

NEIGHBOURS OF MONASH



CITY OF
MONASH

Acknowledgement of Country

Monash Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of this land, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong People, and recognises their continuing connection to the land and waterways.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Introduction

10 wonderful stories of friendship 6 creative pieces of children's artwork

Neighbours of Monash is a celebration of friendship highlighting the value of cultural diversity in the city and to share the connections that make us a stronger and more vibrant community.

These wonderful stories of neighbourliness and friendships were selected for their abundance of kindness, friendliness and demonstration of community connections in Monash.

The stories show that friendships can come along when you least expect them but quite often right when you need them. Many of these stories highlight the welcoming nature of our Monash residents who are happy to lend a hand to their neighbour in any way they can.

The cross-cultural, gender and generational friendships in these stories are truly remarkable. From an elderly lady striking up a pen pal friendship with an eight-year-old girl during the time of COVID lockdown to a local gentleman teaching a group of Chinese women conversational English in his spare time. These stories show the generous and amicable nature that make Monash the community it is.

The answer to the question 'What does this friendship mean to you?' is the key to what makes these stories so powerful.

cultural diversity

vibr

connections



abundance of help

ant community

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Tess & Heather

Which of the following best describes your identity? Woman

Suburb: Oakleigh

Do you speak a language other than English? Italian

What is your cultural background? Australian/Italian

What is your neighbour/friend's name? Heather

Where is your neighbour/friend from? Australia (English background)

When did you meet? 1986



How we met...

We both met as toddlers, while staying at our grandmothers' houses (they were neighbours in North Road, Oakleigh from the 1950s).

Due to family circumstances, I was raised by my grandmother (nonna), who I thought was my mum up until the age of five. Heather was raised by her British grandmother, and we met in my front yard one day when our grandmothers introduced us. Heather was only a year old, and I was three.

We grew up playing in each other's backyards and, like most children of the 80s, had a shared love for the outdoors, and backyard cricket. Fast forward 35 years, and we are still neighbours, and the best of friends. Heather supported me emotionally when nonna was diagnosed with dementia. I had spent a decade caring for her, and it all became extremely difficult when the dementia worsened. It was a challenge to say the least, but Heather stood by me and was my pillar of strength.

What this connection means to me...

Put simply, our friendship is my blessing. We are sisters by choice; not by blood. If our friendship was a coffee order, it would be an espresso. Strong, rich in substance, and has stood the test of time! I am a coffee judge and photographer, so linking coffee to this friendship speaks volumes.

“Fast forward 35 years, and we are still neighbours, and the best of friends.”

Pat & Kelly, Ava & Rex

Which of the following best describes your identity? Woman

Suburb: Clayton

Do you speak a language other than English? No

What is your cultural background? Australian

What is your neighbour/friend's name? Kelly, Ava and Rex

Where is your neighbour/friend from? China

When did you meet? 2020



How we met...

Our story started during COVID 2020, when I saw a mother with her two kids outside my place pause for a few minutes. The little girl asked if she could talk to me.

That posed a few problems - masks, distance and the difference in our Aussie and Chinese accents. So I asked the girl if she would like to be my pen pal instead. She quickly agreed with no hesitation at all. So from then on, for some 10 or so weeks a letter would appear every day in each other's letter box.

On some days two or three letters arrived. During the course of that time, I received history lessons, instructions on how to make and fly a kite, even Mandarin lessons! I saved most of the letters, assembled them in two books and gave them back to the family as a written display of how an eight year old coped with isolation.

At some stage I was asked if her little two-year-old brother could also be my pen pal. So many gifts of leaves, stones, flowers, sticks and blades of grass appeared in my letter box.

In due course, restrictions were eased and the little girl was able to go back to school and see all her friends. She had no need of a pen pal now.

What this connection means to me...

During this time the mother and I became friends even though there was a wide age gap. Although I'm not a teacher, now each week I visit her and give her some help with English. This friendship is truly a great gift, that resulted from COVID.



“For some 10 or so weeks a letter would appear every day in each other's letter box.”

Heather & Shikoku



Which of the following best describes your identity? Woman

Suburb: Mount Waverley

Do you speak a language other than English? No

What is your cultural background? Australian/South African

What is your neighbour/friend's name? Shikoku

Where is your neighbour/friend from? Japan

When did you meet? Shikoku moved to live opposite us for a couple of years



How we met...

Shikoku's husband came to Australia for a two-year assignment at a local university, leaving his wife Shikoku at home with their two small sons, Taka & Tomo.

She was very lonely, with little English- so I invited her to join our childrens' playgroup. We'd walk in Valley Reserve and the children would love to play on a horizontal 'crocodile log' where they could all sit astride it. Sadly, that play prop has since been removed. We were heading to Penshurst in Western Victoria for a holiday to farmsit - while the owner was away for a couple of weeks. It was natural outreach for me to invite Shikoku to join us.

