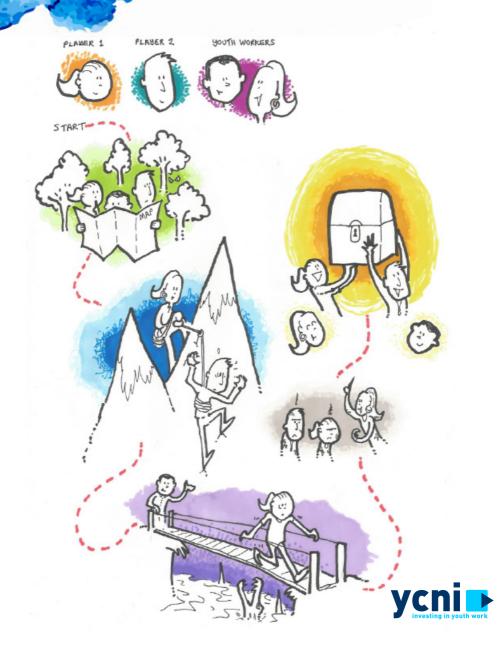
# Lifemaps

...the youth work journey to build mental health

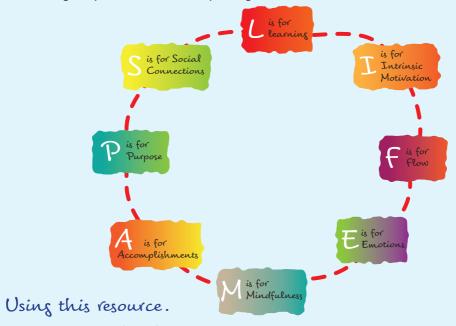




# Introducing LIFEMAPS....

LIFEMAPS has been developed by YouthAction Northern Ireland, by Simon Ward and Eliz McArdle. Simon Ward, Educational Psychologist, in collaboration with Eliz McArdle, Right Here Fermanagh Project lead, has developed this new framework to illustrate how youth work approaches are effective in building youth mental health. This work draws on research and evidence from the positive psychology field.

LIFEMAPS gives practical ideas for improving mental health.



LIFEMAPS is suitable for different groups or individuals, but has been designed with young people (aged 10-25) in mind. LIFEMAPS focuses on the mental health of young people and is a resource for young people themselves, youth workers and volunteers, parents and teachers. LIFEMAPS will help the reader to gain an understanding of the many features of mental health for ourselves and other young people. It will give you tangible ideas and exercises to do yourself or to run with groups and individuals. LIFEMAPS encourages you to REFLECT and to ACT to build mental health.

On one side of the page is an explanation of an idea connected to building mental health. One idea alone cannot build mental health – flourishing mental health will combine all eight together. On the next page are exercises for youth workers to use with groups or individuals, to bring these ideas to life. These exercises are most useful to youth workers, but may also inspire young people, carers, parents, teachers and other health professionals. These are sample exercises and can be adapted or built upon for long term programmes. It is anticipated that exercises will be combined for full effect.

#### Building a health-promoting style



For you to encourage other people towards good mental health, your style and approach is a key to this. The ideas in LIFEMAPS are all health promoting styles to be practiced by yourself, while working to promote the mental health of others. These are for workers, parents, volunteers or healthy peers to consider and practice:

- Understand that mental health is a skill and an attitude with practice and actions, it can be built or improved. But if neglected, it can also suffer.
- Develop an optimistic style, noticing everyday moments that please you or make you feel good. If your natural outlook notices when life goes wrong, take some time to build your noticing skills for when things are either okay or going well.
- Notice achievements, work towards achievements for you and others and then
  celebrate these achievements.
- Work with and through 'failures' when things go wrong, you can learn perseverance by sticking at difficult tasks. This lesson and the skill of tenacity can be directly transferred to life events outside our control, even at the worst and most painful times.
- Fear is different from one person to another, but it is often tied up with a fear of
  failure. This can be one of the biggest blocks you face. You need to be prepared to
  fail first time or not achieve. Next time round, you might be more successful and can
  grow bravery.
- Invest in relationships that encourage you, make you feel good, challenge you and where you feel valued. Deep friendships, light hearted friendships and friendly acquaintances all add to your mental well-being.



