

THE ORGANIZATION OF HOPE: A WORKBOOK FOR RURAL ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



A COMMUNITY BUILDING WORKBOOK FROM
THE ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE
AND THE BLANDIN FOUNDATION

THE ORGANIZATION OF HOPE: A WORKBOOK FOR RURAL ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A Community Building Workbook
from the
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:
A COLLABORATION TO HELP WIDEN THE CIRCLE

Rural asset-based community development is a collaborative effort, and this book is no exception. This book is a kind of asset-based community development effort itself, because it builds on the assets of community practitioners who are working to strengthen our rural communities, and because it “widens the circle” of people who are involved, by sharing stories, lessons, and resources.

So it only makes sense that this book is a product of teamwork. The two primary partners in the project are the sponsors and publishers of the book, the Blandin Foundation and the Asset-Based Community Development Institute.

- **The Blandin Foundation.** The mission of the Blandin Foundation is to strengthen rural Minnesota communities. Established in 1941 in Grand Rapids by the pioneering newspaper man, Charles K. Blandin, the foundation has a deep and abiding interest in rural towns and cities of the state. The Blandin Foundation has a special interest in Grand Rapids, where it was founded and where its headquarters are located. The foundation’s grantmaking programs currently provide nearly \$20 million annually to Minnesota organizations that share its goal of strengthening rural communities. The Blandin Foundation’s convening programs provide forums for the discussion of issues by state and community leaders, while its leadership training programs provide skill-building experiences to give leaders the tools they need to address local concerns. The Blandin Foundation’s assets exceed \$450 million as of January, 2001.

- **The Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD),** established in 1995 by the Community Development Program at Northwestern University’s Institute for Policy Research, is built upon three decades of community development research by John Kretzmann and John McKnight. The ABCD Institute spreads its findings on capacity-building community development in two ways: (1) through extensive and substantial interactions with community builders, and (2) by producing practical resources and tools for community builders to identify, nurture, and mobilize neighborhood assets. The ABCD Institute is funded by the Chicago Community Trust in consultation with the Kinship Foundation.

The ABCD Institute publishes Kretzmann and McKnight’s well-known book: *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets*. That book has become the best-selling book in community development history, and has sparked a series of workbooks, trainings, and projects. *The Organization of Hope: A Workbook for Rural Asset-*

Based Community Development is the eleventh book in the workbook series that follows the original.

Blandin and the ABCD Institute came together on this project for a common purpose: *to support rural community leaders seeking to “build community from the inside out.”* Both institutions work with many rural communities who are approaching development from an assets perspective. Both institutions recognize that this work is challenging and even frustrating at times for practitioners. And both institutions recognize that rural community leaders can find inspiration, insight, and support by sharing lessons and insights with each other. In this partnership, the Blandin Foundation and the Asset-Based Community Development Institute contributed their experience and perspective on rural development, and the ABCD Institute contributed its experience and perspective on asset-based community development.

To help with this effort, the partners recruited and organized an Editorial Board of veteran rural ABCD practitioners. These are individuals who have committed years of time and effort to the development of rural communities, who have built on assets and “widened the circle” in practice, and who have trained and/or worked with a variety of leaders and communities. They have helped identify community practices, draw lessons and concepts from rural experience, and discussed and provided feedback to the author on the content of the book. The Editorial Board members are:

Jim Krile

Director, Blandin Community Leadership Program, Grand Rapids, MN

John Kretzmann

Co-Director, Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Evanston, IL

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Community development consultant, Northfield, MN

Carol Spearman

Director, Blandin Community Investment Partnership, Grand Rapids, MN

Dianne Williams

Consultant to the Kellogg and Rapides Foundations, Little Rock, AR

The partners engaged **Luther Snow** to direct the project and write the workbook. Snow is a community economic developer with 20-years experience working with grassroots community groups. He lives in Decorah, Iowa, where he has been involved with self-employment development, the voluntary local United Way, and other voluntary rural associations. In Chicago, Snow served as Executive Director of the Community Workshop on Economic Development. He is currently a Community Development Fellow at DePaul University, and directs the Congregational Asset Mapping Demonstration Project for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Snow has managed Organizational Learning programs for the Blandin Foundation. He has worked with McKnight and Kretzmann most of his career, and is a member of the adjunct faculty of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute.

Deborah Puntteney, Director of Research and Publications at the ABCD Institute, is the editor of this workbook. Shirley DicKard, an ABCD practitioner, writer, and consultant based in Camptonville, California, contributed the interviews and stories dealing with Camptonville and Trinity County.

Finally, many community practitioners and leaders from diverse rural communities contributed stories, lessons, and ideas to the workbook. These include leaders from:

Camptonville, California

Colonias along the border between New Mexico and Mexico, near Las Cruces

Greene County, Tennessee

Gullah community and the coastal areas of South Carolina

Marvell, Arkansas

Newton County, Arkansas

Pelican Rapids, Minnesota

Todd County, Minnesota

Trinity County, California

Dozens of other rural community practitioners have contributed lessons and experience to this book, through their involvement with the Blandin Foundation, through their work with John McKnight and John Kretzmann and the rest of the network around the ABCD Institute, and through their work and partnership with Editorial Committee members, partner representatives, and the author.

This is truly a book of, by, and for, rural community practitioners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FROM THE AUTHOR, LUTHER K. SNOW

I would like to thank all the people involved with this project for helping me to write this book.

The Editorial Committee has been great to work with. Our discussions and debates have been both thoughtful and rooted in practice. It's been a privilege to staff and receive input from this wonderful group of talented and committed rural development leaders. Thank you for your time and patience.

Jim Kriel deserves a special thanks for coming up with the title, *The Organization of Hope*.

At the Blandin Foundation, I thank not only Jim Krile and Carol Spearman of the Editorial Committee, but also Paul Olson, President, Kathryn Jensen, Vice-President, and the rest of the staff, especially Liam Clarke, Malissa Johnson, Jean Lane, and Connie Budrow. Blandin provided a rock-solid rural foundation for this project. I hope this shows in the practical, hands-on orientation of the book itself.

At the ABCD Institute, my thanks go to Eliza Earle, for supporting and guiding my project management efforts, to Deborah Puntteney, for editing and improving my writing, and to Tedda Walsh, for helping to keep us all on track and in touch.

And of course, I'd like to thank John Kretzmann and John McKnight of the ABCD Institute, for having the faith and confidence in me to recruit me for the project, and for having the faith and confidence in our communities to give us all hope.

I also thank the people and associations in my hometown of Decorah, Iowa, and the rest of the northeast region of the state, who have been on my mind throughout this project and who helped ground my work in context.

Finally, I'd like to recognize my wife, Lise Kildegaard, a rural college professor at Luther College, both for enabling me to travel to rural communities all over the land, and for making sure my writing is clear and direct. Thank you, Lise.

Luther Snow can be contacted at snowluther@luther.edu, or through the Asset-Based Community Development Institute.



SECTION I — INTRODUCTION

A WORKBOOK OF, BY, AND FOR RURAL COMMUNITY LEADERS

One small town in a wooded rural area feels dead to the residents. It's a beautiful place, but it's getting harder to make a living, and no one knows what to do about it. A community leader calls together an unusual group of local folks, who form a "resource council." Anybody who has an idea is invited to come to one of the meetings and share it. They succeed with a few small projects — a crafts booth, an informal women's shelter — and suddenly they're getting volunteers, raising money, and making things happen. The council "incubates" projects, then "spins them off," while coordinating a larger strategy to create new economic opportunities. Now it seems like everyone in town is working on projects, including a community-based Internet service provider, 150 local business Web sites, an ecotourism enterprise, and a project to train and finance local landowners to process more of their own wood.



The people of one scenic rural county feel like they are heading for serious but silent community conflict. The area seems to be economically healthy, but many long-time farmers are struggling while seniors, tourists, and other new residents are moving in. There's a big division in town between the "natives" and the "newcomers," which is colored by tension over environmental issues. But some leaders from both sides act to head off conflict. They cooperate on a new venture — a kind of cooperative for selling livestock — which neither side could accomplish on its own. Then a local college professor starts a storytelling project. She organizes residents and students to collect stories from all kinds of residents about their connections to the land. They "perform" these stories in a kind of readers' theatre, which helps residents better appreciate their common bonds and understand their differences, while celebrating the land and the culture of the place. Now there's real cooperation in decision-making and development, and new enterprises in the works as a result.



What is Rural Asset-Based Community Development?

Pour some water into a glass, and stop about halfway. Is the glass half empty? Or is it half full?

Too often in rural communities, we tend to see the half-empty glass. We don't have enough good jobs in the community to retain our young people. We're missing the suburban shopping mall, or the urban museum. We're too spread out to afford blacktop on every road, or the wiring for Internet connections in every home. We have to leave town for many products and services, and even our own farms and local businesses seem to be controlled in many respects by big corporations from far away.

But sometimes we focus instead on what is good and wonderful about our rural community. Our half-full rural glass includes our beautiful countryside — we can easily get out and enjoy nature. We've got land and we've got space. With rural services, the lines are short, hassles are few, and business is easy to take care of. The person you deal with at the grain supply or the drug store or the school is probably a neighbor or someone you know, somehow or other. Our people are talented and skilled and often experienced in a wide variety of areas. We've got strong social networks and associations. And we are used to getting things done that need to be done, by using what we have on hand.

Asset-based community development (ABCD) is all about looking at the half-full glass. The term was coined years ago by John McKnight and John Kretzmann. But they would say they didn't invent the concept, they discovered it through their work with grassroots community organizations. In every type of community, in every economic condition, among every race or ethnic culture, they came across communities that developed their own success by concentrating on what they had, not on what they didn't have. Successful communities don't concentrate on deficiencies or look for outsiders and professionals to fill their needs. Successful communities use the talents of people, the web of local associations, the strength of institutions, and their available land, property, and economic power to create new opportunities for themselves. In short, they build on their assets.

McKnight and Kretzmann observed this "asset-orientation" in the work of schools, community housing organizations, youth groups, community health organizations, churches, safety organizations, and so on. They gave the concept a name, helped communities share ideas, and collected and passed along the lessons communities learned. They wanted to hold up and celebrate the good work of these communities, and encourage other communities to appreciate and extend their own asset-based work. So they wrote and published *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (1993).

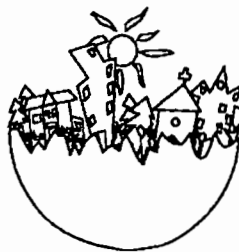
The book struck a powerful chord. It has sold nearly 100,000 copies so far (through the year 2000), making it the best-selling title in community development history. Special workbooks on particular topics in asset-based community development have followed. This is the eleventh workbook in that series.

A Sea Change in Community Practice

As Kretzmann and McKnight discovered, asset-based community development happens in some communities quite naturally. People living in these communities might not call what they're doing "asset-based community development," but they bring to their efforts an emphasis on positives that really makes their work asset-based. In these communities, the ABCD concepts identified by Kretzmann and McKnight provides a framework and language for describing what comes naturally. For other communities, asset-based community development is something entirely new. It's a new way of looking at things and a new way of doing things that enables communities that are stuck to get beyond the negatives and move forward. Traditionally, caring professionals have viewed community residents as "clients," each with a set of needs or deficiencies. In this view, the professional's job is to assess client's needs, and then service them. To access these professionals' care, people in the community have to present their deficiencies and needs in order to obtain service. In this kind of system, community folks tend to focus increasingly on their deficits, not their capabilities, and to enter into a mutual cycle of dependency, expanding their own needs as the professionals expand their services. This process can become a kind of downward vicious circle that communities need to escape in order to progress.

ABCD helps break this vicious circle by promoting a different view: People are *citizens* of a community, not just clients. Every citizen has capacities that can be tapped to make things work right. And communities contain a whole set of other assets and strengths, such as voluntary associations and the relationships between people, local institutions, land and property, and economic assets — including the ability of citizens to produce, not just consume. As the asset-based community development concept has spread, it has prompted a sea change in the way people think about community. Social service and health care professionals, institutional leaders and public servants have begun to reexamine some of their traditional assumptions and methods and to think more broadly about what it means to support people as they develop their communities "from the inside out." For rural citizens, focusing on assets can help us set our own directions and leverage outside resources in the ways that make the most sense for our communities.

Asset-based community development empowers citizens to use all our assets in new ways, and in the process, to create even more assets. It creates a new, more positive cycle of assets and development, leading to new assets and more development, and so on. And that's a "building from within" cycle that rural communities have always used and understood.



Widening the Circle

If every person has talents and skills, and if we need all the assets in our community to get things done, then it follows that we need to tap the skills of every person to develop our community. In practice, one of the first things that happens when communities take an asset approach is that folks learn more about the talents and skills of our neighbors than we ever knew. It's like finding buried treasure in the backyard.

John McKnight says that development is making a new relationship between two or more assets. Asset-based community development is all about relationships. It's not enough to see the half-full glass. It's not enough to list and understand and appreciate our assets. The real benefit of ABCD comes from using these possibilities and that perspective to build new relationships between assets. And since every asset in the community is either a personal asset or an asset controlled by people, ABCD means building relationships between people.

John McKnight says that development is making a new relationship between two or more assets

Every person belongs to many circles — circles of friends or family, circles of neighbors or acquaintances, circles of co-workers or business associates, circles of colleagues or fellow members. Over and over again, successful communities spark their new development by widening the circle,

welcoming outsiders into new groups, and bringing people together to work on new projects in new ways.

Nowhere is this more true than in small towns and rural areas. We tend to know each other, more or less closely. We also tend to keep our distance in some ways, and we've often got past history to account for. Rural communities that have made positive changes, like the communities featured in this book, have been able to forge new relationships between people who may have already known each other, but who had never seen each other and worked together in quite the same way.

To put it another way, ABCD is one part looking at assets, and one part building the community of relationships necessary to take advantage of those assets. **A**ssets plus **C**ommunity equals **D**evelopment. **A + C = D**.

Ruralness and Asset-Based Community Development

There's something very rural about ABCD.

If you think about it, rural areas have always had to "use what we've got, to get what we want." It's only natural. If we have to travel for miles to get a service or product, naturally we're going to see about doing it or making it ourselves.

Without a construction company nearby, a barn raising is a necessity, not just a rural legend. Potluck suppers are the same way.

Another example: Today, it seems like every rural community is proud about what we do to raise money for a family in crisis. In Todd County, Minnesota, 1,500 people showed up for a pork dinner fundraiser for one farmer with cancer. In one Iowa community, pancake suppers are common. In other places it's chicken, or tacos, or soup. There's every kind of raffle, and some places just put out contribution jars in the local shops. In Newton County, Arkansas, they raise money the way many communities used to in the early part of this century, with a Pie Supper. A Pie Supper doesn't mean eating pies for dinner. The supper is potluck, and the pies are donated and auctioned off to raise money. Traditionally, a guy will bid on a pie made by a woman he's attracted to — sort of a dating ritual, I guess. They say the bids can get pretty high for a pie. All for a good cause!

Some people would say that this quality of rural life is vanishing. And for sure, rural life is changing. We're not just on our own. Big outside institutions play a larger role in rural life than ever before. Even the mom and pop retail stores often have to join some kind of franchise or national business network to compete with the chains. Just about every county has state agency offices now to handle certain public services. Farms and ranches are "consolidating."

What is Rural?

But what is *rural quality*? What does it mean to *be rural*? Scholars may discuss this forever. But it is often on the minds of rural folks. For one thing, we are reminded of our ruralness when we read a daily newspaper, or watch TV, and we sense a kind of urban bias. The media sometimes assume that people and institutions are concentrated in small places. The experts often talk about strategies to specialize in narrower fields, to find humanity in a sea of people, or to find economies of scale in bigger institutions. To some, these things seem universal, but they are not.

It seems like every rural person has ideas about what's rural. But even our own ideas often contradict themselves:

- We say we're independent people. But we also say we are "close knit" and that we depend on each other.
- We are proud people. But we're also sometimes defensive and insecure about our small community.
- We say you have to get along with people in a rural community. But we have had our share of local divisions and conflict.
- Only 2% of us actually farm these days. But we are still tied to the land.
- We say you can't make waves in a small town. But we also say rural folks will only take so much.

Can all of these things be true at once? Certainly. Ruralness isn't simple. It can contain all these contradictions and more. Rural life can be rich and varied and full of surprises.

We also say "They think differently in the city." Well, if you're from a small town of 10,000 people, the *city* is the bigger town of 40,000 nearby. But if you're from the town of 2,500, that 10,000-person town is the city. And if there are 250 people in your town, then the city can be that place with 2,500.

Maybe ruralness is relative. Maybe we all "think rural" sometimes, depending on where we sit. And maybe we have more in common than we thought.

Assets are More Valuable in Rural Communities

Rural life is changing, but it's still very different from suburban life or urban life. Rural life isn't as simple as it seems, and our rural perspectives may change depending on whom we're talking to or what we're talking about. And every rural community is different.

*If we're spread out,
then one way or
another, we're going to
have to use every local
resource we've got*

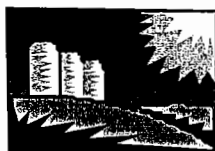
But if we're rural, we're still spread out. When you get down to it, that's what rural means. Not small, necessarily, because there are lots of us — we're just not crowded together. Not even isolated, because

that seems to suggest we are far away from what really matters. Rural means dispersed. More place per person. Spread-out.

And if we're spread out, then one way or another, that means we're going to have to use every local resource we've got.

If you think about ruralness in terms of assets, you realize that *the more spread out you are, the more important each existing asset is to the community*. A concentrated place with lots of businesses can take the loss of one or two without feeling much pain, but if you've only got a few businesses, any closing can be devastating. If there are, say, 20 members in a local service club, losing even a few members can stress the association. Rural schools are constantly struggling with the randomness of local birth rates — big classes one year, small classes the next.

That's why we worry about losing our young people as they become adults. That's why we reuse and fix things. That's why we try to shop locally and make things ourselves. We've got to use what we have, so every asset is potentially valuable. And that's one reason why ABCD is such a rural-friendly concept.



Managing "Unbuffered Relationships"

The other half of the ABCD equation, the "C" in $A + C = D$, is Community. Widening the circle is critical to rural community success. Every person has talents and skills. We need every contribution we can get. We can't afford to leave anyone behind, or to box anyone out. We've got to reach out to one another, or we won't reach our destination.

Urban community practitioners try to figure out ways to introduce people to each other. Rural community practitioners figure we don't need this; we know each other already. And to some extent that's true. We can recognize a lot of faces, fix names, maybe even remember the family connections, jobs, or community positions of people we see around and about. Of course, it's never completely true. There are always people we haven't met, "on the other side of the tracks," or who travel in different circles.

And even with the people we think we know, how well do we really know them? Is the shop clerk also an expert seamstress? Is the guy with the blue pick-up a big reader of historical fiction? Did the teacher learn to fly airplanes in the armed services? Did the gardener learn to cook in a fancy restaurant? Are the young people who hang out on the corner also computer experts? Does your neighbor know sign language?

Our ability to tap the talents and skills of our people is made possible or limited by our relationships. And in rural communities, relationships are different. It's not just that we know each other. City and suburban folks have lots of friends and neighbors too. The difference is that we deal with each other in several ways, at different times and in different roles.

Asset-based community development gives rural communities a way to break through past habits

Rural sociologists call these "unbuffered relationships." The mayor isn't just the Mayor, he's also your daughter's soccer coach and a parent. So if you give him a piece of your mind on the latest public controversy, you're going to have to see him tomorrow at practice. At the same time, if the mayor blows off your public concerns, he's going to have to see you at practice too. Rural folks don't have the buffer of anonymity to separate their various public and private dealings. Sometimes, these unbuffered relationships make us avoid doing things that we know are right and important and just. Sometimes we are silent on the community issues of the day when we should be speaking up, because we worry about the possible backlash.

But it can just as easily work the other way. Because we can relate to our neighbors in several contexts, we have the opportunity to get to know each other better and to understand our common bonds. It can be easier to speak up when you know that the person you're talking to cares about some of the same things you do.

Rural folks can hold their leaders accountable when everybody has to take a turn at leadership in some area. Democracy can be lively and active in rural communities.

Asset-based community development gives rural communities a way to break through past habits, to build new relationships, to Widen the Circle:

- ❑ ABCD gives us each a chance to demonstrate and apply talents that had been hidden, and makes it easier to think of each other in new ways and “break the ice” on new collaborations.
- ❑ ABCD gives us a chance to focus on what we have in common — the hope for the success of the community — rather than what drives us apart.
- ❑ ABCD demonstrates to the whole community that each participant has something valuable to contribute. And when we contribute to a common project, we make it easier on ourselves and increase our chances of success.

Inspiration for Your Efforts: How to Use this Workbook

This is a workbook because it is meant *to help you work on asset-based community development in your community*. It is not a strict step-by-step method or prescription, because every community is different, and different communities take different steps to succeed.

Instead, this workbook is a set of stories and lessons to inspire leaders to act. It is meant to spread the good news that the asset-based approach is working in rural communities, and share the stories of some rural communities who have made new things possible by applying an asset-based approach.

Overview

In Section II of this book, *Stories of Hope and Action*, you’ll read about nine rural development themes, illustrated by the work of nine rural communities. Each community is unique, but each has ideas and lessons that can be helpful to you and your neighbors in your situation.

Section III of this workbook, *How to Use ABCD in Your Rural Community*, extracts some of the important lessons from the stories. In “Starting Point/Turning Points,” you will read about ways that communities get started with a new process of inside-out change, or more likely, get reenergized to expand the change efforts that have been going on already. In “The Organization of Hope — Into Action,” you’ll consider some of the specific methods that rural communities use to widen the circle and to build on assets. You’ll read about the ABCD “transformation” — how rural communities actually make new changes out of existing assets.

***This workbook is a
set of stories and
lessons to inspire
leaders to act***

In “Fruits of our Labor,” you’ll discover practical examples of projects and outcomes — what really happens when you do this kind of work. You will find a whole list of asset-based development ideas that rural communities have tried, and learn about some of the “competitive advantages” that rural communities can benefit from. You’ll read about outcomes both in terms of tangible changes, like health improvements or new jobs, and in terms of intangible changes, like new relationships, new power, and new community confidence and trust. In the conclusion, “Hope for Rural Communities,” you will find encouragement to act — based on the uniqueness of your rural experience and the assets you find within it.

In Section IV, *Resources*, you will find some starting points for the identification of resources to support your work, both from within your community and from outside. And you’ll get contact and network information so you can share your work and your challenges with your peers and colleagues in rural communities everywhere. Finally, in Section V, the *Appendix*, you’ll find some information about the two producers of this workbook, the Blandin Foundation and the Asset-Based Community Development Institute.

Try This

There are lots of ways to use this workbook, depending on your situation. For starters, the book is written in a narrative and informal style so you can read it yourself from cover to cover. You can use what you’ve read to help yourself think of ideas and strategies to use in your own community work. And you can come back to the workbook for more ideas as you move along.

But that’s not the only way to use this workbook. You can also use it for:

- Book Club/Peer Support.** Share the book in a group, in your service club or church, for example, or among the participants in a leadership development program. Talk about what lessons were most valuable, and how you can use them to make things happen in your community.
- Storytelling.** Pull out one or more of the stories that you think speak to your community situation. Share these with others in one of your circles. Ask yourselves, how would we tell the stories of our community? Take turns telling stories. And then ask, what would we like the story of our community to be when we are successful?
- Brainstorming.** You can use the lists of rural development examples to help you brainstorm possible project ideas and development options for your community.
- Troubleshooting.** When you run into an obstacle in your work, you can use the lessons from the stories and the “how to” sections to help you develop a strategy to overcome that obstacle. And you can use the resources sections to

contact peers and colleagues who may have been through something similar, or have different perspectives to share with you.

- ❑ ***Jumping-Off Point.*** This book is not the only resource you can tap. From what you find here, you can identify more specific resources to use. For example, we've mentioned the ABCD workbook series, which can give you greater detail on topics ranging from how to map the skills of local residents to how to work with local churches. Of course, there is the original ABCD book, *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, which provides a wealth of relationship-building ideas for everything from schools and libraries to health centers and police. The Blandin Foundation provides a Web site with articles and links to rural development resources and associations. You can branch out from the foundation you find here.



Overall Inspiration to Act

Often, the biggest challenge to community work isn't getting ideas of what to do, or even learning lessons on how to do something. Often the biggest challenge is *hope*. We need hope that our efforts will succeed, to inspire us to move forward and *act*.

Rural communities everywhere are facing challenges and making positive changes using an asset-based approach

Well, sometimes that hope can come from hearing about the actions of others. If nothing else, this workbook demonstrates that rural communities everywhere are facing challenges and making positive changes using an asset-based approach. Draw hope from their actions. Then use your actions to create hope in other people, both within your community and in other communities. Hope inspires action, and action inspires new hope, until together, we can and do accomplish miracles.



SECTION II — STORIES OF HOPE AND ACTION

In this section you will read stories of rural asset-based community development. You will recognize the themes as common rural challenges, such as how to increase incomes, how to build on the strengths of families, how to use diversity, or how to get people involved in community work. And for every theme, you will hear about a rural community that has used an ABCD approach to try to accomplish things never accomplished before.

