

C.A.L.L.

Communities At Large Letter



**Intentional
Communities Desk**



Yad Tabenkin 

DEAR readers,

We are thrilled to present you with the 44th edition of C.A.L.L. this autumn. As 2018 approaches its end and we brace for the cold of winter, what could be better than to warm

ourselves with some of the inspiring ways that people all over the world are reaching out to each other to live and work together.

In this edition, we have collected tales of communities that warm and illuminate like a campfire on a cold, clear night. Each in its own way, these communities of the past, present and future, bear the flame of resistance to the forces – global and local – that attempt to separate, to dominate and to exploit.

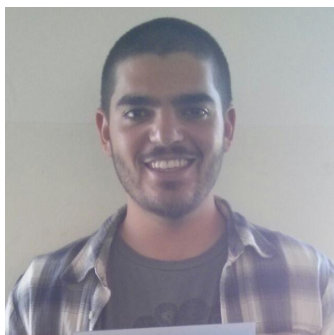
On three different continents and speaking nearly ten different languages, the members of the communities brought together by this issue build autonomous homes, villages, networks and cities that combat poverty, loneliness, racism, apathy, despair and urban decay. They offer hope for the displaced, the homeless, the aging, the disillusioned and the poor.

They show us that things can be different. That a cold world of isolation, where each individual is forced to face their fate alone, is not the only option.

More than that, they show us that where loneliness, poverty and social disintegration are the swiftly raging undercurrent of post-modern culture and global capitalism, community is the opposite and inverse force that rises up to meet it.

They do it quietly, modestly, without fanfare, without slogans and, largely, without coverage in the mainstream media. But they are out there every day, resisting. May their stories light the way for others.

Gabriel Freund, Editor



Contents

2. Community close-up: Bereklauw, Belgium

Ali Ayaz

6. The Golden Age of Squatting

John Komurki

11. As my friends and I grow older, we're setting our sights on communal living

Douglas Tindall

14. There's community and consensus. But it's no commune

Tom Verde

18. Urban kibbutzim plant seeds for improving city life

Abigail Klein Leichman

22. For stressed African migrants in Israel, collective farms offer a refuge

Dina Kraft

25. The Idea of Community in the Franziskusgemeinschaft

Heidi Flammer and Martin Treipl



Community close-up: Bereklauw, Belgium

On the border of Herent and Leuven, hidden behind thick forestry, Bereklauw founder and owner Gosse offers his piece of land as a refuge for all those who seek communal living. The village or commune is based in Belgium but welcomes people of all races and creed to share alongside each other, in a social experiment of cohabitation.

Ali Ayaz, The Word Magazine

You're there once you've stepped in mud. At the beginning of the dirt road, you'll find a panda bear standing on the side, one paw up. The wordplay is supposed to let you know you're at your destination. A bear's claw; *een bereklauw*. If your feet take you along the road, it'll take you through a forest path, wide and covered by trees on both sides - yet something stands out. Large pagan statues, handcrafted into the trees, tower over you all the way until the entrance. Eagles and frogs, dog heads and other mystical symbolism make for a magical runway towards the village's entrance. The border between forest and commune is drawn by the sudden end of statues. If the dirt path says, "Here ends modernity", the entrance to Bereklauw commune excitedly claims, "and this is what comes after!"

Instantly, one notices the alien yet ecologically conscious architecture. Quite unique - in fact, you would be hard-pressed to find a replica anywhere else. It's in standing with the commune's collective spirit: homes are built from society's refuse by those who refused society. Metal sheets, junk and wooden pillars make up the general aesthetic. Its charm is in the chaotic adaptation of needs. There's no plumbing service, only neighbours who are handy with a wrench. The only carpenter around is Mother Nature herself, as she provides the commune with all the wood they need.

The inhabitants are wild, unkempt and constantly in flux. In the three decades since the conception of the village-cum-commune, travellers from around the world came to make Bereklauw their home. To try and get a demographic overview of its population would be a frivolous



attempt at defining the commune and whomever chooses to live there. In fact, the only descriptor that all the inhabitants share is that they all stem from a similar crisis of ideological displacement and an escape from modern comforts. Much like the homes present, Bereklauw's society itself is built from the bits and pieces of oft-ignored and flat out refused materials that one would find scattered around. Hippies, punks, mystics and magicians, all together; eating, building, living and surviving the cold Belgian winters together on the edge of the modernity.

Cobblestones make up the runway through the village. As you walk through, the smell of nature – also known as shit – assails the uninitiated. Small cages with poultry line the walls to the right and self-made homes to the left. Watch your step or you'll probably kill something: if they're not in cages, chickens run around, clucking happily. The cats, eyeing the chicken with lustful grins, sit on the side-lines judging quietly.

Further up the pathway lies the bar; a large structure dedicated to Dionysus, the Greek deity of wine-making, fertility and ritual ecstasy. The bar itself has the same architecture as the rest of the commune, but judging from its size and well-maintained visage, one could surmise that it's actually one of the more respected places in the commune. The windows have a stained design, reminiscent of church glass. This admixture of elements is in my opinion exactly what defines the over-arching theme of the commune: a chimera of modernity and its opposites.

At the very end of the commune, where the pathway bends back, there's a small playground equipped with small mushroom houses and swing sets. Families also live in Bereklauw after all, and in accordance with their aesthetics, all forms of contemporary leisure are fashioned out of wood and mud, re-enacted out of bio-degradable materials. What could have been a metallic and synthetically created playground is now a by-product of tree fibers and hand-fashioned wood: little playhouses made from resources the commune collectively gathered, for everyone to further enjoy.





I took a long cigarette break from the top of the commune as the children play below, soaking up a view of the entire village. Farms that were hidden by the houses on my way up were laid bare in front of me, with all

their vegetables and fruits ready for harvest. Across from the first farm I spotted the communal kitchen, where the inhabitants get together to cook, clean and wash. There's a distinct lack of necessary police presence to enforce social decrees - only nature's laws apply. Yet society in Bereklaauw seems to function as it would anywhere else, which I brought up with my tour guide. In response, he was proud to share his wisdom with me, explaining that the commune functions on a foundational alchemical truth, as above, so below: in other words, bridging together the macro with the micro.

