

Transcript



Title: Webinar: Social Connection 101

Creators: Penny Harrison, Dr Catherine Hartung, Professor Jane Farmer

Year: 2022

Audio/video for this transcript available from: <http://commons.swinburne.edu.au>

JANE FARMER: OK, excellent. Thank you, everybody, who is here for our quickie launch of our social connection 101 resource. And we did release this back in December, so we know a few people are already using it, and we'll get to talk a bit about that at the end. Next slide, Paul.

So first of all, I'd like to acknowledge that I'm hosting a webinar from the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. I also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which you are all working today and joining us, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in this webinar. I pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging. And celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters.

And Aboriginal people have a really amazing knowledges about connections that we have connected with a bit, and definitely need to connect more with. OK, next, Paul.

OK. Just a bit of housekeeping. So as we go through, we'd love you to-- oop, Paul Caffe can't see the slides. Are there people-- other people out there that can't see the slides?

PAUL LAVEY: So if you're having trouble seeing the slides, I'd recommend just going out of Zoom and coming back in.

JANE FARMER: See you in a minute. OK, cool. So just carry on, and most people in the chat seem to be saying that they can see them, so that's great. As we're going through and talking, please start to put things in the chat. We might get to it while other people are talking or we might revisit it at the end.

But that's the best bit of doing this, is hearing what you guys have to say. So please, please do interact there. And when we get to the end-- so we're going to speak for a while. I'm not going to put a number on it. And there will be a Q&A. So please use the Raise Hand at that point or I guess other points, but we'd like to just talk through this and then interact with you.

Paul is actually doing a recording of this session. If you have any challenges with being recorded, please email Paul at this email address here. Otherwise, the recording will be available to everybody who has registered to come to this webinar. Next. I think that's everything housekeeping.

So today we are going to-- I'm going to speak a bit about the resource. Penny Harrison from the Australian Red Cross is going to speak first. I won't tell you what she's going to speak about because I don't actually know it, but anyway. And then Catherine Hartung is going to speak, too, and Catherine's senior lecturer in secondary education in the School of Social Sciences, Media, Film, and Education at Swinburne University. And Catherine's going to talk about her interaction with real live community groups and actually making the resource-- co-designing and making resource user-friendly for the groups it's intended to help. And so after that, as I said, there'll be a Q&A.

So this is what we're talking about today. This is the resource. It's available at that website address there through the fabulous Analysis and Policy Observatory, which has many other fabulous useful resources for the community and nonprofit sector as well. I think now we are going to hand over to Penny for her bit of intro and chat.

PENNY HARRISON: Thank you so much, Jane, and I'm really delighted to be here today to talk about this social connection work which has been a process, actually, over quite a number of years. Reflecting this morning, Jane, back in 2018. I think we began these conversations, and there's been a whole range of people. And I just want to acknowledge the work of Ebony Gaylor and Christian Stenta in particular in collaborating with Swinburne and with Jane and the team on getting actually to this point of this resource.

So I'm just going to give you, actually, a couple of anecdotes, and then also why connection is so important to the work of Australian Red Cross and why it led us to this point of collaborating so deeply with Jane and many others. So in essence, as you may know, Australian Red Cross is, in fact, we are a member and a community-based organisation.

So working with and being a part of community is an essential part of our DNA. Some of the areas of our work include our work in emergencies. Other areas include our work in migration. Other areas involve community support activities and programmes and services across every state and territory, we are a large national organisation.

And back in 2018, we were kind of reflecting and we had this moment where we said, one of the key elements that sits across all of this work-- so whether we're looking from a community benefit point of view, from a client or a community perspective, or we're looking for people who are giving their time and donating their time to Red Cross and to their communities, and/or we're looking at the value that an organisation like Australian Red Cross can bring, connection literally kind of stood out on a whiteboard one day as something that was almost like a thread that runs across all of our work.

And that really was the genesis of starting to say, so what is the value of connection? And if we could understand that more and if we could build that further into all of our work, including the way that we activate communities and people who want to give their time or volunteer their time, I wonder what benefit we would get from that as much as what would be the benefit for those individuals.

And this is also based on evidence. So as Australian Red Cross, we know, for example, that stronger, more connected communities bounce back from disasters faster. And my story, to open this session today, comes from the very live example of what's been happening with the flood disaster in Queensland and New South Wales.

