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grateful  
CONFIDENT  
STRONG  
RI  
ENCOURAGEMENT  
DIGITAL VERSION

# CHOOSING STRENGTHS

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Illustration and Design: Tim Lane



Welcome to the  
Digital Version of

# CHOOSING STRENGTHS

St Luke's Innovative Resources is delighted to bring you the interactive, versatile, digital version of this conversation-building resource, first published as a hard copy card set packaged in a polypropylene box.

You can:

- swipe through the digital cards, one at a time
- swipe through a row of thumbnail images at the bottom of the screen
- bookmark/tag images
- write, scribble or draw on the digital cards—you may want to circle a relevant statement or scribble notes as a card is discussed
- add and drag notes anywhere on the images



- highlight, draw and write in multiple colours
- take a screen shot and access the image in your photo gallery
- send the image to the person you are working with so they have a copy
- print the image and mail it to the person so they have a hard copy
- save the image in your files as a record of your conversation.

## **How can I use this digital tool remotely with groups or individuals?**

If you are running groups or meetings using Skype, Zoom or other similar video conferencing tools, you can use our digital cards and tools in a number of different ways.

A good place to start is to give the group or person some time to get to know the cards:

- The facilitator can share their screen, and scroll through the images so everyone can see.
- Point out the different features of the card set including the types of images, the format of the words (if any), the suits (if relevant) and any other unique features.
- Show them some of the features such as the scribble and text tools.

### **Deliberate Selection**

- As you scroll through the cards, invite the person or group to pick cards that jump out at them for any reason. Perhaps it is the image that catches their attention. Perhaps it is a word or a question, or some other quality of the card. It may be a card they are curious about, or would find most helpful to focus on, or think is very important, or it may be a card that matches something they are thinking about or experiencing at the moment, or even a card that expresses something they have never thought about before.
- As the facilitator, you may wish to choose one or two cards to prompt an activity or discussion.

## Random Selection

An alternate way of getting activities started is to select images randomly, for example:

- Ask each person to close their eyes and randomly say, 'Stop!' as the facilitator swipes through the images.
- Or ask each person to choose a number between 1 and X (X being the number of cards in the set). This is the number of their randomly selected card.
- Or use the timer on your phone set to a chosen interval—5 seconds, 10 seconds, etc. Stop on the image that is on screen when the timer dings.

Many videoconferencing tools allow you to put people into groups using 'breakout' rooms. So you may want to invite two or more people to discuss what a particular card means to them, and then come back to the whole group.

## Some questions for reflection and conversation

Whether you use a deliberate or random selection method, you can then build the conversation by inviting each person to read or comment on their card, if they wish.

Facilitators can then ask individuals or groups questions like:

- What does this card mean to you?
- Have you thought about the topic on the card before?
- On a scale of 1-10 how important is this to you?
- Can you think of a time when this card was particularly relevant? What happened?
- When this is happening, what is the effect?
- When this is not happening, what is the effect?
- Do you know anyone who is really good at this?
- What do they do?
- What is one simple thing you could do today or tomorrow that would make a difference?
- How will you notice the effects? (Some people ask for feedback, and others prefer to notice carefully how it feels inside themselves and what the effect is on others.)

In the booklet written especially for the card set you have chosen, you will find a lot more information. It includes the purpose of this card set, its origins and practice base, things you should take into consideration before using the cards, and many creative ideas for using the cards. Please adapt the suggestions to the digital environment.

**Don't hesitate to call us for support  
in using this digital resource.**



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

‘Life is the sum of all your choices.’

**Albert Camus**

St Luke’s Innovative Resource wishes to thank the many people whose choices have made this resource possible.

Firstly, to Tim Lane, illustrator and designer: The array of graphic styles offered throughout this card set, and the creative interpretations chosen to illustrate the concepts on each card provide an abundance of aesthetic delights for users of the cards. We know that sitting behind these cards are countless hours of drawing, stitching, cutting, winding, sorting, scanning, placing and photographing in order to create the ‘world’ that is portrayed in each card. We know too, that Tim’s daughter, Eshe, was instrumental in the creation of some of the artwork. Thank you to the Lanes!

