Georgia Tech
Center for Sustainable Communities
Research and Education

abcd
INSTITUTE

Exploring Asset-Based Community Development:
A Tale of Two Communities

Adapted from the ABCD Institute Toolkit from DePaul University
https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/resources/Pages/tool-kit.aspx

You are invited by a community to come spend some time there so that you can advise their leadership on recommendations for addressing climate change.

We have divided into "A" groups and "B" groups. Your handouts correspond- Community A or Community B.

You will have 15 minutes to discuss your lists and write down your recommendations. Please choose a spokesperson who will share your list with the rest of the group when we reconvene.

Community A Recommendations

- Turn vacant lots into indoor agriculture spaces, greenhouses, hydroponics and hosting school programs there and over-60 programming
- Create service programs to keep kids active in the community - cleaning up, paint over graffiti
- Vacant spaces repurposed for job training programs
- Intergenerational mentorship program to improve graduation rates and involve elderly + intergenerational Scrabble club
- Introduce trade programs for the students as job preparation
- Community ride-share program - residents volunteer to help with transportation of neighbors
- Community address transportation issues and talk to the chemical plant about remuneration after the fire - LEGAL FIRES
- Connect the chemical plant owners to community members so they can

Community B Recommendations

- District advocate to its council members to change city ordinance related to protecting its tree canopy - reduce urban heat index and sequester carbon with help from educational institution
- Reduce the transportation burden by implementing a bus or shuttle program
- Use empty sunny lot for a senior community garden space because it is close to senior housing and have weekly farmers market and add solar panels in the area
- Use the commercial lot and cover it - solar panel canopy and transition to local produce market
- See if the library will hold storytelling by elders to teach younger generations about the community in the past and how to preserve it
- Leverage the empty lots to improve access to healthcare esp issues like heat exposure as well as climate resilience emergency centers with materials and safe haven

Group A's List

- This community is part of a large metropolitan city in a Southern state.
- There are more people over 60 than under 18.
- The high school graduation rate is lower than in surrounding areas.
- There are very few grocery stores- mostly quick marts and convenience stores.
- Most of the commercial spaces are vacant.
- There are crumbling sidewalks and very little public transportation infrastructure.
- Many buildings have been tagged/display graffiti.
- The mean income is lower than surrounding communities and unemployment is higher.
- Those who do have jobs commute outside of the community to get to them.
- Parts of the local creek are clogged with trash.
- After a hard rain/storm some neighborhoods experience combined sewer overflow and sewage in the streets.
- The chemical plant in the community has had two major fires in the recent past.

Folks who had List B, what do you notice about this list? How is it different from your list?

Group B's List

- There is a neighborhood park with basketball courts and playgrounds.
- Some of the buildings have murals and art from residents.
- During the day, some residents gather in commercial parking lots to grill-out and eat together.
- The community has abundant tree canopy/shade trees.
- Some of the residents keep chickens and sell their eggs.
- Many men in the community are part of the same brotherhood/service society.
- A big creek runs through the community and in many places has sandy banks where local kids play.
- There is a popular local library with a bank of computers, a few loaner laptops, and a dedicated staff.
- This area has rich local history that is known by longtime residents, especially elder women.
- There are several churches in the community.
- Three empty lots get lots of sunshine and are within walking distance of the affordable housing for seniors.
- In emergencies, residents have a phone-tree system to communicate about evacuations, extra resources, and the location of generators.

Folks who had List A, what do you notice about this list? How is it different from your list?

These are observations of the SAME community

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Now that you have the full list of observations, would any of your recommendations change? Are there any new recommendations you would add?

