

Asset-Based Community Development

A learner pack for advocates supporting older people

June 2017

The following pack has four key sections: (1) an introduction to Asset-Based Community Development – what it is and how it can help with project development and the advocacy role; (2) some ABCD tools – how to put them into practice; (3) how to identify and build community connectors; (4) how to become part of the ABCD community.

Welcome and Introduction

West Lancashire Council for Voluntary Service were commissioned by OPAAL UK to create this learner pack. We introduce you to various tools and people in the ABCD community, and hope that you will feel equipped with ABCD-informed ways of working, plus discover various means of making your activity more *visible* once you have studied its contents. In sections two and three we offer ways of supporting individuals towards becoming more active community connectors, and in section four we outline how to share success and so help towards influencing the future shape of projects and services.

You do not have to work from the beginning to the end, although we advise that you start with the first section - the introduction - before exploring the remaining ones.

Please feel free to download and use this guide. The ABCD Institute (de Paul, Chicago, Illinois) and Nurture Development readily share resources and simply ask that the ABCD community acknowledge any use of them:

We will introduce you to other links in this guide and share some of our work at West Lancashire CVS.

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(1) an introduction to ABCD



What do you see in this picture? A glass half empty or a glass half full?

ABCD is a 'glass half full' *perspective*: individuals and communities have *assets*.

Any community building starts with a 'what's strong', not 'what's wrong' view of community.

A 'needs-based' approach focuses on service provision to meet a need: this is important and, in times of initial crisis, vital. For example, health services for diagnosis and treatment should an older person begin to feel unwell or experience pain and possibly ongoing support if the diagnosed condition will affect their long-term quality of life.

An ABCD perspective recognises the important, but *limited* role for services: **Institutions Have Reached Their Limits in Problem-Solving**, and **Institutions as Servants** (12 Guiding Principles, ABCD).

Here are the following 12 Guiding Principles in full:

The ABCD Institute: 12 Guiding Principles

(Source: from <https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx>: from 'What is Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)', n.d. – *USA spelling retained*)

'Most communities address social and economic problems with only a small amount of their total capacity. Much of the community capacity is not used and is needed! This is the challenge and opportunity of community engagement. Everyone in a community has something to offer. There is no one we don't need.

Everyone Has Gifts with rare exception; people can contribute and want to contribute. Gifts must be discovered.

Relationships Build a Community: See them, make them, and utilize them. An intentional effort to build and nourish relationships is the core of ABCD and of all community building.

Citizens at the Centre: It is essential to engage the wider community as actors (citizens) not just as recipients of services (clients).

Leaders Involve Others as Active Members of the Community. Leaders from the wider community of voluntary associations, congregations, neighbourhoods, and local business, can engage others from their sector. This “following” is based on trust, influence, and relationship.

People Care About Something. Agencies and neighbourhood groups often complain about apathy. Apathy is a sign of bad listening. People in communities are motivated to act. The challenge is to discover what their motivation is.

Motivation to Act must be identified. People act on certain themes they feel strongly about, such as; concerns to address, dreams to realize, and personal talents to contribute. Every community is filled with invisible “motivation for action”. Listen for it.

Listening Conversation. One-on-one dialogue or small group conversations are ways of discovering motivation and invite participation. Forms, surveys and asset maps can be useful to guide intentional listening and relationship building.

Ask, Ask, Ask. Asking and inviting are key community-building actions. “Join us. We need you.” This is the song of community.

Asking Questions Rather Than Giving Answers Invites Stronger Participation. People in communities are usually asked to follow outside expert’s answers for their community problems. A more powerful way to engage people is to invite communities to address ‘questions’ and finding their own answer-- with agencies following up to help.

A Citizen-Centered “Inside-Out” Organization is the Key to Community Engagement. A “citizen-centered” organization is one where local people control the organization and set the organization’s agenda.

Institutions Have Reached Their Limits in Problem-Solving. All institutions such as government, non-profits, and businesses are stretched thin in their ability to solve community problems. They cannot be successful without engaging the rest of the community in solutions.

