



BEING THE BRIDGE TO NEIGHBOURHOOD

A Guidebook to help you think
about your role as a 'bridge' to
neighbourhood.



inclusiveneighbourhoods.org.au

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by the
Neighbourhood Circles
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A PART OF INCLUSIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS



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WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This Guidebook is for you if...

- You are a person who identifies as living with a disability or mental illness and you want to know more about the benefits of being part of neighbourhood, what it is, and how bridges can help.
- You are a loved one, friend, family member, or neighbour of someone and you want to know more about the important role you play to be the bridge.
- You are a support worker, coordinator, or community worker who wants to learn more about the benefits and barriers facing people connecting to neighbourhood, and what you can do to help.

This Guidebook is here to help you think about the importance of neighbourhood connection and the role that we all play in being 'bridges' to inclusion. After reading this we hope that you decide to complete the Workbook on '**How to Build Bridges to Belonging**' with your friend, neighbour, family member or person you support.

Who?

WHAT IS NEIGHBOURHOOD?



Neighbourhoods can include the street and area where you live, but it can also include your wider community. **We define neighbourhoods as spaces and places that you can easily get to by walking, riding your bike, taking a bus, or driving a short distance.** These spaces can also be online, like a local neighbourhood Facebook page or 'Buy Nothing' group.

When thinking about neighbourhood we want you to try and keep things as close as you can. The closer they are and the easier it is to get to, the more likely that you will continue to go and maintain the relationships with people who live nearby.

Neighbourhoods include your immediate neighbours, but also places that are close and easy to get to. A neighbourhood can include your local suburb, city council, or community.

WHAT IS 'BEING THE BRIDGE'?

Many people who identify as living with a disability want to meet new people, learn new skills, and share what they are good at, but they feel 'shut out' from their neighbourhoods. By being the bridge you can help a person you know overcome some of the barriers stopping them from engaging with their neighbourhood.

Being the 'bridge' means helping people you know to build more relationships and a sense of belonging in their local neighbourhood. Support workers, friends, family, and neighbours have an important role in helping people who identify as living with a disability or mental illness connect to people and things in neighbourhood.

In this Guidebook, we talk about some of the barriers people face in connecting to their neighbourhood and explain why having a friend, support worker, ally or neighbour who understands their role as 'the bridge' is so important.



**“We need to have people that we can have
real friendships with.”**

-Sarah, lived experience with disability

**“Everyone with a disability needs some
support and help...how that works depends on
the person.”**

-Kym, lived experience with disability

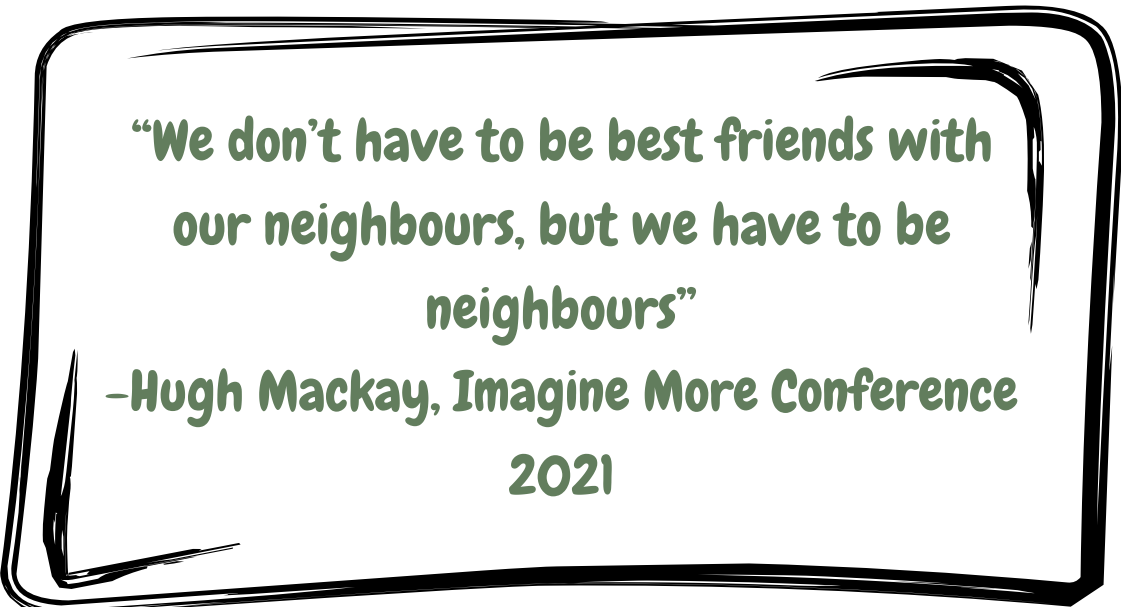
**“Look to enhance really small social connections
and make them bigger.”**

