

Social Connections

A Center for the Study of Social Policy Initiative
cssp.org

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Youth Thrive
An initiative of CSSP

collectively



ABOUT THIS MANUAL



Welcome to the participant manual for the Social Connections training module of the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Youth Thrive Initiative. The Social Connections participant manual is designed to provide in-depth knowledge and understanding of social connections as one of the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors. The information in this participant manual is accompanied by a PowerPoint slide deck and a three-hour workshop. Participants that attend the presentation will learn hands-on tools and techniques designed to assist youth in developing social connections and social support. Additionally, the material provides an overview of social capital and how to create community-based capacity to meet the social connection and support needs of youth.

This training manual was created by Dr. Julie Radlauer, L.M.H.C. , CEO of Collectively which strives to advance mental wellbeing through the engagement of diverse stakeholders to collectively solve complex challenges. We address mental wellbeing through creative approaches to create lasting change. Collectively centers on social support, social connection and the expansion of social capital. Visit us at: <https://collectivelyus.org>.

OVERVIEW

The Center for the Study of Social Policy's Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors framework is a research-informed practice for building protective and promotive factors for adolescents and young adults, particularly the most vulnerable youth (Harper Browne, 2014). The Youth Thrive framework is based on what the research on resilience, positive youth development, neuroscience, and trauma indicates contributes to healthy development and well-being and reduces the impact of traumatic and negative life experiences for all youth.

The Framework applies to older children, teenagers, and young adults and is relevant to all youth between the ages of 9 and 26 years old. The heart of the Framework is five Protective and Promotive Factors that mitigate risk and promote well-being:

- **Youth Resilience:** Managing stress and functioning well when faced with stress, challenges, or adversity.
- **Social Connections:** Having healthy, sustained relationships with people, places, communities, and a force greater than oneself that promote a sense of trust, belonging, and that one matters.
- **Knowledge of Adolescent Development:** Understanding the unique changes and assets of adolescence and implementing policies and practices that reflect a deep understanding of development.
- **Concrete Support in Times of Need:** Making sure youth receive quality, equitable, respectful services that meet their basic needs (health care, housing, education, nutrition, income), and teaching youth to ask for help and advocate for themselves.
- **Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence:** Acquiring skills and attitudes that are essential for forming an independent, positive identity and having a productive and satisfying adulthood.

The material created for this workshop is designed to focus specifically on Social Connections. Research demonstrates that accessing social support is a critical and often a preferred strategy to address behavioral health needs. It is documented that social relationships are significantly related to life satisfaction and happiness (Taylor et al., 2001). In fact, social relationships are better predictors of health than many biological and economic factors (Vaillant, 2008). Youth today are less socially connected due to factors such as COVID-19 and social media. This workshop will provide participants with information on the value of social connection as well as tools and techniques to assess social connections with youth and support them in building healthy connections.

OBJECTIVES



PARTICIPANTS WILL:

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

ACTIVITY

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Write down or make a mental note of a time in your own personal life when you were struggling. This should be a time when you needed support from others.

Recall the details.

Now, answer the following questions while you are thinking about your crisis situation:

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

Raise your hands to the following questions (you can raise your hand more than once):

- 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?

Now raise your hands for family (and keep them up), for friends (and keep them up) and faith (and keep them up). Look around the room before putting your hands down.

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

Notice the difference in the groups?

So, 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)?



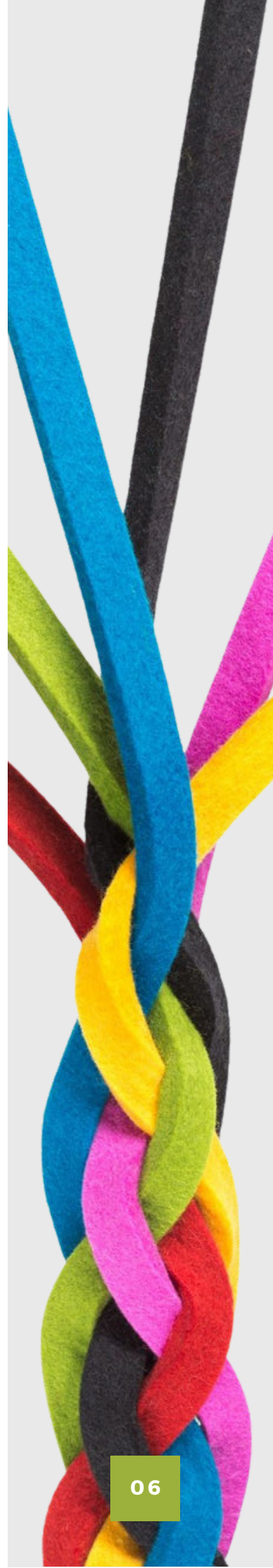
ACTIVITY

WHO ARE YOUR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS?

