

# Neighbourhood Circles Project

## PART 1

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**"A space at the heart of our community":**  
Mapping neighbourhood circles and initiatives  
across the greater Adelaide region

The Neighbourhood Circles project is being delivered as part of the Inclusive Neighbourhoods Initiative and aims to strengthen the models for neighbourhoods where everyone has a role to play; where everyone is recognised, respected and included. This project is about exploring, strengthening, amplifying and advocating for current and future neighbourhood initiatives that work to include and look out for all members of its community. Neighbourhoods where all individuals, regardless of circumstance, can experience inclusion and belonging. The following document highlights the variety of ways that different neighbourhood circles can form and take shape in the greater Adelaide region and provides some background to different concepts that can help to support their amplification, inclusivity and sustainability into the future.

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This project is being delivered as part of the Inclusive Neighbourhoods Initiative and funded through grants provided by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Julia Farr MS McLeod Benevolent Fund.

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# Neighbourhood Circles project

According to an Australia Talks National Survey roughly one in three Australians or only 59% knew their neighbours in 2020. When COVID-19 lockdowns struck, however, people connected like never before, offering help to neighbours and rallying to support their local shops and services. Virtual platforms were used to help connect people together. COVID-19 showed that we want to be more than individuals, we want to be good neighbours and a part of our local community<sup>ii</sup>. However, the pandemic also highlighted growing weaknesses in our neighbourhoods as places of inclusion and belonging. The death of Ann-Marie Smith in 2020 further highlighted the risks for vulnerable people to be victims of isolation in their own home<sup>iii</sup>.

A report conducted by the Australian Psychological Society found that one in four Australians identify as feeling lonely<sup>iv</sup>. Loneliness has demonstrated adverse effects on people's health and well-being and has become a growing global concern<sup>v</sup>. Over 600,000 Australians have identified that they don't leave the home as often as they like, with many feeling trapped and unable to leave<sup>vi</sup>. In enhancing social inclusion and a sense of belonging, much research has shown that "the neighbourhood still matters"<sup>vii</sup>. Be they large or small, funded or unfunded, close or far, neighbourhood led initiatives provide an important avenue for everyday community members to safeguard one another. Due to the important role our neighbourhoods play to counteract loneliness and isolation we wished to explore the following questions:



- **What's out there? What neighbourhood initiatives exist?**
- **How did they come about? Why or for what reason did they form?**
- **What are their habits? What is going on within these groups that engenders a sense of belonging?**
- **How might they be replicated elsewhere? What are the levels of neighbourhood engagement?**
- **What are the barriers that prevent people from participating?**
- **What challenges do these initiatives face for the future?**

Due to the breadth and diversity of initiatives across the greater Adelaide region this document cannot provide an exhaustive list of all the different groups that are out there. Rather a snapshot of the many different types of initiatives that exist and some case study examples will be provided to give an idea as to the kinds of neighbourhood circles that form, as well as what can be done to support their **replicability, sustainability, inclusivity** and **growth** into the future. Most importantly, this document provides some background behind the diversity of initiatives that exist and work to bring people together.

Despite the role that many neighbourhood initiatives play to bring people together, there are still many logistical, cultural and structural barriers that prevent many of our neighbours and more vulnerable community members from participating regularly. By highlighting the *what, why* and *how* behind many existing initiatives we also hope to shine a light on some of the barriers that have and continue to prevent people from meaningfully participating in them. By better understanding the **links** and **conditions** that engender the growth of neighbourhood initiatives we hope to support not only their sustainability, but also their accessibility, inclusivity and replicability into the future.

# Why neighbourhood 'circles'?

For the Neighbourhood Circles Project, a Circles of Support methodology at a neighbourhood level was applied. Circles of Support methodology is about inviting people who hold a freely given relationship into a vulnerable person's life and also assisting people who are vulnerable to take up valued roles within other people's friendships, groups, and neighbourhood associations. Recognising the role that everyone in our neighbourhoods can play to look out for and include one another is central to this Project's purpose. Despite their differences, what neighbourhood initiatives also have in common with this methodology is that they also do not operate in isolation but as networks, which the nature of *circles* reflect. Circles can overlap or grow, they can reflect who is 'in' and who is 'out'. The variety of examples listed in this document demonstrate how different groups of people have experienced a sense of recognition, respect, and inclusion through varying neighbourhood circles. Some virtual spaces have also created a new way of belonging to the local neighbourhood by acting as facilitators for relationships to form or people to come together. Much like circles that exist in the physical realm these do not exist in isolation from one another but often overlap, grow, shrink, include and exclude. These online circles too require a mention.

Based on the nature of their formation and functioning we have therefore grouped **in-person neighbourhood initiatives** into **6 broad circles** of design. These include:

- **Project or problem based groups.**
- **Small fee or free interest groups.**
- **Postcode based groups.**
- **Local neighbourhood associations.**
- **Social business enterprises; and**
- **Everyday acts of kindness.**



We have grouped **online neighbourhood spaces** into **3 broad circles** of design. These include:

- **Online communities.**
- **Online facilitators; and**
- **Local neighbourhood platforms.**

While listed separately, overlaps between circles can and do occur. It is in listing the different types of neighbourhood circles that exist across South Australia's communities where this document begins. This listing will be followed by an exploration into how initiatives are formed and the habits that engender a sense of belonging to them. Factors explaining their foundations as key to their replicability will also be discussed, which also highlights the challenges and barriers that inhibit their inclusivity and accessibility moving forward. This report concludes with case study examples of some existing neighbourhood initiatives, a list of helpful links and resources, as well as further explanation as to how this information was collected and collated.

# What's out there?

## 'Types' of local neighbourhood circles

There are a variety of different types of neighbourhood circles and characteristics. Whatever way the neighbourhood circles form, they all hold something in common, they all work to enhance people's sense of belonging to their local neighbourhood in some way. While they do not exist on a hierarchy there are some that may work better than others depending on the circumstance. Some ways of operating may also prove more sustainable

for some groups compared to others, while others act as umbrella groups for other smaller initiatives to branch off and form. Some circles find themselves rooted in a geographically bounded place, while others rely on the people who come together rather than the place itself. What they all have in common, however, is that all act as versions of neighbourhood circles in their own right and work in their own way to support their neighbourhood and its members.



## Local neighbourhood associations

With a focus on enhancing local neighbourhood democracy and citizenship there are a variety of neighbourhood associations that work to strengthen the capacity of its local citizenry. These types of circles work with the aim to enhance aspects of "formal participation"<sup>viii</sup>, such as citizen democracy and leadership. By taking greater ownership over their local community, everyday community members develop a sense of belonging that is often tied to their sense of civic responsibility to the neighbourhood. A number of different roles are embedded in improving both the quality, safety and livability of neighbourhoods through its members taking a lead role in its governance. These circles sometimes also act as a starting point for other initiatives to branch off and initiate other opportunities for "informal participation"<sup>ix</sup>, either through the establishment of other projects and groups, the provision of grants and funding, or by offering volunteer opportunities for its neighbourhood residents. Often, through playing an important role in raising concerns and liaising with council, this circle can also advocate for the interests

of the local community and its residents or act as an umbrella for important governance matters or social/project-based groups.

**Examples:** 5049 Coastal Community Association; Imagine Uraidla; Gumeracha Main Street Project; Campbelltown Community; Aldinga Bay Residents Association; Colonel Light Gardens Residents Association; Echunga Community Association



McConnell Reserve Neighbour Day picnic hosted by the 5049 Coastal Community Association

## Small fee or free interest groups

Small fee or free interest groups are perhaps the largest example of a circle that brings people together, of which the multiplicity that exist cannot be fully listed here. Often groups that bring people together based on a shared interest creates spaces for like-minded individuals to meet. The shared interest, hobby or passion creates a catalyst for relationships to form and for people to feel a sense of belonging to a community of people. Space for comradery, ownership and responsibility for all members is created, in which the routine act of coming together enables opportunities for people to be missed when not there. While not all groups are based in a local neighbourhood some are sustained by people who live in a particular geographic area. People will often

seek out the interest group that is closest to them or the one that fits most easily into their routine. This is not always the case, however, and so complicates the role of such interest groups in our neighbourhoods. While interest groups play a significant role in fostering welcome and belonging, some involve bringing people from 'all over' and so do not rely on people who live in the same neighbourhood. The multiplicity behind the reasons people come together and where they all come from therefore complicates the role they play in strengthening inclusive neighbourhoods.

**Examples:** One Voice Kingston Park; Cold Nips Perth; parkrun; Book Clubs; Church Groups; Footy clubs; Lawn bowls; Country Women's Association; Lions Clubs.

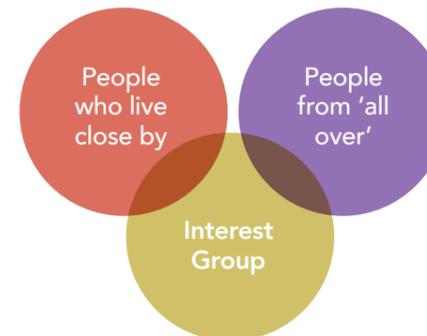


Photo of One Voice Kingston Park Choir by Mike Burton, courtesy of Creativity Australia

## Social business enterprises

What makes these initiatives different from a typical private enterprise or business is the social ethos from which they operate. Either through their values and vision, their community-oriented approach, or their aims to bring people within neighbourhoods together, several business enterprises go above and beyond the objectives of a business whose primary aim rests in making a profit. Many of these social business enterprises facilitate local workshops at low or no cost that invite neighbours to participate, share their skills, and take an active role in their facilitation. Spaces are provided for members of the community to come together, create, sell hand-made or hand sourced items, as well as be a part of the

enterprise itself. Personal touches, such as a space for regulars to store their mugs or involving customers in yearly award ceremonies helps engender a sense of ownership and belonging by the people within the local community to the enterprise. It is through their presence as a social business enterprise that supports this circle's sustainability and reliability as a place of neighbourhood belonging.

**Examples:** *The Pear - Neighbourhood Node; ANMS Community Garden; Joy of Flora; Willunga Farmers Market (WFM); The Joinery; The Heart of Semaphore; Hope's Café; Sparkke at the Whitmore; Chatty Café Scheme.*

This hand sewn tapestry of Port Adelaide is a weekly project at the café by members of the community. The Heart of Semaphore provides a space for local artists to showcase their work, for social groups to meet, low-cost workshops to be hosted by small independent businesses, and yearly sidewalk street parties to thrive.

**"It's not really about the coffee...it's more the company"**  
- Café regular, the Pear



The Pear staff legends Tahnee and Annemijn



Photo of sewing group from the Heart of Semaphore, Facebook



Members of the Pear knitting group

With a café regulars' mug shelf, a birthday wall, pay it forward scheme, free or low-cost workshops and social groups hosted by café neighbours, street festivals, as well as a table where various neighbours can sell their handmade goods, the Pear is more than just a business. Created by the local community, for the local community, the Pear has become a source of belonging, love, and support for residents of the Alberton neighbourhood and beyond.



Volunteer from the Willunga Farmers Market, Facebook

Some farmers markets also play an important social role for people in the community. During the COVID-19 pandemic volunteer roles at the Willunga Farmers Market (WFM) provided opportunities to keep people connected to their community. Every year the WFM provides a scholarship to a new local enterprise, hosts a "Wilmark award" (named after rooster mascot 'Sir Wilmark') for stall holders to vote for their favourite customer, as well as a quarterly social BBQ for stallholders to connect with one another.

