



Friendlier neighbourhoods will prevent lonely deaths

Australians must get over their fear of becoming a 'nosy neighbour' and become more actively involved in their immediate community to help prevent more elderly people dying in their homes.

That's the message from Neighbour Day founder Andrew Heslop who says television dramas have created negative stereotypes that portray people active in their communities as 'busybodies' and 'stickybeaks'.

"We have become scared of getting to know our neighbours because we fear that we'll end up like the gossipy, nuisance characters we see on TV.

"But being a good neighbour isn't about becoming intimately involved in the lives of the people next door and across the street – or on the next farm if you're in the bush. It's about being sensitive to their needs and never being afraid to help out when needed," he said.

Communities rallying to disasters such as floods, bushfires and storms show how quickly people respond when property and livelihoods are under threat but this sense of community must be fostered all year round.

The values of tolerance, respect and understanding are critical to achieving these aims, according to Andrew.

"We have to get past these fears and perceived barriers because vulnerable and isolated people dying alone in their homes and remaining undiscovered for months, sometimes years, is simply unacceptable.

"It doesn't take much effort but a simple visit to an elderly neighbour or someone who lives alone can provide a much needed link for them to the outside world. With the reassurance that someone is nearby and able to help, it could mean the difference between life and death in a personal emergency.

"Everyone wants to live in a vibrant, healthy community but the community you want really does start at your front door," he said.

The 6th annual **Neighbour Day** is on **Sunday 30th March 2008**. For more information visit www.neighbourday.org

Held on the last Sunday in March each year, Neighbour Day was founded in 2003 after the remains of an elderly woman were found in her suburban Melbourne home. She had been dead for two years, forgotten and alone.

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