THE RESILIENCY MODEL

“It’s how we do what we do that counts ... context matters more than content; process more than program.”

Bonnie Benard

Traditional social service programs seek to identify and rectify recipients’ abilities so they can help them to avoid or alleviate risk, and eventually become problem-free. If not exactly treated as adversaries, providers rarely treat consumers as allies – and never as equal partners – in the process.

A diametrically different approach comes from the asset or strength-based Resiliency Model which - as its name implies – attends to “… the building one’s ability to bounce back.” It emerged from the youth development movement of the 1980’s and 1990’s after evaluation researchers uncovered results that confound traditional intervention strategists’ “… core belief that risk factors for the most part predict negative outcomes …”; to the contrary, researchers found that “… supports and opportunities which buffer the effect of adversity and enable development to proceed appear to predict positive outcomes in anywhere from 50 to 80 percent of high-risk populations.

The concept of resiliency is summarized in a recent Sacramento Bee article:

"I think it's something that everyone has within them, regardless of whatever horrors they have experienced in their lives," Bonnie Benard, a national expert in resiliency, told Serna Village staffers and residents. "It's up to the rest of us to create the school, the community, the environment to allow them to succeed."

Unlike most rehabilitation programs, which zero in on people's problems, she said, resiliency focuses on finding hidden strengths and assets and using them to evoke change. The nonprofit Serna Village at McClellan Park and its companion program, Quinn Cottages, are national models in the resiliency movement, said Benard, who holds workshops on the approach throughout the country.

"This program works," she said.

Benard’s research shows that effective organizations offer their constituents ongoing opportunities to:

1) Build their competencies and skills through engaging, challenging and interesting activities;
2) Build belonging through active participation in groups processes with peers;
3) Develop a sense of power and respect through problem-solving and decision-making; and
4) Find a sense of meaning through activities that incorporate dialogue and reflection while providing community service and contribution to others.
In such situations, success comes not from solutions externally imposed; rather, "...the action is in the interaction..." stimulating an ‘alchemy of belonging’ that has the following properties:

- Leadership is in the convening, not in demanding or directing;
- Small group are the unit of transformation, not one-to-one or large classroom settings;
- Questions are the only things to be ‘provided’ and are more transformative than answers;
- Hospitality- the welcoming of strangers – is not just an action, but an attitude; and
- Physical space social interactions are designed to nurture a sense of belonging.

These characteristics completely contradict the traditional provider/consumer service delivery model and conventional authoritarian hierarchal structure that supports it. Together, that model and structure combine to impose a teacher/student – or, worse, a parent/child – dynamic that ends up treating people as recipients rather than participants who become passive objects rather than instigating subjects of action intended for their benefit.

This makes self-fulfilling the misperception that these are hapless/helpless/hopeless people who require not just guidance but direction. If such recipients show any resistance or resentment against such treatment, the traditional response is only more stern measures in an increasingly repressive cycle. The unintended consequence is reinforcement of the very co-dependence from which they - and we - seek liberation.

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**RESILIENCY: What We Have Learned**

"... the most effective, efficient, and even rewarding and joyful approach to problem prevention (or remediation) is through supporting healthy development." (2)

"... most children and youth, even those from highly stressed families or resource-deprived communities, do somehow manage to make decent lives for themselves ...". (7)

"... the innate self-righting tendencies and environmental protective factors that account for the resilience of (those) facing adversity and challenge are precisely the same supports and opportunities that nurture us all." (10)

These are "... individual characteristics, also called ‘internal assets’ or ‘personal competencies’, associated with healthy development and life success ... fittingly seen as developmental possibilities that can be engaged in all individuals through the provision of opportunities and supports.” (13)

"... (when chances) for participation incorporate opportunities for contribution ... (people) no longer see themselves as simply recipients ... but as active contributors to the setting in which they live.” (47)

"... the connection between autonomy and belonging is self-reinforcing: the stronger one’s sense of self, the more able she or he is able to form healthy connections to other people, with those healthy connections, in turn, further nurturing their sense of self.”(79)

