

WHAT COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGISTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT  
RESILIENCY IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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This project is dedicated to my partner who has not only supported me during the preparation of this project, but who has provided his unconditional support during the past two years. I am truly grateful for his commitment.

## Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the research literature on resiliency in adolescents. This overview includes a definition of resiliency and will explore the history of resiliency, as it relates to the health and well-being of children and adolescents. There will be a discussion with regard to emergence of the developmental assets framework, outlining the role that developmental assets play in the healthy development of young people across varied life circumstances in the face of multiple challenges. This paper will also highlight those elements of the research that support the notion that young people who have grown up in extremely disadvantaged conditions can escape without serious damage through the generation of positive environmental contexts within parents, families, schools, and communities. Lastly, this paper will examine the relationship of resiliency to prevention, well-being, risk factors, and protective factors.

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## Chapter I

### *Introduction*

The intent of this project is to provide counsellors with an increased understanding of the concept of resiliency, as well as ways in which they integrate the concept of resiliency into their professional practice in working with children and adolescents. This chapter therefore provides a brief introduction to the concept of resiliency, identifies the purpose and importance of the final project, outlines the structure and format of the final project, and provides a list of operational definitions that will be utilized throughout the project.

Resiliency is defined as “the process of coping with adversity, change, or opportunity in a manner that results in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors” (Richardson, 2002, p. 308). Resiliency focuses on protective factors that contribute to positive developmental outcomes despite the presence of risk (Benard, 1995). Acting more as a concept than an applied theoretical model, psychologists have studied resiliency since the 1970s, producing an abundance of literature that focuses on childhood and family history, as well as environment and social capital as predictors of success in adult life (Benard; Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Runyan et al., 1998).

Historically, efforts to enhance the health and well being of children and adolescents have centered on a problem-focused paradigm, rather than on specific assets (Leffert, Benson, Scales, Sharma, Drake, & Blyth, 1998). Although the problem-focused approach concentrates on identifying and reducing health-compromising risks and behaviours, the literature suggests that there is an emerging paradigm that conceptualizes,

names, and promotes core elements of human development known to enhance health and promote well-being (Leffert et al.). Several intellectual streams have fed into this approach, including resiliency, protective factors, positive psychology, youth development, and strength-based approaches (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Pittman & Cahill, 1991; Rutter, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1992).

From a historical view, the first wave of resilience-led inquiry focused on the shift from looking at the risk factors that led to psychosocial problems to the identification of strengths of an individual (Benson, 1997). This approach decreased dependence on deficit-reduction assessment methods of research and intervention, and emphasized a more positive perspective (Benson, 2003; Minnard, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). According to Leffert et al. (1998),

As studies of the processes related to resilience and our understanding of the relation between community contexts and adolescent development have accumulated, intervention and prevention efforts have developed around these concepts in an attempt to alter the developmental pathways of young people. (p. 211)

Attempts to alter the developmental pathways of children and adolescents facilitated the paradigm shift from a reductionistic, problem-oriented approach to nurturing strengths, which has become a prevalent theme across academic disciplines and the helping professions (Richardson, 2002). In response to this shift, resiliency and resilience are emerging as intriguing areas of inquiry that explore personal and interpersonal qualities and strengths, as well as those related to the larger community that can be accessed to grow despite adversity (Richardson).

Resilience is not the mere absence of risk, but the presence of protective factors (Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Rosenvinge, & Martinussen, 2006). The emphasis on thriving, qualities, surviving, and strengths not only points to the absence of problem behaviour, but also highlights the signs of healthy development (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Risk factors do not discriminate between different races, ethnic groups or socioeconomic status; they can be found within the child, the family, the community, and other societal structures (Armstrong, Birnir-Lefcovitch, & Unger, 2005). Although it could be argued that within our culture, ethnic minorities or low socioeconomic status places individuals at increased risk, protective factors can have an impact on the damaging effects of risk factors at an individual or general level, a child level, or a family level despite increased risk (Rhule, McMahon, Spieker, & Munson, 2006). Adversity and risk affects children at multiple levels with regard to their environment; therefore efforts to enhance resilience must also take place at multiple levels (Brooks, 2006). This is accomplished by generating positive environmental contexts within parents, families, schools, and communities (Benard, 1991; Benson, 2002).

#### *Purpose of the Final Project*

The purpose of this project is to explore the main model of resiliency, developmental assets. Differentiating the concept of resiliency from that of wellness and other terms used in the literature, this project addresses the concept of risk, as well as protective factors, exploring both the internal, and external factors that contribute to resiliency, and identifying what this construct offers to counselling psychologists. There is also a discussion of how resiliency relates to normal development and what counsellors

can do to foster resiliency in their clients. This was accomplished through a comprehensive review of the literature.

### *Importance of this Final Project*

The study of resiliency is important because little theoretical work has been done in order to solidify the concept or to provide a conceptual framework for resiliency, yet research findings indicate that without significantly changing the social environments in which children and adolescents live, attempts to enhance resilience will be met with limited success (Armstrong et al., 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

In addition to research supporting the importance of changing the social environments in which children and adolescents live, a main theme found throughout the literature supports the notion that young people who have grown up in extremely disadvantaged conditions can escape without serious damage (Leffert et al., 1998), therefore this project explores how this can be accomplished through generating positive environmental contexts within the parents, families, schools, and communities (Benard, 1991; Benson, 2002). The role and contribution of nonfamily adults is also examined.

The goal of this project was to identify common themes and relationships that currently exist within the literature in order to the gain a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of resiliency. The following areas of exploration formed the foundation of this project. What does the literature say regarding a) the developmental assets model of resiliency, b) the debate about whether resiliency is something that occurs within an individual, as opposed to something that occurs outside the individual, c) how resiliency relates to normal development, d) what counsellors can do to foster resiliency in their clients, e) engaging adults to develop strength-building relationships with

children and adolescents, f) mobilizing young people to use their power as asset-builders and change agents to facilitate healthy community development, g) the importance of expanding and enhancing programs to become more asset rich h) activating all sectors of the community to create an asset-building culture, and i) influencing decision-makers to access financial, media and policy resources in support of positive community transformation (Mannes, Roehlkepartain, & Benson, 2005).

### *Structure of the Project*

First, a literature review focused on the main model of resiliency, developmental assets, which will be presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 briefly outlines the search engines and terms used to accomplish the literature review. Chapter 4 makes recommendations to counsellors in terms of what they need to know about resiliency and takes the form of a ‘stand-alone’ manuscript that will be submitted to *The International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling* for peer-review after successful adjudication of this project. Finally, Chapter 5 outlines the limitations and directions for future research.

### *Operational Definitions*

Community – a group of interacting people living in a common location, as well as individuals who share characteristics, regardless of their location or degree of interaction.

Positive Psychology – the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive.

Prevention – a proactive process that empowers individuals and systems to meet the challenges of life events and transitions by creating and reinforcing conditions that promote healthy behaviours and lifestyles.

Protective Factors – influences that modify, ameliorate, or alter adolescent’s responses to stressors and risk factors typically associated with maladaptive responses.

Resiliency – the process of coping with adversity, change, or opportunity in a manner resulting in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors.

Resilient – the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to risks or hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning.

Risk Factors – circumstances that increase the probability that a child will experience negative outcomes and problem behaviours.

Strength-based Approaches – approaches that seek to increase the positive influences in an individual’s life.

Thriving – improvement or growth characterized by success or prosperity.

Well-being – the state of being healthy, happy, or prosperous.

Wellness – the state of optimal well-being, not simply the absence of illness, but an improved quality of life resulting from enhanced physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Youth – an individual between the ages of 12 to 18 years of age.

Youth Development – the personal, social, and emotional process that all young people go through on the way to adulthood.

## Chapter II

### *Literature Review: Resiliency in Children and Adolescents*

The intent of this paper is to provide a comprehensive overview of the research literature on resiliency in children and adolescents. Beginning with the history of resiliency in children and adolescents, this review includes several components. These components include: a) a description of the resilient child; b) resiliency and the relationship to well-being; c) prediction of risk factors; d) a discussion of protective factors; e) a list of operational definitions; f) an introduction to the developmental assets framework; g) identification of asset categories; and h) the role of parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults in asset development. There will also be a discussion with regard to developmental assets and counselling practice, including the importance of a multicultural approach to counselling. Lastly, this chapter includes a section on critical reflections and future directions with regard to the concept of resiliency in children and adolescents.

Defined as “the process of coping with adversity, change, or opportunity in a manner that results in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors” (Richardson, 2002, p. 308), resiliency is a complex phenomenon that focuses on protective factors that contribute to positive outcomes despite the presence of risk, and seemingly devastating disadvantages in life (Benard, 1995; Dent & Cameron, 2003; Mancini & Bonanno, 2006).

### *History of Resiliency*

The premise of resiliency is that people possess selective strengths, which are often referred to as protective factors that help them survive adversity (Richardson,



2002). Resiliency can be viewed as a developmental process, whereby experience in successfully overcoming adverse situations increases self-efficacy and confidence in one's ability to influence the environment (Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Werner, 2000). Daniel (2006) argues that an individual must first experience adversity and then exhibit healthier emotional well-being than predicted in order to be considered resilient.

The literature on resilience gives promise to finding specific ways in which parents, families, schools, counsellors, and communities can enhance success among children and adolescents placed at risk (Kitano & Lewis, 2005). However, despite the argument for a more direct measure of resilience, few attempts have been made to solidify this concept (Hjemdal et al., 2006). The first influences to be explored with regard to resiliency were the psychological and social relationships of children who did well despite poverty, mentally ill parents, abuse, neglect, and community and family violence (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2006). Research identified that children were protected by their connections to competent and caring adults in the family and community, as well as by cognitive and self regulation skills, positive views of self, and motivation to be effective in the environment (Harvard Mental Health Letter).

Understanding the characteristics and processes contributing to optimal functioning has become a prevalent theme across academic disciplines and the helping professions (Cheavens, Feldman, Woodward, & Snyder, 2006; Richardson, 2002). Richardson argues that resiliency inquiry emerged through the phenomenological identification of characteristics of survivors, mostly young people, living in high-risk situations. This resilience-led perspective to counselling offers an approach that Gilligan (1997) describes as pragmatic and optimistic, whereby attempts to alter the

developmental pathways of children and adolescents facilitated the paradigm shift from a reductionistic, problem-oriented approach to nurturing strengths. Building on these traditions, Search Institute has launched a research and action effort to unite and mobilize community-based efforts to promote core developmental processes, resources, and experiences for both children and adolescents (Leffert et al., 1998).