To the team at Innovative Resources—from sales and customer support, to editorial, business operations, print production and warehouse distribution: Thank you all. Publications become what they are through countless individual and collective choices.

And finally to you, representative of the ‘every person’ who makes both big and small choices on a daily basis: In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen.’ Choose wisely.

I can choose

INTEREST

I can  
choose  
to be



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I can choose to be

GENERALIST

I can choose to be

SPECIALIST

## STRENGTHS AND CHOICES

For over 30 years St Luke's Anglicare (in Bendigo, Central Victoria) has played a pioneering role in articulating the importance of strengths. St Luke's has endeavoured to embed the principles of strengths-based practice within its own organisational culture, and has inspired and supported many other human service professionals and organisations to attempt the same.

As the not-for-profit publishing arm of St Luke's, Innovative Resources is charged with the responsibility of producing strengths-based materials that can be used to generate conversations about strengths across different age groups and cultures. Such conversations almost inevitably lead to reflection, discussion and storytelling about our values, feelings, goals, and purpose.

The profound and very simple belief at the core of strengths-based practice is that everyone has strengths. What are our strengths and where do they come from? These two questions have fascinated philosophers, psychologists and everyday thinkers for centuries.

At first glance many of us tend to think of strengths as personality traits that we inherit or learn as we journey through life. These certainly are great strengths, but that is not the sum total of our

strengths. Our qualities, capacities, relationships, actions, values, stories, experiences, skills and material resources can all be strengths as well. The 'strengths approach' holds that all of these strengths are our greatest assets to call on for making the most of the ups and downs of everyday life.

Fundamental to the use of strengths as catalysts for change is the concept of freedom: freedom to choose. In fact, we can also think of our strengths as the choices we make. While things are constantly happening in our lives (much of which may be beyond our control), we are still able to make choices about what we think and how we behave.

*Choosing Strengths* is a set of 36 cards from Innovative Resources in the rich tradition of strengths-based conversation-building tools. The *Choosing Strengths* cards are powerful reminders that our use of strengths is in our own hands. We can choose to adopt for ourselves any number of strengths from a huge array of possibilities.

Notwithstanding the significance of conditioning, our environment and our genetic makeup, we remain a species for whom choice gives meaning. *Choosing Strengths* clearly puts the responsibility

for 'making meaning' back onto each of us. While events will always happen, it is our choice as to how we make sense of these events. We are not victims of circumstances even though it is easy to attribute events as the causes of our thinking, feeling and behaviour.

Irrespective of the events that happen around us and to us, we can choose to see the glass as half-full or half-empty. We can choose to see ourselves as possessing great strengths or as riddled with deficits.

Perhaps because choice is such a ubiquitous part of our everyday lives, we may become overwhelmed or even hood-winked by the sheer volume of seemingly trivial choices presented to us. In the plethora of 'little choices' perhaps we risk losing consciousness of the bigger choices that are constantly shaping our identity. (Choosing which of the 54 favorite flavours of gelati to try on an outing to the city might be a fun activity but it may not help our struggle with authenticity and meaning a great deal!)

Paradoxically, it is sometimes when this overload of choice is restricted that we gain a clearer picture of the more significant choices we make. Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl writes in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*:

'Everything can be taken from a man [sic] but one thing: the last of his human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given

set of circumstances – to choose one's own way.'

Many readers will know that Viktor Frankl was imprisoned by the Nazis and lost his wife and all other family members in the German concentration camps. But for Frankl it was the very denial of so many choices in his internment that led to his discovery of his ultimate and immutable choice: who he actually WAS.

'When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves,' he writes.

It was Frankl, Rollo May, and others, who developed 'Existential Therapy' which has influenced all humanistic psychology including the work of William Glasser who went on to expound his own theories of human behaviour in Reality Therapy and Choice Theory.

It is our freedom to make affirming life choices in even dire circumstances that provides a common positive bond in all humanistic approaches.

