

Embodying Collective Transformation Report

*Learnings from a 3-month experiment in creating
conscious community*

Karl Steyaert, Jocelyn Ames, Catherine Tran, Nadine Helm

Embodying Collective Transformation Report

Learnings from a 3-month experiment in creating conscious community

Karl Steyaert, Jocelyn Ames, Catherine Tran, Nadine Helm

September 2024 – subject to revision. Latest version at <https://lifeitself.org/ect/>

Embodying Collective Transformation (ECT) was a 3-month experiment in creating a ‘conscious community’ or deliberately developmental space: an environment for conscious engagement in inner and relational development practices for systemic transformation. Designed and hosted by a 4-person team, it took place in Autumn 2022 at the Life Itself Praxis Hub in Bergerac, France. Over the course of the 3 months there were over 30 participants exploring how to live and work together, and to address the social and ecological challenges of our times.

The program combined a week-long, in-depth training in key practices followed by a three-week residency during which people could use and practice these skills through living together in community. This report details the design, implementation and learnings from this innovative program. The findings will interest both a wider audience interested in community and inner development, as well as specialists interested in the design and delivery of programs for cultivating inner capacities personally and collectively.

Developed as part of Life Itself’s program on conscious community and deliberately developmental spaces – <https://lifeitself.org/conscious-community>

Keywords: Ecology of Practices, Conscious Community, Deliberately Developmental Space, Deliberately Developmental Program, Inner Development, Inner Development Goals, Conscious Coliving, Bildung.

Supported by



EKSKĀRET



Session in the “Painting Room” (main meeting space) with Open Space board on the wall on the left



A moment of shared laughter in the garden



“Enlightenment Intensive” session
People take turns responding to a contemplative inquiry



Participants in a weekly session cleaning up a neighborhood public park

Executive Summary	5
Vision	8
Application Process	8
Program Structure	8
Initial intensive training week with key practices	9
Followed by 3 week community residency	10
Month-long structure with integration of training and coliving was a key design feature	10
Hosting Team: a base for design and delivery	10
Key Principles	11
Multi-level Developmental Approach: Personal, Interpersonal and Systemic	11
Multi-Dimensional Approach: with practices for waking up, cleaning up, growing up and showing up	12
Practical, Embodied Learning	12
Welcoming All Parts	12
Emotional Safety and Connection	13
Modeling Vulnerability	13
Key Practices	13
Nonviolent Communication	13
Internal Family Systems	14
Open Space Technology	14
Peer Learning Groups	15
Distributed Roles and Shared Leadership	15
Community Feedback and Decision-Making	16
Interpersonal Feedback	16
Practical Co-Living	16
Conflict Facilitation	17
Acknowledging Power and Privilege	17
Meditation	17
Physical Movement	17
Creative Expression	18
Testimonials	18
Challenges and Learnings	21
Conclusion	26
Appendix	27
Hosting Team	27
Conscious Communities, Deliberately Developmental Spaces	28
Program Design and Curriculum	29
Participants	31
Outcomes	32

Executive Summary

Embodying Collective Transformation (ECT) was a three-month experiment in creating and running a “Conscious Community” or “Deliberately Developmental Space” (DDS)¹. Each month of the program consisted of: a week-long, in-depth training in key practices, followed by a three-week residency during which people could use and practice these skills through living together in community.

The program took place from September to November 2022 at the Life Itself Praxis Hub in Bergerac, France. It was hosted by Karl Steyaert, Jocelyn Ames, Catherine Tran, and Nadine Helm. ECT was part of a broader conscious communities / deliberately developmental spaces initiative at Life Itself and was co-funded by Life Itself (Rufus Pollock) and Ekskäret Foundation (Tomas Bjorkman).

The vision of ECT was to experiment with creating more robust and whole-person developmental shifts — focusing on what is sometimes called “inner development” — than are possible with more conventional approaches to education, workshops and training. The intent was to bring together a relatively unique integration of features:

- **A multi-dimensional approach to personal and collective development** with training in a rich ecology of “inner development” practices to care for personal, interpersonal, and wider world wellbeing, from meditation and Internal Family Systems, to Nonviolent Communication and collective decision-making;
- An extended period of **co-living to support applied practice and embodied integration**, including shared cooking and homecare, as well as participants working on outside work/projects;
- **Structures to support participants’ belonging and agency**, notably forming small-group “pods” and the use of Open Space Technology;
- An intentional evolution from more unilateral leadership and facilitation of learning, to increasingly **shared leadership and self-organizing community**.

ECT sought to invite and support people to explore the question, "**How are we called to deepen our individual and collective capacity to care for all life?**"

This larger purpose involved three dimensions: supporting people to "**Thrive, Evolve, and Serve**":

- **Thrive:** to increase personal wellbeing

¹ <https://lifeitself.org/conscious-community/> and <https://developmentalspaces.org/>

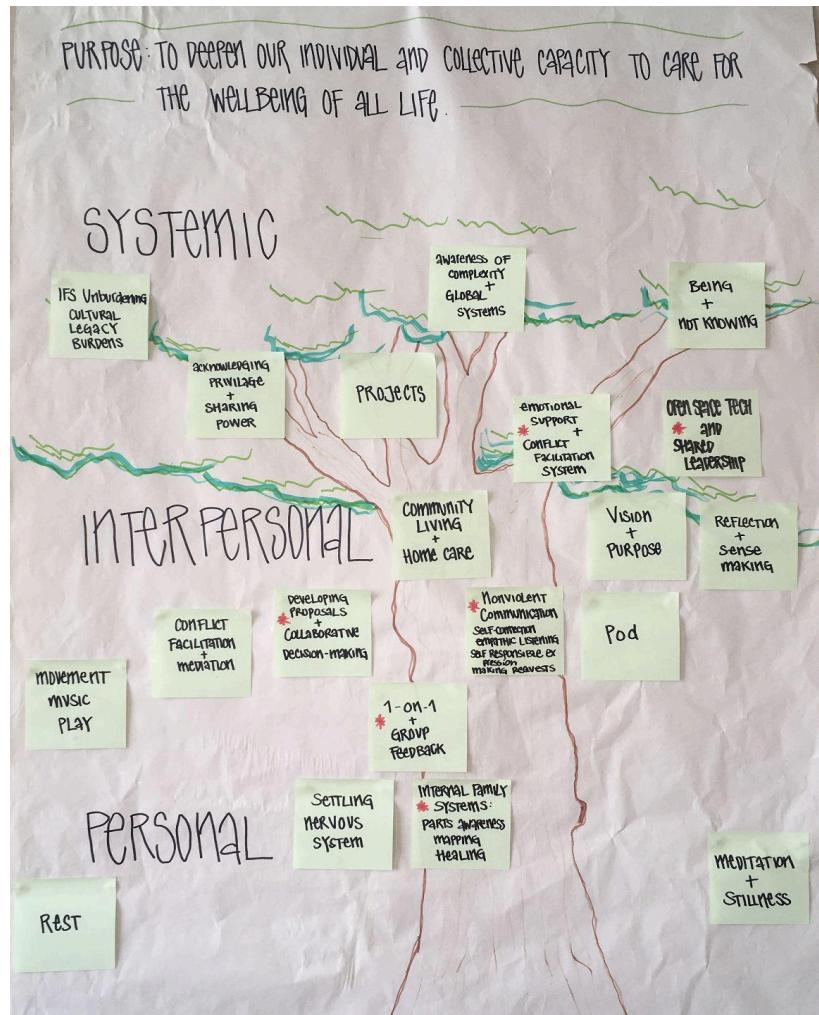
- **Evolve:** to evolve personally and collectively, for example to develop in capacities such as self-compassion, empathy for others, ability to navigate conflict, etc.
- **Serve:** ability to act in service to the wider world

