

ARTICLE: THE FOUR ACTIONS TO CREATE AN ASSET-BASED WORLD

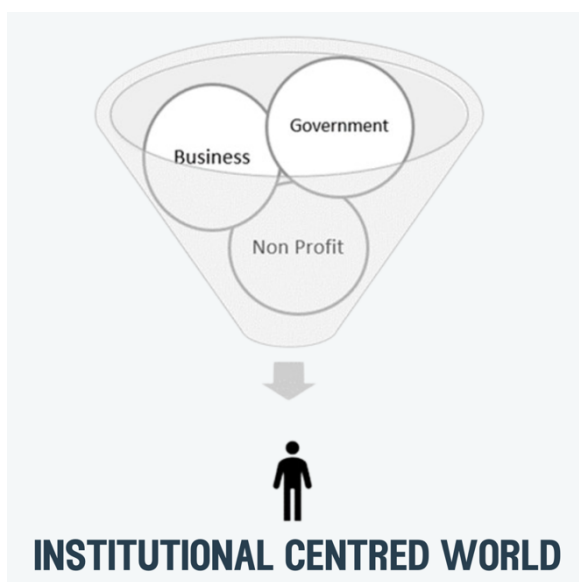
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The complex challenges facing our communities today require us to think differently. We need to turn things upside down and shift our thinking to creating an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) world. A world that empowers people to form the trust and connections necessary to create and sustain vibrant, inclusive neighbourhoods.

This paper is based on the work of a group of connectors working together to understand how we can create an ABCD world. An ABCD world is a world in which it is understood that people have important work to do: they have functions within their community. These functions can only happen when we uncover the assets that are activated by “connectors”. These connectors create a catalog of potential actions that contribute and support people’s functions and ultimately improve health and well-being.



An ABCD world

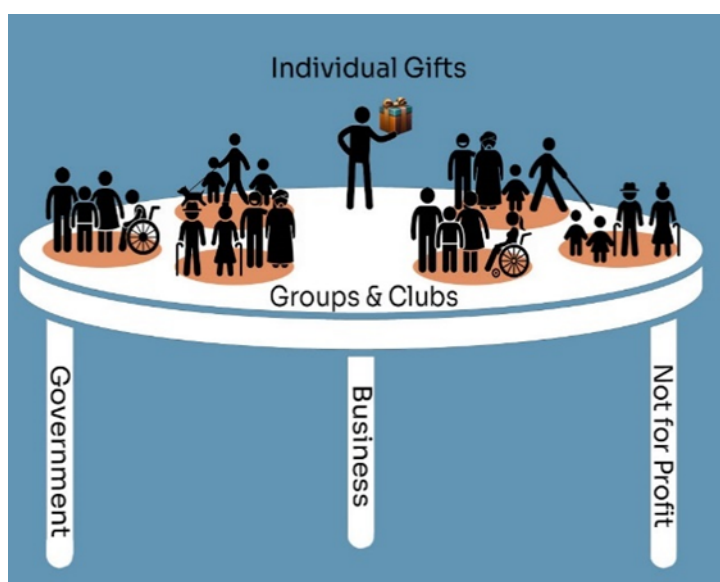
Our current way of community development requires us to define the people and community by their problems, deficiencies and then identify *who* is the problem. John McKnight calls this method of community development as an “institutional centred world”. People consume the products and services of business, government and not for profit.



When institutions do “to” and “for” people, it creates a sense of solving problems meaning people are dependent (opposite of powerful) and are labelled as clients (someone that is at their least powerful). Consumers assume that what makes a good life is to consume programs and services and their life will be good. Once you start with the idea that a neighbourhood is a place where people are consumers of products, goods and services that are produced outside the neighbourhood, people become powerless, inactive and unable to do for themselves.

Organize people

An ABCD world, on the other hand, can be thought of as a table. This is a table where the people, clubs and groups (associations) are the productive units that set the table and pick the food. The role of the legs (organizations, business and government) is not to be an equal partner but rather a supporter of the work that is done by the people and the clubs, groups (associations).



No matter how hard the legs work, they cannot do many things that only people can do. When you look at this table, the people on top need to trust that the legs will support them. It takes time and consistency for trust to be built. An ABCD world is about shifting the focus to people who are *producers* of functions, and not consumers.



