

NEWTOWN

Neighbourhood Centre

New(town) Beginnings # 1 0

Dear Neighbour,

Did you know that a large percentage of the outreach work we perform extends beyond the vibrant, eclectic streets and laneways of Newtown?

In fact, my role has a strong focus in Marrickville South, an area which contains the highest concentration of social and community housing residents in the Inner West. This collection of a dozen or so streets is also home to many boarding houses with residents who are often socially isolated and needing support.

Despite increased gentrification, Marrickville South remains one of the most multicultural and inclusive pockets of the inner west. Living there myself, I often hear several different languages as I pick up my bread and milk at the local Woollies.

With such a rich and diverse community fabric, a collection of local services, including Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, have formed the Marrickville South Collective. The Collective seeks to help facilitate a stronger, more connected and safe community for kids and families in the area.

Collaboratively, we host a weekly supported playgroup and a regular board games afternoon for tweens, plus we run a popular monthly free community BBQ at Louisa Lawson Reserve, open to all. Held from 3pm on a Thursday afternoon, we often have kids excitedly racing down the street to eat their first, of sometimes many, delicious halal sausages. There's nothing like school work to build up an appetite!

Many of the locals are from non-English speaking backgrounds and often have limited family support. One mum I spoke to has only been in Australia for a couple of years. She's just completed her Masters' degree, but without anyone to help her with child care arrangements, she's not in a position to look for work in her speciality area. Her network is now growing so hopefully one day an opportunity will present itself.

We cater for all interests: balls for the sporty kids and playdoh or books for the quieter ones. In the warmer months we sometimes run family yoga sessions. A couple of other families with neuro-diverse children, appreciate the sensory tepee filled with toys, books and fluffy cushions. The perfect sanctuary for the kids when they need respite from over stimulation. And a chance for the parents to have a little break too while their children are occupied.

Aside from the obvious benefits of social connection, I also love the BBQ's which bring together residents of all ages. It's not often you see young children and older people harmoniously socialising side-by-side. Often laughing and having fun as they unwind at their local pocket park.

Recently I was speaking with an older Italian lady who told me that she and her friends have started to plan to meet at the BBQ every month. It's now a regular social outing and they revel in the generosity of the services who supply free food and even much needed food hampers from the Addison Rd Food Pantry.

I wish we could host regular community BBQ's in every neighbourhood. It may seem like a simple exercise but the benefits run far deeper than just facilitating a regular gathering. Providing the neighbourhood with an opportunity to engage, share, learn, collaborate and understand each other's history and perspective - I can't think of a better way to foster healthy relationships and enable a safe community for all.

And while connecting community and enhancing cohesiveness is vitally important, I also can't deny how much I enjoy forming relationships with staff from all the other local services. It's almost like we've become an extension of each another... all with varying skills sets and levels of expertise, we've now formed a somewhat super service!

Together we're always stronger.

Mel

Community Strengthening Team

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

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