.
- **Strengths-based questions** (appendix 7)
There are many examples of strengths-based questions available. We have collated a list of useful questions from various sources.

External tools (see reference list for sources)

- **Supported decision tool**
This [decision tool](#) (2 p. 51) helps an individual to express what is important in their life, to recognise challenges and things that are working well, to explore what could be done differently by them and by others, and to identify goals and actions.
- **Decision-making quadrant**
This [decision-making tool](#) (3) can help to identify what's important when making decisions.
- **Strengths Profile**
The strengths profile is a useful tool from the [Mental Skills Training Toolkit](#) (4). It can be used by individuals to evaluate their current strengths.
- **Worksheet: recognising your strengths**
This [worksheet](#) (5) can help individuals to recognise and gain a better understanding of their strengths.
- **Person-centred thinking tools**
[Helen Sanderson Associates](#) (6) provide 'a set of easy to use templates that are used to give structure to conversations.'
- **12 strengths-based skills and activities**
This [resource](#) (7) explains 'strength theory' and provides a range of useful tools.
- **Safety plan tool**
This [planning tool](#) (8) can help to explore what strengths and support people have that they can make use of when in or approaching a crisis.
- **What's different about a strengths-based approach?**
This tool (9) is a [table](#) that summarises 'some of the key differences between a traditional, deficits (or problems) based approach and a strengths-based approach'.



Your strengths profile Name: _____ Date: _____

Strength: _____
What does this mean for you? _____

CURRENTLY, FOR THIS STRENGTH I'M A...
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MY GOAL FOR THIS STRENGTH IS TO BE...
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How could you move up one point on the current scale? What would that look like?

Strength: _____
What does this mean for you? _____

CURRENTLY, FOR THIS STRENGTH I'M A...
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MY GOAL FOR THIS STRENGTH IS TO BE...
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How could you move up one point on the current scale? What would that look like?

Case study: the benefits of a strengths-based mindset

The below case study illustrates one client's experiences with a strengths-based meeting approach.

Rose's background:

- **History:** Rose has a history of loss, abuse and complex trauma. After time in prison she became homeless. As a teenager Rose was prescribed benzodiazepines to treat severe anxiety, on which she became dependent. As an adult she also self-medicates with alcohol.
- **Relationships with others:** Rose finds it hard to trust people and fears rejection and abandonment. She frequently feels anxious and struggles to regulate her feelings of anger and frustration: others often perceive this as aggressive and combative. Rose expects people to have a negative view of her, so in meetings she can appear defensive and hostile, and will often leave early.

A strengths-based meeting

- **Preparation:** Rose's service coordinator talked through the approach with her before the meeting.
- **During the meeting:** Rose started to speak about her problems. She was given space to talk, which meant that she felt heard, and her concerns were validated. The facilitator then reminded everyone of the meeting structure, and everyone discussed Rose's strengths. One worker commented that at the start of the meeting she had appeared anxious and tense but was *"now smiling and seemed relaxed"*. Rose agreed and said that focusing on her strengths *"made me feel good about myself"*.
- **Service coordinator's observations:** Rose was able to take part in reflective, balanced discussions. Her service coordinator said: *"This hugely contrasted to previous meeting experiences where Rose has become agitated and distressed quickly and subsequently left early."*
- **Psychologist's observations:** Rose's psychologist commented that: *"Investing in and recognising [Rose's] strengths helped build safety and trust as she disclosed more. This then paved the way for a very engaged meeting in which Rose was able to stay present for around two hours."*

Wider systemic change

Taking a strengths-based approach with Rose has had an impact on other professionals, helping to shift people's perspectives and resulting in more positive outcomes for Rose.