She demurred at first - "How can I leave my husband and not be there to prepare his meals?" To me, with different cultural expectations that was easy! "Pre-prepare meals for him and leave them in the freezer if you feel the need to give him that care!" So, they came and had an amazing holiday on a farm with lots of animals to feed, weak baby lambs in by the fire side to be bottle fed, ponies to ride, and a hay shed which offered great sliding play for the children. We were good friends, and she enriched our lives by the cultural exchanges that we had over that time. About 30 years later, I saw a couple of Japanese people hovering at the top of our drive. I called out to say hello -

and to my surprise it was Shikoku and her husband! Their boys had grown up, he had retired and they were revisiting old haunts around Melbourne. She came down and hugged me warmly, spontaneously removed a chain with a diamond around her neck - and gave it to me saying "You've no idea of the difference you made to my life when we lived opposite you so many years ago".

What this connection means to me...

For me it was an ongoing lesson to reach out, to engage with neighbours regularly as it enriches the neighbourhood and your own lives.

"You've no idea of the difference you made to my life when we lived opposite you so many years ago."



Manal & Kyoko

Which of the following best describes your identity? Woman

Suburb: Chadstone

Do you speak a language other than English? Arabic

What is your cultural background? African

What is your neighbour/friend's name? Kyoko

Where are you from? Saudi Arabia

Where is your neighbour/friend from? Japan

When did you meet? Clayton Community Centre



How we met...

I run a mother's group in Clayton that Kyoko was interested in joining.

She became a member and from there we grew our bond. At the time she told me she was looking to move into a new house and, a few days later, she came back to tell me about the one she's found and the area it's in.

To my surprise, she said my street name! And even more so, she was moving to a place just a few houses down from me! I couldn't believe what a coincidence that was!

What this connection means to me...

Our friendship showed me that it does not matter what faith, background or nationality you come from - it comes down to how good a person you are.

Everything else goes out the window.

●

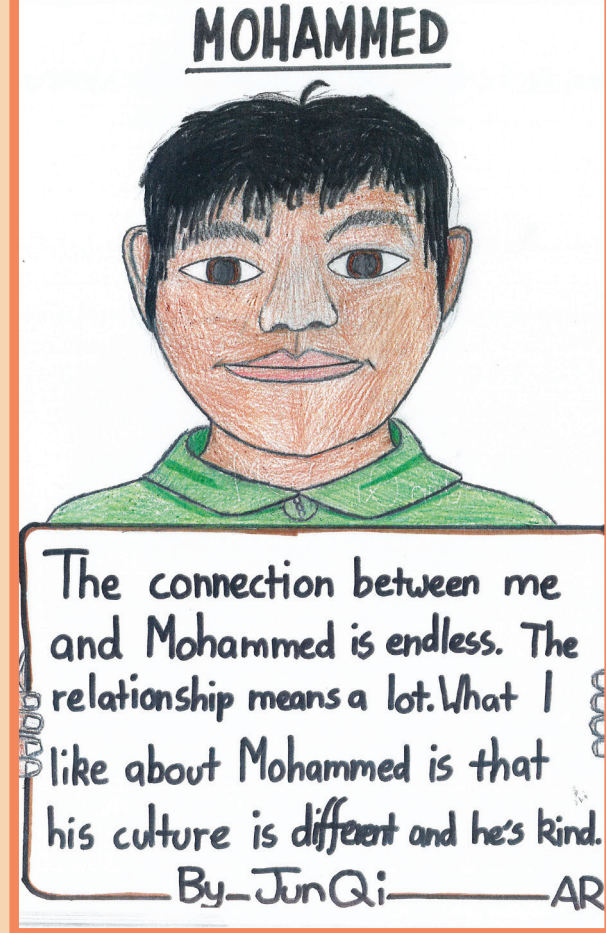
“It does not matter what faith, background or nationality you come from - it comes down to how good a person you are.”

○

Children from Albany Rise Primary School were asked to create a piece of artwork that reflected on their friend from a different cultural background and describe what that friendship means to them.

These artworks were created by children from Grades 3, 5 and 6.

The children speak of kindness, laughter, spending time together, playing, helping each other and many other traits that make up a best friend!



Portrait of Mohammed by Jun Qi

“ They describe kindness, laughter, spending time together, playing, helping each other and many other traits that make up a best friend!

These beautiful artworks really highlight the diverse culture of Monash in a beautifully creative and expressive way.

They were able to acknowledge their differences whilst at the same cherish the similarities between them.