### *The Resilient Child*

While it is difficult to summarize or define what constitutes a resilient child or adolescent, a resilient youth can be described as an emotionally healthy individual who is able to successfully confront and negotiate a multitude of challenges, and effectively cope with obstacles, barriers, and setbacks (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). Overall, resilient children appear to possess certain qualities or characteristics that differentiate them from youth who are not able to successfully meet challenges, or effectively deal with personal setbacks (Brooks & Goldstein).

Qualities that are found in resilient youth include: a) a sense of hope, b) confidence and self-worth, c) the ability to identify and establish realistic goals and expectations, d) the ability to problem solve, and e) the presence of effective interpersonal skills and coping strategies (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). Resilient youth have developed effective coping strategies, as well as the ability to set realistic goals, and make informed decisions. They have a strong sense of self, whereby they are more likely to view personal mistakes, or obstacles as challenges that they have the ability and skills to successfully manage, as opposed to viewing themselves as incapable of coping with. Although they are aware of their vulnerabilities or weaknesses, they are also able to identify their individual strengths (Brooks & Goldstein). Resilient youth also appear to

posses an internal locus of control, defining and focusing their energy on those aspects of their lives that they have control over, as opposed to focusing their attention on factors beyond their control. Lastly, they are able to seek out support and advice when needed (Brooks & Goldstein).

### *Resiliency and the Relationship to Well-Being*

Well-being or thriving is a concept that incorporates the absence of problem behaviours, as well as indicators of healthy child and adolescent development (Scales et al., 2000). While risk refers to a child's susceptibility to adversity, resilience reveals a child's capacity to retain equilibrium after encountering substantial adversity (Edwards, Mumford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007). Research supports the notion that the more assets young people have, the more likely they are to report thriving behaviours such as valuing, diversity, maintaining good health and resisting danger (Scales et al.). The emphasis on thriving not only emphasizes the absence of problem behaviour, but also points toward signs of healthy development (Scales et al.). Scales and Leffert (2004) identify that thriving indicators are generally related to other positive outcomes during adolescence, as well as more distal outcomes in young adulthood.

### *Prediction of Risk Factors*

Risk factors describe circumstances that increase the probability that a child will experience negative outcomes and problem behaviors (Armstrong et al., 2005). Literature identifies risk factors to include: antisocial behaviour and violence, alcohol and drug use, depression and suicide, school problems, promiscuity, delinquency, and gambling (Scales, 1999). There is considerable agreement within the literature that suggests risk factors can be found within the child, the family, the community, as well as in other

societal structures (Armstrong et al.). The presence of risk factors alone does not predict failure in adulthood, as the presence of developmental assets is known to counteract these factors. These developmental assets are also referred to as protective factors.

### *Protective Factors*

Research beginning as early as the mid-1980's identifies the presence of protective factors as those influences that modify, ameliorate, or alter adolescent's responses to stressors (Armstrong et al., 2005). "The considerable evidence of resilience in numerous stressful environments has led researchers to focus on identifying protective factors that modify or buffer children's responses to risk factors typically associated with maladaptive responses" (Rhule et al., 2006, p. 232). Protective factors can exist at a general or individual level, a child or youth level, and a family level (Rhule et al.). "Resilience is not the mere absence of risk, but rather the presence of protective factors or processes that buffer effects of adversity" (Hjemdal et al., 2006, p. 194).

### *General or Individual Level*

Protective factors that exist on an individual level and can impact resiliency in children and adolescents include: easy temperament, intelligence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, effective parenting and social support, connections to caring and supportive adults, increased cognitive functioning, self-regulation skills, high motivation to succeed, and environmental opportunities (Brooks, 2006; Rhule et al., 2006).

Protective factors that exist on an individual level can be enhanced in several ways, and through a variety of measures. Essentially parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults can increase protective factors that exist at this level. While one cannot necessarily change a child's temperament or level of intelligence,

instilling qualities such as self-esteem and self-efficacy is a realistic goal that all parties can work towards in order to foster resiliency in children and adolescents.

#### *Child or Youth Level*

At this level, protective factors include: being female, self-mastery, self-efficacy, an active approach to problem-solving, the ability from infancy to gain the positive attention of others, an ability to be alert and autonomous, the tendency to seek out novel experiences, an optimistic view even in the face of distressing experiences, secure relationships with adults, a positive school climate, and positive and consistent parenting (Armstrong et al., 2005; Rhule et al., 2006; Rutter, 1979, 1985).

As is the case with protective factors that exist at the individual level, many of the factors within this level can also be enhanced through adoption of a resilient mindset. For example, a sense of self-mastery and self-efficacy can be developed within the context of parents, families, schools, communities, and affiliation with nonfamily adults. In addition, secure relationships, a positive school climate, and consistent parenting are all avenues that can be explored and exploited through increased understanding and education with regard to the needs of youth in the pursuit to increase resiliency in children and adolescents.

#### *Family Level*

At the family level, protective factors influencing resiliency include: the age of the opposite sex parent, consistent nurturing during the first year of life, alternative caregivers who step in when parents are not present, a multi-age network of relatives, the presence of sibling caregivers, and structure and rules during childhood and adolescence (Armstrong et al., 2005).

Protective factors existing at the family level are much more susceptible to external forces beyond the control of the significant individual's present in the child's life. However, this does not discount the fact that much can be done to increase resiliency at this level. For example, attending to structure and rules is something that all parents and families can engage in. Furthermore, utilization of family resources such as the presence of sibling caregivers can be brought into play in helping to foster an environment rich in developmental assets.

#### *The Contribution of Protective Factors to Resilience Formation*

Throughout childhood, many children and adolescents experience serious risk factors such as poverty, family discord, divorce or family violence that have the potential to threaten their healthy social and emotional development (Lamb-Parker, LeBuffe, Powell, Halpern, 2008). Often times, these youth respond to these stressors with symptomatic behaviours that can be either internal (ie. withdrawing) or external (ie. aggression) in nature (Lamb-Parker et al.). Presenting a challenge to caregivers, these symptoms often become the focus for medical-like solutions (Lamb-Parker et al.). However, resiliency suggests that strengthening protective factors helps counterbalance the negative effects of risk, thereby assisting youth in overcoming adversity (Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 1985).

Protective factors are important to asset development because they provide a strength-based orientation that enhances opportunities to facilitate adjustment by not only examining deficits, but also by focusing on strengths and capabilities (Black & Lobo, 2008). Supporting children and adolescents in learning more effective behavioural

responses, identified risk factors are thought to naturally decrease as part of the change process involving the introduction of protective factors (Lamb-Parker et al., 2008).

### *Developmental Assets Framework*

The main model of resiliency identified in the literature is the developmental assets framework. Developed by the Search Institute, the developmental assets framework is grounded in the scientific literature and empirical studies of child and adolescent development, with a focus on prevention, resilience, youth development, and protective factors (Benson, Roehlkepartain, Sesma, Edelbrock, & Scales, 2004; Leffert et al., 1998). Part of the action effort initiated by Search Institute to mobilize community-based efforts that promote core developmental processes, resources, and experiences began with the formation of the developmental assets framework.

Under the direction of Peter Benson (1997), the Search Institute conducted surveys of more than 350,000 sixth and twelfth grade students in over 600 communities between the years 1990 and 1995. The results of these surveys were used to identify 30 developmental assets that youth need to function optimally in life. After continued studies conducted by the same researchers, the number of developmental assets was increased to 40 (Richardson, 2002). Although developmental assets are not all that children and adolescents require in their lives, research supports their importance in promoting healthy development (Scales & Leffert, 2004).

The institute's framework of developmental assets identifies a set of interrelated experiences, relationships, skills, and values that are associated with reduced high-risk behaviours and increased thriving behaviours (Mannes et al., 2005). When present, developmental assets enhance developmental outcomes and provide a common language

for communities and social systems. They also play an important role in the healthy development of young people across varied life circumstances and in the face of multiple challenges, setting the benchmarks for positive adolescent development (Leffert et al., 1998; Mannes et al.). The assets include both external, as well as, internal factors (Leffert et al.). Positive family communication is an example of an external asset, while planning and decision making is identified as an example of an internal asset (Benson et al., 2004).

Asset development is a relatively new conceptualization of positive human development that identifies contextual and individual factors that serve to protect from, or inhibit health-compromising behaviors and enhance the opportunity for positive developmental outcomes (Leffert et al., 1998). Developmental assets have a key role in the prevention of a range of high-risk behaviours (Mannes et al., 2005). The more assets young people possess, the less high-risk behaviour they engage in and the more they thrive (Benson, 1997; Leffert et al.; Scales et al., 2000).

Risk affects children and adolescents at multiple levels with regard to their environment; therefore efforts to enhance resilience must take place at multiple levels (Brooks, 2006). This is accomplished by generating positive environmental contexts within parents, families, schools, and communities (Benard, 1991; Benson, 2002).

Nonfamily adults can also impact resilience (Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2006).

#### *Asset Categories*

For the purpose of communication, Search Institute has grouped the 40 assets into eight broad categories (Scales et al., 2006) (see Appendix). These categories reflect both external, as well as internal factors. External assets are identified as those assets that enhance the relationships and opportunities that adults and peers provide for young



people, while internal assets include the values, skills, and self-perceptions that young people develop in order to guide and regulate themselves (Scales et al.). The categories reflecting external assets are: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time, while the internal assets are: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity (Scales et al.).

Leffert et al. (1998) conducted an extensive review of the literature related to the 40 developmental assets and asset categories. Results obtained from the examination of approximately 1200 sources validate the conceptualization of several of the identified asset categories, which are: support, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time and commitment to learning. Studies suggest that the assets identified in these categories are comprised of scales and items that are well-established in the literature as having a positive effect on children and adolescents (Leffert et al.). Furthermore, while the categories were developed for the purposes of communication, literature supports the notion that the individual items in these categories capture the salient elements of the categories themselves (Leffert et al.). For example, the individual assets that comprise the category of support are intended to epitomize youth's perceptions of caring across family, school, and community contexts (Leffert et al.). Research conducted by the same authors suggest that a moderate amount of literature supports the assets that make up the social competencies and positive identity asset categories, while a small base of empirical studies supports the categories of empowerment and positive values. These findings are consistent with, and may reflect the fact that aside from a small subgroup of studies that explore the effects of participation in service learning, the category of empowerment maintains the fewest empirical studies (Leffert et al.).

