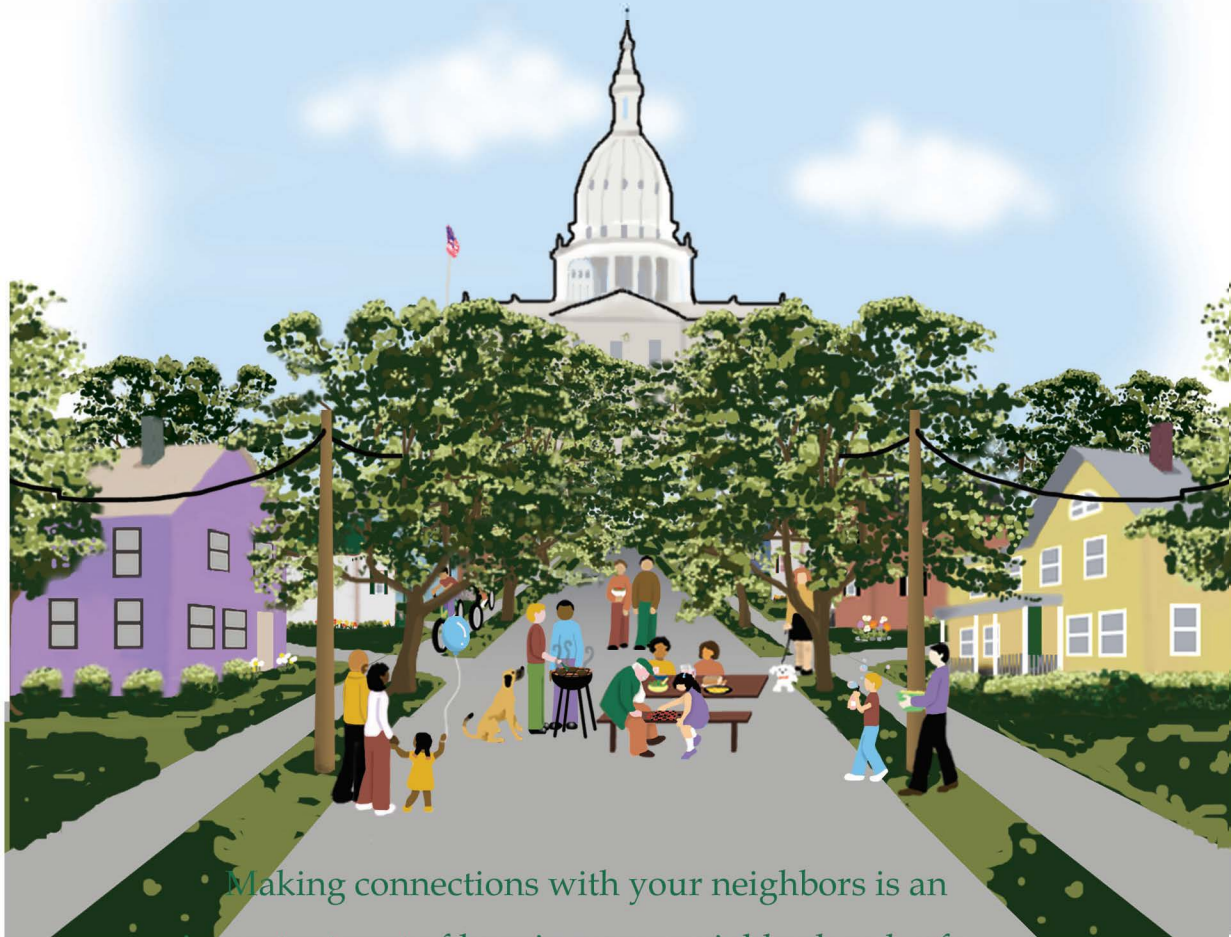


# Building Neighborhood Connections

## A Guide To Successful Neighboring



Making connections with your neighbors is an important part of keeping your neighborhood safe and livable. If something is not working well on your block, your neighbors can help you solve the problem, together.

