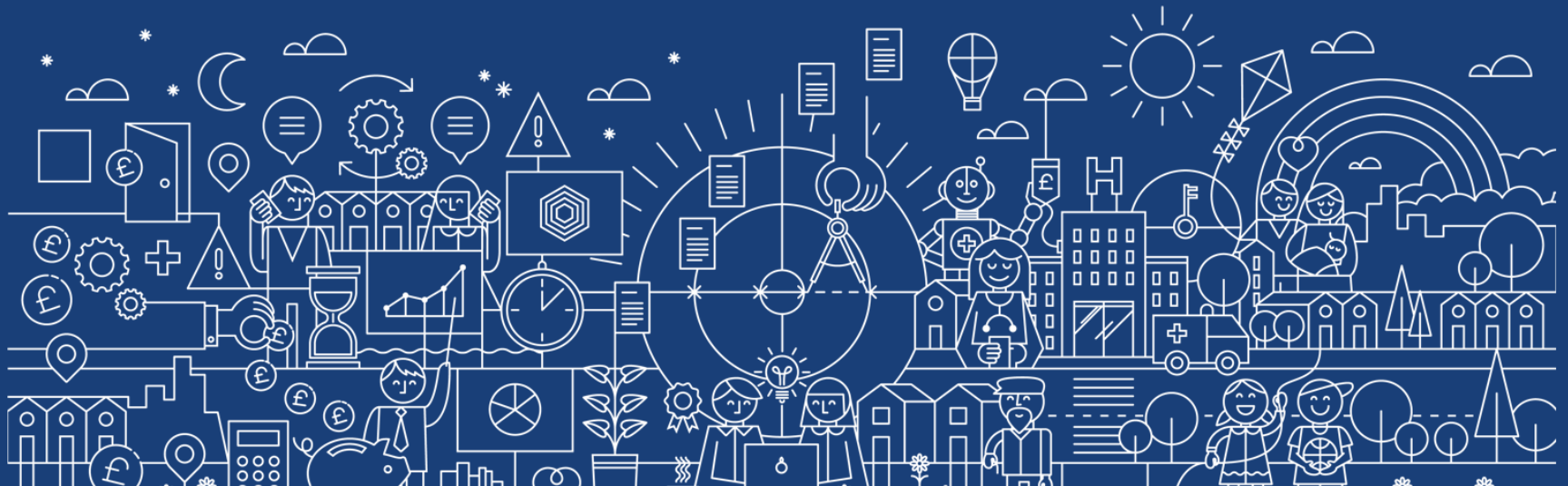


IMPOWER

Strengths-based approaches

Alex Fox OBE

March 2025



This session

- Why do we need strengths-based approaches?
- What are they really, and what are they not?
- What makes working in this way easy and hard?
- What needs to change?

IMPOWER works with councils and the NHS to create better outcomes which cost less

We only work with public services, to create **better outcomes** and **more sustainable public services**.

We

- focus on **individuals**: their strengths, needs & goals
- build an ambition for **strengths-based public services** which is shared by the whole system
- Reshape systems and how public funds are spent to get **better outcomes for less**

We **coproduce** our work with local people.

We are looking forward to **learning** from you!



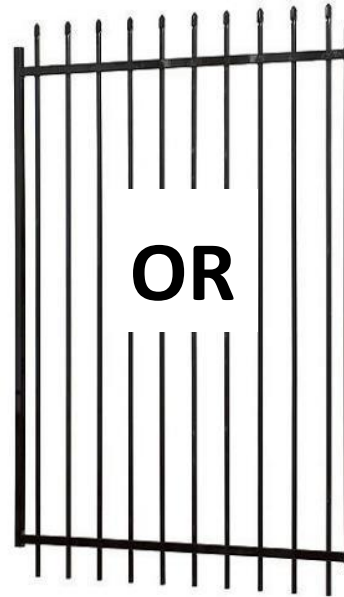
Why do we need strength-based approaches?



