Belonging to something bigger than ourselves is a basic human need. It helps us to see the value in life. Whether we belong to a group of only a few people or a large organization, having a connection helps to relieve loneliness and pain, and improves motivation and happiness.

By belonging to a group, we’re able to see that all people have troubles, and that can be comforting knowing that we’re not alone in our struggles. Communities are a safe place where people can share a passion for something bigger than themselves.

Belonging doesn’t just happen, it requires an active approach. It’s easy to feel disconnected by focusing on how we’re different from others. By focusing instead on finding similarities, we can improve our odds of feeling connected. Finding the common bond with people, while accepting and appreciating the differences, is a great way to build a community.

Say Yes to Opportunities
It’s one thing to want to join a group and another thing altogether to join in the activities. A dozen excuses about why not to attend an event may crop up. Put them aside and jump in. Being together creates a bond. Let go and enjoy the experience; be present for all that happens.

Think and Speak Inclusive
We’ve all been somewhere and heard people that are actively judging others; it’s apparent in the words they use. Words can create barriers to community or promote unity. Look for the strengths each person brings to the group and honor the differences. Honoring and accepting diversity doesn’t necessarily mean agreement, just respectful acceptance.

Let Go of Emotional Sensitivity
Feeling overly sensitive in public situations can hinder a feeling of belonging. Focusing on how we might not fit in takes the focus off from enjoying the experience. Let it go and just be present. Secret is, most people are more concerned about what others think about them. If we remember that, we can avoid being overly sensitive about ourselves in public situations. With less emotional sensitivity, people are more likely to share their story. Shared stories build commonality of experience and a stronger community bond.

We’re fortunate in Hawaii to have many ways to belong. The following are just some examples of groups and organizations that offer opportunities to participate. Anyone looking to join a community of likeminded-individuals can reach out to these groups:
Blue Zones Project Wahiawa
P.O. Box 12229
Honolulu
BlueZonesProjectWahiawa@sharecare.com
hawaii.bluezonesproject.com

Blue Zones Project is a community-wide, well-being improvement initiative to help make healthy choices easier in Hawaii. The Hawaii Medical Service Association has brought the Blue Zones Project to Hawaii to transform our state into an even better place to live, work, and play. One of the precepts of Blue Zones is “belong to live long,” that the people we surround ourselves with, even friends of friends, strongly influence our health. Residents and business owners can join the Blue Zones Project by taking the Blue Zones Pledge.

The Wahiawa Blue Zones Project is ramping up their program to work with schools, worksites, restaurants, grocery stores and faith-based organizations in the Wahiawa area. Check out their calendar of events and get involved in this dynamic community organization.

Girlfriends
808-393-5527
OneExperience.Guru/Girlfriends

Brandi Kiana-Jo had a vision to empower women and strengthen sisterhood, so she launched Girlfriends in 2017. Girlfriends offers monthly events for women entrepreneurs and aspiring leaders that focus on developing meaningful relationships. These events go beyond networking by inspiring creativity and self-reflection, and enhancing personal and professional growth. Women can join one event or attend them all by registering on the website.

Kahumana Farm
86-660 Lualualei Homestead Rd.
Waianae
808-696-2655
information@asi-hawaii.org
Kahumana.org

Sitting on more than 50 acres in the beautiful Lualualei Valley on the sunny west side of O‘ahu, Kahumana Farm helps support homeless families, people with disabilities and youth. They offer volunteer opportunities, learning centers, farmers markets, tours, festivals and a café. They’re committed to assisting vulnerable members of our society through programs that are person-centered, holistic, strength-based, work-focused and community driven.

Kokua Market Co-op
2643 South King Street
Honolulu
808-941-1922
Marketing@Kokua.Coop
KokuaMarket.com

Kokua Market Co-op focuses on providing fresh, local and organic products. A co-op is a business jointly owned by people with a shared vision and values. Becoming an owner of Kokua Market is an investment in the community’s access to healthy and sustainable food.

Their more than 4,000 owners have a say in what they sell and how they operate. While it is a co-op, anyone can shop at Kokua Market. Owner’s receive a discount, and can volunteer, vote and participate in the organization. Lifetime membership is a one-time $160 investment (or a $10/ month payment plan).
Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community.

~Anthony J. D’Angelo
YMCA
808-531-3558
info@ymcahonolulu.org
YMCAHonolulu.org

The YMCA is dedicated to youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. The YMCA of Honolulu is one of the largest non-profit organizations in the state. Their programs and services are open to children, teens, women and men of all ages, faiths and backgrounds. In all of their programs, they promote their core values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility. As an island-wide member, families can enjoy unlimited access to a wide range of programs, classes and amenities at all YMCA branches, including Central, Kaimuki-Waialae, Kalihi, Leeward, Mililani, Nuuanu and Windward.

Whether joining one of these communities or another, get involved with a group of people and share ideas. It really makes a difference.

Karen Charron is a freelance writer living on Oahu and a frequent contributor to Natural Awakenings Hawai`i.