#### Creating a healthy youth work space

- 1. Take the time and care to build a **COSY** space for young people, with warmth, light, pictures and music.
- 2. Develop healthful habits among workers, volunteers and young people by small changes fruit, wheaten bread and cheese, water or juice, walking and outdoor activities. It takes a while to create new habits but this recognises the links between food, mental and physical health.
- 3. Presenting an optimistic style can offer **inspiration** for young people. Motivate, encourage and congratulate endeavour to build self esteem.
- 4. Feeling Sate is one of the biggest attractions for young people. Having quiet and loud spaces can suit a range of moods. Having different styles among the youth workers is an asset. Build an inclusive space and mood by squashing behaviour that make people feel small.



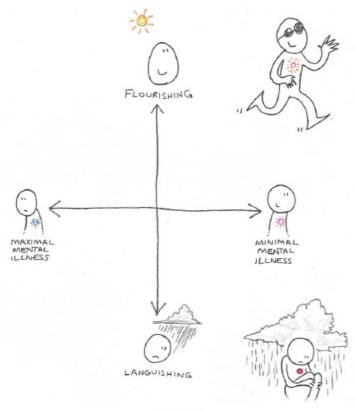
#### What is mental health?

Mental health is about both feeling good and doing well. Mental health helps us to notice and feel happiness and to manage everyday living. When bad things happen, having good mental health skills won't take the pain or stress away, but, in time, it can help us find a way out of it. Mental health is not stuck at one level. With skills and practice it can be strengthened and built.

#### Mental health and physical health

Mental health can be understood in the same way as physical health. You may not have a physical illness, but this doesn't automatically mean that you are fit and healthy. You can build your own health through practicing exercise and diet. If you quit your healthy activities, your health and fitness levels will probably fall.

Mental health is similar. If you have no mental illness, this doesn't automatically mean that you have good mental health. Some people have moderate mental health, feeling okay and doing okay. But if they come across a big or small problem, their ability to cope or keep feeling okay can drop. Others are in poor mental health, finding daily living a struggle or finding it hard to feel happy.





#### Are you languishing?

Those with poor mental health skills are 'languishing' – not with a mental illness, but just in a depressive or downward slump. Many of us are in moderate mental health feeling and doing okay, but nothing like as well emotionally or socially as we could. Those with moderate mental health can move upwards or downwards. They can slip into 'languishing' if they are not careful as their mental health skills might be out of practice and they don't know what to do to make them feel better.

#### Would you like to flourish?

People who have built a positive mental health are 'flourishing' – feeling good and doing well. Bad things can still happen and they will still feel the same natural reactions to terrible events such as death or loss. But if they have learnt and practiced mental health skills, they can find things to do that make them feel better and help them to cope.

There is huge potential to move up or down from one level to another – languishing to moderate mental health and then to flourishing. LIFEMAPS has ideas and exercises to practice skills that can lead to your flourishing mental health.



#### Practicing the 'Happiness formula'

Mental health can be learned. Scientific research has come up with a formula for 'happiness' that shows how we are in control of our own mental health.

The formula is H = S + C + V

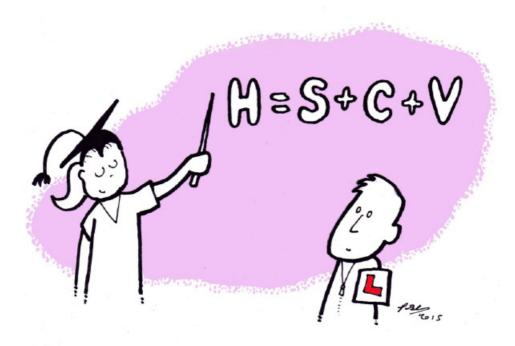
H is Happiness.

S is your set point – some of us tend to be naturally more optimistic or pessimistic. If a big event happens, this may change hugely, but it will soon return to our individual set point. This adds 50% towards our 'happiness'.

C is your *circumstances* – some of your circumstances can be changed, e.g. getting married; losing your job; while other circumstances are outside our control, e.g. age or sex. This only adds 10% towards our 'happiness'.

V is your *voluntary actions* – activities and thinking that we can choose and practice. These can help us feel good and do well. This adds 40% towards our 'happiness'.

Like physical fitness, you can't just read a book about mental health and expect your well-being to be boosted. Instead you can develop skills, thoughts and actions that help your well-being.





