

# Chapter One: Analyzing Community Resources and Needs

## Introduction

### 1. Focusing on Community Capacity

#### 1.1 Identify individual and community assets

- WHAT is a community asset?
- WHY should you identify community assets?
- WHEN should you identify community assets?
- HOW do you identify community assets?

#### 1.2 Define and analyze the issue

- WHAT does it mean to define and analyze the issue?
- WHY should you define and analyze the issue?
- HOW do you define and analyze the issue?

### 2. Developing the Community

#### 2.1 Ensure broad community participation

- WHY should you ensure broad participation?
- HOW do you ensure broad participation?

#### 2.2 Create collaborative partnerships

- WHY create collaborative partnerships?
- HOW do you create collaborative partnerships?
- WHO needs to be involved?

## Summary

## Tips for Analyzing Community Resources and Needs

## Checklist

## Tools

- An introduction to community capacity mapping
- A primer on facilitation skills
- An introduction to community problem solving

## Annotated Resource List

## Introduction

Most of us want the same things from our communities. We want them to be safe from violence and illness; we want neighbourhoods that are alive and work well. And we would all like to have people who care for us and whom we trust. But how do we develop a community like that? Our belief is that communities are built when people work together on things that matter to them, like creating environments where each person feels a sense of belonging and mutual support.

“A community is commonly understood to be about relationships; it’s not a place. A neighborhood is a place, but community is about people’s relationships.”  
- John McKnight 1990

The factors that affect people’s mental health don’t fit into neat categories, but often involve just about every aspect of their lives, and every sector of the community. Defining our problems as being connected to other issues (and people) helps us to see the many ways in which we are linked together.

Complex issues like improving mental health require cooperation throughout a community in order for significant change to happen. No one person, organization, or even sector can bring about major improvements in people’s mental health without the cooperation of virtually everyone involved in or affected by the issue.

In this chapter we look at some of the initial activities that are essential to successful mental health promotion initiatives: defining and analyzing the community’s resources and needs, and engaging the community to build collaborative partnerships and facilitate broad community participation. Completing these activities ensures that the initiatives that result will reflect community values and encourage community ownership.

We examine the ways that people worked to engage the community and identify the issue to focus on which reflected the unique context of the setting -- from a group of Aboriginal Elders concerned about the spiritual and emotional health of younger generations to a group of community members who were interested in creating new opportunities for people with mental illness.

## **Focusing On Community Capacity**

In many fields, including mental health, the growing use of capacity building language and concepts reflects a fundamental shift in the underlying beliefs about how change happens and how to bring about change. At a societal level, institutions are returning the responsibility for maintaining mental health to communities, and at the local level, individuals are reassuming some of the knowledge and control over their mental health that have, in the past, been vested in professionals and “experts.”

The capacity building approach, on which our understanding of mental health promotion is based, assumes that there are strong relationships among individuals, families, groups, and organizations within the community. One must consider and relate to all these arenas while working within any one arena, because each influences and is influenced by the others. For capacity building efforts to achieve their true potential, attention must be given to the web of connections affecting all persons, organizations, groups and communities involved.

A capacity building approach emphasizes what the community has, not what it lacks. Why should we look at things this way? Because assets and strengths can be used to meet community needs; they can improve community life.

Isolated Newfoundland communities have historically been extraordinarily resourceful in dealing with their own human problems and survival issues. Helping skills, indeed, are natural human abilities possessed by many individuals and readily recognized by those who turn to them for support.

In recent decades, however, such skills have been defined and taught by such professions as social work, psychology and nursing, and developed to a high level of sophistication by psychotherapists and counsellors.

The “professionalization” of helping and the placing of ultimate trust in the expert has in many ways undermined the role of informal resources. A certain mystique about professional counselling has developed, so that many people have lost confidence in their own abilities to help friends and neighbours when they are going through difficult times.

In situations of emotional stress such as that caused by the cod moratorium, people tend to feel that informal help is inadequate and that professional counselling is needed. In rural Newfoundland, the changes to the health care system and the difficulty in accessing services were added causes of anxiety.

The Helping Skills project participants addressed this situation and the impact it was having on their communities by taking a capacity building approach. Key to their involvement was their first-hand knowledge of the needs and scarcity of resources in their communities. They engaged in a learning process that challenged them to deconstruct assumptions about helping, and incorporated their experiential knowledge of what’s helpful and what isn’t.

The Helping Skills project made participants more aware of the resources that they already had, rather than pointing out areas of need. They learned that, rather than mental health services, listening skills and friendly support were most helpful resources that they could offer to others in distress.

## 1.1 Identify Individual and Community Assets

### What is a Community Asset?

A community asset or resource is anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life. This means:

- It can be a person - someone who is well connected and knows many paths into community life, someone with unique insight, special experience or specific skills;
- It can be a physical structure or place - a school, a hospital, a recreation centre, a social club, a park;
- It can be a business - that provides jobs and supports the local economy,
- You too are a community asset, and so are your friends, and the people you have yet to meet. This is a very encouraging and promising way of seeing the world.

### Why Should You Identify Community Assets?

Because they can be used as a foundation for improving the mental health of the community, and also because:

- External resources (e.g. federal and provincial funding) often just aren’t available, whether we like it or not. Therefore the resources for change must come from within each community<sup>1</sup>.
- Identifying and mobilizing community assets enables residents to gain control over their lives.
- People can become active shapers of their own destinies, instead of passive clients receiving services from a variety of agencies.

<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the assets that the community already has does not imply that the community does not need additional resources from the outside. It simply means that communities often have the best solution to their own problems.

- Improvement efforts are more effective and longer lasting when community members dedicate their time and talents to bring about the changes they want.

### **When Should You Identify Community Assets?**

- When you can't provide traditional services, even if you want to, and are looking for other ways to strengthen the community

In the rural Newfoundland communities where the Helping Skills project took place, the restructuring of health care services had a particularly strong impact. The provincial health system was undergoing radical change at the same time that the province was dealing with reductions in federal transfer payments, and the effects of the cod moratorium.

