



## Door knocking to connect!

**Initiative:** Massey Matters

**Theme:** Working together in place.

**Cold calling can be scary but hugely rewarding when it comes to finding out what is going on and what is hoped for in neighbourhoods. SAM FARQUHAR talks about working with residents in their streets to bring about some of the changes they want to see.**

Talking to local people in their street can be a really effective way of finding out what they want for their areas. In early January 2012 Sam, the new Massey Matters Project Coordinator, made a series of visits to local streets that were further away from local amenities to find out what those living there felt was missing in terms of services and opportunities for them.

The area Sam chose was connected via a bridge over the motorway with only one way in and out for vehicles. One particular street was mainly Housing New Zealand properties and many residents were the second generation of their family to be living in the street. The street was also very culturally diverse with dogs roaming untended and children outside playing happily on it.

Although a few people eyed Sam with suspicion, she took that in her stride and was soon knocking on her first door. Cold calling. Scary. Yet, once the first door opened suspicion was quickly cast aside and the conversation flowed. This resident and most of those who answered their doors that day were happy to share their concerns, thoughts and ideas about what it was like to live in their street and how they wanted to improve it. The visit revealed that four key things were of common concern. These were that:

1. There was little in the way of things for their children to do that was free and close to their homes;
2. The dumping of rubbish in their reserve was an issue because the cost and process of disposing inorganic rubbish was too high for most of them;
3. They all travelled further away for medical services or went without because the local services were more expensive; and
4. Their street was perceived by others as a 'bad' street.

On the positive side, most of the residents knew each other and were well connected already. They all wanted the wider community to see them as a nice street and they were very keen to clean up their reserve too!

So cleaning up the reserve became the catalyst to working together and generating pride in their street. Following a meeting with a few residents, Paina stepped up to meet with organisations working in the area. Working in this way meant the local residents gained confidence that their thoughts were valued by professionals working locally, and Paina was able to act as both a leader and a conduit of information between the various parties. Paina confirmed that the clean up was what residents most wanted to do and that doing this on a Sunday would be best for many in the street.

The plan evolved over two weeks. Making the clean up of the reserve fun so families could all come and participate was a key driver. An extra incentive for everyone in the street came in the form of a bin just for residents' own inorganic rubbish. This bin was provided by the local park ranger, and it meant that there was a clean start for both the residents and the reserve.

The outcome on the day was amazing! Over 50 residents turned up and, while most children played, the adults picked up rubbish and worked alongside Hew our park ranger and Karena from Project Twin Streams. Karena made a special effort to show the children the importance of keeping the park clean and safe. As well, Lifewise provided information [on Neighbours Day](#), discussed fun ideas and provided a raffle.

Once the clean up ended everyone enjoyed a sausage sizzle and each household received a goodie bag with information on local services that can assist them to continue keeping pride in their neighbourhood and supporting one another. This included information on insulation for their homes, Neighbourhood Support, prevention and removal of tagging and how to access local parks and walks. The final buzz was when Mr Whippy pulled up and, thinking he was part of the celebration, children lined up for ice cream. One of the project partners saw this and agreed to shout each child a free ice cream - what a generous way to end a hugely productive and collaborative day!

The street is now looking at ideas for a shared garden and residents already say they feel proud to live amongst such a great group of people. They also feel prouder of their street and the people in it than they were before and are also hopeful that they can keep their reserve clean and free of dumped rubbish.

For Sam and Massey Matters, taking the time to knock on doors in what might feel like an inhospitable area has opened many doors, including literally many of those on this street. It also shows that even people in 'scary' streets have ideas and aspirations for their place. They are often willing to make things happen too, and only need a nudge to become involved. Making it easier for local residents to do things that improve their local area helps to make changes in those

areas and to keep those changes in place. It also helps to identify local leaders and ways of doing things and leads to other projects being undertaken by neighbours together.

On a more personal note, being the one to start the conversations that led to something actually happening means Sam is welcome in the street at any time. Now the neighbours know her, no doubt they will make sure she helps them bring a few more of their ideas to life. Over a few cups of tea of course!

**Intent:**

To find out and work with what local people want for their street to help make these things happen.

**Key Learnings:**

- Cold calling is difficult and scary. But worth it! Talking is a great way of finding out what is going on in an area and what is hoped for. Starting conversations in people's streets, and on their doorsteps, means residents are talking in spaces that are comfortable for them and can make them feel useful and valued.
- When conversation leads to action, this feeling of usefulness grows into a sense of contribution and pride. People love to see their ideas being given credence by others and they love to take a leadership role in making them happen, as well as enjoying the fruits of their collective labour of course!
- Contribution and pride can begin to change the appearance of even the most run down street. People tend not to dump in areas they have been part of cleaning up, trees planted by locals tend not to get vandalised and so on because neighbours have taken the time to make these things happen themselves. They have a vested interest in them. Even better, it means neighbours get to know each other, and each other's skills and ideas, even more.
- Spending time working together almost inevitably leads to conversations about other projects. These projects, too, may require a helping hand. In the future, though, the residents will already know a bit about the systems involved and may well take the lead themselves, accepting advice and assistance that helps them achieve goals they have set for themselves.
- Often all it takes to make small but significant changes in neighbourhoods is for someone to take the time to find out what locals think and want then make a few strategic connections. After a few knocks on doors, and several cups of tea, suddenly all sorts of things are happening!

**Key outcomes:**

- Residents realise that their thoughts and ideas are valid and valued. Not only that, but they can become reality, with a little help from one another and organisations working in the area.
- Relationships have deepened and expanded amongst residents, between organisations and across residents and organisations. Organisations now realise that residents have both ideas and skills to contribute and that working together is the most effective way of both getting things done at a street level, and maintaining the outcomes achieved.
- The reserve is cleaned up! And alternative ways of managing inorganic waste are understood by the residents.
- Residents have aspirations for their area, and are working together to achieve those.

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