

Our Communities Shape the Leaders of Tomorrow!

Join **Strength-n-Community** Today!

Strength in Community: Our Vision

The chain is only as strong as its weakest link, for if it fails, the chain fails, and the object that it has been holding up falls to the ground.

— Thomas Reid, 1786; [Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man](#)

It's a powerful message that many of us were first introduced to via the modern version of the proverb: "We're only as strong as our weakest link", meaning that when one of us fails, we all fail. The idiom is used in many sectors, including sports, business, the military and the concept isn't limited to people. **From cooperative hunting by wolves to the establishment of international treaties, the idea that we are only strong when we are *all* strong applies to any endeavor for which a group, or Community, must form in order to achieve a common goal.** Nowhere is this more true than in our neighborhoods, whether we live in small towns or big cities. For example, we could successfully make our local school a drug-free zone, but if parents are abusing their medications, then the effort will likely have limited success. However, if we all made the health of our communities a high priority, then we propose that many of the problems that suppress struggling neighborhoods, and even the nation, would disappear.

There are a handful of places in the world in which the health of the entire Community is a top priority. There, the natural world flourishes, children are healthy and happy, crime and illegal drugs are almost nonexistent, people live longer lives and enjoy a greater number of healthy, active years. Such places have been named "[Blue Zones](#)" by the researchers in Sardinia who study them.

What accounts for their healthier lives? Diet and exercise certainly help people in Blue Zones (and everywhere else) to live longer and healthier lives. But physical health is

only part of how Blue Zones maintain widespread health. In the Okinawa Blue Zone, they call it *ikigai*, which means “that which makes one’s life worth living”.

Every Blue Zone has their own version of *ikigai*, but they all achieve it in a similar way. **They all build their beneficial practices on the foundation of Community.** Every Community member maintains a high level of *ikigai* through daily immersion in nature and activity in their many strong social networks. **Every Blue Zone maintains networks as a means of socializing, having fun, staying active, accomplishing chores and identifying residents who need help.** There’s no such thing as skipping a scheduled meeting in a Blue Zone. If you don’t show up, then group members come knocking to learn what’s holding you up. They either encourage you to rejoin them or they help you with the obstacle that prevented you from participating.

Imagine eating your main meal with everyone in your neighborhood, every day. It may or may not be your day to help prepare the meal. The food is tasty but **it’s the lifelong sense of belonging, knowing that you would be missed if you didn’t attend and knowing you’ll enjoy the company of everyone there**, that accounts for how the practice nourishes the body, mind and the spirit. Everyone from the age of 7 to 97 contributes to the functioning of the Community by harvesting vegetables, fish and gathering herbs.

It is their foundation of Community that accounts for the exemplary lifestyle lived by Blue Zone residents.

Blue Zones demonstrate that the perception of *belonging* is powerful. It can change the decisions made by young people. It influences our mood and overall mental health. Strong communities can have the power to affect the decisions made by, and improve the lives of, its members.

Strength in Community sees the potential to make the entire Blue Planet into a Blue Zone! For the next 10 years, the goal of Strength in Community is to provide a place where youth and young adults are nourished by the sense of Community we provide!

We cannot replicate every beneficial aspect of life in a Blue Zone. For example, the connection shared by 2 friends, now over the age of 100, who have lived, worked,

played and been educated side-by-side for 95 years will likely remain rare. Our goal is to apply the ideas developed by Blue Zone communities to our local neighborhoods.

Strength in Community: The Community

Ventura Village (VV) in Minneapolis has been considered a "bad neighborhood" for many years. Neighborhood reviews like areavibes.com give VV an F for employment, crime, and schools.

In Minneapolis, 20% of youth (ages 13-18) will suffer a severe mental illness while they're a teenager. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among youth in Minnesota, and surveys show increasing rates of youth depression, anxiety, and suicide in the State.

