



ASSET-BASED  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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PRACTITIONERS  
WORKBOOK

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Funded by



**PREPARED BY TOUCHSTONE**  
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# ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is ideal for people working in all community settings or those who are seeking to transform service provision through the use of strength-based approaches.

This workbook will walk you through the principles of Asset-Based Community Development and will prepare you to be a discerning user of various ABCD practitioner tools that complement this approach.

The content in this workbook has been developed from Global ABCD practice and in collaboration with teams across Touchstone and organisations across the city of Leeds, UK.

This workbook aims to help users deepen knowledge through supporting you to:

- Take stock of your current practice and evaluate the use (or lack thereof) of strength-based approaches at all levels within your practice or organisation.
- Audit and map the assets within your organisation, system or community.
- Help you highlight areas of good practice.
- Help you plan for the future and make a plan to embed further ABCD and strength-based approaches in your work, community or organisation.

# HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

Reading & completing this workbook will take approximately 6 to 10 Hours & is best achieved with any combination of the following:

- **ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH:** Gather a team of people from across all different levels of the organisation. A person who has operational oversight within your organisation may want to lead the group through the activities in this workbook.
- **COMMUNITY BUILDER APPROACH:** If you are a paid community worker or a resident who would like to work through this workbook with your local community you might want to gather some people from your local area and collectively make your way through the exercises in this workbook.

After you have completed this workbook, we ask that you share your workbook with the ABCD team at Touchstone so that we can follow up and offer future opportunities for training, learning and networking with other practitioners.

Leeds City Council have funded this resource as part of a scheme of work which looks to strengthen the use of Asset Based Approaches across the City of Leeds. As such we may ask practitioners based in Leeds for permission to share some of your reflections with our funders.

# 1. WHAT IS ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?

The next section of the workbook takes you through a overview of ABCD, it involves a mixture of study and practical activity. Use this document to capture your learning as you go.

Key ABCD Principles:

1. Focus on community assets and strengths rather than problems and needs
2. Identify and mobilise assets, skills and passions of individuals and communities alike.
3. Puts communities in the driving seat
4. Focus on relationships

# HISTORY

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a global approach to working in community and citizen spaces. ABCD recognises, connects and mobilises the strengths, gifts, talents and resources of individuals and communities to build stronger and more sustainable communities.

In the late 1980's, John McKnight and John Kretzmann, two academics working out of Chicago University, took a team to study over 300 neighbourhoods across 20 North American cities. The districts they visited had some of the lowest socio-economic outcomes at that time. McKnight and Kretzmann set out to research and understand how and in what ways community action and grassroots organising thrives in low-income neighbourhoods.

Their findings confirmed that low-income communities facing hardship and challenges could, and often do, prosper despite the failure of state-led initiatives to improve the socio-economic outcomes of their communities.

McKnight & Kretzmann co-authored a book in 1993 called; 'Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilising a Community's Assets'. This book described the findings of their study and laid out the principles and practices of the Asset-Based approaches.

Encouraged by the popularity of the approach and the stories coming out of its use brought about real change in communities all over America, John McKnight and John Kretzmann founded the Asset-Based Community Development Institute in 1995 and both continue to support the growth of ABCD today around the world.



"You can't know what a  
community needs  
unless you  
first know what it  
already has."

JOHN MCKNIGHT

# STRONG NOT WRONG

ABCD challenges the usual approach to solving problems in our society, which traditionally sees service providers and decision-makers focus on the needs and problems of neighbourhoods and communities. Kretzmann and McKnight have demonstrated that a focus on community assets and strengths are essential building blocks in sustainable community development efforts.

Deficit approaches are pervasive and run deep at every level of our society. We are taught from a young age to focus on fixing or correcting our failures. Industries built around weight loss, self-help and improving our self image are big business. As a society, we seldom encourage one another to focus on our individual gifts, passions and talents.

When working in community spaces, the pervasiveness of a deficit approach is no less impactful. The narratives that dominate the conversation about the poorest neighbourhoods in our regions too often include themes such as 'anti-social behaviour', 'isolation', 'crime rates', 'lower health outcomes', to name a few.