Let's use different color pipe cleaners to represent 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 that you choose 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?

What did you notice about the diversity of your groups.



LET'S ASSESS

YOUTH THRIVE SURVEY SOCIAL CONNECTION SCALE

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.

Social Connections

	Not at all like me	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Very much like me
1. There are people in my life who encourage me to do my best.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I have someone who I can share my feelings and ideas with.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I have someone in my life who I look up to.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I have someone in my life who doesn't judge me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I feel lonely.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I have someone I can count on for help when I need it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I have someone who supports me in developing my interests and strengths.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I have a friend or family member to spend time with on holidays and special occasions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I know for sure that someone really cares about me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. I have someone in my life who is proud of me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. There is an adult family member who is there for me when I need them (for example, my birth or adoptive parent, spouse, adult sibling, extended family member, legal guardian, non-biological chosen family).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. There is an adult, other than a family member, who is there for me when I need them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. I have friends who stand by me during hard times.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. I feel that no one loves me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. My spiritual or religious beliefs give me hope when bad things happen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. I try to help other people when I can.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. I do things to make the world a better place like volunteering, recycling, or community service.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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



SAMPLE QUESTIONS

TO HELP YOUTH IDENTIFY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

These are questions that workers/staff and other supporters can ask young people.

Who do you trust? Who do you 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 for you? Tell me about the activities for you in the community.

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 helps your family? Tell me about them.

Who do you call when you need to vent or are sad about something? Tell me about them.

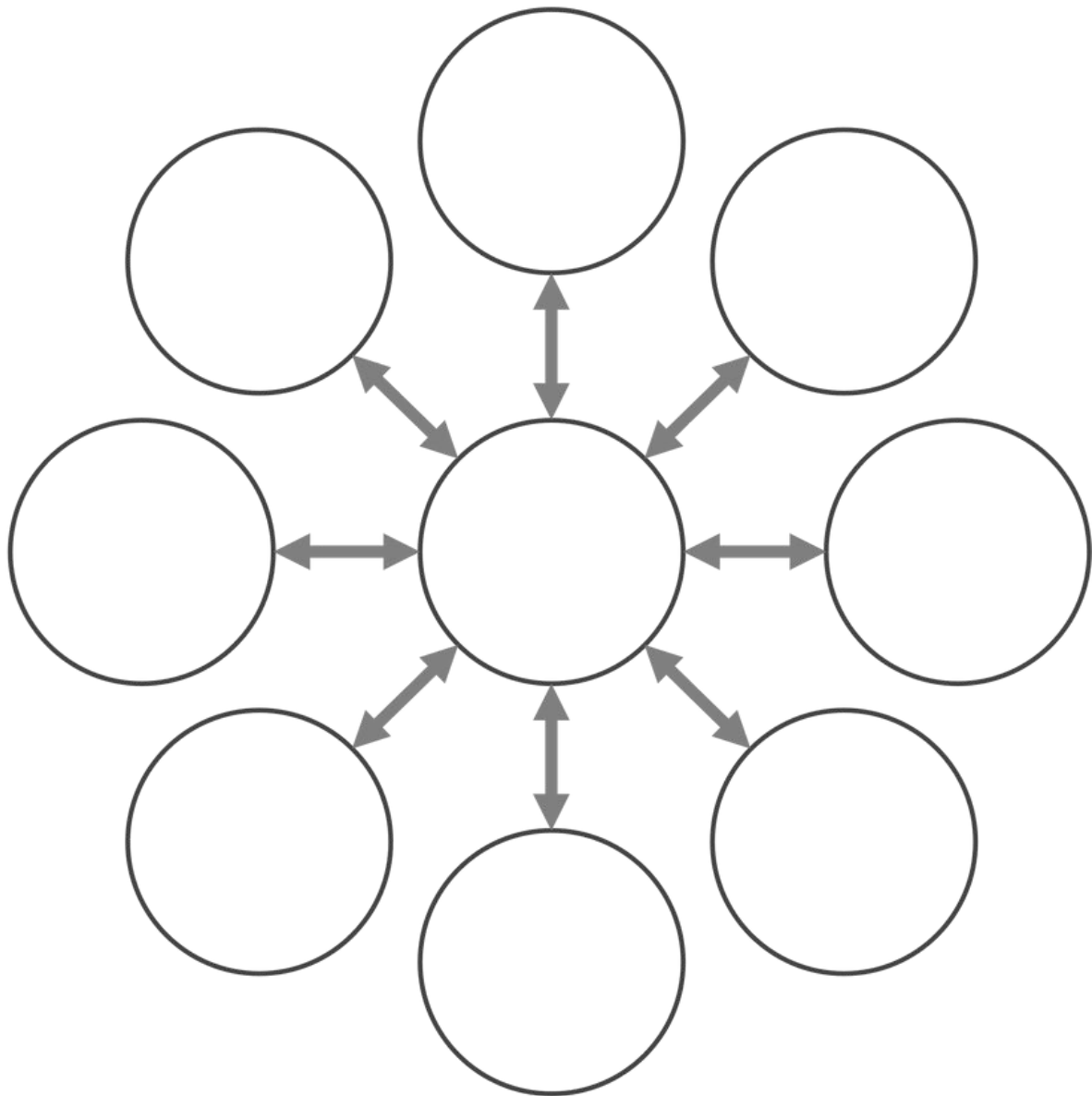
Who do you have fun with? Tell me about them.

