Unlocking Your Community's Hidden Strengths

A G idebook o Comm ni CA e -Mapping

ABOUT THE AL A BA MA YOUTH JUSTICE ALLI A NCE

The AYJA is consortium of advocates, organizations, groups and families dedicated to ensuring that AlabamaÕs youth have the tools and opportunities to grow into healthy, responsible and productive adults. AYJA members work together and with legislators, agencies, courts and communities to build a stronger, safer state for our children.

Every day in communities across the state, ordinary Alabamians step up and give part of themselves to others. We see it in the volunteers in soup kitchens, the Sunday school teachers in our churches, the legions of us working to rebuild our state after devastating tornadoes, and in the tens of thousands of Alabamians who serve in our countryÕs armed forces. Millions of private and individual decisions combine to have a greater impact, positively affecting friends, neighbors, even complete strangers.

Although volunteers may begin their work for selßess reasons, they eventually realize that they, too, beneÞt from their efforts. Through service, we discover communities that embrace us, churches to belong to, and a vibrant citizenship that pervades all aspects of our lives.

Service and cooperation allow Alabamians to take hold of the future of our communities, our state, and our nation, especially during difÞcult times. Now, with the state facing falling revenues and cuts to services, Alabama's churches, neighbors, and volunteer groups have stepped up to help out, greatly expanding their charitable giving and contributions. Our willingness and proven ability to come together and solve problems, whether local or national, is part of what makes us uniquely American.

Yet there are also hundreds of thousands of us who have not yet found a way to give back, who are not reaching our full potential as citizens, neighbors, and friends. It is not for want of desire, motivation, or willingness. The reason so many of us fail to give back to our communities is that we simply donÕt know how.

While so many of us wait on the sidelines, thousands of children go without the resources they need to ßourish Ñ positive role models, safe places to go after school, healthy activities to participate in, and adults to help them with their homework. Children without these resources struggle in school and are likely to drop out. Because they lack the resources so many take for granted, these children are on a fast track to poverty and, all too often, incarceration.

As people who care about children and the health of our communities, we face two distinct challenges: 1) children are not getting the human capital Ñ the time, knowledge, passion, skills, and attention of adults Ñ that they need to succeed; and 2) adults are struggling to Þnd opportunities to contribute to their communities in meaningful ways.

We can solve both problems at the same time by unlocking new opportunities and spaces for adults to work positively with children, and building an infrastructure that lets a community provide its children with the resources and attention they need.

People Ñ not governments, courts, or other agencies Ñ are the solution to the problems children face. Courts in particular, which extend one helping hand while holding child-sized handcuffs in the other, often ending up hurting the children with whom they come into contact, despite their best intentions.

Though they cannot solve the problems on their own, government and courts can

The LOCATE section will help to focus your work. In this section, you will learn how to identify the neighborhoods and schools, where a community-based program would have the greatest impact. You will also begin to explore the types of programs or services that would be most beneÞcial to the children in your area.

The guidebook then moves on to gathering information from the people around you. As active members of the community, your friends and colleagues already know some of the organizational assets your community has to offer. SURVEY gives you easy-to-use tools to reach out to people in the know, solicit their input about assets you may not know about, and helps you organize the information they provide.

While SURVEY identiÞes the assets that are already known by you and your colleagues, DISCOVER guides you through the process of Þnding organizations, associations, churches, and groups that have so far existed under the radar. You will explore documentary sources, go to where groups meet, and make contact with community leaders to discover the organizational assets that lie just beneath the surface. You will discover groups and programs that already work with children, and which can be persuaded to expand their roles. The contacts you make in this phase will be key to your efforts to solicit individuals who can volunteer and contribute.

UNLOCK, the Þnal section of the guidebook, uses the technique of Òtargeting U

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, who runs a barber college in Mobile, Ala., uses his exper tise and experience to help youth in need of employment.

White waives the $3,500 tuition fee at his barber college for students who sign a contract saying they will abide by certain terms.

The contract calls for students to complete 1,500 hours of training, pass all tests and work for at least three months after graduation in a licensed barbershop. Students who sign up also agree to dress appropriately and act respectfully. Saying ÒsirÓ and ÒmaÕamÓ is an expectation.

Revenue for the program comes from the $6 to $9 customers are charged for haircuts. But White, 93, also uses money from his Social Security check to help cover expenses.

