

12 neighbors Discussion Guide

Week Four : Start with Strengths

Before watching the film, familiarize the group with the concept of Asset Based Community Development.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) or Asset Based Community Driven Development as it is sometimes called, is grounded on three principles:

1. Everyone has gifts
2. Everyone has something to contribute
3. Everyone cares about something and that passion is their motivation to act

ABCD would have us focus on a person or community's gifts or strengths, rather than on their problems or deficits. It uses the strengths and assets of the community as a resource for development, empowering them to use the skills they already possess. ABCD involves assessing the resources, skills, and experience available in a community; organizing the community around issues that move its members into action; and then determining and taking the appropriate action.

Pre-Film Question

Read and discuss *Matthew 6:26*, *Luke 6:20*, and *1 Cor 1:28*

*"Look at the birds of the air;
they do not sow or reap or store away in barns,
and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.
Are you not much more valuable than they?"
Matthew 6:26 (NIV)*

*"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven"
Luke 6:20 (NIV)*

*"God chose things despised by the world,
things counted as nothing at all,
and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important."
1 Cor 1:28 (NLT)*

In the scriptures, God frequently affirms all peoples' value, and his promise of provision. Why might we often view the poor as having less value, or less strengths, or less blessings, or gifts than others? Why might the poor, in fact, have unique strengths, special blessings and special insights that the rest of us don't, and what might we have to learn from them?

Watch the "Start With Strengths" episodes 4A + 4B

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss any initial thoughts, impressions, or takeaways from the film?
2. When discussing the welfare system Jorge states, *"it's a system that's really designed (for families) to showcase their deficits. Families have to show how poor they are how broken they are, and only then will they get access to the resources that they need."*

What would happen if we started by looking at a person or a community's assets and strengths instead of their deficiencies and problems?

FII facilitator Victoria discuss the impact the shift has on individual's poverty of identity: "They all felt that everybody just wanted to look at them based upon where they were right now. That is feeling poor, not just from a living perspective but from a mindset. Now... they don't have that deficiency mindset."

Jesus from FII says, "At FII when we start with people's strengths and goals, you begin to see the richness and the activities of what people are doing for themselves already."

3. What are the things we have to do differently if we are to **start with strengths**?

Consider discussing the difficulty of untraining yourself that we have to come up with solutions to other people's problems. As Maria Jaurez says, "we, families, have to be empowered ourselves, because we are the ones who have lived the reality."

4. Can you think of an example in your life where transformation resulted from someone seeing and reaffirming someone's strengths and potential?

Marco of Homeboy Industries says, "That day I walked in here, Father G did see that. He said 'I see a lot of good in you son. You are going to be somebody.'"

5. Discuss an example of relief-based or development-based work, perhaps in your community. What could you change to shift this work towards an **ABCD**¹, or **start with strengths** approach?

6. Read the introductory verses again to this section, and discuss this quote by Father Gregory Boyle,

"These are the folks who know what it's like to have been cutoff. And, because they have suffered in this particular way, God thinks they are trustworthy guides, to lead the rest of us. People are always wanting to go to the margins to make a difference, whereas I think we are being invited to go to the margins so that the folks at the margins make us different. That turns the whole thing on its head, because suddenly we are not rescuing and saving them. It's quite the opposite."

¹ McKnight, John; Kretzmann, John (1996). *Mapping Community Capacity (PDF) (Report) (Revised ed.)*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research.

² **ABCD** was developed by John L. McKnight and John P. Kretzmann. Read more about it in their co-authored book, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (1993).

Assessment

We all have our own gifts, strengths, and assets. Assess your own strengths & assets as individuals and as a team (12 Neighbors Group), and those of the community you live in. These will eventually help guide you as you begin to explore what you as a group would like to do, and what you are best suited to take on for your own community work.

Action

Intentionally engage with someone in a poor or marginalized situation with the goal of uncovering their assets and their strengths through listening. Then, when you discover the strengths & assets, affirm them as a person (their value, their strengths). Don't try to solve anything. Come back to the group with what you've learned from that experience.