



New(town) Beginnings #2/21

Dear Neighbour,

Our team recently made a discovery: one of the simplest ways to spread joy is by offering a stranger a free cuppa. You also get extra smiles if you offer them a Tim Tam!

The Chat N Connect program was born out of a pandemic. In September 2020, when the threat seemed to be diminishing, we decided that a great way to reconnect with our community was to set up a table outside the Centre offering free coffee and the other critical thing we were all desperate for and need – connection.

We acquired an Aldi coffee machine from a local pay-it-forward site, received some pod donations from a generous neighbour, and we were set to go.

In our first week, we encountered a few nervous and anxious people, many impeccably dressed as they had an appointment with the Courthouse across the road.

“Thanks so much for doing this, it has made my day. I feel a bit calmer now.” That was all the feedback we needed to continue the initiative.

Little did we know that six months later we would continue to make on average 20-30 cups of coffee or tea every Thursday morning. Aside from the general chats, it also gives us the opportunity to make referrals for more serious issues.

One woman tentatively approached us to buy a coffee. After discovering we didn't want any money, she divulged that she had had a terrible week because her son was in hospital after a suicide attempt. After spending a good half an hour talking, the woman walked away with some suggestions of places where they could both get ongoing support.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

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On the same day, another woman approached us who had recently escaped a long-term domestic violence situation in regional NSW. That morning while dealing with an unexpected urgent medical matter, she had lost her phone. She desperately needed to connect with a Domestic Violence service who had initially been helping her. We were able to contact the service, arrange a new phone and ensure she had an appointment with the service for the next day.

Although we officially open the service at 10am, we usually have an eager group of now regular customers waiting. For some it's a standing weekly appointment to catch up and share the week's news.

One of these regulars is a couple who our Newtownian Homeless Outreach team had tried to encourage to come to the Centre for months.

Now housed and expecting a child, it was through sharing a tea and coffee that we've built a rapport with the couple and are supporting them in trying to acquire the many baby accoutrements needed. A difficult feat when you're receiving measly income support payments.

Chat N Connect operates Thursdays from 10am-12pm out the front of the Centre, on the corner of Australia and Bedford Street. We are also joined by Orange Sky Laundry who provide a free wash and dry clothing service.

We love to see new faces so if you or anyone you know would like some social support and a free cup of tea or coffee please drop by on a Thursday morning.

Mel

Community Strengthening Team

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