



Australians prepare to celebrate Neighbour Day's 10th anniversary

Ten years ago an idea in a Letter to the Editor of The Age became the catalyst for Australia's annual celebration of community, Neighbour Day, which will be celebrated around the country this year on Sunday 31st March.

Street parties, barbecues, morning and afternoon teas, lunches and major festivals and other events run by councils, resident groups, tenancy associations, developers and churches will bring residents together to connect and to celebrate.

"I'm very proud that the concept of Neighbour Day was so enthusiastically and warmly embraced by Australians from day one," said 2012 NSW Volunteer of the Year and Neighbour Day founder Andrew Heslop, "its success is a living tribute to Mrs Elsie Brown."

Mrs Brown had died alone in her home in January 2001 but was not discovered until March 2003 by Victoria Police after neighbours became concerned for her welfare. For more than two years mail, store catalogues and newspapers had piled up at her front door but neighbours didn't connect this evidence with something being amiss for an elderly woman known to live alone.

"There are many events and special days each year yet Neighbour Day offers something different. It's an opportunity to get together with the people next door, across the street or on the next farm to celebrate why your community is so special to you," Andrew said.

"The great thing about Neighbour Day is that it is entirely up to you and your neighbours to decide together on how you want to get involved. It could be as simple as boiling the kettle and having a cup of tea, a slice of cake or a Tim Tam. It could be a barbecue. It could be a street party – or something far more elaborate.

"Empowering neighbours to decide what works for them and providing the free invitations, posters, name tags and a 'how to guide' they need at www.neighbourday.org encourages conversation. That's a critical element in all well-connected communities, no matter where you choose to call home," said Andrew.

Founded in Melbourne in 2003, Neighbour Day is always held on the last Sunday in March every year and has five principal aims -

1. Strengthen communities and build better relationships with the people who live around us.
2. Create safer, healthier and more vibrant suburbs and towns.
3. Promote tolerance, respect and understanding.
4. Break down community barriers.
5. Protect the elderly, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged.

**** Prime Minister Julia Gillard's 2013 Neighbour Day and 2003 Letter to the Editor message over page ****



NeighbourDay



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PRIME MINISTER
CANBERRA

MESSAGE FROM PRIME MINISTER JULIA GILLARD

NEIGHBOUR DAY SUNDAY 31 MARCH 2013

Neighbour Day is a wonderful opportunity to remember the importance and value of strong communities.

Thanks to the efforts of its founder, Andrew Heslop, Neighbour Day has inspired and motivated communities to reconnect and re-engage.

We all have an obligation to keep an eye out for those around us, particularly those who are most vulnerable. The connections we form with our neighbours can strengthen our sense of community and belonging.

We all should take pride in the community we live in and strive to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in public life.

I encourage all Australians to take part in Neighbour Day, whether you introduce yourself to the new neighbours, have a friendly chat to those you haven't spoken to in a while, catch up with your friends across the fence or organise a community get together for your street. These small gestures can go a long way to creating a safer, more inclusive neighbourhood for everyone to enjoy.

The Honourable Julia Gillard
Prime Minister of Australia

Letters & Opinion

Elsie Brown's lonely death is a wake-up call for us all

The eventual discovery of the remains of 75-year-old Elsie Brown in her Melbourne home last week, almost two years after her death, is an appalling indictment on a supposedly civilised society in one of the world's most affluent countries.

That Elsie Brown's whereabouts had gone without proper investigation by relatives, friends and neighbours — let alone by utilities companies, government agencies or service providers — for so long reflects poorly on our sense of community and concern for others. Yet it is sadly indicative of the isolation many women and men face each day.

With increasing numbers of people of all ages choosing to live alone, for whatever reason, I believe we simply cannot continue to ignore those within our suburbs and towns who are isolated, lonely or at risk — and, as

in this instance, especially senior citizens.

While people disconnect with their family or friends for entirely valid reasons, at an immediate level I'm sure we can all identify someone within our community we know to

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live alone and without regular day-to-day contact.

How often have we watched as new neighbours moved in next door or across the street, yet have not taken the time to say hello? How often have we walked past the residence of an elderly neighbour and looked at the over-

grown garden or piles of junk mail, quietly wondering about their welfare?

So let's do something about it. I propose we designate Sunday March 30 "National Check On Your Neighbour Day". Make the effort to get to know the people next door, in the house behind and across the street. If you live in the country, get in the car and check on your single neighbour on the next farm. Introduce yourself and make sure they're OK — especially if they are elderly. Swap phone numbers, and follow up by dropping by from time to time, and call the police if you're concerned.

Elsie Brown's lonely death was tragic — but let's use it as a wake-up call, and all take greater responsibility for those around us. You never know, it might just save a life.

Andrew Heslop, Albert Park