Using the Strengths, Needs, & Culture Discovery with Families: A Strengths-based Practice

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Introductions
Family Connections Oregon: Overview

- Demonstrate the effectiveness of combined models of Family Find and Family Group Conferencing

- Address infrastructure barriers and install supports for statewide sustainability
FCO Population

- **3 sites:** Urban, small urban/rural, rural
- **Eligibility criteria:** First week of out-of-home placement, likely to stay for 60+ days
- **Focus:** 31 African American families
The FCO Model

Find & contact family → Child & family preparation → Family Group Conference → Warm Handoff
FCO Core Values

Family Connections Oregon

- Family voice
- Solution focused
- Strengths based
- Culturally responsive
- Trauma informed
Strengths, Needs & Culture Discovery (SNCD)

A process for implementing FCO core values

Adapted from Wraparound

Purpose: Engage families in child welfare planning through the exploration of their goals, strengths and needs
Focus of Today’s Session

- Strengths-based approach in child welfare planning
- Introduce you to the SNCD process
- Share caseworker, family meeting coordinator & family experiences with SNCD
Strengths-based Approach

“The work of the strengths approach is the work of empowerment – helping individuals, families, and communities see & utilize their capacities; recognize the options open to them; understand the barriers and scarcities they may face; surface their hopes and aspirations; and align them with their inner and outer resources to improve the quality of their lives.”

Saleebey (2000)
# Strengths in Child Welfare: A Paradigm Shift

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expert/Authoritarian</th>
<th>Strengths-based/Empowerment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know what’s best for your family</td>
<td>I want to learn what you believe is best for your family</td>
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<td>I know enough about you to plan</td>
<td>I want to learn more about how you see your situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know what you need</td>
<td>I want to fully understand your strengths &amp; how they can lead to solutions to your needs</td>
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Strengths: Key Assumptions

- All families have strengths.
- Families are their own best experts on their strengths and needs.
- A family’s culture and traditions are strengths to understand, respect & build on.
- Change is supported by building on strengths.
- Exploring strengths builds commonality and broadens perspectives.
Research Suggests Motivational Outcomes

- Positive perceptions of caseworker & CW case (Furrer et al., 2015)
- Parents’ buy-in to services (Kemp et al. 2014)
- Feelings of empowerment & social support (Green et al., 2004)
- Sense of independence and confidence (Whitley et al., 1999)
Research Suggests Child Welfare Outcomes

- Preventing return to foster care (Furrer et al., 2015)
- Preventing foster care placements (MacLeod & Nelson, 2000)
- Fewer placement changes for foster youth (Clark et al., 1996)
Strengths & Needs-based Planning

- Need to explore how to deepen our talk about strengths and needs
- Move this practice to actual building blocks
- Moving from generic planning to individualized planning
- A way of changing the narrative
Introduction to SNCD Process

Why use SNCD in the context of a child welfare family decision meetings?

FCO Model:
Introduction to SNCD Process

Process: Preparing for meeting

- Engage in informal conversations with family members
- Summarize identified goals, strengths & needs with family
- Family decides on presentation at meeting
Introduction to SNCD Process

Process: Conducting meeting
- Beginning of information sharing
- Posted for all participants to see
- Participants add
- Caseworker outlines safety concerns
SNCD Guide

1. Family Overview
2. Strengths & Culture
3. Extended Family/Natural Supports/Resources
4. Goals & Needs
5. Trauma Considerations
1. Family Overview

- How the family sees their situation
- Hopes for the future
- What has worked in the past/not worked in the past?
- What will help support their child while in placement?
2. Strengths and Culture

- Individual and family
- Values, attitudes, skills, abilities, cultural beliefs and traditions, preferences
- How family strengths increase protective capacity
A strength is...

- A source of power
- Capacity or potential for effective action
- Ability to resist stress or strain
- Pathways to solutions
- Ultimately resolve concerns
- Personal, cultural, environmental
Two Types of Strengths

Descriptive
- Attributes
- Features

Functional
- Action-based
- Related to skill
- Capacity
- Ability
- Address needs
2. Strengths and Culture: Activity

Identify up to three (3) functional strengths that would help inform child welfare planning for Jana & Jeremy
3. Extended Family/Natural Supports & Resources

- Relationships with extended family, close friends, supportive network
- Resources/environmental supports that can help
4. Goals & Needs

- What the family sees as important to accomplish
- What the family feels are issues and concerns to address
- How the family defines the needs of the child
What is a Need?