Reflection

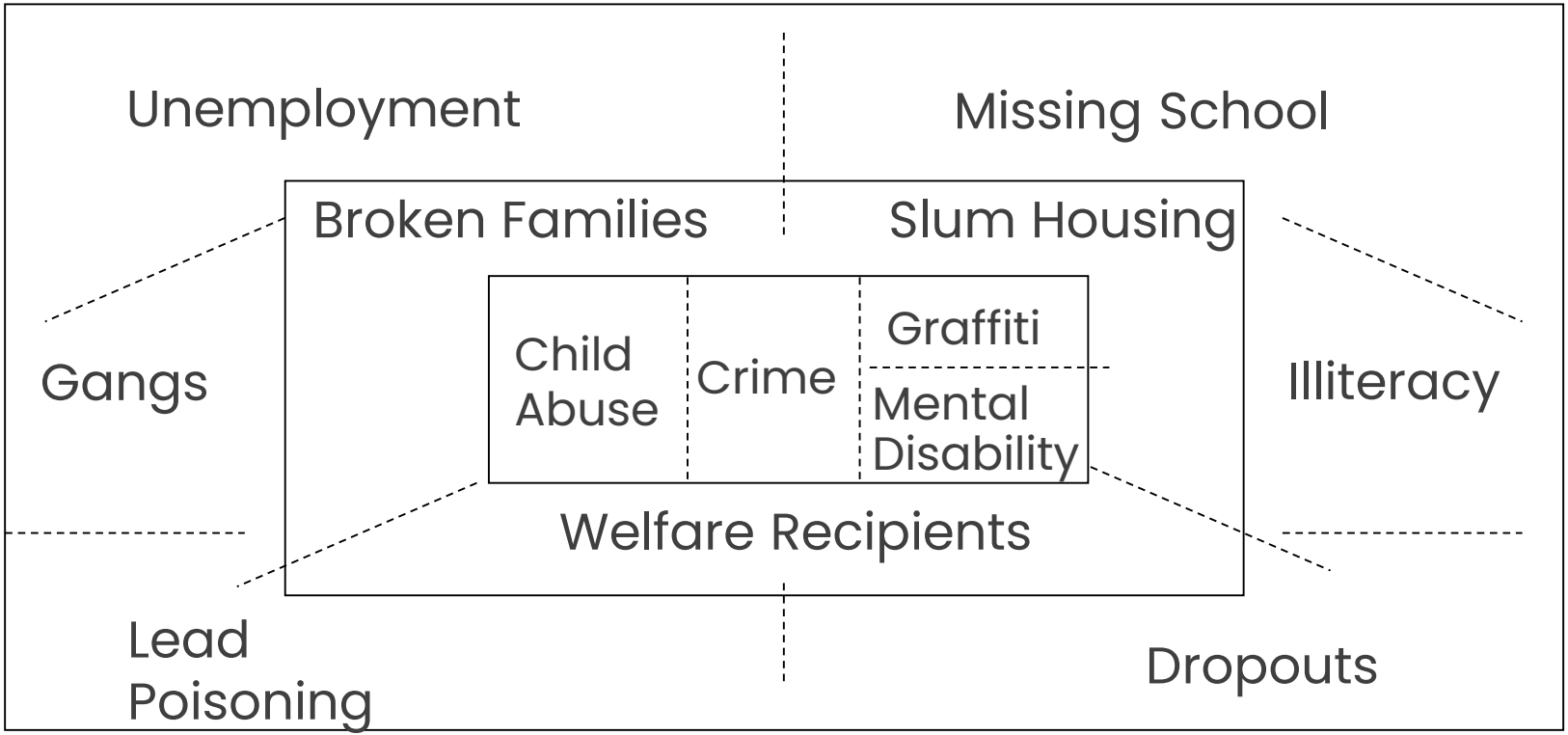
- Whenever we go into a community, what we immediately see creates the baseline for our judgements about it - what is or isn't "missing."
- It is common for us to focus on what a community doesn't have and let that frame how we view that community - **if we determine that "X" is missing, then that must be what the community "needs."**
- Making recommendations based on what the community lacks = ***needs based***
- Making recommendations based on leveraging what a community already has = ***asset based***

