



# Community work: ABCD approach

# What is ABCD:

- ABCD stands for Asset-Based Community Development. It refers to a type of community development based on the work of professors John (Jody) Kretzmann and John McKnight.
- ABCD challenges the traditional deficit-based approach that tries to solve urban development problems by focusing on the **needs and deficiencies** of residents, neighborhoods, etc.
- ABCD demonstrates that **local assets** (people, physical assets etc.) are key to ensure sustainable community development
- ABCD aims to build capacity within communities by expanding their social capital.

# Social capital:

- Robert Putnam:  
Features of social life such as **networks, norms and social trust** that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.  
(Putnam 1995. “Bowling alone: America’s declining social capital” Journal of Democracy 6).

- READ MORE: **Ferlander, Sara 2007. The Importance of Different Forms of Social Capital for Health. Acta Sociologica 2007. Vol 50(2): 115–128.**

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0001699307077654>

# Kretzmann: ABCD builds an inclusive community

- Understands, accepts, and **embraces change**
- Seeks **broad-based** participation
- Focuses on sustainable triple bottom line (**economic** vitality, **environmental** integrity, community **well-being**)
- Values **collaboration**
- Knows and builds on the community's **assets**, capacities, skills, comparative advantages and points of difference
- Continually **renews** and builds diversified **leadership** base
- Encourages **civic pride**
- Champions **passionate** and **entrepreneurial** attitudes and behaviors

# Basic principles

## 1

- Needs-based community development emphasizes local deficits and sometimes looks to outside agencies for resources. Asset-based community development focuses on leveraging existing **strengths** within the community. Solutions to community problems already exist within a community's assets.
- *Everyone has gifts*: Each person in a community has something to contribute.
- *Relationships build a community*: People must be **connected** in order for sustainable community development to take place.
- *Citizens at the center*: Citizens should be viewed as **actors**—not recipients—in development.

# Basic principles

## 2

- *Leaders involve others:* Community development is strongest when it involves a **broad base** of community action.
- *People care:* Challenge notions of "apathy" by **listening to** people's interests.
- *Listen:* Decisions should come from conversations where people are heard.
- *Ask:* **Asking** for ideas is more sustainable than giving solutions.
- *Inside-out organization:* Local community members are in control.
- *Institutions serve the community:* Institutional leaders should **create opportunities** for community-member involvement, then "step back."

# Assets are:



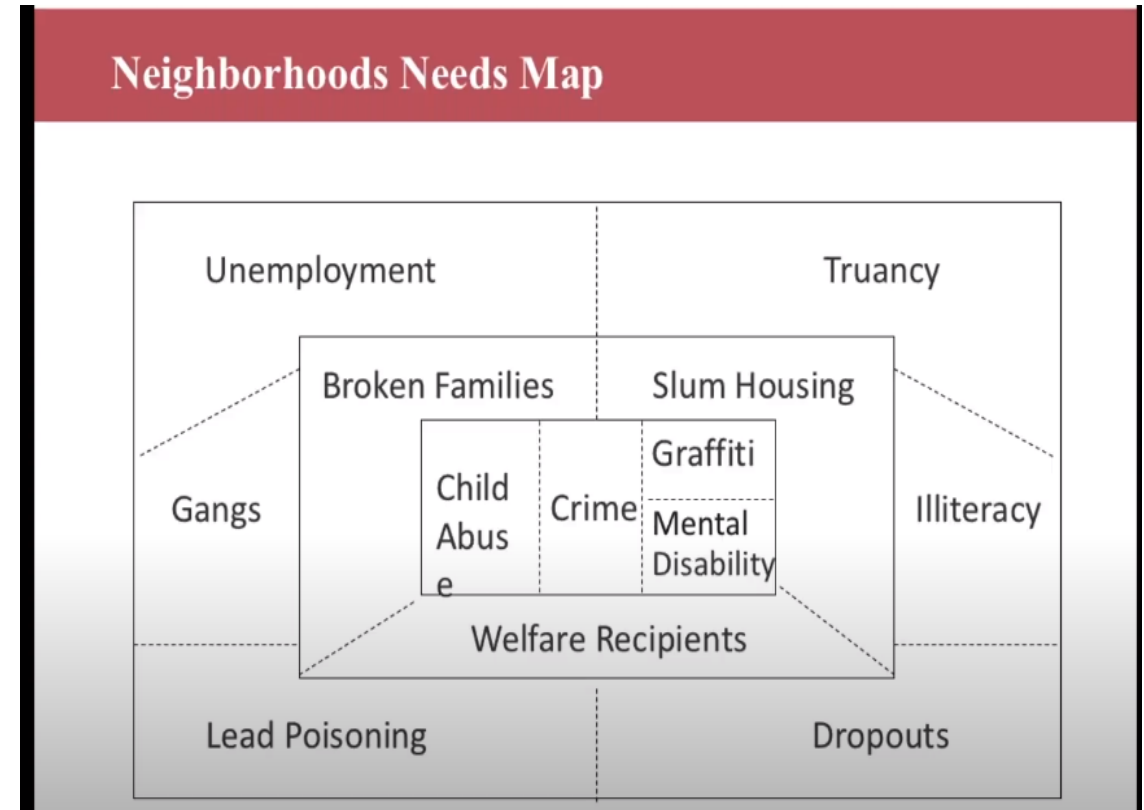
1. **INDIVIDUALS.** Everyone has assets, gifts and resources. They need to be recognized and identified.
2. **ASSOCIATIONS.** Small informal groups of volunteering people, such as clubs, are critical to community mobilization.
3. **INSTITUTIONS.** Public agencies with professionals, schools, private business etc. can help the community capture valuable resources and establish a sense of civic responsibility.
4. **PLACE BASED ASSETS.** Land, buildings, public and green spaces – places with strengths, where people like to be.
5. **CONNECTIONS AND NETWORKS.** Mutual connections are a vital asset to the community. Active people whose gift is to create connections are called connectors.

