SWORD workbook:

KFP 2 Sense of Appreciation

Introduction

Promoting a culture in which all members of staff feel appreciated is the second Key Foundational Principle for organisational resilience.

This is when:

Workers feel valued, and that their individual talents and skills are appreciated.	Leaders are approachable, genuinely interested in people and trust them to do a good job.	Leaders understand the pressures of the work, and support practitioners to prioritise self-care and a healthy work-life balance.

Strategies for fostering a sense of appreciation

Feeling appreciated at work, especially if you've gone 'above and beyond' what is expected in your role, is highly motivating, and helps protect people from stress and burnout. Without this recognition and feedback, workers can see themselves as just a 'cog in the wheel' and feel taken for granted. This in turn can affect performance and the extent to which workers are able to meet the needs of the children, families or adults they're working with.

Feeling unappreciated when doing emotionally demanding work places workers at particular risk of becoming resentful and embittered. Over time, this can lead to burnout. The cycle of emotional exhaustion, cynicism/compassion fatigue, and lack of personal accomplishment that characterises burnout can impair social workers' wellbeing, personal relationships and job performance. There are also major implications for retention. Feeling undervalued or underappreciated is one of the most common reasons for social workers leaving their job.

So, it's crucial to show appreciation for work well done. Feedback works best when it's authentic, rather than tokenistic, and recognises someone's unique contribution or skills. This helps people feel that the work they do is noticed and appreciated.

In order to provide authentic feedback, leaders and managers need insight into the everyday working lives of individuals and teams. One way of doing this is to 'walk the floor' on a regular basis and listen to what people are saying about their successes and challenges at work (see Box 2.1). What you learn will help you ensure that expressions of appreciation and feedback are sincere, personalised and well timed (see Quick Win 2.1). Walking the floor can also help develop other aspects of organisational resilience. It will be particularly useful in building and communicating a shared mission and vision, and facilitating a learning environment. Enhancing cultural competence and an appreciation of the diversity of your workforce will support social workers to feel that managers and leaders have interest in their lives (see KFP4 Mission and Vision).

Box 2.1: Walking the floor

Managing via email and formal meetings is the norm in many organisations. Staff surveys often indicate that managers are not sufficiently visible, and this can be a strong source of dissatisfaction. KFP1 Secure Base includes tips on introducing an effective open-door policy, but another way to encourage spontaneous questions and feedback is to walk the floor. Put simply, this is the habit of stopping to talk to people face to face. Research for *Community Care* (Schraer, 2014) found social workers would value opportunities to engage in open dialogue with managers on a regular basis. Walking the floor helps managers be more visible, connect with practitioners, share ideas, and invite suggestions for how things could be improved. It also allows them to express their appreciation to workers in a personalised way.

Make walking the floor part of your routine:

If you can, ring-fence some time in your diary each day to drop in on people for an informal chat. This doesn't have to take long: even 30 minutes will do, and you can visit different teams on a rotating basis. It's best to schedule your walkabouts at different times of the day to avoid them becoming too predictable.

Do it alone:

Walking the floor works best when it involves one-to-one conversations. Praise and gratitude are often best expressed to people individually to avoid them becoming self-conscious and embarrassed.

Visit everybody:

Dropping in on only some people regularly may be seen as favouritism and can lead to gossip and resentment. So try to spend roughly the same amount of time with each person.

Listen more than you talk:

Take the opportunity to get to know people. Ask about their accomplishments; say something positive and offer praise.

Take the rough with the smooth:

As well as providing feedback and praise, it's important to be receptive and open to criticism. The Community Care survey found that social work managers needed to 'dig deep' to establish how people actually feel about working for the organisation (Schraer, 2014).

Be persistent:

During your first walkabouts, you might find that people feel awkward and don't communicate freely. Don't be discouraged; repeated visits will eventually pay off. When done well, simple gestures of appreciation can be hugely motivating and replenishing for employees; they can increase morale and enhance workers' ability to manage setbacks.

