

Community Development Storytime Theatre

This “Radio Play” is designed to be performed in front of a live audience in the manner of a radio broadcast, six performers reading from scripts standing behind microphones and music stands.

Performers should stand when performing and sit when their character(s) are not present.

SNDFX: Children’s xylophone plays a tune.

Narrator: Welcome to Community Development Storytime Theatre. Every week we bring you a charming fable from the front lines of community development that’s sure to please young listeners everywhere.

This week we bring you one of the oldest and best-loved fairy tales of them all: Building Community Capacity through a Strengths-Based Approach.” I can hardly wait.

So, Kids, fix yourself some hot cocoa, fetch your favourite blanket, curl up in comfy chair, and listen to a tale of enchantment, mystery, and a titanic struggle between two mighty consultants who battle to determine, once and for all, who is stronger, and who is needier.

SNDFX: Tune again.

Narrator: Once upon a time there was a small village called Placidville. For centuries its people grew everything the placid people needed to maintain their happy lives. Livestock, fuel, and perhaps most importantly, rice.

Then, one day, and important looking man from the west arrived by helicopter....

SNDFX: Helicopter noise.

And arrived with important news for Placidville.

Important Man: I need to talk to your farmers.

Farmer: You’re talking to her. That’s a nice suit.

Important Man: Thank you. I have important news for you- you need to stop all of this immediately-

Farmer: Stop what?

Important Man: This growing rice business- it’s yesterday-it’s history- you don’t need to do that anymore.

Farmer: I’m actually fine with this-

Important Man: But the future, miss, is....Mangoes.

Farmer: The Future is...Mangoes?

Important Man: Mangoes!

Farmer: I’m not sure about this.

Important Man: You can import rice from other countries that haven't seen the future yet. You miss, have a chance to grow Mangoes, and Mangoes are what people in El Paso want right now, and they'll pay a lot more for a Mango than a handful of rice. Which means I'll pay you a great deal of money to grow them for me.

Farmer: But the rice is very important to us. At least we know where it will come from-

Important Man: There will always be cheap rice. Now I have to catch a helicopter back home- I can arrange for these things to be delivered to your community,

SNDFX Paper crumpling

Important Man: - including a new health clinic, a new school building, and a day care- provided you drain these rice paddies and start growing some mangoes.

Farmer: You'll give us all these things?

Important: Didn't I tell you the future was in Mangoes? I'll be back to check on your progress soon- Good Luck!

SNDFX: Helicopter takes off.

Narrator: The farmer thought carefully about the offer and decided that the future must be in mangoes.

Placidville stopped growing its own rice and bulldozed the paddys- planting mangoes on every available square inch- even the livestock where pushed aside to make room for the mighty Mango.

SNDFX: Angry Cow.

Narrator: For a short time it seemed that all would work out the way the Important Man with the nice suit claimed it would. But soon the vision of a bountiful Mango-filled future began to crumble. Other villages received a visit from other Important Men in equally nice suits and soon there were too many mangoes for the people of El Paso to eat:

Small Child: Mommy, please don't put Mango crumble in my lunch again! Nobody will trade!

Narrator: And more importantly, there wasn't enough rice to import, and the price skyrocketed. The people of Placidville faced a bleak, uncertain, Mango-filled future. Their people were scrambling for a reliable source of food, their economy was in a shambles, and the promised health clinic and schools remained half finished when the man in the nice suit went bankrupt. They were unsure where to turn. How could they turn their situation around?

SNDFX: Western Theme Song, Horse hooves.

Narrator: Then, one day, when everything seemed to be coming to an end, when all seemed to be lost, when it seemed that no one, no matter how nice their suit was, could turn things around, two people rode into the village of Placidville. One from the East, One from the west. It would always be known, for evermore, as the day the Community Consultants came to town.

SNDFX: Theme Song again.

Narrator: The two consultant-slingers ambled into to the local watering hole to meet the people of Placidville and find out what they could do for the stricken village. The first, Mr. Needs-

Mr. Needs: Howdy.

Narrator: Approached the bar and ordered his regular beverage.

Mr. Needs: A glass of dirty water. Exactly half-empty.

Narrator: The second, Ms. Strengths

Ms. Strengths: How-dee.

Narrator: Approached the bar and ordered her regular beverage.

Ms. Strengths: A glass of dirty water- Exactly half full. And don't mix up my order with the other fella's. I hate what he drinks.

SNDFX: The sounds of drinks being poured, glasses clinking.

