

Helioqram

Solutions to strengthen people and communities

Volume 5, Number 1

A Heliotrope Publication

Spring 2003

Finding Authentic Happiness in an Age of Fear

By Nancy Ashley

Is it inappropriate or insensitive to talk about and reach for “happiness” in a time of fear and dread? Or, is focusing on building an authentic kind of happiness a way to get past fear that threatens to narrow our vision, compromise our core values, and drain our life energy? I’ve chosen the latter view, while not denying the real danger and instability in our world.

I’m guided by a new book based on the growing field of positive psychology, which aims to re-balance psychology’s sole emphasis on mental illness by helping people identify and cultivate their most fundamental strengths and using them in work, love, play, and parenting (*Authentic Happiness* by Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D., New York: Free Press, 2002, \$26.00). Positive psychology is the study of positive emotion, positive traits (strengths and virtues), and positive institutions (democracy, strong family, etc.).

Seligman believes that building strengths and virtues may become more critical in hard times. “In times of trouble, does the understanding and alleviating of suffering trump the understanding and building of happiness? I think not. People who are impoverished, depressed, or suicidal care about much more than just the relief of their suffering. These persons care – sometimes desperately—about virtue, about purpose, about integrity, and about meaning. Experiences that induce positive emotions cause negative emotions to dissipate rapidly. The strengths and virtues buffer against misfortune and against the psychological disorders, and they may be the key to building resilience. The best therapists do not merely heal damage; they help people identify and build their strengths and virtues.” (See *Helioqram* Volume 3,

heliotrope 1. A flower that turns to face the sun. 2. An instrument for making long-term observations. 3. A purple that is bluer and stronger than cobalt violet.

Number 1 at www.heliotropeseattle.com for a related critique of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.)

We don’t need a therapist to learn Seligman’s formula for authentic happiness. His book is written for lay people, and explains both the theory and the tools to help us move closer to an enduring state of well-being despite illness, personal troubles, or lower income. He has selected 24 strengths from psychological research and venerable religious and philosophical traditions that are valued in almost every culture. They fall in the categories of wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity and love, justice, temperance, and transcendence—things that reach outside and beyond us to connect us to something larger and more permanent. He helps us identify and develop these

continued on page 7

HELIOTROPE

INSIDE

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| Tempering Research | page 2 |
| Community-Building Initiatives | page 4 |
| Commitment to Asset-Building | page 6 |

Tempering Research with Wisdom

By Nancy Ashley

In my consulting work, volunteer work, and life, I've considered research an extremely valuable tool for making choices. I give considerable weight to evaluation results and evidence-based programs when working with clients on children and youth issues. I chose to volunteer through Big Brothers Big Sisters partly because of that program's evaluation results, which show that it really makes a difference. I read a lot of health and medical articles to prevent me from getting old or sick too fast. After all, I still have the part of lawyering in my blood that seeks out "proof."

Yet, during this year, I have been humbled by realizing that as valuable as knowledge and research about children and youth is, it is not ready to and should never replace good old wisdom. I have seen close up that our desire for "silver bullets" to help children and youth has caused us to discount the piece of wisdom that says "if it looks too good to be true, it probably is." Human behavior is not as easily reduced to formulas and vaccines as are the behavior of building materials used by architects or engineers, nor medicines to fight a specific virus or reduce cholesterol levels.

I've concluded that my opinions and beliefs about children, youth and families need to make more room for these kinds of wisdom: common sense, judgment acquired through experience, cultural traditions, and our emotional and intuitive intelligences.

In a quick search on the web, I found some ways to help me articulate what I mean by wisdom:

- Wisdom is characterized by profound understanding and deep insight.
- Wisdom shows itself as a perception of the relativity and relationship among things.
- Wisdom is eternal truth distilled from knowledge.
- Wisdom involves seeing things clearly; seeing things as they are; and deeply understanding the human situation.
- Wisdom means using a large repertoire of approaches and techniques.

- Wisdom means knowing there are limits to knowledge.