## Project or problem based groups

One of the strongest and most prevalent examples of neighbourhood initiatives centre around particular projects or even problems that have been identified within the community. This type of circle can often branch off into several other 'sub-circles', in which the focus becomes more refined. Several projects that bring local neighbourhoods together often centre around goals of sustainability and the environment, in which efforts to care for nature work in tandem with bringing people together. Often the ethos of looking out for our local neighbourhoods and the people within them works synonymously with such projects and so they act as natural companions. Some place-

making projects involve the process of people and neighbourhoods making or creating a place or space together, which acts as the catalyst for groups to come together and for relationships between people to form as a notable by-product of the groups initial purpose<sup>x</sup>. It is in working towards a shared goal, project, aim or initiative that often provides the buy-in to bring people in the neighbourhood together and encourage them to bond over a shared enterprise. While people might initially come for the project, it is often the relationships that form in the project-based circles that prompts their decision to come back. *Examples of such initiatives are listed below.*

**"I often say we're not growing food, we're growing community, because a lot of people feel isolated"** - Rosanne, Joe's Connected Garden

### Subgroups or projects



#### Planting Trees and Biodiversity Projects

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Friends of Parks SA        | e.g. Friends of...Willunga Basin, Aldinga Scrub, Pine Gully, Belair National Park                  |
| McLaren Vale Biodiversity  |  |
| Sustainable Communities SA | e.g. Adopt a Spot Scheme, One Planet Market, Waste free Westies, Boomerang Bags, etc.              |
| Repair Cafes               | e.g. Adelaide Repair Café, Unley Repair Café, Repair Café Campbelltown, Payneham Repair Café, etc. |

#### Place-Making Projects

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Community Gardens and Street gardens | e.g. Henley, North Brighton, Fern Avenue, Glenelg North, Ovingham Greening, Rosetta Street Greenies, Wadlyu Yarta, Woodville Greening etc. |
| Joe's Connected Garden               |  |
| Community Sheds                      | e.g. The Red Shed, Rosefield Community Shed, Mount Barker Community Shed, Mt. Pleasant, etc.   |

#### Swaps and community based exchanges

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Food/ Plant and Produce Swaps | e.g. Seacliff Produce Swap, Henley Beach, West End Foodies, Essential Edibles Produce Swap             |
| Adelaide LETS                 |  |
| The Buy Nothing Project       | e.g. Clarence Park/Mitcham, Adelaide City/North Adelaide, Noarlunga/Seaford etc.                       |
| Knitting 4 Charities          | e.g. Knit and Natter Campbelltown, Rostrevor, Tea Tree Gully/St. Agnes, Elizabeth, Port Broughton etc. |

**"More grows in a garden than a gardener grows"**

## Postcode based neighbourhood circles



Photo of the original Little Library and its newly added Children's Library courtesy of Jody from the Little Library on Lloyd Street. Both Little Library's are made from repurposed mini fridges.

Postcode based groups share many commonalities to other circles, however they rely on a specific postcode, street or place that is local. Such initiatives often bring together neighbours from

near and far, yet rely on a set location or suburb that acts as the host. Open Garage exists in the private household of a family who open their garage door once a month to invite neighbours to share in their private space. Joe's Connected Garden is comprised of 5 neighbours' backyards who connected their garden spaces in order to create one super garden that is shared among the wider community. Residents of Ian Street in Morphett Vale do not exist as an official group or body, yet is made up of a key collection of people who look out for each other, run street parties, and act as neighbours always willing to give a helping hand. While many of the postcode based groups

merge across different circles, what aids in their success is how they help to facilitate direct neighbour to neighbour contact. Even if it just a little library placed on one's front yard or a large open garage, postcode based circles help act as the ice breakers or conversation starters; they provide opportunities for neighbours to engage with each other and be seen. Such circles can create important opportunities for neighbourhood safeguarding, in which they help to facilitate the growth of relationships and meaningful engagement between neighbours.

**Examples:** Ian Street residents; Open Garage; Buy Nothing Project; The Little Library on Lloyd Street; Joe's Connected Garden.

## Everyday acts of kindness

The last type of neighbourhood circle is not a group at all, but a composition of all the everyday and seemingly innocuous acts of kindness individuals demonstrate to each other. While some personal acts of kindness may seem small in comparison to larger endeavours, they play an important role in bringing people together and setting the norms for inclusive neighbourhoods. Research has shown that there is a notable strength in everyday social interactions<sup>[i]</sup> and what can be referred to as "weak social ties"<sup>[ii]</sup>. Weak ties are defined as "everyday loose contacts or "nodding relationships"<sup>[i]</sup> within one's neighbourhood. While sometimes minimal in their interactions, having a diversity of 'nodding relationships' between community members can provide new sources of information, facilitate greater access to resources, foster wellbeing, and provide "a feeling of home, practical, and social support"<sup>[iv]</sup>. During COVID-19 small acts of kindness earned greater recognition, in which trends like #kindnesspandemic grew across social media. People in neighbourhoods decorated their windows with rainbows and teddy bears to brighten neighbours' spirits. During the pandemic the Willunga Country Women's Association (CWA) helped link members of the evening branch to some of their more vulnerable members as a way to

provide support. CWA member Allie spoke of the relationship that she built through this exchange and how she has now "made a new friend out of COVID". While recognition for everyday acts of kindness rose during COVID-19 their importance needs to be acknowledged moving forward. Acts like rallying to a neighbour's aid when their pet is lost or quietly fixing their garbage bin when they notice it broken works to build relationships and trust within neighbourhoods. *Examples:* #kindnesspandemic; 'bin-fairies'; lost pet heroes; Plant Drop S.A; 1000 Hearts.



Photo of plant from Plant Drop S.A, Facebook

[i] Huizinga, RP & van Hoven, B 2018, 'Everyday geographies of belonging: Syrian refugee experiences in the Northern Netherlands', *Geoforum*, vol. 96, pp. 309-17

[ii] Kohlbacher, J, Reeger, U & Schnell, P. 2015. 'Place Attachment and Social Ties - Migrants and Natives in Three Urban Settings in Vienna', *Popul. Space Place*, vol. 21, no. 5, p. 448

[iii] Ibid. p. 448

[iv] Ibid. p. 449



## Online neighbourhood spaces

While COVID-19 saw an increase in virtual platforms being used to connect people and places together, spaces of online connection had already been playing an important role in bringing people in neighbourhoods together. There are multiple ways that spaces of the online create their own virtual communities, while also facilitating face-to-face connections between them.

Rather than existing in isolation, several of these platforms provide multiple avenues to enhance people's sense of belonging to a group and strengthen neighbourhood connectedness.

There is a balance to be maintained with the online circles, in which an increased dependence on the online world can inadvertently enhance the segregation of individuals away from valuable in-person contact. Working with the physical world, however, online circles can help create bridges to connect people and places together and facilitate stronger relationships within local neighbourhoods.

## Online communities

Online communities are those that provide social connection purely within the online space, such as Facebook Groups based on interest, local noticeboards, and online communicators. These groups and networks facilitate the sharing of ideas and dialogue primarily across the online space. While there is no cost associated with joining, users are typically required to be online members and the space is monitored by administrators. The online tool in this instance is the community and while inclusivity is not always active it can contribute to creating a sense of presence and belonging. While the majority of online circles exist purely as discussion forums they can also act as facilitators to connect people together or promote in-person contact, such as through neighbours sharing produce or notices shared about events in the local neighbourhood. Some neighbourhood platforms also exist as online communities because they notify members of things happening in the local neighbourhood, but do not facilitate in-person engagement. *Examples: Southern Suburbs Community Noticeboard and Chat, McLaren Vale Region Community Forum, Adelaide #kindnesspandemic, Waste Free Westies, Citizen Network, Centre for Welfare Reform.*

## Online facilitators

Online facilitators are those that exist in the online space, yet act to facilitate greater person to person interaction, such as networking platforms or Facebook Groups that organise social events and gatherings. These groups facilitate the sharing of dialogue across the online space with the intention of encouraging greater social interaction or active engagement among its members. While there is no cost typically associated with joining such groups, users are usually required to be online members or even paid members of a particular group or club, and the space is monitored by administrators. The online tool in this instance can be used to support different groups to engage with other members of their neighbourhood or community by increasing their visibility and exposure, highlighting upcoming events, facilitating gatherings or even providing support in times of need. Some online facilitating groups can fall into the realm of an online community as they can provide information, however, do not stimulate a greater level of in-person engagement. Some neighbourhood pages also work as facilitators when supporting the sharing of goods or needs of local neighbours that stimulates in-person interaction. *Examples: Neighbours helping Neighbours SA, 1000 Hearts, NextDoor, Adelaide-Dive Buddies, The Neighbourhood Care Project group, the Buy Nothing Project, Plant Drop S.A, etc.*

## Neighbourhood platforms

Neighbourhood platforms are those that exist in the online space, however they work to represent a particular geographic area, suburb or boundary and facilitate dialogue and interactions between those who live within them. These groups and networks facilitate the sharing of ideas and dialogue across the online space that relates to matters in their local neighbourhood with the intention of both engaging and informing members of the locality towards things happening in the area, future events, and the swapping of goods and/or services. While there is no cost usually associated with joining, users are typically required to live within a particular suburb or geographic boundary before they are permitted entry and the space is monitored by administrators. The online tool in this instance can be used to support the dialogue or engagement of people who share in a particular locality and as such can act as both an online facilitator and/or online community through its different uses. Some neighbourhood platforms can be used for neighbours to post about items that they are giving away, animals that have gone missing, as well as future local events that can stimulate in-person engagement. Some also fall into the realm of an online community as they can provide useful information to the local community, however, do not stimulate a greater level of in-person interaction. *Examples: Cumberland Park and Surrounds Facebook Group, Barossa Valley Community Chatters, Myponga's Community Group, 5049 Coastal Community Association Facebook etc.*

# Why did they form?

## Crisis leading to moment of self-realisation

Some local neighbourhood initiatives were prompted by a moment of self-reflection. COVID-19 acted as a global example of how many people were prompted to look outward at their own neighbourhoods and communities, as well as inward at their own behaviour and values. Laura from Open Garage talked of the moment she realised her elderly neighbour's wife had passed away and her distress at not knowing she was unwell for so long. The Pear owners Joost and Christie called a community forum together after realising that it took 6 weeks for them to find out that their neighbour Tony had gone to hospital and passed away there. Sometimes it is through those moments of self-realisation that the bright sparks in a neighbourhood are formed. While we should not wait for a time of crisis to change things, it is often such moments that burst the individualistic bubble and gives people the motivation to move outside of their comfort zones for the betterment of their communities.

**"I said to my husband, we should do something... I felt like we can give more"**

## Problem or issue noticed

Similar to moments of self-realisation, many initiatives form from either a problem or issue that was noticed by people in the neighbourhood that require a community of people approach. As seen with project based groups, the coming together of people to solve a particular problem or issue often creates a strong motivating factor that helps give a social bridge or catalyst for people to band together, take ownership and exhibit neighbourhood leadership. Biodiversity McLaren Vale grew from a discussion between two neighbours who were troubled by the feral vegetation that was growing in the Willunga basin. Imagine Uraidla and the Gumeracha Main Street Project grew from concerned residents who wanted to either remove power lines from the main street or revitalise their shrinking townships and their businesses. Many such groups are driven by a passion for sustainability and supporting the welfare of their local environment or neighbourhood, which often works in tandem with bringing communities of local people together.