Go beyond work:

Knowing people as individuals doesn't only mean being aware of their strengths in relation to the job they do. Managers need to be aware of employees' personal circumstances and any challenges they face (while ensuring their privacy is not invaded). When handled sensitively and in confidence, this can help people feel understood and appreciated, and any necessary accommodations can be put in place.

Providing clear and authentic feedback is vital in fostering a sense of appreciation. This will highlight workers' strengths and achievements, and identify areas for development. Quick Win 2.1 offers some tips for giving effective feedback.

Quick Win 2.1: Tips for giving effective feedback

Be clear:

Make sure you are clear in your feedback.

Be specific:

Focus on what you've noticed people have done well, or what they could improve on. If improvement is required, make sure you let them know that it is linked to a specific issue.

Be real and be realistic:

Your authenticity is pivotal to making sure feedback is well received; so, avoid giving feedback unless you really believe it is necessary or deserved. Make sure you're able to give concrete and constructive feedback that is realistic and will help people achieve a goal.

Timely:

Feedback should be provided at the right time. If you wait too long to give feedback, it may seem random or ill considered. And praising every small action can appear overly ingratiating and superficial.

Leaders also need to develop an organisational culture that promotes good practice in relation to self-care. Showing appreciation also means ensuring those who have worked additional hours (for example, when moving a child to a foster placement or completing a Mental Health Act assessment) have time to recuperate and that nobody (yourself included) is working 'out of hours' too frequently. This means that you need to notice the extra hours worked and build in mechanisms to ensure a healthy work-life balance is maintained. KFP5 Wellbeing has guidance on maintaining a healthy work-life balance (this includes managing emails).

Encouraging mindful listening

Effective communication is essential to foster an organisational culture in which people feel valued and that their individual talents and skills are appreciated. It has been estimated that the average person remembers only around a quarter of what somebody has said directly after the conversation (Shafir, 2003). Mindful listening underpins effective communication. It helps people retain information by reducing the 'noise' of their own thoughts, so they can really hear what other people have to say. And because listening mindfully means listening without judgement, criticism or interruption, this also helps the speaker feel understood.

Box 2.2: Tips to help you listen more mindfully

Be fully present:

Focus on the person you're listening to, without any disturbance. Simplify your surroundings; avoid multi-tasking and other distractions. Before you meet, take a few moments to clear your mind to make room for the other person's point of view. You could practise a few relaxation exercises to help you 'focus on the moment' during the forthcoming conversation (e.g. try the breathing exercise suggested in KFP1 Secure Base).

Cultivate empathy:

We tend to see the world through the lens of our own experiences, beliefs and personality. So, try to understand the situation from the other person's perspective. You don't have to agree with them but validate their perspective by acknowledging their views.

Listen to your own cues:

Be aware of the thoughts, feelings and physical reactions that you experience during a conversation, and how they can divert your attention from the other person. Several things – e.g. our past experiences, our motives, our preconceptions, negative self-talk – can make us focus more on ourselves than who we're talking to. Feeling impatient or frustrated (particularly if our 'inner chimp' makes an appearance – see KFP1 Secure Base) can make us interrupt or dominate the conversation. Thinking about what we're going to say next can also prevent us listening carefully and attentively.

Consider doing a mindfulness course:

The Kinman et al (2019) research with social workers from different contexts found that mindfulness training can improve social workers' listening skills and ability to determine what people are really saying. They also found that mindfulness had wide-ranging positive effects for wellbeing and job performance.

Using Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strengths-based, positive approach to leadership development and organisational change. Developed by Whitney and Cooperrider (2012), AI is a framework that helps implement positive systemic change from a position of respect and mutuality, enabling individuals and organisations to create a shared vision for where they want to be. AI differs from the more commonly used deficit approach (i.e. what is going wrong and what can be improved), as it offers a strengths-based, optimistic strategy that 'appreciates' what has gone well and envisions what could be developed in the future.

AI is a particularly appropriate method for fostering a sense of appreciation in organisations. Its flexibility will help enhance the other KFPs that underpin a resilient organisation. AI can also be beneficial for supervision.