A number of Australian Red Cross volunteers a couple of years ago began to take the literature and knowledge and insights that we have around how do you build community resilience? And came up with some frameworks that they felt were going to be very useful in engaging their own communities.

So the idea of community by community. And the heart of that is about building a network and building connections. Because when you've got the foundation of a strong network and strong connections, then the possibilities are endless. And what we know anecdotally-- and I'm very hopeful that we will actually build out some evidence stories around this, is that in the Northern Rivers region where these volunteers built out this framework, we have been able to see the value in how they've been able to respond to this flood event, by activating their network and the connections that sit around that network.

And more generally what we're seeing is communities are able to rally and respond quickly, and at the heart of that is that they know who each other are and they know where their connections stand, and how quickly you can activate around those connections. So as I mentioned at the beginning, we saw this opportunity back in 2018, and that really led to this curiosity around, what if we could build out some stronger evidence that would really help us understand the value of connection?

And so as you'll see in the handbook, the model that we originally designed-- so looking at the inputs and the outputs and looking at the quality of connections to help people understand both individually and collectively what the value could be was a really important starting point. So this really remains relevant for us day in, day out in our work, and we've done some initial testing with various community groups and services and programmes across Australian Red Cross.

And we're really keen, I think, to try and sort of build out that success, but also more deeply, to continue to gather the evidence and insights that help us understand quite deeply the value of connection, not only in terms of responding to disasters, but what else that that can bring, whether it's for volunteering base where we also know that there's mental health and other benefits in contributing your time.

So I'm really pleased that we've got this handbook out there, and I'm very much looking forward to hearing, actually, from people on this call today what your own experiences may have been, what your organisational experiences may have been. And when you look at the framework and the model that's being built, does that resonate with the practise that you're experiencing? And how you think in practical ways you and/or communities around you would seek to implement this. So I might leave it there for now, Jane, and hand back to you.

JANE FARMER: Thanks, Penny. That was great. Yes, it has been a journey. A good journey. OK. Should we go to the next slide, Paul? All right. So I'm just going to very quickly hopefully try and explain some of what's going on in this resource. Penny calls it a handbook and other people call it a primer. We're open to whatever you think it is.

So the point of this resource is really to take the lens of not-for-profit, services, and councils and think about, what can they do to optimise positive social connections? So it's very much a strengths-based approach. Social connection is complicated. I think that's stating the bleeding obvious.

And so what we've tried to do is to kind of pull it all together in this handy resource which is quite short and pictorial, but has the key things to think about. In the resource, we've taken an individual perspective in actions, but there's also a community perspective in actions, because-- and we see that there's different dimensions to social connection.

Lots of people and organisations are already doing great social connection work. So we're not saying throw everything you've got in the bin and start again, that's totally not what this is for. Part of what we love this to be used for is to help to unpack what you're already doing that works. And so as Penny said, it is evidence-based from across disciplines, and it's-- we use co-design to try and make something that's practical useful.

So we think that it's really about helping non-profit services, et cetera, to reflect on what they're already doing, and to identify any gaps, and think about new spaces for new opportunities, and to help design new evidence based programmes and activities. Next. And so the resource has a number of sections.

So the first one is really what social connection is and looks like, to try to unpack that. We've got a Mythbusters section, which has actually been really popular where we look at things like who really is the most lonely or socially disconnected group? Is that who you think is? What's the difference between loneliness, disconnection, and isolation, and those kinds of things.

We then look at how to configure your community for pro-social connection, and we talk a bit about how social connection happens as a process. And then we look at what to do next. The resource also has an explainer of common concepts in this space, and it has lots of pictures and diagrams and frameworks and examples. Next.

OK, so the first thing, I just thought I'd very briefly say is the nuts and bolts of this resource are really a number of frameworks, I guess, that we have made out of the evidence base over the years. So we have what we call the social connection circles, which is really a kind of tool for understanding individuals and their social connections.

So we don't think social connection can be explained just by saying, it's just an interaction with another person, and we think that social connection has four different layers going on. It has very close relationships, but it also then has another layer, which is around of allies and helpers. Then another layer, which is about your identity groups. So you might have different ones like a support group or an online group that you're part of, or your neighbourhood or street. All of these are different communities that you belong to and that bring you different kinds of identities.

