



Network Impact Report 2025

Growing Community Spirit



These survey results were gathered on the traditional lands belonging to the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation, where connection to community has been carefully nurtured for thousands of years.

We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to Australian life.

We acknowledge that the sovereignty of this Nation was never ceded and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Contents

04	Background
05	Our Surveying Process
06	Duration of Involvement
07	Network Participation
08	Social Outcomes
10	Most Significant Changes
11	The Golden Thread
14	Themes of Change
22	Looking Forward
23	With Thanks



*A celebration of Network group
hosts during Volunteer Week*

Background

Befriend is a Perth-based not-for-profit organisation dedicated to growing inclusive, connected, resilient communities. We connect with people from all walks of life — older Australians, people with and without disabilities, people experiencing mental ill-health, young people, families, and neighbours — to create inclusive social groups, neighbourhood gatherings, and community-led projects. These grassroots initiatives grow communities where everyone feels valued, connected, and like they truly belong.

Across Australia and around the world, loneliness and social isolation have been recognised as pressing public health and social challenges, with significant impacts on mental health, physical wellbeing, and community resilience. In an age of rapid technological change, shifting social norms, significant climate-related events and widening inequalities, the need for local, human-centred connection is imperative. Befriend's work responds directly to this need, fostering the relationships, trust and spirit of solidarity that are at the heart of thriving, resilient communities.

Every year, we coordinate a network-wide impact survey to better understand the difference our community building efforts are making. This process combines online and in-person engagement, capturing a rich snapshot of the diverse ways connection and belonging are being nurtured across our network. The survey is shaped by Befriend's program logic model — our 'impact blueprint' — developed over 15 years of community building, aligned with the WACOSS State Outcomes Framework, and grounded in evidence from academic research and lived experience from the field. The insights gathered help us track our collective impact, celebrate meaningful change, and inform our strategies for the future.

This report shares the results of the 2025 Network Impact Survey with our partners, funders, volunteers, and friends. It's both a reflection of where we are now, and a stimulus for possibility — a shared picture of the change we're growing together.



A coastal meeting between our Far Northern Suburbs Community Builder and a local community member

Our Surveying Process

At Befriend, we approach evaluation as more than just data collection — we see it as **‘covaluation.’** This is a community-building mindset and method that reflects our culture and values in how we work with communities. It’s a shared process rooted in relationships, where we take time to connect, reflect, and make meaning together. Rather than treating participants as subjects of research, covaluation invites personal reflection, honours self-determination, and opens space for possibilities to emerge. It’s about listening to the voices of community members in ways that strengthen the very relationships our work is built on, tending to the life force of community spirit.

This year’s survey window ran from **1–31 May 2025**, and we engaged with our network through a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, through online and in-person engagements. The survey was shared via email campaigns and social media, and was also distributed at community gatherings, groups and events. Our Community Building Team visited as many Befriend-affiliated groups and initiatives as possible during the month, supporting people to participate in the moment. Volunteer Hosts also played a key role, sharing the survey through paper-based options and QR codes within their own groups and projects. An Easy English version was also made available this year, to enhance the accessibility of participation.

Through these combined efforts, we gathered **523 responses** from community members across Greater Perth, including those connected to our local hubs in Kwinana, Wanneroo, Armadale, lower Swan, Karawara, Belmont, Mandurah and Vincent. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to over 90 years, and reflected a rich diversity of lived experiences — including disability, mental ill-health, caring roles, cultural and language diversity, Aboriginality, and sexual and gender diversity.

