

ABCD IN ST. ANDREWS

Building on the 200-year legacy of citizen-led development



A rural community in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, St. Andrews has been taking charge of its own development for more than 200 years.

Yet it was only in 2006 that its citizens were introduced to an asset-based community-driven development (ABCD) as a methodology by the Coady International Institute.

This experience has inspired St. Andrews to build on its legacy of “community spirit” and undertake a number of new initiatives.

Appreciative interviews made community members realize that they have a treasure trove of assets to draw upon.

Background

Building on the legacy of pioneering Scottish and, later, Dutch immigrants, St. Andrews, a rural agricultural community of 1,100 people located in northeast Nova Scotia, Canada, has maintained an over two centuries-long tradition of forging its own development. Yet it was not until the Coady International Institute shone light on our successes by documenting them in *From Clients to Citizens*, a collection of 13 case studies of citizen-led development from around the world, that we understood we might be doing something unique in the field of community development.

The ABCD Process

The story of *conscious* ABCD in St. Andrews begins where the case study left off. In September 2006, participants of the Coady Institute’s Certificate Program “Mobilizing Assets for Community-Driven Development”

came to St. Andrews to practice what they had learned in the classroom. They introduced community members to asset mapping. Many of us were inspired by the process and saw that it could give rise to new community initiatives.

This first round involved a series of appreciative interviews, which were equally enjoyed by listeners and tellers. How did previous community projects come to be? Who was involved? What was the process? Why were these projects so successful? By delving into these questions, we came to appreciate that we have a treasure trove of assets, including energetic leaders, generous volunteers, a strong tradition of collaboration among various local groups, and well-planned community workdays. By mapping our associations, we realized that there were at least 14 local groups and another nine external organizations at work in St. Andrews. The “Leaky Bucket” was a fun visual economic analysis tool that helped us come up with as many as 25 ideas for enhancing community well-being, including a fitness centre, funeral coop, ecotourism, production of organically grown vegetables, cheese-making, a campground, a restaurant, a resident nurse, furniture manufacturing, and more.

One of the shortfalls of this process was that not many young people and no one from the community’s new subdivision got involved. This was partly because community sessions were held during the daytime when youth were in school and folks from the subdivision at work. So one evening, we drew people in with the first screening of *By Their Own Hands*—a newly-produced documentary about our community. Two hundred people, young and old, showed up. Everyone was invited to remain after the film to discuss possible next steps for St. Andrews.

We started with a presentation reviewing all the opportunities identified at the earlier stage of the ABCD process. Posters placed around the community centre wall displayed 25

project ideas grouped under the following headings: farming/food; recreation; services; forestry; tourism; energy/transportation; and communication. Community members were invited to propose any additional initiatives they thought would be important to develop in St. Andrews. We then asked everyone to take part in a “Dotmocracy” exercise in which people could vote for the projects they were most interested in by sticking coloured dots next to their choices. This was a great visual showing immediately which projects were the most popular and could be expected to attract broad community support.

Resulting Initiatives

One person from each sign-up sheet facilitated a small group discussion on the project ideas that were prioritized. The groups focused on exploring how these ideas could become reality: What steps were needed? What assets did we already have to work with? What outside help would we need?

Then the project groups held a joint discussion to debrief their findings and identify further steps. One cross-cutting theme was the need for an umbrella group to coordinate the 14 different interest groups. A few community members agreed to meet again to discuss this idea. Six of the groups also organized their own meetings over the next few months, inviting other community members. The results speak volumes:

St. Andrews Community Partnership is an “association of associations,” fostering better communication and cooperation between various community groups. It also supports new community project ideas until they can start developing on their own. Now, when the citizens want to pitch an idea or seek assistance in fulfilling an initiative, there is a place within the community they can go to for support. Recently, the Partnership, in collaboration with the Antigonish Regional Development Authority, has developed a community strategic plan leading up to 2016.

Community website standrewscommunity.ca is an initiative of the Community Partnership. An important feature of the site is the event calendar that enables each community group to plan its activities in such a way as to avoid overlaps with other groups. Each group has its own webpage with contact information.

Community trails have been created behind the community centre and along the beautiful South River nearby. This initiative has led to a partnership between St. Andrews 4-H Club (a youth development group) and the Knights of Columbus (a Roman Catholic service organization) in building and maintaining a hiking/cross-country ski trail system for all-season enjoyment.

An organic gardening study group facilitates the sharing of information about organic practices applicable to local circumstances through informal kitchen meetings between seasoned and less experienced gardeners.

A funeral co-op study group has been formed to explore the possibility of starting a funeral cooperative. After a feasibility study, a visit to a funeral co-op, and a regional meeting of interested congregations, the group decided to focus on sharing information with the broader community on funeral-related topics.

Our efforts recently have earned prestigious recognitions—The Lieutenant Governor’s Community Spirit Award and a Nova Scotia Excellence in Collaboration Award (both in 2009). These awards have boosted our pride in the 200-year history of our community and our passion to keep working for its well-being. One citizen has captured these sentiments in a heartfelt observation, “St. Andrews is just a great place to live!” It is fair to say that in St. Andrews, citizen-led development was the norm long before we learned what the term ABCD stood for. However, the ABCD process did prepare us for when the next big idea comes up for discussion. The Community Partnership, strategic plan, and website are there now for support. St. Andrews is known for its community spirit, and the ABCD process has built on this invaluable resource.

“St. Andrews is just a great place to live!”



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