- **Sharing the mindset:** Sharing the strengths-based approach with Rose's psychologist, solicitor and judge resulted in a community order with positive requirements instead of a prison sentence.
- **Solicitor's observations:** *"As outlined in the [psychologist's formulation] report, Rose has a number of positive qualities which she could use to try and overcome her current situation. I have no doubt that [the judges] considered them when looking at how to sentence Rose. They were probably part of the reason why both judges were persuaded to give Rose a further chance in the community."*

Key learning

- **Preparing with the client:** Talking through the approach with the client beforehand can help the meeting to stay focused and be productive.
- **Effective facilitation:** Clear and person-centred facilitation can ensure that everyone feels heard. Effective facilitation can help participants to adhere to and trust the process.
- **Sharing strengths:** This essential part of the meeting can help the client, and others present, to shift their perspectives and approach issues in a more positive, focused and engaged manner.
- **Modelling a strengths-based mindset:** Consistently taking a strengths-based approach and sharing this with other professionals can have a wider systemic impact, which can result in more positive, coproduced and sustainable outcomes for clients.

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For more information, please visit the Golden Key website
or email learningteam@goldenkeybristol.org.uk

New learning continues to emerge from this work. The Golden Key website will be updated with new tools or resource suggestions as and when they become available.

Appendix 1: Thesaurus of positive language

“ Words are important. The language we use and the stories we tell have great significance to all involved. They can carry a sense of hope and possibility, or be associated with a sense of pessimism and low expectations, both of which can influence personal outcomes. ”

Devon Partnership Trust and Torbay Care Trust²

It is important to be mindful of the language we use, how it is heard by the person we are talking with, and how it may positively or negatively contribute to their health and wellbeing.

The prevalence of stigma from healthcare professionals almost doubles for those diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or borderline personality disorder³. Language can have a strong impact on the perception of individuals and can contribute to stigma surrounding particular client groups.

Consequently, it is important to consider both positive and unhelpful terms and to agree on shared language which is accessible to all.

The next page contains a thesaurus of alternative language – suggestions of phrases you can use which are less stigmatising and more strengths-based.

Further reading:

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³ **Mental Health Council of Australia.** *Consumer and carer experiences of stigma from mental health and other health professionals*. Canberra: Mental Health Council of Australia, 2011.

triggering - stigmatising - judgmental	trauma informed - inclusive - strengths-based
Manipulative, playing people off	Resourceful/really trying to get help
Attention-seeking	Crying out for help
Impulsive	Spontaneous
Demanding	Connected, assertive
Childish	Has areas for growth/learning
Trying to get your own way	Trying to get your needs met/get help
Drawing you in	Asking for help/wanting to be heard and understood
Needy	Having unmet needs/asking for help
Acting out	Disagrees with professional view and prefers to use alternative strategies
Resistant/non-compliant	Chooses not to/has own ideas
In denials	Disagrees with
Not engaging	Faces barriers to engagement
“They are a PD” (or Borderline etc)	A person diagnosed with.....who experiences.....
Borderline personality disorder	Emotionally unstable personality disorder Emotional dysregulation disorder Experiences difficulties with emotional regulation and/or intensity
Unrealistic	Person has high expectations for self and recovery
Plays the system	Resourceful
Helpless	Unaware of own strengths
Hopeless	Unaware of options/resources
Grandiose	Has high expectations of others/elated mood
Suffers from...	Experiences/lives with
Tell your story	Describe your experiences
Right/wrong choices	Acknowledge multiple viewpoints
You don't make sense	I'm trying to understand

Appendix 2: Further reading to inform your approach

A strengths-based approach shares core principles with a person-centred approach, positive risk-taking and the use of positive language. The following section gives a brief overview of the thinking in each area and include suggestions for further reading.

A strengths-based approach

There is a large evidence base which supports the strengths-based approach, primarily from the field of social work.

Fundamental principles of the approach recognise that: everyone has strengths based on their experiences, abilities and knowledge; the community is rich with resources; and all people have an inherent capacity to learn, grow and change.