Introducing ABCD: THE DILEMMA

People and Communities have *deficiencies & needs*

Individuals and Communities have *assets and capacities*

NEIGHBORHOOD NEEDS MAP



EFFECTS OF A NEEDS APPROACH

- Residents internalize labels (i.e. “We are deficient”)
- Local relationships are damaged
- Most money comes into community for (often) narrowly defined programs
- Money can get misdirected towards professional helpers, not residents
- Focus is placed on leaders who magnify community deficiencies
- Failure is rewarded and residents become dependent on systems
- Residents experience powerlessness and hopelessness

connect
community + climate + action
Community Assets
Schools/colleges
Bike trails
Block clubs
Family traditions
Natural areas
Government agencies
Park districts
Beaches/waterways
Individuals' gifts
Cultural values
Health organizations
Art/theater groups
Youth and elderly
Religious organizations
Local businesses
Voluntary associations
Youth organizations
Public art/public spaces
Gardens
Food stores
Recycling centers
Libraries
Individuals
Culture & traditions
Associations
Physical assets
Economy
Institutions & organizations

Asset-Focused Approaches . . .
Deficit-Oriented Approaches . . .
Focus on assets
Builds from opportunities
Investment orientation
Emphasis on associations
Focus on community
Goal is empowerment
Power comes from relationships
People are the answer
People are citizens
COMPARISON
Focus on needs
Responds to problems
Charity orientation
Emphasis on agencies
Focus on individuals
Goal is services
Power comes from credentials
Programs are the answer
People are clients

ABCD Principles

- Every person and every community has gifts.
- ABCD focuses especially on engaging gifts from marginalized people and groups.
- Successful neighborhood action is the result of assets being identified - connected - and mobilized.
- ABCD builds relationships among community members that are mutually supportive.
- ABCD aims to give community members stronger roles in local social change work - which makes the change more sustainable.
- There must be connectors to do this work - individuals, associations, and/or local institutions focused on building relationships and networks.

A

B

C

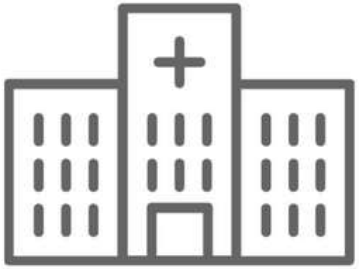
D

COMM-UNITY ASSETS

FOUNDATIONAL ASSETS

Individuals

Associations



Institutions

Individuals

- The gifts of local residents: hopes, concerns, and talents.
- Everyone has something to offer.
- ABCD especially seeks to include traditionally excluded people.
- The only asset in every success story.

Associations

- Small, informal groups of people.
- Individuals choose to give their gifts.
- Power comes from the pooling of individual gifts.
- Clubs, groups, unnamed affiliations.

Institutions

- Three types: for profit, not-for-profit, and governmental.
- Formally structured and work toward repeatable goals.
- Individuals are paid for their work.
- Resource abundant.

Let’s Reflect: Your Research, CER & ABCD

What phrases or mental images are staying with you from this exercise?

What was interesting or surprising? Confusing or frustrating?

What connections do you see between ABCD and your research (if any)? How might ABCD be helpful as a starting point for exploring CER (if you’re new to it) or moving in some new directions with CER (if you’ve done CER before)?

In what scenarios - presently or in your future work / career can you imagine using an ABCD lens or framework?

Some of our favorite ABCD resources

*TOP RECOMMENDATION FOR FACULTY FELLOWS: Special issue of *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* exploring intersections between ABCD and Community-Engaged Research (CER) – co-edited by SCoRE senior director and ABCD Institute Steward Jennifer Hirsch

*TOP RECOMMENDATION FOR FACULTY FELLOWS: Asset-based Approaches to Engaging Communities in Sustainability – see links to a variety of resources from SLS Director and ABCD Institute Steward Jennifer Hirsch

The Asset-Based Community Development Institute at DePaul University (loads of resources on this site)

ABCD Basic Slide Presentation with Notes from The ABCD Institute

"What is Asset-based Community Development (ABCD)" from the Collaborative for Neighborhood Transformation"

"The New Paradigm for Effective Community Development - Asset-based" by ABCD Institute Steward Dan Duncan

"Building 21st Century Communities" by ABCD Institute Faculty Member Jim Diers - likely of special interest to planners, as Jim was the first director of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods in 1988 (see also his *Neighbor Power* book website here)

Sustainable Community Development: From What's Wrong to What's Strong – TED-X talk by ABCD Institute Steward Cormac Russell