

6.5.4 Community assets

What are community assets?

*'Assets are, in this context, any factor that enhances the ability of individuals, groups, communities, populations, social systems and institutions to maintain health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.'*¹

Examples of assets include:

- Skills and knowledge of local residents
- Passions and interests that motivate change
- Networks and connections in a community
- Resources of public, private and third sector organisations that are available to support community development
- Physical and economic resources of a place that enhance wellbeing

It is important to note that assets are defined from the perspective of the local community.

Organisational-driven lists can provide a starting point, but an asset-approach demands real community engagement.

Stakeholders working at all levels need to buy into the concept for it to be effective. It represents a significant shift from the traditional deficit-based approach and requires an acceptance of moving decision-making power to the local community.

Why is this issue important?

*'Communities have never been built upon their deficiencies. Building communities has always depended on mobilising the capacity and assets of people and place.'*²

Community assets are offered as a way for local councils to reduce health inequalities and promote sustainable change. In the current financial climate, with reductions in public sector funding, it is more important than ever to ensure efficient use of available resources. Furthermore, recognising and strengthening assets is an opportunity to address the vulnerabilities that hamper a community's ability to do well in face of adversity.

Figure 1 illustrates how assets can contribute to increased community resilience.

Figure 1: How assets can contribute to community resilience



Individual assets – skills, talents, networks, knowledge, interests, time, positive values, self-esteem and a sense of purpose which people are willing to contribute

Community assets – family and friendships, networks, intergenerational links, community cohesion, religious groups, associations, creative arts and opportunities for people to express themselves and come together

Organisational/Institutional assets – land, buildings, transport, local business/organisation spending, people's knowledge-based assets³

By identifying capacity, skills, connections and potential in a community, an asset-approach seeks to mobilise all available resources, build social capital and promote community resilience.

There are several defined techniques to an asset approach:

- **asset mapping** (communities map resources and skills)
- **asset based community development** (build up community and voluntary groups/organisations and share knowledge/power)
- **Appreciative enquiry** (appreciate the current situation, think about what could happen and collectively deliver this)

¹ Improvement & Development Agency. 'A glass half full: how an asset approach can improve community health and wellbeing.' 2010.

² Kretzmann J & McKnight J. Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets; 1993.

³ NHS North West and Department of Health (2011) Development of a method for Asset Based Working

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- **Participatory appraisal** (Local people are trained to collect and analyse information about their own community)
- **Open space technology** (A meeting of representatives of all stakeholders is held with an “open” forum for the agenda to be decided within the meeting)

These community-led, long term and open-ended techniques specifically aim to discover and mobilise what people have to offer to maintaining and building the health and wellbeing of their communities.

The Localism Act (2011)⁴, sets out a series of proposals intended to shift power away from central government, towards local people, to allow people to:

- be more involved in their local area and identify opportunities for community action
- raise issues that need addressing and develop local solutions
- be actively involved in the decisions that are taken about their area
- be empowered to develop local services and groups

Key outcomes

While there are no outcomes relating directly to assets, there is a national recognition of the importance of identifying and valuing local assets to improve and maintain health and wellbeing, particularly in relation to the harnessing of social capital.^{5,6,7,8,9}

Impact in Brighton & Hove

The 2010 Annual Report of the Director of Public Health¹⁰ used the Young Foundation’s Wellbeing and Resilience Measure (WARM) to map

⁴ The Stationary Office (2011) The Localism Act 2011

⁵ Marmot (2010) Fair Society, Healthy Lives and A Glass Half Full

⁶ NHS Northwest/DoH (2012) Development of a Method of Asset Based Working

⁷ NHS Northwest/DoH (2012) What makes us healthy? The asset approach in practice: evidence, action, evaluation

⁸ DoH (March 2013) Statutory Guidance on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies March 2013

⁹ National Collaboration for Integrated Care and Support (May 2013) Integrated Care and Support: Our Shared Commitment

¹⁰ NHS Brighton and Hove & Brighton & Hove City Council. Annual Report of the Director of Public Health – Resilience. 2010

<http://www.bhlis.org/needsassessments/publichealthreports> [Accessed on 25/08/2012].

community resilience in Brighton & Hove. This used existing data to look at communities in a new way.

