Community Building Guide

"**For the future, it would be amazing to see a community where people don't feel lonely, where people feel supported and people can use their skills and gifts and share it with other people, so we're not so reliant on the Council to sort small things because actually, there's people in the community who can help each other. It would be really nice for neighbours to say hello, and people run their different groups and feel empowered to do what they want to do.**" *Merethe, Paganhill resident*

Community Building Guide

INTRODUCTION

Barnwood Trust has spent the last 6 years developing its community building practice in 20+ areas in Gloucestershire, to build stronger and more inclusive communities across our county. This guide brings together the learning of the Community Building team, over that time.

What is this guide?

This is a hands-on guide to community building, produced by the Community Building team at Barnwood Trust. It draws on extensive and varied experiences from within the team. In this document you will find practical guidance and examples of community building techniques – at different stages of connecting people in a place. Throughout this guide there are top tips, ideas boxes and stories to think about. At the end of this guide there is also a toolkit of pragmatic activities and plans that may be useful for putting some of this work into practice.

In the next section of this guide are the principles of Asset-based Community Development, which underpin our community building activity. In addition, information about the context of Barnwood's community approach is outlined.

Who is it for?

The purpose of the guide is to share what our team have learned, to enable more community-led activity across the county. This guide is for practitioners and professionals working in a community context – from people who are new to community work through to people who would like to develop their community practice further. It may also be of interest to community groups and residents who are keen to grow a stronger community where they live.

During 2020 and beyond, Barnwood Trust will be publishing research findings on the impact, reach and process of our community building work. If you would like to know more please contact the Head of Research roz.warden@barnwoodtrust.org

BACKGROUND

Barnwood Trust is dedicated to creating the best possible environment in Gloucestershire for disabled people and people with mental health challenges to make the most of their lives. We do this by developing people, spaces and voices in a community context.

Barnwood Trust

Barnwood Trust is a long-established charitable foundation with a history of innovation. Since the early beginnings over 200 years ago, Barnwood has valued the dignity of the individual, mutual respect and quality of life for all.

Today, we help thousands of people every year through four areas of work: Discovering Opportunities, Shaping Homes, Growing Communities and Sharing Insights. This means we encourage people to follow their passions, influence housing provision, give grants to help people with day-to-day living, strengthen inclusive communities, and share knowledge and ideas. Barnwood builds belonging across the county, recognising the contribution everyone makes to Gloucestershire.

Once a service provider, Barnwood Trust has shifted its approach for the 21st Century. The Trust became a grant-giving organisation in the 1980s and in 2011 established a new strategy to help create the conditions for social change in the county.

> "We want everyone to have something to do that they enjoy, everyone to have the confidence to join in because they know they'll be welcome, and that 'everyone' includes people living with disabilities and mental health challenges."
> Sally Byng, Chief Executive for Barnwood Trust

Why take a community approach?

We recognise that creating the best possible environment in Gloucestershire, for all people to live and grow old in, is not something we can achieve by ourselves. Our mission is to be a catalyst for lasting change in the county. To achieve this our goals are to develop people, spaces and voices in a community context.

The new government strategy 'A Connected Society: A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change' talks about the need for more connectivity within community, as follows:

> "The relationships we have with our friends, family, neighbours and colleagues are, for many of us, the most important things in our lives. Increasingly, we understand the link between having strong and meaningful social connections and living a healthy and successful life. And we see that having more connected communities means a more thriving, productive society, in which we can all contribute and live fulfilling lives"
> *HM Government 2018*

At Barnwood Trust we have learnt that, when it comes to connection and a sense of belonging, most of the difficulties for disabled people and people with mental health challenges do not lie with the person – rather, they are societal. Every disabled person has unique strengths, impairments and personal circumstances. And yet, social isolation is an experience that many disabled people have in common – from physical barriers to social stigma. Change is required across society; that is why we take a community approach to benefit everyone in our county.

BACKGROUND

Further Reading

A Connected Society: A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/750909/6.4882_DCMS_Loneliness_Strategy_web_Update.pdf

FOUNDATION

Asset Based Community Development is the foundation for community building. It starts with assets and possibilities already present within a community; supporting people to come together and to recognise each other's strengths.

Asset Based Community Development

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) shifts us from seeing communities for their needs or problems, to seeing them as full of potential. Each person in the community has a unique set of skills that, when recognised and utilised, can strengthen the community as a whole. So, ABCD describes the process that brings people together to enable change locally, as led by the community itself. The Jeder Institute, a pioneering ABCD organisation, explains how:

> "Asset Based Community Development is a globally adopted approach that recognises and builds on the strengths, gifts, talents and resources of individuals and communities to create strong, inclusive and sustainable communities."
>
> *The Jeder Institute, Australia*

The Jeder Institute describes ABCD as a set of key principles and practical methods for effective community engagement and development. ABCD principles are applied to help mobilise community by:

1. focusing on abilities and potential, rather than problems and deficits
2. discovering the resources or 'assets' that are already present in a community
3. placing community members at the centre of decision-making and in control of their own lives
4. building relationships between people and creating space for opportunities to emerge

> "ABCD is based on the belief that people primarily want a life, not a service, and that the best way to get a 'good life' is by increasing interdependency in communities."
>
> *Profs. Jody Kretzmann and John McKnight, ABCD Institute, USA*

Core Principles of Asset Based Community Development

There are **five** Core Principles of ABCD that act as a compass to help navigate through this process. These are recognised internationally by community workers and community building organisations.

1. Resident-led: There are many things that people in communities are able to do for themselves, together with their neighbours, and by utilising the assets around them. This is about residents taking the lead, using what they have to secure what they need. Until they know what they have, they cannot really know what they need from outside the community. It's worth considering:

- What is it that residents in communities are best placed to do together?
- What is it that residents can best do, with some outside help?
- What is it that communities need outside agencies to do for them?
- What is it that communities need outside agencies to stop doing for them?

If we invite local residents to ask these questions it can put them in the driving seat of change. What do they have locally in their control? How can they use that to secure what else they need from outside? In this way, residents can take a powerful lead in directing outside 'helpers' to support their community.

2. Relationship-focused: ABCD principles assume that every person has unique gifts, skills and passions. When people come together with a willingness to explore and share these gifts and interests, the community as a whole comes to recognise and utilise its own strength, and relationships are grown. As one resident described:

> "The café can be a really scary place to walk into if you don't know anyone. Relationships are key; having conversations, seeing people's lives change, people having a value - a snowball effect. That is what we want."
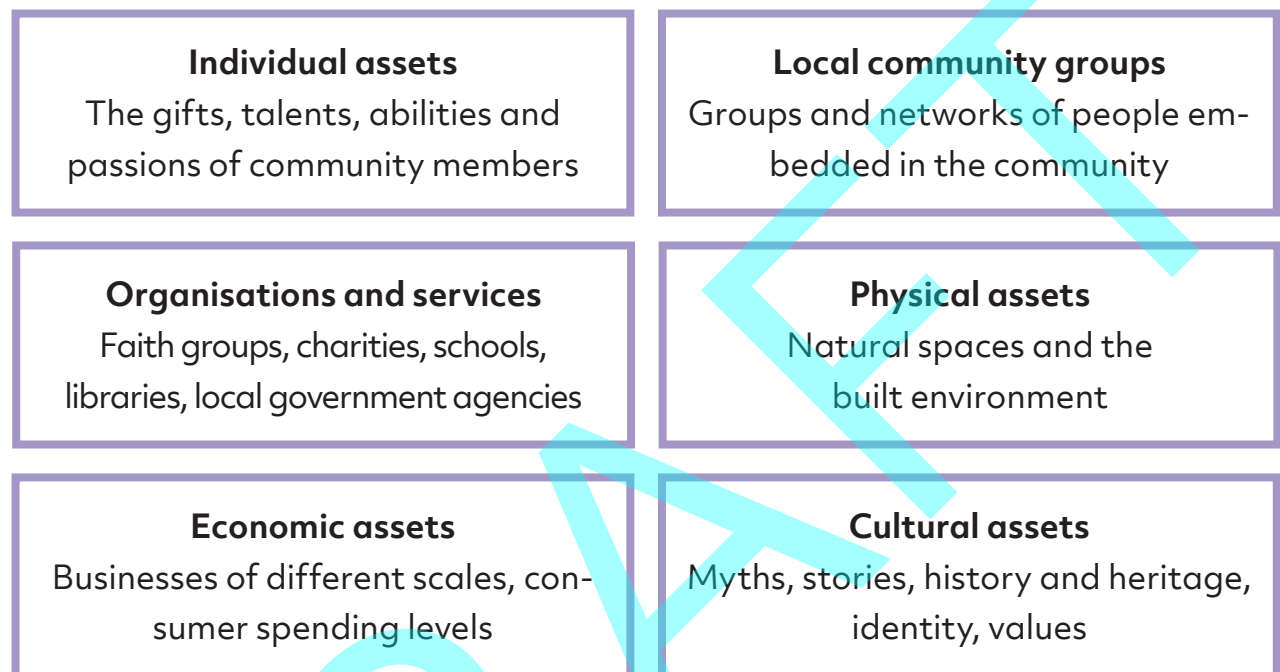> *Merethe, Paganhill resident*

3. Asset-based: A central principle for ABCD is to recognise and identify what's strong, not what's wrong. This is not an attempt to minimise life's challenges: ABCD is the journey by which people come together to intentionally build on the strengths of the community, and challenges are addressed naturally as a by-product. Community Builders in Cambridgeshire describe how:

"Every community, no matter what reputation it has for being deprived, apathetic or 'troubled,' has an abundance of local resources. If connected appropriately, these resources can pave the way for self-sustaining, inclusive communities that stand strong despite social or economic adversity."
Resilient Together, A Practitioner's Guide to Community Building, CPSL Mind

Examples of types of assets are as follows:

Individual assets The gifts, talents, abilities and passions of community members	**Local community groups** Groups and networks of people embedded in the community
Organisations and services Faith groups, charities, schools, libraries, local government agencies	**Physical assets** Natural spaces and the built environment
Economic assets Businesses of different scales, consumer spending levels	**Cultural assets** Myths, stories, history and heritage, identity, values

See pages 31 and 32 for more information about assets and Asset Mapping and about core gifts and the process of Discovering Gift, later in this guide.

4. Local community: Neighbourhoods, small towns, villages and streets are often where people come to believe that they can make an impact. This neighbour-to-neighbour connection is not about service provision, it is simply about neighbourliness.

"So many of our communities in Gloucestershire are already doing amazing stuff together. This approach isn't some new-fangled model, it's been developed directly from the stories of communities coming together and making things better. It is a way of viewing our neighbourhoods. In some of our most welcoming communities there is often more that can be done to extend the welcome - and in other communities sometimes all it takes is a couple of people coming together to start changing their neighbourhood in wonderful ways."
Philip, Community Builder

5. Inclusion-focused: ABCD seeks to engage whoever wants to be included and involved in their community and to be viewed as a community asset - whatever that looks like for them. It's important to find ways to actively include disabled people and people with mental health challenges. Recognising the roles that different people can play, and the different ways in which people and groups can participate in the life of the neighbourhood, makes a vital difference to individuals and to the community as a whole.

> "Community builders see each person in a community as a complex and unique human being with an abundance of gifts. This includes people whose gifts are often overlooked, for example disabled people and people with mental health challenges. As we celebrate that richness within people, we support communities in ways that benefit us all." *Cathy Griffiths, Head of Welcoming & Community Building, Barnwood Trust*

What is Community Building?

In adopting the ABCD approach, community builders aim to catalyse change within communities. We try to cultivate a culture in which everyone is valued, welcomed and included. We work to enable people to connect with others in their neighbourhood, build friendships and find things that they enjoy doing together.

So, we support residents to discover one another's skills and interests, and connect people around 'hidden treasures' in a place. This can take place in a variety of ways, including supporting groups of residents to start meeting together for coffee or to pursue a common interest, or even to hold a neighbourhood street party.

Community Building is about equipping and enabling others to do the things that they want or need to do, together with other people in their community. We also support residents to equip and encourage one another - to pursue the things that are important to them, and to build deeper relationships in the process.