A + C = D, in Practice

In each story, you will hear about the valuable rural **A**ssets that a community has identified, held up, and applied to their own **D**evelopment initiatives. And in each story, you will hear about local efforts to widen the circle, to include more people and build new relationships in community. In real practical ways, then, these stories show that the success of rural communities depends on connecting these two things. We can't develop new initiatives without tapping our rural **A**ssets. And we can't tap our rural **A**ssets without widening the circle of **C**ommunity. But if we do both, there's almost no **D**evelopment we can't accomplish. Because, in rural areas, **A + C** can and does = **D**.

The stories that follow are titled based on the theme that organizes each one:

Patch Work

Sharing Respect

Rural Associational Life

The Culture of Place, and the Place of Culture

Uncovering Hidden Treasure

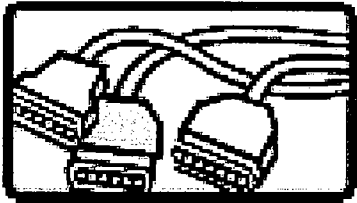
Rural Ethnic Diversity

We Are Family

Creativity, Clowns, and Poetry

Transformation and Power

Patch Work



The offices of the county Resource Council seem plain enough at first. Set behind the main street, around the corner from the gas station, the headquarters lies in a stretch of community offices, including the senior center and the county human services office. Inside, the desks and workspaces are also unremarkable, except perhaps for the walls around the conference table, which are covered in butcher block worksheets analyzing the history, challenges, and opportunities of the area. But in the back, in what used to be a restroom, dozens of little electronic boxes line the shelves with blinking lights and a web of wires. These are the modems, router, and server of the local community-based Internet service connection. And every so often the ordinary office sounds will be broken by another caller dialing in to the network. Muffled but still audible, the connection is established with a honk, followed by a burst of static, like the sound of a train signaling its approach, and the rush of wheels clattering by on the rails.

The trains never did come to Newton County. Apparently none of the railroad companies ever thought it worthwhile to lay track that deep and high in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. The local woods are a wonderful asset, producing a unique variety of Northern and Southern hardwoods. There was a timber boom in the 1920s and 1930s, when they floated logs down river. But the ascendancy of rail freight shifted attention elsewhere, and the county population dropped from a peak of about 20,000 to a low of about 3,000 in the early 1960s. It's back up to about 8,000 now, fed in part by waves of back-to-the-landers, tourists, and retirees. Economics is still the big issue though. Those who stayed and those who came share a common challenge: how to make enough to live in this beautiful place.

Rural legend has it that there are two kinds of pickup trucks in a small town. The rusted-out pickups belong to the people who try to piece together a living off the land and various smaller jobs. The newer pickups belong to people who have to commute hours and hours to get to work, and then spend much of their paychecks

on gas and upkeep for that pickup. We like our rural place and want to live here, so much that we are willing to compromise to make a living.

Like many rural residents, the people of Newton County have a long tradition of patching together income from several sources. Old-time farmers would raise enough vegetables, meats, milk, and eggs to live on, and make enough money for the rest by selling crafts or timber, or their own talents and effort at various services. Today a typical resident might patch together several part-time or seasonal jobs — and still harvest some timber and raise vegetables out in back.



Jack and Rick Martin are brothers who grew up in Newton County, working the family homestead and doing odd jobs for a few extra dollars.

Jack eventually became a math teacher and Rick served for a while as local sheriff. But both men decided to get back to their beginnings on the land, so they started a timber and sawmill business. With the help of the Value-Added Wood Initiative, the Martins have added additional processing business to the sawmill, drying and preparing the wood they sell to get more for it. The business has grown to hire a few additional residents, but just in case, Jack still teaches math on the side to bring in a steady paycheck. Patching income is still part of the strategy for the Martins.

Development Initiatives

Some communities focus on *jobs* and end up trying to attract outside businesses or industries to their area. People in Newton County have realized that what really counts is *local economic opportunity*. As a result, they focus on expanding local sources of income and wealth. Although few full-time, year-round jobs resulted from their projects, many residents have earned new income and increased the value of their assets by connecting to asset-based community development efforts in the county. Local development has been sparked by a nonprofit community

organization called Newton County Resource Council (NCRC). Some of the “income-patching” development Newton County has tried includes:

- ❑ **Internet and Technology:** Newton County folks wanted quality, local Internet service, but didn’t want to take on the risk and effort associated with developing a full Internet Service Provider (ISP). Instead, they formed a partnership with an ISP in a larger town outside the county, and now provide the local phone switching and sales and marketing services. The partner ISP offers the technical support, Web site development, and connection hub. Now in Jasper, a town of 500, more than 150 businesses and organizations have Web sites! The public school in Deer, with fewer than 250 students, has won national recognition for its innovative use of computer technology. And with a grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, a network of local nonprofits all got “wired up,” including the Senior Center, where seniors participate in the national SeniorNet.
- ❑ **Value-Added Wood Initiative:** Timber is still an important source of income for the dispersed residents of the mountain woods. Controversy over the different ways to manage and harvest timber has sometimes threatened to divide the community. But everyone agrees on the idea of “adding value” to the local assets by further processing and finishing the raw wood. Through the Value-Added Wood Initiative, woods owners get training and financing to add creative new processing capacities.
- ❑ **Ecotourism:** In this part of the Ozarks, clear rivers run through beautiful mountain woods. And 60% of the land is owned by the National Forest Service or National Parks. Tourism is a natural. But Newton County is also not far from the big tourist area around Branson, Missouri, and locals don’t want to go that commercial tourist route. Instead they are trying to promote a friendly, quiet kind of tourism, where locals show visitors how the natural mountain resources and local culture work together from the perspective of folks who live here. It’s been a tough business to crack — after all, Newton County is off the beaten track. But the NCRC has high hopes for its latest development, the Woodland Learning Center, a beautiful log-built lodge and wooded campus suitable for everything from single visitor stays to group retreats to summer camp experiences.

Widening the Circle

Central to all of these efforts has been the Newton County Resource Council. When then-Governor Bill Clinton called for the creation of county Resource Councils across the state in the late 1980s, locals say Newton County felt dead. People felt overwhelmed by the challenges of the area and the general attitude about things seemed to be “we can’t do that here.” Newton County Human Services Administrator Mary Lynn Emmett realized that for Newton County’s Resource Council to be effective, it would have to involve as much of the human talent and skill in the area as possible. It couldn’t afford to exclude either natives or newcomers, “environmentalists” or “traditionalists,” men or women, young or old.

It had to feel open to everybody. So Emmett invited a mix of people to create a new Board together. They declared all of their meetings open to the community, and invited everybody who cared to come. Council meetings became a place where people would float new ideas for projects. If enough people were interested, they'd set up a committee and start working on it. In the first years, what got people going were "the basics," projects like a food shelter, an arts and information center for tourists, a community park. Then a group of participants were invited to participate in Training Community Organizations for Change, a statewide leadership development program of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. Foundation staffer Dianne Williams invited John McKnight to come, and the participants were energized by the idea of building community through developing their assets. They came back to Jasper with new hope and new direction.



The Buffalo Lodge at the Woodland Learning Center

In the following years, the Resource Council served as a kind of incubator for development initiatives. At first, people were reluctant to apply for funding for their projects, perhaps out of a concern about the kinds of strings that might be attached to the money. But when Dr. Nancy Haller wrote a successful grant proposal to support a volunteer emergency response program, other leaders began to think that they could use outside funding to leverage local assets and support projects chosen by local folks. A domestic violence shelter was developed,

a housing repair and construction project, and a recycling center. As these projects became well established, they “spun off” into their own entities. The public officials, for example, were happy to see the recycling center and park donated to the local government. These spin-offs, in turn, have left the Resource Council with the role of identifying other community interests and developing new projects.



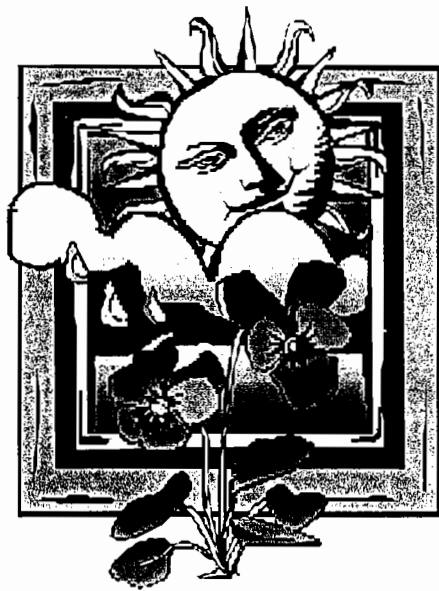
Newton County Resource Council Members

Now, they say, there’s a strong network of local institutions linked by a strong community organization. It seems like everybody in town is writing grant proposals. In essence, Newton County has taken the income-patching tradition of families in the area and applied it to the whole community. Where once there was defeatism, there is now a general attitude that “we can do anything.”



The Buffalo Lodge at the Woodland Learning Center is nicely decorated with the kind of furnishings that suggest lasting quality and classic style. There’s a hanging on the wall of the living room, made by local artist Bonnie Villines, using new materials and an old design. The design is called the “Double Wedding Ring,” and the hanging is a patchwork quilt.

Sharing Respect



I think that as a child you don't appreciate where you came from, and I think that as you get older you begin to appreciate that. You realize that to be able to sit on your porch and hear your neighbors play their banjo and guitar and sing, that's a big deal. And I think it gives you a sense of where you came from, the fact you have the land. You can always go back and work in God's earth and gain something from it. We were a part of this community. Because people went from farm to farm and threshed and the women cooked. People put up barns. There was a lot of community involvement. We was always in church. I can remember when I was a little girl being ashamed of the fact that we lived here and we didn't have shoes sometimes in the summer. And my cousins came from out-of-state in the summertime, and I thought they were a lot better off than we were. But now I'm older and I know they weren't. This is God's corner of the world, and we need to hang on to it. As you grow older you do realize. That's part of your heritage — you've got to hold on to it.

(Excerpted from *Stories on the Land: Understanding our Past, Choosing our Future*, oral history project of Rural Resources).

Greene County, Tennessee, has a story to share about natives and newcomers, how they earned each other's respect by focusing on their assets, and how they opened up new opportunities for themselves in the process. Rural people often joke about how long you need to live in the place to be considered a native. In Greene County they say you're not a native unless "your grandpappy's buried in the local cemetery." The Southern Appalachians have a proud heritage and a long history. Part of that history is the experience of outsiders coming in to take advantage of the land — the timber rush, the coal rush. The tension between natives and newcomers isn't always a joking matter. What do rural communities do about natives and newcomers? The flip side of our tight-knit communities can be an exclusiveness, a clubbishness that sets us against each other. The newcomers

feel shut out. So they form their own club. The natives feel excluded from the newcomer's club, and even more threatened. Walls grow higher, and the community polarizes. Sometimes it can get ugly.

Greene County seemed to be going down that same path. This time the newcomers were seen to be the environmentalists, the organic farmers and other rural enthusiasts who were attracted to the area by the beautiful land. Many of these folks participate in Rural Resources, a community organization founded by some folks who were sometimes viewed as outsiders despite their native roots.

Early on, the community seemed headed for conflict. When members of Rural Resources used words like "sustainable" and "organic," conventional farmers heard another outside threat to their living and way of life. Public discussions of alternatives to tobacco were met with particular concern by the natives. Tobacco is a profitable cash crop for farmers in the area, and a highly charged political issue. In reality, Rural Resources wanted tobacco to remain profitable, but the mere mention of "alternatives" was sufficient to raise the age-old fears of outside intrusion. Only this time it appeared that the newcomers weren't just threatening change. To some natives, Rural Resources and others appeared to be challenging the wisdom of those who had been farming for many years. The situation could have polarized but, instead, caring people on both sides reconsidered. Because when they thought about their community assets — their heritage, the talents and skills of all the people, and most of all the land itself — they realized that they had too much in common to protect, and too little to waste in opposition to each other.

Development Initiatives



One by one, the local cattlemen entered the General Morgan Inn, the newly refurbished hotel built from three historic buildings in downtown Greeneville. They came to talk about a precious asset — their livestock. With crop farming getting tighter, they had often talked about the need to get more income from the stock. But this time it was different. On one side of the podium sat the representative of the Greene County Livestock Association. On the other side sat the Rural Resources representative. What came out of it was a new cooperative.

Milton Orr is the Extension Agent for the Greene County Agricultural Extension Service. Orr explains that folks have always raised livestock in this hilly country. There are 80,000 head in the county now, making the county number one in Tennessee. However, the herd sizes are small, maybe 20 head on average. Farmers have mostly used livestock to clean the ground and keep growth under control, rather than to make a profit. But the sale of cattle is still important income, and when prices go down, the stockers complain to Orr. Selling cattle one-by-one at local auctions, the stockers don't get top dollar. Orr had always thought about forming a livestock cooperative to sell cattle for better prices in large lots. But he had never had the time or the resources to set one up.

Meanwhile, at Rural Resources, the leaders reconsidered their mission and their strategy. They felt badly about how their efforts had been received, and realized that turning further inward would only make things worse. "It's just poor strategy to set yourself up as an outsider in Greene County," says Alice Loftin, Director of the organization's Stories on the Land project. "We have to build on what is here." Rural Resources turned their attention from the land, to the people on the land. "If we care about the land, then we surely have to care about the small farmers who own most of the land in the county," Loftin says.



Touring Farms to Learn About Pasture Management

The way Milton Orr describes it, he and Watt Childres, one of Rural Resources' founders, had several long discussions. "We understand each other now," he says. "We know how we can work together on certain things. Where we complement each other, we do. Where we don't, we do not. I totally respect their feelings. And the bottom line is, I couldn't have formed the Stocker Co-op myself. My job is to put more money in the hands of beef producers. Watt shared that common goal. When he stepped up to work on the idea, of course we cooperated."

The Stocker Co-op is now established, not as a formal business but as a collaborative between Rural Resources, the Extension, the Livestock Association, and the individual cattle producers. Twice a year, Orr and a cattle marketing company review the stock of participating producers to put together a "uniform load" of local cattle for direct sale. Stockers earn as much as 40% more from cooperating than they would by individual sale.

Cooperation has had a way of catching on. Rural Resources sponsored a Farmers' Market in Greeneville, and the idea of supporting small farmers at the Market became popular with the business and professional circles in town. And then Loftin, an English professor at Tusculum College, started the Rural Resources *Stories on the Land* project.

Using a survey form developed by the group, community volunteers and college students interviewed Greene County residents about their connections to the land, and their hopes for the community. They interviewed natives and newcomers alike, farmers and non-farmers, young and old. Then they collected these stories, edited them, and reviewed the edits with the original interviewees. From this material they created a piece of theater, and organized cooperative theater events all over the county.

Dinners on the Land is what Rural Resources calls the events. They invite everyone, serve locally-grown food, and organize volunteers for a Readers' Theater. After dinner, the volunteers stand up in turn and read stories drawn from the interviews. A wide variety of experiences and opinions are voiced, in the words of Greene County residents. Sometimes the stories and views are in apparent opposition, and the stories reveal the different contexts that explain the different perspectives. Other times, the perspectives of very different people come to remarkable accordance.

Usually, people stay around long afterwards to talk about what they heard.

Widening the Circle

How do newcomers and natives earn each other's respect? Rural Resources leaders offer the following lessons:

- ❑ **Value what we have.** We can fall into a cycle of cynicism and despair. Or we can start a cycle of appreciation and hope. Lift up a positive mirror to the community. When we value what we have, we can consider it critically.

- ❑ **Listen to our others, and feed back what we hear.** When the stakes are high, people want to feel heard and understood. We may not agree on everything, but listening shows we can respect each other. The best way to show that we are listening is to feed back what we hear to the speaker.



Club Dinner Meeting Featuring Burgers Made from Local Beef

- ❑ **Share decision-making.** If what other people say is important, then it must be important to share decisions on community projects. Form partnerships. Expand our own leadership.
- ❑ **Change ourselves accordingly.** Don't just listen, but take what we hear to heart. Demonstrate our sincerity by changing our directions and positions according to what we learn. Give and take.

Rural Resources started gaining respect when they started celebrating the assets of the community. They built on this respect with the Stories on the Land, which not only showed they were listening, but helped everybody listen to each other. They proved they could share decision-making, not just by co-sponsoring the Stocker Co-op, but also by expanding their own Board of Directors to include native residents and conventional farmers who widen their circle of leadership.

Extension Agent Orr says, "I can still find people who don't like them, but then, I can find people who don't use Extension. To me, they are a client like anyone else. I work as closely with Rural Resources as I do with any other client. I think we've gotten past some misunderstandings in this community, some mistaken first impressions. The difference is, I think Rural Resources has shown it cares about the people.

And if a farmer comes to me and wants to know about organic farming, I will teach that farmer organic farming. I won't sugarcoat it, I won't tell them it's the only way and I will tell them the risks. But I will respect their position."

And now Rural Resources is changing its directions accordingly. It is planning new cooperatives, value-added agricultural projects, and open discussions of land use issues. And this year the Community Supported Agriculture project features a new crop, grown on Rural Resources' land with the help of Rural Resources volunteers.

The crop is organic tobacco.



After a Dinners on the Land performance, the crowd of 50 people stayed around sipping iced tea in the fellowship hall. People were talking excitedly about the stories they had heard, and sharing stories of their own. Over in one corner, one of the town's leading "native" community leaders approached a leader from Rural Resources. "You know, I was wrong about you," he said. "You're not so bad after all."

Rural Associational Life

by Shirley DicKard



“Tommy’s Joint,” with its peeling red paint and smoke-stained ceiling, is being transformed from a saloon into a university. Susie Rose, whose family donated the building, points to the Budweiser lampshade over the pool table, one of the last remnants of the dim room’s former life as a local tavern in an out-of-the-way mountain town. Ruffled curtains are up in the windows, and there are plans for a flowerbed outside. You won’t find professors or students at the Hyampom University. What you will find are people from all walks of life, including the retired, disabled and unemployed, all pitching in to repair, repaint, make food baskets, collect toys or deliver firewood to families in need. In the storeroom, which once housed cases of liquor, is a clutch of bicycles resting on their sides, waiting to be transformed by members into shiny new Christmas gifts for children. Sam Rose, the Chairman of the Board, tells how this University began as an informal social group, until “Dirty Dale” announced that it was about time they started doing something for the community.

It might be easy to overlook a small group of people painting bicycles when you’re looking for the heart of what makes a community work. Yet it’s just such groups of citizens who really understand what’s missing in a community and have the power to do something about it. It didn’t take an agency coming in to tell them that there were kids who didn’t have much for Christmas, or that the elderly couple down in the hollow needed a cord of wood for the winter. They saw the need, came up with a plan, and set to work. Rural associations, like the Hyampom University, are just ordinary folks working together with a common vision. They do it because they care. It’s their community.

That's where rural associations can make a difference. Being rural often means being distant and inaccessible to the resources that people in more populated areas take for granted. While your cousin in a neighboring city can catch the bus to the health department, you must wait until the visiting nurse makes her twice a month trip to your town. Yet this very isolation can incubate an attitude of "we'll just do it ourselves."

Trinity County in Northern California is so rural there are no incorporated towns or even stoplights. People live physically isolated from each other in twelve small communities each separated by rugged ridges of the Klamath Mountains. In recent times survival has been hard. Yet in spite of economic hardships, folks have found a way to get things done that's uniquely rural, using the power of their voluntary associations.

As far back as folks in the town of Hayfork can remember, people have based their livelihood on what they thought were endless resources of timber and mining. But times changed. The rusty remains of the town's only lumber mill still linger on the outskirts of town, reminding residents that half the town's salary base was lost when the mill closed in 1996. With over seventy-five percent of the land in Trinity County owned and managed by the federal government, the community of Hayfork had little control over its fate. When the government changed its timber harvest policy, limiting the amount of timber that could be cut, lumber sales dropped, the mill closed, poverty mounted, stores closed, people left, and substance abuse skyrocketed. But the town lost more than jobs; it lost community volunteers, childcare workers, Little League coaches, and school board members, leaving holes in the fabric of community life.

This problem is not unique. Throughout the country, communities have grappled with survival when the main employer closes down. The folks in Hayfork knew they couldn't just stand by without a paycheck while government agencies in Washington worked on a plan to restore the lost economy. When you're rural, and off the beaten track, sometimes the only place to turn for help is to each other. And that's what the small community of Hayfork did. They learned how to tap into and mobilize a resource they already had — the power of people working together in citizen associations.

"This is a community where everyone pitches in," said Sally Aldinger, local business owner and Coordinator of Trinity Kids First. Yet as individuals, folks could only do so much. That's when the potential of local citizens groups came into focus. Associations helped provide the social glue that kept the town together. In small communities, people know how to come together almost by instinct. You'll find the Lion's Club or Grange sponsoring social events like potlucks, fundraisers and celebrations that are good for community spirit. They help offset the isolation and despair that often accompany hard times and keep people connected. These are do-it-yourself events and sometimes they just seem to sprout spontaneously. It doesn't take corporate contributions or social service agencies to make them happen.



Development Initiatives

People in Hayfork took this a step further. In spite of hard times, they wanted their children to grow up healthy. Sure, they wanted kids to have their immunizations and sore throats taken care of, but it went beyond just their medical needs. They knew that healthy children come from healthy communities. That's where they wanted to begin. They also knew that by focusing on the well-being of their children — something everyone could get behind — the health and quality of life would improve for everyone.

When the community had the opportunity to become part of the *Community Partnerships for Healthy Children Initiative*, sponsored by the Sierra Health Foundation in Northern California, they were ready to work. They knew their resources were limited, so their strategy was to first identify, then combine the resources of their associations, businesses, agencies, and individuals and get them working together to improve their children's well-being.

One of their first tasks was to map the assets that already existed in the community. How do you know what you can do until you know what you have? They weren't expecting much; after all, there were only 1,800 people left in town. But when they put their heads together and started listing the ways folks worked together, they were amazed to discover that over a hundred formal and informal associations were woven into the fabric of their everyday lives. They were soon to discover the tremendous collective potential that their citizens groups had to offer.

Most of Hayfork's organizations had been around for a long time, like the volunteer fire department, Cattlemen's Association, Grange, local churches, Lions Club, and the Hyampom Rod and Gun Club. They each had their established place in the community and were known for what they did — promoting cattle, agriculture and sports hunting, helping in emergencies, providing places of spiritual worship — things they had been doing for years. But with the mill crisis, people realized it would take more than business as usual.

That's when Trinity Kids First Collaborative began to bring people to the table to explore what they could do together. They began to create connections that linked their associations with schools, churches, individuals, and local businesses. They used these connections as building blocks to create a healthy community for their children.



Local Scholars at the Hyampom University

Like the Hyampom University, many of these associations have colorful names and a colorful history. Each association found a way to help children that went way beyond their original purpose.

- The Mule Committee, which stages annual mule races at the county fair, began raising funds for children and other community needs.

- ❑ The Peanut Women's Club used to run the Bingo games, but they also got their husbands to cut logs for a marquee in front of the school.
- ❑ Members of the Hyampom Rod and Gun Club capitalized on their love of hunting to put on benefit trapshoots for community organizations and to mentor kids on gun safety.
- ❑ The Hayfork Rotary Club donated money to the Mountain Valley Youth Fund for the basic needs of children, and put on free breakfasts for students and families during the annual drug-free celebration.
- ❑ The Springtimers raised funds to keep the local roller rink open.
- ❑ The Lions Club volunteered to put on an annual Fishing Derby for kids.
- ❑ "Boom Boom," owner of the local fireworks business helped the Independence Day Celebration Committee put on a free annual fireworks display for the community, the day before the 4th of July. Proceeds from the event went to the volunteer fire department.
- ❑ The Hyampom University changed its focus from a social club to a service club. They repaired bicycles for kids in the back of their "clubhouse," donated firewood and medical equipment, and were ready to help at a moment's notice.
- ❑ If you need anything else, just go to the "Bubba Breakfast" on Friday morning at Irene's Café. There, you can round up a handful of hearty Hayfork men who will pitch in with anything to help their community.



Associations, then, became places where ordinary folks could work together to contribute their skills and talent — they are the "gift assemblers" of the community. But what happens when you get groups of associations working together?

Jan Raffety, Hayfork's Parent/Community Coordinator remembers when the growing list of unemployed families was longer than the elementary school could handle at Christmas. So they put the word out and began asking. The school nurse contacted her church — they supplied toy-filled stockings. Service organizations, instead of distributing their own holiday baskets, pitched in to supply food, toys, and clothing for children. Men at the Hyampom University restored bicycles for gifts, while the Human Response Network donated helmets for the bicycles. The

State of California Conservation Camp inmates constructed wooden trucks, airplanes, and dolls, local merchants pitched in with donated toys and games, while the Mountain Valley Youth Fund and Ernie's department store supplied warm coats. Even the families who received these holiday baskets contributed what they could to the Community Christmas Program — usually a plate of homemade cookies.

“Even though the business climate is bad and many shops have closed, most local businesses have been generous, because they know that the money donated stays locally,” says Sally Aldinger, who owns the local natural food store. “We’re committed to keeping jobs and this town alive. We thank business owners publicly in the newspaper, and make them feel glad that they’re helping.”



Hyampom University Scholars Repairing Bicycles for Children

Generosity runs deep in Hayfork. “We don’t always get along, but when there’s a need, we pull together,” said Jerry Fulton, member and driving force of at least seven local associations. Hayfork’s groups have found that by working together, they’re each more powerful to make a difference. With a dwindling economy, events like the annual Etiquette Dinner for graduating eighth graders, the Fishing Derby, family dances, and after-school programs would not have survived without the joint efforts of local groups. Because working together has become a way of

life in Hayfork, local businesses and associations were able to raise over \$10,000 for a teenage boy who was diagnosed with brain cancer. That's \$10,000 from a very poor, but generous community.