His advice for mining the assets in the community? ÒYou can tell people what to do, or you can do it yourself,Ó he said. ÒI just do things that need to be done Ñ not for recognition but to help others.Ó

LOCATE

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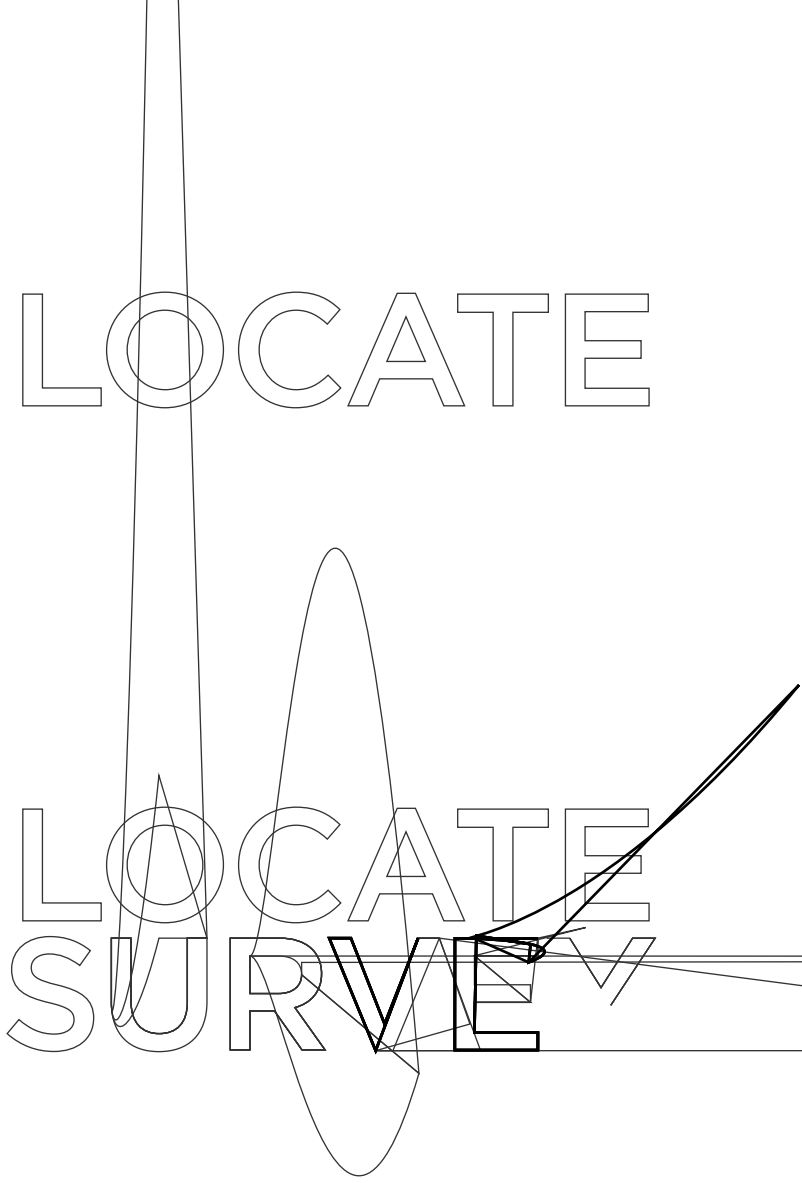
SURVEY



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are clearest. As an interviewer, you will only scratch the surface of your commu nityÕs network of associations. However, if an interviewer asks follow-up questions (ÒAre there associations for women? Sports teams? Fishing clubs? Neighborhood groups?Ó), the additional context forces the person answering the questions to think a little harder. Once you get started, you will also be able to prompt people with stories from other interviews.

When you are asking your colleagues and friends to brainstorm the organizations and associations they are familiar with, it helps to ask similar questions. Follow up a question like:

> Which organizations, businesses, churches, and individuals do you know of who might be interested or enthusiastic about working with children?

with a few prompts:

> Youth groups? Community theater organizations? How about First Baptist? Have you worked with Jerry Smith?

Asking these types of follow-up questions Ñ and asking about speciÞc people Ñ will invite more thorough responses. You may get a tip that someone is unavailable to talk, but that he or she has a relative in town who is already organizing a volunteer tutoring project.

valuable information when they see the information that others have contributed. If you use Facebook or a similar networking site, you may want to post your spreadsheet online to make it available for others to review and update.

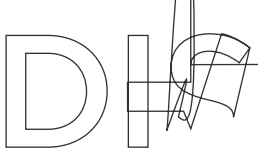
CONTACT YOUR CONTACTS

Now that you have a list of a few organizations that serve (or could serve) children, it is time for you to begin to make contact with them. Different ways of contacting the leaders of the organizations you have identified will be useful in different contexts. Making phone calls, meeting face-to-face, and writing letters are all useful ways to learn more. When you make additional contacts add them to your EXPLORATORY SPREADSHEET. If you are ready to begin making contact, skip ahead to the Reach Out subsection of DISCOVER.

If the SURVEY phase does not provide you with a list of promising contacts, the DISCOVER phase certainly will. At any point, you can loop back to the beginning of the DISCOVER section to scoop up the organizations and associations you donÕt know about yet.

Background: IÕm helping with a project that seeks to connect children who need services with the people, ɵrga nizations, and state agencies that can serve them within their communities. We hope to partner with community groups, churches, and individuals to develop tutoring, mentoring, job training, and other programs for children. Our goal is to build a network of adults who volunteer their time and contribute their knowledge, skills, and passion to positively impact children. We are asking for your input because you are familiar with the organiza tions that serve children in our community and can connect us with the leaders of these organizations.