The main text of the report covers:

- Essential features of the program design, including key principles and practices;
- A selection of participants' celebrations, naming ways in which they celebrated their deepening capacity to thrive, evolve, and serve in their lives and the world;
- Challenges and learnings from running the program, including exploring the considerable complexity of a highly diverse range of participants' backgrounds and expectations, and the inner and outer demands on the capacity of the container and hosting team given this complexity

In addition, the Appendix offers more information on:

- Deliberately Developmental Spaces
- The ECT application process
- Detailed schedule and curriculum
- Participants and impact of the program



“Tree” of Personal, Interpersonal & Systemic Development Practices

A multi-dimensional approach to personal and collective development was a key part of ECT and the conscious community / deliberately developmental spaces approach in general

Vision

How can I be a human presence that supports all other life to thrive?

– Pat McCabe, Diné (Navajo) Activist and Ceremonial Leader

The ECT training and residencies were intended to catalyze the whole-person and whole-system transformation required to face the depth of current intersecting social and ecological challenges facing humanity. In this way, the program was intentionally aligned with the Inner Development Goals (IDG)² initiative and other efforts to create Deliberately Developmental Spaces. (See Appendix for more on Deliberately Developmental Spaces.)

The aim of ECT was to support participants, and the hosting team themselves, to “Thrive, Evolve, and Serve”:

- Thrive: increase wellbeing;
- Evolve: develop in capacities such as self-compassion, empathy for others, ability to navigate conflict, etc.;
- Serve: increase action, and capacity for action, in service to the wider world.

Application Process

The application process for ECT consisted of a written application together with a video interview exploring:

- People’s motivation for participating in the program
- Their experience with personal and interpersonal development and practice
- How they respond to interpersonal challenges.

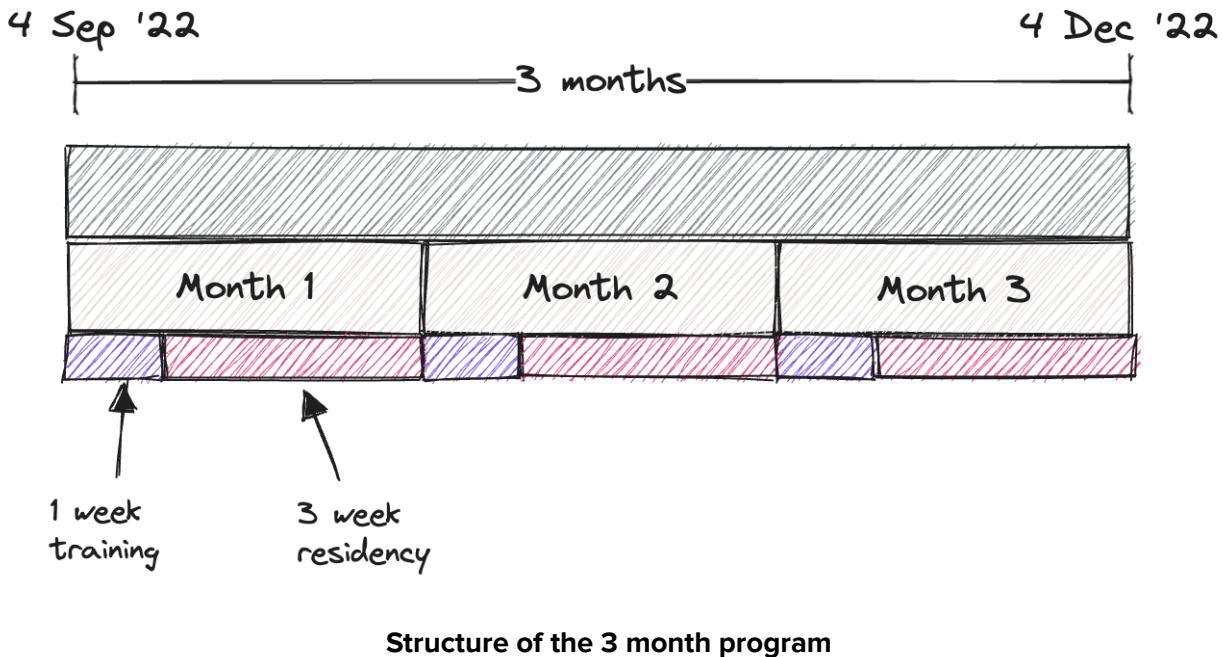
See the [Appendix](#) for more detail on the application process.

Program Structure

The overall three-month experiment consisted of the same one-month program repeated three times: a week of intensive full-time training, followed by three weeks of community living.

² <https://www.innerdevelopmentgoals.org/>

On average, people came for an entire month. However, to support accessibility and flexibility of engagement, it was possible for people to attend only the one-week training, or to leave early from the co-living part of the residency. It was not possible to participate in the co-living part of the residency without participation in the training week. Some people also stayed for multiple months.



Initial intensive training week with key practices

The training week consisted of a morning-through-evening schedule introducing core personal and interpersonal practices, as well as beginning to look at larger systemic issues and world work. The training week gave everyone a set of foundational shared practices for collective living, during the residency and in their lives beyond. In addition to various connection activities and orientation to the community and shared living rhythms, these practices included:

- Nonviolent Communication
- Internal Family Systems
- Collaborative decision-making
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Navigating interpersonal tensions and conflict

Followed by 3 week community residency

After the week-long training, the remaining three weeks of each month were a co-created community residency. During this period, the participants were no longer in a “workshop” or on a retreat but engaged in day-to-day community life: living together, doing their own individual work, cooking and cleaning together, meeting to make community decisions, etc. Most importantly, they were using and integrating many of the practices from the training in “real-life” daily interactions, with live issues and conflicts.

Month-long structure with integration of training and coliving was a key design feature

The month-long design gave participants the experience of an evolution from a more top-down training structure with “trainers/facilitators/hosts” distinct from “participants” to a more co-led structure of everyone being “community co-creators”. Both structures have something important to offer: the first can support participants with focused learning and freedom from responsibility, while the second can support experiential learning about shared power, leadership, and co-creation, and can prepare people for integrating learning into daily life.

See Appendix for the detailed daily and weekly schedules for the training week and weeks of community residency, as well as a link to the curriculum outline.

Hosting Team: a base for design and delivery

The delivery of ECT was supported by the hosting team (Karl Steyaert, Nadine Helm, Jocelyn Ames, and Catherine Tran), their experience in practice, teaching, and facilitation of the core training week content, and by their team culture of trust, mutual support, and shared practice.

