

Benefits of Living in Community – particularly Cohousing

By Julie Kelly

Oakcreek Community, Stillwater OK

Five years ago, my husband and I moved into the first cohousing community in Oklahoma. Three ideas drew our attention to cohousing: 1) the advantage of downsizing in order to live more simply (although we have always lived as “light” on this earth as possible); 2) the security of living in community, as we were planning to spend time doing medical work in Guatemala AS we had done in our younger years; and 3) the idea of being more connected to our neighbors.

When we first heard about plans to build a cohousing community in Stillwater, Oklahoma, where we were currently living, the concept of “living in community” sounded good. Once it was completed and we have lived here for five years we can attest to the fact that living in community really does have many benefits.

Cohousing is unlike most neighborhoods that generally have “Genie Door” neighbors; you can count the seconds it takes for them to enter the driveway, then the garage, and finally to close the garage door. They are friendly if you happen to make a chance encounter, but are not really interested in involvement with you beyond that.

In cohousing you can really know your neighbors. As a community, you share tasks and share fun as well with scheduled and unscheduled (spontaneous) events. These interactions help you to get to know each other better. When I pass a neighbor on the interconnecting sidewalks that join the buildings of our community, there is genuine connection. We greet one another by name and actually talk with one another in a non “chit-chat” fashion. Also, when we return from a trip, the members of our community are always happy to see us and warmly welcome us home. For those who have no family near-by, there is “family” available right here in our community. This is quite evident during times of illness or distress, when cards, home-made soup, and encouraging words are normal experiences.

In community, we share skills and talents, each one contributing what he/she can for the good of the community—mechanical skills, gardening, music, cooking, and organizing, to name a few. I especially enjoy being able to “network” with my neighbors. If I need something for a certain project or even the “how to” knowledge to get it done, I can find a neighbor who can help me. The skills and talents shared with the community are appreciated. Someone will usually notice what you have done and thank you verbally or with perhaps a small token of appreciation.

In a cohousing community, it is easy to “drop-over” to visit your neighbors. In our community, everyone has a front porch to encourage this. If a neighbor is not wanting visits for one reason or another, the blinds of their home will be drawn to inform you of this.

A cohousing community functions in the way I think a neighborhood ideally should function. It's give-and-take, compromise, and thinking in terms of what's best for the community, not just what's best for me. It's like being part of a good marriage or part of a strong family. It's worth the risk to step out and experience it first hand.