

# Asset Based COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

ALONE WE CAN  
DO SO LITTLE  
**TOGETHER**  
WE CAN DO SO MUCH  
- HELEN KELLER -

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*In every community something works. Instead of asking 'What's wrong, and how to fix it', ask, 'What's strong, what's worked, and how do we get more of it?' It generates hope, energy and creativity.*

*– Peter Kenyon*

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# Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

## What is it?

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a global philosophy and practice related to asset (strength) focused, place based and community driven initiatives. While practiced intuitively by many community builders for a long period, it was the work of John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann over a 40-year period and their creation of the ABCD Institute at Northwestern University, Chicago, USA in 1995 that gave it its name and prominence. Today, a wide diversity of impressive ABCD initiatives can be found across the world.

ABCD is not a recipe, but a place-based framework that incorporates such principles as:

- Meaningful and lasting community change always originates from within, and the wisdom of the community always exceeds the knowledge of the community.
- Building and nourishing relationships is the fundamental action in community building.
- Communities have never been built by dwelling on their deficiencies, needs and problems. Communities respond creatively when the focus is on resources, capacities, strengths, aspirations and opportunities.
- The critical developmental process involves highlighting, mapping, connecting and celebrating the diverse range of community assets, and harnessing these connected assets for action that creates and strengthens caring and inclusive communities.
- The strength of the community is directly proportional to the level of diversity its residents desire, and to the level of contribution of their abilities and assets to the well-being of their community. Every single person has capacities, abilities, gifts and ideas, and living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed, gifts given, and ideas shared.
- In every community, something works. Instead of asking “what’s wrong, and how to fix it,” ask “what’s worked and how do we get more of it?” It generates energy and creativity.
- Community residents must be valued as co-producers and citizens, rather than being viewed as clients, consumers and customers. They act responsibly when they care about and support what they create.
- Creating positive change begins simply with the act of conversation.
- Having fun must be a high priority in all community-building efforts.
- The central factor in sustainable change is local leadership and its continuous development and renewal.
- The starting point for change is always mindset and a positive attitude.

By Peter Kenyon, Bank of I.D.E.A.S.

# The ABCD Approach and its Integration into Traditional Service Provider Roles

By Bank of I.D.E.A.S. and Communities at Work

'Top down' and 'outside in' approaches to community development, and the entrenchment of the welfare state, have created a social dependency on systems and institutions to solve problems with a magnified focus on community needs rather than community assets. Citizens have fewer opportunities to exercise their civic responsibilities and rights and have unwittingly become the clients of governments and institutions. This mentality and approach is becoming increasingly unsustainable as services and programs are stretched to meet demand. There are fewer resources to effectively address growing complex social issues; however, expectations and pressure continue to be placed on governments, community organisations and services to deliver solutions.

There is no denying the need for essential services and assistance. However, many of the services people depend upon in continuity, should only be delivering temporary measures to assist people through a difficult time or crisis. The ultimate goal of service delivery, should be to make people as independent in their own community as possible. The longer a person relies on a service, the harder it becomes for them to break away. The longer a person is disconnected from their community, the harder it becomes for them to re-engage.

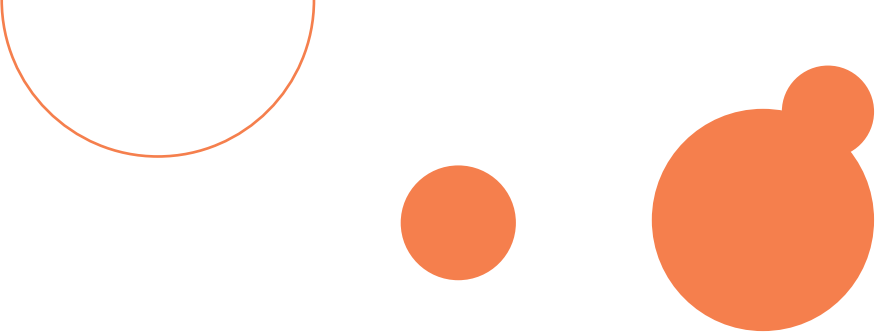
## Six Critical Questions

ABCD is a new lens and framework for encouraging greater community engagement and ownership. An ABCD approach urges service providers working within any community to be continuously asking the following six critical questions; namely –

1. What can residents do by themselves and for themselves without us?
2. What can residents do with a little help from us?
3. What do residents need done that they cannot do for themselves?
4. What can we stop doing to create space for resident action?
5. What can we offer to the community beyond services and programs to support resident action?
6. How can we make our services more asset focused and resident driven?

