NGO Innovation Hub

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Rebuilding Community And Community Asset In The Post-Pandemic Era

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread devastation for three years, with most of the efforts focused on combating the virus. The pandemic not only physically divided communities, but also strained community relationships. Though people adapted to pandemic restrictions in the later stages, interpersonal connections remain weak. In response, many service projects under NGO Innovation Hub have seized the post-pandemic opportunity to reconstruct the community and community asset. With a lesson learnt from the pandemic, they have made the project implementation more flexible so that it could be adjusted in response to the changes in different stages of the pandemic. The following two projects showcase their attempt to rebuild community by developing and make use of community asset.

Tin Shui Wai Play Station

The Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association

The project Tin Shui Wai Play Station by Tin Library – operated by The Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association, was supported by the HSBC Hong Kong Community Partnership Programme. Inspired by the Tin Shui Wai community, the project utilized simple and readily available materials to create various games within the Tin Shui Wai community, encouraging participants to discover stories and interesting public spaces in their community. By co-creating a vibrant and creative community by artists and residents, the project succeeded in transforming Tin Shui Wai into a joyful and creative community and bringing people closer together and rebuilding community connections.

Bringing the community closer together via creative games.

Encourage participants to discover interesting stories in the community

Simple games add fun to the community

Collecting imprints of the community

HELP Community Service Centre

Asbury Methodist Social Service

In addition, locality services need to take opportunity to rebuild the broken community relationships by the pandemic and raise the sense of belong of community members to the community. HELP Community Service Centre – a centre operated by Asbury Methodist Social Service is the centre to provide services to residents of "Three-Nil" Buildings in the Tsuen Wan district, where many residents are new arrivals to Hong Kong and sub-divided unit residents. The living environment in these buildings was unfavorable for building neighborhood and community relationships, which was worsened by the pandemic. To address this issue, the centre attempted to organize residents to pay attention to public hygiene problems of their buildings and participate in voluntary cleaning work in public spaces. This not only improved the living environment but also gradually rebuilt the broken community relationships. The centre identified and utilized the residents' potential skills to re-establish and consolidate community capital in the post-pandemic era, laying a foundation to facilitate "organizing for change."
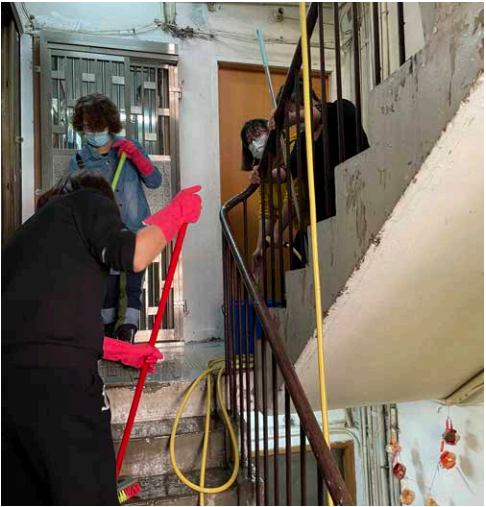

Residents participate in voluntary cleaning work in public spaces of their residential building.

Greening Plans for "Three-Nil" Buildings

A tour to "Mil Mil" to learn recycling

Food recycling program

As the pandemic subsides, we are pleased to see many creative funding projects that enhance community asset which is considered a key outcome that NGO Innovation Hub aimed to achieve. We hope that these projects' impact will be sustainable in the community and lay the foundation for future community development.