Widening the Circle

"Ask, ask, ask," is Trinity Kid's key to success, says Jan Raffety, who is also known as the local "puller-inner." Ask if people would like to come and help, then create opportunities for them to contribute. When something needs doing, her enthusiasm gets people involved, even those who usually don't participate. So when someone approaches her with an idea, she quickly hands them an "Action Plan" form to complete, then puts them in charge of their idea. Becky Stetson, a local teacher, advises that "reaching people takes a lot of tenacity. It's important not to turn down anyone, or eliminate anyone because of how they look. Most people like to be asked."

When people begin working together in new collaborative ways, they come to the table because they care. But sometimes keeping them involved is a challenge. "People here are really independent," explains Gerry Dee Maxey, long-time member of Trinity Kids First. "The best approach is to just bring people together and let natural associations form. When the structure is loose, it allows for people's independence and helps keep them at the table."

The people of Hayfork found they could accomplish a lot with what they already had. They didn't need to start a new organization or bring in outsiders to get things done. They simply created new working relationships among the folks who were already invested in the community. They found new ways to connect the dots.



In the fall of 1996, John McKnight, co-author of Building Communities from the Inside Out, visited Hayfork. People still remember how he inspired the community to stop looking out the rear-view mirror, seeing itself as the town that the mill left behind, and to begin looking forward together. Through the assets of their associations, they've learned to see that their glass is half full.

The Culture of Place and the Place of Culture



It's Friday afternoon, so the true cooks are busy in the community kitchen. They're frying fish and cooking greens and baking cornbread and more for the sale of dinners to the tourists out on the parkway tomorrow. Bill Green lifts the lid and stirs the big pot of fish stew that's simmering on the stove. "I learned about cooking the right way from my grandmother," he says. "The secret is in knowing the right herbs and spices, and then cooking them long enough and slow enough so that the flavors can come out."

Are rural communities isolated? Maybe if you're trying to get there from somewhere else. Maybe even if you're trying to leave. But if you're already home, you're not isolated, you're right where you belong.

The isolation of rural communities has at least one positive effect: It allows local cultures to flourish and develop. We talk about "the way we do things around here." We talk about rural culture, as if it has something to do with a rural place. And there's no better example of that than the Gullah community, living on the Sea Islands and coastal areas of South Carolina.

Most people know that when Africans were brought to North America as slaves, families were broken up and friends were separated. Slave masters seemed to feel that by cutting the Africans off from their family and cultural ties, they would be weakened to resist their bondage. Many slaves on the same plantation couldn't speak to each other, because they spoke different languages from different parts of Africa. What's less commonly known is that there was one place where this didn't happen, at least not to the same extent. That place was the Sea Islands and coastal communities of South Carolina. Liz Santagati, Executive Director of the South Carolina Coastal Community Development Corporation (Coastal CDC) and self-described "born and bred Gullah 'ooman,'" explains why this happened, and how the Gullah culture developed in rural isolation.

The coastal area is often called the Low Country, because the land is so flat and close to sea level. It's wet and marshy in places, where the seawater seeps into the shoreland. The slave owners who controlled this area thought it looked right for growing some valuable crops like rice, which need to grow in wetlands. But the

slave owners didn't know how to grow rice. So they turned to some people who did — Africans from the coastal areas of West Africa. Because the owners needed these slaves for their agricultural expertise, and not just their labor, West African countrymen sometimes found themselves placed together on the Islands. What's more, the slave owners didn't want to live in these areas themselves — too wet, too remote, and inaccessible except by boat. No Boss House overlooking the plantation here. Instead the slave owners stayed on the mainland and hired Overseers to master the slaves. The Sea Island slaves were relatively more independent than other slaves, as long as they produced rice.

During slavery, West African culture survived in the coastal areas to a greater extent than it did inland. After the Civil War, the land became less profitable to the former slave owners without slave labor. Land that wasn't abandoned was confiscated by the federal government and sold in small lots to those free men who were able to earn enough cash to pay for it.

Today, this community can draw a continuous, uninterrupted line through their cultural history to their West African ancestry, which makes it just about unique in American history. The community is called the Gullah community and its rural isolation has resulted in a rich cultural heritage. It's not a little ironic that some of the same geographic features that have made the coastal communities undesirable to outsiders over the years, have also made the area attractive to developers. Hilton Head is just a new name for one of the Sea Islands. They've got a Sun City in the area now, a Disney resort, and a bunch of others. The tourists and the retirees like the warm weather, the golf courses fed by the waters, the beaches, and most of all, the isolation — or what is left of it. On Sea Island Parkway on tiny St. Helena's island, about a million cars pass by each year.

Will popularity ruin what isolation nurtured for so many years? Will development and gentrification do what slavery and neglect failed to do? Will the tourists and retirees kill off the last remaining piece of continuous African cultural heritage in this country?

Not if the Coastal CDC can help it.

Development Initiatives

Gentrification presents a dilemma. Wealthy people moving into the community bring money and new opportunities for business and jobs. But their developments push up rents, property taxes, and other costs to the point where the locals who have lived in this place "through thick and thin" can no longer afford to stay. This is called displacement, and it is happening in the coastal communities. As children grow old enough to want their own homes, they can't afford the "impact fees" imposed by the government, even if all they want is to put a trailer home on the family lot. Some families are selling off their land, others are losing their children when they leave the community for better prospects elsewhere.

“With gentrification,” Liz Santagati says, “the trick is to organize community-controlled development that channels the benefits of growth to existing residents in a positive way.” Coastal CDC is trying to do exactly that, by creating a set of businesses that sell to the tourists and retirees. And they take this a step further. By selling cultural products and services like food and crafts, Gullah people hope to use these businesses to help preserve the Gullah culture.

- **Retail Development.** Coastal CDC owns land on a key corner of St. Helena’s island, where the busy Sea Island Parkway intersects with Martin Luther King Drive. This is where people turn to get to Penn Center, the famous retreat center used by the civil rights leaders in the 1960s, built on the grounds of an historic missionary school for Gullah children. On one corner of the intersection, Coastal CDC and Penn Center have created a green, shady park. On another corner, Coastal CDC has rebuilt the old grocery store for a restaurant. On the third corner, Coastal will manage another rehabbed historic building for shops and businesses, including an outdoor farmer’s market. And Coastal rents to some local shopkeepers on the last corner, who sell culture-oriented products such as clothing and crafts made from denim and other material dyed with local indigo. Coastal CDC is developing this corner not just to take advantage of the traffic of tourists, but also to restore economic life to the Corners Community area, once the rural market center of the island.



Property Improved by Coastal Community Development Corporation

- ❑ **Kitchen Incubator.** Many Gullah people know how to cook in the old, “true Gullah way.” Rather than set up a single food business, the Coastal CDC invested in a large commercial kitchen that can be used by residents for a wide variety of start-up food businesses. Members of the Sea Island Gullah Business Coalition cater events and dinners in the area. Others prepare and sell the Gullah carry-out dinners to tourists driving to the beach. And plans are in the works for a new line of spice mixes and prepared foods to be sold in grocery stores under a single Gullah brand name and label. The incubator allows residents to experiment and test business strategies with low overhead and low risk.



A Gullah Business Coalition Cooking Venture

- ❑ **Housing Development.** Coastal CDC is partnering with a private housing developer to build new housing for Gullah residents. This will also help build the development capacity of the CDC. In the future, Liz would like to create a new housing model appropriate to the community. Historically, the Gullah people have created family homesteads, consisting of a single main house for the parents, circled by separate homes built by older children as they grow older. This keeps the extended family together and takes advantage of family

landholdings in an efficient way. The housing pattern happens to mirror the way family homesteads are arranged in certain West African villages — maybe that's where the idea originated.



Widening the Circle

To develop their assets — culture, land, skilled people — the Gullah community has had to turn outward and become involved in the politics and economics of the coastal area. Liz has always found herself in the role of a liaison between the Gullah community and the outside community. She ran a newspaper on the island that catered to Gullah residents and sold advertising to outside businesses. She's always been involved in Gullah community organization, and volunteers to help seniors and children negotiate business with schools and banks and other large institutions.



Residents of the Gullah Community

When Beaufort County set up a Comprehensive Land Use Planning Commission, Liz and the Coastal CDC Board worked with other community leaders and groups to make sure the Gullah community was represented. They were able to fight some development rules that would have made resident self-development more difficult, and they got the Corners Community area designated as a Public Market area, zoned for rural pedestrian-friendly local businesses. Now Coastal CDC is in conversations with some of the more Gullah-conscious local resorts. There are a few retirement resorts nearby whose residents are regular customers of the Saturday dinner enterprise. These are the kind of people with whom Coastal would like to establish mutually-beneficial, culturally-sensitive business and community relationships.

But Gullah culture is about more than just food or crafts. It's about the Gullah way of life. And selling Gullah cultural products by itself won't preserve the Gullah way. Liz has spent enough time in other parts of the country to know that the Gullah way is special. She knows that because it is a close community, Gullah people will treat each other with respect and won't rush to judgment. On the other hand, Gullah folks aren't afraid to speak up if they feel they're being mistreated, especially by outsiders. They will only take so much.

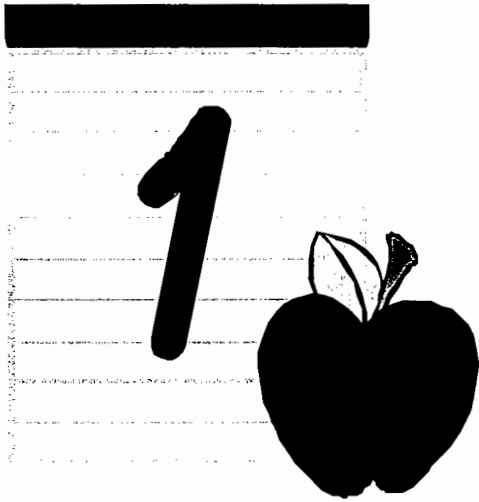
Liz knows that every pair of hands is valuable on the islands. You contribute the Gullah way by doing something you know, something you love. A disabled person who can drive will take the seniors and children around. Many goods and services are still exchanged by barter. Growing up, Liz didn't think of herself as poor, because she knew no other life. What she felt was that Gullah people appreciated her for who she was, not for what other people thought of her. "Maybe some of the young people will need to leave to appreciate what Gullah means, like I did," Liz says. "But once they learn, they'll be back."



It's Sunday evening on Warsaw Island, the small Sea Island that the extended Aiken family have called home for generations. Family members have returned from church by boat, which is the only way to get to Warsaw. Now the family is gathered together for their weekly baseball game. Men and women, children and adults play or watch. Uncles and aunts coach nephews and nieces. Because there must be teams, they divide up according to which side of the island a person lives on. A pot of soup is on the fire. Somebody brought some chicken meat to put in it, other people brought vegetables and rice and other ingredients they had available. Grandma Aiken has brought the spices and herbs. She knows the right mix for the ingredients they ended up with, and how to cook it long enough and slow enough to bring out the flavors.

Uncovering Hidden Treasure

by Shirley DicKard



In the hush of the evening, long after students and staff have gone home for the day, someone turns the key to the front door of the little red schoolhouse and community members enter for a school of their own — Twilight School. As tables and chairs are pushed aside, impatient kids bounce a basketball off the backdrop. A young mother arrives with fresh baked cookies and places them on the refreshment table in the hallway. Soon, families are arriving in cars packed with children, a senior citizen walks from his home across the street and a young couple, new to the community, is greeted warmly. Voices hush in the gym as Cathy, Twilight School Coordinator, describes the evening's program: Leland will talk about the community's rich Gold Rush history. Helene will help young kids make pinecone birdfeeders. Rick will give lessons in chainsaw safety. Students Ruby and Kitty will be computer guides. Beryl will teach cake decorating. Matt will give the Red Cross CPR class, and Greg will take the older kids outside for basketball. None of the classes are led by people who consider themselves teachers, yet each person has something unique to share. Two are Senior Citizens, another is recently off welfare, two are junior high students, and three share skills they learned on the job or in a local organization.

In small towns and rural communities, sometimes it feels like we know just about everybody. We may know some people by name, where they live, and whom they're related to, while others we recognize by their job or their position in the community. But how well do we really know the people in our community? Take

the guy with the red Dodge pickup. How many know he ties flies for fishing in his spare time? Who knows that the woman at the local market once had her own seamstress business or the guy you always see hitching a ride is an expert stone mason?

The talents and skills of our neighbors are perhaps the greatest asset to our communities. Often, this is an asset that we have only begun to tap. Sometimes that's because we don't want to pry into other people's business. Sometimes it's because we put a tag or label on somebody and never look beneath it. Sometimes we just take people for granted. Sometimes we just never think to ask. One way or another, it can be difficult to break out of our old habits and uncover the buried treasure in our community.

The folks in Camptonville, California have found a way to break out of old habits, uncover talents and skills they didn't know they had, and to learn from each other. What came out of this was an entirely new outlook around town, a can-do spirit that had been missing, and new development opportunities that no one would have thought possible before.

During the California Gold Rush in 1849, Camptonville's streets bustled with gold miners and merchants hoping to get rich. Today, with the collapse of the mining and logging industries, people just want to make a living. No one really knows the current population because some folks who live down long potholed roads impassable in winter don't want to be counted. But the Volunteer Fire Department estimates that 650 people live throughout the greater community's 56 square miles within the Tahoe National Forest.

When you live in the remote edges of a rural county, it's easy for county officials to forget you're there. Even the phone book lists Camptonville in the wrong county. The "outlaw" lifestyle of some residents created a reputation that rumor and the media were quick to promote — a dangerous environment of drug labs, highway fatalities, and alcohol-related violence. County officials visited Camptonville only in response to a crisis, and then they came in pairs.

Yet, like many rural communities, Camptonville used to have more of a small family feeling where everyone knew each other's business. That was back in the 1940-1950s when the economy was vibrant with logging and mining. Skip Ness, the school's secretary, remembers how the community felt when she attended the local school.

"When I was a kid here, there were always a lot of family get-togethers, such as picnics and dances. Everyone knew each other. Whenever someone got married or had a baby, the whole town came to the shower. You'd go to the post office and know everybody. Nowadays, even though we're a smaller population, there's lots of people in town you don't know. Some people come up here to hide out. But that's changing. With programs like Twilight School, we're working on getting back to 'us.'"

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Things began to change when a few people got tired of seeing their only fire truck parked out in a field, covered with snow. “We needed a fire hall, and we weren’t going to get one unless we did it ourselves,” recalls Rita Ortega, a member of the Fire Department Auxiliary. Knowing the community was too small to attract outside help, people began to pitch in themselves. Some organized fundraisers, some poured cement and pounded nails, while others sought donated equipment. After ten years of weekend “barn-raising” the firehall still isn’t completed, but volunteer firefighters will proudly open the large doors to show off the three fire engines, emergency equipment, and tables and chairs available for community meetings.

This effort caught people’s attention and sparked their imaginations. If they could build a firehall themselves, what else could they do to improve their community? With the support of the Sierra Health Foundation’s *Community Partnerships for Healthy Children Initiative*, a small group of people at the school helped form the *Yuba Community Collaborative for Healthy Children* and began looking at what assets already existed in the community that they could draw upon.

In most small rural communities, you’ll probably find a school, a fire department, some businesses, and an established core of community volunteers. Each has its customary role in the community. But how do you reach beyond the obvious and find the hidden treasures in the community? Residents in Camptonville commented that identifying the town’s assets was like creating a family tree, so they set out to draw a *Community Tree*. With the school and the fire department as the main branches, they realized that each limb represented a wealth of untapped resources. The school had rooms for community meetings and classes as well as a gym and field for recreation. The fire department could teach community CPR and link isolated senior citizens with others in the community. Once people started seeing the community in this new way, the *Community Tree* began to flourish. Each year, people update the tree by drawing additional branches to depict new ways folks are connecting and contributing to the community.



But thinking in new ways can bring its problems. Sometimes institutions are not comfortable with extending their boundaries and sharing their resources. Barriers such as liability issues, entrenched patterns, and regulations can get in the way of change. Camptonville was fortunate. The local school Board of Trustees recognized that “students cannot be isolated from the community in which we all live. What happens at home has an effect on what happens at school, and vice

versa.” They created a “Community Relations” policy to describe just how the school would commit its resources to the community:

Although the school has many possible resources to offer community projects, the facility itself as a gathering place is a primary resource that is irreplaceable in the community. Hence, when it is decided that a worthy community project is in the academic interests of students, but that school commitment must be limited for fiscal or other reasons, a distinction will be made between facility (providing meeting space, tables and chairs, sports equipment, computers, kitchen facilities, etc.) and program (planning, staffing, funding, etc.), and priority will be given in the order of providing: (1) facility, (2) staffing, (3) financial support.

Camptonville Union Elementary School District Board Policy No. 1115.

This policy opened the school doors to community programs such as Twilight School — a free evening program for the fun, recreation, enrichment, and education of Camptonville families and community. Every other month on Tuesdays, people of all ages gather at the school from 6 to 8 p.m. Some are there to share what they know; others come to learn something new from their neighbors. Some teens just want to hang out with their friends and play basketball, but many take or even teach classes. The schedule of classes is posted around town and in the local newspaper, so everyone knows who’s teaching what.

Widening the Circle

Much like a beckoning campfire, Twilight School brings people out of the woods and into the center of the community. It even draws in the folks you usually don’t see: the shy ones, the ones who sometimes feel they don’t have a place or aren’t welcome because of their lifestyle, economic situation, or something they might have done in the past.

One mother was making the transition from welfare to work with a part-time job in the school kitchen. At first she was shy and reticent to be around people she didn’t know. Just talking with strangers was difficult for her. But she felt safe enough to volunteer to make loaves of whole wheat bread for Twilight School. Her bread won a standing ovation. Then someone heard that her parents were deaf and she knew sign language. Would she teach others sign language at Twilight School? She agreed, and now she’s not only the Children’s Activity Coordinator for Twilight School but has begun reciting some of her own poetry at community talent nights and is making plans to begin her college education.

Many folks are surprised to be asked to share what they know, especially when they’re used to being on the receiving end of services. Another mother, well-known to county agencies for her family’s problems, taught a craft class using leftover supplies from a business she used to have. That evening, her craft tables were buzzing with kids, teens, and adults talking and laughing together while making beaded crafts. At the end of the evening, she shared how much it meant to

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her to be able to offer the class. It put her on a different standing with the community.



Making Music at the Twilight School

Twilight School is a “door-opener,” bringing together a mix of people you won’t find elsewhere in the community. “It’s a safe, non-threatening way to be a part of the community,” explains Cathy LeBlanc, the program’s coordinator. “Every session I try to make sure at least one class is taught by someone who’s never participated before. Next time, they bring someone new, and we expand the circle.” It’s an easy way for some to test the waters and for newcomers to get to know people. Two people who had lived down the street from each other for five years didn’t realize how much they had in common until they sat next to each other at an art class. Now they’re inseparable.

Twilight School works because it’s simple. You need several people committed to organizing the classes and a small amount of money for craft supplies, refreshment ingredients, and maybe a few stipends for key staff. Organizers have learned through experience that folks don’t like the evening to get too academic or serious. Self-help classes and formal talks just don’t go over as well as getting kids, parents, and seniors gathered around the table to learn how to decorate cakes, apply makeup, or make jewelry. Classes aimed at job development though, are always

popular. Now, other communities are developing their own versions of Twilight School — it's easy to tailor it to the personality of each community.



The Twilight School Custodian Teaches Cake Decorating to Camptonville Residents

The Neighborhood Network

Although there has never been a shortage of people willing to share their gifts and talents, finding them was a challenge at first. While word of mouth always works well in small communities, the new *Neighborhood Network* made people's unique talents easier to find. The Camptonville Collaborative distributed a "capacity inventory" that listed an array of skills and talents people might have. Like a newcomer to the community, it took a while for people to understand what *The Network* had to offer. Some folks were reluctant to volunteer, fearing they would be asked to commit to more than they were comfortable with. Some who requested help were actually willing to pay for the services; they just wanted to use someone from within the community rather than rely on people from out of town.

Pam Wilcox, the Network's Coordinator, then expanded the capacity inventory so people could indicate whether they would volunteer, barter, or be paid for each skill or service. Now the Network also serves as a local economic development tool, linking requests for home repair, childcare, and housecleaning with people

looking for odd jobs. Other groups in the community are beginning to discover ways to use *The Neighborhood Network*. The school now has access to a list of volunteer “grandparents” who are willing to read to students, the Outreach Project can quickly find individuals who will contribute money or transportation to a family in need, and Twilight School has a treasure chest of ideas for class topics and teachers.

Economic Development — Action Teams

“There’s not enough jobs here,” is a common lament among rural folks. But when there’s no city council, municipal government, or local elected officials, how do you address the problem? Citizens of Camptonville have found a way to work together to get things done without a formal government structure, using informal Town Hall Meetings and Action Teams to develop business plans and make community improvements. With the Collaborative’s leadership, people gather at the biannual Town Hall meeting to create a community vision. Over the next few years, they work together on this informal plan in community Action Teams, which focus on recreation, health, economic development, communication, young children and seniors. Periodically, all the Action Teams meet to share progress and give each other feedback. In this way, everyone can have a voice.



A Local Dad Shares Soapstone Carving Techniques with Young People

Action Teams serve as informal support networks to help people incubate ideas and plans. Say you have an idea for a project or a business that might make money. You feel it has a better chance with community support, so you present your idea to the group. When you leave, you might have suggestions and offers of help from other residents. Several local entrepreneurs have offered Twilight School classes to try out new ideas or promote their new business. The owner of a new home-based venture gave a class on organizing your home, a teacher of an Eastern relaxation and meditation technique gave free classes, while alternative energy businesses taught how to retrofit homes for solar energy.

With the support of Action Teams, citizens have created the *Camptonville Courier* — a volunteer-run monthly community newspaper, a small health clinic, local Emergency Medical Technician training, youth recreation programs, music performances, and community-building events. Small one-year planning grants from the United States Forest Service added start-up energy to several regional economic development projects, including a comprehensive economic development plan.



Included in the plan is The Camptonville Family Gardens Organic Produce Stand, where gardeners can sell their backyard fruits, vegetables, and flowers on Saturday mornings; a Camptonville Historical and Natural Resources Museum, which will be a collaborative effort between the school and the U.S. Forest Service, and the town's new Web site, www.camptonville.com, which unites all the community's enterprises and projects together. No one wants to create a bureaucracy — they just want to get things done.

Ask anyone in Camptonville and they'll probably tell you they know a lot more people than they used to — people they may have overlooked in the past. Now they're working side-by-side and looking out for each other in ways they wouldn't have imagined five years ago. Sure, social problems still exist, but people feel better about their community. They've learned that they can make things happen.

For Cathy LeBlanc, being asked to contribute was a turning point in her tumultuous life. In 1997, when Camptonville was a finalist at the All-America Cities and Communities Awards, Cathy was one of ten representatives from Camptonville.

At the Awards Ceremony, Cathy LeBlanc told the judges and audience what it meant to be part of a community that believed in people's gifts:



As John McKnight stated when he came to visit us at Camptonville, 'We make the path by walking it.' That's what we're doing in Camptonville. We're waking up to the fact that everyone has something to offer. I became a widow five days after my twins' first birthday, and I credit Camptonville in its quiet way with my family's healthy survival. I'm not the kind of person who wants to be taken care of, so healing for me has come through giving back to my community. The Collaborative has brought our community together and it has given people like me a way to make my community a better place to live. We've done all this by accepting people as they are and not asking for any more than they're willing to offer. But when they're ready, we make room for them. We are transforming our community into a place where dreams really do come true.

Rural Ethnic Diversity



Phyllis Haugrud's great, great, grandfather homesteaded the land when he came over from Europe in the 1800s. Her grandparents built the main wood-trimmed farmhouse in the 1920s. Now it's Prairie View Estates, a lovely bed and breakfast run by Phyllis and her husband Lyle. From the front you can see across the hay fields, to where the hills are fringed with a lacy light green haze, showing that the woods are beginning to bloom. Out back, the big, old, hip-roofed barn still stands. Brush has grown out along the sides, but two burnished metal ventilator stacks are still spinning on top. On the front of the roof, an immature bald eagle perches, like the figurehead on the prow of a boat. Suddenly, the eagle drops about 10 feet, then spreads its enormous wings and flies away.

Rural communities aren't just changing economically. They're also becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Now, in some rural places where once nearly everyone was white and of Protestant European extraction, significant numbers of new immigrants have established homes. The pattern is spotty — one town might have a 25% immigrant population, while the next town over has less than 1% — and the in-migration is usually associated with the location of a meat packing plant or produce processing operation. Most of the rural immigrants are from Mexico and Central America, though there have also been large waves of travelers from the Sudan, Southeast Asia, Bosnia, and other politically charged parts of the world.

Can diversity be an asset to a rural community? When Phyllis's great, great, grandfather moved to west central Minnesota, white European Protestants were a minority in a diverse community of indigenous peoples. Now, rural places are experiencing diversity all over again. The town of Pelican Rapids, Minnesota, is on its way to finding out how this diversity can be an asset.

