

COMMUNITY BUILDING PATHWAYS



DEVELOPING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS THAT SUPPORT
DIVERSE COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

JUNE 2024



BACKGROUND

Volunteering is defined as 'time willingly given for the common good, and without financial gain.' *Formal volunteering* is where someone volunteers with an organisation, and *informal volunteering* is where an individual does not volunteer through another entity, but still gives time for the common good of the community (Volunteering Australia, Volunteering WA, 2024).

As a community building organisation, **Befriend** supports people to discover and give their unique gifts to community, to grow an inclusive, connected society. The nature of our work means we have always existed in the grey space between formal and informal volunteering. In a concerted effort to be responsive to community needs, and to simultaneously make a further contribution to the volunteering sector, the Befriend Team have undertaken a concerted effort to delve more into this grey space between formal and informal volunteering.

We see the potential for purpose-driven organisations to develop **multiple pathways for volunteer engagement** that span the full continuum of both formal and informal volunteering. Within this context, we seek to introduce the term **'mission-aligned informal volunteering,'** to refer to the way in which community members might contribute towards an organisation's mission in a more independent, autonomous capacity.

The role that community organisations can play in enabling, empowering and supporting mission-aligned informal volunteering efforts is not well understood. However, this context is worthy of further exploration due to a range of factors, including (see over page):

EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF MULTIPLE PATHWAYS

- **Inclusivity** - Volunteering for an organisation is incongruent with the worldview and way of life of many First Nations Peoples and people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Embracing (informal) community contributions as part of a natural way of life is more culturally appropriate in some circumstances, and supports greater self-determination.
- **Community Trends** - In the context of our busy modern life, many people are looking for ways of contributing to their community that are personally meaningful, flexible and woven into the rhythms of their life and other commitments.
- **Responsibility** - An environment of increasing legal and regulatory obligations is placing an increased level of responsibility on volunteer-involving organisations to manage risk. Enabling independent, autonomous informal volunteering is a way of sharing responsibility with community while reducing 'red tape.'
- **Sustainable Development** - The social, economic and ecological challenges of today and tomorrow can't be met by institutions and organisations alone. Sustainable development will require investing in growing community capacity and empowering ways for all us to make changes in our everyday lives and communities.

At Befriend, our journey has involved efforts to develop multiple pathways that support community members to step into a form of volunteering / community contribution that best aligns with their needs, hopes, culture and worldview. This pack provides an overview of our journey, our research, our emerging new 'multiple pathways' volunteer engagement model, and some areas that we will be continuing to explore. We hope this little 'window into our work' may offer new insights, perspectives and provocations for other volunteer-involving organisations. Our heartfelt thanks to all of the community members and team members who have contributed to this work, to the other volunteer-involving organisations who we have been co-learning with, and to Volunteering WA for supporting this work.





Befriend is a non-profit community building organisation that exists to **nurture inclusive, connected communities** in which all people are valued, connected and feel like they belong. One of the primary ways we do this is by supporting the start-up and sustainable development of **inclusive social groups** that spark friendships and new connections. These groups are connected as part of a Metro-wide network we call **the Befriend Social Network**. From a volunteering perspective, our focus is on the community members who willingly give their time to start up and host these groups. We call these people **'Hosts.'**

Our own learning journey at Befriend has been 14 years in the making. Our engagement model has always had a high degree of autonomy, supporting community-led decision making and action. Yet technically, most of the community contributors we've engaged with historically would be deemed 'formal volunteers.' This singular pathway for engagement has been the source of a longstanding tension between how we aspire to be 'in relationship' with community, and how we manage the process of engaging with Befriend as a community contributor.

THE BEFRIEND JOURNEY

I'd really love to meet new people in my local area



I'll email Befriend!

I'll go to a Befriend group near me...



It's a bit scary... but I think I'm ready to try hosting my own Befriend group



OOH I'm hosting, look at me go!

THE BEFRIEND JOURNEYS of the future

I'd really love
to meet new
people in my
local area

I want to learn how to surf
with other people in Freo!

I'd like to find a gym
buddy so I have
someone to train
with

I want to try
hosting with
Befriend

I'll email Befriend!

I'd love to share my
homegrown produce
with people, maybe
we could even swap
the things we grow!

Many different
possibilities!!

I'll try hosting a
little street party
for my neighbours
- go me!

I'm organising a
get-together for
other LGBTQ+
people to go to
Pride!