Collectively, the ECT hosting team has decades of training and practice in inner development modalities, most extensively in Nonviolent Communication, Internal Family Systems, Microsolidarity, Restorative Justice, meditation, and yoga. See the appendix for biographies of the members of the hosting team.

In addition, the hosting team shared a high degree of interpersonal trust based on regular connection and intentionally embedding the practices of ECT into our own way of working as a team. The whole team met regularly for more than three months prior to the residencies, not only to “get things done”, but also devoted one meeting each week to tending to interpersonal connection and mutual emotional support. Both before and during the residencies, as well as in our lives and relationships more broadly, we practiced IFS and NVC with each other in our weekly interpersonal connection meetings. In business/logistics meetings, we strove to show up authentically and paused and made space to empathize when we were getting stuck, or when

there was conflict or tension. The resulting trust, emotional support, and shared practice gave the hosting team resilience in addressing challenges during the residency.

Key Principles

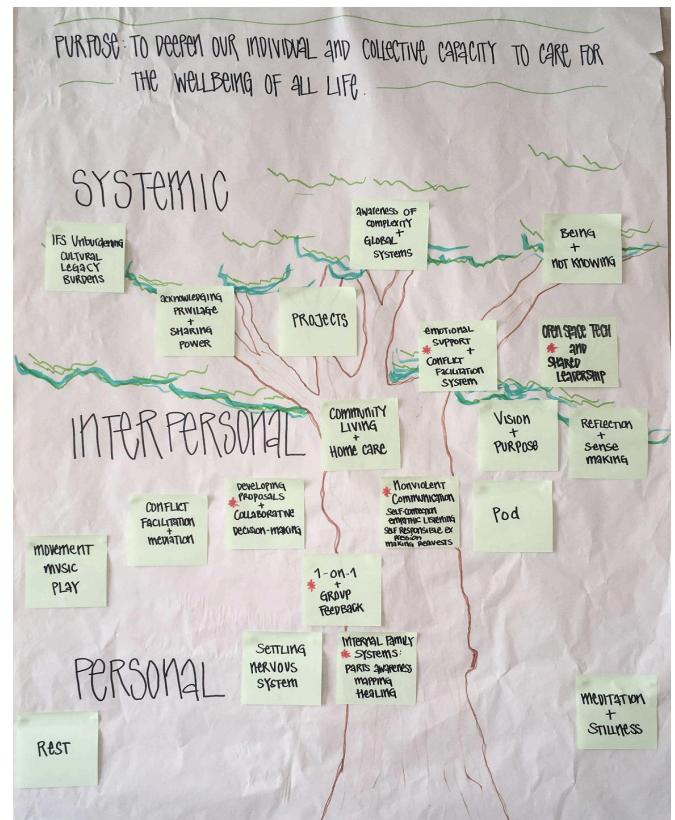
Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.

– Rumi, 13th Century Sufi Poet

Multi-level Developmental Approach: Personal, Interpersonal and Systemic

Together we explored how to operate at three interconnected levels of development for being and action:

- **Personal development:** cultivating self-awareness, self-compassion, nervous system regulation, inner healing, etc
- **Interpersonal development:** learning and practicing conscious communication, interpersonal feedback, collaborative decision-making, and conflict facilitation
- **Systemic development :** Engagement in **systemic** issues: contributing to the wider world, from cleaning up rubbish in the local park to reflecting on wider political, economic, cultural, and ecological systems.



Team clean-up of a neighborhood park

“Tree” of Personal, Interpersonal & Systemic Development Practices

Multi-Dimensional Approach: with practices for waking up, cleaning up, growing up and showing up

Based on the understanding that there is no “one-size-fits-all” perspective or approach to support whole-person and whole-system development, ECT explicitly included multiple practices fostering personal, interpersonal and systemic transformation.

While Nonviolent Communication and Internal Family Systems were two primary modalities, the hosting team – and participants during the Open Space part of the residency, also introduced practices grounded in bodies of work as wide-ranging as Process Work, Restorative Justice, Circling, Microsolidarity, Buddhist meditation, Authentic Movement, Emergent Strategy, and more.

Practical, Embodied Learning

Within the first few days of the October training week, the hosting team facilitated a passionate discussion among participants regarding their conflicting perspectives on how to respond if someone in the community exhibited COVID symptoms. Over the course of several hours, the facilitators mediated a challenging conversation in which the group moved from reactivity to a greater depth of mutual understanding, trust, and connection. This kind of live, practical and embodied learning about conflict resolution and collaborative decision-making – rather than a purely intellectual or theoretical teaching of these practices – was central to ECT.

Welcoming All Parts

Drawing inspiration from Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy, “welcoming all parts” of people was an essential intention of ECT.

This consisted of creating a space which modeled, invited, and supported wholeness and vulnerability, including revealing and bringing compassion to aspects of ourselves that are typically hidden, unacknowledged, and/or even rejected in other settings, such as parts of us that have feelings such as sadness, shame, anger, fear, etc, or parts of us that carry negative judgments about ourselves or others.



The purpose was not to encourage people to speak or act out blindly from all of our typically hidden parts – in the case of angry or violent parts of us, this could pose a danger to ourselves or others, for example – but to support people to acknowledge and bring kindness and compassion to these parts of us as a critical act of healing and integration of our wholeness.

Previous figure: Inner Active Cards representing our internal family of parts

Emotional Safety and Connection

Building connection and emotional safety was an essential foundation of ECT. In our first days of coming together, we explored empathic listening exchanges, Authentic Relating games, and collective vocal toning to “settle” and regulate our nervous systems. Ongoingly we had daily check-ins, peer-led pods (more on these below), shared singing, etc, to tend to group connection and cohesion.

Modeling Vulnerability

In keeping with the aforementioned welcoming of all parts, ECT was premised on a leadership approach which models vulnerability, with the hosting team acknowledging (while ideally not leading from) their more insecure and immature parts, rather than claiming to be somehow beyond these aspects of themselves. For example, the facilitator of a session might name that part of themselves that was feeling anxious, grumpy, or low energy, rather than simply projecting a mask of only competence or positivity. This offered a more congruent example of human development and leadership, and helped to cultivate an environment in which we could expand our capacity to meet ourselves and each other with compassion in a fuller range of experiences, thereby supporting growth and healing.

Key Practices

Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) was a core modality introduced and practiced in ECT, due to its flexible³ framework supporting self-awareness and self-empathy, empathic listening to others, and self-responsible expression. From these essential building blocks, NVC was integral to a wide range of community practices, including: emotional check-ins and emotional support,

³ Flexibility and authenticity are essential qualities to the Nonviolent Communication approach and can be powerfully embodied in its practice. Of course, like any attempt to “systematize” communication, NVC can be interpreted and applied in ways that are less flexible and organic..

processes to address tensions, conflict facilitation, collaborative decision-making, and giving and receiving conscious feedback.

