



WORKING OUT LOUD

A JOURNAL THROUGH COVID-19

NAVIGATING BEFRIEND'S MISSION OF TOGETHERNESS
AMIDST PHYSICAL DISTANCING

CHAPTER ONE | TUESDAY 17TH MARCH - FRIDAY 27TH MARCH

WHAT WE DO

Befriend is a social enterprise based in Perth, Western Australia. We exist to nurture an inclusive and connected society that values diversity, creates opportunities for contribution, and celebrates our differences. We are committed connectors, passionate about reducing social isolation and loneliness.

We are avid explorers, learners, listeners, do-ers, collaborators, thinkers and talkers. We create impact through our two core business units; The Social Network and Befriend Consulting and Development.

We take a multi-dimensional approach to loneliness at both a grassroots and an institutional level to increase the reach and sustainability of our impact. Befriend Community-Building facilitates connection within The Social Network by working alongside local residents to share open-invitation social experiences that they're passionate about. Befriend Consulting supports community organisations with the knowledge, strategies and ways of working that lead to better social outcomes.

The end-goal on both sides is, of course, to create a space where everyone can be present in a valued social role, contributing in their communities and being active in civic-life.

HOW WE WORK

We are a small-but-mighty team working out of Perth, WA. We work hard, play hard, and we aren't afraid to try new things. Above all, we wake up every day because we value all people, connection and belonging, and we love to see communities thrive. This principle is echoed in our internal operations too, as we navigate the complexities of self-organised teams, collective decision making and autonomy. We see ourselves as a community that needs nurturing and we take a lot of pride in that. This journey of discovery is still very much in the making but over the last year and half, we've made great headway in exploring new ways of working and collaborating that feel more in-line with our collective values.

Ultimately, this means diving deep into what matters to us and what makes work an enriching experience and, at its core, it's pretty much the following:

- Feel valued and appreciated
- Autonomy, freedom & flexibility
- Connection
- Growth
- Feeling safe to fail and approaching challenges with authenticity, bravery and resilience

Working out loud gives us an opportunity to share our insights with others; how we work, how we're feeling & what we're learning.

RESPONDING TO COVID-19

The disruptions brought about by COVID-19 (Coronavirus) are being felt around the world and there's increasing uncertainty in what social distancing protocols will mean for human connection. Whilst there is so much we may not know about what the future looks like, one thing we do know is that this is a time, more than ever for connection and that social distancing doesn't have to mean social isolation.

Here at Befriend, we've been blown away by the support of our decision to put a hold on in-person events within The Social Network, and astounded by the steady rise of resident-led initiatives offering opportunities to connect, both online and offline. Events of recent days and weeks have led to an unprecedented groundswell of creativity and action in support of community connection.

Our experiences at Befriend over the last two weeks have given us great insight, first hand, into some of the challenges other organisations may be facing during this time. These 'working out loud' journals are a collection of diary entries written from the perspective of our Staff Team as we've transitioned from 'the way things were' to 'how might they look in this new context?'. We will release a new chapter every two weeks and hopefully, unearth some valuable insights into how we work, how we're feeling and what we're learning amidst this new climate.

"MY REACTION TO COVID-19"

27.03.2020 | STAFF TEAM JOURNAL ENTRY

We had a long discussion about the decision to stop Befriend events meeting in person. When we relayed this decision to Hosts we emphasised it was an involved and lengthy discussion. Whist, in reality, it was, it didn't feel like a hard decision. We went into the meeting as an organisation that was known for running in person gatherings and we came out of it without that! But it felt like it emerged naturally and without forcing it. I feel lucky that we came to terms with the decision over a week ago and have been able to turn, re-group, re-analyse, re-invigorate and be grateful that we can be so purposeful at such a bizarre, unprecedented time.

Something that has been so apparent in the last week and a bit since this decision is the ways different people are understanding this new challenge. Everyone has been affected in such different ways and their lives have shifted so quickly it is hard to know where to stand. Seeing some Hosts who care so much about their groups and the network struggle to understand and come to terms with what this means has been challenging. Hearing them talk about their concerns has also been so valuable. The reality is, that shifting everything to online is going to exclude some people, for now. And it is going to be crazy difficult to try and catch them. That's a really difficult reality to deal with as an organisation that lives and breathes inclusion. But there are other things we are thinking of and other organisations, MPs and people who care that are also working on many different things at this time too. We have learnt that people are concerned about their confidence using technology, that it is scary, that they don't want to touch it.

"MY REACTION TO COVID-19"

CONTINUED.

