

## Lesson 2 Our Community, Our Lives

### Mapping Our Voices

Everyone has unique experiences, but many people remain isolated and disconnected from what goes on outside their lives. Community mapping helps people look outside of themselves, connect with other members of their communities, and share valuable experiences.

Community mapping is a collective process. It enables members of a community to map details of the places where they live and other places they know about. Community mapping is also a unique and valuable tool as it can be used in diverse ways.

In the middle of a major disaster, community mapping can prove to be a very effective and important tool. The first responders to a disaster are often ordinary citizens. They can use maps to create and update data on health facilities, shelters, or even public roads. When community members work together at the time of a disaster, the gathered information can be based on actual needs rather than guesses. This is particularly critical when every second counts.

For example, community mapping helped deal with the impact of Hurricane Sandy, one of the most destructive hurricanes to hit the United States. One of its main effects was energy failures. Residents in affected areas would wait for hours in line at gas stations, sometimes only to learn that they were out of gasoline. In response to this problem, a group of high school students in New Jersey worked together to create an online community map, publishing information on open gas stations with available fuel. The students gathered information from personal observations, calls to local gas stations, and updates from other social media users. The live data streams filled a significant community information gap.

Mapping can also rally community members around the assets of their community such as libraries, community centers, and parks. Heritage and cultural attractions, like landmarks, museums, and public artworks, are also good sources for community mapping. Through marking assets on a map, people become aware of the strengths and resources of their own community and build a strong bond with it. Also, these maps can provide valuable data to be used for tourism or urban design.

The mapping project Where in Wally (short for Walthamstow, UK) is a case in point. A team of architects undertook the project to find out what spots were loved by the locals. People told the team about their treasured places and the reasons why these places were special to them. The team then added the places to an online map and marked them in the real world with yellow tags. The map and tags invited people to go on a treasure hunt and told them colorful stories about the corners of Walthamstow.

name

53. Kitchener Road Park

description

Tagged by CH.

I moved to Walthamstow in 2000 and soon afterward was given a puppy by my parents. We had many happy times in Kitchener Road Park and met lots of other dog owners and dogs there. Walking in the park and getting to know people made us feel at home in the area, and some of the people we met became close friends.

A community mapping project doesn't have to be ambitious in scale. If the idea of mapping overwhelms you, start small. Here is an idea.

Although it may seem that you know all about the routes to school, students have different information from one another due to different experiences. How about making a map with your classmates? Each of you can trace routes that you frequently use and mark how comfortable or safe you feel on those routes. With group participation and feedback, an informative visual map of safe routes to school can be constructed. You can provide the map to local district officials to help identify school safety problems.

There isn't just one reason for, nor one method of, carrying out community mapping. The process is defined by the community itself, depending on what issues are raised and how the community members decide to deal with them. The most important thing in the process is that you have to work with others. Remember that, by its very nature, community mapping is a collective experience.