Internal Family Systems

Internal Family Systems (IFS) was the other primary modality introduced and practiced within ECT. IFS offers a clear theory and practice for understanding and working with the “multiplicity of the mind” – the understanding that individuals have multiple “parts” or subpersonalities within them – as well as the “Self” – an essential witnessing consciousness in all people embodying qualities such as compassion, curiosity, courage, and connectedness. With a basic training in IFS, participants were increasingly able to: cultivate deeper self-understanding and self-compassion, even for their less “likeable” or “acceptable” parts; become aware of and “unblend” from reactive parts; “map” their parts in relation to specific situations or interpersonal dynamics; and support healing for their rejected, dismissed, or suppressed parts.

Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology (OST) served as the format for most of ECT, with participants co-creating and flexibly exploring a schedule of peer-to-peer offerings throughout the 3-week co-living part of the residency. This encouraged shared leadership, initiative-taking, and self-responsibility.

The training week schedule was mostly predetermined and facilitated by the hosting team (except for morning practice, and a few open evening session slots). Once the remaining weeks of the community residency began, there was an OST “marketplace” wherein all participants were supported and encouraged to make requests and offers to the community of what they were inspired to explore and/or share.

Peer Learning Groups



Daily peer-led practice “pod” session in the park

To foster peer-to-peer connection and leadership, learning integration, and emotional support, all participants were assigned to a 3-5-member “pod” on the first day of the ECT training week. These peer groups are an example of a “crew” as described by Rich Bartlett in his articulation of Microsolidarity.⁴ These pods met daily for an hour or more during the training week, and were encouraged to meet daily or multiple times per week for the remainder of the residency. Pod members took turns facilitating pod sessions, during which they would support each other with empathic listening or Internal Family Systems processes, for example, or offer each other interpersonal feedback or navigate tensions together.

Distributed Roles and Shared Leadership

ECT supported participants to take shared responsibility for their experience and to develop essential leadership and collaboration capacities, through increasingly distributed roles and shared leadership over the course of each month. Participants and hosting team members alike

⁴ <https://www.micsolidarity.cc/>

shared daily responsibility and leadership through cooking and cleaning of the house, guiding morning meditation and movement, offering and requesting sessions on the Open Space Board, and taking on (self-generated) roles within the community such as the “Rest Awareness Tracker”, or “Feedback Composter.”

Community Feedback and Decision-Making

To further support shared power and development of collaboration capacities, the training week introduced tools to give self-responsible feedback and to make decisions collaboratively, as well as a process whereby anyone in the community could initiate proposals and decision-making in relation to all aspects of community life. The ECT community came together in some form on at least a weekly basis for community self-reflection on challenges and celebrations, and to develop and agree upon proposals for improvement. Within the first week of ECT, for example, participants were a driving force in a collaborative process of changing the morning practice schedule of meditation and movement, as well as adopting an after-dinner check-in.

Interpersonal Feedback

Understanding that regular conscious, effective interpersonal feedback is as essential to a healthy community as community feedback, ECT introduced participants to written guidelines for one-on-one and group peer-to-peer feedback, as well as encouraging and offering tools for more free-form “courageous conversations.” Folks would regularly head off in pairs for a walk along the Dordogne River exchanging feedback, coming back with deepened trust, connection, and self-awareness.

Practical Co-Living

All members of the community – participants and hosting team – shared the daily responsibilities of cooking community meals, cleaning common spaces, and food shopping. This aspect of working together to care for the collective, each other, and ourselves in very practical ways, was integral to the program and residency. It also supported the integration of learning into something more similar to “daily life”.

A shared meal in the garden



Conflict Facilitation

To empower participants to engage with conflict in a way that was healing and transformational, the initial training week introduced essential conflict facilitation practices – from needs awareness and self-responsibility to empathic listening and basic mediation skills. In addition, the hosting team introduced a community system for peer-to-peer emotional support and conflict facilitation, whereby everyone in the community could go to any member of a group of volunteers to receive support around anything from a small personal upset to a major community conflict.

Acknowledging Power and Privilege

Exploration of power and privilege dynamics in the ECT community was included in each training week, and typically surfaced and was explored in group process over the course of each month. Together we spoke of our various experiences in the community and in the wider world in relation to dimensions of identity – such as gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, mobility, language, nationality, economics, etc – and discussed how we could support each other to care for and reduce imbalances in power and privilege.

Meditation

To support individual and collective development of mindfulness, a 30-minute morning meditation (sometimes guided, sometimes unguided, with rotating facilitation) was a daily feature in the ECT schedule throughout the month. Pod facilitators were also invited to lead a brief (3-5 minute) meditation at the beginning of each pod session.

Physical Movement

In addition to daily morning movement/dance following meditation, there were a variety of other invitations to physical movement and exercise throughout the day in ECT, proposed by both members of the hosting team and participants. These included: 5Rhythms dance, walks, runs, swims in the river, High Intensity Interval training, yoga, Qigong, shaking, and football matches.

Creative Expression



An evening song circle

Creative expression was another consistent aspect of daily life, including shared singing, dancing, drawing and painting, and a “Self-Expression Evening” at the end of the training week, at which people shared an inspiring array of (often self-authored) poetry, songs, dances, and skits.

Testimonials



The power of ECT was most effectively described by participants themselves, in exit interviews and in response to post-program written surveys.

Below are a few examples of participants’ reflections on what they gained from ECT. The Appendix includes more quotations from participants.



Johnson Hsieh

“What did I gain from ECT?... An **enormously clearer and deeper understanding of my interior landscape** ... confidence in my ability to work with tension/conflict, willingness to ask for help/support/general requests ... [and] how to **show up vulnerably and authentically as a leader** ... Compared to before ECT, I feel like I have **relational super powers**.... These competencies will make me a more effective collaborator on everything I do going forward.”



Leni Cellini

“It has given me **hope in human connection** ... The world needs people who have the **courage to go inward** and to be with others even when it's difficult ... **We have been offered many tools to do that.** It really moves me that what **we do here on a very small scale can really ripple out** and lead to **more understanding, healing, connection, tolerance and compassion.**”



Stephen Reid

“We were **not being taught in a simplistic way**: ‘This is how you do community’, rather **we were discovering together**. There's something very **subtle about this work**. ... It's like we're all each other's teachers. This **kind of learning is so important in these times** – to discover for ourselves how to get on with people, **how to be a nourishing and positive and respecting part of a community.**”



Jonas Gröner

"The program gave us **a real laboratory for putting learning into practice**. For example, how do I have a **courageous conversation** in which I have some challenging feedback for somebody else? How can I do it in a way that's **connecting**, that actually stands up for **my own needs**, but also **holding their needs with care**?' You can do a Nonviolent Communication class or read a book, but how do we **actually do that** with people we're going to be **encountering day after day**."



Sen Zhan

"It's like a microcosm, so everything that happens in this container is happening in the wider world. So how do we accept that, not need it to be completely fixed, not need things to be the way that we think they should be, but at the same time observe that this is happening, accept that it's happening and still gently **nudge the system towards something that is more wholesome**."

Challenges and Learnings

Alongside the celebrations of ECT there were challenges which suggest multiple ways this kind of transformational community space can evolve and improve in the future. The greatest challenges emerged from two related themes: 1) the wide range of backgrounds and expectations of participants; and 2) the amount of inner and outer resources required for the program structure and hosting team to hold a supportive and responsible container for such complexity.