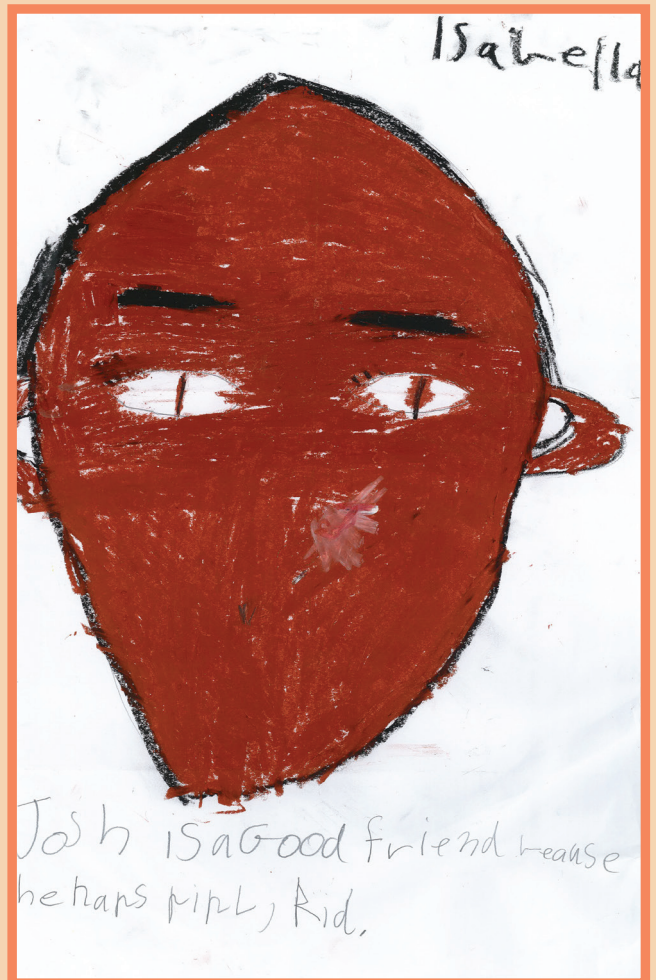
Portrait of Levi by Nicholas



Portrait of Stephen by Luke



Portrait of Stephanie by Sienna



Portrait of Josh by Isabella

Portrait of Sophie by Tamsyn



Pooja & Karamjit

Which of the following best describes your identity? Woman

Suburb: Clayton

Do you speak a language other than English? Hindu, Kannada & Tulu

What is your cultural background? Hindu

What is your neighbour/friend's name? Karamjit

Where are you from? Bangalore, India

Where is your neighbour/friend from? Punjab, India

When did you meet? January 2019



How we met...

When we moved to Melbourne from India in January 2019, I didn't have any friends here.

Soon after the move, Karamjit and I met at the kindergarten where my older son and her older daughter were classmates. As we got talking, we realised our younger ones were also born just a few days apart.

Three times a week, those little conversations at the kindergarten dropoffs and pickups, together with the short walk back home, formed the beginning of our wonderful friendship.

Karamjit, being one of the first few people I met in Melbourne, helped me get acquainted with the place. Her knowledge of things and places, among other things, helped me figure out how to buy the right things for my children, at the right time.

What this connection means to me...

Karamjit is a great source of strength to me. She is one of the most generous, caring and loving friends that I am blessed to have in my life.

I am thankful to her and her family for helping us feel at home in a new country. Her small acts of kindness always brighten my day. I will always cherish those sweet memories and treasure the warmth of her friendship. We often meet at her place over a cup of tea and snacks, talk about different things, which gave me a lot of comfort in a new environment.

Now, our younger children are classmates too and they are very good friends. I am so glad I met this gem of a person and can say that Karamjit is more like family than a friend.

“Her small acts of kindness always brighten my day.”

Kinza & Isadora



Which of the following best describes your identity? Woman

Suburb: Chadstone

Do you speak a language other than English? Arabic

What is your cultural background? East African

What is your neighbour/friend's name? Isadora Rose

When did you meet? In high school year 9



How we met...

We met when we attended the same class in high school.

It was in year 9 media and we immediately started talking once we were put into a group project together.

Over time, we talked more and more and realised that we shared similar interests. Eventually, we got put into more classes together throughout high school, which has led to the development of our close relationship.

What this connection means to me...

Our friendship means a lot to us considering that we had grown up together - from high school students into adults.

We shared the whole time together and also helped each other out through some tough times while we were in high school.



● **“We had grown up together.
From high school students into adults.”**

Mira & Lu



Which of the following best describes your identity? Woman

Do you speak a language other than English? No

What is your cultural background? Jewish

What is your neighbour/friend's name? Lu

Where is your neighbour/friend from? China

When did you meet? 2010

How we met...

I met Lu when I was volunteering for AMES in Oakleigh, doing Conversation English with refugees and new migrants.