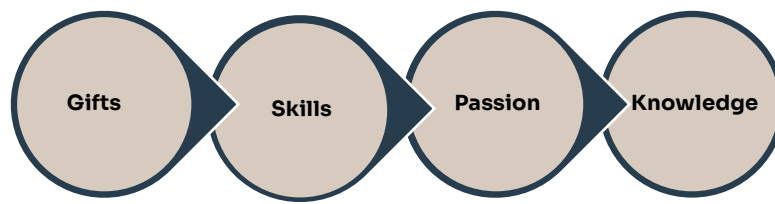
Community has functions

The top of the table is about functions. There is work that needs to be done by the people in the community. If it is not done by the people in the communities, it won't get done. In a ABCD world, there are nine functions of a community. If they are achieved, this will create a people-centred, powerful place to raise a family. These are the functions that people need to perform and there needs to be a way they can do it so that their communities can be healthy.

Assets are the tools that can be used to help to fulfill the nine functions of a community. These tools are only found in the people and associations that embody the gifts and capacities because we are starting at the centre. In an asset-based world, communities have functions to perform; they have work to do.

Nine Functions of a Community

- Enabling Health
- Assuring Security
- Stewarding Environment
- Shaping local Economies
- Contributing to local food production
- Raising our Children
- Co creating Care
- Celebration
- Inclusiveness



Assets perform functions

Assets are the tools that everyday community members have to fulfill the nine functions of a neighbourhood. There are two tools to support and grow the functions of community: the gifts of the people and the groups/ clubs that they form (associations). These are the two tools we can use to do the work of the community. Just because you have these tools does not mean that anything will get done. We need organizations and institutions to connect the tools and get them to work together in the community. Something must happen to activate them and get them working together.

How do we activate the assets in the neighbourhood? Everyone has a gift, including people who have been marginalized or labelled due to addiction, disability, health, cultural background, economic disparity, etc. Who are the people at the margins, who are people who are difficult to reach? Everyone has a gift, skill or talents. It is when people's gifts are not uncovered and connected that people become isolated and disconnected in our neighbourhoods.

Activate assets by connecting

Connectors are those people in our neighbourhoods who discover people's gifts and weave them together to perform functions in their community. Connectors have two main roles that they do: They identify the necessary gifts that people must contribute and then they identify the nature of the associations and their possibilities and connect them.

Ways to connect people's gifts:

- Identifying connectors in your community
- Matching one person to another
- Matching one to a group of same interest
- Identifying people to plan an activity together
- Reinforcing activities for those who have diverse gifts (a businessperson and a baker to open a store) that could reinforce each other



Connectors come from within the neighbourhood, they are the people who live in the community. We know from experience that a connector must be from within and not someone who comes into the community to do the work and does not have any ties or investment in the community. In every community, there are natural connectors, and they have these four natural skills:

- **Gift Centred**—they focus on the positive and not what is wrong
- **Well Connected**—inviting people in
- **Trusted** by the neighbourhood and people will open up and share their gifts
- **Believes** that community is welcoming

If we want change to happen in our communities, we need to find and support the connectors. They are the ones who uncover assets to bring people together to perform functions that will put people at the centre of change. Traditional community development approaches focus on reform of institutions and an individual's deficits. This approach assumes that the role of communities is defined as what happens after the important work of professionals and institutions has been completed. An ABCD world inverts that, highlighting that in a vibrant democracy the opposite is true: the role of professionals (the legs) is defined as what happens after the community functions are performed (tabletop).



Think of assets as a puzzle piece, and every single person that you find they might just be able to offer that one more piece to the puzzle maybe they have a particular skill that's really good at helping them connect or they have a gift that's helps them to meet neighbours.

Nicole Bonder, Community Connector

Resources and articles to help you dive deeper and learn how to build and ABCD world:

- [ABCD In Canada website](#)
- [ABCD Institute US](#)
- [A citizen-Centred Culture: A tale of Two Neighbourhoods](#)
- [How Institutional Leaders can Transform their system into a member of local Neighbourhoods](#)
- [Differentiating the functions of Institutions and Associations: A geometry lesson](#)
- [Capacity Inventory](#)
- [Designing a community Building Initiative](#)
- [Connector Handout](#)
- [Practitioner's Guide to Connecting Residents at the block level](#)
- [Finding Strength in your Neighbourhood](#)
- [Principles and Practices of ABCD webinar](#)

Acknowledgements:

This document is based on the learnings of those who participated in the 2022-23 Connector Cohort. A special thank you to:

Debra Jakubec, Edmonton Alberta

Hardy Steinke, Cooksville Ontario

Ksenia Stepkina, Kitsilano, British Columbia

Melissa Cambell, Edmonton Alberta

Niaomi Gallant, Fort St John, British Columbia

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