

CARAVAN PARK PROJECT, BIG IDEAS GRANT

Using ABCD with transient caravan park communities



The Caravan Park Project has been developed to support residents who live in caravan parks, because they have few or no other housing options.

Using an asset-based approach, the Caravan Park Project has a Big Ideas Grants (BIG) scheme to help fund initiatives that residents identify and that build on their strengths.

As a result, residents own the resulting initiatives. The project has shown that ABCD can work with transient caravan park communities.

Background

The Big Ideas Grants (BIG) project started in early 2008 at a trial caravan park in the Lake Macquarie area (in Australia). The initiative was facilitated by Graeme Stuart, Dee Brooks and Cherie Stephens from the Family Action Centre (at the University of Newcastle).

The BIG project developed because the team felt frustrated when they worked on an idea with a group of residents who, for various reasons, did not always stay around to see an initiative completed. It was also hard on other residents, when resident-leaders left but an initiative was only half-finished. Dee Brooks, from the

team, could see that the mini-grants approach used by the Benevolent Society had real potential in caravan parks.

The ABCD process

The BIG project uses an ABCD and Appreciative Inquiry approach, by asking questions like, what are the strengths and assets of our community? Share a time when you felt our community was at its best. What do you value most about our community? What is the essence of our community that makes it unique and strong? These questions form the basis of conversations between the project team and residents. Some conversations take place between individuals; other conversations occur over shared lunches where residents are invited to come along and bring their favourite or signature dishes.

Through these conversations people's skills and abilities emerge. For example, some older men have mechanical skills that they share with younger kids; one lady who could crochet began teaching others. At one park, residents built a set of pigeon holes for their mail; at another park, residents ran a Christmas lights competition; while at another park, residents organised a Secret Santa Christmas party. These initiatives helped to improve life in the caravan parks, and became a way for residents to meet each other (and thereby develop a stronger sense of community).

An initial asset map was conducted for the surrounding area of one isolated caravan park. A capacity register and skills audit was also conducted. People filled this out individually or alternatively

Conversations occur over shared lunches where residents are invited to come along and bring their favourite or signature dishes.

The activities build people's confidence so they can stand up and say "This is what I am good at".

Gift of the head, heart, hands AND heel!

they were assisted by workers who would use an informal conversation to guide the person through the audit. The worker would get permission to write down the residents responses. This approach worked well because people felt it was their choice to participate in they way that felt most comfortable for them. Results were presented back to the adults' group and this helped form the initial ideas list about what the projects to start with.

The BIG project provides residents with small amounts of funding (\$50) to help them get started with their initiatives. Recently the project has gained funding from Street Smart which allows each park a further \$400. Residents decide what they want to do with the money and are encouraged to fill out a BIG ideas proposal form for the money. Residents can get support filling out the form (especially the budget). For other projects there is no paperwork at all. Ideas emerge organically and groups collectively agree on what to fund. A group at one isolated park has decided that they want a directory of services to give to new residents. To do this they are conducting an asset map of their community. From here they hope to paint a physical assets map on an amenities block.

Currently five parks are using an ABCD approach. This approach has helped shift residents away from "a welfare mentality" to focus on people's skills and abilities. The activities build people's confidence so they can stand up and say "This is what I am good at". Many friendships have formed around shared interests, and people have started to relate to each other differently. For example, Dee Brooks describes how, in some of the isolated parks, people have become comfortable enough with each other to ask for lifts into town.

Challenges

The transient nature of caravan parks provides many challenges. There are times when a group begins and then the resident-leader needs to leave. Residents soon realise if they want their group to continue someone needs to step up to the role. Dee Brooks gives an example of a group where the person in the leadership position had to leave. To everyone's surprise, a quiet member of the group stepped into the leader's role. As a result, her confidence and self esteem has increased and she has helped get the initiative finished.

Another challenge for the project is that sometimes people don't feel that they have anything to give to the community. Gentle and informal conversations help to establish gifts of the head, heart and hands. Many people don't feel confident about talking about themselves but find it easier to talk about what they are good at with their hands. When they talk about what they feel with their hearts and what they care about, they start to talk about their children. In some cases an extra H is added for 'heel' which is used to discover the things that grounds a person and helps them move forward. This tool is simple and easy to use to establish individual assets and skills, and it helps to build confidence in a non threatening way.



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CENTRAL COAST COMMUNITY CONGRESS

A bi-annual showcasing of ABCD



Ten years ago a group of people working and living in the Central Coast region of New South Wales (in Australia) became disillusioned by the negativity attached to the Central Coast.

An informal group was formed to create space for people to tell their stories of positive community development in the area.

As a result the Central Coast Community Congress was developed to highlight the strengths within the region.

Background

The Central Coast Community Congress was formed by an informal committee, who came together 10 years ago to do something different in the Central Coast. People in the group were disillusioned because the Central Coast was portrayed in terms of its deficits. This resulted in strong sense of negativity—and a needs based approach to community development. Initially, the group did not know about ABCD; however, their practices paralleled an ABCD approach. They worked from the inside out, and were relationship driven and community focused. Overall, the group wanted to find positive stories that highlighted the

strengths of the Central Coast community. The group decided the best way to find positive stories was to hold an event that would celebrate positive community stories that highlighted the strengths of people and the area. The first Central Coast Community Congress was held in 2001. 200 people attended, keen to learn from each other about community building and the possibilities in the Central Coast region.

Resulting initiatives

Building on this initial success, the Central Coast Community Congress now takes place every 2 years, and people continue to use the event as an opportunity for learning and networking around ABCD. The Congress is organised by a Working Party, made up of people who live and work in the Central Coast region. This includes people from Wyong and Gosford Councils, Department of Community Services, Burnside Benevolent Society, as well as small community groups.

People who attend the Congress embrace the ABCD approach and use it in their local areas. Through relationships, a number of smaller ABCD projects have become realities. For example, there is the Connecting Kincumber Project, Wyong Housing Department Project and the Killarney Vale, Bateau Bay, Tumbi Umbi Community Building Network (KBT).

Another event that has developed out of the Congress is the *Real People Doing Real Things* community building awards. These awards recognise grass roots community building. Every year, 150 to

Initially the group were not aware of ABCD approaches

**Five-minute
segments
showcase
Real People
Doing Real
Things!**

180 people attend to celebrate local people's strengths and capacities. The Community Congress Working Party is also developing an Australian version of an ABCD tool kit so that community groups can use principles of ABCD in their community building.

The ABCD process

Initially, the Central Coast Community Congress Working Party did not know about ABCD. There was no formal asset mapping; however, the group still looked at what they had in order to build the Congress. This included using formal professional networks, as well as people they knew who would like to be involved. The things that worked well for the development of Congress were the focus on relationships and the passion of the group to build relationships with people who came to the congress.