That is where I found Bereklaauw to make the most sense. The commune was by no means an attempt to reject or even deconstruct society as we know it and how it functions - instead, it revels in self-fashioned laws taken from modern life.

While it would be easy to reduce anyone who chooses to live there as a nutter, their way of life follows an approach



not dissimilar to our own. They keep their doors closed when they're in the bathroom, and they charge their phones at night. The police are unnecessary, courts of law have no reason to exist - Bereklaauw's rules are inherent in its people. What sets Bereklaauw apart is that there is an unrelenting dedication to providing themselves the comforts that the modern world offered.

When you build your world, you also have to find ways to maintain it. Bereklaauw makes no grand claims on how that should be done. Instead they focus on what they would like their own





world to be. The people that make up the commune have nothing in common and have wild differences, ranging from nationality and ethnicity to education and class, yet have all found each other based on

the fact that they rejected the world they first came into. Many leave everything behind and head to Bereklauw in the hopes of a new life. Nothing binds them together besides their dismissal of the worlds they were thrown into, and the new world they built hand in hand.

Leaving Bereklauw is an experience in its own right: taking the same forest path, back onto the mud road at the outskirts of Leuven felt like I myself was entering into another world. A truly intuitive experience: it felt right on all sides. The safety of modern civilization is ever-present in Bereklauw. Residents have iPhones, but charge them with solar panels. They wear Nike shoes; they're just worn out. I had no fear of anyone chopping off my limbs to eat, nor the inclination to run away as fast as I could. With that Bereklauw reflected a sense of optimism that could lead by example. A belief that we can indeed get along, with each other and with the world around us - it just requires team effort.

The world is in a harsh state. Cities are loud and full of cars that stab at the environment with every rev of the engine, and often, the way we as humans organise ourselves is destructive and foolish. It's common courtesy to insult the state of things now. Bereklauw instead rebels against all of the miseries of modern living, but revels in the progress it brings with it. They rely on an understanding of a more authentic human life, using the systems provided by modernity as a way to subvert its message of alienation and mechanicity.



The Golden Age of Squatting

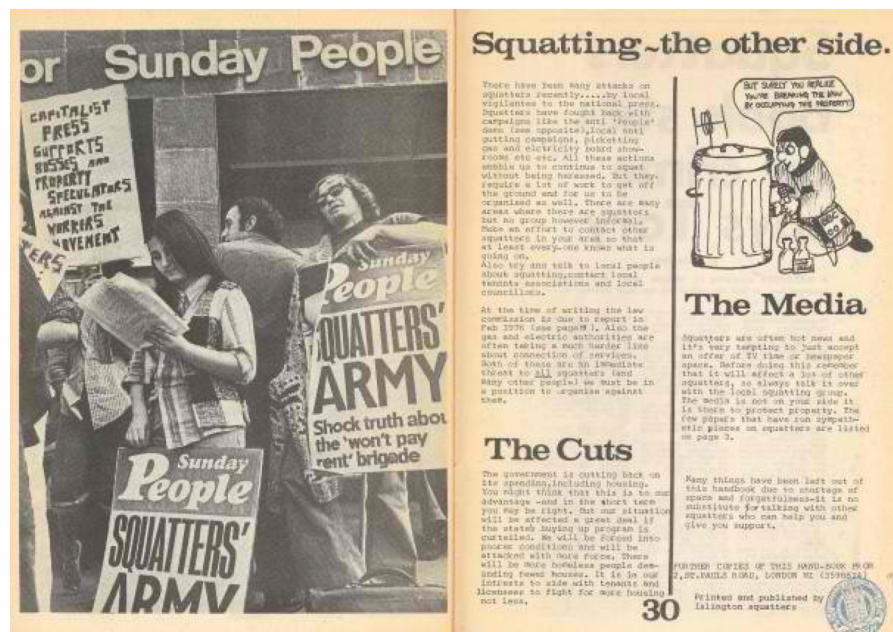
The history of squatting in London tells a story of communities sprouting from the grassroots in resistance to the harsh world of capital.

John Komurki, The Towner

Over the past few decades, London has become a melting pot for some of the world's grubbier money. One knock-on of this has been rampant speculation on property, with local people being priced out of the market, and whole blocks being left empty. Such an economy forces most everyone within it to take part in the cycle of exhaustion and consumerism – or leave the city. More than last week's closing of Fabric, this squeeze is exemplified by the eviction of Passing Clouds, a vibrant music venue and community centre that grew out of the East London squat scene ten years ago in response to a pre-Olympics wave of gentrification. Last year, their venue was sold to developers, who will no doubt knock it down and build overpriced flats.

Another victim of London's colonization by capital has been the squatting scene itself. The squat movement flowered in London in the 1970s, when an estimated 30,000 people lived in squats in Greater London, and the movement provided the base for many London subcultures over several decades. In 2012, the scene took a

legal body blow when squatting in residential (rather than commercial) properties was made a criminal offense; before it had been a purely 'civil' question (that is, a dispute between two parties). The impact of this change was huge, not just on squatting, but among 'alternative' and



activist communities across the UK. Thousands of people suddenly found that sitting in their front room had become a criminal offense.

Many thought this would be the death of squatting, but in recent years there has been a resurgence of bigger, politicized squats in commercially-zoned properties. Squatting today implies a more frontline lifestyle than it did before, and on the whole attracts only highly committed individuals. Nevertheless, many currents of British radical politics still embrace it as one of the few tactics available to the dispossessed. Sisters Uncut, a feminist direct action collective, fighting the funding cuts for domestic violence services that the Conservative government has been rolling out since 2009, squatted a council flat in Hackney this summer and turned it into a centre for victims of domestic violence. Or there is Grow Heathrow, an 'eco-squat' in an abandoned market garden on land slated to be concreted over by the proposed expansion of the airport, which for the past six years has been a hub for community resistance to the expansion, as well as many national grassroots networks.

The success of these and many other initiatives shows how squatting in the UK still constitutes a coherent, well-organized and powerful tradition of resistance. With this in mind, it is worth considering the recent history of squatting in London, as it provides lessons that are applicable to the contemporary struggle against oppression and exploitation.

