



# Elevating Strength Stories in Social Work

## The Power of Strength Stories in Practice

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# WHY DOES STRENGTH BASED REFLECTION MATTER IN SOCIAL WORK

James Caiels J, et al. **Strengths-based approaches—perspectives from practitioners**, *The British Journal of Social Work*, volume 54, issue 1, January 2024, pages 168–188, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad186>

White, M.A. (2021). **Positive professional practice: A strength-based reflective practice teaching model**. In: kern, M.L., Wehmeyer, M.L. (Eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*. Palgrave macmillan, cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_7)

Shift from deficit-focused to strengths-focused (evidence-based strength work has more impact than looking to “fix” deficits)

Builds resilience and motivation

Encourages positive identity and empowerment

Fosters ethically grounded, person-centred practice

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# STRENGTH-BASED APPROACHES FOR THE WORKFORCE

Focus: *What's  
strong, not  
what's wrong*

Supports  
recovery,  
healing, and  
goal-setting

Integrates well  
with  
trauma-inform  
ed and holistic  
models



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## HOW DID WE SUPPORT STRENGTH STORY WORK IN DUNDEE

- Used a story narrative exercise to illustrate how practitioner strengths helped overcome challenge and resulted in practice they were proud of
- Rather than always thinking “what can I do better”, think “what can I do again” – what strengths do I have that I want to notice and replicate in other situations?
- Allows a deeper reflection akin to Brookfields lens reflection which takes us outside self reflection and allows peer reflection which is uplifting, affirming, and authentic
- Empowering
- Can be one to one session or a group peer reflection activity
- We used a coaching tool called *At my Best - Strength cards* ([atmybest.com](http://atmybest.com)), but the exercise is not limited to these cards



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# A STRENGTH STORY - AN EXPERIENCE FROM PRACTICE

- Laying the cards out with visuals or photos face-up, ask the practitioner to pick three cards that represent an experience from practice - “a sparkling moment”, and use those three cards to relay the narrative of your strength experience









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# A STRENGTH STORY EXERCISE IN PRACTICE

Using the remaining cards, we then flipped them over showing lots of strength attributes written in words – we ask the practitioner to pick what strengths they think they exhibited in the story

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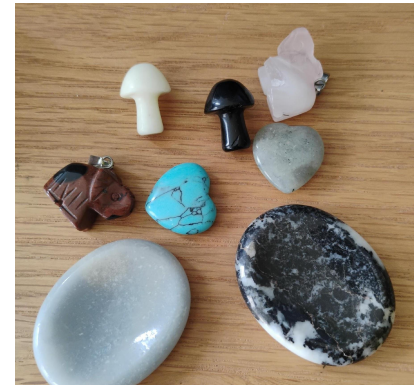
# DEEPEN THE REFLECTION

## The practitioner's reflection



Peer (s) reflection - what cards would they pick and why

- What strengths in the practice do you hear when listening to the story?





# FEEDBACK

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## Using the Exercise as a Facilitator (thoughts from a GP)

“What attracted me to it was the immediacy of establishing connections between professionals that are used to working in their own silos. I had hoped that it would show how working together leads to positive outcomes for patients (we had GPs, nurses, psychologists, community link workers, benefits advisors and third sector representatives at the meeting). I think the strength exercise makes the web of interconnections and added value of MDT working visible.” (GP)

## The experience of being a participant

“We don’t spend enough time looking at what we do well, this made me feel I am good at my job, I am making a difference” (Social Worker 1)

“It helped me understand how hard my colleagues are working to make a difference, I didn’t understand the barriers before” (Police)

“We need to do this every Friday – make us realise how hard we work” (Social Worker 2)

“I didn’t realise how much this exercise would help me understand my role, responsibilities and impact I am having in this situation, as well as helping to me hold onto the good stuff to ground me when I feel overwhelmed in the future” (Newly Qualified Social Worker 1)

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