Narrator: The two Community Consultants eyed each other across the bar- suspicion and hatred in their eyes. They knew each other, these two consultants- town after town, village after village, they had fought each other for the hearts and minds of community members around the world. But today, there was only Placidville, and Placidville wasn't big enough for the two consulting giants of the west.

Mr. Needs: Well lookit that. Ms. Strengths. What bring you to Placidville?

Ms. Strengths: I'm just here to help some folks help themselves. You?

Mr. Needs: Well, I'm here to find out just what's wrong around here so's I can call in the cavalry.

Ms. Strength: You figure that'll be necessary?

Mr. Needs: This here village needs Mr. Needs in a big way- just look around! If they coulda fixed this mess themselves, wouldn't they a done it by now?

Ms.Strengths: That's typical from you. Maybe they just need the help to help themselves.

Mr. Needs: Well, isn't that sweet. Would you like to wager which one of us will clean up this town?

Ms. Strengths: You're on, Mr. Half-Empty.

Mr. Needs: Let's say we both do our best to clean up this town. Whoever fixes it first, stays. The other feller leaves with his tail behind his legs and never consults in this town again. What do you say?

Ms. Strengths: I never thought I would say this Needs, but I look forward to seeing your behind.

Narrator: Just then a community elder came into the watering hole, looking to drown her sorrows in some local beverage.

Mr. Needs: I believe I see someone to Help!

Ms. Strengths: I saw her first!

Mr.. Needs: Outta my way!

Ms. Strengths: Me First!

SNDFX: Furniture breaking, pots, pans falling.

Elder: What the...? Get off me! Ow! Who are you people?

Mr. Needs: Hold still, I'm here to Help!

Ms. Strengths: I'll do the helping around here!

Elder: Whoa whoa, are you the consultants that rode into town today?

Both S+N Yup.

Elder: Well then calm down! You're like two kids in a sandbox! Why don't you two work together to help us? Don't you want the same thing?

Ms.Strengths: My pappy always told me never to work with someone who employs an inferior paradigm.

Mr. Needs: Why you, I have half a mind...!

Ms. Strengths : You said it, I didn't.

Elder: Folks, we can settle this quite easily. In our village, we have a tradition. When two parties have a great argument that can't be solved between them, we ask them to each make their case in front of the village ombudsman. The ombudsman listens and renders the judgment she feels is fair, based on the arguments demonstrated and the input of the community at large.

Mr. Needs: Fine, farmer.. Where is this Ombudsman?

Elder: You're looking at her. And I prefer Ms. Ombudswoman.

Ms. Strengths: When shall we do this? I have an itchy consulting finger.

Elder: No time like the present. Gather round community members! The Consultants will talk each other to the death!

Mr. Needs: To the death!?

Elder: We don't really mean it, it's just more fun that way.

Narrator: And so the community gathered in the watering hole to witness a consult-out at high noon. There wasn't a seat or stool available as the residents of Placidville awaited the Ombudswoman's verdict- who would be hired to lead them out of their misery? Who would be their savior?

- Elder: Quiet, quiet please. The battle will begin. I will set the tasks and ask the questions in this contest, and I alone will judge the winner. Mr. Needs- please outline briefly what you propose to do to save Placidville?
- Mr. Needs: It's simple. I propose to create a needs map of all the deficiencies in your community- the economic, social, political problems that you face, so that we can all know what the problems are. Then I'm going to find the money from Charities, Government Organizations, University researchers, to set up programs to fight the problem- to set up here in the field and bring in folks who know how to solve these problems to help you as much as you need.
- Elder: Hmmmm. Sounds simple.
- Ms. Strengths: If I may?
- Elder: Please.
- Ms. Strengths: I have the better approach.
- Elder: How so?
- Ms. Strengths: I propose bringing none of these people. You don't need this help.
- Villager: Take a look around lady! Are you blind? This place is falling apart!
- Elder: This is Sam, a village elder who has seen much, and he asks a good question.
- Ms. Strengths: I do see the problems, Sam, and they're great. But I believe you already have much of the Strength and resources you need to solve the problems you face.
- Mr. Needs: Is that so? So you're saying these people are too lazy to get up and fix things?
- Ms. Strengths: No, I'm saying they need a map-just not the map you want to give them.
- Sam: I'm not lost lady- I'm broke and I'm allergic to Mangoes!
- Ms. Strengths: I will help you find the resources you need to bring Placidville back from desperation, but most of them are here. I want to start with what is already strong and useful, not with your problems.
- Mr. Needs: She's not interested in your problems-that's all you really need to hear!
- Sam: Lady-If my horse has a broken leg, I don't need to know that he's got three good ones! I need to fix the busted one!
- Ms. Strengths: That's true. And to do that, you need to know where the local healer is, and she needs to know where the herbs are to make the right poultice, and you need to know where to find the materials to make a splint. That's all knowledge of your community's strengths.
- Mr. Needs: I bring a wealth of funding and experts to the table who have years of experience in solving intractable problems like these. What you need is expert advice-why would your village turn down this wealth of experience?
- Sam: I'm with him! I need the help!

