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A Twenty-First Century Map for Healthy Families and Communities

John L. McKnight

The following is excerpted from a 1996 paper written by Professor John L. McKnight, Director of Community Studies at the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University in Chicago and one of the prime developers of the community asset mapping process. Professor McKnight has graciously agreed to share the following insights that form the foundation for this work with our readers.

If we listen carefully to the proposals of social policymakers, we can construct a map of the territory where they believe they operate. This territory has two principal areas. The first is a space filled with systems, so their policies and programs are about "system design," "system planning," "delivery systems," and "system reform." The second area in the policymakers' map is filled with the individuals who are the objects of the systems – clients and consumers.

While this perception of the territory may not appear to be inaccurate, it is clearly incomplete because a space called "the community" does not appear to be present. If we were to include the community, what would its function be? Alexis de Toqueville, in his book *Democracy in America*, described a unique form of local structures and relationships in which the most common of people came together in small, self-appointed groups to solve problems, create new approaches to production, and celebrate the local society. It was he who named these groups "associations." Today, these "associations" are frequently called civil society or the domain of mediating structures. Healthy communities are built through the development of these associational structures, which are the primary vehicle through which the gifts and capacities of citizens are identified and mobilized.

It is difficult to find many examples of authentic partnerships between systems and associations. Indeed, the principal history of the twentieth-century relationships between systems and associations has been the ascent of the system and the decline of the community of associations. The proposition embodied in current social policymaking indicates that systems produce our well-being. Policymakers believe that a system's ability to produce ever more well-being for its client families depends upon (1) more money for the system and (2) better administration of the system. In this century, we have greatly expanded the proportion of our gross national product for services, and yet the measures of social pathology are growing relentlessly. The obvious question is whether even more dollars, resources, professionals, training, and technology will finally stem the tide.

To successfully navigate the twenty-first century, policymakers will have to enhance community power while

diminishing system authority. There are three basic principles that can guide us into a future where families and communities will flourish and social problems diminish. The first principle will be a shift in funding priorities so that income and enterprise are the primary goals enhancing individuals and communities, supported by resources diverted from secondary service systems. The second principle will be to recognize the nature of associational space, remove barriers to its functions, and provide incentives for the community structures to assume new economic and social functions. The third principle will be a legislative and planning focus that sees the community as the principle asset for investment. An asset-focused family policy will be especially important in the new directions for policymakers.

Finally, we must emphasize that the local economic capacity for choice and sustenance is the threshold policy issue. We have economically abandoned far too many communities and left at sea those citizens who have remained. It is these fellow citizens and their economic dilemma that is the first policy issue of this century. It is these fellow citizens who need to be enabled to contribute if our communities are to become powerful once again.

The full text of this paper, as well as other reports and publications from the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute, can be found at http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html.

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Mobilizing Community Assets: The Role of FRCs

John McKnight speaks so eloquently about why professional service delivery is not, and cannot be, the solution to the challenges that we face in so many of our communities. How, then, can a Family Resource Center mobilize the assets of local communities?

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) works from the principle that community can be built only by focusing on the strengths and capacities of the citizens and associations that call that community "home."[1] One example is the FRC created by the Yuba Community Collaborative for Healthy Children and Families in Camptonville. Instead of approaching people about their problems, the FRC asked people what they knew how to do. The FRC then asked those same people to teach classes at "twilight school" in their area of expertise. Classes on auto maintenance, guitar playing,

parenting tips, and other subjects became commonplace. People who were otherwise not recognized for their skills became part of a vibrant and active FRC.

An FRC can also mobilize assets by creating a map of citizen's associations. Associations are groups of people who decide on a common problem or issue to address, share in developing a plan, and take action to implement the plan. Soccer clubs, sewing groups, and book clubs can all be willing and exciting partners.

The Mutual Assistance Network of Del Paso Heights (MAN) in Sacramento built its reputation by approaching existing associations and asking how they could be of assistance. The FRC listened to what these associations wanted, connected them with resources, and then tapped these associations to engage the community in creating much-needed change. The Board of MAN is an

association of associations, representing the diverse lives and interests of the community. By cultivating these strong connections, MAN was able to significantly increase their fundraising capacity.

Clearly, an FRC has a very special role to play in creating long-lasting and sustainable community change. FRCs can operate from a truly asset-based perspective if they follow these principles:

- Promote citizens and associations as the producers of well-being
- Make efforts small-scale and place-based
- Pursue sustainable efforts, not one-shot projects
- Commit to mobilizing everyone's creativity
- Mobilize the gifts of otherwise marginalized people
- Risk allowing room to fail
- Be there for the long haul

For more information about ABCD, community mobilizing, and FRC development, please contact Jason Tescher at (916) 444-5833 or actlocally@pacbell.net.

[1] Thomas Dewar *A guide to Evaluating Asset-Based Community Development: Lessons, Challenges, and Opportunities* (Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1997), 1.

In-Home Parent Support Groups Build Assets

Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities. (Principle of Family Support Practice 3)

One-to-one home visiting is a vehicle for service provision often utilized by family resource centers, as well as a key engagement strategy to encourage broader community involvement among parents and caregivers.

Ventura County in-home family support worker Lilia Gurrola is currently employed by Interface Children Family Services and working as a member of the Pt. Hueneme/South Oxnard Neighborhood for Learning collaboration funded by the Ventura County First Five Commission. She has been a family support worker for nine years. "If I were to go out and get my PhD, I would still come back and work in the home with families," Lilia said. "In the home, I get to help people where they are and see the real dynamics, strengths, and challenges they live with daily."

