

An Examination of Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society Theory of Change Model

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## **An Examination of Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society Theory of Change Model**

In 2017 Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society (FSFFS) embarked on the inquiry and development of a Theory of Change in order to better understand and support each of the unique individuals that walk through the agency doors. Through extensive interviewing, four key principles were identified which comprise this agency's Theory of Change. These principles, which are highlighted throughout the body of this paper, are identified in order to help to guide this agency towards growth, education, and more appropriate evidence based supports for each individual and family. This writer suggests that adding necessary research, which supports these proposed principles, will further support the understanding of individual change as it occurs through the programs and services offered within the agency. Therefore, this paper aims to highlight the research relevant in order to demonstrate this effectiveness and potential impact. In order to accomplish this, this writer has placed these principles into two key categories, which align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: basic and psychological needs. Further to this, this writer elaborates on the complexity and multifaceted components that are involved in meeting these needs from both an individual, and agency perspective. In accomplishing this, this writer suggests that FSFFS is better able to examine the individualistic aspect of change as well as the agency/social impact of change, which are each necessary aspects to consider when assisting an individual to create change within their lives. This writer has provided an agency overview, an exploration of individual motivation, and elaborates on the identified agency principles in an in-depth methodological manner. Additionally, this writer proposes that FSFFS Theory of Change works as a unified approach in efforts to support individual change. Furthermore, this writer provides further considerations and recommendations for FSFFS that may further support both agency staff and clientele. Lastly, as requested by FSFFS in the interviewing process of this

project, found within the Appendix B is the developed format for the agency's Theory of Change.

### **Topical Background**

Understanding change as it occurs in the context of an individual person is highly complex. Individuals change at different rates and stages and for differing reasons over their lifespan. For some individuals change is motivated by internal reflection or conflict. As we know, over the past decade there has been considerable research conducted which has focused upon developing a deeper understanding of human motivation, and what truly motivates an individual to make positive, lasting change within their lives. Be it substance abuse or otherwise, creating and maintaining change in any context is seen as a recurrent challenge for many people. Historically, it has been indicated that individuals either have, or don't have the ability to be motivated to change behavior, however, new research indicates that several factors, when working concurrently, can increase an individual's potential to change, and maintain the necessary changes post intervention.

To add complexity however to an already complex system, individual change can also be motivated by societal/social influence. As well documented throughout literature, social learning theory is one of the most widely cited theories which aims to explain how learning and behavioral modification is done within a social context. As McCullough Chavis (2011) highlights, social learning theory "proposes that people can learn new information and behaviors by observing other people" (p. 472). Thus, as mentioned above, external events can also be equally responsible in helping or hindering an individual from initiating and maintaining necessary change within their lives.

Clearly, with so many variables involved in understanding change, and motivation that is required to attain change, understanding how to support and encourage change from an agency and/or practitioner perspective can be quite daunting, however, it is a question we keep coming back to: How do we help people make positive lasting changes within their lives? This question is certainly not a new question for service providers, however this question is the question which leads professional service agencies to explore the missing middle, to understand this why, this how, and challenge program and service delivery.

Assimilating this knowledge described above, into the question of how, leads many agencies to explore theories which will enable them to assist in the motivation process of helping their clients to create change for themselves. Thus, many agencies choose to embark on the development of a Theory of Change. A Theory of Change focuses on describing what must happen in the delivery of their services to help individuals seek change, as noted above, this is often described as the missing middle, and is essential in order for change to occur. As identified by the Center for Theory of Change (2017) the “Theory of Change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It is focused in particular on mapping out or “filling in” what has been described as the “missing middle” between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved.”

In order to understand this very complex and multifaceted missing middle, service providers work towards clearly defining and understanding their agency goals for the people accessing services, and develop an understanding of the conditions (programs/services) that are required in order for these goals to be met (Center for Theory of Change, 2017). This

understanding ensures that programs and services are the most effective, efficient and useful for each of those who access them.

### **The Theory of Change**

FSFFS is a unique agency, one in which this writer would suggest is continually striving to not only create change for its individual clients, but also to grow with their client needs. As society grows and changes, it is inevitable that the needs and challenges of community will change as well. Thus, FSFFS consistently examines ways to adjust, adapt, and how to effectively challenge new methods of service delivery. This allows FSFFS to continually identify the varying missing middle and meet the goals of the agency in parallel with the needs of their community.

Currently, FSFFS holds four principles in which this writer would suggest can be identified as their missing middle. FSFFS believes that when these four principles are upheld and kept within focus upon each encounter with a new client, they are able to continually help families and individuals reach their goals. These principles are defined as follows:

- i. When someone is heard they feel valued. They feel their story is important. They also get practice sharing their voice-this leads them to understanding their story and embracing/owning their story.
- ii. Research indicates that the majority of people have experienced some form of trauma, and this trauma rewires the brain and shapes behavior. The impact of this shifts our perspective from thinking that something is wrong with them, to wondering what happened in their life; where is the behavior coming from?

- iii. UBUNTU is the South African idea that in a connected society, there is an understanding that everyone needs each other. Today you ask me for help, and that's ok. Tomorrow you may be helping me.
- iv. In a village, everyone belongs-there is a role for everyone to play. When this village language is used the experience changes and allows people to adopt this attitude and behavior.

When examining these principles, it becomes increasingly clear how a Theory of Change is necessary and can aid in the process of motivating individual change. In fact, this writer would argue that holding a foundational understanding of an individual agencies Theory of Change is an integral part of any agency who strives towards motivating its clientele towards genuine change.

