

# Social Connections

Center for the Study of Social Policy  
cssp.org

Created by:  
Dr. Julie Radlauer-Doerfler, L.M.H.C.



**Youth Thrive**  
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# TRAINER GUIDE

Welcome to the Trainer's Guide designed to support the Social Connections training for the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Youth Thrive initiative. This Trainer's guide provides trainers with sample PowerPoint slides, accompanying language to use to train on the slides and activities with instructions. The activities are included in the Social Connections participant manual as well as in this guide.

## **Handouts/Visual Aids**

The following pages provide language that accompanies the PowerPoint slides and participant manual. Please familiarize yourself with this guide, the participant manual, the PowerPoint slides and the activities prior to the training session. Make sufficient copies of the manual, and distribute during the training.

## **Activities**

There are various activities suggested throughout the training curriculum. Please refer to the participant manual page number when the PowerPoint slide prompts an activity. There are instructions for the activities included in this guide. Other teaching strategies are also listed, such as small group discussions and cooperative learning strategies. Factors such as time or what you feel needs to be reinforced, will determine the activities to be performed. Also, with a little bit of imagination, you can switch many of the activities around. In some instances, there are options to conduct multiple activities so you may choose which activity matches the audience or your available time.

## **Lectures or Discussions**

The curriculum is divided into a PowerPoint and a participant manual. When an activity is being performed, it may have instructions, however, this does not mean that there cannot be group discussions, question or answer periods, or other such activities performed. Note that group discussions normally take longer because of the interactions that take place.

## **Equipment and Supplies**

This training program requires access to a projector and laptop for a PowerPoint presentation, a screen or projectable wall surface, and at least one flip chart with markers. Two flip charts are preferable—one for the information that you prepare ahead of time that remains visible during each session, and the other for notes you make during training. If more flip charts are available, they can be placed so they are accessible to the tables of participants. Internet access is also necessary for videos during the presentation.

# Social Connections

A Center for the Study  
of Social Policy  
Initiative

Created by:  
Dr. Julie Radlauer-Doerfler, L.M.H.C.



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Introduce yourself as the trainer, your experience working with Youth Thrive and Protective and Promotive Factors and why you are here. Inform participants to go around the room and introduce themselves using their name, organization, job position, and one thing that they enjoy doing or a hobby that they enjoy. Identifying this hobby is a useful tool to begin planning for creating support. Later in the training we can ask them to refer back to what they identified as their hobby, and look for how they can build support using that interest.



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[cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive](https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive)

Youth Thrive believes that all young people should be valued, loved, and supported to reach their goals. To achieve this, Youth Thrive works with youth-serving systems and its partners to change policies, programs, and practices so that they build on what we know about adolescent development, value young people's perspectives, and give youth opportunities to succeed.

Youth Thrive is both a research-informed framework on youth well-being and an action-oriented Initiative, based on the framework, that is designed to better support healthy development and promote well-being for youth with partners across the country.

Youth Thrive focuses on strategies to improve systems that serve youth who are most marginalized in society, specifically focusing on child welfare and juvenile justice systems and the service system that supports youth who are at-risk of homelessness. Youth Thrive works with states and communities as well as national networks, and other partners on activities such as:

- Helping public agencies amend their policies, practices, contracting processes, training of staff, so that they are aligned with what the research indicates youth need to thrive.
- Identifying, documenting and sharing best practices and innovative ideas.
- Creating new strategies and tools to implement Youth Thrive including the new Youth Thrive Survey, a self-assessment for assessing youth's strengths.
- Bringing together leaders for peer-to-peer learning at national conferences and other forums.
- Partnering with youth, young adults, and young professionals who have lived experience in child welfare and juvenile justice to make sure Youth Thrive values and reflects their perspectives.
- Developing and using training curriculum and materials for direct service staff, supervisors and youth.