Pelican Rapids is a town of about 1,800, located at the intersection of three ecological zones: the Tall Grass Prairie, to the south and west; the Hardwood Forests, to the east and north; and the Pine Woods, to the north. But the most distinctive natural asset is in the form of water. In Minnesota, "Land of 10,000

Lakes," Otter Tail County alone has over 1,000 lakes. Former Mayor Jim McDonald says that from an airplane, the area looks less like land holding lakes of water, and more like water connected by strings of land.



Pelican Rapids is the home of West Central Turkeys, a thriving business employing over 700 people. The jobs start at about \$7.50/hour, with good benefits. But the work is difficult and apparently unappealing to many of the sons and daughters of the Scandinavian-American men and women who used to fill the jobs. At the same time, meat-processing companies are always looking to cut costs and increase productivity, and they may find it more profitable to recruit workers willing to take the work than to further improve wages or conditions.

For a long time, a relatively small number of Spanish-speaking immigrants have worked at the plant and lived in Pelican Rapids. Often, these residents migrated according to the seasons, working in Pelican until after the Thanksgiving turkey rush, and working in Mexico or other warmer places in the winter. But that has changed now as the plant has added more processing capabilities and more year-round work. The Spanish-speaking population has grown, many have lived here for years, and they are no longer the new people on the block. In 1995, a couple of staff from the plant sponsored two Bosnian refugee families, and soon after, the town experienced what felt like a "mini-boom" of Bosnian immigrants. Sudanese, Laotians, Vietnamese, and other immigrants have increased the diversity, to the point where the Pelican school has counted 27 languages spoken by children in the school. All told, ethnic immigrants make up over 25% of the town's population.

Widening the Circle

Sometimes leadership is thrust upon you. Certainly, most of the community leaders in Pelican Rapids didn't plan on becoming pioneers of ethnic diversification. Consider someone like Maria, who was born in Mexico and met her husband Joe in California. Maria and Joe came to Minnesota because Joe is originally from here. But Maria became an informal community liaison and a spokesperson because she can translate Spanish and English and she understands cultural differences.

Ingrid also came with her husband, a native, to live in Pelican Rapids. She became involved in the Pelican Rapids Multicultural Committee because she herself had immigrated from another country and wanted to return the favor of the residents who had welcomed her kindly. Susan and George are public officials, and the demands of serving a changing and diverse constituency are part of the job every day. Susan remembers trying to reach Spanish-speaking parents and children by

using hand gestures, while George remembers trying to communicate on the phone late at night with local natives struggling with changes in the community.

Or consider someone like Bill, who gets a view of the health of the community from his position as a local pharmacist. His eyes were opened when a Bosnian family came to the pharmacy looking for something to help their 10-year old girl get some sleep at night. Bill found out the girl was having nightmares about the abuse she had suffered at the hands of soldiers in her home country.

Leadership can be lonely. In a rural community, leadership on ethnic diversity can feel particularly lonely. Immigration is often concentrated in a single community, so there's little peer support or appreciation from other nearby communities. The leaders of towns like Pelican Rapids don't hear much about the experiences of their counterparts in other diversifying rural areas across the country. They feel local pressure. Sometimes they are praised, and sometimes they feel impossibly glorified. Sometimes they get hate mail. But always, they feel out in front.

This is one of the benefits of a leadership development effort like the Blandin Community Leadership Program. Over 3,000 alumni of the program communicate with each other by Internet connection, by organized follow-up events and by occasional informal meetings. Within local communities, groups of alumni often decide to continue to meet and work on projects after their training. Though it has been several years since the Pelican Rapids group went through the program, they continue to gather, and diversification has been a major focus of their plans and actions. They try to use the skills they learned in training — like how to really listen, and how to build on assets.

How does a rural community widen the circle to use diversity as an asset? The Pelican Rapids leaders don't think they have all the answers, but they do have some lessons to share with other rural leaders:

- ❑ **Broaden immigrant leadership.** An immigrant leader can help bridge the gap between cultures, and that's great. But soon, people on both sides may find it easier to communicate through this one liaison than to build bridges of their own. That leader can become a token of diversification in cases where deeper relationships should be built. It's better to identify and support many leaders who can work in a variety of areas and express a variety of perspectives.
- ❑ **Use a variety of appeals to local natives.** By itself, diversification may not sell to the average local resident. But focusing on the assets of immigrants can help "locals" to realize their own stake in successful diversification.
- ❑ **The immigrant story.** We were all immigrants once. The stories of today's immigrants often parallel the stories of this generation's ancestors. The way we treat immigrants today will prove whether we are truly a free society.

- ❑ **Personal strengths.** Many immigrants overcome hardships to get to a place that the rest of us take for granted. Courage and determination are inspiring.
- ❑ **Family and community bonds.** Our children go to school together. We support the local sports teams. We share the library, parks, and other public spaces and institutions. We care about the same things, our homes, our families, our community. We can help each other. We depend on each other.
- ❑ **Economic strengths.** Sometimes, immigrants are portrayed as “taking the jobs of locals.” More clearly, immigrants are recruited to take the jobs that locals can’t or won’t fill. Without the immigrants, local businesses would close and the whole local economy would suffer.
- ❑ **Cultural strengths.** One criticism of rural areas is the sameness of local culture which eventually bores and turns away some people. Diversity introduces excitement and interest in the community — new languages, new foods, new customs, new fashions. At the very least, cultural exchange helps residents gain skills necessary to personal success in the emerging global economy. For the best developing communities, cultural assets can be translated into economic assets, in the form of restaurants, festivals, language services, etc.
- ❑ **Play your role and build relationships.** Yes, the stories of immigrants can communicate new perspectives and, yes, getting to know “the other” can melt some of the divisions of ignorance. But when it comes down to it, the success of community diversity is going to depend on the talk that happens within circles of friends and family. It’s not just public leadership that counts, or the flashy community project. It’s what people say to each other in private, “on the grapevine,” at family gatherings, and in the workplace. After all, it’s not up to the immigrants to change the minds of the locals who will most likely take their direction from the people they’ve known and grown up with. Speaking up in private, setting the right tone for discussions, sharing stories and successes, introducing friends, and widening your own circles — that’s how people always build relationships, and that’s how community is built.

Development Initiatives

The genius of Pelican Rapids is the staging of development. They’ve taken on some big issues, but in a careful, methodical way. Everything is done in steps, one accomplishment builds on another, and together the successes have laid the foundation for something extraordinary.

- ❑ **“Befrienders.”** When an immigrant family moves to town, volunteers organized by the Multicultural Committee befriend the family, help them settle in, introduce them to others, and just socialize with them. Groups of these friends get together for potluck suppers with international themes.
- ❑ **The Library as an Asset for Diversity.** The Friends of the Library and the

Multicultural Committee have sponsored workshops, speakers, and discussions on racial and cultural themes. They worked with local ministers on a program called "Confronting Our Racism," which combined a library exhibit, a workshop, and sermons at area churches. They have also sponsored art exhibits, theatre, and musical performances related to immigration and international cultures.



The International Friendship Festival in Pelican Rapids

- ❑ **International Friendship Festival.** The Blandin Alumni sponsored the World's Longest Coffee Break as a way to honor and recognize community volunteers. The next year the Multicultural Committee co-sponsored the event, and it became the International Coffee Break. From there it grew to become the International Friendship Festival, a major tourist event, with food and craft booths from many of the nations represented in the town. The event works as a leadership development vehicle for immigrant groups who organize and operate their own booths.

- ❑ **Journeys to Pelican.** The Friends of the Library and the Multicultural Committee sponsored a series of talks by immigrants about their immigration stories — both recent and long-ago. The stories draw the parallels between the journeys of today's immigrants with the historical journeys of European

immigrants. The public-speaking opportunities have also served as a development step for new immigrant leaders.

Taken together, these efforts seem to have set the stage for extraordinary, culture-based economic development in Pelican Rapids. Often there's a big gap between the economic development agenda in a community and its social development agenda. But here the economic development corporation is hoping to develop a new financing initiative for downtown retail development — just what would be needed to support a Mexican restaurant or Bosnian bakery. The Friendship Festival has both demonstrated the economic viability of a culture-based strategy and prepared local immigrants for entrepreneurship in this context. And with all the bridge-building and circle-widening going on in this small town, the people of Pelican Rapids seem ready to develop community using diversity as their asset — by voting with their dollars.



Local Youngsters Completing the Circle on Hug the School Day in Pelican Rapids



The Pelican Rapids Elementary School is having its Hug the School Day as part of American Education Week. All the children are let out of class and they form a circle around the school, holding hands. Ricardo watches his daughter Olga as she leads one end of the line around the school. From the other direction, James leads his end of the line toward Olga's. The two ends of the lines approach each other on the east side of the school by the gym entrance. Olga and James each pull their lines a little closer, and reach out to grasp hands and complete the circle.

We Are Family



It's a warm and sunny spring day in the Mississippi Delta country. The red black dirt of the field beyond the fence has been tilled into neat rows, ready for planting cotton. Inside the play area, 19 three-and-four-year-olds climb around two playground structures — the first is modern and colorful; the second, all weathered wood, looks like it's been around some time. Under a big shade tree, Earlie Jackson and Teola Wilson sit and watch the children. They participate in the program called "Foster Grandparents," volunteering to work with children in the community. LaQuisha, the twin with the blue sweatshirt, comes over and props her foot up on the bench. Smiling, Ms. Jackson bends down and shows LaQuisha how to tie her shoe.

Rural folks often talk about family in an extended way. We'll say we look out for each other's children as if they were our own. What happens when this idea of family is itself the primary asset we develop in our community?

The Boys, Girls, and Adults Community Development Center (BGACDC) started when Marvell parents organized an after-school program more than 20 years ago. Today, BGACDC is one of the largest and most successful CDCs in the Delta region, with a \$1.2 million annual budget, 65 units of housing, a restaurant and catering enterprise, and a whole slate of innovative youth programs serving hundreds of children every year. But, through all this growth, BGACDC is still parent led, still focused on youth, and still building community by strengthening families. In fact, the best description folks at the Center give for their operation is "a big Family." And that Family is Marvell's secret for unlocking the assets of a poor rural community. In the process, Marvell has created wonderful and unexpected economic opportunities for its people.



Probably every rural community worries about its young people. We worry that there's "not much to do around here," for young people, so we predict that young people may be drawn into drugs, violence, and trouble. Even if we can keep our children out of trouble, we worry that when they grow up, they won't want to stay around here. There are no good jobs, we say, and no culture or social life to attract their interest. And it is true that in many places, rural population is shrinking and aging as young people move away.

Nowhere are the concerns about youth more important than in Marvell, Arkansas. Marvell is a town of about 1,500 with deep Southern roots. Located on the border with Mississippi in the Delta region, the area has suffered the familiar decline of small farming economies. Average family income is well below the national average. There are no large manufacturers in town, just a few warehouses and packaging plants for cotton. Downtown, beautiful old buildings surround a lovely plaza and park, but there are more storefront vacancies than the Chamber of Commerce would like to see.



Local Leaders and a Friend at the Boys, Girls, and Adults Community Development Center

Marvell is about half white, half African-American — it's been drawn like that for decades. But the public schools are about 85% black. When the courts ordered integration of the public schools, whites started a private school, Marvell Academy. And visiting the town, you can still see the divisions between the races. The train tracks running through the center of town have been converted to a bike path, and

it is used by both whites and African-Americans. But the former tracks still divide the wealthier, mostly white areas from the poorer African-American areas — you can still come from the “other side of the tracks” in Marvell.

Years ago the African-American leaders of the BGACDC faced a decision. Many people felt they had grown strong enough to challenge the divisions in town if they chose. They could have fought to open up the private school, to integrate the residential areas and the swimming pool, and to try to diversify the local society. But they decided instead to focus on the young people of their community, to build their capacities to succeed, and to lead. The results aren’t just a set of programs. It’s even more than the success stories of individual young people who have grown up in Marvell. BGACDC has made the links between the generations a framework for community development. They’ve reknit their community after the values and structure of a rural family. In a sense, they’ve made their town a family.

Development Initiatives

From a modest after-school program, BGACDC’s growth shows how program success can build on itself, no matter how small the town. Every program strengthens children and families, and together they illustrate how rural communities can apply a variety of creative funding and volunteer strategies.

- ❑ **Family Day Care Homes.** In rural areas, not all children have access to Head Start or center-based child care. But home-based care providers often find it hard to provide quality care at the prices they are paid. BGACDC patched together state funding resources to create Family Day Care Homes, which extend its in-center care to the broader community. With a toy lending library, health and safety training, and meal reimbursements, home-based providers get many of the same early childhood development resources that the child care centers get. This also helps them to apply for state child care subsidies, and they are part of a network that provides access to peer support.
- ❑ **Home Instruction Program for Pre-school Youngsters (HIPPY)** uses a different funding strategy for a similar purpose. A national association trains local leaders and provides early childhood development resources for mothers and fathers at home. BGACDC uses the national affiliation to help raise money locally for the program.
- ❑ **Save the Children Federation.** This national charity enables donors to symbolically “sponsor” a child. BGACDC provides profiles and photos of a child, which helps a donor to connect with the child and to tailor their giving. BGACDC administers Fun Fund events for all sponsored children.
- ❑ **Youth Leadership Development Training.** BGACDC enrolls Marvell youth in every out-of-town leadership, management, and organizing training it can. Locally, BGACDC manages a wide range of leadership and personal responsibility groups with names like Dealing with Adolescent Development (DAD), Mother Too!, Parenting Leadership Project, and Girls are Girls.

- ❑ **Foster Grandparents.** Seniors volunteer to work with young children. Seniors receive non-taxable stipends, paid in part by America Reads! to support reading education, and by Save the Children.
- ❑ **The Best Food in Town Restaurant** is a community-based business enterprise. Like many rural organizations, BGACDC wanted to provide meals to children in day camp or all-day care, but couldn't afford to outfit a kitchen on the limited income these programs generate. Then they realized that a kitchen is an asset, and figured out how to use it to open a restaurant and catering business that brings in some extra money.

Widening the Circle

At BGACDC, Widening the Circle is all about putting community and organizational resources toward developing youth:

Youth development as staff development. Ask Beatrice Shelby about youth development, and she'll start talking about her staff. Ask her again, and she'll talk about her staff again. Because in her mind, the development of youth in Marvell and the development of the community organization are one and the same.

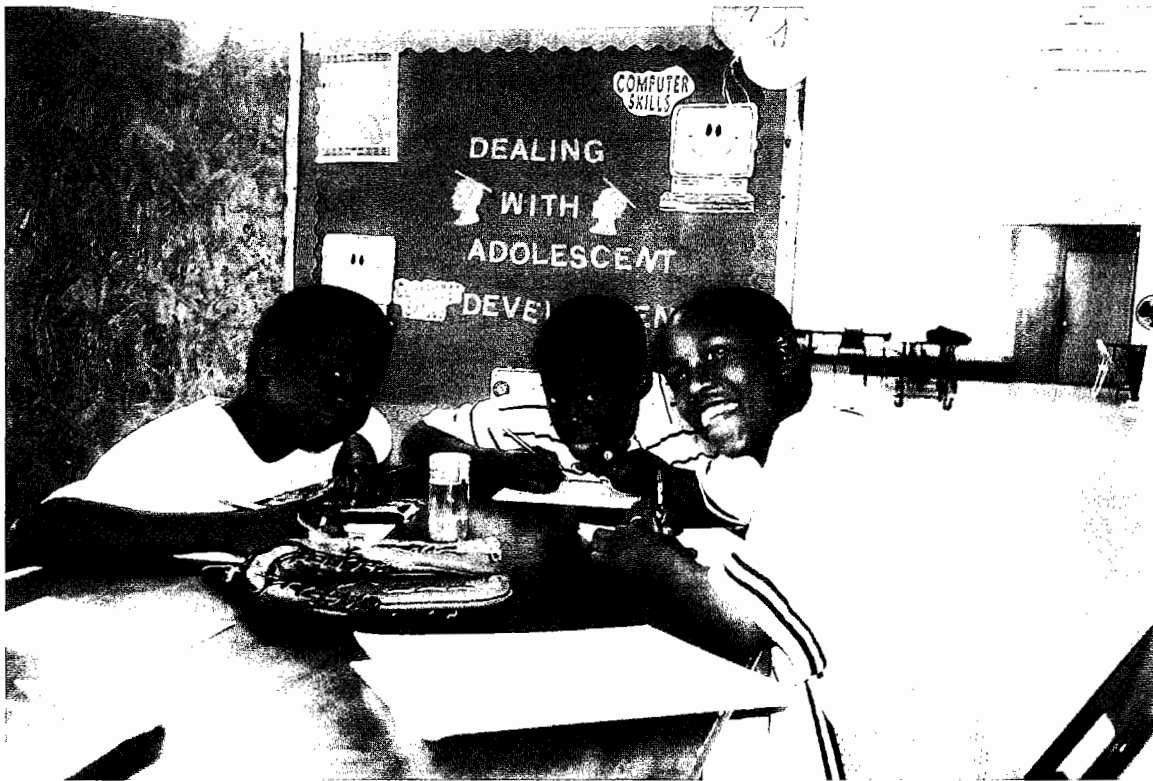


Dennetra Williams graduated as salutatorian from Marvell High in 1986. She got a scholarship to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. When her schedule prevented her from coming home on weekends, she was homesick and dropped out to come back. She got a job as a teacher at the BGACDC Day Care Center and now works as its Director.

Now she's finishing her degree from the University with Distance Learning classes that she can access from the nearby community college. Dennetra thinks about future advancement — she'd like a job with better benefits than the nonprofit can afford. But even then her dreams go to teaching kids in school. Dennetra worries about whether there is enough for young people to do in Marvell, but then she thinks they might like it better here for the security, the network, and the family. Her optimistic sense of family and community is unshakable. Talking about how she was able to get through to an autistic child at the Center, Dennetra says, "If you know how to talk to a child, how to respond, how to show love, then you certainly can have a positive impact in that child's life."

At many social service agencies, there is a distance between the staff and the clients, a distance that helps maintain the professionalism of the staff. But at BGACDC it's not unusual for a staff manager to have attended day care and after school at the Center, come to work as a VISTA volunteer, and gone on to permanent employment with the staff. This personal experience and long-term local involvement makes a difference in a small town where the community organization is one of the largest employers. And as one staff person put it, "you can't teach what you don't know."

Youth development as leadership development. In a town with about 750 African Americans, over 100 are involved at any time as leaders of BGACDC. There's the Board of Directors, and then there are organizational committees of about 10 parents and other volunteers for each of 10 program areas. Youth from every group elect representatives to the Youth Council, which makes real policy decisions. The organization is completely democratic and participatory. It must be to handle its ambitious agenda.



Adolescent Leaders at the Boys, Girls, and Adults Community Development Center

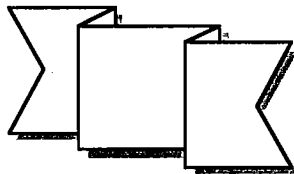
A young person in Marvell might learn democratic decision-making in an after-school group, then get elected to the Youth Council, then join an organizational committee as a parent or young adult, then get elected to the Board. It's no wonder the Recorder and Treasurer of the City Council is a BGACDC "alumnus."

Youth development as family. BGACDC was started by parents, and is still governed by parents in every aspect of its program. Now, the children of the original founders are themselves parents. They're involved in the parenting programs or committees. Their children are in the day care or after-school programs. And the grandparents are still volunteering. Whole families are involved at every age level.

Parents do indeed look out for each other's children like their own. When young people in Marvell miss their ride, another parent will pick them up. More than that, parents will work with each other's children by their committee work, or by their own participation in parent programs. This is the best sense of what people mean by rural community, extended by the community organization.

At a recent community meeting in Marvell, the oldest participant was 83. The youngest was 12. They were there for the same reason.

There's always some sense of sadness in rural communities when a young person grows up and moves out of town. Folks in Marvell have come to grips with this. The goal is not to invest in youth so they will repay the investment with their contributions in town. The goal is to invest in youth so they can succeed. When young people become young adults, they can chose to find success here if they like the sense of family. But if they make it somewhere else instead, that's still a cause for celebration. Another son or daughter of Marvell makes a mark on the world. And a little piece of towns like Marvell could only do the world some good.



There's a plaque hanging in the Big Room of the BGACDC Center, where the after-school tutoring goes on, where the Board meetings happen, and where the staff gathers to talk. The plaque is from the dedication of the Center in May of 1982, and it reads, "To all our children, for our children, who are our future."

Creativity, Clowns, and Poetry

Over 250 residents are gathered at the community college on a cold November evening, waiting to hear the reports of the committees from the foundation-supported community planning initiative — people just call it the “Blandin Process.” Severin J. Blenkush, the straight-laced ex-Air Force Major, gets up to give the report of the Assets Committee. He launches into a poem:



*Every community needs leaders, this
we agree,
Seems someone's always willing to take
the job for a fee.
But some jobs are done without fanfare
or pay,
Many volunteers doing important
things all day.
Be it in government, schools, office, or
in church,
Think of what wouldn't get done —
we'd be left in a lurch!*

When he gives this committee report, Major Blenkush is wearing a clown suit.

How do rural communities get people to work together in new ways? Sometimes we are in a rut. We imagine we've seen it all before. If there's a community meeting, we feel we know who's going to say what. How are we going to do something new? Todd County, Minnesota, is still in the middle of an ambitious community-planning process. But they've already learned some lessons to share with other communities. Like, have fun!

Todd County is about a two-hour drive northeast of the Twin Cities. Agriculture is hard, because the soil is often rocky and less fertile. It's beautiful, lush country, but some people seem to treat the area as a “passthrough” on their way to the resorts and other further locations. They say Todd County has one of the lowest average incomes in the state.

The Blandin Foundation instituted a new program called the Blandin Community Investment Partnership (BCIP). Following up in targeted communities where they had previously trained groups of community leaders, Blandin has invited each of these communities to plan a direction for their community's future. Blandin will provide facilitation, expenses, and technical resources. The BCIP method, or "Blandin Process" as Todd County residents call it, is a careful mix of asset-taking and visioning, planning and action. And there's a carrot: When the community agrees on a vision and a set of initiatives, Blandin will help fund some of the projects. The Blandin Foundation spends about \$20 million a year on rural Minnesota, so even a small piece of that is a nice carrot.

Widening the Circle

Even with the funding carrot and a cadre of trained leaders, it isn't always easy to get folks to meetings for planning. The first meeting in Todd County was a bust. It was the old story: Some people thought the meeting was going to be dominated by some other people, so they didn't go. The invitation didn't seem truly open to everyone.

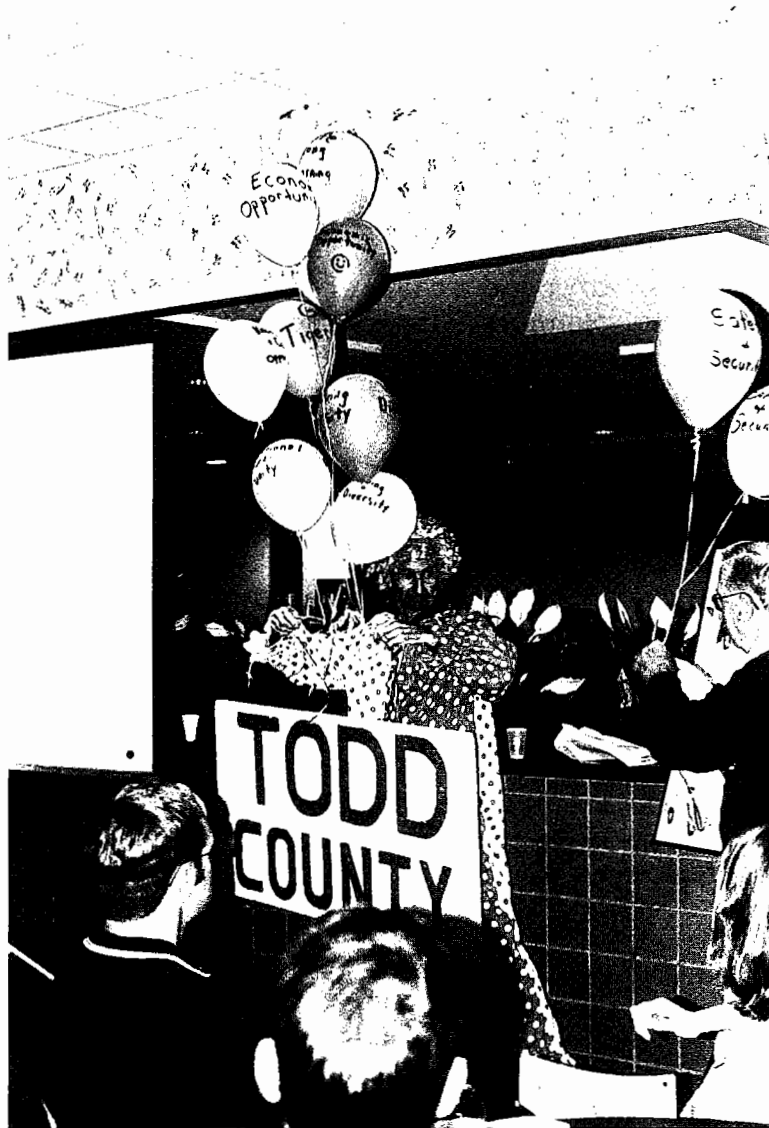
Rita and Gary Stracek worked hard to make the second meeting a success. They grew up on Todd County farms. When Gary became ill and had to quit farming, it seemed to him that the whole community rallied to his support. Fifteen thousand people attended a benefit dinner for his health care costs. Gary's back on his feet, and Rita has a job at the Farm Service Administration. But they haven't forgotten what the community did for them, so they agreed to work on the Todd County "Blandin Process" to return the favor.