### **The Agency and Development of Theory of Change**

FSFFS has a long and broad background in supporting individuals who walk through their doors. In 1998 a unique group of individuals gathered to develop a grassroots, not for profit organization where individuals could come to receive support, education, or further connection to their community. Today, FSFFS supports over 950 individuals each year for varying reasons. The programs and services have grown substantially and now offer programs for individuals and families that vary from mental health supports to drop in programming for families just looking to get out and make connections. In fact, it is often stated that this is what is so unique about the center itself. People could be coming in for family support, to use the lending library, or dropping by to the children's indoor play space, and nobody would know who was there to access what. This is also an incredibly important aspect as often individuals who access the family violence programming are worried about being identified for using this particular service.

At FSFFS, although an individual may be there to see one support person, they often leave with a broad range of additional options and/or support services to help them meet other needs which can often contribute to other barriers and limitations for themselves when left unmet.

Although this is very much a brief overview, and is certainly not inclusive of each program and service available at the center, this writer felt that this was of important note. As mentioned earlier, FSFFS is unique in many ways, consistently examining new ways to better help those that walk through the doors. Although the primary mandate for the agency is families and children 0-6, there are no limitations on who can and cannot access the services, or who can just simply walk through the doors to ask for a helping hand. This in part is what make this agency so successful and well respected throughout its community. It is not uncommon to hear the remarks of its clients as they passed through indicating that they feel relieved because they came through, or it was nice just to get out of the house. Certainly these comments are great to hear, however it is these comments that drove the agency to begin questioning what was exactly that was being done that people were finding so great, so helpful? What was happening when these individuals entered the doors of the center? How did the leaders and individuals working within the building actually support these people in ways that helped them to heal, to motivate them to create their own change? It was these questions that became the missing middle for FSFFS, and thus in 2017 an intensive research study that FSFFS took part in, Project Impact, was conducted in order to answer these questions and develop the agencies principles for Theory of Change (as noted above).

## **Supporting Change from an Individualistic Perspective**

### **Motivation**

The idea of motivation dates back to times of the Pavlovian experiments. Since this time, significant research advancements have been made as well as theories to elaborate upon the idea of motivation. One of which is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Although this hierarchy of needs has undergone much scrutiny over time, several researchers still support the idea of this hierarchy as the basis of human motivation. Essentially, Maslow indicated that human need works in a system of five clusters: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization. In this theory, as Winston (2016) discusses, individuals are driven to satisfy their deficiency needs (physiological, safety, love, and belongingness) and in the process the desire to fulfill our growth, or being need (esteem and self-actualization), becomes increasingly more motivated as the deficiency needs are met. Although Maslow proposed that these needs worked in a systematic format, meaning once our initial physiological needs are met we can progress towards meeting our safety needs, recent literature argues this fact indicating that the needs order is potentially less stable than originally indicated by Maslow. With this said however, the needs still stand, and in fact hold significant evidence demonstrating that this hierarchy of needs remains stable and consistent over time, and across individual's lifespans.

Understanding the workings of individual motivation is essential when considering how to help clients to create change within their lives. As discussed by The Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (1999), motivation is essentially a prerequisite for treatment or change, without an individual holding a certain level of motivation towards their own change, there is little that service providers can do. The good news however, despite historically viewing motivation as static and unchanging, recent research of the accounts of motivation indicate that there are

several experiences which can prompt an individual to make change: Distress levels, critical life events, cognitive evaluation or appraisal, recognition of negative consequences, and positive and negative external incentives (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1999). Thus, motivation is in fact very changeable and when the appropriate techniques are utilized to help motivate clientele, change can be notable.

### **Transtheoretical Model**

As discussed above, change cannot just occur, motivation is required to do so and this motivation can be obtained through the recognition of distress, life event, evaluation, consequences, and positive or negative incentives; more simply put, internal and external events and experiences. It has been theorized that individuals enter various stages of change before actual change occurs, or before motivation to change is identified; this is known as the Transtheoretical Model (TTM).

As most agencies will indicate, working with individuals who appear stuck can often be quite frustrating. In fact, as the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (1999) indicates, understanding client motivation to change “has often been the focus of clinical interest and frustration.” Thus, understanding this TTM for change is necessary and useful in order to help those service providers remove some of the expectation they hold on themselves for client change, and encourages them to remain motivated to work alongside their clients as the progress through the challenges of motivation and change.

The TTM was developed to help practitioners assess a client’s readiness for change in behavior. Additionally, the TTM model has been utilized to help these practitioners and clients progress through the levels of change in order to increase feelings of motivational readiness and

prepare them for transition to the next level of change. The TTM model is comprised, in its simplest form, of five stages of assessed readiness for change. As outlined by Prochaska and Velicer (1997) the first stage, considered the precontemplation stage, can best be described as the stage that exists before people truly recognize their need for change, often times this stage of change is referred to as “denial.” The second stage in the TTM is the contemplation stage. In this stage, individuals are beginning to recognize that a change may be necessary, perhaps even considering it a problem behaviour for themselves, however often feel quite ambivalent about the change overall. The third stage is considered the preparation/determination stage in which individuals have decided that change is necessary and understand the consequences that could occur if change does not. It is quite often within this phase that individuals reach out to additional community supports as well. The fourth stage found in the TTM is the action stage. As Prochaska and Velicer (1997) indicate, this stage can often be quite challenging for many, and often is the shortest in duration. The action stage requires individuals to be highly motivated to achieve and maintain their desired change, often referred to as willpower. The final stage is maintenance. Within this phase of the TTM, individuals are appreciating a feeling of success and wellbeing due to the acquirement of freedom from their previously undesired behaviour. This sense of freedom however is often overshadowed, or abruptly taken away by the phase that practitioners often first sense the feeling of frustration; relapse. As Prochaska and Velicer (1997) indicate, relapse is an added stage of change, or at least a revisit to an early stage within the TTM. This is important to note as a process of change as it eliminates the responsibility in some sense from the practitioner, and client, and helps them to understand and perhaps forgive themselves as they understand that relapse is often a part of the overall change; “relapse tends to

be the rule when action is taken for most health behaviour problems” (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997).