"Infusing the power to make choices and decisions into the (process) does not necessarily require any special program. But it does require adults to let go of a control orientation, to see (program’s constituents) as a valuable resource ... and create a system based on reciprocity and collaboration rather than control and competition.” (81)

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The reality is that “… social fabric and successful communities elsewhere cannot be imported. What works somewhere else often ends up as simply another program here, which might be useful but does not shift the fundamentals that we are after.” (IX) So instead of concentrating on structural form or service functions, this essay instead encourages its readers to focus on mentality rather than
methodology. It is more about attitude and approach than technique and, as it turns out, as much about intentions as effects.

By encouraging program engagement strategies that enhance strengths or capabilities, the Resiliency Model moved Cottage Housing’s program away from what SWITCH later describe as a ‘fixed’ mindset, which “… sees abilities as static and not prone to improvement and therefore adverse to challenge”; instead, we had begun utilizing a ‘growth’ mindset that “… sees abilities as muscles that can be built up with practice by stretching them, taking risks and accepting feedback with a focus on the longer view -- an approach that compliments effort rather than skill.”

“As long as our goal is to ‘get more of them to do enough to get through,’ we will along fall further behind.”

William Glasser

Another reference book that guided Cottage Housing’s early shift toward the Resiliency Model was taken from the education field. The Quality School by William Glasser, M.D. focuses attention on qualitative considerations crucial to any learning/growth environment. Describing the detriment of coercion-based methods, his book suggests how to move away from the traditional ‘stimulus response’ or ‘boss management’ approach with which most service agencies’ staff and clients are habituated.

Adopting the premise of Maslow’s hierarchy (i.e. that all behavior as driven by the desire to satisfy needs) and adapting its form, Glasser presents a service model that starts by addressing the most basic yearnings for safety and love, and then ascends toward needs for power, fun and fulfillment.

Cottage Housing correlated this Glasser’s adapted hierarchy to the Resiliency Model’s recognition that one’s sense of belonging, usefulness and influence within their world are pre-requisites to the acquisition of the competence, confidence and – ultimately – creativity they will need to meet their aspirations to become effective parents, productive employees and – ultimately – happy people. However, as depicted in a chart (below) used in new employee orientation meetings, a homeless person’s transition from ‘hopeless’ to ‘hopeful’ is not a one-way street or forever upward spiral. Rather, this process moves in either direction as new issues/challenges arise when people simultaneously strive to satisfy their needs while increasing their functional capacity to do so.

![NEED SATISFACTION PROCESS](image)

This chart provided Cottage Housing with a useful basis for sequencing attention and action around specific needs as they arose. Seeking to facilitate residents’ transition to a new living environment and alleviate survival concerns heightened while living on the streets, program activities were specifically designed to warmly welcome incoming residents and increase their sense of belonging within the
community. Extending program involvement opportunities heightened their sense of usefulness and sense of influence, power, and the satisfactions of accomplishment depicted in the chart above.

Alternatively, as negative behaviors arose, this chart directed staff’s attention the possibility of unaddressed issues at lower need levels or rising concerns being triggered by new challenges. It also depicts how an incident traditionally interpreted as ‘personal relapse’ (blame the consumer) or as ‘program failure’ (blame the provider) may in fact be a sign of progress - simply indicating a momentary struggle typical in any learning process characterized by trial-and-error. A non-judgmental approach is less likely to put someone on the defensive, and less distracting from causal issues at hand.

While not ignoring such situations and or their consequences, Cottage Housing staff came to share Resiliency Model’s view that such ‘problems’ are neither indicative of a person’s capabilities nor morals - or any other pernicious interpretations. To the contrary, brain science researchers find that people who feel their safety/security needs threatened by their environment often ‘downshift’ their thinking to fight-or-flight stress responses and may not even have access to higher order thinking/learning when they need them most; on the other hand, exposure to environments that engage their sense of ‘self-efficacy’ (i.e. innate resilience) instead activates higher-order thinking, learning and creativity.

