

## Assets-Based Approaches

At the end of February, members of the Assets/Optimists' Network gathered to talk about the network, its purpose and what people wanted to get from it. Among other things, there was a call for a brief paper providing further explanation of asset-based approaches and the role of the network. Following discussion at this session, and subsequent discussion on LinkedIn, this brief paper attempts to provide further detail on both of these issues.

### What do we mean by an asset-based approach?

When we asked members of the Optimists' Network to tell us what an asset-based approach meant to them, what emerged was a mind-set and set of values that was in contrast to what some might describe as a deficit-based approach (which would focus on identifying needs and deficiencies and designing services to fix these). It was also clear that there is no one simple definition of an asset-based approach. It means different things to different people in different contexts. Members highlighted:

- Enabling people and communities – both geographical and communities of interest – to take control; Doing things with people, rather than to them.
- Recognising the strengths and capabilities of people and communities, rather than their problems or deficits.
- Starting with the premise that people are inherently trustworthy and have something to contribute.
- Valuing strong and sustainable communities that are able to withstand pressure, change and conflict.
- Being 'human' and bringing more of ourselves to make best use of our collective skills, experiences and lived realities.



Helping to build a community based on positive gifts, not on negatives or dependencies

At work it means making better workplaces where we can thrive rather than feel done to and where I have the autonomy and permission to make my contribution the best way I know how

Knowing that everyone involved has something to contribute.

*Animating Assets* (an action research project between [the Glasgow Centre for Population Health](#) and [Scottish Community Development Centre](#)) has outlined eight key elements that are consistent features of an asset-based way of thinking and doing:

- Start with the assets and resources in a community.
- See people as the answer.
- Support people to develop their potential.
- Identify opportunities and strengths.
- Invest in people as active participants.
- Focus on communities, neighbourhoods and the common good.
- See people as having something valuable to contribute.
- Help people take control of their lives.

We must also recognise that this way of working is not new and already exists in various contexts across Scotland – terms such as **community development**, **engagement and empowerment**, and **self-management** have been used to describe successful asset-based approaches. A new language of ‘assets’ is being increasingly used to describe this work.

It is also worth re-emphasising that an asset-based approach:

- Does not mean ignoring challenges. It’s about redressing the balance between meeting needs and strengthening the capacity of people and communities. Asset-based approaches are designed to complement, rather than replace, public services and traditional methods for delivering social policy.
- Is not intended as a replacement for tackling the structural causes of inequality, or continuing to improve services. The approach should fundamentally change the way organisations and the people within them think about service delivery.
- Emphasises the importance of a system-level response, identifying assets at an individual, community, organisational and societal level.

### What is the Optimist Network?

The purpose of the Optimist Network, as articulated by its members, is:

- To provide a **source of energy, inspiration, enthusiasm** and help generate **new ideas** and **new ways of working**.
- To provide an **open and safe space to discuss asset-based approaches**, with the opportunity to gain support, to understand the challenges associated with the approach and to learn from failure.
- To be part of a **bigger vision and movement** challenging the status quo.
- To bring together **different sectors and partners**, including local and national perspectives and enhance collaboration across the public sector.
- To help **develop knowledge and understanding of asset-based approaches**, including:
  - Hearing and learning from others who are already working in this way.
  - Highlighting practical stories to help provide an understanding of real life impact.

To find out more about the Optimist Network:

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