As demonstrated above and mentioned throughout this paper to this point, change is difficult and requires, in some sense, an aligning of the stars, for one person to truly create and embrace lasting change within their own lives. Several factors play into this intricate aspect of life, including internal and external events/reinforcements, which act as sublets for motivation. This motivation spikes interest and inquiry into change, and the individual person then progresses down the path towards their true change.

Clearly, as we can see through the information above, change ultimately lies with an individual person and their intrinsic motivation. However, when considering this system and examining external influence on an individual’s motivation, it becomes clear that agency can also play a vital role in this, especially when this agency meets deficiency needs that may have previously gone unmet.

### **Supporting Change from an Agency Perspective**

In the opening of this paper, two key factors were discussed that this writer proposed align with the four principles FSFFS has identified as their pillars for theory of change as well as the hierarchy of needs; basic and psychological needs. Although as demonstrated throughout this paper so far, individualistic motivation is necessary to promote change, agency can certainly play an essential role in increasing and individual’s perceived level of motivation for change. As indicated throughout the explanation of TTM, individuals progress through various stages of change when various factors are met. These factors are dependent upon several aspects, as this writer has discussed, but are largely dependent upon motivation. Essentially, when individual’s

motivation for change is high, the individual seeks out behavior change. Similarly, as demonstrated within the hierarchy of needs, when one level of need is met, an individual is motivated to meet other needs. Thus, with needs remaining unmet, motivation to seek further needs remains low. This is where the importance of agency can come into play. This is where the agency Theory of Change becomes an integral part of behavior change.

### **Basic Needs: Physiological and Safety**

The first factor that this writer suggests that aligns with FSFFS defined principles is the meeting of an individual's basic needs. As found in much of the research that relates to the hierarchy of needs, an individual person cannot just feel esteem, motivation, or security without having basic needs met (McLeod, 2007). Individuals need to feel a sense of safety before they feel a sense of motivation to attain the higher level of belonging. In Maslow's definition of safety it is indicated that people require security. They require a space created that they can feel free from fear and judgement. However, this safety can be difficult to obtain if other basic needs are presently unmet.

As discussed previously, FSFFS offers a wide range of programs and services, many of which are aimed at meeting individual basic needs. For some people that walk through the doors this means food, clothing, and even assistance in finding shelter. However, as we know, people don't necessarily walk through a door and ask for these things, there is a level of trust, a level of safety that is essential for these individuals to be able to take those first steps towards requesting this help. During the Project Impact interviews, one theme that Boonstra and Hetherington (2017) noted was that each interviewee indicated the staff within the building were really what helped them feel secure and encouraged them to tell whatever story they needed to that day. This finding is essential in order to understand the importance of the first principle that FSFFS defines

in their Theory of Change; “when someone is heard they feel valued. They feel their story is important. They also get practice sharing their voice-this leads them to understanding their story and embracing/owing this story” (Boonstra & Hetherington, 2017).

### **Storytelling.**

There is substantial research within the literature documenting the importance of storytelling. In fact, the foundation of one of the most widely utilized therapeutic interventions, Narrative Therapy, is built around just that; authoring and re-authoring our own stories. As Haigh and Hardy (2010) discuss, the importance of storytelling really cannot be overstated. The communication of human experience dates back to the time of the ancient Egyptian’s. According to Haigh and Hardy (2010), “stories are the smallest unity by which human beings communicate their experience and knowledge of the world” (p. 1). Furthermore, Charon suggests (as cited by Haigh and Hardy, 2010) that there are several benefits to individuals when their stories are told. First, individuals develop skills that are required to actually follow a narrative which tolerate ambiguity and surrender to the story itself. Secondly, being able to adapt and understand multiple and contradictory points of view is an essential aspect of emotional intelligence. Storytelling also allows an individual and a practitioner to begin to understand the storyteller’s reality and how this person may make sense of the world around them; which further provides insight into their personal use of image and metaphor. Finally, storytelling allows for the use of imagination in being transported to the storyteller’s reality. Thus, as we can see, storytelling is really invaluable, and certainly FSFFS is correct in identifying this critical aspect of agency support. In doing so, FSFFS is helping individuals create their own change. People who enter the agency are feeling heard, and this is because a space of safety, security, and non-judgement is created, valued, and upheld.

### **Trauma Informed Practice.**

In 2017 FSFFS was recognized as one of the first trauma informed agencies in Alberta. What did this mean? As noted by Boonstra and Hetherington (2017), one of the second pillars that comprise the agencies Theory of Change is: “Research indicates that the majority of people have experienced some form of trauma, and this trauma requires the brain and shapes behavior. The impact of this shifts our perspective from “something is wrong with him/her” to “I wonder what happened in his/her life? Where is that behavior coming from?” As mentioned above, individuals not only need to but also feel a sense of safety, security, and non-judgement when they walk through the doors at FSFFS. This is genuine, and this is trauma informed. Each staff member within the building is required to undergo trauma informed training in order to understand and offer more effective support services to each of the individuals they encounter. This encourages the staff to remain open and non-judgemental with individuals as they share their stories and face the challenge of change that lies ahead. As Record-Lemon (2017) indicate, a trauma informed practice “engages in all aspects of counselling and education with an understanding of trauma and traumatic impacts and have the goal of creating an environment that prioritizes safety, choice, control, and empowerment” (p. 288).

