

Seeds for Recovery:

Using Core Gifts to Inspire Hope and Action



A REPORT FROM
THE AB2034 PROJECT:

Helping citizens in
our communities who
are homeless and have
a mental illness

Seeds for Recovery:

Using Core Gifts to Inspire Hope and Action

Since 1999, the California State Legislature has funded programs designed to provide integrated community support to individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and have a serious mental illness. The programs have shown unprecedented outcomes by using innovative strategies to address this critically important community issue. One of the innovative tools under development statewide is to identify and utilize the “gift” in each person, in addition to their skills, as a way to build their self-worth, hope, and motivation to re-engage in healthy community life. The idea that each community member has a gift—a way to be useful to their community—is deeply rooted in cultures all over the world. This booklet answers common questions about identifying and using gifts and provides stories from the lives of people who have been affected by this powerful and practical idea.

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Introduction

This booklet is a response to the groundswell of agreement amongst social service providers, people who are homeless, and civic leaders that simply providing housing will not solve the problem of homelessness in our towns. Citizens who end up without housing most often have experienced a severe event in their life which resulted in a loss of housing. Whether it is the onset of a disability, losing a job, loss of relationship with a loved one, or substance abuse...the road back into a sustained healthy life always involves attending to the original circumstances and suffering which resulted in homelessness. It involves attending to the person's whole life, not just the lack of housing.

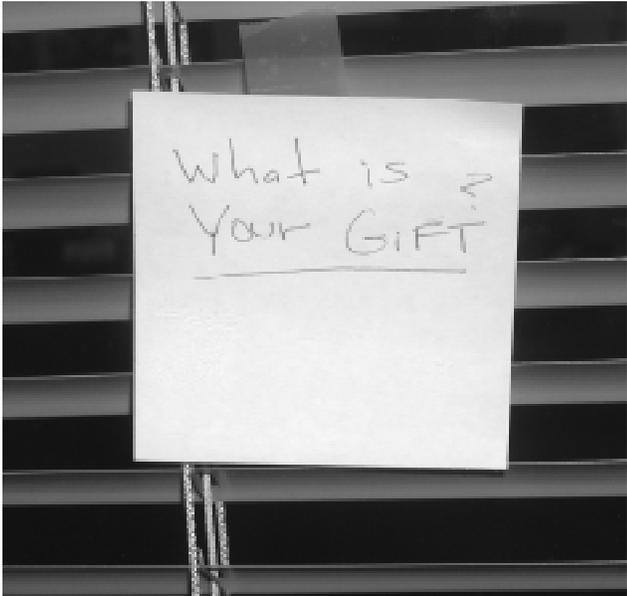
Is it work worth doing? We are living with the devastating social and financial results of what happens when we do not help citizens find their way back into community life.

Homeless citizens are often identified as a separate group in a community. The separation that occurs is happening, however, at deeper levels than not having housing. The person who is homeless is often separated from many of the relationships that used to help sustain him/her, and also

from the usual healthy rhythms of community life including employment, transportation, and the ability to frequent community places. But the most devastating result of homelessness and disability is the gradual change that happens inside a person as they begin to see themselves primarily as homeless and having a mental illness. There is a gradual loss of ability to see him- or herself as someone who has significant skills and gifts, a life story which includes many successes as well as difficult times, and who is worthy of love and respect. Equally as devastating

is the tendency for community citizens to define the person fundamentally by the condition of homelessness or disability. On both sides, there is fear, a loss of hope, and feelings of frustration.

What is broken inside a person is the same thing that is broken in the community—the belief that all of us are worthy of love and all of us have a contribution to make. People need



a bridge to find their way back into community, and as the stories in this booklet attest, giving their gifts can be that bridge. The idea that each community member has a gift—a way to be useful to their community—is deeply rooted in cultures all over the world. When citizens believe they have something valuable to contribute, and the community provides opportunity for that contribution to be made, hope is restored, desire comes to life, and communities become whole again.

Is it easy? Of course not. This is difficult work which requires changing long-held beliefs in both citizens who are homeless and others who live in that community. Is it work worth doing? We are living with the devastating social and financial results of what happens when we do not help citizens find their way back into community life.