Blandin directed participating communities to recruit a broad-based group for the process, and the Straceks took this seriously. They recruited residents of all races and ages, from all parts of the county. They called people they knew to form six committees to prepare for the big meeting. When the committees got going, people began to develop a sense of ownership, and to tell others what was happening.

Hermann Hendrickson, director of the Whole Farm Co-op, wasn't inclined to go to any planning meetings. He had just come off of a year-long battle over a heated real estate development issue, and had said to himself, "Never again!" But Co-op Board members had spoken with committee leaders who were talking about issues important to them, like agriculture and environmental stewardship. They decided to show up in numbers. Hermann was glad he had come. "My attitude going in was something like, 'let someone else do it,' or 'we don't need anything.' But when they did those poems and skits to dramatize the picture of the community, we were laughing out loud, and I knew this was going to be different. They showed everyone that this process wasn't just about some possible future benefit for someone. It was to have an effect on *you*, and *now*."

Attendees at this second meeting were assigned to specific workgroups, and not necessarily the ones they would have naturally chosen. Hermann thought, "What

am I doing in this group?" But he found that he was actually able to contribute more to a discussion on a topic where he didn't consider himself an expert.



The Assets Committee Report Presentation in Todd County

The Blandin Process includes the basic rule for brainstorming: "No idea is a bad idea." That way, everyone feels his or her opinion is respected. The discussions were chaired so everyone got a turn, and no one person dominated. Greg Nolan, a sustainable forester (the local tree expert), appreciated an even more basic

provision: “They served food, and I appreciated that. That showed that they respected everyone’s time and effort.”

Development Initiatives

To break out of old habits, Todd County’s process has been both creative and participatory. Do you know the fable about the six blind men who try to describe an elephant? One says it’s like a snake, one says a tree trunk, another a wall, and so on. Blandin’s Community Investment Partnership process is like that. Assets are important to the Blandin Process. One committee lists community assets, and uses materials by John McKnight and John Kretzmann from the ABCD Institute. This list surprises people by its length; in one community the list was nine pages long and took 45 minutes to cover the “highlights.”

There are four other committees looking at the elephant from other perspectives. One committee looks at the Current Status of the community, while another looks at Future Trends. One committee looks at Needs, and the last looks at community Perceptions. In Todd County, the Perceptions committee gave their report in the form of a skit, punctuated at every point by one older participant, who repeated, “The longer you live here, the better you like it” — in a dry, Minnesota manner that had everyone in stitches.

From these diverse perspectives, all the participants compare their dream for the community with where they are now, and brainstorm possible issues for action. Then participants get to “vote” on community priorities with their time and their money. Each person gets an equal number of play dollars (representing how much public and private money they think should go to a project), and “time cards” (representing how much time and effort they would personally put to that effort.) Participants tape these dollars and time cards to the butcher block paper sheets on the walls, naming each of the possibilities. When everyone is done, there is a clear visual picture of where the community wants to put its time and money. Usually the results are obvious and striking.

Then participants sign up for committees to work on these issues, and get to work. To make sure there are quick successes, Blandin makes small “Quick Start” grants available for pilot projects or smaller initiatives that move in the direction of the plan. With these successes, participants are motivated to stick with their committees and keep pushing for the longer-term victories.

Todd County gives a good example of how this creative and participatory process can lead to creative and diverse development actions.

- ❑ **State Park development.** When you are organized and active, sometimes new doors open up to you. The Recreation and Culture committee wanted to expand visitor opportunities in the area — so Todd County will be a stopping place, and not just a passthrough. But they never dreamed they’d get an opportunity to develop a new State Park. Yet when members of the Todd County recreation committee contacted State Park officials, they agreed to

visit the county. Officials told leaders that since Todd County is about the only county in the state without one, they would be interested in receiving a proposal. And there's beautiful land available down by the Long Prairie River, which is a good river for canoeing. This development will follow its own timeline and track, but it might not have gotten off the ground if the group hadn't been organized around community development in the first place. Opportunities like this may come along, "when the stars line up," but you have to be organized to take advantage of them.

- ❑ **Youth and Adults Dance Place.** Young people participated strongly in the process, and one of the things they said was "there's no place for us to dance in this county." Some adults also said they could use a new dance place. Not only that, some expert adult dancers said they'd be willing to teach dance lessons. So the young people and the adults went together to check out different places that might work, and they even auditioned bands together. For a quick start, they held a dance weekend at a local hall, with dance lessons for everyone, an over-21 dance on Friday, and an alcohol-free dance on Saturday with the same band. They proved to themselves that young people and adults can work together even on recreation, and came up with a creative solution that fit everyone.
- ❑ **Urban/rural food marketing and in-county dairy processor.** Whole Farm Co-op is a network of about 30 local farmers and producers of meats, vegetables, milk, cheese, eggs, honey, and other foods. They sell their products to a network of about 750 customers in the Twin Cities, recruited through churches, universities, and other farm-friendly institutions. They try to "re-establish the age-old connection between producers and customers," by labeling products with the name of the producer, by providing customers with profiles of the farm families, by hosting annual "Customer Appreciation" gatherings in the area, and by offering a standing invitation for any customer to come visit any of the producers. There are plenty of local milk producers in the Co-op, but they've had to send the milk outside the county for processing as cheese. Now they want to build on this asset by developing a local dairy processing operation that will allow for "producer-identified" cheese and dairy products. The Blandin Process agriculture committee has provided just the right vehicle for developing this idea.



Todd County residents have big plans now, and they've got momentum. Time will tell whether residents will continue to follow through with their ideas, keep their

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energies high and build on their success. But by involving a lot of people in a fun and rewarding process, the community has already broken out of any rut they might have been in. Their new thinking has led to new directions.



*"I've named some of our assets, of
these we praise,*

*If we use them wisely, Todd
County will raise!"*

*And the clown lets go of the
balloons.*

Transformation and Power



The public meeting becomes a debate over whether Spanish-language translators should be provided to defendants in the local court system. "Last week we had a defendant who was Mandarin Chinese," says one lawyer. "Do we have to provide a translator for every language in the world?" Diana Bustamante gets a chance to speak. Diana has seen first-hand the courage of Mexican nationals and immigrants who are working in the local pecan farms and onion fields. She knows about the brutality of some border patrol officers who hunt down legal citizens in their homes on the colonias. She wants the judges and lawyers and mostly Anglo-American community leaders present to ask themselves how they would feel if they were subject of a legal proceeding and could not understand a word of what was being said. She argues for the expansion of translation services. She talks about the impact on the community, when so many residents are excluded from public discussion and democratic process. She sits down, and there's a stunned silence in the room. Diana has given her speech entirely in Spanish.

If community organizing and asset-based community development can work for the residents of the colonias of New Mexico, they can work for any rural community. Colonias are unincorporated settlements along the border with Mexico. Thousands of people live in over 37 colonias in the area around Las Cruces, but many of these communities have never had running water, sanitary sewer systems, or other basic infrastructure systems.

Most of the residents of the colonias are U.S. citizens and legal residents who have lived in the community for years. Some are Mexican nationals, but despite local stereotypes, only a very few are undocumented immigrants. Most colonias residents have invested in their own homes. Some of the homes are nicely

decorated trailers, others are crude shacks. But the residents have invested effort and money in these homes because they plan to stay and build community here.

What the colonias residents share in common are poverty and obstacles to economic advancement, racial discrimination and exploitation, scarce housing, inaccessible roads, and the lack of sanitary water and sewer services. On top of this, they face legalistic constraints against their own self-development. Property development in the colonias is illegal without proper infrastructure installations and land subdivisions, but private developers have taken advantage of residents desperate for housing to sell them under-developed places anyway. The school bus won't stop on the rutted dirt roads to pick up their children. The local produce companies want their hard work in the fields at low wages, but do little to provide workers with the basic living conditions most Americans take for granted.



Colonias Residents Working in the Fields

How can a community so oppressed and disadvantaged focus on its assets, on John McKnight's "half-full glass?" "We have to," says Antonio Lujan, Colonias Development Council founder and Director of the Office of Catholic Social Ministry for the Las Cruces Diocese. "We have no choice but to build on the power of the people, the power to transform the mind."

On the surface, looking at assets instead of deficiencies is a variation on positive thinking. Years ago we might have compared it to Positive Mental Attitude. These days people might use the term, “positivity.” But the lesson of the colonias is that ABCD is more than just positivity. It’s positivity with a *purpose*.

Development Initiatives

Colonias Development Council is a democratic, grassroots community organization. The Board of Directors consists of representatives of each of the active colonias in Dona Ana county — currently there are 11. Board members talk with their neighbors to bring input from, and report back to, organized constituencies. CDC staff are classic community organizers, trained by the Industrial Areas Foundation — the group Saul Alinsky formed — and dedicated to the teachings of Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Organizers work with focus groups in each colonia to bring out community concerns, to identify opportunities for action, and most of all, to surface and support the leadership skills of residents. Much of CDC’s time and effort is put into leadership development training and support.

CDC doesn’t “do” development itself. It organizes the constituency and helps them set their priorities for development projects. CDC then partners with a like-minded nonprofit development corporation to get the community’s project done.

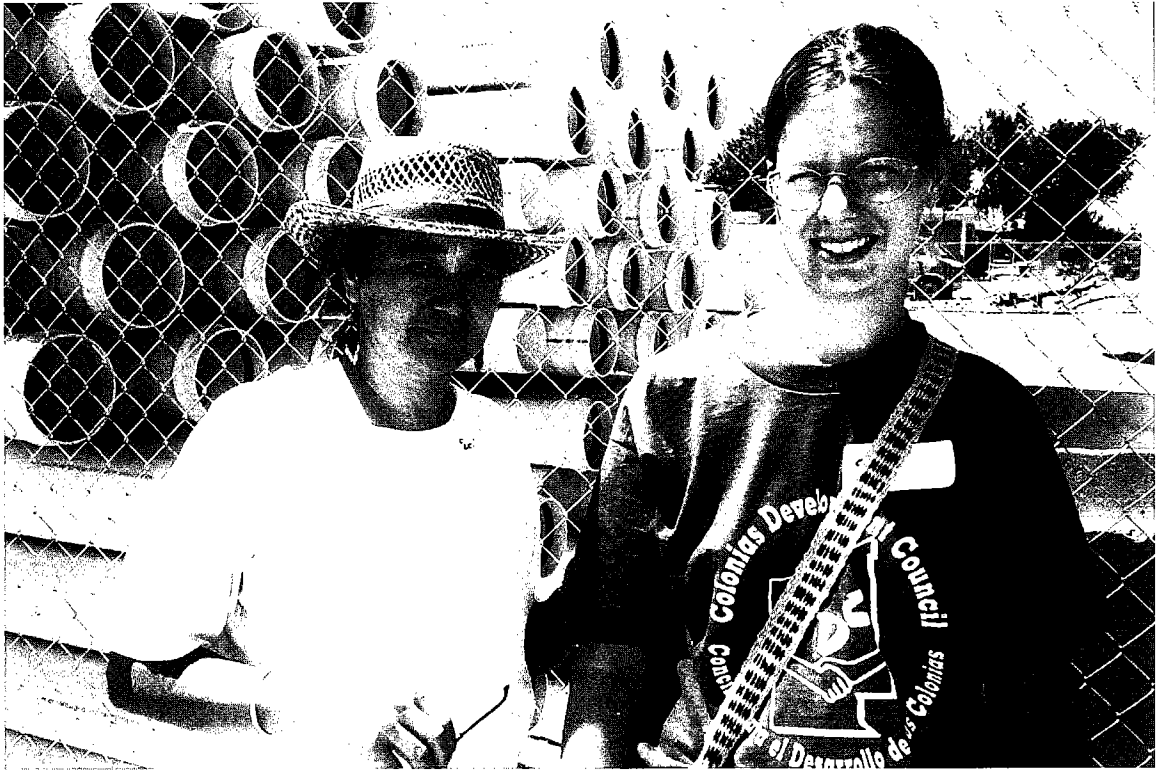
Water development. Many people have heard of a housing development corporation, or an economic development corporation. But a water development corporation? Turns out that’s just what the doctor ordered for the colonias.

Charlie Clements was once President of Doctors Without Borders, the Nobel Prize-winning international health organization. He’s also been active with the fight to ban land mines, so he’s actually got a part of two Peace Prizes. Lately Clements has been working in the dry country of the Southwest, where water access is a major economic issue, and where poor communities usually have to fight for what they deserve.

In El Milagro colonia, for example, town officials told residents that they could not afford to build the necessary infrastructure for the colonia. The colonia was “not dense enough,” they said. The town would bring service to the entrance of the colonia, but no further. If the Milagro colonia wanted regular water and sewer service, they would have to come up with \$1.4 million needed to finish the job.

But the CDC saw another way to use the assets of the colonia to solve the problem. CDC brought in Charlie Clements and his Border WaterWorks, Inc. Development Corporation. Clements asked colonia residents how much they could afford to pay for water and sewer services. Residents said maybe \$15/month, which worked out to cover a \$125,000 project. Clements said, “we can do it with you for that amount.” Border WaterWorks brought its access to appropriate technologies, materials, and construction people. Instead of laying the lines for the colonia, they worked with colonia residents, teaching them to operate the backhoes and make

the proper connections so they could do much of the work on their own infrastructure — “sweat equity” they call it. Now there are little blue water access covers in the dust along the streets. And residents have learned another marketable job skill.



Local Leaders of the Colonias Development Council

In the Salem colonia, on the other hand, residents organized by doing research into their own assets and using these assets as leverage for public funds. They tested the quality of local well water and showed that it was unsafe. They looked into federal funding programs, and found that several programs provide special funding priority for districts that contain a colonia. They checked the legal requirements and found that the population of Salem was large enough to create its own separate water/sewer district.

Then about 25 colonia residents met with town officials. The officials saw that the residents had the power to break off and get federal funding for their own infrastructure improvements. The town stood to lose its access to those funds. So town officials negotiated with colonias residents and agreed to plan and develop new water and sewer infrastructure for the Salem colonia.

These examples show that community organizing for power needn't always be confrontational although that may be necessary at time. Colonias residents have

organized to use their assets — their population numbers, their funding leverage, their own financial resources, and their access to alternative technologies — to gain control over their own futures.

Housing and Economic Development



It's a warm, dry Saturday morning, but the wind is not so bad today, so the dusty grounds of Las Palmeras are mostly still. Tierra Del Sol, an experienced, nonprofit community-based housing development corporation in the Southwest, has asked CDC for cooperation in this colonia to do a survey of resident housing assets in preparation for a HUD-funded rehab and construction project.

CDC has agreed, with the idea that they will take the same opportunity to survey the skills and talents of the residents to inform resident organizing on economic development and jobs. Staffers from Tierra del Sol are here, along with a graduate student volunteer and the CDC Economic Development Coordinator. The language and questions used in the surveys have been checked, and they've got a map of the lots. CDC organizers have worked with residents on this, and the Executive Director is here to gather the survey group and to make sure that her constituents know it's okay, the people knocking on their doors are with the community.

Widening the Circle

The colonias water and sewer projects made the seemingly impossible development happen by using a combination of colonias political power on the one hand, and self-development using the skills and monies of the colonia residents on the other. To accomplish this, the colonia residents had to believe that they had power and assets, and then use them in a creative way.

Antonio Lujan says the key to liberation is creating communities of critical thinkers. Lujan and now-Needmor Fund staffer Frank Sanchez invited John Kretzmann to Las Cruces several years ago to work with CDC and other area community organizations. He says people still remember the stories Kretzmann told about ABCD and “untapped human potential.” “It wasn’t that these ideas were completely new to the colonias,” Lujan says, “it was just great to receive an affirmation of what we were doing, and why.”

The transformation of the mind is apparent around the CDC staff and leadership. Ruben Nuñez was a carpenter in Mexico who moved to a colonia to make a better living working in the fields. Now he’s a community organizer, and the other staff say “he’s a genius at turning negatives into positives.” Meggan Snedden came to the area to earn a graduate degree and ended up sacrificing other career opportunities to dedicate herself to this community development. She works with the organizers and the residents to facilitate an asset-based approach to economic development in the colonias. Executive Director Diana Bustamante worked as a university professor but felt drawn to help organize in her community. She shifted positions to direct the county Maternal/Child Health Council and then moved on to run CDC. She says this is her life work, and “one way or another, I’ll always be involved with some kind of organizing.”

Lujan is realistic, not idealistic, about the process of transformation. He warns other rural community organizations: “Don’t romanticize the poor.” They aren’t “noble savages.” “There may be an inequitable distribution of resources,” Lujan says, “but there’s an equitable distribution of personalities. Our commitment to contribute is because they are poor, not because they are saints. You have to see beyond any immediate obstacles to the long-term common good. Meet people where they are, not where you want them to be.”

Bustamante says, “Look for power where you can find it. We may have a relatively small number of voters, but around here, over half the political elections are won or lost by less than 100 votes. So a few votes can make the difference, and we can have electoral power on the margin.” Bustamante also points to the strength and leadership of the Catholic church as a source of power. “Eighty percent of the residents here are Catholic, so when the Church points to the social mission, that reaches a lot of people.”



Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may prove what is the will of God — what is good, and acceptable, and perfect.

Romans 12:2

SECTION III — HOW TO USE ABCD IN YOUR RURAL COMMUNITY

Now you've heard about what some other rural communities have done. How do you use asset-based community development in your own rural community? This section is meant to help you answer that question. And the answer is as simple as **Assets plus Community equals Development. A + C = D.**

It's simple, but that doesn't mean it's quick and easy. If you've worked in a rural community long enough, you know that change doesn't just happen. It takes strategy, patience, and hard work. But doesn't everything?

It's simple, but that doesn't mean anybody can tell you just what to do either. Your community is special. You have your own set of assets, your own relationships, your own history, and your own future. There's no one route that will work for every community. You're not alone — there are rural communities all over that are making change happen. But you have to find the way that works for your community.

Starting Points/Turning Points

Connecting the Dots

You may already be doing asset-based community development. Think of some positive changes that have taken place in your community. Have these changes come from building on assets in your community — the talents and skills of local people, or your associations, or your economic strengths, for example? Have these changes "widened the circle" by bridging across traditional relationships to include the excluded? Then you've already seen the power of "building community from the inside out."

So, it might be right for you and your community to think about how to get started. But it could be better to think about reinvigorating existing efforts at community change. You might look for turning points, and work to link, restructure, and build on the good work that's already happening.

It's like connecting the dots. The dots are existing assets. The lines between the dots are the new relationships we're creating

Regardless of your community situation, and whether you thinking of it as starting or turning, there's a balance to strike here. Often, we want a fresh break with the past, to get out of a rut, to bridge divisions, or to imagine new possibilities. But we also want to

take advantage of the existing assets in our community, which come from the hard work and effort of community citizens.

John Allen, a colleague and ABCD specialist at the University of Nebraska, even added another category to the list of five types of assets. He calls this additional asset "Previous Efforts." Of course, previous efforts are already "contained" in the five assets — as relationships and results. But he thinks that honoring the history of community work is so important that it deserves special recognition, especially in rural communities

Think of what John McKnight says, that "development is a new relationship between two or more existing assets." It's like connecting the dots. The dots are our existing assets, including associations and relationships and people skills. The lines between dots are the new relationships we're creating. *The balance we strike is represented by the dots we choose to connect and the lines we draw between them.*



Opportunities for Change

Over the course of time, special opportunities arise in communities which allow us to "connect the dots" in ways we never did before. Sometimes our most important work is creating these opportunities. Other times we take advantage of opportunities that present themselves. Several types of change opportunities emerge from the stories of rural communities. What do these suggest about opportunities for change in your community?

Opportunities from crisis. Community organizers share an adage that every crisis presents an opportunity to act. A crisis in a community gets people's attention, and it can lead people to appreciate the unappreciated and re-value their stake in things. In Trinity County, the closing of the lumber mill ended up bringing people together to act. The Gullah community was energized by the dramatic pace of development in and around Hilton Head. In Greene County, common concern over the falling prices of livestock helped motivate a cooperative effort that bridged community divisions.

What's a crisis? Depends on the community — and that's the point. A crisis is a circumstance that people react strongly to. The reaction shows that people care about something. And it's the caring that motivates people to work together for change. The crises in your area reflect the things your neighbors care about, and that opens a door for organizing in your community.

*How can we "build
community from the
inside out" when
we're reacting to a
push from outside?*

When there's a crisis, bring new people together. Talk about how the crisis affects each person. Care for the people most directly impacted. And talk about why this crisis matters so much. *The things that are threatened by crisis must be important assets.* List them, consider them, and you're on your way toward an asset-based approach to proactive change.

Opportunities from an outside catalyst. In Todd County, the Blandin Foundation's Community Investment Partnership served as an outside catalyst to bring people together to work for change. In Camptonville, the Sierra Health Foundation played a similar role. All over the countryside, rural communities respond in new ways to challenges, competitions, and funding opportunities from government agencies, corporations, and institutions.

Partly, this is because of the carrot offered by the outsiders — the promise of funding, or investment, or at least of public recognition. But there's another dynamic at work. Outsider-sparked initiatives can carry a sense of newness. New people can come together around this particular table, because this table is new, and the seats are still open. There's an opportunity to make new connections between the dots.

There's a risk to any outside catalyst, the risk that outcomes will serve outsider interests at the expense of community interests. As the saying goes, those who pay the piper, call the shots. How can we "build community from the inside out" when we're reacting to a push from outside?

Some outside catalysts, like Blandin or Sierra, are nonprofit outfits concerned with building the capacities of their community partners. In this sense, their interests are right in line with your interests. It's not quite the same when a corporation is looking for a location for a plant or a store. And there do exist outfits that purposely exploit rural community dreams for their private benefit.

Take a hard look at any outside catalyst before putting your time and effort into a process that they describe. And regardless of the interests of the outsiders, you've got to make the process your own. *Leave aside the carrot, and ask yourself, "will our community be better off from this, even if we don't get what they promise?"* If the answer is yes, you are using an outside catalyst to build from within.

Opportunities from leadership development. One of the best ways to start or reinvigorate community change is with a conscious effort to develop community leadership. Leadership development can mean many different things (and it's becoming a more popular concept all the time!) In Marvell, it has meant local adults working with local young people. In Newton County, it has meant the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation bringing together and training groups of volunteer and staff leaders from an umbrella organization in each community. In Pelican Rapids and Todd County, it has meant the Blandin Foundation working with diverse groups of community residents.

What leadership development efforts seem to have in common is a focus on exposing people to new experiences and new thinking, with peer support. They all recognize the critical role that individuals play in community change. And they are based on a common belief that individuals can be better leaders if they approach their efforts with broader perspectives.

Leadership development certainly fits an ABCD approach. It develops a critical community asset — the talents and skills of individuals and groups — and if it involves a diverse group, it helps to “widen the circle” of participants. Folks coming out of leadership development often bring new ideas, new energy, and new tools to the community process.

In most cases, leadership development is probably not a short-term strategy. But its benefits can often be felt for years.

It is great to have access to a well-considered and supported resource like the Blandin Community Leadership Program. You should look around to see what outside leadership resources you have access to. But if you don’t find any (or even if you do), you can still promote leadership development within your community.

You can start a leadership development project in your church, or in your service organization, or in the group that has coffee at the café on Mondays. In fact, every association in your area can be a kind of leadership factory, capable of increasing the skills and broadening the perspectives of its participants. *The key is using these associations to expose people to new thinking about local assets, and always reaching out to a broader circle.*

Opportunities from storytelling. Storytelling isn’t just about reading a book to a child at bedtime. Storytelling is a way that people can share their perspectives on neutral turf. It helps cut through community divisions, by focusing on listening, rather than on deciding things. And it’s a way of knowing things about community that isn’t a professional study or an outside report. It’s neighbor-to-neighbor. And that can get the ball rolling for community change.

When people are asked to share, they feel respected

The Stories on the Land project in Greene County showed that when people are asked to share, they feel respected. And when people feel respected, they can put more energy into cooperation and less into defending their position and making sure they are being heard.

There are lots of ways to make storytelling happen in your community. A nearby college professor might want to organize a project, like in Greene County. In Newport, Tennessee, high school youth interviewed local seniors on videotape. In Pelican Rapids, the library sponsored a series of “Journeys to Pelican” events where different families shared stories of their immigration directly with participants.

Regardless of the setting, storytelling seems to be most effective at sparking change when it bridges relationships and increases communication between circles in the community.

Opportunities in timing. Asked “how did your change process happen?” leaders of rural communities often start talking about timing. The “pieces fell into place,” and the seemingly impossible became possible.

Sometimes things do seem to happen by chance. Just as the folks in Todd County were starting to think about recreational development, the state park people were looking for a place to locate a park. The “stars lined up” in Camptonville to make the building, the organization, and the individual skills available for a Twilight School. The Waterworks Development Corporation was looking for places to apply its appropriate infrastructure technology at the same time that the Colonias Development Corporation needed an affordable solution for water and sewer service.

No one can plan on chance, of course. But rural ABCD leaders do share two very important lessons about timing. *First, they say, you have to be organized to take advantage of opportunities.* When the stars finally do line up, the community has to be ready to act. Colonias Development Corporation wouldn’t have been able to partner with Waterworks if they hadn’t been organizing around the issues already. Do your asset inventories and your project brainstorming and relationship building now, because you never know when a new opportunity may present itself, or how much time you’ll have to act.

