

# Stronger Together

Asset-Based Community Development for South Gloucestershire







**South Gloucestershire is a place with huge strengths. We have innovative local businesses, a beautiful natural environment and a rich heritage.**

But at our heart, it's our people that drive us forward. Our local residents are creative, skilled, dedicated and resourceful. Across the district, we have strong networks of local groups and community organisations who have shown that when they come together, they can achieve remarkable things.

We still face big challenges, but we believe that the strengths, resilience and talents of our people provide us with profound ways to overcome them.

This belief forms the foundation of a powerful approach that partners in the public and community sectors of South Gloucestershire are exploring together. The technical term for this is "Asset-Based Community Development" or "ABCD".

**After reading this leaflet, you'll understand:**

- **what ABCD is**
- **how it's different from traditional approaches**
- **what it means for you and your community, and**
- **how you can get involved in making it a success.**





# "What's strong, not what's wrong"

ABCD is a way of building strong communities through identifying and mobilising their untapped strengths and resources. It fosters relationships, collaboration and creativity to empower local people to address their own needs and aspirations.

As illustrated below, ABCD flips the traditional logic of public services on its head. Instead of authorities deciding what's wrong with communities and imposing

solutions on them (doing **TO** or **FOR** people), ABCD focuses on developing services **WITH** people and enables residents to take action **BY** themselves.

This approach sees people as partners with strengths and skills. The public sector doesn't control things, but works alongside local people, helping to navigate challenges and supporting communities to find their own answers to the problems they might face.<sup>1</sup>

This is a more effective and sustainable way of supporting people to stay healthy, keep their neighbourhoods safe, protect their local environment, support local business and receive better care at every stage of life.

 <p><b>To</b> "Everything done, is done to us and without us" (Medical model)</p>	 <p><b>For</b> "Everything done, is done for us, without us" (Charity model)</p>	 <p><b>With</b> "Nothing is done for us, without us" (Social model, advocacy, co-design, co-production, asset-based approaches)</p>	 <p><b>By</b> "Done by us, for us" (Asset-based community development)</p>
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## "When it comes to building community, focus first on what's strong, not what's wrong"

Cormac Russell, Nurture Development

1. Nurture Development, 2018, "The four essential elements of an Asset-Based Community Development Process". Available at: [https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/4\\_Essential\\_Elements\\_of\\_ABCD\\_Process.pdf](https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/4_Essential_Elements_of_ABCD_Process.pdf)



# What type of strengths do communities have?



ABCD seeks to harness the strengths or "assets" in communities. By "assets", we mean:



- 1. The contributions of residents** – the skills people have, their passions, their knowledge
- 2. Associations** – our networks of local people, clubs, groups etc.
- 3. Local institutions** – supportive community-oriented organisations across the public, private and community sectors
- 4. Local places** – shared spaces across our neighbourhoods, like community centres, green spaces, pubs, high streets, local woodland
- 5. Exchange** – what we can do to help each other using our own resources, like our skills and our time
- 6. Stories** – our experience and life lessons that we share to develop a common culture and narrative about our community.



# What does ABCD look like in practice?

Here are a some examples of how this approach might make communities feel different.



## Keeping the district clean

Sodbury & Yate Clean Up is a group of volunteers who "can't stand litter!". They started out in 2020 as a few local people concerned about the amount of litter in the local area. They put up fliers in local shops and notice boards and used social media to invite other local people to join in their litter picks.

The group now meet once a month at different locations to pick litter for an hour, often with 20–30 volunteers taking part. Members also litter pick in their spare time and post photos of their finds on the group Facebook page, encouraging others in the community to do the same.

The group have partnered with Yate Town Council who have donated equipment. In turn, they lend equipment out to other groups in the area or advise on how to borrow litter picking equipment from South Glos Council.

They also support and promote other fantastic groups like the Upper Frome Friends, a volunteer group that organise clean-ups of the River Frome during the summer months.

Both groups see and share the positive impact their actions have on the local flora and fauna and the wellbeing of the people and communities involved.



