



A strengths-based model of practice

Working to achieve outcomes



Our Vision

We believe in genuinely working together with families, carers, professionals, and communities in order to make a difference to people's well being. Through building relationships and trust, we hope to hear what's really going on in people's lives. We want to give people the confidence to believe that things can change. We focus on building on people's strengths and developing a shared understanding of what a good life can look like and how we can work towards this.

The ten principles of how we practice

1 Collaborative conversations

The best conversations happen when people feel really listened to. We want to build relationships and trust with children, people and families through skilled conversations. If we hear what is going on and talk about the main concerns and difficulties, we can start to understand where people are and agree how they can move forward in their lives, building on what is working well; and of course helping people manage the things that get in the way for them as well. When we do this, we can develop a picture of what a better life looks like, and this becomes the outcome we are all working towards. Our role is not to fix, but wherever possible to help people change the parts of their lives that cause problems. We must be honest in explaining what our concerns are.

2 Empowering the voice of the person

We make sure that plans and paperwork are written in children and people's own words and are easy to understand and follow. Letting people and families tell their stories and share their goals in their way and in their words. Working without judgement, we want to show people respect and kindness, actively listening, showing compassion and being empathetic. This means putting the person in the centre, asking them what matters most to them and exploring how they can achieve their personal outcomes. We know that most people want to find their own solutions and our job is to support and help them to get there.

3 Strengths focused

Our contact, actions and plans focus on acknowledging and building on people's strengths (including personal, social and community networks) and not what they can't do (their deficits). It is these strengths that we can build on to overcome the difficulties in people's lives.



4 Relationship based

We know that the best outcomes are achieved when we work with people, families and professionals to build trusting and respectful relationships: taking the time to develop and maintain these relationships is fundamental. It is these trusting and respectful relationships that are so important to help lower people's defences and reduce hidden harm. Our workers understand this means being open and honest about themselves and their work. Workers need to give part of themselves to the relationship.

5 Outcomes focused

We focus on 'what matters most' in children and people's lives and how we can develop a shared understanding of their personal outcomes/goals. This means looking at how we can work towards improving health and well-being, building on individuals, families and communities' strengths and abilities. It is important to record these outcomes in language that is clear and understandable to everyone, using people's own words where possible. Each outcome should be regularly discussed and reviewed or measured, so that we can agree if progress is being made. When things are getting better it's important to say so, but when they are not, other things may need to change.

6 Whole family focus

This means addressing all needs and risks with family members. This also needs us to think about balancing the needs and wishes of each member of the family when they think differently but maintaining a focus on the priority outcomes for all.

7 Strengths/Priority needs/Risk

We must talk about and recognise what we are most worried about and describe them as 'priority risks' in the plan. We work with individuals, families and support services to develop 'safety' and 'contingency plans'. These plans include what needs to happen and who might be able to offer support if things start to go wrong or a crisis starts. We aim to protect where possible and help people manage and take considered risks to achieve their outcomes.

8 Transparent

We are open and honest in our work, so that children, people and families understand what we are working towards (outcomes) and what will happen when and why. We are open about what we are worried about and work with children, people, families and professionals to work out how this can be better managed and reduced.

9 Skills/Knowledge

Workers have training to help them develop collaborative communication skills and are supported to put them into practice. This training and support will be ongoing. Reflective practice sessions with mentors and supervision also support practice. The strengths based approach is how we work internally and externally ensuring that we lead the way and use the same language and approach with each other.

10 Reflection

It is important that we reflect and are always ready to adapt and reconsider the way that we are working. We work to continually understand a situation, ensuring that plans are improved and reviewed regularly to find ways to enable independence and reduce dependency on services. Reflective practice also ensures we are not making assumptions or just following processes, it allows us the space to learn and challenge our thinking. We need to make sure we are continually looking at the situation from the point of view of the child, person and family.



A strengths-based model of practice

Working in this way takes too much time and cannot be fitted into busy working lives!

Working towards Outcomes means we start the conversations in a different place it is not something extra to do. This work takes place during the ongoing visits and meetings that we are already doing. Getting to know people and families through good conversations can save time in the long term. We really can get to the 'heart of the matter' and work towards change that can be maintained because it focuses on what is right at the time for that person and family.

Outcomes can't be done with people who are at End of life stages!

It is more important than ever to understand what we can work towards to help people and families at such a difficult time: we often talk about 'a good death' being very important. Progress with outcomes can be about getting things moving forwards but, they can also be about not letting things slip backwards (this is called maintenance).

Common Myths

You can't work towards agreeing outcomes when people have communication difficulties!

Skilled staff use observation and other methods to connect with people and families to understand what makes a difference, what family dynamics are like and agree outcomes.

Outcomes is expensive and means just giving individuals and their families what they want!

By exploring properly the outcome/s people and families need, we can build on the strengths they and the community already have. We can be clear if formal services are needed and how they support the delivery of outcomes. Outcomes focused work helps to build people's independence and creates less reliance on formal services.

Outcomes cannot be used in Safeguarding Cases!

Strengths based practice has been successfully used in a number of Safeguarding cases: it helps to lower resistance and allows workers to work with the family and achieve change.

A strengths-based model of practice

Co-production/Partnerships

Co-production is one of the main principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It means working with and involving children, people, their family, friends and carers to make sure their care and support is the best it can be. The Act expects us to work with and support people to become more involved in the design and delivery of services. With this in mind, along with the practice principles set out above, we aim to hear from children, people and families and gather their thoughts and suggestions, so that we can design our services and practice to make sure people are always at the heart of what we do.