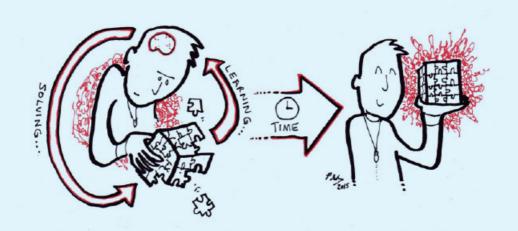
## L is for Learning

#### 'Learn to fail well' or 'Failing is part of learning'

Learning something new is full of risks, because we might 'get it' or we might not. To learn something new, we have to prepare to mess up or to miss the mark at first. If we are ready and expect that failure is a part of learning, then we will be less likely to turn back after the first failure. If you are scared of failure this can stop you trying new things. If you see failure as a weakness in yourself, then your self-esteem will crash if you mess up.

If you don't 'get it' first time round, you have a choice whether to give up or to go again. If you can try again when you fail, if you can stick at it until you get better, if you can recognise and enjoy your own improvements, this is one of the key skills for good mental health. (What is particularly important here is having goals that would stretch you but are ultimately achievable for you).

Doing tasks that stretch your ability, can help you develop thinking and activities to help you cope with tougher times.





#### MAGIC SHOW

Using a children's set of magic tricks, the group is going to perform a magic show. Divide up the tricks amongst your group – ideally with two people for each trick. Give them 15-20 minutes to practice the trick. Then set up the running order for the magic show and let the performance begin.

The PURPOSE of this exercise is to encourage practice as a means of improvement. But this can also be a light hearted measured approach to messing up – some tricks may flop, but the audience can still enjoy the performance and fun. If the trick flops, then the 'magicians' can try again. The debriefing from this exercise will identify how they approach learning, practice, failure and tenacity. Then have some discussion around how people react when bad things happen in life, e.g. trying to build back up or feeling overwhelmed. Have further discussion on learning skills that can help you bounce back.

#### HURDLES

This exercise is a writing exercise which takes a bit of thinking time for each person. Draw five hurdles on a sheet, with the finish line at the end. You need space to write on each hurdle and space to write between the legs of the hurdle. Write a goal at the FINISH line that you would like to achieve, something that is realistic, but needs a bit of attention to reach it. Then identify the hurdles or barriers that are stopping you from achieving what you want. These barriers can be external circumstances, practical issues or your own internal barriers. Then for each hurdle, try to identify actions that can be taken to overcome these. Write these actions under each hurdle, to show how you might overcome these. This might need some discussions in pairs to identify solutions, but the emphasis is on taking manageable steps to work towards a result.

The PURPOSE of this exercise is to build problem solving skills and then to begin thinking about putting these into action. Both problem solving skills and action skills need to be practiced over and over before becoming second nature. This exercise can be repeated.

# I is for INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

There are two types of motivation – intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation means that we will do something because of other people, rewards or punishments. We might do something because we have to but chances are, if we are given the choice, we won't repeat it.

Intrinsic motivation is about having an in-built desire to do something, just because we enjoy it or are interested in it. People who have intrinsic motivation for something are enthusiastic, persistent, excited and confident about the tasks that mean a lot to them. They will practice their skills, just for the drive to improve and the sense of personal achievement. Fishing, rally driving, zumba, reading, playing guitar, gaming, drawing, team games, swimming – each of these will either excite you or switch you off. Try new activities to discover a new excitement that you never knew about before. If you can find activities that reel you in, you can nurture your intrinsic motivation by investing your time and energy in this.



## I is for INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

#### **EXERCISES TO BRING IT TO LIFE**

#### 1. TASTER

It is difficult to identify what excites and interests individuals, if there are many experiences that you haven't yet tried out. Taking part in new activities can be daunting for some, particularly if it seems they need to commit themselves to a full programme. So, taster sessions offer opportunities to try out new things, with no fear of being stuck in something that doesn't suit you. Set up taster days with short sessions of dance, wallpapering, joinery, drama, drumming workshops, yoga or indian head massage. You might have longer sessions of hill walking, golf driving range, DJ-ing, app-design or gaming. Some people are switched on by working for and with others, so set up volunteering opportunities for one-off events.