Second, leaders say that *action creates its own opportunities.* The Pelican Rapids World’s Longest Coffee Break led to the International Friendship Festival and new development possibilities. In Newton County, a women’s shelter and a crafts shop ultimately paved the way for a housing development corporation and an ecotourism initiative. Development, however small, creates new assets to build on. That’s the snowball effect of community development.

***Development,
however small,
creates new assets
to build on***

Look around your community. Are there small, “bite-sized” projects you can get started with? Can you continue to widen the circle as you work toward small victories? If you do, you’ll be making new development possible, even as you ready yourself for a big break.

Who Should Be Involved?

Just as important as *how* to do ABCD is *who* should be involved. Rural community leaders know that who participates in an initiative often depends on who is viewed as leading. For example, some participants felt that the first Todd County planning session was poorly attended because the composition of its leadership led some people to think the meeting would be “the same old thing.” But when a

subsequent meeting was organized with a new and unusual group of leaders, participants came out in number — if only to see what would happen.

The wrong group is the right group. Sometimes rural community leaders think that getting the “right” people involved means bringing together the folks who already have certain power, certain formal authority, certain wealth or privilege in the community. This is an elite approach. It works for some kinds of things, and it’s often hard for the elite leaders to avoid the tendency to organize this way.

But the elite approach certainly doesn’t widen the circle. And for that reason, it often fails to mobilize and motivate popular support — the necessary individual assets — necessary to make real community change happen. How many times have we seen an elite group get together to propose a new school bond, only to see it fail in a democratic election?

In a way, the “right” group to pull together for your ABCD initiative is the “wrong” group, the people who haven’t worked together before, the people whose perspectives have been left out, whose skills have been untapped, or who just haven’t been “in the loop” with each other. A diverse mix of folks who travel in different circles, hear different perspectives, and see different strengths can be much more effective in jump-starting a change process than the usual elite group.

The great person and the village idiot. Rural folks do appreciate the special roles that individuals play in the community process. “I don’t know where we’d be if not for so-and-so,” we’ll say. Certainly, many rural community leaders make great sacrifices and use wonderful personal skills to help get the work done. They can be a kind of “inside catalyst,” with the time, or insight, or position to see connections that others don’t see.

A “Great Person” theory of history suggests that certain changes happen because certain great leaders make them happen. Maybe so, but that does seem to overlook a lot of other assets. It doesn’t say much about the value of different leadership styles in different situations, or about peer support, or about group dynamics.

In fact, one rural community leader suggested that their community success came not because he was a Great Person, but because he was a Village Idiot. Because this leader was something of a clown, he seemed nonthreatening to other leaders and community members. He was elected to run the Chamber of Commerce in town by a diverse group of constituencies. From this diverse base, he oversaw the Chamber in a period of unusual activism on environmental, racial, and community issues in town.

Certainly, the right person can make a difference at the right time and in the right place. But it takes a lot of good people to get the job done, so the best strategy isn’t to become a Great Person, but to become part of a Great Team.

Neutral ground. It's funny, but true, that *how* and *where* you meet, will often say something about *who* will come and participate. Sometimes you may need a fresh start, or to give your efforts new energy. In the "Starting Points/Turning Points" section above, you read about the value of an outside catalyst for setting a new table in the community. In the same way, you should think about finding a neutral ground for your gatherings when you want to widen the circle and build new relationships.

Every rural community has places to meet where most people feel comfortable — maybe a library, a school, or another public place, for example. And sometimes using an outside facilitator can help even an existing group to broaden its perspectives and reach out to unusual partners.

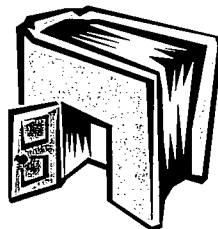
Many Doors, One Room

The final lesson to share about ABCD is that *it doesn't so much matter what issue or project or association you start from, as long as you remain flexible to the connections you find along the way.*

The folks in Trinity County and Camptonville both started by working on community health issues, and soon found themselves running adult education and economic development projects. The Boys, Girls, and Adults CDC in Marvell started as an after-school program, and came to develop housing and run a community enterprise.

Though we may enter through many different doors, we often seem to end up in the same room. We might start by working on health, or youth, or churches, but we often end up finding a web of connections and synergies, and a holistic vision, which requires partnership and coalition-building.

Find your "handle" on community wherever you can. Use it to identify and release local assets. Widen the circle, and build new relationships. Connect the dots. What you'll end up with is a picture of development and opportunity.



The Organization of Hope — Into Action

Build on assets. Widen the circle. **Assets plus Community equals Development.** And development creates new assets, which leads to new development and new relationships, and keeps building from there. That's asset-based community development in a nutshell. These practical lessons from rural communities can help you figure out how to make ABCD work for your communities.

Building on Assets

There's no one way to build assets in any community. But you can get a sense of the possibilities by picturing this simple core process:

- ❑ Consider the five types of assets described below that were observed by McKnight and Kretzmann in a diverse group of community citizens.
- ❑ For one or more of the categories, list as many of your local assets as you can. Try a method based on what other communities have done, and remember to reach out beyond traditional circles.
- ❑ Then "connect the dots." Again in a diverse group, brainstorm actions you can take to link your assets with actions that make sense for your community.

*ABCD involves
community citizens in
the process of self-
discovery and self-
development. It's
about you*

This is not a "needs assessment," followed by a program plan. It isn't a process that can be done by professionals and then implemented. ABCD involves community citizens in the process of self-discovery and self-development. It's about you building your community "from the inside out."

The Five Types of Assets

There are five different kinds of assets in community. An accountant thinks of assets as tangible, physical things like land and property. A business person might think of assets in economic terms, as anything capable of producing a profit. But to our rural communities, *an asset is anything that has value*, even if it's something intangible or hard to measure like a relationship or a reputation.

When communities take stock of our assets, we always seem to end up with something like the following five categories:

1. Individual talents and skills of our people
2. Associations and our networks of relationships
3. Institutions and professional entities
4. Land, property, and other physical assets
5. Economic assets

Individual talents and skills of our people. Every person has talents and skills. Sometimes these are obvious, as with the skills we see people using on a visible job. Other times these are less obvious, as with talents and experience people have that aren't tapped by a particular job, or that just aren't visible to others. In rural communities especially, people often develop a wide range of do-it-yourself skills just from taking care of daily business.

Sometimes we take our own individual skills for granted. Sometimes we don't know about the talents of our neighbors. But individual talents and skills are probably the most important community assets. They are also some of the easiest and most fun to inventory. And when communities do put together an inventory of individual talents, there's often a sense of wonderful discovery, an "Aha!" moment that can give everyone a needed boost.

A capacity inventory is just a list or picture of individual talents and skills of people in a community. Various rural communities have chosen to do this in many ways. Some adapt a sample survey form from an ABCD workbook and pass it around at a community meeting. Todd County assigned a special committee to look at all community assets from their own experiences. Others, like the Colonias, use their survey in door-to-door organizing, then build on the results for discussion and brainstorming in resident meetings. Getting creative, the Greene County Stories on the Land process was a kind of inventory of individual assets through stories. Some communities have been successful using more visual methods, asking participants to draw pictures of assets and skills, or producing together a videotape of interviews. You can have an individual asset-mapping party, or organize a peer-to-peer sharing system. The process can be as elegant as you want it to be.

If you want examples and ideas from other communities, there is an ABCD workbook called:

A Guide to Capacity Inventories: Mobilizing the Community Skills of Local Residents (1997)

This workbook illustrates examples of capacity inventories developed by people in communities across the nation. Each inventory is different because skills and capacities are different in each location. The workbook also shares detailed stories about how the different communities organized to develop their own local capacity inventory.

Another ABCD workbook describes a useful strategy for using individual assets, called a neighborhood information exchange. Like the Twilight School in Camptonville, the information exchange is just a system for people to learn about and share each other's skills to get more done. It's an idea well-suited to rural areas and small towns:

A Guide to Creating a Neighborhood Information Exchange: Building Communities by Connecting Local Skills and Knowledge (1998)

Associations and our networks of relationships. Because we are spread out, rural communities have fewer institutions operating locally to provide various services on a large scale. So in rural areas, voluntary associations often assume this role instead. We can think of visible examples of this, from a volunteer fire department or emergency response team, to a citizen-run youth center or a church-based food pantry.

But voluntary associations go far beyond these visible examples. Even in the most sparsely populated areas, there are more groups, networks, clubs, etc. than folks usually imagine. One rural community going through the Blandin Community Investment Process received a committee report listing local assets, mostly associations. The list went on for 10 pages and took 45 minutes to “summarize!” You will find the same thing if you start mapping the associations in your rural community. If you spread the web wide enough, you’ll map some groups that might seem to be unlikely sources of community development. The Trinity County story shows how this can work. The Mule Committee for the annual fair began raising funds for children year-round. The Hyampom Rod and Gun Club pitched in with fundraising and volunteering with children, and the humorously named “Hyampom University” changed its focus from a social club to a service club — in a way, it really did become a university.

*All sorts of associations
in all sorts of rural
communities have
gotten energized by
focusing on their assets*

For more examples and greater detail on how you can tap your community’s associations for community change, you can check out the ABCD workbook called:

*A Guide to Mapping and
Mobilizing the Associations in
Local Neighborhoods (1999)*

If Trinity County’s story sounds unusual, you should know that all sorts of associations in all sorts of rural communities have gotten energized by focusing on their assets. In Del Rio, Tennessee, for example, the members of the Brushy Mountain Bear Hunters Club wanted to meet year-round, not just during the two-week bear hunting season. They became motivated to service by the illness of a neighbor, and organized a fundraiser. Well, that got other folks in the community looking at the club in a new light, so they started getting members who had no interest in hunting. This wider circle started looking more broadly at health issues. Now the Brushy Mountain Bear Hunters Club is playing a key role in organizing community citizens towards the development of a new health clinic in the area.

Rural ABCD sometimes gets rolling in the churches. Sometimes it’s in parent groups, or business groups, or arts groups. Whatever the setting, there seems to be a pattern, a “life cycle” of positive associational involvement in community:

- ❑ Associations typically start as a *social* gathering, then find a drive toward a critical issue and an opportunity to provide a community *service*.

- ❑ Then, as the circle widens, members begin to see the “big picture” of community around the issue. They become more proactive and start to work towards longer term approaches. That leads them to *development*, not just service, the creation of local efforts and projects to promote stronger community conditions, rather than the continuous remediation of problems.
- ❑ Along the way, an asset-based approach gives associations the tools they need to capitalize on their strength — person-to-person relationships. Associations become the key vehicle for building community “from the inside out.”

Institutions and professional entities. Whether business, public, or nonprofit, institutions are organizations with a staff, a sizable budget, and an ongoing operation. Institutions have a life of their own. In law, a corporation is even called a “natural person.”

It takes a lot of hard work, money, and expertise to create and build an institution. It shouldn't be surprising, then, that the people involved with an institution — its staff, its Board, its funders, even its clientele — value their stake in the institution. They can develop a strong survival instinct for the institution in the face of economic, environmental, and community change. Sometimes we refer to this as “turf.” The bigger the institution, the bigger the turf and, it seems, the bigger the survival instinct.

Local institutional survival can be a good thing for a community. When local businesses work to be competitive and offer good value, for example, that strengthens the local economy. Active schools and hospitals can solidify and extend the caring work of families and associations. Institutions can collect and channel money, land, and property to important uses. Institutions often provide continuity, visible evidence of community investment, and political power.

Institutional survival can also conflict with community interests. Sometimes an institution focuses on its own funding, size, status, and growth, to the point where it loses track of the community interests it was formed to address in the first place. Perhaps because of the complexity of managing large numbers of people and functions, bigger institutions have a tendency to professionalize community services, which can lead to the vicious cycle of need and dependency described in Section I of this workbook.

Institutions have a life of their own

Thus, institutions are community assets, but whether they contribute positively to asset-based community development in your community depends on how you use them. On the one hand, if a big institution dominates your community development dynamic, it almost can't avoid confusing its own interests for the broader interests of the community. On the other hand, if the institutional leaders and members understand that the future of the institution

lies with a stronger community, then you can find ways to build partnerships that direct institutional assets toward community decision-making.

Many rural ABCD leaders have worked long and hard to build positive institutional/community partnerships and roles within an ABCD process. The County Extension office played a positive role in Greene County. A local resort may partner with the South Carolina Coastal Community Development Corporation. The Boys, Girls, and Adults CDC has been able to piece together funding and programs from state and national sources to fit the community's agenda.

One good model of institutional support for ABCD is the city of Savannah, Georgia, which used "mini-grants" to small groups of neighbors as a way to "seed" local capacity-building and citizen involvement and decision-making. Though the example is urban, this model would apply just as well to a rural area. For more details, you can explore:

City-Sponsored Community Building Savannah's Grants for Blocks Story (1998)

What all of these examples have in common is that *building on citizen and associational assets came first*. Once community citizens had laid a foundation of assets drawn from the talents and skills of local people and their associations, they were in position to negotiate partnerships with larger institutions.

Eventually, even grassroots community associations can grow to gain a life of their own, to become more institutionalized. Good community organizations are always watching out for the tendency to "grow apart from our roots." One way volunteer organizations can keep their grassroots accountability is to work as a kind of incubator, helping community initiatives to

get started, then spinning them off when they get big enough to stand on their own. The story in this workbook of the Newton County Resource Council illustrates one incubator approach.

Land, property, and other physical assets. When people think of assets, they usually think of physical assets first. Land, buildings, and equipment come to mind. These assets are critical to community development.

Sometimes we take physical assets for granted, or overlook alternative uses for existing things. *Buildings* are a good example. A church building has space for worship, but during the week the building can also support a child care center, a meeting space, a workshop, a learning center, a theatre, or whatever use you dream up. A school is busy and full during the day, but on evenings and weekends it can serve as a center for all kinds of community activity. In Camptonville, they "connected the dots" between the asset of the school building and the assets of many individual talents to create the Twilight School.

Sometimes we take physical assets for granted, or overlook alternative uses for existing things

When looking for your physical assets, be sure to include simple things like *office equipment* at local businesses or institutions, *tools and materials* at local public maintenance yards or utilities, or *unused and recyclable supplies* from local factories, restaurants, or warehouses.

The accessibility of *natural resources* is one of the greatest benefits of rural life. In an asset-based approach, it makes sense to think about building on these assets in positive ways that link to other assets in the community. Examples of specific community development strategies to build on natural resources are provided in the upcoming section on "Fruits of our Labor."

Economic assets. Traditional business development focuses on businesses themselves as recipients of public services and subsidies. Business developers use a combination of promotions, financial subsidies, and professional assistance to increase the profitability of business. In other words, business development is professionals treating folks as clients with needs again. It's another version of the downward cycle of deficiencies, professional services, and increasing community dependency discussed in Section I — the half-empty glass. And in the case of businesses, it's not always clear that what benefits a particular client will benefit the whole community.

One good source of ideas on community-building projects that use land, property, and other physical assets is the original and most comprehensive ABCD book, the one that started the series and has sold more copies than any other book on community development:

Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets (1993)

Taking an asset-based development approach, you look at all the economic assets of a community, including the productive work and consumer spending power of community citizens. You view these economic assets in combination with other assets, to build new relationships in the community, and ultimately, to create new local economic opportunities.

Sometimes people assume that agriculture is the only economic asset of a rural area. With the consolidation of farming, for example, small towns are just supposed to disappear or something. Even rural residents sometimes fear this is true. But it is not true. Rural areas have many different economic assets to build on.

Sometimes people assume that agriculture is the only economic asset of a rural area

The productive work of individuals. Individuals have talents and skills, and many of these have an economic worth to the community. If creating economic

opportunity is a major goal for your community, you can tailor your individual capacity inventory to look especially at economic capacities. Think of these as job

skills, or business skills, but remember that many people have valuable skills that don't show up on the job they do already.

Individual economic capacities include:

- ☞ Formal work experience
- ☞ General skills and capacities
- ☞ Entrepreneurial experience
- ☞ Training and education
- ☞ Civic or community-based experience

There is a series of three ABCD workbooks dealing especially with economic assets. The first provides examples and details on how to find and use individual economic capacities in your community:

A Guide to Mapping and Mobilizing the Economic Capacities of Local Residents (1996)

Any and all of these capacities provide the basis for creating new asset-based actions for economic opportunity. From mapping these skills, you can discover ways to create new businesses, to link residents to existing businesses, to barter services, and to help residents develop more flexible and productive economic careers.

You might follow an "income patching" approach, similar to Newton County, or an "entrepreneurial approach," like the Gullah community, or another approach of your own. What's important is that these ABCD strategies position local rural residents not as

clients, but as the *source* of economic opportunity in rural areas.

Consumer spending power. Economic strength doesn't just come from selling, it also comes from buying. How and where and whether we choose to spend our money is itself an economic strategy. Taking an ABCD approach, we can build on our consumer expenditures as economic assets.

Rural residents understand better than anybody the impact of "buying locally." Dollars that we spend on locally produced products and services stay in the local economy, to be spent again and again, multiplying in effect to do the work of several dollars. In this sense, dollars spent locally come back to us in increased community economic power. We can't help but know this when businesses are owned and operated by our friends and neighbors.

ABCD strategies position local rural residents not as clients, but as the source of economic opportunity in rural areas

Most of us do consider the local impact of our decisions about where to buy certain retail household goods. And there are reasonable arguments for spending dollars outside the local economy — in poorer communities, for example, where many

products are difficult to find. But household retail spending is actually just a small portion of the local economy. The greatest potential benefits of spending power are often overlooked.

Think about housing, for example. If you build a new house, usually two-thirds of the cost goes to materials. Unless you live and work where those materials are produced, that's money leaving the community. But if you pay to fix up an existing house instead, two-thirds of that cost goes to labor, which means it goes to local workers and benefits the local economy. By the same token, most of every dollar that you save on energy costs is money you've kept from leaving the local economy, so energy-efficiency is a good way to develop economic assets that are sometimes overlooked.

For another example, when the residents of the El Milagro colonia worked on the construction of infrastructure lines in their community, they not only kept dollars in the local community, they also got valuable work experience.

Sometimes, local institutions overlook their spending power, even as they work for community development. Any institution or association with a budget has an opportunity to use that spending to help local residents start a business or expand an existing business to employ more people. Think about this next time you look over a church budget, or a school budget, or a town budget.

Local business assets. Lastly, ABCD looks at local businesses as economic assets. Local businesses are institutions, and they can contribute greatly to the development of the community economy.

In rural areas, local businesses are often viewed as a source of potential charitable contributions or, less often, as a source of donated goods and services. Sometimes rural business owners feel beleaguered by the number of these requests, even though they may understand the importance of these efforts to the whole community. But there are other ways for businesses to help develop community assets, and further strengthen their business prospects in the process.

The ABCD workbook on consumer expenditure patterns — the second in the series on economic assets — includes a detailed set of sample surveys and tools you can use to map local consumer spending and develop your own strategy to use this power to create more economic opportunity in your community:

*A Guide to Mapping
Consumer Expenditures and
Mobilizing Consumer
Expenditure Capacities (1996)*

Some rural communities have surveyed local business practices to figure out the extent to which businesses:

- Employ local residents
- Purchase goods and services locally

- Invest in local development
- Participate in local development efforts

Using this kind of information in combination with other assets, rural communities

The third ABCD workbook in the economic series contains a wealth of information on surveying and understanding local business assets:

A Guide to Mapping Local Business Assets and Mobilizing Local Business Capacities (1996)

can “connect the dots” and come up with creative new development strategies. For example, one community figured out that local businesses could employ high school students to create Web pages for increased customer access. This not only took advantage of the talents of the youth, it provided them with real work experience to expand their knowledge. At the same time, this saved the local businesses money in Web development fees and increased their sales in the process!

The Gullah community in South Carolina figured out that local resorts were spending a lot on prepared foods, mostly from bland, packaged services. Combining the unique culinary skills of several residents with the asset of a community kitchen “incubator,” they would be able to provide Gullah dinners to some of the resorts and resort residents. This not only could keep these food-spending dollars in the community, but would help widen the circle between the Gullah and the resort residents, increasing the newcomers’ understanding and appreciation of the culture of the place.

Widening the Circle

Building on assets is half the story. The other half of the ABCD approach is widening the circle. You might look at widening the circle as expanding the scope of your own circle. Or you might look at it as building bridges to other circles in the broader circle of community. Either way, you’ll end up in a similar place, respecting all individuals for the assets they contribute, and appreciating the common bonds that hold us together for the public good.

Expanding who you think you are. Every group has an identity. Widening the circle can be about expanding who you think you are. This might be as simple as inviting new people to your meetings, adding new members to your Board, or reaching out to new members. You could be joining other groups or circles. Or you could work at a public level to take advantage of the people assets in what you call “the community.”

For example, in Pelican Rapids, the “Journeys to Pelican” series at the public library worked as an effort to expand the definition of “we.” By inviting both recent and historic immigrants to a public institution to share their story of immigration, the sponsors made the point that we are all immigrants. The series illustrated the challenges people face in moving beyond their circle. In the process, it highlighted

the universal traits of persistence and character, which overwhelm mere differences of race or ethnicity.

An asset approach makes this outreach easier and simpler. Every member of the circle has assets to contribute. The wider your circle, the greater your assets. In this sense, your outreach isn't charity or service, but enlightened self-interest. An asset orientation will enable you to welcome new members with respect, because you will seek out and value their contributions.

Your outreach isn't charity or service, but enlightened self-interest

Reaching across to your partners in community. Maybe other people don't want to join your circle. And maybe they don't want you to join theirs either. People do feel it is important to have their own circles of friends, family, or neighbors, with their separate identities. In rural areas, these circles help people to manage the unbuffered relationships of daily life. They help us set boundaries between our work, civic, family, and personal lives. They help us preserve and develop culture and social capital.

That's not a bad thing. It's a good thing. Building community doesn't mean we have to lose our identities. In fact, it means that we can emphasize and celebrate our identities — as assets that are valuable to a larger whole. And we can "widen the circle" without overshadowing or taking over people's identities.

When dealing with other groups and networks, widening the circle is about *bridge building*. It's about recognizing and appreciating the value of what makes other people special, even while linking to them. It's about recognizing our common bonds. It's about respect.

The "Sharing Respect" story is an inspirational story of bridge building. One way or another, the lessons from Greene County are relevant to any small town or rural area.

Institutions are a special kind of "circle." If you are a leader or a volunteer or a worker and you'd like to help "widen the circle" of your institution or organization, an excellent resource is a workbook entitled:

A Guide to Building Sustainable Organizations from the Inside Out: An Organizational Capacity Building Toolbox from the Chicago Foundation for Women (2000)

This workbook (developed by the Chicago Foundation for Women and the ABCD Institute) focuses specifically on organizations. It provides 12 unique asset-mapping tools to help you explore the organization's relationships, stakeholders, and other assets, so that you can widen your circle and sustain the organization.

The four lessons they learned on how to develop trust and respect between partners are worth listing again:

1. **Value what we have.** We can fall into a cycle of cynicism and despair. Or we can start a cycle of appreciation and hope. Lift up a positive mirror to the community. When we value what we have, we can consider it critically.
2. **Listen to our “others,”** and feed back what we hear. When the stakes are high, people want to feel heard and understood. We may not agree on everything, but listening shows we can respect each other. The best way to show that we are listening is to feed back what we hear to the speaker.
3. **Share decision-making.** If what other people say is important, then it must be important to share decisions on community projects. Form partnerships. Expand our own leadership.
4. **Change ourselves accordingly.** Don't just listen, but take what we hear to heart. Demonstrate our sincerity by changing our directions and positions according to what we learn. Give and take.

Following these principles, Greene County folks have been able to overcome divisions within the community without erasing identity or eliminating difference. They've been able to accomplish more in partnership and respect than they ever could in isolation and distrust. Most people want that, no matter how it seems at times. Whatever the climate in your community, you may be surprised how far a little respect will go toward resolving community problems and allowing people to focus on assets and positive change.

Connecting the Dots: Your Development Process

Okay, so how does it really work? How do you put these lessons together, build on assets and widen the circle, add **A**ssets plus **C**ommunity to get **D**evelopment? How do you connect the dots?

Start where you are. The simple answer is you start where you are, and move forward from there. If you are in the middle of a project or issue, does ABCD mean you have to stop and start over? Of course not. Try using assets to strengthen, advance, and expand your existing project. Use a capacity inventory or asset map to identify resources for your project. Widen the circle of people involved by recognizing their assets and respecting their roles. If you encounter an obstacle, get together to brainstorm ways to connect the dots between assets you haven't used before. See for yourself what can come from this simple approach.

If you are already in the middle of a development project, does ABCD mean you have to stop and start over?

Maybe you need a fresh start instead. Use ABCD to start with a broad circle and focus on assets to inspire and motivate participants. People love thinking about new ideas for development, and connecting the dots gives your new group a way to generate ideas and strategies. Make inclusive, democratic decisions to build ownership and follow some of these ideas. Your development action will lead to new opportunities and new hope.