The citizens who appear in this booklet are either recently homeless, work in programs serving citizens who are homeless, or both. Their stories and photographs reveal the powerful difference that knowing and giving their gifts has made—both to themselves and to their communities. As individ-

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uals get their lives back, the changes can be quite remarkable...in their physical appearance, the powerfulness of their voice, their clarity about goals, and their focus on serving their community.

This booklet is one way to say, “Welcome home. The time for you to rejoin us is now. We have been waiting for you.” ■

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“There are no high functioning or low functioning people. There are people whose contribution we are able to see and value and there are those whose gifts we have failed to see and have failed to value.”

Patricia Deegan, P.E.,
Journal of Psychosocial Nursing, 1993. Vol. 31

Dawn Solomon, Long Beach



“My gift is helping others come out of their shell. I do this by helping people feel comfortable and then provoking them, believing every person has a dream and a purpose, and being uninhibited myself.”

Do you think you could make it if you were me? See, I'll provoke you.

I was in college and I started to lose my mind. My whole life changed in a matter of a month. I ended up in Long Beach with no place to live. People at the Village Mental Health Center got me in a motel room and my life started to change.

I have a collection of shells that I have gotten from people. It's a powerful image to me. Everyone suffers from having to be things that we're not. We get the idea that who we really are is not o.k. and we slowly become this kind of fake, happy person who is in a shell. But after a while, you begin to feel confined and it causes you pain. That's when you need to be provoked.

I make people feel comfortable, and then provoke them. Comfort and provoking, these two can dance together to get a person to change. There is a wiser part of me that tells me when I should get into it with somebody...to provoke them to be something bigger than they are right then. I'm good at it. I have a keen sense for knowing who wants to be real but is afraid. That's the trick of helping somebody come out of their shell. You have to know who is ready.

The truth is, I'm still in my shell. When you grow up like I did, where you didn't get a lot of love, then you always worry that you will run out of

love. Getting past the idea that it was all about me getting more love was really hard. I hate to admit it, but I've spent most of my life asking, "What about me?" Now I've started to think, "What about them?" I think most of us want to be loving, but we don't know how to start.

A few months ago, I went into this African Art gallery. I got to know the owners, and I had this vision of having a poetry reading in their gallery. It's a long story but now, every week, I host this poetry reading and twenty to fifty people show up. Now I see that I host the poetry reading because it's connected to my gift. There are a lot of people in their shells in that room... people who can come out if they get provoked a little bit. One lady who comes never got in touch with her creativity...but now she sings and plays the guitar...she is flawless. She said that my place was the first place where she has been able to come out and sing in front of an audience. Isn't that worth doing?

As I look back on my life, I can see how my gift has been happening the whole time. It's not like I'm doing so good myself, but I can just inspire people. I think it's the contrast between my past and who I am right

now. Most people have a hard life. That's just the way it is. But my story is right out there and it can inspire people. Then I provoke them to change. ■

"When you go to a job interview, the employer should ask you what your gift is. But they never ask. They want to know how fast you can type. We do everything backward in this culture. Your gift should be at the root of it all."

Frequently Asked Questions about Core Gifts

What is a core gift and where does the idea come from?

Core gifts is an old idea, rooted in cultures around the world, which says that each person comes into the world with the capacity and desire to make a certain kind of contribution to the world around him/her. This contribution is called the person's "gift." The idea of the gift includes the acknowledgment that, in addition to this gift, each of us also has many other talents and skills. If we take the opportunity to identify this core gift we will unlock significant authority and capacity for change inside of us and in the world around us. Old community language says that our core gift forms the most important seed from which our life unfolds.

In older times, elders in communities guided youth through initiation processes that were designed to help a young person name his/her gift. The public acknowledgment of the young person's gift then formed the basic relationship between that young person and the community around him or her. Throughout the person's life, they would be offered opportunities to give their gift, learn about how to use it wisely, and be mentored by others with a similar gift. As youth initiation processes began to disappear from many cultures, there began a slow decline in the understanding and usage of gifts as one of the most powerful and universal tools for personal and community growth and healing. In addition, the gradual breakdown of community life, illustrated by the increasing isolation of neighbors from each other and the growing divide between the haves and the have-nots, has further contributed to the disappearance of the idea of gifts from modern life.

We are in a unique position now to reclaim this powerful idea and bring it back within the context of helping citizens who are in the margins of community to find

acceptance and purpose, and heal the wounds that exist whenever broken relationships and broken dreams occur. ■

Why is the idea of gifts becoming more common now in helping professions?