The new community health boards (which were charged with the responsibility of implementing community mental health services) had very limited resources. They were simply not equipped to respond to the level of distress in rural communities with professional services.

The Helping Skills project proposed a way to develop the capacity of the communities to respond to their own immediate needs. The result of the project was a powerful and sustainable new community resource: a network of citizens skilled in listening and providing social and emotional support to their neighbours.

- When the community includes talented and experienced citizens whose skills are valuable but underused

The Elders who came together every week at the Friendship Centre in Portage did so to discuss their concern over what they were seeing in their community. Several generations of community members bore the emotional, physical and spiritual scars of residential schools, which had systematically destroyed their language, culture and traditions.

The children who were raised in the shadow of the residential schools had not known healthy family and community life, but were faced, on a daily basis, with violence, abuse and lack of hope.

The Elders decided to do something to improve this situation. In their discussions, the Elders realized that they themselves were among the few who possessed the skills and strengths that were necessary to address these problems. They had insights into their community and possessed cultural understanding and wisdom that they could use to make a difference in the lives of the children.

By teaching the younger generations about their culture and traditions, the Elders were providing them with skills and knowledge that the children's parents had not been able to. By acknowledging and sharing their skills, the Elders were promoting their own, and the children's mental health.

- When you want to strengthen existing relationships and build new ones that will promote successful community development in the future

Although an enormous diversity of different people and communities participated in the Inclusion in Community project, they all shared an understanding of the key element that would ensure the project's success: relationships.

People with mental illness have often been isolated from community life. The Inclusion in Community project helped to focus particular attention on opening up community life, so that people who have experienced mental health problems could contribute their talents, and form the relationships and friendships that we all need to keep us strong and healthy.

The relationships and partnerships that formed through the project were wide ranging, and brought together people who might otherwise not have met. The bonds that were formed have outlived the project itself - the original partners, as well as new ones, continue to get together formally and informally, to find new ways of opening community doors for isolated people.

## **How Do You Identify Community Assets?**

In order to build on the assets and strengths in your community, you must first find out what those assets are. In the tools section at the end of this chapter, you'll find a guide to identify community assets and resources in your community.

### **1.2 Define and Analyze the Issue**

Often the issues that bring people together are those that are initially viewed as 'problems'. Problems are a part of life for individuals, families and communities. Communities, like individuals, work to solve their own problems. The process of analyzing those problems helps in their solution.

Before jumping into any attempts to solve community problems, it's important to spend some time thinking about the nature of mental health issues and problems, and to address several key questions: Why has a certain problem developed? What is the underlying cause of the problem? What kind of community action will help solve the problem?

#### **What Does it Mean to Define and Analyze the Issue?**

Analyzing community mental health concerns is a way of thinking through a particular mental health problem or issue before acting on a solution. It starts with looking for possible reasons why a problem exists, and then checking out whether those reasons are true. Then, and only then, is it time to start identifying possible solutions and implementing the best ones.

Stated simply, a problem can be defined as the difference between what is, and what might or should be. We often have a strong internal sense of when something is wrong and should be corrected - a feeling of distress or injustice. Knowing what to do to solve the problem is often less obvious.

If we spend some time defining and analyzing community problems -- gathering information and thinking about their root causes -- it helps us to clarify and understand those problems so that we can come up with more effective and appropriate solutions.

This is especially true in the case of mental health promotion. Because the factors that determine mental health are so complex, it's particularly important to spend some time defining the community mental health issue, and analyzing its various aspects, before taking action. A careful

consideration of the causes and parameters of the problem will help to lay the foundation for an effective solution.

### **Why Should You Define and Analyze The Issue?**

There are several key reasons why it's a good idea to do some analysis before setting to work to promote mental health in your community.

#### **To better identify what the problem or issue is:**

Before looking for solutions, you'll want to clarify just what is the problem. Unless you are clear, it's hard to move forward.

In the Inclusion project, community members identified that people with mental illness are often excluded from meaningful participation in the life of the community.

#### **To understand what is at the heart of the problem:**

A problem is usually caused by something; what is that something? And often the problem we see is actually a symptom of something else. You need to get a complete picture.

Persistent stigma, and over-reliance on the formal service system are two factors at the heart of the exclusion of people with mental illness from community life.

#### **To determine the barriers and resources associated with addressing the problem:**

It's good practice and planning to anticipate barriers and obstacles before they happen. By doing so, you can often get around them. Analyzing community mental health issues can help you to understand and find the community resources you will need to tackle the problem.

The barriers to inclusion included: fear, prejudice, and lack of understanding and education. The resources that the Inclusion project drew on included: people's positive experiences with friends and family, and the enthusiasm and motivation of certain community members.

#### **To develop the best action steps for addressing the issue:**

Having a plan of action based on a careful analysis of the issue is always better than moving forward without a clear idea of where you're headed.

In each of the sample projects, people came together to analyze the situation - to ask themselves and each other why a certain problem was occurring, or why a particular mental health issue had become a concern. They did this before they attempted to propose a course of action or implement a solution to the situation in the community. Here are their stories:

The idea for the Helping Skills grew out of the CMHA Newfoundland and Labrador Division's project called "A Needs Assessment for Community Self-Help". The project involved people in 27 communities that had been affected by the northern cod moratorium, telling about the impact the moratorium was having on their well-being and that of their families and communities.

What people said was that while many of them were coping adequately so far with the support of their family and friends, there was a lot of anxiety and some serious distress about the sudden, mass unemployment caused by the moratorium. Everyone was worried about the future and how their communities would survive, and everyone saw the need for more sources of help and support as the situation got worse. Where mental health services existed, they were stretched to the limit, and in many communities there were no such resources at all.