**"Had to gather all the troops"**

## Servicing gaps or neighbourhood needs

Many initiatives also grew and have been sustained by members of a local neighbourhood in order to meet the gaps of existing services. Many 'Friends of...' groups are sustained by dedicated volunteers who come together to maintain local vegetation in National Parks. The Willunga Farmers Market was the brainchild of local community members who wanted to support both local producers, growers and consumers to sell and access fresh produce in the area. Many old streets in the hills or outside of the Adelaide CBD grew a strong sense of neighbourliness and desire to look out for each other due to their isolation and limited-service availability, communication or public transport. Many such initiatives give reasons for everyday members of a community to come together to sustain and support people and places locally. A fundamental core to these kinds of initiatives beginning is through having an everyday awareness towards who lives in a neighbourhood and what its needs may be. Familiarity to the fundamental rhythms of a neighbourhood, who lives there and what they need helps to shape thriving and sustainable initiatives into the future.

**"Having awareness is a fundamental building block. It's starting at the start"**

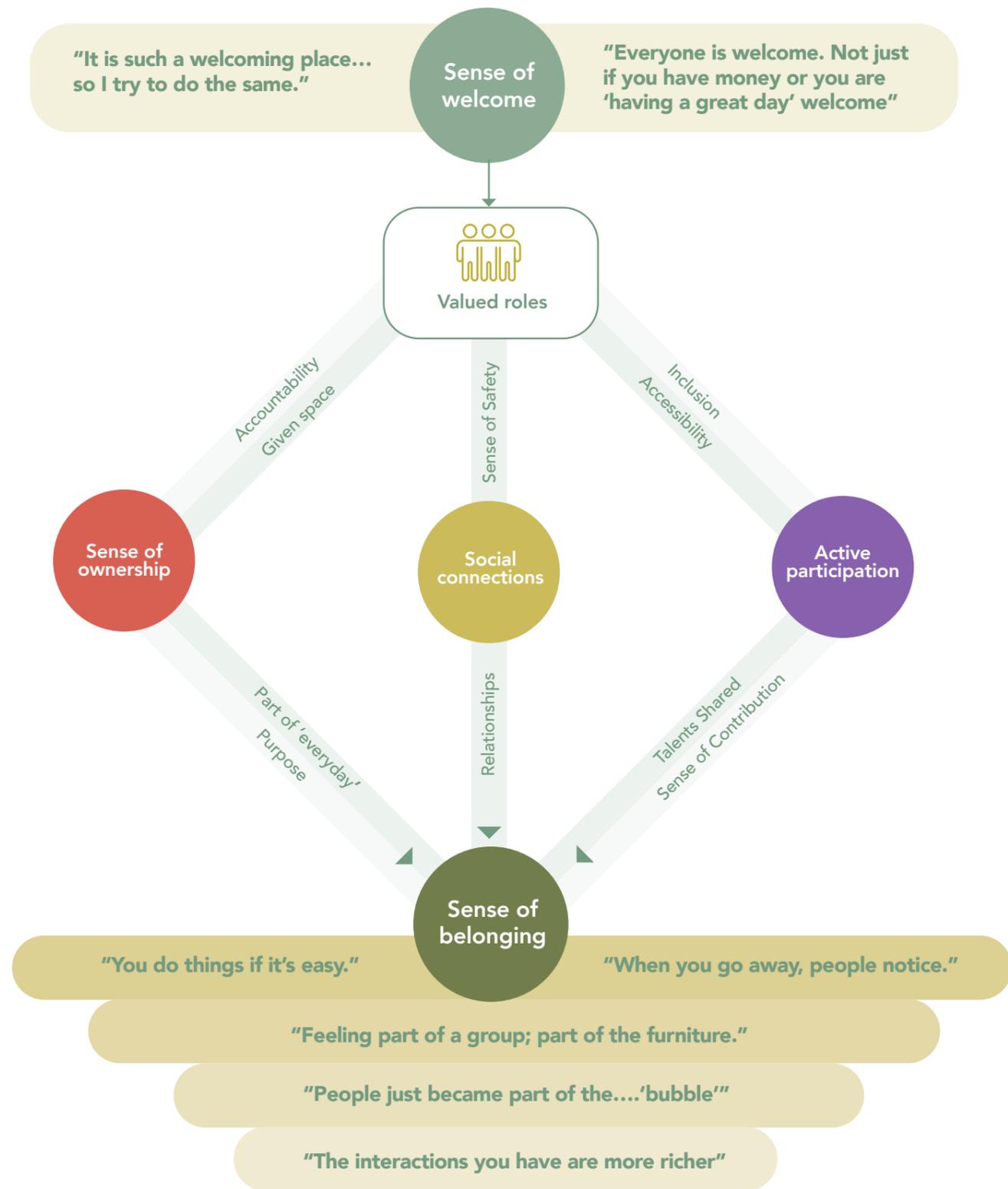
## Shared interest or passion

Many initiatives that involve a social aspect were originally created based on a desire for people to share in a particular interest or passion. Several initiatives grew beyond being purely interest based to include all members of a broader community. While parkrun began as a timed 5km race for running enthusiasts, it now runs on the ethos of providing a safe, inclusive and community-oriented space for people from all backgrounds to come together. One Voice Kingston Park operates as a more inclusive way for all singing enthusiasts to share in their passion for music, regardless of skill-level. Many Knit and Natter groups operate on the shared desire to contribute free knitted items to those in need. Beyond purely meeting the needs of people's interests and passions, such spaces grow to include all members of a community and spread a message of welcome and belonging.

**"It works because I think people are just wanting that"**

# What are the habits?

What's going on that creates a sense of belonging?



A sense of belonging means being missed when you are not there.

# Belonging

"People understand and look out for you. They've got your back"

Regardless of the reason why people first create or come along to a neighbourhood circle, it is what keeps them coming back that is significant. Starting with a genuine feeling of welcome, the move to feeling a sense of belonging is often through an acquisition of **valued roles**. This is either through being in positions that allow them the chance to contribute their knowledge, skills and talents or through giving them their own physical space or place of belonging. In a big or small way, people are engendered to feel a sense of responsibility or ownership to a space or group of people, in which they feel accountable to something beyond themselves. Sometimes it is merely through feeling recognised or remembered through the relationships that are formed or the space given to them that helps generate a feeling that they belong. The reduction of spatial barriers and improved accessibility through links and supportive relationships help people to become more easily involved and allows the initiative to become part of their everyday routine. Participation becomes something that can be easily sustained across busy schedules, limited resources, and time constraints. It is in providing a space for people to be present and to feel like they have a role to play that engenders a sense of belonging to the place and its people. Either through providing a role or a title, one's own garden bed, or even just a place to hang their personal coffee mug, these initiatives give people space to be recognised, remembered and included. Another key factor that helps shift a sense of welcome to a deeper sense of belonging is through the long-term process of trust and relationship building. Many of the groups and places where belonging is deeply embedded have been developed over many years and many shared experiences. One member at the Pear spoke about the café as a space akin to feeling a sense of *home*, in which, like the markings on a wall that tells her child's growth over the years, this has become a place where "you watch people grow up".

"You know the theme song from Cheers? A place where everyone knows your name? Well on one level it is"

# Un-belonging

"Either you are seen as a curiosity or an 'oh god I hope they don't join' as a liability"

During conversations of belonging it is also important to recognise the occurrence or presence of people's feelings of unbelonging. For those who have been increasingly marginalised or rejected by society, experiences of unbelonging can have long-lasting consequences on people's ability to develop trust or confidence in new things or people into the future. Having the confidence to "give things a go" or try something new becomes harder for those who have increased experiences of othering or rejection. People with heightened vulnerabilities can face increased discrimination and devaluation from society, in which they are often labelled as menaces, drains, liabilities or burdens. Often people who are most marginalised in society are labelled by their disability, mental illness or vulnerability rather than having their strengths and contributions recognised. Recognising that people's ability to put themselves 'out there' requires a higher level of resilience, and planning for those with heightened vulnerabilities is also important in order to not negatively impact (even if unintentionally) their confidence further by rejecting or criticising their efforts. Acknowledging the gifts and talents that all people in our community can provide is critical for neighbourhood circles to be fully inclusive and ensure that everyone feels a sense of inclusion and belonging. People are more than what society labels them to be. We need to recognise that every individual is unique and has something that they can contribute to their community in their own way.

"You can be in a group, but what is different is them knowing who you are and that you are a part of it."

# Big “little” roles

## Family roles, neighbourhood roles, friend roles

When we talk about valued roles we don't just include the seemingly big roles, such as what comes with official titles or positions. What can contribute to a deep sense of belonging and inclusion on a local level are what are quite often thought of as the seemingly everyday acts of being a good neighbour, thoughtful friend, or conscientious family member. In little ways such roles can have a big impact. As mentioned before there are many creative ways that someone in a neighbourhood can create change and bring people together. Yet even gestures such as offering to water a neighbour's plant while away, or baking biscuits when they are unwell, can contribute to deepening the relationships between people on a level that can often lead to longer and more trusting relationships. It is often through the little actions taken by an individual that have the biggest impact.

## Frequent and regular - being 'in'

Many of those embedded in their neighbourhoods, groups, and various initiatives talk of the routine or frequency with which they attend. Regular attendees of the Willunga Farmers Market talk of how it has become part of their “Saturday morning ritual”. Many times the “ritualisation” or regularity of people's presence in various spaces, places and initiatives is what leads to their own recognisability and memorability. If belonging means “being missed when you are not there” then a frequency of attendance is essential. Regular and frequent attendance is what increases a person's visibility to other members of the community. Either it be through walking their dog the same time every evening, getting coffee at the same place each week or participating in the same singing group every week or month. Whatever it might be, visibility relies on a level of repetition and time. Having regularity and a sense of purpose is what can then help move people from being in the role of witness to their community to that of active member.

## Heart of roles - contribution

Roles often carry with them a sense of identity, purpose, responsibility, and expectation. As highlighted by one member of a community it is the “sense of giving to community” that in itself also contributes to a sense of belonging to it. Many leaders and members of neighbourhood circles talk of the “joy of giving” to their neighbourhood that builds on their sense of belonging. The joy of giving does not always come from an expectation to receive like for like or to get something in return, but is based on a sense of ownership to a place that is built through giving back to it and its people. Similar to what is seen in place-making projects it is this sense of giving, building and sharing responsibility that helps contribute to feeling a sense of being part of or involved in a circle at a deeper level. At the heart of any valued role held in the neighbourhood is this sense of having contributed something to it, be it one's skills, gifts, talents or time.

