

I cannot fix it but I can help you fix it: A strengths based approach to working with children and families with mental health concerns

Amanda Kruger¹, Abraham Francis²

¹ *Child and Youth Mental Health Accredited Social Worker, Queensland Health, Australia*

² *James Cook University, Australia*

This paper is based on clinical experience of working with children and families in Australia. It has been observed that while working with parents/carers that they often present 'broken children' and expect the clinician to miraculously 'fix' the problem. It has also been noted that when working with children, young people and families in a tertiary mental health setting, it is often the problem saturated perspective that is the focus that consumes clinical practice. Finding ways of assisting them to put the pieces back together often requires specific knowledge, skills and innovative ways of interventions. It also requires an approach that is not deficit focused. This can be quite confronting and challenging for the practitioner who provides a service within a medical model of framework. In a strengths base approach, the person is not the problem; the problem is the problem and we are all part of the solution. Evidences from the literature show that utilizing a strength based approach allows people to experience a sense of control to focus on all the aspects of their life rather than be defined as the negative presenting issue. Aspects such as survival skills, abilities, knowledge, resources and desires are discussed as a mechanism to assist this process. This allows the clinician to both view and explore with the person their strengths instead of the problem itself. By doing this, a more holistic productive therapeutic alliance between clinician and consumer/s occurs.

The ability to assist families in changing perspective and to focus on their strengths that they already possess to build resilience and sustainability provides them with the opportunity of ownership and control over the situation. This paper will discuss the importance of using strengths based model and how it has been implemented in clinical practice in north Queensland. The authors, based on their experience and through case studies, illustrate the importance of this strengths model of practice when working with people with mental health concerns and explain how it can make a difference in the lives of people.