The modern squatting movement started on 18 November, 1968 in the kitchen of teacher Ron Bailey, with the founding of the London Squatters Campaign (LSC). The LSC initially comprised around 15 people, most of whom, Bailey later wrote, 'were from the libertarian left - there were a couple of anarchists... three or four people from the solidarity group, and some 'unattached' libertarians.' The immediate aim of the LSC was clear: the rehousing of poor families from slums or hostels in the swathes of local authority housing stock that at that time stood empty. Its broader goal was to spearhead a movement that would inspire homeless people and slum dwellers to squat en masse.



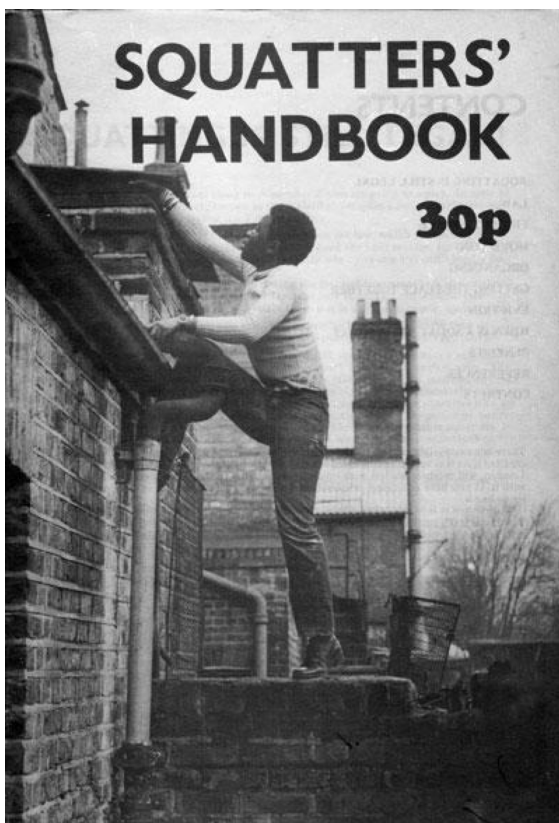
Bailey was a veteran activist. He had spent years travelling England, talking with people who lived in Welfare Department 'temporary housing,' largely hostels provided by local authorities. Unsanitary, crowded and cold, these hostels enshrined a workhouse mentality left over from



the days of the Poor Law. By the end of the 1960s, hard as it may be to imagine today, there were three million families living in hostels and slums around the UK. These were the 'invisible homeless,' constantly passed between different welfare authorities, their children taken in and out of care.

Bailey's LSC set the tone for the early stages of the squatting movement – young, highly-politicized radicals committed to direct action on behalf of disenfranchised elements of society. The great anarchist historian Colin Ward saw the LSC as a "harbinger of a new style of social and political activity that changes demoralized and helpless people from being the *objects* of social policy to becoming active fighters in their own cause."

The initial stages of the LSC's campaign involved a series of brief, symbolic, protest squats to generate media attention. Their first action was to infiltrate a block of luxury flats on Wanstead High Street, East London, which had been built four years earlier but were still empty, largely because of the high rents being asked for them. Two members of the LSC posed as electricians to get in, and then opened the door for the rest of the group. They climbed to the roof and strung up banners, tossing leaflets to the crowd of supporters and onlookers below. After a couple of hours, they descended to give a press conference.



Then on 18 January, 1969, activists 'cracked' a condemned house in Notting Hill and moved in one Maggie O'Shannon and her two children. Owners the Inner London Education Authority reacted with predictable belligerence, but following an upswell of media support for O'Shannon, they pushed a rent book through her letter box. She became the first person since the 1940s to obtain permanent housing through squatting, and the movement began.

A key aspect of the LSC's campaign was its targeted courting of the media. Crucially, the organizers were not the ones who were living in the squats they opened, nor were they the focus of the broadly sympathetic newspaper treatment of their campaigns. They focused the attention on others, though, crucially, this wasn't true of all squatting movements of the period.

It would be simplistic to say that the squatting movement split as 1969 progressed, but there is no question that another, distinct tendency began to emerge alongside the LSC. This took the



form of an increasingly prominent collection of countercultural types who saw squatting as a means to challenging mainstream values: private property, naturally, but also many of the 'bourgeois' characteristics that irked them in their parents. This second tendency was a somewhat grittier incarnation of the Hippy movement, and it was they who came to define squatting in the minds of the general public.

Certainly the hippy squatters did their part in changing prevailing attitudes, but they also often obscured and complicated the work of true activists engaged in the Sisyphean plod of social change. This divide still exists today: for every one more or less sober crew who want to save an abandoned public building from collapse or to protest against gentrification, there are two whose sole goal is to get in, do a rave, sell warm cans of Stella for three quid, and disappear on Monday morning, leaving behind only squalor and sleep-deprived civilians.

The evolution of the movement during the early and mid-1970s was exemplified by two distinct squat projects, both emblematic in their failures and successes.

The Free Independent Republic of Frestonia was founded on 30 October 1977, when the 120 inhabitants of Freston Street in Kensington, the entirety of which had recently been squatted, made a unilateral declaration of independence from Great Britain. They applied for full membership of the United Nations and the EEC, and sent a telegram to the Queen announcing their secession. A full cabinet of ministers was appointed; everyone who wasn't made a minister became an ambassador.

The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, David Rappaport-Bramley, articulated their aims in a letter to the Secretary General of the UN: "the GLC [Greater London Council] and the British government, through a long history of neglect and mismanagement of Frestonia, have forfeited the right to determine the future of the area..." The hoped-for media frenzy ensued, with tabloid photographers queuing up to take pictures of the Minister of the Interior in his pushchair. They showed the reporters their communal garden, which fed nearly the whole street, and eloquently communicated their desire to live together as a self-sufficient community (all the squatters had changed their last name to Bramley, in response to an earlier change in GLC housing policy). The GLC felt obliged to come to terms with Frestonia, and the street remained squatted for several years.