CMHA, however, recognized that the need being expressed was not so much for psychiatric services as for support and help with the natural process of adjusting to major loss and change. The Division responded by developing a proposal which reflected the issue and suggested ways in which it could be addressed at the local level. The proposal was submitted and accepted, and the Helping Skills project was born.

The idea for the Inclusion in Community project came from the input of people with mental illness from all across Canada who had participated in national consultations and evaluations of mental health programs. Time and again, consumer/survivors expressed the idea that although formal mental health services are important, they are not the only, nor the most important support that help people with mental illness to recover and lead fulfilling lives in the community.

By focusing exclusively on the provision of formal mental health services, the important role that non-formal supports (such as housing, recreation, family and friends) play in the lives of people who have experienced mental health problems has often been neglected. People expressed the need to participate in and have access to generic community supports and services. Taking an active part in the activities and facilities offered by the community gives people a sense of belonging -- a need that is shared by everyone, regardless of the presence or absence of a psychiatric label.

The Inclusion in Community project, like Helping Skills, was organized and administered through CMHA (although this time it was at the national, rather than the provincial, level) but grew out of the ideas expressed by consumer/survivors themselves. They "named" the problem - the need to provide more opportunities for people with mental illness to connect with the broader community - and suggested ways of supporting communities to work toward solutions.

The communities that implemented the project focused their energy on getting a wide range of people involved, and developing a strategy that was appropriate to their particular situation, while the National office of CMHA looked after many of the administrative duties, such as reporting to the funding agency and managing the budget.

## **How Do You Define And Analyze the Issue?**

In each mental health promotion initiative, the process of defining and analyzing the issue reflects the community context, and will therefore be unique to that particular setting.

There are, however, some general guidelines that might be helpful to a variety of groups who are interested in defining and analyzing mental health issues in their communities. In the tools section at the end of this chapter you'll find a guide to get you started analyzing mental health issues in your own community.

## **2. Developing The Community**

Community development can change the relationships between people in communities and the institutions which shape their lives. By encouraging involvement in local life, community development helps people have a say in decisions which affect their lives. Those most affected by decisions need to be integrally involved in making those decisions.

A community development approach to mental health promotion emphasizes community participation and self-reliance, with individuals, families and communities assuming more responsibility for their own mental health. These themes - self-help, citizen participation, and community control, are hallmarks of a community development approach to mental health promotion.

Encouraging the community to take control of mental health promotion initiatives will help to mobilize the kind of local human and material resources that you'll need to bring about sustainable change in your community. These grassroots efforts should result in programs that are small enough to manage and large and durable enough to produce a significant impact on community conditions that support mental health.

In the Inclusion in Community project, the sites wanted to build the goal of inclusion of consumer/survivors in the broad life of the community into all aspects of their work. To those involved in one of the sites, this meant that consumer/survivors should steer the process, and determine the direction that inclusion would take in their community. Because the decisions made in the project would most strongly affect the lives of consumers, they determined the direction the project took.

As a first step, the consumer/survivors who steered the project decided that they wanted to document the wealth of experiential knowledge that people in the group, and other consumers, possessed. Nearly forty individuals gave freely of their time and experience to discuss the process of recovery from mental illness. The end result of the research project that followed was a rich resource of documented life experience entitled "Journeys in Recovery".

In the report many consumers identified that when they were trying to get back on their feet after having been in the hospital, they often felt adrift and isolated. They felt they needed to be able to make connections with peer support groups and other community resources that could assist them with basic things like finding a decent place to live, getting work and accessing community facilities and services.

The consumers who took part in the research emphasized that they were not referring to specific mental health-related services, they were talking about peer-support and the types of resources that were available to everyone in the community.

"Journeys in Recovery" led to what became the hospital outreach project, which proposed to link people coming out of the hospital to peer and community supports, to make the transition more manageable. As one participant described the process: "our project went from recording experiences to putting the experience to practical use to make the journey easier for the ones following us".

The recommendations yielded by the "Journeys In Recovery" research process became the spark for action. By providing an opportunity to document people's experiences, analyze the information and take action based on that information, the Inclusion project encouraged people with mental illness to play an active role in shaping the decisions that affect their lives.

"Significant community development takes place on/y when local people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort"

John Kretzman & John McKnight, 1994

## 2.1 Ensure Broad Community Participation

Broad community participation is a key component of mental health promotion. Because the factors that affect mental health are so diverse, any effort to promote mental health should encompass that diversity by encouraging the participation of a wide range of community members. Mental health promotion works by encouraging effective community participation in setting priorities, making decisions and planning, implementing and evaluating strategies to achieve better mental health.

### Why Should You Ensure Broad Participation?

Connecting people both to one another, and to the issue is a critical component of empowerment. When communities members are actively engaged with one another and with community life, a series of interlocking relationships are formed that become not only a support for individuals, but also a resource for the entire community.

Participants in successful mental health promotion initiatives find out experientially that they can make a difference, be heard, and that a group of diverse people can constructively address complex mental health issues.

Our communities are made up of people from a broad range of cultures and abilities. In many cases, culture provides people with a sense of identity and belonging, nurturing and supporting community life.

People from distinct cultural groups have different perspectives, experiences, expectations, knowledge, and other qualities and attributes. These differences can become a source of conflict and division if they are disregarded, but they can become a source of richness and strength when they are recognized and valued. By appreciating diversity, you will communicate more effectively, make more relevant decisions, and take advantage of a broader range of insights and talents.

In order to ensure broad community participation, we must recognize that everyone has some preconceived notions about people who are different from themselves, in terms of culture, ability, etc. It is important to overcome these so that people feel at ease participating in the group.

The Inclusion project took place in five different sites across Ontario, from major urban centres like Ottawa, to Forest a small, mainly rural community. In Forest., CMHA staff organized a community forum that brought together a variety of different people to discuss mental health issues

of concern to the community. During that initial forum, a number of people from the community expressed their interest in being members of a steering committee to guide the development of a community mental health promotion initiative.