# Real People, Real Neighbors



## What Will This Handbook Do For You?




This is a handbook for all people. Whether you live in an older neighborhood, a new neighborhood, a suburb, a townhouse, or a Victorian mansion, your neighbors are part of the fabric of your life. They are real people who eat, sleep, play with their children and mow the lawns on your block. As a group, you and your neighbors form a community. Together, you share neighborhood assets like parks, churches, grocery stores or laundromats. And you also share concerns such as neighborhood safety or a poorly maintained lot.

Because you live there, you are a part of the community. Whether or not you connect with the people around you is a choice that you make.

This handbook will show you things you can do to make a connection with your neighbors and improve your neighborhood. If your block is not attractive, this handbook will show you ways to make it nicer. If your block feels dangerous, this handbook will show you ways to make it safer. If your block is already great, this handbook will show you some ways to make it even better.



### **This handbook will help you:**

-  Make connections with your neighbors.
-  Be a better neighbor yourself.
-  Make your neighborhood a better place to live.

**Remember, by making connections and planning improvements with your neighbors as a group, you are protecting your own interests as well.**

# Enjoying Your Corner of the World

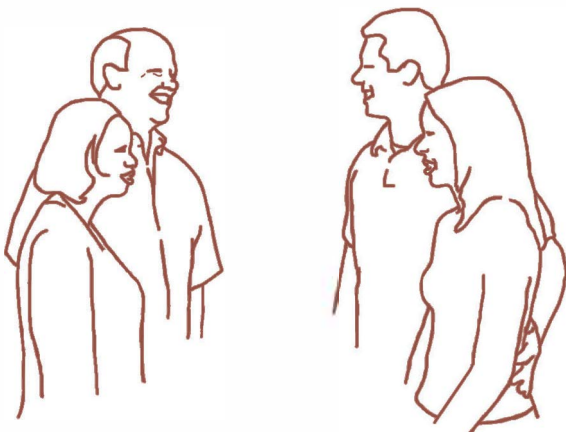


## Why Is Being A Good Neighbor Important?

Residents living in areas where they share a sense of community with their neighbors are more likely to feel safe and secure and have a lower fear of crime. They feel healthier and are happier about their lives. People living in connected neighborhoods are more likely to vote and recycle and to help others by volunteering and donating blood. For these reasons and many more, being a good neighbor and connecting with others on your block not only makes the neighborhood better, but also helps you personally.



And don't forget, neighborliness is not a special talent. It is a decision! Anyone can be a good neighbor, it just takes a little initiative, and the rewards make it worth while. Neighborhoods with a higher sense of community enjoy a higher quality of life. So do it for yourself and your family.



Wouldn't it be great if you knew all, or even some, of your neighbors a little better?



## Getting To Know Your Neighbors

Finding the courage to make new connections is not easy for everyone. But you and your neighbors will discover that it becomes easier after the first step. Once you have made yourself familiar to your neighbors, “breaking the ice” will be simple.



### Try the following:

-  Find an excuse to walk around the block with your pet or children in order to make yourself visible.
-  Say hello to everyone you meet on your block.
-  Give your neighbors a compliment: “Your lawn/garden looks nice”.
-  Take your backyard project to the front yard. Work on your bike or lawnmower on your porch or sidewalk. That way you can say “hi” to neighbors.
-  If you’ve lived on your block for some time, take the first step towards newcomers. Take new neighbors a plant or small gift, bake them some cookies or help them unload their car and welcome them to the neighborhood.



## Building Trust Through Group Activities

So, you have just made a connection with your neighbors. That's a good first step. Now you can strengthen your relationships and build trust with your neighbors through group activities. You don't have to become friends overnight, but through activities together, you can learn to trust each other. Over time you might become friends, or just stay friendly neighbors, but either way you can feel better knowing who is living around you.

### Try some of the following ideas:

-  Put up a neighborhood bulletin board, or an electronic one on the Internet.
-  Organize a welcome wagon for new neighbors.
-  Have a neighborhood yard sale. Your neighbors are sure to come and you might even sell a few things.
-  Organize a block party.
-  Research the history of the neighborhood.