So, what does this mean at a time when there is more and more emphasis on using evidenced-based programs for children, youth and families in our community? Here are some of my current thoughts:

- The best support for children, youth and families comes from the integration of practical wisdom, research and other forms of credible knowledge. Without incorporating wisdom, we cannot adapt to local circumstances or operate intelligently in many areas where research evidence is absent or incomplete. Without using research, we fail to generate cumulative knowledge and we can be driven by fad, fancy or personal bias. (Lisbeth Schorr, a highly regarded researcher on ways to strengthen children, youth and families, has just written a paper for the Brookings Institution that calls for a balance in the types of knowledge that can inform our decisions about social programs and policies; it can be found at <http://www.brook.edu/views/papers/sawhill/20030226.htm>)
- Just because common sense has not been demonstrated in a study does not mean it is not valid.

continued on the next page

HELIOTROPE



For more information about Heliotrope, contact:

NancyAshley

Christina Malecka

1249 NE 92nd Street

Seattle, WA 98115

Tel: 206 526-5671

Fax: 206 522-6557

E-mail: nancyashley@heliotropeseattle.com

Web: www.heliotropeseattle.com

All contents copyright© 2003, Heliotrope. Permission to reproduce in whole or in part is granted with the stipulation that Heliotrope and *Helioqram* be acknowledged as the source on all copies.

Tempering Research

continued from previous page

- When common sense and research come together (as I believe they do for developmental assets), we should notice that alignment.
- Those with the most formal knowledge are not necessarily the wisest about children, youth or the people who care for them.
- Be wary of the self-interest of both those who claim that research is “the answer” and those who protest too much that research has no value.
- A program that shows incredible results by the person who created it will not necessarily show similar results elsewhere. The passion, personality, skills and resources of the developer cannot necessarily be bottled and sold. (This seems to fit with the universal law that no one can make grandma’s apple pie like she does, no matter how many times they write down the recipe.)
- A program that is designed for one group of children and youth may never fit for other groups. A high-ranking person working with one of the well-known evidence-based programs recently stated that it has not worked and will not work for Hmong parents and families.
- Many local programs are doing an incredible job with very limited resources. If they were given the same level of resources required for some evidence-based programs that have been shown to be successful, they could likely produce substantial improvements through increasing the intensity and duration of their services, paying staff enough to keep them, and improving quality.
- The Seattle/King County area would likely benefit from adding some evidence-based programs to the current mix, and from providers becoming more knowledgeable about research and evidenced-based programs.
- We would be wise to move at a modest pace in replacing local responses to children and youth with evidenced based programs, lest we create unintended negative effects that are hard to undo. Those include discounting local wisdom, diminishing the community-building function of some agencies, not being able to sustain the high cost of some evidence-based programs, or finding that replication in our multicultural community is less successful, feasible or appropriate than we might like it to be.

- This one is not new, but bears repeating: Programs are only a small part of what young people in our community need from us. They need relationships with caring adults; opportunities to succeed and fly; safe neighborhoods; and good role models in their family, neighborhood, school and social lives.

I will continue to use and value research in my work and life, and to appreciate its growing contribution to how to grow strong, healthy and capable kids. However, I’m going to be clearer about the differences between knowledge and wisdom so I can widen my view. And I’m going to be more mindful of the following advice from Andre Gide, French critic and writer:

*Believe those who are seeking the truth;
doubt those who find it.* **H**

Late Breaking News from Nancy

My life has taken a major new turn. On April 11 the juvenile court awarded my husband and me temporary placement of my 13-year-old Little Sister (who I’ve known through the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program for 2 ½ years) and her 11-year-old brother.

They are great kids. The plan is that they will go live with relatives in California in two to four months. Fred and I had an hour to decide whether we would be willing to have them stay with us in the meantime or go into foster care. We chose the former in a moment of either total insanity or brilliant wisdom (or both).

My new responsibilities are rightfully going to demand considerable time and energy. I plan to continue my consulting work at the same level of quality, but with somewhat scaled down hours.

Thanks to everyone who has already sent your encouragement and support.

Building Community in a Fragmented Society: Settlement Houses and Family Support Centers

By *Christina Malecka*

“People in the community know what they need. Our role as staff is to provide space and support for what families know will strengthen them and their community.”

Robin Russell, Cascade People's Center

When I walked into the Cascade People's Center in Seattle's South Lake Union Neighborhood one afternoon in early April, I was immediately struck with a warm sense of community and comfort. I was a complete stranger who looked a little lost, but the adult participants in the Spanish class in the front room welcomed me and told me how to find Program Director Robin Russell. On my way to find her, I walked into another room where adults were playing with children and teens were tutoring each other in front of a computer. An outgoing little boy of about seven led me to Robin, who greeted me warmly and told me that just last night the center hosted seven different events initiated by community members: a community stakeholder meeting on changes proposed to the park next door; an after school program where teens tutor grade school kids; an International Workers of the World meeting; a talking circle where mostly Native American parents support each other; a meeting

of the Seattle Columbian Association; a group planning a “Fiestas Patrias” celebration; and the Palestine Solidarity Committee.