> "Community Building is a chain reaction. It's sparked when we all know we have a part to play, that we belong, and that our actions are significant: we discover our unique way to be leaders in our lives, and enable others to do the same."
> *Molly, Community Builder*

Strengths-based practice

Strength-based practice builds on a person's skills, strengths and support systems in response to a problem or crisis. It works with the question "What is it within me and around me that keeps me safe and strong?" and builds from there. Community Building is similar because it focuses on what is strong, but there does not need to be a problem to fix. It does not ignore problems but focuses on resident-led ideas - what the community wants to build on together.

What Community Building is:

- Getting to know people and helping them see what's possible locally
- Facilitating conversations and connections between people
- Finding ways for each unique person to be a valued part of their community
- Recognising people's gifts, including disabled people and people with mental health challenges, and people who feel they are on the margins
- Encouraging people to see and celebrate what's already present in their community - finding and connecting around strengths
- Supporting people to explore ideas with their neighbours, and to act on them
- Helping to identify people's passions and gifts to share
- Asking questions that provoke action and inspire people to get together
- Encouraging people to share their stories

What Community Building isn't:

- A linear, scientific process
- Leading on events, or providing activities or services for people
- Providing the answers
- A one-size-fits-all exercise
- Short-term
- A solution to government cuts

There may not be a rule book but there are principles, experiences and suggestions that we can explore to help inform the work in a variety of contexts. New Community Builders take time to find their feet and develop their own approach – perhaps in conjunction with tools that other people have found useful in the past, perhaps by developing their own.

"Community building practice is organic, we can't provide a step by step guide, or a set of directions on a map. All we can offer is a compass – a set of guidelines and principles to help someone figure out their own way forward."

Sue, Community Builder

Evaluation: Thinking about capturing outcomes

At the early stages it is helpful to begin thinking about whether you might like to document the impact of community involvement for residents in the area.

Traditional approaches to evaluation can sometimes involve setting targets for outputs and outcomes for a project from the outset. The resident-led focus of ABCD, where community builders seek to follow the passions and interests of residents, challenges us to think differently about what success might look like and how to measure it.

Exploring a range of different evaluation methods, and thinking creatively about how you might use them, can be helpful at this stage.

Learn more: Barnwood's Research team have shared their reflections of capturing impact in Gloucestershire https://www.barnwoodtrust.org/blog/reflections-researching-community-building-gloucestershire/

FOUNDATION

Further Reading

Art of Participatory Community Building: guidebook by Jeder Institute
http://jeder.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ABCD-Immersive-Guidebook.pdf

4 Essential Elements of an Asset Based Community Development process: ABCD Institute
https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/4_Essential_Elements_of_ABCD_Process.pdf

Resilient Together, A Practitioner's Guide to Community Building by CPSL Mind
https://www.cpslmind.org.uk/what-we-do/resilient-together/abcd/

Community Building Guide

An overview of the Community Building components

For many Community Builders, the main components of the role fall into the following three categories, which feed into one another:

Discovery Stage
- Guiding principles in practice
- Getting to know the community
- Connecting with people and groups
- Hanging out in 'bumping' spaces
- Starting purposeful conversations
- Open, strength-based questioning
- Starting with possibilities, not problems
- Encouraging big thinking
- Listening

WHERE TO START?

HOW TO PROGRESS?

Reflective Practice
- Self-reflection and personal challenge
- Offering 'good' help and knowing when to step back
- Thinking about what enables activities and relationships in the community to be sustainable
- Listening to residents' community stories and encouraging groups to share their stories
- Creating blogs and podcasts to capture our own stories too

WHAT NEXT?

Building Relationships
- Facilitating and supporting people to discover community assets
- Developing people's skills and confidence and recognising their 'Gifts'
- Finding and connecting people:
    - o with ideas/vision
    - o with passion for change
    - o willing to offer time/skills
    - o on the margins
- Bringing people together to explore possibilities further
- Enabling rather than doing

As a Community Builder, getting started is perhaps your greatest challenge. You may have received an invitation to get involved with the community, but even so it can feel daunting to enter the unknown - where to start?

The first task is to figure out what energy, interest and passions already exist in the community. This is often called the 'Discovery' stage.

The initial phase of the Community Building role is discovery:

- Guiding principles in practice
- Getting to know the community
- Connecting with people and groups
- Hanging out in 'bumping' spaces
- Starting purposeful conversations
- Open, strength-based questioning
- Encouraging big thinking
- Starting with possibilities, not problems
- Listening

– *What's happening?*
– *Who's who?*
– *Who wants to chat?*
– *What's important to people?*
– *What's possible here?*
– *Where's the energy?*

Principles in practice

Discovery is an exciting phase of the community building process but it isn't easy. As a team of Community Builders, we developed and learned our roles together and by frequently reflecting on our own practice.

> "In the beginning we questioned ourselves every day: How can we present ourselves in a friendly manner, while neither offering to be someone's friend nor imposing a firm organisational agenda, as we talk with them about their passions and gifts? How can we get across that we are authentically exploring what's possible locally, without people thinking we want something in return?"
>
> *Molly, Community Builder*

How the team approached the challenge of getting started was slightly different for each of us, based on the areas we were in and on our own styles of working. The following concepts helped us in the beginning to put the fundamental principles of ABCD (p7) into practice, and continue to guide us now:

Avoid assumptions	**Authentic relationships**
Focus on people's passions	**Encourage and enable**
Travel at the speed of trust	**Seek invitation**
Self-aware	**Who else?**

Avoid assumptions: It's best not to have preconceived ideas about how things will go. When talking with a resident, it's important to truly listen to what they want to say about the community, to their hopes and dreams for the area and to the gifts or talents that they'd like to share with others. Rather than focusing on any particular outcome or ideas of our own, it's best to ask the sorts of questions that will encourage them to think about what it would take to turn their hopes into reality; how they can best share their gifts with those around them; and find their own way forward, driven by their own motivation.

This connects with the ABCD principles **Resident-Led** *and* **Local Community.**

"In the early days I found it really hard not to steer conversations. It was so tempting to jump to an idea and think about ways to move it forwards, rather than being patient and waiting to see how the resident themselves could imagine it developing."
Molly, Community Builder

Authentic relationships: How you present yourself, and the language you use to describe your reason for being in the community, is really important. If people think you are there working to make things happen for the community, the power dynamic is really unhelpful. Alternatively, if your role is to encourage more residents to make things happen for themselves, the power shifts away from you and back onto the residents.

*This connects with the ABCD principle **Relationship-Focused.***

"When I go into a conversation with somebody, I'm not there to go through a list of questions from a clipboard, but what I'm trying to do is build some sort of relationship where I can discover their interests and see how connections might be made, with others rather than myself. This might be over a cup of tea, or in a group, or on the street."
Liam, Community Builder

Focus on people's passions: When people in a community are passionate about meeting others, bringing people together, sharing a skill for the benefit of the neighbourhood, or even pursuing an idea or interest alongside other people, this is where the work comes to life. We spend time finding people with that sort of energy and enthusiasm, and then encouraging them to run with it! We support them to follow their own passion, on the strength of their own motivation and alongside others in the area who share their energy.

*This connects with the ABCD principle **Resident-Led** and **Asset-Based.***

Knitting stations | *Jane, Community Builder*

"When I started as a Community Builder, it was Pantomime season, and someone suggested that the local community come together and decorate the local theatre for Jack and the Beanstalk. I supported a group of residents to run with this idea, and they decided to knit a Beanstalk for the show. The project mushroomed from there, they set up small knitting stations in cafes, waitingrooms and shops all over the community with pairs of needles and green wool – people were invited to knit a few rows and then leave it for the next person to continue it. Every day the green knitting grew longer. People began sending in letters, some saying that they had been unwell but now had a motive to get up and do something – the response was incredible! Even the local primary school got involved. When it was over, the beautiful Beanstalk was stitched into blankets for orphanages in Romania. And a core group of people who had been meeting for the project continued as a knitting group, which is still thriving years later!"

Encourage and enable: Being present in a place, without having preconceptions or expectations, opens natural conversations and enables you to notice the strengths of the area – neighbourliness, kindness, creativity, and so on. Hanging out in the community, smiling and chatting with people about the area and about people's hopes and ideas can give rise to rich interactions. Our approach is to talk with people about what's important to them in the community; it's not about providing a service or offering to organise things.

This connects with the ABCD principles **Resident-Led** *and* **Asset-Based.**

> 'When I start a conversation with a resident, I always start by asking, 'How are you?' It's a really helpful thing to do to find out about someone before you talk about anything else, to show that you're interested in them as a person."
> *Sue, Community Builder*

Travel at the speed of trust: As a Community Builder spending time in a neighbourhood it is vitally important to build trust, in particular to help foster relationships and trust between residents. You need to ensure that your role and intentions are clear and that people feel comfortable with you being around. Move at a slow and steady pace, be reliable and let people know that community action,

led by residents, matters to you. Our work will always be unpredictable, non-linear, and all the richer because of its emergent nature.

*This connects with the ABCD principles **Relationship-Focused** and **Local Community.***

> **Top Tip:** Consider creating a Facebook page so that residents can see who you are and see the kinds of stories and local activities you share.
> It can also be a good way for people to contact you.

Seek invitation: Ask for permission to visit groups or societies before attending. Ensure people are comfortable with you being present at their meeting or club, and be open about why you are there. If a resident personally invites you, or is happy to accompany you, all the better. You'll need to discern when it is ok to pop in and visit a community activity and when to wait for an invitation. Consider the trust you are building, the reason for your visit and the purpose of your conversations, to determine what feels most appropriate in each situation. (Context is key – there is no one-size-fits-all to this work.)

*This connects with the ABCD principles **Resident-Led** and **Asset-Based,** and potentially also **Inclusion-Focused.***

> **Top Tip:** Get to know community-facing professionals in the area, they will have valuable knowledge to share and contacts in the local area to help you get started. Bear in mind that Community Builders are primarily accountable to local residents, and that this matters more than a commitment to one approach or another. Residents must be the ones leading the change – and while paid practitioners may have valuable local knowledge and relationships in the community, they should be there to support citizen-led change, not to replace it.

Self-aware: Be aware of your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. Ask yourself how you are feeling and what energy levels you have on that day, and think about the impact it could have on your interactions. Be open and honest about the boundaries of your role – what you're not able to do as much as what you are, as well as being clear that you won't be present in the community forever. And always be mindful about sensitivities that there may be for people you meet and only pursue a conversation if someone is genuinely willing and comfortable to engage.

"Learning about ABCD has subtly changed the way I think and communicate. There is such a delight in hearing other people's passions. However, there are also days when I don't feel so open to such conversations. It is important to be aware of our own energy levels and sensitivities. For example, my enthusiasm can encourage one person but equally it can be too much for someone else."
Philip, Community Builder

Who else? It's also worth thinking about who's not present; who we're not connecting with - disabled people (including people with less visible impairments), people with mental health challenges, people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, people in varying financial circumstances, elderly people, young parents, children – in short, all members of a community. You might also consider the impact of times of day you work (weekend / daytime / evening). Working through ways of including people who may be marginalised in your area won't always be easy but speak to residents and get their help to come up with ideas for enabling a wide range of people to get involved.

"Community Builders emphasise inclusion. This is because everyone in a community has something to contribute – whether at the centre of that community or on its margins. Active inclusion means far more than just helping someone be present in their community, it's about helping the community find their own practical ways to engage people who are on the margins; to provide equal access and opportunity, to challenge discrimination, and to remove local barriers to involvement."
Cathy Griffiths, Head of Welcoming & Community Building, Barnwood Trust

The Art of Conversation

A Community Builder's role is to keep the conversations about possibility alive. We consider how best to encourage people to 'think out loud' about what might be possible in their community, and to think about what their own passions and skills are that they might be willing to offer others.

"Purposeful conversations are centred around the people we meet; how local people can turn their dreams into a reality in their own way, using their own skills and resources. It's not about something we want to achieve or anything we want to do for people: it's theirs."
Kat, Community Builder

The idea is to help people to think outside of the box - to equip people to pursue their dreams, to bring people together, to get to know their neighbours better, and to include people who may not often be invited.

And it all starts with a conversation.