The AI model involves a four-stage process:

1.	**What is currently going well?**

2.	**'Dream' about how things could be improved**

3.	**Design a strategy for how these dreams could be realised**

4.	**Consider ways of delivering the change**

AI can be used at an individual, team or organisational level. Its premise is that individuals have experience and that helping them to express this provides a stimulus for change. AI also builds positive relationships within organisations and enables a shared understanding of members' contributions. It can enhance feelings of appreciation by recognising people's individual experience and skills and helping them to contribute towards shaping change.

Based on a resource developed by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and NHS Education for Scotland (2016) (which can be found **here**), Box 2.3 outlines how organisations can use AI to inform organisational change. Moving away from a problem focus to one that acknowledges and builds on success is likely to be a useful approach for social work leaders, who are often tasked with implementing change initiatives. A constant change of direction that disregards what has worked well in the past is often unsettling and demotivating.

Box 2.3: Using Appreciative Inquiry to implement change

This approach to planning change involves engaging with people to consider how good work can be built upon. This may seem a simple exercise, but AI can be a powerful tool in helping people move from being 'stuck in a rut' and lacking motivation, to a position from which a new future can be imagined and then realised.

The approach involves working in pairs, at first, to discover strengths. These are then shared, and small groups begin to imagine and plan for the future of a service. The four key steps to using AI are outlined using the example below:

1. Discovery

What has been your best experience of social work practice? Think of a time when you felt:

> Most engaged, alive and enthused by your work

> That it worked well for people

Now think:

> What made this possible?

> What did 'good' look like?

> What was important to its success?

2. Dream for the future

Imagine it's a year from now, and your team or service is working very well. It may have achieved recognition for its work – e.g. best team working, partnerships with families, or enablement-based practice with adults.

> What are you doing differently that enabled this change?

> What is it like to work in this team?

> What does 'good' look like?

3. Strategising

To move from dreaming about the future to a more concrete strategy and plan, you should now consider the steps you need to take to achieve this goal. These need to be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely).

> What is going to make this possible?

> What will you have to do differently to make this work?

> Who do you need to help you to get there?

> What else might you need to pay attention to?

> What might be the signs that you are moving in the right direction?

4. Implementation

> How are you going to implement these plans?

> How are you going to communicate your plans to others?

> How will you know if you are continuing to move in the right direction – how will you measure success?