And then there's the idea of fitting in within your wider community environment. Do you feel comfortable and safe there? Do you feel part of that wider community or do you feel alienated? And I guess this is all, as I said, based on evidence from psychology, evolutionary psychology, which has also been borne out by brain evidence from looking at how people's brains work.

And I guess the idea is that if people can have positive connections in these different circles, they can achieve well-being and they can have help and they can feel like they belong to their community. And the importance of positive connections here is obviously really significant, but we also kind of say that in order to get these outputs, you do need to think about the inputs, and those we define as time, emotional attachment, and reciprocity.

And I think this is-- I guess we also use this as a kind of social connection investment tool. So like, how much time do you have? Is it really realistic to have lots and lots of people in all of these circles? You don't have much time, that's unlikely to happen.

Yeah. I mean, I think the other thing about this tool is that it can-- lots of people we interact with talk about measurement, and this can be, I guess, used in a measurement kind of way in interactions with people to look at how their social connections circles might grow through interventions or programmes that you guys run. And it can be used, I guess, as a kind of individual reflection tool. OK, next.

Then I also said we look at what's happening at the community level, because it's not simply enough to say to people, here's the social connections circle, go and get your social connections, now you know what to do. They need to live in communities that are most pro-social connection, that have most going on in them that can really help people to access connection.

So again, we've built this out from the evidence. There's a lot more examples and information in the resource, but just very simply, we have this pyramid which basically says, you need a number of foundations. You need safe, accessible communities. You need a choice of things for people to do. You need different kinds of spaces and places. In particular, we're very keen on bumping spaces. And these are those spaces where you literally do bump into each other.

This could be as simple as meeting outside the gym class or the yoga class, or it could be actual spaces that you specifically build. Like on the way into buildings you can meet little cafes or whatever. Then we have looked at which activities are very much pro-social connection. So things like problem-solving and coordinating activities we know are really good for people who don't know each other at the moment, and because they're focused on another task, they can get to know each other well they're actually doing another purpose.

And these activities can also work online. So you can have a task together to achieve online, obviously probably not as good as face-to-face, but still workable online. And we also know there's a lot of other kinds of activities like, for example, synchronous activities where people are drawn together by the effect of doing things together.

So musical activities tend to be really good for this, but also things like sport, laughter, those kinds of activities where you get caught up in that whole is more than the sum of its parts kind of feeling. Again, this framework can be used to audit what's going on in your community and to reflect on how to find gaps and fill gaps. Next.

OK, so we have those two things, but clearly it's not just enough to say, let's have all these things going on in our community and let's let these people know what they want, because actually, we all

know that connecting is really difficult. I mean, for any one of us, it's super difficult. I personally have a lot of difficulty joining new groups because it's just too scary.

And so I think we have to acknowledge that and understand that it's not weird, and to not be able to make social connections is actually really hard. And so the third part of our framework is about the socialisation process, again, which is evidence-based. So we forget how hard it is to make connections. There could be a number of reasons why people can't make connections.

And this process breaks it up into different sections, I guess, over time, such as seeking to join a group where you feel really uncertain, and then there's that kind of difficult phase where you may fit in or you may reject the group. And then there's that feeling of, yes, over time, I feel I belong here.

In this particular process, we think there's a role for community connectors, which was actually a top part of that pyramid that I forgot to mention on the previous slide. We know that community connectors is something that's really starting to happen in Australia and obviously has already been in communities over many years, but perhaps unacknowledged.

So community connectors are those people who go out of their way to connect people together to connect them into organisations and activities that are going on. Community connectors can be a paid role, a voluntary role, or it could be something that people are just spontaneously doing in communities. Next.

OK, so I know I've rattled through that, but as I said, there's a lot more going on in the actual resource. So before I hand over to Catherine, I just wanted to summarise what's going on in the resource. So I think it really helps to cut through what is an absolutely massive evidence base from different disciplines. As Penny said, we have spent years reading things putting this together, and also testing it out to see if it has validity.

It presents that kind of need to know as opposed to nice to know, which was something that the people from today design made me do. They're like, yes, Jane, we know that all this stuff and it's all in the literature, but what do people really need to know? Short pictorial with examples. As I said, you can use it for different things such as planning or auditing.