Instead of focussing on the negatives and trying to fix peoples problems, ABCD invites us to take a different and more accurate view of what is happening.



# THROUGH A DEFICIT LENSE

If we only focus on the problems & needs communities face, we can only ever expect to see problems in return. A deficit approach is when we focus on 'shortfalls' and try to plug gaps, so people aren't so badly impacted by a problem.

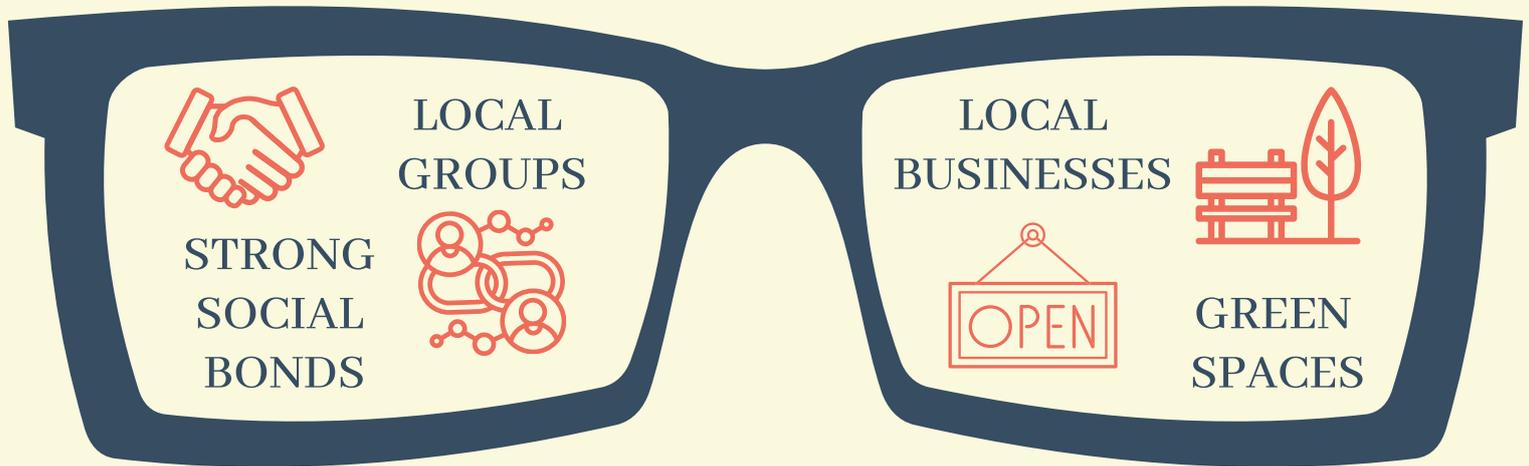
However, if we exclusively seek to fix peoples problems without lifting our eyes to see the full picture, we cannot expect to fully understand what is really going on. Any solution we design when only focussing on the problem is unlikely to get to the root cause of an issue.

Using deficit language can also have an impact on the way communities or individuals see themselves. If we only exclusively talk about needs and problems, communities become known for and can sometimes only see themselves from the perspective of having problems and needs that require fixing.



# AN ASSET-BASED VIEW

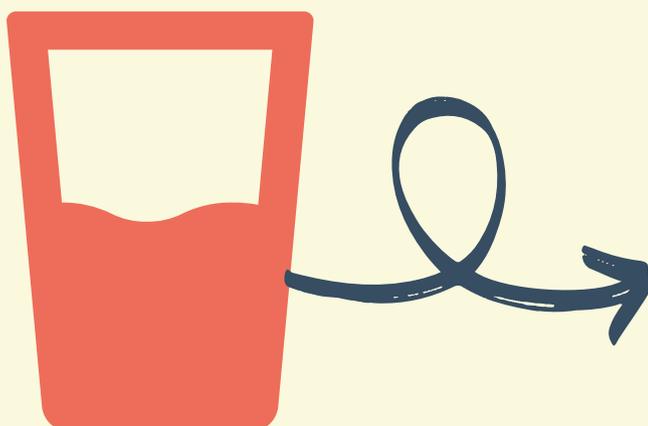
An asset based approach invites us to zoom out and see communities from a different point of view. Taking a broader perspective helps us understand the whole story and not just one part.