The Youth Thrive curriculum focuses on the protective and promotive factors. By being deliberate and intentional about building protective and promotive factors in their everyday encounters with the youth they support, youth workers can increase the likelihood of making significant, positive differences in the lives of youth resulting in improved outcomes. One of the identified factors is Social Connection, and this training provides actionable and tangible activities to recognize, support, and maintain social connection with youth.

## Objectives



### Participants will:

- Learn how to promote protective factors
- Understand social connection and support
- Utilize tools to assess social support
- Practice skills to enhance social connection
- Learn new techniques to expand social connection
- Engage in reflection on thoughts, feelings and identification of actions to expand practice

collectively

Today we will discuss and learn the following information. Review this material with participants.

- Learn how to discuss protective and promotive factors
- Understand social connection and support
- Utilize tools to assess social support
- Practice skills to enhance social connection
- Learn new techniques to expand social connection
- Engage in reflection on thoughts, feelings and identification of actions to expand practice

## What is the magical formula for...



- Increase life span (decreased the risk of premature death by 50%)
- Lower stress (and triggering the release of stress-reducing hormones)
- Better cardiovascular health and reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Increased immunity (resistance to illness)
- Decreased risk of substance abuse and mental health conditions (including depression and anxiety)
- Help you think faster
- Better psychological and physical well-being

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While participants know the purpose of the training, people do not usually correlate the outcomes listed on this slide with social support. Take time to review each of these outcomes and ask participants what they would attribute these outcomes to?

## What happens when we don't have the formula?

- Studies show that when we don't have this in our lives the effects are:
- Increased risk of heart disease
- Have the physical effects of smoking 15 cigarettes a day when we don't even smoke
- Increased risk of dementia and slows your brain functioning
- Worse than obesity on your body
- Have increased anxiety and depression



collectively

Similar to the previous slide, ask participants why they think the above-mentioned outcomes occur- what do people need to make positive changes in their life. If the group has not already identified that social support creates better outcomes and lack of social support results in the above-mentioned outcomes, tell them what the "magic potion" is.



**Activity:**  
**Social Supports**

Think of a time when you were really struggling in your life...

collectively

Ask the group to write down or make a mental note of a time then they were struggling in their own personal lives. This should be a time when they needed support from others.

Ask them to recall the details.

Ask them to think about the following questions while they are thinking about the situation:

- How did they get through this crisis?
- What supports were the most critical to them?



## Who did you turn to for help?

- Friends
- Family
- Faith
- Paid professional with an advanced degree

collectively

Ask the group to raise their hands to the following questions (they may raise their hands for multiple responses):

- How many of you were able to get through your challenge through the help of your family?
- How many of you were able to get through your challenge through the help of your friends?
- How many of you were able to get through your challenge through the help of your faith?
- How many of you were able to get through your challenge with the assistance of a paid professional with an advanced degree?

Have them raise their hands for family (and keep them up), for friends (and keep them up) and faith (and keep them up). Now, have everybody look around the room before putting their hands down.

Then have them raise their hands for paid professionals with advanced degrees again and look around the room.

After the questions and having everyone raise their hands, discuss the number of participants that got through their challenge with help from their family, friends, and faith compared to paid professionals.

Then ask the question, “why is it that this room full of people get through our challenges through the assistance of our faith, friends and family but we think that the people that we are working with can only get through their challenges through the assistance of us (paid professionals)?”



## Activity:

# Who are your social connections?

collectively

Who Are Your Social Supports? Pipe cleaner activity

Break people into small groups (4-6 people) and give each group one of each color pipe cleaner per participant.

Use different color pipe cleaners to represent the race/ethnicity while answering the following questions. You must answer the questions based on majority representation and can only use one pipe cleaner per question. (Blue represents Black, Red represent White, Green represents Hispanic, Yellow represents Asian/Pacific Island, Purple represents Indigenous, Pink represents other)

- Who do you work with? (the people you choose to spend time with at work)
- Who lives in your neighborhood?
- Who is part of your friend circle?
- Who were the last three people that came to visit your home?
- What shows do you watch on TV?
- Who do you pray with?

Look on page 6 of the Participant Manual for instructions

Process what people noticed about the diversity of their groups.

