



# THE ART AND PRACTICE OF NEIGHBOURING

Civic Engagement and Volunteering  
for the Local Community



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Raymond Loh, Mimi Rojo Laurilla, Jason Banico

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A Book by Canopy Accelerator Cooperative, WynTree Nursery,  
and Next Door Garden

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Curated by Raymond Loh and Jason Banico.

Authors: Walter Villagonzalo, Iris Du, Tim Langdon, Sam Leong, Isaac KP Ng, Raymond Loh, Mimi Rojo Laurilla, and Jason Banico

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*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command:*

*'Love your neighbour as yourself.'*

Galatians 5:14.

# Authors



**Walter Villagonzalo.** Walter has served for 25 years as a full-time community volunteer and social entrepreneur for the City of Wyndham and the western suburbs of Melbourne. He was the City of Wyndham's Citizen of the Year, and Wyndham Community Engagement Awardee, both in 2015. He was a Finalist for the Victorian Premier's Volunteer Champions Dame Elizabeth Murdoch Award in 2016, and a Finalist for the Third Sector Australian Volunteer of the Year Award in 2017. He was also awarded the Social Enterprise Champion Award from Social Traders in 2016.

As a community servant, Walter has served as a Deputy Mayor and Councillor for the City of Wyndham, and Portfolio Chair for Future Focused Economy.

He is the founder and president of the Migrant Hub Inc., President of Canopy Accelerator Cooperative Limited, Convenor for WynTree Friends and Vice President for New Ventures, Social Enterprise, International and National Business Networking and Local Government Representation Australian Council for Multicultural Entrepreneurs Inc.

Walter also served as an Honorary Philippine Investment & Trade Representative from 1998-2002, and was a member of several organisations, including the Ministerial Council for Volunteers (Victoria), North and Western Metropolitan Regional Advisory Council for the Victorian Multicultural Commission from 2012-2016), Rotary Club of Hoppers Crossing, and City West Water Community Liaison Committee in 2008.



**Iris Du.** Iris is a Leadership Strategist, You Want Group Co-founder, Motivational speaker, Human Behaviour Expert and #1 Amazon bestselling author.

Iris Du is a multi-award-winning leadership strategist, motivational speaker, #1 Amazon best-selling author of 'Great Leadership Starts With You— Be The Leader You Want To Be' and human behaviour expert who thrives on helping individuals, leaders and businesses achieve the success they deserve.

Boasting 15 years of leadership experience, Iris is the Gold Stevie® Award Female Executive of the Year 2021, Silver Stevie® Award Mentor or Coach of the Year 2021, Silver Stevie® Award Woman of the Year 2021, The Accolades Gold Winner in Business Survivor Category, The Accolades Finalist for Women in Influence, Mental Health Foundation Australia - Recognition Award 2021 and Bronze Stevie® Award Female Executive of the Year 2020.

Iris' vision of a united society coming together for the greater good is evident in her support of global social change initiatives like B1G1 and Project Karma. Under her guidance, You Want Group has successfully achieved over 200,000 social impacts with B1G1 and raised over \$10,000 for Project Karma causes. Iris was also selected to star in a ground-breaking TV show, Adventure All-Stars, as an official TV cast member by the internationally acclaimed Charity TV Global. The show is broadcast in 25 different countries to almost 100 million homes, making the series one of Australia's most-watched international TV shows.

In 2021, Iris was appointed as a community leader for the Multicultural Community Engagement Committee of Mental Health Foundation Australia (MHFA), supporting and creating events that promote diversity, multiculturalism and mental health awareness.

Iris is the Co-Founder of You Want Group and sits on the executive committee of several major associations including Deputy Chairperson of the Association of Leadership & Diversity Australia, Board Member at the AUS Asia Business Council (AABC), a Monash Business School Mentor and Editor in Chief of Your Career Magazine.

Iris also draws on her own story of overcoming adversity to help CEOs, executives and business owners gain clarity and create the strategy to maximize their results and live the life they want.

Iris arrived in Australia aged 15, on her own, with no family or friends and had to fight to survive each and every day. With persistence, she turned that adversity into opportunity, using it to grow and develop the skills she now shares with others as a leadership strategist and co-founder of the award-winning business- You Want Group.

Iris is a master NLP practitioner, human behaviour expert, Chinese metaphysics consultant, a certified conversational hypnotherapist and a certified values facilitator, who thrives on empowering individuals and businesses to discover their values and passion.

Drawing on leadership, attraction and manifestation strategies, Iris works with organisations to help them leverage their natural talent to create highly engaged and high performing leaders and teams.

Visit <https://youwantgroup.com> to learn more about Iris Du and how You Want Group empowers individuals and organisations for success.



**Tim Langdon.** Tim is a senior commercial executive with a broad focus crossing a number of industries including – banking & finance, capital markets, media and the environment. His career has spanned roles at Southbank Capital, NAB, British Petroleum Finance Australia, Bank of America, Banque Indosuez & HSBC - specialising in Treasury. He has a Bachelor of Economics, MBA. and Diploma of Financial Services.

He is a FTA Certified Treasury Professional ([financetreasury.com.au](http://financetreasury.com.au)) and is a Fellow of the Institute of Managers and Leaders Australia/New Zealand ([managersandleaders.com.au](http://managersandleaders.com.au)). He is

also an Industry Mentor for RMIT University - Melbourne, Australia Campus ([mentoring.rmit.edu.au](http://mentoring.rmit.edu.au)).

For community involvement, Tim is a judge of the Banksia Sustainability Awards ([banksiafdn.com](http://banksiafdn.com)), and the Parks & Leisure Australia Awards of Excellence ([parksleisure.com.au](http://parksleisure.com.au)).

Tim is the Founder and Sole Director of Carbon Market Pty Ltd ([carbonmarket.com.au](http://carbonmarket.com.au)), which operates Eco Voice ([ecovoice.com.au](http://ecovoice.com.au)), and Wimmera Native Nursery Pty Ltd, which owns The Native Shop ([nativeshop.com.au](http://nativeshop.com.au)).



**Sam Leong.** Sam is with the Community Service Leadership with Lions Club of Kuala Lumpur North. He served as District Governor In 1996/1997, and a recipient of 3 Lions Clubs International Presidents' Medals and a Leadership Medal. He also received the Red Crescent Humanitarian Award. He has also attained Distinguished Toastmaster Award with Toastmasters International. Author of GPS for Success & Happiness. Sam has more than 40 years of professional experience in various business activities and areas, as well as in community & humanitarian services in leadership roles. Has also been active in various capacities in business and trade organisations: He is a trained professional accountant, manager and trainer/speaker, and Life Coach, earning all his professional qualifications through self-studies and distance learning. Sam possesses varied street-smart experiences in sales, management and leadership, which he used to train sales professionals, business executives, and youths, our leaders of the future. He has facilitated many learning and training sessions in sales, behavioural change, communication & public speaking, leadership & team-building, and management.



**Isaac KP Ng.** Sr Ng Kim Poh has over 43 years of practice and experience in the property industry serving clients locally and internationally, specialising in Property Development & Investment consultancy, Marketing & Sales, Viability & Feasibility studies and Project & Property management. In recent years, he has started to conduct feasibility & viability studies in the Senior Homes, Retirement Villages and Medical & Wellness industry as a Real Estate Specialist for AJT Holdings International, headquartered in Bangkok, Thailand with centres in Cambodia and Singapore.



**Raymond Loh.** Raymond is an entrepreneur, property developer and founder of many successful companies at the local and international level, with vast business experience and extensive community services and expertise in Education, Training and IT, Raymond has been awarded the Lions Club International Highest Award and a District Fellow Club Member, with many other Community & Leadership Awards to his credit.

Raymond's personal passion is to make this world a better place for all to live an extraordinary ordinary life with a legacy through SMART Innovations & Philosophy for sustainable Future Generations and Quality Lifestyles. This Raymond has learned through his many roles

throughout his vast business working and social volunteering experiences. From life coaching to team building and leadership training, managing investment portfolios, advising on Investment Strategies Project Managing a number of key projects around the Asia Pacific region, Raymond brings a breadth of knowledge in all types of Marketing Projects and Business Development Management Skills.

With a rich background in multi-cultures Raymond brings to the team an essential understanding of local and global business networks and pooling business resources and experts to form innovative and functional teams in Australia.



**Mimi Rojo Laurilla.** Mimi Rojo Laurilla is a writer, educator, music teacher, and now a published author. She has worked in several industries over the span of 24 years of her professional life. She had a career as a lecturer/university professor both in public and private tertiary institution settings whilst taking on administration roles both in the Philippines and in the United States of America. After her long stint in academia, she moved to an office role within the health sector in New Zealand. She had the opportunity to support executive/senior-level management positions both as a Personal Assistant and as an Executive Assistant. In the not-for-profit sector, she served as a volunteer Board Secretary and Executive Officer. She also worked for an international tripartite project as a communications manager with the title National Communications Awareness Specialist.