Using a strength-based approach challenges us to resist the urge to rush in and fix peoples problems. More often than not, if we take the time to look, we will find community-led initiatives that are already coming up with solutions from within. If we rely solely on deficit approaches, we risk undermining potential community-led initiatives.

Using tools developed through ABCD; we can take time to discover the fullest range of assets within communities.

This approach doesn't mean we ignore or dismiss the challenges communities face but by taking time to listen and uncover the assets and strengths from within communities themselves we can make sure we are complimenting and supporting community-led initiatives.



The glass  
half full  
approach

# JUMPING OFF POINT

Taking an asset-based approach invites us to intentionally start from a place of evaluating strengths and extending faith in communities to know what is best.

Asset-Based Community Development challenges institutions, organisations and those with decision making power in community settings to look beyond their usual delivery operations and create space for communities to step into a place of leadership.

Any process that involves giving up power is, by its very nature going to be challenging, in fact, if you do not feel comfortable on an ABCD learning journey, you're probably not going deep enough.

**ACTIVITY:** In your learning group, discuss the word 'community'.

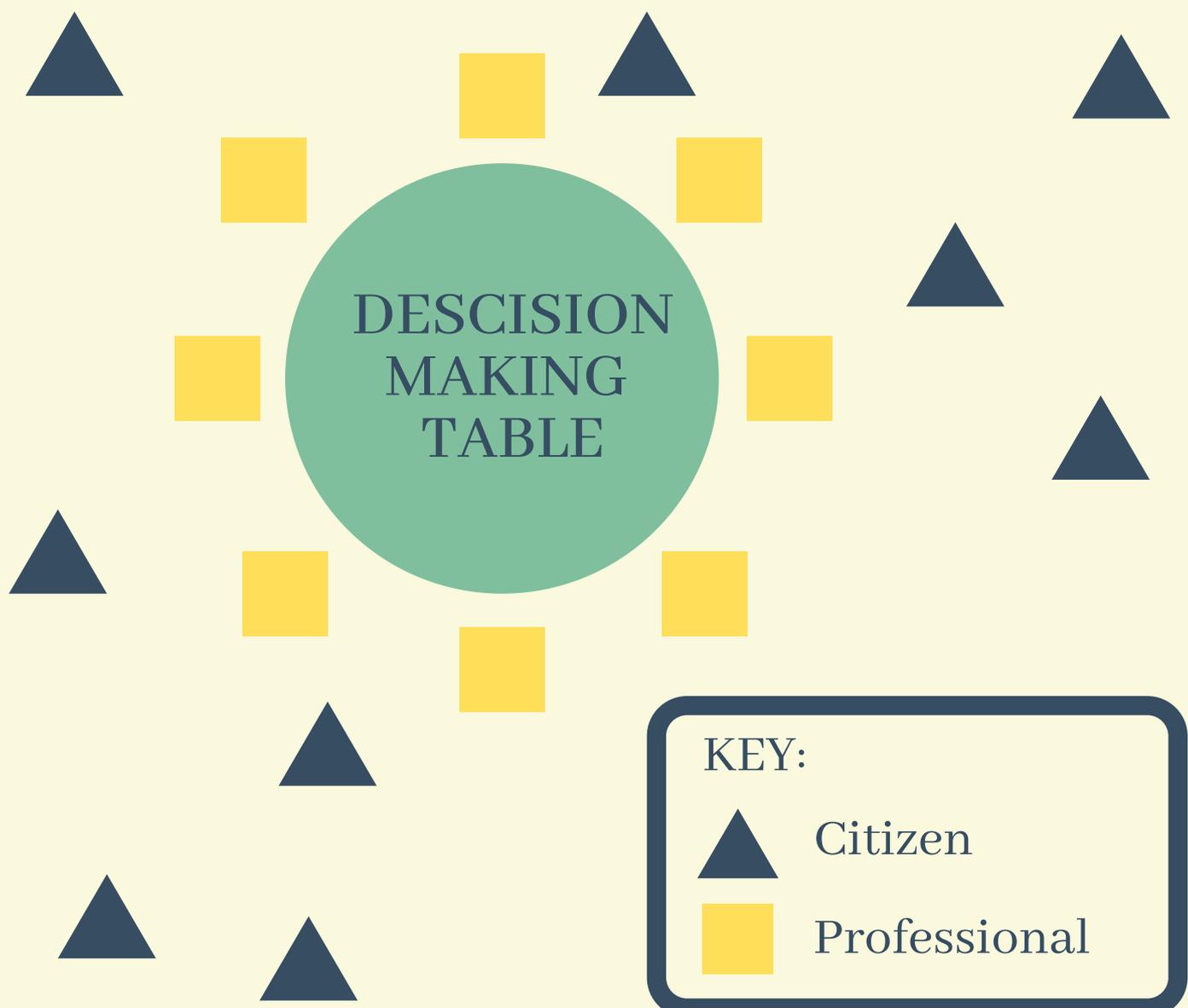
- What are the different components that make up a community?
- Where might we learn more about our community?