Frestonia built upon the lessons of a previous, similar project, based in a different part of London: Kentish Town, where in 1972 there were 292 people squatting in 52 houses. The community was centered around Prince of Wales Crescent, a whole street that had been standing empty for seven years, pending redevelopment. When they moved in, the squatters had to fix up the place, building, plumbing and wiring. A number of workshops were set up – electronics, engineering, silk-screening, jewelry, carpentry – and an eclectic mix of organizations instituted: the London filmmakers co-op, Little Sister of Jesus, European Theatre

Exchange, and, naturally, a Polytantric Academy. There was a free restaurant that cooked unsold produce from local markets, and a free shop for recycling unwanted goods. There were two community newsletters, an informal police force, a Mental Patients Union, and a drug rehab clinic. The squatters also cleared a rubble-filled wasteland and built a public park.

Leaflets produced by the community described Prince of Wales Crescent as a “decentralized urban self-managed community...[a] green revolution in the city.” They put forward plans to Camden Council emphasizing mixed use and social heterogeneity: “It is a genuine organic community. Planners are searching desperately to produce this phenomena in new estates, so far without success. Prince of Wales Crescent is an excellent example of what people can do if left to their own devices.”

This heart-warming utopianism turned out to be unsustainable. As the '70s progressed, the squatting movement took on different characteristics, providing a refuge to the nascent Punk scene. In fact, there is a sense in which Punk was indivisible from squatting – all the luminaries lived in squats, from Shepherd's Bush to Hampstead. Joe Strummer's first band was named after their place at 101 Walthamton Terrace, and the Clash were later heavily involved in the Elgin Avenue/Chippenham Road scene, comparable in scale to Prince of Wales Crescent. The Slits used to rehearse at Strummer's house. Meanwhile, 'God Save the Queen' was written in a squat in Hampstead. As Johnny Rotten told Punk chronicler Jon Savage: “I went squatting with Sid. Hampstead, not the posh end, but those awful Victorian dwellings round the back of the station. Really desperate people lived up there. It was awful. I liked it.”

1977 was the turning point, the first formal pushback from the authorities, and the end of a golden age of squatting in the UK.

At the time, local councils were also applying another, more insidious technique to defang the squat movement: legalizing it. Increasingly, squatter collectives were allowed to remain in the properties they occupied on the condition that they formalize their organization and become legally responsible. This was an attractive option to those who were tired of insecurity and many jumped at the chance, creating housing co-operatives many of which are still operational today. The GLC even offered squatters an amnesty in 1977, giving them 28 days to give up their squats in exchange for permanent housing. At the time, there were 5000 squatters in GLC properties, 1000 of whom registered.

But squatting was far from dead, remaining the focus of the London alternative scene for several decades more, and even experiencing a boom with the emergence of the occupied social centre in the late '90s. Today, like all of London's subcultures, squatting has been eroded by the implacable tide that is swamping the city. But it remains one of the few true alternatives to that tide, as well as a powerful weapon in the fight against injustice. In the words of the invaluable Advisory Service for Squatters, squatting is still legal, still necessary, and still free.



As my friends and I grow older, we're setting our sights on communal living

Changing life circumstances, including aging, present an opportunity to take stock and think about the way we choose to live. For a growing number of retirees in the West, reaching out to and building new communities is an exciting and comforting prospect to face major life transitions.

Douglas Tindall, the Globe and Mail

A few years ago, four friends began a conversation: Here we are in our 50s and 60s, still active and (relatively) youthful, but all moving toward the day when we can no longer cling to our cherished independence. Retirement homes seem unappealing, nursing homes a last resort. Why not live together and support each other?

It was casual at first, a bit of a joke. But we kept coming back to it. Finally, a few months ago, we went off for a weekend together to come up with a plan.

We began with our reasons for wanting to consider this seemingly offbeat idea. What attracts us to living together?

First, community. André Picard, among others, has written about the extensive research showing that community is vital to health. Being connected – to family, friends, neighbours, a community group, a running club, a mosque – can add years to your life, studies have found.

Second, a smaller carbon footprint. A smaller home envelope to heat and cool and a shared kitchen with fewer appliances than separate houses mean fewer greenhouse gases.

While affordability is not the key driver of our plan, we do expect living together to be more economical than our current, independent living arrangements.

Gradually, a rough plan came into focus. The house should have a front porch, one of us said (zeroing in on essentials!). It has to be downtown, we all agreed – downtown, walkable and close to transit.





Over the course of our weekend retreat, the conversation took some radical turns. Initially, we had imagined a series of neighbouring condos or other self-contained units, but as we talked further, we found ourselves more drawn to a truly shared space.

We realized, for example, that we want to eat dinner together more often than not. Most of us like to cook, and we all love to eat. So a big common kitchen is essential. We like to discuss stuff – just about any stuff – so we need places for conversation.

We have children and grandchildren, and love to entertain, so a guest suite is an obvious need. A media room. A wine cellar! As the common areas became more central to our discussion, the private areas became smaller. We now imagine each unit (person or couple) having private space of about 600 square feet, designed to suit individual preferences. Naturally, everything will be designed to accommodate “aging in place.”

At the end of the weekend, we had a three-page “proposal.” Confidently, we sent off a series of e-mails to friends who we thought might be interested.

Crickets.

Gradually, we realized that our months of casual conversation and our weekend of focused discussion had led us to ideas that might seem rather startling to anyone hearing them for the first time. It was almost as if we had suddenly interrupted a polite afternoon tea by suggesting group sex.

Our friends didn't know how to react. "Lovely to hear from you," one reply read, avoiding any mention of our proposal. "Hope to see you soon."

Okay, maybe we should have eased into it more.

Others picked up on the architecture but not so much on the community. "Really interesting idea. We might consider it when we can't manage the stairs any more."

Okay, maybe we could have explained that part better. It's not about the stairs.

Barring the unforeseen, each of us has decades of healthy living ahead of us. We don't yet need any physical accommodations to our living space. So, why now? Why not wait until the stairs are too much for us? Simply put, it takes time to grow old together; it takes time to form community.

We have seen parents and older friends reluctantly accept the move into a retirement house full of strangers when they felt there was no other choice. But hanging on until there's no choice can become a trap.