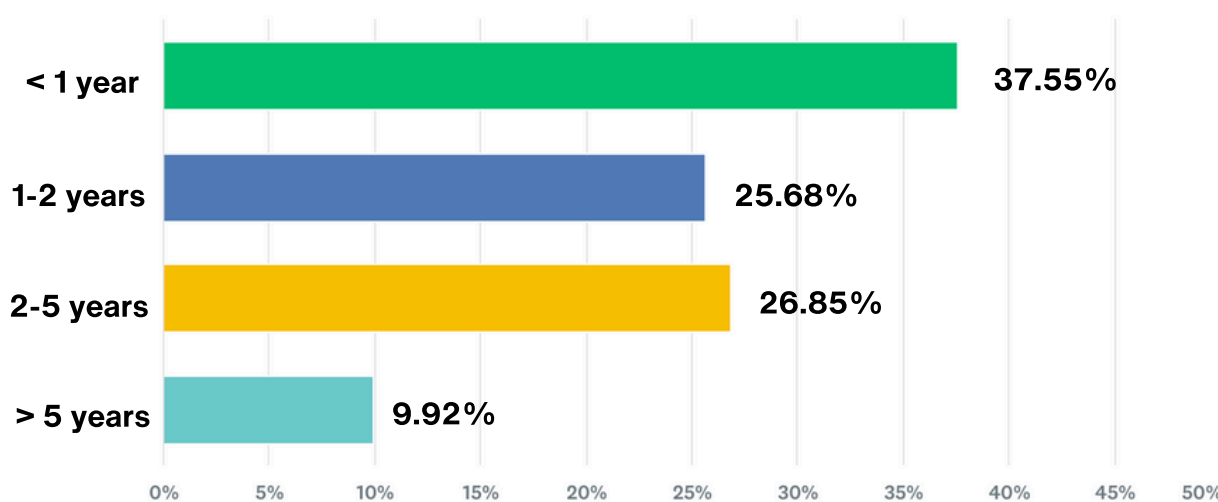
By blending the principles of covaluation with the practical work of survey distribution, we ensure that this process doesn’t just measure impact — it actively contributes to nourishing the connected, inclusive communities we seek to grow.

Duration of Involvement

How long have people been part of the Befriend Network?

The survey data shows how long respondents have been participating in Befriend's community building network, grouped into time categories from less than one year to more than five years.

Understanding the duration of involvement helps us identify patterns in engagement, and consider how experiences may differ for newer and longer-term participants. These insights can help inform how we design and adapt our engagement approaches to meet the needs of people at different stages of their journey with Befriend.



Consistently, we see that around 60% of respondents (2025: 63.3%; 2024: 58.3%; 2023: 58.7%) are within their first two years of involvement with Befriend. We believe this reflects **the significance of Befriend's impact in the early stages of a person's journey of connection or reconnection**. Our data and field observations point to a common pattern of growth and change: participation in the Befriend Network leads to increased social and community engagement, which often leads to an increased size and strength of a person's social network. As these friendships and relationships deepen, people report greater confidence, self-worth, and a stronger sense of acceptance and belonging. From this foundation, individuals begin to contribute more actively to their communities.

