Rebalancing the scales: from asset-based to asset-balanced practice

Stuart & Brownin. A more nuanced one alone is unrealistic and skewed, it is important to focus on both if we are to support the understanding of the situation is that strengths and weaknesses co-exist, assets and deficits co-exist. Focussing on wellbeing of clients. The solution is not to take one approach at the expense of the other, but to tread a balanced line where practice works with assets and deficits and offers support and challenge where necessary. I have worked extensively with youth work organisations to overcome the deficit approach, have revised my understanding of how youth environments should be structured and decorated, reconsidered the role of the practitioner to be that of a skilled helper, have cleared out wait rooms and toilets removing all ‘warning’ and ‘at risk’ posters. I have changed the language of assessments of need to focus instead on strengths assessments, and I have worked on end of programme evaluation forms to ensure they document the gains that clients have made as opposed to those made by the service. These are all well intentioned developments and changes, and yet, I had to ask myself, what about the needs that still exist? What about the information young people need to be sign-posted to? What about the role of the service in facilitating change? What about the young people who need support as well as challenge? This reflective work has led me to a position where asset-based and deficit-based practices need to co-exist in an asset-balanced form of practice. To this end I have revised my understanding of how youth environments should be structured and decorated, reconsidered the role of the practitioner to be that of a skilled helper, have carefully examined the ways in which interventions are planned and articulated, and investigated what kinds of practices may both support and challenge creating opportunities for empowerment. As a result of this work I feel better able to articulate such a balanced approach to work with people as demonstrated in the revised below.

### Deficit approach

| Assess what people can’t do - needs led | Assess what people can do - strengths based |
| Setting goals for people | People setting own goals |
| Plan interventions for people | People select own interventions |
| People are labelled as issues | Circumstances are blamed for people’s issues |
| Rescue, over supportive, providing relationship with practitioner | Facilitative, empowering relationship with client held power |
| Gains made by the practitioner / organisation measured for the person | Gains made by the person measured by the person |
| Enabling people to conform to society | Supporting people to be who they want to be |
| Welfare state | Wellbeing state |

### Asset approach

Stuart & Brownin. A more nuanced one alone is unrealistic and skewed, it is important to focus on both if we are to support the understanding of the situation is that strengths and weaknesses co-exist, assets and deficits co-exist. Focussing on wellbeing of clients. The solution is not to take one approach at the expense of the other, but to tread a balanced line where practice works with assets and deficits and offers support and challenge where necessary. I have worked extensively with youth work organisations to overcome the deficit approach, have revised my understanding of how youth environments should be structured and decorated, reconsidered the role of the practitioner to be that of a skilled helper, have cleared out wait rooms and toilets removing all ‘warning’ and ‘at risk’ posters. I have changed the language of assessments of need to focus instead on strengths assessments, and I have worked on end of programme evaluation forms to ensure they document the gains that clients have made as opposed to those made by the service. These are all well intentioned developments and changes, and yet, I had to ask myself, what about the needs that still exist? What about the information young people need to be sign-posted to? What about the role of the service in facilitating change? What about the young people who need support as well as challenge? This reflective work has led me to a position where asset-based and deficit-based practices need to co-exist in an asset-balanced form of practice. To this end I have revised my understanding of how youth environments should be structured and decorated, reconsidered the role of the practitioner to be that of a skilled helper, have carefully examined the ways in which interventions are planned and articulated, and investigated what kinds of practices may both support and challenge creating opportunities for empowerment. As a result of this work I feel better able to articulate such a balanced approach to work with people as demonstrated in the revised below.
Deficit approach | Asset-balanced practice | Asset approach
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Assess what people can’t do – needs led | Balanced needs and strengths assessment | Assess what people can do – strengths based
Setting goals for people | Goal setting with people | People setting own goals
Services designed by experts | Service design with people | Services designed by people
Plan interventions for people | Planning interventions with people | People select own interventions
People are labelled as issues (structure view) | People seen as having issues linked to life circumstances (structure and agency view) | Circumstances are blamed for people’s issues (agency view)
Rescue, over supportive, providing relationship with practitioner power | Balanced fit for purpose support and challenge | Facilitative, empowering relationship with client held power
Gains made by the practitioner / organisation measured for the person | Equal efforts of the service and the person measured and evidenced with appropriate attribution | Gains made by the person measured by the person
Enabling people to conform to society | People supported to be who they want to be within the norms of society | Supporting people to be who they want to be

These are initial thoughts, in need of grounding in practice and proving through research and I welcome responses from the field.

Acknowledgments
None.

Conflict of interest
The author declares no conflict of interest.

References