A Typology and Narrative Illustration of Procedures for Following a Strengths-Based Approach in a Children's Mental Health System of Care

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Helping vs. Not Helping

Helping that is Helpful *Based on Strengths*	Helping that is Not Helpful
Not-Helping that is Helpful	Not-Helping that is Simply Not-Helping

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A Successful Family Support Plan Focuses On:

- Enabling and empowering families;
- Helping families acquire a sense of control;
- Strengthening families and their natural supports;
- Helping families acquire competencies;
- Giving hope to the family and to the team.

FSP Principles

- Base intervention efforts on family identified needs and aspirations.
- Build upon existing family strengths and capabilities.
- Strengthen the family's personal social network and use untapped sources of aid and assistance.

FSP Principles

- Employ help-giving behaviors that promote the family's acquisition and use of competencies and skills in order to enhance the family's ability to become more self-sustaining.
- Both the development and implementation of the FSP should emphasize promotion of the competence of the family and interdependence with members of the family's community.

FSP Principles

- Recognize that all families have unique strengths that are dependent on the family's culture.
- The failure of a family to display competence must be viewed as the failure of social systems to create opportunities for competencies to be displayed and learned.

FSP Principles

- Work must focus and build on the positive aspects of functioning, rather than seeing families as broken and needing to be fixed.
- The goal must be to make families more capable and competent and less dependent upon professionals for help.
- Goals should focus on proactive concerns—in anticipation of what a family wants or desires in order to make things better rather than in response to problems, worries, difficulties, or troubles.

Context

- The Children's Board of Hillsborough County, Florida received a grant from the federal Center for Mental Health Services to advance the integration of services for children and youth with serious emotional disturbance and their families.
- Two local studies were conducted to identify the degree to which services were provided consistent with system of care and wraparound principles and provide feedback to service providers in order to improve practice.

Study Purpose

- The primary purpose of this secondary analysis of the data was to identify and categorize child and family strengths used in family service and support planning as illustrated through the concrete behaviors evidenced in field notes and interviews.
- These strength categories were used as the basis for training service providers in the identification and use of strengths in planning and service delivery.

Method
Team Meeting Observation

- Observations of 118 Family Support Planning meetings were conducted.
- Mixed methods - Checklists of behaviors that operationalized wraparound principles were completed (Epstein et al., 2003), complemented by detailed field notes. The wraparound domains included are 'Community - based', 'Individualized', 'Family', 'Cultural Competence', 'Interagency Collaboration', 'Unconditional Care' and 'Outcomes'.

Method
System of Care Practice Review

- Mixed methods – case study methodology (Hernandez et al, 2001) informed by interviews with case managers, caregivers, youth and informal supports, as well as by review of the medical record (n=65).
- Looks for evidence that supports or refutes conformity with SOC principles in the domains 'child-centered / family-focused', 'community-based', 'cultural competence' and 'impact'.
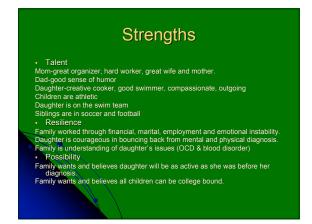
Method
Present analysis

- Field notes from the Team Meeting Observation study and open ended responses from interviews conducted as part of the System of Care Practice Review were included in the present study.
- Exploratory content analysis was used to categorize themes related to strengths that were observed in meetings or recorded in the interviews.
- This analysis resulted in identification of 7 types of strengths used in family service and support planning.

Findings
7 Types of Strengths

- Talent Or Competency Strength: tied to a hobby/skill
- Resiliency strength
- Possibility strength
- Resource strengths: tied to family and team resources
- Borrowed strengths
- Past or historical strengths
- Hidden strengths

Examples & Discussion

Strengths

- Talent

Mom-great organizer, hard worker, great wife and mother.
Dad-good sense of humor
Daughter-creative cooker, good swimmer, compassionate, outgoing
Children are athletic
Daughter is on the swim team
Siblings are in soccer and football

- Resilience

Family worked through financial, marital, employment and emotional instability.
Daughter is courageous in bouncing back from mental and physical diagnosis.
Family is understanding of daughter's issues (OCD & blood disorder)

- Possibility

Family wants and believes daughter will be as active as she was before her diagnosis.
Family wants and believes all children can be college bound.

Strengths

- Resources

Best friends, school, support groups, church, therapists, extended family, Dr. N., M.D., Girl Scouts, YMCA, and THINKids

- Borrowed

From parents, mom has patience and the skills to manage an active family

- Past/Historical

Both sides of grandparents are still married
Mom's parents are spiritual and there is unity

- Hidden

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