Institutions as Servants. People are better than programs in engaging the wider community. Leaders in institutions have an essential role in community-building as they lead by “stepping back,” creating opportunities for citizenship, care, and real democracy.’

Q:

What strikes you about the order of these Guiding Principles? What comes at the top?

What at the bottom of the list, for example?

What sits well here with your approach to community? What do you consider to be a challenge? Why?

- ✚ It identifies needs, problems and issues, and provides a service, BUT with the view to 'fixing' that need, problem or issue.
- ✚ The risk? An assumption that the issue is then 'resolved' once the service has completed its task.

Read the following example (YouTube video at <https://youtu.be/veRV9bNSJaE>):

John McKnight 'The Worm Story', Kirkham International ABCD Festival June 2015

John told the following story:

He was visiting rural Ireland and wanted to go fishing at a local lake – but did not have any bait.

He found a small store, went up the path and asked, "Sir, do you sell bait?" He looked at me and said, "What do you mean, bait?" John said, "Well, like, worms." The man responded, "Son, when you walked up the path, did you see those three big whitewashed stones on each side of the path? I think if you just go and turn over one of those stones, you'll find all the worms you need".

(Laughter)

"This is the great, great lesson of Ireland which is: all around you is what you're looking for, but it's hard for you to see if you think the way you have a good life is to buy it. And so that's why I think being a consumer is the way you'll never see what's there".



For John's biography:

<https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/faculty/Pages/john-mcknight.aspx>

For his blog with Peter Block:

http://www.abundantcommunity.com/home/peter_block_and_john_mcknight.html

What does this story tell us about an ABCD approach? About the 'needs' approach?

In the above story, John delivers a simple, powerful message: people who are used to buying products and services, or feel the lack of money when they cannot buy them, overlook assets that *already exist*, such as life experience, local knowledge, time and skills. These assets may be very close to home - a lot of ABCD work is local and *place-based*. McKnight and his colleague, Jody (John) Kretzmann started with mapping residential areas where businesses had moved out and services had moved in (until the project money or subsidies ran out) – and asked people not what they *needed*, but what they could *contribute*.

An asset-based perspective is about *long-term* change: Asset-based activities work on changes in attitudes and beliefs to support a change in behaviours, and so aims for *long-term* impact.

OPAAL UK

The OPCV (Older People's Cancer Voices) programme has very much sought to amplify the voices of older people affected by cancer into health and care settings and so has had a strong focus on valuing older people as local assets and exploring how local communities can work together to promote Cancer, Older People and Advocacy (COPA), share information and create stronger local networks for older people.

To this end we have explored ABCD approaches to giving older people a stronger voice; generally projects have had strong community-based relationships within their own local networks including local councils for voluntary services or similar local infrastructure bodies.

Ang Broadbridge, OPAAL UK

An asset-based perspective involves asking the following questions *in this order*:

- ✓ What can people / communities do *for themselves*?
- ✓ What could they do if they had some help?
- ✓ What do they really need someone else to do?

Nurture Development expands on these three questions in its discussion of the following 5 core principles of ABCD work:

'1. Citizen-led. 2. Relationship oriented. 3. Asset-Based. 4. Placed-Based. 5. Inclusion focused'.

Asset-based community development – 5 core principles. Nurture Development, <http://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/asset-based-community-development-5-core-principles/> accessed 07 June 2017.

(2) some ABCD tools – how to put them into practice

At the end of section one we presented three key questions that may seem 'common sense', but can be difficult in practice: for activity to happen, someone has to act. So how does change start?

All ABCD work starts with the individual:



To generate change there must be *motivation*. **Motivation to Act**. What are people passionate enough about to act? What motivates an individual?

Reflect on the following questions:

Think of a time when you were motivated to act: why did you act?

If you got others involved, how?

What was the result?

So what is meant by these terms?

For an answer, try the following 'asset tool' with one other person, or a few of you:

Ask each other to name:

- one gift of the head ('what you know')
- one of the heart ('what you are passionate about')
- one of the hands ('what you can do and can teach someone else to do')
- one human connection ('who are you connected to and how?')

Write each gift on one piece a paper: a post-it, or a scrap piece of paper. Two people should produce at least 8 gifts, three at least 12!

