

Putting Associations Back in Public Education

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The asset-based community development process identifies five basic community building resources that exist in almost every neighborhood. These resources are:

1. Capacities of individuals
2. Associations
3. Institutions (four profit, not-for –profit, government)
4. Physical environment
5. Exchange

The first three assets represent human learning resources in addition to their other attributes. There are numerous neighborhoods organized to identify the knowledge of local residents as learning resources. However, almost none have understood the potential of associations as learning resources.

A study of local associations was conducted in the small town of Spring Green, WI, entitled [A Study of the Community Benefits Provided by Local Associations \(2013\)](#). The actual questionnaire for the study, is the [Spring Green Study Questionnaire](#). Item C-2 on the questionnaire asks, “What are the major benefits your members get from your association?” Of the 62 associational leaders interviewed, 20 answered that “learning” was the major benefit their members acquired. Therefore, the associational life of the community was identified as an educational resource in a third of the cases.

Reviewing the 62 associations, the following 23 can be identified as learning sites:

Bloomin Buddies Garden Club – gardening

Friends of Governor Dodge State Park – environment and ecology

Friends of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway - environment and ecology

Friends of the Spring Green Library – literature

Green Squared Building Association – energy efficiency

Habitat for Humanity – construction methods

Mew Haven – animal care

Mostly Mondays Poetry Society – literature

Older and Wiser Land Stewards (OWLS) – prairie restoration, environment

River Valley Players – theater

River Valley Soccer Association – sports

River Valley Stitchers – quilting
Solstice Jazz Band – music
Spring Green Arts Coalition – arts
Spring Green Chamber of Commerce – business
Spring Green EMT – emergency preparedness, medical care
Spring Green Historical Society – history
Spring Green Food Pantry – food scarcity
Spring Green Film Club – films
Spring Green Lions Club – community service and citizenship
Spring Green Literary festival – literature
Stitch’n Bitch – needlework
Veterans for Peace – peace advocacy

There are also 8 associations specifically designed to engage youth:

Girls Scout Troop 669 – citizenship
Cub Scout Pack No. 38 – citizenship
Future Farmers of America – agricultural management and citizenship
River Valley Youth Football Club – sports
High School Madrigal Choir and Jazz Vocal Group – music
High School Senior Service Learning Class – community service, citizenship
Skills U.S.A. – mechanical skills
Spring Green Dolphins – sports

There are also 4 church associations that provide numerous learning opportunities for their members, including young people:

Christ Lutheran Church
Cornerstone Church
Community Church
Catholic Church

The total is 35 associations providing diverse learning opportunities. Paradoxically, practically none of the 23 non-youth/non-church associations have youthful members such as teenagers. This lack of a relationship results in several losses:

1. The loss of valuable learning opportunities for young people.
2. The establishment of productive relationships between young people and adults in the community.
3. The loss of energetic contributions that young people could make to the life of the association.

4. The loss of the learnings that the adults in the associations would acquire from the young people with different perspectives.

There is an open field for creative invention in civic life if associations could be inspired to begin to incorporate people in their organizations who are under 18 years of age.