Strength-Based Approach to Employment Plans

May 22, 2014
Purpose

- The Ramsey County WFS vision for ES includes opportunity for participants to increasingly self-determine while setting goals, identifying strengths, and including strengths in plan activities to pursue and achieve the participant’s goals. We want to make sure we share with you our perspective on this.
- We want you to know of this direction, in its informal stages, as we move towards a more formal system for using strength based approach in the EP later in the 2014.
- We want you to ruminate (meditate, muse over, ponder) and to percolate (become active, lively, or spirited) the strengths based concept in anticipation of a later workshop in October or November.
- We want to continue to build/clarify shared meaning regarding the counselor and participant roles in the Ramsey County Employment Services system.
Objectives

- Define strengths based approach
- Describe three legged stool of strengths based approach
- Describe the role and responsibility of the counselor and participant in creating a strengths based employment plan
- Describe the challenges for the counselor to shift from being the expert to honoring the experience and expertise of the participant (the participant is the expert in his or her own life)
- Describe the challenge for the participant to shift to this new EP structure
- Describe two ways in which the participant will demonstrate control of own life and own employment plan
- State one result of the informal reviews of employment plans.
Assemblage

- Webster says: a sculptural technique of composing into a unified whole a group of unrelated and often fragmentary or discarded objects
Assemblage (Wm Skrips)
Content
- Kelly Sangster Slides on the Strength Based Approach
- Purpose and Background
- Hua Moua and Ops Definition
- Review of Selected Slides From Earlier presentations
- Definitions
- ES Manual Description of EP
- Components of Theoretical Strong EP
- Current Workforce 1 EP Structure
- Informal Review of Current EPs
- Factors to Consider for Linking Strengths Based Approach to Factors of Strong EP
- Questions/Discussion
- Adjourn
Roots of Service 2014–2019

The 2014 ES contracts require that assessments with participants will “identify strengths, abilities and options, replacing the past practice of identifying barriers and limitations”.

Coaching and Counseling Distinctions

- Coaching
  - The participant comes to the answers to all of the questions on their own
  - more powerful than being told what to do and given a prescribed course
  - The participant is a subject matter expert of their own life

- Counseling
  - A counselor is a Subject Matter Expert and has expertise to offer
  - Gathers information about participant’s skills, abilities, styles, likes and helps them direct their job search and selection of the right career path
  - Has a list of possible career-path and trainings
  - Has a list of different resources for the participant
  - Educates about choices and impact
ES Role

- To be both a coach and a counselor, find a balance between giving participant an inspiration to create own path and guide them to be successful on the path
- Change roles from one to another
- Coaching and Counseling are philosophy of services, not a physical job description
- Skills can be developed within the employment counselor
Ambiguity Tolerance

Accepting fact that we’re working through a bit of ambiguity during this change process

Some things are clearer now than in January but we have some distance to go
Activities

- Put people in activities that matter
  - Employment
  - Self Employment
  - OJT
  - Paid and Unpaid Work Experience
  - Job search
  - Job readiness
  - Social Services
  - Other – including enrollment into the Disparities Reduction Strategy Services (DRS) Program (beginning March)
  - Training and Education
  - GED
  - Post Secondary Training and Education
  - Assessment
  - ESL and Functional Work Literacy
  - Social/Legal/Health Related
From FAST presentation

- FAST philosophy is to cultivate existing strengths and focus on what people can do; every person is capable of and deserves to participate in the world of work; approach is grounded in respect and dignity
Also, from FAST presentation

- Sometimes employment specialists unintentionally lead people to “give the right answers.” Sometimes participants try to please employment specialists by saying what they think staff wants to hear. Eventually, everyone’s work will fall apart if it is not built upon the participant’s values, interest and own way of doing things.
Definition: Self–Determined

- the personal decision to do something; the right to decide for self
Definition: Comply

- Comply: to conform, submit or adapt (as to another’s wishes) as required or requested; to do what you been asked or ordered to do.
Expanded Version: Comply

» submit or adapt (as to another’s wishes) as required or requested; to do what you been asked or ordered to do; to do what you’ve agreed to do.
Definition: Coins of the Realm

- Merriam Webster dictionary describes coins of the realm as something valued or used as if it were money in a particular sphere.
Dreaming the Dream

(Langston Hughes Poems As Voice of Dream)

Ennui

It's such a bore
Being always poor.

