

OPINION EDITORIAL:

Pauline Turner, Community Development Manager, Woodlea

## Beyond the Build: Why Developers Must Create Community, Not Just Homes

Woodlea has quietly launched an industry first Community Builders Program, a hands-on way to turn local ideas into real projects that strengthen the community. At its helm is Pauline Turner, who led the creation of the Community Builders Program and has been instrumental in shaping its vision. She believes developers should share a broader commitment to creating places where people don't just live, but belong.

**OPINION** - The Australian housing conversation is often dominated by numbers, supply, density, affordability. Critical challenges of course, but they only tell part of the story.

Because housing, at its best, is not just about delivering roofs over heads, it's about creating the conditions to connect, participate and belong.

At Woodlea, we focus on legacy, considering not just what we build, but the kind of community that will endure and flourish long after the project is complete. That is why we embed community into the development process from the outset, treating social connection, including networks, relationships and local leadership, as essential infrastructure, just like roads, schools and utilities.

Our industry often treats community as something that forms naturally after construction, but meaningful connection must be intentionally designed, supported and sustained, which presents both an opportunity and a responsibility to think differently.

This has led to the development of the Community Builders Program - a scalable framework that empowers residents to turn ideas into real community projects through mentoring, workshops, networking and guidance on planning and funding. It is designed not only for Woodlea, but for adoption across emerging communities more broadly.

We often see residents emerge as community leaders within new neighbourhoods, particularly in the early stages of development. Our program is designed to provide the tools and knowledge that will nurture that community leadership to ensure that cohesiveness and pride in their new home endures long after development has concluded.

In its simplest terms, we can explain the functionality of this program with the GROW Framework:

**Gather**

Understand the community, its people, strengths, and needs

**Reveal**

Uncover ideas, passions, and opportunities

**Own**

Support residents to lead and deliver their own projects

**Weave**

Build connections and networks so initiatives can be sustained and enriched

We are already seeing this come to life across Woodlea, with residents leading initiatives that reflect the diversity and needs of the community. Some of these include a community-led ANZAC Commemorative service, bringing people together in a shared moment of reflection and unity; Aintree Children's Academy's enrichment programs, offering activities such as chess, arts and public speaking; and the Woodlea Islamic Network's 'Neighbourly Table', providing hot meals to those in need in Melton each week.

Together, these projects demonstrate how empowering residents to lead can create stronger connections, foster belonging, and build a community that continues to grow well beyond the build. The role of the developer evolves from provider to enabler, helping to create the conditions for the community to thrive from within.

Why does this matter? Because strong communities don't just feel better to live in, they function better. Social connection underpins everything from mental wellbeing to economic participation. It builds resilience, fosters a sense of identity, and creates neighbourhoods that people actively invest in.

And most importantly, it lasts.

Physical infrastructure has a defined lifecycle, but social infrastructure, relationships, networks, and local leadership, compounds over time. When done well, it creates a legacy that continues long after construction is complete.

This approach requires a broader mindset shift across the industry, from planners and designers through to developers and policymakers, with a greater focus on long-term investment and outcomes that aren't always easy to measure. For Woodlea, this commitment to legacy plays a critical role in shaping our reputation, with genuine community outcomes and word of mouth acting as powerful indicators of success.

As Australia grows, the real question is not how many homes we build, but whether we are creating communities that can thrive, endure and stand the test of time.

To have neighbourhoods that truly thrive, we need to design for connection, invest in people, and recognise that community is not a byproduct of development, it is the foundation of it.



**WOODLEA**

For more information about the Woodlea Community Builders Program, please visit [www.woodlea.com.au/community-builders-program](http://www.woodlea.com.au/community-builders-program).

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