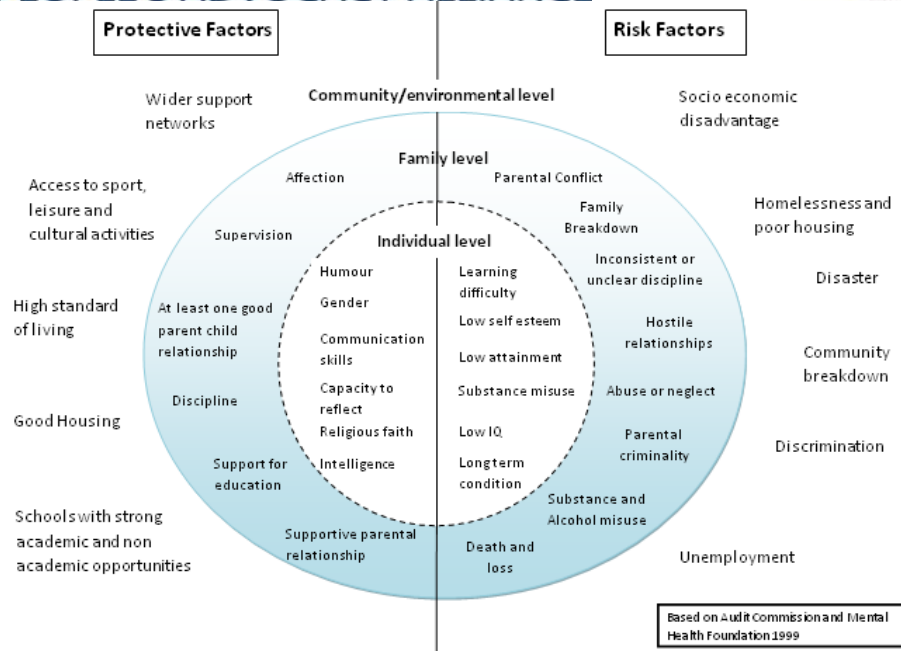
Keep naming more – try to fill a table top of gifts.

If time, ask each other to learn more about one gift. Sharing stories (telling them and hearing them) is key. It reminds us that people have and gain a wealth of experience over time – good and bad – and may reveal more gifts than would have emerged without a conversation to bring them to the surface.

After all, how many of us recognise our own resources - our gifts, skills, capacities and human connections? And if we see ourselves primarily through the lens of a key role in life, such as a job or a volunteer position that is important to us, can we see what we are capable of *outside* that role?

What about those who are in the periphery of community – those who are easily defined as 'in need' or marginal?

- Take a look at the graphic below – and at the 'risk factors' that impact on an individual. Then write down an example of a person who would be typically labelled as 'in need'.
- Now rethink that person as someone with 'assets': what they may have to offer (e.g. budgeting skills, neighbourhood knowledge, resilience). How can we mobilise people who may feel marginal?



To help with this exercise, look at the story below:



'Legless Les Courier business'

From: **Peter Kenyon, 'Rural Development around the World, through the lens of ABCD':**

<https://youtu.be/nUKGx4ORqOk> (third story on video)

Peter is based in Australia and has extensive experience in community building. His biography can be found at

<https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/faculty/international-faculty/Pages/peter-kenyon.aspx>

Les was a relative of Peter's, an alcoholic and drug addict, and by age of 50 had to have both legs amputated as a chronic Type 2 diabetic. He was told he had less than **six months** to live. Peter was asked to take him back to his village, where he was moved to a local hospital.

The community rallied, but the "talk of the town" was only about his disabilities, until a hospital orderly (attendant) asked if he would start up a business, as the village no longer had a courier service. Les was a truck driver. It was the first time that someone had asked him about his abilities. That evening Les had already had the local printer produce business cards; he'd contacted the local men shed to modify his car so that he could drive and tow a trailer. He called his new service "Legless Les Courier Business".

The consequence? 'Legless Les' lived for **six years**. It had taken a conversation around his *abilities* to motivate and mobilise his assets.