Briere and Scott (2015) indicate that although trauma in adulthood is often extreme and can be associated with severe psychological outcomes, “research suggests that, on average, childhood traumas are even more related to lasting psychosocial difficulties” (p. 30). As much of the research on trauma and brain development demonstrates, this factor could be due in part to the fact that a childhood is one of the most crucial developmental times of an individual’s life. Thus, when trauma occurs within a child’s life, the impacts of this can often be carried with them

into their adulthood, and when left untreated, can often create further challenges, vulnerabilities, and victimizations for these individuals in their adult lives.

As Record-Lemon and Buchanan (2017) discuss, when an individual experiences trauma in early childhood, severe implications on brain function, development, and emotional regulation skills are impacted. Because of this, these individuals will often experience later mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, substance use disorders, and/or posttraumatic stress disorder, each of which have serious long term impacts and can be pervasive throughout adulthood. Furthermore, these traumas may also impact and challenge an individual's social function, schema development and further relationship-attachment disruptions. As such, we see through the exploration of this information, trauma informed practice, and principles which support this practice, are essential in order to provide effective, supportive, and safe service delivery for each individual that walks through the door.

Ko et al., (2008) conducted a review of various agencies and service providers whose trauma informed practices varied across these systems. In this, these authors noted the importance of streamlining trauma informed practices over the various service providers in order to make each service system more trauma informed and support clientele more effectively. What is suggested by Ko et al., (2008) is that although each service agency supports the notion that each agency has unique needs because of the services they deliver, they suggest that consistency across practice is necessary, possible, and beneficial for clientele. Thus, the first recommendation made by these authors is exactly that: "Promote the integration of trauma-focused practices across formal mental health treatment and other service sectors" (p. 401). In doing so, as Ko et al., (2008) indicate, clients are essentially accessing more appropriate interventions, referrals, and supports to help each client more effectively work through their identified barriers.

Essentially, any door that a client walks through then becomes the right door. Service providers can work with the individual to identify their needs and create a safe and supportive referral to more appropriate agency when necessary. Likewise, Ko et al., (2008) further suggest that, although agencies need not to be experts in traumatic stress, agencies who provide trauma-informed care and traumatic stress interventions early and strategically are better able to make the appropriate referrals to trauma specialists, leading to better outcomes for the clients they serve.

Thus, we can see through the information provided above that trauma-informed practice is essential in the work that is done throughout any support service agency. In identifying the need for trauma-informed practice into FSFFS, this agency is not only better able to serve clients who have experienced trauma, but are also better able to make essential and supportive referrals to outside agencies and/or trauma specialists ensuring that their clientele receive the best possible supports needed to work through their presenting concerns.

Similarly, this writer emphasizes the essential aspect of incorporating trauma-informed practice into service delivery. As previously mentioned, in meeting an individual's basic needs, namely physiological and safety needs according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, both require attunement from agency in order to understand the barriers in which these individuals experience in their lives. This requires agency to provide a space of safety, a space of opportunity, and a space of collaboration in order to effectively encourage, motivate, and support a client through whatever story or difficulty they find themselves in. As demonstrated above, with the first two pillars identified by FSFFS in their Theory of Change; storytelling and trauma-informed practice, demonstrates to readers that FSFFS is making strides towards helping individuals meet their

basic, physiological and safety needs by remaining a space that is trauma-informed and inviting for individuals to share their unique stories.

### **Psychological Needs: Love/Belonging and Esteem**

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, outside of basic needs, individuals also hold what is identified as psychological needs. These needs include love and belongingness and esteem needs. Reflecting back on the information above on trauma, one of the outcomes of trauma in early childhood is its impact on social and relationship development over the lifespan. Individuals can attend an agency seeking support for the basic needs (ie. food, assistance with shelter, etc.) however, often times they may attend a service agency looking to find support their psychological needs as well. As mentioned earlier, FSFFS has many different services that they offer clientele, in many ways the agency itself acts as a bit of a hub for the community. Sometimes clients walk through the doors looking for assistance to meet those basic needs, but often times it is much simpler than that. Often times clients attend FSFFS looking to build their support network, their friendships, and/or their relationships as a whole. Be it through the daily play group, or the any of the parenting programs available, FSFFS works to build relationship between clients and between agency and client. Essentially, FSFFS aims to connect individuals to community, to build their support network, their resources, and in turn their relationships. This is where the final two pillars of FSFFS theory of change comes into play.

As Boonstra and Hetherington (2017) describe, "UBUNTU is the South African idea that in a connected society, there is an understanding that everyone needs each other. Today you ask me for help, and that's okay. Tomorrow you may be helping me." Additionally, "In a village, everyone belongs-there is a role for everyone to play. When this "village" language is used the experience changes and allows people to adopt this attitude and behavior." These are the final

two pillars that comprise the agencies Theory of Change, and these two pillars, as this writer would suggest, develop the essential aspect of the need for relationship in working with individuals who are attempting to make positive lasting changes in their lives, and further, work collaboratively alongside the psychological needs of love/belonging and esteem needs according to the hierarchy of needs.

