

Nurture Development

Development - Redefined



Learning Sites: In Response to COVID-19

The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) response to COVID-19 is a community building, capacity oriented approach that puts communities in the driving seat and enables professionals to work in citizen space in a generative and strengths based way. As well as supporting practitioners to work with communities in developing preparedness and emergency response plans, we also train participants in how best to support community-driven renewal strategies. We offer our full training and mentoring supports to professionals and communities using the best of video conferencing and e-learning platforms.

Over and over again, from the AIDs epidemic in 1980's to the Ebola crisis in Western Africa in 2014-2016, we have learned that the only credible response to significant public health crises is a community driven one. The COVID-19 pandemic is no different. As noted this month in the Lancet "Community participation is crucial in a pandemic", it will not be unilaterally addressed by a top-down deficit-based agency response nor will it yield to volunteer drives (Marston, C., *et al* The Lancet May 2020). There is only one credible, evidence based, tried and tested response to the current challenge. That's the one that puts communities in the driving seat, with institutions in a strong support role.

ABCD Learning Sites

Drawing on extensive field experience, Nurture Development uses an integrated, neighbourhood-wide approach to nurturing and creating space for grassroots, citizen-led efforts that result in in great levels of wellbeing, associational efficacy and enduring change. Our approach uses what is commonly referred to as 'test and learn sites', or what we prefer to describe as "learning sites' to ensure that the required community animation practice and asset-based community development become deeply rooted.

Nurture Development has supported the establishment and development of 15 Learning Sites across the UK, 35 in Australia and many more around the world. We also support collaboration across and between learning sites, at regional, national and international levels. The feedback from these learning sites and from independent evaluations have shown that Learning Sites:

- Create time and a safe space for citizens, associations, local practitioners and helping organisations to learn together how to make to discover and connect disconnected assets in a citizen-led way.
- Create an opportunity and context within which to break down traditional structures and work beyond silos towards the greater good of a given neighbourhood or number neighbourhoods or their equivalent (outer estate, town, village etc.)
- The learning process offers timely and proportionate training, mentoring and development input to advance neighbourhood initiatives.

We believe that there are 11 shifts in narrative required to move from a Deficit to an Asset Based approach. See Appendix A.

3.0 What does a Learning Site Look Like?

A Learning Site is made up of three or more neighbourhoods across a given locality. Each neighbourhood will have a population of approximately 3,000 to 5,000 people. Additionally a learning site is made up of practitioners and leaders who wish to support and precipitate more citizenship, community-driven change and more interdependence in natural communities for those currently excluded.

There are five main constituent groups involved in a Learning Site:

- **Sponsor(s)** - an organisation able to fund the learning process, including the remuneration of a Community Animator. e.g. Local Government or Health Authority/Agency
- **Host(s)** – a small organization/association rooted in the neighbourhood which understands the local context and has enough structure to recruit and support a Community Animator. E.g. Neighbourhood Association or Faith Organisation.
- **Community Animator(s)** - employed by the host association/organisation to support local community and economic building; accountable to the local community whom they serve.
- **Communities** - The process is initiated through the invitation of the local communities themselves. Practically speaking this requires at least 8-15 residents in each local community who are passionate enough to form an initiating group and willing to host conversations with other residents that are inclusive and long term in orientation and commitment.
- **Nurture Development facilitator:** each Learning Site is assigned a highly experienced member of the Nurture Development team to be a companion on the journey, as well as having access to a wide range of diverse, skills, knowledge and experience across the Nurture team.

2.2 What is our Approach?

Invariably no two learning sites are the same, however, our support remains consistently aligned to five guiding principles:

1. **Place based** - we recognise that it is in neighbourhoods that everything comes together.
2. **Focus on strengths** - we start with 'what is strong?' not 'what is wrong?'
3. **Citizen-led** - we are committed to working in a way that puts communities in the driving seat.
4. **Relationship building** –our main focus is on building on the strengths of the informal associations and networks that make up the fabric of community life and bringing them into productive relationship with each other.
5. **Inclusion** – we are committed to ensuring an inclusive approach is at the heart of community building and social justice is a foundational value.