## Getting people cycling

**Yate Community Bike Hub** is a self-funded, volunteer-run initiative that works to promote the great benefits of cycling and help people move around Yate and Sodbury by bicycle, safely and confidently.

The group was founded in 2022 by a small group of volunteers and cycling enthusiasts from **Climate Action Yate and Chipping Sodbury** and the Joint Cycleways Group. They wanted to prevent unwanted bikes ending up in the waste system and encourage cycling as a green and cheap alternative to driving, a leading source of carbon emissions.

With support from Yate Shopping Centre, the Hub was created. It now hosts regular events, including community bike rides and bike security sessions with the Neighbourhood Policing Team. They offer free cycle training and bike maintenance courses. Volunteers also refurbish donated bikes and equipment for distribution and to families in need at low or no cost.

The Hub is helping people see the benefits of cycling as a quicker, cheaper and healthier alternative to driving and are helping to reduce the environmental impact of bikes being sent to landfill, with over 1,200 bikes re-homed to date.

# Community Bike Hub

*The start of a new journey*





## Improving parks for everyone

The Friends of Page Park is a group of local residents and park users who work to protect and improve Page Park and its facilities for the community and future generations.

At a launch event in 1999, the group asked the local community to place small flags on a 3D map of the park to show what changes they would like to see. The Friends group has been working on that list ever since!

Over the years, the group has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds to improve the park and surrounding area. There is now an accessible Sensory Garden, a new aviary and play equipment, a restored Edwardian bandstand, accessible toilet facilities and a new entrance for a local cycle path. The group also secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to build a new café and restore the park's clock tower.

Page Park has become a hub for events and activities. There are annual events like the Lunar New Year Celebration, Armed Forces Day and the Refugee Festival. There are also Walking Well, Yoga in the Park and gardening activities run by volunteers.

The Friends group continually go out to visitors of the park and the local community with surveys and consultations, promoting a sense of ownership of the park.





# Doing this together in South Gloucestershire



There is a big opportunity for us to do things differently in South Gloucestershire.

Partners and communities have worked together to produce a framework for action. This does three things:

- 1.** Defines a set of principles to shape how we can work together in South Gloucestershire in an ABCD way
- 2.** Provides some example actions for what these principles might mean in practice for everyone
- 3.** Suggests a way of measuring what's happening – some outcomes and indicators to help us understand if this is working or not.

You can read more about how this framework was developed, the opportunities and challenges it faces, and where we can go next in [\*\*Locality's full report\*\*](#).



# Our principles for ABCD

and what they mean in practice







**We will work together.** Making collaboration the starting point: sharing power, listening to each other, building trust and making connections.

**In practice:**

- Get key people from all sectors together in community spaces
- Understand everyone's roles and what they bring to the table
- Consider power – who has it, who doesn't, and how it can be shared so the already powerful don't dominate
- Pool collective knowledge.



**We will start small.** Working in communities at a hyper local level and piloting approaches.

**In practice:**

- Define our neighbourhood – where will we be working together?
- Don't overreach – start with small pilots to test what works and build confidence in the approach.





**We will unlock community strengths.** Understanding what assets already exist and how they can be developed further.

**In practice:**

- Develop an initial "asset map" to understand our neighbourhood's strengths and where there are gaps
- Consider what resources are necessary to harness these strengths and fill those gaps.



**We will tackle inequalities.** Looking at everything through the lens of how it addresses – or risks furthering – disadvantage.

**In practice:**

- Think about who isn't in the room but should be
- Build new partnerships with grassroots organisations to expand our reach into the community
- Assess our communications to ensure inclusion.





**We will learn from what works.**

Developing a learning culture, testing ideas and embracing failure.

**In practice:**

- Consider what's already working to avoid duplication
- Share data as much as possible
- Look outside our area to draw lessons from elsewhere
- Analyse and evaluate, openly and honestly, whether or not we've been successful.



**We will take our time.**

Recognising that big changes don't happen quickly, having patience and long-term commitment.

