

Neighbourhood Connect

ANNUAL REPORT

Financial Year ended 30 June 2022



Because life is better when we belong

“The state of the nation starts in your street... Think about the kind of neighbourhood you’d like to live in and then start living as if it’s that kind of neighbourhood. Pretty soon it will be.”

– Hugh Mackay, Australia Reimagined

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 Connect with us on Facebook

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Who are we

Neighbourhood Connect is a not-for-profit community organisation. We help people turn streets into communities and foster a national network of neighbourhood groups. We help people across Australia feel happier, safer and more supported by creating neighbourhoods where connecting with neighbours in real life is the norm.

Neighbourhood Connect facilitates the formation of neighbourhood groups. The neighbourhood group is the social infrastructure, or vehicle, which builds much needed social capital and social cohesion. Neighbourhood Connect is about creating a movement of connected neighbourhoods – that’s why we invite all sorts of neighbourhood groups that encourage community, sometimes in addition to a focus on sustainability, place-making, safety, gardening, addressing local issues, or something else, to be part of our Network.

Everyone benefits from community life – people feel happier when they are connected to those who live near them. People naturally help those they know. This can have benefits for the elderly, for people with disabilities and for people who are unwell. People feel safer when they know their neighbours are looking out for them. Research has proven that social connections improve wellbeing and sense of safety, and are an antidote to social isolation, loneliness, depression and anxiety.

We commenced in 2014, under the auspices of the Centre for Civil Society, a social innovation and public policy institute established in 2007 for the empowerment of ordinary people and strengthening of civil society. In 2018 we changed our name from The Street by Street Project to Neighbourhood Connect, incorporated, registered as a national community organisation and were granted charity status (Advancing Health).



VISION

Our vision is an Australia where everyone everywhere feels a sense of belonging, safety and support in their neighbourhood.



MISSION

Our Mission is connecting neighbours to strengthen the social fabric of Australia’s neighbourhoods.



VALUES

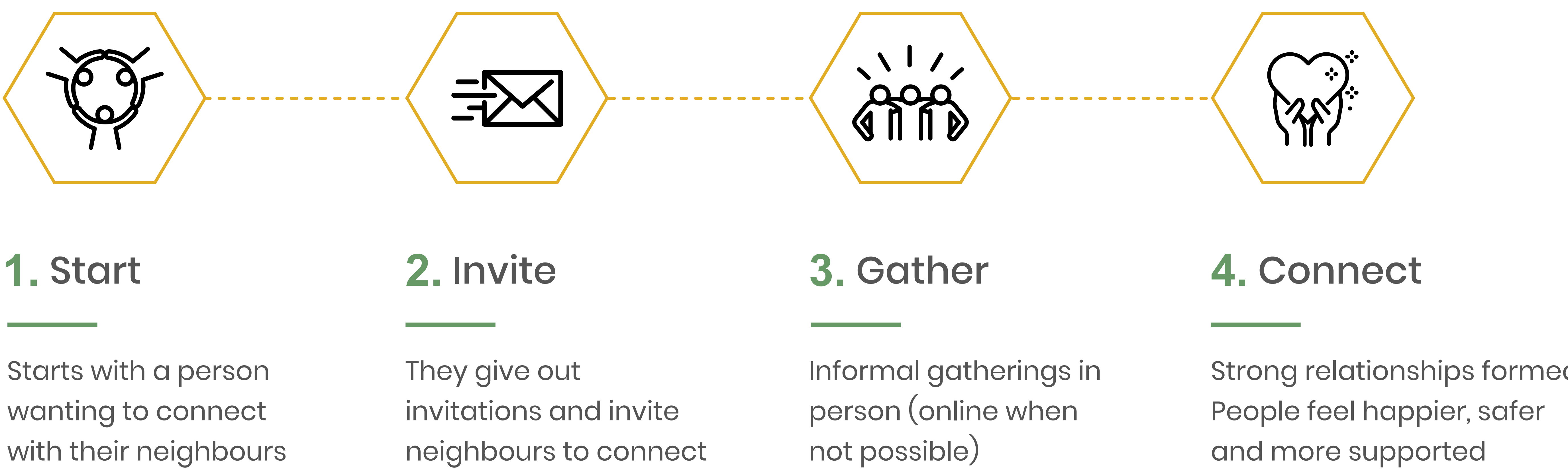
Our Values are Kindness, Inclusiveness, Sharing and Collaboration.