### *Roles in Asset Development*

As previously identified, literature supports the notion that young people who have grown up in extremely disadvantaged conditions can not only escape without serious damage, they can thrive (Leffert et al., 1998). However, research findings indicate that efforts to enhance resilience in children and adolescents will be met with limited success unless there are significant changes within their social environments (Armstrong et al., 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

Changes in social environments can be accomplished through generating positive environmental contexts within parents, families, schools, and communities (Benard, 1991; Benson, 2002), which all assert a critical role in the development of resiliency. The support of nonfamily adults also plays an important role in positive youth development, and will be explored in the subsequent section along with the role of parents, families, schools, and communities.

### *The Role of Parents in Resiliency and Asset Development*

Not only are parents primary sources of support, caring control, and values for children and adolescents, they are also the child's first educators (Gleason, 2007; Rice & Mulkeen, 1995; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbush, 1991). The literature supports the idea that a significant relationship with a family member or adult mentor contributes to resilience in children and adolescents (Simon, Murphy, & Smith, 2005). Several studies on child resilience demonstrate a significant relationship between the quality of caregiving and a child's ability to adapt to adversity (Masten, Morison, Pellegrini, & Tellegen, 1990; Werner, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992). For example, studies conducted by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) found that secure attachment at one year

is a predictor of positive child social adjustment at Grade 3. This relationship is consistent with previous research demonstrating the predictive significance of a secure mother-child attachment for better peer relations in childhood (Ainsworth et al.).

Secure attachment lays the groundwork for later child social competence by serving as a working model for relationships, as well as by facilitating the internalization of moral values and social skills transmitted by the parent (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Kochanska & Thompson, 1997). Reid (1993) acknowledges this fact and concludes that numerous risk factors are effectively mediated by the quality of parenting. Specifically, parental support has been identified as an effective protective factor against the negative effects of developmental stress on adolescent depression, as well as suicidal ideation (Petersen, Sarigiani, & Kennedy, 1991; Rudd, 1990). In addition, positive relationships with adults and good intellectual functioning have been shown to predict resilience in the face of potentially damaging circumstances (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

While parents cannot protect their children from adversity or change the world around them, they have the ability to engage in parenting in a manner that promotes resilience and prepares their children to cope with, and effectively meet the challenges and demands placed upon them both at home, as well as outside the home. Parents can foster resilience in their children by teaching and conveying empathy, by teaching them effective communication skills, and by providing unconditional acceptance.

### *Empathy*

The majority of resilient children experience unconditional acceptance from at least one significant individual in their lives (Goldstein & Brooks, 2002). As empathy is identified as a means for individuals to demonstrate unconditional acceptance, one way

that parents can foster resiliency in their children is to teach and convey empathy. This can be accomplished simply by the parents serving as positive role models for their children, whereby they create an atmosphere where their children feel as though they are loved and accepted for who they are (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). In return, the child will experience increased confidence and self-worth, which are qualities characteristic of resilient youth (Brooks & Goldstein).

### *Communication*

Helping adolescents develop effective communication skills enhances resiliency by providing them with the skills necessary to function within the community as active participants (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). Effective communication also reinforces the qualities of resilience previously identified, which include: a sense of hope, confidence and self-worth, the ability to identify and establish realistic goals and expectations, the ability to problem solve, and the ability to generate effective coping strategies (Brooks & Goldstein). Furthermore, effective communication skills assist youth in establishing meaningful connections and interpersonal relationships, which will not only serve as protective factors, but will help them cope in the face of adversity (Brooks & Goldstein). One way that parents can help their children develop effective communication skills is to become active listeners (Brooks & Goldstein).

### *Unconditional Acceptance*

In order for parents to demonstrate unconditional acceptance they need to accept their children for who they are as individuals, rather than attempting to change them. Parents display acceptance through collaboration, a willingness to compromise, and efforts to support their child in exploring their own personal goals and endeavors (Brooks

& Goldstein, 2001). For example, engaging the youth in a discussion about their interests, and then working with the child to help them explore these interests would be one way to show evidence of acceptance, as would helping the youth focus on their strengths, as opposed to pointing out their deficits.

### *The Role of Families in Resiliency and Asset Development*

Recently, the focus of resilience has been extended to include the family unit (Simon et al., 2005). As the most immediate caregiving environment, the family has the ability to have the greatest impact on the development of resilience in children (Brooks, 2006). There are several qualities or characteristics of the family unit that have been identified as having an impact on resilience, with each family member contributing uniquely to family resiliency (Simon et al.). For example, coping mechanisms known to help promote resiliency include: good marital communication, increased problem solving skills, satisfaction with quality of life, financial management skills, family celebrations, family hardiness, family time, family routines and family traditions (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988; Shortt, Hutchinson, Chapman, & Toumbourou, 2007).

A main theme found throughout the literature supports the notion that resilient families use a combination of individual, family, and community strengths (Simon et al., 2005). The literature also identifies the presence of greater resilience in those families who reach out to others in their social environment, including extended family, friends, and community members (McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson, & Thompson, 1995). In addition to social support received from schools, churches, and neighbourhood resources, the effective utilization of health care and mental health services appears to strengthen

family resilience (McCubbin, Balling, Possin, Frierdich, & Bryne, 2002; McCubbin et al.).

As suggested in the literature by Brooks & Goldstein (2001), one of the ways in which families can increase resiliency in children and adolescents is to create routines and traditions unique to their own family unit. This can be accomplished within the immediate family environment through engagement in activities like family dinners, or through time spent together such as a scheduled recreation day. These types of routines and traditions can also be extended to include the larger family unit. For example, families can work together to form traditions and routines with extended family members with regard to special holidays or other important events. The establishment of traditions and routines helps foster resiliency in children and adolescents by providing cohesiveness, as well as a sense of pride, ownership, and belonging for youth, which in turn provides them with increased confidence, a sense of self-worth, and effective interpersonal skills, all of which are identified as qualities unique to the resilient child (Brooks & Goldstein).

#### *The Role of the School in Resiliency and Asset Development*

The school is viewed as an environment where children must succeed in order to develop competencies in adulthood (Brooks, 2006). “Restructuring the school environment is one means of strengthening resilience in children – minimizing negative outcomes for youth and promoting positive youth development” (Brooks, p. 69). Throughout the literature the school is identified as an important environment in which protective factors can be enhanced while minimizing risk factors (Brooks). Asset-rich schools are those in which teachers and other significant adults attempt to understand

children's perspectives, consistently inform children that they are loved and valued, encourage children's success, and communicate with them about their questions, concerns, and challenges (Aspy et al., 2004). Furthermore, relationships with teachers are important assets that enhance opportunities for positive developmental outcomes, including improved quality of life and cognitive outcomes (Aspy et al.).

Higher levels of assets are associated with greater academic achievement and lower rates of school dropout, which is one of the reasons why schools are being explored for the potential to strengthen resilience in children and adolescents (Benson, 2002; Brooks, 2006). Studies indicate that those youth who increased both their developmental context and developmental process assets from nonfamily adults from middle school to high school had significantly higher levels of thriving in high school than other students (Scales et al., 2006). Strengthening protection within schools provides a buffer for risk experienced in families and communities and contributes to positive youth development among children and adolescents (Brooks). There is also empirical evidence that the school environment impacts student outcomes (Brooks). For example, perceived school connectedness is associated with reduced levels of emotional distress, suicidal involvement, violent behaviours, alcohol and drug use, as well as with a later age for sexual involvement (Resnick et al., 1997). Research identifies that teachers who establish appropriate personal relationships with their students can improve their chances for a successful school experience (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003).

Attempting to understand the youth's perspectives, conveying that children are valued and loved, encouraging their success, and establishing effective communication are effective ways to promote resilience in children and adolescents (Brooks & Goldstein,

2001), thus, schools have the ability to work with children and their families to increase resiliency on multiple levels. One way that schools can foster resiliency in youth is to include children, as well as their families in the decision making process, providing effective communication and ensuring that all parties are actively involved in the decisions that are going to impact them with regard to the youth's education (Brooks & Goldstein). Schools working from a strength-based approach can also help shape young people's healthy development by providing positive role models and opportunities for youth to engage in activities that will impact them in a positive way. For example, encouraging adolescents to participate in extracurricular activities, or attempt tasks they have not previously attempted are ways to promote resiliency in youth.

In the classroom, teachers can enhance resiliency by taking a hands-on approach, whereby they work with their students to develop assets such as effective problem-solving skills, time management skills, and coping strategies (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). They can also work with youth around ways to set personal boundaries, and establish realistic goals and expectations. As the school is a place where children and adolescents begin to explore their own personal identity, teachers automatically become role models for students, helping them develop a strong sense of self, celebrating their successes, and supporting them in their mistakes and challenges. The school is also a place where teachers and other professionals can work to instill a sense of community in the youth by teaching them the skills necessary to ensure that they are able to enter into the larger community as healthy and productive individuals.



### *Role of the Community in Resiliency and Asset Development*

The role communities' play in adolescent development is a recent development, facilitated by an increased awareness of the rising incidence of problem behaviours, as well as an interest in the role that contextual factors play in influencing developmental outcomes for youth (Leffert et al., 1998). Research indicates that communities contribute resources to healthy adolescent development in a number of ways (Leffert et al.). The asset-building approach developed by the Search Institute is a strategy aimed at building and strengthening community capacity through individuals, organizations, and networks to contribute to all of the community's young people's accumulation of numerous developmental assets in multiple contexts (Benson et al., 2004). The theoretical framework of developmental assets suggests that by building external assets in communities, adolescents will develop internal assets to guide them for the rest of their lives (Scales, 1999). "The asset framework attempts to redefine what is possible, and reinvigorate the public will" (Scales, p. 118).

Not only does the asset framework attempt to invigorate the public will, the foundation of asset-building communities is the mobilization of public power, capacity, and commitment that creates a normative culture in which all residents are expected to contribute to the healthy development of children and adolescents in order to improve and maintain the well-being of the community (Benson et al., 2004; Mannes et al., 2005). Werner and Smith (1992) argue that young people who thrive under adverse circumstances have the support of neighbourhood mentors and Blyth and Leffert (1995) suggest that young people with few personal assets benefit from living in healthy communities. The assets are useful in that they suggest ways community residents can

realistically build these connections, enhance the environment, foster the norms, and establish the competencies that are essential to building a community committed to the healthy development and well-being of children and adolescents (Mannes et al.).

