

A group of people are gathered outdoors in a lush, green garden setting, enjoying a barbecue. In the foreground, a man in a light blue shirt is smiling and looking at a woman in a white blouse who is holding a skewer of food. They are standing near a grill where other food is cooking. In the background, other people are seated at tables, and the garden is filled with various plants and trees, creating a warm and communal atmosphere.

# It Takes a Village: A Neighbourhood Manifesto

The It Takes a Village program uses the well-known phrase ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ as it captures the essence of life as a collective endeavour.

It is all too easy to forget that we were all children once, a time where we were completely dependent on others to care for our needs. It is those relationships that helped shape us into the people we are today.

This program encourages us to measure our lives not by our income and wealth, our status and successes, but by the quality of our relationships and the quality of our service to those relationships.



northern  
beaches  
council

### **Why is a program like this needed?**

Australian and international research shows the increasing impact of social isolation and loneliness. Loneliness is affecting our health and wellbeing in dramatic and profound ways. It should cause us to pause and think: are we in the midst of some kind of subtle, silent crisis?

There is a growing tide of opinion that suggests we are experiencing some kind of crisis of solidarity and with it a profound loss of deep, human connection. This is perhaps best highlighted by the contemporary paradox whereby we can communicate instantly across the globe and yet find it difficult to chat with our neighbour next door.

In *The Second Mountain*, David Brooks suggests that our current age has swung too far in the direction of individualism, focusing too heavily on what makes 'me' happy rather than on our obligations and responsibilities to one another. Referring to this as 'hyper-individualism', he argues this focus leads to us living superficial and unsatisfying lives lacking depth and deeper meaning. If he is right, are we creating a way of living that starves us of the things we yearn for most deeply?

In *The Village Effect*, Susan Pinker recounts the story of a cluster of villages in Sardinia where there are 10 times as many centenarians as the Italian national average. These villages are places where no one lives alone, where the elderly live with children and social contact is high. This study suggests that increasing social connection increases longevity of life. If this study is right, we need to create places and spaces for social connection, and ones that especially value and honour old age.

### **Alternative ways of being**

*It Takes a Village* asserts that relationships are the most valuable and value-creating resource of any community. It acknowledges that 'we' always precedes 'me' noting how the love and care of a village of people is always the foundation for every child's development. This program encourages us to measure our lives not by our income and wealth, our status and successes, but by the quality of our relationships and the quality of our service to those relationships.

When we focus on people's self-interest or the highly competitive nature of the world around us, we can often miss the incredible amount of goodwill shown every day. *It Takes a Village* seeks to tap into this aspect of human nature that we know is alive and well and is a powerful antidote to the stultifying and wearying effects of a world driven by self-interest alone.

It is common for people who reflect on their life and realise that the moments when they felt fully alive was when they were in service to some kind of ideal and committed to people or to a project. French sociologist Emile Durkheim made this point when he claimed that we achieve our greatest joys in the brief moments where we have a strong sense of being simply a part of a greater whole.

Moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt refers to this as the hive switch, our ability under special conditions to transcend self-interest and lose ourselves, temporarily and ecstatically, in something larger than ourselves. And so in the context of being driven by self or collective interests, Haidt suggests we are 90 percent chimp and 10 percent bee. *It Takes a Village* is in the business of making honey.

### Third Pillars and Third Places

In his landmark book, *The Third Pillar*, former Chief Economist at the International Monetary Fund Raghuram Rajan identifies community as the indispensable and often undervalued third pillar alongside those of the market and the state. Rajan shows how a return to strengthening and empowering local communities is the only antidote to growing despair and unrest. *It Takes a Village* seeks to provide just one small platform, like thousands of other like-minded projects across the world, for building community connections at the local level.

In *The Great Good Place*, American sociologist Ray Oldenburg reflects on the coffee shops, beauty parlours, general stores and other locales that sit at the heart of communities. While we might frequent these kinds of small businesses for a particular purpose — to buy a coffee or get a haircut — it is the relationships we build within them that keep us coming back. Third places are unlike home or workplaces where we fulfill certain social roles and are powerful social levellers, places where we engage with one another as equals. Oldenburg argues that these ‘third places’ are essential to our communities. This program seeks to resource and inspire residents across the Northern Beaches to build their relationships in their local neighbourhoods and communities.

### A Neighbourhood Manifesto

The *Second Mountain* concludes with a ‘Relationist Manifesto’ proposing relationships at the centre of our lives and being rather than the autonomous self in a ‘Declaration of Interdependence’. All this seems to suggest a singularly powerful and important truth, that humans are happiest when we are living for each other. As Australian social researcher Hugh Mackay is often quoted as saying ‘the state of our nation begins in our local street.’

Inspired by this Relationist Manifesto, the *It Takes a Village* program proposes a ‘Neighbourhood Manifesto’ to reclaim our connections to our local neighbours and community. The Manifesto puts forward 10 commitments summarising some of the key aspects of this program, framed as actions towards which to aspire. We encourage you to consider these, and to become a signatory to them.

Through this program, Council seeks to empower and support the many hundreds and thousands of relationship-minded people across the Northern Beaches committed to the principles behind *It Takes a Village* and being a part of improving our individual and collective wellbeing through increasing social connections in our local neighbourhoods.

## It Takes a Village: A Neighbourhood Manifesto

I commit to:

1. Know my neighbours by name
2. Host or support a Meet your Neighbour party with the neighbours around me
3. Get involved in local groups and activities
4. Work out what it means for me to give back to my community
5. Look out for my neighbours, particularly those who may be more vulnerable and in greater need of care and assistance
6. Play my part in Ending Loneliness Together
7. Be more attuned to the impact of loneliness upon people around me
8. Embrace my local community as a 'third pillar' and 'third place'
9. Focus more on the quality of my relationships
10. Share these insights with my family, colleagues and friends

[Click here](#) to sign the Neighbourhood Manifesto.

