

Community Mapping

What is it and why would you do it

(Taken from the Open Doors Newsletter February 2016)

Community Mapping

The Open Doors Project launched the Community Mapping Toolkit in July 2014. This resource, developed with Stephanie Cole from Sharing Learning Doing has now been piloted with a number of community centres and we will be making the final version available very shortly (watch this space!).

Why would you want to undertake a community mapping exercise?

The main purpose is to help communities bring together information from within their own community and then from this to decide what is important and what is not.

If undertaken properly with the intention of positive engagement it can be an enjoyable and vibrant process which helps centres develop connections and to understand what needs to be done to attract people to become more active within the centre.

At a very practical level it will inform your development of facilities and delivery of activities, ensuring that your building is well used and relevant to your community (whether that is your local geographic community and/or a community of interest). It means you won't just do something that seems like a good idea to then discover that you have invested time and money for no one to turn up.

The information that is gathered provides a wider picture, allowing you to explore options and putting you in a stronger position to represent yourself and influence other organisations. It can be used to inform a number of strategies and to produce business plans, funding applications and publicity materials.

At a deeper level the process of involving people within your community to undertake this process builds skills and capacity and it creates a sense of ownership. Collecting this information and having the capacity to use it results in communities becoming aware of what they can achieve by working together.

So what is a community mapping exercise?

The clue is sort of in the name!

“Community mapping is a mapping process carried out by the community for the community. It is a development tool that aims to tap into and expand the breadth of knowledge and experience within communities, in order to empower them and develop their capacity to deal with a variety of issues and problems, developing solutions for themselves.” (WaterAid Guidelines)

The process we have put together is a positive asset-based and enabling approach, but it is not strictly the same as what is understood as “community asset mapping” which is a particular way of approaching community development and regeneration.

Asset based approaches are a response to the tendency to look for the problems and deficits in our communities.

“Sometimes it seems like the negative approach is so ingrained that we appear to be regarding the communities themselves as the problem.” (Preston City Council Guide to Community Asset Mapping).

Asset based community development seeks to rebalance that view by properly cataloguing everything that is of value and that can be used to find ways of addressing problems in an area.

The Open Doors Community Mapping Toolkit provides a structured approach with a range of activities based around three themes:

- Knowing our community centre
 - who are we?
 - what happens here?
 - who uses our centre?
- Knowing our community – mapping local resources and organisations
- Knowing our community – needs and wants

The toolkit is easy to understand and use and can be used in full or in part equally successfully.