First, there has been a growing trend in the past decade for social service programs to find out the strengths of people asking for help in addition to describing the difficulties they are facing. This trend has resulted in social service programs creating a list of a person's strengths,

but these strength lists fail to distinguish between "things a person can do" and "things they have a passion for and are likely to stick with." This is a critical distinction for both service users and service systems, since it is a primary basis for sustaining a person's hope and dramatically affects a person's desire to take action that will change his/her life. When a person is aware of his/her gift, they will often be highly motivated to give it in ways that will help reshape their lives and reduce reliance on social service systems. In this way, it is identified as the person's primary strength.

Second, many of the people who come to social service programs looking for help have begun to define their life solely in terms of the problems they face. When a person believes that they have a significant gift to offer others, they often feel motivated to not only change their life, but also begin to see themselves as someone worthy of respect, love, and acceptance. To be acknowledged for your gift can result in deep feelings of having been seen for who you really are.

Third, many of the people who use social service systems are in a struggle to figure out what the purpose of their life is. Why is all this happening? Why is my life so

We are in a unique position to reclaim this powerful idea and bring it back within the context of helping citizens in the margins of community find acceptance and purpose, and heal the wounds that exist whenever broken relationships and broken dreams occur.

hard right now? This kind of deep questioning can be aided by the idea that the person really does have a purpose to their life, and that the problems they are facing are worth getting through in order to get back to what is important to them about living. For most of us, knowing we have skills is not much of a “reason to live.” But believing you have a unique and worthwhile gift to contribute can be a significant reason to keep moving forward. It is a foundation for hope. ■

What is the difference between skills, talents, and gifts?

The differences between skills, talents, and gifts are significant, and form a basis for establishing the importance of gifts. **Skills** are things you have learned how to do and may or may not enjoy or feel motivated to do. Example: “I have learned the skills of helping resolve conflicts between people, but I don’t want to do it and I don’t enjoy doing it. I don’t really like conflict.”

Talents are things you have an innate capacity for at birth. You are drawn towards opportunities to learn about and engage in a talent throughout the course of your life. Example: “I have learned the skills of helping resolve conflicts, and felt like I had a natural ability to learn about it. I enjoy learning about different ways people can resolve conflict, and look forward to opportunities where I can be mediator.” Out of your list of talents, your **Gift** is the talent which you feel the deepest connection to, most compelled to learn about, and eager to do. In addition, you also have some firsthand knowledge of the suffering that can result when this gift is not given. Example: “I

have the gift of helping others resolve conflicts. All my life I have been interested in why people sometimes can’t get along and how to help them come to peaceful agreements. When I see a situation where people are not getting along, I feel compelled to get involved. Last year, I became a volunteer mediator in my spare time because I was so interested in it. In my early life, my parents used to fight a lot, and now I just want things to be peaceful.” ■

Can a person have more than one gift?

If you use the framework of skills, talents, and gifts as the way to understand the different levels of capacity in humans, then everyone has one gift. Your gift is the talent which you are most motivated to learn about and use in your daily life. Remember, in addition to this one gift, you have multiple talents and skills that make you an enormously capable, complex, and valuable individual. ■

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“It just gets you deep to the core. I have relationships with clients that are fundamentally different after helping them find their gift. I recognize how many judgements, prejudices, and fears I have about people ...and how deeply homeless people are hurt by not being seen for who they really are.”

Philip Bates,
El Hogar,
Sacramento

John Black, Modesto



“My gift is my ability to develop relationships between people. I do this by using my personality, being able to communicate well, taking advantage of opportunities to develop relationships, and being honest and friendly.”

The onset of my illness came at age 25. I remember talking with my mother and father and I would see a tear come down their eyes. It was a tear of pain. I remember hearing voices say, “You’re never going to measure up to the gentleman your Dad is.” That would rip my heart out.

During that time, I couldn’t seem to form any relationships...or if I did they would be gone soon. After a while, I had lost all my personal and professional relationships, and I believed they would never come back.

The other day I saw a friend of mine that I knew before I got sick. His tears of disgust during my illness turned to tears of joy as I told him my story. I have gone to great lengths to learn and practice the recovery principles of honesty, integrity, faithfulness, and trust. Now I know how to keep a relationship once it comes into my life. I can build them and keep them long lasting. It is my gift.

