

Why a Neighbouring movement?

Back in the spring 2020, John Helliwell, a happiness economist and editor of the *World Happiness Report*, sent me an Op-ed that he'd recently written on how, like previous crises, the pandemic was propelling people to connect and band together. He writes: "People are reaching out to friends, family and beyond to make contact, provide assurance, offer help, and share reminiscences and laughter... It has taken a pandemic to bring home how much of the human condition is shared, and how much we are all in this together."

I've heard some of these wonderful stories as well - in fact, they haven't stopped coming in! After one of the many virtual screenings of *The Great Disconnect*, an audience member from the Graduate Student Society at the University of British Columbia sent me this heart-warming story:

"The condo I currently occupy is a unique low rise building where our entrances oversee a courtyard. For the past 4 years that I've lived here, I would say 'hello' to my neighbours but could not identify any of them by name (except for their dogs, I always know the dogs). When everything shut down in March 2020 and the world turned upside down, I found my covid 'silver lining'. A week into the lockdown, one of the neighbours on my floor put up signs around the building about a 6 o'clock dance party. At 6pm every night for 3 months, they played 3 songs (the last one was always baby shark for the little ones) and residents would stand outside their doorways, dance, wave, and chat at an appropriate distance. One of our neighbours would sing every Friday and another played her harp in the courtyard for us when the cherry blossoms were in full bloom. Because of the way our building is designed, we were able to find community and get to know each other. During that time, about 5 units have become very close. We'll do (grocery) runs for each other, share a bottle of wine in our open-air hallway, or plan playdates for the kids."

Inspiring story, isn't it? It also shows the importance of good urban design and how it can really amplify our connections with those who live around us.

Having strong community wellbeing and neighbourliness is no longer just a nice thing to have, it's an essential element of our happiness, safety and health - mental, physical, spiritual and emotional (see more about this on page 3).

When I discuss the concept of "neighbouring" and why its so important, people often ask how they can be neighbourly in a safe, physically-distant way. **Sometimes it's just a matter of making eye contact and sharing a simple "hello" to break the ice.** But if you're looking for more, I did a little research and some creative thinking, and I've come up with **twelve ideas** for you on the next page. I call it **12 days of Neighbouring.**

As an eternal optimist, I believe many of us have learned just how important connection to others is - and my hope is that the best is yet to come. As Winston Churchill once said:

"Never let a good crisis go to waste."

12 Days of Neighbouring

- Connect through Food** - Food can be a great way to communicate and connect. Try bringing over a home-cooked meal to a neighbour, or even baking some (healthy, allergen-free) cookies or other baked goods to share.
- Group Fitness Challenge** - Meet outside once a week for some physically distanced fitness such as 30 minutes of dancing, plyometrics, yoga or even a group walk around the neighbourhood. Take turns leading and make the activity level inclusive for all, including children!
- Use books to bond** - Put out an old shelf or table and start a community library in which people can take a book or leave a book. If you live in a condo or apartment building, place a shelf or box by the common mail area. And if your neighbours are really active readers, you can even start a monthly or quarterly book club (virtually in the winter, outside in the summer).
- Weekly Photo Challenge** - This activity will not only get people's creative juices flowing, but will allow your neighbours to see the beauty and uniqueness of where they live! Create an email group and have your neighbours take photos from the neighbourhood or surrounding area and submit them once a week. The organizer chooses a winner - that winner then becomes the organizer to collect next week's photos. In the spring and summer, find a creative way to display the photos!
- Window Walks** - Create some art to display in your windows or on your front doors for your neighbours to admire when they walk around the neighbourhood. You could even coordinate with your neighbours on themes, a game of "I Spy" or even a scavenger hunt (read more [here](#)).
- Lend a Helping Hand** - Shovel snow, clean off a neighbour's windshield or even offer to do a grocery run. There's lots of ways that we can help those around us who may need it. Consider creating a buddy system in your neighbourhood to make sure you're more vulnerable neighbours are staying safe during these uncertain times. To let neighbours know you're willing and able to help, give them a "connection card" - check out these great examples [here](#).
- Donate to a local organization** - Many local organizations and non-profits have seen an increased need for volunteers or financial donations during the pandemic. Find an organization in your community to support. (My wife and I support Parkdale Food Centre - read about them [here](#)).
- Holiday Cards** - Who doesn't love getting a holiday card? Grab a box of cards and write a note to each of your neighbours. And if you don't know them yet, sign your name and address and promise to come by and say hi, when it's safe to do so.
- Put on a show** - Are you a musician, actor, magician, comedian or storyteller? Do any of your neighbours have a special talent? Work with your neighbours to create a free outdoor talent show series!
- Make a Care Package for a New Neighbour** - If there's a new neighbour on the block, welcome them with a care package. Consider including things like a map of the area, list of your favourite local businesses, your name and contact information.
- Plan a community garden** - It's not the season for planting, but that doesn't mean we can't start thinking about the warmer days ahead. Engage your neighbours now by asking who's interested in starting a community garden, where the garden should be planted, what should be planted and even a schedule of tending the garden.
- Advocate for a Neighbour Day in your city** - There's family day, mothers day and Victoria Day so why not have neighbour day?! During one Saturday in the summer, just like many festivals, the streets should be shut down and every neighbourhood should organize a block party, or whatever theme a particular neighbourhood should choose to have. Read this article on ideas for a Neighbour Day [here](#).