What do all of these groups have in common? They are all deemed important by the youth, adults and families that find community at the Cascade People's Center – an organization that shares ties with ten other Family Support Centers in Seattle with striking similarities to mostly east coast institutions known as settlement houses.

The settlement house model

The late-19th century through the mid-20th century was a time of dramatic change in America. The permanent shift from an agrarian economy to an urban, industrial economy drew immigrants from all over the world to US cities.

Originally developed to address the needs of recent immigrants, many of whom were forced to live in poverty and relegated to urban slums, the “settlement house” model emerged in the 1880's. The first “official” settlement house was the Neighborhood Guild established by Stanton Coit in New York City in 1886. By 1918, the settlement house model was fully institutionalized with over 400 houses stretching across

The Settlement House Model in Action

Below are some examples of activities and events from settlement houses in New York City.

- At the **Grand Street Settlement** in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, a large group of seniors planned and threw a party to celebrate the 50th wedding anniversary of two of its members. In simultaneously translated Spanish, English and Chinese, celebrants offered answers to the question “what is love” amid cheers of: “Amor,” “Ai,” “Love.”
- The **Lennox Hill Neighborhood House** trains homeless and formerly homeless people to become couriers for **New Horizon**, a worker-owned delivery service based in Spanish Harlem.

- In the Chelsea neighborhood on the West Side of Manhattan, one of the oldest settlement houses in the US, the **Hudson Guild** runs a theater company. The Guild involves a diverse group of youth, adults and seniors in their productions – many of whom have never acted in or helped to produce a dramatic performance.

The examples from this section were all taken from the publication “Connecting Neighbors: The Role of Settlement Houses in Building Social Bonds Within Communities” by Prudence Brown and Kitty Barnes. This publication was co-published by United Neighborhood Houses of New York and the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago in 2001. It is available from United Neighborhood Houses of New York at www.unhny.org.

the country with particular concentration on the eastern seaboard. Activist and 1931 Nobel Peace Prize recipient Jane Addams established one of the best-known settlement houses – Hull House – in Chicago in 1889.

Seattle Family Support Centers grew out of a 1991 Education Summit convened by former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice where families expressed a need for more support around ensuring the healthy development of children and an interest in doing it through neighborhood-based Family Centers. The first three Family Support Centers were opened in 1992 and were so successful that there are now eleven Centers in Seattle. Each is run through a non-profit agency that contracts with the City of Seattle. For example, the Cascade People’s Center is a program of Lutheran Community Services Northwest. Centers provide welcoming space and a bridge to resources for whoever happens to walk in the door. Each has different areas of emphasis which are family and community driven.

“You don’t have to fill out a form or be “eligible” to participate in Family Support Center activities. Families come because they’re interested in learning or meeting new people.”

Wendy Holman,
City of Seattle Family Support Centers

Beyond “Service Delivery.”

The traditional settlement house has several distinct characteristics. All of these are shared by Seattle’s Family Support Centers:

- **Place –based and community oriented.**

Settlement houses and Family Support Centers are generally based in a neighborhood to address the specific needs of a particular population. They intentionally provide hospitable, informal space for community members to simply “hang out.” An underlying philosophy of these institutions is that community leadership will emerge naturally when a community is given a place to gather.

- **Strength-based.** Settlement house and Family Support Center programs are generally designed from a deeply committed strength-based perspective. This means that instead of focusing on what is “wrong” with program participants and trying to fix problems, settlement houses focus on what is “right” and on celebrating and building each individual’s strengths and internal resources.