All the organising is on a voluntary basis, so no-one is employed. The Central Coast Community Congress Working Party itself has no formal structure or positions. Decisions are made by consensus between all current members of the Working Party.

The Congress also draws on secondary assets in the region. The Central Coast Community Council acts as a banker for the Congress. The Community Council is the peak body in the region for community service organisations (and it is funded by the Department of Community Services to work on regional development and advocacy on social and community issues. The Council looks after the small amount of money that is generated from the congress (and that goes towards funding the next Congress). The Council also looks after funds that are accessed via local and state governments. Gosford Council donates \$10,000 a year and Wyong Council \$10,000 every 2 years, as part of their budget allocation.

What works well

Every time the Congress comes around, the group of people on the Working Party draw on their resources and networks to create the event and build the vision of ABCD. The event aims to create a space where people can learn from each other, share stories, develop skills and celebrate ABCD. The event includes keynotes and five-minute segments throughout the event from *Real People Doing Real Things*. In these short segments local community builders tell all Congress participants about their own local story. Workshops are also run by people from the Central Coast, and further afield, on projects and themes that reflect an ABCD approach to community building. Stalls and creative spaces also provide opportunities for plays and music.

Challenges

One challenge for the Community Congress Working Party is that because it has no formal structure, it is based the passion of people to keep the Congress running. Thus a major challenge for this group is keeping energy flowing and keeping an awareness of ABCD principles through changing group dynamics. This is addressed by maintaining good will and humour as well as bearing witness to the change that the congress makes to community development practice.



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COMMUNITY PARTNERING PROJECT

Building on hidden community and economic assets



In the 1990s, the Latrobe Valley in Victoria, Australia went through a decline as the power industry was restructured and workers made redundant.

Community Partnering was a joint Latrobe City Council and Monash University initiative to trial an ABCD approach to community and economic development.

Four community projects were initiated during the two years of the project. While three continued for several years afterwards, one is now over ten years old.

Background

In 1998, a Latrobe City Councillor (Tony Hanning) and several Monash University researchers (Jenny Cameron, Katherine Gibson and Arthur Veno) found out about Asset-Based Community Development and avidly read *Building Communities from the Inside Out* (by John Kretzmann and John McKnight) and watched the videos from the ABCD Institute. The group could see the power of starting not with the needs of an area but with the existing assets and resources, particularly those that are hidden. They could also see that responses to the soaring levels of unemployment in the Latrobe Valley were needs-based, with people looking outside the area for

expertise, resources and solutions. So they decided to trial an assets approach. They received funding through the Australian Research Council for the trial, with the Latrobe City Council and several of the privatised power companies providing additional funding.

The Project

Community Partnering Project ran for two years in 1999 and 2000. Three local residents were employed as community researchers and they were supported by the university researchers and Council staff. The community researchers were an ex-power industry worker, a young unemployed person and a single parent. None of the community researchers had any previous training or experience in community or economic development; what they did have was first-hand experience of the impact of the power industry restructuring. The community researchers were therefore well-able to connect with others who had been impacted by the restructure. The community researchers did this by going to neighbourhood houses, training centres and other places where they could meet informally with impacted groups.

The first step was for the community researchers to tell their own story of life in the Latrobe Valley through photo-essays, which became starting points for conversation and connection with impacted groups as the photo-essays resonated with people's sense of hopelessness and despair.

But the photo-essays were only the start. Once they had been trained in ABCD the community researchers could turn conversations around and get people to identify the assets in the Latrobe Valley, particularly the skills and abilities of those who had been most heavily

Community researchers—the key to connecting with marginalised groups.

impacted by the restructure. Wonderful stories emerged of people's resilience, innovation and care, and people started to recognise not just the extent of hidden community activities but the host of diverse and informal economic activities they were involved in. People's sense of themselves started to shift. In place of the usual view of the unemployed and marginalised as a drain on society, people could see how they were already contributing to their community and being active in a diverse economy.

*People "got it".
They could see
the difference it
made to start
with assets and
not needs.*

Building on people's changed sense of themselves the community researchers worked with groups to explore ideas for the things people wanted to do to build on the hidden community and economic assets. People came up with all sorts of ideas and got to test the possibilities through workshops, bus trips, brainstorming sessions and so on. Out of this period of play and experimental thinking four ideas emerged that groups were keen to work on—a cyber-circus, a community garden, a community work-shed and a Santa's Workshop.

In the final stage of the project the community and university researchers worked with each group to get the projects up and running.

The ABCD Process

The Community Partnering Project was founded on the principles of ABCD. The project focussed on the groups most heavily impacted by the restructuring of the power industry. These groups were positioned as the primary asset of the Latrobe Valley, and the project worked with their skills and abilities, ideas and dreams. To help reveal people's assets, the project used a Portrait of Gifts; but it was used as a starting point for conversations between the community researchers and participating groups—it was not used as a comprehensive survey.

Secondary assets—community organisations and groups, the local council, businesses and so on—were then drawn on to support the projects that the groups wanted to pursue.

What worked well

People who had been so badly impacted by the restructuring of the power industry "got it". They were all too familiar being treated as a problem; whereas the ABCD approach was an opportunity to create something with other people, and in the words of one participant "put back into the community what we've got out of it ourselves". People, even in the most desperate of situations, relished the opportunity to do something for someone else.

Challenges

The biggest challenge was sustaining the four projects once the two-year funding for Community Partnering ceased. In the final months the community and university researchers worked with the groups to help prepare them for the change. The cyber-circus folded in the first twelve months after Community Partnering finished, the community garden and community work-shed continued for several more years, and Santa's Workshop is ongoing. The key lesson, that subsequent projects based on Community Partnering have put into practice, is to build strong relationships early on with secondary assets like councils and community organisations so they can provide an ongoing support role.



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See the [Resource Kit \(Shifting Focus\)](#) and Videos (It's In Our Hands: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)).

See also the stories on Santa's Workshop; and Latrobe Valley Community Environmental Garden

Written by Jenny Cameron

LATROBE VALLEY COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL GARDENS

An enormous undertaking



In the 1990s the Latrobe Valley in Victoria, Australia went through a decline as the power industry was restructured and workers made redundant.

Latrobe Valley Community Environmental Gardens was a project that a group of dedicated local residents put their hearts and souls into.

However, after almost four years of hard work, the group decided to close.

***“We’re talking
about for the
whole
community”***

Background

Latrobe Valley Community Environmental Gardens (LVCEG) started in 1999 as part of the Community Partnering Project. This was a joint action research project between Latrobe City Council and Monash University that used ABCD to initiate community and economic development projects. As part of the Community Partnering Project a mixed group of people who were unemployed, sole parents, retired and had various disabilities came up with the idea of developing a community and environmental garden for the Latrobe Valley. The Community Partnering project team worked with this group to start the garden.