She recently completed a role as Program Coordinator for an organisation in Melbourne specialising in disability support and aged care where she trained and supported people with disabilities who want to be public speakers.

Outside of her day job, she is an e-course creator, a piano teacher, an English tutor, and now a book writer as well. She is a mum to three young adults and a devoted wife to her husband. She also enjoys being a mum to the family's pet bunnies, Charlie and Cloudy.

**Jason Banico.** Jason is an IT professional and entrepreneur, with an interest in using IT and social media to serve social enterprises and not-for-profits. In 2006, he was a Fellow for the Reuters Digital Vision Program at Stanford University, a program that supported social technopreneurship. He is a member of Australia Mensa, and a co-founder of Civic Space Australia.

# Volunteering and the Sense of Belonging

by Walter Villagonzalo

I started my volunteering journey in Australia almost immediately after I arrived in 1986. I joined the Filipino Community Club in Werribee and also volunteered in other migrant associations like the Ethnic Communities Council of Werribee, the Migrant Resource Centre in Altona, and other groups. I worked as a Senior Systems Analyst in a major insurance company and later did computer contract work. I also started small businesses including IT consulting, a money remittance/cargo forwarding business and import/export of goods between Australia and the Philippines.

In those early years, although I was active, I felt that I did not belong or was appreciated. This is common among skilled migrants. Some end up returning to their home country because of not having that sense of belonging.



Walter's Family Today

Twelve years after our arrival, in 1998, I decided to take my family back to the Philippines. I was travelling frequently between Australia and the Philippines, where I had an agribusiness project, to rehabilitate land that was covered by lahar after the eruption of the volcano, Mt. Pinatubo. I felt like I was more accomplished and appreciated back there. One night, I announced to my family that we were staying in the Philippines for good, but our children, who were already in their teens, said, ".... but Dad, we are Australians," as they felt they belonged in Australia. We discussed and prayed about it and my wife and I decided to return to Australia for our children's sake.

Although committed to staying in Australia, I still had the issue of not feeling I belonged. I then worked on overcoming it by volunteering again and doing it a lot more. The more I volunteered, the more I felt belonging and being recognised. I did it full-time for around 25 years, taking up 50 different roles for the community.

In 2008, I wanted to organise a Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) in Wyndham. We had a growing migrant community but didn't have such a centre. I was a co-opted Committee Member of the Westgate Migrant Resource Centre in Altona, which had an extension office in Wyndham. I asked the Wyndham Council for funding so we could have our own MRC - an office and a support worker but Council said no. I then gathered other members of the community and started The Migrant Hub and operated it as a social enterprise. We started MiHUB Cafe, a community cafe in Hoppers Lane as one of our team members was an experienced chef. We set it up and operated it out of our own pockets. As the cafe was able to pay for the overheads, we then had our office space from where we provided services to the migrant community in Wyndham.

The cafe became a place to eat, a place to meet and a place to build community. Local employers came for meals and ended up meeting jobseekers. We organised small business ventures like gardening/lawn mowing and flyer distribution so unemployed residents could earn some income. When asylum seekers were transitioning into community from Christmas Island, we partnered with a developer and leased their 9 apartments and made them available to the Australian Red Cross for short-term accommodation for their asylum seeker clients. We eventually had 25 houses and provided accommodation and settlement support to more than 1,000 asylum seekers.

It was for such work, and other volunteering engagements, that I was recognized by Wyndham City Council, and the State and Federal Governments. I got awards like Third Sector Volunteer of the Year Finalist, Dame Elizabeth Murdoch Award Finalist, and was named a Paul Harris Fellow by Rotary International, for my Community Service. I received the 2015 City of Wyndham's Community Engagement Award and was named 2015 Citizen of the Year. The Migrant Hub, the social enterprise I founded, received 2015 Community Group of the Year Award. I also received the Social Enterprise Champion Award from Social Traders in a national search in 2016. FILCCA or the Filipino Community Council of Australia, the peak body of Filipino organisations in Australia gave me the 2016 Philippine Australian Achiever Award and Megaworld International named me the Megaworld Exemplary Global Achiever in 2021.

There are around 5 million Filipinos living outside the Philippines, 300,000 in Australia and around 60,000 in Victoria. The government of the Philippines named me, the only 2021 awardee from Australia, as one of 56 Filipino individuals and organisations overseas that brought honour and pride to the Philippines while pursuing their vocation and fields of expertise. I will be receiving the 2021 Pamana (legacy) ng Pilipino Award and a Medallion from the President of the Philippines.



Walter receiving the award from Social Traders.

It was always a great honour to receive the awards, but I wasn't doing what I was doing because of them and the recognition. I did it because I enjoy belonging to the organisations and giving back to my community.

# How Leadership can Enhance Good Neighbouring

by Iris Du

When the team from Nextdoor Garden approached me to contribute a chapter to their book – ‘The Art and Practice of Neighbouring’, I was thrilled. I came to Australia when I was fifteen. Growing up alone in Australia as a migrant from Hong Kong was challenging as I failed many times and made mistakes in my early adult years. But it was because of the mistakes I made that helped me quickly see and turn failure into excitement for growth.

By celebrating every failure and turning it into a valuable lesson, it showed me my path and my destiny. I am grateful for my journey in Australia and deeply honoured for all the things I have achieved, especially meeting the love of my life, who is now my best friend, business partner and life partner, Thai. Now I dedicate my time to empowering and inspiring others to keep achieving what they want in life.



Thai and Iris invited as Monash Business School mentors

I was a high school dropout who turned my life around and became a multi-award winning leadership strategist, motivational speaker and Monash Business School Mentor. I've also authored an Amazon #1 Bestselling book, 'Great Leadership Starts With You – Be The Leader You Want To Be'. I am super grateful for the success I have achieved and would like to show

others that if you open up your heart and embrace the goodness in yourself and that of others, you can go a long way in making a difference in the community you live in.

In this chapter, I would like to focus on leadership and good neighbouring. As a leadership strategist and passionate community advocate, I have worked with some of Australia's top business and community leaders. Leadership is a key component of success. But leadership is not just limited to people in power. You don't have to be a boss or the chairman of a committee to be a great leader. You can be a great leader from within, whether that is in your own home or on your street, and make a positive impact on the lives of the people who live close to you.

### **Good neighbouring builds communities**

By definition, a neighbour is someone who lives near or next door to you. Unless you are living on an island alone, you will have neighbours. Neighbours can make your life a blessing or pure hell. If you have good neighbours, you have friends who are happy to share their baking with you, check your mail and your home while you are away. As with many things in life, sometimes we don't appreciate our neighbours until we lose them.

Good neighbouring builds communities. When we provide support to one another, our lives and communities are transformed. Good neighbouring is about leading by example and demonstrating what it means to be a good neighbour that appreciates the people who live close to you.

### **Be the great leader in your neighbourhood**

Leadership is not an exclusive trait that only a few possess. Every individual can become a great leader. Set yourself some goals, clarify what you want to achieve, have a strategy and put it into action to create what you want in life, and you are on your way to becoming a great leader.

Great leadership fosters great neighbouring. You don't have to become an elected leader in your community. You can be a leader at home or on your street. Small acts of kindness have a significant impact. So, let's have a look at how you can channel your inner leadership qualities to become an even greater neighbour.

### **Leadership and good neighbouring**

Great leaders work on their communication skills. They are discerning in their communication approach. A good neighbour is friendly and courteous but never intrusive. We exchange pleasantries with the people who live close to us, but we know how to respect one another's privacy and boundaries. Likewise, great leaders know when to act. So, if you know a neighbour who is going through a challenging time, you can take the initiative to approach them and see how you can help and support them.

In my book 'Great Leadership Starts with You', I discussed how every individual has the ability to be a great leader. Great leadership is about character and integrity. A good neighbour

respects others' religions, cultures and lifestyle choices. We do not judge, nor do we speculate. Instead, we embrace and welcome them as part of our community. If you accept others, they accept you in turn. Acceptance is the first step towards fostering a healthy and harmonious neighbourhood. With acceptance comes understanding and mutual respect.



Iris with fellow TV cast members holding a copy of her bestselling book

Your neighbours are your community. Here are some suggestions on how you can lead by example in your neighbourhood.

- Plan to end your family gatherings, parties or celebrations earlier rather than continuing loudly into the wee small hours. Let your neighbours have a good night's sleep.
- Greet your neighbours when you see them. Ask after them.
- Inform your neighbour if you see unusual activities or suspicious behaviour around their property.

### **The essence of neighbourhood volunteering**

A good neighbour is dependable, supportive, caring and helpful. As such, important concepts of good neighbouring are volunteering and community engagement.

Volunteering can make a significant difference in your neighbourhood. You are demonstrating your inner greatness by investing your time, energy, and resources in meeting the needs of your neighbourhood. We lead busy lives and have our own priorities or commitments, but by dedicating some of your time to helping others, you are contributing to a greater neighbourhood.

