

What we learned about Community

Community is messy and human. It's not about sameness - it is endlessly diverse and ever changing. At the same time though, it is enduring and constant. In considering this duality we find the value and benefit of a community like We are Ocean - to each of us as individuals and to the cause that brings us together - our ocean.

While each of us is unique, as humans we need community and a sense of belonging. In a world that is increasingly challenging and rapidly changing we need community more than ever. So what can We are Ocean do to create community for the ocean tribe?

We understand that no one can be forced to feel part of a community. But what the community can do is keep the doors open, make sure the room looks inviting and listen so that we can fill it with what the community say they need. The We are Ocean Summit was an opportunity to listen and here is what we heard

Be welcoming

Joining in can be scary so we need to be as welcoming as possible. We need to make it easy to cross the threshold. Sometimes simple acts of care and kindness can be what invites people in and conveys a sense of belonging and connection. The smile and offer of a cup of tea, the look that settles our nerves.

We are Ocean

People told us how lucky they feel to be part of a community - it's important for us to acknowledge that we value one another. In being part of a community you learn to bring your best self forward and reflect on the fact that you are less without the community and the community is less without you. Just as there is no separation between people and planet, there is no separation between the individual and the community.

Kindness fuels change

We heard stories of how kindness and community acceptance was a catalyst of self acceptance. When a person feels they can be their authentic self and own their space in the community it gives rise to positive behaviours that drive change. Including paying forward kindness within the community. The community becomes an enabler - giving agency to individuals.

Focus on what matters

Shared value is the bedrock of a community. We are Ocean is built on the collective belief that our ocean is our future and our collective action is important to the future of our ocean. It is this shared view that binds us not what we look like, how old we are, what we do for a living or where we live. Focussing on what really matters means we can be very clear and confident in communicating who we are and why we are together.

Embrace diversity

Having a shared cause doesn't translate into sameness. In fact communities are healthier when they can embrace difference and still bind and move together. There is danger in communities that forget the diverse nature of the world. We need to make sure we both nurture and reflect a culture of diversity, fairness, inclusion and equality. All of us bring

different parts of ourselves to our communities and it is in bringing together the 'unusual suspects' that the magic sometimes happens.

Listen before you speak

People connect with issues in different ways so one message may need to be conveyed in many different ways - only by listening can we learn to meet people where they are. The beauty of community is that we can engage simultaneously in many different ways and find resonance even in diversity. And then we can enable learning to be shared.

Take inspiration

Healthy communities are full of incredible people who are doing inspiring things. We need to create a platform for these amazing people and enable the ocean community to take inspiration wherever it is to be found. Inspiration brings energy.

Don't be afraid to be vulnerable

Sometimes it is in taking the leap of faith, risking failure, that we find our most inspiring ideas and the bravery to do things we never thought possible. Having a strong, supportive community can enable us to step into uncomfortable spaces and try new things.

Free to do what you want

Successful communities create an enabling space for people to take action and tell their own story in their own way. We are Ocean needs to focus on bringing ocean minded people together with the freedom to imagine things that would perhaps not otherwise have been imagined. If something sparks, the spark belongs to whoever has the energy to fan the flames. Feeling part of a community can give people the agency to step up and take on a challenge.

Enjoy the ride

Being part of a community means having a sense of collective effort and being part of something with momentum. Because it doesn't wholly depend on the continuous action of any one individual, it's OK for you to take a rest when you need to and then step back in when you're ready. Or to move on to something new. The wheels will remain in motion.

Show and tell

The value of community, though clearly recognised by some people, can be difficult to communicate and difficult to resource. We are Ocean can both embody community, providing a real lived experience for people, and tell the story of the change we make because we come together in order to strengthen the case for future investment in community building.

Our conversation closed with a call to go into the world with love.