Learning with other Organisations

Rather than the traditional approach of 'become the expert, then train others,' we've been developing relationships with other volunteer-involving organisations and learning together along the way. This has supported real-time learning and experimentation in our own context, as well as other organisational contexts. We've spotlighted two volunteer engagement models below that we believe are particularly helpful for illustrating the possibilities of multiple / alternative volunteer engagement pathways.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH WA



The Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) program was initiated by the WA Police Force in 1982. In its earlier iterations, NHW relied on collaboration between community volunteers and police representatives to establish local networks to collectively prevent crime and enhance the safety, security, and quality of life within neighbourhoods. Volunteers operated relatively autonomously, hosting shopping centre info stalls, conducting door-to-door outreach, and organising regular meetings.

Over the last decade, the WA Police have **progressively shifted away from the formal volunteering model** of NHW. Changes to WHS legislation were a key driver in the decision to develop a pathway for informal volunteering engagement. In 2023, NHW is promoted as **a philosophy of 'neighbours looking out for each other,'** and the focus of WA Police has shifted to supporting less formalised engagement, **promoting organic networks of residents and individual champions who align themselves with this philosophy.**

Non-volunteer groups and individuals are supported through

- **Guidance** on establishing a NHW Network
- Encouragement and support to develop their **own identity** (group name and brand)
- Provision of crime prevention **advice** and NHW **resources**
- **Optional registration & promotion** via the NHM website

Despite the transition to a less formal network model, the WA Police have decided to continue supporting volunteer groups operating under the former structure. This includes support for seven NHW groups, although the overall number of formal groups has decreased from approximately twenty over the past decade. Hence, NHW now currently supports community contribution through both formalised volunteering and non-volunteer relationships with 'affiliate' groups. Anecdotally, NHW report that the development of this new pathway has seen a great uplift in the scale and diversity of contributors.

Learning with other Organisations

COMMUNITY REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP AUSTRALIA



Initially launched as a joint initiative of leading Australian charities and nonprofits, Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) is now an independent charity organisation with a vision to play a leading role in encouraging, developing, and supporting the implementation of a community-led refugee support program in Australia. This community sponsorship program **enables groups of everyday Australians to take primary responsibility for welcoming and settling refugees.**

CRSA supports community refugee sponsorship by:

- **Matching** newly arrived refugees with community sponsorship groups.
- **Recruiting and providing guidance, training, and resources** to support community sponsorship groups.

Like Befriend, CRSA's core focus is on **empowering individuals to be agents of change in their communities**, promoting social connection and inclusion, with a focus on newly arrived refugees. Sponsorship groups operate with limited supervision, but are provided with **guidance and support** from CRSA. It provides an example of enabling contribution through a supported pathway into informal volunteering.

KEY PATTERNS & INSIGHTS

As we look across these two illustrative examples, reflect on other examples we've encountered and look closely at our own organisational context, we can begin to notice some patterns that reveal important insights on the **key indicators of a model that supports mission-aligned informal volunteering.** These include:

- **Different terminology** - Intentional language is used to refer to the roles and relationships between the organisation and the contributor. These terms are specific to the context, but intentionally avoid the term 'volunteer.'
- **The nature of the agreement** - Volunteer Agreements are replaced with different types of agreements, which have varying degrees of formality depending on the context. There is a focus on agreement of shared philosophy/purpose.
- **Independent identity** - Contributors are supported (and in fact, required) to have their own unique name and brand that empowers their ownership and independence.
- **A capacity-building role** - The organisation's role shifts from more traditional volunteer management functions to providing information, guidance, training and resources.
- **Peer-to-peer learning** - Organisations also play the role of network facilitator/convenor, enabling the flow of knowledge- sharing across the network of contributors.