Volunteering is an extremely rewarding experience for both the receivers and the giver. In volunteering, we show we care enough about our neighbours to want to make a positive impact.

During the first COVID wave back in 2020, my neighbourhood experienced one of the most lockdowns. It was the first time in a century that the world shut down and people were forced into their homes. One of the first things I did was knock on the doors of my neighbours to see if they needed any help. Even though I wasn't doing very much beyond checking on them, they were appreciative of having someone to talk to – albeit at a safe distance. And soon after, I started organising a fundraising campaign to raise money to buy winter clothing for the disadvantaged who were living on the fringes of my local neighbourhood.

You Want Group has been continuously contributing to B1G1 – with over 200,000 social impacts up to date, supporting people and communities around the world. And in 2021, together with our generous sponsors and donors who supported my campaign, we raised over \$10,000 for Project Karma causes. I was invited to star in a multi-award winning TV show, Adventure All-Stars, as an official TV cast member by the internationally acclaimed Charity TV Global for my philanthropic efforts. The show is broadcast in 25 different countries to almost 100 million homes, making the series one of Australia's most-watched international TV shows.



Iris during the filming of Adventure All-Stars Episode 5 Season 2

You don't have to go out and start a major campaign. You can always start small by utilising your skills and strength to put them to effective use for the good of your neighbourhood. Remember, everything adds up to a bigger impact. When you help someone, and you see the happiness and appreciation on their faces, you are left with a wonderful sense of euphoria and the motivation to want to do more. That is the essence of volunteering.

### The benefits of good neighbouring

Good neighbouring is about building a community that is safe, happy and harmonious. If you are blessed with good neighbours, you have peace of mind, security, and a sense of belonging. In a

good neighbourhood, you know you can count on your neighbours, and they can count on you. It's one less thing to worry about in your life!

Good neighbouring brings out the best in people. If you show kindness and generosity towards others, they will reciprocate in kind. Living in a good neighbourhood is more than just doing things for one another. Of course, it's great to know that you can rely on your neighbour to take the trash out for you when you are away or keep an eye on your property while you are on holiday, but good neighbouring is also about closeness and belonging. You feel a genuine connection with your neighbours and share unique experiences together.

My local neighbourhood is multicultural. One of the best things I love about living here is that I feel like I belong to every culture. Whenever there are religious festivities or celebrations, the entire neighbourhood joins forces to create a festive atmosphere to include every household. Out of all the laughter, fun and entertainment comes a deeper understanding and appreciation of others' cultures, beliefs, and traditions.

That is why I set myself a goal to contribute more to our local neighbourhoods and communities. As a result, in 2021, we were able to fundraise thousands of dollars with the help of sponsors, volunteers and like-minded people to support Mental Health Foundation Australia—where I had the honour of receiving a recognition award for my philanthropic efforts.



Iris receives award of recognition from MHFA presented by mayor Cr Jim Memeti

### **How to be a leader in your neighbourhood**

You don't have to be a member of a committee or leader of a project to make a difference. The small gestures you show to your neighbours will add up to something bigger.

I am thankful for all the little contributions I have made that created positive impacts for others in different communities. As a community leader, I am now sitting on the executive committee of several major associations, including Deputy Chairperson of the Association of Leadership & Diversity Australia and Board Member at the AUS Asia Business Council (AABC) to give advice and support their mission and campaign.

My advice is to look at what you are good at and how you can contribute to making your neighbourhood a better place. For example, if you are an ace at organising events, you could volunteer your time to manage a community project. There are many things you can do. Even if it's just between you and your next-door neighbour. Let's start by putting the good back in the hood because great leadership starts with you.

Want to learn more about leadership? Check our website at <https://youwantgroup.com> and start learning how you can become an even greater leader in your neighbourhood and your community.

# The Need for Neighbouring

by Raymond Loh

How connected are Australians to their neighbours?

A third of Australians (34%) have no neighbours they see or hear from monthly. Nearly half of Australians (47%) have no neighbours they can call for help.

Our relationships with our neighbours are not close, with 70% of people saying they have no neighbours they would talk to about private matters.

However, those with close neighbour relationships see neighbours regularly – a third of Australians (30%) see a neighbour at least a few times a week or weekly.

Australians rarely talk to their neighbours about important decisions. Only 10% of Australians frequently have a neighbour available to talk to about important decisions, while 5% say their neighbours frequently speak with them about important decisions. Three-quarters of Australians (75%) never or seldom have a neighbour available to talk to and their neighbours rarely or never consult with them (82%) about important decisions.

What's behind this shift?

Maybe it's because we spend so much time on our phones or chatting online. Maybe it's the result of changing jobs and moving more frequently.

Just 11% of people have a large friendship group they see at least once a month, while 8% don't see any friends regularly. About one fifth never or seldom have a relative available to talk to. The survey is still open for recruitment as part of a larger study run by Swinburne University.<sup>8</sup> Nov 2018

One in four Australian adults are lonely. One in two (50.5%) Australians feel lonely for at least one day in a week, while one in four (27.6%) feel lonely for three or more days. Nearly 55% of the population feel they lack companionship at least sometimes.

About 60 per cent feel left out or isolated from others, according to the report. Members of the Greatest Generation are least likely to report having feelings of loneliness.

A report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) points out that more than one-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated.

Social isolation's adverse health consequences range from sleeplessness to reduced immune function. Loneliness is associated with higher anxiety, depression, and suicide rates. However it happened, there's a lot of evidence that it's a significant loss.

This book is about the art and practice of neighbouring, filled with stories about how to reach out to others. We hope that it can help enlighten us on a way towards recovery.

# Mentoring

by Tim Langdon

There are so many ways that people of all ages can volunteer in our community and make a difference to other peoples' lives. Mentoring is a fabulous way for older people to help the young and less experienced. The Cambridge Dictionary defines mentoring as 'the act or process of helping and giving advice to a younger or less experienced person, especially in a job or at school'.

I have been involved as a mentor in the RMIT University Career Mentoring Program (Melbourne, City Campus) for many years providing guidance and advice to recent graduates of finance, business and commerce. Helping recent graduates is so rewarding and potentially an incredibly valuable and life changing way to volunteer in our community. It is such a pleasure to speak to a room full of recent graduates - with their enthusiasm and a desire to succeed written across their faces. Even the smallest snippets of anecdotal career highlights, and answering their many questions, can provide awareness and inspiration.

To help steer recent graduates in a direction that best suits their skill sets and desires is not only helpful to the graduates, it is highly valued by the graduates and staff. One-on-one discussions and consultations with the graduates are particularly rewarding. The mentoring volunteer process encourages openness, connection and engagement that otherwise may not be possible.

Everyone's time is precious. Giving your time to help others is a gift that we can all give.

Further Information: <https://mentoring.rmit.edu.au>

# The Law of Reciprocity

by Sam Leong

The adage that "What goes around, comes around", the Law of Reciprocity, is a universal truth that no one can change.

Recognising this, one can work along with this line of thinking to get what one desires. If one desires to be happy, make others happy. Invariably, the joy and happiness that others get will be bounced back to oneself. And in most situations, in stronger doses.

I have made it my life practice to make at least one person happy daily. How do I do it?

A simple action like wishing friends or even strangers good morning when we cross each other can give joy to the person we greet. Let me share my most recent example with you.

One morning, a group of us, senior citizens, decided to have our morning walk in Lake Garden. Our most senior member, Michael (78 years old and still very healthy), has never been to Lake Garden although he stayed and worked in KL/PJ for the last 40 plus years. On arrival, he exclaimed how he missed such a beautiful place for morning walks and thanked me for bringing him there. I could feel his joy walking in the garden and in turn, I felt happy too. A simple act of sharing a great walking venue brought joy to a friend and strengthened our bond in friendship.

See what I mean?

Another experience I would like to share is my connection with a former corporate hotshot, Datuk Lawrence Lim, who walks in the Subang Ria Park, near where I live. As usual, I greeted him when I walked past him as I would for everyone, during our morning. Nothing much transpired until one day when he asked if he could walk with me. I replied in the affirmative and chatted as we walked along. Then, to my surprise, he asked if it was correct that I play in a pop band. I confirmed that I do and he expressed his desire to engage our services. He then started sharing his challenges in organising his daughter's wedding. He was assigned the challenge of arranging for the door gift, and he was lost as to what gifts he should present to their guests. He wanted to present them with memorable door gifts which they will appreciate and want to keep. I suggested that since he was engaging our services, we could help him produce a video with him singing a meaningful song with a message, dedicated to his daughter and her life partner. He liked the idea and became very excited about it. To cut the story short, we finalised the contract subsequently, started coaching him to prepare him for the recording, and rehearsal and finally produced his song! A Star was born!

We became good friends and he has joined our band since to sing with us for fun. We have built a mutually beneficial and warm relationship, and he has become one of our most active members. He has also sponsored the renovation of our club and extra facility of an in-house karaoke.

See the power of the simple "Good morning," and how it has helped bring us together as friends, enabled us to enhance our group's facilities, and provided our newfound team-mate with a platform to build on his singing hobby.