Questions

Asking appropriate and engaging questions is a skill. In almost every conversation we look out for certain things: ideas, abilities and talents; what someone wants to learn; what people care about; concerns that a person may have for their community or for a friend or neighbour.

Later, we might move our questioning to ask about what it would take to turn ideas into a reality, or to find out who they know that might want to be involved.

Whatever the context, the way you frame your questions will impact on the direction of your conversations. So, think about questions that have potential to inspire, energise, and mobilise. Strengths-based questions work best – appreciating what we have, imagining what could be, then creating what will be.

The following outlines the difference between questions based in problems and in strengths:

Problem-focused questions	Strengths-focused questions
• What's the biggest problem here? • Why don't people get involved? • Why do we still have those problems? • What do we need to fix?	• *What can we do together?* • *What have we already got to build on?* • *What possibilities exist that we have not yet considered?* • *What's the smallest action that could make the biggest impact?* • *What has worked in the past?*

"Starting with what's strong doesn't mean ignoring the challenges that communities face – rather, communities can use what's strong to address what's wrong, and make what's strong stronger!"

Philip, Community Builder

These purposeful conversations can take place in many different contexts: in local groups, in cafes and pubs, at the bus stop or park bench. We hang out, we listen, we ask questions and we encourage.

For examples of helpful questions to prompt conversations in a variety of settings see the Useful Questions TOOL.

Importance of listening

Our role isn't to advise with our own ideas or plans; we discover what people in the community would like to do. This knowledge comes about through deliberately and consciously listening to people – listening without interrupting, without jumping in with suggestions, and without putting words in people's mouths.

Ways of starting

During the discovery stage, hang out where the community hangs out! Holding in mind the principles described above, it's useful to form a list of places in your area where people gather and are likely to 'bump' into each other and make small-talk. Typical 'bumping spaces' include local pubs, cafés, libraries, community centres and other shared spaces in the community. In addition, bus stops, post offices, park benches and street corners are also useful - anywhere that people gather and may be open to having an informal conversation.

> **Sitting on a wall |** *Sue, Community Builder*
>
> "When I first started working as a Community Builder, the obvious place where I could meet people was a small row of shops in the community. I knew that all four shops would attract different people at different times of day. So, I thought the best way to get to know the community was to sit there and have conversations with people.
>
> For two weeks I sat at different times of day on the wall outside the chip shop. I met carers, dog walkers, school children, office workers, people from the community on their way to groups, older people going for hair appointments, and people in the evenings who were working during the day.
>
> People were reluctant to talk at first, but seeing me over a period of time encouraged them to build the conversation up with me."

Lay of the land | *Ismail, Community Builder*

"When I started, I first checked out the area on a map, to see which streets fall under the boundaries of my area. I looked into community centres and local buildings; people of influence in the area such as parish counsellors and local leaders. Later I discovered that the coffee shop owner knows everyone, and everyone knows him! I introduced myself to all the local businesses and organisations, and then found out what sorts of activities happen in the community venues. Then I found a useful online report written by the parish council and borough council – I dissected the report in order to understand the area: its demographics, age, background, and people. This really helped to build a picture so I could work out my approach from there."

More ways to engage

There are many different ways to create opportunities to meet residents:

- Visiting local groups to listen to residents
- Organising a drop-in where people can share their ideas
- Setting up a listening base – a suitable bench, a blow-up sofa or camping chairs will do – to hear people's thoughts and insights
- Approaching people in the street or in a local park – people are often surprisingly willing to chat if they're not in a hurry
- Knocking on doors, together with a neighbour, and introducing yourselves

Involve other residents in the process too – friends, neighbours or residents you've met that want to participate in purposeful conversations.

Top Tip: Be a regular face within the community. As a general rule, 80% of your time out and about in the community and 20% at your desk is average for a new Community Builder.

Top Tip: At the end of a conversation make a note of the person's contact details, if it's relevant and they're willing. The next step would be to arrange a follow-up conversation within a few days to talk through any specific ideas, or to introduce them to someone else in the community who shares their interest.

Things to consider: Community Builders will sometimes come across vulnerable residents who are at risk of significant harm. This Guide is written on the understanding that all Community Builders (paid, voluntary or members of their own community) must follow national Safeguarding practice. For up to date guidance, please refer to your local Safeguarding Adults and Safeguarding Children Board websites. For Gloucestershire, the links are www.gscb.org.uk/ and www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/gsab/safeguarding-adults-board/

Things to consider: It's worth keeping in your back pocket the fact that seed funding is available in Gloucestershire to help groups come together around a shared interest or to bring neighbours together. If people come up with an idea for an event or ongoing community activity, first encourage them to think about what they might need and how they might find those resources from within their community - for example, if they need tools for a community garden, before buying them consider who might have some to borrow. How might they find that out?

But if a small financial push would help get things started, they might want to apply for a Small Sparks Grant from Barnwood Trust. The idea of the grant is that the group applying commits to give their own time to make the group or activity work and it must be inclusive and welcoming to everyone, including people with a disability or mental health challenge. Further information here: https://www.barnwoodtrust.org/grants/small-sparks/

Evaluation: Recording community building activity

As you begin engaging with the community, you might want to explore different ways of recording details about who you meet, places and groups you visit, and conversations you have with residents. This could be for monitoring and evaluation purposes, as well as helping you take stock and plan your work going forwards. This can take many forms, whether on a spreadsheet, in a reflective journal, or using simple techniques such as the Chat Challenge prompt sheet (see Tool 4). Remember to bear in mind any permission you might need to get from people to keep hold of their contact details or personal information, in line with GDPR.

WHERE TO START? | Discovery stage

Further Reading

– The Power of Asset Based Approaches: http://postgrowth.org/the-power-of-asset-based-approaches/

– Why have a meeting when you can have a party? https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/why-have-a-meeting-when-you-can-have-a-party/

– It's not about overt positivity: https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/abcd-not-overt-positivity/

– Tips for supporting citizen-driven community building: https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/7-top-tips-supporting-citizen-driven-community-building-part-4/

– Blog by Cormac Russell: https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/abcd-approach/scarcity-remembering-the-obvious/

– Power to the People article: https://nickmaisey.wordpress.com/2017/10/15/power-to-the-people/

– The hydraulics of community power: https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/abcd-presentations/the-hydraulics-of-community-power/

– Sticky Spaces blog post: https://www.barnwoodtrust.org/blog/bumping-spaces-sticky-places/

Now that you have begun to find your feet as a Community Builder in your area, your task is starting to broaden and deepen. With some fruitful conversations under your belt, and ideas and activities germinating around you, you need to discern which energies to follow, and how – so, what next?

Relationships

Relationships are the route to community cohesion and to positive action. So, next is figuring out how best to develop relationships locally and how to connect people around shared passions, ambitions and ideas. This includes thinking about who might be on the margins and how best to bring them into the picture. In this section there are suggestions and tools to help you explore this.

Community building moves into a phase of strengthening community relationships:

• Facilitating and supporting people to discover individual and community assets	– *What's important to people?*
• Developing people's skills and confidence and recognising their 'Gifts'	– *What's possible here?*
• Finding and connecting people:	– *Where's the energy?*
o with ideas/vision	– *What is happening already?*
o with passion for change	– *What would it take?*
o willing to offer time/skills	– *How best could?*
o on the margins	– *Who might?*
• Bringing people together to explore possibilities further	– *Who else?*
• Enabling rather than doing	

How to gather people

Creating the conditions to help people get connected is important. Gatherings that are welcoming, safe and open, and are resident-led not community-builder-led, have a greater chance of leading to positive action.

When people are brought together it is always with the aim of sparking connections that may lead to new activity or new friendships. It's not about taking charge of the conversation, managing a group or the actions that follow – your role is as a facilitator not a leader.

Some people may believe it's your job to make things better in their area – that you represent the community and will act on their behalf. Avoid the temptation to 'step into that power'. Be clear about the boundaries of your own role and refer back to the principles in practice (p7) to help with this.

Hopefully, the tools and principles in this guide offer practical ways to gather people. This is just a starting point and decisions should be led by residents, the people who know the community best.

> "I met with a local resident to chat through how he could bring people together in the neighbourhood he had grown up in. I took him through some of the tools and ideas I knew and saw his face change.
> He said, 'I know this community really well, they need to feel like nothing is really happening, that it is just an informal low-key conversation'.
> So, we looked at the tools and then together we shaped what would work best for his community."
> *Molly, Community Builder*

Purpose

First and foremost, ask yourself: what is the purpose for gathering people? Who is the meeting for, who should be leading it, and how best can you support, in your role as a Community Builder?

There are different ways to bring people together: one-to-one, in small groups or in larger groups. Match the type of activity or 'tool' to the purpose and context – what will create the most helpful conditions? And, in whichever way suits best, co-create meetings and events alongside residents, enabling them to direct things as much as possible. It may also be helpful to simply share these tools with residents for them to utilise and adapt for their activities, with or without your support.

Top tips for residents hosting a group activity

Invitation: Invite people in person to a meeting or event, as well as putting up posters or sending out an email. This will help people to feel that their presence is important and give you a chance to explain what it's all about in more detail. Think about the dynamic of inviting residents or professionals, or a mix – how might the conversations or activities be affected?

Group dynamics: Facilitating a group activity is about encouraging people to talk to one another and get excited together about what's possible. It is also about ensuring that quieter voices in the room are included and that group dynamics are healthy and helpful. Various elements can feed into this, such as the welcome, the layout of the space, the plan of activities for the session, the physical movement of the people present, and the body language of the group facilitator(s). Also, bear in mind that an informal and fun gathering will be more fruitful than a formal one.

The welcome: Ensuring the space is accessible for disabled people and warm and inviting for everyone is vital. Think about how you will 'host' the event. Do people know where to go and what to do when they arrive? Does somebody say hello to them? Will there be refreshments and, if so, who will serve or invite people to help themselves? Where are the toilets? Are the activities inclusive and do they allow quieter and less confident people to participate comfortably?

Layout of the space: The way a room is laid out can have a huge impact on how comfortable people feel and therefore the way they engage with one another and the sorts of things people talk about. Where mingling and sharing ideas and thoughts are part of the purpose of the session it can be helpful to have either small clusters of chairs, ready for small-group conversation or one large circle with smaller 'breakout' spaces to the sides (if there is room).

Physical movement of the group: Depending on the nature of the session, this could be as simple as moving people into pairs or small discussion groups, to then feed back to the whole group. Alternatively, you could ask people to congregate in certain parts of the room, based on their particular interests, or provide an energising 'icebreaker' activity.

For more ideas check out this handy article on 'rediscovering welcome':
https://www.barnwoodtrust.org/blog/rediscovering-welcome/

Young group dynamics | *Liam, Community Builder*

"I was working with a group of young people who were quite disruptive. I ended up using simple techniques to support the group to work together more effectively. We tried moving around the room, allowing different voices at different times, and found this very useful for group dynamics."

Icebreakers and Energisers: Icebreakers are simple games or activities that get people mingling and moving. They can be a fantastic equaliser and help people relate to one another more freely and openly. It is important to bear in mind who is in the group and what the purpose of the activity is before you start. Consider what people might feel most comfortable with and what would help people to connect on a simple human level. See suggested Icebreaker activities TOOLS Link

Mums meet over mingle bingo | *Ismail, Community Builder*

"A group of residents had planned a street party for their road, to help build relationships with neighbours. On the day, the residents who were organising the party wondered how to encourage people to mingle and get to know one another.

They decided to use an activity for people to explore what qualities people in the street have and what they are interested in. They had to have conversations with one another to fill the boxes, like a human version of bingo.

People began to chat and connect, three new mums who had recently moved to the area realised they were in the same boat and, as a result, they started meeting together regularly."

Circle Practice: It is broadly recognised that bringing people into a circle creates a positive and productive setting for conversations in a group. People tend to be more receptive and thoughtful listeners and contributors. Circles work for a variety of groups, types of discussions, and for different lengths of time. A circle can also be used to 'check-in' and 'check-out' at any point in a gathering, or as a forum for making decisions together. Bringing people into a circle is often combined with other group activities, like the ones suggested under Connecting and mobilising.