First, there was a significant range of backgrounds, needs, capacities, and expectations of participants – in relation to personal emotional vulnerability, interpersonal and group process, shared and emergent leadership, exploring intimacy, etc. To take one example, some participants were eager to explore personal emotional vulnerability, intensity, and interpersonal and group processes, had years of prior experience in such spaces, and wanted more than was available. Meanwhile, other participants were newer to such explorations or for other reasons preferred more privacy, emotional containment, and space and time for processing.

Second, to hold a supportive and responsible container for three continuous months of co-living and co-learning, particularly with the above-mentioned diversity of participants, presented a considerable demand on a program and hosting team of 3-4 people. In ways both expected and unexpected, we experienced considerable demands on and at times overload of our inner and outer resources, including time, nervous system regulation, empathy, rest, and even the basic functioning of the building facility itself.

These challenges have led to learnings which are already shaping future programs. Most notable are realizations about the importance of even more clearly defining the precise purpose and audience for any offering, and ensuring that all aspects of the structure of the program and resourcing of the hosting team are fully aligned and matched with this purpose and audience, from the application process, to the leadership approach, to the specific practices and curriculum.

Challenges

Alongside the celebrations of ECT there were a range of challenges which suggest potential improvements in design and delivery. Below are some of the challenges that seemed most prominent to both participants and the hosting team.

Nervous System Regulation

One of the most essential ingredients of effective Deliberately Developmental Spaces is nervous system regulation, particularly by “leadership” (in this case the hosting team), as people in a

facilitating role have an outsized impact on the nervous system regulation of the collective.⁵ Based on this understanding, a big challenge for ECT was caring for the nervous system regulation of the hosting team – and therefore the community as a whole – in the context of an immersive 24-hour/day 7-days/week community for three months. Further challenges listed below were all exacerbated by insufficient “down time”, integration, self-care and overall nervous system regulation, for both hosting team and participants.

Venue

The antiquated nature of the Bergerac Praxis Hub, located in a 19th century French palazzo, is something which many participants found charming, yet a few participants said that their accommodation was unsatisfying. At different times during ECT there were challenges such as a leaking roof, a week during which the washing machine was broken, a few days of no running water in the main house, and various minor breakdowns of the aging physical infrastructure. For some participants these constraints were seen as offering opportunities to practice adaptability and collective problem-solving, but for others they were viewed as uncomfortable and problematic.

Group Process

While the application process was intended to ensure both a baseline familiarity with and motivation to explore inner and interpersonal work, there was divergence among participants in terms of their background in, desire for, and comfort with personal emotional vulnerability, and interpersonal and group processes.

At one end of the spectrum were those who had no or very little experience or training in community living, authentic relating, conscious communication, therapeutic modalities, shadow work, conflict resolution, etc, and for whom sharing emotions such as shame, fear, sadness, or anger was challenging or even inaccessible in a group context. At the other end of the spectrum were participants who had extensive experience and training in all of these modalities and practices, who themselves facilitated such practices, and who not only were eager for shared expressions of emotional vulnerability and intensity, but even in some cases found it dissatisfying when others were not able or willing to join them in such depths of group process.

This variability of experience and desire was a challenge for many participants, as well as for the hosting team to navigate.

⁵ See

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/helping-colleagues-coworkers-regulate-nervous-system-better-kassir/>

Approaches to Leadership

There was divergence and disagreement among participants in their desire for and comfort with shifting roles, shared leadership, less structured space etc.

Again, some participants had little experience with self-organized, co-created, or emergent spaces, and had a strong desire for clear structure, strong leadership, and direction provided by the hosting team, even after the training week completed and the community residency and Open Space Technology structure began. Others had significant experience with and desire for shared leadership, to the point of some participants wishing there to be no distinctions between the roles of hosting team and participants, and for the community to be entirely collaborative in its functioning.

Exploring therapeutic practices, such as Internal Family Systems, with the hosting team sometimes in more of a therapeutic support role, made the shift to a more peer-to-peer relationship between hosting team and participants even more challenging.

Physical Touch and Intimacy

There was also great diversity in participants' comfort with and desire to explore discussion and practices related to physical touch, intimacy, and sexuality. On one end of the spectrum were those who expressed discomfort with discussion of the topic, while others had strong desire to explore consensual physical touch (through massage exchanges and cuddle piles, for example) and to discuss topics related to intimacy and sexuality.

Framing

Some participants struggled with understanding the purpose and larger context of some of the practices within ECT, suggesting that the framing and connection of the why and how of the curriculum could have been clearer and more thorough, helping participants understand how practices fit within an integrated exploration of inner, interpersonal, and systemic development.

Learnings

What follows are a series of key learnings from hosting ECT, along with ideas for modifying the design of future offerings of this kind.

Separate Training and Residency/Community

Due to significant psychological and social demands of a multi-week residential experience, and the importance of a good match between participant and program, there are good reasons to separate an initial, shorter training from an extended community experience, especially for

people who don't have a prior background and track record of navigating the intensity of ongoing community. One possible modification would be to run an initial stand-alone training of one week, after which participants can choose to apply for an extended residential program of multiple weeks. This separation is important because a multi-week residential experience is a significant commitment not just of time, but in terms of emotional energy and preparedness.

Clear Purpose and Audience

To support clarity and coherence in program differentiation, design and delivery, it is essential to clarify the specific purpose and appropriate audience of any particular offering. Asking the following questions can support: What kinds and depth of learning, healing and/or transformation is the program intended to explore? What is the ideal audience for this offering, and what characteristics and prerequisites will they have? What developmental range and age? What kinds and degree of diversity in participants will serve the purpose of the program, and which will inhibit it?

Clear Invitation

Clarity in the promotional materials and interview process about what the space is, its purpose and intended audience, and what challenges and benefits people might expect, in addition to what they are expected to contribute, can support participants to self-select and prepare for what they can expect from the particular event and its culture.

Rigorous Discernment Process

While a week-long training may not require a significant application process, for a multi-week residential program a rigorous process of application and interview supports both potential participants and facilitators/hosts to assure an appropriate match between people's interests and capacities, and what the container will be and can offer. For an extended community residency, the selection process could include assessing people's experience with and capacity for community living and collaboration in general, and more specifically their capacity and willingness to engage in: emotional self-regulation, honest self-reflection, empathic listening, making collaborative decisions, giving and receiving feedback, tension and conflict, and awareness of power and privilege. As mentioned above, to have a high degree of confidence regarding someone's fit for a longer residential program, have them first participate in a week-long learning community.

Regularly Contextualized and Reinforced Learning

Throughout the course of a developmental program, the following can support participants to orient to a multi-dimensional curriculum integrating inner, interpersonal and systemic lenses: Consistently frame learning and practice within a conceptual map of purpose and practice, as

well as repeating and reinforcing essential practices. Help people understand and contextualize the importance and necessity of inner and interpersonal work in relation to wider world work. This includes helping people understand the tendency to want to bypass the uncomfortable emotions elicited by inner work, and to want to jump to action, or to theorizing, or to talking about “why aren’t we doing more about the world situation?” In the case of a program that includes practical co-living such as shared community cooking and cleaning, offer clear context for the developmental value of these practices.