### **Relationship.**

This writer notes that it is of no surprise that relationship arises as an essential component of support, and in turn an essential component of FSFFS Theory of Change. The research in the area of relationship and its essential components involved in motivating successful change in client's lives is somewhat unlimited. In fact, in counselling, relationship is noted as one of the most effective and important pillars in working with individual clients. As Ludedke, Peluso, Diaz, Freund, and Baker (2017) discuss, "therapeutic relationship-the relationship between a counsellor and client-is one of the single greatest predictors of success or failure in counselling" (p. 125). This too translates beyond client-counsellor relationship in the therapeutic sense, and extends well into agency working with individuals with various needs. In fact, as demonstrated through the interviews conducted by Boonstra and Hetherington (2017) people not only felt safe and as if they were building relationships with others, but also, as indicated by one participant of the research study, "I didn't enjoy it for the first month because I didn't know anybody. There's been a shift-I feel like I belong now" (Project Impact Participant, 2017). That feeling of belonging, as we know, is developed through relationship, and thus, this writer would suggest that in developing these relationships, FSFFS is helping individuals grow their community; their 'village'.

### **The Need for Belonging to Develop Relationship.**

Holding a personal sense of belonging can often times be overlooked in agency settings. When people walk through the doors of an agency looking for support services, it is often assumed that this individual or family requires supports that are basic need (ie. food, clothing, shelter, etc.). However, this is actually a gross misunderstanding. Although these needs are often times what people are seeking support services for, once these needs are met, as has been demonstrated throughout this paper, people need, and often feel motivated to move forward on the hierarchy an attain feelings of belongingness; to satisfy psychological need. Wubbolding (2005) actually provides illustrations of the importance of belongingness need satisfaction. In this article Wubbolding (2005) discusses the story of a women held in confinement for several years. During this time, the individual experienced pervasive feelings of depression, loneliness, and isolation. At one point this individual was interrogated during her stay, and she described shouting her answers at the interrogators because she felt that the other prisoners in the building could hear her, and this gave her a sense of belonging, and ultimately a sense of courage. Although this is only one story, you certainly do not have to go far to find others alike it. Similar to the individual who was interviewed during the project impact interviews by Boonstra and Hetherington (2017), who indicated that “I didn’t enjoy it for the first month because I didn’t know anybody” indicates that in the absence of not knowing anyone so came the absence of belonging. Once this individual met people, and their village grew, they felt as if they belonged. Thus, this writer suggests that sometimes having the sense of belonging, is enough to help us move through other challenges we may be facing. Although unknown to this writer where this individual is at in their journey today, in follow up interviewing this writer would suggest that exploring where this individual is at in this point in their journey may be worth note, and further

support the importance of meeting belonging needs in order to attain higher levels of development.

Poston (2009) states that it is not uncommon or hard to believe that social needs are essential in order to live satisfying lives. In fact for most people, as Poston (2009) discusses, “the social level generally becomes the priority only after the physiological and safety needs have been sufficiently met and maintained” (p. 350). Although as we know through the section of this paper on the TTM, the maintenance stage of change can present various challenges, including regression, for many, Poston (2009) points out that a certain level of belonging must be determined relatively early on because this sense has a major impact on an individual’s level of self-esteem. If an individual perceives their belongingness level as low, this perception will often times increase social anxiety and lead individuals searching for that belongingness to withdraw. When we consider this, it becomes apparent how difficult and highly complex this all becomes. One can truly not function without the other. Relationship is essential to personal development, just as feeling a sense safety is essential to developing said relationships. Without safety in relationship, people will not feel belongingness, and thus, become more at risk for regression and therefore experience further challenges. Thus, this writer would emphasize that the need for relationship and sense of belonging, within agency or otherwise, really cannot be understated.

#### **Esteem Development in Forming Healthy Relationship.**

As briefly mentioned above, when we belong we feel we belong we also experience increased feelings of self-esteem. Interestingly these feelings, as indicated throughout much of the research on developmental needs, begin in early childhood and progress throughout our lives. As Poston (2009) discusses, “the influence in a child’s upbringing starts with a home and family that secures the previous levels of Maslow’s hierarchy by meeting and maintaining the

foundation levels of needs” (p. 351). This does not come as a surprise, that healthy relationships, or the understanding of healthy relationships, begin to develop in early childhood. As well noted throughout much of the literature, attachment in early childhood plays a vital role in the development of later relationships, and in turn self-esteem, in an individual’s life. To understand this system, and where it all belongs within the context of this paper, this writer feels it is important to highlight the essential aspect of attachment and how these attachment styles can be highly influential in our later life choices/style.

Bowlby (as cited by Burke, Danquah, and Berry, 2016) demonstrates that it is during our early experiences in life where we begin to develop mental representations of the world around us. During this time, if our caregivers provide consistent messaging that is secure, healthy, and safe, children develop what is considered in Bowlby’s model as ‘secure’ attachment. This attachment style enables the child to build skills that are essential in building other future adaptive relationships, manage stress levels appropriately, build independence, and further, as it relates to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, establish a positive, secure, self-esteem. However, as further detailed by Burke, Danquah, and Berry (2016), the opposite of this also becomes true when a child’s attachment needs go unmet. Individuals with these experiences often go on to develop insecure attachments, which is characterized by feelings of insecurity, anxiety, avoidance, and overall, disorganized relationships. In fact, to date, much of the literature surrounding insecurely attached individuals does not only indicate that these attachments or often reinforced in later relationships (ie. domestic violence) but further that these individuals are at much greater risk to experience depression, anxiety, eating disorders, symptoms of psychosis, and even personality disorders (Burke, Danquah & Berry, 2016). Thus, as we can see through this information presented, understanding attachment as it develops in our early childhood, is

essential in understanding not only how an individual relates with others and develops relationships, but also what these relationships are like with their individual self. How do they identify their own self-worth/esteem?