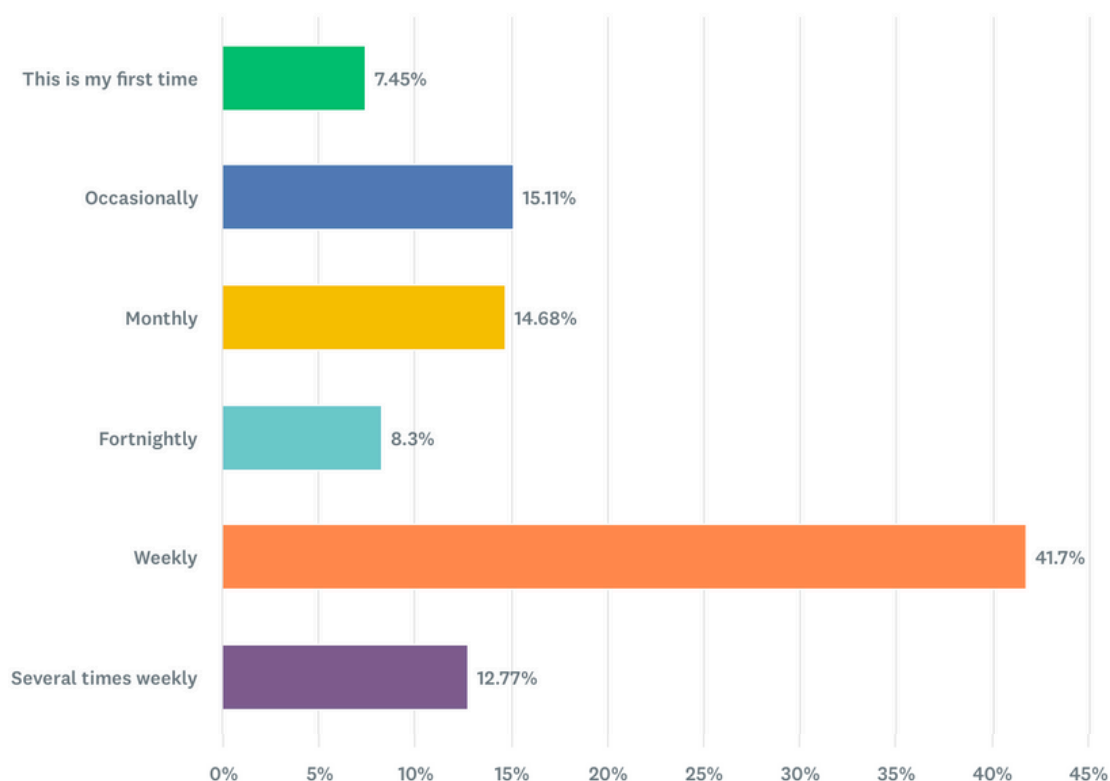
Over time, these changes extend beyond the Befriend Network. The skills, relationships, and confidence people develop become embedded in their everyday lives, leading to increased participation and capability in a range of formal and informal social contexts. For many, this means their need for regular, structured support from the Befriend Network may naturally decrease as their social worlds become self-sustaining. This data has implications for the importance of investing in multi-year community building projects which offer the 'growth pathway' and longevity needed for meaningful change.

Network Participation

How often do people participate in the Befriend Network?

This section explores how often respondents take part in community activities through Befriend's Network, ranging from those who have never attended or are participating for the first time, through to those engaging on a weekly or more frequent basis. Understanding participation frequency provides insight into the different ways people engage with the network — from occasional drop-ins to regular, ongoing involvement. This data highlights the role the Network plays in people's lives at varying levels of engagement.

The literature on social connectedness clearly evidences **the importance of consistency of social participation as an essential factor for relationship development**. This knowledge is embedded in Befriend's frameworks and training for Community Hosts, which in turn influences patterns of routine and consistency in the hosting of Network experiences. Notably, of those respondents who've attended at least 1 activity, **63% have rates of 'high-frequency participation'** (participating in an activity fortnightly or more frequently). This indicates what a significant contribution the Network makes to participants' overall rates of social and community participation, and is an essential factor working in favour of relationship development.



Social Outcomes

What difference does the Befriend Network make in people's lives and communities?

This section presents the key quantitative findings from the survey, focusing on the social outcomes identified in Befriend's Community Building Program Logic Model. These outcomes are measured through a set of evidence-based statements that reflect internationally recognised indicators of social connectedness, belonging, and social inclusion.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement, on a 5-point scale, with statements about their experiences in the Befriend Network. These statements explore shifts in confidence, awareness of personal gifts, diversity of relationships, self-worth, friendship formation, and community contribution. The figures below represent the proportion of respondents who selected 'agree' or 'strongly agree'.

The results offer a clear picture of how participation in the Befriend Network is influencing people's lives. These are foundational shifts that not only enrich individual wellbeing but also strengthen the social fabric of communities.



I feel more confident going to activities and events in my community



I am more aware of my unique gifts (inner qualities)



I have met people who are different to me



I'm more comfortable being myself



88%

I have made new friends



60%

I have made new friends I see outside of Befriend-affiliated activities



71%

I feel like I'm making a valuable contribution in my community



A group convening to learn about their gifts and their call to contribution

Most Significant Change

What are the most significant changes that have arisen through Befriend's community building work?

Most Significant Change is a qualitative evaluation methodology that offers a systematic way of listening deeply to the people at the heart of our work. After exploring the varied experiences of change, it boils down to one core question:

“What is the most important thing that has changed for you since you connected through Befriend?”