Not a ladder, but a flow. Community building is not a linear process. It isn't a ladder. You can't take a certain number of steps up a straight line and reach the top. It never happens that way, and if you expect it to, you'll only be disappointed. ABCD is more like a flow, a general movement in a positive direction with ebbs and tides along the way. There will be obstacles and restarts that feel like "going back to square one." That's okay. In fact, in some ways that is necessary to continue to widen the circle. Sometimes it will feel like very little is happening, but in fact, the relationships you are developing are creating new opportunities you aren't aware of yet. So continue to seek out new assets, and the opportunities will emerge as you go.

Keep your eye on the big picture. This means not focusing on steps that create a line but on parts of a circle that keep us rolling forward. Remember:

- We increase our recognition of our assets — we don't just collect data for data's sake.
- We combine assets in new ways, through new relationships.
- We apply our assets to our goals in projects and initiatives.
- We leverage outside resources toward goals, by finding common goals.
- We recognize our increased assets and renew ourselves.

Sources of power. Sometimes we feel powerless to make changes in our rural communities. But the experience of communities using asset-based community development is the experience of tremendous power. That power comes from action in the development process:

↳ *The power of realization:* Something happens whenever a community starts to list its assets in a new way. The list grows longer. People learn things about each other, and about their community. At some point, people say "Aha!" They *realize* what they've got. They start to see things differently. And that enables people to act differently.

You can find the power of realization in your community by involving people in the process of identifying community assets. Be creative. Brainstorm talents and skills at a table. Call people on the phone. Go door to door. Draw pictures. Make a map. Take videos or use computers. When you pull together everything that you find, you'll have that "Aha!" moment too.

↳ *The power of story:* What *realization* is to assets, *story* is to circle widening. When people share stories with each other, they understand each other better. They understand differences, and they understand common bonds. That builds respect, and trust, and cooperation.

You can find the power of story in your community just by getting people to share their memories in any neutral, nonthreatening setting. That could be sitting around a table talking about how you came to a place or a position.

The suggestion Greene County used in their Stories on the Land project is a great one: "Tell us about your connection to the land." You can make storytelling a creative project or a fun reason to gather. You can use story to build leadership and cooperation for action.

- ↳ *The power of recombination:* Development initiatives and projects can come from connecting unusual assets. When we mix and match individual talents, associations, physical or economic assets, we create new possibilities. Not all new possibilities are valuable. Some are just screwy or far-fetched. But some *recombinations* of community assets can resolve difficult issues and create unexpected opportunities. Recombination makes forward progress possible.

You can only find the power of recombination if you first identify assets and widen the circle. Since people control the assets in a community, new relationships between people are necessary to make new combinations of assets.

- ↳ *The magic of community:* It happens every time. Ask a diverse group of people to make a list of community assets. Then ask them to brainstorm positive community actions. With no step-by-step instruction, professional expertise, or outside assistance, they will produce extraordinary ideas. It's like a black box: Assets and community go in; development comes out. It's like magic.

You can find the magic of community by bringing together people to identify assets and brainstorm development. The results are often unusual, sometimes ingenious, but always inspiring. Regardless of the actions your group brainstorms, what you will learn is the magic of community.

- ↳ *The power of transformation.* We are not clients with needs. We are community citizens with capacities. That's a *transformation* of identity, attitude, and approach. When people get involved with ABCD, they sometimes say "it's turned my world around."

You can find the power of transformation in your community by focusing on the half-full glass. Whenever the discussion dwells on deficiencies and needs, pull out the assets. Whenever the discussion emphasizes professional services, encourage citizen action. Whenever the discussion assumes an outside solution, push to build from within. Include the excluded, and join together for collaborative action. You'll be amazed at what you can accomplish.

FIND YOUR POWER THROUGH ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Power of Realization

The Power of Story

The Power of Recombination

The Magic of Community

The Power of Transformation

Fruits of Our Labor

So what? The bottom line question is, what do rural communities get out of asset-based community development? What can we use it for? What are the *results*?

In Spanish, the saying goes, “*arbol seconos por su fruta:*” The tree is known for its fruit. And in rural ABCD, the fruit of our labor is *positive community change*.

By mapping and mobilizing our assets, our *quality of life* improves — not because we are trying to become more like suburbs or cities, but because we are *making more out of our rural strengths*. We increase our sense of *identity* by enhancing the bonds between our diverse people and our special place. We work together as *citizens*, who are productive, who are responsible, and who direct and lead development. We not only build on our own assets, but we *establish a way of doing things* that continuously taps and renews our capacities. Our glass is always half full.

*Rural communities
use asset-based
approaches for every
imaginable kind of
positive development*

More specifically, rural communities use asset-based approaches for every imaginable kind of positive development. Some of these results are more *tangible*:

We create *jobs and business opportunities*. We increase the *health* of our community members. We make *transportation and housing* easier in spread-out places while taking advantage of our natural resources for improved *agriculture, tourism, and recreation*. Tangible results also include the new *associations* we form and the positive changes we make to our local *institutions*.

Equally important are the *intangible* results we accomplish. More often than not, rural communities involved with ABCD will point with pride to a change in community attitude — from pessimism and powerlessness to *hope* and a “*can do*” approach. We talk about the importance of establishing a *track record* for making our next efforts easier. We point to the new *leaders* who have emerged, and to the value of new *relationships* between people who can do wonderful new things together. We talk about finding unexpected and uplifting *power*.

The following list paints a picture of rural ABCD results. It’s just a list of examples, some summarized from the cases in this book, some drawn from the broader ABCD network. The list isn’t meant to be complete — it would be out of date as soon as you score your first victory! The list isn’t meant to tell you what you should do, or to take the place of your own asset-building process. Instead, this list is meant to help you get a handle on your own goals and objectives.

- ☞ Read the list to *spark* ideas in your own mind, and *imagine* the kinds of things you’d like to accomplish in your community.
- ☞ Read the list again, to *focus* on real victories — which don’t always have to look exactly like the standard kinds of program outcomes that bureaucracies seem to dwell on, but *can* help persuade outsiders that results are real.

↪ And finally, read the list to *remind* yourself, that we *can* change our rural communities for the better. It's happening all over. Put yourself on the list.

Tangible Development

Examples of tangible rural development outcomes:

Transportation. Small towns and rural areas are spread out. So it makes sense to develop opportunities that help rural folks get around.

Small town taxi company. It might seem unlikely, but some small towns have supported a taxi company. The business is financed with a combination of fares, state transportation subsidies, and local hotel tourism taxes. Seniors are a big customer market, and taxis help seniors manage rural life and remain independent.

Restoring or rehabbing cars for work. People donate cars to a group of mechanics-in-training, who practice job skills by restoring the cars. Restored cars are then made available to people who need them to get to a good job.

Senior transportation and driver's ed. One rural driver's education program has young students practice driving and earn credit by shuttling seniors on their errands.

Meal delivery. In many rural communities, volunteers deliver meals to seniors — with a little companionship on the side.



Technology and connectedness. We're spread out, but with new technologies it doesn't matter much anymore. We can use technology to enhance our ruralness.

Community-based internet service provider. Newton County needed an Internet Service Provider, and wanted to develop one with community control. But they didn't want to invest in all the infrastructure and technical capacity. So they partnered with an existing ISP in a nearby town. Newton County Resource Council houses the switching equipment, and markets the service. Their partner manages the lines and the tech support and the Web page development.

Targeting industries. Technology isn't just computers and the Internet. Every industry has new technologies, and every career depends on learning these technologies. Schools and training organizations are targeting industries of local significance and working to help students stay ahead of the changes. If you think

about it, this is exactly what rural communities have done for years with agriculture, mining, timber, etc.

Seniors and youth on the Web. Local senior centers participate in SeniorNet or another Internet chat and Web site for seniors. Seniors get online computer time at the center and local youth help train them.

Wireless phones. Forget the Internet, many rural residents don't have phones. Some rural communities find they can skip the expensive phone line installations by going straight to wireless connections.



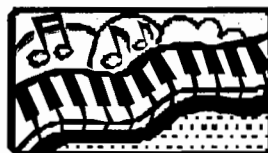
Arts and culture. Every rural community has gifted artisans. Often, their craft is rooted in rural culture. And increasingly rural culture is seen as a strength for diversity, not an obstacle to it.

Stories. Rural churches and associations sometimes publish a book of remembrances by members as part of an anniversary celebration. The Greene County Stories on the Land series is a good example of how rural residents use rural culture to find common bonds to overcome differences. The Pelican Rapids "Journeys to Pelican" series emphasized common themes in immigration while describing diverse indigenous cultures. Another rural community had young people video-tape seniors telling stories — again, finding commonality against difference.

Arts and crafts. Many rural communities form a cooperative of artisans and craftspeople to sell to visitors and tourists. Sometimes a craft shop can serve as an information booth — and draw tourism funding or volunteers.

Kitchen incubator. The Gullah community invested in a common kitchen to enable local cooks to prepare Gullah-style meals for sale to tourists and resorts.

Talent show. Talk about showcasing assets! People love a talent show, the simpler the better. Link it to your asset-mapping project, and you'll make the half-full concept come to life, while opening a new door to cultural development.



Enterprise development. The results we want are *jobs* and *income opportunities*. Studies have proven that using tax incentives to attract outside companies only shuffles business around and wastes public dollars. Instead, successful rural areas take advantage of our competitive economic strengths. Modern economic development practice is based on building from within — and we have lots to build on.

Networking businesses. Instead of building huge, inflexible corporations, businesses today are focusing on connecting networks of smaller firms who can produce in large scale but remain flexible to business changes. Rural businesses are perfect for this. Some rural communities have formed networks of several businesses from one rural area to cooperate on big jobs, while others link similar rural businesses from several rural areas to join together for big jobs.

Entrepreneurship. Rural citizens have always sold services and products. But we sometimes take this for granted. One of the most successful economic development efforts in the world was the “peer lending” project of the Grameen Bank, which was primarily a rural project, and has generated billions in business. “Circles” of entrepreneurs join together to support each other and pool their funds.

Job networks. It’s not about training for jobs anymore. Jobs change too fast, businesses move, and new opportunities arise. Now it’s about developing core competencies that make us valuable to businesses in certain industries but flexible enough to adapt and even lead business changes. Some rural workers have formed job networks with their colleagues to learn from their current jobs and research the emerging technologies in the industries they choose. In some cases, job trainers and community colleges are focusing classes to support this approach instead of training for yesterday’s jobs.

Creative financing. Financing doesn’t create business, but it can support the right development strategy. Small town banks can be very conservative, but they can also use their understanding of local people and markets to see opportunities that big banks can’t. One rural community brought residents, farmers, business people, bankers, and university leaders together to form a regional mutual lending fund, spreading the risk while banking on small-town know-how.

Community-based business targeting. There is hidden treasure in our communities — people who have valuable skills that are going unused. Several communities have mapped the assets of former farmers and ranchers. Others have mapped the skills and resources of spouses, young people, older people, immigrants, and just everybody who is “underemployed.” Then they link these assets to identify businesses and industry that use the existing talents of local people, and work to start or link to such businesses.

Increasingly, rural communities are developing businesses to build on community assets. We are finding the types of businesses that work for our people and our place. When we support this with some entrepreneurship, some job networking, and some business networking, we have a cutting-edge job and business strategy.



Land. Sometimes we take it for granted, but land is obviously a tremendous asset for rural communities.

Biological management. In one ranching community, ranchers and environmental regulators were at odds over grazing standards on land draining into threatened salmon rivers. The choices seemed to be to rest the cattle or to graze them. By mapping and listening to the skills and interests of each participant, they were able to focus on the goals of natural resource management instead of regulations and practices. They came up with an alternative solution. They agreed to plant timber near the headwaters. And they instituted active herding of the cattle in small bunches in rotating areas. The solution not only cleaned the river water, it reduced disease and increased weights among the cattle while decreasing rancher costs.

Creative land development. In many rural communities, landowners are tempted to “cash out” by selling their land for purposes that threaten the community and the public good. The financial needs of the landowner can sometimes be met by forming or working with an existing land trust. A land trust can buy the land to be held for the public good — as farmland, or recreational land, or land for affordable housing, for example. Sometimes a trust just buys the development rights on significant land, or purchases a conservation easement, which can leave the ownership of land in the hands of the original family owners.

Planned agricultural districts. As suburban sprawl encroaches on farmland, rural areas lose the “spread-out-ness” that is valued even by the incoming suburbanites! Often, residential and commercial development have an even broader impact, as new occupants complain about the smells and noise of ordinary rural land production nearby. Some counties and towns are using special new land use planning methods like “planned agricultural districts” to establish and manage areas where agriculture, mining, ranching, etc., will be permanently provided for, so that everybody understands what kind of development goes where.

Reusing land. Some valuable rural land can be used in new ways. Abandoned railroad tracks are a good example. The national movement to convert “rails to trails” has grown beyond expectations, and new bike/ski/skate/walk trails are producing economic and social benefits for rural communities. Newton County’s Ecotourism project is another example of reusing land in new ways.



Natural resources. Natural resources have been the backbone of rural communities for everything from ranching to mining, from timber to corn, and from fishing to dairy production. Corporate centralization has changed the business, and will continue to do so. But natural resources will only continue to grow more valuable over time. And the same asset-based strategies we used to found and develop our rural communities can also be used to build on natural resources “from the inside out.”

Value-added production. “Value-added” has been the buzzword in rural development circles for some time now. It simply means taking on more of the production steps locally — adding value to the raw material by processing it further. In Newton County, for example, the Resource Council is helping local timber owners to finance and develop additional sawing and finishing of the wood they cut. Sometimes small-scale processing of materials like this can be done better and more cheaply right at the source, creating jobs and business opportunities.

New products. We now grow corn for ethanol. University researchers and rural developers are looking for new ways to use other agricultural products. A town in Nebraska has formed a community-owned business in partnership with developers to process sunflower seeds for oils that can be used as substitutes for petroleum.

New markets. Some commercial soybean farmers have switched to organic, local-scale production to reach lucrative markets for tofu in Japan. Todd County farmers joined together to form a selling cooperative so they could reach targeted customers in the city. They skipped the middleman to sell to consumers who want to buy food they can identify by its source.

New uses. The “maze craze” is a recent trend in creative rural asset development. Communities plant and grow corn or another crop in the shape of a human-sized maze that customers can walk through. The maze produces jobs and tourist traffic and can be used to teach people about local agriculture.



Infrastructure and public services. By necessity, rural residents have always cooperated and volunteered to work together for critical community services and infrastructure. Why not apply the same approach to new uses today?

Resident development and construction. Residents of the colonias worked with a nonprofit water development corporation to build water and sewer lines for their community. They have used their time and talents as assets to help build the pipelines and, in the process, learned new talents that can be used in future construction or business.

Rural associations. The Volunteer Fire Department is an example of legendary rural asset-based community development, using a voluntary association to provide critical community services. Some rural communities have used similar cooperative associations for supporting victims of domestic violence, or troubled teens, or home-bound seniors.



Housing. Housing is relatively cheap in rural areas, but it doesn't always seem that way because wages and salaries are also lower. And location is a big factor where things are spread out, since it doesn't help to have a house in a place where you can't get to a job or child care.

Construction as training. Some communities organize their assets to get "two-for-one" benefits in jobs and housing. Job seekers get training and experience by working on jobs to build affordable housing in the area. More housing produces more skills, and more skills produce more housing. In the same way, a "handyman cooperative" can provide lucrative and hands-on experience for workers looking to get into high-level construction jobs, while filling a common gap in local services.

Housing development. If we want affordable housing, we often have to do it ourselves. Rural groups find that they can gain experience starting out with home repair and weatherization, then move on to rehab and housing development. To make projects work on tight rural budgets, groups use "sweat equity" and volunteer work, or low-income housing tax credits, or both.

Value-added housing: Infill and rehab. There are often lots and open spaces in small towns that are overlooked by suburban-style developers. Filling in those lots with housing is usually more cost-effective, because the infrastructure is in place or nearby. And because of the rising cost of construction, rehabbing an existing building almost always results in better quality for less money. These approaches add value to existing housing and infrastructure assets.



Parks, recreation, and leisure. Quality-of-life is a rural selling point, and parks, recreation, and leisure activities are a big reason why. Recreational development offers rural communities a way to attract income from visitors while enhancing amenities for local folks.

Park development. Rural communities have used volunteer sweat and time to build new playgrounds, basketball courts, soccer fields, skating parks, and so on. These projects help bring people together across generations, and are often a highly visible sign of progress and strength for a community heading in a new direction.

Community garden. Similarly, even a small piece of land can be worked by several residents for a community garden. The residents in Pelican Rapids used a part of a park near downtown to grow different kinds of gardens demonstrating international diversity. The vegetables and flowers that result from a community garden can be sold at a farmer's market.

Park designation. When Todd County residents set plans to expand recreational land, they found they could advocate to the state government for a new state park. Such a designation makes a productive alternative use for land, attracts tourists, and recycles tax dollars. Don't forget to consider ways to fund the maintenance of the park as well as the acquisition.



Generational initiatives. One of the most interesting and promising trends in rural asset-based development is bringing together younger and older residents. Widening the circle across the generations brings out creative new synergies in the match-up — and reveals new historical, cultural, and economic assets in the process.

Leadership development and intergenerational learning. The adults and youth in Marvell have organized all of their efforts around intergenerational leadership development. Adults mentor and teach youth, to be sure, but youth are organized in clubs and groups that make their own decisions. That also teaches the adults something about listening to new perspectives.

Living history. Young people in one rural community used video equipment to interview seniors about the old times. They edited the work into a video cultural

history. Participants said the project combined the youth assets of discovery and hope with the senior assets of experience and wisdom. Made money, too.

Creative exchange. Senior assets and youth assets can complement each other. In one community, seniors tutor youth on their school homework, then the youth turn around and tutor seniors on computers. In another community, youth learn to drive while transporting seniors on their errands.

Youth enterprise. Young people can and do make money. Often, they can bring new entrepreneurship to a community. Nowadays, youth businesses run from Web site design to bicycle repair.

Youth voices. A small town chamber of commerce got involved in helping youth. But they realized that young people have ideas and perspectives of their own. They invited young people to form a Youth Council, and took its decisions seriously.



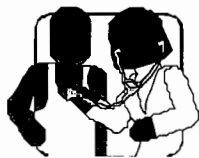
Health promotion. Because rural people are spread out, we have more difficulty affording expensive, capital-intensive, centralized equipment and buildings like hospitals and clinics. But health care is changing. Increasingly, communities realize that good health mostly doesn't come from medical care. We get better health by eliminating the causes of injury and sickness. Good health is fostered by our quality of life. And promoting a great quality of life is something rural communities can excel at.

Alternatives to violence. We think of rural communities as safe, but domestic violence and spousal abuse is often one of the biggest threats to health in rural areas. The folks in Camptonville developed the Twilight School as a place where everybody in the family could both learn and teach. This has helped strengthen families, reduce stress, and increase hope — more effective health solutions than patching up beaten women in the hospital. Other rural communities have started volunteer parent clubs and family classes to help community citizens work out strategies for daily family life.

Alternatives to substance abuse. Drugs and alcohol are major rural health issues. Trinity County approached things from the "half-full glass," pulling together folks in all sorts of clubs and groups to work together on community projects. They built new relationships between adults and youth, and focused people's attention on positive action. In Todd County, young people and adults cooperated on

organizing weekend dances. Studies show these kinds of efforts do more to reduce drunk driving and injuries from substance abuse than anything a hospital can do.

Awareness. In one rural community, a woman grieving her brother's death from AIDS poured her feelings into making dolls. The dolls became popular sellers at galleries and shops and increased health awareness at the same time.



New organization development. Bringing together new people to work on specific, asset-based projects often has one immediate tangible outcome — a new organization.

Community-based development organizations (CBDOs). There are lots of active groups in rural communities, but real community-based development organizations are relatively scarce. Many of the communities in this book formed new CBDOs just for the purpose of continually building on assets and widening the circle.

- ❑ In Marvell, the Boys, Girls, and Adults Community Development Center (BGACDC) started as an after-school tutoring project, and became a democratic vehicle for all kinds of development.
- ❑ The Newton County Resource Council (NCRC) acts more like an umbrella organization and an incubator of new projects.
- ❑ The planning group in Todd County is pretty informal and ad hoc, but it's a new development organization just the same.
- ❑ One community tried asset mapping and decided it was the perfect foundation for a new, progressive Welcome Wagon-type organization.

The size, structure, scope, and function of a new organization must be determined by the situation in each rural community. And, many times, it is better to change and renew existing organizations than to reinvent the wheel or create unnecessary competition for time and funding. But continuous change does require organization and structure.



Institutional change. Institutions may be relatively small in rural communities, but they can be as difficult and inflexible as the largest corporation. Rural community leaders have been able to use asset-based methods to change institutions — opening up decision-making, adopting new roles, and refocusing on community.

Institutions Widening the Circle

- ❑ The county water system doesn't have to exclude the poorest areas. The Colonias CDC showed that a water district can form a successful partnership with community groups.
- ❑ School doesn't have to be just for kids. Twilight School shows that a school can be a community learning center for everybody.
- ❑ The land use planning board in the coastal district doesn't have to operate without Gullah participation. It can broaden its membership and gain the value of the Gullah community development perspective.

Rural institutions that limit their idea of constituency just close themselves off to change in the long run. Residents working with assets can show institutions the value of widening the circle.

Institutions Adopting New Roles

- ❑ New residents and new cultures in Pelican Rapids presented new institutional challenges for the library, the businesses, the schools, and so on. The Multicultural Committee made the local connections and built the social network necessary to support and promote these changes.
- ❑ Partnership for community development between the traditional farming organizations and the sustainable development organizations in Greene County changed both institutions — from within.

Citizen-based collaboration. Like any institutions, rural institutions have their own turf. But sometimes the best way to take advantage of assets is to combine them in new ways, and that calls for partnership and collaboration. For example, there have been efforts all over to bring small towns together for planning, especially on big ticket public goods like schools, tourism, police, and so forth. Where these efforts have been most successful is where ordinary citizens have led the process. In one rural community, for example, a joint planning council of small towns consists of half citizens and half city officials. This has become a citizen-led vehicle for collaboration between towns, and has led to new business development in the area.

Institutions can't drive ABCD — they'll only reinforce the outside-in process that produces the "half-empty glass." But community-driven asset-based development efforts create new opportunities for everyone, including institutions.



Intangible Development

Why do rural communities point most proudly to their intangible accomplishments? Because ABCD comes down to changing and developing relationships. You might not be able to see that, but you can sure feel it. Here are some examples of intangible rural development outcomes:

New attitude and energy. The most common ABCD outcome, and yet the most extraordinary, is the change in community attitude and energy that comes from the process. The realization of untapped assets, the transformation of roles, and the power of collective effort give people new hope.

Confidence. The leaders of Camptonville said that before the ABCD process, there was a “dead” feeling in town. After experiencing success and planning even more development, residents are starting to feel like “there’s nothing we can’t do.”

Fun. In Todd County, participants in asset-based planning had fun with their process, and created a new atmosphere. People sensed something different was happening, and that motivated more people to participate and feel welcome to be involved.

New relationships. Building new relationships isn’t just some general philosophy. Rural ABCD practitioners can often point to specific relationships that have been formed or renewed by the process.

Governance. In Greene County, the Board of Directors of Rural Resources added new leaders who bring new background and perspective to the organization.

One-on-one. In Camptonville, a health outcome of the community-building process has been that every young person is connected to an adult (outside of family) to whom they can talk.

One-on-one. In Pelican Rapids, “befrienders” make an affirmative effort to get to know new neighbors and cross the lines between the traditional circles in the community.

Same people, new relationships. In Trinity County, groups and individuals who maybe knew each other but hadn’t worked together before — the rod and gun club, the school parents, the mule committee, and the youth — all joined together to work on common goals.

Sociologists call the network of relationships “social capital,” because it’s been shown to contribute as much as financial capital to the economic health of a community. But what these examples show is that social capital isn’t exclusive, it’s inclusive. It’s widening the circle. It’s the opposite of clubbishness.



Innovation. Asset-based development creates innovation by linking together assets that hadn’t been linked before. That’s why looking at assets can help a community get out of a rut or help a polarized group of people find a third way out of a conflict.

Common ground. The livestock marketing cooperative concept isn’t unique to Greene County, but in that community it represented an innovation because it was the first project that long-time residents and newcomers could work on together.

Positive celebration. Pelican Rapid’s World Longest Coffee Break was a real break for the community because it celebrated various positive volunteer efforts, and led to greater appreciation of diverse human assets in the community.

New approach. The kitchen incubator is innovative to the Gullah community, because it shows a way to channel the benefits of local development to the community, instead of simply giving in to development pressures.



Track record and reputation. ABCD is about replacing the downward cycle of needs and outside services with a positive cycle of assets and development. In rural communities, new reputations of groups and community leaders create new possibilities for new projects — the snowball effect. Every victory, no matter how small, creates a track record for further success.

Negotiating from strength. In Newton County, local groups and leaders just didn’t apply for grants or resources. They were concerned about being tied to funder strings. After building their own plans based on their own assets, leaders started to feel confident about negotiating with outsiders on their own terms. Now, “everybody in town is writing grant proposals.”

Deeper leadership. If we are going to widen the circle in rural communities, we are going to have to create opportunities for new leaders to lead. ABCD gives all community citizens a chance to participate and demonstrate their talents.

New leadership opportunities. In Pelican Rapids, the MultiCultural Committee created a kind of leadership support group, and the International Friendship Festival gave many individuals a chance to practice leadership in the development of new exhibits and demonstrations. This deeper leadership helps humanize the strangers in town to each other.