In his own words, "Since I retired from the corporate world, this is the best thing that has happened to me! "

He confided then that he has always wanted to be in a band, but his profession has kept him away from his passion.

What goes around, certainly, comes around.

Finally, allow me to share a couple of stories of our many community services here.

A very close friend informed us during this pandemic, that a community nursing home needed to replace 20 mattresses to make it more comfortable for the senior residents. Without hesitation, I accepted the challenge and secured our Lions Club's approval and a budget to purchase the mattresses. As I always advocated, we should involve our community in our projects so that a "people helping people" culture can be nurtured. Thus, we formed a committee to do fund-raising through personal donations to finance the project. To our surprise, we raised 3 times more than we required. We then have funds to fund other projects for senior citizens. Another event that proved that "what goes around, truly, comes around!"

My final story is our recent project - Students, We Care for you. At my behest, our Club decided to carry out a project to provide eyeglasses for 500 poor students who have visibility challenges. A budget of RM5,000.00 was approved. We got down to form a committee to carry out the task of identifying and reaching out to these 500 students.

One of our teammates, Lion Isaac Ng, on his initiative approached and secured the participation and services of one of Malaysia's largest chains of optical suppliers, Focus Point, to be our partners. With Focus Point's participation, our job became so much easier. They provided facilities of their 16 outlets in Klang Valley for eye screening and prescribed the glasses for the students. The employees of Focus Point were most helpful and provided efficient and friendly customer service to the selected students who had to observe strict SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) that made the job more challenging. Nevertheless, these employees performed exceedingly well and we managed to successfully prescribe 432 pairs of eyeglasses to the students at a much-subsidised price of RM4320.00. Without the subsidy by Focus Point, the project would have cost us many times more! An estimate of RM20,000 would be considered conservative.

In conclusion, may I urge everyone to wish "Good morning with a smile" to people we come into contact with? This will make everyone happy and good things will happen. Also, do volunteer to serve those in need, and we will enter the realm of good samaritans who will respond to our good initiatives.

Believe that What goes around, truly, comes around!

Wisdom for volunteers:

*"I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still, I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do."*

Edward Everett Hale

# Reaching Out to Our Neighbourhood

by Raymond Loh

I am an active member of my community.

My community plays a big part in my life besides my family and I jump at the right opportunity to give back each chance I get involved.

My family and I had always taken part in community group events and activities, such as my children's school council's policy and strategic planning, and parents and teachers committee programs for a better educational outcome.

While I am an active member taking part in community projects and activities organised by Lions Clubs International Association and St. Vincent de Paul Society, I have been identified as a Society representative (Welfare Assistant) to visit homes in and around our neighbourhoods for the needy and the underprivileged.

Though it may seem trivial to many outsiders who may not be aware of the struggles of our neighbours, these community projects, events, and activities are at the core of our community and humanity.

In challenging times, your neighbourhood can be a great source of support. Kindness is compassion and love in perfect harmony that can transform someone's dark moment with a blaze of light. Showing kindness to fellow neighbours, supporting local businesses, and strengthening connections with your local community can have a major impact on the vitality of your neighbourhood.

Thriving communities are built by extending our hands to those neighbours we may not know and inviting them to build a stronger community together.

It is my responsibility to contribute to keeping this community thriving for years to come. One person can do a little bit of good to truly make a difference, and those little bits of good put together by our neighbours overwhelm the world!

Today, I am reaching out to my community. I choose to be active in my community and make a difference. I encourage others to do their part in making our community one that we can be proud of.

## **Self-Reflection Questions:**

1. Do I regularly volunteer my time in the community?
2. Which events can I take charge of organising?
3. Do I plan on staying in this neighbourhood for years to come?

# Life Is Service

by Isaac KP Ng

*"I slept and dreamt that life was a joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was a joy."* Rabindranath Tagore.

I came across the above statement by Tagore only a couple of years ago. I have been a Lions Club member for more than 30 years now. This statement rang true for me ever since. Serving the community in so many ways we know-how has truly brought me much joy every time my Club and I carry out humanitarian activities. The Lions Clubs International is the largest service organisation in the world with over 1.4 million members, guided by kindness to serve our communities and the world in times of need.

Mother Theresa once said, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."

This is the essence of what Lions Club International stands for. With many hands make light work. A good friend once told me that one person taking a hundred steps is very different from 100 persons taking just one step. Our Club members for the last 5 decades have done just that. Together, we have made that difference to the communities we serve and brought joy not only to them but to ourselves as well. The Lions movement has become a major part of our lives and certainly shaped us into who and what we have become. It is in our blood. Our Lions' mission is to serve the underprivileged communities, in terms of improving health and well-being, strengthening and supporting those in need through humanitarian services and grants that impact lives locally and globally, and encouraging peace and international understanding.

Mother Theresa said, "Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you." The little we can do, we must do.

We Serve.

# Innovative Volunteering for the Local Community

by Walter Villagonzalo

Where does one find opportunities to volunteer? The local Councils have units that are dedicated to promoting volunteering because volunteers save the government a lot of money. The community does not just benefit from the time and effort given by the volunteers, but also from their unique skill sets, passion and innovative ideas as well.

If you have the time and the desire to give back to the community you can find an existing organisation you can belong to and feel comfortable with, you can give it a try, get to know the people in the organisation and see if you enjoy doing what they are doing and dealing with their clients, the members of the community they are there to serve. You can grow in that organisation, find ways to improve how things are being done and perhaps lead or be one of the leaders in the future. To some, Volunteering is one way to learn more about governance, leadership and community building. Some use it as a stepping-stone to higher responsibilities in business, community and politics.

If you are seeking employment and need a boost to your employability, volunteer. Many employers consider the time spent volunteering as a demonstration of your civic-mindedness, attitude and personality.

I see volunteering in organisations as an exercise of innovation and entrepreneurship. My training in computer programming and systems analysis and design always prompt me to find opportunities to improve the existing system.

While volunteering at the Inner Western Metropolitan Region Migrant Resource Centre, I visited most of the migrant resource centres in Victoria and looked into their existing information systems, particularly on how they gathered, maintained/updated and processed data to provide correct, accurate, relevant and timely information to management and their clients. I submitted a report and proposed recommendations which were forwarded to the relevant department in the State government.

As the Chair for the Pride and Participation Committee of the Heathdale Neighbourhood Renewal Project, I published the Chatter, a local newsletter which won a major award from the Community Newspaper Association of Victoria, I organised the Kulcher Club, a public speaking club, introduced a Filipino-style (Barangay Tanod) of the Neighbourhood Watch and presented to higher management of Neighbourhood Watch. I organised the first Barbecue Competition and Festival in Australia at Heathdale and chaired it for 4 years. It was held again at Wyndham Park with Bridge Builders for AustralAsia implementing it.



Barbecue Festival and Competition, 2021

In the early years that I was volunteering in Wyndham City, I felt that the local Council then was not supportive enough of the migrant community and the small business sector. I submitted a proposal and made presentations to Council to request funding to establish a migrant resource centre in Werribee. The Council said no so I established The Migrant Hub with no funding support and operated social enterprise projects such as the MiHUB Cafe which became Wyndham's place to eat, meet and build community. I established the MiRefuge which received no funding but collaborated with local businesses to provide short term accommodation and settlement support to more than 1,000 asylum seekers transitioning into the community through 25 houses/apartments we leased.

My home church moved to different community halls 5 times in 4 years to hold Sunday services. It was inconvenient as we had to bring in and pack up afterwards, our music and other equipment as well as re-arrange the chairs every Sunday. I led the establishment of Blockhouse Inc, a social enterprise that leased a warehouse, got church members to renovate it and leased the worship hall to the church for 2 days and the meeting room to a registered training organisation for 3 days. This gave the church a larger space, security of tenure, income and ministry opportunities for church members. At another church with a larger space we moved to later, I initiated the Wyncubator project which supported more than 30 migrants starting small businesses and hosted 40 Work for the Dole participants who used their skills to support the start-ups while improving their own employability for which we received payment from the Commonwealth government. I also created a project for Blockhouse where we leased another warehouse and did a repair of bicycles and furniture also utilising Work for the Dole participants.

I was elected as a Councillor at the City of Wyndham in 2016 and immediately I introduced a Notice of Motion for the Council to adopt a Social Procurement Policy so that when Council

spends ratepayers' money, they consider seriously sourcing the product of service from a local supplier or a social enterprise which brings additional social benefits to the local community. This also led to Council developing a Social and Economic Inclusion Framework which, like the Social Procurement Policy I introduced, is being implemented today. For around 20 years I advocated for the Council to support small businesses and start-ups by establishing a business incubator and mentor the local entrepreneurs. As the Chair for the Future Focussed Economy Portfolio, I wanted Wyndham to grow a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. When I left Council in 2020, Council had established the annual Wynnovation Festival and Pitch Competition. It had also established Spark, the innovation centre supporting the local start-ups.