When I first heard someone say I had a “gift,” I was very resistant. But knowing my gift has made a big difference in my life. It helped me because I could look back and see my gift, even as a child, and how it got torn down during my illness. It also has brought me a new sense of direction and purpose. My whole goal now is continuing my education in ways that will help me to improve my communication skills, which is directly related to my gift.

Already, my written and verbal skills have skyrocketed. I’m working toward a B.A. in organizational leadership. My long-term goal is to be a “connector” or public relations person in a company where I can make a difference for lots of people.

I’m working now for Telecare as a mental health service coordinator. I see the mental health system as too often isolating people—they wrap a cycle of services right around them and it cuts off people’s hopes for being in the mainstream of the community. I use my gift to help others bring out their gifts and make connections in the community. I now have all kinds of relationships with businesses and media sources, and many projects have come out of it as a result. For example, there is now a weekly Thursday evening “Blues Buffet” series at a local restaurant where people can meet, relax, and listen to music. I have also organized two city-wide “Day of Hope” events, and a concert to raise funds for clean and sober organizations.

Now I have people who respect me as a gentleman with a good heart—not unlike my father before me. That makes me proud. ■

“I had high hopes for myself when I was a child...those dreams were lost when I got sick. Knowing my gift has focused me on rebuilding those once shattered dreams.”

Does having a gift or talent mean I am better than others at doing these things?

No, not necessarily. It can be confusing to understand the idea of gifts because modern culture has changed the original meanings of the words **gift** and **talent**. The new meanings of “gifted” or “talented” are most often reserved for people whose abilities far exceed the usual. The original meanings did not imply extraordinary ability, but rather were meant to describe the primary contributions that a person wanted to make to those around them. Most important, in the older definitions, every person was “gifted.” For example, having a gift for motivating others does not necessarily mean I am better at this than others. Instead, it means that I have a strong desire to learn about motivation, a natural inclination towards it, and an interest in helping to encourage and motivate others.

The word **talent** goes back to the German word for weighing the currency of gold. Talent, in the context of human ability, also has in it the idea of weight or responsibility. Just as you would not waste gold, you would not waste talent. Implied in this is that each of us has the responsibility to bring our talents to the world. ■

Does everyone have a gift?

Yes, everyone has a gift. You may not have taken the time to identify it, but it is active and being used by you in your daily life. Each of us uses our gift, along with our many skills and talents, to make decisions and get through each day. By taking the time to identify and acknowledge your gift, you can tap the power of it more fully in all areas of your life and also focus on learning more about how to use it. ■

Isn't it bragging to say you have a core gift?

No! Remember, everyone has a gift. In that way, you have nothing to brag about! But more important, this core gift is an innate capacity you were born with—it was given freely to you, and didn't have to be earned. Although you may work hard to understand and give this gift, the origi-

nal seed of it was a gift to you. Thus, it is important to feel humble about your gift—no matter if it appears small or large to you or others. The primary reward you will receive is natural feelings of “being at home” when you are giving it, not the attention you receive from others. ■

How can knowing your gift be useful to you?

Knowing our gift can increase our willingness to engage with ourselves and others in the following ways:

1. When we know our gift it strengthens our confidence and feelings of self-worth. It can help to change our orientation from despair to hope when we are in the midst of difficult times.
2. When we believe we have a gift it tells us that we have a value to our community and an important contribution to make. We have an increased desire to act.
3. When others acknowledge our gift, it provides an opportunity to feel deeply honored and seen. Some individuals with severe experiences of feeling unwanted and rejected have said that discovering their gift in the presence of others was the first time they felt like they had been seen for who they “really” were.
4. Knowing you have a gift reconfirms that the fundamental descriptor of who you are is a gift, not a deficit or the current difficulties you are facing. In this way, the gift provides a counterbalance to the suffering and hard times we all have faced.
5. Similarly gifted individuals can develop strong bonds, mentor each other, and feel compelled to stand by each other in times of trouble. Knowing your gift helps you to know who your allies are and develop friendships that are deeply rooted.
6. If you are tentative about joining a group or becoming involved in an activity, you can get engaged by finding ways to give your gift within the activities of the group. Because you have a talent in this area, and you feel motivated to give it, it is likely others will see you as useful and welcome you in.