I recently heard about an elderly couple still living independently while coping with disabilities. He's blind, she's beginning to show signs of dementia. Together, they are fine: She can see where they are, he can remember why they're there. But their independence is precarious. If either one were incapacitated, neither could function alone.

We are choosing to form community now, while we can still run up a flight of stairs, so that later, when our steps are more tentative, we will have friends within reach.

Of course, we also have our share of the baby-boomer attitude that says, if you don't like the choices on offer, demand something else. Not happy with retirement homes? Fine, we'll reinvent them for ourselves.

However, this is not truly new, it's a modern variation of the extended family that was common a few generations ago. It's a bit countercultural, in the face of the North American ideal of independence. We're okay with that. We have come to see interdependence as more desirable.

So, we're continuing to explore the idea and have created a Facebook page, [@CohousingForCreativeAging](https://www.facebook.com/CohousingForCreativeAging), in the hope of expanding the conversation - and, perhaps, the community.



There's community and consensus. But it's no commune

A small movement with an ungainly name, cohousing is appealing to more people of retirement age - and younger - who no longer want to be isolated.

Tom Verde, The Independent

Moving into a new house that's roughly a 90-second walk from that of your parents may not be the ideal living condition for most adults - in fact, for nine years that familial proximity provided most of the plot lines and barbed jokes of the TV comedy *Everybody Loves Raymond* - but that's what drew Ben Brock Johnson, 37, to Amherst, Massachusetts.

In December, Ben, his wife and their newborn twins moved to a two-story, three-bedroom house in the Pioneer Valley Cohousing Community 120 yards from his parents, Jane and Kit Johnson.

"The house is probably the furthest away from my parents that it could be and still be within the community," Ben Johnson says. "So there's a nice buffer zone there."

The 32-unit development on 23 acres of farmland is designed to encourage a cross section of people - young, old and in between - to live together in a village-like setting. That means more opportunities for Ben's parents to see and care for their grandchildren, while still having their privacy.

"We did talk about boundaries, but that aside we are thrilled to have Ben nearby," says Jane Johnson, 74, a retired librarian from Stonington, Connecticut, who moved to Pioneer Valley with Kit, also 74, in 2013.

Pioneer Valley is one of 165 cohousing communities in the US, with another 140 in the planning stages, according to the Cohousing Association of the United States. Most of these intentional communities are multigenerational, while a growing number are either predominantly or exclusively occupied by older residents. People own their own homes and can sell them on the open market. Residents pay into a fund to maintain facilities and



collectively agree on how they should be used. Some, like Pioneer Valley, are rural. Others are suburban, and even urban.



Shared space: residents of Amherst community gather in their common house

"A lot of cohousing is out in rural areas, but we wanted to be in the city to be near things," says Janet Boys, 68, of Denver. She and her husband, Don McGuire, 73, left Philadelphia in August to move into the Aria Cohousing Community, a former convent close to Regis University in Colorado's capital. The convent's dwindling community of seven nuns vacated the building when they could no longer maintain it, said Aria's developer, Susan Powers of Urban Ventures LLC in Denver. The initial group of residents, who in 2013 expressed interest in

transforming the building into a cohousing community, had a bit in common with the previous tenants.

"They were a group of single women, empty-nesters, who each lived in a single-family home and didn't want to live alone anymore," Powers says. Aria, which opened in August, now includes men and residents of every age.

The self-determination of Aria's founding residents is a hallmark of cohousing, along with clusters of homes or living spaces gathered around shared public areas.

The heart of each community is the common house, or a space, where group meals are offered once or twice a week, together with activities and events. Houses are connected by pathways. Instead of a lawnmower in every garage, there often are no attached garages. Cars are exiled to peripheral parking areas, while a single, shared lawnmower suits the needs of everyone.

The common house is also where residents gather to make decisions about governance. Cohousing communities are most commonly set up as homeowners' associations, with



Dig in: members of the Aria community work on their garden together (Aria Denver)



residents adhering to legally binding bylaws. Yet with cohousing, there is one critical difference.

"We are our own board, since most cohousing communities operate by consensus," says Karin Hoskin, executive director of the Cohousing Association of the United States and a resident of Wild Sage, a cohousing community in Boulder, Colorado. Though typically not required, residents are expected, or at least encouraged, to attend the group dinners and pitch in where they feel most comfortable: maintaining the grounds, for example. When it comes to finalising decisions about maintaining common areas, or questions like noise levels in public spaces, the entire community must agree. The objective, Hoskin says, is to regain a lost sense of community.

"I know all of my neighbours," she says. "If I need to borrow some eggs, I know which houses I can go to where they'll probably have eggs. If they're not home, there is a good chance I'll have a key to their house. It's really reminiscent of old-fashioned neighbourhoods."



Feed into: communal dining in Copenhagen
(Lange Eng Cohousing Community)

Cohousing can be traced to Copenhagen, Denmark, where the first "living communities", or bofaellesskaber, opened in 1970. A decade later, two architecture students, Charles Durrett and Kathryn McCamant, were on a year abroad at the University of Copenhagen. During Durrett's daily commute through mundane suburbs, he noticed one complex that stood out.

"People in this one development were always out there talking to each other, sitting at picnic tables

drinking tea. There were children running from house to house, and people coming and going to this building, the common house, where nobody lived and apparently everybody lived," he recalls.

Durrett and McCamant later married and, in 1984, returned to Denmark to learn more about the concept. In 1988, they self-published a book on the topic, and three years later built America's first cohousing community, Muir Commons, in Davis, California. Since then, their Nevada City, California, firm, McCamant & Durrett Architects: The Cohousing Company, has designed 55 cohousing communities across the US, with more in development.



The momentum for cohousing has been growing. The National Building Museum in Washington notes the recent “boom in cohousing communities nationwide” in a current exhibition. One reason for the boom is that cohousing construction is seen as a good investment, says Richard Jenkins, director of social impact initiatives at the National Cooperative Bank, a Washington lender that finances cohousing projects.