The Project

LVCEG started in October 1999, on an old caravan park site near the centre of the town of Morwell. The group worked

through the local council to gain access to the three hectare (or almost 8 acre) site. There was tremendous excitement when the news came through that planning permission had been approved and the group could use the site. There were working bees to clear the site of the rubbish, weeds, concrete pads (that the caravans used to sit on) and rows of old pine trees. The group worked hard to raise funds to reconnect the water, get perimeter fencing (a condition of the planning permission from council) and purchase gardening equipment. To help with these things the group was successful in getting funding from the Federal government (through the Family and Community Networks Initiatives), the Latrobe City Trust – Gambling Impact Fund, and the Latrobe City Council Community Grant scheme.

Over time the group set up a composting system and a worm farm, and put in crops of broad beans, potatoes, onions, corn and pumpkin. Some of the produce was kept for seed stock, some given away to local charities and some was eaten by members.

However, the group found it tiring to keep up the momentum and finally in mid-2003 they made the difficult decision to close the garden. But their hard work on the site left a lasting legacy and a group of local rose growers were able to immediately use the site for propagation.

Core values

Set up through the Community Partnering Project, LVCEG was based on the principle that the groups of people who had been most heavily impacted by the restructuring of the power industry—the

unemployed power industry workers, the young people who never had the chance to work in the industry, and the families whose relationships had broken apart under the pressure—were the primary asset of the Latrobe Valley, and that their skills and abilities, dreams and passions, should be the basis for community and economic development projects.

The group who were working on the garden wanted it to be a project for everyone. One member said “we’re talking about for the whole community ... elderly citizens, street kids, your drug addicts, correctional services, work-for-the-dole”.

What worked well

The group who were involved learned an enormous amount over the almost four years that LVCEG ran. As well as doing formal training in Occupation Health and Safety, Leadership and Accounting, members learnt about the general organisation needed to get things going and keep them running. The learning was hard, but also rewarding, as one member described, “And I have fallen apart quite a few times. And I’ve been helped a lot. I’ve cried a lot ... The hard work has taken all this time to learn and slot things where they really fit, your safety, your health, your environment, your office girls, your banking, your fund raising ... It’s one big giant job, but you learn from it.”

Along with more formal skills in things like office and meeting procedures, members learned about the ups and downs of working with other people. Here’s how one person described it: “It wouldn’t matter if you were ten in here, or a hundred and ten, everybody’s equal. They’re sharing, their morning teas, their coffee, have a laugh, have fun, get ideas, the youngies can come up with things too, you all learn from each other, you’re coping with all types of people, from your hot-tempered stand-over bully to your type that if you say something to them they scream straight back at you. You’ve got to learn to deal with every

type. It’s good learning, it’s (I don’t know) there’s just something right about this whole thing.”

Challenges

LVCEG was an enormous undertaking. It involved redeveloping an old caravan park site, so in the earlier years gardening had to wait while considerable effort was put into preparing the site.

It was also an ambitious project. The large site meant there were tremendous possibilities. The group had dreams of not just individual and shared garden beds, but orchards, free-range chickens, and demonstration water recycling projects and mud-brick and straw-bale buildings. In retrospect perhaps it would have been better to start with a smaller site that needed less preparation and so gardens could be up and running almost from the outset.



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See also the story on Community Partnering Project.

Written by Jenny Cameron

“There’s just something right about this whole thing”

SANTA'S WORKSHOP

Redundant workers become a primary community asset



In the 1990s the Latrobe Valley in Victoria, Australia went through a decline as the power industry was restructured and workers made redundant.

Santa's workshop became a community project that brought retrenched workers and others together to make large outdoor Christmas decorations.

Throughout the year people drop in to see what's happening at the workshop and in the pre-Christmas period people come in to make decorations for their own houses and for others in the community.

Background

Santa's Workshop started in 1999 as part of the Community Partnering Project. This was a joint action research project between Latrobe City Council and Monash University that used ABCD to initiate community and economic development projects. Since he was made redundant from the power industry, Keith Peters had been making large outdoor Christmas decorations for his house. Keith was recognised as an important community asset, and when asked said he would be prepared to teach other people and help them make Christmas decorations. Council identified a disused

preschool building that could be used for Santa's Workshop. Staff from the Community Partnering Project worked with Keith to ready the Workshop for its opening in October.

The Project

Santa's Workshop has continued operating since 1999. It's open 2 days a week throughout the year. For most of the year people come along and make large outdoor Christmas decorations that are sold to individuals for their homes and to town committees for street decorations. Nobody is paid for their labour so once the cost of materials is taken out Santa's Workshop makes a surplus from what it sells. Using voluntary labour was a decision that the core group made early on. Another decision they made was that they didn't want to handle money, so all money is paid directly to a local hardware store that takes out the cost of the materials and then holds the surplus that Santa's Workshop makes over the year.

In the lead up to Christmas, Santa's Workshop uses its accumulated surplus to purchase timber and paint that's given to local residents so they can make their own decorations with guidance from Keith and the core group (currently Carmen, Lynne and Colleen).

Core values

Santa's Workshop exemplifies an ABCD approach. Local residents who have time on their hands, and a keen interest, run the project. Keith and the core group never saw themselves as community leaders or community teachers but Santa's Workshop is an opportunity to develop these new skills.

Santa's Workshop aims to make a strong contribution to the community. The

***Giving the
community a
lift***

***You paint what
you want to
paint ... there's
no meetings ...
no minutes ...
that's why it
works!***

workshop uses its surplus to make decorations that are donated to schools for fund raising, to nursing homes for Christmas cheer, and to local families who are doing it tough. The Workshop also hosts visits from groups. One memorable visit was from Baringa Special School (for children with intellectual disabilities). The Santa's Workshop team worked with the children to help them make their decorations.

What works well

Santa's Workshop worked initially because it was run as a trial to see if people were interested and if the idea would work in practice. There was no expectation that it would necessarily continue beyond the trial. Delightfully however, Santa's Workshop worked! Keith thoroughly enjoyed himself and found that he had a really talent as a teacher. Along with Keith a small group of local residents stepped forward to take responsibility for running the workshop.

Over the years the membership of the core group has changed as people get jobs, move out of the areas and so on. But Keith has always attracted a small group willing to share responsibility.

The project has also been successful because of the support of Latrobe City Council. Council provides the building, pays for the electricity and covers public liability insurance. In return, the building is used and maintained by the group.

Local business support the project. The local hardware store acts as a banker for the group. In return, the group buys most materials from the store (and they are only charged cost price). Other businesses lend support where they can. Local paint shops have donated mistints of paint, and one of the electricity companies donated an electric jigsaw.