Befriend's Community Building Context

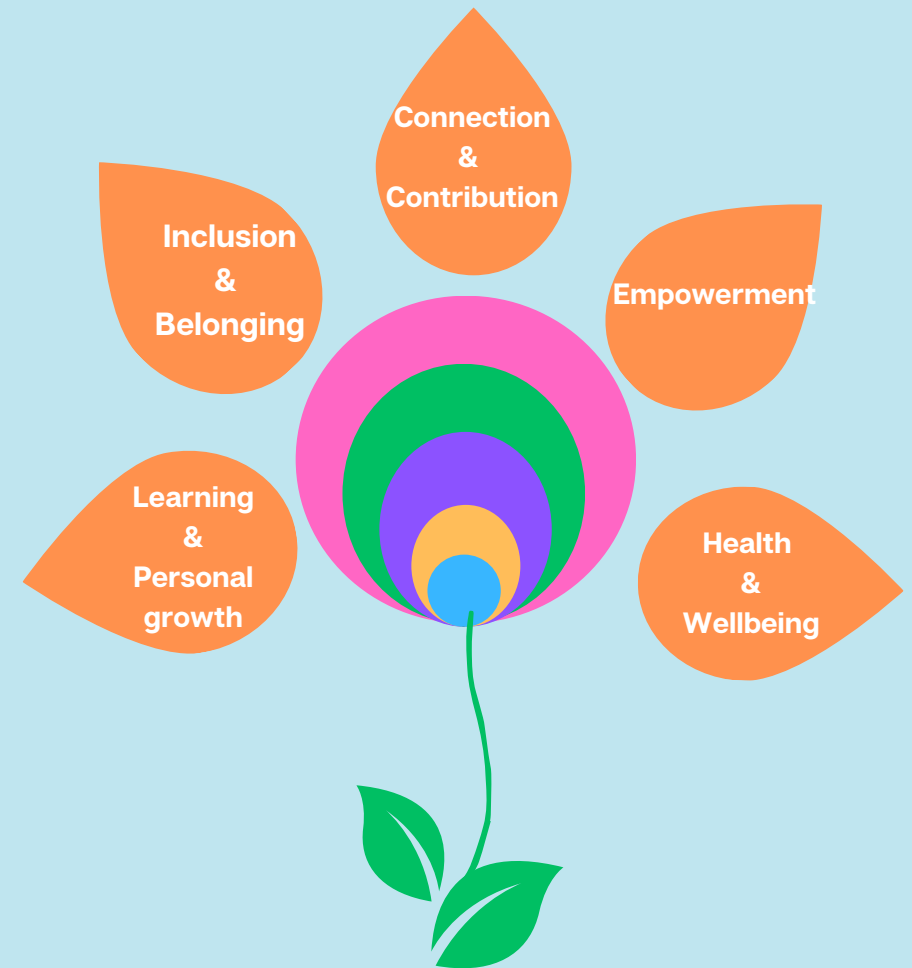
When adapting an organisation's engagement model, it can be helpful to step back from the detail of the day-to-day activities and view the broader perspective of the ultimate purpose and changes that are aspired for. As a community building organisation, Befriend exists to nurture inclusive, connected communities. We know that the 'real work' of this mission is done not by our organisation but by everyday people who engage and contribute within their community in a diversity of ways that help it thrive.

Ultimately, we hope to see people connected within communities, feeling empowered to share their unique gifts generously through a **diversity of contributions** that nurturing personal and collective wellbeing.

It is clear from the research and our experiences that developing a clear and intentional pathway for **supporting independent, autonomous community groups, projects and initiatives** will open up significant potential in supporting more diverse, self-determined contributions in alignment with our mission.

For now, let's call these independent contributors '**Friends of Befriend,**' to signal their independence.