**“If we start with filling time, all we'll get is activities. If we start with filling roles, then time looks after itself”<sup>xv</sup>**

– Lynda Shevellar

**“There's a stickiness about the place.”**

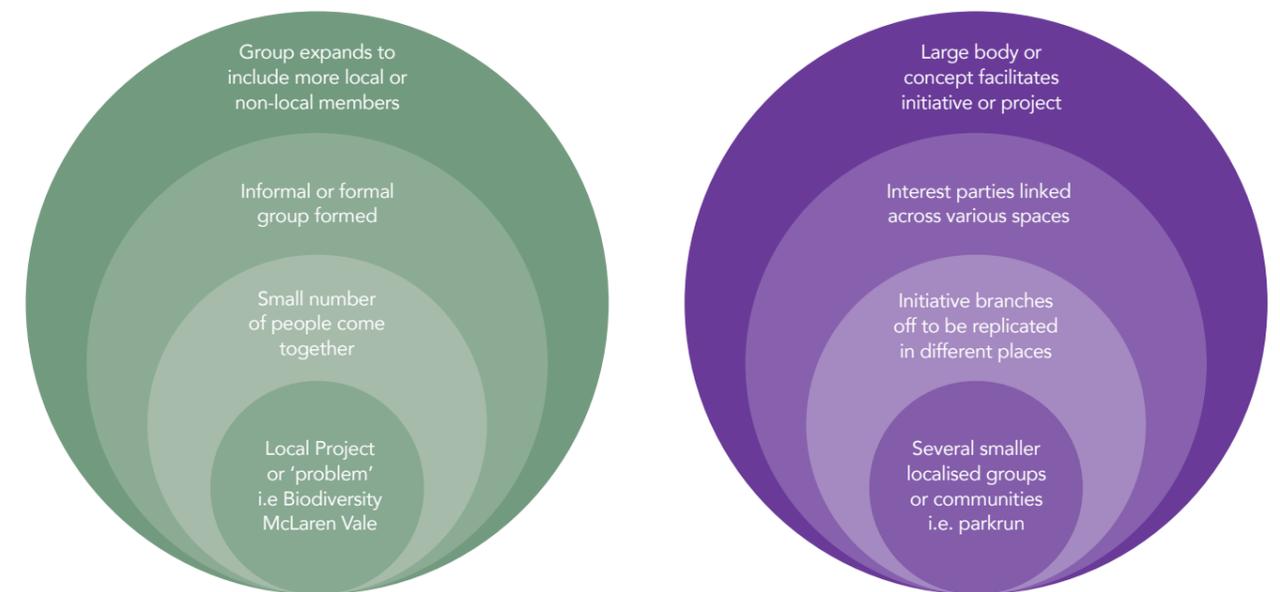
**“It takes time to feel part of a group... Everything you do, leads you somewhere else”**

**“A good place in community is typically one's neighbourhood. That, you can make into a great place”**

**“There are so many ways that people can give back.”**

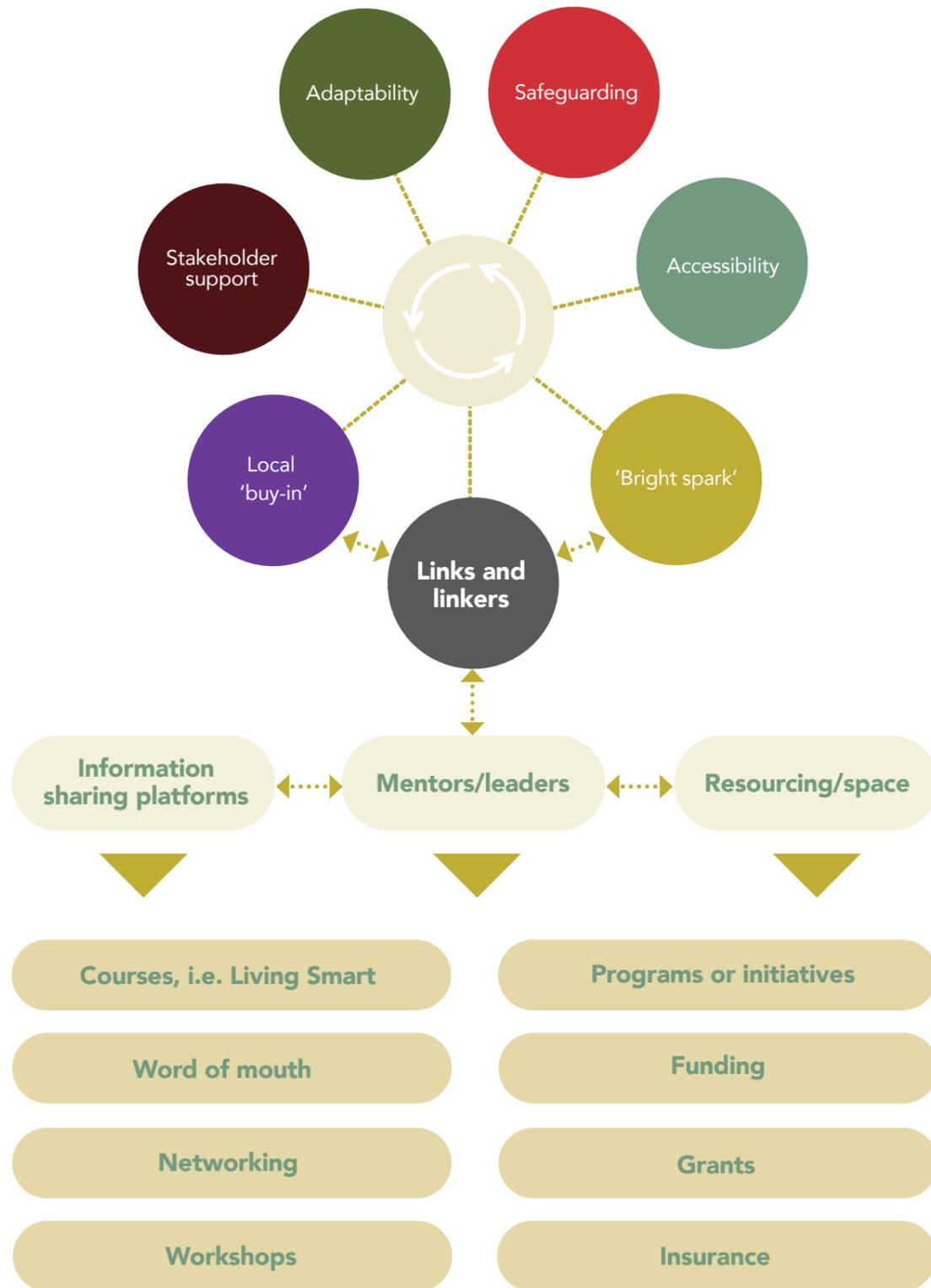
# How did they form?

Some neighbourhood circles are formed at a micro level and grow outward, while others are facilitated by a larger body or concept that grows inward. Both operate on a more local level and often rely on geographic proximity, yet might be formed and facilitated in an opposite direction. Often large bodies that support neighbourhood initiatives, such as parkrun, started small but now exist as something that spans across different geographic areas, spaces, and places. It is often at the grassroots, however, where these circles typically start and finish.



There is no set way that a neighbourhood circle forms. There is not one particular size nor approach that fits all groups. While some initiatives grow and change to either include more members, acquire funding, develop partnerships or formalise, several projects also stay the same and do not have any set objective other than to build relationships among neighbours. Some circles exist purely out of social means, such as a neighbourhood social group (e.g. Open Garage) or ones that come together over shared hobbies and interests (e.g. One Voice). How these groups form is often the key to their replication and sustainability into the future. It is looking at the different ways they have formed that gives clues to how they might be repeated elsewhere.

# How might they be replicated or repeated elsewhere?



Whatever the neighbourhood circle's size or scale there are some elements that play a key role in the foundation of the initiative and its replication, growth, and sustainability. In order for a new or similar initiative to be replicated in like-minded neighbourhoods there are a series of things that should be considered if it is to thrive and become fully inclusive. There are a number of *who's* and *what's* that are involved in the implementation and potential replication of a neighbourhood circle. While this is not an exhaustive list it does touch on a few key factors that were highlighted by a variety of

neighbourhood leaders and members as integral to their formation. What is perhaps most important to highlight here is the role that *links* or *linkers* play in initiating and sustaining neighbourhood initiatives. Many of these links support the how behind a neighbourhood circle's growth and sustainability, which is key to their replication elsewhere. It is often a lack of knowledge or access to these links that can also create the greatest barrier to people's inclusion and active participation. It is the substance of this connection that will support neighbourhood sustainability and inclusivity into the future.

## The how

### Links and linkers

While there are many *bright sparks* that exist, what they often need is the confidence or support to take their good idea and do something with it. In come the linkers. Linkers act as the connectors, the people or programs that help join the dots between great ideas and the how to make it happen. These dots exist in the form of individuals, community groups, council workers and umbrella agencies. How the dots become joined is often the missing link for some initiatives to move from being an idea to a neighbourhood circle. Links or linkers come in many different forms, either through the guise of a mentor or leader, the sharing of information through formal programs or workshops,

like the Living Smart Course<sup>xvi</sup>, or the acquisition of key resources or accessible spaces. The way that linkers become connected to the people or groups behind an idea is through a myriad of ways and exist as a symbiotic relationship rather than a set process. For example, some mentors and leaders can act as the link to further programs and opportunities, while other times it is a program or initiative that links mentors and leaders together. Whatever order they appear it is often through the support of linkers that has helped many of these initiatives get up and running. Linkers act as the how behind the what. Linkers act as the connectors between an idea and an action. Linkers help make things possible.

# The who

## Bright spark/ super connector/ champion/ 'conciierge of the universe'

In every neighbourhood circle there is always one person who acts as the *spark*, someone who is willing to give an idea a go or who acts as "the cruise director" to help lead a group or initiative to get started. A neighbourhood street champion works to share an ethos of empathy, connectedness and safety in a neighbourhood and often acts as the "lead lurker" or main go to person who others trust around them. It is important to acknowledge the role that such everyday leaders play in bringing communities and neighbourhoods together. The idea may be something as large as a community garden or as small as a shared library on their front lawn, yet they all play an important role in getting neighbours to engage with one another and spark the conversation between them. Some of our neighbourhoods' best ideas don't come from large think tanks, councils, or corporations, but from the passion and perspective of an individual who wanted to make things just a little bit better than it was before. How these bright sparks develop the know-how, the confidence, and the skills to make something out of their bright idea, however, is where a community of support comes in. While bright sparks may start with a good idea it is often through the informal and formal support provided by a community of people or linkers that gives them the confidence and ability to move forward.

## Local 'buy-in'

While many strong initiatives started from a good idea it is through the *buy-in* from the local neighbourhood that can either support or hinder their growth. The North Brighton Community Garden was originally planned for South Brighton, however, the local community rejected the proposal. Instead the Garden committee was presented with a vacant tennis court

in North Brighton where the local neighbourhood was more receptive. The Pear and Imagine Uraidla were both founded from a neighbourhood forum, in which members of the local community voiced their desire to make their communities better. Having the local buy in from neighbours themselves helps an initiative to grow and thrive, in which all members feel they have a stake in the game. Providing neighbours a voice, a role, or continued leadership over the process helps to instil a sense of ownership, which acts to safeguard the initiative into the future.

## Support from other stakeholders and partners

While many grassroots led initiatives had humble origins it is sometimes the support of larger bodies, such as local councils, government or 'umbrella' organisations that can provide a level of administrative *safeguarding*. Many neighbourhood circles spoke of the support received from local councils, either through the provision of space, funding, resources, programs, or even insurance. Some small circles, such as the Seacliff Food Swap and Friends of Pine Gully Group, rely on larger bodies to provide insurance coverage for their participants, without which they may face challenges to continue. Many social business enterprises, such as the Joinery and the Pear, receive external funding from partner groups to run their neighbourhood engagement projects. Several initiatives began through access to local funding grants, such as the *Fund My Community* project<sup>1</sup> <sup>xxiii</sup> which provided the necessary start-up capital. Either through the formal support of council and its employees, the presence of a community Mayor at events, or an external partnership that provides formal administrative support, the stakeholder buy-in can help to reduce structural barriers that often prevent good neighbourhood circles from surviving and thriving into the future. Striking the right balance between supporting the neighbourhood circle and not overtaking its sense of ownership, however, is a critical piece of this relationship.