Key elements of circle practice:

- Intention – there is a clear purpose for coming together
- Welcome & hello – everyone is welcomed into the circle
- Check-in – opportunity for people to share what they are thinking or feeling
- Agreements – decide together a set of 'rules' for how the meeting will be
- Wellbeing – as a group, look out for one another
- Guardian – one person ensures the group keeps to time and sticks to the 'rules'
- Check-out & goodbye – how was that conversation and are there any actions?

For further information about the methods and principles for hosting a group conversation visit: www.artofhosting.org

Circle planning | *Ismail, Community Builder*

"We gathered 12 residents together for the planning of a street party. We had to have the right atmosphere and shape of the room, so that there was no hierarchy and the meeting is informal. A circle helps foster mutual understanding"

Sharing in a circle | *Cathy, Head of Community Building*

"We had circle time with a range of people from a village, to discuss what they wanted to do with their dilapidated recreation hut – to make it somewhere accessible to everyone. It was a facilitated circle. The setup of it meant that residents, an advisor and a local councillor were all level – all the voices were heard in the discussion."

Assets and Gifts

The assets in a place, and the gifts within people in an area, are at the heart of what community building is striving to unearth. Identifying the assets in an area can be a powerful community exercise. It helps residents get to know one another better and creates an opportunity for them to tap into the diverse gifts and skills of people in their area. The opportunities and possibilities are limitless.

Here are two methods to help build a picture of the assets and gifts in a neighbourhood – Asset Mapping and Discovering Gifts.
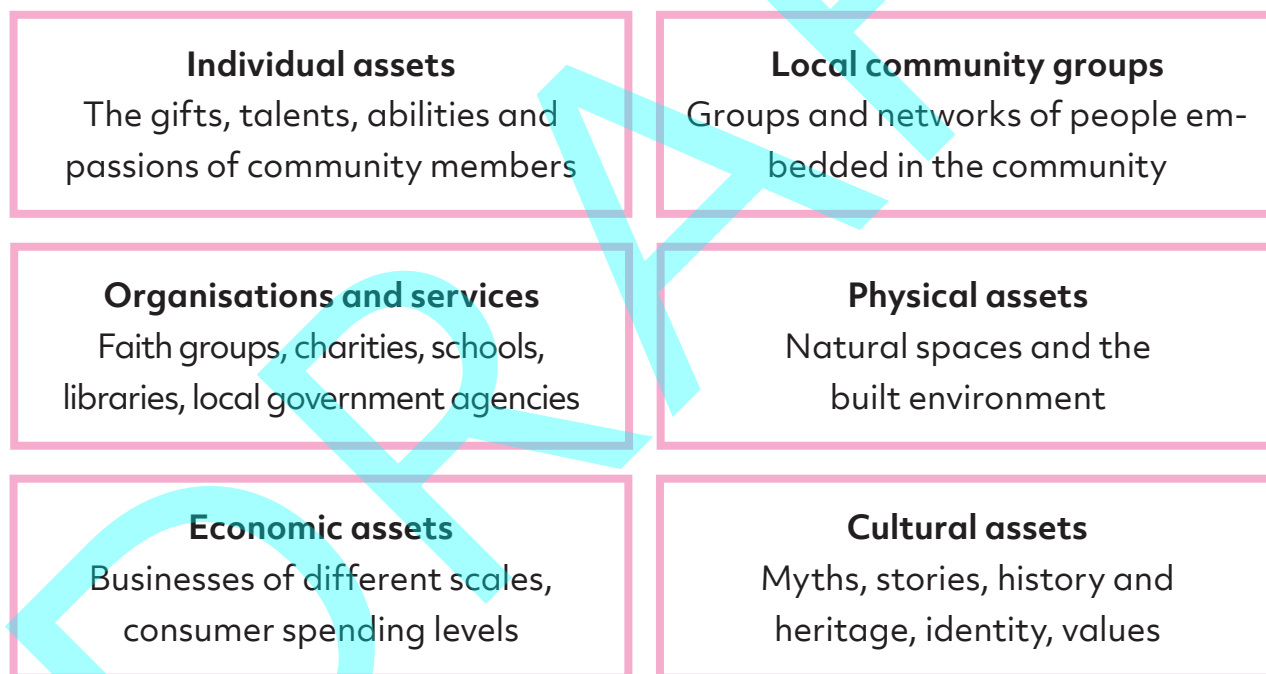
Three key elements of any mapping exercise are:

- Discovering the assets
- Connecting assets and people together
- Creating opportunity for these to come together, leading to action

Further information about Asset Mapping and Discovering Gifts is below and examples of Asset Mapping and Discovering Gifts activity plans are available in the Toolkit.

What are assets?

There are various types of assets:

Individual assets The gifts, talents, abilities and passions of community members	**Local community groups** Groups and networks of people embedded in the community
Organisations and services Faith groups, charities, schools, libraries, local government agencies	**Physical assets** Natural spaces and the built environment
Economic assets Businesses of different scales, consumer spending levels	**Cultural assets** Myths, stories, history and heritage, identity, values

Asset Mapping

Asset Mapping helps people to seek out the strengths and passions already present in a community rather than looking for the problems and needs – the assets of a place and the gifts of the people within it.

Work alongside residents to invite everyone you know in the local community to come together to discover what's on their doorstep – local groups, societies, organisations, individuals and their neighbours. You could do this exercise in a community venue such as a local café or community centre, where passers-by can join in. Asset Mapping can't be hurried, it develops at the speed of the relationships

so is more like an ongoing process than a one-off task that can be completed and then set down. The relationships and networking are themselves a valued outcome but there is also a hope that shared activity will emerge from the conversations.

> "It's wonderful watching the process unfold as people discover that all they need to make an idea happen is actually already there and available, and seeing people learn new things about their neighbours"
> *Kat, Community Builder*

Building a map takes time | *Sue, Community Builder*

"A group of us took a sofa around to different places in the community, to have conversations with people in the street. We brought with us a large fabric sheet, and we had drawn a map of the town, tracing the main streets and areas.

We stuck this sheet on a wall wherever we went, and asked people questions such as, "Where are your favourite places in the community?", "Do you know of any local groups or activities? Where do they meet?", "Do you know any local history that you could write on the map?"

People added to the map with post-its and pens wherever we went. It was taken into activity groups in the evenings as well, so that we could have thoughts from as wide a cross section of people as we could find.

Afterwards, the map was used locally to enrich people's understanding of the area. Informal groups and societies, as well as the town council, churches and more formal groups, found it helpful to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the area."

What are gifts?

Gifts are the interests, experiences, passions, insights, skills and motives that are unique to each of us as individuals. As Community Builders, we talk about people's gifts as a useful tool to help us describe the valuable contribution each person makes to their community. We spend time helping people recognise the diverse gifts within their community, and encourage people to give their own gifts and to utilise the gifts of others. As the phrase goes, "A gift is not a gift, until it's given." It is important to recognise that everyone has valuable gifts to offer, including those who are on the margins of society.

Types of Gifts

There are three main categories of gifts:

1. Gifts of Talent tend to be things that we are curious to learn more about, learn easily, and gain pleasure from learning about and giving. Gifts of Talent can include history, painting, football, mindfulness, woodwork, music, or other hobbies and interests. See p.68 for a further breakdown of gift of talent.

2. Gifts of Wisdom come from significant learning moments that alter how we think or feel about something ("Aha!" moments). Often these come from an experience or event and then become a central part of who we are. Some questions that can help us consider and recognise these gifts include:
   – Who have I met in my life that has changed how I act in a positive way?
   – Who has significantly changed my attitude towards something?
   – Who have I had a serious conflict with? What was that person in my life to teach me?

3. Gifts of Passage are the abilities we gain from going through difficult or important events in our lives. Passage gifts can include tenacity, being trustworthy, being loving to people, or acquired skills like maintaining physical health. Uncovering gifts can help transform communities and can be a life-changing process for some but can require huge sensitivity – especially passage gifts. Community builders are not counsellors and must be careful how to frame this exploration.

"Every single person has capacities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given"
Bruce Anderson, The Core Gift Institute

For further information about Gifts of Talent, Wisdom and Passage, as defined by Bruce Anderson of the Core Gift Institute, visit: https://www.coregift.org/

Why discover gifts?

Giving and being appreciated for our gifts is connected to a sense of wellbeing, and helps people to feel passionate about their own role in, and contribution to, their community.

> "Seeing people's gifts helps us to get to know one another better, trust each other more, and work together in a more enjoyable and reciprocal way – celebrating each other's gifts."
>
> *Sue, Community Builder*

Identifying and sharing our gifts helps us to build:

Hope *"I am more than my current situation"*

Identity *"My gifts keep me grounded in who I am and reflect my most powerful interests and abilities"*

Belonging *"Giving my gifts helps me know where I can belong in the community"*

Healing *"Giving my gift helps me heal from difficulties I have faced in life."*

A teenager's gift | *Molly, Community Builder*

"There was a teenage girl who moved to a new area and didn't feel she had anything valuable to offer to others in her school community. After a conversation she began asking different questions about what matters to her and why.

She realised that she has a valuable gift of listening and helping other people to come out of their shell. This led to her spending time with a group of foreign exchange students. She now facilitates a lunchtime chat group in school, helping people talk to each other and make new friends."

Sharing gifts | *Molly, Community Builder*

"I was in a café talking to the manager, who said they needed some new signs to make the space feel more welcoming. A local artist I knew came in as we were talking, and when I introduced him to the manager he said he'd love to make some chalk signs for the café.

Someone else came in who I'd met previously. He had just moved to the area and didn't know anyone but wanted to share his knowledge on web design and general tech support. When I introduced him to the artist it came out that the artist needed some support with a new website, so they were able to support each other.

They have since passed work back and forth;the website designer has found work for the artist, who produces drawings, logos and designs for the clients who want new websites. Their kids hang out together too!"

Care home gifts | *Sue, Community Builder*

"I have been spending quite a bit of time in local care homes. Together with staff, I wanted to connect people with one another through their gifts, and find ways for them to connect with other people outside the home around their gift too.

A resident in one home was an accomplished artist before he had a stroke. We encouraged him to keep his gift alive by exploring a more abstract style of painting. He then shared his skill of teaching art in a group in the home, later teaching and encouraging other people in a local café. This then led to him holding his own art exhibition within the care home. It's because we saw the importance of starting from a person's place of gift that we are now encouraging other dementia care homes in the area to change the culture of their activities."

For activity plans for hosting an Asset Mapping exercise and a Discovering Gifts exercise see the Asset Mapping Activity Plan TOOL and the Discovering Gifts Activity Plan TOOL.

Connecting and mobilising

The following are summaries of group activities that work well to engage people in a community in conversations that move towards action. Wherever possible, support residents to host these types of events and meetings by coaching or standing alongside them to achieve the purpose that they have identified.

Throughout this section there are links to practical tools and plans for carrying out these group activities.

Ideas Fairs

Ideas fairs are a fantastic way to engage with people about their hopes and dreams for the community. They provide space for people to come up with ways of making those things happen. At the same time, people get to know their neighbours and explore their own gifts and skills. There are many possible ways of running such an event. For one example that can be adapted to suit your community see the Ideas Fairs TOOL link in our toolkit.

Things to consider: People you invite will come with different agendas, so there is always a need to try and balance the voices that are heard. Bringing together professionals and residents for an activity can have a big impact on the energy and types of conversations in the room. Keep in mind questions like, 'How can an organisation's assets strengthen assets already present in community?', 'Who does the organisation have a relationship with that could help?', 'What physical assets or particular skills does the organisation have to support local action?'

World Café

A World Café event enables a group of people to address various questions or topics (or various parts of a complex topic) in one session. There are three underlying assumptions for a World Café event:

i.   whatever insights we need to address the questions are available to us in the room

ii. we welcome and value diverse contributions, including from disabled people and people with mental health challenges because they move us to a better outcome

iii. by really listening to one another and questioning what matters we move towards a deeper understanding and more creative solutions together.