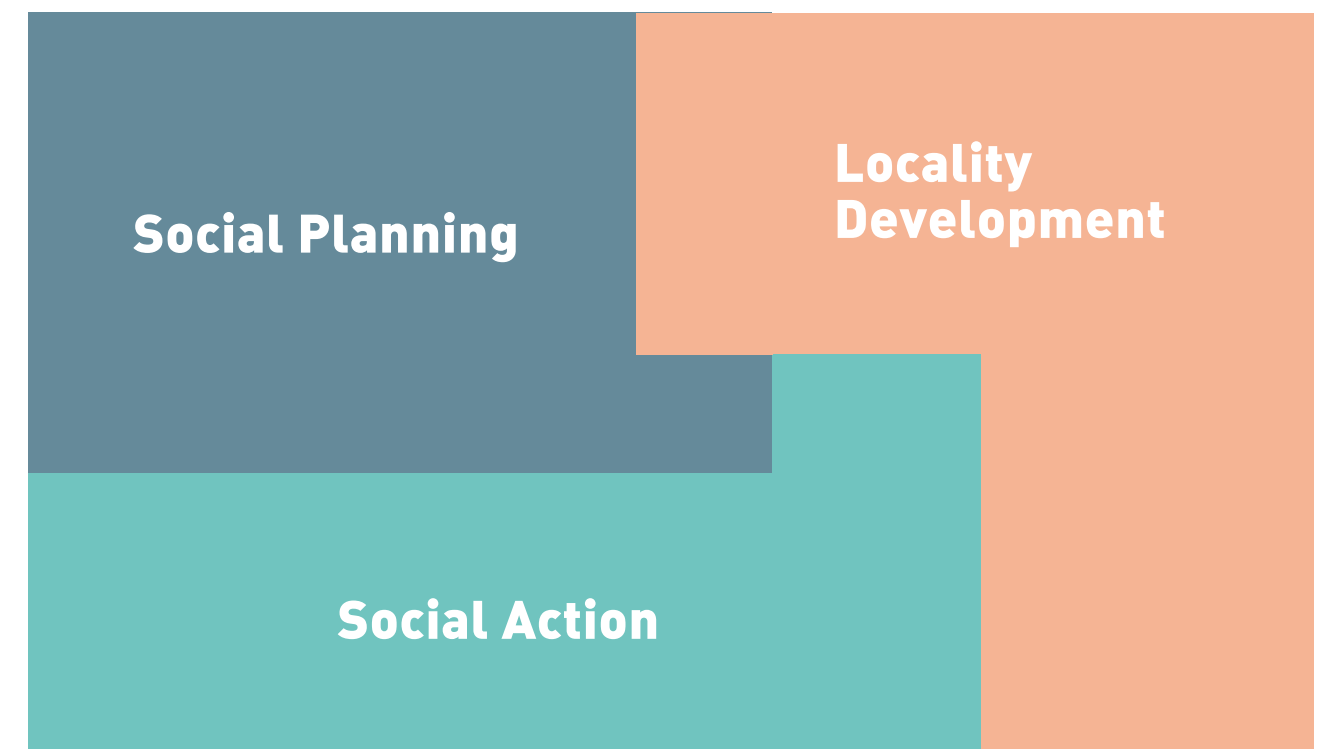# Changes That Community Development Practice Promoted

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Community development is "a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, through the organisation, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings." (IACD, 2018). From this definition, while responding to community needs and solving community problems is certainly one aspect of community development work, it is more important to promote different types of changes and development through organising work with community members in response to community needs.