The committee was composed of a wide range of people: consumer/survivors, members of the local clergy, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, staff from the local community health centre, recreation centre, and community college, as well as farmers and family members. By getting together on a regular basis and discussing the barriers in the community for people with mental illness, the group identified that the stigma surrounding mental illness posed one of the greatest barriers to the inclusion of consumer/survivors in the community. The diverse nature of the group helped to ensure that the project would be truly representative of the community.

### How Do You Ensure Broad Participation?

### **Support the participation of all people**

If you want to have a diverse group of people committed to your project, it's important to support their participation. Make sure the project is accessible to people from ethnocultural and disability communities by providing practical support such as transit allowances and making sure meetings are held in accessible locations, and during times that are convenient for everyone.

Think about significant dates and holidays for the different ethnocultural groups in your community so you don't schedule meetings on these dates.

### **Communicate clearly**

Effective communication is also an important part of supporting people's participation. Avoid using jargon, and make sure that everyone understands what's being said. Act quickly on any input that people provide about making the project more supportive of diversity,

### **Use your networks**

Start with people you know. It will be easier to talk to and interest people with whom you already have some relationship.

Find out what other organizations, groups and individuals are active in your community who share some of the same concerns, and get in touch with them. You may be able to form partnerships that benefit you both.

### **Go to where people are**

Instead of trying to get people to come to you, try going to them. Go to the meetings of other groups and to places and events where people gather. This is particularly important if you're trying to involve different cultural and ethnic groups, youth, seniors and others who may not come to you.

### **Ask members to invite others**

Most community volunteers become involved because they were asked to participate by a friend, a family member, or a neighbour.

### **Create newsletters and leaflets**

Newsletters keep group members in touch. Delivering leaflets to a wide range of neighbourhoods will help you to attract new members.

## **2.2 Create Collaborative Partnerships**

An essential element of mental health promotion is creating innovative partnerships and enhancing community capacity. By participating in collaborative projects, people become empowered and energized; they quickly see that they are able to accomplish a great deal more by joining forces than by working in isolation.

A variety of different community organizations, associations and individuals need to work together collaboratively in order to effectively address issues that impact mental health, such as economic development, housing, health care and education.

“Collaborative approaches to health promotion contribute to health goals and community empowerment. In so doing, they offer a glimpse of the connectedness that is part of the essence of a good life.”

Stephen Fawcett et al. 1996

## Why Should You Create Collaborative Partnerships?

It makes sense to try to bring as many different sectors of the community on board for several reasons:

- your initiative will be more representative of the whole community;
- your group will stand to gain broader community support;
- the contacts and connections made in a diverse, multi-sector group will lead to new community relationships, which can spark new initiatives that might never have otherwise existed in the community.

The Inclusion in Community project was designed so that partnerships in the sites were developed among consumer/survivors, families, CMHA staff, and community partners. One important purpose of the partnerships was to engage those groups not normally involved in mental health issues to be more proactive in involving and welcoming those with mental health problems.

In the Cornwall site of the Inclusion project, partnerships were developed with service clubs such as the Navy Veterans, and other community agencies, such as a local literacy project. These partnerships connected consumer/survivors to the broader community by opening up the world of volunteer work to them.

In addition to learning from the experiences of other consumers, Ottawa participants also reached out to non-mental health specific organizations such as local colleges. Each group wanted to let people know of their supports and services but each faced the same problem - limited resources. Inclusion was the key to bringing these groups together to do collectively what they could not do separately.

All three of the sample projects used collaborative partnerships as a means to improve the mental health of people in communities. In each site participants understood that the formation of new and innovative community partnerships was a key part of the overall mental health promotion strategy, and one that would help to ensure that the initiative would take root in the community.

## Who Needs To Be Involved?

Collaborative partnerships should be as inclusive as possible, bringing together people from all parts of the community (schools, businesses, government., etc.) and from different levels (neighbourhood, municipal, provincial).

Partnerships should also include representatives from the various ethnocultural groups that live in the community. A community partnership to promote mental health might include representatives from:

- the media;
- the business community;
- area schools;
- seniors, youth and cultural organizations;
- local government;

- health organizations;
- the faith community;
- financial institutions.

People from each of these areas will be able to promote mental health in important, unique ways.

## **How Do You Create Collaborative Partnerships?**

### **Go for it!**

Private citizens have initiated many of the most successful cases of broad-based collaboration. They usually start with a small group of people with the credibility to convince others that something can and must be done.

The members of the “initiating committee” are broadly representative of the community, and often begin by gathering information on the issue and identifying the stakeholders.

### **Engage your stakeholders**

As your understanding of the issue grows, so will your understanding of who needs to be involved. Who is responsible for the problem or issue? Who is affected by it? Whose perspectives or knowledge are needed to develop good solutions or strategies?

When you have identified your stakeholders, the next stage is to bring them together by inviting a key representative of each group to a public meeting or information session.

### **Spend time learning about each other**

Before jumping in to any attempts to collaborate on the issue, it’s important to devote some time and energy to learning about each other. Take the time to discuss interests, to appreciate the points of view and values that are common to the members of the group, and to share hopes and fears.

Building a collaborative climate and sustaining it through the many challenging and even frustrating moments that lie ahead demands a solid foundation of trust.

### **Build agreement among stakeholders**

Differing perspectives enhance the wisdom brought to the problem-solving efforts and the possibilities for real change.

Focus first on building agreement that the problem exists and on getting enough stakeholders to work together to change the situation. When you’ve established that agreement, you can move on to defining the problem and creating strategies to take action on the problem.

Communities are never built from the top down, or from the outside in.  
John Kretzmon & John McKnight 1994

## **Summary**

- Action to promote mental health is all about connecting people to each other, to the issue and to the community.