## Video: Protective and Promotive Factors



<https://youtu.be/PUAKevwFG3A>

collectively

Show Youth Thrive The Five Protective and Promotive Factors video (runtime: 1 minute 26 seconds)

Questions following the video:

- How have you used these protective and promotive factors in your interactions with youth?
- Can you share an example of how focusing on any one of the factors has helped a youth?

## Let's Talk Protective and Promotive Factors

- **Resilience**- managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity or trauma
- **Social Connections**- positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental, and spiritual support
- **Concrete Support in Times of Need**- Access to concrete support and services that address a person's needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges
- **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**- Understanding development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development
- **Social and Emotional Competence**- interactions that support the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions and establish and maintain relationships.

Center for the Study of Social Policy, Strengthening Families™ Protective and Promotive Factors  
<https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/protective-factors-framework>

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Explain Protective and Promotive Factors in more depth and have brief conversation about what people know about Protective and Promotive Factors and how they explain it to the youth that they work with.

## What are Social Connections?

Social connection is the experience of feeling close and connected to others. It involves feeling loved, cared for, and valued, and forms the basis of interpersonal relationships.



collectively

Read this definition and ask participants what or who they consider to be their social connections.

## The Components of Social Connection



- Social integration and belonging (quality of social relationships)
- Social network structure (network ties to relationships)
- Relational content (emotional caring and concern)
- Social influence and comparison- guidance about norms and behaviors
- Social control includes how social network members monitor, encourage, persuade and pressure adherence to positive practices
- Behavioral guidance, purpose and meaning (mattering) by occupying social roles
- Includes emotional support, instrumental support and informational support
- An important source of healing

Let's look through a cultural lens...

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After reading the slide facilitate a conversation about how culture plays a part in each of these components of social connection. It is important to recognize that different cultures connect in different ways and that if we are not grounding in culture, we will miss important cues in how to facilitate connections with youth.

How does race and culture impact connections?

What about gender and sexual orientation?

How are connections effected by racism and other discrimination?

## Potential Sources of Social Connections

- Friends
- School
- Family
- Community service
- Community building activities
- Leadership activities
- Activism
- Social Media online communities
- Church or spiritual connection
- Sports and hobbies
- Others...

collectively

What/where are other sources of connection for youth you work with?

Which options are working best for young people to feel a sense of belonging?

Are youth finding enough or the right people and places for youth in community? If yes, what's working well? If not, where are the gaps?

# Let's Assess:

## Youth Thrive Survey: Social Connections Scale



Pass out the Social Connections Scale page and have participants divide into pairs and discuss the survey. Have participants brainstorm how they would present this information to youth and process out as a large group.

The Youth Thrive Survey™ is a valid and reliable youth self-report instrument that measures the presence, strength, and growth of the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors as proxy indicators of well-being. Designed with significant input from youth and young adults and taking less than 15 minutes to complete, the survey can be an effective tool for informing case planning and practice, evaluation, and continuous quality improvement (CQI) purposes. The Youth Thrive Survey is free and provides an array of data reports that can be used to inform policy and practice decisions, and measure positive indicators of well-being for youth and young adults. The Youth Thrive Survey is available in both English and Spanish.

Some sample questions include:

- I have someone in my life who I look up to.
- I have someone who supports me in developing my interests and strengths.
- I have friends and family members to spend time with on holidays and occasions.
- I have someone I can count on for help when I need it.
- I know for sure that someone really cares about me.
- I have friends who stand by me during hard times.
- 

<https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive/#survey-instrument>

## How Do We Help Build Social Connections?



Now that we understand the why behind the need for social connections, let's talk about tangible techniques to help youth build social connections

## Video: Guide Someone to Ask for Help



<https://youtu.be/WnNCOvYfT14>

collectively

We are going to watch a Ted Talk given by Janesha Bull (runtime: 10 minutes 36 seconds). Janesha struggled with depression and anxiety for years but didn't know what to do in order to get better. She had always been the type of person who was "always on top of her game," and struggled with vulnerability her entire life. Through her suffering and pain, she finally learned to ask for help. Through patience, love, and understanding from an amazing support system she now stands firmly on encouraging others to be brave enough to ask for help as well. Janesha Bull, is a 21 year old graduating senior at Delaware State University studying Public Relations and Advertising. Janesha's talk is not only to encourage people to ask for help, but to challenge the support systems to try a little harder to show up. – Let's watch together.

