



# PRACTICE BRIEF

## Appreciative

## Inquiry and Safety Organized Practice

*Adapted from the Winter 2015 issue of Reaching Out*

*As the human and social service sectors continue the move to more strength-based practices, the concept and research of appreciative inquiry (AI) is often noted as serving as the theoretical underpinnings of the method. This practice brief describes the research and concepts of AI and how Safety Organized Practice (SOP) naturally evolved from the AI model.*

AI is based on the premise that organizations change in the direction in which they inquire. An organization (or individual) that investigates problems will keep finding problems, while an organization (or individual) that investigates what to appreciate in itself will discover what's successful. AI is the paradigm or philosophy one uses when asking questions and envisioning a future that fosters relationships and builds on the goodness in a person, a situation or an organization. By so doing, a system's capacity for collaboration and change is enhanced.

AI was developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in the 1980s. Beginning as a theoretical model, Cooperrider and Srivastva argued that organizations are not "problems to be solved" but are centers of infinite human capacity—ultimately unpredictable, unknowable or a "mystery alive." This framework argues for the need to go beyond the deficit or problem focus of the field and, in the language of Safety Organized Practice, to focus on "what's working well" in order to build on existing exceptions to problems, identify further solutions, and highlight strengths that are already present.

### **Appreciate (verb)**

1. Valuing; the art of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes and potentials; to perceive those things that give life to living systems.
2. To increase in value.

### **Inquire (verb)**

1. The act of exploration and discovery.
2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities.

### **APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS**

In the early 1990s, appreciative inquiry founders developed a practical model to implement the theory—calling it the Four D's:

- Discover
- Dream
- Design
- Deliver

Inherent and required within this process or paradigm is the "art of asking questions." Asking questions is something that is done by social service workers all day long, but it is in fact the way in which questions are asked that will elicit the responses that are obtained. The power of the question and how it is posed will impact the answer.

The "medical model" of health has been the main operating paradigm under which social services has functioned for more than a century. Under the medical model of health, practitioners seek information related to illness, problems, disease and disorders that are afflicting the community or individuals. Diagnosis and treatment are the standards of operation.

Appreciative inquiry, while having the same goals as the medical model of health, operates significantly differently by seeking strengths and making changes from that point. Several models in social services have been introduced which are making this shift. In Northern California and several other regions, Safety Organized Practice serves as a fully realized strengths-based human services practice model. By engaging families to identify their own strengths and support networks, SOP does not focus solely on problems, but rather assists families with finding pathways to well-being through their own support systems and problem-solving capacities.

A child welfare organization that has embraced SOP as an organizational framework also examines, embraces, and builds upon its own strengths to improve outcomes.

- **To read more about AI and SOP, please see the Safety Organized Practice edition of *Reaching Out* at <http://bit.ly/ReachingOutJournal>**
- **For additional resources on Safety Organized Practice, please visit our SOP Resources Page at <http://bit.ly/SafetyOrganizedPractice>**



## References

- Carson Greil Group. (n.d.). Appreciative Inquiry: The Power of Positive Change. Retrieved from: <https://carsongreil.wordpress.com/strategic-change-consulting/strategic-change-consulting/>
- Cooperrider, D. & Whitney, D. (2005). Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2005