What we do



The Neighbourhood Connection process

These are the steps we take people through in starting up a neighbour group.



Let's Get Neighbourly

Training and Mentoring Program

With the generous support of our funders, the Let's Get Neighbourly Program has continued to train new Connectors and supported them through a journey to becoming a Connector and starting a Neighbour Group. The program has five stages:



- 1 Promotion to invite people to become Connectors.
- 2 Workshop (in person or online) to give people the tools, inspiration, skills and confidence to organise an event with their neighbours (with the aim of starting a neighbour group).
- 3 Mentoring as each person holds their first event.
- 4 Workshop to give Connectors the tips and skills to lead an ongoing neighbours group.
- 5 Sharing stories of the new neighbour groups, evaluation and reporting.

Feedback on the Program

Door knocking with invitations was part of the process for some Connectors with positive results:

“I was surprised at how open people were to me knocking on their door and inviting them to a get-together. It was an interesting experience and no one was negative.”

“It was great to discover that the people in my street are interested in being neighbourly!”

On the program:

“The mentoring assistance from Maureen was invaluable - gave me chance to talk through logistics and concerns and keep me motivated to make it happen. I do think we are off to a solid start and there is more to come.”

- Mary

“Great tuition, practical tools, excellent follow up and supportive mentoring, very helpful.”

- Richard



Irene Oppenheimer
President

President's Report

Against all the odds in a highly challenging pandemic environment, Neighbourhood Connect has been the catalyst for 13 new neighbour groups, in Victoria and Western Australia. We have now helped people in 59 neighbourhoods across all states and territories turn the streets around them into supportive communities. Where there is a neighbours group, members automatically support one another. Our Neighbourhood Connect Network, which includes groups who started independently, has reached 93. This is the beginning of a connected neighbourhoods movement.

Over the last 12 months we have continued to offer free webinars open to all, where we give people an insight into the wonderful outcomes of neighbour groups and the tools and tips to get started. We recognised that residents often get the best outcomes when they have additional encouragement and support to work through the steps to bring neighbours together, so we have continued to deliver the Let's Get Neighbourly Training and Mentoring Program. Delivered over four months, this program provides inspiration, tools, skill development and support through an initial workshop and one to one mentoring as Connectors hold their first event. A second workshop equips Connectors to lead an ongoing informal neighbours group. The program is delivered by myself and Maureen Maher, our Communications Manager and WA Coordinator.

Covid restrictions made this incredibly challenging, and we adapted by developing online options for our workshops and for connecting with neighbours, and by extending our support for longer so that face to face events could be held. We found that while online connection is possible, it can't compare with real life connections. Most of our programs are in urban areas, but this year we got the chance to run a program in Warrnambool, a town in Victoria, and found that our program works in smaller areas as well as in the cities. Some participants undertook the program as part of a Community Services course and this proved beneficial.



Gathering of neighbours at Pascoe Avenue, Croydon, Vic



Irene Oppenheimer
President

We continue to foster relationships with like-minded organisations to share our experience of creating neighbourhood connections and seek collaborations to build social capital and wellbeing, and reduce social isolation, loneliness, depression and anxiety. We have a leadership role with the Friendship Alliance and good links with Neighbour Day, Ending Loneliness Together, Grow, many neighbourhood houses and other community building organisations.

Our Strategic Plan for 2020–2022 was aspirational, relying on securing funds to deliver it, and these funds have not been secured. Securing resources remains critical to achieving our goals. Our grants team has succeeded in bringing in funds for Let's Get Neighbourly programs but no core funding has been gained. We are very appreciative of funding from the City of Maroondah, City of Casey, Warrnambool City Council and City of Canning. We have also enjoyed working closely with the committed staff at some of these councils in promoting and delivering the programs. Special mention goes to Fiona, Zoe, Marta and Jaimee.

We now have proof of our effectiveness as a result of independent evaluation achieved through a partnership with the Research School of Psychology, Australian National University. We wish to thank Olivia Evans, Post Doctoral Researcher, and Tegan Cruwys, Associate Professor, for contributing pro-bono for the first six months of this project. We thank them and Joseph Selwyn, Masters of Clinical Psychology graduate, for evaluating our program. The ANU Service Evaluation Report 2022 is available on the Neighbourhood Connect website (full version and summary).

