Attributes of a Thriving Community

Community has made everything in my life easier and has allowed me to have huge dreams, inconceivable without community. The skills I've learned, practical and human, seem infinite. My love for humanity has thrived and expanded. Nothing about community has been easy, but it all has been fun.

— Patch Adams

Outline

1. Case Study: ElderSpirit Community
2. Lessons Learned
3. What Makes Communities Successful?
4. Summary

1. Case Study: ElderSpirit Community

ElderSpirit Community (ESC) is essentially a community of mutual support and late-life spirituality that has come to fruition in a mixed-income, co-housing neighborhood in Abingdon, Virginia.[1]

— The ElderSpirit Community was established in 2006 as one of the first elder co-housing communities in the United States.

— The founders of ESC are members of a community service and action group called the Federation of Communities in Service (FOCIS), which has been in existence since 1967.[2]

— ESC has 33 residents

[1] http://www.elderspirit.net

[2] https://github.com/Henryvw/eruditus/blob/master/archive/eruditus_04/src/aging_in_a_community_of_mutual_support.pdf

1. Case Study: ElderSpirit Community

What makes the ElderSpirit community?

— To live in a community of diverse spiritual paths.

— To give and receive support in relationship with neighbors in community.

— To belong to a community who make the decisions on how they will live together.

— To encourage each other to live simply and care for the earth.

The population older than 65 years will double by 2030, but the population of traditional caregivers (women between 25 to 50 years) will increase only slightly during this period (Day, 1996), and the baby boomer generation is more likely than past generations to have only one or no children (National Center for Health Statistics, 2005)[3]

[3] https://github.com/Henryvw/eruditus/blob/master/archive/eruditus_04/src/
aging_in_a_community_of_mutual_support.pdf

2. Lessons Learned[4]

— residents should be in agreement about their expectations toward mutual support and other shared values. It's best for them to sign an agreement to participate with some sort of consequence - even if minimal - if they fail to comply

— successful mutual support model: give help if needed, ask for help when needed, accept help. Take care of yourself

— provide all residents with training for consensus decision making if that is what you chose

— promote open discussion and consider having something like a clearning house if differences in opinions arise

— if mutual support is a concept, ask every member to declare a care coordinator to help organize when help is needed

— consider hiring outside help for work members cannot or do not want to do

— allow prospective residents to stay with the community for a week up to a month to see how they fit inside the community before they make the move

— be patient and keep a positive attitude

[4] https://github.com/Henryvw/eruditus/blob/master/archive/eruditus_04/src/lessons_learned_from_a_new_elder_cohousing_community.pdf

2. Lessons Learned - Documents[5]

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I respect other spiritual paths and do not hold mine as the only one.			
I have or would like to have a regular spiritual practice.			
I try to be as physically active as my health allows.			
I am interested in learning new things.			
I value a sense of community with others.			
I would like to participate in some group activities.			
I am willing to give some time to ESC work and responsibilities.			
I have a history of volunteer work and might like to continue.			
I would like to give and receive caring support as I age.			
I would like to further develop my gifts and talents and encourage others to develop theirs.			
I am open to change.			
I appreciate diversity in a community.			
I am willing to face the mysteries of aging and death.			

[5] http://www.elderspirit.net/pages/vision.html

2. Lessons Learned - Documents[6]

Inner Work	Caring for Oneself	Mutual Support	Community Service	Reverence for Creation
Seeking meaning in life Seeking Spirit in small and large experiences Willingness to face the mystery of death Freedom of religion Learning lessons from life	Physical health Mental health Kindness to self; Forgiveness of others. Taking oneself with lightness & laughter Connecting with family and friends Speaking your truth	Face- to- face relationships Shared Meals Celebrations Helping care for the ill and dying Respect for each other's history and traditions	Kindness toward others Compassion toward those in need Social awareness and action	Respectful relationship with nature Less emphasis on materialism/ consumerism Awareness of the Beauty of the Earth Caring for animals, trees and plants
Interactive relationship with a Higher Power Regular spiritual practice, i.e.: Yoga, Prayer, Meditation, Stillness, Tai Chi, Respecting the practices of others	Aerobic exercises Outdoor activities: Gardening, Walking, Biking Mental exercise: Reading, Puzzles, Games. Ability to ask for help when needed Noticing losses: physical, mental and social Allowing oneself to grieve the losses	Birthday/holiday celebrations Attention to the needs of caregivers Listening well; clearly expressing oneself Giving and receiving support Asking for help when needed Avoiding the need to "fix" others	Attention to challenges of aging Volunteer work Involvement with neighborhood Civic responsibilities Seeking a just and loving world	Simple lifestyle Consideration for the environment in decisions & actions Companion animals Less reliance on cars Recycling Organic gardening, use of local foods

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ElderSpirit Community: Conceptual Model of Late Life Spirituality. ElderSpirit Community, Inc.

[6] https://github.com/Henryvw/eruditus/blob/master/ archive/eruditus_04/src/ aging_in_a_community_of_mutual_support.pdf

Eruditus #4 Jan/Feb 2018 Matthias Loker

3. What Makes Communities Successful?

1. Establishing fair and participatory communitcation

— What does your decision making process look like? (consensus, majority voting, multi-winner voting, sunset clause, mixed)

— Train members in whatever process you choose to make decisions

— How open can you communicate with one another?

— Can issues be voiced without being judged? (i.e., clearning house)

— How do members stay in the loop about each others lifes? (i.e., check-ins, storytelling sessions)

3. What Makes Communities Successful?

2. Having a clearly defined vision

— Why are you coming together as a community?

— What are some of the core values that you believe in?

— How do you envision the community in 5 years from now?

3. What Makes Communities Successful?

3. Having a sound structure and good documents

— Good documents make good friends

— Have a process that keeps people accountable for community committments

— Write down agreements

— Have a process that allows the community to self improve and experiment

— How do you track work committments for the community? (i.e. internal time bank system)

3. What Makes Communities Successful?

4. Setting criteria for new members

— A single "toxic" member can ruin a group of 10 people

— How are you vetting new members? (questionnaires, provisional membership, membership fees)

— How do you deal with a member that "turns" toxic?

3. What Makes Communities Successful?

5. Being realistic about challenges and expectations

— Building a community is hard

— What legal issues might come up with land purchases?

— Can everybody carry the financial costs of being a member? (If not, can you help them?)

— Are there similar communtities you can learn from?

— Are you planning on turning a profit?

4. Summary

Attributes of a thriving community:

1. Fair and participatory communitcation
2. Clearly defined vision
3. Sound structure and good documents
4. Criteria for new members
5. Realistic about challenges and expectations

It's much easier to get solitude in the midst of community than to get community in the midst of solitude

— Tom Moench