



# intentional communities



## what are they?

There are lots of ways to do it, from shared houses to communes, but it's about *intentional* communities - groups of people who have come together intentionally to share various aspects of their lives; the extent of the sharing depends on the community.

Communal living groups sometimes call themselves communes, eco-villages, co-housing groups, or alternative communities. They can be very interesting, satisfying, healthy and fun places to live, and there are many different kinds. Some have a shared philosophy, which could be religious, spiritual, environmental, political, or based on ideas around child-care, diet or other practical things. Often there is no unifying philosophy except a desire to live in community.

There are differences as regards organisation too. Some are very communal, some are loose-knit; some share income, some don't; some share meals, some don't; some share one big house, some have separate houses around the property; some are urban, some are rural; some require new members to have capital, some you can just join and start paying rent; some are registered housing co-ops, some are land trusts, some are privately owned.

Co-housing is a type of communal living where certain spaces (e.g. gardens, living rooms, laundry rooms etc.) are shared, but members have their own private homes. There is also the germ of a movement towards new rural self-build communities, such as Lammas (Pembrokeshire) and the Ecological Land Co-op.

**History:** there have been, and still are, many traditional and tribal groups in which people live communally, but the first known example of intentional communal living was the Essenes, on the shores of the Dead Sea over 2000 years ago. Since then, famous examples include the Diggers, religious groups like the Shakers (who are no



*Springhill Cohousing in Stroud - the UK's first new-build cohousing scheme.*

longer around), Hutterites, Mennonites and Amish (who are), and the 19th century utopian communities of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier. Mexico (Ejido), Israel (Kibbutz) and Tanzania (Ujamaa) introduced (or in the case of Ejido, re-introduced) large-scale intentional communal systems in the 20th century; and China (People's Communes) and Russia (Kolkhoz) introduced decidedly unintentional ones.

There was a wave of hippie commune formation in the late 60s & 70s, some of which are still around. Longevity involves solid structures when it comes to legal and financial matters, along with responsibility when it comes to work and membership. There's not so much tie-dye or free love around nowadays (you'd probably find more in the suburbs), although environmental and social concerns are still important.

## what are the benefits?

**Personal:** counters the loneliness and alienation that many people experience in modern consumer society; personal development from learning how to live closely with other people; fun; good places to gain skills – practical, social, accounting, cooking for large numbers, caring for animals, gardening, meetings, running courses, chainsaws, building maintenance etc.; good places to grow old – always useful things to do, experience is valued, always company.

**Environmental:** shared resources - such as laundry and kitchen facilities, vehicles and tools; members can produce a lot of their own (organic) food and grow their own space-heating fuel in the form of firewood; it may be easier to experiment with the environmentally-friendly facilities and activities found on our other factsheets; members and visitors can be educated about those facilities; can ensure that chemicals are not used on the land, and that wildlife and habitats are



*Communities are great places to bring up kids - or to be a kid.*

## intentional communities



lowimpact.org

protected; internal recycling in the form of books, clothes, CDs, furniture etc.

**financial:** can provide affordable housing; can share equipment like lawn-mowers, washing machines etc.; can buy consumables in bulk.

**kids:** great places for kids to grow up - other kids to play with, lots of different adult input, shared toys, lots of space; good for parents too - shared childcare, safety.

## what can I do?

If you're interested in living communally, think about what kind of community would suit you best, and do some research about what kinds of communities are out there. It doesn't matter in which order you do this - you might find a community that you really like, maybe because of the people living there, that you wouldn't have initially thought was right for you.

How many people would you like to live with, ideally? Would you prefer a large community with lots going on, or a small, intimate group, more like a family? How much are you happy sharing (meals, bathrooms, gardens, income)? What part of the country, or the world, would you like to live in, and in a rural or urban location? Are you looking for a place with a specific philosophy, or a particular age group, focused on practical work, or personal development, or with no focus?

Read more about communal living, and/or attend a course (see [lowimpact.org/communal](http://lowimpact.org/communal)). See [diggersanddreamers.org.uk/index.php?one=faq&two=faq](http://diggersanddreamers.org.uk/index.php?one=faq&two=faq) for an interesting FAQ page for people thinking of joining a community. Making decisions and getting along together are crucial in a community. See [lowimpact.org/people](http://lowimpact.org/people) for books and websites about conflict resolution and consensus decision-making. Consensus isn't the only decision-making process that works for communities, but it often works well - you don't want a group splitting into factions, and it's not brilliant to have members who aren't on board with a decision that's been made.

There are directories of communities in the UK, in Europe, in North America and the world - see [lowimpact.org/communal](http://lowimpact.org/communal). Some communities require you to buy a share of the property, or to buy a unit. Others don't require any money at all - you just start paying rent. Most communities welcome visitors, either paying or working. Many have regular visitor days. An excellent way to visit

communities is by joining WWOOF - see [lowimpact.org/wwof](http://lowimpact.org/wwof). And here's an article on the etiquette of visiting communities - [ic.org/wiki/visit-intentional-community](http://ic.org/wiki/visit-intentional-community). Never just turn up at a community, as they are people's homes; always write or call to arrange a visit first.

You may have a strong desire to start a community - maybe because there isn't one in the area you want to live in; maybe because you are part of a group of friends who would like to do it; or maybe you have a new idea on how a community could be. It may be worth living in an existing community first, to get a feel for how they work. See [thefec.org/start](http://thefec.org/start) for a step-by-step guide to starting a community, by the Federation of Egalitarian Communities.

## resources

- see [lowimpact.org/intentional-communities](http://lowimpact.org/intentional-communities) for info, links, courses, magazines & books, including:
- Fellowship for Intentional Community, *Communities Directory*
- Jonathan Dawson, *Ecovillages*
- Diggers & Dreamers, *Cohousing in Britain*
- National CLT Network, *the Community Land Trust Handbook*
- Chris Coates, *Communes Britannica*
- [diggersanddreamers.org.uk](http://diggersanddreamers.org.uk) - UK directory
- [ic.org](http://ic.org) - international directory
- [ic.org/icsa/efal.html](http://ic.org/icsa/efal.html) - research into communal living, past and present
- <http://lammas.org.uk> - group in Wales challenging the planning system to allow new self-build communities



*Lammas in Pembrokeshire - successfully challenged the planning system to allow a new self-build community.*

Feel free to upload, print and distribute this sheet as you see fit. 220+ topics on our website, each with introduction, books, courses, products, services, magazines, links, advice, articles, videos and tutorials. Let's build a sustainable, non-corporate system.

[facebook.com/lowimpactorg](https://facebook.com/lowimpactorg)

[Lowimpact.org](http://Lowimpact.org)

[twitter.com/lowimpactorg](https://twitter.com/lowimpactorg)

Registered in England. Company Ltd. by Guarantee no: 420502