



New(town) Beginnings #33

Dear Neighbour,

So it turns out that a modern-day pandemic is the perfect time to learn and upskill oneself. My Outlook calendar is looking very different to what it looked like 6-7 months ago. Words such as outreach, pop-up and BBQ have been replaced by webinar, workshop and of course the zeitgeist's winner of 2020: Zoom.

Across our sector, name a topic and I guarantee there is a webinar or workshop you can now participate in. This year has enabled experts, practitioners and leaders to share their knowledge with much broader audiences and I'm relishing these opportunities.

While I always try to remain mindful of the hardship, loss and discombobulation of this year, I think it's equally important to pay tribute to personal gain and growth that would not have been possible or have happened otherwise.

Let's acknowledge emotional fragility and pain but recognise that despair can't sustain us long term.

I'm quite certain that I wouldn't have had as much time to learn about areas such as transformational ethical storytelling, delve deeply into Aboriginal culture and history, or hear about the innovative new ways advocacy groups are addressing the domestic and family violence epidemic, had the status quo remained.

Our older clients have had to quickly learn about technology in order to stay connected and informed. There are many wonderful volunteer-led cross-generational initiatives which connect older people with younger ones who are fluent in digital literacy.

Over in South Marrickville, in the area's largest social housing complex, a community garden complete with 20 or so garden beds has just been installed. Residents were offered their own plot to grow food and within days they had been inundated with requests.

The property, which is managed by St George Community Housing, had arranged for [Community Greening](#) (look them up, they're a brilliant organisation) to get the project started. The program includes workshops where residents can learn all about soil, planting seed propagation, pest management, when to harvest, companion gardening and more.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

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When I visited two weeks ago, the ginormous smiles and looks of sheer delight on their faces were proof enough that this project had already succeeded. These are skills that can be passed down from generation to generation and what could be better than that.

In the most serendipitous way, a few days after visiting their new garden, I saw an ad for TAFE's fee-free pathways outreach program listing an Urban Food Growing course that was starting soon. So without much consideration and feeling inspired, I decided to enrol!

The course started last week and I've already picked up some much-needed green thumb skills which will hopefully lead to the development of our own green community projects and programs in the future.

Last week, my colleagues and I also participated in an online 'community conversation' with workers from all over Sydney and beyond. Normally an activity like this would have taken months to plan had it been the face-to-face model. While we all know the virtual aspects of meetings can be awkward with the muting, unmuting, accidental interrupting and WIFI dropouts, I heard so many varying perspectives it made the other aspects seem minor.

We shared our personal experiences and discussed the strengths and challenges of our respective communities; safety and lack of connection being a major concern for many.

I was reminded that communities come in all shapes and sizes, even within the same city, and that ours is so wonderfully unique and special, but importantly density doesn't mean disconnection. It was useful to step away from our bubble momentarily to appreciate this.

My one learning recommendation is to check out [Your Mob Learning](#) – NNC has bought a very affordable online subscription so all staff can learn about Australia's real history and more about our First Nations culture.

I am hopeful that this extra time dedicated to improvement, reflection and acquiring knowledge will mean I will become a better community worker.

Mel

Community Strengthening Team

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