The PURPOSE of this is to offer *real-time experiences* that might tap into the intrinsic motivation of individuals. This may point to the start of a new journey where the intrinsic motivation can drive them towards personal achievements and practice for self-improvement.

#### 2. THE MOTIVATE DEBATE

Ask for a volunteer from the group who will be in the centre of the debate. Divide the rest of the group into two. The volunteer is given a scenario facing their character. At the end of the scenario, two options are presented and the character must make a choice that is right for her/him. Each group is given one of the options and their role is to present the most persuasive arguments for the character to choose their option. After each option has been presented the character makes her/his choice. The character then identifies which argument they found to be the most persuasive. Many scenarios can be played with different motivators exposed. The group debrief can discuss what character traits and personal motivators come to the fore in this exercise and how motivators for one person can have the opposite effect for another.

# f is for FLOW

'Flow' activities are where you are totally immersed in the activity, where you can lose yourself, lose track of time and be totally engrossed in the experience. A wide range of activities can bring 'flow', but not necessarily for everyone – it can come from gardening, designing software, reading or climbing mountains, but it has to suit you. To reach 'flow', the activity must be both challenging and just within our skills range. Running can be a 'flow' activity, but for a beginner to race Usain Bolt, neither will experience flow as the levels of skills and challenge are not evenly matched.

During flow activities, you might not experience many positive emotions. However, in these flow activities you also have a break from negative emotions or feelings, e.g. while climbing a mountain, you think about the next step and practical things, rather than feeling joy or focusing on our own low mood, anxiety or sadness. After the flow activity, we experience an increase in positive emotions. Flow encourages us to stick with tricky tasks. This can lead to learning something new, but slowing the tide of negative emotions, even for a little while.



# f is for FLOW-

#### **EXERCISES TO BRING IT TO LIFE**

#### 1. PINS AND STRAWS

This exercise is best in groups of 4-5 people. Each group are given a box of 50 straws and a box of sewing pins and asked to create a structure using these materials, in 15 minutes. The structure will be given points in 5 categories for height, beauty, strength, a good name and a story behind the name. The winning team wins a small prize.

The PURPOSE of this exercise is in building problem solving skills, moving towards action skills and trying to overcome problems. This is also a flow activity, whereby participants become immersed and totally focused on the task. It is also a chance to see participants who are not caught into the flow moment, who stay on the outskirts and this can be a point of discussion in debrief. The debrief is about how you felt and feel, and how this activity might relate to mental health.

#### 2. SQUASHED SARDINES

Squashed sardines is a childhood game. For this reason, some people may not want to take part because it is 'too immature', but the beauty of these games is a reminder of how simple things can bring fun and joy. One person hides while the others try to find them. If you find the person who is hiding, you join them, trying to fit into their hiding space alongside them. The last person to find everybody, is the next person to hide.

The PURPOSE of this game is as a flow activity which consumes all your attention, has fun, excitement and anticipation. These are positive emotions to be built as part of developing an optimistic style. Because these are childhood games, there are reflective aspects and memories of the past, that can be fun-filled and invigorating. Other games such as dodgeball or hide and seek can have the same effect. The debrief focuses some discussion on how simple activities can make us feel good.



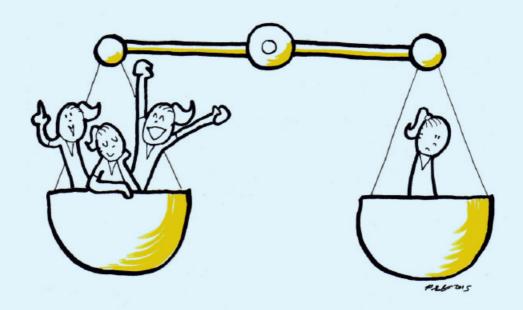


# E is for EMOTIONS

Everybody experiences both positive and negative emotions. Lots of research has been done on negative emotions, trying to work out how to cope with anxiety, anger or pain. We know that when we feel negative emotions, we find it hard to think straight, make good decisions or to act wisely.

More recently research shows that the more positive emotions you have, the more you can think creatively, overcome barriers and can recover more quickly from shocks or hard times. Positive emotions are not just about feeling happy all the time, but there are a wide range of emotions like joy, serenity, hope, pride, awe or inspiration that help us feel better. They do more than make us just feel better...; work, study, physical health and relationships are all boosted when we experience positive emotions.