In academic discussions of community development, many scholars have proposed the possibility of promoting different changes and developments through community development practice. For example, in Jack Rothman's (1979) three models of community organisation practice, which is recognised as a classical categorisation, he clearly classified the different types of changes that different practice models can bring about. In social planning model, workers aim to rationally solve specific community problems. As experts, practitioners collect and analyse data related to community problems and sort out solutions. In the locality development model, the goal of intervention is to establish self-help relationships, community capacity, and community integration. By including different community members in the process of defining and discussing community problems, relationships and communication mechanisms can be established between different community members. In social action model, the focus of practitioners is to raise the awareness of community members and change the power relations and existing resource allocation. Influenced by Alinsky's model, practitioners in the social action model achieve goals through collective action, lobbying, and negotiation. Rothman emphasised that these three categories are ideal types. In reality, practitioners engage in community development practices often mix different purposes and methods based on the community situation. He further expanded the categories to 9 different mixtures in his publication of multi modes of intervention at the macro level (Rothman, 2007).
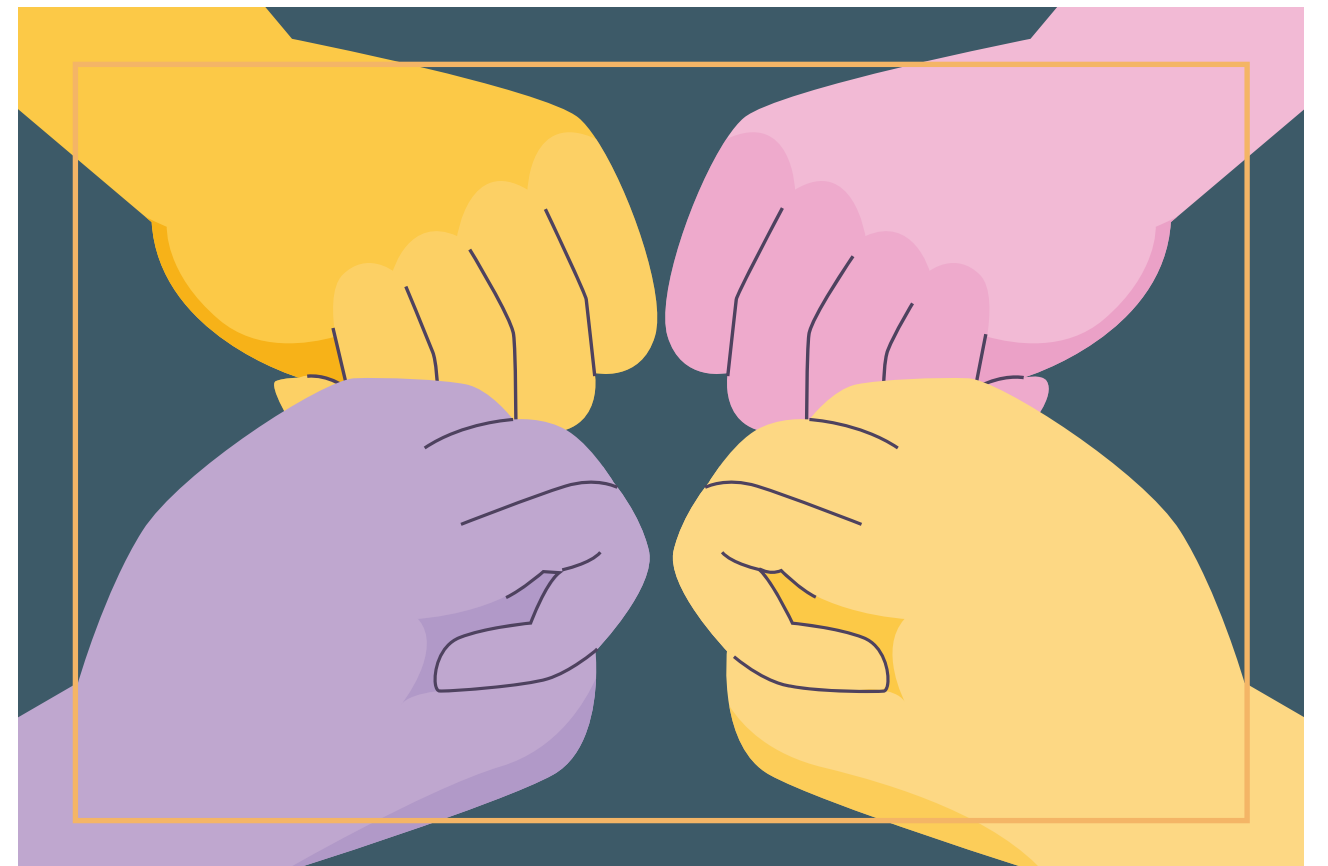
Three Models of Community Organization Practice