### *Action Strategies*

Search Institute has identified five action strategies that identify ways in which communities can create asset-rich environments that contribute resources to children and adolescents (Mannes et al., 2005). These strategies include: a) engaging adults to develop strength-building relationships with children and adolescents, b) mobilizing young people to use their power as asset-builders and change agents to facilitate healthy community development, c) expand and enhance programs to become more asset rich, d) activate all sectors of the community to create an asset-building culture, and e) influence decision-makers to access financial, media and policy resources in support of positive community transformation (Mannes et al.).

As with the school system, the community has the power to unite and connect individuals, impacting healthy development and increasing resiliency in children and adolescents on multiple levels. There are several ways that communities can work to facilitate resiliency in youth. These include: taking an active interest in their youth, demonstrating commitment to their youth, placing value on their learning and input, and creating opportunities that engage youth regardless of age, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). Communities can also enhance resiliency by creating their own traditions and routines. This can be accomplished by creating after school programs to engage youth, or by developing and implementing programs and activities that youth can participate in on the weekends. Ideally, these

programs should be designed in a manner that does not exclude youth based on the above mentioned factors, nor the ability of their families to pay for these services. In addition to creating structured opportunities to actively engage youth, communities can incorporate activities designed to showcase a multitude of talents, ranging from athletic ability to more creative endeavours such as art competitions, or theatre productions with the goal of creating a sense of identity, pride, and belonging in the children and adolescents within the community. Another way that communities can accomplish these goals is to provide youth with opportunities to contribute. This can be accomplished by hosting events such as fundraisers, community cleanups, barbeques, and other social events and activities that include not only the youths themselves, but also their families. Such events would not only benefit the individuals involved, but also the community as a whole.

*The Role of Nonfamily Adults in Resiliency and Asset Development*

Caring and supportive relationships with trusted adults are essential to the healthy development of children and adolescents (Brooks, 2006). Research supports the idea that relationships with adults outside of young people's families that are characterized by trust, attention, empathy, understanding, affirmation, respect, and virtue play significant roles in providing children and adolescents with a number of the developmental assets (Brooks; Scales et al., 2006). The literature also speaks to the ability of nonfamily adults to successfully contribute to the well being of young people with whom they have contact. For example, Scales et al. conducted both a cross-sectional national sample of 614 12-to17-year-olds and a longitudinal sample of 370 students followed from 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades through 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades. The results from these studies report that increases in the level of other adult assets are associated with a significant increase in thriving, as well as

a significant decrease in patterns of risk behaviour. However, there are limitations to these studies. First, much of the data is cross-sectional, which prevents the researchers from making inferences about the causal relationship that other adult assets make to adolescent well-being. Secondly, the other adult assets mixed together both measures of developmental contexts such as time spent in youth programs with those perhaps better thought of as processes, such as boundary setting by neighbours. Therefore, although the correlational relationship between other adult assets and adolescent outcomes is strong, there is little insight that can provide information as to how these assets contribute to positive development in children and adolescents (Scales et al.).

Despite the fact that current research provides little insight with regard to how the assets contribute to positive youth development, the role of nonfamily adults in relation to resiliency is important for several reasons. Specifically, these relationships provide children and adolescents with increased opportunities to connect with individuals who have the ability to have a positive impact on their life regardless of family affiliation. These relationships also provide opportunities for youth to establish positive supports and connections outside their families, affording them the luxury of being able to find natural connections or bonds with individuals whom they trust, look up to, and feel comfortable with, or those who share common interests. For example, coaches, family friends, employers, or youth workers are all identified as individuals who have the ability to connect with youth. These connections will not only provide a supportive environment, but will serve to promote resiliency. The impact of nonfamily adults in relation to resiliency is also important for single parents, or families who either do not have

extended families, or are simply not able to connect with family members due to finances, proximity, or other barriers.

Although childhood and adolescence represents a period of change, it is also a window of opportunity in which there are countless opportunities for parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults to impact youth development in a positive manner. By changing the environments in which children and adolescents live, individuals in multiple roles can foster resiliency in youth by enhancing their physical, mental, and spiritual health.

### *Developmental Assets and Counselling Practice*

One of the key aims of counselling is to discover and apply the families' unique resources and capabilities in ways that are useful to the family unit as a whole, assisting them in utilizing their inherent capacity for growth and change (Simon et al., 2005). The developmental assets framework has several important implications for counselling practice. These implications include: a) support for a strength-based approach, b) the idea that developmental assets play a role in the healthy development of young people across varied life circumstances and in the face of multiple challenges, c) the notion that assets enhance developmental outcomes, d) the understanding that developmental assets provide a taxonomy of developmental targets, and e) the knowledge that the assets provide a common language for communities and social systems that focuses on prevention. These five implications will be discussed in turn in the next section. The developmental assets framework also provides structure and focus for counsellors in terms of how they can foster resiliency in children and adolescents through the development of treatment plans that address this concept, as well as how they can educate parents, families, schools,

communities, and nonfamily adults on the importance and benefits of enhancing resiliency in youth. These ideas will be taken up after a discussion of the five implications, as will a discussion with regard to the importance of adopting a multicultural approach to counselling.

### *Strength-Based Approach*

Emphasizing prosocial expectations, the developmental assets framework is a strength-based approach to child development that identifies positive relationships, opportunities, and personal characteristics that impact and shape young people's healthy development (Edwards et al., 2007; Mannes et al., 2005; Sesma, Roehlkepartain, Benson, & Van Dulman, 2003). Moving away from a problem-focused paradigm, it provides counsellors with a way to identify an individual's strengths, as opposed to targeting weaknesses, or areas of concern with regard to development. The framework also provides a tool for responding to the emerging understanding of the ecology of human development, thereby promoting a sense of responsibility and social trust, as well as a means of identifying and articulating the common good of children and adolescents (Mannes et al.; Sesma et al.).

### *Healthy Development*

Not only do developmental assets provide a tool for responding to the ecology of human development, they help identify ways in which counsellors can foster resiliency in children and adolescents regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. Research supports this notion, identifying that assets play an important role in the healthy development of young people across varied life circumstances and in the face of multiple challenges. The idea that developmental assets have a positive effect on

children and adolescents regardless of their life circumstances and personal variables is important because it highlights the fact that no one is exempt from the positive impact of the assets, as each individual will benefit from increased resiliency. However, too few young people report experiencing enough of these assets (Mannes et al., 2005). For example, young people report having on average, 19 of the 40 developmental assets (Mannes et al.), while one in five young people are identified as asset-poor, experiencing as few as 0-10 assets (Scales, 1999). Studies conducted by Sesma et al. (2003) further identify that on average, 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade youth experience fewer than 20 of the 40 developmental assets.

#### *Developmental Outcomes*

When present, developmental assets enhance important developmental outcomes, conceived as both the reduction of health-compromising behaviours and the increase of school success and other indicators of positive outcomes (Leffert et al., 1998). For example, several studies identify that youths' sense of belonging such as feeling connected to school and being valued by classmates and teachers is positively related to liking school, enjoying class, demonstrating a concern for others, and having conflict resolution skills; and negatively related to depressive symptoms, social rejection, peer victimization, delinquency and drug use (Anderman, 2002; Battistich & Hom, 1997; Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992; Soloman, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). As such, they establish a set of benchmarks for positive child and adolescent development (Leffert et al.).

### *Developmental Targets*

Developmental assets not only set benchmarks for positive adolescent development, they provide a taxonomy of developmental targets that require both family and community engagement to ensure their acquisition (Leffert et al., 1998). Research indicates that the more young people experience a variety of developmental assets, the less high-risk behaviour they engage in; the more they thrive (Benson, 1997; Leffert et al.; Scales et al., 2000). For example, the more developmental assets young people have, the less likely they are to engage in substance use (Benson et al., 2004). Studies also indicate that children and adolescents possessing greater numbers of assets are consistently more likely to be successful in school, be leaders, value diversity, resist danger, and maintain good health (Benson et al.). This is important, as communities not only have the ability to contribute or enhance resiliency in children and adolescents, but will benefit from increased resiliency in their youth, thereby strengthening the community itself. Although developmental assets are not all that children and adolescents require in their lives, research supports their importance in promoting healthy development (Scales & Leffert, 2004).

### *Common Language*

One of the most important aspects of the developmental assets framework, and the assets themselves is that they provide a common language for communities and social systems (Leffert et al., 1998). This is largely due to the fact that the institute's framework of developmental assets identifies a set of interrelated experiences, relationships, skills, and values that are associated with reduced high-risk behaviours and increased thriving behaviours (Mannes et al., 2005). As previously mentioned, every child can benefit from



utilization of this framework, which seeks to help identify what can be done to foster resiliency on multiple levels through the incorporation of an individual's identified strengths.

### *Treatment Plans*

For counsellors utilizing a strength-based approach, the developmental assets framework can be incorporated into treatment plans in working with children and adolescents. Incorporation of the framework into treatment plans can assist counsellors in not only identifying areas of concern or growth, but also highlighting and identifying the youth's individual strengths, which can be extended to help foster resiliency in the child. This can be accomplished by helping them cultivate their own assets, while assisting them in exploring and developing a support system either in the family, community, or school.

### *Education*

In reviewing the literature, it is evident that there is a lack of education with regard to the construct of resiliency itself, as well as with regard to what individuals can, and need to do in order to foster resiliency in children and adolescents. Therefore, one of the main roles of counselling psychologists is to educate parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults on the benefits of enhancing resiliency in youth, and provide them with ways in which this can be accomplished.

### *Adoption of a Multicultural Approach to Counselling*

Current research findings with regard to the identification of developmental assets as having a key role in the prevention of high-risk behaviours, regardless of racial and ethnic backgrounds (Mannes et al., 2005), speaks to the need for counsellors to adopt a

multicultural approach to counselling. Defined as “the conscious and purposeful infusion of cultural awareness and sensitivity into all aspects of the counselling process and all other roles assumed by the counsellor or psychologist” (Arthur & Collins, 2005, p. 16), the study of culture-infused counselling is important because of the need to accept each other’s differences and move beyond simple tolerance in order to embrace and celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity that exist within individuals (Leebert, 2006). As counsellors and psychologists we have an important role to play in supporting the Canadian ideal of equality and freedom for all individuals and groups (Arthur & Collins).

Developing multicultural competence is a lifelong process of learning that requires counsellors to purposefully include enhanced multicultural competencies into their professional planning and development (Collins & Arthur, 2005). Inclusion of multicultural competencies into professional practice is essential because research indicates that prevailing theories of counselling fail to adequately address the worldviews of non-dominant populations, resulting in cultural differences being mislabelled as dysfunctional or pathological (APA, 2002; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Research supports the notion that failure to incorporate cultural influences into the counselling process contributes to misunderstandings and a perceived lack of appreciation for presenting issues (Arthur & Collins, 2005).