-Lea, community connector

BENEFITS OF BEING IN NEIGHBOURHOOD

There are many great reasons why people should be connected to regular things happening in their local neighbourhood. There are a lot of studies and stories out there that tell us why. People knowing their neighbours, even just knowing their first name and saying 'hello' when they see them on the street, **helps keep people safer, happier, and healthier.**

Being a part of your neighbourhood looks different for everyone. Sometimes people are part of a group based on their interests, like sports clubs, church groups, or choirs. Some people join community gardens and others start a Little Library. Other people bring in their neighbour's bin or water the plants when they are away. There are lots of **small and big ways** that people become part of their neighbourhood that can make a **positive change and increase their sense of belonging.**



“We don't have to be best friends with our neighbours, but we have to be neighbours”

-Hugh Mackay, Imagine More Conference 2021



Neighbourhoods look different everywhere you go, but the relationships people build with neighbours and members of their local neighbourhood have been shown to:

- Help keep **safer** - by having neighbours 'look out' for the person or going by to check in on them
- Create opportunities for more **freely given friendships** and relationships to form;
- Create chances for people to be '**missed**' when they are not there; and
- Provide opportunities for people to **contribute their skills, strengths and talents** that make the neighbourhood better for everyone!

More great reasons are found on the next few pages.

**"It's people knowing him
that keeps him safe"**
- Maria, parent

The importance of neighbourhood by...

Britt.

“I wanted to get to know my neighbours and my community and I needed that sense of security. Because if my partner went to work...what happens if I fall or if something falls over in the house and I can't pick it up? Me and my partner needed that security of like, if something happened like that, who's gonna come help me?...When I first moved in I sent letters out to all my neighbours like this is me... like to say hello... I want to have that network and that sense of safety and to relieve some pressure off my partner...then trying to build that community of like, looking out for, looking after.”

Than.

“Neighbourhood extends beyond just a geographical point. And...it relates more to community as a whole and finding safe spaces and inclusive spaces that we can access. And I guess I'm considering what boundaries especially as people with disabilities have in terms of accessing those spaces... Sometimes all you need to do is just say like, ‘how can I help?’ ... even if you just ask that they can give you tangible things to then kind of move their brain in a direction... sometimes you just need to listen sometimes or sometimes it's just like, ‘hey, like, is it too much of a bother for you to just like knock on my door every day?’”

MORE GREAT THINGS ABOUT NEIGHBOURHOODS...