To build good mental health, we need more positive emotions than negative ones. Research shows that we need three positive emotions to lift us up, for every one negative emotion that drags us down. We can build these emotions, not by forcing positivity, but by being open – open to new experiences, new ideas, new people, new thoughts. And open to reviewing old ideas or experiences that we thought were rubbish.



# E is for EMOTIONS

#### **BRING IT TO LIFE**

#### 1. CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT

Each group, with 4-5 people has been given a gift, which is a curious ball with a task and present inside. The anticipation and curiosity are built up by having these visible for much of the day, as part of the build of curiosity. Each group is told that they will be given 10 minutes to devise a performance/ presentation piece on the topic in their curious ball. Inside are the names of different positive emotions recognised to be good for mental health, e.g. bravery; zest; humour; curiosity; fairness; hope. All presentations are shown and the other groups have to guess the emotion from a list presented from the www.viacharacter.org. The PURPOSE of this exercise is for group members can discuss their own emotions in taking part in this, their approach to learning, risk and failure and their personal thoughts on the emotion.

#### 2. THE HA-HA GAME

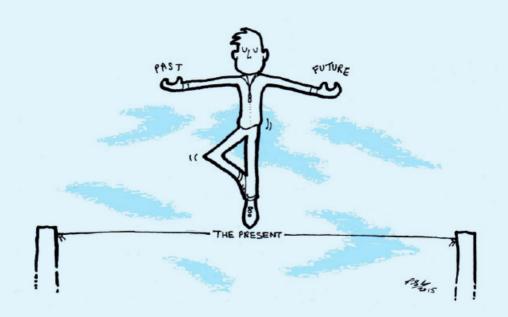
This exercise will generate laughter and lift spirits. Everybody lies down so that their head rests on the stomach of another person. The group are all interconnected by heads and stomachs. Set a mock 'serious' tone, and explain that the purpose of this exercise is to complete the task without anybody laughing. Ask all group members to close their eyes. Each person will in turn say 'Ha!' out loud. The second person says 'Ha!' and so on. Explain that the object of the game is to reach the end of the group before somebody laughs. After a few attempts, this usually generates a great deal of laughter and mood enhancing.

## M is for MINDFULNESS

How often in your everyday life do you notice when things are going okay or that you are doing well or fine? Not as often as we could! We have a tendency to see where things go wrong, go bad or to notice what is missing. At your party,you are disappointed by those who don't make it, even though loads of your friends came. At a parent-teacher meeting, you remember the one negative comment made over 10 great comments. The human brain tends to notice bad things, bad events and bad people easily; but this isn't the full picture. To build a more balanced view of the good and bad aspects of our life, we need to equally notice and appreciate the positive and simple things that give small pleasures or mean we are doing okay.

Mindfulness is about trying to tune into what is happening in and around us in a conscious way. We can try to extend our enjoyment by 'savouring the moment'. This might be about slowing ourselves down or paying attention to what you are doing, so that we can appreciate something fully in the present or in the past. We can listen more to the music, feel the wind on our face or be pleased with having a pretty good day.

Mindfulness is also about having a balance between the past, present and the future. Always looking back at the past or always dreaming of the future can mean we get stuck in one 'place'. But if we have a balance of past, present and future, we can enjoy childhood memories, while thinking the best of a future event. But all the while, we notice small or good moments from the present, from our everyday living.



# M is for MINDFULNESS

#### **EXERCISES TO BRING IT TO LIFE**

#### 3. MINDFUL MOMENTS

There are many mindful moments that can be created to build up skills of reflection, appreciation and gratitude.

- Opening circles and closing circles give us a moment to set the atmosphere and pace. An opening circle is where everybody in a group is asked to contribute something to the others questions such as 'tell us one thing that made you feel good since we last met?' or 'tell us one kindness in your life since we last met?'. Some questions are difficult to answer at first but when the exercise is used regularly, the skills become stronger. Closing circles might ask participants to share with the group 'tell us 1 thing you discovered today?'; 'tell us 1 thing you were thinking about today?'; 'tell us 1 emotion you feel or felt today?'
- 'Eat the sweet' is a moment to savour something. Pick a sweet and slowly
  eat it, noticing the experience. Use the debrief to discuss this experience
  and how this might relate to our own lives.
- '3 good things exercise' research shows that writing down three things that went well and thinking about why these good moments happened, can improve our mood. If this is done weekly, then we develop a habit that can build an optimistic style.

