

Nurture Development, ABCD and criminal justice

Rebecca Daddow is optimistic that changes can be affected through community building

We all know that justice is not a product that can be unilaterally dispensed by law enforcement or the Judiciary. It is simply not within the power of the Police, Judiciary, the Prison Service, Probation or any other professional to rehabilitate people and produce more just societies, when this is fundamentally about tackling issues of poverty and health inequality.

Nurture Development believe these are issues of social justice, more so than criminal justice, and their complexity requires a community response that is radically different to the status quo.

The most significant function of the criminal justice system is to compensate for the limits and failures of society's other major systems...It is the people, caught in this web of counterproductive systems, who must seek survival in the hopeless spaces available. They react in many ways, just as we would. They strike out in anger, as some of us would. They create productive, phoenix-like new ventures and initiatives, as some of us would. They despair and retreat into addictions, as some of us would. They are normal people in an abnormal world, surrounded by expensive, costly helping systems that are the walls that bound their lives. To defy those walls, they must live abnormal lives – often productive sometimes destructive, always creative.
(McKnight, 1995)

We believe that an opportunity for the level of transformation that we, like the Centre for Crime and

Justice Studies, want to see, lies in using the theory, ethos and practical experience of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) to:

1. Co-create and champion community based alternatives to custody.
2. Reawaken communities to their competencies in creating strong communities with vibrant local economies that actively bring people in from the margins.
3. Pilot 'disruptive innovations' at various entry points throughout the criminal justice system to explore what works, for who, and when.

What is Asset Based Community Development?

The ABCD approach was developed by Professors John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann following decades of research in some of the most 'disadvantaged' communities in the USA.

Initially asked to identify the needs and problems in these communities, McKnight and Kretzman began to see a common problem. The problem was weak communities that were being made ever more incompetent by the growing service-producing institutions that had gradually

commodified almost every aspect of life.

Asset Based Community Development is a form of participatory democracy that builds on the resources found in every community – focusing on what's strong, not what's wrong. These resources are often described as the six building blocks of community:

1. The skills of local residents
2. The power of local associations
3. The resources of public, private and non-profit institutions
4. The physical resources of local places
5. The economic resources of local places
6. The stories of our lives and evolving communities

McKnight and Kretzmann established the ABCD Institute at Northwestern University in 1995, and they

continue to develop and encourage the proliferation of the approach worldwide.

At Nurture Development, we have taken up this challenge, seeking to grow the presence of ABCD throughout the UK. Cormac Russell, the Managing

Director, established the organisation in 1996, setting out to redefine how people think about and act together to effect social change. Having trained directly under McKnight, Russell had strong foundations to build on.

Commitment to social justice

Nurture Development, the only strategic partner of the ABCD Institute in Europe, and its growing team are committed to working for social justice because we know that it leads to:

- **Better analysis of social issues:** when the starting point is strengths and potential, rather than deficiencies and problems

- **Better social systems:** when the government shares its power and responsibilities with citizens

- **Better community building:** when it happens from the inside out

- **Better quality of life:** when new people connect up to support and challenge each other – and have fun

- **Better relationships:** when kindness, straight talking, encouragement and trust are the norm

- **Better society:** when citizens, community groups and institutions are clear about what it is that each of them can and cannot do

- **Better democracy:** when citizens develop their own community plans

Nurture Development wants to broaden and extend the challenge of 'rehabilitation' to the whole community to step into their role as citizens and create the conditions in which everyone can thrive and in which the socio-economic drivers of crime weaken. We want to help

Investment in building communities will yield a greater return in sustainable change

create communities with fewer 'hopeless spaces', in which people can contribute to, tap into and develop the resources (referred to as 'rehabilitation capital' in this context) they need to flourish, and

in which those returning from prison can access the 'rehabilitation capital' they need to live a good life. These resources are universal e.g. positive relationships, job/purposeful activity and somewhere safe and secure to live. Communities, including people labelled by their involvement in the criminal justice system, can create these conditions for rehabilitation and that is their challenge.

Nurture Development wants to build stronger communities not a bigger criminal justice system or more service-based interventions. Investment in building these communities will yield a greater return in sustainable change, than augmenting a system of service provision that can be restricted by commissioning structures, budget cuts and internal agendas.

As specialists in the ABCD and other strength-based approaches,

we're excited by the agenda set out by Justice Matters. We hope to make a meaningful contribution by demonstrating through practical action, how neighbourhoods, organisations, agencies and the institutions of the criminal justice system can think and work in a way that creates the conditions for rehabilitation and contributes to wider community building efforts. ■

Rebecca Daddow was Recovery and Justice Lead for Nurture Development until August 2014

For more information about the Justice Matters project, visit: www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/project/justice-matters

References

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- McKnight, J. and Block, P. (2010), *The Abundant Community. Awakening the Power of Families & Neighbourhoods*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

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