7. The gift can be a touchstone for you...a feeling of security and comfort in times of trouble or confusion. You can come back to it when you are at any transition point in your life, considering how your gift can help you in this situation. Because your gift can cause trouble in your life when you give it too much or unwisely, you may also reflect on how your gift has influenced the current situation in ways that may not be helpful. ■

How can knowing a person's gift be useful to a helping professional, family member, or other interested person?

There are many practical advantages to knowing a person's gift. Most of the advantages are tied to increasing motivation for change, having increased hope, and having specific information which can help the person to move forward in his/her life.

1. When people are facing some kind of difficulty or hard time, they have a deep desire to be seen and acknowledged for "all" of who they are, not just this current situation they are in. By acknowledging the person for their gift, and helping them find ways to use it, you are making a concrete statement that you believe this person is more than the current situation they are facing. It is a way to reveal your hope and confidence in the person.
2. Because a person's gift is central to who they are, they value it and are very motivated to learn about it and give it. When a person is frustrated or stuck, supporting them in finding ways to give their gift will often get the person moving again.
3. If you help a person discover their gift, your relationship with that person will deepen because you have seen and acknowledged them in the most important way they want to be seen in the world. Relationships often become more trusting, and the person will often have increased confidence in your ability to be helpful in other areas.
4. For individuals who are facing loneliness, knowing his/her gift can be the ticket into less isolation. When you know someone's gift, you can connect them with others who have similar gifts, find mentors, locate community activities where the person's gift will be valued, and have a specific positive way to introduce a person into situations where they want to be welcome and accepted.
5. For individuals who want to find jobs, the gift is a specific description of something the person wants to be engaged with and do. When you help a person get a job where they can give their gift during part of their workday, they are highly motivated to be in that workplace and be successful.
6. When you are helping a person who has little confidence and low feelings of self-worth, reminding them about or helping them to find their gift will often reorient the person to think of him- or herself as someone with valuable contributions to make and worthy of respect and love. Their courage and confidence in themselves often rise and they will become willing to change their life. ■

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"Why is the gift work important to do? Because it's a front door approach. It asks who a person really is, rather than how their life has gone wrong and what I can do to fix it. When you know who a person really is, you know how to help them go forward."

**Inta Marie-Sage,
El Hogar,
Sacramento**

Darlynn Mann, Sacramento



“My gift is struggling with harmony and balance. I do this by not wearing a mask, staying on the edge of the flock, getting grateful, showing strength through my stories, and making it happen.”

As a former homeless person, I can tell you that by the time you reach homelessness you feel bad about yourself. My self-esteem was right in the gutter. Being penniless makes you feel worthless. Knowing my core gift put me back in touch with what I am made of. I had forgotten.

I think when we are young our gifts shine brightly. Then for some people their gifts get trampled down. You try to bring it out, it gets knocked down again and again. After a while, you don't bring it out anymore. To remember that I have, and always have had, a gift—I knew it was true and it lifted me and helped me to put it all in perspective. It gives me something to rebuild. Looking at your gift you are looking at real truth about yourself. I'm not just a drunk and a whatever...the bottom line is that I am alright. Many people don't know the truth about themselves. The staff at El Hogar made a plaque for me with my gift written on it and it's made a lot of difference to me. I show the other ladies in the house who have low self-esteem.

Part of my gift is that I'm willing to say what has to be said, even if it's not popular. It's not always easy, but I can do it. There is a woman who lives in the building who doesn't have any legs. Somebody stole her laundry. There were people creating all kinds of gossip about "who done it." I had to confront them...I had to say that I wasn't going to let anyone take the blame

without having hard evidence. I am the defender of the underdog. After telling everyone so, I came in my apartment and read my gift statement — and felt real good about myself.

I've always been a storyteller. That's part of my gift. Until I did the core gift interview I didn't even really realize it, but I use a particular story that gives people hope. First of all, I've thought back and recognized the big things that have happened in my life. I tell people about the ordeals I have been through, what happened to make it change, and how it is now. I have a lifetime of stories to tell. I tell them to people who need help, at AA meetings...I know my story lifted one man out of a deep, deep depression.

When people ask me about gifts, I tell them that my gift is the "good stuff" about me. Stuff that is true that I had forgotten. I think even the people who appear to be real bad people could do this gift interview and come out with some good they were born with. ■

"...for some people, their gifts get trampled down. Knowing my core gift put me back in touch with what I am made of. I had forgotten."