The PURPOSE of building mindful moments is to build skills that can reduce the negativity bias, (tending to notice bad things over good).



# A is for ACCOMPLISHMENTS

We feel good when we accomplish a goal that we have set for ourselves. Research also shows that our mental health improves with accomplishments - as we feel pride, we have a sense of purpose in the world and we have uncovered or nurtured a personal strength. The size of the accomplishment is irrelevant, as the important part is what it means to you. Achievements must be relevant to the individual for them to build self-esteem.

Many goals that we or others set are toxic to our mental health. Sometimes goals are set to please other people, e.g. exam success to please your parents. These goals might only be concerned with or notice the end result, but might not take account of the improvements and the many small learning accomplishments along the way.

Learning goals are about building skills in an area, practicing these skills, that might lead to growing expertise in the area. Life is less about winning and losing, or passing and failing, but more about growing and learning. You notice and recognise small milestones, which builds confidence and motivation to keep improving. This is built even more by reflecting on these accomplishments with others who are meaningful in your life.



# A is for ACCOMPLISHMENTS

#### **EXERCISES TO BRING IT TO LIFE**

#### 4. WARM FUZZIES & A GIFT FOR THE WEEK

There are many ways that we can acknowledge the accomplishments of ourselves and others:

- Ask each person to choose as many fuzzy pom-poms from a bag as they
  want. Each pom-pom (or warm fuzzy) is to represent something that gives
  them a warm fuzzy feeling. Then each person shares their own thoughts
  with the group.
- Again using the fuzzy pom-poms, each person is asked to identify how they make other people have the warm fuzzy feeling. Again, each person shares and listens with others.
- 'A gift for the week' is a way of reminding others of the qualities or skills they hold. Everybody in the group is given an envelope each. They put their name on the envelope. Then each member of the group is asked to put a positive message into each envelope, writing something positive about each member of the group. Ideally, there are 8 people in the group (thus, with seven comments for each person). The group members are encouraged to take their envelope home and read one positive comment per day. The group leader is encouraged to have a quick check to ensure that thoughtless or mean comments are changed or removed before sending home.

#### 5. FACEBOOK PAGE

A facebook profile builds a public picture of an individual highlighting strengths, unique interests and characteristics. Each person is given an A3 sheet and markers and asked to design a facebook profile page. This page is then to be filled in with personal details and quirks. This might include likes and dislikes; favourites; interests; favourite TV, film & music; personal hates; dream job; personal portraits or pictures. All facebook profiles are presented by their creator to the rest of the group as a way to build public pride in self.

# P is for PURPOSE

Having a clear sense of purpose in the world adds to our feeling of wellbeing. This sense of meaning and purpose is most clear when you have goals that improve the lives of other people, rather than yourself. When our purpose is about self-promotion, we might have a clear personal goal to have fame and fortune, but this self-absorbed goal doesn't feed your desires. Instead, the more you get, the more you will want.

Meaning is seeing a goal that is bigger than yourself. Volunteering, helping others or joining a cause that you believe in are ways to build our sense of purpose in the world. When people help others, in small acts of kindness or large scale actions, it promotes our sense of worth as well as benefiting others.

If we feel that we have something to bring to or give to the world, this helps us feel that we are of value and meaning to the wider world. That is why the greatest way to find our purpose is in finding and building on our *Signature Strengths*; things we like doing and are good at. Research shows that is mainly pointless to spend much time on fixing your weaknesses. Finding and focusing on our signature strengths brings greater successes in living and greater satisfaction with life and self. If we can use our signature strengths of bravery or justice or wisdom for the benefit of others, we build a strong internal belief that this is the purpose and meaning for being alive.





#### **EXERCISES TO BRING IT TO LIFE**

#### 6. LIFE TRIANGLE

Take one sheet of flipchart paper and 15 small pieces of card and a glue-stick. LIFE triangle is to help you identify your life goals for the next five years. At the end, on your flipchart, you will have a triangle with 5 squares at the bottom, 4 on the next line; 3 next; 2 next and 1 at the top. Write 5 things that you have now (assets or strengths) that will be important to help you in the future (that will help you to achieve your goals). This will be your bottom line of your triangle. Now write 4 things you would like to achieve in the next six months or so. Then 3 things on the next line, which you would hope to work towards in the next year. Then 2 goals on the next two cards, for about 2-3 years time. Then your five year goals stands alone at the top. Don't stick the cards on until the end, so that you can swop them around if you want to. Then share in small groups.

