

The Kind of Community I Want to Rebuild

by Robyn Papworth from *Never too Old to Play*



When I think back to my childhood, some of the people who gave me the strongest feeling of safety, warmth and belonging were the neighbours who opened their doors to me, let me sit at their table, played music with me, talked with me, let me play with their children, or simply gave me somewhere else to be when life felt heavy.

At the time, I don't think any of them would have realised how important those moments were. They were not trying to run a program or change my life. They were simply being neighbours, but what they gave me was significant. They gave me places where I felt welcome, people who were glad to see me, and little pockets of connection that helped me feel safer and less alone.

The older I get, the more I think about what those people gave me, and the more I feel that I want to give some of that back to the community I live in now.

I keep thinking about teenagers who may be spending more and more time at home, feeling disconnected from school, friendships or community, and at the same time I think about older adults who may also be spending long stretches of time alone, even though they still have so much knowledge, humour, skill, experience and care to share.

It makes me wonder whether there is an opportunity to rebuild some of the connection that used to happen more naturally between people of different ages, not by forcing relationships or creating another formal service, but by giving people somewhere warm and welcoming to spend time, make things, move, listen to music, learn from each other, laugh, sit quietly, or simply be around other people.

This idea has really started from gratitude for the neighbourhood that helped shape me, and from the hope that we might be able to create that same feeling of belonging for someone else.

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What I Hope We Can Create Together

My hope is that this becomes much more than a place where teenagers and older adults simply come together to socialise.

I would love us to use rhythm, movement, music, craft, art and hands-on making as ways of connecting with one another, but also as ways of contributing to the wider community. We might embroider or sew something that a local kindergarten can use, create something for an animal rescue organisation, make a resource for another community group, or eventually develop projects that come directly from what people around us say they need.

For me, that giving element matters, because I do not want anyone who walks through the door to feel that they are there because they are lonely, vulnerable or need to be fixed. I want people to feel that they have something to offer, something to teach, something to learn and something meaningful they can contribute.

At the same time, the very things we are doing together can support us too. Moving our bodies, finding rhythm, listening to music, working with our hands, learning a new skill, concentrating on a piece of embroidery, weaving wool through a loom, laughing with someone or simply sitting alongside another person can all give our mind, body and nervous system something positive to engage with.

What excites me most is the possibility of creating connections that continue beyond the people sitting in the room. A teenager and an older adult might create something together, but that project could then connect them with a kindergarten, an animal rescue organisation, a family, another community group or someone else who benefits from what they have made.

That is the kind of network I would love to build, where connection grows through contribution and where nobody is simply the person receiving support.

Before I decide what this should become, I want to bring people together who understand young people, older adults, families and community, and hear what they think could genuinely work.

Monday 5 October, 11am
Never Too Old to Play, Chirnside Park
Free to attend, with the first table limited to 12 people

I would love you to join us and help shape what we create together.