

# Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

## The 'glass half-full' approach to community empowerment

John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann are the founders of the 'ABCD' approach – a way of developing communities that differs from more traditional methods by focussing on an area's assets rather than its needs. This simple shift in perception makes all the difference.

We were fortunate to have the inspirational, ABCD Institute faculty member Jim Diers (<http://www.abcdinstitute.org/faculty/diers/>) visit the borough. Subsequently, Croydon has embraced the concept and has gone to become a front-runner for ABCD. At the heart of the approach are the 'six stepping stones'

1. **Walkabout** - find local Community Connectors
2. **Asset Mapping** – identify local skills, talents, groups and organisations
3. **Find and connect passions** – Connectors find out what local people care enough about to act on
4. **From passion to action** – hold an ideas fair to agree what can be done to make the community better
5. **Match Funds** - funds and other external resources can oil the cogs of activity already started
6. **Celebrate** - the shared vision should be celebrated and disseminated widely

For Croydon, the ABCD story begins after the riots of summer 2011 when, supported by the Mayor of London, the Council engaged local partners to undertake a pilot 'Community Connectors' project. Fortunately, it was a success and has led to many more ABCD projects across the borough. Below are details of just three specific initiatives and at the foot of the page are links to the full and summary 'Community Connectors' report.

## Parent Support Project- Emilia (Selhurst Connector)

Emilia moved to Thornton Heath in 2012 from another borough with her husband and young children. She didn't know anyone in the area and wasn't aware of any support for families locally.

Emilia met Community Builder, Jennine Bailey, at CVA who introduced her to the ABCD initiative and invited her to attend a Community Connectors meeting in Selhurst. At that meeting she discussed her experiences and ideas with others and was inspired to attend a training session to become a Community Connector herself.

At the training session Emilia met other Community Connectors who were looking for similar support and, like herself, had skills and knowledge to share with others. Emilia had a number of conversations with people in a similar position and started to develop a network of support and a plan of action. After mapping associations in the area and connecting with them to explain her ideas she was able to access free space and a crèche at Selhurst Children's Centre. She also received matched funding to complement the work she and others did.

Emilia and some of her fellow Community Connectors then ran four weekly personal development courses aimed at supporting nine other parents – eight women and one man – who were looking for support to get work. The courses covered topics such as preparing for interviews and CV preparation.

Emilia evaluated the courses that she delivered and found that the knowledge and skills that participants gained boosted their confidence and morale. She also learnt that many other parents were interested in attending similar courses and is now the process of developing a social enterprise that draws upon the skills of local people to offer that support and guidance.



"ABCD is a great project. I feel that the connections I have made offered something much needed to others in the area and was done in a way that is open to them. There are many things to share.

We ran a successful personal development programme drawing on a range of resources within the community. From there we developed a CIC (*Community Interest Company*) and have been awarded 'Awards for All' funding."

## Croydon Family Power

Back in 2012, Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA) and local nursery, Gingerbread Corner began working in the Thornton Heath and Selhurst wards to identify and strengthen human and physical assets.

They recruited 60 adults and 20 young people (aged 8 to 10 yrs) as Family Connectors who went on to harness the energies of 600 local people to develop new social and peer support networks.

The focus was very much on doing things and the initiative has led to many activities including;

- Creation of the Green Lane Nature Space
- Cooperative store safe zone
- 4 edible garden projects
- Information website sharing activities and events recommended by local parents
- Thornton Heath Arts week ,and
- 'I Love Selhurst' photography initiative



## It's a Selhurst Thing

After the tragic murder of local school boy, Fico Dougan, a Selhurst resident, Sadie Campbell, was inspired to do something good for her community.

Sadie attended an ABCD Community Connectors event in Selhurst and at this identified that lots of people in the area had a negative view of it, which in turn impacted on themselves. Through support from Sue Dzdzera, Chief Executive of Gingerbread Corner and the ABCD 'Community Builder' for Selhurst, she looked into what could be done to change people's perceptions of the area.



Sadie's idea was a project called 'It's a Selhurst Thing', where local people take photographs to capture the things they like and dislike about their area and record the last 100 years of the area. As well as giving local people a creative outlet to highlight issues to decision makers and members of the wider community, the project enabled people to gain valuable transferable skills such as project and event management and photography experience.

The ABCD approach made the project possible though supporting Sadie with her ideas and connecting her with people with the assets to make her ideas a reality. Gingerbread Corner, for example, was able to offer free space for meetings and Sadie was connected to people why wanted to get involved.

The 'It's a Selhurst Thing' exhibition was launched in August 2014 and is travelling throughout the borough before being archived to serve as a historical record of how we lived, worked and played over the last 100 years. It will also serve as a memorial as it is dedicated to the memory of Fico Dougan.