#### 7. STRENGTHS HUMAN BINGO

Create a worksheet which has approximately 25 boxes in a grid – this will be your bingo card. Prepare the cards in advance. In each box, devise statements about the strengths of each individual, such as ....

- Find someone who is brave...
- Find someone who has strong faith...
- Find someone who is loyal...
- Find someone who is curious...
- Find someone who has a proud moment...
- Find someone who is humourous....

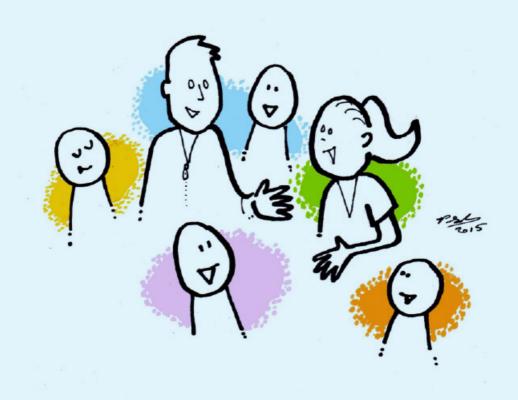
Pass out a bingo card and pen to each person. Then when given the go ahead, each person must try to fill up their bingo card, trying to find out who will fit into each box in the bingo card. EACH NAME CAN ONLY BE USED ONCE ON YOUR CARD. When one person completes their bingo card, they shout bingo and claim a prize. Then, the group sit in a circle to 'verify' that the information on the card is all correct. To do this, participants are asked to share their stories that show they meet the criteria, e.g. somebody who has been identified as brave tells the story that illustrates this.

# S is for SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Having strong relationships with others is a key part of having good mental health. Having lots of different connections with people, even if they are not BFFs, are also critical for good mental health.

We do and feel much better when we are in social networks that offer cooperation, support and enjoyment. There is a great sense of belonging by being part of a 'community' that can build our positive emotions. If we have no sense of belonging to any group, individual or community, this can add to the sense of isolation and loneliness that can weigh heavily on our mental health. This can lead to more negative emotions and the purpose of life seems very far away.

Building relationships with young people feeds basic and complex needs to be valued, listened to, cherished, empowered and worthwhile to the world. Significant adults can sustain and grow social connections with young people for life long health impacts.



# S is for SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

#### **EXERCISES TO BRING IT TO LIFE**

#### 1. 'SING A SONG'

Each person is given a piece of paper on their way into the group with a line from a well known song on it. They have to find the other lines from their song and the only way they can do it is by singing their line to the other group members. Allow a few minutes for group members to wander and find the rest of their chorus; then give them another minute or two to practice their chorus. Then share singing with the rest of the group.

#### 2. MOVING SCULPTURES

Write down the name of some machines or moving structures on pieces of card and put them into a hat. Each group (of about 4 people) pick out one piece of card and they are given 3 minutes to devise how they are going to use their full group to show this moving sculpture. The other groups will guess what the sculpture is. Favourites for this include washing machine, rollercoaster, grandfather clock, time machine, lawnmower, London Eye.

The PURPOSE of this is as a bonding activity, where people laugh and work together. This builds relationships that can be either deep or light hearted, but feel positive when together.

#### 3. RING OF FIRE

This is a sharing game to deepen relationships and connections. A normal pack of playing cards is used. The pack is face down in the middle of the group. The first person chooses a card and calls it out. Each card corresponds to a question on a list that have been created in advance. The card holder is then asked the question and shares their answer with the group. Group members are asked only to share what they are comfortable with, remembering that some information is private to the person or to loved ones. This process continues around the group and can be repeated for a few cycles.

Black suits (clubs and spades) correspond to more difficult personal questions on themes such as anger, bullying, loneliness or self-image. Red suits (hearts and diamonds) are for questions on positive aspects of self, such as proud moments, funny events, favourite things, joyful times. Design questions that build connections.





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