



AGEING WELL IN TORBAY

OUR APPROACH TO COMMUNITY BUILDING

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a new and effective approach to restoring a culture of involvement and a sense of community.

"Only a coherent community, fully alive both in the world and in the minds of its members, can carry us beyond fragmentation, contradiction and negativity, teaching us to preserve, not in opposition but in affirmation and affection, all things needful to make us glad to live."

Wendell Berry

We believe that local people are better equipped to build their community than anyone else. An ABCD approach encourages people to come together to determine their own futures and to become more involved in making their neighbourhood more hospitable; a place where they can age well together, share in the bringing up of children, care for the marginalised and feel good about themselves and their community.

The ABCD approach involves trained Community Builders acting as catalysts for the social change that local people tell them they want to see. They make new connections among people and deepen the relationships between them. Each person is valued as a human being who is able to co-operate with and to care for others. Each person is recognised for the wealth of practical experience, insights, knowledge, skills and local connections that she or he brings to the table.

The assumption is always made, (yet to be disproved), that everyone has something positive to contribute to the health, well-being and safety of others – that in every neighbourhood there is an abundance of such hidden treasure waiting to be discovered.

Pressures on welfare professionals often predispose them towards the view that ageing is a problem. However, it is just another stage in life, bringing

with its certain challenges, but, like any other stage it is as much an exciting, rewarding and enjoyable prospect as we chose to make of it.

"The older I get, the more I feel almost beautiful"

Sharon Olds

Research shows us that a life-enhancing old age is founded upon an active life style that involves a range of meaningful social relationships.

To this end, welfare thinkers have embraced 'asset based' thinking and recognised the value of respectful, resilient and resourceful informal social networks. Timebanking is a social innovation which grew out of asset based thinking and has been successful in creating new friendships and strong social networks, even in communities that have been labelled disadvantaged. Our experience in pioneering Timebanking has shown that there are some very specific beliefs that create unnecessary barriers to stimulating informal care and more connected communities in the UK.

Generally, people today report that they:

- Are reluctant to offer unsolicited help, they like to be asked first.
- Tend to be 'overcome with shyness' when it came to asking for help from others.
- Falsely believe that they have nothing of value to offer to others in their community.
- Feel that they ought to give unselfishly and yet often feel disappointed when they don't receive help in return.

Community Builders, (and Time Brokers), overcome these barriers by getting to know people and by gathering together and retelling stories of when people have joined together to make things better for themselves and for the wider community. By naming and bringing back to life all that people and groups have done to contribute to the common good in the past they facilitate the growth of a more positive attitude towards the future. And they capture loads of inspiring and motivational stories!

Opportunities to make tangible differences to community life are organised by the Community Builders. They continually look for what people are prepared to do for themselves and for others. For the things that people feel passionate about and that with a little help from others they may well be able to change for the better. The Community Builders and these emerging active citizens develop their ideas and 'give them oxygen'. They form themselves into action groups and develop alliances with those who share their aspirations. They make connections and gather resources* and the Community Builder steps back to allow the local people to do it for themselves. To be the change they want to see.

[* 'Matching Funds' are often used to provide seed money; local people pledge their time which is matched hour for hour by small amounts of cash.]

Achievements are regularly broadcast to the wider community using the media, social media, newsletters and magazines and by word of mouth. Over time more and more local people join in and pick up the task of defining what is to be done, doing it and rediscovering the joys of associational life.

More conversations, celebrations, social events, ideas fairs, performance art, story telling, community lunches and street parties mean more people coming together freely and by common consent to make the neighbourhood the sort of place in which they would all want to grow older.

Such public demonstrations of a developing community life and a sense of belonging widen the circles of participation, contribution and inclusion and in time everyone's focus shifts from what is wrong to what is strong - and to what can be built upon to be made even stronger.

Once 'enlivened' in this way, communities are then better prepared and willing to join forces with professional agencies to co-produce consensus building collaborations that mobilise all of the under-utilised 'community assets' that the ABCD Institute identified are present almost everywhere.

These most commonly include:

- the skills, knowledge and connections of local residents
- the collective power of local informal associations and clubs
- the resources of public, private and non-profit institutions
- the physical places and mediums of exchange, (e.g. Timebanking)
- the shared stories, culture and heritage of local communities

ABCD Community Builders help weave the fabric of the neighbourhood. They bring together the natural 'connectors', people who know their neighbours and know what is happening in 'their patch'. The connectors reach out through learning conversations and find more people like themselves. They become the eyes, ears and hearts of the community and make contact with the most isolated and those hitherto labelled as 'hard to reach'.

Among the many techniques and theoretical approaches used by ABCD Community Builders are Appreciative Inquiry, Asset Mapping, Co-production, Timebanking, Positive Deviance, Non-Violent Communication, Salutogenesis, Transactional Analysis and the Arts of Story Telling and Community Building.

They engage with the associational life of the area; the clubs, groups and networks of unpaid enthusiasts already contributing to the arts, sports, faith, environmental and leisure activities.

They bring to centre stage people's strengths, kindness, stories, ideas, hopes, skills, passions and connections and encourage them to act upon them.

Slowly, broader community building themes emerge that form both a vision for their collective future and a plan of action.

Long term success depends on the continued use of an asset based lens through which to look at the world and a willingness to work together with other 'community/person-centred preventative approaches'.

Early examples of such collaborations at Ageing Well in Torbay are the Pioneers programme, My Support Broker and Social Prescribing.

Throughout the process statutory and voluntary agencies are welcomed in and invited to participate in a 'Community of Practice', where they are encouraged to shift their roles from being paid innovators to enthusiasts for social innovations that are driven by the community.

Deficit based thinking can then be reserved for professionals charged with servicing what is left to do after the community has done what it does best.

Deficit Approach:	Asset Based Approach:
Focus is on needs and problems	Focus is on assets and strengths
Problem response	Caring and connected communities come first
One way services	Reciprocity and mutual aid
Contracting Agencies	People power
More services and more users	More participation
Main emphasis is on Agencies	Community driven
Interact with individuals	Interact with social capital
Fix people	Develop potential
Answer is programmes	Answer is community

The community is best placed to understand exactly what it is that local people care about and what they are prepared to do to change things in future. Asset Based Community Driven change is how 'Ageing Well' can harvest this potential contribution to a beautiful area like Torbay and increase the possibilities for people to **grow older better together**.

*"Others have seen what is and asked why.
I have seen what could be and asked why not?"*
Pablo Picasso

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