

***“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”  
(Henry Ford).***

Coming together:

*The Community Partnership on Drug Abuse (CPDA)* began in 2004 when it formed to tackle issues relating to prescription drug abuse in Cape Breton, such as loss of life from opiate addiction. It brought numerous partners, organizations and community representatives working in various fields and sectors to the table and had three working groups as part of its structure. One working group focused on *Education and Prevention* of substance use. In 2006, this working group of individuals found a model that had proven to be successful in many areas of North America to reduce risk factors like drug abuse. The approach known as developmental assets had brought results as close to home as Miramichi, NB.

The developmental asset framework is based on decades of resiliency and positive youth development research from the *Search Institute* in the United States. It recommends 40 skills, competencies, relationships, values, opportunities, and behaviors that youth need to have in order to thrive in life. The working group was so impressed by the wealth of research and other communities using the asset approach, that in 2008 they conducted an asset survey that had been used all over North America. They surveyed 1302 junior and senior high age Cape Breton youth. Findings concluded that on average, out of 40 possible assets, Cape Breton youth possess 20.5 – showing room for improvement. The more assets a youth has the lower their risk for problem behaviors and negative outcomes and the greater their likelihood to lead a healthy, contributing life. The committee then recommended to the larger *CPDA* that implementing an asset-based intervention would create healthy and supportive communities for our youth to grow up in and should be an approach pursued further.

Keeping together:

Unfortunately before any major inroads could be taken with the survey information, the *CPDA* officially disbanded early in 2010. A number of the *Education and Prevention* working group members felt their work was not done and still saw the value of embarking towards interventions using developmental assets. Many of the relationships among the working group members remained strong as did a belief in the meeting, goal setting, brainstorming and planning processes that had been established.

So, in April 2010, an adhoc group known as the *ABCS of Building Neighborhoods* began meeting, with 24 members from various organizations, clubs and agencies in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. Sectors such as health, education, justice/law, community and youth services were represented and at times three youth reps were involved. The committee met monthly to act as a ‘think tank’ to address community needs through presentations, research, and project design based on sharing the developmental assets framework. The *ABCS Committee* completed local research studies and developed a strategy and complimentary report to guide the integration of developmental assets into the work of services and community life. They were

successful in securing some one-time funding to undertake the hiring of a Coordinator who facilitated the training and placement of four workers, in four different communities at four host agencies – that became known as “asset headquarters.” The individuals, who were once in receipt of income assistance under *Department of Community Services*, gained employment experience and confidence in their abilities. The project sites also brought together teams of youth and adults of a wide range of ages, from 12 to 70. Teams examined community needs, strengths and barriers and designed a project for their community that they collectively felt enhanced developmental assets. The facilitators, host agencies and community teams became well-versed in developmental asset building.

One of host sites and asset headquarters was *Town House Citizens Service League* in Glace Bay where an intergenerational team was initiated to look at community needs and brainstorm ideas that might build assets in Glace Bay and surrounding areas. The executive director of Town House and the board of directors embraced the developmental asset approach and saw its usefulness in giving youth a voice; building relationships; creating partnerships; and instilling a healthy philosophy and awareness of what is needed for community members to thrive.

It must be noted that the *ABCS of Building Neighborhoods* was not a registered society or non-profit but rather an adhoc team of committed individuals, wanting to help communities take action, using a well-researched approach. The *ABCS committee* was struggling with practical aspects like finding a regular space to meet; reduced involvement of original representatives as workloads, management support, and areas of interest shifted at their organizations; finding organizations that were officially registered groups to actively partner with on funding applications; not having a bank account for finances; and so forth. At the same time *Town House*, approaching its 50<sup>th</sup> year of multifaceted service to the community, was setting in motion its three-year strategic plan. *Town House* had outlined youth involvement and asset building approaches as a meaningful future direction. *Town House* also had goals to expand its volunteer program, moving to offer organized service learning opportunities, and saw developmental assets as providing a suitable foundation for their plans.

#### Working Together:

In 2013, the *ABCS of Building Neighborhoods* officially joined forces with *Town House* and became a committee that meets monthly at *Town House*, in downtown Glace Bay. Since 2013 they had a short term project coordinator look at asset building and volunteer opportunities and interests in Glace Bay. They also received funding to hire a youth intern for 11 weeks who designed an awareness session to help instill an interest in volunteering among young youth (grades 5/6). Most importantly they have set in motion plans to revive the intergenerational asset building team, that met in 2011-12 at *Town House*.

This relatively new partnership is beneficial as the *ABCS* members remain able to pursue their original goal of integrating assets into community activity and promoting this philosophy, while *Town House* is able to enhance their volunteer base, improve reach and appeal to youth and

expand their funding application opportunities. *Town House's* mission statement “to improve the quality of life of the residents of the community in response to needs identified by the residents” fits exceptionally well with the goals of the *ABCS* asset group. Most importantly this new structure brings the work of the *ABCS* (and the original *Education and Prevention* working group of the *CPDA*) to the ground level in a long standing, well respected, grassroots community organization.

Representatives around the table successfully work within the boundaries of their organizations and can bring forth their own unique expertise. In coming together, the identity of neither group has been lost – relationships and creative thinking have been fostered; there is a great respect and a new awareness of each other’s daily work; and tasks are divided up based on personal strengths and interests. The symbiotic joining of *ABCS* and *Town House* reflects the true essence of asset building. We are excited to see where activity grows from here – as it is a partnership we believe will bring unique and impactful projects to our municipality.