Summarise your discussion below:

# Who has the power to make decisions?

In the scenario below, professionals are designing a new service to address social isolation. Occasionally a citizen affected by isolation is brought into the conversation.

In your groups, take some time to discuss what types of decisions that might be made by the professionals sitting on this table and why.



# Are communities in the driving seat?

In this scenario below, the roles have been reversed.

In your groups, take some time to look at the scenario below and discuss how the decisions made at this table might be different from the one previously.



KEY:



Citizen



Professional

"Asset Based Community  
Development invites us to work  
beyond our administrative  
agendas, boundaries and  
status quo."



CORMAC RUSSELL

Four Questions to ask ourselves when organising in community spaces...

1

What activities or decisions are community members best placed to organise amongst themselves?

2

What activities do communities want some outside help with?

3

What activities do communities want outside agencies to do on their behalf?

4

What do outside agencies need to stop doing if they haven't received an invitation from the local community?

**ACTIVITY:** In your learning group, discuss what sort of things organisations and professionals can do to help support communities to take the lead.

Answer the following questions:

- What are the benefits of this way of working?
- What are the challenges?

Summarise your discussion below...

# THE STAGES OF AN ABCD JOURNEY

## DISCOVER



STAGE 1: Start with one or a group of community builders (sometimes called 'community animators') who aim to discover, listen and fully understand what assets a community has already. Asset mapping and other ABCD tools can be used to go deeper and get to the heart of what people really care about.

TIP: This stage cannot be led by any specific agenda and can take time, be patient and focus on having rich conversations, gathering insight and documenting what you learn.

## CONNECT



STAGE 2: This is the stage where we connect people, assets and passions together. At this stage we focus on building on peoples skills and encourage people to take positions of leadership within their community. We call these people 'community connectors'.

TIP: This is the stage where you will see people come together, share ideas and start to plan. It might be tempting for workers or professionals to take the lead at this stage, resist that urge and instead look for ways to help others use and develop their skills.

## MOBALISE

STAGE 3: This is the stage where community-led initiatives take flight. The role of a community builder at this stage is to always be stepping back to allow the community to fully mobilise their assets.

TIP: At this point, Community Builders can play a vital role in encouraging, signposting and building capacity in the local community so that initiatives might be as strong and as sustainable as possible.

# Lincoln Green, Leeds - A CASE STUDY

Situated just on the outskirts of Leeds City Centre, Lincoln Green is a mainly residential area with a small, local shopping centre. Most housing in Lincoln Green is made up of council-owned high rise flats.