Strengths approaches incorporate the optimism that underpins these philosophies of personal change while maintaining a broader view of the need to keep working at social change.

Not to choose is also to choose. Of what value are personal choice and freedom if they contribute to social structures that oppress and

diminish others? The strengths approach urges a constant vigilance for social justice because of the value that is placed on freedom and respect.

Sometimes ‘strengths’ are conceptualised as personality traits with an implied immutability or an inability to be changed. But personalities are not predetermined even if we are shaped by powerful genetic predispositions and environmental forces. While we all have personality patterns that can be described using strengths language it is also true that we are constantly making choices around our strengths.

- Which strengths will I employ in this situation to achieve the outcome I want?
- If I am unhappy with this part of my life, which strength can I adopt to create positive change?
- If I am stuck what can I do to move? Which strength can I put into action?
- Who do I know who has a strength I can learn from or even ‘borrow’ by asking for their help?

Thinking about strengths as being available for choice can be very

liberating. One does not have to feel trapped in any limited repertoire of strengths, there are many to choose from. Neither does one have to feel oppressed by fatalism. Choosing strengths is a long way from feeling like one is merely a parcel of knee-jerk reactions.

Strengths, choices and freedom inevitably co-exist—but as in all things there is a ‘shadow’. Recognising that one has the freedom to make real choices implies taking personal responsibility for one’s choices; *‘If the choice is mine how can I blame someone else?’*

Erich Fromm in his classic book *The Fear of Freedom* postulates that this freedom brings a responsibility that many people resile from, preferring to put their choice-making freedom into the hands of an external authority—God, the Church, the State, the Organisation, etc.

Taking responsibility for one’s decisions and recognising the array of strengths at one’s disposal can threaten the naive security that can come with ‘being looked after’ or controlled by someone else. But Fromm concludes that when we abrogate the opportunity to choose we actually choose a lesser identity for ourselves:

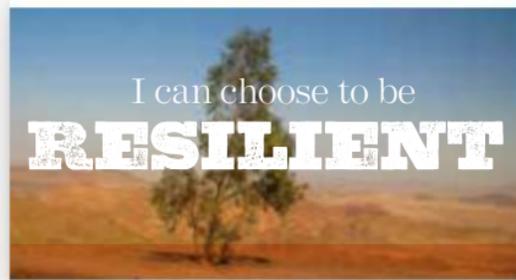
‘Man’s (sic) main task in life is to give birth to himself, to become what he potentially is. The most important product of his effort is his own personality.’

## THE ARRAY OF CARDS

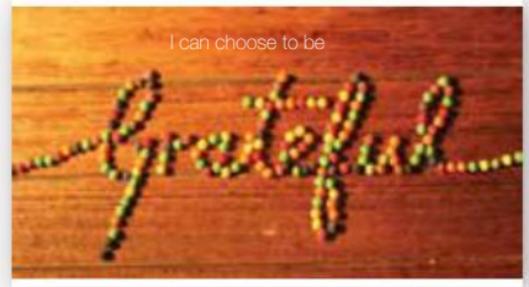
Here is the complete set of 36 *Choosing Strengths* cards.













## IDEAS FOR USING THE CARDS

Each *Choosing Strengths* card is designed to build conversations, tell stories, and help people think differently about strengths—the strengths they want to celebrate, the strengths they want to build further, and the strengths they admire in others.

They can be used to create conversational pathways about:

- Who we are
- What is important to us
- What we want to change
- How to use our strengths to take steps towards our goals
- The power of our own choices.

These strengths-based cards can be used in such settings as:

- Counselling
- Supervision
- Education
- Tutoring

- Management
- Parenting
- Employment services
- Goal-setting
- Team-building.

We hope that these cards will be messengers of hope and possibility for you as well as for the people with whom you live and work!

While there are a myriad of creative activities that can be found for using the cards, in general, these all fall into two broad methods.