**INCREASES PEOPLE'S SENSE OF SAFETY,
SECURITY, AND BELONGING;**

**PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPORTANT
RELATIONSHIPS AND FRIENDSHIPS**

**HELPS REDUCE PEOPLE'S ISOLATION AND
FEELINGS OF LONELINESS**

**IMPROVES MENTAL HEALTH, WELLBEING, AND
FEELINGS OF LIFE SATISFACTION**

**CREATES CHANCES FOR PEOPLE TO SHARE
THEIR SKILLS, GIFTS, AND TALENTS**

**PROVIDES OPPORTUNITES FOR VALUED
ROLES AND CONTRIBUTION**

HELPS EVERYONE TO LIVE THE GOOD LIFE

STORIES OF NEIGHBOURHOOD CONNECTION

The Pear & QT Neighbourhood Node

The Pear Coffeehouse and QT Work-hub are Neighbourhood Nodes (spaces) in the City of Port Adelaide that allow people to come together and promote opportunities for neighbours to work together. Inspired by a participatory culture, social coffee catch-ups, Thai Chi classes, neighbourhood celebrations, and inclusive neighbourhood meetings and workspaces are available. Neighbours contribute to, experience and enjoy their neighbourhood in many different ways. Neighbourhood Node enables this neighbourhood participation and turns it into purpose and meaning. The Neighbourhood Node's motto is 'inclusion is everyone's responsibility'. The neighbourhood is a thriving space for social connection, contribution and belonging where people feel missed when not there.

Six years old, a certified social enterprise and under community direction, the best is probably still to come!

"I can make toast at home... I come here for the conversation"
-Carol, patron



A photo of Annemijn from the Pear at a neighbourhood event

Songs of inclusion, Vocalize Warradale



Vocalize is a community choir based in the south-eastern suburbs of Adelaide that has been running for over 15 years. Choir conductor Kerrie had a vision for a community choir that provided a place that welcomed everyone who had a passion for singing or a desire to learn how to. The choir provides ample opportunities for members to be involved, both in the weekly choir practices, as volunteers on the committee, or participants in singing festivals and shows.

There are a variety of small and big roles for people to be involved and contribute. Other things that increase the inclusivity of the choir is how they help adapt to individual learning styles by providing sheet music, alongside video and audio learning tools. Each new member who comes to their first practice is also assigned a Choir buddy who is in charge of supporting their introduction and adjustment into the choir. The community of welcome and belonging is clear in the number of members who come back each week and how often they socialise and get together outside of the choir itself.

**“There is a greater chance to be protected if
we have freely given relationships...
friendships strengthen that protection”
– John Armstrong, Imagine More Conference 2021**

BARRIERS TO NEIGHBOURHOOD

Neighbourhoods are great places for people to contribute their skills and feel a sense of belonging, but many people who identify as living with a disability or mental illness feel 'shut out' from their neighbourhood. The barriers that people face to connect to their neighbourhood highlight why having the support of a friend, ally, neighbour, or support worker to act as the 'bridge' to help overcome such barriers is so important.



*“I can't seem to find things to connect to...It can be tricky to forge a path for yourself.”
-Sarah, lived experience with disability*

There are a number of things that keep people excluded from their neighbourhoods, some are **barriers of access** and some are **barriers of attitude**. For people who face more barriers than others, it can be harder to participate, contribute, and be included in their neighbourhood.

In order to help be the bridge to neighbourhood, you need to be aware of the barriers facing people, so that you can better understand how you can help overcome them. Some of the biggest barriers included in this Guidebook are those as told by people with lived experience themselves.

SOME PEOPLE HAVE SAID...

Many people have told us about some of the barriers that they face to be included in their neighbourhood. Here is some of what they have said.

Social and Paid Supports

Many people with a disability rely on their paid supports, family members or friends to not only access places, people and things, but also to find out about them. Paid or unpaid supports are sometimes their only link to find out what is happening in the community, to get there or access them. Without that support to connect to neighbourhood it can be very hard to bridge these and other barriers of access and inclusion.

“The support worker would probably just put it (flyer) in the bin”

“My support worker would need to drive and take me”

Safety and Fear

Many people living with a disability or mental illness have either been victims of abuse and neglect or live in fear that they will experience it. The fear of stigma or rejection can increase people's feelings of social anxiety or apprehension when putting themselves in new or unfamiliar situations. A lifetime of either negative experiences to rejection and 'othering', increased social anxiety or limited social resilience can exacerbate a sense of fear towards the unknown and potentially unsafe.