These stories are personal, complex and diverse — moments of friendship, confidence, purpose, belonging and community spirit. By listening to each person's experience, and then looking across all the stories with a lens of **thematic analysis**, we begin to see the patterns and themes that capture **the essence of Befriend's impact**.

This year, for the first time, we've also undertaken an **integrated analysis**, identifying a **unifying story of change** that runs through it all — we call this **The Golden Thread**. It represents the shared heart of people's experiences, while each theme of change adds its own distinct colour and texture.

On the following pages, you'll first meet The Golden Thread, and then explore each theme of significant change in more detail, brought to life through the voices of the people who've lived them.



“Give It A Go” - a community initiative based in Swan designed to offer flexible, inclusive and low-commitment opportunities to connect

The **Golden Thread**

The pattern of change at the heart of Befriend's impact approach

At the heart of Befriend's work lies a recognisable and repeatable pattern of change — a journey that begins with feelings of isolation and disconnection, and leads towards active, self-directed community contribution. This progression is not a linear program, but a natural, generative human process nurtured through the environments we help create in our uniquely Befriending way.



From isolation to first steps into community

Many people first encounter Befriend during a season of loneliness, uncertainty, life transition, or social withdrawal. Initial engagement often comes through a low-barrier, community-led activity within the Befriend Network — a book club, a morning tea, a crafting circle, a neighbourhood walk - all created and led by friendly, warm-hearted local residents. These are small but significant first steps into public social life, offering purpose, structure, and a chance to see familiar faces.

"I feel less lonely. I have a place to go where I will see friendly faces."

Creating the conditions for connection

The activities hosted through the Befriend Network are intentionally shaped by four evidence-based “**essential ingredients**” for growing connection:

1. **Shared interests** – Participating in activities that centre around something enjoyable and mutual creates natural conversation, comfort, and shared purpose.
2. **Regularity** – A consistent rhythm of gatherings builds familiarity and trust over time.
3. **Inclusive atmosphere** – An environment that welcomes people as they are, valuing each unique individual in their authenticity.
4. **Gift discovery and contribution** – Encouraging people to recognise and share their unique gifts, fostering mutual appreciation and the bonds of connection.

These elements combine to create safe, stimulating spaces where participation can deepen into meaningful engagement.

"I am meeting people interested in the same things that I am and I see the potential to make new friends."

Growth in confidence, self-worth, and relationships

Over repeated experiences, people begin to affirm their self-worth and develop greater social confidence. As their inner relationship with themselves strengthens, their outer relationships expand — friendships form, and bonds grow stronger.

"I'm connecting with heaps of people and feeling more confident."

From belonging to **contribution**

Belonging is not the end of the journey. As people feel more secure in themselves and their relationships, they naturally begin to express this outwards, contributing to others with the generosity of community spirit. This can take many forms:

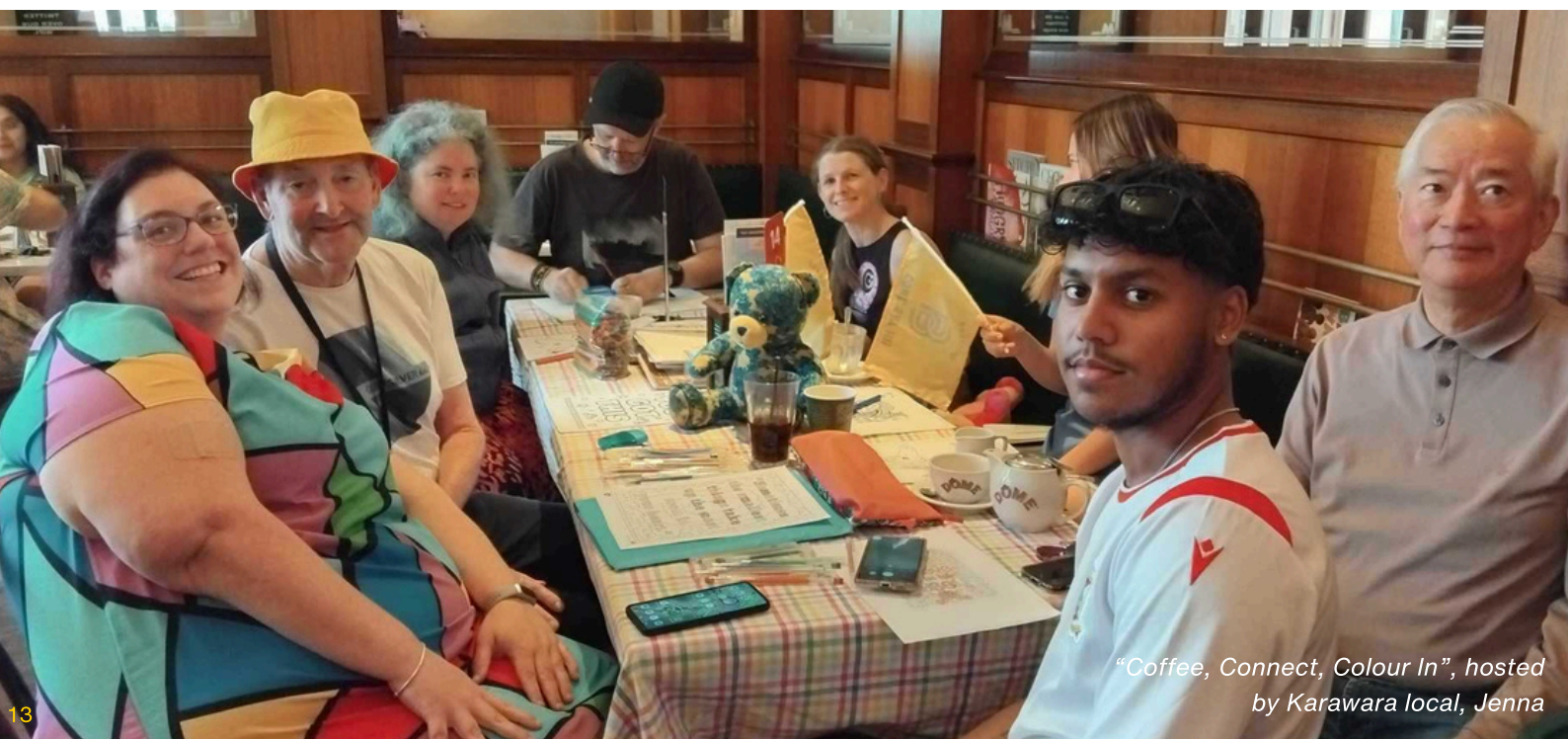
- Small, everyday acts of relating with kindness, encouragement and support
- Active participation in group activities
- Volunteering, co-hosting, or initiating new social groups and projects
- Tending to relationships in varied life contexts (family, workplaces, community)

"Making friends locally has increased my confidence, feeling a sense of belonging. Now I feel prepared to contribute to the community through business and community activities."

"I feel more connected to those around me and I believe I can contribute to impacting other people's lives! I feel less isolated than before."

"Befriend has given me opportunities to meet new people and learn new skills. That has given me the confidence to extend and share my skills and knowledge with others in my community."

In this way, the journey comes full circle — **today's participants become tomorrow's community builders, sustaining, regenerating and multiplying the threads of our social fabric.**



"Coffee, Connect, Colour In", hosted by Karawara local, Jenna

Themes of Significant Change

Theme 1: Social and Community Participation

This year, the most frequently described change again centred around the early steps of people's journeys towards greater connection and reconnection. For many, Befriend's value lay in supporting them through those first important shifts - the decision to "*get out of the house*," or even "*a reason to get out of bed*." These small but powerful beginnings mark the start of becoming more present and involved in community life.

Commonly, people describe "*meeting new people*" and "*more connected*" as the most significant change, highlighting the role of the Network in creating accessible, inclusive contexts for beginning to increase one's level of social and community participation.