Who are the last five people you called or texted? Tell me about them.

TOOLS & TECHNIQUES

SOCIAL SUPPORT ECOGRAM

Let's use and Ecogram to identify Support Systems. Place the youth's name in the center circle and identify potential supports in each domain in the outside circles.



TOOLS & TECHNIQUES

CIRCLE OF SUPPORT DIAGRAM

When facing any challenge it can be helpful to know whom you can count on. Different people may be helpful in different situations. Use the circles below to write down the names of people who you know you can ask for support or help.

Examples of who might fit in the Outer Circle:

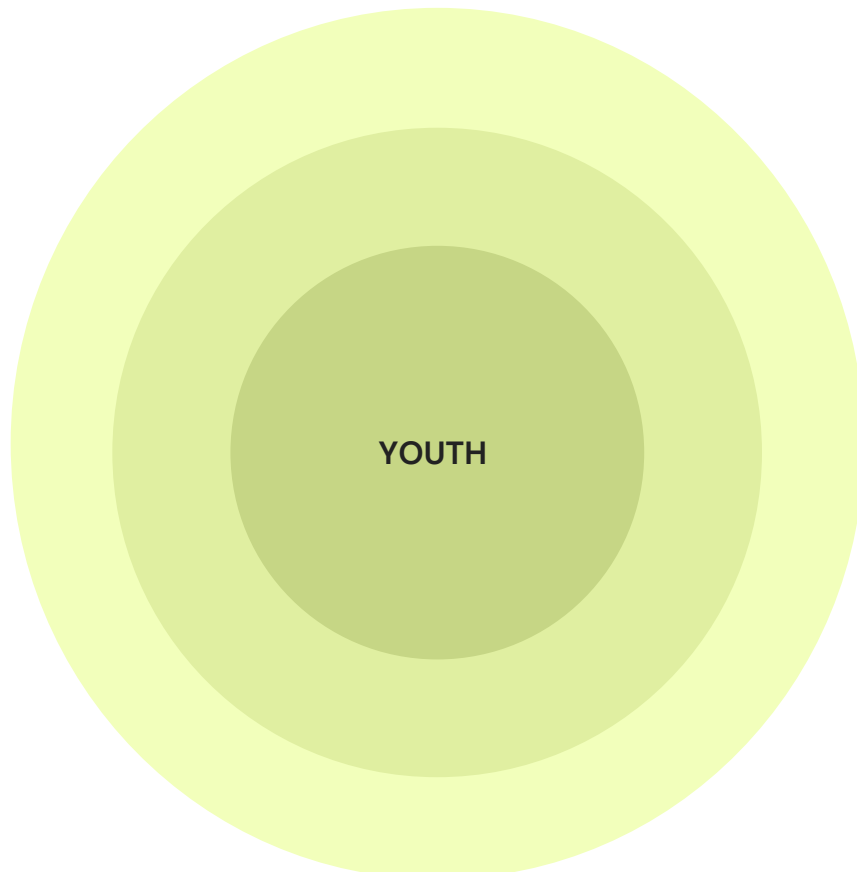
Professionals, Helpful Neighbors
Community Members, Acquaintances, Colleagues

Examples of who might fit in the Middle Circle:

Friends and Extended Family
Fellow Members of Faith Institutions

Examples of who might fit in the Inner Circle:

Close and Trusted Friends
Supportive Family Members



ACTIVITY

DEVELOPING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

You are trying to help the youth create positive peer relationships in the community. Complete the following worksheet with the goal of addressing the need of creating positive peer relationships.