One of the leading factors is peer pressure. Youth are constantly weighing the desire to feel connected (to *belong*) against doing the right thing, maintaining the values that their parents have instilled in them or maintaining their own values.

We know that with the right support, teenagers and young adults can build the determination to leave dangerous situations, break bad habits, make wise choices, finish their education, and find their inner compass by which to guide their lives in a constructive direction. We also believe that when these young people enter maturity and take on leadership responsibilities, their communities will see a gradual revival of these individuals, their neighborhoods, and communities.

Strength in Community: The Mission

Our mission is to connect underserved Community members to available resources to first meet their immediate needs, and then to achieve their healthiest selves. Once physical and mental health are stable, to identify their life goals. It's difficult for anyone to set goals when self-esteem is low. We will facilitate our clients' discovery of their strengths and abilities to develop confidence in their capacity to create a bright future for both themselves and their community.

By 2032, we intend to have one or more exemplary communities in Minneapolis to which other neighborhoods can look for leadership and ideas.

We maintain a presence in VV and our location is common knowledge amongst Minneapolis youth. Our facility provides access to resources that helps underserved Community members become their healthiest selves. It's difficult for anyone to set goals when self-esteem is low. That's why we facilitate client discovery of their strengths and abilities to develop confidence in their capacity to create a bright future for both themselves and their community. They receive help, building themselves up and helping others. Client physical and mental health is our first priority. Once stabilized, they learn how to cope with stress and conflict in everyday life. They identify the sources of support and stress that already exist in their lives and how to meet their own emotional needs.

Optimism doesn't mean that you're blind to the reality of the obstacles you face. It means that you remain motivated to seek a solution to whatever problems arise.

About Us

Minneapolis, Minnesota-based non-profit Strength in Community, is at the forefront of enabling underprivileged youth to discover and develop their abilities into positions of leadership and income-generating skills to change their lives and the lives of everyone around them. In addition, the life skills that Strength in Community teaches helps youth to alter their perspectives and to avoid harmful behaviors, like prostitution, extremism, joining a gang or abusing drugs. Most importantly, Strength in Community clients will experience the effect that a sense of Community has on them and others. They will learn the change that can happen when a community can exert on themselves and their entire neighborhood. can shift the power dynamics from domination by criminals and gangs to the residents, many of whom have been victims

The creator of Strength in Community is Susan L Solarz, PhD. Dr Solarz had a fulfilling career with her expertise in conservation biology and policy making. She finds that her knowledge of government policy and her experience drafting and lobbying for policy applies directly to her new career in Community organizing. Dr Solarz currently advises an informal neighborhood group dedicated to adding speed bumps to their most

dangerous street. The official limit is 20 mph, but cars and trucks routinely reach speeds over 50 mph. Dangerous drivers have forced parents to prohibit their children from crossing the street—which they must do in order to play on grass rather than asphalt. Dr. Solarz has worked for 5 years to change the current cynical and hopeless perspectives people have in her neighborhood, but without the resources needed to have a long-lasting, positive impact. Her goal with Strength in Community is to enormously increase the number of people she can help. To provide more services than she currently can and most importantly, to fund a campaign to develop a strong sense of Community in VV residents.

On a warm day this summer, while she was collecting her mail, a local teen came rushing through Dr Solarz' front gate, out of breath and shaking in fear. Susan closed the gate behind the girl, Nadia, who grew calm as Susan repeatedly assured her that she was safe. Susan learned that Nadia had been running from a woman who tried to rob her as she ran an errand for her mother. Once the crisis was resolved, Susan asked Nadia why she chose this yard to seek safety. Her answer was, "Oh, everyone knows that we can always come here if we need help". It was that incident, and several similar ones, that inspired Dr Solarz to provide an official safe place for youth. Strength in Community, the place, is where underprivileged youngsters come to air their frustrations and get the attention that their often-overworked parents can't always provide. The youth in this neighborhood want to learn how to talk through conflict instead of resorting to violence.

