



Befriending Network Scotland Conference and AGM 2007

Summary Conference Notes: Resilience and Befriending

What is resilience?

Resilience can be defined as “normal development under difficult conditions” (Fonagy et al, 1994).

What’s its relevance to befriending?

Befriending is a protective factor that supports positive outcomes (such as resilience), despite adversity. A resilience-based approach offers an alternative framework for intervention because it focuses on potential areas of strength within the befriended. This approach offers workers a real focus for positive practice. Although much of the academic work done on resilience has concentrated on children and young people, conference feedback proves that it is both a concept and theory that can be applied across all of befriending’s client groups.

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One hundred delegates attended the BN(S) annual conference and AGM held on 11 October 2007 at St George's West Church, Edinburgh, representing projects from all over the UK for a day of information, discussion and networking around the theme Resilience and Befriending. The morning explored current theories of resilience (presented by Professor Brigid Daniel, Chair of Social Work at the University of Stirling and a leading expert in resilience) and ways in which it affects befriending (presented by Jill Stephen of the Freagarrach Project). The AGM looked back over the year and towards the main aims for the period 2007/8 and the afternoon offered delegates a series of structured discussion workshops to reflect on and think through the issues raised by resilience. David Shipley from Age Concern, Newcastle chaired the day.

The following notes represent a summary of the day. For full notes, please visit www.befriending.co.uk. Notes will be available from 13 November 2007.

1. Nurturing Resilience: Professor Brigid Daniel, University of Stirling

Professor Brigid Daniel kicked the conference off with a presentation on resilience. A paraphrased version of her talk follows.

"So often at practice level, our focus tends to be on client vulnerability and risk. We tend to overlook human qualities of survival and don't ask the questions about what enables people to cope, what makes people thrive. Asking the questions that reveal the things that have gone well in people's lives lies at the heart of resilience theory and resilience-building practice. Put simply, if resilience theory is about pinpointing the factors that assist people to thrive despite adversity, resilience-building practice (such as befriending) is about nurturing these factors for people who are experiencing adversity. The concept of resilience, therefore, builds on a body of evidence about good, rather than bad outcomes and provides a theoretical underpinning for the considerable amount of creative work that people are already doing with their clients. What this means then is that resilience is defined both as an *outcome* (emotional well-being against the odds) and/or as a *process* (adaptability in the face of adversity). A key strength behind all of this is that because resilience focuses on thriving, it transmits a positive message and gives people hope and a sense of potential. For many clients, it can be very uplifting to be asked 'what are you good at' rather 'what do you struggle with' or 'what do you find difficult'. Similarly, resilience can be a more revealing hook than self esteem: having a raised self esteem doesn't place any responsibilities on a child (a lot of misbehaving children think very highly of themselves). Resilience on the other hand reveals positive values towards others and reveals the impact you are having at all sorts of stages: it creates a turning point.

Fortunately, we now have a lot of evidence about the factors that are associated with resilience. According to Robbie Gilligan, resilience has three building blocks: a sense of security, good self esteem and appropriate self efficacy, and three key factors: at least one secure attachment relationship – a secure base, access to wider supports such as extended family and friends and positive nursery, school and or community experiences. In other words, resilient people can say: 'I HAVE.....people I trust and love', 'I AM.....a loveable person' and 'I CAN.....find ways to solve problems'

Individual Factors Associated with Resilience during School Years: female, sense of competence and self-efficacy, internal locus of control, empathy with others, problem-solving skills,

communication skills, sociable, independent, reflective (not impulsive), ability to concentrate on school work, autonomy (girls) / emotional expressiveness (boys), sense of humour, hobbies, willingness and capacity to plan

Wider Community Factors Associated with Resilience: neighbour and other non-kin support, peer contact, good school experiences, positive adult role models

Potential Pitfalls, Criticisms & Challenges for Resilience: a) Could imply that adversity from social disadvantage can be overcome simply through the efforts of individuals – ‘if you really try hard, you’ll be OK’, b) term can be used too loosely as in ‘children bounce back’, c) children may appear to be coping well with adversity, but showing ‘apparent resilience’ (Luthar), d) there has not been much attention to how people themselves describe adversity (Gore and Eckenrode): one person’s problem is another person’s challenge, e) resilience is about tackling social structures & is not just a personal outlook: it’s better to have an ethos and community of resilience, f) romanticisation of overcoming the odds, g) you can put up lots of systems, but you need to have a good working relationship with an individual to make a difference

Resilience can be seen in the following six domains:

Secure Base

- There is a clear association between the presence of a secure attachment relationship and resilience.
- Insecure attachment can change in the context of the formation of new, more secure relationships.

Education

- Good educational attainment is associated with good outcomes.
- The school as a *place*.
- Education as a *process*.
- Educators as *people*.

Friendships

- Resilience is associated with having positive peer relationships and good friendships.
- Having friends can help buffer the effects of stress.
- Friends are also for fun and companionship: children enjoy activities much more if they are carried out with friends.