In a pluralistic, multicultural society, professional and ethical practice requires counsellors to engage in continuous self-monitoring and ongoing consultation and development in order to improve levels of competence in serving culturally diverse clients (Johannes & Erwin, 2004). The literature clearly identifies that counsellors working from a monocultural framework are not as responsive to their clients as

counsellors who have adopted a culture-infused approach to counselling (Arthur & Collins, 2005). Adopting a culture-infused approach to counselling provides counsellors with the ability to appreciate and understand the cultural experiences of their clients and to incorporate cultural diversity into the ongoing assessment, case planning, interventions, and evaluation of work with clients (Arthur & Collins).

### *Critical Reflections and Future Directions*

The studies reviewed for the purpose of this paper highlight several themes, which are consistent across the literature and while the studies reviewed elicit much strength, they also have several drawbacks. Prominent themes noted throughout the literature include: the movement towards a focus on prevention, resiliency, and protective factors (Leffert et al., 1998), the idea that the more assets young people possess, the less high-risk behaviour they engage in and the more they thrive (Benson, 1997; Leffert et al.), the belief that risk affects children and adolescents at multiple levels with regard to their environment (Scales et al., 2006), and the idea that generating positive environmental contexts within parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults can impact resilience (Scales et al.).

The studies on resiliency not only identify the importance of generating positive environmental contexts within systems, but they are very broad in their scope and provide a research base with which to explore the concept of resiliency in children and adolescents. However, there is very little in the research that identifies the practical application of the concept of resiliency. Therefore, while the studies reflect the importance of generating positive environmental contexts, there is limited information about how to operationalize this concept within the existing systems. This could be due to

the relatively new interest in the resilience-led perspective to counselling and it is possible that more research in this area could have profound effects on the health and well-being of children and adolescents.

There were several other strengths identified within the literature reviewed. The first is the consistency with which the literature identifies the impact that generating positive environmental contexts within parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults can have on resiliency in children and adolescents (Scales et al., 2006). The second strength within the literature reviewed is the fact that it covers all of the domains or systems within which children and adolescents interact. Third, the literature clearly identifies the objectives and action strategies of resiliency, as well as the positive results that can be attained through utilization of the developmental assets.

While the studies reviewed identify objectives and demonstrate the positive effects that can be generated by the developmental assets, much of the literature is fragmented and lacks clear direction about how to implement these objectives or action strategies. The studies reviewed also remain specific to their identified domain, therefore while the literature identifies the impact that parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults can have on resiliency (Scales et al., 2006), there is very little research that identifies how these systems can work together to strengthen resiliency and enhance the health and well-being of children and adolescents. Fourth, the majority of the research of resiliency is cross-sectional, which prevents researchers from making inferences about the causal relationships between developmental assets, resiliency and well-being in children and adolescents. Therefore, little insight can be provided with information as to how developmental assets might contribute to positive development in children and

adolescents (Scales et al.). Lastly, there is no evidence that disputes the concept of resiliency. While this may be viewed as strength, it also points to the need for continued research in this area.

### *Summary and Conclusions*

Historically, efforts to enhance the health and well-being of children and adolescents centered on a problem-focused paradigm (Leffert et al., 1998). However with an increased understanding of the processes related to resilience, as well as increased understanding of the relation between community contexts and child and adolescent development, the current trend suggests that there is an emerging paradigm that conceptualizes, names, and promotes core elements of human development known to enhance health and promote well-being (Leffert et al.). In response to the increased understanding of the processes related to resilience, there has been a shift towards the identification of strengths and protective factors in the development of child and adolescent resiliency (Benson, 1997; Masten et al., 1990; Pittman & Cahill, 1991; Rutter, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1992).

Research identifies developmental assets as having a key role in the prevention of a range of high-risk behaviours for children and adolescents (Mannes et al., 2005), supporting the notion that the more assets young people have, the more likely they are to report thriving behaviours such as valuing, diversity, maintaining good health and resisting danger (Scales et al., 2000). The emphasis on thriving not only emphasizes the absence of problem behaviour, but also points toward signs of healthy development or the presence of protective factors or processes that buffer the effects of adversity (Hjemdal et al., 2006; Scales et al.).

## Chapter III

### *Methods*

This chapter outlines the research methods that were used to complete this project. Accordingly, this chapter includes a list of research questions, as well as the search terms and parameters that were explored.

#### *Research Questions*

The following questions formed the foundation of this project. “What does the literature say regarding” a) the developmental assets model of resiliency, b) the debate about whether resiliency is something that occurs within an individual, as opposed to something that occurs outside the individual, c) how resiliency relates to normal development, d) what counsellors can do to foster resiliency in their clients, e) engaging adults to develop strength-building relationships with children and adolescents, f) mobilizing young people to use their power as asset-builders and change agents to facilitate healthy community development, g) the importance of expanding and enhancing programs to become more asset rich, h) activating all sectors of the community to create an asset-building culture, and i) influencing decision-makers to access financial, media and policy resources in support of positive community transformation (Mannes et al., 2005).

#### *Search Terms and Parameters*

A literature review was undertaken using the electronic databases PsychINFO (1966 – 2008), Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection (2000 – 2008), and Internet resources such as Google Scholar. The following search terms were used but not limited to: community, developmental assets, positive psychology, prevention, protective

factors, resiliency, resilient, risk factors, strength-based approaches, thriving, well-being, wellness, youth, and youth development. A search of the University of Calgary library, Athabasca University, University of Lethbridge, and Calgary Public Library was also conducted using the same key terms.

Inclusion criteria for this project included English speaking peer-reviewed journal articles published between 1978 and 2008. This project examined both qualitative and quantitative studies that explored the concept of resiliency across children and adolescents of varied socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, as well as those from varied life circumstances facing multiple challenges. Exclusion criteria for the scope of the project included non-English speaking peer-reviewed journal articles, and those articles that explored the concept of resiliency in individuals over the age of 18.

## Chapter IV

### *Manuscript Draft: What Counselling Psychologists Need to Know About Resiliency in Children and Adolescents*

The intent of this manuscript is to provide counsellors with an increased understanding of the concept of resiliency, as well as with information regarding what they need to know about resiliency in children and adolescents from a practical standpoint. This manuscript includes the following components: a) working themes from the literature; b) a brief description and overview of resiliency; c) a description of the resilient child; d) an introduction to the developmental assets framework; and e) a discussion of the role of parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults in asset development. There will also be a discussion with regard to developmental assets in relation to counselling practice, including how counsellors can effectively incorporate the concept of resiliency into their professional practice.

Up until recently, resiliency has remained an elusive construct to those in the field of counselling psychology, whereby traditional methods to enhance the health and well-being of children and adolescents centered on a problem-focused paradigm. However, with an increased understanding of the processes related to resilience, as well as increased understanding of the relationship between environmental contexts and child and adolescent development, there has been a shift towards the identification of strengths and protective factors in the development of child and adolescent resiliency (Benson, 1997; Masten, Morison, Pellegrini, & Tellegin, 1990; Pittman & Cahill, 1991; Rutter, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1992).



In looking at the identification of strengths and protective factors, the concept of resiliency provides counsellors with a framework to conceptualize childhood development. Resiliency also elicits provocative opportunities to engage individuals utilizing a client-centered approach to counselling that identifies the presence of protective factors that buffer the effects of adversity and point towards signs of healthy development.

### *Working Themes From the Literature*

In reviewing the literature, three key principles were identified as imperative for counselling psychologists to attend to in working with children and adolescents. The first is the premise of resiliency, whereby all youth are thought to possess strengths and assets (Richardson, 2002). The second is that without significantly changing the environments in which children exist, attempts to enhance resiliency will be met with limited success (Armstrong, Birnir-Lefcovitch, & Unger, 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). The third is the notion that fostering resiliency in children and adolescents requires comprehension and understanding of the developmental assets framework, and its inclusion or incorporation into client treatment plans, as other invested parties such as parents, communities, schools, and nonfamily adults of children and adolescents must be educated on the benefits of enhancing resiliency. Each of these three main themes will be examined with a particular focus on what counsellors need to know.

### *Resiliency*

Defined as “the process of coping with adversity, change, or opportunity in a manner that results in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors” (Richardson, 2002, p. 308), resilience is a complex phenomenon

that focuses on protective factors that contribute to positive outcomes despite the presence of risk, and seemingly devastating disadvantages in life (Benard, 1995; Dent & Cameron, 2003; Mancini & Bonanno, 2006). Acting more as a concept than an applied theoretical model, psychologists have studied resiliency since the 1970's, producing an abundance of literature that focuses on childhood and family history, as well as environment and social capital as predictors of success in adult life (Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Runyan et al., 1998). The study of resiliency is important because little theoretical work has been done in order to solidify the concept or to provide a conceptual framework for resiliency, yet research findings indicate that without significantly changing the environments in which children and adolescents live, attempts to enhance child resilience will be met with limited success (Armstrong et al., 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

#### *A Brief Overview of Resiliency*

The premise of resiliency is that people possess selective strengths, which are often referred to as protective factors that help them survive adversity (Richardson, 2002). Resiliency can be viewed as a developmental process, whereby experience in successfully overcoming adverse situations increases self-efficacy and confidence in one's ability to influence the environment (Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Werner, 2000).

The first influences to be explored with regard to resiliency were the psychological and social relationships of children who did well despite poverty, mentally ill parents, abuse, neglect, and community and family violence (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2006). Research identified that children were protected by their connections to competent and caring adults in the family and community, as well as by cognitive and

self regulation skills, positive views of self, and motivation to be effective in the environment (Harvard Mental Health Letter). As knowledge of the processes related to resilience and our understanding of the relationship between community contexts and adolescent development have accumulated, intervention and prevention efforts have developed around these concepts in an attempt to alter the developmental pathways of young people (Kitano & Lewis, 2005).

### *The Resilient Child*

While it is difficult to summarize or define what constitutes a resilient child or adolescent, a resilient youth can be described as an emotionally healthy individual who is able to successfully confront and negotiate a multitude of challenges, and effectively cope with obstacles, barriers, or setbacks (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). Overall, resilient children appear to possess certain qualities or characteristics that differentiate them from youth who are not able to successfully meet challenges, or effectively deal with personal setbacks (Brooks & Goldstein).