“I wouldn't go because I don't know if it will be safe”

“I wouldn't go if I didn't know the person”

Physical access and transport

Many people living with a disability spoke about the barriers to accessing neighbourhood places, like parks or cafes, because they are inaccessible to get to or even into. Beyond getting into the place, getting to the place is hard if transport options are limited. For example, a bus does not run there or they have to rely on expensive taxis. Not being physically able to get to a place is one of the biggest barriers facing people to connect.

“Access transport and other types of accessibility are the biggest barrier of all”

“I used to catch a bus, but gave up. It was too hard to do that”

Access to information

For some people with a disability or mental illness finding out what is happening around their neighbourhood is difficult because they might struggle to use technology or social media, they might not be able to read, have limited English language, or people around them who can tell them what is happening. While word of mouth can be an effective way to hear about new things, how do you hear about things happening in your neighbourhood if you don't know any neighbours?

“He 100% relies on others to share this information with him... He wouldn't go unless I drove or went with him”

“The website is not easy to navigate... information is hard to find. You have to hunt for it.”



SOME OF THE BARRIERS I FACE...

Thanh.

“I often don't go to events because I'm very conscious that like, I have to have a support worker with me if it's an unfamiliar environment. And for some reason, there's always this... treatment when I go there with a support worker, where it's like, ‘Oh, so you're with this person, so we can't approach you’. And it's often unintentional, it's often an unconscious thing. But I think that's what a lot of people are afraid of, especially when you're disabled or...if you're just, you know, not an able-bodied person...you're very conscious of the fact that...you ruck up and you're like, I don't know anyone. What if no one talks to me? What if, like, you know, they are really different to who I'm expecting. Or you know, especially when you are marginalised?...you never know who you're going to encounter and I think that's like a really big thing.”

Anonymous.

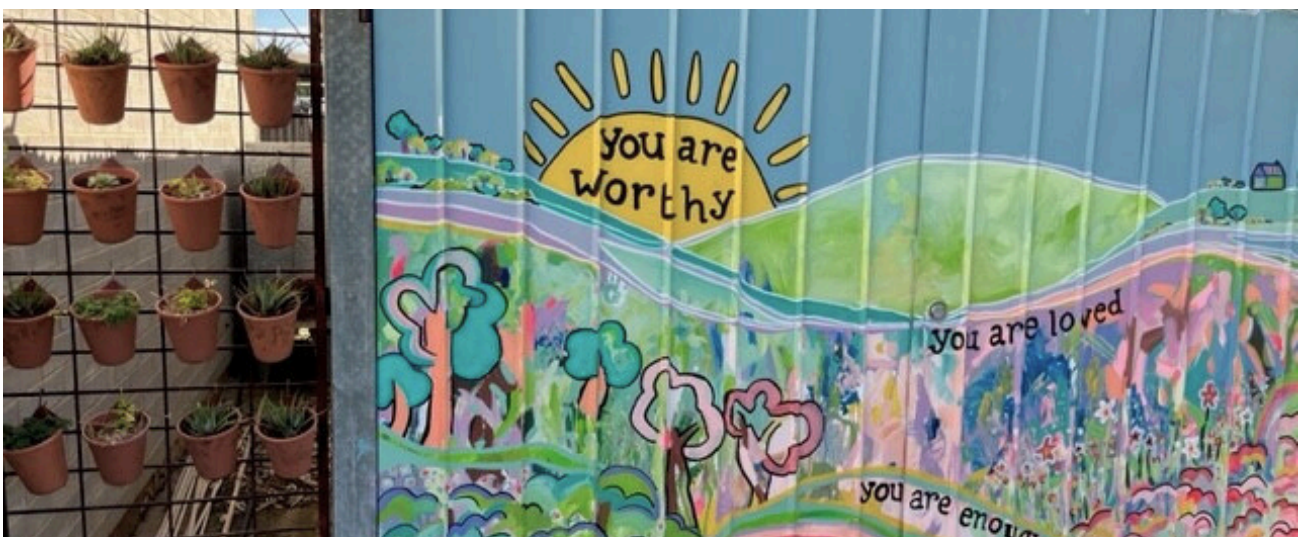
“I think I have a lot of trouble being understood by a lot of support workers. Or people in the like... disability support industry... they're willing to listen, but quite often, I feel like they're just not listening....I think invisible disabilities and mental and cognitive stuff is not very well catered to by a lot of support workers....I felt like in general having a disability, you don't really need that much support from the people you hang out with. You just need them to be a little more accommodating. But they sort of hear that like ‘oh, hey, can you make a minor adjustment for me?’ And are like ‘whoa, that sounds like a lot of work’. That's really not, but yeah.”