Various tenets have been proposed as the basis for this work. Dennis Saleebey (2006), who promotes strengths-based practice in social work, described the following principles:

- Every individual, group, family and community has its strength
- Trauma and abuse, illness and struggle may be injurious but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity
- Assume that you do not know the upper limits of the capacity to grow and change and take individual, group, and community aspirations seriously
- We best serve clients by collaborating with them
- Every environment is full of resources

Other notable principles include:

- Working with people in naturally occurring settings within the community is most effective, taking an outreach approach to engagement (St Jacques et al 2009, Kisthardt 2002)
- Problems are seen as the result of interactions between individuals, organisations and structures rather than deficits within individuals, organisations and structures (Pulla and Francis, 2015)

Further reading: a strengths-based approach

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Pulla, V. and Francis A. (2015) Advancing Social Work in Mental Health through Strengths -Based Practice. Edition: 2. Chapter: 6 (A Strengths Approach to Mental Health). Publisher: The Primrose Hall. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316039055_A_Strengths_Approach_to_Mental_Health

Saleebey, D. (Ed.). (2006). The Strengths Perspective in social work practice. (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Social Care Institute for Excellence (2015) Strengths-based approaches for assessment and eligibility under the Care Act 2014. <https://www.scie.org.uk/strengths-based-approaches/guidance>

A trauma informed approach

There is a wealth of information about trauma informed principles and this framework links closely with the concepts behind a strengths-based approach, as can be seen below.

SAMSHA (2014) has identified the following key principles in a trauma informed approach:

- Creating physical and emotional safety.
- Trustworthiness and transparency in how organisational operations and decisions are made with the goal of creating a high sense of trust.
- Peer support from others with shared lived experience.
- Collaboration and mutuality in how services are run with an emphasis on levelling power between staff and clients.
- Empowerment, voice and choice with both those using services and those working within them recognising individual strengths and experiences.
- Cultural, historical and gender issues: moving past stereotypes and ensuring responses fit the cultural or other specific needs of the individual.

(as cited by Homeless Link, 2020)

Based on a literature review, Hopper, Bassuk and Olivet (2010) identified four key principles of trauma-informed care:

- Trauma awareness
- Emphasis on safety
- Opportunities to rebuild control
- Strengths-based approach

Further reading: trauma informed approaches

Hopper, E, Bassuk, E & Olivet, J (2010). Shelter from the storm: trauma-informed care in homelessness service settings. The Open Health Services and Policy Journal. Vol 13 (2).

SAMHSA (2014) SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf

Person-centred approaches

The Health Foundation (2016) identifies a framework for person-centred support and care, which comprises the following 4 principles:

- Affording people dignity, compassion and respect.
- Offering coordinated care, support or treatment.
- Offering personalised care, support or treatment.
- Supporting people to recognise and develop their own strengths and abilities to enable them to live an independent and fulfilling life

Further reading: person-centred approaches

The Health Foundation (2016) *Person-centred care made simple: What everyone should know about person-centred care*. <https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/PersonCentredCareMadeSimple.pdf>

Person-centred safety planning

Boardman and Roberts (2014) describe the following as key elements of collaborative person-centred safety planning:

- Helping people develop their understanding, skills and confidence from supported risk taking.
- Supporting people to recognise and use their own skills, resources and resourcefulness.
- Focussing on safety planning through an emphasis on self-determination and taking responsibility for exploring options and choices.
- Enabling people to stay safe whilst supporting them taking opportunities to do the things that they value and which give their lives meaning.
- Engaging in co-production and shared responsibility for developing understanding of difficulties and co-creation of plans to develop safety and well-being.
- Having an organisational ambition to enabling people to become successfully self-directed and take control over their treatment choices and supports.
- Developing personal strategies to deal with the problems and difficulties they face.
- Having a desired outcome of people discovering a new sense of self, meaning and purpose in life, living beyond their health problems and accepting risk as part of life and living.
- This approach is supported by Department of Health Guidance (2007)

Further reading: person centred safety planning

Boardman, J. and Roberts, G. (2014) *Risk, Safety and recovery*. Centre for Mental Health and Mental Health Network, NHS Confederation.

Department of Health (2007a) Best practice in managing risk. London: Department of Health.