A huge thank you to the Board and the Project Team for all their work, passion and dedication in contributing to a connected neighbourhoods movement. We have the answer to improved quality of life, social support, sense of safety and a proven way to lessen loneliness, depression and anxiety – the challenge is to roll this out across Australia.



First gathering of Gateline Dale Downs Neighbour Group, Warrnambool

Our impact

There has been steady growth in the number of neighbour groups. The majority of neighbourhood groups have been in Victoria, followed by Western Australia. The vast majority are in urban areas. Each neighbourhood group has its own flavour, shaped by its members. Most groups have a regular social gathering at a local venue, park or home. This ranges from every three weeks to every quarter.

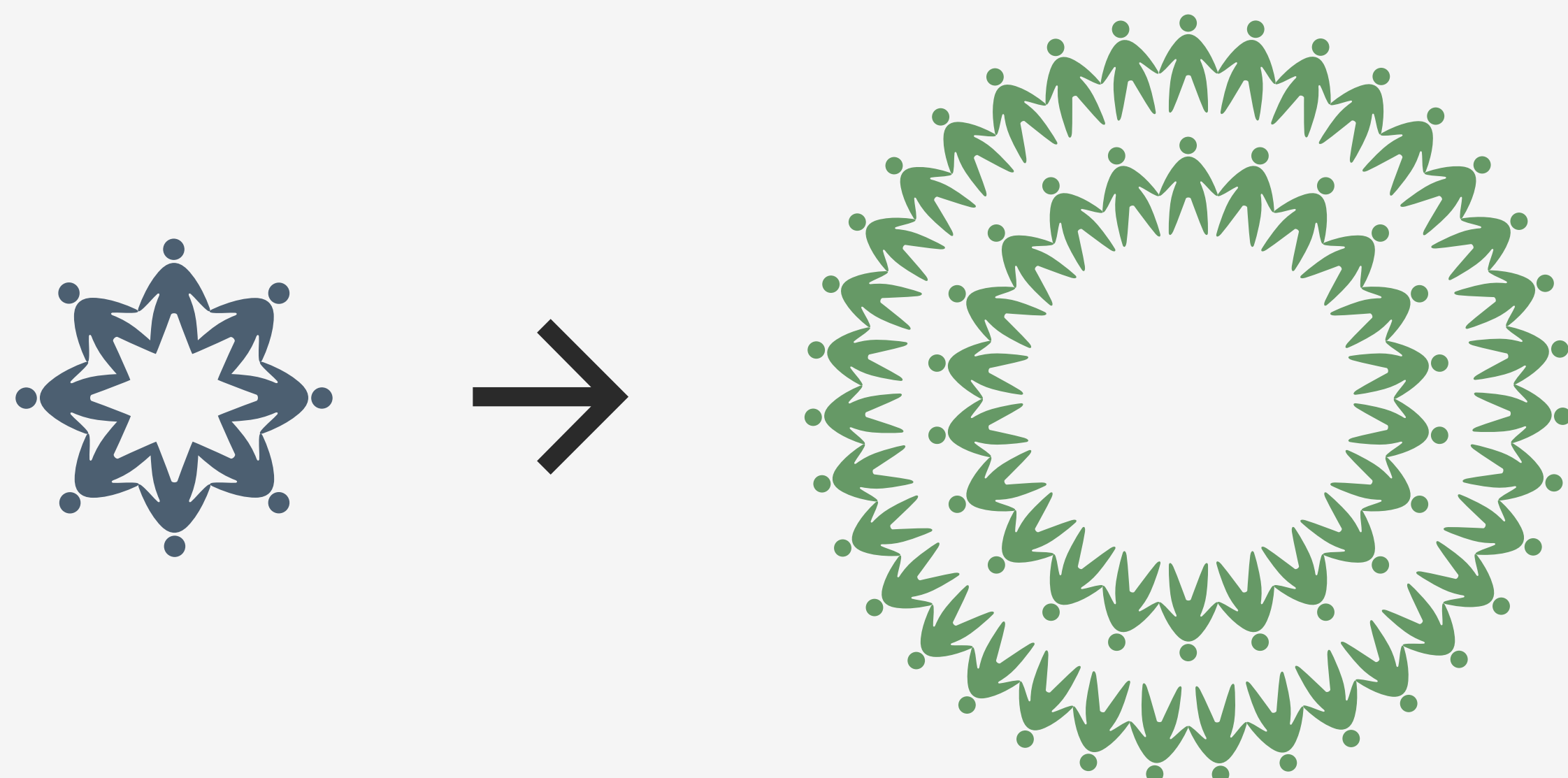


“I am mightily impressed with the Neighbourhood Connect initiative – it’s a particularly good example of the positive action that can be taken to deal with the malaise of social fragmentation, isolation, loneliness and anxiety.”