As with many of the topics that have been covered throughout the course of this paper, the good news is, is that self-esteem is also not static. That is, that although an individual may have been raised insecurely attached, and in turn may experience various mental health issues and/or unstable adult relationships, they may be able to establish a growing evaluation and sense of personal self-esteem. This again is where agency can play an integral role. As was noted above, the idea of being connected to, or having relationship with your village, your community, and belonging to something outside of yourself, is the foundation of the FSFFS Theory of Change.

### **The Role of Ubuntu in Relationship Development.**

Ubuntu, as mentioned previously, is the idea of our connectedness to others. Throughout the proceedings of this paper this writer has referred often to relationship, but will clarify that relationship and the theory of Ubuntu truly are one in the same, or at least connected by virtue in several ways. As Maphalala (2017) describes, “in the process of unpacking the various definitions of Ubuntu, it becomes apparent that the common idea is one of interconnectedness, humanness and interdependence among people” (p. 10240). In other words, that people feel valued and connected in their relationships with others, that they belong.

Maphalala’s (2017) research, although set within a classroom, demonstrates the significance that the idea of Ubuntu can have when implemented across a macro system, such as FSFFS. The idea of Ubuntu translates itself across three systems: Interpersonal values, intrapersonal values, and environmental values. It does not isolate itself to the idea of ‘me’ but

rather the idea of ‘us,’ that we are all here, connected by relationship, by humanity, and when we belong together, we meet our needs. Jolley (as cited by Maphalala, 2017) notes that “Ubuntu was initially created in African villages to knit together humans with respect and love, and that it effectively strengthened human intrapersonal communication and communication with others, including family and community, and thus strengthened town and country” (p. 10241). Because of this, individuals do not only feel connected or as if they belong, but also hold an increased sense of self-esteem. As discussed by Poston (2009) people have an innate desire to be liked, accepted and valued by others. Because of this, our sense of belonging and acceptance is often directly linked to our self-esteem. Thus, as discussed above, when we belong, when we have relationship, we become validated and appreciated by these relationships, and through this we are able to develop and maintain higher levels of self-esteem. This writer notes that a more detailed illustration of this concept, taken from Maphalala (2017), can be found within Appendix A of this paper.

As such, although this writer has broken the idea of relationship down into several forms: attachment, esteem, belonging, Ubuntu, this writer emphasizes how interconnected each of these aspects are to one another. Although notably very complex, we can see through this information the essential aspect that agency plays for an individual who may be without basic or psychological need fulfillment, and how agency can in fact bridge that gap for individuals who may, in this time, require their village.

### **Using Village Language.**

The last aspect to consider in tying the identified principles for change for FSFFS is the idea of the village. As indicated above, Boonstra and Hetherington (2017) identify the principle of village as its own pillar in order to motivate and encourage change in the clients that attend

FSFFS; “In a village, everyone belongs-there is a role for everyone to play. When this “village” language is used the experience changes and allows people to adopt this attitude and behaviour.” Although this writer would suggest that there are marked similarities between the idea of village and the principle of Ubuntu, as discussed above, this writer notes that there are several important features that arise in encouraging “village” language within an agency setting.

In a longitudinal study conducted by Christakis and Fowler (2009), questions of the true essence of village were examined. For instance, how does illness or the death of a loved one cause illness in another? Is there a relationship there? As Christakis and Fowler (2009) discuss, this research was developed because it was recognized through years of observation that there were several types of dyads which had influence and impact over the other; “the key realization was that these dyads agglomerate to form huge webs of ties stretching far into the distance. A man’s wife has a best friend who has a husband who has a co-worker who has a sibling who has a friend...” (p. 14). Essentially, as a village, each individual had tremendous influence over the other, perhaps without even knowing so.

As Christakis and Fowler (2009) explain, social networks are a necessary aspect of all that we do and accomplish. Without these networks we simply could not accomplish the things in life we have. These authors provide the example of a house fire. If you are alone, although you live by a river, it would be impossible for you to retrieve water from this river and run it back to your home enough times to distinguish it. However, if 100 of your neighbors are nearby, it is possible to form a bucket brigade and distinguish this fire as a village. There is power and opportunity in numbers, in villages, and each person has a unique and essential role to play.

A further important aspect to this idea however is the famous concept of six degrees of separation, that we are each connected to all other things within six or fewer steps. Christakis and

Fowler (2009) however reduce this idea by explaining that although we may be able to access anyone living thing within six steps, “our influence within a social network obeys what we call the Three Degrees of Influence Rule” (p. 28). What this concept proposes is that within our social network, our experiences, our moods, our habits etc., carry a ripple effect into our village. That is, what we do impacts our friends, our friends, friends, and our friends, friends, friends.

As Christakis and Fowler (2009) found throughout their study, our networks truly have lives of their own. Just as us as individuals, they too can grow and change, they are in their own formation “a kind of human superorganism” (p. 289). Thus, each of our contributions to these networks have tremendous impacts that ripple beyond what we can see. Although we know we can influence our friends, we often forget how our friends go along and influence their other friends, and their friends, friends. Although it may not be so obvious to us, as Christakis and Fowler (2009) demonstrate through their findings, not only is our connection to others is powerful, but also highly influential and essential in all that we do.

Thus, we can see that from an agency perspective, upholding the principle of “village,” and encouraging the use of this language can not only be influential, but is essential in order to encourage connection, create change, and build relationship within the village itself.

