A Strengths-Based Model for Evidencing the Impact of 'Second Wave' Prevention Strategies

Background

The growth of 'second wave' preventative interventions has led to increased interest in strengths-based approaches, such as Local Area Coordination (LAC), Neighbourhood Networking, Place-based Wellbeing Hubs. The transformative potential of these approaches lies in their perceived ability to relieve demands and financial strain on public services, while simultaneously developing more effective systems of support and empowerment for citizens and communities.

However, we currently lack a concrete understanding of how, why and under what circumstances these strategies can improve the lives of people who access health and social care services and whether they reduce the need for statutory services. Second wave approaches, by their very nature of being strengths-based and community embedded in place, and their unique location as a connector between services-citizens-communities, offer potentially significant benefits to social care and other statutory services. However, traditional service measures with their overreliance on transactional models of 'problem addressed - action - outcome' are ill-suited to capturing the complex interactions within strengths-based prevention. Consequently, prevention has struggled to become integrated into mainstream practice and strategic decision-making. Prevention thus faces a paradox, whereby its weak evidence base combined with an escalating crisis in social care renders it increasingly vulnerable to budget cuts despite its clear potential for significant impact.

Building on research in both the adult social care and poverty prevention fields, a research team from the Universities of Hull, Sheffield and Exeter, have developed an evaluative model which helps to overcome many of these challenges. This model provides a stronger basis for understanding the impact of strengths-based prevention strategies, by focusing on the outcomes delivered across three levels: individual; community; and for the wider service system. By better understanding why and how strengths-based approaches make a difference, it is then possible to develop tools that can more effectively capture and evidence this impact. To accompany the model therefore, the team have developed a series of bespoke tools that can be utilised to more effectively and consistently capture data that reflects the actual outcomes achieved through strengths-based prevention.

A strengths-based model

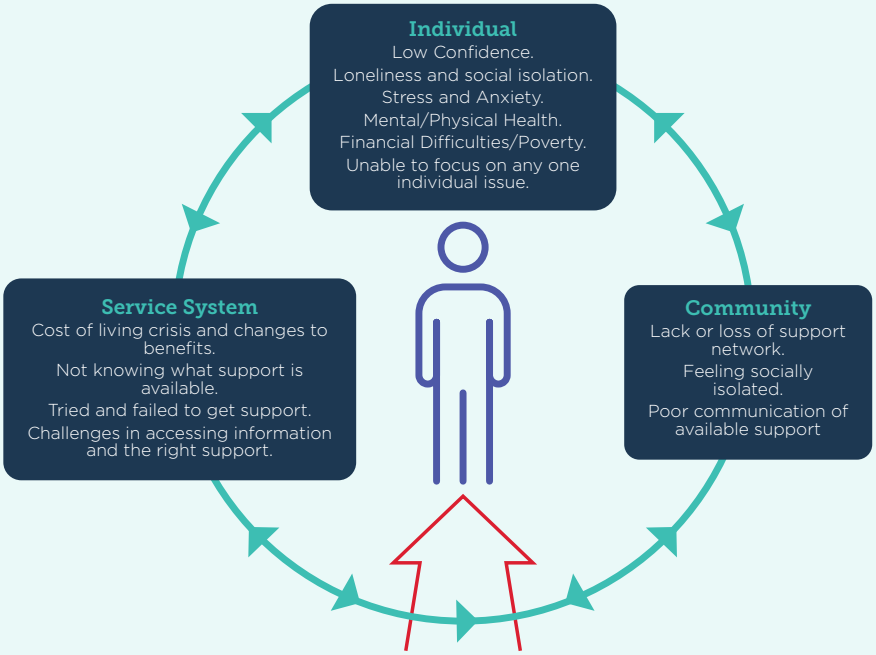
Evidence frameworks for prevention need to reflect a strengths rather than deficits approach; understanding that an individual's engagement with support is often not a simple linear progression of problem – action – outcome, but is far more cyclical and developmental. The model focuses upon the broader context of peoples' lives as a starting point, rather than the traditional focus on the presenting issues that lead individuals to seek support.

The research identified three overlapping contexts, reflecting the underlying situations in which individuals are living on a day-to-day basis and which provide the background for understanding why certain pressures or 'triggers' led them into needing support.:

- People who were experiencing life changing issues related to ageing and transitions into older age.
- People living with lifelong physical disabilities and mental health conditions.
- People who have experienced a sudden traumatic event or a significant change in life circumstances.