Positive risk-taking

Boardman and Roberts (2014) give the following overview of positive risk-taking:

- The term 'positive risk-taking' describes a way of working that enables practitioners to support people in taking risks as a route to positive outcomes.
- The term 'positive' is attached to the desired outcome, not to the risk.
- It may be defined as "weighing up the potential benefits and harms of exercising one choice of action over another. Identifying the potential risks involved (i.e. good risk assessment), and developing plans and actions (i.e. support for safety) that reflect the positive potentials and stated priorities of the service user (i.e. a strengths approach). It involves using 'available' resources and support to achieve the desired outcomes, and to minimise the potential harmful outcomes" (Morgan, 2011).
- A person's confidence, capacity and resilience are not enhanced by avoiding risk, but may be improved through carefully considered and appropriately supported engagement with risk.
- Risk taking may be a major source of constructive experience which enables people to share or take responsibility for their choices and to grow in confidence that they are able to control their own lives (Morgan, 2013).

Morgan (2011) describes positive risk-taking as being characterised by:

- Real empowering of people through collaborative working from the outset of discussions about risk and risk-taking
- A clear understanding of responsibilities, that service users and services can reasonably hold in specific situations; and understanding the consequences of different courses of action
- Making decisions based on a range of choices available, and supported by adequate and accurate information
- Supporting people to access opportunities for personal change and growth
- Establishing trusting working relationships, whereby service users can learn from their experiences, based on taking chances just like anyone else
- Working positively and constructively with risk depends on a full appreciation of the service user's strengths in order to identify the positive resources that underpin the confidence to take the risk
- Focusing on the 'here and now', but with clear knowledge of what has worked or not worked in the past, and why. The influence of historical information lies in the deeper context of what happened rather than the simple stigma of the events themselves
- It is an on-going risk decision-making process, not a one-off decision
- A clear focus on the specific outcome to be achieved, so it involves a process of attempting to script what the future could look like.

Further reading: positive risk-taking

Blood, I. & Wardle, S. (2018) Positive Risk and Shared Decision-Making, Social Care Wales

https://socialcare.wales/cms_assets/file-uploads/Positive-risk-and-shared-decision-making.pdf

Boardman, J. and Roberts, G. (2014) Risk, Safety and recovery. Centre for Mental Health and Mental Health Network, NHS Confederation. <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/risk-safety-and-recovery>

Department of Health (2007a) Best practice in managing risk. London: Department of Health.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478595/best-practice-managing-risk-cover-webtagged.pdf

Morgan, S. (2011) Positive Risk-Taking. Practical ways of working with risk. A Practice Based Evidence production for Hampshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.
<http://staff.southernhealth.nhs.uk/resources/assets/inline/full/0/90051.pdf>

Appendix 3: Meeting structure (simplified)

Below is a simplified version of Golden Key's strengths-based meeting structure which may be useful in some contexts:

[Client Name]'s Meeting – [Date]

Language check in – clarify any language which is preferred or viewed as unhelpful

Introductions – include roles and hopes for the meeting

Strengths, abilities, skills, resources

- [Client name]'s view
- Worker/carer/family/friend/others' views

What's going well?

- [Client name]'s view
- Worker/carer/family/friend/others' views

Current issues, challenges, goals

- [Client name]'s view
- Worker/carer/family/friend/others' views

Keeping safe

- [Client name]'s view
- Worker/carer/family/friend/others' views

Anything else?

Actions

- [Client name]
- Workers
- Carer
- Family/friend/others

Next meeting date

Appendix 4: Meeting structure: statutory mental health service adaptation

Below is a statutory mental health service's adaptation of Golden Key's strengths-based meeting structure:

Introductions

What was discussed in last care plan assessment?

What are our hopes for the meeting?