The City of Wyndham has the lowest percentage of tree canopy cover in the whole Greater Melbourne Area. After my term in Council ended, I organised the Canopy Accelerator Co-operative Limited and secured Crown land at the Point Cook Coastal Park to establish the pilot community owned tree nursery that would grow seeds to seedlings, seedlings to advanced trees and a base for a planting team that would establish and promote the Tiny Forest concept in Wyndham, Victoria and Australia.



Pinoy Ako Pinoy Tayo program started at 97.4FM and is now a daily Facebook Live program

There are around 300,000 Filipinos in Australia and 60,000 in Victoria. As a community we needed to find more ways to communicate, promote cohesiveness, support Filipino businesses, disseminate important information more widely, gather support for international students, etc. I partnered with a fellow Filipino with many years of broadcasting experience and established the Pinoy Ako Pinoy Tayo Facebook Live program which now serve the community 2 hours a day, 7 days a week. This has been very useful especially when the COVID19 pandemic hit us, It is watched by a large Filipino audience in Australia, Philippines and many other countries.

We have a lot of talents in our community. We have a lot of experts in different fields especially from among our skilled migrants. Imagine what the local community can yet accomplish with the amount of time, talent, and resources that are still untapped today!

# On Neighbourhood Relationships

by Raymond Loh

I value my relationships with my neighbours.

My neighbours are an important part of my life, and we are part of a strong community together. I appreciate the relationships I develop with my neighbours.

My neighbours make my life more fun and interesting.

They help me during a crisis and support me during difficult situations. They bring me food and encouragement. They give me advice and wisdom during complicated times.

My relationships with my neighbours are built on understanding, loyalty, and love. We care about each other's families and want to see everyone succeed. They respect my views and share their ideas. We may disagree on some things, but we always work to resolve our issues.

My neighbours help me celebrate important life events. I cherish the time we spend together as a group.

The neighbours around me are part of my joy and abundance.

My neighbours inspire and uplift me. They share stories to help me overcome obstacles and thrive in my happiness.

Today, I concentrate on my neighbours and our relationships. We have strong bonds that link us to each other and the community.

## Self-Reflection Questions:

1. How can I help my family appreciate and value our neighbours?
2. What can I do to build stronger relationships with my neighbours?
3. How can I help my children understand that my neighbours have boundaries?

# Dedication and Sacrifice

by Walter Villagonzalo

If somebody were to ask me what my job or career is, I would proudly say I'm a volunteer.

I served in the Philippine military for 15 years. We were trained, not in volunteer service doing community work, but in the "art of war," to fight the country's enemies. Things changed when I became a Christian. My heart was then focused on helping others, and the community. If this didn't happen to me and had I stayed in the Philippines, I believe I could have been a Philippine ambassador, a head of a government department, or now a retired military general. I know because most of my contemporaries from the Philippine Military Academy were and are in those positions.



Walter as a Cadet at the Philippine Military Academy

When we migrated to Australia, I started as a senior systems analyst for an insurance company. It would have been a lucrative IT career if I hadn't pursued full-time volunteering. By full-time, I mean doing 30 hours or more a week. After 35 years in Australia, we're still paying off our mortgage. Despite all of this, I have no regrets. It's where God has put me, here in Australia, as a servant of the community, and I know that I'm serving my purpose. For this reason, I'm happy.

Although I have received awards for the works I have done, I wasn't doing it for the awards. It's good to be recognized, as it helped my family see the community appreciating what I have done, and that it was all worth it. I have sacrificed a lot of my personal and family time as a volunteer, and I'm blessed to have a supportive wife and family.

At The Migrant Hub, we had asylum seekers coming in from Christmas Island, transitioning to community. We provided short term accommodation and settlement support for them under contract with the Australian Red Cross. It took a lot of my personal and family time. For instance, instead of being with my family at dinner, I was out at night sometimes until 2 am

supporting asylum seekers adjusting to their new neighbourhood and environment. I broke my leg helping asylum seekers move house and was in hospital and on crutches for six months. The asylum seekers needed my support so I had to stay in one of our houses so I could continue to help them, while I recovered.

**Migrant hub founder helps others**

**Honour | Florencia Cavallo**

**HOPPERS** Crossing's Walter Villagonzalo never imagined that 24 years after moving to Australia from the Philippines, he would be helping migrants like himself.

Mr Villagonzalo, 57, founded Wyndham's first Migrant Hub in February. The hub – which has a cafe and a community garden – works with migrants from Wyndham to help them with the challenges of surviving in a new country.

"Trying to find a job by yourself is lonely, it's frustrating," he said.

The hub is not just a place to eat but a place to meet and build connections.

Mr Villagonzalo said the migrant population in the western suburbs was set to increase by 30 per cent over the next five years, so it was important for migrants to have skills to take the community forward.

"The problem we have is that the migrants aren't getting involved with the community, so what's going to happen in 10 to 15 years?"

If we have migrants who are upset with the situation they are in, they are unlikely to give back to the community.

Mr Villagonzalo's wife Liza works fulltime as an analyst programme to support him and his project. And although it was not financially, he said the hard work was part of it.

Mr Villagonzalo's community work has earned him a nomination for the Pride of Australia awards.

He felt "honoured and humbled" to be nominated. "I feel a lot of satisfaction with what I'm doing. But there's still a lot of work to do. We need to keep pushing."

The Pride of Australia Medal is proudly supported by Leader Community Newspapers and News Limited newspapers and media organisations. Nominate someone in your community by visiting [prideofaustralia.com.au](http://prideofaustralia.com.au) before July 6.

PICTURE: GLENNDARVELS NEWSROOM

My team at the Migrant Hub were from Malaysia, Singapore, the Pacific Islands, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and even as far as the Middle East and Africa. They were leaders from their own communities. They understood the dedication and sacrifice that was needed. I frequently got invited to speak at their events and training sessions to speak about volunteering and about social enterprises. I often said that being a volunteer is not about oneself, but about being an active part of the wider community they and I now belong to.

Sometimes, dedication and sacrifice are not enough. One also has to have persistence. Serving in the Council, one of the things I accomplished as a Councillor was to get the innovation hub that now provides a co-working space for start-ups complementing the annual Pitch Competitions in Wyndham. This was one of my advocacies which I consistently spoke to Council about for 20 years and I could not see it happening, so I resolved to run for a Council seat and was successful and got elected on my fifth attempt. It is good to be an activist but it is better to be a reformer and effect the change from within.

Creativity is also a useful trait. It helped in my volunteering and service career to accomplish things for the community. I consider myself a "Blue Ocean" person, and it helped that I was doing things that aren't popular or done by many people – the "Red Ocean". I try to do new things and show others that it is possible. Many of my projects were in uncharted waters, like those involving social enterprises. I got trained with social enterprises early, back when there was only a handful in Australia. Now, there are more than 22,000 of them nationwide. In 2016, Social Traders named me the Social Enterprise Champion for Australia for setting up social enterprises as well as advocating and supporting other organisations to establish social enterprises and cooperatives generating income so they would not be totally dependent on

grants and donations and would become more financially sustainable in achieving their social impact objectives.

We have a strong community in Wyndham and in Victoria. We have many active citizens finding new ways of making life easier and more meaningful for the rest of the community. Some are finding success while others are struggling. We need to support those who have a clear vision and are dedicated by sharing with them templates of successful community projects and encouraging those that have endured and struggled to make their projects succeed to share their experiences and mentor others so they would not make the same mistakes and thus make their journeys a little smoother.

# On Giving Back

by Raymond Loh

I enjoy giving back to the community through community services, charitable donations through Lions Clubs International Association, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Canopy Accelerator Cooperatives, and The Tree Project volunteering in non-profitable organisations and social enterprises. I am constantly looking for new ways to get involved through various programs, collaborations, and partnerships.

Giving back to my community gives me a sense of pride. It makes me feel as if I am where I belong, doing what I am supposed to do.

When I give back to the community, I feel like I am making a difference in the world, one act of kindness at a time. Caring and sharing for one another is a human responsibility that we have for each other.

Giving back to my community makes me feel connected to those around me. When I volunteer, I meet other like-minded people who share a passion for improving my community. I also meet those who are less fortunate and simply need someone to care.

I can easily be part of the positive change by finding a list of community projects and service events in my area and getting involved or even starting my own social enterprises. Whether I join to be a volunteer of an organisation or a member of the Lions Clubs International Association in our neighbourhood area, the social impact is great.

If I am unable to actively participate during a season due to other commitments, I give financial or mental support to help organisations that reach out on a regular basis to those in need.

Giving back requires empathy that I put myself in their shoes. I am blessed to have the ability to give my strength and funds to help others. Giving to others is rewarding!

Today, I reflect on all the blessings I have been given with a thankful heart. From this day forward, I choose to become more involved in my community and share my blessings by offering my time as a volunteer.

## **Self-Reflection Questions:**

1. How has my community helped me become who I am?
2. Does my city have a community service calendar where I can volunteer?
3. Is there an organisation that I can support financially?