Qualities that are found in resilient youth include: a) a sense of hope, b) confidence and self-worth, c) the ability to identify and establish realistic goals and expectations, d) the ability to problem solve, and e) the presence of effective interpersonal skills and coping strategies (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). They have a strong sense of self, whereby they are more likely to view personal mistakes, or obstacles as challenges that they have the ability and skills to successfully manage, as opposed to viewing themselves as incapable of coping with. Although they are aware of their vulnerabilities or weaknesses, they are also able to identify their individual strengths (Brooks & Goldstein). Resilient youth also appear to possess an internal locus of control,

defining and focusing their energy on those aspects of their lives that they have control over, as opposed to focusing their attention on factors beyond their control (Brooks & Goldstein).

Well-being or thriving is a concept that incorporates the absence of problem behaviours, as well as indicators of healthy child and adolescent development (Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2000). While risk refers to a child's susceptibility to adversity, resilience reveals a child's capacity to retain equilibrium after encountering substantial adversity, therefore the emphasis on thriving not only emphasizes the absence of problem behaviour, but also points toward signs of healthy development (Edwards, Mumford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007; Scales et al.).

#### *Developmental Assets Framework*

The main model of resiliency identified in the literature is the developmental assets framework. Developed by the Search Institute, the developmental assets framework is grounded in the scientific literature and empirical studies of child and adolescent development, with a focus on prevention, resilience, youth development, and protective factors (Benson, Roehlkepartain, Sesma, Edelbrock, & Scales, 2004; Leffert et al., 1998). Under the direction of Peter Benson (1997), the Search Institute conducted surveys of more than 350,000 sixth and twelfth grade students in over 600 communities between the years 1990 and 1995. The results of these surveys were used to identify 30 developmental assets that youth need to function optimally in life. After continued studies conducted by the same researchers, the number of developmental assets was increased to 40 (Richardson, 2002).

### *Asset Categories*

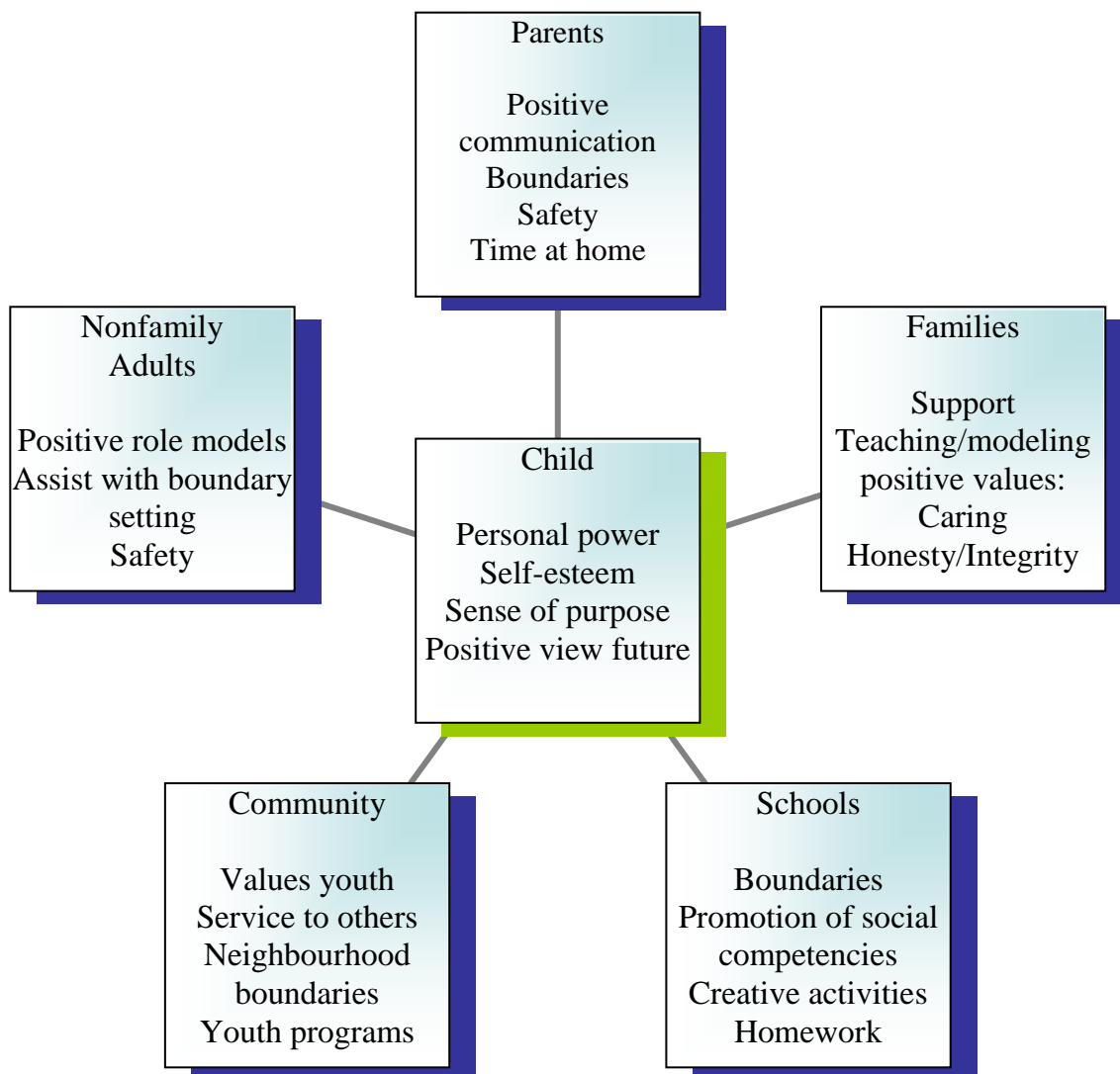
For the purpose of communication, Search Institute grouped the 40 assets into eight broad categories (Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2006), which are outlined in the Appendix. These categories reflect both external, as well as internal factors. External assets are identified as those assets that enhance the relationships and opportunities that adults and peers provide for young people, while internal assets include the values, skills, and self-perceptions that young people develop in order to guide and regulate themselves (Scales et al.).

When present, developmental assets enhance developmental outcomes and provide a common language for communities and social systems. They also play an important role in the healthy development of young people across varied life circumstances and in the face of multiple challenges, setting the benchmarks for positive adolescent development (Leffert et al., 1998; Mannes, Roehlkepartain, & Benson, 2005).

Developmental assets have a key role in the prevention of a range of high-risk behaviours (Mannes et al., 2005). The more assets young people possess, the less high-risk behaviour they engage in and the more they thrive (Benson, 1997; Leffert et al., 1998; Scales et al., 2000). Risk affects children and adolescents at multiple levels with regard to their environment; therefore efforts to enhance resilience must take place at multiple levels (Brooks, 2006). This is accomplished by generating positive environmental contexts within parents, families, schools, and communities (Benard, 1991; Benson, 2002). Nonfamily adults can also impact resilience (Scales et al., 2006). For example, an extensive longitudinal study of resilience in urban children in the United States found that parent support was a strong predictor of resilience, including self-

reliance, lower substance abuse, lower school misconduct, and decreased depression (O'Donnell, Schwab-Stone, & Muyeed, 2002). Scales et al. (2006) identify that young people with increased developmental process assets from nonfamily adults from middle school to high school experience higher levels of thriving in high school than other students.

## The Sum is Greater than the Parts: Systemic Change



*Figure 1.* The relationship between resiliency in children and adolescents and positive environmental contexts within parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults.

### *The Role of Parents in Resiliency and Asset Development*

Not only are parents primary sources of support, caring control, and values for children and adolescents, they are also the child's first educators (Gleason, 2007; Rice &

Mulkeen, 1995; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbush, 1991). Several studies on child resilience demonstrate a significant relationship between the quality of caregiving and a child's ability to adapt to adversity (Masten et al., 1990; Werner, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992). Therefore, while parents may not be able to protect their children from adversity or change the world around them, they have the ability to engage in parenting in a manner that promotes resilience and prepares their children to cope with, and effectively meet the challenges and demands placed upon them both at home, as well as outside the home. Parents can foster resilience in their children by teaching and conveying empathy, by teaching them effective communication skills, and by providing unconditional acceptance.

### *Empathy*

The majority of resilient children experience unconditional acceptance from at least one significant individual in their lives (Goldstein & Brooks, 2002). As empathy is identified as a means for individuals to demonstrate unconditional acceptance, one way that parents can foster resiliency in their children is to teach and convey empathy. This can be accomplished simply by the parents serving as positive role models for their children, whereby they create an atmosphere where their children feel as though they are loved and accepted for who they are. In return, the child will experience increased self-esteem, which is a quality found in resilient youth.

### *Communication*

Helping adolescents develop effective communication skills enhances resiliency by providing them with the skills necessary to function within the community as active participants. Effective communication not only reinforces the qualities of resilience



previously identified, but also assists youth in establishing meaningful connections and interpersonal relationships, which will not only serve as protective factors, but will help them cope in the face of adversity. One way that parents can help their children develop effective communication skills is to become active listeners.

### *Unconditional Acceptance*

In order for parents to demonstrate unconditional acceptance they need to accept their children for who they are as individuals, rather than attempting to change them. Parents display acceptance through collaboration, a willingness to compromise, and efforts to support their child in exploring their own personal goals and endeavors. For example, engaging the youth in a discussion about their interests, and then working with the child to help them explore these interests would be one way to show evidence of acceptance, as would helping the youth focus on their strengths, as opposed to pointing out their deficits.

### *The Role of Families in Resiliency and Asset Development*

Recently, the focus of resilience has been extended to include the family unit (Simon, Murphy, & Smith, 2005). As the most immediate caregiving environment, the family has the ability to have the greatest impact on the development of resilience in children (Brooks, 2006). Therefore, one of the key aims of counselling is to discover and apply the families' unique resources and capabilities in ways that are useful to the family unit as a whole, assisting them in utilizing their inherent capacity for growth and change (Simon et al.). For example, coping mechanisms known to help promote resiliency include: good marital communication, increased problem solving skills, satisfaction with quality of life, financial management skills, family celebrations, family hardiness, family

time, family routines and family traditions (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988; Shortt, Hutchinson, Chapman, & Toumbourou, 2007).