I was talking to a Host yesterday about this, who is older and very able with technology. She was pondering why some people think they can't use a particular platform to meet socially when they already use that platform in their lives. And that is such a complex question in itself. But something I have taken away from this week, is that we also can't spend all our time worrying about people being fearful about technology. From what we understand, so much is about confidence. How can we give people the confidence to use technology in a way that works for them? It is not about a one platform solution but being able to use what makes sense for them. It is a time of questions indeed! How can we work with what we have to help people along the tech journey?

How can these people then grab others they know and be positive about the idea? How do we acknowledge that steps might be slow on this journey. How can we be ok with people who don't want to come on the tech journey? In a week of rapidly changing advice and ideas I have really tried to instil that we are working on this together and we can never underestimate people, in the best kind of way. We have never lived like this before. In the context of tech, I just wonder when people know that tech can be the connector to a way of life they used to live, will they be more likely to try it out and how can we lead them gently there so that they feel excited and as positive as they can about a new way of life?

"LEADERSHIP THROUGH CRISES & DISRUPTION"

27.03.2020 | STAFF TEAM JOURNAL ENTRY

For a long time, I've applied deep thought, presence and intention to cultivating a style of inclusive leadership. One of the most difficult aspects of this challenge for me has always been striking the balance between creating the space for others to step into their power, without diminishing myself in the process. Before this whole COVID thing went down, I'd let things push back too far to overrun me – Through the complexity of working actively to create spaces of power for others, I'd been diminished in the process. What's interesting for me to reflect on in this recent period of 'response and regeneration' is my leadership instincts – This period of crisis and disruption has brought me back to life. I feel like I've brought much more assertiveness than what I've brought in a while, but somehow that doesn't feel any less inclusive.

Inclusion is a value I hold to heart, but when I sink deeply into it, to me, inclusion itself is not what matters – It's something deeper. To me, inclusion at its core is about love. So what does it look like to bring a loving response through leadership in a context of great disruption, rapid change, fear and uncertainty? Instinctively, the loving response as leadership for me has been one that is assertive, decisive, honest, compassionate and hopeful.

"LEADERSHIP THROUGH CRISES & DISRUPTION"

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Through the turmoil of the recent days and weeks, one of the strangest sensations has been holding fear and possibility in each hand. When I was holding fear, in my mind, there wasn't enough – not enough time, not enough resources, not enough hours in the day, not enough dollars in the bank. It felt like drowning. But every so often, I'd flick into a totally different space, one of possibility. Nothing I've ever experienced has turned the whole world to focus on the importance of connection like this has. Never before have I seen such an abundant groundswell of human generosity and goodwill. Initiative and creativity are firing. There is so much risk here to our interconnectedness, and there will be much suffering. But, is there a chance that we could emerge from this more connected than before? More united in solidarity through our shared humanness? Is this really a dark storm for me to weather, like that fearful inner voice tells me, or is this the moment I've been getting ready for my whole life? Is this not a call to arms for leadership and citizen-led action in sparking the connections across our communities that will not only be essential and life-saving through the storm, but life-giving in regenerating the connectedness of our communities for years to come?

I'm grateful for the opportunity to lead with creativity and possibility, to meet people where they're at, sit alongside fear, create safe spaces for vulnerability and connection, whilst always sewing the seeds of possibility and hope. It's also a response that is considerate of the whole, the bigger whole, the bigger 'us.'

"LEADERSHIP THROUGH CRISES & DISRUPTION"

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It's going beyond 'my people,' 'my organisation,' 'my community,' to the bigger 'us.' It's leading not only in the local, but holding the bigger whole in mind and seeing the greater possibilities that can come from 'bigger than us' contributions. It's incredibly energising, it's a call to something bigger. The suffering and the loss is real, there's no denying that. At times, it's overwhelming. But I can find the balance between acknowledgement & acceptance, active response, and the regeneration of new possibilities that this time is giving birth to.

"INSPIRATION"

27.03.2020 | STAFF TEAM JOURNAL ENTRY

I have been inspired by the people on my street & my the people in my community. In particular my friends Flavia & James with whom I hosted a 'How to Zoom' session for members of Connect Victoria Park (the former Senior Citizen's Association). What a privilege it was to be 'tech support' for over 30 older residents, guiding them onto and around Zoom. How happy they all seemed. How relieved they were that there is a way for them to connect with each other in these times of distant socialising. The participants genuinely seemed happy/relieved to have been supported to participate. I feel lucky to be part of a community where people like James & Flavia step up to help others. It reminds me how good people are. In times when lots of people are scared and fearful, to see people willingly stepping up to help gives me hope for the future.

I'm inspired by the folks on my street who, after I letterbox-dropped them with a note offering help, unanimously offered help in return, with no expectation of help themselves. Including people I've never met despite only living a few doors away.