**"All it takes is one person in 40 houses to start it off."**  
- Shani, Living Smart <sup>xxvi</sup>

# The what

## Adaptability to own circumstance

For a neighbourhood circle to be meaningfully replicated and sustained it needs to become something that fits with the people or place where it is created. Neighbourhood circles do not follow a one size fits all approach but rely on people thinking consciously about *how* it will operate and *for whom* it is targeted. When discussing the concept of Open Garage, founder Laura emphasises that "open garage is unique. You can make it yours". The ethos behind Open Garage is about bringing people in a neighbourhood together. What it might look like, where it might take place, and how it will operate will vary depending on the circumstances and what is right for the people involved. Adapting a concept so that it is easy to sustain, fits with the participants' lifestyles, and allows for people to develop a sense of ownership over its creation are important if it is going to be meaningfully replicated and sustained into the future.

## Safeguarding

A key factor related to the sustainability of many initiatives comes from *intentional safeguarding*. Whatever the reason, intentional safeguarding towards the potential risks to that circle's sustainability and its continued efforts towards inclusion is key for its ability to thrive meaningfully into the future. A strong and sustainable group is one that has some level of safeguarding in place to protect its mission and values, its members, or ensure its continuance into the future; whether it is acquiring insurance coverage to protect the group against any legal liability, having an administrator to regulate the group Facebook page, a membership or leadership committee to handle governance concerns, developing a COVID safe plan, undertaking detailed succession planning, or even sharing roles among multiple people to avoid dependence on one person. The role of welcoming, being inclusive and creating a safe space also needs to be a shared responsibility of all members of a group and not just reliant on one person or leader. One of the strongest forms of safeguarding often exists in the creation of positive norms and values for inclusion, to which all members - not just one - become responsible for supporting. Whatever shape they may take, it is always important to consider what the potential risks might be in order to consider the right safeguards to counter them.

## Accessibility and access

One of the most significant factors affecting the active participation of people across many neighbourhood circles relates to its accessibility, either physical, spatial or structural. Spatial access to the place or group can be largely hindered or supported by a group's efforts and awareness towards its own accessibility. Spatial access is often easiest when the initiative is close to where participants live, which reduces barriers caused by distance like travel time, access to public transport, ownership of a car, etc. Many initiatives also use a variety of methods to reach out to many people and inform them of their existence, such as different social media platforms, letter dropping, door knocking, networking, accessible signage, easy read, etc. Some circles charge minimal membership fees or are free to join, which reduces the financial limitations that some people may face. Often it is by examining the potential barriers of access to a neighbourhood circle that the ways they can become more inclusive and accessible can also be addressed. The most inclusive initiatives are the ones in which there is an *intentionality* behind inclusion, in which thought and consideration has been made towards addressing potential barriers.

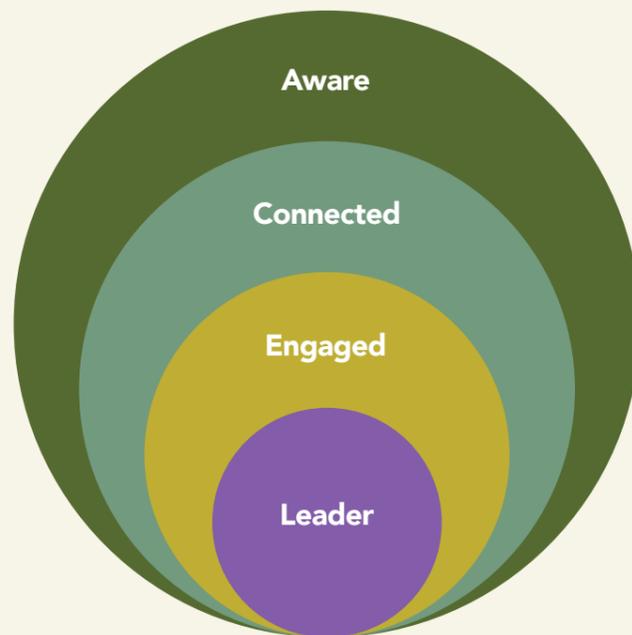
## Values and ethos

Similar to the community buy-in that was mentioned before, the values and ways of working for a neighbourhood initiative and group is integral to its formation and sustainability for the future. More importantly, however, are the values and ethos for inclusion that must be a central feature of the neighbourhood circle and its members if it truly wishes to be a source of welcome and belonging for the future. While many groups are created with a specific project or purpose in mind, being mindful of the circle's own behaviours and values is important if that group is to truly be inclusive into the future. Sometimes the priorities of a community garden to look neat, or a singing group to be pitch perfect, distract from the primary aim of what that circle or initiative was founded to do in the first place. It is often with the goal of bringing people together over a shared passion or interest, regardless if it is done perfectly, that needs to be remembered. People can contribute in a variety of different ways and at varying degrees. Denying a person's inclusion based on pre-conceived notions of how things 'should' be done, how often, or in what manner requires careful consideration. It is therefore embedding the values for inclusion and an ethos that everyone has a right to belong that is central to the sustainability and replicability of neighbourhood circles moving forward.

# Levels of neighbourhood engagement

**“We don't have to imagine that our neighbours are going to be our best friends or that we need to be in each other's pockets, but knowing neighbours, being on smiling... conversational terms, with our neighbours, with everyone in the street, depending how long the street is, is very important to our sense of physical safety, and emotional security. And none of that depends on living in a beautiful place. But it does depend on having made those social connections.”**

- Hugh Mackay, *Belonging Matters* 2015 <sup>xix</sup>



## Aware

Often the answer for building a community built on safeguarding and trust starts with having a level of awareness towards those who live in our neighbourhoods. Being aware does not mean having to take an active role, but merely “recognising patterns of one’s environment”. Not everyone will be actively engaged in their neighbourhood, however by merely paying attention to who is around us another layer of safeguarding can be provided. Emphasising the role of neighbourhood awareness exists as the first, yet most critical and potentially most replicable layer to building inclusive neighbourhoods.

## Connected

In moving beyond awareness, many members of our community act in a role of being connected to their neighbourhoods, but in low-profile and often everyday ways. Going beyond ‘aware’, members of our neighbourhood can initiate other ways to support people in their neighbourhood that does not require a high level of commitment or effort, such as offering to bring in a neighbour’s bin, watering their plants or collecting their mail when they are away. Being connected to one’s neighbourhood helps provide greater bridges between moving neighbourhoods from being disconnected to connected.

## Engaged

Ways that members move from being connected to engaged varies, however a common link is found when a member begins to take on active roles within their neighbourhood or engage in a variety of initiatives, platforms and groups. People like Libby from Gumeracha Street Project who become

the designated “lead lingerer” due to their active presence in community and ability to maintain contact with everyone. Engaged members may be part of their local suburb Facebook or Buy Nothing group, they may be members of their local community garden, connect with neighbours regularly or take part in various projects. While they may not initiate new initiatives or circles, they play an essential role in supporting their sustainability and success. Neighbourhood regulars take all forms, but they play an important role in connecting new and existing neighbours together. Often the most vibrant, healthy and thriving neighbourhoods are ones that are made up of many engaged neighbours, many of whom inevitably move into a leadership role organically.

## Leader

The final stage of neighbourhood engagement lies with the *bright sparks* or *super connectors*. While they act as the most deeply engaged members of our communities there is no one set way to be a leader. Leadership takes many forms and it is through the variety of leadership roles performed in a neighbourhood that bright sparks can be seen. Some leaders become founders of groups or initiatives, while others take on formal roles through governance processes. Some leaders, however, are just those who take on active yet informal roles within their communities, either by hosting neighbourhood BBQ’s, supervising the local Buy Nothing group or hosting community cake stalls and fundraisers. Leaders play a vital role in our communities yet are quite often formed through the support and encouragement of others. Through a variety of leadership forums, educational programs, and supportive councils and communities, many leaders are given the confidence, know-how, and resources necessary to support their leadership.

# What are the barriers that prevent people from participating?

## Spatial barriers

### Social and paid supports

While many people may be interested in attending a group or initiative they may find themselves dependent on the help of paid or unpaid supports in order to attend. While different farmers markets, like the Willunga Farmers Market, provide an important place for market goers to socialise and belong, the ability to collect groceries and navigate across multiple stalls can be difficult, stressful or sometimes impossible for those with physical, social or intellectual vulnerabilities. Some initiatives rely on the efforts of paid or unpaid supports to put in that little bit of extra effort to support someone to engage with a particular initiative or get there on time. Many

vulnerable members of our communities often rely quite heavily on their paid supports, families or freely given relationships to not only access to places, people and things, but also to find out about them. For members of our community who are particularly isolated, paid or unpaid supports are sometimes their only link to find out what is happening in the community. More needs to be done to emphasise the importance of helping people connect to their neighbourhoods and encourage paid and unpaid supports to think creatively about how they can help make it happen. Support workers and families often act as the gatekeepers to community. Therefore ensuring their roles as *linkers* and **not** *inhibitors* needs to be emphasised.

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

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

“The support role is to be the bridge to relationship”

### Safety, fear and stigma

For many of us, trying something new can be intimidating. Often it takes a level of mental preparedness, a sense of confidence, or the help of an ally or friend for us to step outside of our comfort zones and go along to a group or initiative for the first time. Relationships between neighbours and people in our communities often rely on someone making that first move, initiating the first gesture, interaction, or act of kindness. For those who face increased vulnerabilities, however, a lifetime of either negative experiences to rejection and ‘othering’, increased social anxiety or limited social resilience as a result of a disability or mental illness, or even an enhanced sense of risk-averseness as a result of their vulnerabilities, can exacerbate a sense of fear towards the unknown and potentially unsafe. Many vulnerable people have either been victims of abuse and neglect or live in fear that they will experience it. For many people living with a mental illness the fear of stigma or rejection can increase their feelings of social anxiety or apprehension when putting themselves in new or unfamiliar social situations. Bridging social gaps and placing oneself in unknown or unfamiliar ground is of increased challenge for many living with a mental

health problem, which often becomes exacerbated by societal prejudices and misunderstandings that exist about mental illness.

Often for people with negative and deeply wounding life experiences, the fears of potential rejection or even abuse can act as one of the most significant barriers to their visiting a neighbour’s home, a social event, a group or club for the first time. Even if the group actively encourages new members to join or take part, having the confidence that is required to take a risk and ‘give it a go’ will stop them from trying it in the first instance. Once they are in this group, how they are then received and welcomed can also have an impact on whether the place can be seen as a safe space for the future. Having the support of a trusted friend, support worker or companion who can act as the social buffer or safeguard to that initial meeting can enable people to bridge their fears of the unknown and give time for a required level of familiarity to develop. It is also essential that a group recognises the social resilience that it might have taken for that person to step out and into the group for the first time, or to increase their own understanding towards the impacts of certain vulnerabilities in order to provide a more welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for everyone involved.