Dreams

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Island

Wave of sorrow,
Do not drown me now:
I see the island
Still ahead somehow.
I see the island
And its sands are fair:
Wave of sorrow,
Take me there.
Dream Dust

Gather out of star-dust
Earth-dust
Cloud-dust,
Storm-dust,
And splinters of hail,
One handful of dream-dust
Not for sale.

The Dream Keeper

Bring me all of your dreams,
You dreamers,
Bring me all of your heart melodies
That I may wrap them
In a blue cloud-cloth
Away from the too-rough fingers
Of the world.
“Cultural resiliency is a term we use to describe the competencies people develop through diverse life experiences.”

“These are competencies that people who have survived have already developed and can transfer to other areas of their lives.”

Even if a participant scored a 1 on EM subject area, maybe because they have scored a 1, they indeed have strengths and competences that helped them get to that point (succeed to even that degree).

Use those strengths. Build on them
The Shocking Things The ES Manual says about Employment Plan behind her back!
“An employment plan is a social contract between the county/ES provider and each participant.”
“All MFIP (and DWP) participants are mandatory ES participants and must develop an EP (exception regarding taking child under 12 months exemption).”
“The EP must include the participant’s overall employment goal; activities and steps necessary to reach that goal; hours of participation and a timeline for each activity; expectations and measure(s) used to determine satisfactory progress; meetings with the counselor; documentation/verification requirements (relative to type of EP being created); and the support services that will be provided.”
“The function of the EP is:

- Identify the participant’s self-support and employment goals, breaking those goals into smaller objectives, and listing the steps the participant must take to achieve the goals in the shortest time reasonably possible.
- Document the partnership between the participant and the counselor, specifying what each will do and when each is expected to do it.
- Help gauge progress; serving as a tool for determining participant progress and compliance with the expectations of MFIP/DWP Employment Services.
- Identify the parameters that are used to determine non-compliance.”
“Participants have two basic requirements:

- Develop a plan
- Comply with the plan”

(Remember the revised definition? “submit or adapt (as to another’s wishes) as required or requested; to do what you been asked or ordered to do; to do what you’ve agreed to do.”)
“The number of hours in the Employment Plan must meet the requirements:

- 87 hours per month of work activities for single-parent families with a child under 6; DHS recommends writing the plans up to the equivalent of full-time work; 130 hours per month of work activities for single-parent families with no children under 6; plans should be written with at least a minimum of 31 hours a week. EP’s should include enough hours to meet participation requirements unless a compelling reason to do less is case-noted in the participant’s file.”
“EPs may include any allowable activity, however, participation in activities that meet core hourly requirements are a primary consideration when developing or revising an EP. Use the information in DHS ES Manual Sections 9.12.3 and 7.9.3 to determine core and non-core activity hours and as a guide to selecting activities.”
Au Contraire!

(sort of)
Splitting Hairs: Activities

- Earlier: Put people in activities that matter
- Now, find out and apply strengths to action plan of things that matter as determined by participant, then fit into corresponding MFIP activity(ies):
  - Employment
  - Self Employment
  - OJT
  - Paid and Unpaid Work Experience
  - Job search
  - Job readiness
  - Social Services
  - Other – including enrollment into the Disparities Reduction Strategy Services (DRS) Program (beginning March)
  - Training and Education
  - GED
  - Post Secondary Training and Education
  - Assessment
  - ESL and Functional Work Literacy
  - Social/Legal/Health Related
This is an upside down MFIP/DWP shoehorn. It is the new way we want to use it.
In the direction in which we are heading, we will want to have the participant identify their strengths and goals (and actions steps activities meaningful to meeting the employment plan goals), then the counselor can shoe-horn the MFIP activities to fit the participant.
What WFS Says About EPs

