

Connecting Communities: What's this about?

Introduction

Some people like street parties and community festivals. Others enjoy a daily meet up at the off-leash park where local dogs and their owners socialise and make friends. Residents bond through volunteering or campaigning to improve aspects of the local area, creating community gardens, advocating against over-development, helping at kids clubs, piloting a [food share program](#), participating in babysitting groups, or extending civic life in culturally diverse ways.

What is wellbeing?

At the individual level, everyone defines wellbeing a bit differently because it's based in personal experience and opinion. The [most influential factors](#) affecting our personal wellbeing are the quality of relationships we have with family and friends, our financial situation, our work, the character of the neighbourhood where we live, health, exercise, our personal freedom, and our values.

It's true that wellbeing rarely occurs in isolation. Relationships are the essence of life. It's hard to live productively without warmth and love, or sharing and mutual understanding. Being connected to people is central to community.

Why community wellbeing matters

Communities are groups with a common affinity: a neighbourhood, workplace or faith, or a set of experiences (e.g., caring for the environment, [playing chess](#), surfing). Community wellbeing is an outcome of involved participants engaging, planning and speaking up about what community wellbeing means for them. Actively involved members contribute ideas, time, resources and talents to creating improvements in their community.

There are many potential benefits to individuals and the community from being actively involved, such as:

- Having a voice in decisions that affect you and others
- Designing more effective or relevant services
- Including minority groups that might otherwise be marginalised
- Utilising local resources, intelligence and energy
- Increasing democratic participation by working with local government/authorities

What are the best ways of taking personal responsibility for our own wellbeing? One developed by The New Economics Foundation is [The Five-Ways to Wellbeing](#). This approach highlights many small steps we can take in everyday life to make ourselves happier and healthier. The Five-Ways method contributes to personal *and* community wellbeing.

Our purpose

The Connecting Communities stream of the Australian Society for Progress & Wellbeing is dedicated to showcasing how to drive community wellbeing. The goal is to create a curated resource of effective, emerging and innovative methods, research, case studies, and grassroots initiatives from Australia and around the globe. Sharing readers' experiences of projects that connect communities is one way to educate and inform. We welcome your comments, tips, advice, successes and learnings.

In our next post we'll describe how Australia's Sunshine Coast Council used one idea from The Five-Ways to Wellbeing to inform residents about how to increase their quality of life.

About the Author

Joanne Abbey PhD is Director/Organisational Psychologist with the [Centre for Corporate Wellbeing](#). Her research investigated the meaning and outcomes of wellbeing at work. Given that 'culture is strategy', organisational wellbeing is a significant driver of personal and operational performance. Follow her on twitter [@wellbeingsavvy](#).