Another example of community building

Another Seattle organization that shares characteristics with settlement houses and Family Support Centers is the Chinese Information Service Center. This organization has been providing support and empowerment to Chinese American and other Asian American families since it was founded in 1972 by high school and college students to help non-English speaking, elderly residents of the International District access linguistically and culturally appropriate services. Since that time, the CISC has grown into an organization that provides not only social services, but also culturally appropriate resources on family issues and opportunities for Asian American children, youth, adults and elders to celebrate cultural traditions, often through intergenerational sharing. Children recently put on a performance for elderly community members to celebrate the Lunar New Year, and elders teach children traditional Chinese arts such as knotting and calligraphy. CISC also collaborates with other refugee and immigrant communities through the Refugee and Immigrant Advocacy Network to support parent organizing, involvement and advocacy around their children’s schooling. For more information on the Chinese Information and Service Center, go to <http://www.cisc-seattle.org>

- **Staff as peers and reciprocal participation.**

While settlement house and Family Support Center staff may be trained social workers, they will generally refer to people involved in their programs as “participants” rather than “clients.” The focus is on empowerment, social events and training (in English as a second language, professional skills, tenant law, the arts, etc.) and community building rather than delivery of traditional social services. Ideally, community members who participate in activities do so with the understanding that they will give as much to the community as they receive from it. In fact, a high percentage of participants in Family Support Center programs are also volunteers.

continued on page 6

Commitment to Asset Building Remains Strong Locally and Nationally

As the Seattle School District, the City of Seattle and others look to the risk-reduction approach of Communities That Care to prevent adolescent problem behaviors, many individuals and organizations in the region remain committed to the developmental assets model created by Search Institute. In addition, a large proportion of organizations are very interested in blending the best of both models.

Both Communities That Care and developmental assets are research-based approaches. Both seek to help young people and their communities to be healthy and strong. Communities That Care focuses mainly on reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors for targeted high-risk children and youth.

Developmental assets seek to “raise the tide” for all children and youth by promoting the factors needed for healthy development – as a means to increase thriving behaviors, decrease high-risk behaviors, and increase resiliency in tough situations.

Some opinions from community organizations

Recently, School’s Out Washington, which offers developmental assets training in King County, sent a survey to its contact list asking whether people preferred the asset model, a combination of the asset model and Communities That Care, or the Communities That Care model. A total of 104 responses were received. Of those responding:

- 26% preferred the asset model
- 62% preferred a combination
- 9% preferred Communities That Care
- 3% did not make a choice, but provided comments

Those favoring the asset model noted that the “asset model has the greatest potential for long-term impact and sustainability,” liked its “focus on strengths,” described it as a “realistic model for creating community change,” and noted that “it feels like there is more room for cultural diversity in an asset model.”

Those favoring a combination of models commented that “presenting the two models as an interwoven theory would be most beneficial to me,” that

Communities That Care offers practical applications for specific interventions, and that “we need to continue to use a variety of tools.”

Those favoring Communities That Care said “I serve the 5-7% most vulnerable,” and that “reducing risks is most important.”

continued on the next page

Building Community

continued from page 5

- **Focused on socializing *and* social reform.** Participants in settlement house and Family Support Center activities frequently work toward self-improvement as well as neighborhood, city and societal reform. These spaces may become the center of a community campaign to increase police accountability, a local effort to effect statewide or national welfare reform, or a gathering place for gay and lesbian youth among many possible activities. They can also house theater groups, painting classes, garden parties or any other cause for fun or celebration.
- **Committed to promoting relationships across generations and racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups.** Both settlement houses and Family Support Centers provide opportunities for people to connect through similarities – but also to interact across traditional boundaries of race, class and age.

In an increasingly fragmented world, the strengths-based work embodied in the settlement house and Family Support Center models are excellent places to spark small and large transformations of individuals, families and communities. **H**

For more information on settlement houses, visit United Neighborhood Houses of New York at www.unhny.org

For more information about Seattle’s Family Support Centers contact Seattle City Family Center Specialist Wendy Holman at Wendy.Holman@seattle.gov

For more information on the Cascade People’s Center, contact Robin Russell at 206-587-0320 or rrussell@lcsnw.org

continued from previous page

Seattle/King County serving as model for organizational change

The *It's About Time for Kids* initiative in Seattle directed most of its efforts to providing information and training on developmental assets to a wide range of organizations that serve children and youth. Those organizations were seen as important catalysts for community-wide change, as well as offering thousands of opportunities for children and youth to experience asset-building approaches.

Walking Your Talk: Building Assets in Organizations That Serve Youth, a new publication of Search Institute, is designed to provide practical tools and examples to organizations serving youth to build assets with the young people in their programs. Of the 70 adults the author listed as resources, 11 of them are from Seattle/King County – as are two of the five youth groups with whom the author talked. This region's strong contributions of ideas, examples and advice for organizational change reflects the success of *It's About Time for Kids* training and awareness efforts here.