Public services have always divided people into two groups.



We can still make people choose between getting the support they need and being full citizens.



A strength-based approach doesn't ignore our needs, but it does mean seeing beyond them.

Deficit-based approaches

Only see the risks

Only see this moment (which might be a crisis)

Only see what workers and services can do

Strengths-based approaches

See the whole person

See what people have achieved or could achieve

See what people, families and communities can do

Strengths-based approaches don't just make support more effective, they also safeguard our rights.

- The deficit-based labels we give people can **dehumanise** them and undermine their confidence.
- We don't apply those labels equally: they foster **bias** and **grow inequalities**.

Strengths-based working is also a legal obligation under the Care Act 2014

The Care Act requires councils to consider the person's own strengths and capabilities, including what support might be available from their wider support network or within the community, to help in considering what else, other than the provision of care and support might assist the person in meeting the outcomes that they want to achieve.

The assessor should consider the person's needs, in the context of their skills, ambitions and priorities.

The Act says social care's purpose is to achieve wellbeing, including control over day-to-day life, and participation in work, education, training, or recreation. It also specifies strengths-based approaches such as Personal Budgets and prevention.



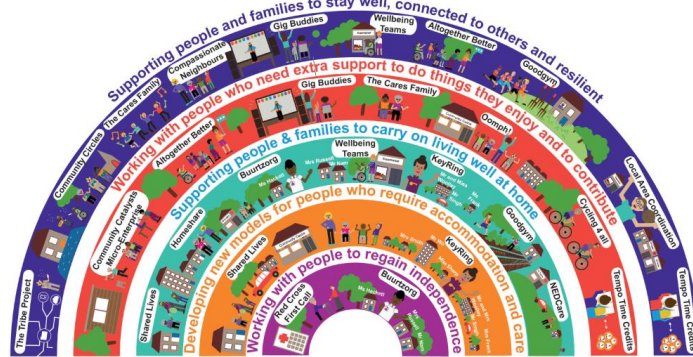
The UK has already scaled strengths-based, coproduced approaches in some sectors such as social care



[SharedLivesPlus.org](https://www.SharedLivesPlus.org)



Shared Lives is one of a growing range of strengths-based community approaches catalogued by Think Local Act Personal



Innovations in community-centred support

There are many community centred approaches out there: this is a tiny selection. More information can be found on the Think Local Act Personal website.



Meet 'J'

J is a vulnerable adult with a long history of alcohol misuse and abuse. She is often disengaged and her behaviour challenges support services. After a long period of institutional support, she now lives alone. She is socially isolated and has so far struggled to find friends or a partner, which is something she often fixates on.

Meet 'K'

K is a survivor, who has been through a lot, including escaping an abusive relationship. She has been sober for a year after beating her alcohol addiction. She knows her own mind and is fiercely independent; she hates being told what to do by professionals. She lives independently in her own place for the first time. Her main goal now is to find new friends and perhaps a partner.

Two stories: your feedback

J is a vulnerable adult with a long history of alcohol misuse and abuse. She is often disengaged and non-compliant with support services. After a long period of institutional support, she now lives alone. She is socially isolated and has so far struggled to find friends or a partner, which is something she often fixates on.

K is a survivor, who has been through a lot, including escaping an abusive relationship. She has been sober for a year after beating her alcohol addiction. She knows her own mind and is fiercely independent; she hates being told what to do by professionals. She lives independently in her own place for the first time. Her main goal now is to find new friends and perhaps a partner.

Language is important

Disengaged

Challenging

Client

Dual
Diagnosis

Service
User

Entrenched

Multiple
Needs

Chronic

Alcoholic

Vulnerable

Impaired

Frontline

Complex
Needs

Cases

Chaotic

Non-
compliant

At its simplest, strengths-based practice looks for what's strong, not what's wrong



Goals that are meaningful to the individual



Building on strengths now and for the future



Looking for resources: connections, relationships and community



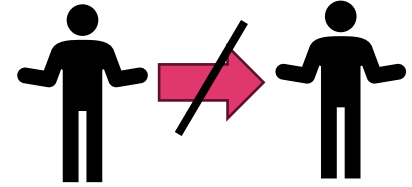
Relationships

What are the building blocks for good strengths-based practice?