What's going well? Achievements and outcomes

Current issues, challenges, and goals

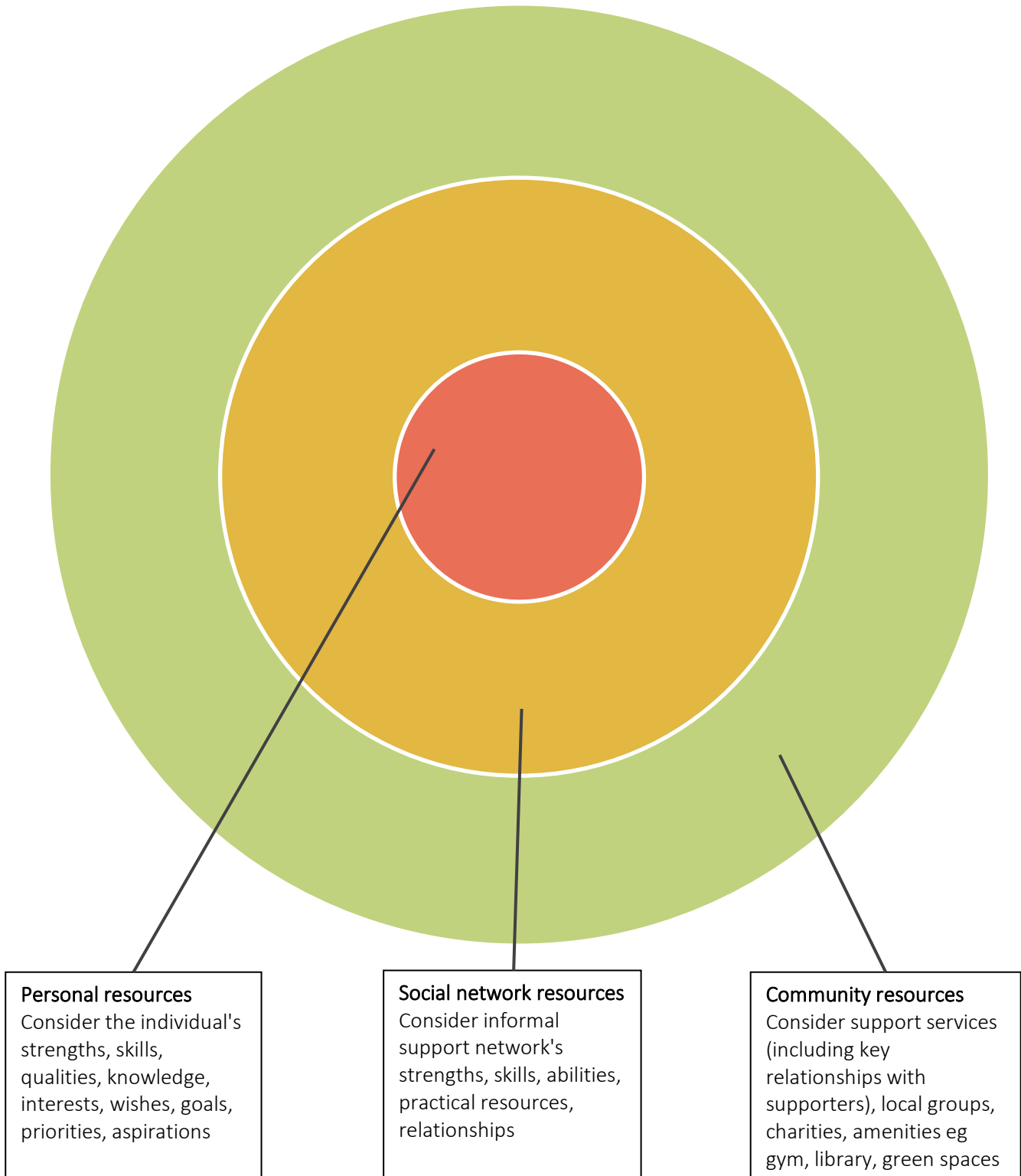
Actions to be taken from the meeting

Client:

Professionals:

