

Reconnecting with community



Organisation:

Befriend

Website: befriend.org.au

Focus: First Nations



Sam* is a proud First Nations woman who strongly believes in connected communities and being in service to others. After realising that she had become isolated and disconnected from society, she started to actively look for volunteering opportunities. "I was looking for ways to learn how to be part of community," Sam said.

In her search, Sam came across Befriend, a Perth-based organisation that supports people to come together and build thriving communities. Befriend connected with Sam when she attended one of their online workshops, "Contributing to your community: Discovering what you love to give". Sam also took part in a second online workshop with Befriend called "Stepping stones: Taking the next steps to connect with your community."

APPROACH

The language around connecting with community really resonated. For Sam, it was important to find opportunities that felt natural and without set agendas. She was looking for groups where people supported each other in more general ways, and the Befriend workshops were a great fit. The workshops helped to feel more confident with volunteering.

OUTCOME

The Befriend workshops sparked a snowball effect of involvement for Sam. She attended a writing group, storytelling workshop, and connected with a local Befriend community builder. They chatted through ideas for Aboriginal-led art workshops that Sam wants to host in the near future. She has also started volunteering with the Red Cross and is in the process of becoming a facilitator with the Alternatives to Violence Project Australia.

Sam wants to continue exploring what community really means to her. She shared that having welcoming and friendly experiences with an organisation that is grassroots in nature, has motivated her to connect more. In the future, Sam is interested in hosting her own group, where people can connect and support each other.

"The Befriend workshops really helped me come out of my shell and kind of lit a fire under me. They encouraged me to be involved and contribute more. The informal, inclusive, encouraging, and safe ways these sessions were run helped 'bring me out of myself'. By not being put into a tick box of a role, I am inclined to want to do more." – Sam (volunteer)

LEARNINGS

- By expanding the language used to discuss volunteering, messages covered themes of generosity, empathy and sharing.
- A focus on informal volunteering made it easier to connect people and support mission-aligned and community-led efforts.
- While communities of place are important, there are other types of communities that volunteers may relate to.
- Having a more personal and human approach with people at the start of their volunteering journey can help to find roles that are fulfilling.