- What DHS said, and
- Should be the tool that participants refer to know what they can do on their own to make things better.
- Components of a strong EP include participant defined goals, sub-tasks that matter, reliance on/use of self-identified strengths, and participant time investment (hours).
More DHS Speak About EP: Goals

“Goals are:

- Specific: describe the goal in such a way that you will know when it has been reached.
- Realistic: the goal must represent a measurable step toward self-sufficiency (or safety for DVW) and must be acceptable to you and participant.
- Achievable: the goal must be within the participant’s abilities – it must not require resources beyond what you can provide.
SMART:
Another Goal Frame:

- Goals are:
  - S for Specific
  - M for measureable
  - A for attainable
  - R for realistic
  - T for time bound
10 Minute Break
WF1 Employment Plans

- Goals, Interests, Strengths Sections
- Comment Section on Main page
- Comment Section With in Each of Nine Plan Sections
- Drop Down Boxes of the Plan Sections
### Goals

* **Goals for Family**

* **Job Interests**

* **Strengths**

### Active Plan Sections

**Add section of plan**  
None Selected

**Note:** Once Employment Plan status is Active, sections may no longer be added, deleted or edited. A new plan must be created.

### Comments

I agree to participate in the following activities  
hours per day for a total of  
hours per week.
Review of Employment Plans

- All had something in Goal, Interests and Strengths Section
- 6% had no plan
- 40% were FSS
- 60% were regular
- FSS hours 1–25
- Reg hrs 20–35
# Goals

| Provide for son | Get driver’s license, get GED, get car. Get GED | Maintain health
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------
| Find stable employment to support family. Get off MFIP | Care for child’s health, seek expungement, learn about jobs, learn parenting | Become a teacher
| Working | Continue medical treatment and apply for SSI | Get assistance to study and prepare for Accuplacer test, research college programs, and network
| To secure child care by end of month | Maintain PT employment and secure FT job. | Find bigger housing. Get job for holidays
| To be self-sufficient with stable job | Learn about stabilizing health and influencing children’s enrollment in treatment | Finish school and get good job
| Further education | Secure permanent housing, get job, support family | Find housing and get income stabilize
| To stabilize health, work FT, earn enough to leave | Secure FT work and leave MFIP | Stabilize family life
| Work FT, have financial stability | Finish GED, go to college, help 16 year old finish school | To find employment
| Continue job searching, become registered as cc provider | Stable employment and higher income | Long term: live with family in own place; short-term finish school, find employment
| 1. Gain stable employment. 2. Go school | Stabilize employment and get off MFIP. | Go to school/college. Start a business.
| Maintain employment | | P long-term goal of living w/ family in own place and financially stable; short-term finish school and find employment.
| Get custody of child. Find a career. | | Stabilize: get employment, larger home, kids through school, kids prepared for college, then self-employed
| Take care and provide for family, go to school, obtain FT employment, and be self-sufficient | |
Hours
A few without hours

Most regular EPs that should have been for 87, were

Not all 130 hour plans were

1 Reduced Hours plan

Almost half the FSS had two or less hours

Hours did not always add up.
Comments

- Many did not use the comments section
- Most of the time when used it was a reiteration or clarification of the rules.
- Not surprisingly, none of the EPs linked a strength to a task or goal.
- About 35% didn’t link the action to the goal
- Not infrequent to see little use (in some case no use) of the power of the drop down boxes or those Other or comment sections
I agree to participate in the following activities for 4 hours per day for a total of 20 hours per week.