- What enables people who draw on support to build strengths?
- What beliefs, skills or experiences do workers need?
- What do support organisations need to do differently?

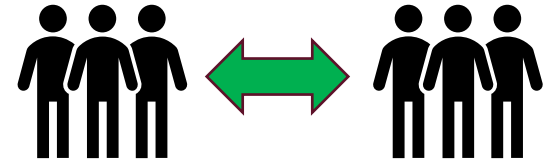
It all starts with good relationships.

Social care is not a gift that one person can give to another

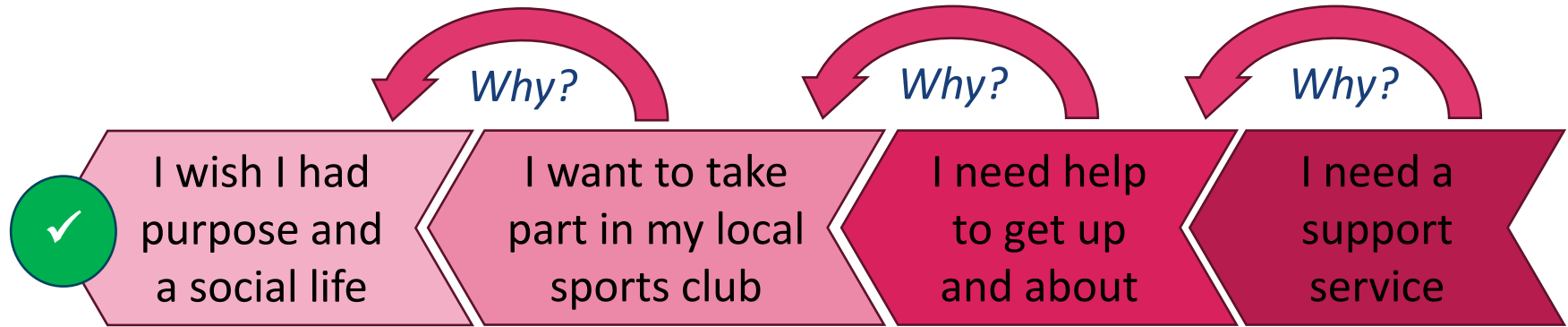


The change we make in people's lives is made up of:

- What the worker does
- What the person drawing on support does
- What people around them do
- And the strength of their relationships



We need to understand what is most important to the individual seeking support...



... then we can explore with the individual the least intrusive and most independent ways to reach their goals.



We need to think about risk differently.