– Hugh Mackay, AO – Social Researcher and Author

The majority of Connectors have told us that they would not have started a neighbour group without support from Neighbourhood Connect.

13 groups formed in 2021-2022, with an estimate of over 250 members, adding to the thousands of people benefiting from groups started in previous years.



96 groups in the Neighbourhood Connect Network (2015 – mid 2022).

59 groups initiated with our support (2015 – mid 2022).

Over 60 people participated in our Neighbourhood Connector training program, in person or online.

Evaluation by Australian National University

Authors

Dr Olivia Evans is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Australian National University within the Research School of Psychology. Her research primarily focuses on the impacts of inequality and status on social connectedness and mental health.

Joseph Selwyn is a recent graduate from the Masters of Clinical Psychology program at the Australian National University. His research interests include environmental influences on mental health, and the processes of addiction and recovery.

Associate Professor Tegan Cruwys is a National Health and Medical Research Council Emerging Leadership Fellow and Clinical Psychologist at the Australian National University. Tegan has expertise in social identity, mental health, and health risk behaviour.

Main findings



Following the launch of their neighbourhood group, Connectors (group leaders) reported having **increased their number of neighbourhood connections by 247%**.
These benefits were further reflected in a significant **increase in their overall level of satisfaction with being a part of the community**.



Neighbours in these groups and events **scored above the population mean on satisfaction with neighbourhood safety**.
Participants **increased their number of neighbourhood connections by 327%**.
Additionally, participants endorsed numerous further benefits stemming from taking part in their group: **increased satisfaction about living in their area; increased sense of connection with other people; and improvements in their general health and well-being**.



Major themes emerging from all participants in the evaluation were that **neighbour groups brought a sense of 'cohesion', 'unity' and 'support' to their community**, while also providing them personally with a **greater sense of 'confidence' and 'connection'**.
The majority (78%) stated that they **preferred in-person social events to virtual events**. This confirms Neighbourhood Connect's approach which emphasises in-person events, with virtual events only being recommended for situations such as lockdowns or restrictions.



Most importantly, Connectors overwhelmingly reported that **they would not have gone ahead with forming a neighbourhood group if they had not participated in the Let's Get Neighbourly program**. This highlights the importance of Neighbourhood Connect's work in facilitating and supporting these neighbourhood groups.

Evaluation by Australian National University cont.

Recommendations

Our results suggest Neighbour Connect’s Let’s Get Neighbourly program represents a scalable, grass-roots approach to building connections within communities and we have provided some preliminary evidence that this program has benefits for social connection, community engagement and wellbeing. Based on these findings, we make the following recommendations:



The findings reinforce the effectiveness of the Let’s Get Neighbourly Program in supporting people to create neighbour groups and subsequently become substantially more engaged with their community. Thus, initiatives that help to build neighbourhood and community groups should be promoted and funded as a priority.



Connectors reported deriving substantial benefits from the mentoring aspects of the Let’s Get Neighbourly program, and said they would not have started their neighbour group without the help of Neighbourhood Connect. Thus, Neighbourhood Connect delivers an effective approach to developing community connectedness and should be invested in.



In light of changing social behaviours (e.g. from COVID), it will be important to investigate robust and flexible methods to support people in building neighbourhood connections during these times of social and behavioural change.



Further evaluations with better representations of the number of people engaging with the program will also help add to the weight of evidence of the benefits of the program. The strongest possible evaluation of Neighbourhood Connect’s programs would entail a controlled intervention study looking at how the introduction of the Let’s Get Neighbourly program into a number of neighbourhoods impacted individuals and communities who had previously not been engaged with Neighbourhood Connect. Additionally, economic evaluations will help provide evidence of the cost-effectiveness of the program.