Sixty-two percent of people polled in a Cohousing Research Network survey last spring said sale prices of cohousing units in their communities have been rising, according to an analyst for the network, Angela Sanguinetti. But substantial down payments are not always required for prospective residents. Many developments offer units eligible for Federal Housing Administration loans.

“I’ve seen some terrific examples of cohousing developments that incorporate a number of low-income units, as many as 20 to 40 per cent,” Jenkins said.

Still, there are those for whom cohousing might not work.

“Some people feel that cohousing is too much togetherness,” says social scientist Bella DePaulo, who wrote about cohousing in her book *How We Live Now: Redefining Home and Family in the 21st Century*. The model is also not for those who bristle at the self-governing element, she adds. Then there is cohousing’s association with hippies.

“People immediately think communes, but cohousing is not a commune where everyone lives under one roof,” DePaulo says.

For ageing hippies and baby boomers, however, dedicated cohousing for older people offers an alternative to a retirement home.

“It’s definitely a good ageing-in-place or downsizing model for people in their fifties and early sixties who still have quite a bit of life ahead of them but want to move out of the old family house because they want less maintenance,” says Jim Leach, 77, a founder of Silver Sage Village, a cohousing community of mostly old folk in Boulder.

Community living can also be a balm for the documented isolation and loneliness plaguing older Americans, which researchers say threatens public health. According to a 2010 AARP survey, social networks ease the loneliness that can follow the loss of a spouse or family members moving, Karin Hoskin says.

“People aren’t staying where they grew up anymore,” she adds, “and a huge trend among seniors is that they don’t have their siblings or their kids around them because they’ve gone away to university or moved out of state for a job. Living in a community can help people feel connected.”



Urban kibbutzim plant seeds for improving city life

The old socialist model gets a modern twist as intentional communities make educational and social inroads in underprivileged Israeli neighborhoods.

Abigail Klein Leichman, Israel 21c



Guy Gardi, center, speaking at an event in the community garden built by members of Kibbutz Beit Yisrael for local residents. Photo: courtesy

Guy Gardi, a founding member of 25-year-old urban Kibbutz Beit Yisrael in the southern Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo Aleph, doesn't consider himself a pioneer like the founders of the nearly 100-year-old Kibbutz Ein Harod in the Jezreel Valley, where he grew up.

Those original egalitarian communes (kibbutz means "gathering" or "collective") struggled to establish fertile farms in long-barren soil, while today's urban kibbutz is an intentional

community working to improve quality of life and education in underserved neighborhoods. It's a different kind of pioneering.

"The unique idea of an urban kibbutz is to take the old idea of a kibbutz – a group of people living together and sharing their resources to help each other accomplish a mission – and apply it to a social environment rather than an agricultural environment," explains Gardi.

Five secular and religious families started Kibbutz Beit Yisrael in 1993. They moved into a former immigrant absorption center in a rundown part of Gilo and extended a hand to residents of the surrounding public-housing projects.

"We're working with amazing people who happen to have a lot of troubles. To understand them we have to live among them, respect them and build trust. The connection has to influence both sides," Gardi says. "Of all the things I do, the most important is just to live there and be a caring friend and neighbor."

Members founded the Kvutzat Reut nonprofit as a vehicle to promote social action and religious pluralism in Gilo Aleph.

Kvutzat Reut-Kibbutz Beit Yisrael offers informal education programs for all ages; revitalizes public preschools and elementary schools with declining enrollment; and founded Mechinat Beit Yisrael, a pre-army leadership, study and local volunteering program that attracts students from Israel and abroad.

"Kibbutz Beit Yisrael was one of the first to invent this model and a lot of people have come here to learn about it in the past 25 years," says longtime member Omer Lefkowitz. "Israel is full of people looking for vision, for a life of meaning. Mission-driven communities give them a way to do that."

A new social movement

Nomika Zion, founder of urban Kibbutz Migvan in the blue-collar southern town of Sderot, estimates that more than 200 urban kibbutzim or similar intentional communities exist across Israel. More are springing up all the time.

"It's a new social movement," she says.

This movement includes Garin Torani communities of religious young families; student volunteer villages of the grassroots Ayalim Association in the Negev and Galilee; and non-Jewish (including Druze) intentional communities.

"What they have in common is that they are extremely involved in



Nomika Zion, founder of urban Kibbutz Migvan in

their city or town's social welfare and education," Zion says. "Most don't have a sharing economy like classic kibbutzim but they often work and live together."

Zion frequently hosts foreign visitors, reporters and university students wishing to understand the phenomenon. She starts with her own story as a third-generation kibbutznik.

"Israel is full of people looking for vision, for a life of meaning. Mission-driven communities give them a way to do that."

"I was raised on social values of equality, but nearby there was a development town of North African immigrants we never met. I wanted to break down the metaphorical wall," Zion says. "I wanted to bring the kibbutz into the city and share my life with people of different backgrounds, and try to build relationships not based on patronizing anyone."

Six young pioneers followed Zion to Sderot in 1987. At that time, many children of the town's original Moroccan immigrants were growing up and taking leadership roles to improve life in Sderot.

"There were exciting changes happening and we wanted to be part of that," says Zion. "When we started we got no support from the Kibbutz Movement or the government. But we wanted to create a new kind of communal model in Israel."

Kibbutz Migvan members lived in public housing for 14 years before buying land and building their own houses and community center.



Members of Kibbutz Migvan built their own neighborhood in the city of Sderot.

They established the first high-tech company in Sderot. The owners from the kibbutz and the workers from town earned equal salaries and made management decisions democratically.

In 1994, they founded the Gvanim

Association to provide equal employment and education opportunities for Israelis with special needs. In 2008, they built houses for about 20 people with physical disabilities to live among them.

Today, the high-tech company and Gvanim are independently run. Many of Kibbutz Migvan's 100 members are involved in these enterprises but are free to work wherever they choose.

Without sacrificing shared activities such as meals, childcare, holiday celebrations and educational seminars, the economic and social structure has become more flexible just as it has on many of the 250 traditional kibbutzim across Israel.

"Over the years many families joined us but didn't want to have a shared economy, so today only six families are in that shared economy and the rest are not," Zion explains. "Everyone is very close to one another despite their differences. People contribute in different ways."