[1] Second wave prevention approaches encompass broader commitments around the promotion of wellbeing and social connectedness and understanding the associated benefits for public services.

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Context for support

1. People experiencing life changing issues related to ageing and transitions into older age.

2. People living with lifelong disabilities and mental health conditions

3. People who have experienced a sudden traumatic event or a significant change in life circumstances.

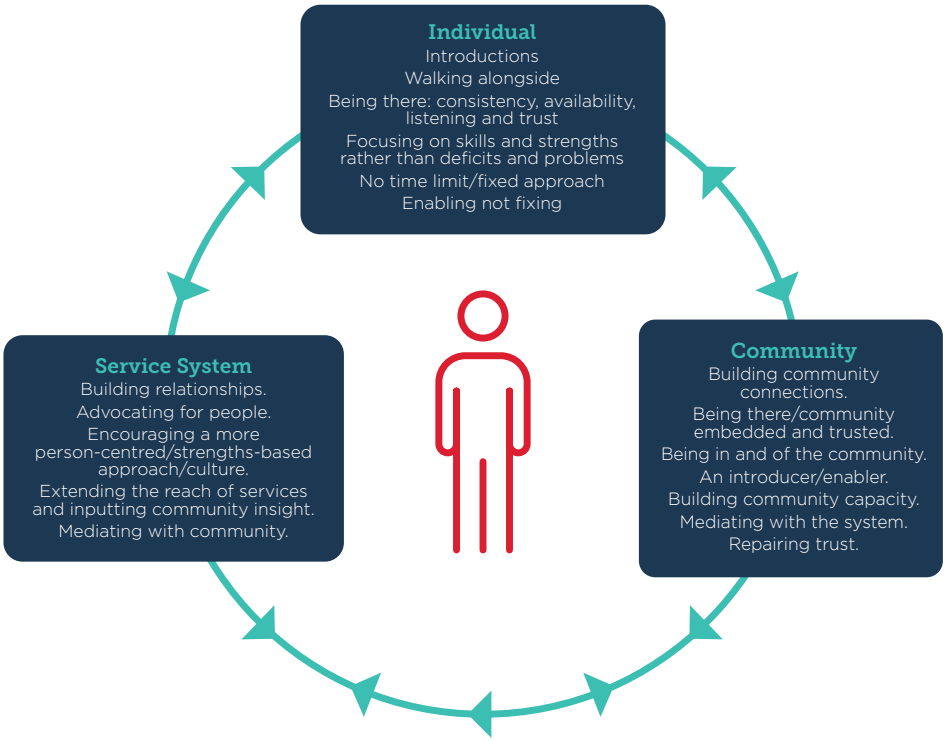
4. People experiencing challenges related to migration.

Triggers and contexts for support

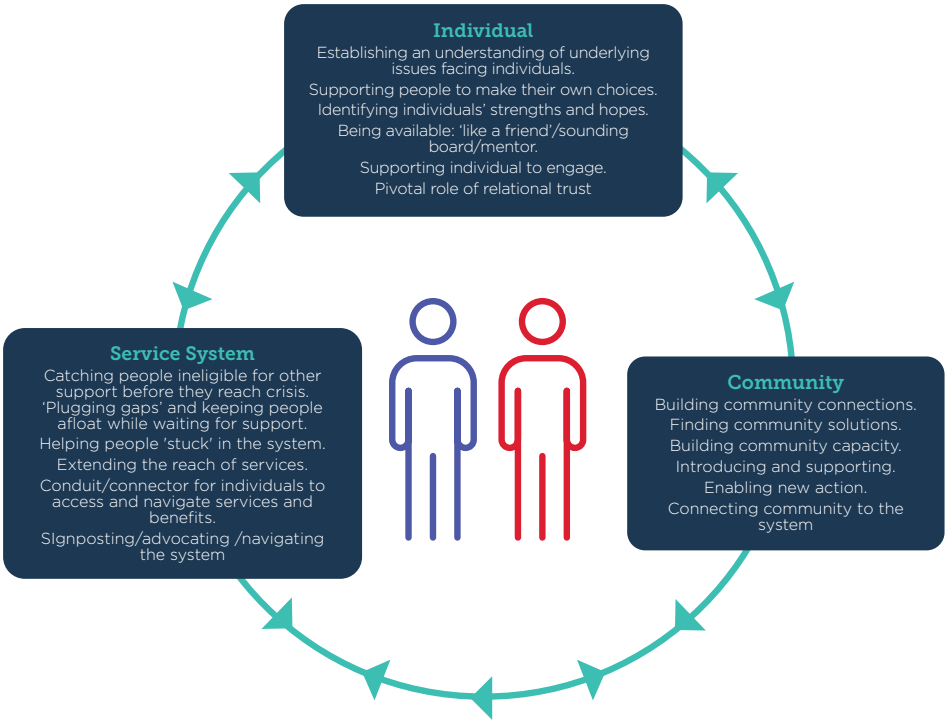
Many of the 'presenting issues' that lead individuals to seek support represent specific pressures, or 'triggers'. These pressures may trigger a need to seek support, but they are not necessarily the only, or even the primary, challenge facing that individual. Triggers impact at individual, community and system levels, are often multi-faceted and interactive.