, center, is a social worker with the Department of Human Resources in Jefferson County, Ala., responsible for identifying housing, em ployment, and independent living opportunities for youth transitioning out of the foster care systemSheÕs also a tireless advocate for homeless youth, and serves on various boards dedicated to eradicating homelessness.



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Call Ñ DonÕt be shy! Call the community members you have identiÞed. See the GUIDELINE FOR CALLS AND INTERVIEWS (page 20) and the SAMPLE QUESTIONS (page 31) for advice on how to introduce your project and what questions to ask. Make sure to tell them you are calling because someone recom mended them as a valuable resource. Also be sure to introduce yourself and the project in a positive light. If someone seems as if they would be particularly valu

YMCA	Downtown	Volunteer tutoring program. After homework, children participate in supervised athletic activities.	Children who struggle in school	Bruce Kamradt Advocate and Director 555-0227
Local Mentoring Program	West Side	Connects each child with a positive role model, and organizes one-on-one and group activities.	Court-involved youth at risk for increased involvement in Juvenile Justice system	Neil Brown (Community Member) 555-2281
Mrs. JohnsonÕs sewing circle	Oldtown	Group of friends who have been getting together twice a week for 15 years	Might be willing to bring a teenager into the circle	

June 15, 2013

Reverend David Johns
New Home Baptist Church
1422 Hill St.
Montgomery, AL 36108

Dear Reverend Johns,

I truly enjoyed our conversation last Tuesday, and am excited about the prospect of working with you to build community supports for children. You mentioned in our conversation that your church has a youth group that meets on Monday and Wednesday evenings, and that new children would be welcome to attend. I appreciate your help, and have contacted the youth group director, Randy Peterson, to work out the logistics.

I also want to thank you for putting me in contact with Mrs. Bailey, who has offered to be a mentor, as well as the folks at the After School Alliance. Because of people like you and like them, our project is really getting off of the ground.

I have included a document that shows the organizations that we have identiÞed so far, including the ones I learned of through you. Please take a look at it, and make a note of any other organizations or people you think of who could be helpful, especially people you know through your work on issues of poverty and community renewal.

I will contact you next week regarding any additional feedback that you may have. Again, the success of our program relies on community input from leaders like you. Together we will build a stronger, safer community for our children.

Thank you,

David Jones

LOCA

The UNLOCK phase of community asset-mapping is where you meet with individuals, collect information about their skills, talents, and gifts that they want to share with children in their community. Unlocking is when community members step off the sidelines and become the tutors, mentors, art teachers, and volunteers who make community-based programs a reality.

not only with individual residents but also with organizations. When one organization says it will share its space and its people, others tend to follow suit.

At this point, you have completed most of the legwork of community asset-mapping. You should congratulate yourself and your partners for discovering the wealth of organizations, churches, and associations that serve children, as well as for establishing contact and learning about the skills of several individuals within your community. As you achieve small successes, word of your project is likely to spread. You will be able to revisit the SKILLS CHECKLIST and conduct additional interviews of community leaders. In the meantime, you should move on to putting community-based networks into action.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Now is when the fun of connecting the dots begins. Some community-based programs will be ready-made: choirs, youth groups, and community support groups require very little start-up on your part. Your role is simply to begin referring children to these groups and to ensure that they are expected and welcomed.

TIP: LEA D THE WAY

Offer to accompany a potential community volunteer to their Þrst tutoring or men toring experience. Once people begin this type of work, it quickly becomes less intimidating, and people can overcome their fears. If you can persuade someone to volunteer once, there is a solid chance that you can transform them into a lifelong contributor. The most difÞcult part is usually getting them to take the initial step.

EPILOGUE: TELL YOUR STOR Y

1. What groups does your church/park/library/school/organization sponsor?

This could include meeting space, existing youth groups, musical ensembles, support groups, sports leagues, transportation

Part of our vision involves connecting children with community members who want to share their gifts, skills, and talents. We are especially interested in retirees who want to volunteer as tutors or mentors, and in men and women who are willing to teach children how to build skills, such as tuning up a car, building a house, or playing an instrument. Would you be interested in sharing your skills and interests with a child? Which members of your congregation/organization/association do you think might also want to participate in these types of activities with children?

6. How can you help connect us with potential volunteers? Would you be willing to make an announcement, help parishioners complete the SKILLS CHECKLIST (see page 32), or participate in other ways?

7. Whom else should I talk to?

AYJA MEMBER LIST

Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP)
The University of Alabama
Box 870395
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487

Alabama New South Coalition-
Montgomery Chapter
838 South Court Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36014

Alabama New South Coalition-
Birmingham Chapter
908 7th Place SW
Birmingham, Alabama 35211

Alabama Possible Ð From the
Alabama Poverty Project
P.O. Box 55058
Birmingham, Alabama 35255

Alabama Poverty Project
Southside Baptist Church
1016 19th Street South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

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