Actions That Build Community

*connect with others • build trust • get involved*

Communities grow stronger when citizens regularly and persistently do a variety of simple things together that give them chances to connect with others, build trust and get involved in doing things together. The web of trusting relationships that grows from people sharing food, helping others with everyday tasks, and joining together to recognize, help, involve and entertain one another makes bigger joint ventures possible and strengthens resilience (go to www.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/ to learn more).

This exploration identifies 75 different actions from a longer list prepared by a group of academic researchers and civic leaders who want to support the creation of what they call social capital (their label for networks of connection that build trust by involving people in one another’s lives and projects). This list is just a way to encourage thinking; it is not an instrument for research and many other actions will serve the purposes of connecting people, building trust, and involving people with one another. Use these pages to explore the current pattern of community building action from three different angles: the actions you and your family regularly engage in; the actions your organization actively supports people with developmental disabilities to take; and any service policies or practices that could make it harder for people with developmental disabilities to act as community builders.

People have different interests and gifts so actions that come easily to some might seem alien to others. What matters to the quality of community life is the number of people who regularly connect, build trust, and get involved with one another. There is more to overcoming social inclusion than taking actions like these, but these are good practices to build a stronger, more diverse foundation for our common life.
Community grows stronger through hundreds of little and big actions citizens take every day. As you scan the list put a mark next to any of these actions that you or a family member has done either in the past month or so, or for more occasional actions, in the past year or so.

- Invite neighbors over for a meal or barbecue
- Attend a political meeting
- Support local merchants
- Volunteer your special skills to a community organization
- Donate blood (with a friend)
- Work in a community garden
- Mentor a person of a different ethnic group
- Surprise a new or favorite neighbor by taking them food
- Avoid destructive gossip or help someone else avoid it
- Help another person outside your home fix something
- Attend local school or children’s athletics, plays, & recitals
- Get involved with scouts
- Sing in a choir
- Attend a party in someone else’s home
- Get to know the clerks and salespeople at your local stores
- Audition for community theatre or support a production backstage or volunteer to usher
- Attend a lecture or concert
- Give to your local food or clothing bank
- Play cards or games with friends or neighbors
- Walk or bike to support a cause and meet others
- Participate in a political campaign
- Attend a local festival or parade
- Find a way to show personal appreciation to someone who builds your local community
- Coach or help out with local (youth) sport
- Offer to help a neighbor with garden work or shopping or a ride
- Start or participate in a discussion group or book or film club
- Start or join a carpool
- Plan a “Walking Tour” of a local historic area
- Tutor or read to children or have children read to you
- Run for public office
- Host a party
- Offer to serve on a committee outside of work
- Form a walking group (or a swimming group) with at least one other person & encourage each other
- Play a sport
- Go to church and connect with people and activities
- Ask an elder or a young person to teach you something
- Host a potluck supper
- Take dance lessons with a friend
- Become a trustee
- Join a campaign & take action that brings you into contact with others (not just a donation)
- Gather a group to clean up a local park, cemetery or waterway
- Bake something for neighbors or work colleagues
- Plant trees
- Volunteer at the library or primary school
- Call an old friend
- Sign up for a class & meet your classmates
- Accept or extend an invitation
- Log off and go to the park
- Say hello to strangers
- Find out more by talking with a neighbor you don’t know very well yet
- Host a movie night
- Help out with or create a newsletter
- Collect oral histories to discover the interesting things people have done

*Adapted from www.bettertogether.org which identifies 150 social capital building actions.
Cut back on TV & interact with people instead
Join in to help carry something heavy
Make gifts of time
Greet people
If you think someone needs help, ask to find out & do what you can
Fix it even if you didn't break it
Pick up litter even if you didn't drop it
Attend gallery openings & art exhibits
Organize a neighborhood yard sale
Read or listen to the local news faithfully
Attend a public meeting or hearing & speak up
When inspired write a personal note or send a card to friends
Offer to watch a neighbor's home while they are away.
Help out with recycling
Ask to see a friend's photos
Invite a local politician or official to speak to a group you belong to
Start talking to people you see regularly
Listen to the children you know and find out what matters to them
Plan a reunion of family, friends, or people with whom you had a special connection
Hire local young people for odd jobs
Write a letter to the editor
Join a group that is likely to lead to making new friends of different ethnicity, or religion, or income, or life experience

What can we learn about community building from your own pattern of action?
Community grows stronger through hundreds of little and big actions citizens take every day.
As you scan the list, put a mark next to to any of these actions you or your organization have supported a person with a developmental disability to do in the past month or so, or for more occasional actions, in the past year or so.

___ Invite neighbors over for a meal or barbecue
___ Attend a political meeting
___ Support local merchants
___ Volunteer your special skills to a community organization
___ Donate blood (with a friend)
___ Work in a community garden
___ Mentor a person of a different ethnic group
___ Surprise a new or favorite neighbor by taking them food
___ Avoid destructive gossip or help someone else avoid it
___ Help another person outside your home fix something
___ Attend local school or children’s athletics, plays, & recitals
___ Get involved with scouts
___ Sing in a choir
___ Attend a party in someone else’s home
___ Get to know the clerks and salespeople at your local stores
___ Audition for community theatre or support a production backstage or volunteer to usher
___ Attend a lecture or concert
___ Give to your local food or clothing bank
___ Play cards or games with friends or neighbors
___ Walk or bike to support a cause and meet others
___ Participate in a political campaign
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___ Find a way to show personal appreciation to someone who builds your local community
___ Coach or help out with local (youth) sport
___ Offer to help a neighbor with garden work or shopping or a ride
___ Start or participate in a discussion group or book or film club
___ Start or join a carpool
___ Plan a “Walking Tour” of a local historic area
___ Tutor or read to children or have children read to you
___ Run for public office
___ Host a party
___ Offer to serve on a committee outside of work
___ Form a walking group (or a swimming group) with at least one other person & encourage each other
___ Play a sport
___ Go to church and connect with people and activities
___ Ask an elder or a young person to teach you something
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___ Become a trustee
___ Join a campaign & take action that brings you into contact with others (not just a donation)
___ Gather a group to clean up a local park, cemetery or waterway
___ Bake something for neighbors or work colleagues
___ Plant trees
___ Volunteer at the library or primary school
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___ Sign up for a class & meet your classmates
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___ Log off and go to the park
___ Say hello to strangers
___ Find out more by talking with a neighbor you don’t know very well yet
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Hire local young people for odd jobs
Write a letter to the editor
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What can we build on in the experience of the people we support who are building community in action?
75 Actions that Build Community

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Community grows stronger through hundreds of little and big actions citizens take every day.
As you scan the list put a mark next to any of these actions that a willing person with a developmental disability would find it harder to do because of a service policy or current practice or routines or setting.

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- Attend a political meeting
- Support local merchants
- Volunteer your special skills to a community organization
- Donate blood (with a friend)
- Work in a community garden
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What changes would make it easier for the people we support to take community building action?