According to Local Authority data, Lincoln Green is in the 1% 'most deprived' areas in the UK and residents are disproportionately young, with many new migrant families housed in the area.

In 2019 Leeds City Council funded a Community Builder, hosted by Touchstone to work in the area using an ABCD approach. The first few months, the Builder set out to get to know local residents and began uncovering assets and mapping the local area.

In the beginning, the Builder made use of 'bumping places' - aka places where you might bump into people and strike up a conversation. In Lincoln Green, these are places like cafe's, restaurants, the laundrette, community groups, the school and bus stops.

It took months of walking around and chatting to people, but slowly and surely, the Builder started to gain a good working knowledge of the local area. They got to know the people that lived there and their strengths and passions. There were some thriving community-led groups and organisations already active in the area.

Building connections wasn't easy at first, for a while, efforts felt fruitless, and no obvious impact or measurable progress could be seen. Despite not being able to see measurable change, before long the fly by conversations the Builder had with local residents were going deeper than before, and the Builder was connecting with the passions and histories of the local area.

In late 2019 the Community Builder made use of a small pot of funding they had and ran a participatory budgeting event in the local area. All residents were given the opportunity to pitch an idea for an activity to benefit the local area, and residents were then invited to vote for their favourite ones. Participatory budgeting is a way to administer funding directly to the community in a truly democratic way. Amongst the ideas funded was a mums and toddlers group, a sports tournament, a community kitchen and equipment for the local youth club.



ABCD work continues in this area, and it is clear that whenever this community are given space and opportunity to step into a place of leadership, there is no shortfall or 'deficit' in ideas, skills or capacity.

2020 brings new challenges to Lincoln Green and many other communities like it up and down the country. We must ensure that residents are given a voice and have opportunities to be part of the solution.

# 2. WHAT IS ASSET MAPPING?

This section of the workbook will take you through the principles of Asset Mapping and give you some practical tools to use in community settings.

"Every single person has  
capacities, abilities and gifts.

Living a good life depends on  
whether those capacities can be  
used, abilities expressed  
and gifts given"



JOHN MCKNIGHT

# ASSET MAPPING

Asset mapping is a vehicle for a community to identify, discover and connect with each other. It's not the only way to empower communities, but it is a tool that can help connect people and kick start an ABCD learning journey through the sharing of stories and the identification of mutual strengths.

There are six categories of Assets/Strengths defined as part of an ABCD approach.



Individuals - their skills, gifts, passions & abilities.



Networks, relationships & connections between people.



Organisations - invested stakeholders & local resources.



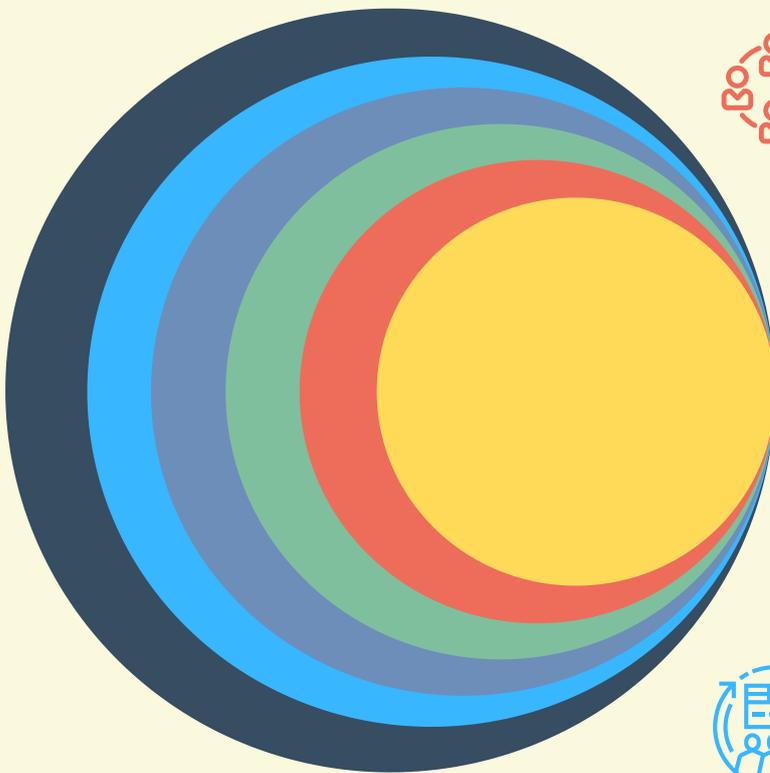
Physical resources- such as meeting spaces & buildings.