### **The Three Ss: Spread, Scan and Select**

Firstly, there is the method known as ‘The Three Ss’—Spread, Scan and Select. Using this method, all or some of the cards are spread face up on a flat surface and participants are invited to scan the cards and make a selection. Sometimes spreading the cards on the floor can create a different dynamic. Participants are invited to walk around the cards and in so doing they have a more bird’s eye

view of the array of cards and they also engage their bodies more fully during the process of selection. This can open up learning and reflection in different ways.

The amount of time allowed for scanning the cards can vary enormously. Generally, the more complex the cards and the more reflective the activities, the more time is needed. As always though, it is preferable to move at a pace that participants are comfortable with. As in any therapeutic conversation, managing the available time well is an important skill.

## The Fourth S: Serendipity

The second method for using the *Choosing Strengths* cards is the fourth 'S'—Serendipity. Sometimes interesting learning occurs when a touch of random choice is introduced into a conversation using cards or other prompts. This method includes such activities as shuffling and dealing the cards, placing the cards face down on a surface, fanning the cards and having participants randomly select a card, playing a range of games that involve hiding and finding cards, lucky dips, random cards on chairs, selecting a card with eyes closed, and so on.

While none of the conversation-building materials created by Innovative Resources comes with a manual, it is always important

to use any tool in respectful, considerate and sensitive ways (please see the section in this booklet called 'Being Mindful'). There are no prescribed activities or rulebooks governing how to use any of Innovative Resources' card sets including *Choosing Strengths*. This means that users have a wide range of choices they can make as to when and how to use *Choosing Strengths*.

Here are some ideas for using the cards to spark your imagination:

### Personal Reflection

It is always useful to have access to materials that are well-made, look good and feel good. Surrounding ourselves with materials that are both functional and beautiful is pleasurable and life-affirming. It is perhaps especially beneficial during tough times, when we may need to be reminded that qualities such as aesthetic enjoyment, good design and creativity are not only possible, but also directly accessible to us.

The *Choosing Strengths* cards do not require a facilitator to introduce them. Almost anyone should be able to pick them up and find them useful as a reflective tool.

Some questions that might work as starters are:

- Which cards have the most appeal?

I can  
choose to be  
peaceful

I CAN CHOOSE TO BE

- Why might this be so?
- Which strengths am I aware of using right now?
- Which new strengths will I choose to use?
- Is there a strength I have used successfully in the past?
- Is there an event or a story that comes to mind when I think of that strength?
- Which strengths do I find most challenging to choose?

## Counselling

Everyone has strengths but finding a way to express these, use them and choose others can be difficult, especially in the face of stress and trauma. At times of challenge it is very easy to become enmeshed in the problem to such an extent that we can lose touch with the strengths we have and the times when the problem is absent or less active.

One of the primary understandings of strengths-based practice is the value of focusing on strengths and exceptions to the problem, as opposed to dwelling exclusively on problems and deficits.

*Choosing Strengths* can help focus conversations on strengths, goals, values and possibilities.

- Which cards come closest to describing strengths you see in yourself?
- Can you choose three cards and talk about a time when you used each of the strengths depicted in the cards?
- Did these strengths come naturally to you or did you have to consciously choose to use them?
- How did you know how to use these strengths? Did you learn from someone else? Did you learn by doing? Or did you learn in some other way?
- Did you get better at 'doing' this strength as you went along? If so, in what ways?
- Which card(s) represents one or more strengths you think would help you most at the moment? Why?
- What is one step you could take towards developing this strength a little more?
- Who do you know who might help you develop this strength?
- How will you know when you are using this strength more? What will you be doing differently?
- What will you notice?
- What will others notice?
- For something you are about to undertake, which 2 or more

cards represent the strengths you think will be of most value?

- Which card represents how you would like to be by the end of the year (or any other occasion)?
- What do you imagine you will be doing, thinking and feeling when you achieve this?
- How might you celebrate?

## Storytelling and Creative Writing

Storytelling can take place in groups, in pairs or in a solitary way within one's imagination via writing or journalling.