*Go to the people. Live among them.  
Learn from them. Love them.  
Start with what they know. Build  
on what they have. But of the  
best leaders when their task is  
done, the people will remark –  
“We have done it ourselves.”*

*– Lao Tzu, 530 BC, China*



ABCD places the spotlight back on community assets and capacities rather than on community needs and deficiencies. As a philosophy and practice ABCD allows a community to focus on and use what it has to become stronger and get what it wants.

ABCD operates under the premise that in any community, the most important assets are its people. Jody Kretzman (co-founder of the ABCD Institute), summarises it well – “Every single person has capacities, abilities, gifts and ideas, and living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed, gifts given and ideas shared.”

ABCD may seem idealistic, however, its values and principles steer actions towards social inclusion. People desire to have a purpose in life and to feel useful and connected to their communities. It is no secret that a person’s relationships define them. ABCD supports social inclusion through highly relational processes. It encourages people to see themselves as someone who can make a difference in their community and in the lives of others. Relational processes also allow networks of trust and reciprocity to expand, grow and strengthen social capital.

A community that focuses strongly on building relationships and identifying assets is able to look internally to meet its needs. It relies on the passions, skills and interests of its residents to maximise on its assets and capacities and solve its own problems. A community where individuals feel connected and valued requires less individualised and costly services.

“

*Strong communities are created when citizens are the producers of their own future. They cannot be replaced. No professional, institution, business or government can substitute for the power, creativity or relevance of productive citizens.*

– Mike Green

”

## Providing a Framework

Communities will always require services; however, ABCD can help keep in check how dependent people become on those services, as well as changing the way services are delivered. This is the most powerful benefit of ABCD – by providing a framework that allows individuals to focus on community assets, it has the potential to transform a disconnected community, dependent on resource intensive external services, into a connected and empowered community that relies on itself and is in control of its own destiny. Ultimately, there is a major shift in community mindset. In this way, the practice and philosophy of ABCD has benefits for both communities and service providers.

The very nature of service delivery as it has evolved in the welfare state is needs based. Individuals are defined by their needs and deficiencies which most service providers address using top down approaches. This has resulted in 'citizens' with the power to exercise rights and responsibilities becoming 'clients' who look to services to meet their needs and demands.

Most service providers and institutions tend to do things 'to' and 'for' community. Participatory approaches tend to do things 'with' community. Ideally, service providers should look to supporting communities to do things 'of' and 'by' themselves as they discover and tap into community assets and capacities. This is exactly the type of result that ABCD can facilitate.

Incorporating the seemingly radical principles of ABCD into the entrenched needs based framework of service delivery can seem a daunting challenge. However, ABCD can be embedded into organisations and communities in small, incremental yet impactful ways. It is a highly relational process that focuses on continuous learning. This ultimately translates into a shared knowledge of community assets and resources that can be effectively connected and applied to areas of need to achieve something greater than the sum of the parts. Service provider staff have a unique role and advantage in gaining a knowledge and understanding of the communities they work in, and utilising this knowledge to empower citizens to strengthen their communities from the 'inside out'.

## Qualities of Effective Community Development

According to Mike Green, author of *When People Care Enough to Act*, effective community development has three qualities; namely – asset based, internally focused and relationship driven. The following table relates ABCD philosophy and practice to these three elements. It describes practical ways service providers can integrate ABCD into traditional roles, on any scale.