Clear Boundaries for Therapeutic Work

While it is possible, and may be desirable, to include therapeutic work within a larger context of development and community, it is crucial to clarify the boundaries of therapeutic work, and be aware of the challenges that can arise with transference and countertransference.

Awareness of Hosting Capacity

The scale, scope and depth of a program needs to match the capacity of the hosting and facilitation team. Additionally, it is invaluable for the hosting team to have strategies in place for when they and the participants inevitably encounter the edges or limits of their capacity. In the program design phase, it can help to ask: What capacity do you, your team and the container have to hold the developmental range present? What are the limits of depth of process you can support?

Need for Rest, Integration, and Nervous System Regulation

Given the demands of both multidimensional development work and residential community living, it is essential to actively create and protect plenty of time for rest, movement, solitude, quiet, integration, and play, for both the participants and hosting team.

Conclusion

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

– Helen Keller

Reflecting back on the richness and intensity of the three months of hosting (and living within) the Embodying Collective Transformation community residencies, we both acknowledge the challenges and celebrate the gifts of shared innovation and experimentation.

Perhaps like any true developmental journey, ECT was one of the most joyful and most challenging experiences of our personal and professional lives – as it was for many participants. It was invaluable in reflecting our blind spots and learning edges as facilitators and human beings. ECT participants speak with fondness of the program’s significance in shaping their lives, and we are happy to now think of many people from this experience as life-long friends.

Setting out to host a “community space for transformation” inevitably brings up unforeseen challenges. However, the journey has been a deeply rewarding one and is inspiring many of us forward to the next experiment.



Appendices

Hosting Team



Karl Steyaert

Karl is a visionary cultural catalyst with over 25 years experience facilitating personal and collective transformation across North America, Europe and Asia. His clients range from non-profits, intentional communities and ecovillages, to universities, governments and Silicon Valley tech companies.

Having designed and directed programs in Integral Sustainability for the University of Massachusetts at Findhorn Ecovillage (Scotland) and Auroville (India), as well as supporting the development of dozens of ecovillage and community projects worldwide, Karl has a passion for co-creating hubs for the evolution of consciousness and life-enriching culture. He is a certified trainer in Nonviolent Communication, and a Level 1-3 trained practitioner of Internal Family Systems therapy, as well as having extensive training and experience facilitating collective trauma healing, restorative justice, aikido, and meditation. Karl has studied with Marshall Rosenberg, Richard Schwartz, Thomas Hübl, Arnold Mindell, Joanna Macy, and Thich Nhat Hanh. In 2013 he founded the Cultural Catalyst Network – a global community of changemakers integrating inner, interpersonal, and systemic transformation. More on Karl at www.karlsteyaert.com.



Jocelyn Ames

Jocelyn is a community catalyst with over 10 years of experience embodying a toolkit of practices for personal and collective transformation. Her inquiry into making the world a better place for all was seeded by her schooling at the United World College of Southeast Asia. After completing a BA in International Development and Geography at the School of Oriental and

African Studies (London, 2012) she went on to explore more grassroots and systemic approaches to collective change and sustainability. She has dedicated many years to living and experimenting in various forms of community around the world while tending to the inner ecology of the self, the interpersonal ecology of relationship, and regenerative relationships to the earth through yoga, permaculture, Nonviolent Communication, mediation, Internal Family Systems and menstrual cycle awareness. Since 2020, she has been working alongside Karl as host and developer of the Cultural Catalyst Network, as well as being a ‘social fabric weaver’ within the Microsolidarity network. You can read more about Jocelyn at www.becomingtogether.net.



Nadine Helm

Nadine loves contemplative practices, deep connection and presence with life and all beings. She is a CNVC Certified Trainer of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), beginning her study in 2004. Besides NVC and Living Compassion (work of Robert Gonzales), she is trained as a yoga teacher in the Sivananda tradition, yoga therapy instructor, Level 1 trained practitioner of Internal Family Systems therapy, received Mindfulness and MBSR teacher training with Tara Brach, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, Bob Stahl and Thich Nhat Hanh. Nadine spent three years living and working in an Ashram and about 8 months at Plum Village monastery. Nadine gives workshops and accompanies people in individual sessions on the fascinating journey into the inner world, intuitively allowing the pillars that shaped her to flow together in her work. More on Nadine at www.embracing-life.com.



Catherine Tran

Catherine studied English at the University of Cambridge (UK) before completing a joint M.A. in Cultural Narratives at the University of Guelph (Canada), University of Santiago de Compostela (Spain), and University of Perpignan (France) in 2021. During her master's she explored the role that art and literature might play in cultivating ecological responsibility, and she's currently interested in what it means to be a responsible human being in a web of interspecies interdependence. This has led her to working for Life Itself, an organization of pragmatic utopians committed to action for a radically wiser, weller world.

Conscious Communities, Deliberately Developmental Spaces

The ECT training and community residencies were a prototype “Conscious Community” or “[Deliberately Developmental Space](#)” (DDS) – a context designed to support healthy human development through integral frameworks and practices. Inspired by Kegan and Lahey’s term “Deliberately Developmental Organizations”, Life Itself defines DDSs as “physically colocated groups together for a sustained period of time with a conscious engagement in multidimensional developmental praxis.”⁶ The ECT residencies, like other DDSs, were intended to catalyze the whole-person and whole-system transformation required to face the depth of current intersecting social and ecological challenges facing humanity.

⁶ R. Pollock and T. Cox. (2021, October 5). Deliberately Developmental Spaces: a key to addressing the metacrisis? *Life Itself*.
<https://lifeitself.org/blog/2021/10/05/deliberately-developmental-spaces-a-key-to-addressing-the-metacrisis>

Program Design and Curriculum

Training Week

Daily Schedule

07:30–8:30	Morning Practice
08:30–9:00	Breakfast
09:00–10:00	Collective Home Care* (cooking, cleaning, etc)
10:10–11:20	Morning Session 1
11:30–12:30	Morning Session 2
13:00–14:00	Lunch
14:30–15:50	Afternoon Session
16:00–17:20	Pod
17:30–18:30	Collective Home Care*
18:30–19:30	Dinner
20:10–21:30	Evening Session

*Each person would participate in one Collective Home care session per day, either morning or afternoon.

Detailed Schedule

While there was a detailed plan and schedule for the training week program, in practice in each residency it was adapted live to fit the needs and pace of the group and circumstances.

