

Neighbourhood Circles Project: Summary



Why does this Project matter?

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both our communities' vulnerabilities, as well as the role of our neighbours and local communities to safeguard them. Trends such as #kindnesspandemic were seen across virtual platforms, local neighbourhood groups and associations were renewed, and small acts of kindness were demonstrated. The pandemic highlighted the desire and need for people within our neighbourhoods to connect to and be supported by one another. In April 2020, Australians were further shaken by the tragic story of Ann Marie Smith who was the victim of neglect and abuse at the hands of her support worker. For over a year Ann Marie was left confined to her Adelaide home and suffered the brunt of squalid conditions and poor care. At the time of her death some neighbours, old friends, and extended family reflected across that time and questioned whether things might have been different if they had 'gone around' to visit or check-in. The relationships we build in our neighbourhoods can provide important sources of safeguarding and support for those who are at greater risk of being isolated and marginalised. However, the inclusion of many people in our neighbourhoods does not just happen. Often people living with a disability, mental illness, or other vulnerability can live increasingly segregated lives and face disproportionate barriers to connecting to their community that put them at greater risk for exclusion, marginalisation, rejection, and isolation. Barriers of distance, transport, literacy, access to information, and formal and informal supports can further isolate those already isolated. It is unfortunately because inclusion does not just happen for everyone in our neighbourhoods why this project matters.

In order to address some of the barriers to inclusion within our neighbourhoods, this project aimed to seek out and learn from what already exists within Adelaide's neighbourhoods and explore what it might take to bring more vulnerable people 'in'. Across a 12-month period this project took a dive into a variety of different neighbourhood circles and initiatives that exist across the greater Adelaide region to hear their stories of neighbourliness, belonging, and inclusion.

This project also sought out the advice and counsel of a variety of people with different lived experiences of disability, mental illness, marginalisation, and vulnerability in order to hear their stories of exclusion, inclusion, and belonging. What was found across this time was that the solution to belonging and inclusion requires a whole of neighbourhood approach. From identifying what is out there, to addressing barriers to access, we are now exploring a variety of ways that we might support inclusion with neighbours in neighbourhoods themselves. Addressing exclusion in our neighbourhoods requires all members to be intentional and mindful around what they can do at an individual and group level to ensure that all neighbours find safe places of inclusion and belonging. Addressing barriers to accessing our neighbourhoods also relies on taking a long-term and focused approach. The primary aim of this project is to therefore shine a light on the important role that neighbours play to keep each other safe and ensure that the story of Ann Marie Smith is not repeated.

Within the Mapping Documents Part 1: "A space at the heart of our community" and Part 2: "Inclusion is Everyone's Responsibility", you will find snapshots to different types of groups that exist within Adelaide's neighbourhoods, how they are formed, and what encourages a sense of belonging to them. You will also find an exploration into what some of the barriers to accessing them are and potential strategies that can be considered to address them. While the answer to inclusion is not a one-sized fits all approach, these documents hope to expand people's thinking to not only what it might take, but also the importance of taking a more intentional role to invite others, who may be more vulnerable, 'in' and recognize their value and contribution.

"I know that things would have been different if I had gone around to see her"
- Old friend and schoolmate of Ann Marie Smith



Government of South Australia
SA Health