Cottage Housing’s approach in this regard was consistent with literature on learning communities, where high rates of success are achieved through an interactive partnership structure that emphasizes:

1. High expectations and a rigorous structure to support it;
2. Varied strategies for engaging learners in real-world experiences;
3. Strong connections between learners and staff;
4. Managerial leadership and organizational culture that is committed to institutional learning;
5. Unity among staff in their dedication to build capacity of the organization and those it serves.

“I can feel guilty about the past, apprehensive about the future, but only in the present can I act”

Abraham Maslow

The Resiliency Model’s goal - to enhance people’s ability not just to survive but to strive and thrive not just in today’s world but tomorrow’s as well - is accomplished not at some future point. Instead, it fosters substantive present-day experiences that directly and immediately advance the acquisition of developmental capabilities in five essential areas:

- **SOCIAL COMPETENCE:** responsiveness, flexibility, cross-cultural proficiency, empathy/caring, communication skills and a healthy sense of humor;
- **EMOTIONAL AUTONOMY:** positive Identity, self-efficacy, initiative, mastery and self-awareness;
- **MORAL/SPiritual WELL-BEING:** sense of purpose/meaning, future goal directedness, learning aspiration, imagination, achievement motivation, persistence/determination, optimism, faith;
- **PHYSICAL FITNESS:** capacity to remain sound in mind/body and make healthy choices;
- **COGNITIVE SKILLS:** problem-solving, planning, critical thinking, resourcefulness
None of these capabilities can be acquired second-hand, but rather only through real world/real work situations that are the exact opposite of traditional provider-controlled interactions that minimize both risk and reward. Rather, their acquisition requires not only meaningful involvement of those considered ‘consumers’ throughout the process, but also a redistribution of discretionary authority and instigation responsibility. These ‘strengths’ or ‘assets’ fall into four general categories:

### PERSONAL STRENGTHS: What Resilience Looks Like

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL COMPETENCE</th>
<th>PROBLEM SOLVING</th>
<th>AUTONOMY</th>
<th>SENSE OF PURPOSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Positive Identity</td>
<td>Goal Direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Internal Locus of Control</td>
<td>Achievement Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy Caring</td>
<td>Resourcefulness</td>
<td>Adaptive Distancing Resistance</td>
<td>Educational Aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion Altruism Forgiveness</td>
<td>Critical Thinking Insight</td>
<td>Self-Awareness Mindfulness</td>
<td>Special Interest Creativity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| | | | |
| | | | Optimism Hope |
| | | | Faith Spirituality |
| | | | Sense of Meaning |
| | | | Humor |

Bonnie Benard (2004)

To tighten the correlation between activities and results, Cottage Housing’s staff developed program activities and interactions with residents in a manner consistent with resiliency researchers’ finding that such capabilities are nurtured in an environment that consistently reinforces three ‘protective factors’:

- **CARING RELATIONSHIPS:**
  Establishing a basic trust/safety by “being there”, conveying unconditional love and compassion through listening and patience;

- **POSITIVE EXPECTATION MESSAGES & BELIEFS:**
  Expressing confidence/belief in the individual’s resilience by emphasizing their strengths and showing respect through firm guidance that both supports and challenges them to reframe/refocus on personal resilience as their key to success;

- **MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION & CONTRIBUTION:**
  Offering safe places where people experience inclusion and peer support for self-determined activities from which they exercise responsibility and derive a sense of accomplishment.

“We don’t receive wisdom; we can only discover it ourselves after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us.”

Marcel Proust
Two other books solidified Cottage Housing’s embrace of the Resiliency Model. The smallest of these books had the biggest influence on this changing mindset. You^2 - A High-Velocity Formula for Multiplying Your Personal Effectiveness in Quantum Leaps was the first of several Price Pritchett booklets that drastically altered the direction of our program design process. This booklet’s invigorating single-page chapters describe the “self-imposed trap” created by our own narrow perspective, and highlights how a problem-oriented focus limits the range of possibilities.