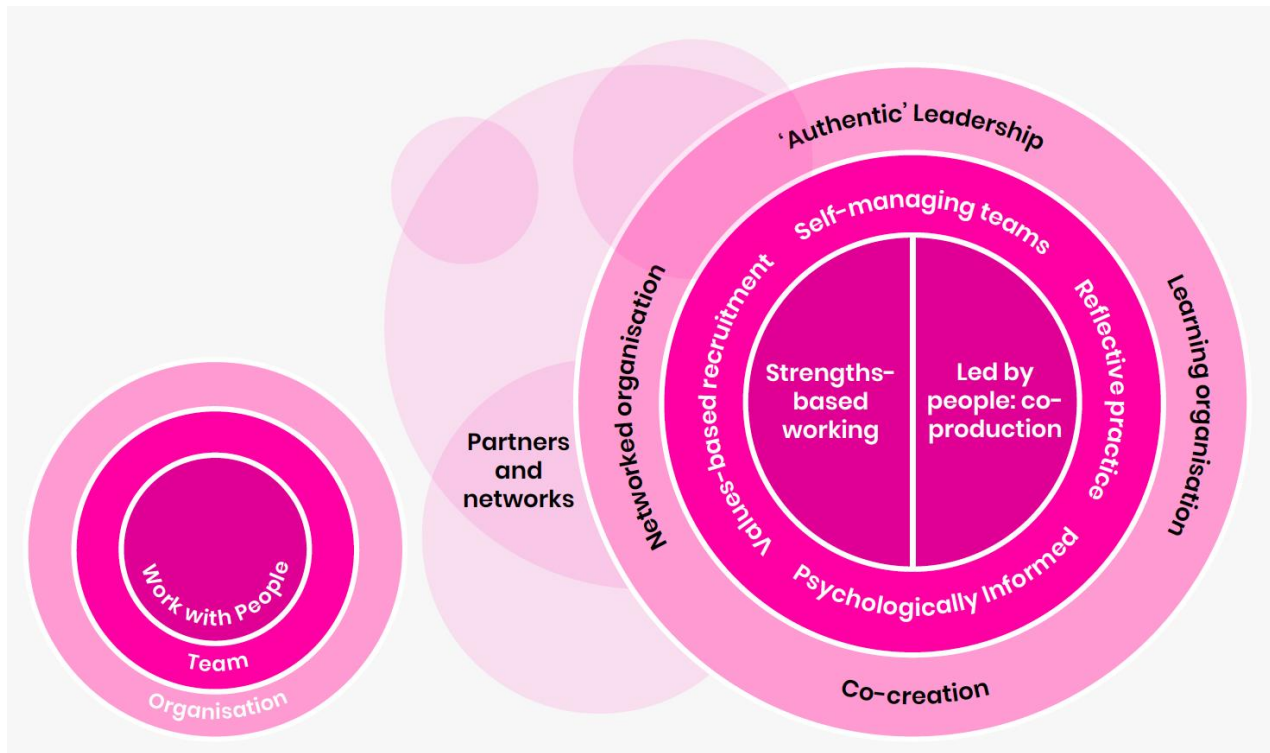
What risks matter most to you?

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For each of the enablers we talked about earlier, what gets in the way?

Enabler	What gets in the way?	What can fix this?
e.g. Trust	Rigid rules.	?

This can be delivered by networked public sector organisations which have strengths-based practice and coproduction at their heart



NEW THINKING

HOW WE LOST SIGHT OF THE POINT OF PUBLIC SERVICES

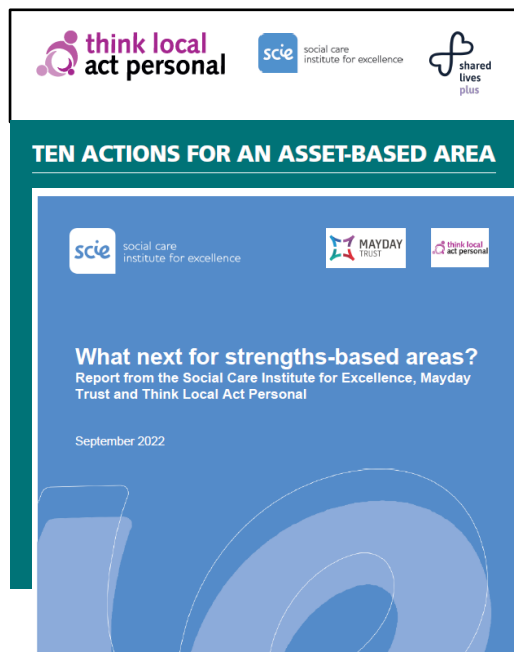
The case for whole system reform moving towards strengths-based and relational services