Lilia has taken this first "step out" of home visiting to another level in her work with parents, beginning her work several years ago with a

mother – we'll call her "Juanita" – and her baby. Lilia reported that she started to notice that "different neighbors would 'drop by' whenever I visited and listen from the kitchen." Because Lilia had developed such a positive relationship with Juanita, and because Juanita was respected and liked by her community, Lilia's visits

had become a topic of neighborhood discussion and curiosity, as well as a desirable resource. With Juanita's permission, Lilia began – very informally at first – to invite the curious neighbors into her sessions with Juanita.

Eventually, Lilia developed weekly groups in Juanita's home around specific questions that parents wanted to discuss, often couching them in larger topics such as child development or positive discipline. Participants not only acquired

parenting information, but the groups also built their natural support systems and helped them become resources to each other. By keeping the groups small, Lilia was able to develop individualized goals with participants and measure outcomes utilizing a version of the Family Development Matrix.

Lilia has identified the ingredients for the success of these groups:

- Assure that participants set group goals and topics
- Keep groups to no more than six people
- Schedule meetings according to parents' needs
- Make groups time-limited, but with plans for how parents will support each other when they end
- Think about visitors not as interlopers or interruptions, but as potential group members and allies to each other

For more information about developing in-home groups call Lilia Gurrola at (805) 485-6114, ext. 540.

Pictured: Linda James, Lilia Gurrola, Lupe Garcia (standing, l-r), and Denise Dean (seated), members of the Family Support Team at Interface Children Family Services.

Asset-Based Programming In National City

Throughout Southern California, Family Resource Centers are promoting efforts to build capacity in their communities through the collaboration of services and programs. One FRC that exemplifies community asset building efforts is in San Diego County.

The National City Collaborative is a partnership of over fifty organizations working to improve the overall well-being of the community of National City. Their goal is to develop the capacity, availability, and sustainability of the assets of individuals, local organizations, and large institutions.

Individuals

Together with a local initiative known as Partners for the Public's Health, the National City Collaborative has completed an assets mapping process that allows them to implement programs within six focus areas: economic self-sufficiency, academic achievement, safe environment, accessibility of services, social connectedness, and good health/mental health.

Local Organizations

The National City Collaborative has developed mutual outcomes measures that cross agency/organizational lines. This data is being captured on a web-based database that permits agencies with varying hardware, software, and funding sources to share their program results.

Large Institutions

National University Institute is assisting the National City Collaborative with the development of a customized database and the ongoing, external evaluation of their efforts.

Programs/ Services

Due to National City's close proximity to the U.S./Mexico border, many of its residents are monolingual Spanish speakers and/or are undocumented. Simultaneously, San Diego County is one of the most expensive residential venues in the United States. This combination of factors creates an ongoing challenge to assist residents to become economically self-sufficient.

The National City Collaborative has also partnered with two affordable housing organizations to create FRC satellites that host a myriad of programs and bridge the digital divide through state-of-the-art computer centers and training.

Since the National City Collaborative FRCs have historically involved mostly women and children, and because research demonstrates that when men are involved in their children's lives, positive outcomes improve and negative outcomes decrease, the National City Collaborative has begun to offer a series of programs specifically for men with young children.

In exchange for free classes at the FRCs, residents barter two hours per month of volunteer time somewhere in the community. Over time, this provides community residents with opportunities to learn new skills, experience new roles, and develop their own capacity to improve their own community.

Building Bridges

Family Assessment Form Software – Connecting Quality Practice and Outcomes Measurement

The Family Assessment Form (FAF) is a practice tool designed by social workers and home visitors to help family support practitioners standardize the assessment of family functioning and service planning, and to assist agencies in measuring program effectiveness. Developed by Children's Bureau of Southern California in 1985 and

validated through research, the FAF has been used with families receiving family support, preservation, and home-based services. Now, thanks to a grant from the Stuart Foundation, the FAF is available in a software format.

The FAF gives practitioners a structured way to document a psychosocial assessment by collecting information in eight areas of family functioning: living conditions, financial conditions, social support, caregiver/child interactions, developmental stimulation, caregiver interactions, caregiver history, and personal characteristics. The FAF software is flexible and adaptable to different populations and service providers. Agencies may chose to use one or more of the assessment areas without losing the FAF's overall reliability and validity as an outcome measurement tool.

The FAF's availability as a software program increases its value to practitioners and agencies. It greatly expedites assessment and facilitates service planning while supporting casework documentation, the gathering and analysis of data, and the measurement and reporting of program activity and client outcomes. By integrating routine clinical tasks, required servi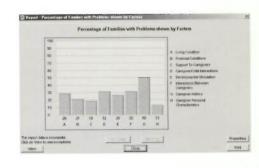ce documentation, and measurement of service results into one process, the FAF software encourages quality practice while maximizing agency resources.

Enhancing the capacity of agencies to quickly, easily, and inexpensively accomplish these tasks while systematically supporting outcomes measurement supports the service providers that use it to improve their practice, make more sound program planning decisions, and provide the background information needed for the pursuit of additional funding.

For more information about this new and exciting resource, contact Sandy Sladen, Consultant, Children's Bureau of Southern California, at (714) 538-9609 or sandy.sladen@gte.net.

Pictured (clockwise from above left): FAF intake screen, FAF case log screen, FAF data analysis, FAF family functioning screen.