These early steps of increased presence and participation build momentum through enabling factors such as routine attendance and the emergence of a new personal commitment to engage.

"I commit to going to a regular event. I try not to let things get in the way to prevent me from going."

"It's helped me decide to commit to doing something weekly after just drifting from day to day."

"I can feel lost some days, hard to fill in time, but look forward to my groups on Mon, Tues, Wed and Fridays."

These reflections point to the effectiveness of the Network in offering a steady anchor for people as they begin to shape their connected community lives.

"I feel more connected to my local space – like going down the shops and stuff like that, there's a better chance of seeing people I know."

Theme 2: Genuine Friendships & Relationships

The development of friendships and relationships continues to be one of the most frequently described changes, and is often spoken of as a natural progression from increased community presence and participation. Many people shared the joy of meeting others and forming new bonds:

“It has been lovely meeting other people. It gives me a buzz to see people involved in the community. Thus I have more contacts and friends now.”

“I’ve made lots of new friends and connected with them in the community.”

“Finding a bestie who is there for me anytime.”

For some, these friendships have been especially significant at key life stages - when moving to a new place, navigating single life, adjusting to retirement, or taking on caring responsibilities. Befriend groups have offered a welcoming doorway into connection, often making what could have been a long and difficult journey towards belonging much quicker and easier.

“I have been single for nearly 3 years and have taken on a larger caring role, and coming to my weekly event has connected me to multiple friends that have made my life significantly better.”

“Having moved to a new state of Australia it has really expedited my introduction into a community... instead of searching for years to find people it has come quite quickly.”

“We had moved to Perth and all my friends were in Melbourne. This helped me to start a friendship circle.”

“After retiring and not having much of a social life, finding out about Befriend has been wonderful.”

These reflections highlight the importance of friendships as a vital form of natural support, extending well beyond the activities themselves, and contributing deeply to people’s sense of connection, stability, and belonging.

Theme 3: Personal and Social Confidence

Confidence once again emerged as one of the most significant changes people described. This was often expressed in terms of feeling more at ease in social situations, experiencing less anxiety when meeting new people, and developing a stronger sense of self-assurance.

“I am more confident getting out, where before I didn’t go out, I was always making excuses not to.”

“I can’t believe how easy it was to participate in Befriend activities and how welcoming everyone is. It has given a relatively shy person a new lease on life.”

Many respondents noted the way confidence builds upon itself, creating a ripple effect that encourages people to take further steps on their journey - whether that’s joining new groups, participating more fully, or stepping into a community role for others.

“The meetups have made me more confident to go to [more] meetups.”

“I have the confidence to call out the numbers at bingo.”

“Confident to attend alone (sometimes without my carer).”

“Enjoy being part of my community. Even feel confident about helping others in my group.”

People also highlighted the ways in which increased confidence had extended into personal growth and skill development. Respondents spoke of building confidence in public speaking, workshop facilitation, and managing disagreements - illustrating how the supportive environment of the Network can unlock further capacities.

“I feel more confident being myself.”

These stories suggest that confidence acts as a key enabler of change, allowing people to feel more affirmed in their own self-worth, more connected to others, and more willing to contribute their gifts to the wider community.

Theme 4: Recreational Skills & Participation

For many respondents, participation in the Befriend Network has opened the door to learning new skills, (re)discovering forgotten hobbies, and finding joy in creative and recreational activities. These opportunities are closely linked with themes of connection, friendship, and a renewed sense of purpose:

“Learning new skills that have become a hobby I enjoy. Connecting with lovely people who raise my spirits.”

“The invitation to try new things only to realise how much fun it can be, how inspiring and how it's trickling through into my daily life, one giggle and laughter at a time.”

“Getting back into a hobby I had dropped due to life circumstances, and I love it.”

“Finding something new I really enjoy.”

“I've been more social and have picked up a new hobby. I've met more amazing friends and enjoy coming to the meet every week.”

Some responses pointed to a broader sense of purpose, confidence, and contribution that grew from these activities, especially when participants could share their skills with others:

“Befriend has given me opportunities to meet new people and learn new skills that have given me the confidence to extend and share my skills and knowledge with others in my community – as well as engage in new experiences.”