Stories from the Neighbourhood

The strength of the Neighbourhood connect model is evident in the stories of the people and neighbourhoods across Australia who have made a start. What begins with a simple local gathering to meet friendly faces, can blossom into a long-term neighbour group with strong relationships, trust, fun and social and emotional support. Here are just a few.

| Ringwood East Neighbourhood Group (Victoria)

After door knocking 34 people in her street with invitations, and a warm response, Beth gathered neighbours on a weekday afternoon to a local café. She plans to make regular social events. Ten people joined her first event with a great contribution from all. The happy group pictured above. Here's how Beth describes the gathering:



“What a warm, cordial, interesting, and engaging group of people! The conversation flowed naturally; and when each shared a bit of his/her life, that would spark off many more questions and conversation. I was warmed by it all, and so involved with everyone that I wouldn't stop to order any food from the café's excellent menu. All in all, I am glad I knocked on those doors – I do feel better about where I live. I have truly lovely, friendly people right next to me”

– Beth, East Ringwood

| Willetton Neighbours Group (WA)

When Willetton (WA) local Caleb, his wife and baby made a doorknock to neighbours to hand deliver invitations to his first neighbour event, he was not sure how he would be received. He need not have worried as his friendly approach encouraged more than 40 people to join the gathering over the course of a few hours!

Food was plentiful, with everyone contributing, an outdoor fire warmed up the space and Caleb's perfect backyard set up made sure there was plenty of room to mingle. People from all walks of life, a diverse range of cultures and abilities came along too. Caleb says the group talked about another gathering in the lead up to Christmas so his neighbour group is off to a great start.

Our people

Board members



Irene Oppen | BA MSWAP – President

Irene is a passionate advocate, project manager, change manager, manager of social and multicultural services, capacity builder, trainer, community development worker, researcher and mediator. She is a consultant to the not-for-profit sector and government (Oppportunity Consulting) and has over 30 years experience in managing services and projects. Irene is passionate about re-creating the benefits of connected neighbourhoods across Australia. Irene is the National Manager of Neighbourhood Connect Inc as well as a Connector for the Green Knoll Neighbourhood Connect Group in Melbourne.

Contact: Irene@NeighbourhoodConnect.org.au



Alexis Garnaut-Miller | Vice President

Alexis brings over 30 years experience in HR, Training and Coaching alongside various business projects (owned health centres and retreats in UK & Australia) and is currently launching a men’s mental health project “Be Ballsy: Every Bloke’s Call To Greatness” to support and inspire Australian men. She also runs “Garden of Eden Growers” which is an online gardening school and local veggie box network.

Alexis has a long-term personal commitment to volunteering as a social responsibility, sharing her skills with voluntary organisations. Roles have included committee and Chair roles for YWCA Melbourne and YWCA London; internet marketing mentor for The Prince’s Trust London. “Service” is an important part of her Buddhist practice.



Sanja Vitomirov | Secretary

Sanja is a committed change manager with a passion for enabling individuals and communities to recognise and embrace opportunities to improve themselves and their environment. With nearly two decades in the not-for-profit sector, Sanja has expansive knowledge of the complex needs of our communities.

Having worked in many roles within community services, ranging from staff and case management to project management and organisational change management, she brings her varied skill set to the role of Secretary within Neighbourhood Connect.



Joshua Parrott | ADCSA AMICDA – Treasurer

With experience at a number of wealth management firms in Melbourne, Josh brings expertise in finance and wealth management. Josh is RG146 qualified and is currently furthering his education in the areas of finance and accounting. Josh has worked with Neighbourhood Connect for over three years and established a neighbourhood group in his local suburb of Highton. He is passionate about community and enjoys assisting Neighbourhood Connect in a financial and practical capacity.

We wish to thank board members Somaieh Ebrahimi, Allie Hilmer and Christine Welsh who each resigned due to personal reasons early in the financial year.

National Project Team

“Thank you for all my experiences with Neighbourhood Connect and for letting me be a part of such a great organisation, and for being my referee. My experiences with Neighbourhood Connect really helped me to realise what sort of career I would like to pursue and to secure my new job. I would absolutely recommend getting involved, the experience has honestly been invaluable.”

-Sam Grounds, former Grants Researcher and Writer

Our organisation is voluntarily run, so we rely on a dedicated group of people from all around Australia to support our growth. A big thanks to these people who supported us in the last 12 months.