Positive Values

- Having the capacity to act in a helpful, caring and responsible way towards others is associated with resilience.
- *‘Appreciating my own worth and importance and having the character to be accountable for myself and to act responsibly toward others’* (California State Department of Education)

Talents and interests

- Self-esteem is one of the fundamental building blocks of resilience.
- Encouraging the child’s unique talents and interests can help to boost resilience.

It is a practitioner's role to foster resilience strings between these six domains – for instance, to build friendships at school, to be able to develop talents and interests because of having a secure base, to have positive values because of increased social competencies.

2. Discussions: What Resilience Means to My Client Group

The conference took fifteen minutes after hearing Professor Daniel's presentation to discuss what resilience might mean to their client group. The following comments were made:

Children's and Young People: for us, resilience is about the importance of having a stable person at home or in your life. This person might not come from an obvious source and might not be there all the time e.g. a granny. We also talked about the importance of talents and interests to children and young people as productive routes out of somewhere bad. Asking children and young people, 'What are your talents and interests' is a much better question than 'what are you good at'.

Mental Health: resilience is about the acceptance of one's abilities, coming to terms with your own parameters – a journey to recovery, about people's expectations – especially people in power e.g. teachers and doctors

Older people: resilience is all about expectations: your own and others' expectations about you. This can be a double-edged sword with older people sometimes as they can often be expected to cope just because they are older. It's all too easy for them to go down a slippery slope however because of frail health and bereavement. Older people also tend to have a different face in public as they do in private – resilience will be a veneer a lot of the time with some people.

3. Question put to Professor Brigid Daniel:

Is there a genetic factor to resilience? Yes, and no. There is a lot of debate about this in the field. Nature and nurture are interactive, so often it's a mixture of both. There is evidence that resilience is gender-based – girls are more likely to be resilient, for instance. A sense of humour is said to be a sign of resilience – but how do you pin this down?

4. Freagarrach Project, Stirling

Jill Stephen, Manager of the Freagarrach Project in Stirling, talked delegates through how resilience underpinned their work. The following is a paraphrased account of her presentation.

"The Freagarrach Project is a Stirling-based Barnardo's project working with young offenders. Its aim is to reduce and ultimately stop the offending behaviour of young people aged between 12 – 18, who are at risk of being placed in care or custody due to the frequency, nature and severity of their offending. Most have 15-20 offences before they come to the service. An important reason for their referral is to get them to take responsibility for their actions. Work cannot be done in isolation and the Project divides our work into six main areas: offending behaviour, victim awareness, education/employment, family work, self/health, constructive use of leisure. All the young people have a framework of intervention and this is individual to each person and where they're at age-wise, education-wise etc.

The project was evaluated in 2001 and a major finding in the report was that the benefits of Freagarrach diminished over time. Since the evaluation, the Project has set up an aftercare service and befriending is now offered earlier on in people's interventions. The aim of the aftercare service is to support young people to continue to reduce their offending, and manage transitions, after they have left the full programme. This is done through offering individually tailored structured aftercare support to young people who have attended Freagarrach, offering support to siblings and parents of the young people who attend Freagarrach, offering an 'as and when' support/advice/crisis work. The average placement lasts 9-12 months and aftercare support lasts two or more years so we've still got 20- and 21-year-olds on our books.

Volunteers for the aftercare service are recruited on a yearly basis depending on the needs of the service and the roles of volunteers over the years have included groupworker, admin and holiday support. On the whole, most of our volunteers are undertaking befriending work.

We use Brigid Daniel's and Sally Wassell's six domains of resilience in the following ways to structure and inform our work. The project's makes active links between their six aims (offending behaviour, victim awareness, education/employment, family work, self/health, constructive use of leisure) and the six domains of resilience using the following:

Secure base:

We work with young people to build up a more secure base for themselves by making sure their key workers and volunteer befrienders do the following:

Key worker: maintaining links with school through attending meetings/reviews/liasing with relevant school staff, using a genogram to determine who is important in young person's life, use of drama/arts worker to act as a medium for communication

Volunteer Befriender: turn up at agreed time, planned contact involving young person, provide protected time and space for young person, acknowledge birthday eg Card/gift or special activity

Education:

The project encourages their interest in learning by key workers and volunteer befrienders doing the following:

Key worker: take young people to local areas of interest that has a connection to school work, set up in Project a computer for young people, being creative about how we undertake work based on yp level/skill of literacy eg use of cards/pictures, problem solving techniques, links with local college

Volunteer Befriender: support young person to access after school clubs/youth clubs, support interest in school by incorporating this into activity planning ie trip to science centre, befriender to look into what's on in area eg cadets/Princes Trust, befriender has a copy of school timetable so they know what young person has been doing that day

Friendships:

Key workers and volunteer befrienders work with young people in the following ways to support them to develop the characteristics that help with making and keeping friends:

Key worker: joint activities and groupwork in the project, encourage the making of new relationships, peer mentoring, working with young person and co-accused

Volunteer Befriender: find out what is going on in the community, volunteers support the making of new relationships

Talents and interests:

Key workers and volunteer befrienders encourage young people in his/her particular talents and interests in the following ways:

Key worker: arrange a pick and mix of taster sessions, DIY group over the summer, football coaching awards, leading a 5 a side football team with community Police, setting up a cooking fundraiser for volunteers training & for open days

Volunteer Befriender: support an interest that has been founded at Project and build on this, locally if possible, support the young person in arranging football match, encourage young person to try the befriender's interest eg cycling

5. Discussion

The conference split up into their client group tables to discuss where befriending might fit in with the kind of resilience model presented by the two speakers.