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

“Public transport is not safe at all. I’ve been assaulted before... it takes a while for me to get my confidence back”

“Rather not. Don’t want to risk it”

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

## Time of day

Often *when* an initiative takes place can work to include or exclude many people from taking part. Notably there is no perfect time that ensures all members of a community can participate. In thinking about how to support more vulnerable people to attend a neighbourhood initiative, however, the time an activity is hosted significantly matters - particularly when factoring in considerations of safety. Many great neighbourhood initiatives that happen first thing on a Saturday or Sunday morning can be difficult for those requiring personal care, transport and assistance to get to in time. Initiatives that happen later at night can mean more people relying on rides from family, friends, support workers, or access taxis to ensure security of movement. While a dependence on access cabs can prove costly, many vulnerable people also do not feel safe using them, particularly at night, and so

will avoid initiatives that meet at such times. Hosting meetings or initiatives during high traffic periods can exacerbate a person's sense of stress to attend or creates further logistical barriers that prevent them from joining. Offering a few different schedule times or allowing for different levels of participation can support more inclusive practice if done thoughtfully. Even encouraging members of a group if they live locally to give lifts or ride share can address some barriers of time. Whatever the time, a level of consideration towards the barriers it might create ought to be acknowledged.

**"If it's at night I won't go. I get nervous and anxious at night. I need someone with me"**

## Ease of transport

When thinking of the *where* an initiative is to take place, much thought also needs to be given to not only *how* close or far it may be for people to get to but also how they are expected to get there. For initiatives that are embedded locally challenges of mobility are easier to navigate. A dependence on mobility can create barriers for those who either lack their own form of independent transport or face barriers of access. For those who drive their own car, a lack of accessible or affordable parking can prevent them from attending a variety of neighbourhood initiatives. For those that rely on other modes such as public transport, access cabs, rides with family or support, bicycling, and/or walking can create other challenges. A dependency

on transport for access can be challenged by places that may be more out of the way, rural, too far, or not on a main transport line. Some of our communities more vulnerable members also don't feel safe taking some transportation options, such as taxis or ubers. The time that the activity is held may also exacerbate such access. For example, one gentleman spoke of the meaningful relationships he had built at one community garden, however he can no longer attend because it relies on him catching two buses on a Saturday where the weekend bus schedule is limited. Another woman spoke of how she will not attend events that take place at night if she doesn't have a ride because she feels unsafe taking a bus or taxi. The diversity of ways that people get to a place therefore requires greater consideration.

**"I won't go if I don't have parking"**

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

**"I can't drive myself"**

## Cost and means

Many successful initiatives work very hard to reduce barriers that relate to cost and affordability for participants, however such a barrier still exists for some neighbourhood circles or groups. Many interest-based groups involve costs or fees to attend, which may prove prohibitive for those with limited financial means. Some initiatives also hold expectations for previous skills, knowledge or expertise in an area that brings with it a level of privilege or competency. Sometimes the activity revolves around acquisition

of particular equipment or clothing that also comes at a cost. Even when some initiatives are free or at low-cost there might be other fee related factors that need to be considered, such as the cost of supports or transport to attend. Some of our neighbourhoods more successful initiatives have been able to reduce the costs expected of participants through funding, pay it forward schemes, being within walking distance and other cost-covering measures. Providing ways to reduce the financial and means-based barriers that prevent people from attending is an important consideration if the initiative is to be fully inclusive.

**"You get taught not to hop in a car with someone you don't know. Then you get told to take taxis and ubers"**

**"The taxi still does not feel safe"**

**"At night I always go with someone"**

**"Access transport and other types of accessibility are the biggest barrier of all"**

**"If it is too far my parents won't let me go"**

## Location accessibility

Some physical barriers to access can also be caused by the place where an initiative is based, in which people with limited mobility are already disadvantaged. The spatial barriers presented are ones embedded in the place itself. Either by the nature of the activity or its location, particular demographics of people will either not feel comfortable enough to take part or will be physically prevented from attending. Activities that take place on sandy beaches, bush scrubs or mountain trails

already create many logistical challenges for people with physical vulnerabilities. Other spatial barriers that may not be as obvious but just as preventative, such as poorly maintained sidewalks, doorways that are too narrow, entrance ways with a step, uneven and rocky surfaces, steep or sloping driveways, places on busy roads with limited parking, etc., can actively inhibit people from attending. Such barriers either explicitly prevent people from going or just make it too hard for them to meaningfully engage on an everyday level.

**"It's very accessible. But that doesn't mean everybody has access"**

**"Inclusion is patchy...There are quite a few hurdles"**

# Access to information

## Lack of 'linkers' or 'connectors'

By exploring different initiatives one of the most significant findings was just how much existed out there, yet how little others knew of their existence. Many of the steps taken through this process highlighted how much is dependent on personal networks to share news, stories and information. Many initiatives spoke of programs attended, mentors who provided support, and information given through councils that led them to create or attend something in their neighbourhood. The linkers can provide access to essential information, however without such connectors much of this information can be held by a particular group of people and not shared with others more widely. Networking, connecting and linking act as powerful facilitators for

information to be shared, however many vulnerable people can miss out if they are particularly isolated or have limited contacts. Linkers can also provide a level of support and confidence for a more vulnerable person to go to something new for the first time. Linkers, mentors and connectors provide an important facilitation role that is often missing for many neighbourhood initiatives to grow.

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

## Word of mouth

Many initiatives that exist out there have also found themselves reliant on the reputation they build in the community through word of mouth, networking and just being known. Many people speak about how being able to receive trusted recommendations from friends and being able to ask questions helps build a sense of confidence around what the initiative is about. While word of mouth can act as one of the most beneficial methods of information sharing, it can further isolate those who are already quite isolated. Reliance on word of mouth depends on people having some level of contacts or networks that can be learned from already. However, many of our communities most vulnerable members might already live isolated lives and so often miss out on many opportunities as a result. How do you hear about things happening in your neighbourhood from neighbours if you don't know any? For many vulnerable people the lack of current and existing networks creates the greatest risk

to their safety and wellbeing. More needs to be done for neighbours to feel confident to knock on each other's doors, collect phone numbers, and generally look in on each other to ensure such knowledge and safeguarding is spread far and wide. More also needs to be done to enhance the role of support services, support workers, and informal supports in sharing and disseminating important information.

**"I talk to people...I find out through other people"**

**"There is a gap"**

## Digital and written information sharing

While the majority of neighbourhood initiatives highlight the success of their groups through Facebook groups, Instagram and email newsletters, too much dependence on the digital means risks excluding those who do not use or are not as comfortable with online methods. 13% of Australians do not have access to internet at home, while only 55% of Australians 65 and older report as using the internet<sup>xx</sup>. One elderly neighbour spoke rather of being handed a paper flyer at the grocery store and being verbally told about a local sewing group as a way to find out about its existence. This particular neighbour does not own a computer and so risks missing out on many initiatives that rely primarily on digital means to share information. Many vulnerable people may not own their own technological device or face access restrictions, such as only using a computer when a support worker is present or when they can get to their local library. There are also many initiatives that use a variety of online methods for people to register or sign-up, in which such platforms can be exclusionary in nature. While online platforms such as

Facebook groups provide useful ways for people to be informed and engaged, there is also the risk of many people being left out if they do not have access to such digital means or if the method relies on a high-level of technological comprehension.

Some people whose English language or literacy may be limited also risk being left out when flyers, ads or posts are not written in simple English, *Easy Read* or their first language. The ways that things are written or shared may prove inaccessible to many people who might have limited reading comprehension or speak English as a second language. How advertisements for initiatives are written can also shape a person's perception of what is happening at a particular event or for whom it is for, which can either inhibit or enable their attendance. Many sign-up forms or registration processes - both online and virtual - can also prevent many people from taking part, either from the way they are written, the depth of information required, or the extent of the selection criteria. While a group may highlight their initiative as a place of welcome and inclusion, many vulnerable people may be excluded from even knowing about their existence dependent on how information about them is being shared.

**"My friend cannot read"**

**"I miss the local paper"**

**"60% of Australians cannot read or write properly"**

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

# What challenges do these initiatives face for the future?

As highlighted through the key factors required for replicability, as well the barriers facing participation, some neighbourhood circles face many challenges to their sustainability and accessibility for the future. Barriers created by a 'tricky' neighbour or a community's fear of change can often create challenges for inclusive neighbourhoods moving forward. All levels of government - local, state, and federal - need to prioritise addressing the "loneliness pandemic" and encourage initiatives that help bring all people in neighbourhoods together. If local councils or systems fail to provide the necessary administrative supports or get on board, then many neighbourhood circles can face a diversity of structural barriers that will prevent them from getting started. The State Government also has a role to play, in which a lack of support or funding to provide essential start-up capital or program supports, such as through the *Fund My Community Project*, can prevent good ideas from becoming great neighbourhood initiatives. It is in engendering a stronger ethos within our neighbourhoods and leaders of the benefits that inclusive neighbourhoods provide that will help counter such similar challenges in the future.

Many initiatives also involve a significant amount of know-how, time and energy. Such effort capital can be a barrier in itself. Some initiatives find themselves highly dependent on one individual or a small group of individuals, funding or grant applications, which makes it highly vulnerable to collapse. Promoting opportunities and ways for neighbourhood initiatives to be created with greater ease or as part of the everyday routine can help allow more people to actively initiate and participate into the future. *The Every One, Everyday Project*<sup>xxii</sup> out of the UK is a strong example of the role that local councils and partnering organisations have played in engendering opportunities for everyday participation and belonging. By taking away many of the structural barriers to development and doing much of the heavy lifting, this project was able to help neighbours interact with one another and share their skills in a way that was local and organic. Another method to build safeguards within a neighbourhood

initiative is to build a sense of joint responsibility for welcoming and inclusion across a wider community of members. Manager Annemijn talked about the early conversations they had when she started her 3-year role in developing community connections at the Pear. A former Union leader, Annemijn understood the importance of having relationships with people, but also in building their own sense of ownership and purpose so that there comes a time when "they don't need you anymore". By enlisting all members of the café with the role of welcoming everyone who comes through the door, the values and norms of the Pear as an inclusive space became embedded in its ethos and way of being, such that it became greater than one person alone. There are other ways that neighbourhood circles can form without the burden of significant time and resources, and often that is through emphasising the power of big little roles.

A good neighbourhood circle can start with an ingrained idea that a meaningful relationship between neighbours is normal. Rather than thinking about the nosy neighbour, we need to think about what makes a *kind* neighbour, how people can better support one another through informal mechanisms rather than formal ones. Similar to Circles of Support, we hope that neighbourhood circles can recognise the power of inviting vulnerable people in to make a contribution and hold valued roles into the future. Initiatives that operate on informal trading systems, in-kind support, or gentle asks from each other rely on a value system of care and reciprocity, rather than one of money and expectation. Changing the norms around asking, sharing the good stories, and highlighting what is possible through the relationships built with our neighbours is the first step to building stronger, more inclusive neighbourhoods for the future.

.....  
**"That's the thing that scares me the most. What would we do if it wasn't here."**  
.....



## Case studies

Some of our favourite examples.

