

# Runaways, Truants and the Knuckleheads Who Harbour Them: Eco structural interventions with difficult teens

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# Who is Robert S. Wright?

- BSW, MSW Child & family Mental Hx
- Forensic, Sex Offender Specialist
- Varied background in anti-poverty, child welfare, race relations
- Former E.D. Of Child Welfare Agency
- E.D. Child & Youth Strategy, N.S.
- Bona Fide Knuckleheadologist

# Who are the Kids We're Talking About?

- You know them!



A photograph of several hands stacked on top of each other, with fingers pointing downwards. The hands are of different skin tones, suggesting a diverse group of people. The background is a dark, solid color.

# The Problem

## Difficult Kids Are Hard to Manage

- Run away from home and school
- Engage in risky behaviours (drugs, alcohol)
- Create havoc in communities (delinquency)
- End up in increasingly expensive and inappropriate placements



# The Problem

## Traditional Methods Ineffective

- Rescue/Child welfare method great for little kids, not so good for adolescents
- Kids are often bad fits for foster care
- Policing model slow and unresponsive
- Unduly criminalizes the acting out behaviour of children in need



# The Problem

## Traditional Clinical Focus is Limited

- Kids seen as the problem
- Kids therefore focus of our attention/intervention
- Kids are resistant so we spend time chasing and attempting to contain them to treat them

The more we chase, the more  
they run!







# Towards a Solution

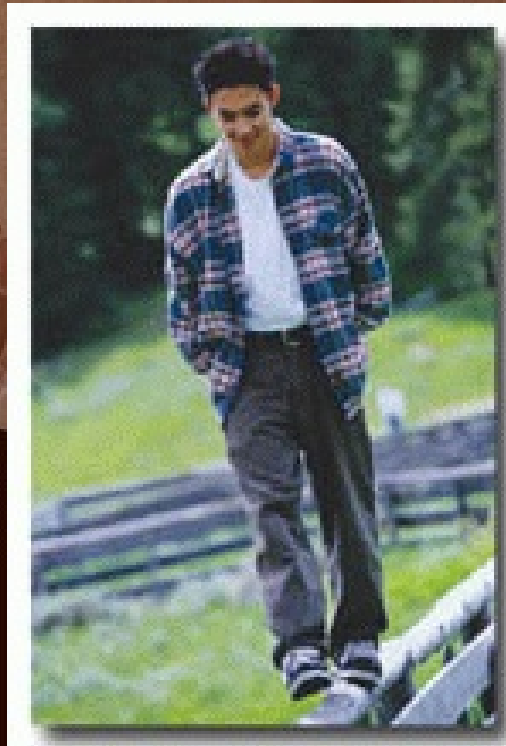
## The Eco Structural Approach

- Difficult youth need systems interventions
  - MST widely seen as effective (Henggeler)
  - Individual, family, community work indicated (McGoldrick)
  - Resiliency theory identifies multiple domains for intervention (Ungar)



