

BOOK REVIEWS

Applying Strength-based Approaches in Social Work Edited by Deanna Edwards and Kate Parkinson

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¹ Solution Revolution

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Applying Strength-based Approaches in Social Work is an exceptional read. It is a resource not only for social workers, but for all professionals and services working to support people in their everyday lives. This extraordinary resource brings together some of the most innovative and impactful practices in social work today — and could not be more needed.

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Applying Strength-based Approaches in Social Work is an exceptional read. It is a resource not only for social workers, but for all professionals and services working to support people in their everyday lives. This extraordinary resource brings together some of the most innovative and impactful practices in social work today — and could not be more needed. By introducing narrative approaches, multisystemic therapy, solution focused approaches, Signs of Safety, and family group conferencing in one very accessible volume, the book offers a very exciting, revived vision for the future of social work and partnering agencies. It is no exaggeration when I say that I could not put it down!

It is important to come clean at this point and share that I am a solution focused practitioner and social worker and have been since I was introduced to the SF approach in 2001. So, I instinctively gravitate towards practices that emphasise co-construction and possibility. However, I would happily argue with anyone that when applied appropriately (as per the guidance), these approaches could change the face of social work.

In reading the book, I found myself wishing it had been available when I was studying social work — it would have been an invaluable guide. Social work is steeped in values and ethics that pertain to strength-based approaches. As the book beautifully details in its initial chapters, social work is all about

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empowerment, resilience, human dignity, and promoting the rights of people in an inclusive and collaborative approach. This book respectfully highlights and demonstrates how each strength-based approach can support this, whilst also being open and reflective about the critiques and concerns surrounding the approaches.

The structure is both accessible and engaging, with each chapter offering a balance of theoretical grounding, practical case studies and actionable learning points. I am a huge advocate of sharing the voices of those with lived experience of approaches (where ethically appropriate), so I was grateful to have a chapter solely dedicated to the views of people with lived experience of strength-based approaches.

It seems important to close this review with the following sentence from the book's conclusion: 'Finding strengths should not be about expecting families to find their own solutions' (p146). I deeply appreciated this book for its clarity in distinguishing strength-based approaches from neoliberal ideologies. At a time when public services are often underfunded and individuals are too readily held responsible for systemic challenges, it is crucial to ensure that strength-based approaches are not misconstrued as an excuse to shift responsibility away from structures and onto individuals. This book underscores the importance that, 'to be effective, strength-based practice must be placed hand in hand with both relationship-based and systemic-based practice. Only then can it live up to its potential as an elixir for truly empowering social work.' (p146).

This makes the book an essential read for anyone working in social care, ultimately serving as both a philosophical reminder, and a practical guide for creating more inclusive, empowering practices in social work.

In conclusion, *Applying Strength-Based Approaches in Social Work* is not just a resource but a call to action. It challenges practitioners to embrace inclusion, collaboration, and empowerment without losing sight of the systemic factors influencing their clients' lives. For me, it re-ignited my passion for social work and reinforced the importance of practices that are grounded in hope, respect, and a deep belief in human potential.

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