- Choose one card. Can you tell/write a story about a time when this quality featured? (Perhaps you experienced someone else demonstrating this quality, or you demonstrated it yourself.) Can you remember the first time/last time you experienced this quality?
- Place the cards face down and randomly choose 3-6 cards. Or shuffle and deal the cards. Can you tell/write a story using all of these cards?
- A variation is to leave the ending open and randomly choose another card that will give you clues to the ending of the story.
- Do you think these qualities are related? How was it to connect these strengths together in one story like this?

- Choose a card. Can you tell/write a story about what happens when this strength seems to disappear from our own individual life, or the life of our family, community, workplace, or world?
- What actions could you take to 'invite' the strength back?
- What if you chose to embody this strength? What is one simple thing you could do each day to demonstrate your own 'strength with this strength'?
- Can you use the cards to tell a story about your best, worst and funniest experiences today or this week?

## Navigating Transitions

Times of transition such as divorce, marriage, a new job, pregnancy, changing schools or moving house, can be full of creative potential, but they can also be times of uncertainty and vulnerability. They are times when choosing to focus on strengths rather than on deficits can make a world of difference.

- Can you think of a time when you were going through a significant change in your life?
- Is there a card that says something about how you made it through this time?
- When you want to change, how do you do it? Is there a card that represents a quality you draw on to help you or the

circumstances change?

- Which cards do you think are most helpful in times of need?

## Creating Your Own Card

It can be very powerful when people create their own cards. Facilitators, counsellors and teachers may wish to supply blank pages and invite students, clients and workshop participants to draw, paint or collage their own cards. They may want to make up different words, or take existing words from the cards and create their own images.

You can spark their imagination with questions such as:

- Is there a strength you are already focussing on in your life right now? If not, what strength would be most useful to you right now?
- What image would you put with this strength? Perhaps it is an object, an animal or an aspect of nature such as a plant, cloud or mountain? Or is it an inanimate object such as a table, a book or a quilt?
- What graphic style would you use to show this image? For example, is it something you would make or photograph or draw?

## Choosing a Strength of the Day

Another idea for using the cards is to select a single card that will be the focus for the day, week or month. There is also something delightfully serendipitous about randomly selecting a card and using this as the focus. Teachers speak of the fun and excitement that can be generated by placing a set of cards in a bag and having a lucky dip where a different student selects a card from the bag each day. The card can then be placed on the wall, on a shelf or in any prominent position. By focusing on a particular strength each day, a teacher, team leader, manager or facilitator can help build a culture of noticing strengths, as well as a strengths vocabulary.

Once a card has been selected, questions like the following can be asked:

- What does this card mean to you?
- What sorts of things will we see if we notice people 'doing' this strength (i.e. enacting this quality) today?
- What are 2 or 3 things you can do to practise this strength today?
- Are any of your family or friends good at this strength? What do



I can choose to be

ee

they do that tells you they are good at it?

- Can you find a poem or a quote that uses the word on the card that has been selected?

## Team-building and Leadership

The *Choosing Strengths* cards can be used as a refreshing window into the strengths of teams and leadership.

- Which 3 (or more) cards do you think are important strengths in effective leadership?
- Thinking of a team you are part of, which card do you associate with each person on the team?
- Which 3 cards represent qualities you are able to bring to the team?
- Which cards represent strengths your team already does well?
- Which cards represent strengths you would like to see your team develop further?
- Can you select a card that identifies a style of leadership you think your project, position or team needs right now?
- Is there a card that represents something you or your colleagues struggle with from time to time? Is there another card ( i.e. strength) that could help with this?

## Developing Strengths through Difficult Times

The recognition of choice is an empowering one. While we cannot always choose the experiences that come our way or the emotions that arise spontaneously within us, we can exercise choice in how we react to those experiences and emotions. Just as any exercise routine strengthens muscles in the body, the exercising of choice strengthens our choice 'muscle'. With practice we can become more flexible and skilled in how we apply choice to our emotions, actions and thoughts.