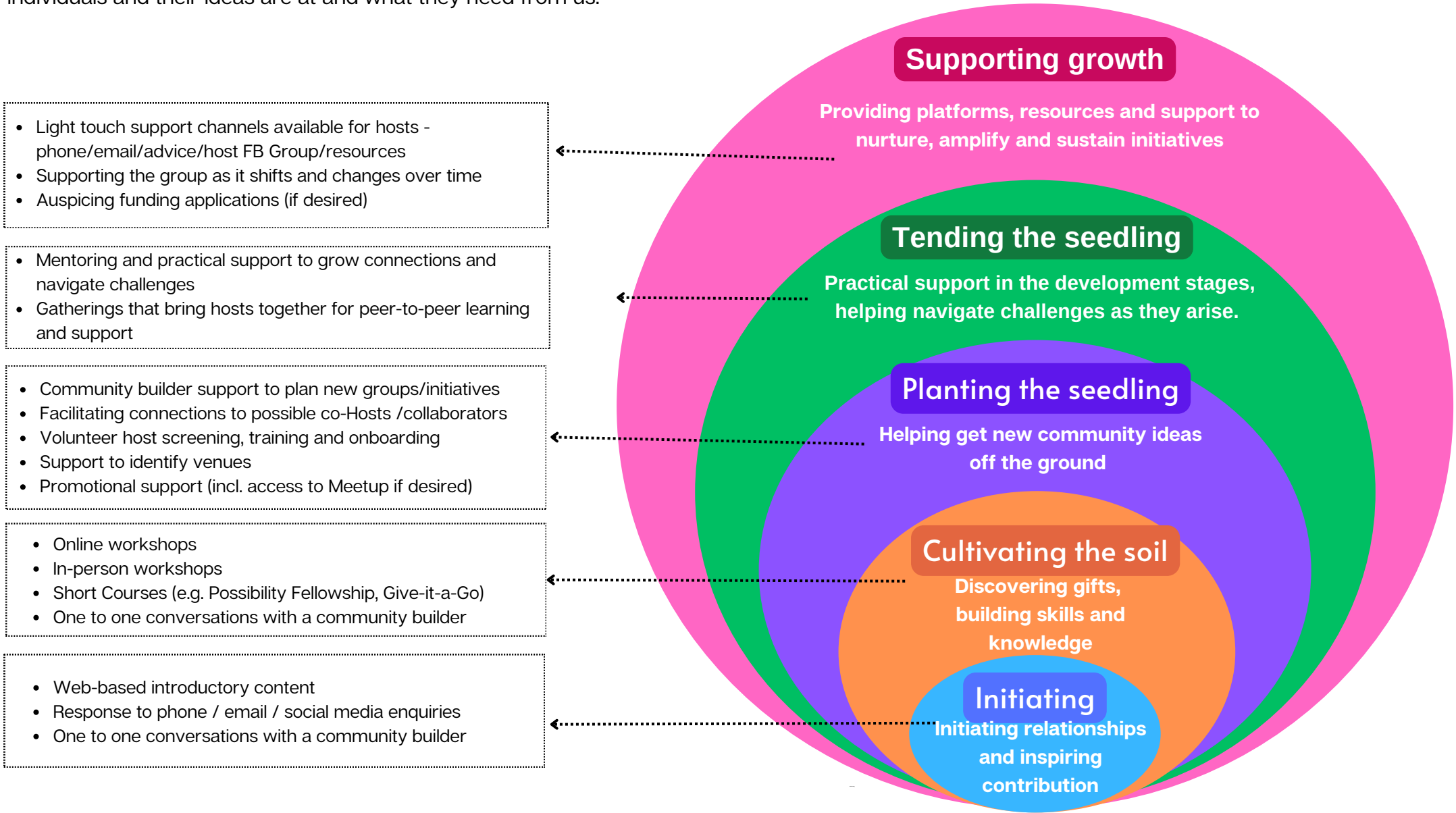
To progress further towards bringing this new pathway into fruition, we can begin to map the contributor's journey with Befriend, bringing clarity to the unique variances between the (formal) volunteer Host pathway and the (informal) Friend of Befriend pathway.



The blooming flower represents the outcomes we hope to achieve through our community-building work, through the efforts of a diverse network of community contributors.

