



**ASSETS, STRENGTHS AND  
RELATIONALITY:  
INTEGRATING APPROACHES IN  
THEORY AND PRACTICE**

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## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

There can be quite a lot of ‘wooliness’ about what strengths based practice is or is not – which makes it harder to answer research questions such as:

- Are we doing strengths based practice?
- Are we doing it well?
- Can we integrate more than one approach?
- What contexts are needed to support it?



# WHAT IS ASSET/STRENGTHS BASED WORK? *LYN ROMEO*

Supports people, carers and communities to find the solutions that are right for them

Getting alongside people – power analysis and social justice principles

**Positive attitude towards risk**

**Identifying strengths and assets**

What matters rather than what's wrong

What's possible and who cares – reflecting and improving

**Coproduction**

**Communicating and interacting**

Best use of what we have – community resources and enterprises

Solution Focused Approach to Assessments and Interventions

**Holistic approach**

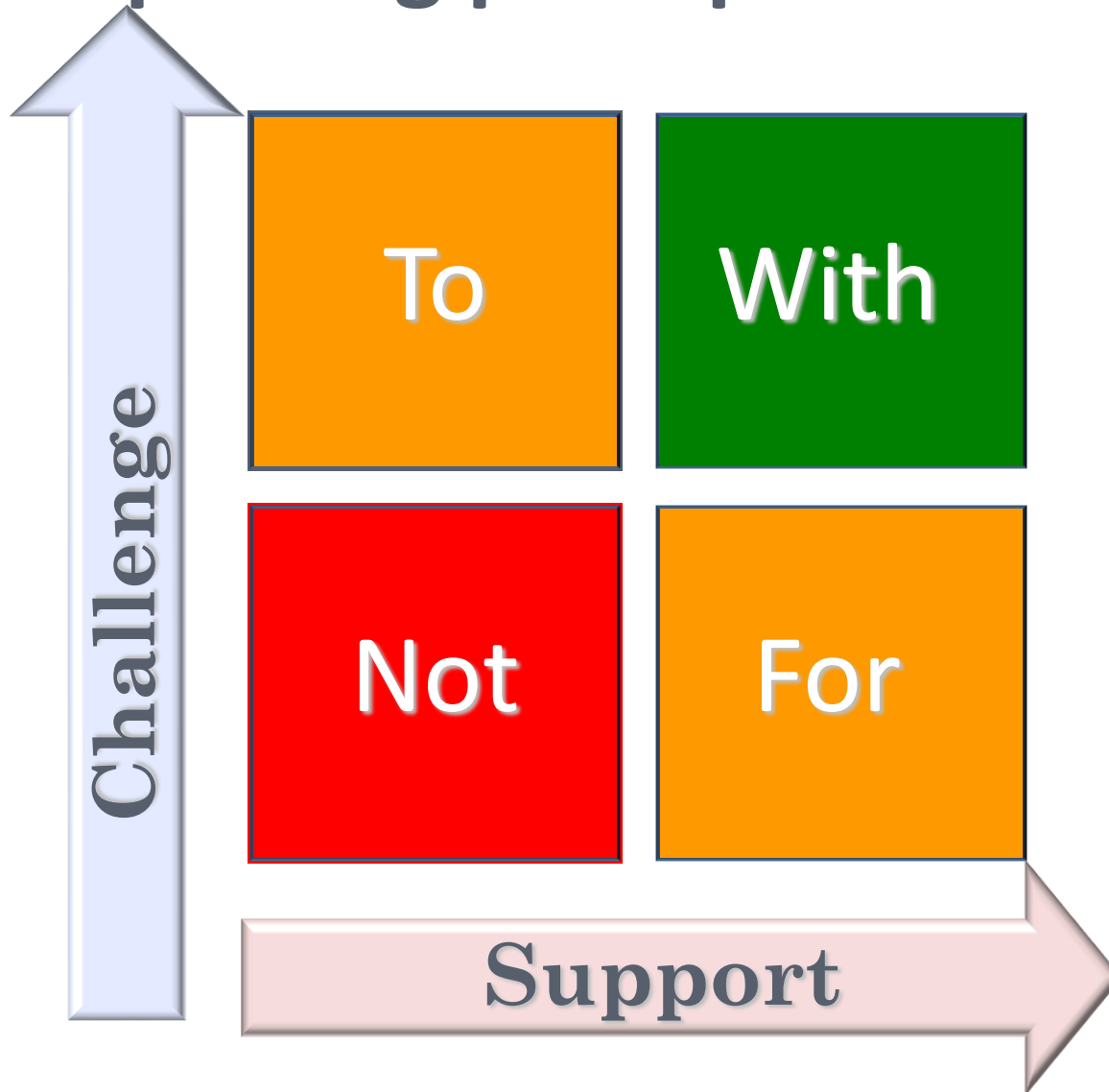
**Identifying support networks**



# STRENGTHS AND ASSET BASED APPROACHES



# Underpinning principles: Four ways...



Adapted from: Wachtel T et al (eds), (2001),  
Restorative Justice and Civil Society, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge



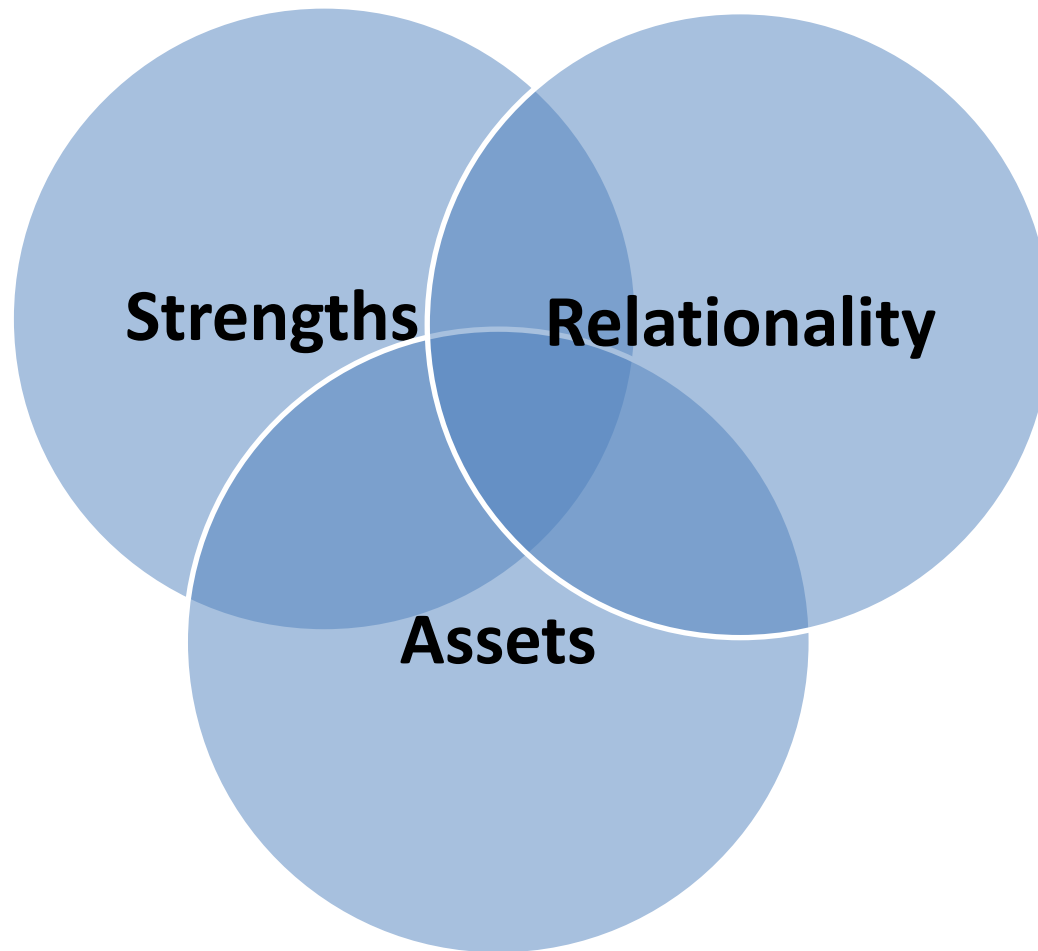
# UNDERPINNING PRINCIPLES

- Fundamental revisioning of the role of local services and the relationships between services, citizens and communities
  - Or is it just another one on the list of practitioner / agency led *doing to* / *doing for* interventions?
- Positive and holistic focus on what individuals, families and communities can do, or could do with the right support and connectedness.
  - Whole person
  - Whole family
  - Whole lifetime
- Acknowledgement of the factors that may make it harder for people to have the sort of life that they aspire to
  - Social exclusion, impact of trauma, poverty...

*This is actually quite radical...*



# MAKING SENSE OF A COMPLEX FIELD: 3 LEVELS OF (OVERLAPPING) FOCUS



# 3 LEVELS OF FOCUS

- **Strengths based practice:** Engaging with individuals in creative, purposeful conversations about what would be a 'good life' and how to achieve this – *e.g. 3 Conversations*
- **Relationality:** Mobilising relational networks around the individual and resolving issues that may be getting in the way of people collaborating and supporting each other – *e.g. Restorative Practice; Family Group Conferencing*
- **Assets:** Understanding and developing wider community resources and connections – *e.g. Asset Based Community Development*

*These are complementary.*

*But tendency for 1 focus to be dominant in process of innovation – and this can be less effective*





# BUILDING BLOCKS FOR INTEGRATED STRENGTHS / ASSET-BASED APPROACH

- Coherent values / different sort of professionalism
- Purpose – what sort of changes are we seeking to enable people to make in their lives?
  - Flourishing, not maintenance
- Theoretical clarity – what are the mechanisms of effective engagement and what factors enable positive outcomes?
- Ability to see beyond the individual and engage with the **social** contexts of people's lives



# DIFFERENT SORT OF PROFESSIONALISM

- Devolving power to citizens, or citizens and practitioners, to co-produce creative solutions together
- Removal of bureaucracy and proceduralism