**You^2 - A High-Velocity Formula for Multiplying Your Personal Effectiveness in Quantum Leaps**

Sample chapter titles:
- Ignore conventional approaches
- Think beyond what common sense would allow
- Suspend disbelief
- Focus on ends rather than means
- Rely on unseen forces
- Choose a different set of risks
- Get uncomfortable
- Make your move before you’re ready
- Look *inside* for the opportunity

“Your most dependable behaviors can become obstacles to future success … things that worked for you in the past lose their serviceability … (and) you reach a point of diminishing return.” (7-9)

“… doing what you do best can be the worst thing you can do. It really doesn’t matter how well you can do something if it’s the wrong thing to do.” (11)

“… focus on possibilities rather than on limits or obstacles … people typically use only about 10% of their true potential … if you must doubt something, doubt your limits.” (13-16)

“A quantum leap is a move you are prepared to make. You just haven’t done it yet.” (17)

“… be prepared for… confusion, anxiety and failure. That’s part of opening yourself up to … exponential performance gains … Progress often masquerades as trouble.” (25-26)

“… if you worry about everything that will be involved in getting from here to there, you are bound to bog down in the questions about methodology … you’re not supposed to be concerned about what happens in...” (25-26)

Early in this program redesign process, a resident or staff member would often come into a meeting to excitedly announce that they “just took a quantum leap!” All in the room knew what they were talking about and commended their courage in doing so, which stimulated the program’s forward leaps as well.

> “To alienate humans from their own decisions-making is to change them into objects.”
> 
> **Paulo Freire**

Additional support for CHI’s programmatic shift toward the Resiliency Model came from an equally timely source - *Leadership and Self-Deception* - which highlighted an imposing obstacle to forward movement. After reading this book, Cottage Housing’s staff came to recognize many situations in traditional social service agencies where people are expected to act in a manner contrary to their own sense of how they should behave -- treating others not as people but rather as objects to be manipulated to our own interests or our program’s convenience. By presenting these startling facts in the context of a simple story, without judgment or blame, this book gave Cottage Housing staff the...
permission – indeed the responsibility – to explore ideas and employ techniques far beyond their usual repertoire.

**Leadership and Self-Deception**

“Identify someone with a problem and you’ll be identifying someone who resists the suggestion that he has a problem. That’s self-deception – the inability to see that one has a problem.” (16)

“Whatever I might be ‘doing’ on the surface ... I am being one of two fundamental ways when I am doing it. Either I’m seeing others straightforwardly as they are ... or I’m not ... I experience myself as a person among people (or) I experience myself as a person among objects. One way, I’m out of the box; the other way, I’m in the box.” (35-36)

“... this issue of whether we’re in the box or not is at the heart of most of the people problems we see in organizations.” (62)

“Self-betrayal occurs when...my thoughts and feelings will begin to tell me that I’d justified in whatever I’d doing or failing to do” (66-71). “I become self-deceived as my perceptions become distorted systematically in my favor” (79) and thereafter “... begin to see the world in a way that justifies my self-betrayal.” (77)

“... (soon) you cannot focus on results because, in the box, you are focused on yourself ... we (instead) try to control others, which provokes the very resistance that we feel the need to control all the more ... (so) my box ends up provoking more of the very thing I set out to change.” (105-106 & 130)

“... our box is penetrated by the humanity of others. We know in that moment what we need to do – we need to honor them as people. And in that moment (when) I see them as another person, with needs, hopes, and worries as real and legitimate as my own – (we’re) out of the box.” (144)

“... two things need to happen: First, we need to institute a process in our companies where we help people see how they’re in the box and therefore not focused on results. Second ... we need to institute a system of focusing on results that keep us out of the box much more than we have been: a way of thinking, a way of measuring, a way of reporting, a way of working.” (161)

It comes as nothing less than a shock to most people that their minds play tricks on them as self-interest filters our perception of reality in ways that are, unsurprisingly, self-serving. Even more surprising is the fact that so-called ‘objectivity’ is itself relative and therefore subjective. The realization that Cottage Housing and most other social service programs were ‘in the box’, and the necessity to ‘get out of the box’ to be effective, created an opportunities for honesty and openness that would not have existed otherwise.