| The 3 Qualities of Effective Community Development | ABCD Philosophy and Practice                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Asset Based</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Changing mindset – focus on the ‘glass half full’, rather than the ‘glass half empty’.</li> <li>■ Strengths based approach.</li> <li>■ Asset mapping – understanding what the community has and what works.</li> <li>■ Gift obsessive – everyone has a contribution to make.</li> <li>■ Appreciative inquiry – a cooperative search for the best in people, their organisations and their community.</li> </ul>                                                                       |
| <b>Internally Focused</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Citizen driven.</li> <li>■ ‘Inside out’ and ‘bottom-up’ as opposed to ‘top down’ and ‘outside in’ approaches.</li> <li>■ The wisdom of the community always exceeds the knowledge of the experts.</li> <li>■ Appreciative inquiry.</li> <li>■ Community visioning.</li> <li>■ Place based.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Relationship Driven</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Building and strengthening formal and informal social networks.</li> <li>■ Building social capital.</li> <li>■ Continuously having learning conversations.</li> <li>■ Continuously creating community connections.</li> <li>■ Asset mapping – ensuring a community drives and participates in the asset mapping process is a powerful way to build and strengthen relationships within a community.</li> <li>■ Shareable.</li> <li>■ Celebrating successes – fun-grounded.</li> </ul> |

# About Us

## Bank of I.D.E.A.S.

Bank of I.D.E.A.S. is an international community and economic development consultancy based in Western Australia. Since 1989, it has worked with over 2000 communities throughout Australia and in 59 countries overseas seeking to facilitate fresh and creative ways that stimulate community and local economic renewal.

Bank of I.D.E.A.S. staff are motivated by the desire to create caring, healthy, inclusive, sustainable and enterprising communities and local economies. Subsequently, it specialises in initiatives to strengthen community building, local economic development and youth empowerment.

## Communities at Work

Communities at Work is Canberra's largest for-purpose not-for-profit community organisation. Communities at Work has a strong commitment to building resilient, sustainable and socially inclusive communities. It is responsive to the needs of the community and delivers complementary services that support positive educational outcomes, assist in alleviating hardship, enhance quality of life and lead to positive social change.

# 10 Great TED Talks on Community Building

Compiled by Bank of I.D.E.A.S.

|                         |                                                                             |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>ANGELA BLANCHARD</b> | 'Building on the Strengths of Communities'                                  |
| <b>RON FINLEY</b>       | 'A Guerrilla Gardener in South Central LA'                                  |
| <b>SHANI GRAHAM</b>     | 'Take a Street and Build a Community'                                       |
| <b>DEAMON HARGES</b>    | 'ABCD and Making the Invisible Visible'                                     |
| <b>CELESTE HEADLEE</b>  | '10 Ways to Have a Better Conversation'                                     |
| <b>KEN ROBINSON</b>     | 'Do Schools kill Creativity?'                                               |
| <b>CORMAC RUSSELL</b>   | 'Sustainable Community Development<br>– from what's wrong to what's strong' |
| <b>ERNESTO SIROLI</b>   | 'Want to Help Someone? Shut Up and Listen'                                  |
| <b>ROBERT WALDINGER</b> | 'What makes a good life? Lessons from<br>the longest study on happiness.'   |
| <b>PAM WARHURST</b>     | 'How We Can eat Our Landscapes'                                             |

In addition, the following two **YouTube** videos are worth watching:

|                    |                                  |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>KEN DIEHM</b>   | 'Participatory Budgeting'        |
| <b>SACRED SUDS</b> | 'Getting to Know the Neighbours' |

# Case Study



The Tuggeranong Repair Café sprang to life in November 2020 by local group Tuggeranong SEE Change who wanted to create a southside initiative involved in repairing non-working items, imparting skills to community members, and reducing the amount of waste to landfill generated from broken things.

As background, the Tuggeranong SEE Change Group is one of the many locality Groups of the Canberra based, grass-roots sustainability organisation SEE Change, an organisation that is focussed on making beneficial changes to our Society, Environment and Economy (SEE). SEE Change has delivered some wonderful projects in sustainable living over its 15 years such as an electric bicycle lending library, a bulk purchase scheme for electric vehicles and bikes, sustainability house tours, co-housing initiatives and lots more, plus they supported the formation of Canberra's first Community Toolbox, a lending library for tools, gadgets and household appliances.

Find out more on: [seechange.org.au/](https://seechange.org.au/)

## Our supporters

The Tuggeranong Repair Café could not have got off the ground without the support of local organisation Communities at Work, who have been instrumental in providing both the space and venue in which to conduct the activity, and support for flyer design, printing, and ongoing discussions around community engagement. So often the first hurdle for any community organisation is the challenge of finding a suitable and affordable space to undertake their activities to allow the community to come together in a safe space.