Day 1

Morning Practice: Welcoming All Parts and Listening to the Body

Guided meditation based on Internal Family Systems

Movement practice based on the Feldenkrais Method and Authentic Movement

Morning Session 1: Orientation to the Training

Morning Session 2: Orientation to the Training Continued

Afternoon Session: Introduction to Internal Family Systems (IFS)

Pod: Personal Story Game

Evening Session: Settling the Nervous System

Based on Somatic Experiencing and the work of Resmaa Menakem

Day 2

Morning Practice: Meditation and Movement

Morning Session 1: Introduction to Nonviolent Communication: Needs and Feelings

Morning Session 2: Introduction to Nonviolent Communication: Observations and Requests
Afternoon Session: Self-Connection and Self-Expression
Pod: Empathic Listening
Evening Session: Authentic Relating

Day 3

Morning Practice: Meditation and Movement
Morning Session 1: Awareness of Privilege
Morning Session 2: Awareness of Privilege Continued
Afternoon Session: IFS Parts Mapping
Pod: Self-Connection and Requests
Evening Session: Wheel of Consent

Day 4

Morning Practice: Meditation and Movement
Morning Session 1: Collaborative Decision-Making
Morning Session 2: Collaborative Decision-Making Continued
Afternoon Session: IFS Demonstration
Pod: IFS Practice
Evening Session: Open

Day 5

Morning Practice: Meditation and Movement
Morning Session 1: Awareness of Parts Dynamics
Morning Session 2: Brave Conversations
Afternoon Session: Open
Pod: Group Reflection Circle
Evening Session: Self-Expression Evening

Day 6

Morning Practice: Meditation and Movement
Morning Session 1: Retrospective and Feedforward
Morning Session 2: Closing Sharing Circle
End of Training Week

3-week residency

The only required elements of the schedule were the one daily session of Collective Home Care (cooking, cleaning, etc) in the morning or afternoon and the weekly Community Heartspace Meeting on Wednesday evenings. The rest of the community residency schedule was voluntary,

to support people to engage in work or other projects beyond the community, and to support people in finding a schedule suited to their individual needs.

Daily Schedule

07:30–8:30	Morning Practice of Meditation and Movement
08:30–9:00	Breakfast
09:00–10:00	Collective Home Care
13:00–14:00	Lunch
16:00–17:20	Pod
17:30–18:30	Collective Home Care
18:30–19:30	Dinner

Weekly Elements

Wednesday evenings: Community Heartspace and Meeting

Saturday mornings: Community and World Service

Curriculum

The complete agenda outline for both the training week and Month Residency is available here:

[+ ECT Curriculum .](#)

Participants

Over the course of the 3 months of ECT, there were 36 participants. This exceeded our baseline goal of 25 participants. Below, we describe some demographics.

Age & Gender

The participants ranged in age from 19 to 68. Median age was 38. We had:

- One person in their teens
- Eight people in their 20s
- Thirteen people in their 30s
- Seven people in their 40s
- Five people in their 50s
- Two people in their 60s

Of the 36 participants, 19 identified as male, 16 as female, and 1 as non-binary.

Nationality

Participants came from 13 countries: 9 from the UK, 7 from the Netherlands, 5 from Germany, 3 from the USA, 2 from France, 2 from Australia, and one each from Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Canada, Iran, India, Sweden, and Turkey.

Educational & Professional Background

In terms of educational background, 3 participants had a Doctoral degree or equivalent, 18 had a Master's degree or equivalent, and 13 a Bachelor's degree. The majority of the participants were professionally engaged in some kind of facilitation, coaching, and/or consulting, but they also included the CEO of an international design consultancy, a vocal performer, a psychiatrist, a book designer, a writer, and a software developer.

Length of stay

The average length of stay of the participants was 28 days. 7 people attended only the 1 week training, 7 people stayed for 2-3 weeks, and 15 stayed for an entire month. 6 people stayed for 2 months, and 1 person stayed for all 3 months.

Outcomes

Measuring Impact

As for the impact of ECT on participants, we employed two primary means of measuring impact: 1) we invited participants to complete pre- and 1-month post-program surveys with both quantitative and qualitative questions integrating assessment of the transformative skills identified in the Inner Development Goals⁷ initiative; and 2) we recorded video interviews with participants after the training week or near the end of the month-long residency.

Effectively measuring the impact of a program such as ECT poses multiple challenges. The challenges of reliable measurement of changes in wellbeing, developmental capacities, and action include: the difficulty of isolating the impact of an intervention like the ECT program from the impact of other factors in participants' lives; the difficulty for participants to accurately self-assess; the complex and long-term nature of integrating and seeing the results of the practices explored in ECT; the challenge of getting participants to respond to multiple lengthy surveys; etc.

For the aforementioned reasons, the quantitative data yielded by the written pre- and post-program surveys was limited (28 of 36 participants responded to the pre-program surveys,

⁷ <https://www.innerdevelopmentgoals.org/>

while only 9 of 36 participants responded to the 1-month post-program surveys) and at this point appears inconclusive.

On the other hand, the most compelling indicators of impact are found in the approximately 30 hours of participant interviews (video interviews were conducted with 28 of 36 participants), as well as the qualitative responses to the written surveys.

Benefits

Feedback from participants illustrates a rich array of celebrations of ECT, indicating the range and depth of impact of the program. Below are some quotations from participant interviews and surveys, grouped according to the three core aims of ECT: to support people to “thrive, evolve, and serve”.

Thrive

Evidence of thriving can be seen in the experience of qualities such as emotional safety, deep connection with others, playfulness, creativity, support, and nourishment.

“In one sentence, **I feel I gained a family** – so many close relationships formed during this one month, and I felt and still do feel more connected to many of the ECT people than to the people in my everyday communities.”

- Sen Zhan

“There's a lot of space for people to **play**. I think people's **creativity** comes out as **free expression**. When people start humming together or dancing freely all of that stuff comes out. People get a little bit more childish when they're vulnerable. **That's life – when people are just happy to be present**. I think when we're not threatened it comes naturally.”

- Liam Kavanagh

“I think for me, on a personal level, it has given me a **place of refuge**. This residency, it was a place where I could land with all the challenges that I was bringing, with all the brokenheartedness and pain that was in me. So **for me, this was a very safe container to just be in and to be held in.**”

- Leni Cellini

Evolve

Participants described a range of ways in which ECT supported them to develop their capacities for inner, interpersonal, and world work.

“What this residency did for me was very much to **encourage me to jump into the water and help someone that's drowning, even though my skills aren't perfect yet**. So that percolated through in a very organic way. I can start doing these things. I don't need to go through some official training regime that takes three years and costs 10,000 dollars. **I can start doing the work now** and learn more and recognize where my boundaries are with it.”

- Jonas Gröner

“Since ECT, I think the way I show up is more relaxed. I'm happy to take the plunge and take adventurous opportunities, and **I've got tools to remind myself of when faced with emotionally challenging interpersonal situations.**”

- Theo Cox

“I've received a lot of encouragement to express myself, whereas before I was more swallowing my words, or I was just holding myself back and being a bit invisible in the group. So **what I've learned is I can speak and show myself and express my voice. That's really a big one for me.**”

- Leni Cellini

Serve

While within the scope of the one-week to three-month framework of ECT it is unrealistic to imagine seeing the ultimate outcome of “world service” fully manifest, participants’ reflections point to ways, small and large, in which they saw ECT supporting them to be of service in the world.

“Since my experience with ECT, when I am in the presence of others who are in touch with their truth and who are willing to express that to others, I feel reminded and empowered to do the same. And **I have seen that if I can do the same for others, this effect will ripple out in the circles I move in.** In the workshops I host, I need to be the first to show vulnerability and honesty, if I am to ask that of my participants.”