“My daughter is using her own learned skills to pay forward to the community.”

“Looking at utilising my experience and skills in the future.”

“New purpose to use my creativity to contribute to the wellbeing of my community.”

Across these reflections, it's clear that recreational skills and participation are about much more than hobbies - they create pathways for self-expression, confidence, and contribution, while fostering new connections and a sense of belonging.

Theme 5: Acceptance, Self-worth and Belonging

Many respondents described a strong and deeply rooted sense of belonging, often captured in phrases like “*finding my tribe*” or “*feeling part of a special community*.” Befriend groups appear to offer a space where people can connect meaningfully and feel truly included:

“Finding my tribe.”

“To feel like I belong to a special club.”

“I made more friends and love being a part of a family.”

Alongside belonging, participants also spoke about growing acceptance of themselves, feeling valued and included for who they are:

“I have been judged on my appearance usually, but not at Befriend.”

“I feel included and accepted for who I am.”

“I fit in and don’t feel I am there just with my support as I am talking with everyone.”

“I am feeling like a valued member of the community.”

For some, this self-acceptance seemed to translate into quiet confidence, enabling them to journey further along The Golden Thread and contribute meaningfully to others:

“Seeing my strengths to help people learn new skills.”

“I think about others more and realise I may not be perfect, but it's OK just being me.”

These reflections suggest that Befriend groups do more than foster social connection; they provide a supportive environment where people can build self-worth, grow personal acceptance, and experience a genuine sense of belonging.

Theme 6: Improved Mental Health

Many respondents explicitly described positive changes to their mental health and wellbeing, often linked with reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation. Befriend groups were seen as a reliable space to turn to when emotional or mental energy allowed, providing both connection and a sense of routine:

“I have made new friends and feel less lonely. I feel I have a place to go on Wednesdays where I will see friendly faces.”

“I feel less isolated knowing that there are groups that I can join when I have the stamina. I have met some lovely people.”

“My mental health has been helped by having a reason to get out of the house.”

Participants also highlighted improvements in mood and outlook on life, showing how social engagement and community participation contribute to emotional well-being:

“Increased self-awareness and a more positive outlook.”

“I feel happier and like I have new friends.”

I now practise gratitude regularly and it has positively impacted my life. I’m more content.”

“I seem to smile a lot now.”

These reflections reinforce the research that social inclusion, meaningful connections, and supportive relationships act as protective factors for mental health.

Befriend groups offer a safe environment to engage with others while leaving worries behind, helping participants to feel more grounded, positive, and emotionally supported:

“I feel good about being involved in things that I know are good for me emotionally and for my mental health.”

“I know I have struggles and so do others, and my Befriend groups are a place I can leave them at the door and pick them up if I remember to when I leave.”

Theme 7: Contribution & Volunteering

Many respondents described meaningful changes in how they contribute to others and their community, often reflecting a growing awareness of the importance of community spirit and a sense of responsibility for supporting others:

“I know I have things to contribute to others.”

For some, this contribution was closely linked with confidence and a sense of making a tangible difference:

“I know my contributions of hosting make a difference to everyone.”

“A feeling of making a difference to others.”

Others reflected on how these experiences helped them find a broader sense of direction:

“I have realised that I want to work in the community more, so, changing career.”

“More aware of my life purpose.”

Befriend activities and groups provide natural opportunities for people to contribute in both big and small ways. Participants described sharing skills, supporting the cohesion of the group, and assisting others in practical ways:

“Felt happy meeting new people, sharing and showing/demonstrating craft.”

“Learning to share my skills and manage disagreements.”

Others highlighted smaller, supportive actions that nevertheless made a meaningful difference:

“I’ve learnt to just listen when someone needs to talk or cry.”

“Being able to help and welcome new people to our group.”

These reflections suggest that Befriend provides a supportive environment where people can grow their contribution in ways that are meaningful and personally fulfilling, and enriching for others and the broader social fabric.