Community Building Stages

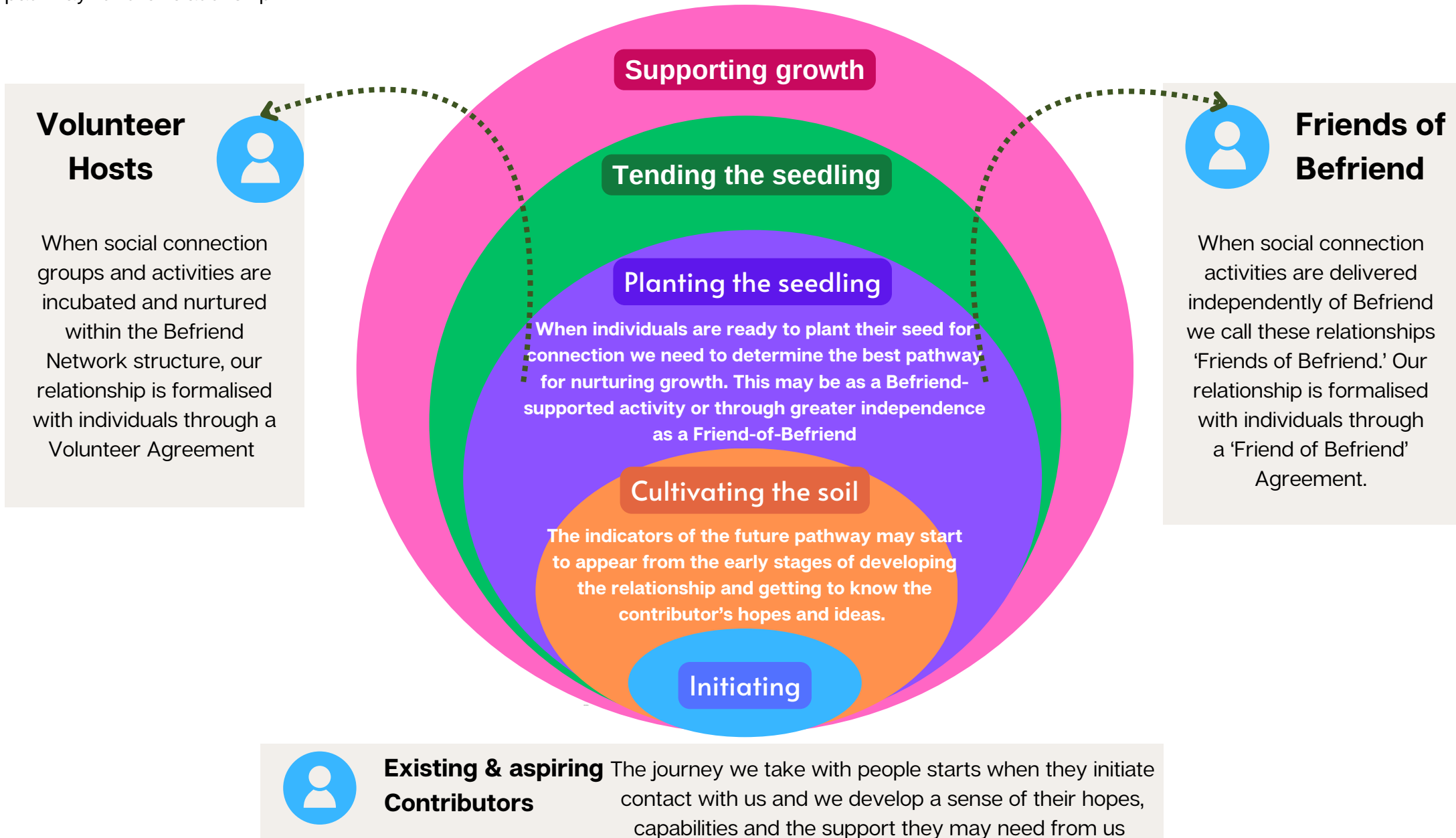
This image depicts different stages of community building that all social connection initiatives move through in their journey with Befriend. As people move in and out of these stages, our relationship with them changes, as does the type and level of support that we provide. It's important to recognise that this journey Befriend takes together with volunteers and Friends of Befriend is not always linear. Sometimes we connect with people when they are just starting to contemplate their contribution and are looking for inspiration and guidance. Other times people come to us with mature initiatives and strong capability and are just looking for a little bit of support to help them grow and adapt. Befriend staff adapt to where individuals and their ideas are at and what they need from us.



Community Building Pathways



These core stages of the community building (volunteer engagement) process create a foundation from which we can begin to better understand the different pathways of the two different types of (formal and informal) contributors. Within the journey, we see a clear point of divergence at which the contributor and Befriend have a shared understanding of their hopes and idea, and make a conscious choice to pursue either a formal or informal pathway for the relationship.



Implications for Self-Determination

It is helpful to think about these different relationships as characterised by both different types of support and a varying locus of control. Using a garden analogy, sometimes we are planting seeds in a supported environment (like a greenhouse) where the organisation has a higher degree of control; other times we are helping individuals sow their seeds in the wild open garden with greater freedom. These multiple pathways support different levels of self-determination and autonomy. The presence of the same 'outcomes flower' in both contexts signals that both types of contributions are 'mission-aligned,' just arising in different contexts, in different ways.

