



## UCLA CENTER FOR HEALTH POLICY RESEARCH

### **Technical Assistance Series Article #1: Asset Mapping December 2004**

#### **What Is Asset Mapping?**

Asset mapping is a way of visually representing the location of important sites and services within a community, allowing you to see if there is a concentration of available programs, service overlaps, gaps in services, and unmet community health needs. Once community strengths and resources are inventoried and depicted in a map, you can determine how to build on these assets to address community needs and improve health. Asset mapping promotes community involvement, ownership, and empowerment.

#### **What Is a Community Asset?**

A community asset or resource is anything that improves the quality of community life. Assets include the following:

- The capacities and abilities of community members
- A physical structure or place, such as a school, hospital, church, library, recreation center or social club
- A business that provides jobs and supports the local economy
- Associations of citizens, such as a Neighborhood Watch group or a Parent Teacher Association
- Local private, public and nonprofit institutions or organizations

#### **When Should You Use Asset Mapping?**

Use asset mapping when:

- You want to start a new local program and need information about available resources
- You are making program decisions
- You want to mobilize and empower the community

#### **How to Make an Asset Map:**

Identifying and mapping assets in your community can be easier than you think. The following are the steps to create an asset map.

- 1. Define community boundaries** – Keep in mind that the geographic boundaries of cities or towns do not always reflect citizens' perceptions of their communities.
- 2. Identify and involve partners** – Ask people and organizations with a variety of interests and knowledge of the community to participate in creating the asset map.
- 3. Determine what type of assets to include** – Identify the assets needed to address the issues on which you are focusing. These may include economic resources, physical assets

(such as buildings or office space), knowledge and skills, political connections, legitimacy in the community, or accessibility to the public.

4. **List the assets of groups** – List the associations, organizations, and institutions in your community, and the location, type of service offered, public/private membership, and available resources for each group.
5. **List the assets of individuals** – Gather information from community members on their knowledge, economic resources, skills, contacts, and other types of resources in which you are interested. You may want to survey community members using a mailed, telephone, or face-to-face questionnaire.
6. **Organize assets on a map** – Get a map and mark the locations of the group and individual assets you listed. You can either make the map by hand or use a computer program.
  - a. One simple way to create an asset map involves first finding a street map that includes your community. These are available from your local government, as well as from online sources such as <http://www.mapquest.com>, <http://maps.yahoo.com> or <http://www.thomas.com>. Remember to look for a map that provides many details of your community and its boundaries, such as major streets, parks, freeways, lakes, or other landmarks. Use the list of resources and addresses you created in steps 4 and 5, and place dot stickers on the map to identify the locations of the resources you found. You might want to use different colors for different types of resources. This map becomes a visual representation of your findings, and it may reveal gaps in services and identify areas for further work or improvement.
  - b. Another way to create an asset map is to use a computer program or website designed for that purpose. Two user-friendly websites are available for public use to map neighborhood information:
    - **The Healthy Children – Healthy City Asset Mapping Project**, <http://www.healthycity.org>. This website maps human and social service sites, public schools, and non-profit organizations throughout Los Angeles County, and can help you to create a general asset map of your neighborhood. It may serve as a helpful first activity in conducting the community resource inventory.
    - **Neighborhood Knowledge California**, <http://www.nkca.ucla.edu>. NKCA is a statewide interactive website. It maps and displays several types of data, such as income, race, education, age, language spoken at home, and housing. It also allows you to map your own resources, if you have a list of these resources with street addresses and zip codes.

Here is an example of an asset map of the Los Angeles area, created using Neighborhood Knowledge California. The green stars represent locations of free health clinics.



There are advantages and disadvantages to using asset mapping, as shown in the following table. You should discuss both the advantages and disadvantages within your organization or group before you begin.

#### Advantages and Disadvantages of Asset Mapping

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds on existing community assets</li> <li>• Creates a visual depiction of existing and lacking assets</li> <li>• Data can be used to raise awareness about the availability of assets, to develop or improve services and programs, or to apply for funding</li> <li>• Can generate a lot of community participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding the right maps can be difficult, and mapping software can be expensive and difficult to use</li> <li>• Some community assets will be difficult to map if they don't have a physical location</li> <li>• Community buy-in and collaboration is needed to adequately inventory up-to-date community resources</li> </ul>