Co-production is an asset-based approach to public services that enables people providing and people receiving services to **share power and responsibility**, and to work together in equal, reciprocal and caring relationships. It creates opportunities for people to access support when they need it and to contribute to social change. The key elements of co-production from the Co-production Network for Wales are:

- › Value all participants, and build on their strengths;
- › Develop networks of mutual support;
- › Do what matters for all the people involved;
- › Build relationships of trust; share power and responsibility; and
- › People can be change makers and organisations enable this.



A strengths-based model of practice

These fit fully with the principles of the Outcome Framework as discussed in this document.

The Act tells us that care and support plans should reflect the personal wellbeing outcomes that have been developed with people who need care and support. Part of this is for Local Authorities to record and measure progress against outcomes. People are at the centre of this framework and must be equal partners in their relationship with professionals. The law says that an assessment for care and support must be based around a conversation between the practitioner and the person/family/friends, so that we can understand the personal outcomes people want to achieve and how they can be supported to achieve them.

Evidence from practice tells us that **how** you do something can be more important than **what** you do. Having a social worker come into someone's life often uninvited, can be scary for the people and children we are working with. Getting to the 'heart of the matter', talking, to families and partners, and communicating the approach consistently helps get an agreed and shared understanding of where we are now, where we want to be and what needs to happen to get there.

The Act also expects us to continue to strengthen our partnerships with other agencies: we need to do more to work together. This ensures that our strengths based approach is understood and supported across partner agencies and that partners use the principles of the approach when working with families as well. We also recognise that the families we work with are also our partners and will make sure their voice, view and wishes are listened to properly throughout the time together.

Recognising trauma and the impact that life-experience can have on a person

We appreciate that anyone can experience trauma and that many things can traumatise a person. Some of these may include frightening experiences, racism, disability, trafficking, cultural, race and gender exclusion. We work in a way to prevent re-traumatising a person by making them feel safe, giving people choices and empowering them to make their own decisions. We look past people's behaviours understanding that trauma can be the underlying cause for some behaviours, looking past these, finding out people's triggers and working through these with therapeutic techniques. Understanding what matters to people and promoting opportunities for wellbeing, healing and recovery with everyone having a role.

Having a whole systems approach

A key message from the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is that public bodies must work together to deliver improvements in the wellbeing of people and communities in Wales. An important way of achieving this is to ensure that we work collaboratively across all areas that matter to families. Local Authority Corporate and Executive Members are part of this partnership and are involved and included in the work that we are doing and the outcomes we aim to achieve.

Within Neath Port Talbot, the strengths based model is not only supported but implemented throughout the whole organisation from Corporate Members, the Director of Social Services, Heads of Services right through to our frontline workers. This means that the approach is reflected upon at all stages of the service for example in supervisions, case consultations, legal surgeries and in all planning and strategic work which happens across the service.

To make sure that we don't fall back into more traditional and older ways of working, champions are needed in organisations. Within Neath Port Talbot our Consultant Social Workers are champions who keep up to date with new developments, share good practice and develop the



skills and learning with their teams. We make sure teams have time to reflect together on their work, as well as through supervision by mentors, peers and managers.

This model links our approach to a vision and set of values which are clear, easy to understand, and shared across the whole Social Care Service. This is allowing us to change systems, processes and structures, so that they support rather than work against the way we need to work.

To achieve this we have and continue to train a large number of staff and work with them to transform the way we work. We have on-going support from in house trainers who continue to ensure this model and way of working is maintained and developed.

We recognise that this approach means practitioners need to have the time to build relationships because we know that often changes take time to get to. As a service we continually ensure practitioners have the time they need to apply the skills confidently, the support needed to safely give part of themselves to the relationship, building processes that recognise through experience, that once this time is invested in the early days, time is later saved through transparent and honest conversations.

All of this requires ongoing support, guidance and training. However we also include regular reviews and reflection across the whole service to gather feedback from practitioners, partner agencies, families and the people that we work with. This ensures that we continue to move in the right direction and adapt our processes as required, allowing us to measure how far we have come and what more needs to happen.

A strengths-based model of practice

Why we use this model of practice?

Recently a survey was undertaken with children and families across Neath Port Talbot regarding the service that they are receiving. The survey further evidenced the need to shift the way that we are working to ensure that we are working with people and their families with the following comments showing how good practice feels:

“She’s good at asking questions like that – what you think you need to make you happy.”

“I feel I can speak to my social worker about anything I need. G the social worker is doing really well with me and my sister.”

“If H says she is going to do something it is done this wasn’t always the case in the past.”

“Always kept us informed.”

“I haven’t got a bad word to say about my social worker. They’ve outweighed everything I have asked of them. They are caring and so nice. They are more like a friend than a social worker, I don’t think they could do anything better.”

“M (social worker) has got more done in the last couple of months than my last social worker did in a year. She has been amazing.”

“Really helpful, everything explained in black and white, nothing sugar coated, told straight.”

“Very good, been brilliant, has offered general services supporting me to keep my son in my care. The case was finalised 2 weeks ago in court.”

“Good relation with R. has always been there when I have need her, very supportive”

“The social worker now has nothing to improve on, everything is explained fully, they are supportive and put in the right plans at the right time. This was not the case with involvement from previous social workers when my other children were removed from my care.”

For more information regarding anything in this document please contact:

Rebecca Johns on r.johns@npt.gov.uk



Neath Port Talbot Council would like to thank Social Care Wales for the co-production of this Framework



Gofal Cymdeithasol Cymru
Social Care Wales