Does a person's gift change over time?

The person's gift does not change, but their understanding of it and ability to use it can change dramatically. This is particularly true for those of us who take the time to identify our gift and seek to bring it more fully into our life. For instance, if your gift is "to motivate others," then your gift will always be "to motivate others." However, you will continue to learn skills throughout your life that will increase your ability to motivate others. By remembering experiences from your own life when others did not provide help by motivating or encouraging you may also increase your understanding of why it is so important to give this gift to others. You also will begin to notice other people who are good at motivation, and will have a desire to spend time with those individuals so you can learn from each other. Old stories from cultures around the world tell us that each of us comes into this life and leaves this life with a gift and spends the time in between understanding and giving it. ■

How do you help a person identify his or her gift?

There are three primary ways to help a person identify his/her gift.

First, there are social service programs in California and elsewhere using an interview method called Core Gift Identification. This process, developed over the past five years by people working in helping professions, takes about an hour and results in a person being able to state their gift and also their primary talents. The core gift and talents can then be utilized as primary strengths towards helping the person make changes in their life. This process has been used successfully across a wide span of youth and family, mental health, employment, homeless, and welfare-to-work programs.

Second, you can help a person to identify the general area of his/her gift by helping them to see the themes that have kept recurring throughout their life that fall into the category of "what I have contributed to situations I have been in." If the person can recall a wide variety of situations, and identify what he/she has brought to those situations, patterns will emerge. It is important to help the person remember family memories, school and work experiences, friends, and community volunteer work. With each experience, ask the person to tell you what they

contributed, more than anything else, to that situation. Oftentimes, one theme keeps recurring which is in the general area of the person's gift.

Third, according to many cultural and spiritual traditions, a person's gift is connected to their wounds. A person who has suffered in some significant way will feel compelled to bring the opposite experience to others. For instance, a person who was rejected by their family or significant people in their life may have a gift for bringing unconditional love to others. A person who was discouraged from using their imagination may bring the gift of ideas and creative thinking to others. A person who was part of a chaotic family may bring a gift of structure and organization to others. A person whose family held the secret of abuse or alcoholism may bring the

gift of telling the truth. By helping a person to understand the significant suffering they have experienced, they will often be able to identify their gift and further understand why it is so important to give this gift to others. ■

...simply listing a person's skills fails to make the distinction between "things a person can do" and "things they can do, have a passion for, and are likely to stick with." This is a critical distinction since it is a primary basis for sustaining a person's hope and also dramatically affects a person's desire to take action that will change his/her life.

Who is qualified to help a person identify his or her gift?

In older times, village elders were often responsible for helping a young person to identify his/her gift. The idea of the gift itself informs us that, regardless of degrees and training, some people will have the gift of helping others to know their gift. Some people struggle with the task while others feel immediately comfortable, engaged, and talented.

The ability to help another know his/her gift does not require traditional social service training or degrees. Community organizers, mentors, family members, friends, employment providers, therapists, youth workers, spiritual advisors, case managers . . . almost any person with strong interest and a desire to build their communication craft in this area can learn the basic skills of gift identification. As a start, all of us, by reflecting back to a person when we have seen them do something powerful or particularly meaningful, can help a person begin to notice their talents and gift.

Organizations that have gained proficiency in gift identification have the common threads of 1) having an intense interest in learning about the history of gifts from multiple cultural perspectives, 2) designating a small group of employees to experiment with gift identification methods and gain proficiency, 3) encouraging and supporting those employees to meet with each other and share what they are learning on a regular basis, 4) finding ways to bring the ideas and stories about gifts into the everyday conversation of the workplace, and 5) employees being aware of and having acknowledged their gifts to each other. ■

Can knowing your gift have any negative consequences?

When you know your gift, you realize you have a very powerful capacity inside you. The choices you make about how and when to use it determine whether or not it is helpful or not helpful to you and others around you. For instance, again using the gift of motivation as an example, a person could choose to use this gift to try and manipulate or control a person for his or her own selfish benefit. On the other hand, the same person could use this same gift of motivation to help a person decide to stop using harmful drugs. Using your gift wisely requires being attentive to your values and what you believe is important as you make decisions about how to use your gift.