Elder: We can't pass judgment so quickly. I'm interested in hearing more. Why do you feel we shouldn't accept the help of Mr. Needs experts? They bring knowledge, money, and the backing of organizations that can continue to help us for decades.

Mr. Needs: No problem. We'll be here in a jiffy.

Ms. Strengths: Money and knowledge aren't bad things, but what kind of knowledge and how the money is delivered are the problem.

Sam: We accept VISA, Mastercard, Traveller's Cheques, Salt, Chickens and Cash.

Ms. Strengths: Mr. Needs-why don't you describe how you'll set up in this town-what will your solution look like?

Mr. Needs: Well, don't mind if I do.

After expertly mapping the deficiencies of this town, our team will set up agencies and organizations to steer this town back to the right direction. We'll funnel resources to the most needed sectors of society, monitor the delivery of services and ensure that people with the requisite skills are flown in to help you folks solve your problems. We'll always be here to help.

Ms. Strengths: That's exactly the problem.

Sam: What problem?

Ms. Strengths: Didn't you get into this problem in the first place because people from the outside came and advised you to do things differently? That doesn't seem to have worked out very well...

Mr. Needs: Those people who convinced you to grow mangoes only had their own interests at heart. I'm here to help.

Ms. Strengths: But the people who are going to bring money to this village need you to provide a map that emphasizes and catalogues the deficiencies of this community. The more helpless this community appears, the more likely you'll be able to provide assistance.

Elder: Shouldn't we receive help if we really need it? What's wrong with that?

Ms. Strengths: I believe it's up to you to decide what the course of action should be based on a map of your strengths.

Sam: Gonna be a pretty small map.

Elder: I think you should demonstrate for us how this map of yours would look and how it would help us.

Ms. Strengths: My pleasure.

Now if I understand correctly, the problems started when your town threw all your mangoes in one basket, is that correct?

Sam, Elder: Absolutely, yes etc.

Ms. Strengths: And what you want to do is grow your own rice and feed your own livestock again?

SNDFX: Cow moos “Yes”

Ms. Strengths: Well- let’s create a map ourselves right now. You, sir, what do you do here?

Farmer: I used to work in the rice paddies, years ago, before the mangoes came.

Ms. Strengths: That’s wonderful- You have the knowledge of how to work in the rice paddies again?

Farmer: I remember how it was done. But I’m so old I can barely walk- and I’m the last one of my generation left. I don’t have the energy to start again. I can’t do it by myself, and there aren’t any other farmers left.

Ms. Strengths: But you have the knowledge-that’s important.

What do you do, sir?

Man #2 I’m an engineer. I don’t know anything about rice farming.

Ms. Strengths: What kind of engineer?

Man#2: I used to build waterways and small dams around the country. I came here to retire.

Ms. Strengths: And you, in the corner, what do you young men do?

Elder: They’re my cousin’s boys. They don’t do anything. They just play ball all day.

Ms. Strengths: They look strong and fit. Why don’t they work?

Elder: There are no jobs since the mangoes took over.

Ms. Strengths: And you, Sam, what do you do here in Placidville?

Sam: I used to run a transportation business from here to the port city on the coast. I had to shut it down, though- we had nothing left to ship except Mangoes, and nobody wants those any more.

Ms. Strengths: And you, Ms. Ombudswoman, what can you do?

Elder: Well, I’m a good listener. That’s my job. I hear everything.

Ms. Strengths: And you have a great sense of the skills that exist here. I think we have a map already.

Sam: I don’t understand- all you did was talk to a bunch of unemployed people in a watering hole- what kind of map do you get out of that?

Ms. Strengths: A good beginning.

We know that there are fit, able bodied people to work in the fields, an engineer that understands how to divert waterways, a farmer who still knows how to plant and harvest a rice paddy, someone who understands transportation and can move product that can’t be sold here and a community member who cares about the future and has an in-depth sense of the hopes and aspirations of her community.