For example, when African-American project managers expressed concern that one of their staff members showed indications of racism, for example, they were shocked that I not only agreed with them but also indicated that - since we all had grown up in a more-or-less subtly racist culture - I would be surprised if it were otherwise. Having never heard this admission from a Caucasian created a fascinating discussion among us about how we – rather than he – are affected by that up-bringing, and how we – rather than he – needed to deal with it. The employee eventually was moved onward for other reasons, but not before we had developed some creative approaches to engage him and all other staff in a broadly focused yet reality-grounded discussion about the biases we all bring to this work and the necessity to remain conscious of their influence.

This gently brought project staff to an even more shocking realization: that, regardless of whether we are either in or out this ‘box’, it is of our own making. And that prompted the most disturbing news of
all: that their efforts to get out of this ‘box’ can follow Newton’s third universal law of physics – for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction\textsuperscript{xix} -- and only get them deeper in the ‘box’ unless approached carefully, consciously and in collaboration with others’ assistance and support.

Broadening the perspective of Cottage Housing staff, such reference texts helped us all become less judgmental and thereby more inclined to take a more cooperative and even collegial approach in their interaction with project residents, confirming Self-Deception’s prediction about how to break an escalating control cycle.

How much the Resiliency Model changes everything from the conceptualization to the performance and evaluation of the action was described twenty-five hundred years ago in the guidance of a Chinese poet/philosopher:

\textit{“Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them.}

\textit{Start with what they know. Build with what they have.}

\textit{With the best leaders, when the work is done,}

\textit{the task accomplished, the people will say:}

\textit{‘We have done this ourselves’.”}

Lao Tsu

By offering a specific framework for a simple shift in mindset that reverberated in every aspect of the operation, these books’ findings provided a timely affirmation to program residents and staff alike whose reliance on a conventional organizational structure to implement traditional social service interventions had proven highly unsatisfactory to both.

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  \item \textsuperscript{ii} \textit{KAREN PITMAN \ldots}
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  \item \textsuperscript{iv} Benard, 8
  \item \textsuperscript{v} Huber, Cynthia - \textit{Sacramento Bee} (10/29/08)
  \item \textsuperscript{vi} Benard, Bonnie - \textit{Resiliency: What We Have Learned} (2004), ibid. 102, citing several research studies
  \item \textsuperscript{vii} Jackson & McKergow, ibid. 42
  \item \textsuperscript{viii} Block, ibid. 83-84, citing the work of Christopher Alexander
  \item \textsuperscript{ix} Block, ibid. 3
  \item \textsuperscript{x} SWITCH, 163-165 citing “Mindset: The New Psychology of Success” by Carol Dweck
  \item \textsuperscript{xi} Glasser, William, \textit{The Quality School} (1990) 5
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  \item \textsuperscript{xiii} Glasser, William - \textit{Quality Schools} (1998) among his many other books on this subject
  \item \textsuperscript{xiv} Caine, Renante and Geoffrey - \textit{Education on the Edge of Possibility} (1997)
  \item \textsuperscript{xv} Walcott, Catherine et. al. - \textit{High School Reform: National & State Trends} (2005)
  \item \textsuperscript{xvi} Benard, ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{xvii} “Toward Participant-Driven Social Services Delivery Strategies: Appling the Resilience Model” seminar presentation by Bonnie Benard, MSW (6/3/05); also “Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors In the Family, School, and Community” by Bonnie Benard, MSW (1991)
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  \item \textsuperscript{xix} Newton, Sir Isaac -\textit{Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica}, (1687)
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