# Leading Migrants to Volunteer

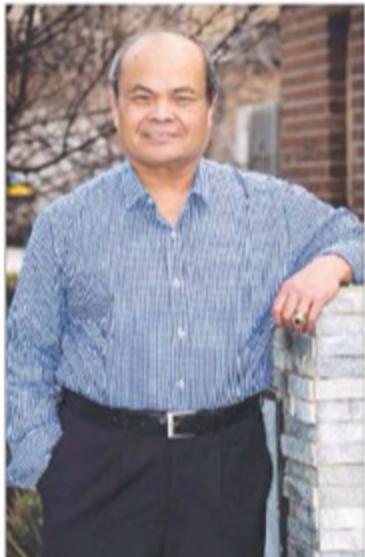
by Walter Villagonzalo

Before being in public service as a Councilor, I was performing my role as a Citizen of Year Awardee by giving speeches at Citizenship Ceremonies. I told my story for 22 of these ceremonies, each having an audience of 400 new citizens and their families. I shared with them what volunteering has done for me, and the story resonated with them. I sometimes encounter some of them at the mall, and they express their appreciation for that inspiration. It's a very rewarding moment.

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WYNDHAM



## Help for fellow migrants earns man top honour

Sarah Anderson

WALTER Villagonzalo's dedication to helping migrants settle in the community has earned him Wyndham's top honour.

The president of the Migrant Hub was named Citizen of the Year on August 14 – 29 years to the day since he moved to Australia from the Philippines with his family.

Mr Villagonzalo said he was honoured to receive the award.

"This is significant for me and my family, the Filipino and migrant community but also should be significant for the City of Wyndham," he said.

"The Citizen of the Year award this year is given to

more people, including those born overseas, to volunteer in the community."

"You are part of the community in Wyndham, be out there, integrate, contribute and help build a better Wyndham for your children and future generations."

Mayor Peter Maynard said Mr Villagonzalo had been a worthy recipient of the top honour.

"Walter has made an outstanding contribution to the community and was recognised for his work with the migrant community which includes providing accommodation and support to asylum seekers, and motivating new migrants to use their skills to start small businesses and create local jobs," he said.

Setting an example for others to follow in the path to volunteering is something that needs to be done. Many migrants settle here and are hesitant to get out of their comfort zone to do something for the community.

One of the new members of our community is a refugee with a PhD in Forestry from a major Japanese university. He is looking for a job so he can provide for his family. I encouraged him to volunteer, but he was reluctant because he needs to focus on job-hunting. I said that doing volunteer work while still looking for a job may help by providing him with a bigger network of contacts. I'm glad that he listened.

One of our volunteer committee members of the Association of Skilled Migrants in Australia was a lady from South America who was an experienced engineer. She had a hard time finding a job too and was cleaning toilets to make a living. She was very disappointed and frustrated. She wasn't a refugee seeking asylum but voluntarily came here as a skilled migrant. As a volunteer,

she became our representative and got interviewed in the local papers and spoke at a TV program Insight on SBS, talking about how migrants have underutilised skills. As a result of that exposure, she got a lot of offers and is now a Senior Manager at a large Australian company. What would have happened if she did not volunteer?

Encouraging migrants to volunteer is something that needs to be emphasised. In 10 to 15 years, migrants will be the majority in Australia. If not enough of them who are now here will volunteer, what will happen to volunteer organisations like the SES and the Fire Brigade? It's also not just for us, but for the future generations as well. If we are not volunteering now, how will our children be encouraged to volunteer when their time comes?



Councilor Walter as Deputy to Mayor Peter Maynard

Even at my age, I'm still working hard at volunteering and public service. I ran for Council six times and became a Councilor for the City of Wyndham in 2016, and was elected Deputy Mayor in 2017, too. I already feel like I have accomplished what I wanted to. At age 69 and feeling the aches and pains that come at that age, I have a lot of reasons to just retire, get my pension and perhaps travel but I am intending to run for State Parliament in 2022 because I want to continue to serve, at a higher level, and show that it can be done and I want to set a path for the next generations of my fellow Filipinos and other migrants to follow.

**If not me, who? If not now, when?**

# On Charity

by Raymond Loh

I take part in community projects and charitable events.

I actively seek community projects and charitable events in which to participate. I like to help those that are in need and hope to make their life better in some way. As I help others, I also enrich my own life.

My friends and family want to know what community projects and charitable events I am planning to take part in so they can also help those that are less fortunate. Likewise, if they find something that I can help with, I enjoy hearing about it also.

I also keep in touch with many people in my community about the community projects and charitable events that are happening in my area. I take part in as many as possible.

When my place of employment sponsors a community project or charitable event, they know that they can always count on me to help organise it. Participating makes me happy.

Helping others is mutually beneficial. I receive many benefits myself from helping those in need. I make new friends with others who have similar interests. I network with others in my community who are happy to mentor me or help advance my career.

But most of all, seeing the joy in someone's eyes when I help them is the best gift I could ever receive!

Today, I am thinking of the homeless people who live downtown under a bridge. I plan to buy some blankets for them to help keep them warm and dry.

## **Self-Reflection Questions:**

1. What types of community projects and charitable events can I take part in today?
2. How can I enlist my friends and family to help build a stronger community?
3. How can I help the less fortunate and the needy on my own?

# Thinking of Volunteering?

by Mimi Rojo Laurilla

Volunteering is the act of giving one's time, skills and energy to serving others without the expectation of any wages, remuneration or reward. I have been in the volunteering space for more than 9 years now in my capacity as a former volunteer coordinator, or working with volunteers in general on projects or programs, fundraising activities whether it be a part of my day job, or as part of my "extra-curricular activities". I have been a volunteer myself doing a variety of roles. I love volunteering! I have even studied to gain qualifications in managing volunteers.

This short piece is for people who are considering volunteering.

People are probably not aware that there is such a thing as formal or informal volunteering.

Formal volunteering happens when a person looks for a volunteering role that is usually associated with work done for an organisation, and where a person undergoes formal or structured volunteer recruitment and induction process. Role and scope are clearly defined, including expectations on work schedules. Due diligence activities are also undertaken such as carrying out checks like police checks and working with children's checks, and the candidates are asked to provide associated legal documents. One example of formal volunteering is volunteering for a not-for-profit organisation requiring people to assist in fundraising activities, or if in a hospital setting, volunteers can welcome visitors entering the hospital premises. They call these volunteers greeters, but sometimes hold other roles such as guides, and admin assistants and sometimes get to hold babies for warmth and to cuddle them!

Informal volunteering is more ad hoc, more like a "where needed, when needed" type of service, and perhaps done with less or no structured volunteer recruitment and induction process. It could happen during a natural disaster for example, where people are needed to assist the vulnerable to get away from dangerous areas by transporting them to an evacuation centre, or by helping organise some relief goods for the needy by packing food and supplies in boxes or assisting in its distribution.

In a conference that I attended maybe a year ago, one of the speakers talked about informal volunteering as something that might also happen today, and most of the time people are not aware that they are already doing this. In most recent times, COVID-19 prevented the elderly to leave their homes for the possibility of compromising their health. Informal volunteering may range from just calling or checking up on your elderly neighbour to see if they needed anything bought from a store and running other errands for them, or just to let them know you are thinking of them to reduce their feelings of isolation. Another example of an act of volunteerism is giving warm food to front line workers at the end of each week at a local rescue or COVID-response centre, or making homemade face masks and giving it away for free to those

front liners. Perhaps you have had the experience of minding the children of your neighbours for a couple of hours while the parents worked, joining your church choir for their music ministry or being involved in a church committee or local community group. These are more informal types of volunteering but in some institutions, they are now requiring more checks for prospective volunteers moving towards the more formal set-up.

All of the above are examples of scenarios where one thinks of “just wanting to help” but in reality, are creating a huge impact on the lives of others.

Volunteering certainly suits anyone regardless of their age, gender, location, cultural background, family lifestyle and work conditions --whether they are busy or working full-time, whether they are not working or already retired. Newly arrived migrants use volunteering as a pathway to get a local experience, or to network and find opportunities through the organisations they volunteer for or from referrals from the people that they meet.

There is no longer an excuse as to why we can’t squeeze in volunteering in the mix of all our other endeavours. Nowadays, most volunteers seek opportunities that are flexible to suit their availability and lifestyle. And believe it or not, organisations are desperate for people to help them out. With the advent of working from home, there are now more “online volunteering” opportunities available. But of course, it still depends primarily on the nature of the volunteering role. Some roles just require your physical presence on-site or to be working face to face with clients or participants.

