

Meeting Summary:

PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY

How Public, Private, and Non-profit Institutions
Can Connect with Community Assets



a conversation with John McKnight

Co-Director, Asset-Based Community Development Institute
Northwestern University

Tuesday, Feb 10, 2009
Fruitville Library, Sarasota, FL



Overview

Staff and leaders of local nonprofit and government agencies gathered to discuss the how to apply asset-based community development principles in their work.

“How can we strengthen our organization by connecting with local assets?” Times are rough for businesses, nonprofits, service agencies, and government alike. As a result, we’re becoming more aware of a timeless truth: trusting relationships of exchange and collaboration between these organizations, citizens, and community groups enable all parties to thrive and make for a better community. How do we begin to forge these partnerships as leaders or staff or public, private, and non-profit institutions? What do such collaborations they look like? How can they be sustained, deepened, or expanded?

Take-Aways

- **Community Assets**

From studying what “worked” and “made things better” in thousands of neighborhoods across the US, Mr. McKnight has found 5 main assets present in neighborhoods:



Individuals with gifts (skills, talents, capacities)



Associations (groups of people where members do the work and they are not paid)



Institutions (groups of people who are paid and organized hierarchically)



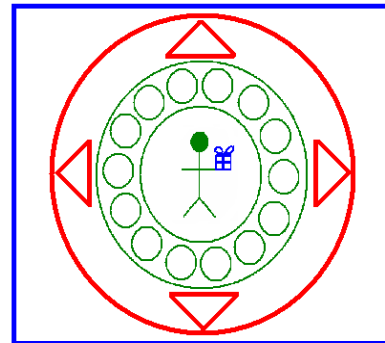
Physical Place (the physical assets of a place such as the land, buildings, parks, etc.)



Exchange (the relationship between things—bartering, selling, sharing)

All of the assets can be drawn as a whole in an “Asset Map.”

Healthy, vibrant communities always involve and often start with the individuals, their gifts, & associations.



- **Unexpected Leaders, Assets, & Outcomes**

Good things happening in neighborhoods are not always started, driven, or even known about by people most would call neighborhood “leaders.” One woman Mr. McKnight met in a neighborhood had gotten together with the mother of a neighboring teenage girl out of concern for their daughters’ activities one summer. They partnered with other mothers to create summer activities for the girls, using the neighborhood park facility as a place to meet. It led to a father’s group forming. In the end, everyone benefitted more than expected—the woman described it as having “broken down the lines” that had separated people from each other in that block, and now everyone knew and appreciated one another.

- **Two-way Helping**

Alfred Katz of the University of California found that 12-step programs are so successful in large part because they are based on a, “I help you, you help me” set of relationships. Help is not one-way. Any agency that is organized “one-way” in its help is disempowering. Community agencies could become skilled at entering people into thinking that they have something to give.

- **Assets vs. Grants**

“Asset” in “Asset-Based Community Development” is significant. It’s different than a grants-based way of doing community development. With grants, you begin with a lot and have to use it all up—from a lot to a little. With assets, you begin with a little and through investing it, it grows.

- **Ignore Needs, Nurture Capacities**

Every group that is successful is successful because it ignores peoples’ needs and deficits. Mr. McKnight works in the best department of his kind at Northwestern University. The people have all kinds of problems, but there is an agreement that they will ignore their deficits and nurture their capacities.

- **What Only Community Can Do**

What is it that only the local community can do? Most successful institutions are those that know that boundary. Those that fail are the imperial institutions that say, for example, “Education is our turf.”

There are six things only local community can do:

1. *Health* - Research shows health is determined by our local circle.
2. *Safety* - Beyond a certain point, more policemen stops affecting crime rates.
3. *Youth & Education* - “It takes a village to raise a child.”
4. *Environment*
5. *Enterprise/Economy* - Small businesses employ more people than large; families start most successful small businesses.
6. *Care* - We have come to believe we can buy care. When I say, “I will care for my father until his dying day,” I don’t mean I will send him to a nursing home. Community is the site of care; institution is the site of service. Service is never care.

- **“What have you done about it?”**

If institutions really want to support community, the question they should ask when approached by community groups for money is, “What have you done about that problem?” If nothing, the response can be, “If it’s that big a problem and you haven’t done anything, I’m not investing in you. That would be a wonderful institutional position.

- **Money: “Do we need it? Do we have it?”**

Mr. McKnight learned from one community group that always asked itself at the beginning of any project that required money, in the following order: (1) “Do we really need it (or are we hooked on grants)?” (2) “Do we have it?” (3) “If we have to get it from the outside, what can we trade for it?”, (4) “Shall we beg for it?”

- **“What is it you see yourself doing differently as a result of this shifted thinking?”**

- Carol Butera-Dutton, Children First, began to think of how Children First could look more at the assets of families who come in to our organization and how they can be used to help other families.
- Debbie DeLeon, Manatee Neighborhood Services—in her experience of working with neighborhoods, we often make the mistake of giving [as their primary activity.] How can we teach that kind of commitment to neighborhoods? Could create programs that focus on the positives and ask, “What are you doing for your area?”
- Carolyn Mason, County Commissioner, is committed to working on mapping the assets in Newtown.
- John Kroteck of Fruitville 210 will continue working to recover citizens’ capacity to care by bringing people to a safe haven for talking about local issues with his Olive Branch Forum.

Resources

- "Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets," written by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight
Link: <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/community/buildingblurb.html>
- “Leading by Stepping Back: A Guide for City Officials on Building Neighborhood Capacity” by Henry Moore and Deborah Punttenney
Link: <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/community/stepback.html>
- Asset Based Community Development Institute, Northwestern University
Link: <http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/abcd/>

Participants

Diane Andrews, Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County

Jeraline Baker-Graham, Economic Development Action Team, New Beginnings for Newtown

*Joe Barbetta, Sarasota County Commission
Danny Bilyue, Office of Congressman Vern Buchanan*

David Brain, New College of Florida

Nicole Brown, Senior Friendship Center

Erin Bryce, City of North Port

Carol Butera-Dutton, Children First

Debbie DeLeon, Manatee County

Neighborhood Services

Michael Dieck, Sarasota County Health Department

April Doner, SCOPE

Tim Dutton, SCOPE

Anne Ferrier, Sarasota Partnership for Children's Mental Health

Vickie French, Sarasota County

Al Gedeon, Manatee County Neighborhood Services

Margie Genter, Goodwill Industries

Jane Grogg, Sarasota County Neighborhoods Services

Beverly Hill, USF

Martin Hurwitz, Newtown Front Porch

Paula Ivory-Bishop, North Sarasota Library

Sarabeth Kalijian, Sarasota County Libraries

Kathy Keh, Fortified Consulting, LLC

Chris Kohatsu, Sarasota County

Neighborhood Services

John Kroteck, Fruitville 210

Pattie Lanier, Library Advisory Board

Ken Marsh, Sarasota County School Board

Carolyn Mason, Sarasota County Commission

Teresa Mast, Sarasota County Government

Tenaje Ndah, Sarasota Health Department

Don Roberts , Goodwill Industries

Nancy Roucher, SCOPE Board

Marius Stolz, Sarasota County Health Department

Pamela Truitt, Truitt Consulting

Tom Tryon, Sarasota Herald Tribune

Gene Weborg

Pam Wilson, Senior Friendship Centers

Jim Wolfson

Steve Zaborski , Friendship Volunteer Center