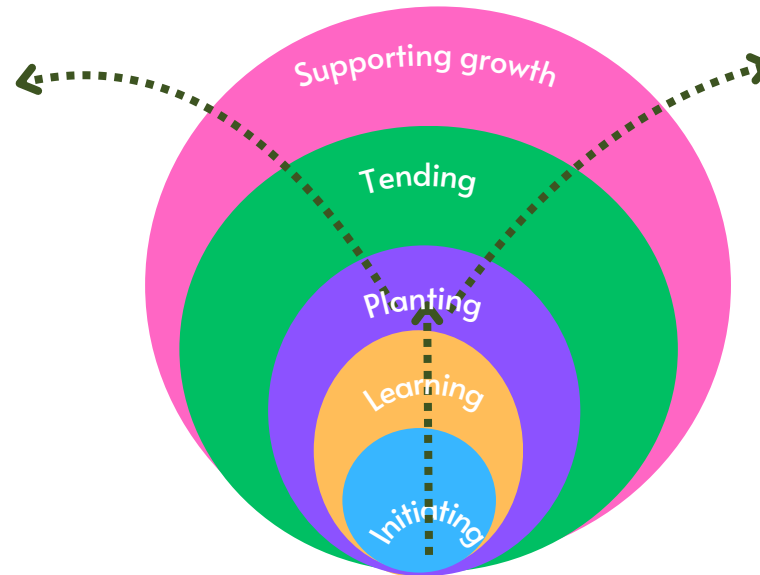
Volunteer Hosts

Supported in the Befriend greenhouse



Friends of Befriend

Wild in the community garden



Befriend-supported

Operating semi-autonomously, within Befriend limits



Befriend actively supports volunteer hosts to contribute within a clear framework

Befriend led



Community-led

Operating independently, autonomously



Befriend provides resources to help community have power and control

Befriend Social Network



The green house is an analogy for the support structure that we provide to individuals who become volunteer Hosts and run activities under the Befriend Social Network banner.

Relationship are formalised through:

Volunteer Agreement. This activates Befriend's responsibility to ensure safety of volunteers under WHS legislation. This includes providing adequate information, training, guidance and 'supervision.'

Educational & relationship support includes:

- Community Builder coaching & mentoring
- Host training
- Access to workshops and courses
- Resources
- Access to free venues
- Access to Network of Hosts

As activities that come under the Befriend brand volunteers are provided with promotional support including:

- Access to Meetup
- Canva branded templates
- Spotlighting opportunities via Befriend's socials & newsletter
- Localised sharing by Community Builder

Risk management support includes:

- Safe & Well planning together
- Community Builder guidance and support to manage risks
- Coverage under Befriend's insurances
- Learning opportunities
- Resources and information (e.g. e-newsletter articles)

WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS OF THE GREEN HOUSE?

Whilst the Befriend Greenhouse provides some people a safe nurturing environment for ideas to seed, grow and blossom, the Greenhouse also has limitations. As Befriend has a higher level of responsibility for activities within the Greenhouse, we need to ensure that Befriend can adequately manage the risks associated with volunteer-led activities as well as ensure that activities align with Befriend's purpose and values.

Examples of activities that can't currently be supported within this structure due to their risk profile include:

- Home-hosted activities
- Overnight stays or trips
- Water-based activities
- Activities with specific compliance requirements (eg. in which a licence or qualification is required)
- Activities for children or mature minors without parents/guardians present
- Activities that aren't purpose-aligned and/or values-aligned
- Activities run primarily for personal financial gain

These limitations may constrain certain types of contributors from making the unique contribution to community that they wish for.

Friends of Befriend

Friends of Befriend operate outside of Befriend's organisational structure. The activities they deliver are governed independently of Befriend and outside of the limits on the type of activities that are supported within the Greenhouse.



Relationships are formalised through:

Friends-of-Befriend Agreement - this is a statement of commitment to shared values and clarifies the nature of our relationship

Educational & relationship support includes:

- Community Builder coaching and mentoring
- Access to workshops and courses
- Resources
- Access to Network of Connectors

Activities are independently branded and we help promote through:

- Spotlighting opportunities via Befriend's socials & newsletter
- Localised sharing by Community Builder

We don't take ownership of risk but help our Friends manage risk through:

- Community Builder guidance and support to manage risks
- Safe & Well planning support (if desired)
- Learning opportunities
- Resources and information (e.g. e-newsletter articles)

WHERE MIGHT SEEDS THRIVE BEST?



In determining the pathway that best supports seeds to thrive, we need to take a number of things into consideration:

Existing capability/support required:

- Where is the individual at in their journey (early idea initiation or established activity)?
- What capability do they already have and what support do they need from us?

Independence:

- What level of independence does the Connector/group desire?
- If an activity is already existing, is there an identity that needs to be preserved?
- Would anything be compromised if the activity was to be delivered within Befriend limits?

Our capacity to support growth & manage risk:

- What is the scope of the activity (Eg. a group, versus a project, campaign, or something else?)
- Would the Greenhouse limit its ability to exist, grow and evolve?
- What level of risk is involved in the activity?
- Can we provide effective controls to eliminate/minimise risk to an acceptable level?