It looks across the individual and the community. It busts those myths that you may have in your mind or had built up over time. And it's also fully referenced. So if you get really excited about any of the things going on in the resource, you can follow up with other resources. So that was quite a rattle today. I'm now going to hand over, I think, to Catherine to tell us about how we kind of ground-truthed the resource.

CATHERINE HARTUNG: Yeah. Hi, everyone. So yeah, we were keen to test this resource out to make sure that it resonated with the intended audience, and also pick up any little issues that we might have overlooked. And I came to this project quite late, so I should mention this, it's been years in the making and I came in last year.

So as part of that effort to garner feedback, we approached a number of organisations where we had kind of existing connections. So obviously the Red Cross, but also IPC Health, Salvation Army, and Uniting. And with the intention of-- these are organisations that are working with really-- a



range of different communities for young people, old people, et cetera, culturally diverse, socially and culturally diverse. And so-- and different roles, too. So different people who are working at different levels of the organisation.

And so we invited them to review the resource. We had an initial pitch with different groups, and then they were given two weeks to review the resource and then come back and basically have a chat-- I don't want to call it a focus group, but a non-focus group that involved a group focusing on something.

And they basically gave us feedback on a range of different things. This all took place in August, September of last year. So we were then able to-- that informed the next revisions that were made to the resource. And obviously not all of-- they were-- we got feedback that was pie in the sky, big picture stuff, through to like little niggly, like can you move that line there sort of thing.

So some of it was immediately amendable, other parts maybe not so much, but I'll explain a bit more about that. Next slide, please, Paul. I'm not used to not having control of my slides. So yeah. So to help kind of focus the discussions, we gave them four questions. And that's just so we didn't get carried away talking about fonts, I guess. Not that fonts aren't important.

But yeah, so the first question was, what-- essentially what resonated with you? What stuck with you about this resource? Were there particular things that you liked about it? Because it's always nice to-- a compliment sandwich. We're going to start with some positives. Then secondly, how might this resource be implemented in the specific work that you do? And also how would you then potentially go about measuring that? So that was a big question.

And then thirdly, what was missing? Was there anything that you read that you were confused by or just didn't sit comfortably with you or that you felt didn't make sense or you wanted further elaboration? And then lastly, what tools would be useful in addition to what we have provided? So they were the sorts of questions-- the vast majority the feedback-- of the feedback we received was positive.

I know that's obviously what you want me expect me to say at the actual launch of the resource, but it was really-- people showed a general-- there was a lot of general enthusiasm, which I-- we appreciated a lot, especially given-- August, September last year was a difficult time for a lot of these organisations and challenging. And so taking time out to review this resource, we-- yeah, we valued their time a lot and appreciated that they took the time.

So yes. So in terms of that first question, we got a range of responses, a lot of sort of recurring themes in those responses where they appreciated that the resource is accessible, it was clear. They liked that it was visual. This wasn't just an academic exercise, it was something that was clearly targeting people on the ground.

They liked that it was-- but at the same time, they liked that it was referencing academic literature, and as Jane pointed out, there was a lot that informed this resource. They liked that it was informed by that and there were references, but it wasn't too, as one person put it, academia. They

particularly liked the mythbuster section, which I guess is-- yeah, we could talk about why that is the case.

And then lastly, what they really liked about it and what we were particularly happy to find out is that they found it resonated with them both professionally and personally. So it wasn't just something that they would use with clients or use with each other, but something that stuck with them in terms of thinking about their own social connection in their private lives, which-- or public lives, if you like, which I think was particularly good to hear from our perspective.

The second question in response, a lot of them said that it helped to kind of legitimate some of the kind of intangible dimensions of the work that they do in communities. It gave them a bit of a common language as Jane was saying and Penny was saying, like a lot of the time people are using this language, but are they always using it in the same way or has everyone got a shared understanding of what certain concepts mean? So this sort of they saw this as a potentially offering that.

They-- in terms of what-- they did struggle, actually, to give extensive feedback on was how they might go about measuring that implementation. So someone suggested a sort of counting the number of bumping spaces or that sort of thing, but generally speaking, they're kind of working for a bit more guidance around measurement.

And then in terms of that third question, what was missing or confusing? There were a lot of discussions in these groups around language. And so some of them sort of said, oh, there's a bit too much casual language. Others said, oh, you could get rid of some of this formal language, so it kind of was at opposite ends of extreme. I think we had to get rid of FOMO at one point.