-  Create a neighborhood map and share it with the rest of your block.
-  Do face painting for the kids
-  Help a neighbor prepare for severe weather, or a blackout.
-  Get a few neighbors together to plant flowers in a median or clean up a park.

# Being a Helpful Neighbor








## Tips for Connecting With Children and the Elderly

If you have neighbors who are children or are elderly, it is important for them to feel involved in the neighborhood as well. They benefit greatly from feeling safe, secure and connected to those around them.



### Keep these ideas in mind when you are thinking about your neighborhood:

-  During hot or cold spells, check in on community elders to make sure they are safe and comfortable. Sadly, a few elderly people die every year during heat or cold waves because no one bothered to check up on them.
-  Mow the yard, rake the leaves, or clean the gutters of an elderly neighbor. Many of them are unable to do it themselves and can't afford to pay someone to do it for them. Besides, it will make the neighborhood nicer for you too.
-  Plant a small garden for an elderly neighbor, or even just a potted tomato plant. Have neighborhood children help you.
-  Help neighborhood children create a lemonade stand.
-  If you have a neighborhood newsletter, let children be summer reporters of fun things happening from their point of view. They can draw pictures or take photographs too.

# Building Community Pride








## Neighborhood Clean Up

If a block or corner looks clean, safe and well cared for, it sends a message of unity to strangers and to one another. It can reduce crime and benefit children with feelings of safety and well being, not to mention improving neighborhood appeal and housing values.

Getting your neighbors together for a clean-up day moves us beyond our personal boundaries to work together for the betterment of what we share and how our personal space connects.

### Try these ideas:

-  Ask a neighbor to get together to discuss a clean-up project on your block. Ask them to bring another neighbor. Now you have a team!
-  Empty lots attract crime and pests. Get a team to clean up litter and mow the weeds.
-  Rake the extra leaves in untended areas and remove stray litter.
-  Get neighborhood kids to help you clean up a park. Provide them with gloves and garbage bags and watch them go to work.
-  Contact the city to discuss graffiti removal, abandoned cars, tree trimming or other tough jobs.



**Build community pride  
by cleaning up as a team.**

# Building Community Pride






## Neighborhood Beautification

Now that your block is clean, why not make it beautiful? There are many small things you can do to improve your house and yard. If all of your neighbors do a few small things, the results will be huge.

Planting flowers and gardens, repairing porches and repainting window frames can make a big difference in how you and others view your neighborhood.



### You could:

-  Have a block flower-planting day. Put flowers in porch planters at every house, plant flowers in medians or vacant areas.
-  You could even select a shrub or flower for all the houses on the block as a show of unity. Or celebrate special occasions like the 4th of July with red, white and blue potted flowers.
-  Share extra paint with neighbors and help them repaint the trim on the front of their house.

In the summer months, gardens flourish. Many urban gardeners trade tools, ideas, plants, or seeds. You probably know someone who has extra tomatoes, beans or flowers from their garden every year. Sharing the bounty is fun for all ages.



# Visualize Your Block



## The Neighborhood Map





A neighborhood phone list is a great thing to have on hand. A neighborhood map takes this idea a step further. This important tool is a simple sketch of your block with the names and phone numbers of your neighbors and their children and other important information to be used in emergencies or for planning neighborhood events.

There are many ways to create a neighborhood map. You can start by simply drawing your block with houses as squares along the line of the street. Look at our example map for ideas.

Ask your neighbors for help filling in the empty boxes on your map as you are creating it. Offer them a copy too.



### Label each house with:

-  Names of neighbors and their children.
-  Addresses and day and evening phone numbers.
-  Neighbors who work at home, or stay at home during the day.
-  Pet's names

# Visualize Your Block



## Making Your Neighborhood Map



Here's an example map to give you ideas.

## If You Have Children

Children can draw these maps for fun to help them better understand who they can contact in an emergency or just to get a better sense of community and place.



Let them be creative. Use colors and symbols for the things they see around your block.