Generic befriending: felt that it would be important to get the timing of befriending as an intervention right; that projects would need to know where the most appropriate point would be in someone's life – would it be at their lowest or when they were on a road to recovery?

Health-related befriending: felt that dividing resilience up into six domains made it very clear to work out how befriending might build resilience in a client, for instance:

- *Social competencies* are built in befriending because clients get out and about;
- *A secure base* is built because we are providing a reliable service, we're there each week and we're there on time;
- We're building on their *education* base because we can disseminate information on their health condition, we can signpost them on to relevant informal learning opportunities, befriending also provides a good role model to learn from;
- *Talents:* befriending nurtures clients interests and picks up on their strengths
- *Positive values:* befriending provides clients with encouragement and positive feedback

Learning disabilities: felt that resilience could be built through befriending because befriending offers social contact outwith the family; befriending offers support to its clients so that they can make active choices. The table felt that it was important that realistic expectations were built into a resilience model.

6. Questions to Jill Stephen

Has a resilience model brought down client's re-offending rates?

Yes – the average reduction is 80-85% and we're able to demonstrate this as the police now track our clients for two years after they leave the service.

7. A Summary of Resilience

A summary of the morning's talks was presented to the conference by Susan Gilchrist, Training Officer with Befriending Network Scotland.

What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to: resist adversity, cope with uncertainty and recover more successfully from traumatic events or episodes. Resilience is something acquired through experience, although there are some inherited aspects. Continuous and extreme adversity is likely to drain the most resilient person. (Newman, T (2002) Promoting Resilience: A Review of Effective Strategies for Child Care Services (Exeter: CEBSS)

What are the factors that affect resilience?

In the person: gender, secure attachment experience, an outgoing temperament as an infant, good communication skills, being sociable & knowing how to conduct friendships, ability to plan, belief in control, sense of humour, problem solving skills, positive attitude, experience of success and achievement, religious faith, capacity to reflect, having skills and talents.

In the family: close bond with at least one person, affection, clear, firm consistent discipline, support for education, absence of severe discord, required helpfulness.

In the community: wider supportive network, good housing, high standard of living, high morale school with positive policies for behaviour, attitudes and anti-bullying, valued social role, e.g. a job, volunteering, etc, range of sport/leisure activities, friends, positive role models

Resilience can be developed by:

Compensatory experiences. i.e. finding areas of weakness and building on them or developing areas of strength, succeeding at challenges, offering protection factors e.g. stable relationships or networks of support, changing a person's way of viewing themselves & the world, Changing the ways a person processes events, managed exposure to risk.

Six areas where resilience can be promoted:

Social competence, secure base, education, friendships, talents & Interests, positive values

What do we know about resilience in a nutshell?

Everyone can become more resilient, stable supportive positive relationships are key to building resilience, the things that make us more resilient are the same as the things that make our clients more resilient, the resilience model offer a theoretical framework for much that befriending is already doing.

8. Further Reading

Brigid Daniel and Sally Wassell: *Assessing and Promoting Resilience in Vulnerable Children: The Early Years*: Jessica Kingsley Publishers (2002)

Brigid Daniel and Sally Wassell: *Assessing and Promoting Resilience in Vulnerable Children: The School Years*: Jessica Kingsley Publishers (2002)

Brigid Daniel and Sally Wassell: *Assessing and Promoting Resilience in Vulnerable Children: Adolescence*: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Robbie Gilligan: *Promoting Children's Resilience – Some Reflections* (2003)
(Available as a .pdf download – please contact BNS if you'd like a copy)

Edith Grotberg: *A Guide to Promoting Resilience in Children* (International Resilience Project)
(Available as a .pdf download – please contact BNS if you'd like a copy)

Heads up Scotland: National Inter-Agency Training
(Available as a .pdf download – please contact BNS if you'd like a copy)

***A Two Way Street: The importance of friendship and social support for people experiencing mental health problems*: The Mental Health Foundation (2007)**
(Available as a .pdf download – please contact BNS if you'd like a copy)

***Promoting Resilience: A Review of Effective Strategies for Child Care Services* (report prepared by Tony Newman for the Centre for Evidence-Based Social Services, University of Exeter)**
(Available as a .pdf download – please contact BNS if you'd like a copy)

South Australia Migrant Health Service: *Building Resilience-Sharing Journeys: a Group Therapy Model for Working With Newly Arrived Refugee Women*
(Available as a .pdf download – please contact BNS if you'd like a copy)

<http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk>