A Guide to Asset Mapping

BANK OF I.D.E.A.S.
INITIATIVES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENTERPRISING ACTION AND STRATEGIES

What is Asset Mapping?

Asset Mapping represents the process of identifying, connecting, celebrating, promoting and mobilising the strengths, resources, skills, opportunities, passions and experiences that exist within a community, to build upon and enhance positive community outcomes.

The five most important aspects of the asset mapping process are –
- **Discovery and learning** – asset mapping is about having fresh eyes, seeing community resources in a new light and making the invisible, visible.
- **Relationship building** – asset mapping begins with conversation. It is not so much about cataloguing resources and compiling lists, as it is about making connections, building relationships and in doing so, unlocking unrealised potential.
- **Connecting** – connecting residents to assets and projects in meaningful ways is key to shifting / relocating power and responsibility from agencies and governments to citizens. When residents feel empowered, and in control of their assets, they can more easily make the shift from client/recipient to citizen/co-designer.
- **Celebrating and Promoting** – revealing the asset richness of any community provides an opportunity to celebrate and share pride.
- **Mobilising** – the ultimate purpose of asset mapping is to identify and link resources for productive future actions.

"The real voyage of discovery *consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.*" (Marcel Proust)

The asset mapping process can be undertaken to achieve the following outcomes –
- Discover what communities care about.
- Allow communities to discover that every resident has skills, talents, ideas and passions that are relevant to community well-being and, every time a resident is given the opportunity to exercise their abilities and ideas the community is strengthened.
- Create community understanding of available resources to design and implement local plans and strategies.
- Unlock and build upon local opportunities, potential and capacity within the community to turn common ideas into positive action.
- Grow local leadership by connecting and engaging residents around local assets.
- Problem solve and develop projects without having to rely on external resources and leadership.
- Build and enhance relationships between residents, organisations and institutions by drawing on strengths, connections and common goals.
- Build social capital by creating and growing networks of trust and reciprocity.
- Help residents create a shared awareness and understanding of local resources as they discover, connect, act upon and celebrate the assets that exist within their community.

Types of Community Assets

Asset mapping is not about data collection and counting. It is about connecting residents to each other and their local economy and ecology, within an ecosystem based on assets and priorities. Fundamentally, there are six key asset areas, namely –

People Assets: the skills, talents, passions, ideas, experiences, knowledge and expertise of community members – above all, *'what they care about'*.

Social Networks: the formal and informal networks, groups, clubs and local based organisations that exist within a community.

Institutional Assets: organisations, clubs, churches, schools, libraries, colleges and universities, health facilities, childcare facilities, aged care facilities and emergency services (e.g. police, fire).

Economic/Business Assets: local businesses, home based enterprises, local markets and the gift / shareable economy with its various forms of exchange e.g. time banking, swap meets, tool libraries etc.

Physical World: both the physical infrastructure / built environment (e.g. buildings, roads, facilities, public spaces, playgrounds, carparks) and the natural environment (e.g. landscapes, parks, community gardens, walk / bike trails).

Cultural Assets, Stories and Heritage: local history, museum collections, public art, traditions, rituals, belief systems and values – what gives value and meaning to the life of the community.

The Asset Mapping Process

Identifying, mapping, connecting, celebrating and mobilising assets in any community can be a simple or intensive process depending on the purpose. Every asset mapping process will be different. There is no cookie cutter method. However, here a few key steps that should be followed to help make the process easier and more productive.

1. **Define the purpose**
2. **Agree on community or project boundaries**
3. **Identify and involve stakeholders**
4. **Determine methodology and tools**
5. **Discover and map the assets**
6. **Connect and apply the knowledge**

1. Define the purpose

Ask yourself, or the group / team, what you hope to achieve by carrying out an asset mapping project. For example, you may want to better connect newly arrived migrants to the community or create leadership and engagement opportunities for young people. By outlining a specific goal, you can design better questions. Asking the right questions is key to unlocking potential and making the invisible, visible. If you do not have a specific purpose in mind, the asset mapping process itself can reveal opportunities as residents become excited when they discover how asset rich their community really is.

2. Agree on community or project boundaries

Determine the boundaries that your asset map will include. Are you developing an asset map of a street, suburb, town, city, region or a community of interest?

3. Identify and involve stakeholders

"Every community has more assets than any one person knows."
(Mike Green)

The above quote really sums it up. In other words, asset mapping should involve as many community members as possible. Depending on the purpose, different individuals and groups will have a varying knowledge of a community's assets and will respond to different methods of revealing and recording those assets.

4. Determine methodology and tools

The idea is to ensure the asset mapping process is fun, visible and results in building relationships whilst sharing knowledge. The key to asset mapping is to GET CREATIVE. The asset mapping process should be undertaken with a cross section of groups / individuals within the community, and the tools used should be appropriate for each group. Examples of tools are given in the section below.

A great example of creative asset mapping was the "MADCAP" community engagement process within the small Victorian town of Deans Marsh, where residents focussed on discovering their assets, aspirations and ideas. To discover more, contact Lisa Jarvis at the Deans Marsh Community Cottage via email cottage@deansmarsh.org.au

MaDCAP
make it happen

This is what happens when a small country town has a BIG Conversation...

5. Discover the assets

Once you have chosen a method(s), the asset identification process begins. This is not just about listing assets. The most important aspect of identifying assets is asking the right questions. The aim is to tease out the hidden knowledge. For example, you can list a neighbourhood centre as an asset, but asking the right questions will give it the context and meaning that is key to unlocking potential. Questions you might ask in this case are – *Who currently uses the neighbourhood centre? What activities is it used for? What activities could it be used for? What physical assets does it have? What are its connections to the community?*

6. Connect and apply the knowledge

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"Asset mapping is about connecting, not counting."
(Dee Brooks)

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Remember, creating an asset map is about building relationships whilst sharing knowledge. The knowledge acquired should be used to further enhance relationships and strengthen community by providing opportunities for residents to get involved and utilise the talents, skills and assets they have discovered to achieve tangible outcomes. In other words – *How will you apply this knowledge to build and strengthen community? What will you do with the information you have discovered? How will you apply it to your original purpose?* Asset maps are a work in progress. They are constantly changing and "involving". Displaying the knowledge where it can be easily accessed and modified (if needs be) is important.

An excellent example of the asset mapping process to watch in action has been developed by the US Organisation 'Sacred Suds'.

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"There is nothing more powerful than a community discovering what it cares about."
(Margaret Wheatley)

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Asset Mapping Tools

There are many ways that a community can discover and map its assets. Ideally, a combination of tools should be used. Employing more than one tool will ensure the process is kept, fun, fresh, relevant, creative and responsive. Residents need to be able to easily share knowledge and information, and the information shared needs to be made accessible to everyone. It is also important to remember that the asset mapping process begins with conversation.

Discovering what residents care about – their interests, passions, ideas, experiences, skills and talents – is the very essence of asset mapping. The most favoured methods of asset mapping are those which allow residents to interact and get creative as they share knowledge. Traditionally, asset mapping tools involved surveys and interviews resulting in lists and catalogues. Whilst these tools are still useful, more creative ways to map and display assets are emerging and proving very effective.

1. Hosting of Learning Conversations

"One of the things we need to learn is that every great change starts from very small conversations held among people who care."
(Margaret Wheatley)

Learning conversations is one of the corner stones of asset mapping. These conversations are intentional about extracting individual knowledge of community assets, strengthening personal relationships and connecting residents to community assets and each other. Below is some advice from Nurture Development when undertaking learning conversations:

When undertaking one on one Learning Conversations, engage with and talk to residents with the express purpose of finding out:
- What people care enough about to take action.
- What gifts and talents they would like to contribute to the community.
- What would need to happen for them to join like-minded locals in the community building effort.
- Who else do they know that might be willing to join.

If you don't know who in the community you should begin talking to, take Cormac Russel's advice – *"Start anywhere, but go everywhere."*

2. Community Street Audits

Essentially street audits involve gathering a group of residents and going out into the neighbourhood with cameras and notebooks and recording observations and information. Street audits can also be extended to include such groups as walking groups and neighbourhood watch groups. Below is some advice from Nurture Development when undertaking a street audit:

While on walkabout and in conversation with others, consider the following questions about the different streets in the neighbourhood:

- What needs community attention, distinct from systems attention?
- What obvious assets do we have that we can use to attend to the things that need our community's attention?
- What hidden assets (treasures) do we have that, if we found and connected would help?

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3. Compiling to do / Best of Lists

This asset mapping exercise can be a lot of fun. Convene a group of residents and compile lists with titles like '*50 Things Kids Can Do in our Community Before they Turn12*' or, '*The ten best places to go for a walk in our Community*', or, '*The five best places to eat dinner in our Community*'. The information can then be reproduced and distributed to other residents and tourists. Examples are given below.

This is a brilliant list of 50 Fun Things to do in Sheffield in the UK – in terms of identifying and connecting community with local assets, this list is impressive. Below is another example from the City of Kalamunda in Western Australia – local businesses sponsored the printing on card with a magnet on the back so it could be stuck to the fridge.

4. Utilising Special Events

Events that are organised by residents for the local community are an invaluable asset mapping opportunity as the relationship building aspect is truly emphasised in the planning and execution of any event. They also help reveal so many hidden assets, passions, skills and talents. Events especially relevant to the asset mapping process include – community treasure hunts, races (amazing race, homemade billy cart race etc), community get to know each other BBQ's, community cook offs, street parties, teddy bears picnics – the list is endless! Below are a couple of flyers from community organised events with the express purposes of revealing and connecting local assets.
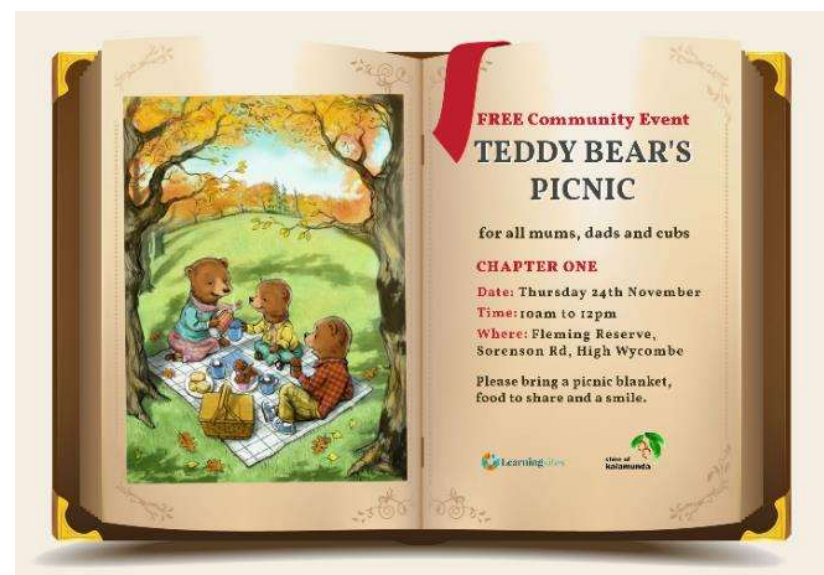
5. Harvesting of Stories

Collecting stories is a very useful way to asset map as it reveals the individual passions, skills and talents of residents, as well local history. It also breaks down barriers, builds trust and strengthens relationships as people open up and share their story – when you know someone's story, it is harder to judge them. You can also get really creative with how stories are displayed and shared with the community. The Mallee's Living Histories provides an excellent example of the story telling / harvesting process where 15 local writers captured the life stories of 15 local storytellers in a local aged care facility.
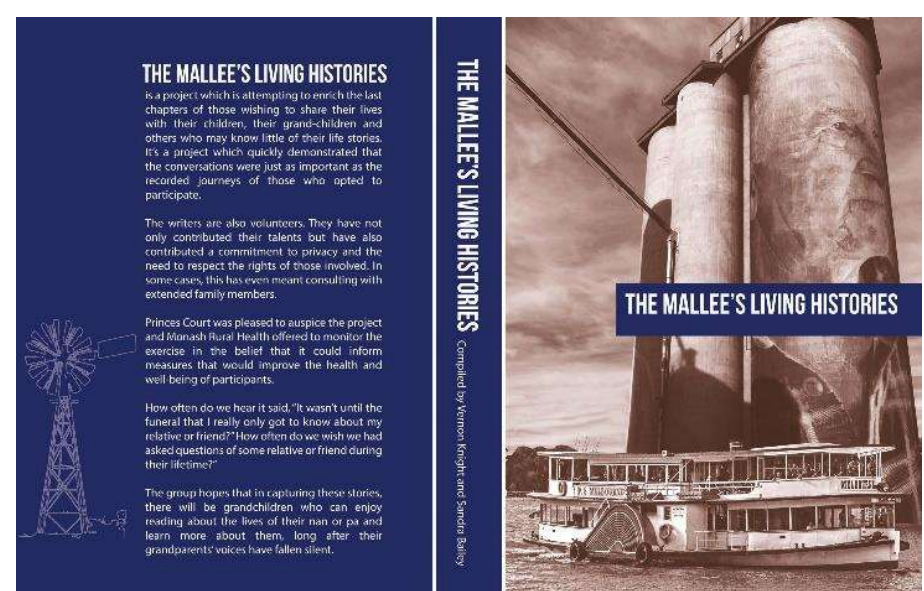
6. Using Google maps / tabletop mapping

Tabletop mapping simply involves gathering a group around a map and pinpointing assets and sharing information about particular locations. Google Maps allows the same concept to be applied online. A Google Map can be shared with a number of residents who can contribute and update information. The map could potentially be embedded into a website for the broader community to access. This embedded Google Map from Toronto Urban Growers is a brilliant example of how Google Maps can be used for recoding and displaying information.

7. Collecting Love Notes

Love Notes can be a powerful asset mapping exercise. It provides residents a chance to share what they love about their community with other residents and outsiders. Essentially, residents are asked to write down what they love about where they live and then these 'love notes' are displayed creatively. The options for getting creative are endless. See examples below.

Coff's Harbour Live Love Coffs

Using a 'Story Tree' residents were invited to write down what they love about Coff's Harbour and peg the note to the tree.

Love Melbourne: Queen Victoria Markets

The Love MELBOURNE installation has gradually become covered in thousands of messages or 'love notes' that reflect the diversity of what people love most about the city. 6000 colourful iconically Australian Kevron key tags were made available for people to write down what they most love about Melbourne and then click it into place on the letter of their choice.
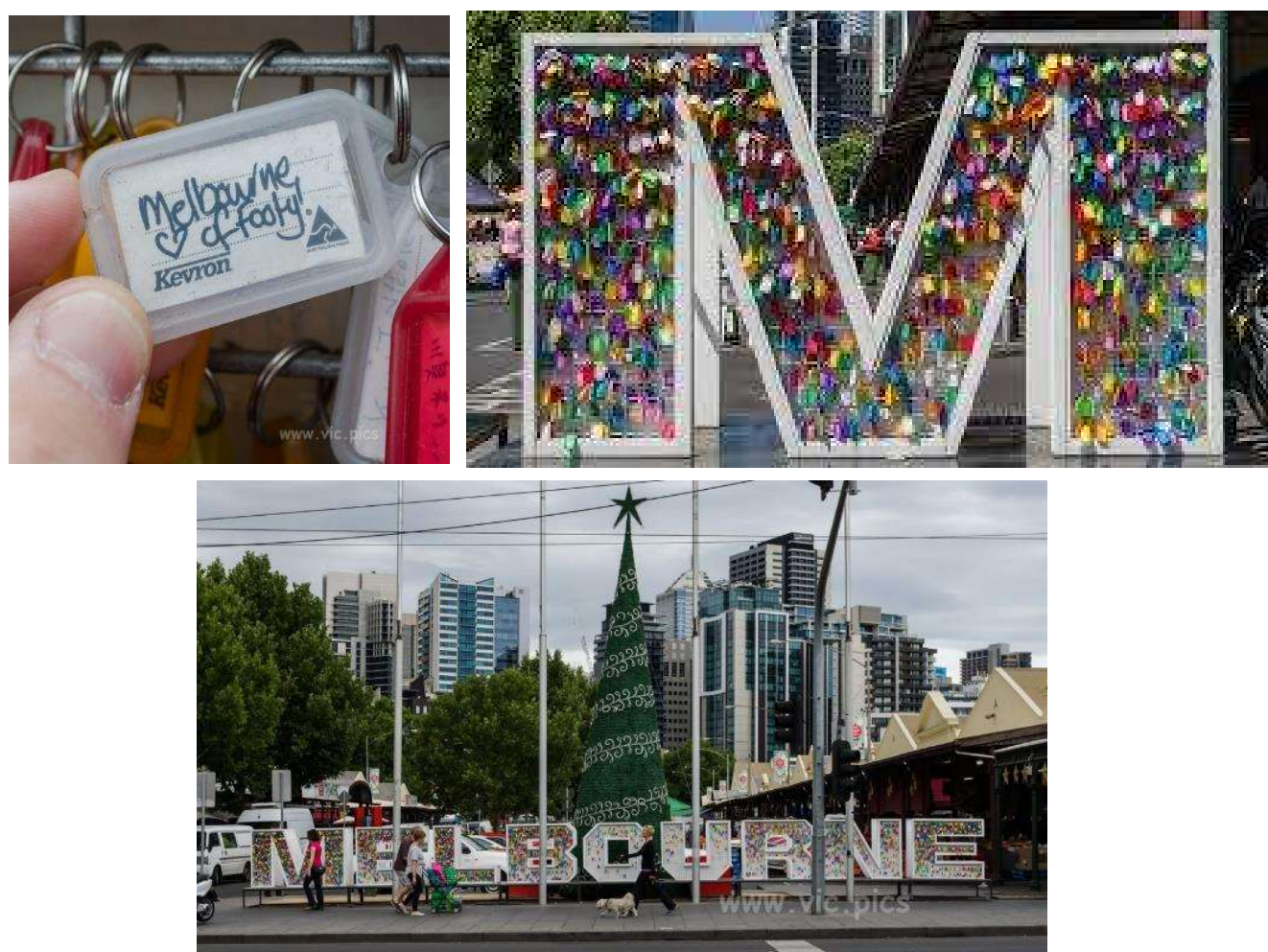
8. Undertaking a Head Heart Hands Feet Exercise

This very simple exercise that uses post-it notes or a form to capture and share individual gifts of the head, heart and hand.

HEAD
Things I know something about, and would enjoy sharing

HANDS
Things I know how to do and enjoy

HEART
Things I care deeply about

FEET
Contacts and Networks I have

What passions or skills do you have that you'd like to contribute towards a community cafe?

Head   Heart   Hand

9. Instigating Surveys

Surveys are the traditional way top asset map and they certainly have value. Surveys are especially useful when looking to map the individual assets of all the members who might belong to a particular club, group or organisation.

Community Skills and Passion Audit

Our organisation seeks to inspire and support local residents to discover the strengths and opportunities of our local community, and engage in community projects that 'make a difference'. This audit sheet seeks to identify community residents who may be able to share their interests and experiences with students. Any information shared will only be shared with your permission.

Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

Position: _____

Address: _____

Contact No: _____ Email: _____

Please list 2 – 4 things in each category – things you are happy for us to know about you.

HEAD (things I know something about, and would enjoy talking about, or teaching to others about, e.g. local history, conservation, business management etc)

HANDS (things I know how to do and enjoy, e.g. project organisation, gardening, painting, rock climbing, cooking, jewellery making, using the internet, sign language etc)

HEART (things I care deeply about, e.g. environment, intergenerational activities, animal welfare, women's rights, youth unemployment etc)

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (groups / committees / clubs I am a part of)

Please return you completed form to our group postal (_____) or email (_____). This information will be kept on file and stored in the school office. Information can be updated at any time.

(Inspiration for this form came from the LEAD ON Organisation in Bendigo, Victoria)

10. Exploring Social Media

Community pages on social media have become a very useful tool in the asset mapping tool box. Information pages, buy, swap, sell pages and community discussion pages are all useful in revealing assets.

11. Examining Directories

Every community is likely to have directories for businesses, facilities, clubs and organisation and services. In terms of getting a broad idea of what exists in a community, and who should be approached, directories are a good place to start.

Ways to Display and Promote Assets

It is important to think about the most meaningful and effective way to display and promote the knowledge that has been discovered through the asset mapping process. A range of examples are given below.

1. Creation of Websites/ Website Pages
Websites are a great way to record and display information. A member login option allows residents to directly contribute content. See Connect Warrnambool and All We Need Is Right Here.

2. Production of a Film
This is a great way to record and display the passions, skills and talents of residents, as well as showcase other assets. Utilising local filmmakers and talent enhances the process. They can be short videos or feature films. Below are some great examples:
- Dear Mowbray (Launceston, Tasmania)
- Inspiring Volunteer Stories (City of Melville)
- Participatory Community Asset Mapping (Jamaican Diaspora Youth Connect)

### 3. Holding of Public Art Displays
Murals, sculptures, photovoice – static, ephemeral, evolving. Harnessing the talents of local artists and bridging those talents with the knowledge of residents can be a powerful way to engage the creative community to connect residents around assets.

4. Printing of Booklets and Books
Publications compiled and designed by locals for distribution are a great way to share and record assets. Some good examples include Benalla's Top Ten Book and The Mallee's Living Histories.

5. Designing and Developing a 'Communi-tree' and Graphic Displays
Below are some examples of creative graphic displays of community assets from the communities of Mowbray and Rocherlea (Launceston, Tasmania).
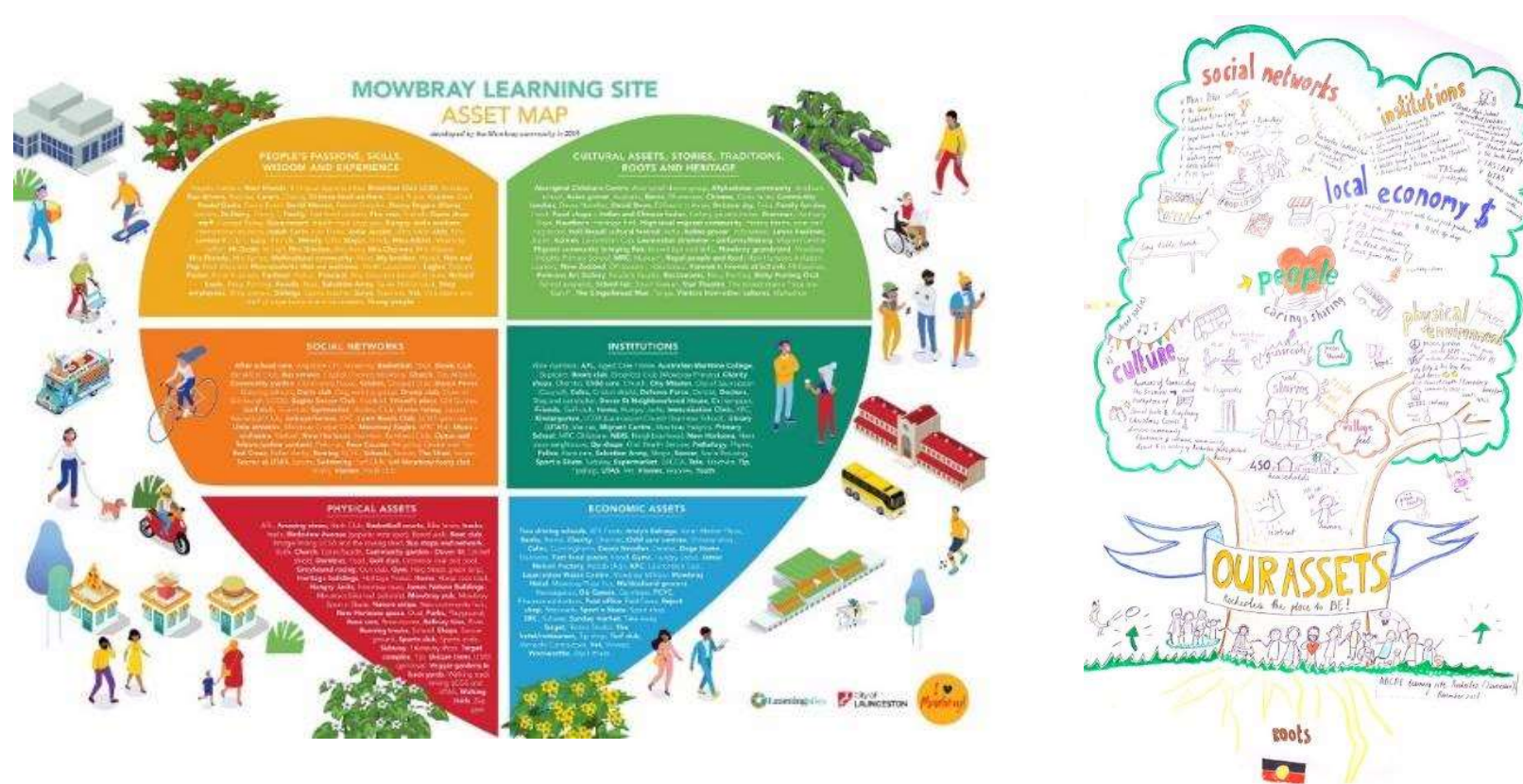
Some Key Asset Based Community Development Resources

- Bank of I.D.E.A.S tools and resources - www.bankofideas.com.au
- ABCDE Learning Sites tools and resources - https://www.abcdelearningsites.com.au
- Nurture Development tools and resources - https://www.nurturedevelopment.org
- ABCD Institute tools and resources - https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx
- Green, M. (2006), When People Care Enough to Act, Inclusion Press

'Asset mapping is not data collection. Words on a list have no power. Purpose of asset mapping is to create relationships that mobilises and connects a community's assets for productive action.'
(Mike Green)

"How do you know what you need, if you don't know what you already have?"
(Cormac Russell)