What tangible tips did you take away from this video in relationship to social connections and social support?

How do you think that youth that you work with can relate to Janesha? Would you share this video with them?

**Sample Questions to Help Youth Identify Social Connections**



- Who do you trust? Who do your parents/family trust? Tell me about them.
- Do you have neighbors, friends, or family members who are aware of your situation and can help you? Tell me about them.
- Are there any activities in the community? What about for you? Tell me about them.
- Are you involved in any spiritual or religious activities? What kind and how often? Tell me more about that.
- Who is your emergency contact? Tell me about them.
- If your car breaks down, who will you call? Tell me about them.
- Who helps you now? Who helped you in the past? Tell me about those people.
- Who do you call when you need to vent or are sad about something? Tell me about them.
- Who do you have fun with? Tell me about them.
- Who are the last 5 people you called or texted. Tell me about them.

collectively

Here is a brief list of questions that you can use with youth to have conversation about social support. Break into small groups and review these questions and add more. Come back to the larger group and share one new question from each group.

Look on page 8 of participant manual for sample questions



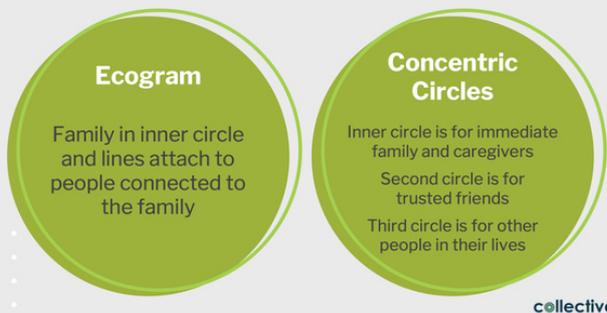
**Building Social Connections**

- Attending to existing relationships
- Take social risks
- Increase community involvement
- Attend Support Groups
- Use Professional Support
- My Five
- Reciprocity- what can you do for others
- Identify your interests
- Others?

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Discuss identified avenues to build social connections and list additional ideas in a large group.

**Using Circles to Identify Supports and Connections**



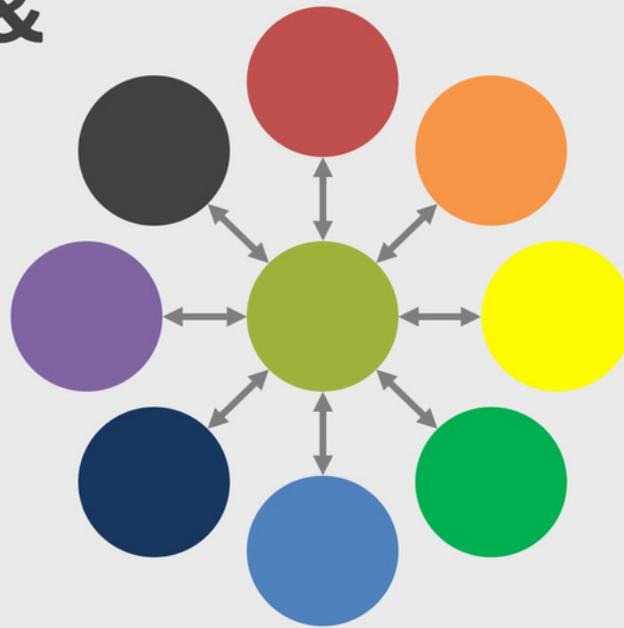
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The next three slides will share a couple of tangible techniques that can be used to understand the existing support systems with youth.