Real decision-making. In the Todd County process, young people reported that they felt listened to for the first time. They played an active role in the planning and decision-making, not as tokens. Young leaders participate as equals, with particular perspectives. And the network of participants benefits from their leadership and energy.

Peer support across issues. In one rural community, leaders on several different community issues were forced together by circumstances. They stood together and won a victory, and that led to the realization that each group comprised a valuable asset to a broader, long-lasting coalition.



Power. A good definition of power is “the ability to act upon your interests.” So even though power is a loaded term that can bring up negative images sometimes, really everything we are talking about here involves creating and using power. Sometimes power comes from the capacity to hold larger institutions accountable. Sometimes power comes from the capacity to develop our own alternatives. In rural ABCD, we use and gain power by widening the circle, mapping our assets to understand our value to each other, and mobilizing our assets to create a voice for all of our people, especially those who have been left out of decisions in the past.

Power from research and leverage. When the Colonias CDC used research and information on alternative funding options to negotiate for infrastructure investments by local government, they gained and used power to hold local government accountable.

Power from self-determination. And when other Colonias residents built infrastructure lines using their own financing and some of their own labor, they gained and used another kind of power, the power to develop their own alternate solutions.

Join the Movement — Share Your Work

What examples of rural asset-based community development would you add to this list?

Part of our work is sharing our work. The community leaders whose stories you read about in this book set aside time and effort from their local work to share their stories with you. They did this because they know that they have learned from others, and want to pass the word along. You can do the same, in your community, in your region, in your field, and in your circle of colleagues and fellow rural leaders.



Conclusion: Hope for Rural Communities

The New Economy is Rural

Some people say that rural economies are on the way down. They say that rural economies have been based on farming, fishing, mining, timber, ranching, and so on, and that with consolidation, opportunities in those industries are shrinking. There just isn't enough agribusiness to support small towns and rural communities anymore.

There is another view. Looking at our assets, we might observe that rural economies haven't just been about certain crops or products. Our rural economies have been based on the talents and skills of our people, brought together by common bonds in special places.

Over the years, what we've been good at is developing and maintaining a *productive network of entrepreneurs*. After all, farmers and ranchers and so forth are really small businesses. We work independently, which keeps us on our toes. But we cooperate to produce goods and services in large quantity.

Economists call this a flexible business network. And it's the biggest trend in business today. After getting hurt by fast changes in the global economy, huge corporations have come to realize that size is no help if you can't be flexible. They are trying to reorganize, to combine the advantages of small-scale flexibility with large-scale production.

*From the perspective
of the new economy,
we are all rural now*

And that's what we're good at. That's the core competency of rural economies. It's what comes from being spread out, but being tied together by community.

This trend toward flexible networks is only further fueled by the Internet and changes in technologies, and the movement of capital. These days, we are all spread out across the globe. From the perspective of the new economy, we are all rural now.

And who better to lead the new rural economy, than rural communities?

Organize to Act

Rural areas are facing real change. It's true that farms are closing all over every day. A small town may watch a whole operation of timber, fishing, mining, or meatpacking close up, and watch the jobs go with it. Shopping and retail business shifts to the suburbs. Some analysts, and even some rural folks, wonder whether small towns will survive.

Ten or twenty years ago, people said the same thing about inner-city neighborhoods. The experts said that the flight to the suburbs and racial discrimination would leave some neighborhoods and even whole cities as ghost towns. The experts wondered whether it was even worth trying to save the cities. But those experts were wrong about the cities then, and they are wrong about rural areas today. Inner-city neighborhoods are coming back. And now for the first time in decades, rural population is increasing. The age of suburbanization seems to be coming to an end, and both the city and the country are on the rise again.

Rural communities will grow and thrive in the 21st century. We're not closing up our small towns or giving up on the countryside. We've got something special to develop. Our communities each have a special identity, a reason for being here in the first place. We've got economic advantages for business and jobs. We have space. We enjoy an easy and human quality of life. We live in beauty and nature. We've got culture and a closeness of community. We have places where everyone can be a true citizen.

We've got our ruralness.

And that's an asset we can build on.



SECTION IV — RESOURCES

This section on resources offers some suggestions for thinking about financial resources, and provides some specific research and networking resources.

Financial Resources

All too often, community leaders come to believe that money is the answer to their problems. If we only had more money, we'd say, then we could get things done. Of course, the flip side of that seems to be if we don't get more money then we can't get things done. And that's not true at all.

Money: You May Not Need It

Much asset-based community development gets started with little or no money. We volunteer. We contribute what we have, potluck style. And that doesn't limit our scope or our impact. The Twilight School costs very little, but involves more people and makes more community impact than a professional service might, or even an expensive building.

Projects that require professional staff — and offices and budgets and space and so on — are often limited by what the professional staff can do. Professionals often complain that they can't get enough people involved. Volunteer efforts are also limited in some ways, and often complain about money. But the biggest, best organizations of people are voluntary — churches, associations, clubs, and other networks. Better to have people and little money, than money and few people.

A big urban and rural program of the federal government in recent years has been Empowerment Zones, which make up to \$100 million available to targeted communities. Some have been very successful. But according to the experts, one community that tried and failed to get the designation and money has kept more people involved and done more for the community than some of the funded efforts. One reason is that asset-based volunteer efforts get people focused on results, rather than on dividing the pie. Don't start with the money you think you need. Start with the assets you know you have.

Money: You Already Have It

We think we don't have money, but we do. Even in the smallest, poorest communities, thousands and millions of dollars are spent every year. We just need to use money in new ways.

*Even in the smallest,
poorest communities,
thousands and millions
of dollars are spent
every year*

Todd County has been one of the poorest communities in the state of Minnesota. But when a community leader was stricken with a serious health problem, more than 1,000 people chipped in to help at a charity fundraiser. This is the rule, not the exception, in rural community life.

Grassroots fundraising experts say that raising money from local residents for local projects is the best way to build support, increase ownership, and ensure the success of both current and future efforts. The value of local fundraising goes far beyond the dollars raised. We can use the money we have to get what we want. The residents of El Milagro colonia don't have much money, but they could each afford to spend \$15 a month or so for water and sewer service. Maybe that money would have gone for buying drinking water another way — or for medicines or services to treat the symptoms of unsanitary conditions. By pooling their sweat equity, El Milagro residents created a way to redirect their monies for the improvement of their own community.

If every Marvell parent tried to tutor children after school, they'd lose salary and wages. But when the parents cooperated to take turns on their own after-school center, they started a whole new community institution.

Think about our existing financial assets — our buying power, our savings, and our earning power — to create cooperative economics and to rechannel monies in our community.

Money: Leverage What You Have

Yes, of course, sometimes we just have to have outside money to accomplish some of our particular goals. Sometimes we have to ask funders to support our projects.

The first thing to learn about getting grants, loans, investments, or other funding is what Newton County learned: Get your own plan and priorities together before you go for funding. Funders and financiers want to invest in something positive. Funders want to put their money behind a community that can do something good with it.

There is such a thing as a planning grant, where a funder will invest in a community's process of planning and developing good projects. The Blandin Community Investment Partnership is a good example of this. But even with a planning grant, a funder will want to invest in a good, diverse, committed network of people. Build on that.

The second thing to learn is to leverage outside funds with your own. Funders want to be part of a team too. Funders want to see their money contribute to and draw strength from the time, energy, and funding of local community members. They want to see evidence that you have a stake in your own success. Since you do have a stake, that's not as hard as it seems. Funders helped pay for the kitchen incubator in the Gullah community. But local cooks pay for their own materials, supply, and labor. And they pool their efforts to support each other.

One of the most important rural development efforts in recent years has been the “seeding” of local rural community foundations by national funders. Community foundations are just a form of local fundraising, which collect grants and contributions from local citizens and then make those monies available for targeted local projects. Any community can start a community foundation, even without a nice “seed fund.” It’s a good way to organize leaders around priority issues.

Money: You Can Find Outside Sources

Studies show that foundations and government agencies don’t fund rural communities in proportion to our numbers — whether you look at population, size, or the extent of poverty and disadvantage. That’s the half empty glass. The half-full glass is that funders are starting to realize this historical gap in funding rural community development. You can find foundations, corporations, public agencies, and individuals willing to invest in asset-based projects in rural communities all over.

The half-full glass is that funders are starting to realize this historical gap in funding rural community development

Every region has a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing information on grants and grantmaking to various grantseekers. Find yours, and make a point to visit the office or check out its resources on the Internet.

Colleges and universities are another good source of information on funders and grants. Public agencies have many ways of spending money. Sometimes, a community initiative can provide an effective way for a public agency to allocate existing funds. Other times, funding decisions are a policy issue.

Just because we can accomplish a lot without money, it doesn’t mean we should overlook the significance of public funding decisions. We have two very strong and important arguments to make in public policy debate. First, grassroots, asset-based initiatives are the most effective way to accomplish many public goals. We create jobs and economic opportunity more effectively, we develop and build community, and we create hope.

Second, by widening the circle ABCD makes it possible for public funds to reach the greatest good for the greatest number of people. When people come together to build community by sharing assets, that’s real constituency.

Public funding comes down to politics. If you have the people, then you have constituency. And in politics, constituency is what matters. Use your people power. Use it, or lose it.



Research Resources

There are literally hundreds of organizations and groups involved in rural community development of some kind. And there are also many organizations and communities all over the world who are working from an ABCD perspective, rural and otherwise. Some of these groups are local, some are national or international, some are issue-based, some advance a certain method or approach. You might research these organizations to find other useful books, Web sites, materials, advice, etc.

This is not the book to try to sort through all of these. Even if you read a listing here, it would be out-of-date soon after the list was set in print. But we can give you a start on your research.

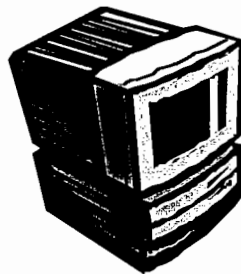
The sponsors of this publication each maintain Web pages on the Internet that can help you in your search. But first, take a look at these descriptions of the Blandin Foundation and the ABCD Institute.

- ❑ **The Blandin Foundation** Web page has information and links to rural resources. See especially the Community Resources section. The address is:

www.bcip.org/

- ❑ **The ABCD Institute** Web page has links to more information on asset-based community development. (This is also where people can order copies of this book!) The address is:

www.northwestern.edu/IPR/abcd.html



Networking Resources

We are not alone. There are rural communities all over that are doing great things from an asset-building approach. And we have learned lessons, sometimes tough lessons, about the challenges and successes of this approach.

In the spirit of widening the circle, ABCD practitioners and rural community leaders strive to share lessons and build networks with each other. This book is just the start. You can participate in this effort by talking to your peers and colleagues in this movement.

Your Existing Associations

As ever, you should start with your own assets — the contacts you have with people in other rural communities who are working on similar issues. Set aside some time in one of your gatherings to brainstorm these “associational assets” — who knows somebody in another community who can offer experience on an issue or challenge that your community faces.

*In most cases, you'll
find that people are
happy to share*

And remember, sharing is a two-way street. In exchange for information, offer information of your own. Even if you don't have much to share with one community, there will be another community coming along who needs to learn what you know. Treat their request as you would like to be treated when you ask for information.

In most cases, you'll find that people are happy to share. Sometimes, we are proud of our work and want to toot our own horns to anybody who will listen. Other times we have been through hard struggles and want to prepare colleagues who may face similar challenges. Often, it's both. Either way, we know that we are exploring new territory, and we have to support each other to cover the ground.



Peer Contacts — Featured Rural Communities

Nine rural communities were featured in Section II of this workbook. A variety of organizations and individuals from these nine communities have volunteered to list contact information here, in order to spark more sharing and networking with the readers of this book. If you have a question or can offer help of your own, you are

encouraged to contact an organization or individual who shares a common interest with you.

If you choose to contact any of these organizations, you are reminded to follow the good networking guidelines described above. Give and receive. And respect the time and perspective of peers you contact. They are community folks like any other, who are not paid to give advice, but who share lessons with colleagues to advance the cause together.

Newton County, Arkansas (from Stories of Hope and Action, *Patch Work*)

Newton County Resource Council
Babs De Chant, Administrative Director
PO Box 513
Jasper, AR 72641
Phone: (870) 446-5898
Fax: (870) 446-2701
E-mail: bdechant@jasper.yournet.com

Faye Knox
HC62 Box 692
Deer, AR 72628
E-mail: fknox@jasper.yournet.com

Greene County, Tennessee (from Stories of Hope and Action, *Sharing Respect*)

Rural Resources
Sally Causey, Executive Director,
2870 Holley Creek Road
Greenville, TN 37745
Phone: (423) 636-8171
E-mail: ruralres@xtn.net
www.RuralResources.net

Alice Loftin (Stories on the Land) can be reached through Rural Resources

Greene County
Milton Orr
Ag Extension Service
204 N. Cutler Street, #105
Greenville, TN 37745
Phone: (423) 798-1710
E-mail: mworr@ext1.ag.utk.edu

Trinity County, California (from Stories of Hope and Action, *Rural Associational Life*)

Trinity Kids First Collaborative
Sally Aldinger, Coordinator
P.O. Box 1256
Weaverville, CA 96093
Phone: (530) 623-2861 extension 226
E-mail: sallyald@tcoe.trinity.k12.ca.us

Jan Raffety, Parent Community Coordinator
P.O. Box 269
Hayfork, CA 96041
Phone: (530) 628-5878

Sam Rose
Hyampom University
P.O. Box 74
Hayfork, CA 96041
Phone: (530) 628-4152

Gullah community in coastal areas of South Carolina (from Stories of Hope and Action, *The Culture of Place and the Place of Culture*)

South Carolina Coastal Community Development Corporation
Liz Santagati
Phone: (843) 838-3295
Fax: (843) 838-2954

Camptonville, California (from Stories of Hope and Action, *Uncovering Hidden Treasure*)

The Camptonville Wellness Resource Center
PO Box 278
Camptonville, CA 95922
Phone: (530) 288-9355
Fax: (530) 288-1908
E-mail: wellness.center@cville.k12.ca.us

The Camptonville Collaborative
(Yuba Community Collaborative for Healthy Children)
Shirley DicKard, Coordinator
E-mail: sdickard@jps.net

Twilight School
Cathy LeBlanc, Coordinator

The Camptonville Resource Network
(The Neighborhood Network)
Pam Wilcox, Coordinator

Pelican Rapids (from Stories of Hope and Action, *Rural Ethnic Diversity*)

Pelican Rapids Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 206
Pelican Rapids, MN 56572
E-mail: pracofc@iname.com

City of Pelican Rapids
PO 350
Pelican Rapids, MN 56572-0350
E-mail: citypr@means.net
www.pelicanrapids.com

Pelican Rapids Area Economic Development Corporation
PO Box 892
Pelican Rapids, MN 56572-0892
E-mail: praedc@means.net

Pelican Rapids Multicultural Committee
PO Box 362
Pelican Rapids, MN 56572-0362
E-mail: mozart@means.net

Jim McDonald
PO Box 305
Pelican Rapids, MN 56572-0305

Phyllis Haugrud
Prairie View Estates
RR2 Box 443
Pelican Rapids, MN 56572

Marvell, Arkansas (from Stories of Hope and Action, *We Are Family*)

Beatrice Clark-Shelby
P.O. Box 1356
Marvell, AR 72366
Phone: (870) 829-3636 or 3274
Fax: (870) 829-2282
E-mail: bgacdc@aol.com

Todd County (from *Stories of Hope and Action, Creativity, Clowns, and Poetry*)

Blandin Community Investment Partnership
Rita and Gary Stracek, Co-chairs
Route 2, Box 100
Browerville, MN 56438
E-mail: garyrita@rea.alp.com

LeRoy Williams, Co-chair
Todd County Extension
Phone: (320) 732-4435

Colonias along border between New Mexico and Mexico (from *Stories of Hope and Action, Transformation and Power*)

Colonias Development Council
1485 N. Main Suite C
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88001
Phone: (505) 647-2744
E-mail: cdcmain@juno.com

Diocese of Las Cruces
Office of Catholic Social Ministry
1280 Med Park Drive
Las Cruces, New Mexico, 88005
Phone: (505) 523-7577
E-mail: alujan@dioceseoflascruces.org

The ABCD Institute Network and the Blandin Foundation Rural PeerLink. Both the Blandin Foundation and the ABCD Institute have established ways for you to network with peers and colleagues through the Internet.

The ABCD Institute manages e-mail discussion groups for asset-based community development practitioners. By joining an e-mail discussion group, you get the opportunity to send and receive e-mail from other members of the group on the discussion subject. Participants ask each other questions, make suggestions, discuss issues and alert each other to gatherings, funding opportunities, and other important events.

The primary discussion group managed by the Institute is called the ABCD Listserv. This is appropriate for discussion of rural ABCD in general. There may be other, more specialized lists active at the time you read this. To check out these discussions and to apply to join a list, log on to the same ABCD Web page:

www.northwestern.edu/IPR/abcd.html

and click on "Discussion Group."

The Blandin Foundation is planning to start a space on its Web page called the Blandin Rural PeerLink. This is a place for rural practitioners and community leaders to post examples of rural development efforts you have been a part of. The PeerLink will provide contact information for participants who choose to participate, so that peers and colleagues working on similar issues or projects can locate and contact each other for sharing and peer support.

To post your rural community example on the Blandin Rural PeerLink, and to check the list for examples you might be interested in, log on to the Blandin home Web site:

www.bcip.org/



SECTION V — APPENDIX

About the Blandin Foundation

Established in 1941 in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, by pioneering newspaper man, Charles K. Blandin, the Foundation has a deep and abiding interest in the rural towns and cities of Minnesota. While the Foundation was once linked to the Blandin Paper Company, today they are distinctly separate organizations. The Blandin Foundation has a special interest in the Grand Rapids area, where it was founded and where its headquarters remain today.

The mission of the Blandin Foundation is to strengthen rural Minnesota communities. Its leadership training programs provide skill-building experiences to give leaders the tools they need to address local concerns. Foundation community-focused programs provide technical and financial resources to assist citizens revitalize and transform their communities. And Blandin Foundation convening programs provide forums for the discussion of issues by state and community leaders.

With assets exceeding \$400 million at the end of 2000, the Blandin Foundation provides grants and programs totaling more than \$20 million annually.

Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP)

The Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP) helps current and emerging leaders understand more fully the dynamics of their communities, the skills of visioning, planning and action, and the role shared leadership plays in building healthy community. The program is intended not only to enhance individual leadership skills, but to foster effective leadership networks for collaborative work on specific community projects.

Since 1985, BCLP has provided experiential leadership training for over 3,000 community leaders from 200-plus rural Minnesota communities. Teams of participants are chosen by local committees to be representative of that community's ethnic and cultural diversity, varying levels of involvement, occupations, and life situations. This program brings together men and women from diverse backgrounds — civic leaders, educators, health care providers, volunteers, social workers, business people, and elected officials. All share one thing in common: a commitment to the future of their communities.

BCLP's core program is comprised of a total of nine days of training in a residential retreat and two subsequent workshops. Alumni of the core program are provided continuing learning opportunities through BCLP's Building Inclusive Community Program and Academy for Advancing Community, as well as seminars on topics such as Managing Change and Working With Volunteers. BCLP also conducts the

Partners-in-Leadership program to provide training for emerging leaders in communities of color.

For more information about the Blandin Community Leadership Program, visit BCLP's Web site at www.bclp.org or contact:

James Krile, Ph.D., BCLP Director

Blandin Community Investment Partnership (BCIP)

Building on the success of the Blandin Community Leadership Program, the Blandin Foundation now offers an opportunity, to rural Minnesota communities with a strong leadership base, to invest in a partnership with the Foundation. The Blandin Community Investment Partnership (BCIP) acts as a catalyst by providing a dynamic framework and technical and financial resources to the citizens of rural Minnesota for exploring, designing, and implementing innovative projects that will revitalize and transform their communities.

The Blandin Foundation will invest in the community by providing technical assistance and meeting facilitation, assessment tools and resource materials, financial resources, and convening of multiple communities to share the lessons learned from participation in BCIP. In turn, the community must provide a strong base of leaders who can recruit a diverse, multigenerational group of individuals and major stakeholders committed to the process of identifying and taking action on significant community issues.

BCIP is a means for the Foundation to realize its vision of strengthening rural Minnesota communities by investing resources in significant projects that will improve the health of the communities involved.

For more information about the Blandin Community Investment Partnership, visit BCIP's Web site at www.bcip.org or contact:

Carol Spearman, BCIP Director

Blandin Foundation contact information:

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About the ABCD Institute

The Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD), established in 1995 by the Community Development Program at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research, is built upon three decades of community development research by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. The ABCD Institute spreads its findings on capacity-building community development in two ways: (1) through extensive and substantial interactions with community builders, and (2) by producing practical resources and tools for community builders to identify, nurture, and mobilize neighborhood assets. The ABCD Institute is funded by the Chicago Community Trust in consultation with the Kinship Foundation.

As a first priority, the Institute has responded to the many calls by community organizations requesting speeches, workshops, and consultations by establishing the ABCD faculty. These 32 highly skilled leaders come from foundations, community groups, United Ways, churches, universities, consulting groups, and health organizations in the United States and Canada. They have worked with more than 200 organizations helping them with their asset-based community development projects. Some of the many issues and groups they've worked with include: Healthy Communities, community mapping, welfare reform, youth, people with disabilities, institution/community relations, and families and children. They've addressed church groups, policymakers, community groups, educators, social service providers, hospitals, foundations, and leadership groups.

The Asset-Based Community Development Religious Network

The Asset-Based Community Development Religious Network (ABCDRN) is a network of faith-based community builders who are working to support and build community within their congregations and neighborhoods, following the basic principles of asset-based community development. The group originated in 1997 after an ABCD seminar at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, New Mexico. The week-long ABCDRN Ghost Ranch seminar is now an annual offering with a new subject focus each year. The ABCDRN also has an informational directory of participants, a newsletter, and a listserv discussion group for members.

Network members are currently focused on the following areas:

- Building congregations from the inside out, starting with the strengths and assets of their members rather than relying solely on outside "experts" and resources.
- Involving congregation-based people in building communities using the asset-based community development approach.
- Applying congregational and community asset-based approaches to vital public policy issues such as welfare reform.

The Asset-Based Community Development Neighborhood Circle

The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute recently launched a community organizing project called the Neighborhood Circle. The project is comprised of twelve local groups committed to organizing their communities using ABCD principles. Their efforts are being guided by a national director who provides training, advice, and technical assistance for the local projects. ABCD offers a unique contribution to ways of thinking about community organizing in that it emphasizes that all individuals in a community have valuable gifts to contribute. ABCD also emphasizes that local associations can contribute to the well-being of the community, and that the key to a strong community is that producers actually live inside the community. ABCD has clear core values about keeping citizens central, encouraging a focus on developing local economies, seeking cooperation rather than competition, being inclusive, inviting innovation and creativity, developing sustainable initiatives, and supporting place-based neighborhood work.

Regional ABCD Networks

Over the last five years, regional networks of people involved in and committed to strengths-based approaches to revitalizing communities have developed in California, Chicago, Connecticut, South Carolina, and Wisconsin. These groups have each developed independently. They serve various functions as discussion forum, action group, and/or technical assistance and training consortium.

Asset-Based Community Development Institute contact information:

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Fax: (847) 467-4140

www.northwestern.edu/IPR/abcd.html



More resources on the Asset-Based Community Building approach...

Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets, by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. This widely circulated 376-page book suggests that communities cannot be rebuilt by focusing on their needs, problems, and deficiencies. Rather, community building starts with the process of locating the assets, skills, and capacities of residents, citizens, citizens' associations, and local institutions.

\$20.00 for a single copy. Discounts available for multiple copies.

Mobilizing Community Assets—This six-module video training program featuring McKnight and Kretzmann introduces the concept of "asset-based community development" as outlined in *Building Communities from the Inside Out*. **(\$79.50)**

ABCD Workbooks **(\$9.00 each)**:

- ▶ A Guide to Mapping and Mobilizing the Economic Capacities of Local Residents (1996)
- ▶ A Guide to Mapping Local Business Assets and Mobilizing Local Business Capacities (1996)
- ▶ A Guide to Mapping Consumer Expenditures and Mobilizing Consumer Expenditure Capacities (1996)
- ▶ A Guide to Capacity Inventories: Mobilizing the Community Skills of Local Residents (1997)
- ▶ A Guide to Evaluating Asset-Based Community Development: Lessons, Challenges, and Opportunities (1997)
- ▶ A Guide to Creating a Neighborhood Information Exchange: Building Communities by Connecting Local Skills and Knowledge (1998)
- ▶ City-Sponsored Community Building: Savannah's Grants for Blocks Story (1998)
- ▶ Newspapers and Neighborhoods: Strategies for Achieving Responsible Coverage of Local Communities (1999)
- ▶ A Guide to Mapping and Mobilizing the Associations in Local Neighborhoods (1999)
- ▶ Leading by Stepping Back: A Guide for City Officials on Building Neighborhood Capacity (1999)
- ▶ The Organization of Hope: A Workbook for Rural Asset-Based Community Development (2001)

Exclusive distributor: ACTA Publications, 4848 North Clark Street, Chicago, IL 60640. Phone: 800-397-2282. Fax: 800-397-0079. E-mail: acta@one.org. All orders must be prepaid or charged to Visa or Master Card.

A Community Building Workbook
from
The Asset-Based Community Development Institute
Institute for Policy Research
Northwestern University