Navigating the 'spaces in between'

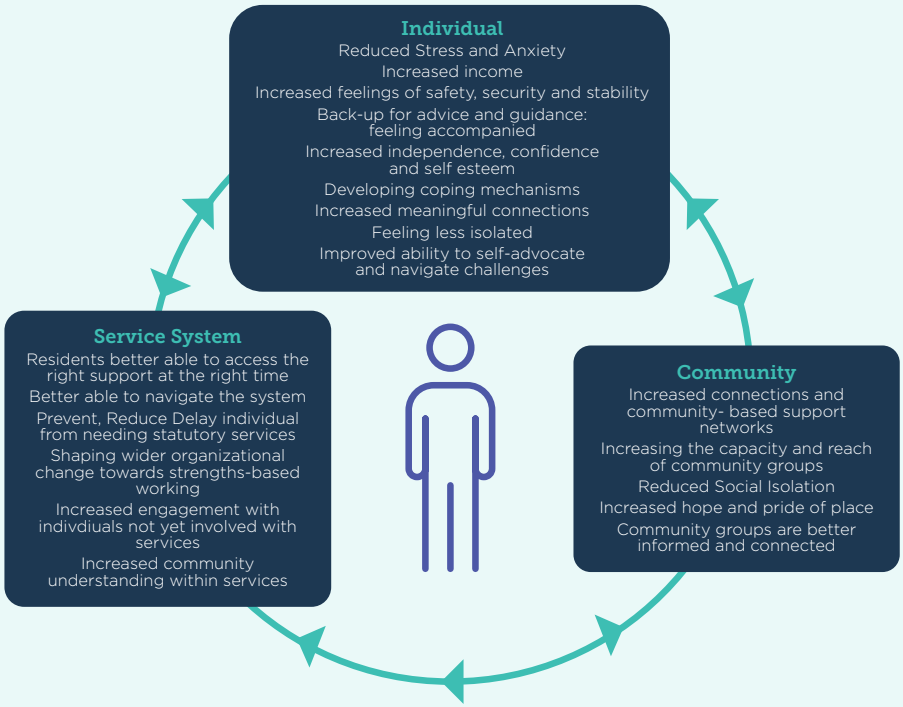
Because individuals face a complex set of challenges cutting across individual, community and service system levels, an effective preventative response must similarly seek to engage across all three levels. Successful strengths-based approaches position support in 'the spaces in between' the public service system, the community and the individual. Navigator or coordinator roles devote time and resources to develop relationships and trust across all three levels. In this way, they create a 'boundary spanning' function, building connectivity and capacity across and between individuals, communities and the system.



Providing strengths-based support



By filling the 'spaces in between' and enhancing capacity to support across individual, community and service system levels, strengths-based approaches are more effective at covering the gaps in the system where people often get lost. Coordinators and navigators are able to more effectively support individuals by being able to tailor support to their specific needs; helping them to strengthen their own abilities to respond to challenges, signposting them to community support and helping them to navigate the service system and connect with the community. People experience challenges in cycles rather than in neat linear paths. Life contexts such as ageing or living with a long-term disability are not situations that can in themselves be 'prevented', or 'solved'. What is important is whether the support individuals receive enables them to better respond and navigate the challenges they face, to help prevent them falling into crisis. Strengths-based models provide the reassurance of someone 'being there' as a reference point, to help when needed.