Befriend Host

A person who is **supported by Befriend** to initiate and run a social group/activity to nurture an inclusive, connected, thriving community.



Friend of Befriend

A person or group who **independently** undertakes an activity, project or initiative to nurture an inclusive, connected, thriving community.



Agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friend-of-Befriend Agreement
Forms of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Builder coaching & mentoring • Host training • Access to workshops and courses • Resources • Access to free venues • Access to Network of Hosts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Builder coaching & mentoring • Host training Access to workshops and courses • Resources • Access to free venues (context dependent) • Access to Network of Connectors • Auspicing support (situation dependent)
Promotional Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Meetup • Canva branded templates • Spotighting opportunities via Befriend's socials & newsletter • Localised sharing by Community Builder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Meetup • Support to develop/affirm unique identity • Canva support • Spotighting opportunities via Befriend's socials & newsletter • Localised sharing by Community Builder
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Police Clearance / WWCC • Safe & Well planning together • CB guidance, support & oversight • Coverage under Befriend's insurances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Police Clearance / WWCC • Safe & Well planning support (if desired) • CB guidance and support to manage risks • Coverage under Befriend's insurances

'Horses for Courses' - It's about what's best for the individual

It is valuable to acknowledge that one pathway is not 'better' than the other; each has its strengths and limitations. It is the presence of these multiple pathways together that creates a more inclusive overall volunteer engagement model, with different choices that suit the needs and hopes of different people.

Befriend Host

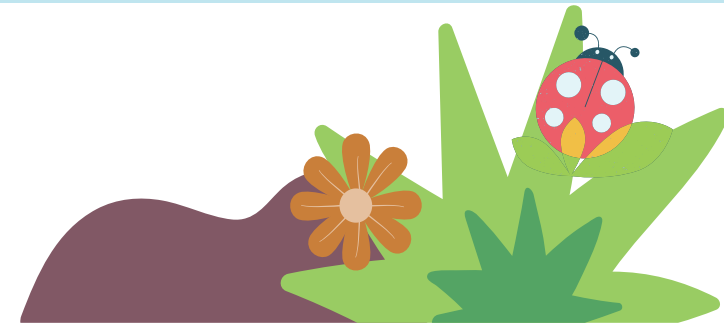
An ideal pathway for a contributor who...

- Is interested in hosting/co-hosting a social group
- May have zero experience or lots of experience running groups
- Intends to run a social activity that is low risk
- Wants a clear and supportive model
- Wants the underpinning support of a reputable organisation
- Is happy to be perceived as a Befriend representative

Friend of Befriend

An ideal pathway for a contributor who...

- Is interested in running a community project or change initiative aligned with our mission
- Wants independence and control over their initiative, and is willing to be wholly responsible for its activities
- Wants a relationship with an experienced organisation who can offer guidance and support
- Has (or wants) a unique identity for their initiative
- May have a little or a lot of experience
- Intends to run a social group/activity that has a risk profile too high for Befriend to support directly



Purposeful Peer Groups

Things get a little more nuanced here when we look at two very particular types of situations. We use the term **'purposeful peer group'** to refer to a social group that exists to nurture relationships exclusively between people with a shared background / lived experience. These groups create safe, supportive, celebratory spaces for people with specific identities/lived experiences.

Historically, the social groups that Befriend has supported have primarily been open groups with an 'everyone is welcome' philosophy. While these groups make a valuable and worthwhile contribution to nurturing inclusive, connected communities, we have deepened in our understanding and appreciation for the unique importance of purposeful peer groups. Supporting these groups has become a valid, valuable and necessary part of our inclusive approaches to community building.

Purposeful Peer Groups - 'Befriend Group' or 'Friend of Befriend'?

The short answer is - **It depends on the Host/group's preference.** Hosts of these groups can follow the same Host-support pathway as any other Host, and these groups can certainly be promoted within the Befriend Social Network. However, particular attention will need to be paid to the group's identity - the way it is named, described and promoted. This includes considering whether (or not) Meetup is a preferable channel for promoting the group's activities. In this way, it's useful to view Meetup as an **optional form of support** for a Befriend group, rather than a **requirement**. In some instances, the group may desire complete independence and control, in which case a Friend of Befriend relationship supports their self-determination.