By guest contributors Alex Fox OBE and Prof Chris Fox



We need a 'whole-place' approach to developing strengths-based public services

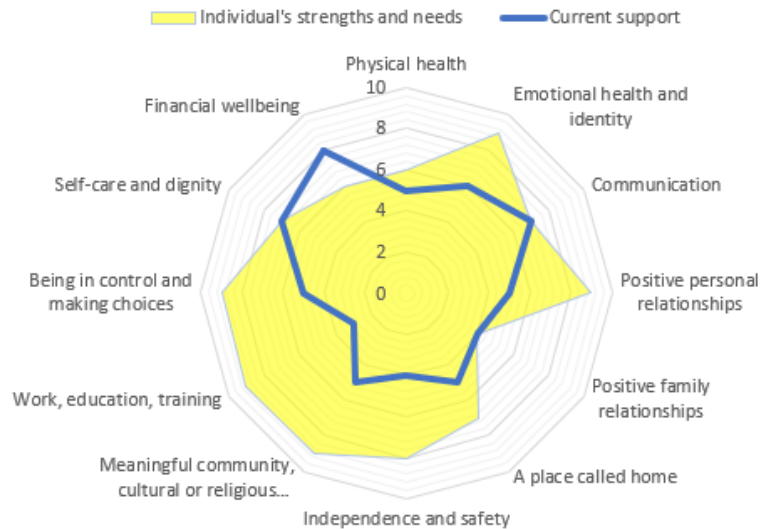
From:



People with power	Workers and volunteers	Citizens
We show empathy and humanity, and feel valued.	We show empathy and humanity, and feel valued.	We show empathy and humanity, and feel valued.
We are open to change and being led. We are present in our community.	We work alongside (not for) citizens, connecting ourselves and others.	We are active – doing and starting stuff in the community, and we are well-connected with others.
We are happy in our roles, creating healthy, learning workplaces.	We are happy in our roles and help people to live good lives.	We pursue good lives and have positive relationships.
We aim to achieve wellbeing and resilience. We measure good and bad impacts of our work.	We are confident we do what matters to people (not the system), showing humility and courage at the right times.	We define the lives we want to live and the roles we want supporters to play. We know we can feedback and take the lead.

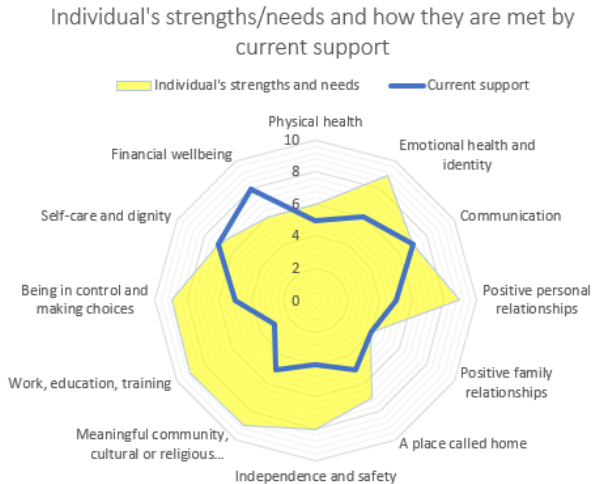
IMPOWER's Valuing Good Lives programme aims to turn strengths-based practice into real change.

Individual's strengths/needs and how they are met by current support



This approach starts with taking a whole-person view, to ensure every adult is living as independently as possible. We are working with councils and providers on this.

IMPOWER's Valuing Good Lives programme aims to turn strengths-based practice into real change.



So far we have learned:

- That there are opportunities for between a third and half of people to live more independently.
- The sudden breakdown of family care can be a big reason that people go into a care home.
- There are big opportunities to improve planning for adulthood with young people and families.

Valuing Good Lives looks at 12 areas of a good life.

- Which areas of life are most important for people to live a good life?
- Which can get forgotten about by services?



What are our key messages to government?

- We are working with Social Care Future to think about the right 'Outcomes Framework' for social care (called ASCOF).
- This means 'what gets measured'.
- What should councils and the government measure?

We need to get more ambitious about moving to strengths-based public service systems...

Alex Fox OBE, afox@impower.co.uk

A New Health and Care System: Escaping the Invisible Asylum
(Policy Press)

policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/a-new-health-and-care-system