Each Learning Site is a bespoke offer. If you would like to know more about how we would work with your organisation to develop one in your town, city or region, please contact Cormac Russell at Cormac@nurtureddevelopment.org or on +353 87 9280998.

Appendix A: Moving from a Deficit to an Asset Based Response to COVID-19

Cormac Russell, Nurture Development ©

	Deficit-based response	Asset-Based Community response
1.	Focus is on community deficiencies.	Focus is on community resources & responses to local priorities
2.	Problem response / Technical solutions. Short-term emergency response	Opportunity orientation / Community resources and local vision are the springboard for preparedness, crisis response and ongoing community-wide renewal.
3.	Old charity model / sympathy-based response: professionals & vetted volunteers deliver essentials to the “most needy”, “most hungry”, “most vulnerable”. Supports are “one-size” fits all, needs are identified from outside in.	Investment & rights-based approach grounded in principles of sustainability and community building: communities are supported to organise their capacities to prepare and respond to the crisis and plan for renewal. Professional supports supplement their capacities. Appropriate supports are agreed through collaborative dialogue. We can’t fully know what a community needs, until we first know what a community has. The neighbourhood is the unit of change.
4.	External experts provide solutions in one-way transaction; compliance with rules/directives is the central goal.	Citizens and their associations are recognised as having unique contributions to preparedness, response and renewal efforts which can be powerfully connected and organised to be impactful; and which can be supplemented and extended by unique agency expertise and resources when required.
5.	Criteria for grants are determined centrally by central/local government or large & distant donors.	Funding is used to support citizen-led community-driven responses as defined by local communities with minimum bureaucracy and paternalism. The message from outside institutions/donors to communities is: ‘you know what’s needed, we are here to support you.’ Donors/Funders are “on-tap; not on-top”.
6.	Supports needed are determined by outside actors through top-down standardised needs assessments; with scant regard to the resources of those considered in need, or the resources of the people around them (family; social networks; community; local businesses)	Communities determine what supports they need to fulfil community functions including support for (with) people most vulnerable to COVID-19 direct/indirect impacts; with agencies providing subsidiary supports. People who are vulnerable to COVID-19 impacts are supported to self-determine supports that best enable them to be safe and well and to continue to socially/civically participate while remaining well & safe.

7.	<p>Aim is to ‘save’ or ‘rescue’ defined target groups: those labelled: intrinsically “vulnerable”, “hungry”, “needy”, with no reference to their capacities/contributions. Communities seen as passive recipients.</p>	<p>Aim is: to animate a community-wide response that heightens preparedness and confidence for renewal, while also actively planning to care for the most susceptible. Communities are seen as associations of active citizens.</p>
8.	<p>Safety I Model*: Risk aversion, command and control. Expert define criteria, communities and frontline workers comply with protocols. Emphasis is on compliance and conforming.</p>	<p>Safety II Model*: Accepts all systems are dynamic and always have some element of risk, hence the need is to promote adaptability, agility and learn quickly how to optimise safety in context: promoting a safety culture. Emphasis is on chosen accountability to one’s community & solidarity with fellow citizens, especially those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, now & in the future.</p>
9.	<p>Emergency Relief; siloed approach</p>	<p>Resurgence/renewal; ecological approach: the neighbourhood is the primary unit of change. Resurgence includes preparedness and direct response and organising strategies in the face of COVID-19, as well as an emphasis on renewal.</p>
10.	<p>Providing Top-down; Short-term; Done to; Done For solutions in the shape of programmes, services & one-off stimulus packages</p>	<p>Precipitating organised & safe bottom-up efforts; sustaining and sustainable responses “Done with”; “Done by” local citizens and their associations, with appropriate supports.</p>
11.	<p>Success = more dependable services for named target groups</p>	<p>Success = more interdependence at the centre of natural communities with services in reserve as required (subsidiarity)</p>