Social Planning

Locality Development

Social Action

Establishing Community Relationships To Promote Asset Exchange As Changes

Asset-based community development can be considered as a typical example which suggests that focus of community development should not solely be put on specific community problems and needs. Scholars John Kretzman and John McKnight (1993) proposed that the focus of community development should be put on the different existing community assets rather than on community problems and need assessments. They believed that if the focus is on community problems and need assessments, there will be an endless list of problems. It can lead to top-down service design and result in fragmented solutions. It also reinforces dependence and causes workers to neglect the assets already exist in the community. The characteristic of asset-based community development is asset-based, inward-looking, and relationship-oriented. The important task of community development is to explore the strengths and resources of the community. It supports the local development through discovering the assets of the community, building community relationships among residents, promoting economic and information sharing among community members, facilitating the community to establish its own vision and plan, and leveraging outside resources. Cormac Russell (2020) categorised local community asset as the gifts, skills, and passions possessed by different residents; the social networks and influence of the local community; the resources of public, private, and non-governmental organisations; local material and economic resources; and the stories of shared life among residents. Community development can establish relationships among community members and meet mutual needs by connecting these different assets in the community.

The 3D Printing Inc.

The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups
Jockey Club Ping Shek Youth S.P.O.T

The 3D Printing Inc. by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups Jockey Club Ping Shek Youth S.P.O.T. is a service project that attempted to connect different community assets in the community. According to census data, the surrounding community of the Youth S.P.O.T. is a community with lower income and older ages (Census and Statistics Department, 2022). During the pandemic, grassroots older people were the group with the most urgent needs in the community. However, if the integrated children and youth service centre is only perceived as a service unit to solve youth problems and needs, the youth centre may not have capacity to respond to the needs of the older people in the community. From the perspective of asset-based community development, the youth centre can be a place where relationships can be established between the youth and other community segments. In fact, the abilities, attitudes, and experiences that young people and the older people have are community assets. However, there were inadequate relationships between which limited the possibilities to satisfy needs of each other by existing community assets. The 3D Printing Inc. established and strengthened relationships

between young people, the older people, and grassroots families in the community through organising a 3D printing platform. On the one hand, the service project enabled young people who had been staying at home for a long time during the pandemic to learn skills such as 3D printing, artificial intelligence programming, and design thinking. On the other hand, it allowed young people to tailor home hygiene and safety products for grassroots older people and grassroots families. By contacting different groups in the community and making 3D printing products for them, young people learned how to analyse the needs of people different from themselves and how to provide appropriate services based on the situation of the service targets. At the same time, the older people were curious about the printed products made by young people and thought that such products can facilitate their daily life. This is exactly the emphasis of asset-based community development. Different individuals have different assets, while the role of non-governmental organisations is organisers who discover these assets and facilitate the establishment of community relationships.

Acting Against Oppression and Proposing Alternatives As Changes

Another perspective on community development emphasises the need to address social justice issues in society and promote change. For example, scholar Margaret Ledwith (2016) argued that community development should be a form of critical pedagogy. Influenced by Paulo Freire, she believed that people's understanding of society in their daily lives is constructed under social relations confining their social development. Therefore, community workers should promote reflection among residents on experiences that are taken for granted, and co-create new understandings with residents. In discussions of literature under the influence of the critical school, including anti-oppressive social work practice and critical social work, scholars such as Donna Baines (2017) and Bob Pease and Sharlene Nippers (2016) pointed out that the logic of neoliberalism is embedded in the daily lives and social relations of people. They argued that people view the workings of the competitive markets as natural and discipline themselves and their families to meet the market's needs. Scholars argued that social work practice should facilitate reflection of the market logic and propose alternatives with service users from their daily lives.