Economic resources such as funding or investment.



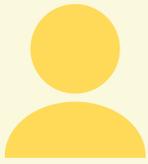
Stories, culture, histories and traditions.



When starting to asset map it's useful to get people together in a physical room or a zoom room and connect with each other.

Discovering assets is like peeling an onion, with the first layer being the individual people, their skills and abilities. Work out from individuals, to groups, then organisations etc.

# TIPS WHEN ASSET MAPPING



- Define the boundaries of your map and the categories you will focus on before you start.

- Start small, the more focussed you are, the better.

- Think about how you can get as many people as possible to contribute to the process of asset mapping.



- Think about where you will facilitate spaces to explore local assets. Arranging meetings is great but think outside the box - can you use surveys or social media polls to cast a wider net and capture more input?



- Think of how you will capture the data; will you create a physical or digital map? Initially, you could gather contact information for each asset (Excel is great for collecting/organizing data).

- Google is a great option for digital maps, allowing you to save all the points and colour-code categories, etc. This can then be shared and accessible to unlimited people.



- For paper maps, search for a neighbourhood map online to order one to print.

- Get moving and walk sections of the neighbourhood to ensure the list is as comprehensive as possible.



- Focus on cultivating relationships and partnerships throughout the process, share ownership to ensure the map is alive and assets are mobilised across your community or group.



- Remember an Asset map should be more than a 2D map or a list of places, it is about relationships, skills, people and connections.

- Asset maps can be in any format, get creative! You could even make a piece of art or an engaging film and share it across local Social Media groups.

- REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN!

## ACTIVITY 1 - Individual Asset Mapping - The 5 H's

This is a well known exercise that can help people connect and discover the gifts they already have. The gifts of the head, hand and heart exercise can be, and indeed has been adapted in many ways.

Below is an outline of a session that can be adapted for almost any setting. Feel free to be as creative as you like in using this exercise and change it up however you see fit – the idea is to generate conversations between individuals, with groups or the larger community.

Start by introducing the 5 gifts:

- Gifts of the Head (Things I know something about and would enjoy talking about with others, e.g., art, history, movies, birds).
- Gifts of the Hand (Things or skills I know how to do and would like to share with others, e.g., carpentry, sports, cooking).
- Gifts of the Heart (Things I care deeply about, e.g., protection of the environment, civic life, children).
- Gifts of the Heel (Things I do to help me stay grounded and would like to share with others, e.g., meditate, walk, breathing exercises, hang out with friends)
- Gifts of Human Connection (Things I do to stay connected to my community, e.g., join an interest group, connect people e.g. introduce someone I know to someone else with a similar interest)

After introducing the gifts, ask the group to split into pairs and reflect on their own personal gifts with their partner. Make sure you let people know how long they will have each (eg 3, 5 or 10 minutes?).

Direction:

In pairs, share with each other what your gifts of the head, hand and heart are. You won't have to feedback what you discovered; this is just for you and your partner.

In pairs, share your gifts with each other. As the listener, take some simple notes so you can introduce your partner to the larger group after the exercise.

As the sharer, be careful to only share what you are comfortable with as your partner will be introducing you.

Note: you can unpack this exercise after everyone has had a turn by asking prompt questions like;

- “How was that sharing conversation, for you?”
- “Did anyone find any of them difficult (or easy)?”
- “Can anyone see how this might be a useful soft entry conversation with new people in a team/group/community?”