Introducing an asset-approach gives an opportunity for the local community to participate more meaningfully in decision-making by creating a safe space for individuals to identify solutions to their problems and determine funding priorities.

Where we are doing well

The concept of community assets is relatively new and yet there are examples of strategic, citywide, local work towards recognising assets in Brighton & Hove.

Strategic assets work includes:

The **Brighton & Hove Strategic Partnership** brings together different parts of the public, private and third sector and provides a local structure for coordinated action. The Partnership developed a **Community Engagement Framework** setting out the strategic aims and key principles for community engagement, and examples of good practice.

The City Council’s **Community Development strategy** acknowledges the need for an asset based model and the communities and equality team have supported the implementation of programmes that build on an asset based model including work led by the CVSF and communities through neighbourhood governance work.

Citywide assets work includes:

The Brighton & Hove FED Centre for Independent Living launched the **It’s Local Actually Project** which has gathered information about 250 groups and clubs and 950 social activities on offer in the local area. The resource is available online, allows searching by service or by area of the city and is seen as a benchmark for mapping community assets in Brighton and Hove.

The Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (CVSF) is an independent charity that facilitates advocacy and networking between local community organisations. In partnership with the University of Brighton and Brighton & Hove City Council, CVSF produced ‘Taking Account: a social and economic audit of the third sector in Brighton and Hove’. The report provides an overview of the community and voluntary sector and demonstrates

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the social and economic benefits of these local assets. An update of this is currently underway.

Between November 2011 and January 2012 the Council asked residents' opinion of neighbourhood decision making. 90% of respondents felt they wanted more influence over their area and 68% said they would get involved in this. Since then local initiatives are already mapping assets and employing an asset-approach in their community work. A few examples are given here:

Neighbourhood governance is an initiative in Brighton & Hove to explore the mechanisms through which decision making in particular areas can be devolved to local communities. Two pilot projects in Whitehawk (neighbourhood) and Hollingdean and Stanmer (ward) use an assets approach to increase communication between service providers and users so services can meet needs better and where appropriate handing those services over to the community. Participatory budgeting has meant that funding is available for local residents to allocate to community projects chosen by themselves.

Two **Coldean and Hollingdean asset mapping workshops** formed part of the Neighbourhood Governance Project trialled in Brighton & Hove and were run between October 2012 and March 2013 to chart all the resources and assets identified and valued by the local communities, and to provide opportunities for ideas on how to build on these resources. A customised Google map was created for each area plotting local assets and is intended as a live source of community information that can be accessed and added to by community members.

Predicted future need

An asset-approach provides an opportunity for the local community to become equal partners in co-production and has the potential to bring about real and sustainable change in health outcomes. In the current financial climate, maximising the use of available resources is more important than ever.

What we don't know

National guidance encourages an asset approach but does not define how this should be implemented at a local level. It is likely that 'no one size fits all' and Brighton & Hove needs to decide what tools are best suited to the local community.

To date, asset-based approaches have been small-scale and exploratory in nature. From these pilot projects, there is emerging evidence on different tools, but little is known, either locally or nationally, about how to introduce an asset-approach on a larger scale.

Key evidence and policy

The Brighton & Hove Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2010

<http://www.bhlis.org/needsassessments/publichealthreports>

'What makes us healthy? The asset approach in practice: evidence, action, evaluation' is a follow up document to 'A glass half full'.

<http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/assets-alliance/What%20makes%20us%20healthy.pdf>

The Well London programme is a Big Lottery-funded initiative that is designed to gather high-quality data on the impact of community action projects on health outcomes

<http://www.welllondon.org.uk>

Recommended future local priorities

1. Closer working with relevant partners to look further at how an asset-approach might inform city needs assessment
2. Further develop asset approaches in the city building on learning from the Neighbourhood Governance pilots.

Key links to other sections

- Social connectedness
- Community resilience
- Happiness and wellbeing

Further information

Community Engagement Framework

<http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1218794>

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