The Second ChancExit

Caritas Ngau Tau Kok Community Centre

The Second ChancExit by the Caritas Ngau Tau Kok Community Centre is an example of a service project that attempted to organise grassroots women to explore alternatives. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many grassroots people had been, which had a significant impact on their economic situation. In addition to providing support for epidemic prevention and control, the community centre found that responding to residents' economic needs became increasingly important. Originally, the Second ChancExit project aimed to help residents learn various skills and strengthen their ability to return to the market. However, during the organising process, the community centre discovered a group of housewives who had little working experience or even no working experience but were eager to have a job to relieve their family's economic pressure. From a view of adapting to market needs, the community centre should provide specific vocational training and arrange internship opportunities to help housewives enter the market. However, from an asset-based perspective, women themselves are community assets and have different strengths. For example, some members are good at making handicrafts or skincare products. However, these strengths cannot bring them economic exchange opportunities in the mainstream market. With reference to the approach of community economic development and community bazaar, the community centre targeted facilitate women to set up their own stalls in the community bazaar. Through operating their own businesses, women had the opportunity of self-actualisation and income earning. They played some more new and proactive roles such as bosses and entrepreneurs, instead of passive roles such as service recipients and caregivers. At the same time, they were no longer limited to adapting to the job positions in the market but could exchange their strengths for income. Of course, this one-year service project could not bring significant changes. But this attempt reflected that community development practice can propose alternatives for oppressive social relations.

More Photos of "The Second ChancExit"

Top left

Visiting a manicure shop.

Top right

Making business at the Commuity Bazaar.

Middle

Winners of the "Second ChancExit" receiving their award.

Bottom

Graduates of the "Second ChancExit" program.

Conclusion

In the process of community development practices, instead of focusing solely on a specific community problem, promoting change is an important goal. The two examples in this article reveal two possibilities for community development practice to promote change. On the one hand, it is possible to establish or strengthen relationships among community members by responding to community problems, facilitate the exchange of community assets, and meet the needs of community members. On the other hand, community development practice can propose alternatives under the existing market logic and facilitate reflection upon the mainstream discourse.

Event Highlight

NGO Innovation Hub Symposium: Innovative Approaches and Strategic Responses for Community Development under the Pandemic

The NGO Innovation Hub Symposium ("The symposium" hereafter) aims to provide a platform for participating agencies to share knowledge and practical wisdom. It encourages exchange of experiences in solving community problems using various community development approaches with the industry and community development workers, motivates mutual learning among service units and promotes the use of community asset as a force to solve problems.
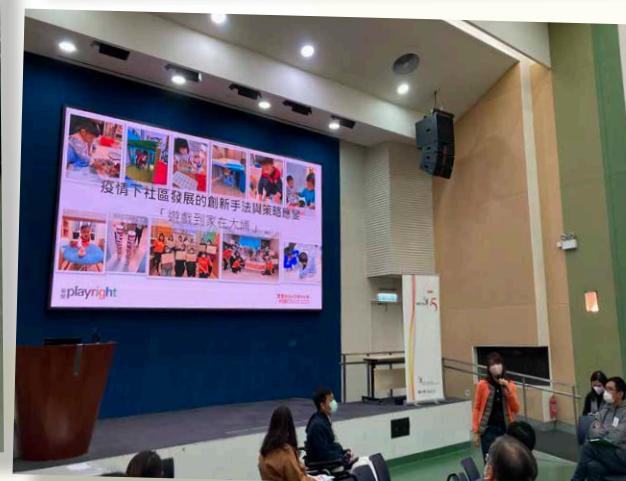

We held our first symposium on December 16 last year. We were honoured to have Dr. CHAN Wai Yin - Assistant Professor of School of Arts and Social Sciences, Hong Kong Metropolitan University, and Prof. HUNG Suet Lin - Professor & Head of Department of Social Work, Hong Kong Baptist University to be our keynote speakers. Prof. Hung also served as a Trustee (East Asia) in International Association for Community Development (IACD). Their topics were "Empowering Waste Pickers: The Value of Community Development and the Role of Social Worker" and "Trends in Community Development and Innovation of Community Work", to discuss the present and future development values and prospect of community development with the participants. Indeed, the symposium also invited four participating agencies of NGO Innovation Hub to share how they adopted innovative community development approaches to break through various limitations brought

by the pandemic, as well as promoted the use of community participation to solve community problems.

The council is organizing another symposium this year, giving the participating agencies of this year the opportunity to exchange with the industry on how to achieve social innovation in the field of community development. We will invite overseas specialist to share on the mix of these two concepts and reconceptualize social innovation from a new perspective. We look forward to everyone's participation. For the update about the symposium, please pay attention to the announcement from our webpage or the council.

Scan QR Code To Follow Our Latest Moves!

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