- Although each of the sample projects came about through a somewhat different process, the idea for each project was generated by the community, and not imposed from the outside.
- In each project, the course of action taken to promote mental health built on local resources, assets and strengths.
- Each sample project was based on relationships of groups of people, for that is what communities are built on. These groups come together in clubs, associations, organizations, businesses, neighbourhood groups and families.
- Each project involved a broad range of community members and created new relationships and partnerships. These relationships and partnerships took many different forms - both new friendships between individuals, and broader community partnerships involving organizations, neighborhood groups, local businesses, etc.
- An important outcome of the ongoing process of community and citizen involvement is community ownership. Communities need to shape their own program directions and develop and mobilize the skills necessary to manage continued efforts.

## Tips For Analyzing Community Resources and Needs

**USE LOCAL LEADERSHIP** - in all of the projects, influential local citizens were part of the community process. Members of the community who are well known, respected and active in civic life can be excellent resources for your mental health promotion project

**NETWORK** - use your own networks - personal and professional - to link with a range of community partners. Networking will give you access to a wide range of community assets. Think broadly about who you can include as partners.

**TAP INTO THE SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND RESOURCES** available in your community for help in setting your goals, planning and developing leadership. These include non-governmental organizations, community colleges, and university-based community research teams.

**INVITE PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS TO WHATEVER EXTENT THEY WISH.** Even those who are very interested may have some real time constraints. People will be more willing to participate in the effort if they feel their availability and interests are respected.

**KEEP YOUR EFFORT VISIBLE.** Make sure you're getting the attention you need from the broader community by developing contacts in the local media.

## Checklist

- Local residents' capacities are being used to promote mental health in your project.
- You have developed an inventory of the capacities and skills of local residents.
- Your mental health promotion project mobilizes, enhances and expands these local capacities.
- You have taken the time to get to know one another.

- Your project will involve partners from many different sectors of the community
- Your group members reflect the cultural diversity present in your community.

## Tools

In this section we'll give a brief description of some of the tools that could be helpful to you in the beginning stages of setting up a mental health promotion initiative in your own community. Because there are so many wonderful and comprehensive tools that cover the areas of engaging the community and identifying the issue, we'll just provide an overview and a list of resources you can refer to for further reading.

The tools that follow include:

1. An introduction to community capacity mapping
2. A primer on facilitation
3. An introduction to community problem solving

## Introduction To Community Capacity Mapping

Wherever there are effective community development efforts, those efforts are based on an understanding, or map, of the community's assets, capacities and abilities.

Each community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. A thorough map of those assets would begin with an inventory of the gifts, skills and capacities of the community's residents. In a community whose assets are being fully recognized and mobilized, all people will be part of the action, not as clients or recipients of services, but as full contributors to the community-building process.

In addition to mapping the gifts and skills of individuals, households and families, community-building initiatives can compile an inventory of citizens' associations. These associations, less formal and dependent on paid staff than formal institutions, are the vehicles through which citizens assemble to solve problems, or to share common interests and activities. These groups are indispensable tools for community development.

Beyond the individuals and local associations that make up the asset base of communities are all of the more formal institutions which are located in the community. Private businesses, public institutions such as schools, libraries, parks, police and fire stations, non-profit institutions such as hospitals and social service agencies -- these organizations make up the most visible and formal part of a community's fabric.

There are several excellent internet and written resources available to guide community members through the process of recognizing and mapping community assets, and mobilizing those assets to bring about positive change in the community. You can refer to the following resources for more detailed information on community mapping:

### **A Guide to Capacity Inventories: Mobilizing the Community Skills of Local Residents.**

Kretzman, J., McKnight, J. and Sheehan, JACTA Publications, 4848 North Clark St., Chicago, IL, 60640. Tel 1-800-397-2282. [www.nwu.edu/IPR/publications](http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/publications)

This book provides eleven clear examples of capacity inventories developed and used by different communities across the United States as well as practical reasons and valuable tips for conducting and using capacity inventories in your community.

### **Asset Based Community Development - North Victoria Healthy Communities Coalition**

<http://-.netl-nvhcclasset.html>

This website provides templates that can be used by any group to map the individual, community and economic assets present in their community. The site also contains a number of examples that will be helpful to for those who are new to asset mapping to follow.

**Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets.** Kreaman, J. McKnight, J. Chicago:ACTA Publications,ACTA Publications, 4848 North Clark St., Chicago, IL, 60640.Tel 1-800-397-2282.  
<http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/publications> , 1993.

This non-traditional yet practical guide to the process of building communities is reflective of the values of mental health promotion. Based on a five-step process for “asset-based community development”, the book presents a positive approach by focusing on locating the assets, skills and capacities of community members and organizations. It provides a contrast to a more traditional approach (which focuses on needs, problems and deficits) and suggests a number of limitations to this earlier model.

### **Community Tool Box Chapter 2, Section 6: Identifying Community Assets -**

<http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/ctblc2lc2s6.html>

This chapter summarizes the capacity building approach by highlighting the different assets that are present in each community, and discussing ways of mapping and accessing those assets.

### **Mapping Community Resources - <http://www.ctcnet.org/r98lcor2.htm>**

An interesting article that describes a community mapping project and the process used to develop assets. The article is based on the work of the Community Technology Centre Network (CTCNet), whose Research and Evaluation Team conducted a community mapping project in the Boston area.

## **2. A Primer On Facilitation**

To be really successful at taking action on a mental health issue in your community, you will need to spend some time focusing on the skills that you'll need to make all of the action happen.

One of the key skills that you'll need for successful mental health promotion work is the ability to facilitate effectively. Facilitation skills are the “process” skills that you will need to guide and direct key parts of your organizing work with the community: in meetings, and planning and training sessions.

### **What Is Facilitation?**

Whether it's a meeting (large or small) or a training session, someone has to shape and guide the process of working together so that you meet your goals and accomplish what you've set out to do. While a group of people will probably be involved in setting the agenda and figuring out the goals, one person needs to concentrate on how you're going to move through your agenda and meet those goals effectively. This is the person we call the “Facilitator”.