Anyone who has been on the planet for more than five minutes knows that things don't always go according to plan. As an inevitable part of living we face disappointments and loss. At times we may face disappointment in the behaviour of others; and at other times we may face disappointment in our own behaviour. We may experience sadness at the loss of species and the pollution of the environment; we may be angered and frustrated at the injustices and conflict we see in our world. We may face the dismay of realising our own contribution to these things. Many of us will experience illness and the death of loved ones. In the face of loss it is natural and appropriate that we experience grief. In fact, it is a

strength that we as individuals and as a society retain the ability to truly feel our losses and empathise with the suffering of others.

Within our own suffering, as well as within our joy, we can find the key to change and growth. While we may not choose difficult times, we can choose to allow them a respectful place in our lives, even to embrace them and be present with them rather than automatically trying to make them go away. We can search for the gifts contained in such experiences as sadness and even depression. If we choose to allow it, difficult times can help us to:

- reflect
- take stock
- let go
- slow down
- savour our own company
- change and move on
- soften our hard edges and develop compassion and humility
- awaken to beauty and tap into our own creativity
- practise courage, patience and endurance
- value our soul's longing for wholeness and connection
- sit more comfortably in 'not knowing'

- deepen our capacity to be still and to listen
- notice and draw on small everyday moments of upliftment
- accept contradictions, imperfections and shades of grey
- make conscious, meaningful choices
- sharpen our intention and purpose
- accept and get to know ourselves.

The *Choosing Strengths* cards can be used to strengthen our capacity to search for these hidden gifts:

- Is there a card that speaks to you about slowing down?
- Is there a card that reminds you of a time when you chose to draw on courage or endurance?
- Is there a card that reminds you of a time when 'letting go' was, or would have been, a useful skill to draw on?
- Is there a card that reminds you of a change you would like to make in your life now?
- Can you see any other cards that represent strengths that might help you make this change?
- Can you choose a card that speaks about a time or experience in your life when you felt sad or disappointed?
- Looking back, did you discover any unexpected gifts during

this time?

- How would you tell a child about what you learnt?

## Meaning-making Actions

It is tempting to think that our strengths only come to the fore when we face the big challenges of life—when we are able to access great courage or patience, when we are able to make strong and definite decisions. But it is also useful to recognise how our strengths can lead the way in the small, everyday moments of life. Even actions that may seem inconsequential or menial often contain many great strengths. Recognising how we already apply our strengths every day helps us build self-respect and imbue our small, daily actions with meaning. It also helps us to exercise our strengths muscle more fully. We can see more clearly how we are already applying our strengths when we take time to ponder our values. For example, if leading a life that is balanced between work and leisure is a value we hold then simple choices such as having coffee with a friend, or going for a swim can be viewed as strengths we are choosing to exercise. Actions such as these that are in service of our values can be recognised as ‘meaning-making’ actions.

- Can you find cards that might represent key values that you hold?
- Can you choose a card or several cards that show actions that are related to one or more of your key values?

- Is there a card that shows actions that you find helpful to do, or strengths that you can bring to the fore when you are under pressure?
- Is there a card that shows actions or strengths you would like to develop more during difficult times?
- Is there a card that represents ‘meaningful actions’ you would like to do more of?

## The Power of Naming

The name we choose to give an emotion or experience can greatly influence how we interpret that experience. Emotions are often difficult to capture in words and even when we have found a word to describe an emotion, others may not interpret the feeling or behaviour in the same way. What is ‘scary’ or ‘risky’ for one person can be ‘adventurous’ or ‘exciting’ for another. One person may describe the behaviour of a child as ‘naughty’ while another may describe it as ‘energetic’ and ‘exuberant’.

This difference in interpretation, however, is also a strength because different words open different windows into the experience. They direct our attention to different flavours of the experience. By experimenting with the words we use to describe experiences, we can choose to cultivate different, and perhaps more useful, ways of looking at them. We may even discover after careful reflection that what we had interpreted as ‘sadness’ may be

more akin to ‘melancholy’. The word melancholy is quite poetic and may invite us into a different relationship with our experience. What we may have somewhat flippantly labelled as ‘depression’ and ‘wrong’ may reveal a deep spiritual longing at its core and lead us into deeper richness in our lives. This does not mean that a serious illness such as depression can be whisked away with a name change. Difficulty cannot be solved by declaring an experience or emotion to be other than it is for us. But it does invite us to apply a discerning eye to our feelings and experiences and consider the power of the labels we may automatically give them.