# Getting Together to Share Ideas





## Your Neighborhood Association

Your neighborhood may already have a neighborhood association. You can check with your local neighborhood council. If it's active, join it. If not, think about creating one. You can start with just a few people and grow from there. There are some resources on the back cover of this booklet to give you more information about existing neighborhood associations or about starting a new one in your neighborhood.


Neighborhood associations are powerful tools for dealing with your local government on matters of safety, zoning, and local regulations. In addition, a neighborhood association can help you plan group activities like community picnics or block parties.


**Here are some ideas that have been used by neighborhood associations to build community:**

 Organize a neighborhood clean-up. Contact the city for information about a special trash pick up.

 Plan a community picnic or potluck where every family brings a dish. You could even have a chili cook-off or pie contest.



 Have games, raffles and music that can be enjoyed by everyone.

 Start a neighborhood newsletter.

# Creating a Safe Environment Together



## Neighborhood Watch





All across the country, neighborhood watch organizations help people work together to lower crime in their neighborhoods.

A Neighborhood Watch can also get involved in community clean-up and beautification projects.

Start by contacting your police or sheriff's office and the National Crime Prevention Council. They can provide information on crime patterns, safety tips, and crime prevention techniques, as well as Neighborhood Watch signs and window decals.











**When neighbors are away, be sure to keep an eye on their house, and help keep it safe by making it look lived in.**

-  Make sure footpaths look used.
-  Ask neighbors on vacation if you can collect their mail and newspapers, and make sure fliers are out of sight.
-  Put stray lids back on garbage cans and put them away after trash day.
-  Leave your porch light on at night for the benefit of all your neighbors.



## Small, Fun Acts That Go a Long Way

**Here are a few fun things you can do to make your neighborhood friendly and cheerful. Be creative, and enjoy life!**

-  Leave a holiday treat as a surprise to brighten a neighbor's day.
-  Leave cut flowers in a jar on the sidewalk with a "take one" sign.
-  Visit a farmer's market and bring fresh produce to a homebound neighbor.
-  Ask a longtime resident to share some stories of your block.
-  Invite an elderly neighbor to an event they would enjoy.
-  Hire a neighborhood teen to help you with some yard work, or to clean an elderly neighbor's windows.
-  Invite a neighbor to your front porch for some iced tea.
-  Give your neighborhood newsletter editor a tip for the next issue, or write an article yourself.

Just get involved with your neighbors and your neighborhood and see how quickly others join. Everyone wants a better neighborhood. And it's easy. Just take it one step at a time.



## Acknowledgements

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Art work, graphics and layout by: Julie Reynolds

**The Sense of Community Team of the Center for Urban Affairs at Michigan State University coordinated the development and production of the handbook.**

# Neighborhood Resources

## For neighborhood based information and resources contact:

Allen Neighborhood Center at 485-7630,  
ancjoan@aol.com,  
www.allenneighborhoodcenter.org

Baker Donora Focus Center at 485-0907

North Network Center at 346-5794

South Network Center at 272-7492

Wexford Network Center at 882-2306

## These organizations work to strengthen overall community health:

Eastside Neighborhood Summit/  
Allen Neighborhood Center 485-7630,  
ancjoan@aol.com,  
www.allenneighborhoodcenter.org

Northwest Lansing Healthy  
Communities Initiative at 483-4499,  
info@nwlhci.org, www.nwlhci.org

South Lansing Healthy Communities  
Initiative at 487-6828

## To organize or strengthen a neighborhood association in Lansing contact:

Lansing Neighborhood Council  
at 372-6290

## City wide resources available to neighborhoods:

Community / Landlord Organizer  
at 272-7488

Community Services of the Lansing  
Police Department at 483-4469

Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Board  
Grants at 483-4141,  
www.mayor.cityoflansingmi.com/NAB/

## State wide resources for neighborhoods:

Neighborhood Associations of Michigan  
at 353-8610

Sense of Community Team at  
Michigan State University at 353-9144,  
socomm@msu.edu,  
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