Irene Oppen
National Manager, Facilitator
and Mentor

Maureen Maher
Communications Manager, WA
Coordinator, Facilitator and Mentor

Pallavi Mathur
Promotion Team

Alieca Tam
Desktop publishing

Grace Villarino
Website Design and support

Lauren Jenkinson
Funding Research Team

Sean Egan
Volunteer Recruitment
Coordinator

Matt Kuter
Chief IT Problem Solver

Shenhav Nave
Funding Research Team
Volunteer interviewing

Sushma Hegde
Team Admin Coordinator

Pro Bono Support

We are very grateful for the support provided from the following organisations:



Australian
National University

Our Finances

Treasurer's Report

Neighbourhood Connect has continued to support people to create supportive neighbourhoods.

At the start of the financial year Neighbourhood Connect had \$23,815 at hand. While the Statement of Financial Position and Statement of Comprehensive Income show that the organisation ran at a deficit of \$11,498, these funds were expended from grants which were carried over into this financial year (FY22) and Neighbourhood Connect still has sufficient cash flow to sustain its fixed operating costs. At the end of the financial year, the bank balance was \$12,316, a healthy amount for a small non profit organisation.

Neighbourhood Connect is still in a position to meet all its financial obligations and does not have any additional insolvency risk following this year's performance.

The Board is hopeful that we will secure the resources necessary to fully fund our operations and that we can continue to see the benefits of our Let's Get Neighbourly program.



Joshua Parrott
ADCSA AMICDA
Treasurer

As President of Neighbourhood Connect, Irene Oppen declares that in my opinion:

- there are reasonable grounds to believe that the registered entity can pay all of its debts, as and when they become due and payable; and
- the financial statements and notes satisfy the requirements of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012;
- the financial statements and notes fairly present the registered entity's financial position as at 30 June 2021 and its performance for the year ended on that date.

Signed in accordance with subsection 60.15(2) of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Regulation 2013.



Irene Oppen
BA MSWAP
President

Dated this 14th day of September 2022

Financial Reports

Neighbourhood Connect Inc. is incorporated in Victoria (A0104326V) and is an Australian Registered Business (ARBN 629 671 389) and an ACNC approved Charity (ABN 61477565710)

Statement of Comprehensive Income

Income		2021 - 2022 \$	2020 - 2021 \$
Grants	City of Mandurah	-	3,300
	City of Fremantle	-	3,000
	City of Hume	-	4,990
	City of Maroondah	-	4,990
	City of Port Phillip	-	9,000
	Vic Health - Reimagining Health	-	10,000
	City of Canning	6,600	10,000
	Department of Communities WA	7,020	10,000
Contracted Services	City of Casey	7,500	7,500
	City of Maroondah	15,000	8,000
	City of Warrnambool	3,500	3,000
	Williamstown Community and Education Centre	-	5,000
	City of Mandurah	975	200
Fundraising / Donations		475	120
Bank Interest		7	21
Other income		-	330
TOTAL INCOME		41,077	59,451

Financial Reports cont.

Statement of Comprehensive Income

Expenses	2021 - 2022 \$	2020 - 2021 \$
Program Delivery Fees	43,886	40,822
Program Delivery – Other Expenses	1,282	649
Research/Evaluation	6,179	-
Social Media*	50	149
IT & Supplies	231	231
Memberships	225	161
Insurance	623	750
Evaluation Incentives	100	-
TOTAL EXPENSES	52,575	42,762
SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	(11,498)	16,689

**Some social media costs have been included in the cost of delivering the project*

Statement of Financial Position

Assets	30 June 2022 \$	30 June 2021 \$
Total cash at bank	12,316	23,815
Total Assets	12,316	23,815
Liabilities	-	-
Total Liabilities	-	-
Total Retained Earnings	12,316	23,815
TOTAL EQUITY	12,316	23,815

Note: Cash balance at 30 June 2020 \$7,125.57

Get involved

Become connected

“Since our first event there’s been more hellos, more sharing, a more friendly attitude. Neighbours are putting out lemons to give away – this didn’t happen before. One neighbour is now regularly checking in on a man in his eighties, just to make sure he’s ok ... Now there’s more connection and more helping one another out, the general feeling on the street is better, it feels friendlier and safer.”

–Marta, Gladys Grove Neighbours group, Croydon, Victoria.



Start connecting in
your neighbourhood
with our support



Share your stories
of neighbourhood
connection with us



Volunteer on our
National Project
Team



Support us with financial
or in-kind resources so
we can expand

 www.neighbourhoodconnect.org.au

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