Questions:

- What features of his story would define "Legless Les" as 'in need'?
- Who recognised his potential assets and *why* was she/he motivated to act?
- What immediate impact did this one person have on Les and on others in the local community?
- What was the long-term benefit and for whom?

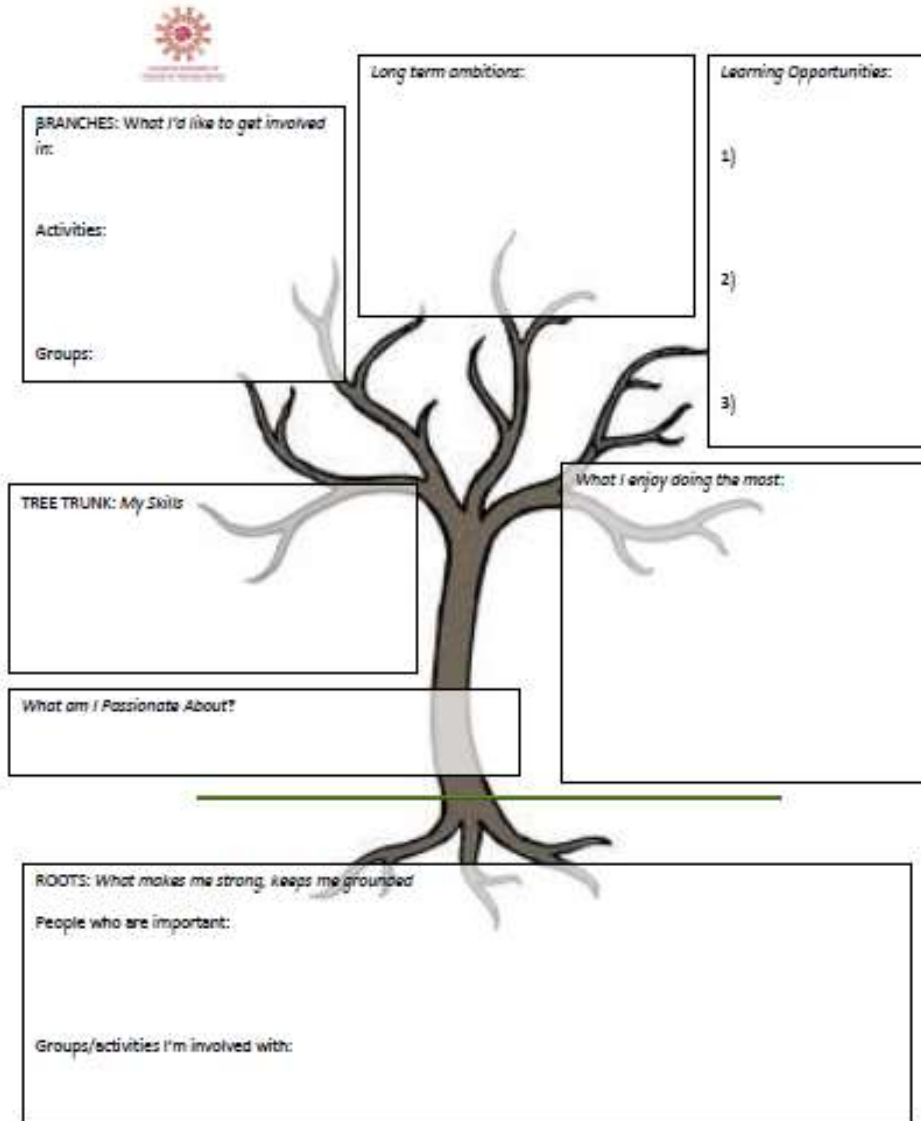
Les's long-term health condition, his addictions and his break from family ties until he became terminally ill all made him vulnerable. However, he was not as dependent as his problems would have suggested; instead, he was still capable of running a business and had a skill that was missing in the community to which that he was relocated.

One hospital worker recognised a gap and saw a solution: this person was neither connected to the affected family, nor was he/she a health professional with a primary focus on clinical needs. And the impact was immediate, given the speed with which Les acted: it generated work for others (a business – the local printer – and a voluntary group – the local men shed). And in the long term, the newly generated courier business reconnected places, replaced a missing service need, and lengthened Les's life considerably. It also contributed to his social health in a positive way and improved the quality of his life in his final years: it got him out of a hospital bed and back into work.