# ABCD tools 1:

- Community assets mapping

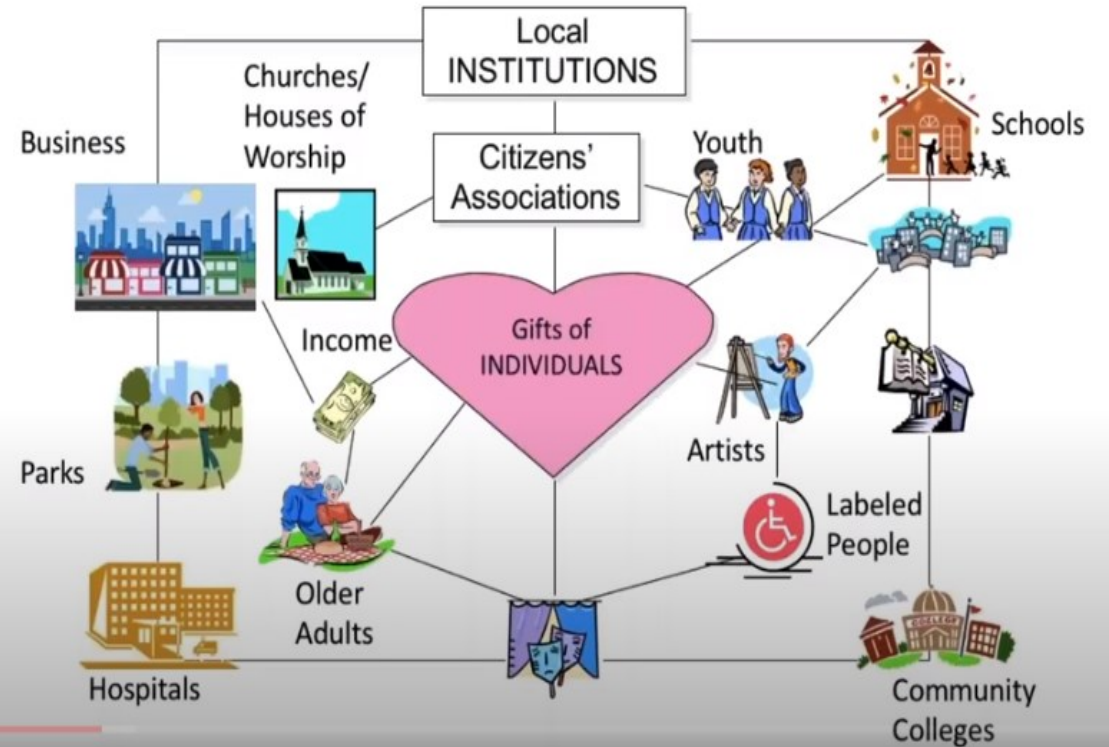


# From needs mapping...



...to assets  
mapping

## Community Assets Map



# ABCD Tools 2

## Types of Asset Mapping

### **Individual Asset Inventories:**

- Gifts, talents, dreams, hopes, fears

### **Associational Mapping:**

- Associations you know
- Associations you don't know
- What do they currently do?
- What have they talked about doing but haven't done yet?
- What might they do if they were asked?

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### **Institutional Mapping:**

- Important institutions (public, business etc.)
- Equipment
- How money is spent - supplies, services, hiring, etc.
- Current relationship with community

### **Physical Space Mapping:**

- What is in the neighborhood - parks, schools, libraries, community centers, hospitals and clinics, apartments, single family homes, neighborhood businesses, bike and walking paths, green spaces, vacant lots...
- What happens where - block club activity, recreation/sports, crime, senior activities, youth activities, clean-ups, code problems, housing type, etc.

# ABCD Tools 3

## Three planning questions:

1. As neighbors, what can we achieve **by using our own assets**?
2. What can we achieve with our own assets if we get some **outside help**?
3. What can't we do with our assets that **must be done** by outsiders?

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**ABCD process:  
an example**

See the video:  
Community Skills 4: Asset-  
based Community  
Development (7 min.)

[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=ena4Rhe\\_IPo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ena4Rhe_IPo)

# Criticism 1 (Emejulu 2015):

- ABCD is not necessarily a call for grassroots democracy but a response and a capitulation to the **neoliberalism** and its values of **individualisation**, **marketisation** and the **privatisation** of public life.
- ABCD seems to actively support the incursion of **free market ideas and principles** into community life—its peculiar focus on ‘assets’ rather than, say, ‘solidarity’ is not an accident.
- ABCD, perhaps inadvertently, directly contributes to the process of **privatising social problems** by shifting the **responsibility for tackling inequality** and injustice **from the state to individuals and communities** using the rhetoric of ‘community empowerment’.
- In this moment of **cuts to public spending**, it is not surprising that ABCD is popular.

## Criticism 2:

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- too local, too small scale? – does not address the macro challenges of justice or power? <- local voices need to be integrated into policies of large magnitude.
- neglects power? <- power is not a zero-sum game (e.g. “the government takes power, we surrender more”), a “win-win” attitude works on the community level.
- emphasis on empowerment and “do-it-yourself” overshadows a necessary conversation about rights? <- through ABCD, empowered citizens will be more likely and capable of challenging systems that undermine them
- too optimistic? <- there is strong evidence in successful community work projects
- anti-statist, rolls back the social welfare state <- community and the welfare state can unite their resources and work together.

# References

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