Resources on the Benefits of Neighbouring

"We welcome strangers because we value their gifts and need to share our own. Our doors are open. There are no strangers here, just friends we haven't met."

- John McKnight

Here are links to resources showing the strong connection between neighbourliness and health.

The Abundant Community Initiative Edmonton by Abundant Community

"Creating more connections among neighbours through shared activities and interests would increase relational networks, grow the neighbourhood's positive sense of self and, in so, increase its ability to work together towards a common good." - Click [here](#) for the full resource

The Benefits of Neighbourliness by Vancouver Foundation

"Research...shows that when neighbours know and trust each other, streets are safer, people are healthier and happier, our children do better in school, there is less bullying and less discrimination. We are simply better off in many of the ways that matter." - Click [here](#) for the full resource

Global Study Finds Knowing as few as 6 Neighbours Reduces the Likelihood of Loneliness - by PR Newswire

"A team of leading loneliness experts, found that knowing as few as six neighbours reduces the likelihood of feeling lonely and is linked to lower depression, social anxiety, and financial concerns related to COVID-19." - Click [here](#) for the full resource.

The Benefits of Neighbourliness by Neighbourhood Small Grants

"When neighbours know and trust each other, streets are safer, local businesses thrive, people are healthier and happier, our children do better in school and in their development, and there is less bullying, discrimination and addiction in our communities." - Click [here](#) for the full resource.

Get to Know Your Neighbours, They Might Just Save Your Life By Tamarack Institute

"Emergency preparedness is increasingly important as communities plan their response to extreme events and the best path to recovery afterward. Ron Dwyer-Voss has written extensively about discovering the power in communities, and says that the principle asset in a disaster is social capital. Ron states that "Your neighbours have everything to do with improving your immediate chances in a disaster." Neighbours, and their collective extended connections, will determine how well and how quickly your community will recover." - Click [here](#) for the full resource.

How can we connect with neighbours in a COVID world by GenWell

Check out this great infographic designed by the team at GenWell project by clicking [here](#).

About Tamer

Bio

Tamer Soliman is a social entrepreneur who consults, speaks and writes on the importance of sustainable community practices.

With a background in holistic wellness and a keen interest in longevity, Tamer teaches people that a truly healthy life includes eating local and sustainable food, having strong social connections and a deep relationship to our natural environment.

He regularly gives talks at companies, wellness centres, schools and conferences, sharing his unique perspective on wellbeing. Conference organizers have described Tamer as, “the best professional health and wellness speaker to work with...He has a tremendously positive outlook that is absolutely infectious.”

Films

Tamer has produced and directed award-winning documentaries on meaningful and timely health topics that have inspired both local and international audiences.

One of his proudest achievements to date was being a part of the revival of the local food movement in the Cayman Islands, as a result of his film ***Bright Spot***.

His latest award-winning film, ***The Great Disconnect***, invites people to explore the relationship between their sense of community and overall sense of wellbeing. This film has been screened across Canada through multiple municipalities and Non-Profit organizations, and has been shown in over ten countries across Europe.

Work with Tamer

Consulting - When working with city planners, civic leaders, urban designers, communities, neighbourhoods and citizens themselves, the goal is to teach and inspire sustainable practices that optimize wellbeing. Click **here** to learn more about Tamer’s consulting services.

Speaking - Whether giving a keynote talk, participating in a panel discussion or facilitating a workshop, my goal is always the same: to inspire and educate people to immediately take action and engage with their communities to make a positive difference. Click **here** to inquire about speaking engagements.

Coaching - Much of the research tells us that alongside a healthy diet and physical activity, strong social connections and community involvement help us live a long, happy and purposeful life. I strongly believe that healthy communities have the ***power to heal***. So much so, that I’ve created this simple **3 Step Program** to get you on your journey of becoming a **A Good Neighbour**. Click **here** to learn more about the coaching package

Questions or inquiries? Email me at tamer@tamersoliman.ca and stay in touch with by subscribing to my weekly newsletter at www.tamersoliman.ca.

Sincerely,

Tamer Soliman