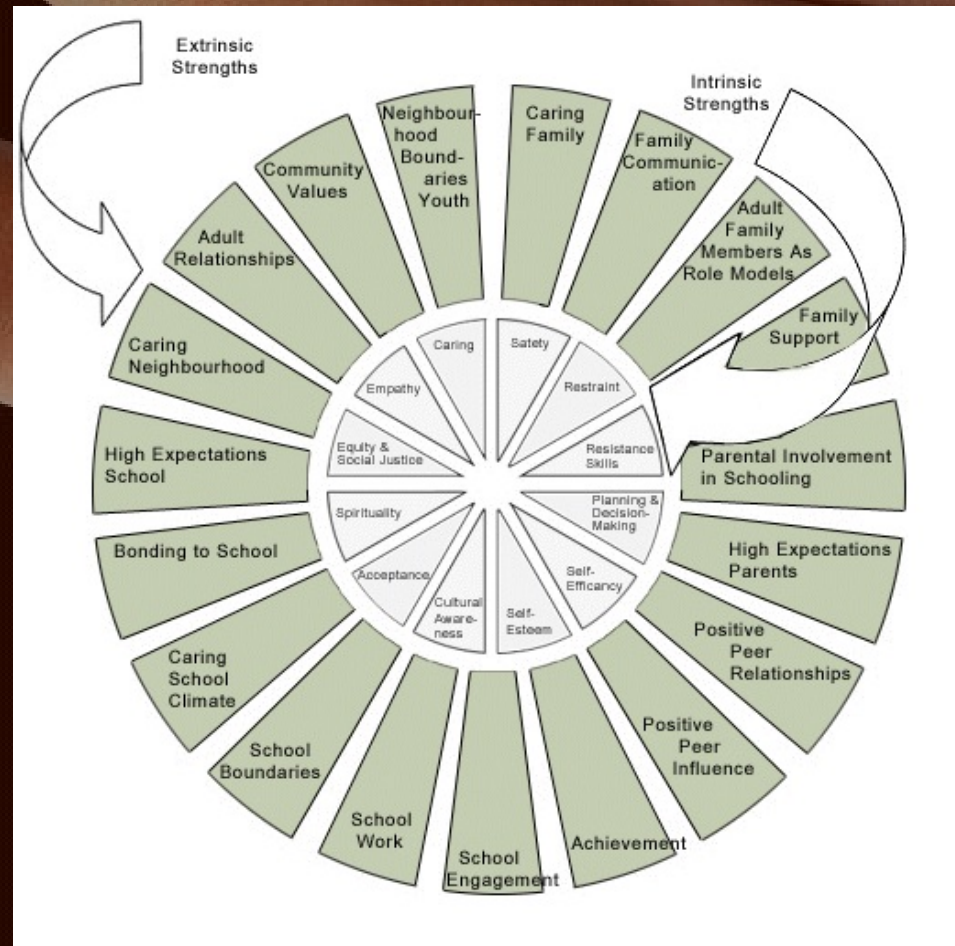
# Old Model

Just Looked at Youth



# Newer Models

Look at the whole system





# Sounds Good in Theory, How Does it Work?

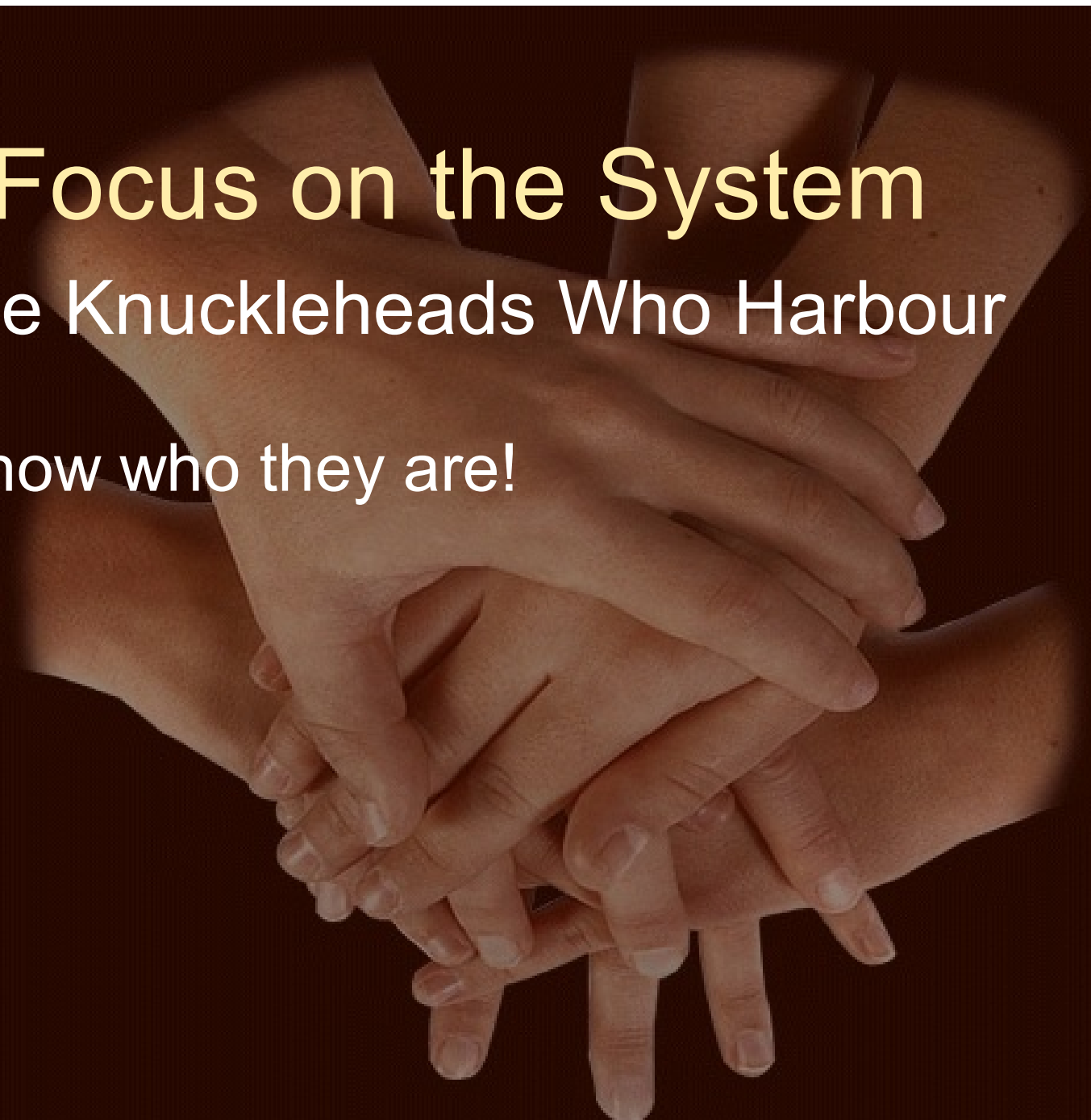
## Case Example

- The Problem: Runaways and Truants
  - Kids jiggling school, coming home late
  - Rash of teenage drinking and drug use
  - Epidemic of inappropriate sexual behaviours
  - Kids coming home late or running away for days (from home, foster home or group home)

# Focus on the System

The Knuckleheads Who Harbour

- You know who they are!







# Focus on the System

## The Knuckleheads Who Harbour

- After taking several children from several such homes, developed a plan
  - Contacted, informed and engaged police
  - Identified homes that harboured
  - Visited each to engage in “helping”
  - Provided education re: Crim. Code and CFSA violations
  - Solicited “invitations” to return occasionally

# By What Authority?

- CFSA (NS) s.92 - No interfering with a child in the Care of an Agency. cf. s.71-73 CYFSA (NL)
- Criminal Code, R.S.C. s.280-281 - No harbouring kids against parents' will - abduction
- Moral/Community Authority!





# Outcomes

- Reduction in young truants
- Reduction in curfew violations and runaways from families and care
- Improved relations with knuckleheads who were ready sources of “intelligence”
- Increased sense of empowerment among parents and carers
- Returned sense of “community ownership of welfare of children”

# Obstacles to Eco Structural Work

- Confidentiality?
- Job description/role/function/union?
- Worker Safety?
- Cooperation of partners?
- Legality?

Exercise?