A typical monthly Tuggeranong Repair Café event will see anywhere up to 15 volunteer repairers with skills ranging across electrical, mechanical, sewing, knife sharpening, laptop and computer repair, Apple product expertise, jewellery repair, garden tool and appliances, engraving, and bicycles & scooters, set up at fixing stations in now two of the venue's rooms (yes, we grew so big we expanded!). On occasion we have also had massage therapists doing seated massages, because hey, sometimes bodies need a little repair now and again.

The public come with their broken items and are matched with the repairer most suitably qualified to repair it. A conversation then takes place around the reparability of the item and the owner can observe (and take part in) the fixing of the item. So often people lack both the know-how and the tools required to perform the repairing themselves, so it can be a lovely experience for them to be shown how their item can be fixed. Touching are the stories surrounding sentimental items or things that have lingered broken in cupboards for years, too good to throw out, suddenly brought back to life again by the touch of an experienced hand.



## How we operate

Our repairers are such wonderful members of the community, each providing their time and experience every month at no cost. The repairing does not cost anything, except if a certain new part is required. The Repair Café is run between 1-4pm on the last Sunday each month, so nearby retailers such as Bunnings and Lincraft are open and handy for owners to purchase things like a new switch, or zipper to complete their repair.

The Repair Café is also supported by local group Diversity ACT who run the Café selling treats such as homemade scones, slices, cakes plus tea and coffee. They put the Café into Repair Café. This enables Diversity ACT a fundraising opportunity to assist them in providing services to assist the LGBTIAQ+ community of the ACT Region. Plus, it enables the community to sit and have a cuppa, and chat and connect with like-minded locals.

Find out more on: [diversityact.org.au/](https://diversityact.org.au/)

The Tuggeranong Repair Café provides additional services to the public, these include a recycling drop off spot for those hard to recycle items. Plastic bottle tops through the Lids4Kids project are collected, along with metal bottle tops, medication blister packs, bread tags, batteries, e-waste items, corks, empty cosmetic tubes and containers, finished/emptied dental products such as toothpaste tubes, toothbrushes (including electric), eyeglasses & cases, and even socks for textile recycling on behalf of local girls Emma and Olivia. Continue reading this story on [www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-20/act-primary-school-sisters-collecting-10000-socks-to-recycle/100843084](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-20/act-primary-school-sisters-collecting-10000-socks-to-recycle/100843084). Often attendees just pop down to drop off their recycling when they are out and about on the day, which saves them from having to visit the various drop off points themselves. Retailers such as Officeworks, Priceline, Specsavers, local dentists, and charity group Lids4Kids receive the donations which again saves these small items from ending up buried in local landfill sites.

We regularly invite community groups and local handmade sellers of sustainable products to have a stall at our event. This enables groups to connect with the community and share information and products, it also adds variety and interest to the Repair Café as well.

## Expanding our Repair Cafés

Promotion of our Repair Café endeavour has been at a low cost, grass roots level with lots of sharing on platforms such as Facebook, Next door and the Ginninderry Community Switch. Local media have promoted us on television, radio, the Riotact and there is an article coming out in the October 2022 edition of Money Magazine. Word of mouth has also helped to get the word out, and we are seeing many repeat customers.

The **Tuggeranong Repair Café** joins a growing list of repair cafes in Canberra, as there are now six spread across the ACT. The others include the very first **Repair Cooperative** located in Acton, **UC Repair Cafe** a textile and clothing one located at the University of Canberra in Bruce which runs during university term, the **Repair Cafe at Ginninderry**, the **Hawker Community Repair Cafe**, and the newest Community Toolbox Canberra located in Watson. To find out more, check out their facebook pages.

Several of our repairers have also assisted at local eco-stall sustainability events run by the Group to increase the visibility of clothing repair to help reuse, repurpose and remake as much as possible. People are encouraged to repair their items of clothing, rather than dispose of them which add to the enormous number of textiles disposed of every year. Statistics show that an average of 23kg of clothing is discarded per person, per year, so every effort in prolonging the life of clothing helps.

The Tuggeranong Repair Café has grown so much in the 18 months since its inception, and it has become a cherished and popular event. It provides an inclusive, rewarding, safe space in which the community can come together, to foster community engagement, well-being, and grow resilience.

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DO SO LITTLE  
**TOGETHER**  
WE CAN DO SO MUCH

– HELEN KELLER –

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