A main theme found throughout the literature supports the notion that resilient families use a combination of individual, family, and community strengths (Simon et al., 2005). The literature also identifies the presence of greater resilience in those families who reach out to others in their social environment, including extended family, friends, and community members (McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson, & Thompson, 1995). In addition to social support received from schools, churches, and neighbourhood resources, the effective utilization of health care and mental health services appears to strengthen family resilience (McCubbin, Balling, Possin, Friedrich, & Bryne, 2002; McCubbin et al.).

As suggested in the literature, one of the ways in which families can increase resiliency in children and adolescents is to create routines and traditions unique to their own family unit. This can be accomplished within the immediate family environment through engagement in activities like family dinners, or through time spent together such as a scheduled recreation day. These types of routines and traditions can also be extended to include the larger family unit. For example, families can work together to form traditions and routines with extended family members with regard to special holidays or other important events. The establishment of traditions and routines helps foster resiliency in children and adolescents by providing support and positive family communication, which are identified as qualities unique to the resilient child.

*The Role of the School in Resiliency and Asset Development*

The school is viewed as an environment where children must succeed in order to develop competencies in adulthood (Brooks, 2006). “Restructuring the school environment is one means of strengthening resilience in children – minimizing negative outcomes for youth and promoting positive youth development” (Brooks, p. 69). Throughout the literature the school is identified as an important environment in which protective factors can be enhanced while minimizing risk factors (Brooks). Asset-rich schools are those in which teachers and other significant adults attempt to understand children’s perspectives, consistently inform children that they are loved and valued, encourage children’s success, and communicate with them about their questions, concerns, and challenges (Aspy et al., 2004). Furthermore, relationships with teachers are important assets that enhance opportunities for positive developmental outcomes, including improved quality of life and cognitive outcomes (Aspy et al.).

Strengthening protection within schools provides a buffer for risk experienced in families and communities and contributes to positive youth development among children and adolescents (Brooks, 2006). There is also empirical evidence that the school environment impacts student outcomes (Brooks). For example, perceived school connectedness is associated with reduced levels of emotional distress, suicidal involvement, violent behaviours, alcohol and drug use, as well as with a later age for sexual involvement (Resnick et al., 1997). Research identifies that teachers who establish appropriate personal relationships with their students can improve their chances for a successful school experience (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003).

In addition to providing appropriate personal relationships, schools have the ability to work with children and their families to increase resiliency on multiple levels. One way that schools can foster resiliency in youth is to include children, as well as their families in the decision making process, providing effective communication and ensuring that all parties are actively involved in the decisions that are going to impact them with regard to the youth's education. Schools working from a strength-based approach can also help shape young people's healthy development by providing positive role models and opportunities for youth to engage in activities that will impact them in a positive way. For example, encouraging adolescents to participate in extracurricular activities, or attempt tasks they have not previously attempted are ways to promote resiliency in youth.

In the classroom, teachers can enhance resiliency by taking a hands-on approach, whereby they work with their students to develop assets such as effective problem-solving skills, time management skills, and coping strategies. They can also work with youth around ways to set personal boundaries, and establish realistic goals and expectations. As the school is a place where children and adolescents begin to explore their own personal identity, teachers automatically become role models for students, helping them develop a strong sense of self, celebrating their successes, and supporting them in their mistakes and challenges. The school is also a place where teachers and other professionals can work to instill a sense of community in the youth by teaching them the skills necessary to ensure that they are able to enter into the larger community as healthy and productive individuals.

### *Resilience and the Role of the Community*

The role communities' play in adolescent development is a recent development, facilitated by an increased awareness of the rising incidence of problem behaviours, as well as an interest in the role that contextual factors play in influencing developmental outcomes for youth (Leffert et al., 1998). Driven by the notion that by building external assets in communities, adolescents will develop internal assets to guide them for the rest of their lives, the theoretical framework of developmental assets is a strategy aimed at building and strengthening community capacity through individuals, organizations, and networks to contribute to all of the community's young people's accumulation of numerous developmental assets in multiple contexts (Benson et al., 2004; Scales, 1999). Accordingly, the foundation of asset-building communities is the mobilization of public power, capacity, and commitment that creates a normative culture in which all residents are expected to contribute to the healthy development of children and adolescents in order to improve and maintain the well-being of the community (Benson et al., 2004; Mannes et al., 2005). The assets are useful in that they suggest ways community residents can realistically build these connections, enhance the environment, foster the norms, and establish the competencies that are essential to building a community committed to the healthy development and well-being of children and adolescents (Mannes et al.).

As with the school system, the community has the power to unite and connect individuals, impacting healthy development and increasing resiliency in children and adolescents on multiple levels. There are several ways that communities can work to facilitate resiliency in youth. These include: taking an active interest in their youth, demonstrating commitment to their youth, placing value on their learning and input, and

creating opportunities that engage youth regardless of age, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Communities can also enhance resiliency by creating their own traditions and routines. This can be accomplished by creating after school programs to engage youth, or by developing and implementing programs and activities that youth can participate in on the weekends. These programs should be designed in a manner that does not exclude youth based on the above mentioned factors, nor the ability of their families to pay for these services. These opportunities should be available for each and every youth in the community. In addition to creating structured opportunities to actively engage youth, communities can incorporate activities designed to showcase a multitude of talents, ranging from athletic ability to more creative endeavours such as art competitions, or theatre productions with the goal of creating a sense of identity, pride, and belonging in the children and adolescents within the community. Another way that communities can accomplish these goals is to provide youth with opportunities to contribute. This can be accomplished by hosting events such as fundraisers, community cleanups, barbeques, and other social events and activities that include not only the youths themselves, but also their families. Such events would not only benefit the individuals involved, but also the community as a whole.

#### *The Role of Nonfamily Adults*

The literature speaks to the ability of nonfamily adults to successfully contribute to the well being of young people with whom they have contact, by providing evidence that a significant relationship with a family member or adult mentor contributes to resilience in children and adolescence (Simon et al., 2005). Identifying caring and supportive relationships with trusted adults as essential to healthy development, research

supports the idea that relationships with adults outside of young people's families that are characterized by empathy, trust, attention, understanding, affirmation, respect, and virtue play significant roles in providing children and adolescents with a number of the developmental assets (Brooks, 2006; Scales et al., 2006).

The role of nonfamily adults in relation to resiliency is important for several reasons. Specifically, these relationships provide children and adolescents with increased opportunities to connect with individuals who have the ability to have a positive impact on their life regardless of family affiliation. These relationships also provide opportunities for youth to establish positive supports and connections outside their families, affording them the luxury of being able to find natural connections or bonds with individuals whom they trust, look up to, and feel comfortable with, or those who share common interests. For example, coaches, family friends, employers, or youth workers are all identified as individuals who have the ability to connect with youth. These connections will not only provide a supportive environment, but will serve to promote resiliency. The impact of nonfamily adults in relation to resiliency is also important for single parents, or families who either do not have extended families, or are simply not able to connect with family members due to finances, proximity, or other barriers.

#### *Implications for Counselling Practice*

The developmental assets framework provides structure and focus for counsellors in terms of how they can foster resiliency in children and adolescents through the development of treatment plans that address this concept, as well as how they can educate parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults on the importance and

benefits of enhancing resiliency in youth. The developmental assets framework has several important implications for counselling practice. These implications include: a) support for a strength-based approach, b) the idea that developmental assets play a role in the healthy development of young people across varied life circumstances and in the face of multiple challenges, c) the notion that assets enhance developmental outcomes, d) the understanding that developmental assets provide a taxonomy of developmental targets, and e) the knowledge that the assets provide a common language for communities and social systems that focuses on prevention.

### *Strength-Based Approach*

Emphasizing prosocial expectations, the developmental assets framework is a strength-based approach to child development that identifies positive relationships, opportunities, and personal characteristics that impact and shape young people's healthy development (Edwards et al., 2007; Mannes et al., 2005; Sesma, Roehlkepartain, Benson, & Van Dulman, 2003). This moves away from a problem-focused paradigm, and provides counsellors with a way to identify an individual's strengths, as opposed to targeting weaknesses, or areas of concern with regard to development. The framework also provides a tool for responding to the emerging understanding of the ecology of human development, thereby promoting a sense of responsibility and social trust, as well as a means of identifying and articulating the common good of children and adolescents (Mannes et al.; Sesma et al.).

### *Healthy Development*

Not only do developmental assets provide a tool for responding to the ecology of human development, they help identify ways in which counsellors can foster resiliency in



children and adolescents regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. Research supports this notion, identifying that assets play an important role in the healthy development of young people across varied life circumstances and in the face of multiple challenges. The idea that developmental assets have a positive effect on children and adolescents regardless of their life circumstances and personal variables is important because it highlights the fact that no one is exempt from the positive impact of the assets, as each individual will benefit from increased resiliency.

#### *Developmental Outcomes*

When present, developmental assets enhance important developmental outcomes, conceived as both the reduction of health-compromising behaviours and the increase of school success and other indicators of positive outcomes (Leffert et al., 1998). For example, several studies identify that youths' sense of belonging such as feeling connected to school and being valued by classmates and teachers is positively related to liking school, enjoying class, demonstrating a concern for others, and having conflict resolution skills; and negatively related to depressive symptoms, social rejection, peer victimization, delinquency and drug use (Anderman, 2002; Battistich & Hom, 1997; Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992; Soloman, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). As such, they establish a set of benchmarks for positive child and adolescent development (Leffert et al.).

#### *Developmental Targets*

Developmental assets not only set benchmarks for positive adolescent development, they provide a taxonomy of developmental targets that require both family and community engagement to ensure their acquisition (Leffert et al., 1998). Research

indicates that the more young people experience a variety of developmental assets, the less high-risk behaviour they engage in; the more they thrive (Benson, 1997; Leffert et al.; Scales et al., 2000). For example, the more developmental assets young people have, the less likely they are to engage in substance use (Benson et al., 2004). Studies also indicate that children and adolescents possessing greater numbers of assets are consistently more likely to be successful in school, be leaders, value diversity, resist danger, and maintain good health (Benson et al.). This is important, as communities not only have the ability to contribute or enhance resiliency in children and adolescents, but will benefit from increased resiliency in their youth, thereby strengthening the community itself.

#### *Common Language*

One of the most important aspects of the developmental assets framework, and the assets themselves is that they provide a common language for communities and social systems (Leffert et al., 1998). This is largely due to the fact that the institute's framework of developmental assets identifies a set of interrelated experiences, relationships, skills, and values that are associated with reduced high-risk behaviours and increased thriving behaviours (Mannes et al., 2005). As previously mentioned, every child can benefit from utilization of this framework, which seeks to help identify what can be done to foster resiliency on multiple levels through the incorporation of an individual's identified strengths.