- List the strengths associated with this need:
- List the culture 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 youth would pick:
- Who could help them get involved in the option you selected (who would you want to connect them to)?
- Develop an action plan for getting started



WORKSHEET

DEVELOPING SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Bryan is a 17-year-old African American male in the 11th grade in ESE classes. He lives with his foster mother Mary and two younger brothers Sean and Dwayne. Bryan stays in his room on computer games and occasionally plays basketball with his neighbor at the park. He also likes to walk the dog when he will leave his room. Both brothers are in elementary school. Bryan was receiving in home mental health services and was making progress until a few months ago. Since then Bryan stopped showering, spent more time in his room, and neglected his schoolwork. Mary has her hands full with working from home and trying to help her younger children with school. Bryan was participating in virtual wellness groups until he stopped attending and communicating with staff. He just agreed last week to speak to his therapist. Mary is worried that if he continues to withdraw, he may attempt to harm himself like he has done in the past.

1. List the strengths associated with this need:

2. 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 Bryan would pick:

3. Who could help them get involved in the option you selected (who would you want to hook him up with)?

(continued on next page)



WORKSHEET

DEVELOPING SOCIAL SUPPORTS

4. Develop an action plan for getting started

STEP	PERSON	DATE

5. How successful do you think this plan will be? Why?

ACTIVITY

FIND MY 5

Access to support is a game changer!

When we have people to share ideas with, ask for support when we need it, or easily connect with to say thanks, we are happier and healthier. This activity is designed to help you create your virtual support system. Pre-identifying your support people and creating your support chat is the most important piece to successfully accessing support.

Try to identify the people in your life that could be part of your My 5 Group by doing the following:

PLEASE TAKE SOME TIME TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY WHO YOUR **MY 5 GROUP** WOULD BE:

when something goes well for you, who do you want to tell?

when you get a text or call from this person you always answer

who do you celebrate your holidays with?

who do you ask for help with something big (like a move?)

who have you helped in the past?

who do you share your struggles with?

Once you have identified your group, reach out to them individually and ask if they are comfortable being on a group text with the others you have identified as your 5. You may want to set up some rules about frequency of chatting or what to chat about or not chat about as some people do not like very active group texts. Once everyone has agreed, create a chat group and you can start it with this introduction message:

WELCOME TO MY 5!

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my 5. I may reach out from time to time when I need support. Please take a moment to respond when I reach out-asking for help is hard but we all need to do it! I hope that if you need help you will also reach out through this chat. Thanks for going on this journey with me.

Remember to thank your 5 whenever you get the chance and reciprocate support when asked to ensure that everyone in the group gets the support they need when they need it.



ACTIVITY

ASSET MAPPING: DEVELOPING COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

Based on Bryan's story work through the following activity:

1. List several different organizations and groups that exist in your community. This could include formal organizations such as faith institutions or civic clubs but also might be bowling teams and leagues, motorcycle clubs, or rock star fan clubs.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. 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.

Group	Mission	Types of Activities
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

3. Discuss what would these groups want or need to get involved as supports for some of our youth and families.

Group	Mission	Types of Activities
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

4. 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 supports. Ask what your organization can do for the identified groups- just asking the group for their resources will not work long term.



LINKS

Youth Thrive Project

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

Protective and Promotive Factors Video

<https://youtu.be/PUAKgvwFG3A>

Guide Someone to Ask for Help Video

<https://youtu.be/WnNCOvYYT14>

Build Socially Connected Communities Video

https://youtu.be/f_c6FokE_i8

Find Help Website

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

Collectively

<https://collectivelyus.org>

Center for the Study of Social Policy

<https://cssp.org>

REFERENCES

Risk and Protective Factors Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9szON9Yo2mY>

Center for the Study of Social Policy, Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors

<https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/protective-factors-framework/>

Eco-Gram Activity– High Fidelity Wraparound– Julie Radlauer–Doerfler

Circles of Support

<http://caringforandhealing.com>

Developing Social Supports Activity; High Fidelity Wraparound, Vroon Vandenberg

My 5 Activity; Julie Radlauer–Doerfler

Making Social Capital Work for Excluded Communities Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSONTzR3U5U>

Asset Mapping Activity; Developing Community Supports; Collectively

