

STRENGTHS ASSESSMENT

What is it?

Working with people's strengths should form an essential part of the on-going process of supporting people, deserving at least equal attention as the problems and difficulties. Problems categorise and generalise about people, whereas strengths should help to capture a more individual picture of people. The *Strengths Assessment* form is the main prompt to ensure this is happening for all clients/service users. It should be a positive, hopeful and constructive part of the way you work with people, helping to identify their personal qualities, abilities, capabilities, past achievements, current resources and future wishes in all aspects of their lives. It should gradually build up a positive picture of the person.

A *Strengths Assessment* is a continuous working document that you develop and consult daily or weekly, as appropriate. It will provide essential resources for underpinning confidence in making positive risk-taking decisions &/or supporting people to constructively take risks in their own lives.

When is it to be used?

- ***Immediately that someone is coming into contact with services...*** everyone should have a balanced assessment that includes recognition of their strengths and abilities, not *just* a summary of problems
- All clients/service users will have an assessment of their strengths being worked on, enabling these strengths to strongly influence the on-going daily work being done with people
- It is not a specialist assessment only to be drawn on in special cases... it is a continuous work in progress to be updated by anyone in a team at the point when new strengths information arises.

What does it link to?

- Any assessment of a person's needs, views and aspirations will provide the initial baseline of information to be transferred onto the *Strengths Assessment*
- It provides essential information about positive resources that can be used to work constructively with the ***personal priorities*** developed on the Strengths-Based Support Plan... this link is essential to stop it becoming a paper exercise in documenting assessment information without then making proper use of it
- It counter-balances the problems and current risk information identified in traditional service assessment formats
- In Learning Disability services it links closely to the concept of *Person-Centred Planning*

- Where *Thumbnail Sketches* are used the *Strengths Assessment* should help to inform the overall picture, but the sketches are not a substitute for developing the *Strengths Assessment*.

How is it used?

- It is a flexible approach that is individually tailored to client/service user needs
- There is no single way of doing it or documenting it; but the outcome should be a positive statement of achievements, resources and aspirations individualised to the experience of the person themselves
- The form should prompt you about areas in which to engage conversation with the client/service user; or areas to share reflections on in a team meeting
- It becomes the place to note down important points of information as they emerge... it is not a form to dictate when, how and in what order you ask things!
- The assessment is best conducted in an informal, conversational manner, rather than a structured interview, in ways and places where the client/service user feels most comfortable, rather than in formal meetings
- The *Strengths Assessment* format offers a more user-friendly way of capturing important priorities in the 'here and now'... it could be used as a document to be added to by any team member as relevant information arises. It is about a 'team' working with each client/service user, not just a focus on a key-worker with the individual at the time a *Support Plan* needs to be completed
- It can be used as a source of information to prompt discussion, or a basis for developing a shared picture of a person in a team meeting
- Within the process of team-working:
 - An allocated key-worker should oversee that the *Strengths Assessment* is developing, but the whole team can contribute the on-going details as new pieces of information arise
 - A typed version can be added to using hand-written comments, but an updated version will need to be re-typed and dated by the key-worker occasionally (N.B. Each hand-written comment does not have to be dated, the important date is recorded at each point the form is re-typed)
 - Details such as personal qualities and other specific strengths should be used to form the basis of plans and interventions in response to the identified needs or risks.

How is it reviewed?

- It is a method of working that supports practice, not a service-driven need for auditing standards

- The *Strengths Assessment* is updated daily, weekly or monthly as new information arises not just whenever there is a formal review
- The information on a *Strengths Assessment* should be consulted as part of every review.

How is the client/service user involved in its use?

- As with the overall process of using them this will be determined flexibly on a case-by-case basis
- Clients/service users generally do not like the formality of a long meeting to complete a *Support Plan*... it doesn't necessarily capture accurate information, generally providing more of a response to the formality of the situation and language of the questions
- In some instances, the whole process could be described to the client/service user, and where appropriate, a *Strengths Assessment* format left with them to ponder and complete in their own time... this may then form a basis for the person to lead their own subsequent discussion of their strengths and wishes with staff members
- In other instances, the *Strengths Assessment* can be shared with the client/service user on a more informal basis, providing positive feedback on a regular basis
- Where two different strengths assessments are emerging on the same person (i.e. a team version and a separate client/service user's own version) it is up to the team how they try to then combine these into a composite; or whether circumstances suggest that continuing with two slightly different versions is productive and useful.

Special considerations

- The *Strengths Assessment* as a working document should help to reduce the overall amount of paperwork and should result in clearer paperwork!
- However, it requires a shift of thinking to documenting and consulting the form on a regular basis
- Using this as a working document should also be triggered by the act of making entries in the *daily/contact notes* (N.B. individual's/teams need to think about the specific purposes of the daily notes, what should be captured in them that is different from what is captured on *Strengths Assessments* documents, and how these will be referenced in the *daily/contact notes*).

STRENGTHS-BASED CARE/SUPPORT PLAN

What is it?

A means for developing the identified strengths into a 'working support plan' that responds to the *priorities* stated by the client/service user (identified on the last part of the Strengths Assessment as 'What is most important for me to do').

When is it to be used?

- **On everyone...** from the point where a priority want or wish is specified by the client/service user
- As relevant information is identified from the Strengths Assessment.

What does it link to?

- It emerges out of the process of developing a Strengths Assessment
- It provides a balance to the documenting of risks in a risk assessment
- It will help to inform the review of Outcomes, specifically in relation to the definition of positive risk-taking.

How is it used?

- It is a flexible approach but should always emerge from discussions with the client/service user
- The document may or may not be introduced directly into client/service user conversations... this will be a **worker judgement**
- It may be presented in team meetings as a prompt to develop a team plan around a specific client/service user
- The prompt for 'intended outcome' challenges us to think about what successful achievement of the *priority* might look like (e.g. the *priority* might be to move into more independent accommodation, whereas the *intended outcome* might be to live in a one bedroom flat close to the support of friends and family near to a familiar shopping centre)
- The prompt about 'other resources needed' refers to what the individual worker, the team, the client/service user and any other agency will need to contribute to implementing the plan successfully

How is it reviewed?

- This will be determined by the specific priority and the plan itself (i.e. it is a flexible arrangement rather than an administrative timescale)

- This could be just between the workers and client/service user on an ad hoc basis, or it may happen through team meetings
- In more defined 'teams' (e.g. crisis resolution & home treatment teams or residential projects) it will not always be the key-worker who will be developing and reviewing a specific plan, it can be any team member who is relevant or involved with a specific priority while they are on-shift
- The *Strengths-Based Care/Support Plan* should help to inform the reviewing of Outcomes.

How is the client/service user involved in its use?

- This is a flexible arrangement, but as it responds to the client/service user priorities it will usually involve them in all parts of its development and implementation.

Special considerations

- As stated priorities are achieved the plan should be fed back to the client/service user as an indication of progress
- Achievements can also be captured in updates of the Strengths Assessment, where relevant.