I agree to turn in completed activity log no less frequently than:
- Daily
- Weekly
- Bi-weekly
- Monthly
- Other

Comments

I understand that incomplete activity logs may not be accepted and that my activity log must contain the following information:
- Date and time of each employment contact
- Type of contact
- Position interested in
- Status of the contact
- Name of employer/business
- Contact information of employer/business
- My signature stating that the activity log and hours are accurate
Strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication 6</th>
<th>Assertiveness</th>
<th>Dedicated 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good with children 2</td>
<td>Well organized 2</td>
<td>Happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardworker 14</td>
<td>Detailed</td>
<td>Healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People person 8</td>
<td>Customer service 2</td>
<td>Smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Desire for better days</td>
<td>Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated 4</td>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>Bubbly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On time</td>
<td>Hand’s on</td>
<td>Out-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>Get along with others 2</td>
<td>Determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader 3</td>
<td>Likes to learn</td>
<td>Sense of humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable 6</td>
<td>Dealing with stress/copes well 2</td>
<td>Timely 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient 3</td>
<td>Energized to get stuff done</td>
<td>Good mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-judging</td>
<td>Fast reaction time</td>
<td>Informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well educated</td>
<td>Take pride in work</td>
<td>Keeps busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependable 4</td>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>Cooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good management skills</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Cleans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good listener 2</td>
<td>Go extra mile</td>
<td>Drives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>Planning ahead</td>
<td>Has certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast learner 3</td>
<td>Follows instructions</td>
<td>Nursing experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive 3</td>
<td>Team player</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes people 2</td>
<td>Goal oriented</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft skills</td>
<td>Open minded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What About Other Strengths?

- Accurate
- Adroit
- Aggressive
- Appreciative
- Convivial
- Cool-headed
- Curious
- Skilled with sharp objects
How might we start linking strengths to the goals? Any assessment but EM might work well. Goals Plus Strengths
Two Legs of A Three–legged Stool

- On slide 16 of his slide set, Kelly pointed out that despite the intention of the ES Manual to link EM and MI, the manual doesn’t suggest a way to elicit or capture the participant’s description of their strengths. Kelly made a suggestion that is simple and brilliant two step process.
1. Ask. Observe.
   Kelly suggests to use the open ended questioning of MI (or the permission asking and observation stating functions of MI) to draw out the participant’s description of their strength.
2. Use.
When the participant chooses activities for his or her EP, help them insert the strengths as a strategy of their action steps. Consider a variation of:

“In order to meet my goal of ________, I’ll use my strengths of _______ and _______ to _______ and ________.”
Exercise:

Using an example from EM, work as a group to identify a reasonable goal to help a participant move from a score of 1 to a score of 2 (or 3). Make sure the goals are clear and follow the principle of either the DHS criteria or SMART criteria. Include at least one strength (several have been provided) into the goal or an action step. List five action steps. The paper on your table will make this exercise clearer. We’ll ask for volunteers to share your results.
This is a light switch.
Light’s on.
Start Small
Now: Pilot Tool in WFS Assisted Services

- October 30, 2014 Workshop
- Until then, consider and experiment with making goals more specific, identifying strengths and tying them to goal steps.
LET'S SUMMARIZE
STRENGTHS BASED APPROACH

Focuses on the participant's assets, resources and resiliency
STRENGTHS BASED

- works well with EM and MI
- is one way to support self-determination
- you play a big role, asking, listening, using info
IN STRENGTHS BASED

- understand and cultivate strengths
- increase vocabularies
- use WF1 EP comments to support
- write down your support/encouragement
- ruminate and percolate
IN STRENGTHS BASED

- participant pairs strengths and goal
- participant describes actions to goal
- you support in this process
ASK

"what strengths do you think you used?"
THEN LISTEN
and use their words
START OR EXPAND SMALL
MORE THAN SKILLS
Strengths are biggest
QUESTIONS?
This is the light switch, again.
We’re done

- Last one out the room, please turn out the lights
Thank You

- Questions/suggestions call your agency planner

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