I'm inspired by people being emotionally vulnerable; people saying publicly that they're scared, fearful, worried, anxious.

"INSPIRATION"

CONTINUED.

I'm inspired by my children's school teachers who have made it very clear that my children are welcome to remain at school for the next two weeks if we need them to. No judgement, no blame; just an acceptance of the situation and a knowing that they are doing their bit to help. I hope that we remember the lessons we're all currently learning. Like how shit Centrelink is; how neighbours are important; how hygiene matters; how we can share what we have; how people care; how we can step up when those in charge fail to do so; how everyone matters; how we should never pit economics against people's lives.

"ADVICE"

26.03.2020 | STAFF TEAM JOURNAL ENTRY

Nine days ago, we made the difficult decision to put a hold on all in-person gatherings within The Befriend Social Network. For perspective, that's around 200 resident-led social experiences every month with around 700 RSVPs that were just paused, indefinitely. That's hours upon hours of routine socialising, community participation and friendship that have found a space here in Perth to flourish and become meaningful for so many of us, gone. The idea of taking that 'away' for people would've seemed unfathomable. The first few days after we announced our decision, we recognised that there was a process of collective grieving for the loss of what was; events, routine, sharing physical social experiences with others, and just, the norm. And that was seriously uncomfortable. Change always is. But, a week and a bit on, I can sense that we've turned a foggy corner and we are starting to see the opportunity that this presents us. This is a chance for Befriend to reach new people who aren't restricted by location, to experiment with our creativity, to look deep within ourselves and find talents and strengths we didn't know we had, to find new ways to support connection that are a bit outside of the box, and to be okay with uncertainty **but feel energised by possibility.**

I think that's important advice that I'd offer to anyone who is unsure or lost about their purpose right now; to see this as a snapshot in time where we've been forced – or perhaps granted a chance – to push ourselves further.

"ADVICE"

CONTINUED.

There is rarely going to be another moment in our professional lives to put aside the 'every day' schedule of activities and operational tasks and adapt our collective skills in new ways. I have fleeting moments of feeling liberated from 'well, this is how we do things around here', and I'm energised by the question of 'well, what could this look like?'.

The second piece of advice is to hold true to your values and let them guide you. Every organisation has an essence, a unique fingerprint or DNA, that is at the core of its existence. For Befriend, that essence is threefold; we value all people, we help bring people together, and we support connection and belonging above all else. That is still so relevant and that is still what we're doing. It might look different, for sure, but in every decision we've made over the last week and a half, that essence has been subconsciously present. Trust in your core value, core process and core purpose.

Don't get me wrong, I am still on my journey, which has been a mixture of grieving, frustration, fear, hope, inspiration, and many more things, and I imagine you are still on yours. I have a feeling we'll all continue on this journey for quite some time, even once this all ends. But I can also say with a great degree of certainty, that I am enormously proud to be a part of a community that in times of crises, has been hugely resilient, adaptive and kind throughout and that we all woke up, sometime last week, and asked ourselves 'what can we be doing right now to make this better?'. That seems like a great place to start.

"GRATITUDE & CHALLENGES"

27.03.2020 | STAFF TEAM JOURNAL ENTRY

This has been a week unlike any other. I have cried, laughed, connected with more people than ever before, also felt moments of loneliness and anxiety. I am grateful for strength in humanity. I'm grateful for kindness. I have discovered that I am strong and have the ability to hold other people's worlds.

My biggest challenge this week has been to find stability in this rapidly changing time we all find ourselves in. In the past, I've relied heavily on structure and routine to bring stability, now that is all gone, so it's been lots of 'making things up'! I have hope that life will find its centre again, that even though we will never be the same, I'm hopeful that we will be better, stronger, and live life more intentionally. Social media has never been more creative, funny, and meaningful which has been a nice relief from the usual (often superficial) content that we see.

As I write this, I can't help but think of the hundreds and thousands of people on the frontline of this pandemic. I feel incredibly fortunate to be in the position that I'm in and hope that I can pay it forward in some way. In my search for exemplary leadership, I can't help but be inspired by Jacinda Arden's transparency, strength and authenticity. I'm at peace with where life is at right now, and look forward to another week of wild living!

"EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER"

27.03.2020 | STAFF TEAM JOURNAL ENTRY

As the COVID-19 crisis escalated into an international pandemic, my initial thoughts and feelings were of absolute frustration, anger and disappointment about the world we had created. There are so many wonderful, and joyous things about our local community and the global community. Wow, even the fact that there is a global community – no less than 200 years from the sparking of an industrial revolution we can speak to friends, family and global community members from anywhere in the world, to another! Time and space has reduced, and there's more material wealth in the world than ever. We'd made great strides in reducing poverty, inequality and oppression of people around the world. We continued to tackle socio-economic problems, albeit very slowly. In a nutshell, we are improving, slowly, but we were improving. However, there were two things that frustrated me during this crisis that I couldn't shake. Firstly, our material wealth has been misplaced and misguided. We live in a world of excess, of fast food, finance and fast fashion. Our practices of humans doing whatever we like, has seen the sparking and spreading of global threats that includes huge quantities of plastic killing our planet, man-made climate change 'killing' our planet, and new strains of viruses and illnesses emerging from human made environments.

Secondly, the unequal distribution of wealth has left us disconnected, vulnerable, and helpless. Whilst there is more money in the world, that unequal distribution of money and overall wealth is at an all time high – essentially, very few people have high amounts of money and wealth, and the gap to the rest of us is the largest it's ever been.

"EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER"

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How sad, that during a crisis, arguably caused by our misguided excess and wealth, was the reality that we lacked the connectedness, coordination, and capacity (including resources) to react in a meaningful and intentional way. Not only had we caused a world and global community fraught with socio-economic decline, but we'd eroded our sense of objectivity, and pureness for ourselves and our 'collective'. Our slow improvements were at the expense of ours and the global community's health. It was slow because it wasn't authentic, genuine, and pure. Okay, so that's the frustration, anger and disappointment out the way – now the good stuff! As local and regional communities reacted, something amazing happened. The spirit of others and the community began to emerge, demanding stronger, more coordinated, and more intentional community leadership. The optimism, compassion and empathy that people are showing in their efforts from the ground up to protect those most vulnerable, and to balance the need to protect oneself and their family with the socio-economic situation of their community and wider community, has been somewhat overwhelming and inspirational.

My optimism is that our values to be part of a collective, something that humans have lost in our transition to a global community, is now seeping back in tidal waves within local communities. Thinking and acting as part of a collective approach is evidenced to make us happier as individuals within a collective, and as a group.

"EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER"

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My hope and aspirations as we continue to respond and regenerate during COVID-19 is that we value the collective, each other, the group. We continue to be humble about the needs of others as well as ours. That we continue to give up our seats on public transport for those more needy, that we continue to do favours for our vulnerable neighbours, and that we continue to appreciate our place in the community – local and global.

Finally, my last hope is that we can trigger a local and global conversation about the 'value of good work' – health, education, housing and social connectedness. Excess wealth has not been good for communities all around the world, including our global community as a whole.

We can and must do better together – and I trust that we will.

We are but small stars in the universe.

Our power is in our collective sparkle. Signing off – smile at strangers and mean it, it's eternally better for the soul than smart-phones and money.

"FIRST WEEK(S) AT BEFRIEND"

27.03.2020 | STAFF TEAM JOURNAL ENTRY

I started at Befriend already feeling really insecure of myself, wondering whether I would be of value. I was a fresh intern just doing my first week.

That was tough, constantly dealing with self-doubt. Others tried to reassure me but I wasn't so sure. "This would be the time of such personal growth" they said. I knew that it was going to be a like climbing a mountain but I just had to take it moment by moment. Just get through today and start again next Thursday. I don't know what I did in a past life but week 2 on the job; I wasn't coping like I was before. All that time, sweat, money, sweat and tears were for nothing. I thought everything I worked on was for nothing. I had so many things I was working on and my hopes were on hold. I was weak. I was a failure.

I felt so ashamed of myself and then someone put something online. We are at war. Before doing national service we would be called up and have to run through trenches with guns pointed at us. I am just being asked to stay home and watch Netflix. I can do that. I can manage. Yes it does suck. I need reinforcements and I can't do this by myself and that doesn't make me a failure. This is not normal so how can I be expected to cope normally?

But one word as got me through. That word is "YET". Yet means that things will get better. Maybe not now, maybe not in a month time. It just hasn't happened yet I am not weak. I am not a failure. I have a black eye and I missed that big ball but I am going to keep swinging!

"HARRY POTTER"

27.03.2020 | STAFF TEAM JOURNAL ENTRY

This week I felt like I entered a whole new world – a bit like when I opened my first Harry Potter book.

I discovered that I could find a portkey (a Zoom link) which would take me to a different place (meeting).

Sometimes the port key took me to unexpected places – a desert island, a world under the sea... In this new world I did not always have control of where I was – I could be moved to another place without doing anything (Zoom rooms).

Sirius's head in the fireplace no longer seemed so fictional as my co-worker emerged and disappeared into her virtual background like some ethereal being.

When I first entered the world of Harry Potter I was amazed at the creativity, excited at the possibilities and compelled to find out more. Now I feel like I am in that world.



Stay safe, stay home,
stay connected

