**Activating the Power of Community Potential**

**Nick Maisey**

When the unimaginable threat descended, and restrictions disrupted service operations like never before, it was citizens that stepped up. The groundswell of citizen-led action in response to COVID-19 gave a glimpse of the potential that lies dormant in our communities. How can we tap into, activate and realise that potential, to grow a thriving society?

Community building, at its essence, is an approach to working in relationship with local residents to activate their citizenry, engaging in grassroots, person-to-person conversations about people's aspirations for a thriving community, and discovering their gifts and potential to step into roles and forms of contribution (their power and responsibility as a citizen) to make these changes happen.

Since its inception 10 years ago, Befriend has been on a fascinating learning journey as a grassroots community development organisation. Befriend’s developmental path has grown in the direction of a community building organisation in support of nurturing citizenry and the unique potential of local residents to act as agents of community connection in diverse, creative, personally meaningful ways. Befriend’s Community Builders work to develop their capabilities for engaging with local residents developmentally, respecting their power to self-determine their contributions as a citizen, whilst encouraging and supporting them to step into that power.

In this presentation, Befriend’s Founder/CEO Nick Maisey will share stories of grassroots citizen-led action, and his perspectives on Befriend’s unique development as an organisation that has evolved as an agent of community potential.