

III. D. Activity: Case Studies

Case studies give you a chance to practice analyzing a person's resources. Soon you'll do a self-assessment of your own resources.

Time: 30–90 minutes

Materials: Case studies provided by facilitator

Procedure:

1. Do one case study at a time.
2. Read and score each case study using the upcoming three-page table. You will notice that for each resource there are five levels: (1) = Urgent/Crisis, (2) = Vulnerable/High-Risk, (3) = Stable, (4) = Safe/Secure, (5) = Thriving/Giving Back. Read the five descriptions of each resource and decide which description best matches the information in the two case studies.
3. Share your scores with others and discuss how you came to your decision. It is important that each person gets good at “tight thinking.” One of the best ways is to hear what others think, so you can sort out and explain your own ideas. It's OK to build on the ideas of others. Try to be specific.
4. In each of the two case studies, look for the person's strong and weak resources. It's the strong resources that he or she will use to build the other resources.

Case Study—Carl

Carl's memories of his early family life are of an abusive and disturbed father who heard voices and had mental health problems that became progressively worse over time. His father taught his children to steal from malls. He also beat his wife and children. Carl's mother couldn't handle the beatings anymore and, taking her three children, left his father.

Carl's family moved frequently and went from having lots of toys and material things to

being hungry and not having enough clothes. Every time they settled into a new place to live, his father would find them, and they would have to move again. They lived in dumpy apartments, shelters, and with family members and strangers. During this time Carl learned to protect himself from being hurt by building walls and isolating himself from others.

Carl has a vivid memory of his mother standing in front of a gas station looking at the chil-

dren, trying to smile, but with tears rolling down her face as she told them they were going to live with a different family.

Carl and his siblings were taken from his mother and put into a foster home. The first foster placement was for three years, but then the children were split up. The second foster parents were Christians who went to church every Sunday and Wednesday and enrolled Carl in a Christian school. That was a good experience for him—

both for the religious foundation and academically. He was a good student and made good grades. The family lived on a farm where he was given chores.

His mother brought the family together again only to continue the life of moving from neighborhood to neighborhood with a series of men. She was heavily involved in drug use. As the oldest child, he protected his brother and sister as best he could.

When Carl was in high school he skipped school frequently and began experimenting with alcohol, drugs, and sex. He went to parties and was in lots of fights. He dropped out of school his senior year.

He moved from place to place, job to job, and girlfriend to girlfriend. Carl found it easy to find work and always learned

the work quickly. If he had stayed at any of the jobs, he could have worked his way up quickly. But he was heavily into drugs, which took a toll financially and physically.

Toward the end of his drug use Carl was homeless and described himself as spiritually bankrupt. He had developed a terrible reputation and all kinds of enemies. At the time he went into treatment for drug addiction, his nose, cheekbone, eye socket, and hand were all broken. Carl said he had hit bottom. His recovery began with a renewal of his spiritual life.

He now has two part-time, low-wage jobs. His money goes to paying child support and rent, leaving very little for keeping his car running and food. He is basically healthy but doesn't have health insurance. His social life is centered around 12-step meetings and reconnect-

ing with his family. He enjoys helping people with fix-it projects, moving, and giving them rides. He wants to get a GED, but is busy with his two jobs, along with helping family and friends. His mother is very ill and still using drugs; his brothers always need money. They are not supportive of his efforts to stay clean and sober.

Despite his conflicting feelings about his mother and the hard times they have lived through, Carl remembers some good times too. They would go for walks and to the park. He finds himself laughing over the silliest things they did. Carl has deep bonds with his brothers and maintains a relationship with them. He has learned to turn hard experiences into strengths; he has the ability to survive and find the humor in things. He is generally self-assured and able to make friends easily.

Case Study—Sandy

Sandy is the product of a one-night stand. Her father was Vietnam veteran and, for a short time, a member of the Black Panthers. Her mother was a white girl from Tennessee. He was married at the time of their encounter and went on to marry two other women. She was married twice; they both had several children from each of their marriages.

They were living in a small town in Indiana when, at the age of 8, Sandy's father took her to California, telling her that her mother was in jail for welfare fraud. Her father spent most of his time living with girlfriends and using drugs. He became addicted to cocaine and would leave her alone in motel rooms or with strangers for long periods of time. Before her mother was able to find her, Sandy experienced homelessness, spent her ninth Christmas living in a car, learned how to fend for herself, and got herself to school using the bus and rail system in San Francisco.