### Joe's Connected Garden

Beginning in the backyard of two neighbours in Elizabeth over ten years ago, Joe's Connected Garden is an example of how neighbours can break down barriers (quite literally in the form of fences) to work together. Neighbours Rosanne and Joe decided to open the space between their fences and create one connected garden that they could maintain together. Not to keep things to themselves, Joe made the offer to his other neighbours along their street who either shared a passion for gardening or saw the benefits in working together. Joe's Connected Garden has now grown to link 15 gardens locally in two clusters and include individual satellite gardens that consider themselves part of the connected community. Supported by other green thumbs across the neighbourhood, with the offer of free produce with their Grow Free cart, Joe's Connected Garden has received national recognition for the way they have brought people in their local community together. This initiative has grown to even include a successful yearly Open Garden event with guest speakers, fundraising, and plant sales.



A photo of Joe's Connected Garden from one of their Open Garden events courtesy of Joe's Connected Garden, Facebook

**"If people don't feel that sense of belonging we're tried to foster here then we haven't really succeeded."** -Rosanne, Joe's connected Garden via Gardening Australia<sup>xxiii</sup>

## Open Garage

When Laura found out her neighbour Bob's wife had passed away and that she had been unwell for some time, Laura was devastated that she had not known. Despite being a self-identified introvert she knew that something had to change. Laura suggested the idea of hosting their neighbours for a morning tea in their garage to her husband and then Open Garage was born. Open Garage is a simple concept that involves one neighbour opening their garage door for a few hours every two months to neighbours, inviting them to share in a baked good or cup of coffee. Soon Laura found kindred spirits in B3 Coffee, a small coffee van

who shared Laura's community values. With coffee available for purchase at a low-cost price and a shared table for people to bring baked goods and garden swaps, Open Garage became a place for people to bring friends, neighbours and family together. What makes Open Garage so special is the way it naturally evolved within the neighbourhood. From initially inviting family along to boost numbers and letter dropping flyers it grew to a website, Instagram page and over 200 regular members of the garage "bubble". Open Garage brings people in the Brighton neighbourhood together unlike any time before.



A photo of Open Garage goes together from the Open Garage website

**"Open Garage is all about providing a welcoming space for the community to come together, enjoy a cup of tea or coffee, a slice of cake and a chat with friends and neighbours...It's a clear sign that our communities want to know each other again."** - Laura, Open Garage.

## The Pear - Neighbourhood Node

Alberton locals Christie and Joost were horrified that it was 6 weeks before they knew their neighbour Tony had passed away in hospital. Calling a community forum together they listened to the needs of their neighbours and their desire to get coffee close by. Converting half of their 100-year-old town house on the corner into a coffee house the Pear was born. With Manager Annemijn at the helm the Pear is more than just a café, it is a meeting place where regular free neighbourhood driven events, conversations, workshops, get-togethers, activities, services and programs come together. The Pear stands as a strong and important example of the role that social business enterprises can play in bringing a community together, while also demonstrating the role that government and other stakeholder agencies play in helping to sustain and support such neighbourhood initiatives. As a recipient of the Fund My Neighbourhood grant with financial backing from ECH and the Port Adelaide Football Club, as well as grants from the City of Port Adelaide Enfield, the Pear is able to offer so much more to its neighbours without the financial concerns that often cripple small businesses and prevent them from thinking beyond the barriers of financial overheads and costs.



A photo of a painting completed of the Pear 'mug wall' by a visiting neighbour

**"The Pear is a neighbourhood cafe and meeting place. A space at the heart of our community where you can meet your neighbours, enjoy great coffee and small treats... We have a number of regular activities at the coffee house and will keep working on ways that we can stay connected and keep getting to know each other. This is really important to us and to our community."**

- The Pear, via the Pear website

## Buy Nothing Project

The Buy Nothing Project originally began with two friends who were working hard to address three infamous "R's": reducing, reusing and recycling by creating an experimental hyper-local gift economy in Bainbridge Island, Washington in 2013. Since then, the Buy Nothing Project has become a worldwide social movement with groups across 44 nations. Found online using the free platform provided by Facebook groups and open-source documents, everyday people are able to set up their own Buy Nothing Project groups for their own neighbourhoods that allows neighbours to easily participate. Rules for Buy Nothing are simple: "Post anything you'd like to give away, lend or share amongst neighbours. Ask for anything you'd like to receive for free or borrow. Keep it legal. No hate speech. No buying or selling, no trades or bartering, we're strictly a gift economy." The ethos behind Buy Nothing operates around notions of a "gift economy", whose real wealth is seen through encouraging a level of asking followed by acts of giving, the connections that are formed, and trust that is fostered between neighbours.



The Buy Nothing Project, Facebook Logo

**"Sharing builds trust between members, and this trust allows groups to grow quickly and encourages people to both give freely and ask for what they need.... Along with the positive environmental impact, Neighbours are getting to know and trust each other, building relationships that see them through all of life's challenges and celebrations."**

- Buy Nothing Project



A photo of Kinda and Friends of Pine Gully members working on the garden

## Friends of Pine Gully

When Syrian migrant Kinda moved to Seacliff she noticed the poor conditions of a local gully near where she lived and wanted to do something about it. Developing confidence and the know how she needed to get a group started through the Smart Living Course hosted by the Holdfast Bay Council, the Friends of Pine Gully group was formed. Now operating in its fifth year, the group is largely made of neighbours who live near the gully and consider themselves a community of friends who support one another. Aside from the regular working bees the

Friends of Pine Gully group have monthly morning teas and social catch-ups with each other. With the support of their local council for insurance coverage, the Friends of Pine Gully group is a strong example of how one bright spark built their confidence to create something that brought a group of people in a local neighbourhood together. This initiative also provided the catalyst for other meaningful relationships and projects between members to grow and develop. As part of her master's research project, Kinda undertook a deeper exploration into her own Friends of Pine Gully group and found out more about how it has instilled a sense of pride, belonging, ownership and confidence in all its members within the community.

**"A group of locals come together to help to restore Pine Gully's native vegetation and to make this event a community opportunity to come together over a cuppa and good chat" - Kinda**

## The Little Library on Lloyd



A photo of books inside the Little Libraries on Lloyd courtesy of Jody from the Little Library on Lloyd

While some neighbourhood initiatives require greater foresight, effort and resources, it can often be small gestures or conversation starters that help to bring neighbours together. By placing a library box outside of one's house, neighbours are instantly given a reason to start up a conversation with their neighbour or to actively take part in its growth. What makes the Little Library so special is not only its presence in the community, but also the added plant stall pop ups, the facilitation of local events, as well as the relationships that come about as a result. Jody takes pride in actively promoting the Little Library on Facebook, providing resources and tote bags for people to borrow and return books, and sharing in news about other initiatives in the community. Inspired by the City of Marion's Leadership Course in 2019, Jody was encouraged to focus on a smaller achievable project in her local neighbourhood. How the Little Library was created, how it has grown, and how it has brought people in the neighbourhood together make it one of our favourite examples of a small yet tangible way that one neighbour can make a difference.

**"If I'm outside when someone visits the library I'll say hello and strike up a conversation. Kids love it and when it first opened I got a thankyou note from one of the children across from us. If it wasn't for the library I never would have met them"– Jody, Little Library on Lloyd**

## The Red Shed

Since opening eight years ago, the Red Shed in the Adelaide Hills community of Uraidla has become an important source of connection, support and community. A program of the Adelaide Hills Council, the Red Shed is a place open to everyone who lives in the wider neighbourhood and does not discriminate based on age, gender or ability. While a small shed in size, the Red Shed prides itself on the work that it can provide to general members of the community. For the cost of a small donation to the Shed, members will happily fix a broken chair, table, planter box etc., for anyone that comes through its doors. What makes the Red Shed extra special is the way that the different members know and look out for each other by either giving each other lifts to the Shed, giving support to learn new things and ensuring that the site remains a space of welcome for anyone that would like to become a part. For Donna who has struggled with depression for many years, every week she "looks forward to Thursdays at the Shed". For Terry who lost his wife many years ago and found himself lonely and isolated at home, the Shed has now given him a source of "24 friends" and belonging. With Shed coordinator Robert at the helm, the Red Shed is a place where giving ownership to the members and recognising the strength of their connection to community is integral to its way of working.

**"Here, it's all about mateship"**  
- Red Shed Member



A photo of the Red Shed 'mug cupboard' for visitors and regulars



A photo of Ian Street residents at the annual street Christmas party

## “Ian Street”, Morphett Vale

Ian Street is a seemingly innocuous, everyday street in the suburbs of Morphett Vale. There is no Facebook, Instagram page or formal association that brings people together. Rather it is through the everyday ways that neighbourhood champions look out for each other and inspire a sense of neighbourliness that make this place special. As a regular walker with a friendly disposition, neighbour Chris has developed a sense of notoriety among neighbours. By being seen Chris has provided greater opportunities for other neighbours to be introduced and for a sense of trust to be built. Ann has lived in the neighbourhood for close to 50 years and having been awarded the Order of Australia (OAM) for her work as a mental health

advocate, she has also created a level of notoriety among her neighbourhood as being a safe space for people to seek help and support if they need it. Chris and Ann both carry with them the values and ethos that everyone on the street “has a story to tell” and is deserving of support and friendship. They encourage produce to be swapped among neighbours, organise annual celebrations, and know the names of everyone who lives in the area. Neighbours know that they can turn to Ann and Chris if they are in need, if they need a lift, or if they are just looking for a friendly ear. It is through the act of being good neighbours to each other that makes Ian Street a safer, more welcoming and inclusive place.

**“By connecting with the street or these people it doesn’t mean you are there to solve their problems, but it does mean that you can be a friendly face and there if you are needed” - Chris**

## “Greening Groups”, City of Charles Sturt

Within the City of Charles Sturt - supported by Janet Willoughby - you will find many formal and informal community gardens that range from small raised garden beds to kilometres of garden surrounding railway lines and train stations. Regardless of their size, the people within these gardening groups share a passion for improving the live-ability and beautification of their local neighbourhood. While many community gardens have structured memberships, fences and plots, the “greening” groups within the City of Charles Sturt are open and freely accessible for all members of the community to take part, be involved and enjoy. Through these groups important relationships between neighbours are established, in which the different street gardens give everyone a common purpose and reason to come together - either over a love of plants, a desire to improve the look of their street, or just meet new people and make a difference.



### Woodville Greening



Woodville volunteers Anthony and Kerry show the results of their work since 2020

### Ovingham Greening



Ovingham founder Barry and key volunteer Angie have been hard at work since April 2021

### Friends of Mudge Way



Passionate community member Brooklyn started the Friends of Mudge Way in early 2021

### Rosetta Street Greening



Dedicated volunteers Daniel, Sarah, Mark, Phyllis and Cheryl of the Rosetta Street Greening since 2016

# An interview with the Little Library on Lloyd

With Jody Moate

## How did the Little Library start? What prompted you to give it a go? How long has this been going for?

It was inspired by the City of Marion's Community Leadership course, which I participated in, in 2019. The course is also open to people outside of Marion Council and I applied to meet new people and learn new skills. Part of the program is to help you launch a local project as an individual or with a team. The library, a verge garden and a neighbourhood community group had been something I'd thought about for a while but other volunteer work meant I put local work off for years. The course enabled me to focus on a smaller achievable project. Something tangible I could look at and say, "I made that". The library officially launched in March 2020. We had food and invited neighbours via social media and a letterbox drop.

## What role does this play in your neighbourhood? How has it changed the relationship between neighbours in your neighbourhood, if at all? How has it changed the relationship you have with your neighbours, if at all?

