

## 20 Year Anniversary of Neighbour Day launches

Yesterday, Tuesday 8 February, Relationships Australia launched the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Neighbour Day, the leading social connection campaign addressing loneliness in Australia - marking the commencement of this important campaign in the lead up to Neighbour Day on 27 March 2022.

Ngunnawal Elder, Aunty Violet Sheridan opened the celebratory event with warm welcome to all those in attendance, telling of the importance of neighbours and connection across all communities, to make the country a better place for everyone.

In acknowledging Aunty Violet's warm welcome, Claire Ralfs, Chair of Relationships Australia National, noted the crucial importance of relationships as a protective factor for us all.

The co-chairs of the Parliamentary Friends of Ending Loneliness group, Dr Fiona Martin MP, and Mr Andrew Giles MP both spoke in strong support of Neighbour Day and the collective need to continue to pursue an end to loneliness and its many ill effects.

Dr Andrew Leigh MP, who is also a respected author and has studied the topic of loneliness, discussed the ongoing need to focus on social connection and how using the language of 'we' and 'us' instead of 'I' and 'me', can foster stronger communities to the benefit of everyone.

In acknowledgement of the 20 year Anniversary, Relationships Australia gathered a majority of Neighbour Day's key Ambassadors from around the country.

Bringing a real community feel to the event Costa Georgiadis spoke of habits becoming culture and the need to encourage social engagement in all that we do, sharing stories of starting a 'happiness garden' in his local neighbourhood, and other initiatives to help bring people together. Natalie Ahmat spoke of the inherent nature of community across Indigenous Australia and the importance of everyone staying connected and checking in with our mob both near and far. Mitch McPherson shared his story of starting the positive mental health campaign for everyone, *SPEAK UP! Stay ChatTY*, and the alliances of core values with Neighbour Day in that we need to have conversations, build meaningful relationships and keep individuals and community connected to maintain positive mental health and combat loneliness.

Key Ambassador and original Founder of Neighbour Day Andrew Heslop spoke of the campaign's origins and his ongoing support of the campaign's aims. Sadly, Mr Heslop also announced that he is relinquishing his role as an ongoing Ambassador of Neighbour Day and will step away from the campaign in 2022.

Neighbour Day was founded in 2003 by Mr Andrew Heslop, who then gifted the campaign to Relationships Australia in 2014.

As the campaign has evolved, Mr Heslop has remained a key Ambassador.

“Relationships Australia wishes to thank Andrew for trusting Relationships Australia to continue his good work these past 9 years and into the future, and we wish him every good fortune in his future endeavours”, said Mr Tebbey.

Video messages from Neighbour Day Ambassadors Hugh Mackay AO and Sophie Thomson, echoed the sentiments of addressing loneliness through social connection at all opportunities.

As we approach the annual Neighbour Day celebration on 27 March 2022, Mr Nick Tebbey, National Executive Officer of Relationships Australia said: “Together we call on all Australians to join in the campaign and help shift the tide from loneliness to connection”.

Loneliness and social isolation continue to affect the health and wellbeing of Australians, and Neighbour Day works to connect people and communities across Australia – one relationship at a time.

Relationships Australia works with ANU to produce research on Neighbour Day, and Associate Professor Tegan Cruwys addressed the audience and discussed the year on year findings. Neighbour Day research has found that identifying strongly with multiple groups (such as neighbours, volunteering groups, sports etc.) was protective against loneliness and mental ill-health, and that connecting with your community improves your perception of your relationships with your family and friends.

“The importance of social connection, especially during the times we’ve collectively faced lately, cannot be understated. Increasing the sustainable and respectful relationships in our lives benefits us as individuals, and our communities as a whole to be more resilient, and helps address loneliness broadly.

“Neighbour Day encourages people to reach out and make sustainable connections with those around them and across all their communities. We encourage all Australians to join with us and help celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Neighbour Day and communities broadly”, said Mr Tebbey

Join us this Neighbour Day [neighbourday.org](https://neighbourday.org) and register your Neighbour Day event today!

**Media Contact:**

Kathleen Caller, National Communications and Engagement Manager,  
Relationships Australia  
[kcaller@relationships.org.au](mailto:kcaller@relationships.org.au) M 0416 106 612



*Relationships Australia is a leading provider of relationship support services for individuals, families and communities. We aim to support all people in Australia to achieve positive and respectful relationships. We are a community-based, not-for-profit Australian organisation with no religious affiliations.*