Appendix 5: Strengths map

- Offers a visual approach to mapping strengths
- Links to the three different elements of strengths (identified by SCIE⁴), described below
- Offers an alternative to focusing predominantly on the individual's personal strengths (which some people may find uncomfortable)
- Helps identify areas where further resources could be helpful



⁴ Social Care Institute for Excellence (2015) Strengths-based approaches for assessment and eligibility under the Care Act 2014. <https://www.scie.org.uk/strengths-based-approaches/guidance>

Appendix 6: Strength based plan



Knowledge of my strengths gives me reassurance that I am good at some things and can handle certain tasks. Mapping out the resources I have around me if I need to outsource support is helpful and counteracts the feeling of being lost.



Golden Key client

Things I want help with	My strengths and resources	
Current support e.g. services, community, family, friends	My goals and dreams e.g. leisure, work, social, spiritual	
What has worked in the past/not?	My experiences of the system e.g. what has worked well/challenges/blocks	
My safety, positive risk-taking	Anything else?	
Actions	Who	When

Appendix 7: Golden Key strengths-based questions

Integrating strengths-based questions into an informal conversational approach is an effective way to engage with others to think about their strengths.

Open questions can be really helpful to explore and reflect, but can also feel daunting for some people, so it may be helpful to break the questions down or give examples of what others might say.

Similarly, some people appreciate thinking space to reflect following a question, whilst other may find silences uncomfortable and may find prompts helpful.

There are many examples of strengths-based questions online. A particularly useful list of these can be found on the [Positive Psychology website](#)⁵. Another bumper example of 50 questions can be found on the [Changed Lives New Journeys website](#)⁶.

The strengths-based questions below are suggestions and examples collated from a range of sources (including the examples above) and our own experiences. Please feel free to adjust and amend these to suit the person, the situation, your own style, and the relationship dynamic between you.

Individual

- How have you managed to survive this far given the challenges you have faced?
- What's worked for you in the past / what have you tried? (eg strategies, resources)
- Have you ever done something different second time around?
- When things have gone well in your life, what was different?
- What's working well in your life now?
- What do you enjoy doing / what did you used to enjoy doing but can no longer do?
- What energises / motivates / inspires you?
- What are the things in your life that you really value / have valued?
- What is the most rewarding part of your life?
- What does a good / better day look like for you? What makes it a good day?
- How do you spend your time / how would you like to spend your time?
- What are the things in your life that help you stay strong?
- What helps you bounce back from challenges?
- What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forwards?
- How can we build on where you are now?
- What small thing could you do that would make a difference?
- How would your friends / someone who knows you well describe you?
- When people say good things about you, what are they likely to say?
- When now, or in the past, have you felt like you are making a difference, making a contribution? How did you make this happen?
- What would make you feel you are making a contribution?
- If you had the opportunity what would you like to teach others, based on your experiences?
- What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?

⁵ Stoerkel, Erika. [PositivePsychology.com](https://positivepsychology.com/strengths-based-interventions/). [Online] 27 February 2021. <https://positivepsychology.com/strengths-based-interventions/>.

⁶ Atkins, Melanie. [Changed Lives New Journeys](http://www.changedlivesnewjourneys.com/50-first-strength-based-questions/). [Online] 8 October 2013. <http://www.changedlivesnewjourneys.com/50-first-strength-based-questions/>.

Informal support network

- Who's important to you?
- Who supports you in day-to-day life? In what way?
- Who do you feel able to count on? What would you count on them for?
- Who do you have regular contact with? How often?
- Is there anyone you have lost contact with who has previously been supportive?
- Do you have the resources you need to maintain contact with your informal support network, eg devices/connectivity?

Community resources

- Are there places/environments you like to go to spend time?
- Where do you feel safe?
- Where do you feel calm/relaxed?
- Are there any organisations/professionals currently involved in your support? How are they supporting you?
- Are there previous relationships with professionals which have been particularly meaningful or helpful? What was helpful?
- What community resources do you access now, eg community centres, hubs, groups, amenities? Are there any community resources you would like to access?

