

## ***Healthy Neighbourhoods Built on Social Connections***

*Author Shanti Ang lives in a wonderful neighbourhood in Maple Ridge with her husband, two children, and a cat. She is active neighbourhood builder and is involved in the local neighbourhood group.*

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I live in a great neighbourhood in a subdivision within the Laity View Study Circle area. My street is safe, quiet, and pretty and backs onto farmland with a view of the mountains. We have a Neighbourhood Emergency Plan as well as a Block Watch program and neighbours watch out for each other.

There is a mix of households in the subdivision: single people, young families, families with teenagers, and retired couples. Children play on our streets, residents regularly walk dogs or themselves, and gardeners trade plants. A couple of people one street over organizes a multi-family garage sale every year. It's a great day to walk around and visit with each other. My neighbourhood is not perfect – no place is – but it's really, really, really, really close.

I tell you all this because I think it is important to highlight the positives in our community and to recognize that good, healthy neighbourhoods exist and are achievable. One of the most important ways to build a great neighbourhood is to get to know one's neighbours. And one of the best ways to do that is to have a party.

Our fourth annual block party will be this July and it has been a fantastic way to get to know each other. Although the party only occupies a few hours in a year, sitting down and sharing food and drink with each other creates a bond that lasts the entire year.

I encourage everyone to hold some sort of social gathering this summer. It doesn't have to be big or complicated because a little effort goes a long way to building

relationships with your neighbours. If you aren't sure how to get started here a few tips from our experience.

1. Get someone in your neighbourhood to help you. It reduces the work and is more fun. We always work in pairs and choose different people to organize the party each year.
2. Decide what kind of gathering you want. It could be a potluck dinner, a dessert night, or simply have everyone bringing their own picnics.
3. Pick a day, time, and location. Try to use the street in front of your homes because it is visible and neutral. However, if you live on a busy road, someone's yard or a nearby park would work. Don't worry about finding a day that will suit everyone – there's always next year.
4. Make a list of all the things you need to provide and the things you want people to bring. We ask each family to bring a potluck dish, their own drinks, and a chair then we borrow a couple of tables and coolers for everyone to use. We buy paper plates, cutlery, and pop and ask each person to contribute a loonie to cover the costs.
5. Make up a simple invitation with the date, time, location, and what people should bring. Be clear if you are asking for money to cover purchased items. Alternatively, consider applying for a Building Community Solutions Seed Grant which offers up \$100 to offset costs associated with neighbourhood initiatives – that includes block parties.
6. Drop off the invitations at each home. You can request an RSVP if you want to or you can keep it casual and be surprised on party day.
7. On the day, drag everything out, relax, and have a great time!

If you want more information on the grants or on organizing a party, contact the Building Community Solutions Coordinator at [info@rmkstudycircles.ca](mailto:info@rmkstudycircles.ca) or (604) 467-7433.