The principles of AI can also be used as a framework to guide a more narrative approach. The Tree of Life exercise (Box 2.4) is a playful and creative tool that can be used in teams to enable people to communicate what they appreciate about their work, their colleagues (in their own team and beyond) and their organisation. Feedback from Change Project participants suggests it can be an effective way to help people identify their contribution to the wider vision and mission of their organisation as a whole, and to refocus on what drives them to continue in practice. Many of our participants have subsequently used the exercise in their own organisation with considerable success. More resources on AI can be found **here**.
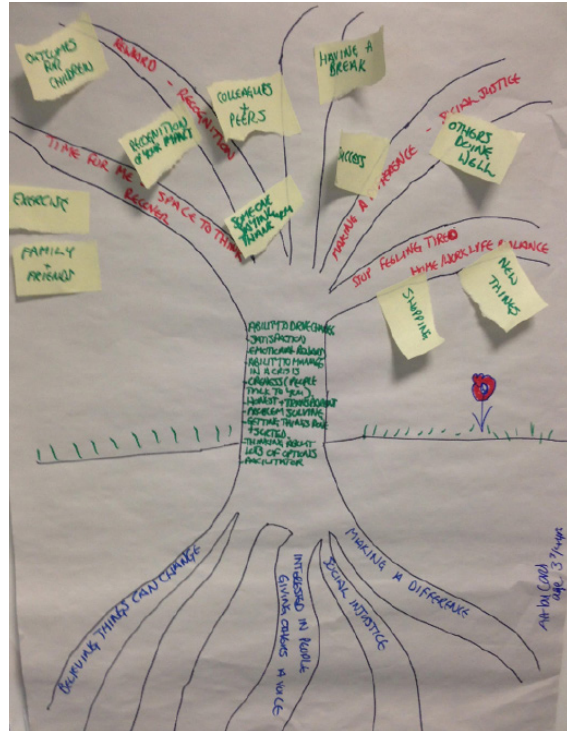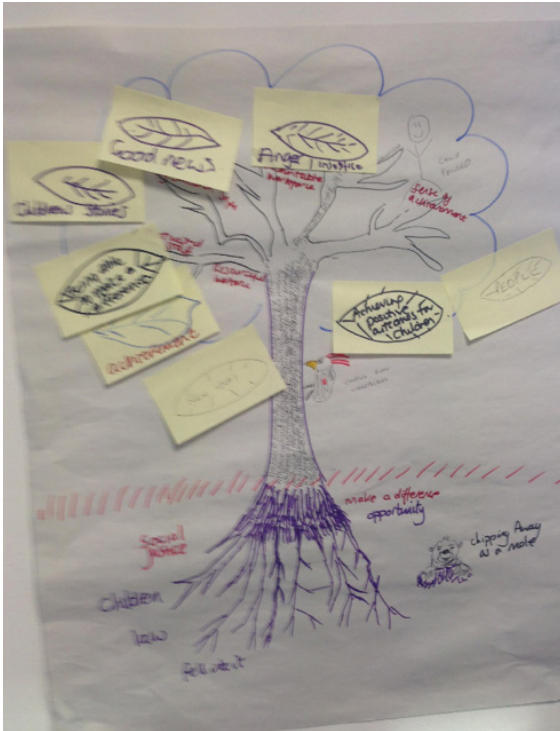
Box 2.4: The Tree of Life exercise

The Tree of Life is a narrative therapy tool, which was designed by Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough (for more information see **here**) for young people with HIV. It aimed to encourage the children to believe in their own abilities, acknowledge their dreams and stand in a safer place from where they could talk about their difficult experiences in ways that were not re-traumatising, thereby enabling them to feel stronger in themselves.

The Tree of Life has since been adapted to various settings to help individuals and organisations recognise their strengths and create co-produced knowledge about how to respond to new opportunities. Here it is used as an exercise to help social workers reconnect with their professional identity and appreciate their values, strengths and resilience. It also enables practitioners to explore how strengths can be used to overcome potential difficulties or storms in their career.

The exercise may appear simple, but it can be a powerful tool. It can take several hours to do well or can be simplified if you only have a shorter period of time. Figure 2.1 shows examples of completed trees.

Figure 2.1: Examples of completed trees using the Tree of Life exercise

Box 2.4: The Tree of Life exercise

Materials needed:

All you need are brightly coloured felt-tip pens, Post-it notes and flipchart paper. Experience suggests that any initial reluctance to 'play' is usually quickly overcome, and senior leaders will soon engage in creating amazing and meaningful visual images.

Instructions:

Explain that participants should draw a tree – step-by-step – to represent themselves, their team or their organisation. This can be done individually, in pairs or in a group. Tell participants they can be as elaborate as they want. Let them know that they can share as little, or as much, as they want to in their drawing (but the content should be anonymised when sharing later). They should begin by drawing the roots of the tree, then the ground, the trunk, the branches and finally the leaves. Below are some questions to guide their drawing (these should be adapted for group work). Tell them when to move from section to section (allow about 10 minutes for each section).

Aim:

The aim of the exercise is to help people see that understanding individual and collective strengths can enable us to build a sense of individual, team and organisational resilience. This will also foster a sense of appreciation for our individual and collective skills, values and professional hopes and dreams.

Roots

> What shaped your life and your decision to be a social worker?

> What brought you into the work; who influenced and inspired you?

> What aspects of your past influenced who you are today; what keeps you grounded?

Trunk

> What are your skills and values?

> What drives you in what you do?