Groups for Children & Young People

Another nuanced situation is groups for children and young people. While the Befriend Social Network originally could only support activities for adults, our organisational growth has increased our capacity and capability at managing risk, and we are now able to support 'family-friendly groups.' This has important cultural implications for groups who naturally participate in community as a whole family. However, there are a great diversity of scenarios involving children and young people, and many of these will be beyond Befriend's capacity to manage.

Groups for Children & Young People - 'Befriend Group' or 'Friend of Befriend'?

The short answer is - **It depends on the nature and risks of the activity.** Befriend's Child Safe Policy & Statement of Commitment defines the scope of activities that can be supported and the conditions for these. Notably, any community activities associated with Befriend that intend to include children and young people **must always include their parents or guardians.** We refer to these as 'family-friendly community activities.' In all of these activities, parents/guardians are responsible for the supervision of their own children. Hence, any community activities that are designed for the participation of **unaccompanied minors** would need to be supported through the 'Friend of Befriend' pathway.

Navigating the grey spaces

It is important to note that, in practice, there are often scenarios that don't fit neatly into predefined categories designed to clarify our roles and relationships. In these situations, we may need to have further conversations with individuals to define our respective roles and responsibilities. For example, there may be scenarios where we determine that it would be helpful for us to assume some of the risks associated with community-driven activities. Some organisations invest in umbrella insurance coverage to provide protection for community groups that are unincorporated or unable to afford public liability cover, which is often required for hiring many public venues. Providing support in the form of auspicating funds is another way organisations like Befriend can support community-led activities.

When entering into arrangements that require us to take greater ownership of risks, it is important to consider:

- What the risks are and the level of ownership we need to assume
- Our level of comfort with the risks and/or our ability to control them
- The desirability of controlling them, being mindful that some control measures may have unintended consequences or risk diminishing community capacity

What is auspicating?

Auspicing is when an organisation (the auspicor) helps a less established or unincorporated group (the auspicee) by providing funding, support, or sponsorship. This setup is often used to meet the requirements of funding bodies because the smaller group might not have the legal or financial setup to receive funds directly. Auspicating arrangements in community development function more like partnerships than subcontracting arrangements whereby, the smaller group runs the project and the auspicor helps by handling the funding.

Whilst auspicating arrangements can help support community groups achieve goals that they may not have been able to otherwise, these arrangements increase Befriend's accountability for community-led outcomes as well as its responsibility for managing the risks associated with community-led activities. Depending on the funding agreement Befriend may be responsible for ensuring the compliance of the auspicee with certain requirements (e.g. WWC compliance, WHS, delivery agreed milestones, financial compliance, reporting). As an auspicor Befriend has ultimate responsibility for the delivery of activities, within the agreed timeframe specified in the funding agreement. Decisions on whether to enter into an auspicating arrangement need to consider the auspicee's capacity to deliver on the agreed scope.

It's important to weigh up the risks and the benefits in these scenarios. Where auspicating arrangements are supported there will be a need to put some additional safeguards in place to manage risks and ensure there is a clear understanding of roles, relationships and responsibilities. This may be in the form of an auspicating agreement.



[Auspicing Guide,
Justice Connect](#)

CONCLUSION

Befriend's pursuit of supporting **person-centred, culturally sensitive pathways into community contribution** has taken us on a significant journey of co-learning and development. The more traditional (formal) volunteering pathway creates a supportive, accessible structure for volunteering, while the development of the new **'Friend of Befriend'** pathway for **mission-aligned informal volunteering** opens up exciting new potential for the variety of ways in which we can support diverse, self-determined community contributions that grow inclusive, connected communities.

The journey continues on, leaving us with a number of areas for further exploration and development including:

- Deepening our understanding of the legal and risk implications of these different types of relationships
- Understanding the nuances of different contributors' journeys, and the forms of support helpful along the way
- Updating information and developing new resources that support informed decision-making for prospective contributors
- Shaping new narratives that spotlight and amplify the stories of these varied forms of contribution, to generate new understandings and inspire new possibilities

We hope this window into our work offers a valuable stimulus for other volunteer-involving organisations to consider the possibilities within their contexts. Our shared challenge for growing an inclusive volunteering sector is, **how might we nurture the unique and self-determined contributions of people from diverse backgrounds?**



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

This development work has been part of an over-arching project supported through Volunteering WA's Volunteer Management Activity, funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, and delivered on the lands of the Whadjuk Noongar People in the Perth region. For enquiries about this project, contact nick@befriend.org.au