Some users of the library I never see, they are introverted readers that like to quietly visit then leave. During COVID lock down, someone left rolls of toilet paper to give away and I have no idea who that was to this day. We have a visitors book that people can leave notes in, I find notes in there from people in the suburb and further afield, it's a deliberate destination for some people. If I'm outside when someone visits the library I'll say hello and strike up a conversation. Kids love it and when it first opened I got a thankyou note from one of the children across from us, if it wasn't for the library I never would have met them. The library is an ice breaker and makes people feel braver

to say hello. I launched a Grow Free cart at the same time which hasn't done as well but has also meant neighbours have had a reason to say hello. I met a new neighbour this way, who turned out to be a real librarian and has helped whenever we run an event. She has puppets she brings along and is just amazing with kids. I definitely feel like the library makes our house more approachable but it forces me to be more friendly too. I have anxiety which means I'm not the person to say hello first very often but if someone wants to talk books, gardens, bugs, veggies etc., it's hard to shut me up!

## Have you faced any challenges with the Little Library? Any 'tricky neighbours', acts of vandalism, council issues etc.?

I have a note on the library which explains we (number 34) curates it but that we encourage community to look after it too and they have. We've had tradies in the area a lot too because of street paving and housing renovations in the area and I've heard them talk about the library in a really fun but respectful way. So even people that are not local like it and look out for it in their own way. I didn't ask council, it's on my front lawn, so I figured I didn't need to. To be honest I didn't ask if I could plant my verge either. I figure better to beg forgiveness than ask permission and I don't think I'm doing anything that council isn't trying to achieve anyway, that being community connection, less waste and greening the suburbs. Once or twice I've forgotten to lock the front door and people have walked in to my house looking for the library! I have to explain it's the yellow box out the front. The library is also listed on google maps (not by me) and I've had a few people thinking it's a public library wanting to do photocopying etc. I just direct them to Marion or Mitcham library usually.

## Do you have any stories about the library and its role in your neighbourhood that you would like to share? Any 'good news' stories or positive experiences that came as a result? Fondest memories about what the library has brought to your life?

Oh the time the kid from across the road got a book and then sat on the ground next to the library to read. I just left them alone but it was precious.

I decorated the library with my son's friend. I'd been procrastinating because it wouldn't be perfect and then I had help and the support and artwork from her was just wonderful. I love how it looks like it's homemade now and I think of the time we got to hang out on the project together. During COVID lockdown especially, it was a new purpose for me and gave people something for free when some people had lost so much. I'm a huge fan of libraries from what I do through to large council run libraries. I think during COVID they tried so hard to keep people connected. My family help with it too by putting out our overflow books on trestle tables when the weather is nice. They help out if we put an event on too. I won a voucher through the council to help pay for a Neighbour Day BBQ, so that's my next event for the library to host.

## For those that may want to build their own library in their neighbourhoods, do you have any advice for them? Was it hard? Expensive? Words of wisdom to ensure it is a success?

Think about accessibility. I wanted something that all ages and most people could physically get to. I'm not sure how little kids or people in wheelchairs for example access the libraries up high. I am currently 'too successful' and trying to find ways to get all the

books out that I'm given. I've taken crates of books on the road to events. My son's local high-school parent group had a family fun day and I took books to that for example. I've got a second fridge now as well so I can expand. Use the resources that already exist if you don't know where to start. E.g. streetlibrary.org. My biggest cost was time and the paints. I spent \$100 at most as the fridge was free. That's a lot of money for some people, so I think it could work if you wanted to work together with say a whole street and everyone chipped in. You're highly likely to find a local crafty/artistic/handy person/s in the mix too!

## Have any other initiatives or groups been created as a result of the little library? Spin off groups, events or initiatives that were formed either through relationships made from the library or ideas shared with you etc.?

I run a Grow Free cart at the same time. I'm involved in Bringing Back the Butterflies with a local propagation team and I advertise our progress. Every few months I pick a reason to run an event. I'm not inundated by neighbours at these but if I get ten people I feel that's a success. Halloween, Valentine's Day, Neighbour Day, there's heaps of themes to piggy back on to. I try to advertise local opportunities too from council surveys to school holiday sessions. I have permission to paint the stobie pole nearby too (that's super easy through SA Power Networks and council leaves any permission up to them). I have a vision of book spines on one side and native butterflies on the other. So once I do that, I hope it inspires some more local art.

# Global/national initiatives to build our neighbourhoods

Some helpful resources.

## Think tanks and sharing platforms

**Centre for Welfare Reform** - Focus on strengthening neighbourhood democracy and responsible citizenship

**Village-NextDoor** - Neighbourhood linking platform

**Community Lovers Guide** - Collection of innovative global projects

**Citizen Network** - International network to strengthen equal citizenship

## Cooperatives

**Neighbour Day** - Relationships Australia Initiative

**Welcoming Cities** - National network and initiative of Welcoming Australia

**Village in the City** - International network to support micro-villages or neighbourhoods to take shape

**Abundant Community** - Information and video conference hosting platform to support neighbourhood democracy

## Helpful reads/inspiring podcasts

**Every Day is Neighbour Day Resources** - Tips to host a neighbourhood event or be 'neighbourly' by Relationship Australia

**Community Connector Kit** - Information kit by Neighbourhood Connect on starting your own neighbourhood circle

**Village Builder Handbook** - by the Village in the City

**The Art of Belonging** - Belonging Matters Podcast with Hugh Mackay

**Leading the Inclusive City** - Place based innovation for a bounded city by Robin Hambleton

**Loneliness, Isolation and Human Touch** - Report on Loneliness and COVID-19 impacts by the AdCouncil

**A Man Called Ove** - By Frederik Backman (fiction). A book on age, loneliness and the power of neighbours to overcome it.

## Other international/national initiatives

**Participatory Cities Project** - Every One, Every Day Initiative: Network of Projects and Businesses across Barking and Dagenham, UK.

**Living Smart Australia** - Courses that provide participants with the skills to take action to improve quality of life and reduce their environmental impact

**Netherton and Springfield Communities** - A tale of two UK communities that came together through COVID-19 challenges

**The Chatty Cafe Scheme** - Encourages and creates opportunities for people to interact through conversation in a Café setting

## How was this information collected?

The research process did not follow a strict methodological approach but remained exploratory in nature, aiming to learn from those within the communities themselves. An active participatory role was also taken across a variety of projects and groups over the span of 12 months, in which conversations with a diversity of leaders and participants was made possible through a series of online and in-person qualitative approaches. The style of research borrowed from virtual and in-person ethnography, semi-structured narrative interviews, facilitated focus groups, and further unobtrusive research methods. Rigorous external mapping of various online platforms was initially conducted that collated a variety of in-person and online neighbourhood initiatives across South Australia. Included in the mapping process was also various national/international initiatives, neighbourhood resources, and online platforms. Various search engines were used to do a preliminary mapping of groups and resources available and included social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The mapping research provided a jumping off point for which to build networks among neighbourhood leaders and other initiatives in the broader community.

Significant time was spent across a variety of the different circle types, as well as in monitoring activity across the different virtual spaces. Time spent within the various groups and projects also allowed for in-depth

conversations to be had with neighbourhood leaders and group members, both through the conversations had during group gatherings, email correspondence, phone conversations, and face-to-face interviews. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with over 40 different neighbourhood leaders and community stakeholders that remained informal yet followed a semi-structured narrative approach. A series of focus groups were also facilitated with groups across a range of backgrounds and geographic locations. In total 7 focus groups were facilitated with 50 people that ranged from a diversity of positionalities, including advocates, people living with a disability or a mental illness, neighbourhood leaders, and community stakeholders. Extensive networking, purposeful and snowball sampling was also utilised to build on the mapping document, as well as lay the groundwork for future 'Conversations About...' think tank discussions that informed **Part 2: Inclusion is everyone's responsibility**. This document is by no means an exhaustive reflection of the different initiatives that exist across Adelaide, but mainly hopes to provide a snapshot to what is happening in our neighbourhoods. By providing a glimpse into the kinds of circles that exist in our community, how they are formed, their role to bring people together, and the challenges they face for the future, we hope that we may better support current and future circles' accessibility and potential replicability into the future.

## Author's note

While attempting to remain unbiased towards the many different circles and initiatives that exist within Adelaide's neighbourhoods, it would be remiss to neglect my own personal history, positionality and experiences that have the potential to shape the research conducted. Human-based researchers cannot be "blank-slates"<sup>xxiv</sup> and so some of the reflections and examples provided were no doubt shaped by the level of access I was able to achieve and the level of focus that could be given. I must also acknowledge that while an attempt was made to be comprehensive in the exploration of Adelaide's various groups and initiatives there are no doubt so many more that were not captured within this document. This document therefore must act as a snapshot to the kinds of neighbourhood circles that exist and the type of work that can be done. Upon writing this document I also personally moved to a new neighbourhood in the Adelaide Hills, in which the approaches taken by members of the community to welcome my husband and I no doubt reaffirmed the importance of feeling a sense of inclusion and belonging in one's neighbourhood, not only for safeguarding, but also for one's own emotional, social and mental wellbeing.

What was most impactful were the seemingly big little actions that people took, which had the greatest impact on not only helping us to feel seen but like an important part of the community. Within the first week I had neighbours drop by with cakes and offers of help, advice and welcome. My husband and I were invited to provide a bio for the local newsletter that gets dropped into everyone's mailboxes. We were encouraged to join our local Neighbourhood Association, CFS and attend the various neighbourhood gatherings, such as an annual bonfire and pizza night, Christmas party and Easter Egg hunt. The origins of this level of enhanced community involvement no doubt stems from the place's historical isolation, lack of mobile reception, and risks presented by bushfires, however the benefits it provides to the people and their sense of community was what has kept it intact. This experience only enhanced my own understanding towards the significant role that knowing your neighbours still plays and the incredible source of belonging and safeguarding that they can provide. While I now live in the bottom of a gully an extra 17 kilometres away from the closest petrol station, I have never felt safer or less isolated. It is in thinking and hoping for this sense of safety for all of Adelaide's residents that this project seeks to achieve.

## Acknowledgements

In putting this document together great thanks must be given to the people who work tirelessly across our neighbourhoods to bring the people in them together. Thanks must be given to all of those who volunteered their time to speak with me and contribute their wisdom and knowledge to this document. Thank you to the many neighbourhood champions - Laura, Jody, Ben, Emma, Kinda, Pam S., Pam G., Chris and Anne, Daniel, Mark, Sarah, Cheryl, Phyllis, Anthony, Kerri, Barry, Brooklyn, Robert, Mij, Camilo, Helen, Judy, Nicki, Libby, Sarah and Jess, Annemijn and Tahnee, Glender, Allie, Paul, Jenni, and David. A special thanks to all the members of the focus groups whose voices and perspectives guided this research and its findings.

To Jane Sherwin, Jayne Barrett and Prue Gorman for their counsel and guidance. To the neighbourhood initiatives that took charge in driving inclusion and belonging in their own groups and neighbourhoods. Special thanks also to the 5049 Coastal Community, Janet Willoughby with the City of Charles Sturt, Community Living Project Inc, The South Australian Council for Intellectual Disability (SACID), JFA Purple Orange, SA Council of Social Services, ABC Radio, the Now Empowerment Collective, and the Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) with the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist for providing support and enthusiasm in both the findings and outcomes of this project. And to all the families and loved ones within a variety of Circles of Support, thank you. It is with your guiding voice and values that this project was shaped.

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