

# AN INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY ASSET MAPPING FOR COMMUNITY NETWORKS

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## Why Do Asset Mapping?

Government funding of human services will not be sufficient to produce the youth behavior outcomes and community well-being desired by the state legislature and community networks. Even if considerably greater funding levels were appropriated, their application to professionally-staffed services in categorical programs would be unlikely to produce these outcomes.

The wealth that needs to be applied to create these outcomes does not reside in state and federal treasuries, but in the vast untapped human capacity within each community. Within each community, there are private citizens, organizations, businesses, churches, neighborhood and school groups, self-help groups, professional associations, other informal associations, and creative ideas, which, in combination, could be applied directly to community solutions to community problems. These are community assets.

Many organizations and associations are currently applying serious and productive efforts on behalf of youth and family health. Others are applying their efforts, but in a limited or uncoordinated manner. Still others, quite informal in nature, are applying their efforts but in ways invisible to more formal parts of the community. Still others have yet to be challenged and guided to apply their strengths, human energy, ideas, leadership, political influence and will, and their other resources to community solutions, to what networks define as community and family risk, protective, and resiliency factors.

To the degree that the community networks can mobilize these assets in a focused and coordinated fashion, they are using the limited state and federal support to create a far larger and more effective local effort. In effect, they are multiplying the state and federal investment to produce much larger outcomes. This does not mean that community networks can or should produce massive local efforts to achieve outcomes, but that enough efficient local effort can be focused to deflect children, youth, and families toward better life chances.

In order to mobilize these assets, community networks must first identify them, because many of them are not highly visible or immediately recognizable. The community networks' process of finding them is called community asset mapping. It results in community asset building and community asset mobilization.

## How is this different from what networks produced in their comprehensive plans?

Community asset mapping is a detailed, grounded, and continuous activity of community network boards. It is a detailed activity because it examines parts of the community that often lie outside of formal organizations and institutions. It is grounded because it is based on the real life of individuals and associations. It is continuous because assets are continuously coming into existence, as new people come to the community and as new formal and informal associations develop.

In their comprehensive plans, all community networks were required to inventory those services and service organizations that were working with either the problem behaviors or the risk and protective factors selected by each network. Some community network boards viewed the task of developing a services inventory as somehow disconnected from other aspects of their work. However, this activity was to guide the network boards to significant assets within the service provider part of the community. These providers are likely to become either future partners with the community networks, contractors to the networks, and/or subject to network inquiry about the effectiveness of their work in making an impact on target risk and protective factors.

For some networks, this inventory task was also an introduction to more comprehensive and long-term assets mapping, mobilizing, and building, and beyond the confines of the services system. These networks were attracted to mobilizing different assets in the community to alter key individual, family, and community factors and, thereby, improve the behavioral health of youth and families. These networks intend to develop workplans in more comprehensive assets mapping. This memo is intended to assist in this planning process for those networks.

### **Where is the Most Logical Place to Begin Planning this Activity?**

[balance of the guide is available upon request]