I believe that to meet the challenges of our times, people must develop a much greater sense of Community responsibility. We must care, not just for ourselves and our families, but also for our neighbors; not just for residents, but also for the homeless and for the abandoned animals in our neighborhoods. Do not shoo the starving cat begging for food at your door. Instead, open your door, and give him the care that he needs. For **only when the weakest are made strong will we achieve harmony**. Local responsibility is the key to the

survival of our planet. It is the best foundation for world peace.

—Strength in Community founder, Susan L Solarz

Cat Therapy

Strength in Community also administers a feline rescue operation that most clients participate in by spending time with the cats, petting, grooming, using toys to encourage the cats to exercise, feeding, and even talking with the cats. Some children and teens benefit tremendously from airing their problems by talking to a cat who is happy to listen and even make eye contact once in awhile. Cats don't interrupt and they certainly don't judge. Clients benefit enormously from talking or just sitting with a purring cat on their lap.

Strength in Community serves as a beacon for youth in Minneapolis by providing a safe environment in which to regain their health and teach them important life skills. High rates of poverty and overcrowded schools tend to lead to school dropouts and increased gang activity, particularly for vulnerable teenagers from poorer socioeconomic origins, were some of the issues facing the young. The American kids who have participated in Strength in Community have been inspired to strive for educational success and to imagine a brighter future.

Services

Preventing and Resolving Societal Vices

There are several problems in VV that residents consider intractable, including a lack of affordable housing for larger families, little economic opportunity, gangs, elder care, an abandoned cat population, and crime (specifically, theft of cars, car parts, carjacking, illegal drug use and sales, theft of delivered packages, assault and reckless driving).

Resourceful Community Networking

Connect people and families to area resources that promote resilience, such as the education and tutoring services offered by Strength in Community. We also connect people to food pantries (which also provide pet supplies), alcohol and drug

rehabilitation, medical care, veterinary care and transportation to get to the resources they need.

Drug and Alcohol Treatment

Recurrent alcohol and/or drug use that results in clinically substantial impairment, such as health issues, incapacity, and the inability to fulfill important obligations at work, school, or home, is known as a substance use disorder (SUD).

Treatment for substance use disorders aims to assist patients in quitting drinking or using drugs and maintaining their abstinence. It takes a lifetime to recover. Being in recovery is challenging; therefore, we always come up with new strategies to prevent relapses.

Behavioral Health Care

Mental illnesses are categorized as psychological ailments characterized largely by a level of disorganization of the personality, intellect, and emotions that substantially impairs the person's ability to operate normally in a work environment and/or social settings.

A client's plan for mental health treatment is designed in collaboration with a mental health therapist (and family members if the client desires). It could also involve psychiatric medications, supplemental therapies, or mindfulness groups. Most often, a regimen of both therapy and medicine works well.

Help with Housing

We provide services for those who suffer from homelessness and for those who need low-income housing. We help people find housing that fits the size of their family. Many of the tenants in VV are of Somali heritage and have anywhere from 5 to 8 children yet they have trouble finding affordable rentals with more than 3 bedrooms. We also help with housing evaluations, connect people to hotels or emergency shelter units nearby, offer supportive case management to those residing in either emergency shelter or long-term supportive housing.

Navigators

Life Navigators manage their clients' daily requirements and treatment plans, including finding the best resources and care for them. To ascertain their client's requirements and make sure they are connected with the appropriate resources, Life Navigators may conduct intake interviews. They collaborate with multiple organizations or agencies and generally act as the go-between for clients and service providers. When problems

emerge between customers and service providers, Life Navigators also serve as the mediator between the two sides.

Life Skills

Strength in Community offers classes on important life skills. We teach everything from how to balance a checkbook and how to save for retirement, to coping with stress, different styles of learning and the process of applying for and maintaining a job. We find that young people are eager to learn practical skills because they make everyday life easier.

The greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated." — Mahatma Gandhi