### **A Unified Approach**

Although this writer has broken down each of the pillars for theory of change into several categories of their own in order to support and develop research to meet the needs of this paper, this writer emphasizes that this information works collaboratively and non-systematically. It considers aspects in an eclectic and holistic aspect, and strays away from dividing itself into one limiting category or agency for change. What is suggested is that FSFFS theory of change model

fits within the frameworks of unified theory. That is, the Theory of Change that was developed by Boonstra and Hetherington (2017) supports much of the recent literature in the effectiveness of unifying work. As Dweck (2017) highlights, “motivation, personality, and development belong together. Motivation is about why people think, feel and act the way they do at a given time; personality is about how and why people differ from each other in their characteristic modes of thinking, feeling and acting; and development is about how these different ways of thinking, feeling and acting come into being” (p. 690). As we can see through this explanation, individual differences between people does not exist within a single silo or theory. To assume that it does, this writer would suggest, minimizes the true complexity and nature of humanity as a whole. Thus, it is then equal to assume that change occurs through various ideas and principles working in collaboration with one another. As the Executive Director of FSFFS indicates in their philosophical statement, “If we do not know a parent’s story, for example, it is difficult to connect him or her effectively with others. Likewise, if a parent does not feel valued, helping him or her to find his or her voice can be a real challenge” (Boonstra, 2013). Thus, it is of great value and importance to FSFFS to uphold the idea that each unique individual has an equally unique story to share. That understanding that each person who walks through the doors of the agency has had vastly different life experiences than the next. In doing so, FSFFS is able to integrate various theories and research in the work they do in order to ensure that each person’s story is not only shared, but valued and further integrated into their own personal goals for change.

## **Recommendations**

### **Motivational Interviewing**

Throughout much of the research conducted for this paper, the topic of motivational interviewing (MI) arose often as a means of supporting and increasing clientele's motivation towards change. Motivational interviewing is used as a conversational style of interviewing, often used in counselling, as a means to address ambivalence that individuals experience when they are faced with change in their lives (Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, 2017). Although much of the research available surrounding the efficacy of MI examines its use in substance abuse issues, many researchers indicate that its effectiveness can be useful with many individual challenges that involve motivating change. Essentially, MI falls very much parallel with the idea of relationship discussed earlier within this paper. Similar to that of relationship, MI requires the individual helper to uphold relationship with the client in high regard, noting that these relationships and interactions have "powerful effects on how the client's ambivalence is resolved" (Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, 2017).

Divided into two groups, MI-CBT group and CBT-only group, Khattrra et al., (2017) examined the corrective experiences of participants with generalized anxiety disorder and compared the outcomes of these treatment groups against each other. What is noted in this study, and this writer suggests is interesting to note for the purposes of this paper, is that although both the CBT-only group and the MI-CBT group indicated positive changes in their experience with anxiety, the MI-CBT group reported higher levels of confidence in their personal ability to maintain the changes they had made post therapy. If we consider this finding to be attributed to the addition of MI to the intervention, as Khattrra et al., (2017) have done in their research, this type of training for staff members could be very beneficial for agencies who are wanting to

encourage their clients to attain their desired goals but experience barriers in doing so.

Furthermore, unlike other therapeutic interventions, MI is a training that any service agency employees can take. As discussed by the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (2012), MI training is “appropriate for all health care practitioners who have any direct client care responsibilities and who provide conversations/consultation about behavioral changes across a range of health-related issues.”

As such, this writer suggests as a future recommendation that it may be of benefit to FSFFS to offer this type of training to its employees. Each employee at FSFFS holds such a unique and influential role in their client’s lives. As has been demonstrated throughout this paper, relationship is so strongly valued within the building. Because of this, with the appropriate training, MI may be very effective in helping FSFFS clientele feel motivated to change and thus may perhaps be more supported and encouraged in defeating their basic and/or psychological barriers in their own journey of change.

### **Measurement of change**

As briefly mentioned within the relationship section of this paper, clients want to share their stories with FSFFS because they feel empowered and safe in doing so. Many clients did exactly that in the Project Impact interviews conducted by Boonstra and Hetherington (2017). This information and the sharing of these stories has proven invaluable to FSFFS, and in addition, this paper. As such, a further recommendation for FSFFS would be to encourage follow up with these interviewees. These stories they shared have provided incredible valuable information, however as noted above, measuring their level of perceived change over the course their relationship with FSFFS, may provide further insightful information. As Patty (2013) discusses, if we can implement evaluation as an ongoing practice within agency “it can

profoundly enrich our organizational culture and effectiveness” (p. 131). Patty (2013) highlights that evaluation, although often thought of in terms of metrics, can create or recreate meaning in the work that each of us do. Often times we make assumptions that in our way of doing something it is right, because it has always been done this way. However, when we implement evaluation into our work, we create evidence, a solid foundation, that we are, or we are not, actually being effective in the work that we do. Furthermore, evaluation leads to a place of curiosity, it encourages us as practitioners to want to know what motivates individuals to change, and further, in doing so we want to engage with these individuals and each other, versus just working to accomplish our job in a day. These considerations of evaluation are important to apply, as they not only promote the ideas this writer has listed above, but inform us on the future direction the agency must grow. This, again, is relationship in many ways. Through this method we are truly listening to our clients, hearing their stories, acting as their village, reciprocating Ubuntu, and encouraging them to create their own change.

### **Conclusion**

This writer notes that there is great complexity woven into this paper with many variables to consider. However, as further worth noting, each of these variables, as demonstrated, are essential in order to both understand and create change.