A similar shift has taken place at Kibbutz Beit Yisrael in Jerusalem. Its 10 core families are supplemented by an economically independent group of 60 to 80 families who help carry out Kvutzat Reut's programs. Mechinat Beit Yisrael currently has 60 men and women in the first year and 25 in the second year.



Four generations of the Simon family, all Kibbutz Beit Yisrael members, on the steps of their communal home in Jerusalem.

Lefkowitz, now 40, graduated from the first class of Mechinat Beit Yisrael and came back after the army in 2002 to join the urban kibbutz. He teaches at the academy and directs the activities of alumni who have so far started six similar urban kibbutzim around Israel.

Many of the at-risk neighborhood kids who benefited from Kvutzat Reut programs also come back after the army and become partners in improving the neighborhood.

"The social projects we do touch more and more people," Lefkowitz says. "It's not a project; it's life. You need people that see it as a mission."

For stressed African migrants in Israel, collective farms offer a refuge

A government plan to expel thousands of African refugees elicited an emotional response from many Israeli Jews – and the idea that kibbutz members could host at-risk families.

Dina Kraft, CS Monitor

Under a canopy of jacaranda and eucalyptus trees, Rowha Dabrazion, an Eritrean asylum seeker, pushes her one-year-old daughter in a crib on wheels, a fixture of kibbutz life. Her five-year-old flashes a triumphant smile, enjoying her perch on the back of a kibbutz member's bicycle.

It's been a week since she arrived here to this lush cooperative community along the shores of the Mediterranean, midway between Tel Aviv and Haifa. And the relief is beginning to set in that she is no longer one step away from homelessness.

Just one month ago her husband left her and the children. She had quit her job cleaning to care for her baby daughter, and she found herself with no income and no idea where the money would come from to cover rent and expenses.

Then Ms. Dabrazion got word that a kibbutz would take in her and her children as part of a new program in which kibbutzim across Israel are volunteering to take in the highest risk cases of refugee families. Most such families are headed by single mothers struggling with dire poverty in Tel Aviv, where the majority of asylum seekers live. The program offers them housing, health care, education for their children, and "adoptive families" for social support.

"I feel better, like I can breathe. Every day my mind would race and wonder what would be," she says, sitting in the living room of Yael Eisner, a kibbutz member who, along with her husband, volunteered to host, or "adopt" Dabrazion and her children.

While Dabrazion talks about her life as an asylum seeker in Israel – she crossed the Sinai Desert, partially on foot, to get here seven years ago – her younger daughter fidgets in her lap. "Come to *savta*," (Hebrew for grandmother), Ms. Eisner says, sweeping the little girl into her arms. As



Rowha continues, recounting some of the harrowing moments in Eritrea that led her to seek asylum in Israel, Eisner takes the girls to visit the kibbutz cowshed.

Outrage at official policy

So far twelve asylum-seeking families have been placed on kibbutzim, and the goal is that 100 families will be hosted by the end of the year. The grassroots initiative was undertaken by individual members within the national kibbutz movement. They were first mobilized to help refugees in Israel early this year, outraged by government plans for a mass expulsion of asylum seekers, whom officials referred to as "infiltrators."



Ada Gross (l.), the kibbutz volunteer coordinating the resettlement effort of refugees on Kibbutz Maagan Michael, with Yael Eisner, who has 'adopted' one of the families.

The plan was to deport the asylum seekers, most of them from Eritrea and Sudan, to third-party countries in Africa. Those expulsion plans were at least temporarily thwarted, but the fate and legal status of the asylum seekers, who number some 38,000, remains uncertain. A decision was made by some kibbutzim to host families temporarily, for 12 to 18 months, in hopes of providing them and their children with stability and support during a desperate time in their lives.

"Even though the refugees have been here for as long as 12 years, the expulsion order woke up people in a way that is hard to describe," says Avi Ofer, a member of nearby Kibbutz Maanit who is overseeing the effort. "I'm more proud to be Israeli now. There are people who really are there to help."

"The plan is to help first those considered high-risk emotionally and economically," Mr. Ofer says. "There are those who have resorted to prostitution or feel so on the brink of despair that they would take the government offer (a one-time payment of \$3,500) to go to Rwanda," a country Israel has encouraged asylum seekers to go to. Testimonies of migrants who have gone, however, warn of bleak consequences – of being robbed of the payments and even of human trafficking and death as the migrants continue on toward Europe.

The kibbutzim, originally founded as socialist agricultural collective communities in the days preceding Israeli statehood, have a tradition of taking in people in distress, beginning with Jewish children orphaned during the Holocaust. Ofer's own mother was one of them. In more

recent years, kibbutzim have temporarily taken in refugees from Kosovo and immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

'I too could have been a refugee'

Although the kibbutzim themselves are initially covering the cost of hosting the families, to make the effort sustainable they are seeking sponsors.

The Consortium for Israel and the Asylum Seekers, an umbrella group of activists working on behalf of the asylum seekers has launched what they are calling the Kibbutz Resettlement sponsorship initiative to support the work of the kibbutz movement.

Eisner, a nurse, recently volunteered at an Israeli medical clinic in Serbia at a refugee camp for those fleeing Syria and Iraq.

"That is where the story of refugees came into my heart. It was there I understood I too could have been a refugee. That they are like me with homes, careers, and communities, but they lost everything," she says.

"All of us need to do something to help. And I have everything I need in life, a family, money, a kibbutz, a normal country even if I don't like the government," she adds as her one-year-old "adopted" granddaughter naps next to her. "So how can I be quiet and do nothing? And when the story of [the proposed] expulsion began, I thought, how can we as Jews do this?"

'You can laugh here'

Dabrazion enters her one-room apartment with her daughters. She had just stopped at the sprawling communal dining room with its views of the sea and multiple food stations offering fresh salad fixings, watermelon slices, hot meals, and once a week even sushi.

In her tiny kitchen, a cooking pan overwhelms a corner of the counter used to make traditional injera bread.

"On the way to the kibbutz, I was fearful, wondering 'where am I going?' but when I arrived and saw how I was welcomed by people with all their hearts, I saw that things are good for us here," she says.