- Sen Zhan

“This safe space to be courageous and to have conversations I would normally not have with people - that has been a big insight that it is actually possible to do that and it gives me so much hope for the future because if I can do that with people, **it means it's possible for us, as the human race, to navigate challenges and difficulties and conflicts in another way and to come to a place of more understanding, richer understanding.**”

- Leni Cellini

ECT Application Process

The ECT application process was intended to ensure, as much as possible, that participants would be a good match for the program. In particular, that participants would be willing to reflect and engage at the necessary depth. Reading the applications gave valuable insight into people's degree of psycho-spiritual maturity, self-awareness and experience with community, etc. The two-stage application process included:

1. A written application including questions about motivation for participation, experience with personal and interpersonal development and practice, and how they have historically responded and would respond to instances of interpersonal challenge.
2. An hour-long interview interview with the applicant.

Application Form



Application for Embodying Collective Transformation Community Residencies

Autumn 2022 – Life Itself Hub, Bergerac, France

For questions, contact us at: info@culturalcatalystnetwork.org

Hello! We are so glad for your interest in this year's Embodying Collective Transformation community residencies. Our hope is that you'll find filling out this application to be a meaningful self-reflection and mini transformation experience unto itself. We look forward to hearing from you!

Please understand that there are a limited number of places available in each community residency and training. Applications will be reviewed as they are submitted, followed by an invitation to an interview call with two members of the Facilitation & Hosting team for any follow-up questions or concerns (from your side as well as ours). Typically it will take 4+ weeks from the date of your application for a final decision about admissions.

If you apply to be on a WAITING LIST, we will review your application and invite you to an interview if/when a spot becomes available.

In this application we are most interested in how we can acknowledge and reflect both on how we all shine, and how we all struggle. Our understanding is that none of us is complete in our development, so we invite you to respond as honestly as you can about both your celebrations and challenges.

As we wish for you to express yourself in this application in a way that is as natural as possible, if you would rather respond to some or all of these questions using a video recording or some other means of communication, please feel free. That said, written responses are very welcome.

We realize there are a number of deeper reflection questions, so we invite you to aim for less than 250 words (or 2 minutes speaking) for each response.

All responses will be confidential.

ksteyaert@gmail.com [Switch account](#)



* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email



First and Last Name *

Your answer

Personal pronoun preference *

- she/her
- he/him
- they/them
- Other: _____

Date of birth *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

City & country of residence *

Your answer

How did you find out about the Embodying Collective Transformation Community *
Residencies?

Your answer

What inspires you to be a part of an Embodying Collective Transformation Community Residency? How do you imagine this enhancing or expanding your ability to contribute? *

Your answer

Which events are you applying for? (you may check more than one) *

- September Community Residency (including Training)
- September 3rd-8th Training Only
- October Community Residency (including Training) **WAITING LIST**
- October 2nd-7th Training Only **WAITING LIST**
- November Community Residency (including Training) **WAITING LIST**
- November 2nd-7th Training Only **WAITING LIST**
- Other: _____

Do you have regular individual or shared practices that contribute to your development and self-awareness (e.g., meditation, yoga, journaling, co-counseling, Nonviolent Communication, circling, etc)? If so, how consistent is your practice at this time? How have these practices contributed to your life? Which practices do you aspire to do regularly, and with what frequency?

*

Your answer

Describe one of the more significant challenges or turning points in your life. *
What supported you in navigating this experience? What did you learn from it?

Your answer

In community residencies, transformation is supported by living and learning together, taking turns cooking for the community, caring for common spaces, etc.
Describe your experience of living and/or participating in community. What have been the biggest challenges and gifts of community in your experience?

*

Your answer

What is your vision? What are you excited about creating or contributing to the world? What do you have to offer? *

Your answer

Describe a time when you received challenging feedback and you didn't respond as you would have liked. If a similar situation were to arise again, how would you like to respond? *

Your answer

Describe a time when you experienced conflict with someone and it did not turn out as you would have liked. How did you respond in that situation? Why do you think it turned out as it did? If a similar situation were to arise again, would you respond differently? If so, how? *

Your answer

Reflect on the Pathways to Liberation Self-Assessment (<https://bit.ly/3Lb3YRK>) to * answer this and the next question. Identify three skills in which you perceive yourself having more experience or competence (relative to the other skills). For each skill, offer a specific example of how you see yourself applying the skill in your life.

Your answer

Identify three skills you most aspire to develop. For each skill, explain why you * want to develop it, and in what situations you imagine applying the skill.

Your answer

Do you have any accessibility requirements or special needs you would like us to know about?

Your answer

Room preference

	Shared room (2 persons)	Standard room	Premium room
My first preference is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm open to this option	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not this please	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Financial Support

Our aim is that cost is not an obstacle to anyone's participation. If you are experiencing financial constraints, please send us an email at info@culturalcatalystnetwork.org describing: 1) your current financial situation; and 2) the specific amount of support you are requesting. We will do our best to see if we can provide assistance in some way or another.

Would you like to be added to our mailing list for updates on future events?

- Yes
- No

Is there anything else you would like to share, and/or do you have any questions?

Your answer



Thank you so much for your time and care in submitting your application!

Again, please know that there are limited number of places available in each community residency and training. Applications will be reviewed as they are submitted, followed by an invitation to an interview call with two members of the Facilitation & Hosting team for any follow-up questions or concerns (from your side as well as ours). Typically it will take 4+ weeks for a final decision about admissions.

Application Interview Template

NAME OF PERSON BEING INTERVIEWED

Date:

- (Interviewer #1) 1. Introduce ourselves and our roles, and give preview of call: check in, chance for each of us to ask questions of each other, next steps, check out, maximum one hour
- (Interviewer #2) 2. Check in: What are you noticing inside as we gather for this conversation? What can support you in this conversation? You go first to set the example: model an authentic/vulnerable AND concise check in.
- (Interviewer #1) 3. Appreciations of what person wrote in their application
- (Interviewer #2) 4. What inspires each of us to be a part of the Embodying Collective Transformation Community Residencies?
- (Interviewer #2) 5. Do you have any questions for us? It's ok if not, but we're happy to answer any questions you may have.
- (Interviewer #1) 6. IF they asked for financial support, do we have any additional questions (see financial request considerations below)? Let them know we will let them know what we can offer within 48 hours.
- (Interviewer #1) 7. IF they indicated a willingness to share a room, how comfortable are they with this? Limits on with whom they would be comfortable sharing, say in terms of gender identity, etc? Do they know if they snore at night? Any other considerations?
- (Interviewer #2) 8. Any follow up questions we have in relation to their application
- (Interviewer #1) 9. While we are not a strictly sober community, we are aware that alcohol and other substances can impact how present people are with one another, and other aspects of interpersonal dynamics. With the understanding that your responses are confidential, we are curious to hear about your relationship to substance use.
- (Interviewer #1) 10. There is no one "right" answer to this question: if you saw a pile of dirty dishes in the shared kitchen sink for three days in a row, what do you imagine you might do?
- (Interviewer #2) 11. Next steps: Thank the applicant for their time and let them know we will be in touch within the next 48 hours. Any qs about next steps?

- (Interviewer #2) 12. Check out: How was the conversation? How are we all leaving this call?