We got talking and both progressed very well with our English. Lu was married to a Chinese man who, like her, was friendly and enjoyed seeing her learn so quickly.

They soon became pregnant with their first baby and I worked together with Lu to prepare her for the birth. Reading about pregnancy and the development of the child gave her a great deal of confidence. Later, two more children came along. To this day we are in close contact.

Her English is very good now, her three boys are thriving and we still get to enjoy each other's company!

What this connection means to me...

I enjoy the company of people from different cultures. While I worked at AMES, I also became very close with a young Turkish migrant who was pregnant. With her we also keep in close contact and I have learned so much about her culture.

These are just two examples of the many clients I have worked with and got to know as a volunteer.



“Her English is very good now and we still get to enjoy each other's company!”

Kamla & Michelle



Which of the following best describes your identity? Woman

Suburb: Glen Waverley

Do you speak a language other than English? Hindi

What is your cultural background? Fiji Indian

What is your neighbour/friend's name? Michelle

Where are you from? Australia



How we met...

I am an Australian with a Fiji Indian background, who migrated to Australia in 1989 and have been living in Glen Waverley since.

One day on one of my daily walks I met Michelle, who is a Caucasian, married to a Chinese gentleman. We exchanged greetings and I discovered that she lived just next door to me. That marked the day when our great friendship began.

On weekends we would walk together, share our backgrounds and history and provide each other with much-needed company. I even invited her to join some of the clubs that I am a member of. We have also got to enjoy each other's company on weekend retreats!

What this connection means to me...

We both know that we are a pillar of help and support to each other in time of need. I really value Michelle's friendship.

“We both know that we are a pillar of help and support to each other in time of need.”



Ryan & Morgan



Which of the following best describes your identity: Man

Suburb: Clayton South

Do you speak a language other than English? No

What is your cultural background? Sri Lankan

What is your neighbour/friend's name? Morgan

Where is your neighbour/friend from? Queensland

Where did you meet? At Oakleigh Library on a windy Saturday afternoon



How we met...

One Saturday afternoon, I started work at Oakleigh Library to cover the lunches of my colleagues.

We were offering a click and collect service at the library service due to the current health and safety regulations. I was at the desk when a lady called to say she was here to pick up her holds. I told my colleague I will take it to the customer. Wanting to promote the collection to our customers, I recognised the book she was borrowing.

It was called Sisters of Winter Wood by Rena Rossner. I didn't particularly enjoy it and having no filter, I told the customer I didn't like it but added to give it a go anyway. The small conversation that followed developed into discussing our preferences in books.

The next day I arrived at the library for my next shift and found that Morgan had left a letter with a book for me to read and donate to the Monash Library collection.

What this connection means to me...

I love connecting with people! When my grandma passed away in 2017, it was a big loss for me and I realised that I took for granted the last week I could have spent with her.

I love Morgan's personality, it has a vulnerability to it to which I can relate to.



“Her personality has a vulnerability to it to which I can relate to.”

Billy & Eva



Which of the following best describes your identity? Man

Suburb: Mulgrave

Do you speak a language other than English? No

What is your cultural background? Australian

What is your neighbour/friend's name? Eva

Where is your neighbour/friend from? China

When did you meet? At the social centre of Mackie Road Neighbourhood House

How we met...

We met at the social space of Mackie Road Neighbourhood House, about two years ago.

A Chinese lady came up to me and greeted me. We started talking and she shared her want to learn English, asking if I was interested in helping teach conversational English to a group of Chinese in the centre.

I had failed English at school, but was happy to share my gift of the gab and skills to be able to positively engage with people, so I gave it a shot. About seven people

in the group, mostly older Chinese immigrants, had expressed interest in the teaching. One of them was Eva. She was an English teacher in China and helped me with the classes and translation.

We started going on walks together, discussing our common love for nature and many other things. I accompanied Eva and her sister on trips around Melbourne, teaching them about the history and surroundings.

We now use WeChat not only to chat to each other, but also to engage with her students in China.

What this connection means to me...

It has been a very engaging and rewarding friendship. I really believe in engaging with everyone I see and improving the lives of those who might be sad or lonely. A small hello goes a long way.

For Eva, their friendship has been equally very important. His helpfulness, kindness and advice have been there for her even in the tougher times of her life. Even though she is now back in China, they both still cherish the friendship they share.

“His helpfulness, kindness and advice have been there for her even in the tougher times of her life.”



Thank You

Monash Council wishes to thank the community members featured in Neighbours of Monash for sharing their stories for this project, as well as those who contributed behind the scenes in the making of this book.

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togetherness

cu

acts of kindness



Cultural integration

friendliness

Neighbours of Monash



CITY OF
MONASH