NOT LETTING VULNERABILITY GET IN THE WAY.

“Concerns are sometimes raised about the dangers present in community, especially for people who have a higher degree of vulnerability, but **the risks of marginalisation and isolation are far worse.** Being known and valued by your **local neighbourhood is some of life’s most protective safeguards.** By this we mean people who will invite you over for a cup of tea, check your mail when you’re away or notice when you don’t turn up for a regular engagement.

It is also important **to be reciprocal with these things;** be a good neighbour, invite people over for a cup of tea and keep an eye out for those around you. For a person with disability some assistance in doing this may be required, but **when supported well the benefits of being an active member of the community will still be there for them.”**

- CRU, 2023: <http://thegoodlife.cru.org.au>



“A lot of people are very isolated, especially people dealing with mental health issues or some kind of life crisis. They very rarely get someone to speak to”

- Dureece, lived experience with disability

“I think we face a lot of challenges from building communities. I think a huge thing that I talked about with a lot of my friends and that I worry about is like the loss of third spaces, so to speak. And I think it's the loss a lot of young people face. You do not have many communal places to hang out in”

- Ezra, lived experience with disability

Suggested activity:

Watch the video by Purple Orange on ‘loneliness’

Link here: <https://vimeo.com/774103935>

Reflect on what was said by people interviewed in this video. What things made them feel lonely? What are some things that helped **reduce** their feelings of loneliness?

Your role to bridge barriers...

Many people who identify as living with a disability or mental face a number of barriers to engaging with neighbourhood. Some of the issues mentioned are barriers of access, like spaces being inaccessible or information not being in easy read. Some other issues include barriers of attitude, like groups having a deficit perspective or people having feelings of fear or anxiety about unknown groups, initiatives or people.

Being the bridge means helping the individual person overcome the barriers keeping them from neighbourhood. This could mean going with the person to something new and providing social support. It could also mean actively exploring, linking, and helping them to engage with things happening in neighbourhood. Being the bridge means recognising the barriers facing a particular person to connect and doing what you can to assist them to overcome those barriers.



Being the bridge will look different if you are in a paid or unpaid role. If you are in a paid role then your job is to **be the bridge to other freely given relationships** and **not** the relationship itself. Even unpaid friends and family need to be mindful of potential new relationships and not get in the way of their growth.

Being the bridge, if you are in a paid role...

“Families frequently express to us that their family member with disability experiences loneliness and holds **desires for more friendships...**

It is common for many people to pay support staff to fill this void in people’s lives. However, we know that this can lead to sadness, confusion, and frustration when support staff leave, which can cause an **unintentional deepening of loneliness.**

It is helpful to realise that **paid supporters can serve as a ‘bridge’** to help establish other relationships, rather than ‘being’ the sole relationship itself. By **building such bridges**, the paid supporter can depart knowing the person's life is all the richer.”

-Imagine More Inc., 2023



Building bridges through gardening...