**Facilitation has three basic principles:**

1. A facilitator is a guide to help people move through a process together, not the seat of wisdom and knowledge. That means the facilitator isn't there to give opinions, but to draw out opinions and ideas of group members.
2. Facilitation focuses on how people participate in the process of learning or planning, not just what is achieved.
3. A facilitator is neutral and never takes sides.

Effective facilitators are able to balance several tasks at once. They ensure that agenda items are covered, that important issues are discussed, decisions made and actions taken, while at the same time focusing on how the meeting is structured and run, to make sure that everyone can participate.

### **Why Do You Need Facilitation Skills?**

If you want to plan effectively, keep members involved, and provide positive leadership for your initiative, you will need facilitation skills. The more you know about how to shape and run a good planning and learning process, the more your members will feel empowered about their own ideas and participation, take on responsibility and ownership, and stay invested in your initiative.

Meetings are a big part of organizing a mental health promotion initiative in your community. It might seem that you are going from one meeting to the next, especially in the early stages of your project, so you will want to make those meetings as fruitful and effective as possible. The key to this is developing strong facilitation skills. These skills will come in handy in many places other than just meetings: for planning, for "growing" new leaders, for resolving conflicts, and for maintaining good communication among the members of your group.

Being a good facilitator is both a skill and an art. It is a skill in that people can learn certain techniques and can improve their ability with practice. It is an art in that some people just have more of a knack for it than others. If there is no requirement that a certain person facilitate (e.g. president of the Board) then your group can draw on members who already possess a natural skill or talent.

#### **Facilitating means:**

- understanding the goals of the meeting and the organization;
- keeping the group on the agenda and moving forward;
- including everyone in the meeting, including drawing out the quieter participants and controlling
- the domineering ones;
- making sure that decisions are made democratically.

### **How Do You Plan A Good Facilitation Process?**

A good facilitator is concerned with: the outcome of the meeting or planning session; with how the people in the meeting participate and interact; and also with the process. While achieving the goals and outcomes that everyone wants is, of course, important, a facilitator also wants to make sure that the process is sound, that everyone is engaged, and that the experience is the best it can be for the participants.

In planning a good meeting, the facilitator should focus on ensuring that the following three areas are covered in advance:

#### **1. Climate and environment**

There are many factors that affect how safe and comfortable people feel about interacting with each other and about participating. The environment and general "climate" of a meeting or

planning session sets an important tone for participation. Some of the things you will want to consider include the following:

- Is the location a familiar place, where people will feel comfortable?
- Is the meeting site accessible to everyone?
- Is the space the right size for the number of people you are expecting?

## 2. Logistics and room arrangements

Believe it or not, how people are seated, whether they are hungry and whether they can hear can make or break your planning process. As a facilitator, the logistics of the meeting should be of great concern to you, whether or not you are the person responsible for them. Some things to consider are:

- Seating arrangements: Arranging chairs in a circle or around a table encourages discussion, equality and familiarity.
- Places to hang flipcharts: you'll need some space to display the results of brainstorming sessions and other important material.
- Refreshments: If people are hungry, they are much less likely to participate fully. If you're planning on having refreshments, to make the necessary arrangements well before the meeting begins.
- Microphones and audio-visual equipment Will you need any equipment? Have you arranged for it and made sure that it works?

## 3. Ground rules

To build a safe and comfortable environment, a good facilitator has a few more points to consider. How do you protect the people who are worried their ideas will be attacked or mocked? How do you hold back the big talkers who tend to dominate, while still making them feel good about their participation?

This is an especially important concern in the area of mental health promotion. Discussions about mental health issues need to be facilitated effectively, so that people can feel safe and supported sharing personal, often painful experiences with others. Having a clear set of ground rules should help the facilitator as well as the participants to have a sense of trust and safety in the group.

Most meetings have some kind of operating rules. Some groups use a more formal procedure, while others have rules they've adopted over time. If you want participation to flow naturally, and people to feel invested in following the rules, the best way to go is to have the group develop them as one of the first steps in the process. This builds a sense of power among the participants, and the rules tend to be respected. Common ground rules include the following:

- One person speaks at a time;
- Listen to what other people are saying;
- Respect other people's ideas;
- Have a system to keep track of speakers - to make sure everyone is heard, and that no one dominates to the exclusion of others.

Now that you know the basics on developing facilitation skills, you can put them into practice at your next meeting!

This section provided only a very brief summary of facilitation skills, drawn from information found in the Community Tool Box, Chapter 10a, Section 3: Developing Facilitation Skills <http://ctb.ukans.edu/ctblc10as3.html>. You will also find a number of other resources on facilitation in the annotated resource list at the end of this chapter.

### 3. Introduction to Defining the Issue and Developing A Solution

People in communities often come together to identify issues that matter to them, and take action to bring about positive change.

The starting point in any attempt to taking action to promote mental health is understanding the community context. The context is influenced by many things:

- people's hopes and expectations - for example, the belief that things can change;
- job and family demands;
- issues of identity - cultural, gender, linguistic, sexual, etc.;
- problems, especially poverty and inequity;
- the broader social and political context.

Within this context, people may come together to identify issues that matter to them, and take action to bring about positive change in the community.

In this section we take a brief look at a process to help you define and analyze a community mental health issue, and then we lead you through some steps to generate and choose solutions to take action on that issue.

#### What Are The Steps In Defining An Issue?

If you've decided to take action to bring about change in your community, then you already understand that something isn't quite right. You may have noticed that people in the community who have lost their jobs are experiencing a great deal of distress, and are not getting the support they need, or that children in the community are being neglected, and have a sense of hopelessness about their future.

Although these problems may seem insurmountable at first the process you can use to begin to solve these problems is not. It consists of four basic steps, which we explain in the following pages: looking at what you know, finding out more information on the problem, defining the problem, and generating and choosing solutions. The first step in solving any problem is to:

##### 1. Start with what you know

You will never know everything about the issue you have decided to focus on, but you and the people in your group will probably already know more than you realize.