Ecograms and Social Support

Communication/Concentric Circles

# Ecograms & Social Support



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Now we are going to talk about how to utilize an Ecogram to identify social support systems (or lack of systems). Ask participants if anyone has used an Ecogram before. It is a common tool but usually used to identify family trees and family relationships. We are adapting the tool to address support and connection.

To use the Ecogram for support, write the youth's name and their need in the center circle. The need should be related to lack of support, connection or the experience of isolation. The outside circles represent different life domains including school, home, community, extended family, faith, social media, clubs or activities (see list below). In a conversation with a youth ask them the following question:

If you were feeling lonely or isolated at (fill in the domain) who would you turn to for support? Then write that person's name in the circle and move on to the next circle. For example:

If you were feeling lonely or isolated at school, who would you turn to? Youth answers, my cousin Mikey

If you were feeling lonely or isolated at home, who would you turn to? Youth answers, my brother

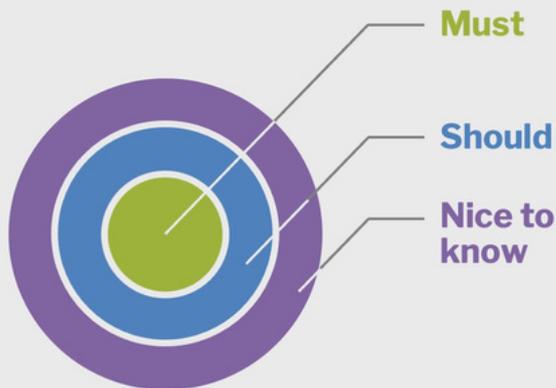
Go through all of the circles/domains that apply to the youth.

One of two things will happen using this activity, either the youth will realize they have more support than they thought, or you and the youth will realize that they do not have support, which is probably a contributing factor to the way they have been feeling. It then becomes your shared responsibility to help the youth build supports and connection in their life. Sample domains include:

- School
- Family
- Friends
- Work
- Home
- Neighborhood
- Faith base community
- Social media

Look on page 9 of Participant Manual for sample form

# Communication / Concentric Circles



- In the first circle identify what you **MUST** know about the youth's connections (who are their peeps)
- In the second circle identify what you **SHOULD** know about the youth's connections (who can they spend time with)
- In the third circle identify what would be **NICE TO KNOW** about the youth's connections (who would they like to get to know better)

collectively

This tool is used to identify the support that youth have and the level of each support. Research demonstrates that we need a mixture of strong connections as well as weak connections. Supports in the middle circle are strong ties and those on the outside circle are weak ties. Using this activity, helpers will be able to get an understanding of the strength of connections that their youth experiences. This knowledge can then guide how to assist youth in making connections.

## Communication Circles

- In the first circle identify what you **MUST** know about the youth's people (who are their peeps)
- In the second circle identify what you **SHOULD** know about the youth's connections (who can they spend time with)
- In the third circle identify what would be **NICE TO KNOW** about the youth's connections (who would they like to get to know better)

Look on page 10 of the Participant Manual for written instructions

# Activity:

## Developing Social Connections



Identify a need



List strengths associated with this need



Brainstorm at least 10 community options that would meet this need while building on the strengths and culture (use resources available in your community). Circle the one you think the individual would pick



Who could help them get involved in the option you selected (who would you want to connect them with)?



Complete the action plan

collectively

Divide the group into break-out groups of 4 or 5 people.  
In each small group have them complete the following worksheet.

You are trying to help the youth create positive peer relationships in the community.  
Complete the worksheet below answering the following questions.

- List the young person's strengths associated with this need for positive peer relationships.
- Brainstorm at least 10 community options that would meet this need while building on the strengths and culture (use resources available in your community). Circle the one you think the youth would pick
- Who could help them get involved in the option you selected (who would you want to hook them up with)?
- Develop an action plan for getting started

Look on page 11 of the Participant Manual for the story and worksheet using the scenario of Bryan.