SNDFX: Cow.

Ms. Strengths: (concedes) And a cow.

Mr. Needs: But while you are still evaluating what people might be able to accomplish, we could already be here delivering services- we wouldn't need to take the time to train those boys how to farm or explain agriculture to that engineer- we can get underway much sooner.

Ms. Strengths: It's true, we might take longer-but the community will be stronger and able to decide its own future. You'll identify yourselves based on what you can do, not what you can't. You won't be so dependent on outsiders in making decisions on your future.

Sam: I'm confused. They can't both be right.

Elder: All right. The consultants have each made their cases. Each seems to propose a very different path- one that seems to reject the path of the other. It seems we need to make a choice.

As is the tradition, I would like to hear from members of the community on how we should proceed. This is a decision we need to take together.

Yes, What do you think? (to an audience member)

Audience member #1:

I think we need to hire Mr. Needs. I think when we're facing a problem this serious, we have a responsibility to seek the best help we can as quickly as possible. If Mr. Needs has been doing this around the world, he brings a great deal of experience learned elsewhere that can be applied here. We can't assume that we have the ability to do this alone.

Elder: Thank you. You, over there, do you have something to say?

Audience member #2:

I disagree. We've spent so long not being able to fix this problem that we've convinced ourselves we can't do anything. Sometimes, though, you just need an outside perspective on who you are and what you can accomplish. If we don't decide for ourselves how to proceed, we'll always have to rely on people who don't need to live with the consequences of the plan they are implementing. I propose we hire Ms. Strengths and take control of our destiny.

Elder: Thank You. Anybody Else?

Little Girl: (a small girl) I have something to say.

Elder: Yes, little girl. Do you have something to say?

Little Girl. I do.

This reminds me of the story of the blind men inspecting the elephant. Depending on what part of the animal each man is touching, they think they're holding a completely different thing- but really, it's always an elephant- they just can't see it.

We don't really need to make only one choice or another. We can learn from both of these people. I think we should know what our community can do and where the resources lie- but I also agree that we should seek help and assistance from people who have knowledge learned outside our community- once we have decided on the direction we want to take.

We all agree on the fact that we want change- and both Ms. Strengths and Mr. Needs want to help- I propose that we either hire both of them, or neither of them.

Narrator: The watering hole fell absolutely silent. Mr. Needs and Ms. Strengths were unprepared for this revolutionary proposal from this young villager. For the first time in a long time, the consultants had nothing to say.

Elder: Well. This is an interesting suggestion from this young child. I feel this third choice is most attractive. I call a vote.

All in favour?

All: Aye!

Elder: Opposed?

(Silence)

Well, it seems there is only one question left to answer. Will you, Mr. Needs, work with Ms. Strengths to map the assets of our community?

Mr. Needs: I suppose I could try. The people who give me money might not be happy. I'm not making any promises.

Elder: And will you, Ms. Strengths, use Mr. Needs to find the resources and agencies that could potentially help us meet our goals?

Ms. Strengths: So long as nobody tells my Pappy.

Elder: It's settled then! Let us all celebrate!

Narrator: And so the villagers all drank until the wee hours. While some drank from glasses that were half-empty, and others from those that were half-full, they all felt safer in their new-found knowledge that, in the end, it's just a glass of water.

Ms. Strengths and Mr. Needs found that working together wasn't impossible at all, although there were some growing pains...

Ms. Strengths: O.K. Needs, let's practice our mapping. Now, what do you see on this table?

Mr. Needs: Well, right here, I see pile of mud and a mess we need to clean up.

Ms. Strengths: No,no,no. I see rich, fertile soil, and seeds which could potentially become a bountiful garden, and life-giving moisture to bring it all together. Do you see?

Mr. Needs: I can see you cleaning up my table!

Narrator: The villagers in Placidville found that they could benefit from considering more than one point of view, and they developed a new sense of what they could accomplish. In time, rice was once again grown in Placidville, and pasture returned for livestock-

SNDFX: Cow.

Narrator: Soon, it was time for the consultants to ride off in to the sunset

Ms. Strengths: Needs.

Mr. Needs: Strengths.

Ms. Strengths: We'll be seein' ya.

SNDFX: Horses clopping off.

Narrator: And all was peaceful in Placidville. That is, until soybeans came to town.

SNDFX: Theme Song

Narrator: Join us next week for Community Development Storytime theatre when we'll tell the story of the consultant who fell in love with his own reflection.

End.