- **‘Doing with’** rather than **‘doing to’** or **‘doing for’** - Restorative Practice relationships of High Challenge and High Support

**‘Your hands are never tied’** (Heather, Shared Lives Ambassador)



# WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE? CAPABILITIES (*AMARTYA SEN*)

- Access to valued opportunities (for being and doing) that we may or may not choose to take up at a particular point in time
- The notion of capability focuses on what people can do, be and achieve, and the choices available to them, so is:  
*“a kind of power in a way that happiness clearly is not”* (Sen, 2010)



# KEEPING A BROAD FOCUS: FORMS OF CAPITAL TO UNDERPIN STRENGTHS BASED APPROACHES

- **Personal capital**
- **Relationship capital**
- **Identity capital**
- **Social capital**
- **Economic capital**

Tew (2013) Recovery capital: what enables a sustainable recovery from mental health difficulties? *European Journal of Social Work*



# POWER


Both the **outcomes** and the **mechanisms** of strengths based practice involve a shift in how we do power relations (N.B. not a zero sum game)

- Less subjection to others (including local authorities) having **power over**
- More opportunities for people to develop their own efficacy (**power to...**) and to mobilise **co-operative power** and **protective power** together

*(Tew 2002, 2006)*



# CORE IDEAS TO TAKE FORWARD FOR STRENGTHS BASED PRACTICE

- Need to focus on strengths, relationships *and* assets
  - Enable new forms of connection between individuals, families and communities that build or sustain **capabilities** and forms of **capital**
  - Shift of **power** and **resources** to citizens, families and communities so as to enable people to find **solutions** to their difficulties and maximise their **capabilities**
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## PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

One approach which integrates a focus on strengths, relationships and assets is Local Area Coordination.

This is an approach which is already making a big difference in Swansea....