But yeah, so it-- they sort of spoke about that. But even things like-- originally we had called them community changemakers, and some of them said, oh, but sometimes you're not actually changing something, you're just connecting things that already exist. And so we changed that to community connectors, which that seemed to resonate more with people.

And then lastly, a few said, oh, is it maybe ambiguous in terms of who the audience is? So we added a bit more clarity around that at the beginning. But that also speaks to the fact that this is a document that has to be a little bit open because we're trying to make it as useful as possible to the widest audience possible.

So thank you. And then the fourth, I'll go to the next slide-- thanks, Paul-- with that fourth question. And that was just the suggested tools. What would they like to see in addition to this resource? What would be the next thing? So some spoke about-- these were clustered these into the three recurring types of tools that were mentioned.

Tools for facilitating workshops. So training workshops could be in-house, professional development-type stuff, and conversations. Even workshop outlines, how they could run in a 20-minute session, et cetera. Prompt cards. They were thinking, oh, self-reflection things could be kind of handy as a tool.

Then others spoke about tools but actually connecting with community and building on existing work. So as Jane said, we've already got some of those concepts there that are good for auditing, but

potentially moving like the next stage for that in terms of auditing and mapping the existing happenings in a community.

And then thirdly, the tools for measuring impact, and like I said, they were keen for that. They were feeling less confident in that space and they were keen to get some guidance around measurement, especially because that's so important when it comes to validating their work with government. And that's it. So thanks.

JANE FARMER: Thanks, Catherine. It's great to get-- it's great to interact with feedback in the process of making this. I guess in relation to these tools, this is great feedback for the next stages of what we want to do with the resource with you guys and others. So Paul, maybe the next slide.

And as usual, someone is making a hell of a noise outside in my courtyard, but that's life. And we've already had great feedback from some groups and organisations that have started using the resource from when we soft-launched it for Christmas. And I just really love-- thank you for getting in touch with us. It's really good to know that this thing has been used.

So I could see that Lucy's there from Befriend Boorloo. Thank you for joining us, Lucy. So just to pick up on what Lucy has said to us, is that her group is using the resource collectively and forming a study circle for their remote team to come in and discuss around the document. And so I think that's a great use for the tool obviously.

And obviously we've organised to meet up with Lucy and have further discussions with her group about their experiences of working with communities and social connection. We also have got a relationship there with Uniting Communities South Australia who have used the resource to help them to put together their proposal to the parties in the upcoming South Australian elections.

I think they just really like the fact that there were frameworks that they could actually use to organise their proposals, and obviously an evidence-based product that they could reference. And then also, we have been influencing, I guess, other people's programmes and research. So there's a big project that Bolton Clarke is undertaking in Melbourne. And again, as we say, they said they've been influenced by our work in making their programme. I heard from another group yesterday who said they were using the work to guide their volunteering programme.

So awesome. If you guys are using this at all or even if you use that and go, actually, you know what? This isn't exactly what we need, we'd absolutely love to hear feedback. That would be really good. So next. Yep, so now we are finished. And as I say, you can get in touch with us. You can find this thing free on the internet. Please find it around, and give us feedback. I think there might even be a final slide here. Oh, thank you. Yes, thank you very much for coming. And now we'd love some questions.

Are there any questions in the chat? I don't know. Does anyone ask a question? Oh, Jonathan. Yay!

AUDIENCE: Thanks. This looks like a really interesting and exciting resource. We're attempting to set up a network of mental health carers interested in advocacy and systemic improvement to help the Mental Health Commission of New South Wales implement the lived experience framework.

And we do understand that getting a group of forensic carers of forensic patients together, for example, has got benefits in mutual support as well as hopefully purposeful activity around activism to help improve the situation and the supports for them and their loved ones. But I think that this gives us a great framework for making sure that we're focusing on the right kinds of activities in the right kind of way to maximise that sort of side benefit and make sure it isn't just a side benefit, because peer support and peer experience being so important.

I was wondering, though, is this going to be useful for the explaining the collateral mental health benefits of things like the local football club to the local football club so that it can maximise the benefit that it can do for the local community?