Because secondary assets like Council and local businesses support the project, Santa's Workshop has never received any grant funding. This means that the group doesn't need to spend time applying for

funding or filling in report forms, instead the group can get on and do what they want to do—make large outdoor Christmas decorations!

One member describes the arrangement in the following way, "It's so refreshing just to come when you want to come, paint what you want to paint, leave when you want to leave. There's no meetings, no sitting, no 'You can't do this you can't do that', no minutes. It's loose and that's why it works."

Challenges

The group has faced ups and downs. Sometimes there is conflict between people, and copyright and intellectual property can be an issue (i.e. who owns the designs? can people copy each other's work?), but these challenges are responded to with good humour and equanimity. One member says, "We have some major stuff ups", and the rest of the group chime in, "But there's nothing that can't be fixed!"

Another challenge is that Council may redevelop the preschool building. The group would have to find new premises and an arrangement that gives them the flexibility they have at the moment.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is that Santa's Workshop relies on Keith's involvement. Would the workshop continue without Keith?



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See also the story on Community Partnering Project.

Written by Jenny Cameron & Sarah Cutler

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

Fostering community well-being and family harmony



Starting in mid-2009, ICP has taken a holistic approach by working with entire communities and helping them support every family they include. ICP has also adopted an asset-based approach to both community and family strengthening. The goal of the program is to help communities and families use their assets to build viable livelihood options for themselves. An important secondary objective is to foster family harmony in a context where domestic violence is common.

Initial funding from AusAID provided ICP with the opportunity to test various strength-based approaches in three communities over a six-month period. Based on this experience, the ICP team agreed on the set of tools and methodology to be used in implementing their version of ABCD.

The ABCD Process

Once a community has agreed to work with ICP, a team of 3-4 ICP field staff together with a representative from a community which has already embarked on the ABCD process and a member of yet another community which is considering ABCD as a future option come to live in the newly-engaged community for three weeks. During this period, community members – organized into groups of men, women, young men, and young women – are familiarized with the ABCD process through a range of activities. They engage in **story-telling** to bring out the community's past successes; they conduct a community-wide **visioning** process to create a shared picture of what they would like to achieve in five years; they carry out **asset mapping** embracing the community's natural, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual resources as well as stakeholder networks that can be used to implement their vision for the future; and they do **action planning** to learn how to effectively mobilize community assets and external resources. Parallel with

The goal of the program is to help communities and families use their assets to build viable livelihood options.

Although Solomon Island residents mostly live in self-sufficient villages with access to adequate natural resources, recent years have seen a growing discontent and frustration among these communities as their expectations of government aid to meet their development needs remain largely unfulfilled and traditional customs and practices – that for centuries provided the basis for social cohesion – are increasingly eroded.

The Inclusive Community Program (ICP), known for its extensive experience conducting skills development trainings across the Solomon Islands, has initiated a strategy aimed to help communities and families build sustainable livelihood options for themselves by leading them to discover, and make effective use of, the various assets they have.

Early results show the potential of an ABCD approach for improving community and family well-being, particularly by way of reviving traditional ways of working together for the common good.

Background

The Inclusive Communities Program is one of the six projects operating under the Solomon Islands NGO Partnership Agreement funded by the Australian Government's International Development Program (AusAID).

ICP motto:
**“One is
too small
a number
to achieve
greatness.”**

that, workshops are held on **power dynamics** and **financial literacy** to help community members realize how power can be used for their common good and how they might interact more advantageously with the formal economy.

Next, ICP staff visit every family to review these community-wide activities and generate a family vision and action plan. During this stage, data is also collected on family health and well-being. Eventually families with similar visions will be clustered for mutual support and to share experiences.

Resulting Developments

The ICP staff work in communities until they are able to conduct the ABCD process themselves. Following the initial phase of engagement, the community elects a “development committee” to oversee the implementation of their plans and a lead facilitator to liaise with ICP and help coordinate additional training and mentoring.

The following case demonstrates typical developments in a community involved in ICP. The village of Pago-Pago (located on an island about a two-hour boat ride off the coast from the capital Honiara) developed a vision focused on improving the overall health and safety standards in the community. As the first step, they resolved to repair all semi-permanent houses to meet minimum safety and sanitation standards within 4 years. At least 60 houses would be repaired, rebuilt, or moved to safer ground. The dominant clan of the village, which owns most of its forest resources, has decided to give every family access to whatever amount of wood it needs for rebuilding. The community decided that every family will make a small contribution towards employing a group of skilled tradespeople from the village to supervise the largely volunteer work of cutting and milling timber, making cement bricks, and constructing improved sanitation and access to clean water. In addition, community members opted to close the nearby 1.4 km-long reef to all commercial use for a 12-month period, whereupon the replenished shell, shellfish, and fish stocks would be harvested at sustainable levels – and sold at the capital city market to generate funds for

implementing their development plans. Further signs of improvement in community well-being include the establishment of a management committee and revival of grassroots activist groups such as Mothers’ Union which seeks to enhance the quality of family life by teaching parenting skills and encouraging young people to become responsible members of their community.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The idea of using an asset-based approach as the key instrument for solving social and economic problems at the community level is new to the majority of people residing in the rural areas of the Solomon Islands. The ICP field staff has found that many residents of those communities which are going through the initial stages of the ABCD process are reluctant to commit to initiatives that do not rely on government handouts or project grants. Even though the process typically generates a surge of enthusiasm and creative energy amongst the communities involved as the progress they are making becomes more tangible and their self-esteem increases, they realize all too well that the journey ahead is long. Many sources of support will be needed to enable them to implement their collective vision, suggesting that the next steps should focus on establishing linkages with outside agencies in government, private, and civil society sectors.



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NHIP CAU FOUNDATION

Providing free vocational training for people with disabilities



“Let us help ourselves before asking for help from outsiders.”

An offspring of the Can Tho Club of People with Disabilities, the Nhip Cau Foundation was conceived in 2002 with the vision of bridging the social gap between the “disabled” and the “undisabled.”

The Foundation’s work helps people with disabilities in Vietnam’s Mekong Delta Region achieve self-reliance and integrate into community life by offering free training courses on producing handicrafts.

Since its inception, the Nhip Cau Foundation has provided vocational training to 121 persons with disabilities and benefitted 825 people indirectly, including those family members of its trainees who have also become involved in handicraft production and the participants of vocational courses run by the Foundation’s graduates for other organizations.

Background

The Nhip Cau Foundation, with its vocational training centre for people with disabilities, was formally established in 2003, following

an “Innovation Day” organized by the World Bank and sponsored by the Canada Fund. The idea sprang from the work of Mrs. Bui Thi Hong Nga, founder and president of the Can Tho Club of People with Disabilities, and pilot vocational training initiatives in the Mekong Delta Region (undertaken in 2002)—a household sewing project and a coconut handicraft workshop—showed just what was possible. People with disabilities created employment by and for themselves using locally available materials such as coconut shell to make handicrafts, demonstrating not only their skills and abilities but also how quickly vocational training can be applied in viable small scale enterprise.