Giving your gift will bring great joy into your life, but also can bring difficulty. Sometimes another person will react strongly to you when you are giving your gift. They may be challenged by your wisdom and strength in this area, or because you gave your gift in a way that was seen as not helpful for some reason . . . maybe it was the way you said something or the forcefulness with which you entered the situation. When you are giving your gift, others will often see you as powerful, and that can cause conflict as well as the possibility for making a significant contribution. Learning how to give your gift in a way that finds acceptance is one of the challenges of life. ■

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“This gift work has had a profound influence on me. It has provided a way of looking at the past roads and seeing how the twists and turns have all been part of my trying to find what my place is and what I need to be doing. It fits so well with recovery because it asks the question: What are you really here to do?”

**Rozanne Miller,
La Casa\Telecare,
Long Beach**

Susan Hagar, Long Beach



“My gift is to create or re-awaken hope. I do this by helping others to link their emotions to their actions, confirming their usefulness, and showing faith in them.”

At the Village, we help people get jobs. We are working under boot camp time restrictions to get people battle-ready for community employment. How do we maximize the time we have with them?

We are doing good work, but it is not the best we can do. A more profound difference will occur as we further commit to the belief that each person has a gift and our task is to help him or her discover that gift and find a job where they can give it.

We are working with individuals, most of whom have never been recognized for their individuality and their ability to contribute. Because of this, the affirmation of a person's uniqueness as worthy of consideration and recognition is the most powerful tool we have. It causes the person to think about the possibilities of hope.

Using the idea that each person has a specific gift as the fundamental expression of our commitment to the individual serves three functions.

First, it can awaken in the individual thoughts about themselves that are healthy, bringing the positive into focus and establishing the possibility of hope. Because of the intimacy and intensity level that the core gift identification experience creates, this awakening of hope can be very powerful and long-lasting.

Second, we have personalized information to plug into our employment framework. This helps the job developers to identify specific jobs, the employers to know something unique and powerful about the person, and sends the message to the person that they matter to us—we have taken the time to get to know them.

Third, and most powerful, it will reveal to us their desire. We can teach bus schedules, but we cannot teach desire—and desire is the only thing that will make the person get on the bus and go to work every day. We can get a person job after job, but if the job does not fulfill even a part of their desire, they will not stay at the job.

Believing each of us is gifted, and taking the time to discover and use those gifts, is the foundation for all the work we do. ■

"A more profound difference will occur as we further commit to the belief that each person has a gift and our task is to help him or her discover that gift and find a job where they can give it."

Can a person be too fragile to be able to identify and use his/her gift?

Yes, however it is important not to make assumptions about a person's ability to know or use their gift based on traditional stereotypes that have been a part of having a disability, being homeless, facing addictions, lacking significant schooling, being too young or too old, or not being able to "think clearly."

...you are making a concrete statement that you believe this person is more than the current situation they are facing. It is a way to reveal your hope and confidence in the person.

It is also important to separate out the process of helping a person to *identify their gift* from helping them to *use it in their life*. A person who is experiencing severe emotional trauma, a psychotic break, or other kinds of disorientation is probably not in a state where they could identify

their gift. The questions or the process might prove too difficult, or might raise strong feelings that are not helpful in their current condition. On the other hand, a person who is in this same condition may benefit from being reminded about the gifts, talents, and skills they possess as a way of helping them to reclaim feelings of self-worth and identify which of those attributes might be helpful in their current situation. Traditional wisdom from many cultures teaches that, when you are in some kind of trouble in your life, you go back to your gift and use it to help you find your way. ■

The *Core Gift Identification* interviewing process has been used successfully across a wide span of youth and family, mental health, employment, homeless, and welfare-to-work programs. You can get further information about this method by contacting:
Community Activators, (206) 463-3666.



"The first thing I did after the gift training was go out and pick a really hard person to do it with. I wanted to see if it would really work. The man's hallucinations stopped, he articulated really well, and he finished the process in one sitting. He said he got chills afterwards, and he wanted his gift put up on the wall with everyone else's."

Michele Ruble
Home Center, Inc.,
Fresno



"Knowing your gift is a matter of personal dignity.

This seed of dignity is bigger than the degree of tragedies or disappointments we experience. It can be hindered by too much suffering and abuse, but it can not be taken away from us. Our dignity lies in knowing our path, and having the courage for a renewed start to the giving of our gift.

Gina Anderson, Community Activators



