Strong neighbours are the foundation of strong communities

The resilience of neighbours who united against Cyclone Yasi; the floods in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia; plus the bushfires in Western Australia; reinforce why it's important for all Australians to have great relationships with other local residents all year round.

As Australia prepares to celebrate the 9th annual Neighbour Day on Sunday 27th March 2011, founder and Australia Day Ambassador Andrew Heslop says the disasters brought neighbours together for a common purpose.

"Our communities are only as strong as the people who live in them," said Andrew, "and in many places where homes and buildings were destroyed the residents are determined to stay and rebuild.

"The physical structures may be missing or seriously damaged but the sense of community, the spirit of the community, remains. They may have lost everything but neighbours are adamant they will unite to ensure what has been lost is restored," Andrew said.

Held on the last Sunday in March every year, Australia's annual celebration of community gives neighbours the opportunity to pause, relax and say thanks. By choosing how to celebrate – a street party, bbq, morning tea or by attending a council run event in a local park – residents decide how big or small their activity is going to be.

"The growth of Neighbour Day has been organic and it's success is due to its flexibility. You can simply boil the kettle and have a cup of tea and a Tim Tam, or do something more elaborate. It's entirely up to you and the imagination of your neighbours," added Andrew.

"Getting together with our neighbours strengthens our community and connects us with other people who live nearby. So this year, introduce yourself and welcome new residents, leaving them your mobile number to use in an emergency."

Founded in Melbourne in 2003 - following the discovery of the death of an elderly woman who had passed away two years earlier - Australians have willingly embraced the day with the only incentive being better relationships between the people next door, across the street or on the next farm.

Neighbour Day has five principal aims –

1. Strengthen communities and build better relationships with the people who live around us.
2. Create safer, healthier and more vibrant suburbs and towns.
3. Promote tolerance, respect and understanding.
4. Break down community barriers.
5. Protect the elderly, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged.

www.neighbourday.org

FOR MEDIA INFORMATION ONLY

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