Strengths Based Practice
By Lisa Cannady, B.S.

"In fact, for just about any population of children that research has found to be at greater risk than normal for later problems—children who experience divorce, live with step-parents, lose a sibling, have attention deficit disorder, suffer developmental delays, become delinquent, run away, become involved with religious cults, and so on---more of these children make it than do not"(Benard, 2004, p. 7).

Clinical practice from a strengths perspective means that professionals work with clients on "identifying, mobilizing, and respecting the resources, assets, wisdom, and knowledge that every person, family, group, or community has, as well as their potential for transforming their experiences and lives" (Kansas University School of Social Welfare, 2007). Strengths-based practice recognizes "the importance of human relationships" and underscores the right to client self-determination (NASW *Code of Ethics*, 2007).

The strengths model is a well-respected practice framework, and Kansas University's School of Social Welfare is at the forefront of research. Among others, strengths-based theory has been used successfully in helping:

- Adults with severe and persistent mental illness,
- People struggling substance abuse,
- Children with behavioral challenges,
- Older citizens, children and adults in the justice system,
- Neighborhoods and communities,
- It has also been used as a framework for policy analysis and feminist issues.

What strengths-based practice does not do is ignore that individuals, families, and communities have challenges to face. As Saleebey notes, "Schizophrenia is real. Child sexual abuse is real. Pancreatic cancer is real. Violence is real. But in the lexicon of strengths, it is as wrong to deny the possible as it is to deny the problem" (1996, p. 297).

The strengths-based practitioner will believe in the people he or she serves, convey hope in human resiliency, encourage collaboration, empower the individual, and show respect by listening to what clients have to say.

References

Benard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned.* San Francisco, West Ed.

National Association of Social Workers. (2007). *Code of Ethics*. Retrieved May 1, 2008

from http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/Code/code.asp.

Saleebey, D. (Ed.). (2006). The Strengths Perspective in social work practice (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

University of Kansas School of Social Welfare. (2008). The lexicon of the strengths perspective. Retrieved May 1, 2008 from http://www.socwel.ku.edu/Strengths/about/lexicon.shtml.