There are a lot of different ways to gather information about how people perceive the situation. They can be asked in advance to write down what they know about the problem. Or the facilitator can lead a brainstorming session to try to draw out the greatest number of ideas. Remember that a good facilitator will draw out everyone's opinions, not only those of the most vocal participants.

The following are some helpful hints to keep in mind while brainstorming:

- **Watch out for assumptions.** Be aware that people may have the diversity in your group and your community.
- **Be creative.** Even just telling people that they should think as creatively as possible will probably help your group come up with more numerous and interesting suggestions.

- **Don't censor ideas.** Brainstorming sessions are intended to produce as many ideas as possible. Discussion, analysis and idea selection come later.
- **Write everything down.** An idea which seems outlandish on first hearing might turn out to be possible, or might yield another idea which end up being the perfect solution to the different cultural interpretations of information and ideas. Respect could problem.
- **Keep energy level high.** The facilitator can set the pace and keep things going by soliciting more and different ideas from the group.
- **Stay on track.** It's easy for the group to go off on a tangent during brainstorming. The facilitator or recorder can gently remind people of where they are going.
- **Encourage synergy of ideas.** Ideas can be piggybacked or combined as people see connections during : the process.

## 2. Decide what information is missing, and gather what you need

Information is key to effective decision making. You need to gather as much information about the problem as possible, in order to generate effective solutions. You might collect any of several types of information available. Usually, what you hear or read will fall into one of the following categories.

- **Fact:** People in the community who have experienced serious mental illness often find that they are excluded from many aspects of community life.
- **Inference:** People with mental illness in the community probably aren't made to feel welcome in non-mental health related settings, such as local recreation and community centres.
- **Speculation:** If people with mental illness don't feel comfortable taking part in the regular life of the community, like going to the community centre, it's probably pretty hard for them to get back on their feet.
- **Opinion:** Places like recreation and community centres aren't properly set up to deal with the needs of people with mental illness.

When you are gathering information, you will probably hear all four types of information, and all can be important. Speculation and opinion can be especially important in gauging public opinion. If public opinion on your issue is based on faulty assumptions, as in the case of the opinion expressed in the example used above, then part of your solution strategy will probably include some sort of informational or educational component.

Where and how do you find this information? It depends on what you want to know. A few of the possibilities include:

- the library;
- the internet;
- questionnaires;
- interviews.

## 3. Define the Problem

With all the information in front of you, you're ready to create a "problem statement" a comprehensive definition of the problem. Before you do, remember two general principles.

- **Define the problem in terms of what you want to see change, rather than solutions to problems.** If you define the problem in terms of a particular solution, you're closing the door to other, possibly more effective solutions. "People with mental illness in our community don't feel welcome taking part in community activities" offers more space for possible solutions than, "We need to create more activities and settings where people with mental illness will feel comfortable."
- **Define the problem as one everyone shares; avoid assigning blame for the problem.** This is important to ensure that the problem is not represented as the concern of only a few people, but is one that is important to the community as a whole.

Now, you're ready to define the problem. Often the best way to do this is to have the facilitator write the problem statement on a flip chart, so that everyone can give feedback on it until the statement has developed into one that everyone is pleased with.

When you're defining the problem, ask if everyone understands the terminology being used. Define the key terms of your problem statement, even if you think everyone understands them. People may understand the terms you're using to have different meanings, and it's helpful to come to a common understanding.

After you have developed a problem statement that everyone agrees with, you should make sure that there is agreement as to why the problem exists in the first place. Write down the problem statement, and ask participants "Why does this problem exist?" Write down the answer given and ask "But why does (the answer) exist?"

(in a table in the book)

e.g. "People with mental illness are often excluded from community life"

But why?

"Because they don't feel welcome taking part in many community activities"

But why?

"Because of persistent stigma surrounding mental illness"

But why?

and so on....

Continue on down the line until participants feel comfortable about the root of the problem. Agreement is essential here. If people don't agree about the source of the problem, an effective solution may still be out of reach.

#### **4. Generate and choose solutions**

Generating and choosing solutions will be a much easier task for your group if you have already been through the process of defining and analyzing the problem together. Group members will have already reached a certain level of comfort with each other.

##### **Generating solutions**

Now you're ready to think up some possible solutions. Besides brainstorming, there are many other ways to gather the kind of ideas you'll need to develop your solution. The following are a few suggestions of some different techniques for generating ideas:

- Send several pieces of paper around the room. People can write down their ideas, which can later be discussed without anyone knowing who suggested which idea.
- If your group is large, divide it into smaller groups of 4-6 people. Each person writes a possible solution to the problem on his/her own pad of paper. Then each person puts their pad of paper on the table in the middle of the group. Next, everyone takes someone else's pad and comments on the idea. People in the group keep doing this until everyone in the group has commented on everyone else's idea. During or after the meeting, all the ideas are discussed or summarized in a report.

### **Evaluating solutions**

Hopefully your work up to this point has produced many potential solutions. Now it's time to which idea is best suited for your group. Answering the following questions for each idea should help you get closer to making a decision:

- What do you like about the idea?
- What don't you like about the idea?
- What might the side effects be?
- Is it practical?
- Is it effective?
- Is it cost effective?
- Will be easy to put into practice?
- Can group members do it, or will you need outside help?
- How much time will it take?
- Will it be accepted by everyone involved (i.e. group members, community as a whole)?

### **Making a final decision**

If a thorough discussion doesn't result in a decision that everyone agrees with, there are several techniques you might find helpful:

#### **Dotmocracy:**

Write the potential solutions on flip chart paper and post them where everyone can see. Give each member of the group the same number of sticky dots at least as many as the number of solutions posted) or you can use magic markers to draw dots.

Next, get group members to "vote" on the solutions by placing the dots next to the solution(s) that they think would be most effective. People can distribute their dots between solutions, or they can place them all next to a single solution, according to their preference.