Capture group learning/reflections on a white board or flipchart.

## ACTIVITY 2 - Connecting Individual Assets - Know, Teach, Learn

Once people have discovered the gifts they have to offer their community (which could be through the 5H's exercise), we should have a dynamic list of talents laid out on flip chart paper or on a whiteboard so, how do we create the opportunity for these gifts to be activated?

The following Know/Teach/Learn tool offers a simple and powerful framework for discovering how these gifts can be productive and powerful together and it's as easy too!:

- Ask people to decide which of their gifts they are passionate enough about to share with others
- Ask the whole group to come forward and create a “master list” of the gifts they are willing to share on the side of some flip chart paper
- Write up the words ‘know’, ‘teach’ and ‘learn’ across the top of the flip chart paper, creating 3 columns and underline the gifts to create a grid
- Finally, ask each person to write their initials in the box, on the grid, according to; what they know about, what they could teach and what they want to learn.

You should end up with something like this:

<i>Skills</i>	<i>Know</i>	<i>Teach</i>	<i>Learn</i>
<i>Cooking</i>	PB	MS	QN
<i>Meditation</i>	LS TV	TV	MS MP
<i>Gardening</i>	VD LS	RH LS	DS MS
<i>Bike Safety</i>		RH	LS QN OB
<i>Bookkeeping</i>	MS		PB PB

At the end of this exercise you should be able to tell a story. Where does the appetite for learning lie in the group and are there any natural teachers/leaders within the group or will the group need to invite in an external practitioner?

# 3. WHERE ARE YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY?

This section of the workbook is for you and/or your team to record your journey so far. Answer these questions as openly and honestly as you can and use the answers as a roadmap for your journey.

If you are a Leeds based practitioner please email these reflections to the Touchstone team, we will send you a reminder to revisit your journey in six months time. Contact details can be found on the back page.





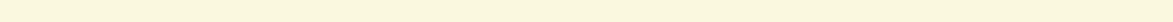








6. Identify three pledges that outline the tangible actions you or your organisation will take towards community-led change.

1.   
  
  
  


2.   
  
  
  


3.   
  
  
  


# 4. FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

We have compiled a useful list of resources and further reading.

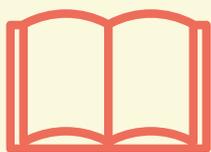
Many of these resources have influenced, informed and shaped the content in this workbook.

# RESOURCES

## WEBSITES

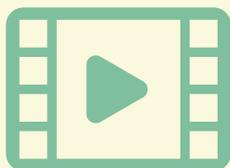


- [www.abcdinleeds.co.uk](http://www.abcdinleeds.co.uk)
- [www.nurtureddevelopment.com](http://www.nurtureddevelopment.com)
- [www.jeder.com.au](http://www.jeder.com.au)
- [www.resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute](http://www.resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute)
- [www.bankofideas.com.au/resources/](http://www.bankofideas.com.au/resources/)



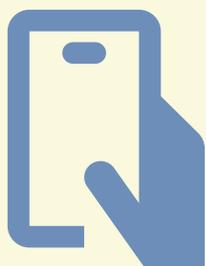
## BOOKS

- McKnight, J. (2013). A Basic Guide to ABCD Community Organizing.
- Green, M., Moore, H., & O'Brien, J. (2006). ABCD in Action: When People Care Enough to Act.
- Kretzmann, J. P. (2010). Asset-based strategies for building resilient communities.
- Russell, C. (2029). Rekindling Democracy: A Professional's Guide to Working in Citizen Space



## VIDEOS

- Youtube: Sustainable community development: from what's wrong to what's strong by Cormac Russell for TEDxExeter
- Youtube: It's all about the approach -- asset mapping by Deanna Lewis for TEDxRillitoRiver
- Youtube: Creating A Community And Finding Purpose by Stephen Jon Thompson for TEDxCarsonCity



We wish you the best of  
luck on your ABCD journey!

PLEASE  
KEEP  
IN TOUCH

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