> What are the 'non-negotiable' codes that guide the way you act?

> What values have you learned, or what do you appreciate from those who have influenced you?

Branches

> What are your hopes, dreams and wishes for your career, your service and your organisation?

> Throughout your time as a social worker, what have you contributed that has made you proud?

> What do you want to achieve for your organisation?

Leaves

> What brings you energy in your work?

> Who and what helps keep you going when things get tough?

> What brings you energy outside of work and are good things to focus on?

Feedback

Once people have done this individually or in their groups, ask them to share and discuss with the wider group. Facilitators have found that asking people to put their trees on the walls around the room is particularly effective. Describe this as a forest; remind people than an individual tree is more susceptible to storms, while a forest is far more resilient.

Storms and challenges ahead

Invite the group to think about the challenges or storms that are on the horizon:

> What storms and hazards do you face?

> What is the likely impact of the storms?

> Are there ways of weathering the storms that will allow you to hold onto your values?

> How can we use our collective strengths, visualised by the trees, to weather the storms?

One-page profiles

KFP1 Secure Base emphasises the importance of workers feeling appreciated as individuals if they are to feel they truly belong in an organisation. But managers often find learning more about individual practitioners a challenge. Some people prefer to keep their personal lives private, while others are all too happy to share such details. One-page profiles are often used by health and social care professionals to provide person-centred care, but they can also be a useful team-building exercise and a way of getting to know people. These brief profiles allow people to understand each other better and to appreciate individuals' skills and talents. One-page profiles can also be used to gain insight into people's preferences, likes and dislikes – from simple issues to more complex ones.

One-page profiles offer several potential benefits:

> Profiles can help us see people as rounded individuals, rather than just as someone who does a job. So, we can recognise and celebrate each other's unique gifts and talents.

> Knowing people's preferences means we're better able to support each other, so teams will work more effectively.

> Understanding potential barriers in communication can improve relationships between individuals and teams.

> Profiles enable better matching of colleagues to mentors in order to support the development of their skills and wellbeing.

> People can feel better understood; this in turn makes them feel they belong in that environment.

Figure 2.2 shows an example of what a one-page profile could look like, although they can be customised for your own purposes. Profile templates that are co-produced with practitioners are likely to be particularly effective. These could be completed by pairs of colleagues, in supervision, in team meetings or in longer workshops.

More information on one-page profiles can be found **here**.

Figure 2.2: Example of a one-page profile

My one page profile

My name

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My photo

What people appreciate about me

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How to support me

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What is important to me

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Sparkling Moments

As outlined in KFP1 Secure Base, a psychologically safe organisation encourages practitioners to discuss their errors openly in order to consider how practice can be improved. But it's also crucial to learn from what we do well and to celebrate success. Sharing success stories not only helps others solve similar problems, it can also inspire them to excel. And showing respect for another person's achievement will boost their self-esteem and engagement and strengthen working relationships.

Nonetheless, while people are often open about their perceived failures, they can be reluctant to disclose their achievements for fear of appearing arrogant or boastful. Social workers are rarely encouraged to celebrate their successes and can find it difficult to share their accomplishments. This can lead practitioners to focus on things that have gone wrong, rather than those that have gone well. This is not only demotivating, but means we are also restricted to learning from errors rather than success.

'Sparkling' (or 'peak') moments is a technique that helps social workers share their success stories.

> ### Sparkling Moments
>
> Sparkling Moments are times when you felt your best self. For example, you may have achieved something at work that you thought made things better for someone and enabled progress. Or you may have conquered a fear of public speaking by presenting in court. Identifying Sparkling Moments is a very effective way to recognise the individual skills and strengths that underpin such achievements, and how these can be used to improve outcomes in the future.

The Sparkling Moments technique is described in Box 2.5.

Box 2.5: Celebrating success:

The Sparkling Moments technique

One person (A) asks the other person (B) a series of questions:

> - What did you do when you were you 'at your best'?

> - What skills, knowledge and attributes did you use?

> - How did you feel?