Where do you start? If you have reached this part of my piece, that means you might potentially be interested to find volunteering opportunities. Some tips and strategies are below:

- a. Word of mouth – ask your friends, neighbours and contacts working for other organisations to find out if they are needing some volunteer support and then you can perhaps call or email to inquire.
- b. Searching online – this means looking at search engines like SEEK or through social media (e.g. Facebook groups that focus on volunteering) for similar opportunities with keywords such as volunteer roles in administration, etc.
- c. Updating your CV or social media profile or advertising online using your social media profile to include a line or two that says, for example, “looking for volunteer opportunities in retail and hospitality” or “looking to volunteer in a role that can utilise my graphic design skills” depending on your interest and skills base
- d. Contact your local church group, local council or charities within your area as they often require people to help out in projects or programs. You can even advise of your availability, so it fits with your schedule. They can certainly work around that.

These are only some of the ways by which to start your own volunteering journey. Good luck and enjoy this new experience!

# On Meeting Others

by Raymond Loh

I enjoy meeting others.

Socialisation is one of the most important parts of life. Having friends I can call when I need help and who also call me when they need me makes my existence more rewarding. However, sometimes friends come and go. Thankfully, meeting new people is easy and fun for me.

I have confidence in my ability to understand and relate to others. People tell me I have an easy smile and a comfortable way about myself. I make eye contact with those around me and pay attention to them because I am genuinely interested in them and their stories.

Greeting others and speaking to people whether I know them or not just seems like the natural thing to do. Even when I attend social events such as parties and neighbourhood get-togethers, I can walk up to anyone and start a conversation with him. Because I enjoy meeting others, my social life is diverse, active, and fun.

Today, I vow to take every opportunity to meet new people. I am confident that I can meet many new people and make friends quickly and easily.

## Self-Reflection Questions:

1. How do I feel about meeting new people?
2. Do I approach others I don't know at a party, or keep to myself, waiting for others to come to me?
3. What can I do to make meeting new people come more easily to me?

# The Reformer

by Trish Prentice, Senior Researcher, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute

Walter Villagonzalo wouldn't describe himself as a politician. While he served one term on the Wyndham City Council, including as deputy mayor, and has stood for election to the Victorian Upper House, he was not really interested in politics—he was interested in reform. There were certain things he wanted to change, he had certain objectives, so he stood for office to see their fruition. At his heart, Walter desires to serve his community. And he has a long history of doing so.

Walter came to Australia from the Philippines in the 1980s. His background was in the military but seeking a better life for his children, Walter and his family migrated to Australia and decided to stay. With a strong professional IT background, Walter didn't find it difficult to find work. Yet after a time, he felt there was something missing: that he didn't feel belonging, he wasn't being recognised for his efforts, that he could do more to contribute to the community. He started volunteering; then he continued to do so full-time for 25 years. His wife became their breadwinner during that time.

Through his voluntary work, Walter found the sense of recognition and belonging in the Australian community that he was seeking, but at the same time, this involvement exposed him to his community's deepest needs. He began to see there were issues that need to be addressed, and, for him, it was frustrating sitting outside the system

"We cannot be an activist all the time. You need to get inside and reform. That's what motivated me."

In 2015, Walter was named Citizen of the Year in the City of Wyndham. He was also named the 2016 Social Enterprise Champion in a national search by Social Traders. Walter stood for office and was elected as a councillor in the local City of Wyndham elections in 2016 after unsuccessfully attempting four times before. He was elected Deputy Mayor in 2017.

One of his first projects was to establish a migrant resource centre in Wyndham. Recognising the fast-growing and diverse demographics of the local area, Walter wanted to establish a hub and a resource centre to support other migrant families like his own. As a local resident, he had long petitioned the council for support to establish one but they had always said no, so he said to himself, "Well, I'll have to get in and make sure that the future is not going to be the same as what he has now."

Walter spearheaded other projects too, like establishing a business incubator to help small businesses thrive (and not fail) in the community. He was involved in social enterprises and planned an innovation festival where people could compete to pitch their ideas so they could be commercialised. Noting that Wyndham had the lowest tree canopy cover in the Greater Melbourne area, he is setting up community-owned tree nurseries with one in Point Cook as a Pilot to be replicated in other suburbs. Walter's time on the local council was based on

identifying community needs and responding to them, especially the needs of Wyndham's thriving migrant community.

Walter hopes his record of service stands as an example to other migrants in the community, that these activities show others a way to increase their sense of belonging and their sense of accomplishment. For Walter, getting into politics was one way to do that. It helped him to "do something" not just talk about it.

He hopes his example will serve as a model for the next generation. That he will create space for others' children, and his own, to step into local government roles, especially in councils that don't fully reflect the cultural diversity of their community

# On Contributing

by Raymond Loh

I contribute to my community.

Giving back to my community makes me feel better about myself. I see how I can use my unique strengths to make a difference.

I create better conditions for myself and others. I may clean up litter in a public park or tutor children after school.

I develop a sense of belonging. I recognize how much I have in common with my neighbours. We work together towards the same goals.

My life becomes more meaningful. I work for the common good. I connect with something larger than myself.

My time is one of the most important things I can give. Volunteering is a priority for me and I regularly include time for it on my calendar.

My talents are one of the most personal things I can provide. We all bring our own pieces to the puzzle. My experiences and abilities enable me to play a unique and valuable role.

Sharing material resources helps in many ways. When I donate money or supplies, I am helping community organisations to serve more people.

Today, I pay attention to the needs of my community and how I can help to fill them. I make the world around me a better place.

## Self-Reflection Questions:

1. How would my community be different without me?
2. Why do I care about contributing to my community?
3. How can I become a more powerful force for strengthening my community?

# **COVID-19 and Neighbourhoods**

**by Jason Banico**

As of writing, the world is gradually emerging out of the shadow of pandemic lockdowns. The crisis has impacted our physical and mental health, our economy, and our society in ways that will be felt in many more years to come. Much has been written about the detrimental effect of the coronavirus on our personal and mental health, as well as on the global economy. But how has an environment of fear, insecurity, and isolation, affected our neighbourhoods? Did it damage us as a common people?

Researchers from University College London (UCL) have found that the shared experience of the pandemic has brought a greater feeling of closeness, and higher levels of trust and shared values.

In their COVID-19 social study which surveyed more than 70,000 respondents, Dr Elise Paul, lead author and epistemologist, said that 'there have been positive improvements in the way we feel about our neighbours when compared to before the pandemic'.

Feelings of unity and a sense of community increased by about 3 times from 2020 to 2021. 32 per cent of the surveyed Britons felt an increased sense of 'shared values' with their neighbours, an increase of 9 per cent. 35 per cent said they felt greater neighbourhood support, compared to 28 per cent in 2019.

In another research, a study of the impact of COVID-19 on neighbourhood social support and social interactions conducted in Umea, Sweden, by the Department of Social Work in Umea University and the School of Public Health in the University of Gothenburg, found that effects on the neighbourhood vary depending on the level of social capital present.

The level of social capital is defined by the density and strength of social networks and comes in three essential forms: networks of civic engagement, norms of reciprocity, and social trust.

In their study, neighbourhoods that already had high levels of social capital before the pandemic had a greater increase in social interaction and emotional support. The results indicated that neighbourhood relations have become more important in times of societal crisis and social restriction. It also showed that neighbourhoods with high social capital are more resilient to crises like the pandemic.

These studies demonstrate that there is hope for humanity, with the knowledge that adversity makes our neighbourhoods stronger. However, as the Swedish study has noted, we must also keep working towards increasing our levels of social capital to strengthen our neighbourhoods' resilience to cope with crises.

# On Support

by Raymond Loh

I support my community.

There are many ways for me to be a beacon of light for others. I contribute to the well-being of those around me however I can.

My community grows steadily when I purchase from local merchants and farmers. I see their progress when they are supported by the people who share the area with them.

Charity is another way to offer encouragement to those who live in my area. I offer my talents without charge to anyone on my block who is able to benefit from it.

The local nursing home benefits when I volunteer to spend time reading to senior citizens. It feels good to contribute to their quality of life and their happiness. Their families save money on care when I offer my talents without charge.

Environmental efforts ensure that the earth is preserved for future generations. I am an advocate for initiatives put on by local environmental groups.

I am conscious of my actions that can help or hurt the environment. I practice proper recycling and only use environmentally friendly products. This keeps my neighbourhood healthy and safe for the people who live here.

Today, I seek new ways to support my community. The people who live and work around me are my partners in building a positive future. I am happy to do what I am able to keep their ventures up and running.

## **Self-Reflection Questions:**

1. In what other ways am I able to support the community?
2. What role do I play in my professional community apart from doing my job?
3. What are some of my favourite outreach opportunities?

# Top 15 Benefits of Volunteering in Your Community

by Raymond Loh

Volunteering in your community is a win-win situation. Not only do you help those less fortunate than you, but you also receive many benefits as well - both personal and professional.

The best way to find me is to lose myself in the services of others. Our days are happier when we give people a slice of our time and a piece of our heart rather than a piece of our mind.

Nothing gives you satisfaction like giving back to your community. Volunteering brings knowledge, experience and positivity to your life.

