Using local data to inform asset based approaches to improving health

Barbara Coyle

B Coyle
Public Health England, York, UK
Contact: Barbara.coyle@phe.gov.uk

Issue:

Community-centred approaches involve recognising and strengthening the health assets within a community. This is supported by public health systems that work with communities to understand and describe assets. This work describes the steps public health professionals could make to gather local data on assets for the benefit of local communities and to inform decision-makers.

Description of the problem:

For many years public health intelligence described the deficits within populations such as those who smoke or drink. This means we become focussed on 'fixing the problems' in communities rather than focussing on community empowerment. A local authority (LA) in England wanted to move from a deficit approach to a community asset based approach. The LA conducted surveys with its population on what they considered to be assets and their health desires. They used the SHAPE tool to map and visualise the assets and data.

Results:

The asset mapping and survey data was collated by the LA and uploaded into SHAPE. SHAPE provided an innovative solution which visualised locally defined assets eg schools and libraries and combined this with information about the area such as their health desires. SHAPE was instrumental in the ability to integrate assets into their strategic planning and used to inform the LA's approach to building assets and developing community capacity and empowerment.

Lessons:

Asset mapping was a relatively new concept and the LA had struggled to get organisational buy-in to the process. By visualising the data for them in an interactive map which people could easily navigate, enabled colleagues to see the benefit in the work. Maps are a powerful way to engage people, especially the public.

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