JANE FARMER: Yeah, great question. Well, I mean, obviously I don't know that it is going to be useful for a football club, but I'd love to hear from them. I think one of the ways that it could be used by something like a club or a community group is to look at, for example, the different kinds of activities that can be built in.

So like the point of what we've done is that it's really generic. So it doesn't say make a community garden, that'll work, or form a knitting group, that'll work. It basically says, here are some activities you could build in to what you're already doing. So like problem-solving activities, if you said, I don't know, in the local football club, like how are we going to get better at doing headers? Let's make a strategy. I don't know, they call them headers? I don't know. Oh, you're probably talking about-- I'm talking about soccer, you're talking about AFL. Don't do headers in AFL, I don't think, dropkicks or whatever it is they do.

A problem-solving group. And these kind of problem-solving or coordinating activities are really good when people don't really know each other or they're may be a bit shy or socially anxious or whatever. I have this like classic anecdote of like, I was listening to a podcast the other day about online gaming. This guy was going on about how online gaming can be really good if you have activities where people have to get together as a team.

And he actually said, it builds a community, because they're not really thinking about the fact that they're having to speak to new people. They're actually like targeting the thing that they have to achieve. So I think that's why I would say, is that there's stuff in here that groups can take up and use, obviously the concept of connectors, but also the foundational things around making sure that people feel safe, and that's not just physically safe but culturally safe.

That things are accessible to people that there might be near other amenities. So they can go to the shops but it's quite handy to go and connect somewhere as well. So yeah. So we've kind of given these, as I say, kind of generic guidance for people to adopt. So that was a bit of a ramble.

AUDIENCE: Oh, it's great. I mean, the question occurred to me because on a number of occasions we've been asked to help local government identify what it could do to enhance mental health and access to the community for people who've experienced mental illness and their loved ones. And I've often said that it would be great if we could explain how the neighbourhood centre could contribute, how the football club could contribute, et cetera. And I think that this might actually

allow us to explain to people what they could do to enhance those qualities and the things that they support and fund.

JANE FARMER: We've just started a new big project. I should like to shout out to our fabulous partners. Neami is one of them, which is a mental health and well-being organisation. And this is one of the key things that we're going to be looking at using the material for, is how can services use this with groups who maybe have mental health and well being challenges?

But we are really-- in that project, we also have local government. Because one of the things we're really conscious of is that lots and lots of organisations that are in the space of helping people to make social connections, but they're not necessarily working together or they don't have frameworks.

So planners can help social connection and local government, and community developers can help social connection in local government, but don't have a forum to speak at the moment. So this is also a tool around which within organisations you can kind of get people to start talking together around a framework.

OK. And we have a question from Diana. What's the difference between building a programme and building infrastructure for social connection? OK. I'm going to do some interpretation of this question. So when we talk-- I guess when we talk about-- we talk about social connection infrastructure in terms of what a community can have in terms of things that are like built fabric, but also activities and so on. So that's what we regard as social connection infrastructure.

And then I guess a programme might be run by a service. And the service might look at-- it might use a number of tools, I suppose. It might use our circles to understand where people are at now with their social connections and where maybe their gaps are and what they want to achieve, and then they might look at connecting people with some of the infrastructure, a bit like what Jonathan was talking about, support groups or community hubs.

And so yeah. So programmes might link with infrastructure, I guess, is kind of what I'm thinking. I don't know if that answers your question. Tim has asked a question. Are you there, Tim? Do you want to ask this question. Or have you gone? Oh, cool.

AUDIENCE: I don't actually want to ask because they've got a huge noise outside.

JANE FARMER: Oh, me, too.

AUDIENCE: Can you hear me all right?

JANE FARMER: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: OK. I mean, it's just simply the federal government is moving to a funding model in social services that's individually focused. And they're putting less value on social connections. So is this tool useful for that to represent the value of social connection, try to make that more apparent to the government to reflect that better in the new funding models?

JANE FARMER: Potentially. I don't know if anyone else wants to answer this question because I'm conscious that I'd just take over and answer everything, but I could have-- I could have a go. Yeah. I mean, look, I think it's interesting to think about how social connection fits with other things that is the government, say, people are trying to get.

So we also do work about resilience. And within resilience, we understand social connection as being one pillar of resilience obviously based on the evidence. Then there's also good evidence from well-being frameworks that social connection, social integration is a pillar of an overall holistic concept of well-being.