Sandy's mother also had a hard childhood. When she was 12 she was raising her 6-year-old sister and 14-year-old brother who had mental health prob-

lems. She didn't get along with Sandy's father or his family and had to fight to keep Sandy. After she got Sandy back from California, they lived in Chicago where she worked long hours and left Sandy to her own devices. Sandy joined a gang where she found love, support and acceptance. But gang life was a struggle, with frequent fights with members of other gangs; Sandy was hungry most nights and in almost constant pain from fighting. Soon she became pregnant.

Six months into her pregnancy Sandy was jumped by another gang and was spared from being killed by a girl who told the would-be shooter that the baby didn't deserve to die. That crisis led to them returning to Indiana. Sandy promised to go back to school and stay out of trouble. However, she dropped out of school and got involved in abusive relationships. When she was 17 she had an apartment and was the target of every hustler and drug dealer around. She was abused physically, sexually, and mentally on a daily basis. She had five children who were forced on her by men who wanted to keep her in a relationship. She

survived by doing what others did to her: exploiting and terrorizing others.

Eventually Sandy realized that she was starting to do to her children what had been done to her. She worked a series of low-wage jobs and went to school at the same time. She did well in school, getting a GED and going on to a community college. Her children have excelled at school; all five are on the honor roll. She figured that she had role models of "what not to do" and determined that it was more important to be a role model than to have one. It was having children that made her realize that she had to manage her emotions in a less destructive way.

Sandy's relationships with men have settled down considerably. There is no violence, but her life is complicated by relationships that have led to lost jobs, indebtedness, and moves to new apartments. She has borrowed money from payday lenders four times and now must pay them first on payday, leaving little money for necessities.

Sandy is now working 30 hours a week at a “big box” store; there are relatively few companies that pay good wages in her community, and she feels fortunate to have the job she does. At work she has always caught the eye of supervisors and has moved up quickly. Sandy thinks that being biracial has helped her learn to

manage herself in different settings—both the ’hood and the workplace. She is quite verbal.

She uses food stamps and Medicaid. She has been diagnosed with diabetes and is trying to manage it with diet and exercise, but she is finding it difficult because of the crises that often interrupt her days

and all the demands on her to manage her children, three of whom are now in high school. Her relationships with workers at local agencies generally are not good because she confronts those who don’t treat her with respect as she is trying to improve her life.

Resources Scoring Table

	(1) Urgent/ Crisis	(2) Vulnerable/ High-Risk	(3) Stable	(4) Safe/ Secure	(5) Thriving/ Giving Back
Financial	Doesn't have enough income to purchase needed goods and services.	Has some, but not enough, income to purchase needed goods and services—and to save money.	Has enough income to purchase needed goods and services—and to have money saved for crisis.	Has enough income to purchase needed goods and services, to save for emergencies, and to invest for future.	Actively seeks to increase personal financial assets over time and help build community assets.
Emotional	Can't choose and control emotional responses. Often behaves in ways that are harmful to others or self.	Can sometimes choose and control emotional responses. Sometimes behaves in ways that are harmful to others or self.	Can almost always choose and control emotional responses. Almost never behaves in ways that are harmful to others or self.	Is good at choosing and controlling emotional responses. Engages in positive behaviors toward others.	Actively seeks to improve emotional health in self and others.
Mental/ Cognitive	Lacks ability, education, or skills to compete for well-paying jobs.	Has some ability, education, or skills to compete for well-paying jobs.	Has enough ability, education, or skills to compete for well-paying jobs.	Has plenty of ability, education, or skills to compete for well-paying jobs.	Actively seeks to improve on existing ability, education, or skills—and build mental resources in community.

MODULE 7: ELEVEN RESOURCES

	(1) Urgent/ Crisis	(2) Vulnerable/ High-Risk	(3) Stable	(4) Safe/ Secure	(5) Thriving/ Giving Back
Formal Register of Language	Lacks vocabulary, language ability, and negotiation skills needed for workplace settings.	Has some of vocabulary, language ability, and negotiation skills needed for workplace settings.	Has enough of vocabulary, language ability, and negotiation skills needed for workplace settings.	Has plenty of vocabulary, language ability, and negotiation skills needed for workplace settings.	Actively seeks to improve upon already strong vocabulary and language ability foundation—and works to develop language resources in community.
Support Systems	Lacks positive friends, family, and connections that can be accessed to improve resources.	Has some positive friends, family, and connections that can be accessed to improve resources.	Has enough positive friends, family, and connections that can be accessed to improve resources.	Has plenty of positive friends, family, and connections that can be accessed to improve resources.	Actively develops networks and social resources that can be accessed to improve personal and community resources.
Physical	Lacks physical health and mobility for workplace settings.	Has some physical health and mobility problems that could limit effectiveness in workplace.	Has physical health and mobility needed for workplace settings.	Consistently maintains physical health and mobility needed for self and others in workplace.	Actively develops physical resources for self, workplace, and community.
Spiritual	Lacks cultural connections or sense of spiritual purpose that offers support and guidance.	Has some cultural connections or sense of spiritual purpose that offers support and guidance.	Has sufficient cultural connections or sense of spiritual purpose that offers support and guidance.	Has plenty of cultural connections or sense of spiritual purpose that offers support and guidance.	Actively seeks cultural connections and/or spiritual growth.
Integrity/Trust	Cannot be trusted to keep one's word, to accomplish tasks, and to obey laws even when under supervision.	Can sometimes be trusted to keep one's word, to accomplish tasks, and to obey laws when under supervision.	Can be trusted to keep one's word, to accomplish tasks, and to obey laws, without supervision.	Can invariably be trusted to keep one's word, to accomplish tasks, to obey laws, and to inspire others to do same.	Actively seeks to build integrity and trust—and sets high ethical standards at work and in community.