Training is available through 2003 by contacting Krista Galloway at School's Out Washington at 206-323-2396 or kgallowa@schoolsoutwashington.org

National momentum continues

Search Institute continues its research work on children, parents, families, and adults' interactions with kids. Recent studies have looked at how much help parents get and want, and what would help them raise strong and healthy children, and examined how and why adults are dropping the ball in contributing to young people's healthy development.

Search also has many new publications, including *Tag, You're It*, offering 50 easy ways for adults to build connections to kids. It is the perfect answer to the many adults who say they don't know how to meet or talk to youth. *Stopping at Every Lemonade Stand*, by James Vollbracht, seeks to support "a quiet revolution that will restore the type of culture that is healthy for our kids, and hence, healthy for all of us all." It offers stories and strategies in the six interconnected circles of community: the individual, the family, the neighborhood, the community, businesses, government, and elders.

Several large organizations, including the YMCA of the USA and Camp Fire USA, have made national-level commitments to build developmental assets. Local affiliates here have been and remain in the forefront of asset development for our young people.

Information on research studies and publications is available at www.search-institute.org. **H**

Finding Authentic Happiness continued from page one

strengths while clearly distinguishing them from what he calls "shortcuts" to happiness or easy pleasures: television, drugs, shopping, loveless sex, spectator sports, and chocolate.

Seligman's favorite positive "intervention" is to have you take his survey to identify which items on his list are your highest personal strengths. You can take the "VIA Strengths Survey" at no cost by going to www.authentic happiness.org. It takes about 20-25 minutes. I found it fascinating and energizing.

Armed with our strengths profile, Seligman recommends we re-craft our jobs, lives, love relationships, and our roles in raising children to deploy our strengths and virtues every day. He provides many examples and even a survey for young people, which is also on the web site. (Yes, I see many similarities between Seligman's list of 24 strengths and the 40 developmental assets.) He also encourages us to take one more step toward a meaningful life – to use our strengths to forward knowledge and goodness in the world.

Seligman and his colleagues are working on many practical applications of positive psychology. He recently received a \$2.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to teach positive psychology to ninth graders to determine if it helps students academically and emotionally. Lessons will include Fun vs. Altruism, Using a Talent to Display a Strength, Learning Optimism, Civic Engagement, and developing a Portfolio of Strengths. Sounds like something all of us could use! **H**

Life Delays Heliogram Publication

We really did intend to publish one or more *Heliograms* in 2002. Yet, somehow the months slipped by faster than they usually do and we just never quite made it.

Christina bought a condominium and moved. Then she acquired a dachshund puppy. Nancy celebrated her 50th birthday. Heliotrope experienced several challenges in the small business world – pension regulations, others using our registered business name, and other fun things. We both spent more time on our volunteer activities with kids – Christina with Powerful Voices, and Nancy with her Little Sister.

Nancy met her goal of walking 1,000 miles again last year, and of doing a regular stretching and strengthening routine. She also began taking yoga, to add an exercise component that offers stress reduction and nurturing of the soul.

Oh yes, we did a little work also. In April 2002, we began providing staffing support to the Project Lift-Off Opportunity Fund, a collaboration of private and public funders who invest in results-oriented, cost-effective early learning and out-of-school time opportunities for children and youth. For the City of Seattle Domestic and Sexual Violence Prevention Office, United Way of King County, and the King County Women's Program, we assisted with planning for the system of community-based domestic violence survivor agencies in King County. On behalf of the

"I really enjoy reading the Heliogram from cover to cover as soon as it comes in the mail. It's refreshing to receive good news about good work in a world where we are so often inundated with negative images and bad news."

Joe Malecka (Christina's Dad)

Annie E. Casey Foundation, we wrote a 200-page guidebook about "local learning partnerships" (coalitions of data users and providers) involved in the Foundation's national *Making Connections* initiative.

Nancy continued her work on Reinvesting in Youth, an initiative to use cost-effective, evidence-based programs for juvenile offenders, capture cost savings, and invest in early intervention. Christina assisted Chaya and other organizations with grantwriting. We provided additional services to three long-time clients, the YMCA of Greater Seattle, The Seattle Foundation, and the City of Redmond.

Several of these projects have continued in 2003. We are honored to work alongside many wonderful, dedicated, caring people. We hope *Heliogram* provides you with information and ideas that strengthen your work. **H**

Don't forget to check
out our web site:
www.heliotropeseattle.com

HELIOTROPE



Nancy Ashley
Christina Malecka
1249 NE 92nd Street
Seattle, WA 98115