

## Picnic to Bridge the Divide: “We Have A Lot More In Common Than I Thought”

On July 31, 2021, twenty-five people gathered in Look Park (Florence MA) to meet people with different political views in a relaxed setting, to better understand the “other side” and move away from polarization towards respect. Listening to what they had to say, this goal was certainly achieved. Some of the participants had been previously active in Braver Angels, but many were new, and the event was also aimed to help people learn about the organization.

The event began with the two co-chairs of the new Pioneer Valley Braver Angels Alliance, Luke Raskopf and Dave Roitman, telling the group why they had joined Braver Angels and why they thought its mission to depolarize America was so vital to our democracy and way of life. The group then broke into two’s, with each group pairing a person “leaning Red” or Independent with a person “leaning Blue.” Over the next 30 minutes, they shared what they liked to do for fun, why they’d come to the picnic, what the word “respect” meant to them, and some experiences that had shaped their political viewpoints. They then gathered in a circle and each person shared what they’d heard from their conversation partner that “hit home.” Over the following hour, the group enjoyed the hot dogs, burgers, and salads, and re-formed the circle to ask questions about Braver Angels and talk about what they would do to build the Pioneer Valley and Greenfield Alliances as well as deepen and extend their personal work to bridge our nation’s political divide.

From the 12 conversation pairs, several common themes emerged. These could be summarized as: “our views may be different but we share common values;” “we all need to work harder and smarter to identify what’s true and what’s false in the media;” and “I got a lot out of this conversation and I want to do more like it.” All the participants said they would like to attend more Braver Angels events, with several volunteering to serve on a planning team for the new Alliance. Finally, to support their efforts going forward to bridge the divide, each person received an envelope containing the nine-point Braver Angels Way and the 6-page Braver Angels Guide to 1:1 Conversations, and they learned how to participate in on-line Braver Angels workshop and debates.