This can be powerfully experienced when we learn a foreign language. Each language describes the world differently, and invites us to think about ‘how things are’ in sometimes surprising and delightful ways. For example, in English we speak of a balled-up hand as ‘a fist’. For English speakers a fist is a noun—a thing. But in the Hopi Indian language, the word that is used is the equivalent of ‘fisting’—a verb, an action.

What subtle shifts might happen in our attitudes if we viewed some things as actions rather than nouns? At St Luke’s we often speak of ‘doing’ strengths, or ‘doing’ respect and justice. This implies and reinforces that there are skilful actions involved—not simply passive qualities that we either have or don’t have.

Another very significant example is our experience of longing. Not craving or desire but a deep longing for an experience of connection and completion. Some people might call this spiritual longing. Looking back, you may recognise such moments arising even as a child as you sat looking at the clouds or in another quiet moment. Often this feeling is connected with beauty, like a sunset. There can be a feeling of peace and quietude and at the same time there is a deep longing beneath it.

Because we do not speak of the unique human experience of longing very much in our society, people often think something is wrong with them. People may say, ‘I am lonely, I am sad’ when in fact it may be a longing from the heart that they are experiencing. Such an experience, rather than being ‘wrong’ may in fact be very ‘right’.

- Is there a card that represents a strength you could call by another name?
- Are there any strengths depicted in the cards that you used to see as weaknesses?
- What might be some additional hidden strengths within a particular card?

- Do any of the cards represent something about how you may experience longing?

## Not Knowing

Often when difficult problems or times arrive we want to solve them as soon as possible. Solutions are great—who would not welcome them with open arms? But sometimes it is the strident grasping for a solution that obscures or prevents a surprising and unforeseen solution from emerging.

What if we took some time to accept that, for now, we just don't know? What if we allowed it to be a strength to 'not know' sometimes? This can be particularly useful in times of transition. The old has gone, but the new has not yet emerged. We are betwixt and between for a time. In not knowing how things will work out, what to do, and even accepting that there are some things we may never know, we can allow the space for something else to emerge in all kinds of creative ways.

Sometimes we 'don't know' or can't express what we are feeling because we are experiencing two seemingly contradictory emotions at once. Human beings have this extraordinary capacity to experience layers of emotion. Sometimes our language is inadequate to hold these contradictory emotions. For example, we may be sad and happy at the same time; we might be excited and

scared; we might be crying and laughing all at once.

- Do any of the cards remind you of things you don't know?
- Do any of the cards suggest strengths that you might find useful during uncertain times?
- Do any of the cards suggest a time you may have had when a very surprising outcome emerged?
- Have you ever experienced two different and seemingly contradictory emotions at the same time? What strengths do you think are useful to help us hold such contradictions easefully?
- Can you choose pairs of cards that suggest seemingly contradictory strengths or experiences?

*'Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know how, you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows, we guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark.'*

**Agnes de Mile**

## TAKING CARE

Any hands-on tool, like any words we choose to use, has the potential to have unanticipated effects. Materials that use visual, verbal and tactile metaphors can be especially powerful as they can work as shortcuts to meanings and memories. Even apparently innocuous materials can unleash surprisingly strong emotions.

Innovative Resources' materials are very 'interpretable'. A word or an image may be very benign for one person, while stirring up powerful emotions or even negative meanings for another. While we meticulously attempt to avoid anything that may inadvertently cause offence, the very nature of interpretability means that any card or part of a card may have an unforeseen impact.

All this should be taken into account before any therapeutic tool or artifact is introduced. The authors suggest that anyone considering using *Choosing Strengths* in a conversation with another person, particularly if that person is struggling with grief and trauma, should be mindful of the following important factors:

- What is my knowledge of the product?
- Have I used it before?