Theme 8: Inclusive Attitudes & Pro-Social Behaviours

Participation in Befriend activities provides opportunities for people to meet and connect with others from different backgrounds within inclusive, welcoming social environments. Many respondents described the joy and satisfaction that comes from engaging with people they might not otherwise meet:

“Met new people who I never would have before.”

“Built strong confidence within myself, connecting with people from all walks of life, and learning more about different cultures within my area.”

Alongside this enjoyment, many respondents noted an increase in empathy, understanding, and awareness of other people’s experiences and perspectives:

“Understanding people better.”

“I’ve now a better understanding of the importance of connecting with others, also the desire of others to do this.”

“I’ve grown my perspective on the situations of people with differing needs and abilities to myself.”

“Relating to people from all walks of life in a better way.”

“I am more inclined to be open to others around me, even strangers, and engage in conversation. This is becoming more natural to me. I am also more able to listen and give my full attention to what another is trying to communicate. I am aware that we all have burdens and difficulties to cope with. My compassion has grown.”

These reflections evidence that Befriend groups not only foster social connection but also encourage more inclusive attitudes, empathy, and pro-social behaviours, enabling participants to appreciate difference, support others, and feel confident engaging in diverse social spaces.

“This reinforces my value system about people and communities, that people from all backgrounds should live and associate in harmony and with fellowship.”

Looking Forward

The stories shared through this report make a clear statement: **connection is vital, for our lives and our communities.**

Befriend's network of community-led groups has helped people become less isolated, form new friendships, develop skills, rediscover hobbies, grow in confidence, and contribute to others. We've seen people pick up ukuleles and knitting needles, share meals, lead groups, welcome others in, start new projects and find purpose together.

As we look ahead, this feedback gives us reason for hope and a roadmap for growth. People are asking for more: more activities, more variety, and more locations. Some want to try table tennis or woodworking; others dream of hiking, poetry, or creative arts, or leading their own change-making initiatives. There's interest in more weekend and evening groups, and yearning for activities in places Befriend doesn't yet have a local presence. Many see opportunities for better communication and further reach - localised WhatsApp groups, further advertising, and clearer ways to find events.

We also heard about the challenges people experience on their journey to living a connected life; changing life circumstances, poor health, and low confidence can feel like hurdles to overcome. So we'll keep leaning into accessibility factors with greater understanding, empathy and creativity.

Lastly, we heard heartfelt expressions of appreciation for this community. People called Befriend "**a beautiful way of bringing people together**," "**a second family**," and "**a wonderful connector of people**." Many said they look forward to their groups each week, that they smile more, feel braver, or feel a sense of commitment once again.

The thread running through it all is hope: hope to keep building, to keep connecting, to keep making these invaluable spaces for joy and contribution. As one participant wrote:



I feel brighter and lighter, more courageous, more vulnerable, and more confident to try something new. I've had fun and have nice memories with people I've met through Befriend. I'm even more appreciative of others; people's stories, the unique experiences that shape each of them, and all the little ways we all add a little sparkle of joy to the shared space just by being there. I know now that we don't need to make grand gestures that we can't sustain to make a big difference to other people's days. I'm more certain that community life is a vital link for us all, and that has changed me indefinitely.

With Thanks

This report shows the significant personal, community and cultural impacts arising through the Befriend Network. These impacts are the result of a truly collaborative effort, made possible by extraordinary community-led contributions, our dedicated staff team, Board and valued funders and partners. The evidence of changes and the generous and insightful perspectives highlighted in this report give us hope for the future of our communities as inclusive, connected places in which we are all valued unconditionally, appreciated for our uniqueness, connected in nourishing networks, and feeling like we belong.

With heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported Befriend's networks to thrive over the last 15 years.



Connect with us

Place-based community building has been at the core of what we do for 15 years, so if you'd like to know more about our unique approach and have an exploratory conversation about how we might work together, please reach out.

Nick Maisey, CEO



0421 061 042



nick@befriend.org.au

Elaine Olsen, Partnerships Lead



0415 313 991



elaine@befriend.org.au



Merriwa "Coffee, Chat and Board Games"