'Stations' are set up around the room so that different conversations, challenges or ideas can be explored by small groups at the same time. The combined thinking is then harnessed when the group comes back together. For an example plan see the World Café TOOL and for further information about World Cafés visit http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/

Open Space

An Open Space meeting creates time and space for people to engage deeply and creatively around issues that feel important to them. This is a useful tool for any group of people, large or small, to help them make decisions together. The group itself holds the power to decide the agenda for the meeting by identifying questions or ideas they want to discuss and splitting up around the space to join whichever conversation(s) interest them. The following four Open Space principles are key to creating an open and motivating forum:

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened
- When it's over it's over

For a step by step guide to holding an Open Space event see the Open Space TOOL and for further information about Open Space Technology visit: http://www.chriscorrigan.com/openspace/whatisos.html

Top Tip: If you are in a group setting and people seem to be talking about two or three different things, pulling the conversation in different directions, it may be worth splitting people into different groups (similar to World Café or Open Space) so that a few people focus on x and a few others focus on y. You can then bring the whole group back together if that feels appropriate.

Celebration events

After a short while of community building, or perhaps six months after having an Ideas Fair, it is valuable to celebrate the good things that have come out of the interactions with the community; to give voice to the stories emerging and to celebrate the new relationships built. There are many ways of celebrating so pick whatever way feels most relevant and fun, and involve residents in the process.

Here are some ideas:

- Make a ***timeline*** together to reflect on the journey so far. What are the key moments to date? What sorts of changes have taken place in people's lives or in the life of the community? Capture this together in a visible way, either through drawing or writing a timeline on paper, or through video or some other means.

- People might like to organise a ***story sharing event*** bringing together individuals and groups to tell stories about what has changed in their own lives and the life of their community. This enables people to reflect on their own stories and also inspires others to pursue their passions and interests together in the community.

- Similarly, encourage people to ***continue sharing their stories*** with their friends, neighbours and relatives. This spreads the impact of the good things that have happened, as well as helping people to see the power of their own story.

A timeline for the journey | *Ismail, Community Builder*

"In February some residents decided that they wanted to have an event to get people together in their neighbourhood. The event took place in the August, and it went very well.

Following the event, I met with them to talk about how things were going. We created a timeline together to show the time it took to build connections, mapping out the trust-building journey together."

Reflecting on a year | *Sue, Community Builder*

"I worked with a community group to create a timeline to reflect back on what had happened over the year. When the group came to hold their AGM, they showed the timeline to celebrate what had happened and to share their story with the wider community.

They then used it to look ahead, and invited other residents to think about their ideas for the following year, and now this is the pattern of the AGM. It remains community-led and everyone can bring their own ideas to the meeting."

Appreciative Inquiry

As another method for facilitating discussions, Appreciative Inquiry questions can be used with individuals, pairs, small groups, or very large groups. This can help participants to seek out the strengths and passions in their community and think together about how to do more of what works – focussing on and elevating the good, rather than trying to stop or change what is bad. Appreciative Inquiry or strengths-based questions (see p20) can be used in a variety of settings: What do you value most about yourself, your group, this place?

As a professional practice, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) includes asking positive questions as above, but then moves forward through a four-stage cycle to shift the way a person thinks and to support self-directed changes that flow from new ideas.

For further information about Appreciative Enquiry as an in-depth process visit https://www.thinbook.com/appreciative-inquiry and http://learningzone.workforcesolutions.sssc.uk.com/course/view.php?id=67

Community Animation

Community Animation is an approach to facilitating groups that can be used in community development to plan and deliver workshops and when you are working alongside groups; equipping the group and its members to reach their full potential.

When you organise meetings or gatherings it offers a way to prepare and support them to happen in a way that enables a lively, creative and productive time for the people who come.

At its most powerful it equips a group to critically analyse its situation, drawing on their life experience, set goals and take action to influence or change things.

Someone taking an animation approach will:
- Be responsible for how things happen – the structure of a meeting or gathering but not the topics or the content of the discussions or activities
- Respect and value the expertise that everyone has from their life experience
- Respond to power dynamics in a group or meeting – always alongside the person or people in the least powerful position
- Foster the life of the group collectively – assisting and equipping the group to set and achieve goals
- Equip the group to increase their sense of independence, control and influence over their own lives and the life of the group (agency and self-determination)

- Facilitate a group, responding to the energy and flow, sometimes focusing on building relationships, sometimes on completing a task, sometimes on fun

If you already work with groups of people, you will likely be using tools and techniques that animators use. What you might see in a session, gathering or meeting being run by someone using an animation approach are: lively discussions in small groups, people moving around and connecting with each other over the things (big and small) that matter to them, lots of active listening, discussions taking place across a circle, trying things out, people enjoying themselves, people feeling they have contributed, people gaining confidence and skills.

The person 'animating' may at times be very subtle or invisible – using slight shifts in body language, physical position or gesture to influence the group, or stepping right out so the group just gets on with it. At other times, they might be much more present holding a safe space for important and delicate discussion, offering something to change or shift the energy. Over time, group members can learn and take on the animation approach to facilitate themselves.

It is hard to write about and difficult to learn by reading; the best way is to experience it at a workshop, or work alongside someone who is familiar with the approach. To find out about Barnwood Trust workshops and other resources, visit the website at www.barnwoodtrust.org/learning/

Evaluation: Capturing residents' stories

Bringing together residents to share their stories can be a great way of both celebrating what's been happening and inspiring other residents going forwards.

You might want to think about ways to capture these stories shared by residents as part of documenting the impact of community involvement. This can be in various creative ways, including taking photographs, making illustrations and recording what people say on the day. Bringing people together to share their stories means you can get an insight into perceived changes for individuals, as well explore any collective agreement on what's been happening locally.

Learn more: Storyboards are a creative way in which Barnwood has been capturing the stories shared by residents at celebration events. Find out more here: https://www.barnwoodtrust.org/blog/stories-significant-change/

WHAT NEXT? | Building Relationships

Further Reading

- For further information about Asset Mapping visit:
  https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/resources/Pages/tool-kit.aspx
  https://johnbromford.wordpress.com/2016/07/09/unconscious-communities/
  https://mycommunity.org.uk/help-centre/resources/land-and-building-assets/map-assets-community/

- To think more about the relevance and use of gifts in this work, visit:
  http://www.communityactivators.com/toolsarticles/

- The art of hosting groups and conversations
  http://www.artofhosting.org/how-does-it-work/

- 8 Steps to Increase and Support Resident Engagement
  https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/resources/Documents/AssetMappingEightStepsIncreaseResidentEngagement.pdf

- Asset mapping exercise
  https://mycommunity.org.uk/help-centre/resources/land-and-building-assets/map-assets-community/

- Asset Mapping Toolkit by Dan Duncan
  http://www.wego33.org/Downloads/Asset%20Mapping%20Toolkit.pdf

- Asset Mapping Blog by Donnie MacLurcan
  http://postgrowth.org/asset-mapping-occupy/

- Asset Mapping explored by John Wade
  https://johnbromford.wordpress.com/2016/07/09/unconscious-communities/

- Academic paper on asset mapping
  https://oro.open.ac.uk/47472/1/making-sense-of-assets.pdf

- Animation explained
  https://www.yourewelcome.to/sites/default/files/resource/1055/documents/animationexplained-chrisunderhillmay2014.pdf

- Gifts, talents, skills and hope in community building
  http://www.communityactivators.com/toolsarticles/

Moving from 'connections' and 'good ideas' into the realm of 'action' and 'positive change' is in the hands of residents. Your role as a Community Builder is not to lead the change but to enable it. How then do you sustain momentum in your work and in the community – how to progress?

Personal Challenge

Community building practice isn't linear and it isn't tidy. You will need to find a way to balance your input skilfully, in a way that fully supports resident-led action. The task can be personally challenging and, at times, counter-intuitive. Reflecting on your practice and sharing the learning with other Community Builders (perhaps via a Community of Practice or Learning Circle) will help to keep you on track and keep you well.

The ongoing personal challenge of the Community Building role requires reflective practice:

• Self-reflection and personal challenge • Offering 'good' help and knowing when to step back • Thinking about what enables activities and relationships in the community to be sustainable • Listening to residents' community stories and encouraging groups to share their stories • Creating blogs and podcasts to capture our own stories too	– *Who else? / Where else?* – *What might lead to action?* – *What is my role?* – *What can I do that's helpful?* – *What are the expectations?* – *What shouldn't I be doing?* – *How might I be supported?* – *What unintended consequences might there be?*

Self-reflection and support

Ongoing learning and 'reflective practice' as a Community Builder ensures that you stay true to the 'Asset Based Community Development' core principles (see p7); builds your ability and confidence in the role; and maintains and evolves the quality of the work. It also creates a space for you to give support and get the support you need.

The Barnwood Trust Community Building team meets weekly to enable reflective practice and to gain support from the group. Facilitation of our meetings has been

shared by rotating who leads each session; they usually begin with a mindfulness activity to ground us in the room together; and we prioritise our own relationship building to create an atmosphere of trust. We run a regular exercise, which allows each team member to share a significant moment from the week – a success or a challenge from within their community. If someone asks the group to help with a problem, fellow Community Builders ask 'open' coaching style questions to enable the Community Builder to self-reflect and to identify their own solutions to the challenge.

Over time, the network of ABCD Community Builders in the county has grown and reflective practice is supported across various community teams in different organisations. For Barnwood Trust, mentoring and peer support are essential to embedding community building practice in Gloucestershire.

Questioning ourselves and one another

The following are a series of questions that may help you to reflect on your own professional practice at different phases of community building, and also to act as a prompt when supporting someone else to reflect on their practice too:

WHERE TO START? | Discovery Stage

- How might others in the community see your role? What might be their expectations of you? How will you manage these expectations?
- What expectations have you set for yourself? How might these expectations support the community?
- What excites you most about this work? How might your personal motivations be helpful and when might they get in the way?
- Why might a community specifically need you to help them?
- What's your personal interest in supporting or mobilising community led action? What's your own drive or motive for being involved? [Jess – various members of CB team find the skin phrase off-putting…]
- What is it that residents in community are best placed to do together?
- What is it that residents can best do with some outside help?
- What is it that communities need agencies to do for them?
- How will you know when your help in this community is no longer needed?
- Are you seeing people for their strengths, assets and capacities, or for their deficits and needs? What are you noticing that helps you answer this?

WHAT NEXT? | Building Relationships

- What role are you playing in connecting people? Are you needed for this role or is there someone in the community who could do this? How might you support or encourage?
- Who is repeatedly not included in the community? (Minority groups, disabled people, exclusion by gender or sexuality, etc.)
- Where are residents telling you not to go? Have you been there? If not, why not?
- Are any of you own prejudices influencing who you connect with?
- What resources are available in this community that can enable people to do what they want to do?
- In your efforts to help activities to get started, are you 'doing to' or 'enabling to do'? If you're 'doing to', what might be driving that?
- What expectations does your employing organisation have of your role? What outcomes are your employers or funding seeking? How might these be helpful or unhelpful to the community you are serving?
- Who's really in control?
- Where will you personally get support from?
- What are you not going to do, in order to be helpful?
- What is the smallest thing you could do that could make the biggest difference?

HOW TO PROGRESS? | Reflective Practice

- How might the action in this community continue without you needing to be involved?
- What actions are you taking to sustain relationships, and why?
- Are the activities people are involved in 'provider-led' or 'citizen-led'? What might be the unintended consequences of actions being led by an organisation?
- What do individuals and communities lose when either you or your organisations take control and act as the experts on community?
- What are the negative impacts of organisations and institutions always being heralded as the 'change agents' in communities?
- How might you negotiate the relationships if community activities become taken over by organisations? Is their action appropriate?

- Which stories might motivate others to take action? How might you encourage those residents to share their story?
- What might it look like for people to have true ownership and leadership over their own community?
- What is the role of organisations in supporting community-led action? Where is there potential and where are there tensions?
- How might the community recognise and celebrate the progress made?

Good help (and knowing when to step back)

Sometimes it's tempting to jump in and offer our own skills and experience to help get someone's idea off the ground, or to partner with them in turning their idea into a reality. But that willingness to 'help' can be disempowering and the least helpful thing we can do for a person.

> "It's hard to watch someone struggle, we want to make life easier for them by doing lots of things for their project. I think we can be more helpful by building their confidence to take action in their own way."
>
> *Kat, Community Builder*

It's not easy to discern when it's helpful to step in to a situation and have intentional conversations with people about their ideas. There are constant thoughts of: what questions to ask; when to offer to bring people together; when to introduce someone to someone else; when to offer encouragement – and indeed when it is better to step away and give someone space to do their own thing.