So, I mean, I think what this tool does is it really focuses on the idea of social connection, but I think what you're pointing to is like, OK, well, that's fine, but how does social connection then fit with some of the outcomes that government is actually acknowledging as important? Can we then kind of show how social connection is a part of these other frameworks? Is that kind of your ask, I guess?

AUDIENCE: Now that's sort of it. It's also whether we can use it as a tool for lobbying, I guess, is the other part of it.

JANE FARMER: Potentially, I guess. It depends what it is that you're trying to kind of lobby for, I guess. I mean, I think maybe if we had some really good-- I think one of the things we need to do with the tool, as Catherine alluded to and I was sort of a little bit alluding to, is make it into good measures now.

So these have to be things that people can actually measure that are measurable, but that are also meaningful to you guys on the ground, but also policy. And then maybe once we can come up with some data of what social connection actually achieves, then we will have some good evidence to take to government.

Yeah, so this is mainly a tool to do social connections, I suppose, to do as a pro-social connection tool. But it would be great to have a further conversation about what you're talking about, see if there's ways that we could use it in that way. Sorry, Waffle Waffle. Anybody else? How about Taron? Do you want to ask a question? Or have you decided not to?

Taron says, play space-based organisations such as neighbourhood centres do a lot of this work and can do it well. Be fantastic to have their input in this type of research or tool. Yeah. I mean, I think that this is going to be part of our next project, which is with Red Cross, Neami, and local government, to actually look at what happens in a place-based way and what's helping to activate social connection in a place-based way.

I mean, I think we also really I'm-- not sure we've totally got our heads around the relationship between police and social connection also. So we know that place is an enabler of social connection, and we know that places need to be safe for social connection, but I still think there's more to be done around thinking about place and social connection.

OK. Do we have anything else? Any other questions or comments? Lucy, would you like to tell us how you're using this tool? Sorry for dobbing you in.

AUDIENCE: It's alright, I put my hand up. I've got my printout spiral-bound copy here.

PRESENTER: Oh, you get a big prize.

AUDIENCE: --which I go out on my bike locally, yeah, to a few place-based community building initiatives that are close by. And I've been actually using this interactively with the citizens in the place, like in the park, under the tree to give you a little bit of context when we're talking around the value of the things that have already been doing and how-- what's worked might be an example of a challenge question, a design question that might draw other people in a problem-solving activity.

So taking something like, this is the community's words, but antisocial behaviour, for instance. Looking at what's worked and acknowledging that. But then looking at this framework for ok, how can we actually turn that into a design question, around a problem-solving activity to activate others and bring them in so that the connections and the networks form?

And really, to help people see that these things take time, and they might not immediately see the benefits that they expect, but that there's value in every connection because of the outputs. And so that their inputs, no matter how small they might seem, actually have a knock-on effect, which is not always visible, but that we--

AUDIENCE: --build in the infrastructure. And it helps to take away from that need for programme and for the other to provide.

--or the LGD or us, who's a not-for-profit. And it helps to see the value in the empowerment of what they have done and can do more of what's working and to spark new ideas as well. So yeah, I have really an admiration for how succinct and tangible it is and how I can just turn to any one page and really just work with the portion of that in the context of the conversation that we're having.

And I think you said you know what's needed, not what do you know. So need--

versus nice to know. And I can appreciate the art and science that's going into that short statement. But the practical application of that is really meaningful to me, because this makes it something that I can talk under my arm. It's not a presentation. It's just-- it turns into a one page that we can just point to and talk about and create something from as well as reiterate all the hard work that's already done by the individuals in place.

JANE FARMER: That's amazing. I don't think any of us could have put it as well as somebody who's actually taken it and used it. So thank you so much for that. I just was thinking about-- when we started making this tool, a whole lot of different things were happening. A lot of lockdowns happened in our lives, and we ran like a series of workshops.



And a lot of people would say in those workshops, I'm already doing stuff. Like, I'm doing all this stuff, but I don't know why this works and this doesn't work. Or, I think I've done everything. I've done everything and I still can't get some people to connect. And then on the other hand, we also had conversations with-- like I remember having a call with a planner. They phoned me up and said, I hear you do social connection stuff. I'm making a new community. I need to build an social connection, what do I need there?