## Points to Consider



- Culture plays an important part in how people connect
- Relationships are dynamic and people may change roles in our lives
- It is often through shared activity – groups, clubs, faith communities, shared passions, schools, even workplaces – that new relationships are formed.
- People often have lives which are heavy with people providing economic exchange, and can be lacking people who are friends – thus people may be vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation
- Promoting better lives for people includes an intentional focus on genuine participation in the community at all levels.
- Small gestures lead to big things. (Ex: waving at your neighbor everyday may lead into a friendship)

**collectively**

Read and discuss each bullet

- Culture plays an important role in how people connect
- Relationships are dynamic and people may change roles in our lives
- It is often through shared activity – groups, clubs, faith communities, shared passions, schools, even workplaces – that new relationships are formed.
- People often have lives with a lot of people in economic or transactional connections, and not friendships – thus people may be vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation
- Promoting better lives for people includes an intentional focus on genuine participation in the community at all levels.
- Small gestures lead to big things. (Ex: waving at your neighbor everyday may lead into a friendship)



Explain the Find My 5 Activity:

Talk about the value of support and that asking for help is challenging for many.

Work with youth to identify 5 people that they could contact for help.

Ask those 5 if they would like to be part of their "Find My 5" group.

Once they agree, pre-load their information into a texting, group me or other application.

Start the text with the sample note and invite them to communicate with each other.

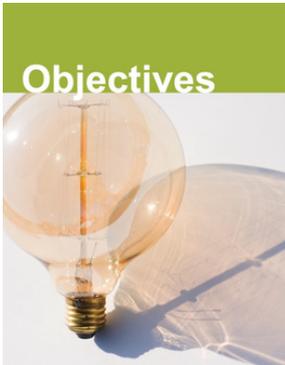
Look on page 14 of the Participant Manual for information

## Let's Talk About Social Capital



Now we are moving into the Social Capital Section

## Objectives



### Participants will:

- Understand the value of social capital
- Explore how to expand social capital with families
- Practice techniques to develop social capital
- Engage in reflection on thoughts, feelings and identification of actions

collectively

We will discuss and learn the following information. Review this material with participants.

- Understand the value of social capital
- Explore how to expand social capital with families
- Practice techniques to develop social capital
- Engage in reflection on thoughts, feelings and identification of actions

## What is Social Capital?

The effective functioning of social groups through interpersonal relationships with:

- Shared sense of identity
- Shared understanding
- Shared norms,
- Shared values
- Trust, cooperation, and reciprocity



Social capital is social support at the macro/community level.

The definition of Social Capital:

A structure of networks and collective resources within a community that individuals within that community can draw upon and that will benefit them.

## Benefits of Social Capital



- Social relationships help youth access resources
- One's perception of their community predicts psychological well-being
- People that attend faith institutions report more life satisfaction
- Social networks results in better overall health
- Building relationships provides social support, and soft skills- allowing for better parent-child interactions and healthier child development

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Discuss the benefits of Social Capital

- Social relationships help families access resources
- One's perception of their community predicts psychological well-being
- People that attend faith institutions report more life satisfaction
- Social networks results in better overall health
- Building relationships provides social support, and soft skills- allowing for better parent-child interactions and healthier child development

## Video: Build Socially Connected Communities



[https://youtu.be/f\\_c6FokE\\_i8](https://youtu.be/f_c6FokE_i8)

collectively

Let's watch a video together from the Prevention Institute and Healthy Places By Design (runtime: 1 minute 25 seconds) that shares some ideas for how to build social support and connection at the community level.

This is important because rates of social isolation are soaring around the world, with profound impacts on health and wellbeing. We need to weave stronger connections among families, neighborhoods, and communities. We need community-led solutions focused on local talents and assets and rooted in community cultures and values. In this short video, based on "Socially Connected Communities: Solutions for Social Isolation," we will learn how communities can improve social connection.

How do you see building social connections in your community?