Another tool to use with individuals: 'assets tree':

The following asset tree was originally created by Lancashire Association of Councils for Voluntary Service for supporting individuals in recovery from addictions:

- the **roots** are about resilience: what someone needs to grow and be resilient in difficult times, such as friendships and family and any treatment and supporting services.
- the **trunk** is about the things that make people strong such as experience, qualifications, and skills, and what he/she can offer as capabilities and strengths.
- the **branches** are the highest part of the tree; every branch on every tree is different and unique. These and the **leaves** are someone's aspirations, dreams, ambitions and hopes.

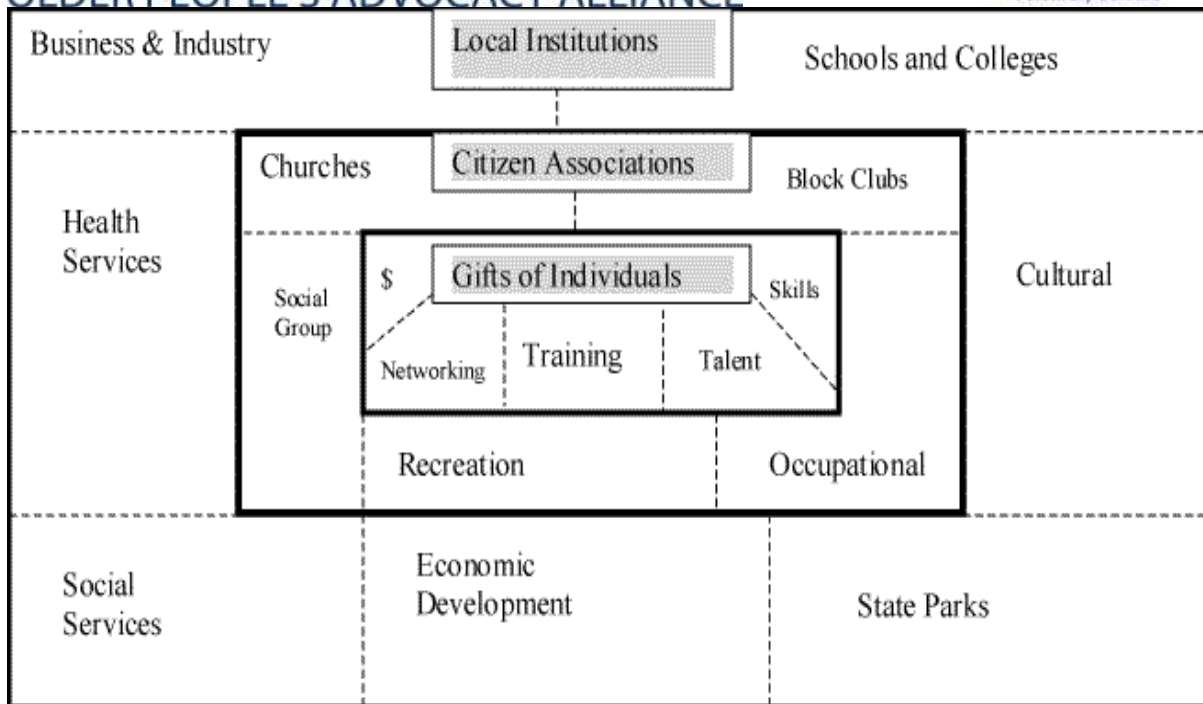


Individuals are invited to identify their roots, their strengths and their aspirations, and supported towards making changes.

While this is a mapping tool for individuals, there is a model for mapping communities which places the individual at the centre:

From individual to community: all assets of a place working together

An individual can act alone, but to have an effect there are other assets that play an important role. Kretzmann and McKnight started their work in residential areas: here is a map from their ABCD resources book: *Building Communities from the Inside Out* (1993):



The linking between the components (gifts of individuals, citizen associations and local institutions) is what generates community.