The story of the Can Tho Club is itself a remarkable story. Initially with a small membership of 20, it set out to prove it could play a major role in reducing the isolation experienced by people with disabilities and improving their participation in community life. After six years of building up its activities with volunteers and small-scale fundraising initiatives, the Club’s membership had grown to 233. With this number it was able to register as an Association—Can Tho Association of People with Disabilities—with an expanded agenda involving vocational training, various support programs (including rehabilitation, provision of small start-up grants and scholarships, and so on), awareness raising, recreational activities, and social welfare services. The Nhip Cau Foundation is part of this Association, dedicated to providing free vocational training and creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities residing in the Mekong Delta.

The ABCD Process

From the very beginning, the Nhip Cau Foundation has employed the principles of an asset-based approach. This is evident not only in how it has creatively mobilized resources to support its training programs, but also in how it has identified the capacities and strengths

of people with disabilities and other resources that could be harnessed to enable them to be fully independent contributors to their communities. The core principle guiding the Foundation's work has been captured in the motto, "Let us help ourselves before asking for help from outsiders."

When it came to envisioning the ways in which people with disabilities could benefit from vocational training, the Foundation's leadership used a variety of ABCD tools to generate ideas about existing skills, capacities, and resources and the opportunities these presented. For example, skills of the "Head, heart, and hand" among the Can Tho Club members were listed at the pilot stage to generate awareness of everyone's different capacities. Included in this list were the cultural traditions and values that encouraged hard work and efficiency. A "Leaky Bucket" tool was used to analyze the local economy to see what opportunities existed that the vocational training offered by the Foundation could take advantage of. Then the various social and institutional assets were discussed, such as the good relationships people had with government institutions and local organizations, including private companies that showed the potential for displaying, selling, and marketing products made by the Foundation's trainees. Locally available natural resources, such as coconut shells and fibre, were also identified as the principal source of raw materials for handicraft production.

Resulting Developments

Beginning with the pilot courses offered in 2002, the Nhip Cau Foundation has provided free vocational training to 121 persons with disabilities from across the Mekong Delta Region. In addition, it has benefitted a total of 825 people indirectly. These include the family members of the Foundation's trainees who are currently assisting the latter in handicraft production (150 persons) and 675 individuals who have attended vocational training courses run by the Foundation's graduates for other organizations. A little over a third of the people benefitting are women. The Nhip Cau Foundation serves as both a workshop and a showroom, with people with disabilities acting as guides to visitors.

Perhaps the most significant achievement of the Nhip Cau Foundation is the change in attitudes. As a result of attending its vocational training courses, people with disabilities have gained confidence and pride in their potential as individuals and community members, including the capacity to sustain themselves financially. Earlier they had internalized the idea of their "uselessness," and this perception of themselves prevented them from seeing the opportunities they could tap into. The ABCD approach has helped them recognize their own inherent worth and power as active members of society. With this newly gained self-esteem, they have also been able to foster a positive change in attitudes towards people with disabilities among the general public.

*The
Foundation's
mission can be
summarized in
the formula:*

*Education
+
Employment
=
Empowerment*



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COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT IN BALE SALKA

Reviving the tradition of collective action



From the very beginning, the ABCD group in Bale Salka decided to forgo the “low-hanging fruits” and focused on ambitious activities to improve community infrastructure.

Bale Salka is an ethnically and religiously diverse community in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia, largely made up of migrants who were relocated to this area as part of the national government’s response to the drought and famine of 1983-1985.

In 2007, a local NGO called Hundee, which works to improve the resilience of rural communities in the Oromia Region, engaged a group of Bale Salka residents in a process of identifying and building on their strengths, known as “Asset-Based Community-Driven” development (or ABCD).

The ABCD process has reinvigorated the community’s pride in collective action and yielded impressive results, including the expansion of the local school and the rebuilding of a washed-out road.

Background

The community of Bale Salka is nestled on a high plateau in Ethiopia’s Bale Mountains some 500 km southeast of Addis Ababa. Its 10,000-strong population consists mainly of immigrants from the Somali Region, who were moved to this area in the mid-1980s under the nationwide resettlement program purporting to combat famine and improve

agricultural productivity, initiated by the military-socialist Derg regime (1974-1987).

The population is diverse, including Somali, Oromo, and Amhara people who adhere to Islam, Orthodox Christianity or traditional religious beliefs.

In 2003, Oxfam Canada, in collaboration with the Coady International Institute and three local partners, set out to pilot an ABCD approach in Ethiopia. As part of this initiative, one of the local partners, an NGO called Hundee, introduced the ABCD process to a group of 50 Bale Salka residents in 2007.

The ABCD Process

Hundee initiated the ABCD process using appreciative interviewing, whereby separate community groups (youth, adult women, adult men, and the elderly) were asked to share stories that highlighted significant community accomplishments in the past. In particular, Hundee facilitators sought to bring out those achievements that involved little or no external support from either the government or NGOs.

Recalling such stories was a fairly easy exercise for the Bale Salka ABCD group. The resettlement program often brought people to places where government services were virtually non-existent, so the migrants had to work together in order to survive. This area also had few NGOs the community could turn to for assistance.

One important story that Hundee learned from this exercise was that Bale Salka residents had been able to raise 350,000 birr several years earlier (~50,000 US\$ at the then prevailing exchange rate) for the installation of 4.5 km of power lines to deliver electricity to the community. Reflections on this episode had a positive motivational impact on the community members as well: if they could leverage their assets for a common cause once, why not do it again?

“Nobody is responsible for the road except the people.”

Other exercises were then used to map natural resources and physical infrastructure, local associations and institutions, and individual skills, and to identify the inflows and “leaks” in the local economy. These exercises provided the ABCD group with an inventory of their own assets that could be used to meet their development priorities.

Resulting Developments

At the next, action-planning stage, the Bale Salka group—despite being encouraged to focus at first on the so-called “low-hanging fruits” (modest tasks that could be fulfilled without any external support)—immediately prioritized a number of ambitious projects.

One of these was to rebuild the road linking Bale Salka to the outside world. The old road had largely washed out and became impassable during the rainy season, limiting the ability of Bale Salka residents to sell their farming produce in outside markets, which is their main source of cash income.

The road rebuilding required not only large sums of money but also technical know-how and the ability to negotiate good deals with contractors. This level of contribution and coordination was not typical of newly-emerged ABCD groups in other parts of Ethiopia, most of which had decided to start small and grew more ambitious over time. However, the Bale Salka group was determined and collected as much as 470,000 birr (~50,000 US\$) from community members in just one year. Using this sizable sum as leverage, the group was able to attract further investment from Oxfam Canada. With community labour, coupled with the technical expertise provided by the government, the vital road was restored.