This way of working can be frustrating, biting your tongue when you can see that a certain way of doing things may not work, or when you can see people struggling to find a way forward, especially when they ask you to help. But we know that as soon as we start doing things for people the power shifts. A project becomes, at least in part, our project rather than theirs. If the group depends on you to do things it can stop them finding ways of doing them amongst themselves.

'Good help' is encouraging a resident or group to find their own way, at their own pace, and learn through that journey. This makes the project more sustainable in the long run.

> **Joining people up |** *Molly, Community Builder*
>
> "A craft group had started up locally and had been very well promoted. In the same venue there was a playgroup run by an external organisation that unfortunately was having to close. I introduced the playgroup mums to the craft group, who were then able to support the playgroup mums to start running the group on their own, and the two groups then began doing joint all-age events together!"

What *can* we do?

It's worth thinking through how involved to become and where the boundaries are for us as Community Builders. We ensure that residents maintain ownership of their own idea or project, which can mean that it takes a long time before an idea becomes a reality.

Ways of supporting residents in pursuing their ideas can be thought of as a spectrum:

Nudging   Networking   Getting involved

Nudging: Sometimes all people need to get started is to be given permission – even from a stranger. It's worth asking people questions such as: "If there were no limits and you could do anything with your time, what would you do?", "What would your ideal community look like?", "What might it take to make those dreams a reality?"

Networking: This is a hands-off way of helping someone to progress an idea or project – introducing a resident to another resident who may have a shared interest. Again, there could be a temptation to set up a group for them – but it's more helpful to introduce two or three people to one another and let them take the idea wherever they'd like.

Getting involved: If the project is something that you are personally passionate about, then it may be ok to get involved, without taking over and disempowering the person or persons who are leading it.

> "Residents are the real Community Builders. We just help them to see their own strengths and make connections with people where they live."
> *Rich Holmes, Community Building team*

Discernment is key here: how far to step in and how much to be involved in things that come up in conversation with residents? Each time ask yourself: How can I be most useful? To what extent should I be involved? Who else might be more useful here?

A bit of encouragement | *Jane, Community Builder*

"A local activity group started up in my town with some support from me. Although it started well, one of the younger members began to show disrespect to one of the older members, and it became quite uncomfortable.

A meeting was called to address the situation, and one of the leaders of the group was very nervous about how it would go, keen not to escalate the conflict but to set out some guidelines for behaviour within the group. They commented, "I don't want to be approached by a hostile and irrational youngster."

They asked me to host the meeting, but I was unable to attend. However, instead of apologising to the group leaders for being unable to make it, I said, "I think that between you, you have the wisdom to deal with this situation." Because of that encouragement they went ahead with the meeting, and it turned out that they did indeed have everything they needed within the group to deal with the situation. Members of the group supported one another to talk it through and set guidelines, and the youngster was included in discussing new ideas for the group.

Although this was a difficult one for me to step back from, the conversation went well without me and relationships within the group were deepened through the experience."

To, For, With, By

International research has found that people are happier, more cooperative with each other, and more likely to make positive changes, when those in positions of authority do things with them rather than 'to' them or 'for' them (Restorative Practice, Wachtel 2005). For this reason, Restorative Practice is increasingly used in schools, youth work, health and social care.

Asset Based Community Development takes this a step further – rather than doing with, it focuses on what is done by the community. The Community Builder is a facilitator, not a direct implementer. They are not the primary actors – those roles

belong to members of the community. Put simply, a Community Builder aims to see more 'building of communities from the inside out.'

We find that the following grid from Nurture Development is a useful tool to help with our reflections – to help us recognise when we are 'doing for' residents what they can 'do for themselves':

- – Medical model: **done to** the people

- – Charity model: **done for** the people

- – Co-production: **done with** the people

- – ABCD: **done by** the people
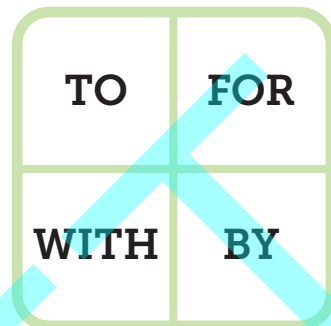
TO	FOR
WITH	BY

> "Instead of asking how you or your organisation can create more value to, for or with a community, ask how you can create more space for community to create what they value."
>
> *Cormac Russell, Nurture Development*

Power dynamics

Traditionally, power is thought of as a 'zero-sum game' - there are those who have power and those who don't, but this is only ever partially true. No one is totally powerless and no one is totally powerful. A person can have their power disrupted or overwhelmed, but not extinguished. Someone may feel worn-down in their personal and community power and, if they feel this way, they may look to external agents to change the situation for them. So, it is important to be mindful about the balance of power in any interaction. ABCD creates an alternative path to change and it is a Community Builder's role to encourage and enable a different approach – where 'relational power' (prioritising the quality of your relationship) is chosen over 'positional power' (impressing your role or status over a person). In this sense, starting with a focus on what's strong and local calls on us to be willing to lift off 'labels' and reveal people's gifts.

> "When we think of power as only being top down, from our role or position, we miss an opportunity. The power of relationships is an infinite opportunity to create, change and build more welcoming communities. It is through building relationships that communities can access resources and energy that might otherwise have remained hidden."
>
> *Philip, Community Builder*

Value of stories

Storytelling is a valuable tool for a Community Builder. A hopeful story about something positive that has happened in the community or an insightful tale about how a group overcame a challenge – both can have a powerful impact on the way people think about what is possible in their own area.

> "Stories are the currency of community building – their impact on the way people see themselves, their community, the breadth of possibility, and indeed the purpose of our own work, is profound."
>
> *Kat, Community Builder*

Hopeful stories can build trust between people, build empathy, and can have a profound impact on attitudes. Firstly, it can be useful to encourage people to share their own stories and think about what community means to them, with the following kinds of questions:

– *What's the best thing that you've ever seen happen in your community?*

– *Has there been a time when you've got together with neighbours and something nice has happened?*

– *How did [your activity group, or coffee morning, or local interest] begin?*

– *What was it like moving into this community, and how did you get to know people?*

[Full list of conversation prompts here: Useful Questions TOOL link]

A Community Builder can offer a story to lift a hopeless conversation about 'what's wrong' to think more about 'what's strong' in a community. A simple example of things going well for a group can help a resident think differently and apply that to their own situation. The idea isn't to encourage people to try the same things in the same way, just to spark ideas and help residents imagine what might work for them in their community.

Wherever possible, it is also more impactful if people share their own stories. So, connecting residents or hosting story-sharing events can be an effective way to harness the power of positive stories – enabling residents to reflect on their own experiences, look forward and celebrate too. Here are a few pointers to keep in mind:

– *What would be the most relevant and useful story to share with this person at this time?*

– *Who do I know locally who can relate to what this person is experiencing,*

and might be willing to meet and talk about it?

– *What question could I ask to encourage this person to think about their own stories of community, and to pursue those ideas or share those stories with others?*

Sharing the story | *Jane, Community Builder*

"I supported a group of residents involved with a community allotment. They featured in a film about the benefits – such as fresh air, exercise, home-grown produce, sharing with the community and building relationships. They were asked, 'What's the best thing you've grown here?' and one person gave the answer, 'Friendship'."

Being inspired by the story | *Sue, Community Builder*

"A group of residents I was working with wanted to set up an outdoor community space, so I showed them a film about a community allotment, which they found inspiring. I brought them to meet the group who had set up the edible garden to hear more about their story. They found this helpful and inspiring and are now starting their own garden as part of a local regeneration project."

"By asking what has worked in the past, community members had the opportunity to reflect on a time when their community was unique and strong and encouraged them to share stories with each other. The story sharing was positive and transformational and provided a solid foundation on which to start exploring what they already had to build on."
Resilient Together, A Practitioner's Guide to Community Building, CPSL Mind

Stories from our own practice

We value sharing stories from our own practice with one another, so that:

- We learn from each other's practice, and feel inspired by one another's work
- We celebrate each other's successes, recognise the value of our own work and affirm one another in it. (We can't always do this in the community because we recognise that the stories of individuals and groups are their own, not ours.)
- We challenge and ask questions that hold each other accountable to ABCD

principles. We reaffirm these values together and explore what they mean in practice.

- We deepen our own understanding of our work. It's fairly unusual to find people in the community, or other professionals, who have a thorough understanding of what our role is (we're continually learning too!) – so it's encouraging and helpful to meet with colleagues who understand it well

- We explore together different methods for inclusion in each element of our work

- We share any difficulties or frustrations with people who understand and listen, to work through challenges together

This sort of sharing is possible when there is a culture of challenge and celebration, and when the group is a safe space to explore our own mistakes and successes.

There are many different methods for sharing stories together to help with self-reflection, these can include:

- 'Morphing' – each person writes on a post-it note a brief summary of any stories, excitements, questions, and challenges that have arisen in the last week and these post-it notes are put on a board. We all gather around the board and these are discussed as a group

- 'Bitesize stories' – in small groups, we each share a recent story of the work, discuss it together and then feedback any thoughts or reflections

- 'Community of practice' – a group gets together regularly and deliberately to share practice and learn together through open discussion and challenge.

"People might like to organise a story sharing event bringing together individuals and groups to tell stories about what has changed in their own lives and the life of their community. This can be done by inviting residents to share their story in groups of say 4 or 5 then that group can pick a story to share with the wider group. This enables people to reflect on their own stories, hear others appreciation of their journey or activity, and inspires others to pursue their passions and interests together in the community too."

Philip Booth, Community Builder

Some of our challenges

So, what happens when things don't go to plan?

Since there is no step-by-step guide to this work, Community Builders are not always sure about the right thing to do in any given situation. It can feel quite messy and we often spend time thinking: "What other ways could I have responded to that?"

or "Might things have worked out better if I had…?"

We all have many examples of this – mistakes, perhaps, or situations that didn't go quite as well as they might have done.

Who's leading?

When the Barnwood Trust Community Building Team was first established we would regularly ask ourselves questions like, "Where did that idea come from?", "Whose dream is that?" As described throughout this guide, we know that anything positive that happens in the community needs to be resident-led, and to connect with residents' own motivation for it to be sustainable. But we can still be tempted to jump in with exciting suggestions in conversation with residents.

> "In the early days of a photography group, we were down to three members. I went to a meeting and did the very thing you shouldn't do – I gave them some of my own ideas! I said 'the group could do [this or that]', and someone stopped me and said, "But we haven't got a group!""
>
> *Jane, Community Builder*

This is a good example of how easily our own ideas can be too-much-too-soon or interfere with a group getting to know one another better first – moving at the pace it needs to.

Is it too soon to step back?

On the other hand, we have also made the mistake of backing away too quickly, forgetting that residents might value our support, as long as we don't take over or give answers. For example, a Community Builder met some residents who wanted to set up a karaoke group. She spent five minutes talking with them and gave them an application form for some seed funding that might help them cover start-up costs, and left them to it. By the time she saw the residents again the energy had dissipated.

This discernment of how far to step in and continue the conversation with people, and how far to step away and let them get on with it (the 'community building dance'), takes time to learn.

"In this balance of stepping in and stepping back, stepping in is important too! I find that it helps to have a few key questions up my sleeve: 'What do you want to see happen around here – and why?', 'What do you think the next steps would be?', 'Who else do you think would like to be involved / could help with this?'. These keep me out of the frame whilst still actively supporting people to develop their own ideas."

Kat, Community Builder

Who else is working in my area?

There may be several community workers in one area representing different organisations, and we don't want to tread on any toes. If there are other people doing a similar role in the area, it's a good idea to build relationships and share your experiences. It's invaluable to learn about what they are doing and to talk about your aims and approach too. There's a lot to be gained by working together and introducing one another to relevant people in the community, wherever appropriate. Finding the most helpful ways to collaborate or simply keep in touch will become clearer as you go along. Going about this intentionally will alleviate any suspicion or divides between people – insecurities (ours and other people's) can affect how we interact, so fostering good relationships with people from other organisations from the outset is hugely important.