INVESTIGATIONS INTO ECONOMIC CLASS IN AMERICA

	(1) Urgent/ Crisis	(2) Vulnerable/ High-Risk	(3) Stable	(4) Safe/ Secure	(5) Thriving/ Giving Back
Motivation/ Persistence	Lacks energy or drive to prepare for, plan, and complete projects, jobs, and personal change.	Has some energy or drive to prepare for, plan, and complete projects, jobs, and personal change.	Has enough energy or drive to prepare for, plan, and complete projects, jobs, and personal change.	Has plenty of energy or drive to prepare for, plan, and complete projects, jobs, and personal change.	Actively seeks to maintain motivation and persistence—and to assist others in finding theirs.
Relationships/ Role Models	Lacks access to others who are safe, supportive, and nurturing.	Has limited access to others who are safe, supportive, and nurturing.	Has enough access to others who are safe, supportive, and nurturing.	Has plenty of access to others who are safe, supportive, and nurturing.	Actively seeks out others who are safe, supportive, and nurturing—and is safe, supportive, and nurturing of others.
Knowledge of Hidden Rules	Lacks knowledge of hidden rules of other economic classes.	Has some awareness of hidden rules of other economic classes but can't use them.	Knows rules of other economic classes and can use some of them in personal ways.	Knows rules of all three economic classes and can use most of them effectively in limited settings.	Actively seeks to understand rules of all three economic classes—and to use them effectively in variety of settings.

Note. Adapted from work of Jennifer Clay, Opportunities Industrialization Center of Clark County, Springfield, Ohio.



III. E. Discussion

When the group has analyzed several case studies—enough to be able to do tight thinking about the resources—discuss these questions.

1. Which resources does poverty impact the most severely?
2. Which resources are the hardest to assess?
3. Which resources do you think are the most important in order to have a well-balanced life?
4. How are an individual's resources interconnected? What happens to other resources when someone has a sudden decline in health or loses a job?
5. As the group worked through the case studies, in what ways did the thinking about the resources get tighter?

Case Study—Dale (Resources in Action)

Dale is a 34-year-old man who was raised in poverty. He's still in poverty, but this story is about the beginning of his transition out. He's a high school dropout who has worked a series of jobs, the best one a manufacturing job in a mid-sized city in Ohio. He has moved frequently, living in a number of states with a number of different women. After a recent divorce, he returned to Ohio looking for work and is living with some friends. Dale wants custody of his daughter because his ex-wife has a serious mental health problem. The only way to get custody, though, is to establish a home. Dale's strongest resources are emotional, physical, and motivational. His weakest resources are financial, support systems, and knowledge of the hidden rules of middle class.

Dale applied at the manufacturing plant several times with

no results before beginning Getting Ahead. He decided to try again, using what he had learned in the class about economic class.

He went to the plant to apply, this time not just dropping off the application and walking away, but staying to talk to the secretary taking the forms. He explained why he wanted the job (establish economic security, get custody of his daughter) and told the office worker that he had worked there before and knew how to do the work. He then asked about a man who had worked at the plant when he first worked there years earlier. It turned out that the man was now in management. The secretary made a call and arranged for Dale to see the manager right then.

When Dale went into the office he was fidgeting and stumbling over his language when

he thought, *I've got to just go for it.* Again he explained himself, how he wanted to provide for his daughter, get and keep a good job, establish a home, and how he was at the point in his life where he knew he had to make a major change. The manager was impressed and told Dale he could have the job, but there was one thing he would have to do first. He would have to cut off his ponytail. The plant was under new management, and one of the rules that had changed was the one about ponytails. One man who had worked there for years quit his job rather than cut his hair. Dale recognized this as a conflict in hidden rules and chose to give up his ponytail for the job. The job pays a living wage and provides benefits. Dale moved to a small apartment near the plant so he could save money.