Upon completion of the road, one community member was asked about the role of external support in the project. He acknowledged its importance, but stressed that “nobody is responsible for the road except the people of [Bale Salka]”—a clear sign that community ownership was central to the project’s success.

Perhaps an even more important outcome of the ABCD process in Bale Salka has been the expansion of the local school to include a secondary section. Prior to its upgrade, the only high school available to local children was in the town of Robe, about 30 km away. The combined costs of tuition, transportation,

and lodging were beyond the means of many Bale Salka families, thus preventing a large proportion of the community’s youth from obtaining secondary education. Determined to resolve this critical issue, the community raised 200,000 birr and provided the labour and materials to spruce up the existing school facilities and construct nine new classrooms.

Converting Challenge to Their Advantage

When the school expansion was completed, the community hit a roadblock. The officials said they could not provide a secondary-level teacher to Bale Salka as this would result in exceeding the number of high schools that the district was allowed by law to have. The leaders of Bale Salka responded by sending groups of youth, women, and elders to speak to the government about the great lengths the community had gone to in order to secure a high school. After over a year of discussions, not only did the government appoint a new teacher, but it also contributed various school furnishings amounting to 50,000 birr. Further on, the government—apparently convinced of the community’s potential—has recently granted Bale Salka municipal status. In theory, this should provide it with access to a wider range of government services. Time will tell.

Bale Salka has achieved some of the most striking results among the 25 communities that have been introduced to the ABCD process in Ethiopia. Its success is due entirely to local citizens who owned their development from the very outset. The role of the ABCD process in Bale Salka consisted as much in providing the practical tools that helped its residents bring about the changes they wanted to see as in reviving the tradition of collective action that has been there all along.



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ABCD IN BORICHO

Encouraging a savings culture



Working with a local NGO, the community of Boricho in the central highlands of Ethiopia started a process of asset-based and community-driven development (ABCD) in 2007.

During this process, strengthening community-based savings and credit was seen as a priority and an opportunity.

Two savings groups have since been established, notably enhancing the well-being and self-reliance of this community and providing women with increased opportunities to play a more central role in community life.

“Savings culture” was one outcome of the ABCD process that stood out the most for Boricho residents.

Background

The *kebele* (village) of Boricho is located 75 km west of Ethiopia’s capital city, Addis Ababa. It is a community set against the backdrop of beautiful highlands and lush fields of teff, wheat, and lentils. Despite favourable conditions for agriculture, formal credit is unaffordable for many local farmers, limiting their ability to invest in their land.

There are two savings groups in Boricho, both of which emerged after a local NGO called Hundee integrated a series of ABCD exercises into the community’s programs to promote positive traditional practices such as group savings in cereals and in cash. These exercises are designed to trigger community-led initiatives through the recognition of past accomplishments and existing capacities and resources. As a result, a number of community members formed an ABCD group which developed a three-year

action plan with concrete targets including livestock fattening, vegetable gardening, a new seedling nursery, home improvement, and savings and credit scheme.

A Major Outcome of the ABCD Process

The emergence and strengthening of two savings groups has been one of the major outcomes of the ABCD process in Boricho. Discussions with community members held several years later provided clear evidence that membership in these groups, particularly in the case of women, had changed not only their economic standing in the community but also their perception of the traditionally accepted roles of women and men. One woman boldly stood up mid-way through the discussion and said: “Women work in the home but changes are coming. Our husbands used to control everything. Now women are controlling their own savings.”

Her statement—made in the presence of over 30 community members, including some of the more affluent men of Boricho—reflected the increasing involvement of women in economic activities. Other women in Boricho also observed that participation in savings groups had improved their understanding of the local economy and thereby fostered joint decision-making at the household level. It also provided women with increased opportunities to play a more central role in community life.

It was evident that what Boricho residents called a “savings culture” was one outcome of the ABCD process that stood out the most for them. This observation is not limited to Boricho. In an evaluation of seven Ethiopian community groups that participated in the ABCD process, carried out in 2011, four groups reported the creation of savings associations of considerable size as well as the proliferation of smaller savings groups.

Hundee (whose name means “root” in local Oromifa dialect) has always emphasized

Women in Boricho have a new-found solidarity and an identity as active citizens through the savings groups.

the importance of building on indigenous knowledge and traditions. Savings-making and mutual assistance in various forms are widespread in Ethiopia. Not surprisingly, it was natural for Boricho residents to identify savings as an activity they could build upon and expand without relying much on outside expertise or investment.

Another trigger for the establishment of savings groups in Boricho (and elsewhere in Ethiopia) was the use of a community economic analysis tool called the “Leaky Bucket.” This visual tool showed people, in a simple way, how money was coming into and out of the local economy, and how it was circulating within their community.

With the help of this tool, Boricho residents realized that much of their money was “leaking out” as a result of paying high interest rates on loans, spending excessively on social festivities, and buying in the market what they could produce locally. They also saw ways to increase their earnings (for example, by fattening their livestock prior to selling it).

What Works Well

Today, there are two formal savings groups in Boricho. One of these, consisting of 144 members, is associated with the local cereal bank and includes both men and women. The other is a women-only group with 44 members. The larger group has formed earlier and accumulated considerable capital, which allows its members to take out bigger loans. The women who have created the second group see its special value in providing them with an identity of their own.

Boricho residents have noted various merits of their savings groups, particularly at the household level. Here are a few examples:

“Before we never had formal discussions about savings [between husband and wife]. Now there is discussion on how to save assets. Monthly we plan our savings and our activities have diversified [into] sheep fattening and vegetable gardening.”

“Because of the savings groups we are now able to pay school expenses. Before we were selling our assets to pay school fees but now we can save them and use our [financial] savings.”

As many community members have pointed out, the ability to purchase inputs, pay for education and services, and keep and grow assets instead of selling them makes them confident of their capacity to provide for their households.

Challenges

While these savings groups have contributed significantly to the community’s well-being, they have also caused some controversy. Strictly speaking, local laws allow only one savings group to be registered per *kebele*. There was resistance to women forming their own group from the leadership of the original group. The women discussed their fears about the possibility of losing their contributions if they were forced to dissolve, but decided that the benefits of having their own economic and social identity outweigh this risk. One woman conveyed their shared sentiment by saying, “We need our place.”

It is still too early to tell what will happen with the women’s savings group in Boricho. Will it be able to maintain its legal status? Will it be better off as an informal group? Will its members find a way of joining the original savings group? What is clear is that women in Boricho have a new-found solidarity and an identity as active citizens through the community’s savings groups. What is also clear is that small-sized savings groups face numerous challenges when trying to bring their activities to scale in a more formal way. It is in supporting this scale-up that intermediaries such as local NGOs continue to have an important role to play.



