



FACTSHEET

Reframing Need: Asset-Driven Youth Program and Community Development

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YOUTHREX AND ASSET MAPPING

At YouthREX, we put a lot of stock in the capabilities of the young people we work with. That's why we look to Asset Mapping as a positive approach to effecting change in the communities we collaborate with.



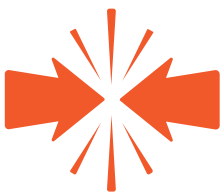
WHAT IS ASSET MAPPING?

Before we can even look at “**Asset Mapping**” as a concept, we must first understand what the term “**Asset**” means on its own. A quick dictionary scan (or Google search) will tell you that an asset is: “A useful and desirable thing or quality”. With this in mind, Asset Mapping focuses on the capabilities and positive strengths (assets) that people and communities have, rather than on the problems such groups may be facing. By doing so, it allows for us to leverage capabilities, strengths, and resources in order to plan with, and for, a community.



SO WHAT DID PEOPLE USE BEFORE ASSET MAPPING?

While the past 20 years have seen a shift towards Asset Mapping, there was (and still continues to be) an approach called **Needs-Based**. This concept doesn't spend much time looking at strengths and resources that could be leveraged to make positive change happen, but instead concentrates on what is missing in individuals, groups or communities. While there may be a context where a needs-based approach makes sense, when working with and engaging youth, we believe in looking at what's working and going from there.



NEEDS-BASED vs. ASSETS-BASED

Let's look at an example using youth unemployment in a community to better understand the difference between these two approaches.

A **Needs-Based** approach to youth unemployment would look at the problems with this issue and identify what is missing and preventing a higher employment rate. This approach may discover that high unemployment in an area is the result of not enough jobs for the population.

An **Asset-Based** approach would study the same community and issue, but look for opportunities to improve the situation. Instead of honing in on the lack of businesses that can provide work, this approach would look at the businesses that do exist and identify how to engage them as stakeholders who can help.

ASSET MAPPING PROCESS

1. Define boundaries: these can be geographic, social (in terms of individuals involved), neighbourhood-based etc.
2. Identify and involve partners: these are the different individuals, groups, and stakeholders that will be engaged in order to do the asset mapping.
3. Determine what type(s) of assets to include: communities are made up of many individuals with diverse capabilities. It is important to focus your scope.
4. List the assets of groups
5. List the assets of individuals
6. Organize assets on a map/visual: this is the planning stage of the process.
7. Interpret meaning for action: this stage is about determining how your assets will be used.

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

This refers to how an Asset Map is carried out.

System-Level: This level looks at systems present in a community (i.e. government, schools, businesses etc.) and examines the important assets that may have.

Community-Level: This is the most common type of analysis and typically involves neighbourhoods and social populations.

Individual-Level: This level looks at individual assets and how to scale them up in a group context.

ALIGNMENT WITH CRITICAL POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

At YouthREX, we examine how research plays a role in ensuring youth assets are fostered. That's why we think Asset Mapping aligns nicely with Critical Positive Youth Development because we believe that we can do a lot more concentrating on the positive rather than the negative.

LIMITATIONS TO ASSET MAPPING

Like anything else, while there are many benefits to Asset Mapping there are some limitations to keep in mind (and address via alternative additional strategies).

- Asset Mapping can be biased towards quantitative (measurable) and 'mappable' information
 - When this happens, data availability helps focus the view/scope of understanding
- It does not directly address unequal power in the community at hand
- It can be easy to slip from an assets-based frame back into focusing primarily on deficits and 'expert-led thinking'
- The focus on particular scales of analysis (e.g. community-level) may obscure factors occurring at, and across, other scales.
 - For example, looking back at youth unemployment rates – this may be the result of much bigger factors that exist outside of the community.
- It can still get stuck in the traditional cross-sectional mode of community assessment/planning/action.
 - Asset Mapping needs to be more "real-time" and dynamic in approach rather than looking at just one point in time.