How do I approach prejudice in community?

We often face prejudice of various kinds from residents during the course of our work. This can be really challenging. Do we confront or ignore prejudiced comments or decisions in the community? We also have to recognise our own prejudice. Maybe we hold preconceptions that affect our decisions, such as which groups or individuals to connect with? Where does that come from and how can we remain fair and open to possibilities? It's vitally important to acknowledge and talk about these things; for ourselves, and to encourage groups to work through these kinds of issues together also.

How do I allocate my time?

On many occasions we have felt unsure how much time to give to what. Time management is key - do we spend more time with people on the margins of community, or with people who have lots of energy for change or new groups, or more time talking with local organisations, community spaces and professionals? Once again, this is something that we just had to experiment with, compare notes with one another and refine as we went along.

Now, over to you

As we said at the start of this guide, there isn't a firm set of rules or a clear direction on a map for this work - just a compass. Over time, we have learned together some techniques to help us and we continue to learn from our mistakes as we go. So, we hope this guide provides you with a solid starting point for your own practice. We hope it gives you the confidence to try, sometimes fail, sometimes succeed, but overall celebrate your evolving work as a Community Builder in your area.

Evaluation: What works in which circumstances?

As there is no recipe book approach to carrying out ABCD, this means that capturing your own learning and experiences about what works and doesn't work can be valuable in equal measure. Documenting the challenges you come across can be as important as capturing any success stories in enabling you to understand what works in which circumstances. This can be helpful within the context of your own work, as well as potentially contributing to the wider evidence base for ABCD.

WHAT NEXT? | Building Relationships

Further Reading

- Good Life Conversation by Nurture Development https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/GoodLifeConversation.pdf
- Cormac Russell on Stories https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkhMylanzYA
- The power of Stories https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/abcd-practice/touchstone-seven-implementation/
- Stories and Evaluation https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/evaluating-asset-based-community-development-abcd-efforts/
- Barnwood Trust stories https://www.barnwoodtrust.org/blog/stories-significant-change/ or https://www.barnwoodtrust.org/what-we-do/stories/

TOOLKIT

Tool #1   Useful Questions

The following may be useful conversation starters:

- *What's your thing? / What do you love doing?*
- *What are you good at? / What do you do best?*
- *What are you passionate about?*
- *What do you care about enough to do something?*
- *What would you like to learn?*
- *Do you know anyone else who could be interested locally?*
- *What would you like to do with other people in your community?*
- *What does community mean to you?*
- *What makes you feel welcome?*
- *What do you love about / What is the best thing about your area?*
- *What would make your community an even better place to live for everyone?*
- *What's your dream for your area? / What would the ideal community be like?*
- *What do you care about enough in your area to do something about it?*
- *What gifts, skills or passions do you have that you would you like to share?*
- *What would need to happen to bring like-minded neighbours together?*
- *If there were no limits and you could do anything, what would you do?*
- *Who do you know locally who might help?*

Useful follow-up questions:

- *Is this something you might like to have another conversation about?*
- *Is this something you'd like to pursue, if there's a way to do so?*
- *What would it take for that dream/idea to become a reality?*
- *Who else do you know who shares that interest or might come on board?*
- *What do you think your neighbours might think of this?*

Three things to avoid

- **Closed Questions** can stall a conversation by eliciting a yes/no response
- **Why? questions** can come across as judgmental, interrogative or blaming and elicit a defensive response
- **Multiple questions** – asking either/or questions, or asking too many questions at once, can limit responses or simply confuse

Useful group-focused questions

- *What is it that residents in communities are best placed to do together?*
- *What is it that residents can best do, with some outside help?*
- *What is it that communities need outside agencies to do for them?*
- *What is it that residents/communities need organisations to stop doing?*

Tool #2   Icebreakers

The purpose of an Icebreaker is to get people moving about and making first contact with other people in the room. If the activity gets a little chaotic, that's ok – it shows that people are engaging with each other and enjoying themselves. Here are a few suggestions. In a circle, encourage everyone to say something interesting or unusual about themselves.

➜ As a variation on above, pass around a pack of cards (or a toilet roll) and ask everyone to take 'some' cards. Then, go around the circle again asking people to say things about themselves - as many interesting facts as there are cards in their hand. This often gets people laughing.

➜ Get people into pairs or small groups and tell each other three interesting things about themselves. A good suggestion for this is to tell one another the history of their surnames or the stories behind how they got your first names. You could ask them to feed back to the whole group what they learnt about each other.

➜ Hand out a sheet of paper to each person and ask them to write or draw something unusual or interesting about themselves, and then make the paper into an aeroplane and throw it into the room. Everyone picks up an aeroplane and has to find the person who fits the unusual fact written on it. This sets the tone for a friendly and fun session.

➜ A variation on the Compass game – the group imagines that the room is a map of the county, the country, or the world. Everyone stand in the part of the country/world where they were born or had their first holiday or their favourite memory, or something similar. This is a quick way to get people sharing information about themselves and getting them moving at the same time.

Top tip: It's good for facilitators to bear in mind the fact that not everyone is comfortable sharing something with a whole room full of people.

Tool #3   Mingle Bingo

Mingle Bingo is like regular Bingo, but with people. You can design your own sheet with your favourite questions too!

Mingle about the space, finding people to add to your Mingle Bingo sheet.

Feel free to take your time, listen to people's stories, ask them questions. Make a note of people's contact details, if appropriate. When you meet interesting people, why not stay in touch? This is community!

Find someone who has an active hobby Name:	Find someone who has visited the Cathedral Name:	Find someone who cares for a family member Name:
Find someone who can knit or crochet Name:	Find someone who loves chocolate Name:	Find someone who enjoys being in nature Name:
Find someone who loves dogs Name:	Find someone who likes spicy food Name:	Find someone wearing colourful clothing Name:
Find someone who writes poetry Name:	Find someone who has always lived in Gloucestershire Name:	Find someone who has a brother Name:
Find someone who likes to be creative Name:	Find someone who has grandchildren Name:	Find someone who has been stung by a bee Name:

The Mingle Bingo format could be used to lead onto more meaningful questions, such as:

"What's your dream for your area? Let's talk about it."

"If you have a vision, idea or hope for your community, chat with someone today – let's explore together what's possible."

Tool #4   Chat Challenge

The challenge is to meet four or five people in your street or neighbourhood.

Have conversations with them about things they enjoy doing (e.g. walking, reading, knitting, photography). Take time to listen to their stories and better understand what they are passionate about. You can also take it a step further and introduce them to someone you know locally who shares their interest, if appropriate.

Use this Chat Challenge prompt sheet if it helps you.

_____

Name:

Interest / Hobby:

Does this person know others in the area who share their interest or hobby? YES / NO

Notes / details:

_____

Name:

Interest / Hobby:

Does this person know others in the area who share their interest or hobby? YES / NO

Notes / details:

_____

Name:

Interest / Hobby:

Does this person know others in the area who share their interest or hobby? YES / NO

Notes / details:

_____

Name:

Interest / Hobby:

Does this person know others in the area who share their interest or hobby? YES / NO

Notes / details:

_____

I would love to hear how you get on. Come and share your thoughts and insights, at

_____ on _____ I'll buy you a coffee ☺

~ Community Builder

Tool #5   'We Can' Game

This is a fun resource for groups of 3-10 people. The aim of the game is to uncover strengths within the community and to see that a great deal is possible when people work together. There are several variations of this exercise, and you may choose to adapt it, but here are the basics:

1. In advance, create (or download from the link below) 100 'capacity cards' each with a word or image of a hobby or skill (e.g. DIY, crochet, plumbing, painting, social media, talking). Bring spare cards so you can add to them if needed

2. Give headings for three possible piles:
   - **We can** - someone present in the room has that skill
   - **We know someone who can** – a known person has that skill
   - **We cannot** – the group is unaware of anyone with that skill
     - o The idea will be to sort the cards together into these three categories. But first, ask the group to guess how many cards, or percentage of the cards, will end up in each pile. People tend to estimate that it will be about equal between each of the piles
     - o The cards are then shared out between the players across the group
     - o Players, through conversation with one another, work out which piles to place each of the cards in into
     - o Pick each pile of cards and discuss how many cards there are (there are usually very few in 'we cannot'). Often groups feel empowered through this, realising that together they can do so much – and it can feel very exciting to discover unknown skills and interests of the other people in the room.
     - o Think about any other skills within the community that may have been missed (use the blank cards if it helps)

> **Top tip:** Allow conversation to emerge! During this activity people begin to recognise common interests or hobbies, or ask each other about some of the more obscure or surprising talents or gifts, and learn things about one another. Networking often takes place naturally as people offer to connect one another up with friends of theirs who have a relevant skill or hobby.

Further guidelines and a downloadable pack can be found here:
https://inclusionnetwork.ning.com/profiles/blogs/the-we-can-game-a-free-download-to-explore-gifts-and-capacities-w Or here: https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/resources/Documents/WECANGuidelinesOct10.pdf

Tool #6   Ideas Fair

An Ideas Fair brings people together locally to share ideas, talk about what's possible and to meet new people. It's good to keep it short and sweet (2-3 hours) to create a bit of a party atmosphere, and ensure entry is FREE.

Preparation for the event

Once you have identified a team of people from across different parts of the community to organise the Ideas Fair, meet up to talk through the purpose of holding the event and to plan how it will run.

1. Be clear in your minds about the **purpose** of the event, for instance:
   - To celebrate the local area, its history and its hidden treasures, its assets and groups
   - To bring people together and an opportunity for new relationships to be built
   - To gather people's insights, passions and ideas around what's possible in the community
   - To encourage and prompt people towards neighbourliness and to turn ideas into action

2. Be clear about what **outcomes** you'd like to see from the event, such as:
   - Greater awareness of all that's good in the community
   - New friendships and connections formed across different segments of the community
   - Ideas and plans forming in people's minds about what's possible in the community
   - Residents more eager to engage with their neighbours and get to know people locally

3. Consider the **process**, things that will need to happen to achieve your goals:
   - Activities to put people at ease and encourage mingling
   - Activities that enable residents to share their stories of what community means to them
   - Activities that tease out people's ideas, passions and hopes for their community
   - Gentle challenges and small practical steps that people will feel comfortable engaging with

How the event could be run

1. Arrival (15mins):
   - As people are welcomed into the space, ask them to sign in and provide their

contact details

- Have people put on name labels to aid talking to new people
- Provide Mingle Bingo sheets to encourage mixing and chatting [see Tool #4]

2. Welcome (5 mins):

- After a bit of mingling time, one of the event-organisers welcomes everyone to the Ideas Fair
- Explain the purpose of the event
- Share something of your own story and your personal reason for being involved to model being open with people

3. Icebreaker / Compass (10 mins):

- Bring the whole group together and up on their feet
- Ask them to imagine that the room is a map of the county, then have people stand at different points in the room depending on where they live
- Ask everyone to say their street name and how long they've lived there
- Ask them to self-organise into small groups with the people who live nearest

4. Activity 1 - Relational & Inspirational (40 mins):

- Ask these groups to find a space together to talk about a time when they helped a neighbour or someone in the community (unpaid). How did it made them feel? (10 mins)
- Ask them jot down on post-it notes anything that stands out, or anything they notice and then feedback to the wider group (5 mins)
- Ask the same small groups to talk about a time when a neighbour or someone in the community helped them. How did it made them feel? Did it effect the relationship? (15 mins)
- Again, have them note down anything interesting that arises in the conversation and feedback some thoughts to the wider group. (10mins)

5. Activity 2 - Dynamic & Practical (total 75 mins):

'We Can…'

- Still in groups of 3-6 play the 'We Can…' Game [see Tool #6]

Blue sky thinking (65 mins)

- In these groups ask: *What would your ideal community look like?*
  - o Ask them to write their ideas on large flip chart paper and pin them up around the room
  - o Groups feedback some of the key themes and ideas to everyone (15mins)

- Back in groups ask: *What would it take to make the ideas happen here?*
  - o Write answers/ideas on post-it notes
  - o Groups feedback and stick their post-it notes on one large Ideas Board
  - o Theme the ideas from the board into 4-6 main categories (30mins)
- Write each theme on a different flipchart sheet and hang in different parts of the room
- Ask people to choose a theme/idea that interests them and congregate around that sheet
- Discuss in these new groups how to make the idea(s) happen in real terms and ask people to write on the sheet (or add post-its):
  - o What they will offer to that idea/theme (e.g. teaching a skill; helping with practical arrangements; introducing a friend)
  - o Write their full name under their offer, and swap contact details (encourage groups to stay in touch and make things happen)
  - o If needed, think about who might help to coordinate / support going forward (20mins)

Activity 3 - Solidifying & Follow-up (5 mins):

- Bring the whole group back together in a circle to close the session
  - o Ask everyone to think of one 'Popcorn' takeaway from the session - have 1 minute's silence while people reflect on everything that has happened and prepare what they want to say
  - o Go around the group, or allow people to speak whenever they feel ready, to share each person's thought from the day
  - o Encourage everyone to keep in touch with the people they met today
  - o Thank everybody for their energy and contributions and talk about any 'next steps'

Top tip: You could give out 'Chat Challenge' sheets (see Tool #5) to help people continue conversations with new people after the Ideas Fair.

