GUIDESHEET
The building blocks of community

Many models of community building start with a 'needs analysis' that seeks to diagnose problems and identify gaps in a given community or area. This is a deficit approach - looking for what is missing or problematic - and often leads to the assumption that the solution lies in the provision of new or more efficient services.

ABCD is completely different. It starts from the understanding that every community, no matter where it is, has a wealth of assets and resources that lie at the heart of building sustainable and vibrant communities. To help us understand all of the potential assets and resources, we often talk about 6 different categories of assets, which we believe are the building blocks of a community:

1. **the skills of local residents**

2. **the power of local associations**

3. **the resources of public, private and non profit institutions**

4. **the physical resources of local places**

5. **the economic resources of local places**

6. **the stories of our lives and evolving communities**

The art of community building lies in the ability to engage with and enable local citizens to collectively identify and connect these assets through learning conversations (within trusting relationships) and through asset mapping exercises, and mobilise them towards community building activities. It may take time to pinpoint and understand the full range of assets across all of the categories especially within communities that have been disempowered and blinded to their own gifts and capabilities by the growth of service provision and professionalisation.

Learning Conversations will be key to identifying these assets. Learning Conversations are intentional, information gathering interactions that help Community Builders and Community Connectors understand the wide range of gifts, talents, resources and passions that exist across their community.

⇒ When speaking to residents begin by finding out what they care about enough to act on; what are the gifts and talents they would like to contribute to the community,

and; what would need to happen for them to join in action with like-minded neighbours? A 'capacity inventory' listing these capacities under categories such as 'community-building skills', 'enterprise skills', 'teaching skills', 'artistic skills' etc. is useful.

⇒ Local associations are the engines of community action in any community because they amplify and multiply individual gifts and are therefore essential as assets. Most local associations are informal groups of people coming together around a common interest, they are rarely constituted and they may not actively promote themselves, making them hard to find. One way to discover them is to start with a core group of residents and ask them what associations and informal groups they belong to. Once these have been listed, ask the core group to expand the list to include associations they know about. This longer list of associations can then be clustered by type and those associations most likely to participate in working together for a common purpose can be identified.

⇒ Local institutions includes government agencies, non government agencies and private sector businesses. The assets of these institutions could be the services and programmes they provide, the meeting places they offer, the equipment and other supplies they may have, or, the contacts they may have. They also have paid or unpaid staff who may provide important links with the wider community.

Revealing gifts to individuals, organisations and communities can be extremely powerful. In every conversation, Community Builders and Connectors have the ability to reorient people and communities to the power they hold to make change happen.