

Tips for building community in your neighbourhood



Do you want to live in a neighbourhood where kids play together, people put your bins out and let you know if someone is acting suspiciously?

You can have that, but you might need to take steps to make it happen.

Neighbourhood sense of community has been shown to be linked to so many positives: creating a sense of belonging, providing physical and mental health boosts, and even lowering crime rates. With benefits like these, we should all aim to strengthen our neighbourhood ties!

Here's a few ideas that you can do to build stronger connections in your neighbourhood.

- 1. Get to know your neighbours** – If you can't name more than a neighbour or two, it's time you introduce yourself. Even if you've lived in your home for a while, this first introduction doesn't need to be awkward. Simply smile and say, "Hey, I've been meaning to introduce myself..."
- 2. Drop a note in your neighbours' letterbox** – It's a great way to invite them for a cup tea or just to give them your phone number, in case of an emergency. A simple note can open the door to a stronger, more connected neighbourhood. Feel free to use Council's Say Hello! connection card as a template for your note.
- 3. Hang out in your front yard** – It's hard to get to know your neighbours if you don't ever see them. Just by being out in front of your house you can give off a welcoming vibe that encourages interaction – even if it's just a smile and "hello".

"I love my neighbourhood. There are days when I'll be out the front with the kids, and end up having an impromptu sidewalk conversation with a neighbour. Kids and dogs running around playing while the adults chat and catch up. Suddenly the kids are sharing Zooper Doopers on the trampoline and we're planning dog sitting for the next holiday over a cuppa. It's the sort of thing you can't plan"

- 4. Create a Facebook group or local online network** (or join one if it already exists) – Social media is an increasingly popular way for neighbourhoods to interact. You could create a group, or join one that already exists in your street or suburb. These groups can be really useful for helping re-connect with lost pets, sourcing recommendations for local labour or promoting local events or activities. Do a local letterbox drop to encourage membership. But, be sure to use it to encourage offline interaction, too! You don't have to be on Facebook to connect. Check out Nextdoor as an alternative.
- 5. Organise a street party** – A street Christmas party or Easter egg hunt is a great way to get to know your neighbours and create more interaction in your street. It may involve a little work, but if you share the coordinating duties with other neighbours—and keep it simple (at least that first time) –it's an easy way to get to know your neighbours.
- 6. Install a street library** – Street libraries are beautiful homes for books, planted in your front yard. They invite your neighbours to share the joys of reading and create lasting connections inside your community. You can find tips for building your own, or purchase a pre-built library at: streetlibrary.org.au. Each street library is registered online, so you can see if there is already one near you.



7. **Build a community garden** – Community gardens are places that bring community members together to grow fresh fruit and vegetables. This is a time-tested way to promote community interaction in your neighbourhood as well as share in a bounty of fresh veggies. Check out Council's website for a list of existing community gardens and download the toolkit for creating your own.
8. **Host a backyard movie night** – Treat the neighbours to your favourite movie. But keep it PG rated – it will be outdoors, after all.
9. **Create a tool-sharing program** – Tools are one of those things that you generally only use once in a while, right? So why not share them when they're not in use? Local Tools is an online lending library management system that can get you started.
10. **Welcome new families** --You can bring a traditional baked good, deliver a stack of your favourite local take-away menus wrapped in a ribbon, or simply introduce yourself and see what you share in common.
11. **Establish (or join) a Neighbourhood Watch group** – These groups are one of the most effective deterrents to neighbourhood crime. There are many active groups across the city. Check out the Neighbourhood Watch Queensland webpage to find a Neighbourhood Watch near you, or if there isn't one, take the tips for getting started with your own group.
12. **Celebrate Neighbour Day on the last Sunday of March** – Neighbour Day is Australia's annual celebration of community, encouraging people to connect with those who live in their neighbourhood. Whether through a cuppa, a picnic in the park, or a message of support; Neighbour Day is the perfect opportunity to say thanks for being a great neighbour and for being there to lend a hand. Check out the Neighbour Day website for inspiration, templates, toolkits, recipes and more.
13. **Host a regular monthly gathering** – Do you have a pizza oven in your back yard that you're keeping all to yourself? Or a dining area that is just waiting to be filled with people eating together? Consider initiating a regular gathering with your neighbours. It doesn't have to be lots of work, your neighbours can even bring the food for a regular potluck dinner (i.e. where everyone brings a dish to share).
14. **Address concerns or issues directly with your neighbour** – Don't let a problem fester and escalate. While it can be uncomfortable, many neighbourhood tensions can be worked out directly with your neighbour rather than reporting a problem to Council as a first port of call.
15. **Shop locally** – You will not only see and interact with your neighbours at local businesses – you may also get to know other neighbours such as the business owners and employees– along the way.
16. **Talk to other parents at the park** – The local park is a great place to meet other parents who can offer a wealth of local knowledge such as the best activities for kids, local events and groups, which new restaurants are coming to the neighbourhood, etc.
17. **Let your neighbours know when you will be out of town** – You don't need a formal Neighbourhood Watch program to keep the neighbourhood safe. If you feel comfortable and trust your neighbours ask them to keep an eye out while you are away and contact you if they see anything suspicious happening. If you ask your neighbours, they will probably ask you to return the favour, which helps to keep the neighbourhood safe for everyone.

“Twenty-five years of a special neighbourly bond. Something that we call, rare. Four houses, two adults and kids in each and a lifetime of laughter, tears, Friday night drinks, neighbourhood talent shows and of course the most important annual Christmas celebrations. For us, it's another family”
Alice Pye, Neighbour of Logan

18. **Read your children books about community building** – There's loads of great children's books about building community – and you may learn something too. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:
 - *In Lucia's Neighbourhood* – Pat Chewchuk, Marek Colek
 - *Look Where We Live! A First Book of Community Building* – Scot Ritchie
 - *In the Town All Year 'Round* – Rotraut Suzanne Berner

Further reading

The suggestions in this tip sheet have been sourced and adapted from a variety of wonderful community builders and organisations. Please check out the following links for further tips, templates, ideas and inspiration:

Relationships Australia, Neighbour Day:
<http://neighbourday.org/>

The Denver Dweller: www.denverdweller.com