We cannot motivate individuals without understanding the incredibly complex systems that are woven into motivation. As we have seen, motivation can be found intrinsically as well as within our supports we access. Thus, social roles play a major role in influencing our choices, our behaviours, and our stories. However, we also cannot understand motivation, without paying close attention to the impacts of trauma, attachment, and personality development. Each of these understandings, as demonstrated throughout this paper, are essential in the work that any

practitioner does. The good news though, is that none of these characteristics, challenges, or stories need to be static. There are several factors which can motivate individuals to create lasting change within their lives. Individual factors, social factors, relationship, basic and psychological needs, esteem, and agency each play a vital role in the development of behavior change.

As such, it is very evident to see that agency holds a very powerful and influential position when working with such dynamic and unique groups of people searching for their own change in life. We all know that it takes a tremendous amount of courage to ask for help from someone you know, so imagine doing so in a building you just first walked into filled with people you have never met before. Because of this, agency holds peoples trust, stories, and ability for change in their hands. With each new individual comes a new challenge, a new barrier, and a new story. With a solid foundation, education, and evaluation in hand, FSFFS evidently developed and can continue to adapt a very comprehensive, adaptable, and influential Theory of Change.

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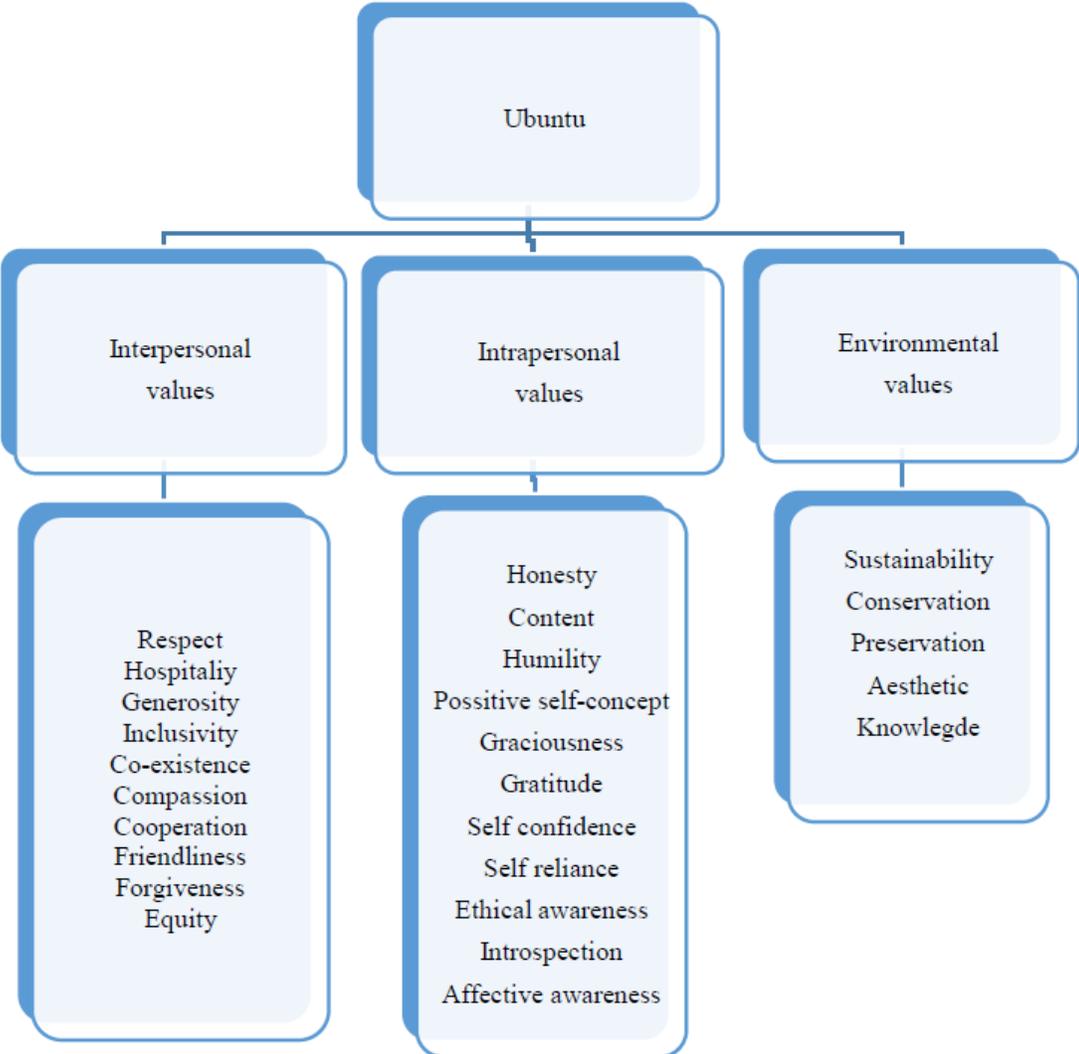
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**Appendix A**

**Components of Ubuntu (Taken from Maphalala, 2017)**



*Figure 1: Components of Ubuntu.*

**Appendix B**  
**Theory of Change**

If Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society demonstrates empathy

And

Hears individual clients stories

And

Those clients see that their story is too, important

And

Families First Society staff understand the principles and impacts of trauma on each client

And

Clients understand that it is okay to ask for help, because tomorrow they may be able to be the ones helping

And

Clients feel as if they belong, to their village, that there is a role for everyone to play

Then

Individuals feel valued, they feel they belong, and they feel increased self-esteem

Then

Client's basic and psychological needs are met

Then

Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society enables their clients to make necessary behavior change in their lives.