# Exercise!

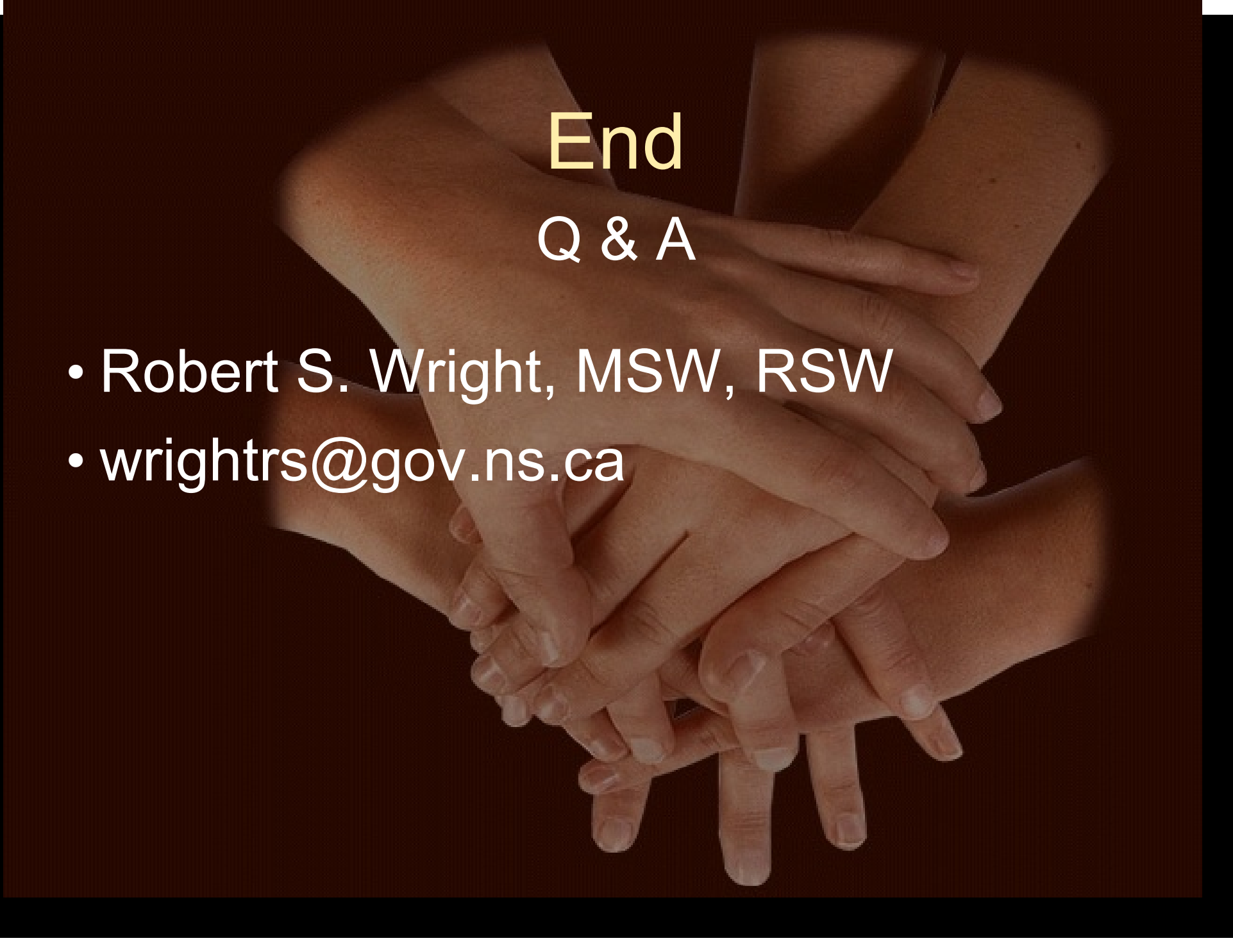
- Identify an issue to address
- Consider the “clinical” and ecological
- Develop a plan for ecostructural action
- Anticipate outcomes of intervention

# Leadership is Necessary!

## Principles of Catalytic Leadership

- Innovation: Solutions to complex problems require collaboratively birthing new ideas, not simply debating and selecting amongst the old.
- Empowerment: The best solutions are created by accepting and aligning the offerings of all critical stakeholders and knowledge holders.
- Ownership: People give time, energy and commitment in proportion to their degree of ownership.
- Inclusion: Participation is the straightest road to ownership.

