

Catalysing Community Connections: How neighbours day brought locals to school and beyond.

Initiative/Location: Maitara

Theme: Creating and Sustaining Momentum.

Getting involved in a national campaign can be an effective way of connecting locally. In Maitara in 2011, senior primary school pupils showcased their hosting talents when they invited neighbours into their school. As well, the morning tea has led to a renewed intergenerational connection on the towns streets since.

Neighbourhoods are all about residents. They also include a range of organisations, including schools. As part of the celebration of Neighbours Day 2011 <http://www.neighboursday.org.nz/> Maitara School's senior class (Year 6) wrote an invitation to households neighbouring the school inviting them to celebrate Neighbours Day at a morning tea at the school. The children hand delivered the invitations and prepared scones and other baking to host their neighbours in the community room at the school.

The morning tea was the idea of Maitara School family coordinator Robyn Krenz, who noticed the day was being celebrated throughout New Zealand. And it was a resounding success, with school Principal Susan Dennison saying that she could not believe how many people turned up. "I was teaching so by the time I got there, honestly the room was full — absolutely chocker," Mrs Dennison said. About 30 visitors attended, including Maitara community development coordinator Jo Brand and representatives from Reap as well as many local residents.

One neighbour, Nora Lennon, began attending Maitara School in 1940 as a nine year old and enjoyed being invited back. Several other people who lived close by were interested in the wellbeing of the school but with no children in their households had previously not had the opportunity to be involved in the school. At the morning tea they met the Principal for the first time.

'It was good networking and neighbours meeting each other,' commented Mrs Krenz. "The year sixes really enjoyed the sense of 'we've been part of creating this'. They weren't just there — they had actually personally invited these people."

As well as the Principal, guests were incredibly impressed with the thoughtfulness of the children who made sure everyone was greeted on arrival, offered a tea or coffee and then taken on a short tour of who had baked which item. "The manners and hosting skills of the year 6 students were outstanding and a credit to their parents and teacher", said Jo Brand.

Jo has also noticed that since Neighbours Day there has been a visible change in interactions between the children and older residents too. There are often friendly greetings in the street and more people know each other's name. "As well, adults have got to know one another better which has increased the community spirit of our town because we all realise we want the same thing, a fantastic community for our families to live within", she says.

National campaigns offer the opportunity to develop a local take on the theme and can really help local investment go further. In the case of Neighbours Day, as well as the national advertising, tips, ideas and resources are available to download and customise. And, as the Maitua experience shows, such campaigns can also have a catalytic effect.

Since Neighbours Day 2011, Maitua School has ensured more parent and community involvement all year round with activities and events at the school. Whilst there is no official event planned for Neighbours Day 2012 there are many community events planned in March including Family Fun day which will bring all the neighbours together for a day of entertainment, games and rides together.

Intent

To create an opportunity where senior primary school pupils could host local residents as neighbours in their school so that stronger connections could be made between the school children and residents, amongst the residents and between the school and residents.

Learnings

- People love to feel part of their community. By approaching the bordering homes to the school property the school clearly announced to these households that they are part of our immediate community.
- Children step up to new roles and enjoy hosting local people. As well, they learnt who lives near the school and developed new relationships of respect for these people and properties.
- Everyone is interested in the best outcomes for children- regardless of their situation and background.

Outcomes

- The children were fascinated with what school was like in times gone past – something some of the neighbours could tell them about from first-hand experience. This connection also led to a conversation of how the Historical Society and School can work together in the future to bring history of our community to life.
- Neighbours who had no contact with the school previously are now comfortable to visit school events and discuss any observations with the Principal.
- There has been no reported damage to any school property in well over a year.

Contact:

Jo Brand

Community Development Coordinator

mcdc@cnt.org.nz

Story by Denise Bijoux and Jo Brand, written in conjunction with The Ensign.

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