

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

What is ABCD?

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach based on the principle of identifying and mobilising individual and community **'assets'**, rather than focusing on problems and needs (i.e. **'deficits'**). In the publication 'A Glass Half Full', Jane Foot and Trevor Hopkins make the case that;

*"as well as having needs and problems, our most marginalised communities also have **social, cultural and material assets**. Identifying and mobilising these can help them overcome the health challenges they face...The more familiar **'deficit' approach focuses on the problems, needs and deficiencies in a community** such as deprivation, illness and health-damaging behaviours. It designs services to fill the gaps and fix the problems. As a result, **a community can feel disempowered and dependent**; people can become passive recipients of services rather than active agents in their own and their families' lives." (Foot and Hopkins, 2010, p7)*

ABCD is a set of **values and principles** which:

- Identifies and makes visible the health-enhancing assets in a community
- Sees citizens and communities as the co-producers of health and well-being, rather than the recipients of services
- Promotes community networks, relationships and friendships that can provide caring, mutual help and empowerment
- Identifies what has the potential to improve health and well-being
- Supports individuals' health and well-being through self- esteem, coping strategies, resilience skills, relationships, friendships, knowledge and personal resources
- Empower communities to control their futures and create tangible resources such as services, funds and buildings (Foot and Hopkins, 2010)

What are Assets?

A **health asset** is: *"any factor or resource which enhances the ability of individuals, communities and populations to maintain and sustain health and well-being. These assets can operate at the level of the individual, family or community as protective and promoting factors to buffer against life's stresses."* (Foot and Hopkins, 2010)

Other **assets** include the following:

- the practical skills, capacity and knowledge of local residents
- the passions and interests of local residents that give them energy for change
- the networks and connections – known as 'social capital' – in a community, including friendships and neighbourliness
- the effectiveness of local community and voluntary associations
- the resources of public, private and third sector organisations that are available to support a community
- the physical and economic resources of a place that enhance well-being.

(Foot and Hopkins, 2010, p7)

Making the Case for an Asset Based Approach

There is increasing policy interest in identifying community assets (through “asset mapping” processes) and the evidence base for ABCD is gradually evolving:

“A growing body of evidence shows that when practitioners begin with a focus on what communities have (their assets) as opposed to what they don’t have (their needs) a community’s efficacy in addressing its own needs increases, as does its capacity to lever in external support. It provides healthy community practitioners with a fresh perspective on building bridges with socially excluded people and marginalised groups.” (Foot and Hopkins, 2010, p6)

Aspects of an asset based approach could also help influence **health inequalities** by:

- targeting appropriate communities to work with
- using local assets to empower people and communities
- valuing resilience
- strengthening community networks
- building trust between service providers and communities.

Using an ABCD approach enables communities to build on what assets they **have** to gain what they **need** and make improvements to their community, thereby improve individual and community level health and well-being.

ABCD Resources and Links

A Glass Half Full: How an asset approach can improve community health and well-being, Foot and Hopkins, 2010, IDeA.

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=18364393>

ABCD Institute (Chicago)

<http://www.abcdinstitute.org/>

ABCD Global Consulting – Consultancy service led by Cormac Russell (Dublin), Jim Diers (Seattle)

<http://www.abcdglobal.org/>

The Coady Institute, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada

<http://www.coady.stfx.ca/>

Neighbor Power: Building Community the Seattle Way (Jim Diers)

<http://home.comcast.net/~jimdiers/aboutthebook.html>

The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods (John McKnight and Peter Block)

<http://www.abundantcommunity.com/>

Sarah Frost’s Travelling Fellowship Blog (ABCD and Social Capital)

www.sarahefrost.blogspot.com

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