To illustrate, take a look at the West Lancashire story below:

Skelmersdale International

When news came through that asylum seekers were to be relocated to West Lancashire, individuals became motivated to act to support them as incoming residents, including local community leaders from the faith community. A welcome party was held at the Skelmersdale Ecumenical Centre in July 2015 led by a local councillor. The people who participated came as themselves, not as representatives of local institutions or organisations. There was no money allocated to do this – it was about people wanting to give a warm human welcome. Some had ‘gifts’, such as language skills.

Following the welcome party, numerous acts occurred: these included putting together information about places of worship and prayer for the houses that Serco was using to place asylum seekers; using Skelmersdale Library as a place for English lessons; local churches and charities hosting food, film and games events; local residents in the rural areas raising money and offering practical help such as car lifts to appointments and hearings.

This is not just a story of meeting needs: current asylum seekers have formed **Skelmersdale International** – utilising their gifts, skills, capacities and human connections as highly motivated individuals. They have taken up volunteer training. Two former semi-professional sportsmen in their home countries have helped with local sports clubs; three are barbers offering free haircuts. As a group, Skelmersdale International took part in a clean-up as part of a new Tawd Valley Park project to improve the use of green spaces (May 2017).

Following a successful event run by the company All About Food, West Lancashire CVS reported on its online portal West Lancs Buzz: "From the initial few families that came to Skelmersdale in 2015, the group has grown to 80+ people. They are a group that are here to improve upon their situation back home but to also try and start a fresh where they can. Their story isn't over, and relationships are just beginning" <http://westlancsbuzz.org/skelmersdale-international-meets-all-about-food-ltd-bingo-things/> (May 2017)

Question: Where are the **Five Key Assets in ABCD** in the Skelmersdale International story?

(Source of the Five Key Assets: <http://www.abcdinstitute.org/>, 'What is Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)', n.d.)

Communities can no longer be thought of as complex masses of needs and problems, but rather diverse and potent webs of gifts and assets. Each community has a unique set of skills and capacities to channel for community development. ABCD categorizes asset inventories into five groups:

Individuals: At the centre of ABCD are residents of the community that have gifts and skills. Everyone has assets and gifts. Individual gifts and assets need to be recognized and identified. In community development you cannot do anything with people's needs, only their assets. Deficits or needs are only useful to institutions.

Associations: Small informal groups of people, such as clubs, working with a common interest as volunteers are called associations in ABCD and are critical to community mobilization. They don't control anything; they are just coming together around a common interest by their individual choice.

Institutions: Paid groups of people who generally are professionals who are structurally organized are called institutions. They include government agencies and private business, as well as schools, etc. They can all be valuable resources. The assets of these institutions help the community capture valuable resources and establish a sense of civic responsibility.

Physical Assets: Physical assets such as land, buildings, space, and funds are other assets that can be used.

Connections: There must be an exchange between people sharing their assets by bartering, etc. These connections are made by people who are connectors. It takes time to find out about individuals; this is normally done through building relationships with individual by individual.

Individuals: the story involves so many: the local councillor, individuals at the welcome party, residents as volunteers, community leaders, refugees.

Associations: included here are local small charities, churches, sport clubs, Skelmersdale International.

Institutions: these include Serco for housing, Lancashire County Council (library), West Lancashire Borough Council, the law courts, the company All About Food.

Physical Assets: these include the Ecumenical Centre Skelmersdale, Skelmersdale Library, local church and arts venues; the river Tawd that runs through and provides a green space (a lot of open green spaces in West Lancashire); sports fields.

Connections: local connectors include local councillors, charity workers, community leaders, refugees – all individuals who not only have gifts, capacities and skills, but who also *utilise* them in their existing relationships with others to build more and new human connections.

Mapping exercises

Skelmersdale International has evolved with no specific mapping - and much activity does happen if there is a specific motivation in response to an immediate need (a sudden turn of events or crisis, for example).

But an initial asset map may be an important step to identify *what already exists*, if a group or organisation wants to work on change and get some activity started: who is active in the area of interest? 'What's strong' in the area?