(Taken from “The Role of the Public Sector in Addressing Tough Community Problems.” Jim Ellsworth, PSEPC)

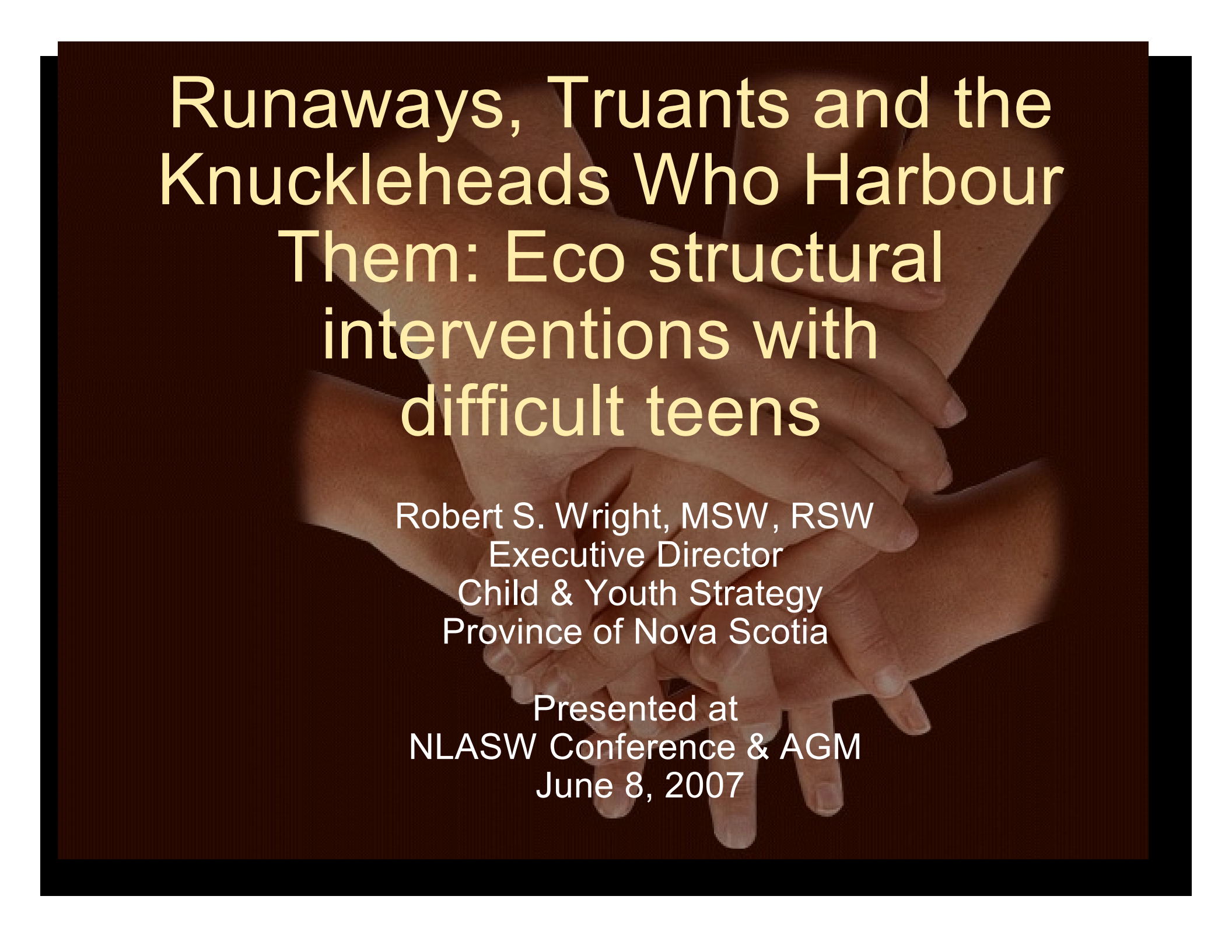


# End

## Q & A

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