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Written by Solomon Henson

Introducing external resources in a way that allows community associations to keep control over their activities is key to their success.

as a multipurpose cooperative registered with the government, had hundreds of members. No less impressively, at a focus group including ten community members, every participant indicated that he or she was a member of at least four associations. When asked how these changes came about, one man noted that “collective hands make the work light” and another said, “If different people each bring a little money then we can make a bigger difference.”

Achievements and Challenges

Some development workers have questioned the sustainability of associations that are heavily supported by government or NGOs on the grounds that they do not always take into account key community dynamics. Two examples from Ilu Aga help shed some light on this issue: a potato cooperative and a dairy cooperative. Both were inspired by community interests, but their engagement with outside actors led to different outcomes.

The potato cooperative was formed in 2008 to take advantage of the revival of traditional irrigation practices as well as the availability of nearby markets (thanks to a newly paved road). These factors encouraged farmers to expand their potato operations and organize for group sales. By complementing traditional water supply systems with foot pumps, they were able to further improve irrigation and boost potato yields. Increased yields allowed cooperative members to pool their resources and thereby reduce the transportation costs required to access larger markets outside of the village. Next, the members decided to construct a storage shed to keep potatoes fresh for longer periods of time. They built the shed walls, and Hundee provided modest funds to purchase corrugated iron sheets for the roof. The results did not take long to get noticed: as early as the second year of the cooperative’s existence, its profits reached 27,000 birr (~2,000 US\$).

The success of this venture had much to do with the fact that it fit well with its members’ resources and required only incremental build-up of their technical and organizational capacity. The way Hundee staff acted was also important: rather than leading the process, they maintained a facilitative role and provided support in a way that was responsive to the community’s interests and capacities.

Whereas the potato cooperative represented a successful community-led initiative based on a realistic vision, the dairy cooperative represented the challenge of scaling up to a higher organizational and economic level. Although this initiative did rely on existing assets such as milk cows, availability of grazing land, and milking and butter making skills, major difficulties have persisted.

First, the newly-formed association received substantial funding from an external donor. Albeit well-intentioned, this donation appeared to overwhelm the group which did not yet have the appropriate expertise to manage large influxes of resources. Second, the members’ experience, extensive as it was in the area of milk production, had little to do with marketing. They often pooled their milk with nowhere to sell. As a consequence, the dairy cooperative went bankrupt for several months. It is now up and running again, and its members are selling milk to the local market—the logical starting place from which the endeavour to reach larger markets can grow as opportunities arise.

This experience has provoked questions about how external organizations can have a more realistic understanding of existing capacities and the pace of change in the communities they work with. It has also highlighted the importance of starting small and introducing external resources in a way that allows community members to keep control over their activities without over-relying on outside expertise. Finally, it has led to the emergence of simplified value chain tools aimed to help Ilu Aga farmers understand markets when evaluating the profitability of income-generating activities.



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ABCD IN WOYIN-WUHA

Investing group profits in future generations



In northwestern Ethiopia, a dynamic process is underway which is not only creating improved livelihood opportunities for rural citizens, but also changing the attitudes and priorities of an entire community.

In the village of Woyin-Wuha, a number of residents created an ABCD group aimed at mobilizing available community resources in order to improve its overall well-being.

In the very first year of its existence, the group was able to successfully combine a range of income-generating activities with sustained social outreach efforts targeting local children affected by HIV and food insecurity.

Beginnings of the ABCD Process

Woyin-Wuha is a *kebele* (village) with just over 1,000 residents in the East Gojjam Zone of Ethiopia's Amhara Region. A high-altitude and densely populated area (averaging ~150 persons per km²), East Gojjam has a long history of struggle with food shortages. Yet it was only in 2009 that Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE), an NGO with a four-decade record of helping improve the livelihoods of the country's rural farmers, started addressing the chronic food insecurity facing this area through community-level activities aimed at enhancing capacity for sustainable agriculture. In June 2010, ASE conducted a three-tier ABCD training workshop in Woyin-Wuha,

which involved appreciative interviewing and reflection on past successes, asset mapping, and community economic analysis using a simple "Leaky Bucket" diagram showing how money flows into the local economy and either stays or leaks out. These activities were intended to serve multiple purposes, such as:

- raising the community's awareness of the full spectrum of resources it has at its disposal;
- helping community members understand how their local economy currently functions and how its efficiency can be improved;
- promoting a community-wide recognition of the role that its residents themselves have played in its past developments.

At the heart of this process was the intention to shift the community's focus from needs and problems to assets and opportunities as a way to stimulate activities that it could undertake using primarily its own resources and expertise. In turn, these activities would inform the program decisions of ASE so that it could invest in and complement community-owned initiatives while increasing its own relevance and the sustainability of its programs. In November 2010, the Woyin-Wuha ABCD group came into being, consisting of 13 men and 10 women.

Resulting Initiatives

Within the first year of its existence, the ABCD group in Woyin-Wuha has already carried out a number of impressive activities. A 400-metre-long stretch of a nearby gully has been treated with check dams and the planting of protective vegetation to prevent further degradation of the village's farmland. Income-generating activities have also begun, such as potato field irrigation, production of *gabis* (traditional woven shawls) for sale, and research into how to improve wheat crops. In addition, the group members have been sponsored to undergo training in carpentry and beekeeping offered by a local NGO.

The most remarkable initiative of the Woyin-Wuha ABCD group has been to use some of the income from its other activities to support local children orphaned by AIDS.

The ABCD group has not only uplifted the self-esteem of local orphans, but also changed stigmatizing community attitudes towards these children.

Yet arguably the most remarkable initiative started by the Woyin-Wuha ABCD group has consisted in using some of the income generated by its other activities to support local children affected by HIV/AIDS and food insecurity. In their discussions of the changes they wanted to bring about, the group members raised deep concerns over the precarious existence of the community's children who had lost one or both parents to AIDS-related illnesses and were left with no other option but to sell their labour to well-off farmers. These discussions culminated in designing a process aimed to identify the community's orphans living in circumstances that hampered their continued development and to find ways of improving their prospects for the future. The orphans' relatives as well as local school and government officials were consulted about how to best address the issue. Eventually, it was decided that ten of the community's children deemed the most vulnerable would be sent to a nearby school with their tuition and other study-related expenses to be covered by the ABCD group.

Changing Attitudes

Supporting local orphans went far beyond the provision of pencils and exercise notebooks. Before the ABCD group started working with these children, they had typically found themselves avoided or rejected by their relatives and neighbours who had perceived them to be associated with the deadly disease. Some of their fellow community members even regarded these children as cursed. Through personal engagement and by demonstrating the potential they saw in these children, the group members have not only acknowledged the dignity of local orphans and uplifted their self-esteem, but also changed the stigmatizing attitudes towards these orphans and HIV-infected people in general that were prevalent in the community before.