Think about: *Why are you asking?*

- What do you intend to do with the data?
- What do you hope it will achieve?
- How will it benefit the community/organisation?

What you will be doing with the data. Will it:

- Help make links and connections?
- Support collaboration?
- Help make better use of resources?
- Provide opportunities around identified motivations?
- Showcase the strengths of the community?

! *Remember: don't asset map for asset-mapping sake*

Sources of information for such an exercise may include:

- the local Council for Voluntary Service
- the borough council
- any VCFS forums
- business directories
- local networking events
- mutual connections

You can list your findings under the headings 'Five Key Assets in ABCD', or use the Kretzmann & McKnight map on page 9. Think about the ways each listing may be connected. See below (I-CANN) for an example.

ABCD asset mapping can support the recognition of *social capital*: **'The networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively'**. (Oxford Dictionaries.com)

A mapping exercise is an important first step towards fostering new connections: but remember 'What can people / communities do *for themselves*?'

So once an initial map is in place, involve more people with:

What to ask?

- 'What are your strengths and are you willing to share them?'
- 'What are you sufficiently motivated about that you will act upon?'
- 'What connections do you have or can you make to help what we are trying to achieve?'

How to ask?

Door-to-door survey; events and meetings; online and social media; mail out; telephone.

When to ask? Where to ask?

- ✓ Plan times around the community
- ✓ Creative use of space: think about your audience

Can information be **gathered and owned by the community**? *Remember*

'Nothing about me without me' – a mapping activity is about finding ways of bringing everyone to the table who may have an interest in a development/new service/project etc.

co – production: community members and local stakeholders working together, building on each other's strengths and resources to find solutions for moving forward.



