

COMMUNITY BUILDER OF THE WEEK

CELEBRATING THOSE WHO STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITY

How many years have you called Alice Springs home?
Just over 25 years ago, having arrived with my family in January 1999.

What is a moment in your life that profoundly shaped who you are today, and how did it influence the person you've become?

Many things have shaped me, but looking back, there was a pivotal moment in 1997 (though it was not a huge thing, at the time) when I got my first ever 'Letter to the Editor' published in a national paper - in fact, any paper - where I commented on Australia's lack of spending on foreign aid. I then not only got the bug for writing, but it was also the start of me feeling more comfortable in my own skin, and realising I could confidently express my opinions and contribute to community life by putting my opinions and ideas into practice. I believe that we can all be agents of change - in small or big ways. Incidentally, Neighbour Day began with a letter to the Editor of 'The Age' newspaper after Andrew Heslop (who became the founder of Neighbour Day) was so shocked at the news of an elderly woman being found dead in her home two years after she passed away - that he put a call out for us to check on our neighbours.

How do you contribute to your community group, activity, or action?

I have been a volunteer for the Neighbour Day (now Neighbours Every Day) movement since 2014 when it began to be auspiced by Relationships Australia. Neighbours Every Day is a grassroots volunteer community-driven initiative that aims to help create and share belonging across Australia and build the inclusive communities we want to live in, one relationship at a time. For most years since 2014, my family and I have helped to arrange Neighbour Day gatherings with neighbours in our street (BBQs, afternoon tea's etc) as well as holding annual Christmas Street parties since 2013 - when I first became aware of Neighbour Day. In addition, I have been involved in organising annual neighbour day events (apart from Covid years) in our local Lyndavale Park in Larapinta - to build a stronger sense of community around us all.

What significance does your community group, activity, or action hold?

Holding Neighbour Day gatherings and Christmas Street parties is a great way to meet and stay connected with neighbours - and especially provides a good opportunity for new and old neighbours to meet each other. Knowing neighbours means we can call on each other for assistance or support, to water gardens, collect mail or look after animals when people are away. We can pick fresh herbs from a neighbour's garden or provide fresh eggs from chooks - or lend or borrow a tool or a helping hand, when needed. Lasting friendships have been formed - which even continue after people move away.

What motivates you to volunteer?

I was very lucky to grow up in a very neighbourly street in suburban Melbourne and to have been raised by parents who showed amazing hospitality (often to strangers) and have tried to take this into my adult life. In Mparntwe / Alice Springs there are lots of people arriving and leaving town and many of us do not have biological family here - so being connected to others is so important for supporting and sustaining each other. I truly believe that having strong networks around us creates a sense of belonging and connectedness - and helps contribute towards making communities happy and healthy places to live.

What achievements are you most proud of?

Lots of strong neighbourly connections and neighbourhood gatherings and Christmas Street Parties have been happening well before Neighbours Every Day started. But I am proud of the efforts many people across Mparntwe / Alice Springs have made over the last...



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JONATHAN PILBROW

decade to be neighbourly with each other and embrace the Neighbour Day/Neighbours Everyday philosophy. Before covid 19 impacted our community, we had seen the Neighbour Day momentum grow each year with 25 events held across the community around Neighbour Day in one year. It would be great to see this momentum pick up again.

Anything else you would like to say?

Mparntwe / Alice Springs has a lot to offer, I would encourage anyone in Mparntwe/Alice Springs if you aren't already involved with your local street/neighbourhood - maybe 2024 is the year you can step out and get involved. It doesn't have to be complicated or costly. It can be as simple as sharing a cuppa and chatting with someone next door - or getting neighbours together for a BBQ or a morning tea where everyone pitches in and brings something to share (and a chair!). And you could ask another neighbour who can assist you to make something happen.

Check out all the resources and ideas that are on the Neighbours Everyday website!



IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO NOMINATE SOMEONE AS THE COMMUNITY BUILDER OF THE WEEK, PLEASE SEND YOUR NOMINATION VIA EMAIL TO: INFO@MASCF.ORG



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