This exercise is particularly effective because it gets people moving, and represents the decision-making process graphically.

#### **Sleep on it**

In some cases, you may choose not to decide immediately, or to defer the decision until the next meeting. Some ideas and opinions may change if people are given a little time to mull them over.

Whatever the group decides to do, the facilitator should ask for feedback after the decision has been made. The facilitator can ask if anyone has any suggestions that might make the solution better, and if everyone is completely satisfied with the decision reached.

Defining and analyzing the problem, and generating and choosing solutions are some of the most difficult tasks you will face in your project. Once you've made it this far, remember to celebrate what you've already accomplished!

This section on defining the issue and developing a solution was based on information contained in the Community Tool Box, Chapter 2, Section 3: Analyzing Community Problems, Berkowitz, B. Chapter 10a, Section 5: Defining and analyzing the problem. Nagy, J. Chapter 10a, Section 6: Generating & choosing solutions. Nagy, J. and Axner, M.

## **Annotated Resource List**

**A British Columbian legacy.** McKnight, J.L. Evanston, III: Centre for Urban Affairs and Policy Research. Northwestern University, 1990.

This paper describes the work of a citizen initiative in British Columbia designed to make communities more welcoming to people with developmental disabilities. It is a personalized account of the author's participation in guiding the enterprise through its first two years. The paper provides insights into the principles and guidelines that are fundamental to successful citizen efforts to make communities more inclusive and welcoming for all people.

**Capacity Building. Wilder Foundation.** Website: <http://www.wilder.org/suc/capbuild.html>

This website contains a wealth of information and resources on community development and capacity building approaches to community work. Also contains a number of links to other helpful websites.

**Collaboration Handbook: Creating, sustaining and enjoying the journey.** Winer, M. and Ray, K. Minnesota: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, Wilder Foundation Publications. 1996.  
<http://www.wilder.org/pubs/commb/commbwbk.html>

Conceived to help diverse groups work together to accomplish more than they could by working alone, this workbook describes what collaboration is, when it is the best strategy for accomplishing goals, and how to collaborate successfully. The book provides instruction, case studies and worksheets to guide users through each stage of the process of developing and sustaining collaborative partnerships.

**Collaborative Leadership: How citizens and civic leaders can make a difference.** Chrislip, D., and Larson, C. Toronto: Jossey-Bass, 1995.

This book offers new perspectives that address key challenges facing communities: how to deal with complex issues, engage citizens, and generate civic will to break legislative and bureaucratic deadlock. The book is written to help leaders bring together diverse community members in efforts that lead to real, measurable change. It provides advice, guidance and insight, examines the conditions that make leadership difficult and provides a framework for initiating, designing and implementing collaborative efforts.

**Community Building: What makes it work?** Mattessich, P and Monsey, B. Minnesota: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. Wilder Foundation Publications, 1995.  
<http://www.wilder.org/pubs/commb/commbwbk.html>

This book provides a review of the factors influencing the success of community building initiatives. It synthesizes the findings of community building studies into an easy-to-use reference. The book also contains a glossary of community building terms, a list of resources, technical support for community builders and an extensive bibliography.

**Community Development: Creating community alternatives -Vision, analysis and practice.** Ife, J. Melbourne: Longman, 1995.

This book provides a theoretical examination of how community development can be achieved in social, economic, political, cultural, environmental and personal/spiritual terms. It also demonstrates how these principles can be practically and sensitively applied by those interested in improving their communities.

**Community Tool Box.** Chapter I, Section 2. Building Capacity for Community Change. Nagy, J and Fawcett, S. <http://www.ctb.ukans.edu/ctblcls2.html>

This chapter provides a good introduction to the concepts of capacity building and collaborative partnerships. It presents a model of the community change process that is referred to throughout the Community Tool Box.

**Community Tool Box.** Chapter 18, Section II. Developing Multisector Collaboration Axner, M and Berkowitz, B. <http://www.ctb.ukans.edu/ctb/c18sII.html>

This chapter provides an overview of different factors involved in bringing a diverse group of people, organizations and institutions together to take action on a community issue.

**Cultural influences in community participation in health.** L. Stone. Social Science & Medicine; 35(4): 409- 17, 1992.

This paper traces changes in the way that the role of culture has been analyzed in relation to community health issues and in particular with respect to 'community participation'.

**Health promotion at the community level.** Bracht, N. (ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990.

This book guides professionals and citizens to mobilize communities to improve their health. It brings together principles and practice of community organization and change. Topics include community change theory and practice; community analysis and activation; intervention strategies; program evaluation, maintenance and diffusion; specific applications to a minority community, smoking and the elderly.

**People-centred health promotion.** Raeburn, J. and Rootman, I. London: Wiley, 1997.

This book presents an approach to health promotion which is first and foremost people-oriented. It discusses the basic elements of a people-centred approach which includes empowerment, organizational and community development, participation, life quality and evaluation, and presents the application of such an approach in practice as illustrated by a series of real-life projects. It concludes with a vision of a society based on people-centred health promotion principles.

**Promoting health, a practical guide.** 3rd edition. Ewles, L. and Simnett, I. London: Scutari Press, 1995.

Intended for health promoters, this book is a self-teaching guide and a source of ideas for group teaching. It has been updated to reflect recent changes in health care research and policies, and has sections that cover basic ideas and issues of health promotion; moving from theory to practice; and developing competence in health promotion.

**Stop, Look and Listen: An interactive guide to working with communities.** Valaitis, R., et al.

McMaster University/Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Public Health Dept.  
<http://www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/nursing/stoplook/>

Stop, Look and Listen is a self-directed, interactive program in CD-ROM format which can assist community workers to better understand participatory community assessment, planning and development. It takes the user on a journey, using childhood pedestrian injury as an example, to facilitate community action. Community assessment includes identifying the community's capacities and issues, reviewing community decision-making, planning, intervention and evaluation.