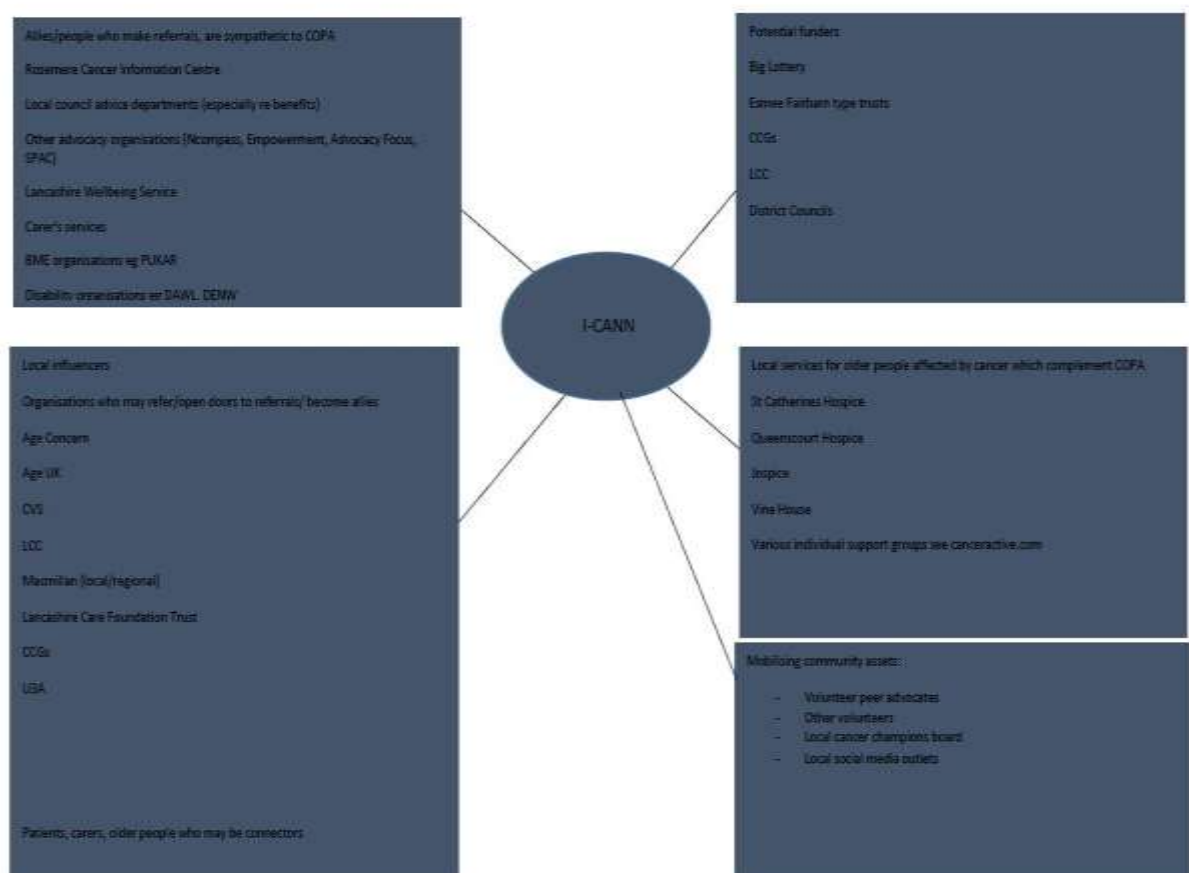
From ABCD Commons online

Undertaken to shape thinking about a bottom-up approach to supporting the promotion of I-CANN's cancer advocacy service (2016).

Local assets (Preston, Chorley, South Ribble, West Lancashire): starting with older people themselves and mapping all of the other local connections that could help I-CANN to give older people's voices a platform.

(Janet Cullingford, ICANN and Angela Broadbridge, OPAAL UK):

Asset mapping – local cancer services, support and connections



(3) how to identify and build community 'connectors'

The previous section introduced 5 key assets, two of which are 'Individuals' and 'Connections'.

Identifying individuals as connectors begins with you – sharing stories, 'talent spotting' and being that connector (just like the hospital attendant in the 'Legless Les' story - section two).

Remember the '4 gifts' exercise? We can utilise it to unlock a **Motivation to Act**, so that individuals, in connection with others, feel they have something to offer. Look again at the

An example:

The Beth Johnson Foundation project used their annual conference to explore Cancer and Hidden Groups, theming their conference around how cancer is experienced by people with learning disabilities, LGBT, prisoners, and the homeless with a view to reaching out to provide advocacy support to these groups.

One of our filming participants requested a DVD so he could share his filmed story with his local church at Christmas, which resulted in a donation being made to the project, an example of older people being empowered to have their stories heard, making a contribution to their communities too.

The role of the advocate as connector

Reflect on the role that volunteer advocates play as community connectors. As identified by health care professionals and clients: the positive benefit of one 'go-to' person to join up services, support and care opportunities, share information and connect to bridge gaps.

(4) how you can become part of the ABCD community

- Check out the following resources:

The ABCD Institute is based at the Steans Center for Community-Based Service Learning at DePaul University, USA, and has a good resources site. The staff members include the founders, John McKnight and John (Jody) Kretzmann.

<https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx>

Nurture Development supports communities to 'reduce institutionalisation and increase interdependency in community life' <http://www.nurturedevelopment.org>. Cormac Russell is the Managing Director.

West Lancashire CVS has online ABCD resources <http://www.wlcvs.org/asset-based-community-development/>

- Join ABCD forums:

ABCD in Action <http://abcdinaction.org/>

ABCD Commons <https://abcdlearningcommons.eu/>

Having joined these communities you can share what you are doing – a lot of ABCD work is done 'instinctively' but the forums help to 'make the invisible visible'. The forums:

- connect ABCD work being undertaken in the UK and across many other countries;
- offer a site to build evidence of achievements;
- enable conversations about ABCD to develop tools and projects;
- give voice to success stories and so inspire emerging ideas.

Cormac Russell, as Managing Director of Nurture Development, is very active on Twitter, as are other ABCD community connectors. Find and follow those who are tweeting ABCD news to keep up to date with local, national and international networking events, and to build mutual connections.

And finally, some items to read:

Kretzmann & McKnight (1993) *Building Communities from the Inside Out* (resources book)

Cormac Russell (2015) *Asset Based Community Development (ABCD): Looking Back to Look Forward*: In conversation with John McKnight about the intellectual and practical heritage of ABCD and its place in the world today. (e-book), Kindle Edition.