## Components of Social Capital

- Networks (friendship)
- Norms
- Trust (feeling safe)
- Social support (rely on others for support)
- Connections
- Reciprocity
- Neighborhood organization (community building activities)
- Institutional linkage (relationships with leadership)

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Break down the components of Social Capital and how they work for youth

- Networks (friendship)- who are the people that youth associate with
- Norms- the rules/expectations that regulate behavior in a group
- Trust (feeling safe)- there must be trust to build capital
- Social support (rely on others for support)- as previously discussed, social support is the framework for Social Capital
- Connections- helping people get their needs met by connecting them with others
- Reciprocity- building an expectation that you will not only benefit from others, but that you will also give to others to create sustainable relationships
- Neighborhood organization (community building activities)- helps build networks with common culture
- Institutional linkage (relationships with leadership)- helps youth expand their experiences and reach

## Recruiting Community Supports



- When identifying community supports make sure culture is addressed.
- Identify community organizations including faith-based institutions, service clubs, support groups and other community organizations.
- Strength-based recruitment of interest-specific supports like pairing youth interested in cars with a mechanic.
- Locate and advocate for resources in the community.
- Good communication and relationships with schools, families, and communities maximizes success.

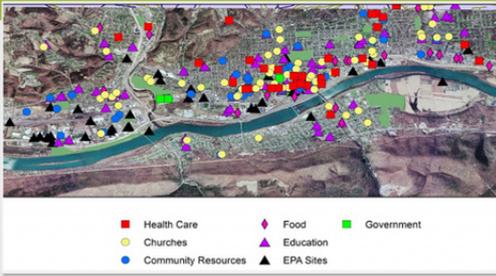
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One of the biggest challenges in building social capital is finding community supports for our youth. When we start at the individual level with the identified assets and strengths of the youth, whatever community supports that are identified will be meeting their needs. Here are ways to find the right support.

- When identifying community supports make sure culture is addressed.
- Identify community organizations including faith institutions, service clubs, support groups and other community organizations.
- Strength-based recruitment of interest-specific supports like pairing auto interested youth with a mechanic.
- Locate and advocate for resources in the community.
- Good communication and relationships with schools, families, and communities maximizes success.



## Activity: Asset Mapping



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This is an activity to build Social Capital in the community. Utilize Bryan's story from the previous activity and complete the worksheet on page 15.

Answer the following questions:

- List organizations in your community to meet Bryan's needs
- Select three of these groups and discuss how their missions or activities might provide reciprocal support for some of the children, youth, or families you are working with that have similar needs to Bryan
- Discuss what these groups would want or need to get involved as natural supports for some of our youth and families.
- Select one of the identified groups and develop an action plan for how you could get them involved. Remember that reciprocity is a key part of sustainable support networks.

## Need Help? Find Help

<https://www.findhelp.org/>

### > We do this in four main ways

 <p><b>Building the network</b> Our team researches, verifies, and adds qualified programs to our listings so they're easy to find on our search platform. Read about how we get our data.</p>	 <p><b>Open access to search</b> Our program search, <a href="https://www.findhelp.org/">findhelp.org</a>, is free, open to the public, and easy to use so anyone can find help and connect with programs in just a few clicks.</p>
 <p><b>Referral and collaboration tools</b> Nonprofits that claim their programs can send and receive referrals directly on our platform. This makes it easier for them to collaborate, ensuring every person gets the help they need.</p>	 <p><b>Strengthening connections</b> Organizations building social care initiatives encourage nonprofit partners to use our platform for making and receiving referrals.</p>

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Has anyone ever used Find Help? This is an example of Social Capital. If no one can speak about it, you can load the website and type in a local zipcode and a concrete need in the community to see what resources come up

*Stay Connected!*

**Dr. Julie Radlauer-Doerfler**  
CEO/Founder at Collectively



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[https://twitter.com/collectively\\_us](https://twitter.com/collectively_us)

"Let's re-write the narrative on mental wellbeing."

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This is the contact information for the curriculum developer, who focuses on social support and social connection so follow the links for more information.



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Ideas into Action



[info@cssp.org](mailto:info@cssp.org)



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Here is the information about the Center for the Study of Social Policy