Creating insulators against triggers

By taking a person-centred perspective, strengths-based approaches enable support to be targeted towards the specific needs of the individual, at the right level, and at the right time. By drawing on the capacity and resources of the individual, the community and the service system, individuals are supported through a distinct set of activities that enables them to better 'insulate' themselves against the complex array of challenges or 'triggers' that they may be facing. Individuals described being better able to cope with future potential challenges, feeling they have the necessary resources (with the underlying strength of support 'being there' when required). The unique positioning of navigators/coordinators 'being there' alongside the services system, community and individual is key to strengths-based prevention strategies being able to deliver these benefits.

Understanding the Impacts of Strengths-Based Approaches

Research has struggled to capture the outcomes and impacts from strengths-based prevention, often due to a lack of clarity regarding how these strategies function and subsequently limited understanding of what types of data should be collected. By using the strengths-based model as an explanatory framework, we have been able to identify what types of data we need to be capturing at each of the three levels and, subsequently, what tools are required to capture this data consistently and effectively.

Location of Impact	Processes to be captured	Types of Data	Tools Used
System Level	Strengths-based capacity building: training, education and influence around strengths-based working	Identifying where SB programmes contribute to wider public services system adopting this approach	Capturing stakeholder perspectives
	Impacts on service support drawdown (avoid, reduce, delay); connecting to community solutions.	Identifying where: levels of service use have been changed. individuals have been signposted to alternative support. individuals supported to access early help/person-centred support	Participant journey and case study data Community data CCA/CBA
	Community reach and insight to help services (including improving access)	Where programmes have shared community insight to support a service with a challenge or with reach. Evidence of place- based integrated working	Participant journey and case study data Capturing stakeholder perspectives Process & dashboard data
Community level	Community capacity building, including identifying funding avenues	No. of community organisations, no. of residents engaged with groups and sustainability of groups. Where funding has been accessed enabling community action.	Process & dashboard data Perspectives of place-based stakeholders CCA/CBA
	Building community strengths and resilience (contributing participants, active citizens and facilitation, ripple effect)	Evidence of where people are supported to engage in community activities Evidence of supporting individuals to become 'active citizens' create new groups/support. Evidence of facilitating community action.	Participant journey data Process & dashboard data Perspectives of place-based stakeholders CBA/CCA
	Embedding the role of community in social care support	Evidence of place-based collaborative strategies; collective decision-making, joined-up working etc. Evidence of increased knowledge of community needs and resources	Perspectives of system and place-based stakeholders Participant journey/case data. Process and dashboard data
	Being embedded in the community to provide a mediating role between the council and communities (sometimes repairing trust). Creating collaborative spaces between the service system and community	Evidence of the programme teams acting as navigators, bridges between community and services which changes relationships/ perceptions and what's possible.	Perspectives of system and place-based stakeholders Case study data
Individual Level	Individual is supported throughout their journey over time and relationally i.e. 'walking alongside' & 'being there', 'being accompanied' Understanding an individual's wider context beyond initial presenting issue access of appropriate early help and/or connectedness	Evidence the individual's journey of support & their journey through the services system Capturing what might have happened if support was not available	Participant journey and case data. Process and dashboard data CCA/CBA
	Bridging the gaps in the service system where people get lost - catching people in crisis who fall through the system -tailor support, signpost & service/community navigation	Evidence where the programme supports people in crisis for whom services have missed them, or not worked - capturing individual's journey of support through the services system	Participant journey and case data. Process and dashboard data CCA/CBA
	Better able to respond to and navigate challenges. Building individual strengths and resilience (confidence, independence); enhanced individual choice/agency.	Understanding what 'insulators' have been put in place to support individuals. Understanding how individuals have been able to 'bounce back better' from subsequent crises.	Participant journey and case data. Process and dashboard data CCA/CBA
	Increasing an individual's community connections	Mapping of individuals' community connections/networks as a result of the programme	Participant journey and case data. Perspectives of place-based stakeholders

Table One outlines the different types of data that should be captured across individual, community and service system levels. A sample of data types are included within the diagram and, while they are separated across levels, many are likely to be cross-cutting and inter-connected; highlighting the need to integrate and embed strengths-based working across support processes. As outlined, this data includes i) capturing information around the individuals' journey and experiences in receiving support and the impact of this support in building insulators against further challenges, ii) the development and strengthening of community capacity to offer support, iii) the utilisation of these support processes and their embedding within a collaborative place-based approach, as well as iv) evidence of how these activities are feeding into changes within the service system, including the expansion of person-centred approaches, connecting with community support and utilising community insight to extend service reach.