**In practice:**

- Ensure we've listened before taking action
- Set realistic outcomes
- Be comfortable with slow progress.





**We will invest.** Making a clear and realistic assessment of what resources exist across the partnership and how they might be most effectively deployed.

**In practice:**

- Understand resources might be a range of different things, like finance, staff capacity, buildings, volunteering
- Assess the different contributions everyone could make
- Focus in on how existing resources can be best coordinated to support action





# How will we know if this working?

Outcomes = **O** Indicators = **I**

## **O Buy-in to asset-based thinking**

- I** Partner organisations adopt ABCD principles in strategic plans
- I** Partner organisations include measures to track implementation and success of this commitment

## **O A more robust and sustainable local VCSE sector**

- I** Growth in the size of the voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector
- I** Number of new "community anchor organisations"

## **O Identification and recognition of the strengths and assets within South Gloucestershire**

- I** Shared toolkit with methods to highlight strengths and assets in places and an 'ABCD insights hub' to share data amongst partner organisations and communities

- I** Tracked information on additions to and use of hub

## **O Increased morale in communities**

- I** Number reporting that they feel they can influence decisions affecting their community

## **O Residents provided with resources and support to be better connected and more active**

- I** Support and resources provided to active residents and community groups
- I** Connected and active residents and their networks better connected to, listened to, and supported by strategic partners

## **O: Improved public service delivery**

- I** Number reporting higher satisfaction with services where ABCD has played a role in its design
- I** Services designed through ABCD delivering improved outcomes for the community

## **O Residents more motivated to bring positive change to their communities**

- I** Number participating as volunteers in VSCE sector
- I** Number participating in co-production activities
- I** Number setting up new social action projects / groups

## **O ABCD-influenced services leading to reduced health and social inequalities**

- I** ABCD-influenced services reaching the people who need services most
- I** ABCD-influenced services reaching the people at the point of prevention rather than acute need
- I** ABCD-influenced services reducing specific health inequalities



# How can we take this forward?



Everyone has a role to play. As residents, volunteers or employees, if we work together, we can achieve our common goal to create better, fairer places for people to live well in South Gloucestershire.

We are already realising the benefits of the ABCD approach, but we can achieve so much more. Sometimes our practices don't work as well as they could. And sometimes they can even be a barrier to harnessing the strengths and capacity in our communities.

## How can we make the biggest difference?

We're inviting everyone who cares about the future of our communities in South Gloucestershire to join us on the ABCD journey.

For local people, it means asking three questions:

- 1. What can we do ourselves when we work together?**
- 2. What can we achieve with a little outside help?**
- 3. What do we require others to do for us?**

Then it is the role of the local public sector and voluntary and community organisations to listen and create a supportive environment where we can pool our joint resources to work towards our priorities together.



Authorities won't be in charge. And they don't have deep pockets so can't always be the providers of everything. But there is a commitment from the council and local health partners to work more in communities to understand the issues and the opportunities, and to coordinate and shape resources in different ways to support an ABCD approach. If we think creatively and join forces, we can support each other to address the issues that are most important in our communities.

For councils, local health partners and VCSE organisations, ABCD requires us to adopt the principles in this framework. Strong, meaningful relationships are fundamental, so leadership and responsibility must be shared. We must build on what works, such as our local networks, forums and events, to connect, identify and raise awareness of assets. We should promote and utilise initiatives, such as **Community Conversations**, **Bridging the Gap** and **Village Agents**, to facilitate dialogue with communities and between partners, and support local co-ordination on the issues.

There will be challenges, but also many opportunities to build on the great strengths-focused energy and practices that we have in South Gloucestershire.

What happens next is up to all of us  
– **let's make South Gloucestershire  
stronger together.**





## Get involved

If you'd like to learn more about ABCD, or if you'd like to connect with others to share learning and expertise, contact us.

Maybe you're working on a project where you think this type of approach could work, or you're seeking advice or support to help get an idea off the ground.

Whatever your enquiry, email us to start the conversation:

[communityconversations@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:communityconversations@southglos.gov.uk)