- Am I personally comfortable using it or would I use it with my own family?
- Do I need to use the whole set of cards or will a subset be sufficient?
- Has the client used the cards before?
- From my knowledge of the client, is there anything in the set that might cause offence or be provocative?
- Is it the right time to introduce the cards?
- Do I introduce the cards or simply have them available for the client to choose?
- How can I give the client genuine choice in being able to use or decline to use the cards?
- If I am using the cards in a group, how will I be mindful of people's privacy?
- Is the language on the cards suitable for the literacy levels of the client or group?
- Are the cards culturally suitable?
- Have I allowed and welcomed people to pass or opt out of an activity?

- How can I help ensure that people are listened to respectfully in a group?
- Have I allowed enough time for participants to process the cards to their satisfaction and for us to work through any significant emotions and thoughts that may arise?
- Do I have a 'Plan B'?
- How will I know if the cards have been useful?
- Will I do anything differently if I choose to use the cards again?

*'The doors we open and close each day decide the lives we live.'*

**Flora Whitemore**

## ABOUT ST LUKE'S AND INNOVATIVE RESOURCES

Innovative Resources is part of Anglicare Victoria, one of Australia's leading community service organisations. Anglicare Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation providing a range of child, youth, family and community services throughout Victoria and New South Wales.

### **Our Publishing**

Innovative Resources publishes card sets, stickers, books, picture books, digital and tactile materials to enrich conversations about feelings, strengths, relationships, stories and goals. Our resources bring colour and creativity to therapeutic and educational settings all over the world. They are used by counsellors, teachers, trainers, social workers, managers, mentors, parents, teams, supervisors ... and anyone who works with people to create positive change.

### **Our Training**

Innovative Resources also offers highly-engaging training in 'strengths-based' approaches to working with people where change arises out of a focus on strengths, respect and

hopeful possibilities. We also offer 'tools' workshops on ways of using our resources to invigorate human service work. Our workshops honour different learning styles and the power of visual images to open up storytelling and other ways to truly connect with children and adults alike.

**[www.innovativeresources.org](http://www.innovativeresources.org)**

I can choose

Gentle

Maxillo

## INTRODUCING THE CREATORS

### TIM LANE

Tim from Woosh Creative is no stranger to Innovative Resources. His considerable graphic design skill and creativity has graced our resources for many years. Tim has designed and created, amongst others, *Reflexions* (one of Innovative Resources' most popular card packs), *Talking Up Our Strengths*, *Our Scrapbook Of Strengths* and the remarkable picture book for adults, *Bereaved Mother's Heart*. As well as being a designer, Tim is also a father of four, a musician and more recently, a professional firefighter in Melbourne.

### RUSSELL DEAL

At the tender age of 17, and in his last year of high school, Russell made the choice to study social work at Melbourne University, the only such course in Victoria at the time. Knowing nothing about social work nor any social workers were no impediments to these choices! Subsequent choices saw him take on the role of social work publisher with Innovative Resources where, for over twenty years, he led a creative team to produce more than 50 life-changing, conversation-building card sets.

### KAREN BEDFORD

Karen has been part of the editorial team at Innovative Resources since 1999. She is also a counsellor, workshop facilitator and the author of a book entitled: *The Uses of Sadness; why feeling sad is no reason not to be happy* (Allen and Unwin, 2009).



I can choose

SERIOUS

## What are our strengths and where do they come from?

We may think of strengths as qualities we inherit, resources we gather or skills we learn as we journey through life. But we can also think of our strengths as choices we make.

We can choose to see ourselves as a 'victim' or a 'survivor'. We can choose to see the glass as half-full or half-empty. We can choose to see ourselves as possessing great strengths or as filled with deficits. We can choose to adopt for ourselves any number of strengths from a huge array of possibilities.

**The 36 *Choosing Strengths* cards are powerful reminders that our strengths are in our own hands!**

[www.innovativeresources.org](http://www.innovativeresources.org)