- Defines what issues must be addressed to accomplish the family’s goal

- Remember: **Needs are not services**
Goals & Needs: Activity

**Goals**: Jana wants to provide a safe and happy home for Jeremy. She wants their family to heal from the past and be able to succeed. Jeremy wants to have a normal life with his mother, school and friends.

**Can you identify needs?**
Trauma & Resiliency Considerations

- Child and parent exposure to trauma; triggered behaviors and resiliency factors; needs associated with experiences.

- Trauma-informed practice: Goal is always to restore a sense of safety, power, and self-worth. Coordinator’s role is to follow, not lead.
A Coordinator’s Perspective

“The way we do [the SNCD] is empowering to the family. The family formulates those statements with me – parents are part of the process of identifying that child has experienced trauma...I write trauma considerations up on the wall during the meeting. Then the caseworker can see that family understands the trauma that they created in their child’s life...we put it in a framework that the parents can deal with – in their own voice.”
SNCD Wrap-up

- Example of write up for Jana & Jeremy
- Format can be different depending on the family
- Final thoughts or questions?
Family, Caseworker & Coordinator Experiences
Family Experience

“[Coordinator] pretty much got a good picture of how my family works together and how important my family was to me...It made me realize I didn’t have to hold a hard shell all the time and that I have a lot of good strengths.”
Family Experience

“It did made a difference because not only was I was able to show it [strengths], but other people were able to recognize it and see it rather than focus on the bad stuff I’ve done. DHS didn’t focus on me being a bad mom...It changed the picture DHS portrayed of me making bad decisions all the time.”
Family Experiences

“It helped the family understand me more. Particularly my strengths.”

“...made it easier for people to understand where I was coming from. [Coordinator] helped me change how I viewed myself.”

“It changed how my family views me.”
A Coordinator’s Perspective

“The workers’ lens or view of the family sometimes changed to be more positive...[I] could reframe things for workers so they could see the family in different light...I could get them to look at how they have been resilient in the past...”
Caseworker Response to Process

“The family’s strengths were presented by [Coordinator] and mom. I learned knew things...people I wasn’t aware of in the parents’ support system. I learned about mom’s anxieties. [Coordinator] found some of [mom’s] strengths I didn’t know about, that she hadn’t demonstrated to me but did in talking and sharing with [Coordinator].”
Caseworkers Response to Process

“I think family input is really important because they know the kids more than we do so allowing them to speak up and share what they know about the children and family dynamics is important and helpful. Because we can make decisions based on what we see on paper but when you know more about what has affected the family and the history and dynamics it is much better...So I think it is important to give family voice.”
How could SNCD affect disproportionality?

- Culturally-specific Coordinator
- Process & tool that makes culture explicit
- Caseworkers experience a paradigm shift
Caseworker Response to Process

“Yes family does have more voice in this type of meeting. This is more welcoming for that. It took away...some of that feeling of the ruling dictatorship role of the state and threats about what will happen if you don’t do this. The approach was more supportive...It put me on more of a notice, made me internalize things differently as to how we work with parents.”
How could SNCD affect disproportionality?

What we learned

- Culturally matched coordinator
- SNCD makes culture explicit
- Allows opportunity for cultural bridging

However...
A Coordinator’s Perspective

“...there is pressure from other agency staff to not be such an advocate for the family. [You] can be accused almost of undermining the agency’s work...So I try to be an advocate for the process...I really try to clarify the meeting process and goals and to keep articulating the strengths of the family.”
Discussion

- Does this belong in family meeting practice?
- How can this process promote or undermine family engagement?
### Family Overview

*How the family sees their situation; hopes for the future*
*What has worked in the past/not worked in the past?*
*What will help support their child while in placement?*

### Strengths and Culture

*Individual and family*
*Values, attitudes, skills, abilities, cultural beliefs and traditions, preferences*
*How family strengths increase protective capacity*

### Extended Family /Natural Supports/Resources

*Relationships with extended family, close friends, supportive network*
*Resources/environmental supports that can help*

### Goals and Needs

*What the family sees as important to accomplish*
*What the family feels are issues and concerns to address*
*How the family defines the needs of the child*

### Trauma/Resiliency Considerations

*Child and parent exposure to trauma, triggered behaviors, strengths and resiliency factors; needs*