



Asset-Based Community Development

All you need to know about using an asset-based approach

What is it?

Every area has the potential to achieve more through the effective use of all the skills, knowledge and assets available within communities and individuals, as well as the public private and voluntary sector. This is known as an asset-based approach

Assets include individual, community and physical assets:

- **Individual assets** – knowledge, skills, talents, gifts, passion and strengths etc.
- **Community assets** – groups, networks, clubs, voluntary and community sector organisations etc.
- **Physical assets** – church, community centre, village hall, school, park, green-space etc.

This approach is about valuing available assets in order to nurture and connect them for the benefits of individuals, families and communities. It challenges the traditional deficit approach, which focusing on the needs and deficiencies of individuals and neighbourhoods – i.e. on what is wrong – as a means of solving urban and rural problems.

An asset-based approach focuses on what works for people and their communities in keeping

them well. It advocated a focus on 'what is strong, not what is wrong'.

Characteristics of an asset based approach

- Asset-based models cannot be imposed from above. Instead the focus is on people as assets, shifting power to communities through co-production, i.e. working together in an equal way and in partnership with the voluntary and community sector and public sector as facilitators and catalysts.
- There is no 'one size fits all' approach.
- Such models, by their very nature, grow out of communities and it is important that they are given the space and support to develop and succeed.
- They enable people to participate in and benefit from community resources and activities.
- The focus is on what matters to people and communities, rather than being service-led or too narrowly focused on needs. Instead, such models are community-based and community-led.

Why should we adopt this approach?

- It increases feelings of control and confidence amongst individuals and communities
 - It enhances health, wellbeing and resilience
 - It provides support to address social and economic needs, e.g. social isolation, employability
 - It builds the capacity of local communities and ensures sustainable community development, enabling people to participate in and benefit from community resources and activities
 - It increases mental wellbeing through activities such as volunteering
 - It increases the capacity to choose healthy behaviours and improve physical and mental health outcomes
- It reduces long-term pressures on higher cost health, care and support services
- There is a commitment from Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group to this approach

How might we carry out this approach in practice?

First, begin by having community conversations with individuals/communities, asking the following questions.

- What do people enjoy doing?
- What do they care about?
- What keeps them well?
- What matters to them?
- What is working in their communities?
- Do they know of previous successes where the community has come together, positive stories about their community and/or themselves?

Through this activity you can start to appreciate what you have as a community and can build up a picture of its existing and potential assets. This information will form the basis of an **asset map**, which can be looked at in terms of:

- **Heart** – What do individuals/organisations care about? What motivates them to act?
- **Hand** – What practical skills do individuals/organisations have? What do they do already and what could they do?
- **Head** – What knowledge/expertise do individuals/groups have? What do they know about?

Think about building the connections between people and resources, and different forms of support. Then develop actions and activity to use the identified assets for agreed purposes.

The next step is to use an **appreciative inquiry** process to reflect, affirm and develop actions by identifying:

- Past strengths and successes (discover)
- The ideal future (dream)
- Practical ways of achieving the ideal world (design)
- How the ideal world can be achieved (delivery)

There are a number of ways in which asset-based models connect people to resources and forms of support, which can include:

- Social prescribing
- Link workers
- Community navigators
- Peer support workers

An asset-based approach puts a high value on a sense of belonging and capacity to control, as well as on finding meaning and self worth, which promotes resilience and wellbeing and develops connected individuals and flourishing communities.

If you want advice and support developing this approach in your community or organisation please do not hesitate to get in touch with us at NCVA.

You can find further details on this approach through the resources listed below.

References

Foot J and Hopkins T (2010), *[‘A glass half-full: how an asset approach can improve community health and well-being’](#)*. London: IDEA.

Rippon S and Hopkins T (2015), *[‘Head, hands and heart: asset based approaches in health care – A review of the conceptual evidence and case studies of asset based approaches in health, care and wellbeing’](#)*. The Health Foundation

Do you need more support with developing an asset-based approach in your community or organisation?

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