Things to consider: Make sure the event organisers have everyone's contact details before they leave so that they can get in touch about any follow-up actions. OR you could arrange a follow-up event and invite everyone to that at the end of this Ideas Fair to help keep the momentum going.

Tool #7   World Café

A World Café provides an opportunity for people in a large and diverse group to respond to different topics in one session. Participants visit different stations, each with a different set of questions and rotate around the room, taking part in discussions and leaving written feedback or ideas. It is a very flexible method for information sharing, relationship building, exploring ideas and action planning. A World Café can take quite a bit of time - allow for everyone to move around all the tables/questions and to come back together at the end to discuss as a whole group.

1. Decide the questions or discussion topics

2. Create several stations around the room using small round tables (if possible) and a cluster of 4-6 chairs around it

3. Set up a station for each topic with a large piece of paper with the question or idea on it. Also provide coloured pens and post-it notes and/or flipchart paper at each station

4. Explain the process for the activity before you start. There are a few ways of organising the movement of people in the session:

    v.   People congregate around the idea that most interests them

    vi. People are put into groups and spend 20 – 30 minutes at each station and then rotate

    vii. People move freely around the room between the stations / questions, as they wish

5. During the discussion, people make a note of their thoughts, further questions or suggestions for how to take things forward, on sticky notes or directly onto the large piece of paper at the station

6. Consider having a 'host' at each table to help progress the conversation or to keep track of note-taking and to brief new people if they join the discussion part way through

7. After the discussions have taken place, bring the whole group back together to share some of the comments from each station

8. Finally, make time for an open discussion about some of the ideas or thoughts mentioned, and how to take some of the learning forward

> **Examples of World Café questions**
>
> **General starter questions:**
>
> "What is this community good at / best at?"
>
> "What would you love to see happen in this community?"
>
> "What do you most appreciate about this community?"
>
> "What would your ideal community look like?"
>
> **Deeper questions for progressing things:**
>
> "What has been good about _____?"
>
> "What have been some of the most prominent challenges in _____?"
>
> "What else do you feel needs to be considered at this stage?"
>
> "What might help you to best achieve the aims of the project going forward?"

Tool #8   Open Space

Open Space is a way of facilitating group conversations around what people are most interested to explore or pursue. There is no pre-determined agenda. It's an extremely helpful meeting method for any situation where there is a significant concern that needs addressing, where there are complex or various parts to a challenge, where there is diversity of opinion, or where agreement needs to be made swiftly. It is also a useful tool to enable participants to take responsibility for discussion topics and for taking subsequent actions forward.

1. Begin with everyone together as one group in a circle and explain the process and principles of Open Space.

2. Invite the group to think of key themes, challenges, ideas or questions that there are for them, individually or as a whole.

3. Each person writes the 'topic' on some paper explains it to the rest of the group and adds it to the blank 'agenda' wall

4. Then, depending on the size of the group, the questions / challenges / ideas are taken forward. If there are too many for the size of the group, select a few of the main topics together

5. The person who first voiced each topic will play host for each related discussion

6. Each host goes to sit in different part of the room or building – and these locations are listed next to the topics on the board

7. The rest of the group chooses a topic that interests them and goes to join that discussion

8. People are free to move between the discussions or to stay at one topic for the duration mentioned, and how to take some of the learning forward

9. The host for each discussion stays throughout and makes a note of key things that people talk about - any ideas, thoughts, decisions or further questions that are voiced in the conversation.

10. Finally, the whole group comes back together to share what people have expressed, how they found the process, and to agree any conclusions that will be taken forward following the session

'Law of Two Feet'

In an Open Space event, deciding which discussion to join is fluid. People are actively encouraged to attend discussion groups they are most interested in and to stay for as long as they wish, moving to another discussion if they wish at any time.

'Butterfly' or 'Bumblebee'

The different ways that people move between discussions can be described as behaving like a 'Butterfly' or 'Bumble bee' – a butterfly flits from one conversation to another reflecting on what they hear and a bumble bee pollinates one conversation with something they have learned or heard in another conversation.

Tool #9 Asset Mapping

Bring a group of people together to share their knowledge about the strengths within their community: people, places, opportunities and skills.

1. Print or draw a large map of the area, or create a large spider diagram, and invite everyone to add to it as a whole group:

   → Map significant community resources, organisations, prominent local individuals and buildings. Are there local nature reserves or other wildlife charities in your area? What are the other agencies of community that may be useful?

   Top Tip: Wildlife charities are worth thinking about as they have an interest in people and community and can be good ways of gathering people around a shared task, especially given the link between access to green spaces and mental and physical wellbeing.

   → Map the key meeting points - school gate, pub, street corner where young people gather, green spaces, a community hall

   → Map contacts and friends in the area and their skills, hobbies or talents, such as "That's Mr Brown's house, and he's a fantastic gardener."

   Things to consider: Bear in mind GDPR, if the Asset Map includes any identifying names or details, they cannot be displayed without prior consent. It's worth thinking about how to manage this with the group.

   → Map the local activity groups in the area

   → Mark key moments from the area's history

   → In what ways are this group engaged in the community?

   → Write or draw favourite spots and talk to one another about memories of those places, such as "There used to be a corner shop here thirty years ago, and we used to buy penny-sweets and vegetables from Mr Smith…"

   Top Tip: Encouraging stories and memories to be shared is a wonderful relationship-building tool, so make a space for these conversations as part of the exercise.

2. Spend some time reflecting on the Asset Map you have produced together

3. Think about who else to include in the process going forwards, and agree next steps

Things to consider: If professionals are included in your asset mapping exercise, their assets may look quite different to the individual and community assets, including things like: staff, business networks, buildings, equipment, expertise, economic power, and so on. It's worth bearing in mind the impact (or unintended consequences) of bringing professionals from organisations into the asset mapping exercise. Sometimes it's best to keep it just as residents, and other times it's best to involve people from local organisations, charities, businesses etc as well. The dynamics will be different depending on who is involved – consider together the purpose and desired outcomes of the activity, and invite people accordingly.

Discovering people's gifts in an area

Bring a group of people together to map their individual assets. Spend time identifying and recording people's knowledge, skills, passions and interests.

1. Set up three large boards or sheets, as follows, perhaps on three walls of the room, and provide lots of post-it notes and coloured pens

   a. **Gifts of the Head** – things people know about (e.g. local history, politics, art, sciences, a specialised topic)

   b. **Gifts of the Heart** - things people care about (e.g. charities, causes, or social change they would like to see)

   c. **Gifts of the Hands** - skills and talents people have (e.g. DIY, crochet, football, cooking, music)

   d. *Gifts of the Heel* – *things people do to stay grounded (e.g. meditation, walking, breathing exercises)*

   e. *Gifts of Human Connection* - *things people do to stay connected (e.g. take part in a local group, visit friends, join meetings)*

2. Everybody fills in their post-it notes for each and sticks them to the Head, Heart and Hands boards. Encourage people to leave their name and a contact detail on each of their post-it notes so that people can get in touch with them about their skill or interest if it's helpful

3. Encourage people to share stories and network with one another, "I didn't know Betty was interested in metalworking – maybe I can introduce her to my neighbour

who has metalworking tools so they can share ideas or work together". Remind people to share only what feels comfortable.

  a. Consider putting people into pairs to have a conversation about the exercise, to share what assets they each have, and to stimulate a connection.

4. Spend some time back as a group to reflect on the Asset Map you have produced together

  a. "How was that experience?", "Has anyone discovered something useful/new today?", "What thoughts are you having about the assets in this community?"

5. Think about who else to include in the process going forwards, and agree next steps

Top Tips:

This is a communal exercise and can be quite messy.

It's usually best if residents lead their own asset mapping exercise.

Questions to think about together:
  a. What will the map be useful for?
  b. Where is best to store it so the whole group can access it?
  c. Who else might benefit if the map is displayed in a shared community space?

See a similar method here: www.shareable.net/blog/how-to-map-assets-expose-real-wealth-for-shared-futures

Know, Teach, Learn

This is an extension of the above gift exercise, designed to help move knowledge into action. Once the group has identified who has what gifts, you could:

6. Create a large grid on some flip chart paper with a number of empty boxes down the left-hand side and the words 'know', 'teach' and 'learn' across the top of 3 columns

7. Ask people to think about which of their gifts they are passionate enough about to share with others

8. Then, ask the whole group to write up all the gifts between them as a 'master list' in the empty row headings on the left-hand side of the grid

9. For each gift on the list, ask people to write their name on the relevant boxes on the grid, under 'know', 'teach' or 'learn', based on what they know about, what they could teach and what they would like to learn themselves.

Tool #10   Role-play

One method to help a group try out solutions to a challenge is to role-play it together. This provides an opportunity to experiment, practice ideas for things to say or do, and to have fun in the process.

1. Start by explaining the purpose of the exercise and checking in to ensure everyone is comfortable with taking part

2. Ask people, in pairs or on their own, to think about one challenge or tricky situation they would like help with

3. People feedback their suggestions on post-it notes, which are added to a notice board or flip chart

4. The post-it notes are themed

5. The room is divided into small groups to each focus on one of the main themes or situations

6. Encourage each group to act it out with each person playing a different role within the scenario. One person stays out of the role-play to observe

7. The observer can freeze the role-play at any time and ask questions or make suggestions. For instance, why did someone respond in a particular way?

8. After a few minutes, everyone swaps roles and the group acts out the same situation again. This is repeated until everyone has had a turn at playing each of the roles, including the observer.

9. Bring everyone back together for the groups to feedback any insights they have gained from the exercise. If suitable, each small group could also act out their scenario in front of the rest of the group

10. [Optional] If there is one main theme that people would like to explore, a few volunteers could role-play that situation in the middle of the circle while everyone else observes. Everyone acts as 'observer' has the power to "pause" the situation and offer suggestions or ask questions

11. [Optional] If desired, people on the 'outside' can then swap in to try out their ideas or techniques in the role play scenario

12. [Optional] Finally, everyone feeds back their observations to the whole group

Top tip: This exercise can help people figure out different ways of addressing a group situation and practicing those ideas together. It can also help improve empathy between people who have not seen eye-to-eye, by trying to understand where a person is coming from and thinking about what might be helpful in responding to them.

Tool #11   Learning Group

A Learning Group is a way for a group of people to help one another work whilst working through a challenging situation and building deeper understanding.

1. People sit in groups of 4-8 people
2. One person explains a challenge or difficulty in some depth while the others in the small group listen
3. For about 5-10 minutes, the others in the group ask questions to clarify the details of the situation so that they understand it more fully
4. After this, the group begins to ask solution-finding questions. These are not closed questions, or an attempt to give advice, but questions that help the person to find a solution for themselves - helping to see it from a different perspective, or helping them to consider what they would like to see happen in the situation and why

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Example questions:

- "How do you think the person might expect you to respond?"
- "What is your ideal outcome – and what might it take to make that happen?"
- "How do you think the group/person sees this situation?"
- "What do you think is the root cause of the difficulty – and how might that be addressed?"

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5. This continues until the person with the dilemma feels that they have a way forward that can be acted upon