Angie and Barry's story

When Barry created a greening group to fix up a verge on his street, he letter dropped flyers in neighbour's post-boxes inviting them to join a working bee. Neighbour Angie had lived in the area for over 15 years, but didn't know many people who lived in the area. On the day of the working bee Angie went along and met Barry where she told him that she lived with anxiety and that while this was nice, it was a bit too overwhelming. Barry then offered to meet with Angie and do some planting alone together. Over the few times that they planted together Angie and Barry struck up a friendship, so by the next working bee Angie lasted the whole time. Over time Angie's confidence grew and the group soon discovered that Angie also had a skill for mosaics. In time she was encouraged to run a mosaic workshop.

Angie now sits on the greening group's planning committee, has several other valued roles in the group, and has run mosaic workshops for other gardening groups. Having a neighbour who helped to act as the bridge, who saw Angie's skills and talents, and who encouraged her confidence to grow supported Angie to become an involved, active and well loved member of her local neighbourhood.

“Angie's [receiving the] Mayor's Encouragement Award recognises how much her life has changed. After being involved in working bees she then had the confidence to transform her bare backyard into the lovely garden it is today.”

-Barry. Angie's Neighbour

MOVING FORWARD...

We hope that by reading this Guidebook you understand a bit more about the benefits to being connected to neighbourhoods, why it is sometimes harder for people who identify as living with a disability or mental illness to connect to their neighbourhood, and so why helping to act as the bridge to neighbourhood is important.

Being the bridge can look very different depending on what the person wants or needs to connect to neighbourhood. If this has inspired you to think more about what you can do to help be the bridge to neighbourhood, we hope you will now complete the **How to be a bridge to neighbourhood workbook**.



The workbook is designed to be completed with the person who wants to do the neighbourhood connecting alongside their supportive bridge builder. Also be sure to check out some of the helpful resources in the back of this Guidebook

SOME HELPFUL RESOURCES



- **neighbourseveryday.org** (Relationships Australia) – National Neighbour Day stories, resources and toolkits to foster inclusiveness and belonging.
- **inclusiveneighbourhoods.org.au** (JFA Purple Orange)– Neighbourhood Circles Project Reports, recordings, and local stories of inclusion.
- **befriend.org.au** (Befriend WA)– Focuses on building stronger, more inclusive communities built on contribution.



- **imaginemore.org.au** (in ACT)– An organisation with lots of free training and supports to help you think about building social connections and belonging.
- **belongingmatters.org.au** (in VIC)– Lots of stories, videos and examples of what it takes to build genuine inclusion and belonging.



- **neighbourhoodconnect.org.au** (national)– Helpful resources, stories, and templates to build neighbourhood connection. Check out their ‘80 great ideas to build neighbourly connections’.
- **volunteerability.org.au** (Orana)– Lots of resources to support people with a disability and their supports to do mainstream volunteering.
- **villageinthecity.net** (UK)– Resources, handbooks and podcasts to support increased local neighbourhood connection and support

MORE HELPFUL RESOURCES



- **cru.org.au/resources** (in QLD)- the Community Resource Unit (CRU) provides resources to help you think about valued roles and community.
- **jeder.com.au** (Vic)- An organisation that advocates principles of asset based community development (ABCD) in their community work.
- **purpleorange.org.au** (SA)- An organisation that provides advocacy, resources, and peer support. Check out their #OneSmallThing campaign.



- **Two Peas in a Podcast** by Mandy Hose and Kate Jones
- **For the Love of Community Engagement Podcast** with Becky Hurst
- **Connected Us** Podcast by Befriend
- ***The Connected Community: Discovering the Health, Wealth, and Power of Neighborhoods*** (2022) by John McKnight and Cormac Russell



- ***The Kindness Revolution*** (2021) by Hugh Mackay
- ***Say Hello*** (2019) by Carly Findlay
- ***Finding People to be there: Rebuilding a sense of belonging*** (2002) by Neil and Penny Barringham
- ***We Come Bearing Gifts*** (1996) by Janet Klees

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