

Construction

A metaphor for the many different ways human services promote well-being



The story you're telling:

Just as building a strong house requires certain materials, building well-being requires community resources, social relationships, and opportunities to thrive. When these materials are not available, people and communities may have difficulty weathering life's storms.



Strategic way to redirect thinking away from patterns such as:

Family Bubble, Human Services=Black Box, Human Services=Direct Services, Human Services=Charity, Well-being=Financial Health, Willpower



How to apply and extend this metaphor:

- **Well-being is built just as a structure is built:** Making this analogy explicitly helps to establish that people's well-being is not solely of their own making, but is influenced by what others do and the resources available.
- **Every building needs a strong foundation:** Helps to establish the need for support early on, before problems occur. Also, because the foundation is just a start, this aspect of the metaphor establishes the need for ongoing support.
- **The materials available affect the building process:** Channels attention to the role of social determinants that affect outcomes, such as income and education.
- **Many different types of materials are required:** Comparing different building materials to different aspects of well-being (social, mental, spiritual, etc.) is important, lest the public rely on the dominant, limiting assumption that well-being consists only of financial self-sufficiency or physical health.
- **Construction is a process, not an event; ongoing work and maintenance are part of the job:** Provides a sound rationale for ongoing or long-term access to human services.

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Concepts and ideas included in this frame element:

- **Constructing a house requires a team of specialists—such as architects, electricians, plumbers, among others—to coordinate and work together. The same holds true for human services.** By specifying a variety of human services roles, communicators can help fill in the public’s understanding of the sector and highlight invisible aspects of the field, such as research and advocacy.
- **Structures can be threatened by spotty construction:** Establishes the need for additional supports for those who had inadequate support—especially early in life – and can also be used to make the case for resources targeted toward children and youth.
- **Structures can be threatened by unpredictable weather.** Provides a way to talk about factors beyond individual control, such as unexpected illnesses or an economic downturn.



User Notes:

Be sure to use the metaphor in such a way that the thing being constructed is well-being, not a person. By focusing the metaphor on the societal goal – broadly distributed well-being – people are less likely to focus on individual characteristics or “worthiness” of human services recipients.