Today, these same children play an integral role in the activities of the Woyin-Wuha ABCD group and their various contributions to its work are widely appreciated throughout the community. Their reintegration into the social matrix of the village has helped forge a new community tradition of extending support to those who were previously often left alone to fend for themselves.

Addressing the Major Challenge

The integration of orphans into the local school community is the main challenge facing the Woyin-Wuha ABCD group. While the group has largely succeeded in reversing negative attitudes towards orphans among the village's adult population, they still face discrimination from other children in the classroom. To address this issue, the group initiated a meeting with local government and school officials. The meeting has led to the launch of an HIV/AIDS sensitization campaign for local school students and the inception of a school-administered award aimed to foster respectful and supportive relationships among students.

Moving Forward

Today, the ABCD group in Woyin-Wuha continues to support local orphans in a number of ways, including providing them with new school uniforms. The group has also planned three new initiatives aimed to assist area residents facing food insecurity:

- the establishment of a community grain bank to make food supplies available at the crucial times;
- further gully reclamation work to prevent farmland decreases;
- the development of composting systems to increase crop yields and reduce expenditure on artificial fertilizers.

These intentions demonstrate the group's unwavering commitment to expanding its social security program to support those community members whose resources have become so depleted that they are not always able to sustain themselves.



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ABCD IN ST. ANDREWS

Building on the 200-year legacy of citizen-led development



A rural community in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, St. Andrews has been taking charge of its own development for more than 200 years.

Yet it was only in 2006 that its citizens were introduced to an asset-based community-driven development (ABCD) as a methodology by the Coady International Institute.

This experience has inspired St. Andrews to build on its legacy of “community spirit” and undertake a number of new initiatives.

Appreciative interviews made community members realize that they have a treasure trove of assets to draw upon.

Background

Building on the legacy of pioneering Scottish and, later, Dutch immigrants, St. Andrews, a rural agricultural community of 1,100 people located in northeast Nova Scotia, Canada, has maintained an over two centuries-long tradition of forging its own development. Yet it was not until the Coady International Institute shone light on our successes by documenting them in *From Clients to Citizens*, a collection of 13 case studies of citizen-led development from around the world, that we understood we might be doing something unique in the field of community development.

The ABCD Process

The story of *conscious* ABCD in St. Andrews begins where the case study left off. In September 2006, participants of the Coady Institute’s Certificate Program “Mobilizing Assets for Community-Driven Development”

came to St. Andrews to practice what they had learned in the classroom. They introduced community members to asset mapping. Many of us were inspired by the process and saw that it could give rise to new community initiatives.

This first round involved a series of appreciative interviews, which were equally enjoyed by listeners and tellers. How did previous community projects come to be? Who was involved? What was the process? Why were these projects so successful? By delving into these questions, we came to appreciate that we have a treasure trove of assets, including energetic leaders, generous volunteers, a strong tradition of collaboration among various local groups, and well-planned community workdays. By mapping our associations, we realized that there were at least 14 local groups and another nine external organizations at work in St. Andrews. The “Leaky Bucket” was a fun visual economic analysis tool that helped us come up with as many as 25 ideas for enhancing community well-being, including a fitness centre, funeral coop, ecotourism, production of organically grown vegetables, cheese-making, a campground, a restaurant, a resident nurse, furniture manufacturing, and more.

One of the shortfalls of this process was that not many young people and no one from the community’s new subdivision got involved. This was partly because community sessions were held during the daytime when youth were in school and folks from the subdivision at work. So one evening, we drew people in with the first screening of *By Their Own Hands*—a newly-produced documentary about our community. Two hundred people, young and old, showed up. Everyone was invited to remain after the film to discuss possible next steps for St. Andrews.

We started with a presentation reviewing all the opportunities identified at the earlier stage of the ABCD process. Posters placed around the community centre wall displayed 25

project ideas grouped under the following headings: farming/food; recreation; services; forestry; tourism; energy/transportation; and communication. Community members were invited to propose any additional initiatives they thought would be important to develop in St. Andrews. We then asked everyone to take part in a “Dotmocracy” exercise in which people could vote for the projects they were most interested in by sticking coloured dots next to their choices. This was a great visual showing immediately which projects were the most popular and could be expected to attract broad community support.

Resulting Initiatives

One person from each sign-up sheet facilitated a small group discussion on the project ideas that were prioritized. The groups focused on exploring how these ideas could become reality: What steps were needed? What assets did we already have to work with? What outside help would we need?

Then the project groups held a joint discussion to debrief their findings and identify further steps. One cross-cutting theme was the need for an umbrella group to coordinate the 14 different interest groups. A few community members agreed to meet again to discuss this idea. Six of the groups also organized their own meetings over the next few months, inviting other community members. The results speak volumes:

St. Andrews Community Partnership is an “association of associations,” fostering better communication and cooperation between various community groups. It also supports new community project ideas until they can start developing on their own. Now, when the citizens want to pitch an idea or seek assistance in fulfilling an initiative, there is a place within the community they can go to for support. Recently, the Partnership, in collaboration with the Antigonish Regional Development Authority, has developed a community strategic plan leading up to 2016.

Community website standrewscommunity.ca is an initiative of the Community Partnership. An important feature of the site is the event calendar that enables each community group to plan its activities in such a way as to avoid overlaps with other groups. Each group has its own webpage with contact information.

Community trails have been created behind the community centre and along the beautiful South River nearby. This initiative has led to a partnership between St. Andrews 4-H Club (a youth development group) and the Knights of Columbus (a Roman Catholic service organization) in building and maintaining a hiking/cross-country ski trail system for all-season enjoyment.

An organic gardening study group facilitates the sharing of information about organic practices applicable to local circumstances through informal kitchen meetings between seasoned and less experienced gardeners.

A funeral co-op study group has been formed to explore the possibility of starting a funeral cooperative. After a feasibility study, a visit to a funeral co-op, and a regional meeting of interested congregations, the group decided to focus on sharing information with the broader community on funeral-related topics.

Our efforts recently have earned prestigious recognitions—The Lieutenant Governor’s Community Spirit Award and a Nova Scotia Excellence in Collaboration Award (both in 2009). These awards have boosted our pride in the 200-year history of our community and our passion to keep working for its well-being. One citizen has captured these sentiments in a heartfelt observation, “St. Andrews is just a great place to live!” It is fair to say that in St. Andrews, citizen-led development was the norm long before we learned what the term ABCD stood for. However, the ABCD process did prepare us for when the next big idea comes up for discussion. The Community Partnership, strategic plan, and website are there now for support. St. Andrews is known for its community spirit, and the ABCD process has built on this invaluable resource.

“St. Andrews is just a great place to live!”



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