She says in Tel Aviv she was concerned about the role-reversal she saw in her older daughter, who was constantly tending to and worrying about her.

"She now says, 'Mommy, we have a grandma and grandpa now. We go to the pool here, we go to the sea. You can laugh here.' "



The Idea of Community in the Franziskusgemeinschaft

The Franziskusgemeinschaft (Franziskus community) is a Roman Catholic fellowship open to members of all Christian denominations, based on collective life in Pinkafeld, Austria, 100 km. South of Vienna. The community, founded in 1981, is named after St. Francis, ~1182 - 1226, patron saint of animals and the natural environment. It publishes a biannual magazine, Francesco. The two following articles appeared in Francesco 50 and deal with gratitude for community as a divine gift as understood by two members of the collective. The articles have been translated from the German by Susan Kennedy and Michael Livni.

It Began in Lourdes: Community Life—a Gift

Sister Heidi Flammer, Franziskus Community, Pinkafeld

I can still see myself sitting in my tent in Lourdes*, filled with a deep feeling of gratitude for the experiences on the bike pilgrimage and arrival at my destination. "Til my dying day I will be grateful to Brother Fritz (the initiator of the pilgrimage)," I thought, without knowing that I would later live with him in a community. Brother Fritz was in fact the founder of the Franziskus Community.

And how blessed was I and were we all in living in this community!

Where should I direct my attention first?

I will start with the wonderful people that I was able to get to know here. I think initially of my brothers and sisters who gave up good jobs, sold everything, and began a communal life here based on the Gospels.

Our friendly and generous neighbors graced our very first winter with hay for our cow, of which we had far too little. They helped us later too, in deed and in advice. A Nicholas (Christmas) gift from some of the Pinkafeld women is also unforgettable: hand-knitted sheep's wool socks for each of us. And now I think of our friends, who for Christmas and on other occasions gave us chocolate, cookies and wine, and not only that, we also received dishes and tools and even money for cinema tickets and invitations to concerts. But I don't only think of my friends in



terms of their gifts, but for the admirable commitment they manifest in their daily lives modeling the Christian life.

Our guests, whether we knew them already or they wanted to get to know us, graced us with hands-on help in building our houses and sewage treatment plant. Certain parts of the construction will always be linked with specific names. For example, there is a "3 Priests' Stairway" because 3 priests helped lay the concrete. But daily we encountered and encounter help in hay-making, in forest and garden work, or in other tasks that happen to crop up.

We got to know our first African chieftain at Epiphany** of the year 1986; friendships followed with many dedicated people, who supported their disadvantaged brothers and sisters. Thus connections were made with Nigeria, Tunisia, Central and South America, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, but also Bosnia and Moldavia etc. There's a big difference between reading the news or watching television and meeting people from these countries personally. And the generosity with which our projects are supported is most touching.

I am incredibly grateful for the privilege of meeting people over and over again who embody brotherly love, as well as for the experiences in communal living with the sisters and brothers, through which we got to know each other and others better.

An additional gift of communal living is the wonderful landscape in which we have made our home. It radiates calm and it is not only us, but our guests too, who value peace and quiet.

Our way of life of communal work and celebration naturally contributes to an inner contentment and gratitude. I don't intend to make any secret of the fact that these feelings can sometimes bubble to the surface.

Although there is more to mention, I want to conclude with the biggest gift: the belief in a benevolent Father in Heaven to whom all this is owed.

Our thrice daily prayer times give us the opportunity to recall in song or in silent prayer the gifts with which we have been blessed in life or on a particular day. To recollect in gratitude also makes one happy.

***Lourdes:** Major Catholic pilgrimage site in the South of France where an apparition of the Virgin Mary appeared before Bernadette Soubiros in 1858.

****Epiphany:** Christian festival, January 6, showing the new-born Jesus to the Magi, three wise men of the East (Matthew 2: 1-2).



A Grateful Look Back at the Day of our Founding

Brother Martin Treipl. Franziskus Community, Pinkafeld

I was an invitee at the foundation speech on 21.8.1981.

The "Lebensversuch Teilen" (trying to share life) group had been meeting each month for a year over a weekend, and Brother Fritz had requested that I celebrate Holy Mass with the group.

This monthly meeting was marked by prayer, Bible and the celebration of the Eucharist.* This impressed me deeply. People were gathered together in a room which served as a chapel and Brother Fritz would repeatedly open the Bible. Acts 2/44-46 was central for us ("All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts") and particularly the question: "Why are we not living that?"

When the group was sitting together in the so-called Christmas tree room on 21.8.1981, Beppo posed the decisive question: "When are we starting?" and then he added, "Or you won't see me again".



Community residence. Photo: courtesy Francesco.

When one by one the group answered, it became clear that eight were prepared to give up their careers and to live somewhere in a community. A place still had to be found. How living together would work out on a practical level, no-one had a concrete idea.

I couldn't imagine such a thing and answered: "I am a priest and will remain one. If you want me to celebrate Holy Mass with you, I will."

After the decision we went into the chapel. The Bible was open at the Exodus from Egypt. Brother Fritz asked me: If the Lord was with the People of Israel in their wandering in the



wilderness, can the Lord also be with us in the Eucharist* and we have it in turns in our houses? I reflected briefly and answered: "If the Lord is treated with reverence in the house, it is surely preferable to Him, than to be locked in an empty church." Shortly after that there was the so-called "Wandering Eucharist" for the burgeoning Franziskus Community.



Members of the Franziskus community. Photo: courtesy Franceso.

The thing that marks my personal life and our communal life to this day is the triad, our roots in prayer, Bible and Eucharist. The melody created by community, a simple way of life, care of the poor, living in nature and ecological awareness are brought into harmony in this triad.

When visiting the Franziskus Community in Ndjeka/Congo I discovered to my pleasure that these roots are doing well and have produced shoots of caring for the poor and communal work. Nsambi losaka! God be Blessed!

Acts 2:44-46 King James Version (King James Version)

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.

*Eucharist (Holy Communion): A ceremony of identification with Jesus where those in the church community partake of bread (representing the body of Jesus) and wine (representing the blood of Jesus).



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