#### *Treatment Plans*

For counsellors utilizing a strength-based approach, the developmental assets framework can be incorporated into treatment plans in working with children and

adolescents. Incorporation of the framework into treatment plans can assist counsellors in not only identifying areas of concern or growth, but also highlighting and identifying the youth's individual strengths, which can be extended to help foster resiliency in the child. This can be accomplished by helping them cultivate their own assets, while assisting them in exploring and developing a support system either in the family, community, or school.

### *Education*

In reviewing the literature, it is evident that there is a lack of education with regard to the construct of resiliency itself, as well as with regard to what individuals can, and need to do in order to foster resiliency in children and adolescents. Therefore, one of the main roles of counselling psychologists is to educate parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults on the benefits of enhancing resiliency in youth, and provide them with ways in which this can be accomplished.

### *Summary and Conclusions*

Resilience is a complex phenomenon that reveals a child's capacity to retain equilibrium after encountering substantial adversity, and focuses on protective factors that contribute to positive outcomes in child and adolescent development despite the presence of risk (Benard, 1995; Dent & Cameron, 2003; Edwards et al., 2007). The premise of resiliency is that people possess selective strengths, otherwise known as protective factors that help them survive in the face of adversity (Richardson, 2002).

The study of resiliency is important to counselling psychologists because the concept of resiliency provides counsellors with a framework to conceptualize childhood development. Engaging individuals utilizing a client-centered approach to counselling,

three key principles are identified as imperative for counselling psychologists to attend to in working with children and adolescents. These include: a) the premise of resiliency, whereby all youth are thought to possess strengths and assets, b) the notion that without significantly changing the environments in which children exist, attempts to enhance resiliency will be met with limited success, and c) the idea that fostering resiliency in children and adolescents requires comprehension and understanding of the developmental assets framework, and its incorporation into client treatment plans (Armstrong et al., 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Richardson, 2002).

Counsellors can attend to the principles identified above utilizing the developmental assets framework, which has several important implications for counselling practice. These implications are: a) support for a strength-based approach, b) the idea that developmental assets play a role in the healthy development of young people across varied life circumstances and in the face of multiple challenges, c) the notion that assets enhance developmental outcomes, d) the understanding that developmental assets provide a taxonomy of developmental targets, and e) the knowledge that the assets provide a common language for communities and social systems that focuses on prevention.

As risk affects children and adolescents at multiple levels with regard to their environment, efforts to enhance resilience must take place at multiple levels (Brooks, 2006). The developmental assets framework provides structure and focus for counsellors in terms of how they can foster resiliency in children and adolescents through the development of treatment plans that address this concept, as well as how they can educate parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults on the importance and

benefits of enhancing resiliency in youth, thereby generating positive environmental contexts within parents, families, schools, and communities, and nonfamily adults (Benard, 1991; Benson, 2002; Scales et al., 2006), in order to enhance the health and well-being of children and adolescents.

## Chapter V

### *Implications for Further Research and Application to Practice*

This chapter includes a discussion with regard to the limitations of this project and body of literature, as well as a brief summary of this project. A comprehensive list of references is provided at the end of this chapter, as is the Appendix.

The premise of resiliency is that people possess selective strengths or assets, which are often referred to as protective factors or developmental assets that help them survive adversity (Richardson, 2002). Providing a useful framework for counsellor interventions that help prevent negative outcomes while simultaneously promoting healthy child and adolescent development and well-being, resilience is a process that develops through interactions of children with their families, peers, schools, and communities (Brooks, 2006).

Research supports the notion that parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults are not only influential, but essential environments for building resilience in children and adolescents (Brooks, 2006; Durlak, 1995). While the literature on resilience gives promise to finding specific ways in which parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults can enhance success among children and adolescents placed at risk (Kitano & Lewis, 2005), little theoretical work has been done that provides a conceptual framework for the developmental assets. However, a main theme found throughout the literature researched (Benard, 1991; Benson, 2002; Brooks) supports the notion that generating positive environmental contexts within families, schools and communities increases resiliency and protective factors while minimizing risk factors.

Building on the identification of strengths and protective factors, the Search Institute launched a research effort to unite and mobilize community-based efforts with the goal of promoting core developmental processes, resources, and experiences for children and adolescents (Leffert et al., 1998). This was accomplished through the identification of 40 developmental assets that youth need to function optimally in life (Richardson, 2002). These assets include both internal, as well as external assets. Grounded in empirical studies of child and adolescent development, the developmental assets framework provides a common language for communities and social system and provides a tool for responding to the emerging understanding of the ecology of human development with a focus on prevention, resiliency, and protective factors (Leffert et al; Mannes et al., 2005).

Research conducted by the Search Institute on the application of the assets provides compelling evidence for the foundational effect of positive human development on young people's health (Mannes et al., 2005). Literature supports the idea that developmental assets play an important role in the healthy development of young people across varied life circumstances and in the face of multiple challenges (Mannes et al.). When present, developmental assets enhance important developmental outcomes, conceived as both the reduction of health-compromising behaviours and the increase of school success and other indicators of positive outcomes (Leffert et al., 1998).

With few presenting limitations and no evidence that disputes the concept of resiliency, the literature reviewed suggests several directions for future research, which include: studies that explore the effects of interactions of multiple systems in the lives of children and adolescents, specific studies that examine the causal relationships between

developmental assets, resiliency and well-being in children and adolescents, as well as research that seeks to look at how the systems can use one another to impact resiliency. An interesting focus of future research could also include comparative studies between the positive stances of resiliency, as opposed to theoretical frameworks that operate from a deficit standpoint. As the focus of resilience has only recently been extended to include the family unit (Simon et al., 2005), this is another area identified for future research.

#### *Limitations to this Project and Body of Literature*

There are several limitations to this project and body of literature. These limitations center on: a) the nature of the current research with regard to the populations studied, b) the age range of the targeted population, and c) the scope of the project in terms of its cultural applicability.

The first limitation to this study is that much of the information to date has targeted individuals who are aware of exposure to adverse conditions or are functioning at a level that is less than satisfactory on a daily basis. These individuals may come to the attention of researchers either voluntarily or through a referral process, as is the case with most children and adolescents. There is very little research that examines the construct of resiliency in children and adolescents who are identified as functioning at an optimal level.

Second, as this project centers on the development of resiliency in children and adolescents, there is little evidence to support the concept of resiliency, or its impact on the healthy development of younger children or adults. Therefore, study regarding building resilience at differing stages in the life span, such as infancy and early



adulthood, in regard to careers, romantic relationships, parenting, and aging may be called for.

Lastly, while the studies on resiliency identify that developmental assets as having a key role in the prevention of high-risk behaviours, regardless of racial and ethnic backgrounds (Mannes et al., 2005), this project does not have the scope to explore the cultural applicability or non-applicability of the chosen attributes. Accordingly, studies that examines resiliency in relation to its cultural applicability would be an important area for continued research.

### *Summary and Conclusions*

The literature clearly identifies resilience as an important construct in the healthy development of children and adolescents. Identifying the notion that the health and well-being of children and adolescents can be enhanced through increased resiliency, research gives promise to finding specific ways in which parents, families, schools, counsellors, and communities can enhance success among children and adolescents placed at risk simply by changing the environments in which children and adolescents live (Kitano & Lewis, 2005). By generating positive environmental contexts within parents, families, schools, and communities, and nonfamily adults (Benard, 1991; Benson, 2002; Scales et al., 2006), individuals can have a positive impact on youth development.

The study of resiliency is important to counselling psychologists because the concept of resiliency provides counsellors with a framework to conceptualize childhood development. Engaging individuals utilizing a client-centered approach to counselling, three key principles are identified as imperative for counselling psychologists to attend to in working with children and adolescents. These include: a) the premise of resiliency,

whereby all youth are thought to possess strengths and assets, b) the notion that without significantly changing the environments in which children exist, attempts to enhance resiliency will be met with limited success, and c) the idea that fostering resiliency in children and adolescents requires comprehension and understanding of the developmental assets framework, and its incorporation into client treatment plans (Armstrong et al., 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Richardson, 2002).

Counsellors can attend to the principles identified above utilizing the developmental assets framework. Providing structure and focus for counsellors in terms of how they can foster resiliency in children and adolescents through the development of treatment plans that address this concept, as well as how they can educate parents, families, schools, communities, and nonfamily adults on the importance and benefits of enhancing resiliency in youth, the framework has several important implications for counselling practice. These implications are: a) support for a strength-based approach, b) the idea that developmental assets play a role in the healthy development of young people across varied life circumstances and in the face of multiple challenges, c) the notion that assets enhance developmental outcomes, d) the understanding that developmental assets provide a taxonomy of developmental targets, and e) the knowledge that the assets provide a common language for communities and social systems that focuses on prevention.

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## Appendix

## Developmental Assets

EXTERNAL ASSETS	INTERNAL ASSETS
<p>Support</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family support</li> <li>2. Positive family communication</li> <li>3. Other adult relationships</li> <li>4. Caring neighborhood</li> <li>5. Caring school climate</li> <li>6. Parent involvement in schooling</li> </ol>	<p>Commitment to Learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. Achievement motivation</li> <li>22. School engagement</li> <li>23. Homework</li> <li>24. Bonding to school</li> <li>25. Reading for pleasure</li> </ol>
<p>Empowerment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Community values youth</li> <li>8. Youth as resources</li> <li>9. Service to others</li> <li>10. Safety</li> </ol>	<p>Positive Values</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. Caring</li> <li>27. Equality and social justice</li> <li>28. Integrity</li> <li>29. Honesty</li> <li>30. Responsibility</li> <li>31. Restraint</li> </ol>
<p>Boundaries and Expectations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Family boundaries</li> <li>12. School boundaries</li> <li>13. Neighborhood boundaries</li> <li>14. Adult role models</li> <li>15. Positive peer influence</li> <li>16. High expectations</li> </ol>	<p>Social Competencies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>32. Planning and decision making</li> <li>33. Interpersonal competence</li> <li>34. Cultural competence</li> <li>35. Resistance skills</li> <li>36. Peaceful conflict resolution</li> </ol>
<p>Constructive Use of Time</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. Creative activities</li> <li>18. Youth programs</li> <li>19. Religious community</li> <li>20. Time at home</li> </ol>	<p>Positive Identity</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37. Personal power</li> <li>38. Self-esteem</li> <li>39. Sense of purpose</li> <li>40. Positive view of personal future</li> </ol>