Check out these benefits for giving back to your community:

1. You're reminded there's a whole world outside of yourself. Giving back helps you de-focus from yourself and your own challenges while showing you the struggles and needs of others.
2. Being a part of something bigger than yourself is rewarding. We're reminded of the impact we can make on others when we become a part of something bigger. Giving back to the community allows you those experiences.
3. Learn something new. Regardless of how you decide to help your community, it's likely you'll learn something you didn't already know.
4. Strengthen your confidence. Because you're helping others, you'll feel more positive about yourself.
5. Gain work experience. Depending on the type of community work you do, you could learn something that will help you in your job or future work.
6. Make new business contacts. Getting out and giving back to your community will help you meet more people. Because each person has a network of their own, you never know how far your positive influence could travel - bringing you new prospects, clients, or even job offers.
7. Helping others is a wonderful thing to do. It does your heart, mind and soul good to reach out to help others.
8. Become known in the community. If you want more people to know and recognize you, helping others is a great public relations strategy.
9. Make new friends. Because you'll encounter so many new people, you could meet people that you become friends with.
10. Strengthen your community. Volunteering contributes to your community by uplifting others in the community.
11. Know that you make a positive difference. Volunteering makes a difference to you, to the agency you volunteer for, and to your community.

12. We don't operate in a vacuum. Living your best life involves making and maintaining connections with others. Giving back to your community develops a network of resources you'll be able to access when you need them.
13. Add to your resume. Volunteering gives you marketable experiences and qualifications to include in your resume.
14. Volunteering is a real-life experience that can't be had in the classroom. Some college instructors recommend "service learning" which is another term for "volunteering" or "giving back to your community." Service-learning provides a real-world experience to students that would be impossible to learn in the classroom.
15. View how others live. Seeing how others live their lives enhances your own life.

Giving back to your community is important for a number of reasons. By volunteering, you view a world outside of yourself, learn new things, develop positive feelings, gain job experience, and make new contacts. Plus, helping out in your community is a kind and wonderful thing to do. Kindness is having the ability to speak with love, it is the language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see. People will forget what you said, but they won't forget how you made them feel.

You might become well-known, make new friends, strengthen your community, and even add a line to your resume when you volunteer.

When you give back, you'll experience things in the real world that you can't in the classroom and you'll see how others live. For these reasons and more, make it a point to give back to your community.

If you have the time to make someone or your neighbours happy, do it. You'll be inspired!

# Eco Clubs

by Tim Langdon, [ecoclubs.com.au](http://ecoclubs.com.au)

The notion of sustainability takes into account all of the stakeholders - the community, economy, and the environment. It is becoming increasingly apparent to many more people that sustainability thinking is the way forward for us all. Providing a platform for clubs and schools to encourage, recognise, and celebrate sustainability is what Eco Clubs is all about. The Banksia Foundation, Clean Up Australia, Eco Voice, and A Drop in the Ocean encourage you to make your club/school as sustainability-focused as possible.

## A message from Graz van Egmond (CEO - The Banksia Foundation)

"Eco Clubs has been designed to create an umbrella position in the Australian community that engages with, and proactively provides mechanisms for Australian clubs to understand their role and work towards their sustainability journey.

Australia's leading sustainability organisations are coming together to provide innovation and leadership through their respective expertise to provide credibility in the marketplace.

Making it attractive for all types of organisations and businesses to get involved to generate serious outcomes for Australia's progress towards our 2030 Goals through community involvement. The unique format of engaging the numerous types of Clubs is a new and refreshing approach to sustainability engagement.

Eco Clubs is a platform that will provide tangible direction and solutions that will enable Australian clubs to become more sustainable. At the same time, the clubs can develop a public image of responsibility in how they operate and take the natural environment and social responsibility into consideration".

Celebrate and be awarded as an official Eco Club with an Eco Clubs' Certificate to provide recognition to your members/students for their hard work and dedication to enhancing sustainability.

- Join like-minded people, share ideas, collaborate, and be part of the solution.
- Your club or school will receive one free published article in Eco Voice - [www.ecovoice.com.au](http://www.ecovoice.com.au) - to showcase your sustainability achievements.
- Opportunity to create your own co-branded merchandise to celebrate & promote your sustainability achievements and to own merchandise from our network partners.
- Access to a wide range of resources (many of which are free) provided by our network partners.
- Gain access to large networks and socials - Your Eco Voice article will be shared across our networks - to showcase your sustainability achievements.
- Gain access to discounts and special offers from our network partners and sponsors as and when they become available.

- Host an Eco Clubs event at your club or school and we will promote your event via Eco Voice - [www.ecovoice.com.au](http://www.ecovoice.com.au) and via our network socials and offer discounts on certain merchandise so that your club or school can raise funds for your future sustainability initiatives. We may provide speakers for your Eco Club events who are experts in sustainability so drop us a line and see how we can help.
- Visit the Eco Clubs website - [www.ecoclubs.com.au](http://www.ecoclubs.com.au) regularly as we will be continually adding more terrific sustainability-focused resources to assist your club or school.

# Supporting Communities via Eco Voice

by Tim Langdon, [ecovoice.com.au](http://ecovoice.com.au)

First published in 2003, Eco Voice is your go-to publication for sustainability news in Australia. Eco Voice prides itself as an independent news platform with a clear focus on sustainability, with articles coming from a diverse range of contributors – all levels of government, corporations, not-for-profits, community groups, small to medium-sized businesses, universities, research organisations, etc. Eco Voice values community, conservation and commerce. Eco Voice is a media partner of the prestigious Australian Banksia Sustainability Awards – The Peak Sustainability Awards.

Eco Voice has been providing a free voice for community groups and not-for-profits to promote their good work, promote their fundraising efforts and to encourage active participation and action. Together with The Native Shop, Eco Voice has developed Supporting Communities. (Please visit <https://www.nativeshop.com.au/pages/supporting-communities>.)

To support communities and community groups/clubs (not-for-profits) Eco Voice has developed a model where not-for-profits can have their merchandise promoted on Eco Voice (via an article) with sales via The Native Shop.

Benefits for not-for-profits:

- free article on Eco Voice - [www.ecovoice.com.au](http://www.ecovoice.com.au) and shared on social media to over 100K people
- free listing of merchandise in The Native Shop - [www.nativeshop.com.au](http://www.nativeshop.com.au) (agreed sales commission only).
- generate much-needed revenue via additional merchandise sales than otherwise achievable via your existing marketing and sales channels
- increase brand recognition by selling more branded merchandise than otherwise achievable via your existing marketing and sales channels
- increase membership through additional exposure of your not-for-profit organisation

To include your not-for-profit, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/EcoVoiceTheNativeShop>.

# About Next Door Garden

[nextdoorgarden.online](http://nextdoorgarden.online)

Next Door Garden is envisioned to be an inclusive home-based eCommerce pilot project that will help underprivileged and marginalised members of the community to be involved with online businesses and livelihood community programs. Initially, the beneficiaries will learn how to grow and sell household indoor plants online to local communities that have the same postcode. This home-based business concept and eCommerce platform will help these neighbourhood households to become more resilient and confident to overcome financial stress and mental health challenges.

Next Door Garden emerged to forge a sense of belonging amongst our diversified multicultural backgrounds, regardless of gender, race, language, or religion. We also aim to build a democratic society based on justice and equality to achieve happiness, prosperity, and progress for an inclusive community that we are proud of, where people in the local communities can engage, embrace, and even thrive.

We will address challenges of financial impact and mental health in our neighbourhoods through various community-based projects and events, such as workshops and mentoring and coaching programs on leadership and entrepreneurship, for the underprivileged and marginalised groups in the local communities.

Apart from providing our beneficiaries with all the necessary materials, training, and support for their household indoor plant business, we will also provide them with microfinancing options to help to start their home gardening and backyard farming business.

# About Canopy Accelerator Cooperative Limited

[canopyaccelerator.coop](http://canopyaccelerator.coop)

The Canopy Accelerator Cooperative Limited (CACL) is a Wyndham-based social enterprise established to address climate change by growing the percentage of tree canopy cover in Wyndham and the western suburbs which currently has the lowest percentage in the whole greater Melbourne area.

It is establishing local community owned tree nurseries which will grow seeds to seedlings, seedlings to advanced trees and through its tree planting teams plant trees in Tiny Forests and/or on contract by clients.

It is a non-distributing co-operative hence a not-for-profit organisation selling seedlings and advanced trees and providing services including planting trees in Tiny Forests and as required by the clients which may include Councils, Parks Victoria, government and private companies involved in tree planting activities.

It established the WynTree Friends Group at 461 Point Cook Road, Point Cook, a part of the Point Cook Coastal Park, a Crown land managed by Parks Victoria. Parks Victoria granted a licence to WynTree Friends Group to operate a nursery and implement approved activities at 461 Point Cook Road known as the WynTree Nursery.

It is engaging and encouraging the local community to participate in achieving its objective of increasing the canopy cover in Wyndham and the western suburbs by offering opportunities for volunteers to grow tree seedlings in their backyards to help the environment and ecosystems suitable for generations to come.