Understanding Strengths-Based Prevention

A Hull and Sheffield collaboration

Stronger Communities Workshop Session Introducing the Strengths-Based Model

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The prevention paradox

- Prevention is increasingly a policy priority, in the context of rising demand and stretched capacity
- But preventative investment is difficult to protect when resources are under pressure
- Part of the problem is evidence: preventative value is inherently difficult to demonstrate

(Tew et al., 2025; ADASS, 2026; Caiels et al., 2021)

Why is strengths-based prevention so hard to capture?

What evidence systems often ask for

Presenting problem -> intervention ->
Measurable individual outcome

Short reporting period
Demonstrable value for money
Multiple reporting requirements

Trusting relationships
Non-linear journeys
Building strengths and capacity
Community and system-level change

Avoided escalation (sometimes things stay the same!)

(Bach-Mortensen & Montgomery, 2018; Marczak et al., 2019; Bach-Mortensen & Barlow, 2021; Garthe et al., 2026)

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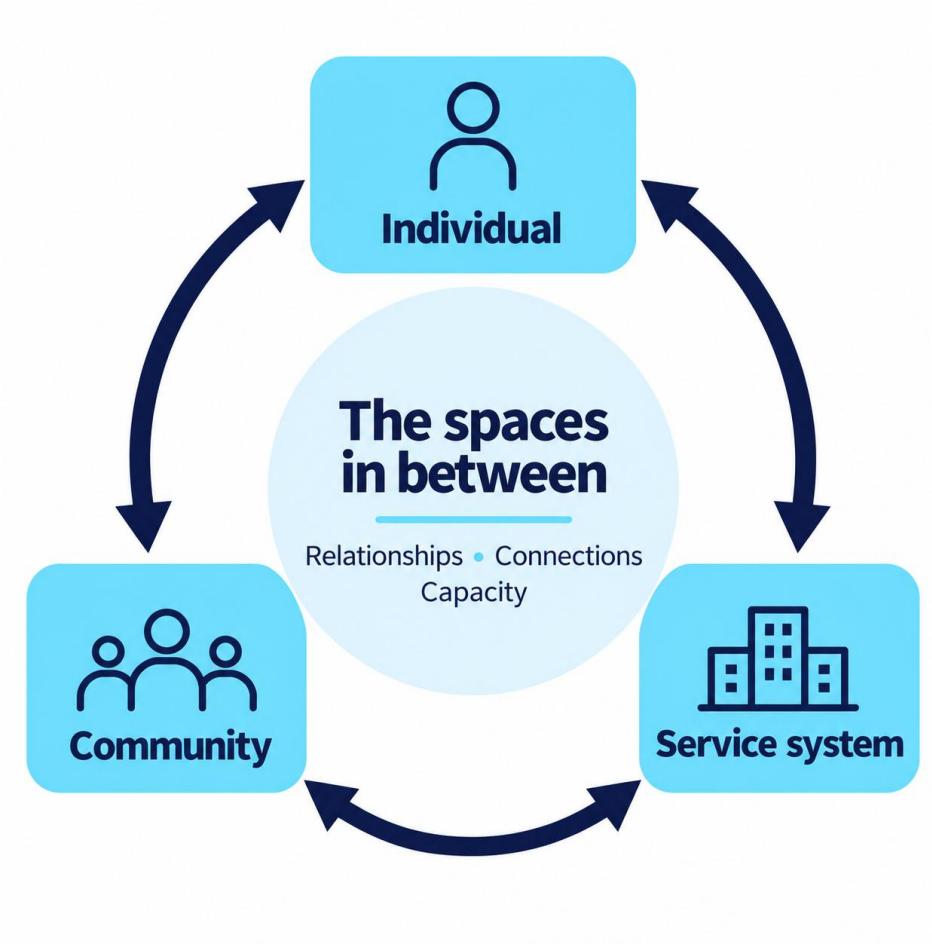
A strengths-based model for understanding prevention

Understand how preventative change happens before trying to measure it.
Creating a ‘prevention narrative’.

Start with lived experience, not the presenting problem

Understand prevention as cyclical, complex and multi-layered not a linear problem -> intervention -> outcome

Burchell et al. (2026)



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What does the SBM seek to capture?

01

Context and triggers

What is happening in people's lives? What triggers people from just about coping into crisis?

02

Building capacity and filling the 'spaces in between'

Understanding and connecting between Individual – community – system levels.

03

Ways of working

What support happens and how? Linking back to filling the spaces.

04

Outcomes and impacts

What strengths and resources are built and how do these 'insulate' against further crises?

We invert the process so we are not trying to prove that something *hasn't* happened but we are capturing the things that *have* been put in place to prevent things from happening.

Having tangible outcomes provides a solid foundation for cost-benefits analysis.

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Discussion

How are you currently capturing the complexities of what you do?

Looking at the SBM, are there important parts of the prevention story that your current evidence doesn’t capture?

Research and practice tools

- Process Data tools:

  Core numeric data. Captures input data around context, activities, outcomes & impacts. Potential to track individual's journey with the support via identifiers. Working with organisations to utilise existing data and amend where appropriate

- Journey Templates:

  Across individual, community and service system levels. As per SBM.

- Individual interviews and focus groups:

  Life story approach carried out by the team. Stakeholder interviews community FGs.

- Cost-consequence table:

  Extracting learning from the qualitative data to frame an economic analysis. Underpins CBA.

Discussion

Thinking about the gaps you identified earlier, how could the model and tools help you capture them?

What might you do differently?