And I was like, whoa. And so that's-- and so that's why we came at, I guess, what formulated those different dimensions of what's in there. And I guess, really, to of point out that, yeah, there's more to social connection that just telling people to go and get their own connections, what's wrong with them sort of thing.

OK, cool. Is there a clear advantage of face-to-face social connection over online? Ooh, Jonathan! That is a really good question. I think that we would probably be able to answer that based on our gut reaction, but we have, again, in our new project that we're starting, we are using the concept-- this is a horrible academic concept, I know, but it's the concept of affordances to like do a sort of framework that we can overlay on different technologies versus face-to-face.

Sort of systematically measure, I guess, what are the things that can be afforded through this kind of-- it's very transactional. I can't stand here and you guys can shout at me or support each other. It's like-- it has to be like someone asking a question to me going, Jonathan, what do you want to say, blah, blah.

So it's super transactional in this space. But I'm sure you've also had the experience as well. Like the other night, me and my colleagues met in the pub and some of them I've never met before. And I'm thinking, wow, that person is so much smaller than I thought they were, and like, you're not getting that 360-degree kind of experience of a prison.

And I think also there's a lot of discussion about this and designing for the metaverse where people talk about, oh, the metaverse doesn't quite work at the moment because eyes don't work in the metaverse. So there's a whole lot of things that are going on in this face-to-face that we haven't quite-- we haven't necessarily got the tools to measure, but as I say, the next project that we're doing is very much going to be-- one part of it is about systematic looking at the affordances of these different kinds of technologies.

And also looking at the flow-through. So how can you have flow-through between face-to-face and technology that are particularly in place where if we have got lockdowns or wherever, people are still in their place, they just can't get out there. So is there a way that we can have much better flow-through between the face-to-face and online experience maybe with services or community groups or that kind of thing? So it's a great question, obviously.

I don't know if anyone's got any other burning questions. Do you have any comments about building social connections and school communities? Oh Catherine, this might be one for you, where the foundational connection is very transactional, but we'd like to create more social or positive connection. Right, stop me from speaking. Catherine, can you translate our material for a school scenario?

CATHERINE HARTUNG: Great question, Olivia. Do you have any comments about building social connections? And so school communities. I mean, yeah, I think the resource actually speaks to some of those spaces, because it's not just these-- yeah, well-- so bumping-in spaces, the school pick-up and drop-off, for example is like a key one for certain people in their communities.

But yeah, in terms of how to create more social positive connection, I want to go away and think about that a little bit more before I give you a butchered answer. But yeah, it is a really important question. I think it would be really interesting to see-- I would love to take this resource to schools and to school-- particularly school execs and see what they think, how they see their schools-- the role that they play within their communities, et cetera.

JANE FARMER: Yeah. It's cool because I think it touches on the translational work. So we have used the framework in different settings and translated these kind of principles. So last year we did some work with Allianz, older workers who were online. I can't relate to what Jonathan said. And we used the frameworks and principles to help them design a social connection policy and tools to try and get pro-social connection going while people were online.

We've also-- a lot of the material originally came out of a lot of work that we've done in social enterprises with people with different kinds of different capabilities, I guess, and how social connection was built-- or not built-- by different practises and different designed spaces are not designed spaces in social enterprises.

So again, I think my feeling is really about-- it's about that these materials are principles-based, and it's really about going, OK, these are all the activities that evidence says are pro-social connection, how can I build more of them into what I'm already doing?

Or actually, I'm already super great on this, and obviously we'd love to hear about anything that you have done that actually really works that isn't in the material that we have at the moment, because it's called version 1. That implies that there will be other versions and based on the other work that we're going to do, but also the interactions we'd love to have with all of you and other organisations. Yeah.

All right. I feel like we are at 12:57. You've already probably used up your lunch break or another super valuable hour of your day. In Catherine's case, an hour of her parental leave. So thank you, Catherine. And yeah, enjoy-- yeah. Get in touch with us, we'd love to know what you're doing with it, and work to support you and whatever ideas you have about what needs to be done next. And thank you to Penny and Catherine, and as I said, to all of you. And Paul, who makes this all happen.

CATHERINE HARTUNG: Oh yeah, thanks, Paul.

JANE FARMER: Yeah, awesome. Thanks so much. We'll see you next time.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