Person A listens carefully and notes down the skills, knowledge and attributes that Person B describes, as well as any key themes or behaviours that emerge from their description.

When Person B has finished speaking, Person A should provide feedback on the specific skills and attributes that have emerged. They then ask Person B:

> - What have you learnt about your key skills?

> - How could you use these to manage a problem you are experiencing right now?

> - What steps could you take to maximise the opportunity for more experiences like this?

Participants then swap roles, and Person B asks the same questions of Person A.

Grant and Kinman have used the Sparkling Moments technique extensively in training sessions to identify times when practitioners have shone, and found it is particularly effective in peer coaching (see KFP 3 Learning Organisation). It can also be useful in team meetings and during supervision to encourage people to talk about their strengths, and how these can be utilised to face new challenges. Quick Win 2.2 highlights another strategy that can be used to celebrate success. KFP3 Learning Organisation considers how Serious Success Reviews can be used to recognise achievement at an organisational level.

Quick win 2.2: Celebrating success in team meetings

Sharing personal success stories in team meetings is a good way of celebrating achievements and embedding the learning. To do this successfully, it might help to ask social workers to send details of their achievements to team leaders by email, as people are often reluctant to speak up in public – especially about their success. Asking team members to record examples of inspirational practice that they have observed in their teams can also motivate others and encourage learning and personal growth. In time, celebrating achievements should become embedded in the team culture. It's also worth thinking about celebrating non-work achievements; this can also help people feel valued.

Being grateful

Practising gratitude means appreciating the good things that others bring to our everyday lives. Gratitude has a positive impact on wellbeing – it has been found to reduce stress, enhance physical and mental health, improve sleep and increase vitality (Wood et al., 2010). Grateful people also tend to be more empathic, optimistic and emotionally resilient, and are better able to meet personal and professional goals. Gratitude is also beneficial at the collective level; organisational cultures that are built on a foundation of gratitude are not only more satisfying to work in, but more efficient and creative (Fehr et al., 2017; Waters, 2012).

As emphasised throughout this workbook, it's crucial for managers to express their appreciation for what practitioners do and to make them feel valued. A culture of gratitude will strengthen relationships between individuals and enhance trust and respect. However, it is important to adapt your style of recognition; some practitioners may find a public display of gratitude embarrassing and prefer to be acknowledged privately. Expressions of gratitude from colleagues are especially effective, so consider introducing recognition programmes that allow people to recognise peers.

Evidence suggests that keeping a gratitude journal (where people write down the positive things in their lives), or focusing on three things to be grateful for before going to sleep, can have wide-ranging benefits. Learning about employees as individuals (for example, through an open-door policy and walking the floor) can build a gratitude-rich culture. Quick Win 2.3 outlines a number of ways for managers to show their gratitude.

Quick win 2.3: Ways to show your gratitude

Here are some ideas that can encourage a culture of gratitude to develop. It is important to recognise that what is rewarding for one team may not necessarily be so for another, so teams should be encouraged to set up their own 'menu' of ways to express their gratitude and celebrate achievements. Ideas that are 'imposed' can seem inauthentic or patronising.

> There is evidence that a simple 'thank you' from a line manager can boost feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy among practitioners. A hand-written note of thanks or a card, can further demonstrate genuine regard and make a big difference. Always make sure you're clear what you are saying thank you for.

> A box of chocolates (or even a home-made trophy) for somebody who needs cheering up, or has done something well, can be effective.

> One option is to use a 'Jar of Joys' – as suggested by Catherine Watkins (2017) – where team members write down their small successes on slips of paper and put them into a jar. Eventually the good work that people do will fill up the jar.

> Celebrate birthdays, but make sure not to set a precedent that may cause discomfort for some people. For examples, buying cakes for the whole team can be expensive and can be excluding.

> End the week with a team gathering or celebration (or a Fika session – see KFP1 Secure Base). But make sure these events are inclusive; so, avoid visits to the pub or 'get togethers' at the end of the day, which may exclude people with caring responsibilities.