



Creating Community 15 Ways to Craft a Circle of Caring

by Linda Buzzell

In facing up to today's often degrading environmental, economic, political, social and hyper-individualistic cultural conditions, we instinctively know that survival requires coming together to effect constructive change. Here are proven approaches to community building that work.

1 Build a campfire. Whether literal or metaphoric, create a clear, focused attraction that draws people into a circle.

2 Connect with nature and the seasons. Tying gatherings into what's happening seasonally with all life forms is a traditionally effective way of fostering community.

3 Welcome each person. Either designate greeters or go around the circle welcoming and acknowledging each participant before proceeding with the event's main activity. People that feel seen and known are more likely to stay involved.

4 Provide food and drink. Traditional societies have always taken hospitality seriously. Having people bring items to add to the collective feast is better than catering.

5 Ceremony, ritual and the sacred. Deep in our collective human memory lie countless spring and harvest festivals, ceremonial or religious events, meals and celebrations that included a strong sense of

passage, initiation and the sacredness of all life. Use one as a springboard to add meaning to a contemporary gathering.

6 Collective problem solving. People bond into a community when they participate in solving a real-world community problem, helping someone in need or addressing a situation that demands a community solution. Consider using *Robert's Rules of Order* or other guidelines for discussions that maintain civility, discourage competitiveness and peacefully resolve conflicts in order to reach consensus.

7 Storytelling. Humans learn best when seeing and hearing stories. Facts don't arouse us as much as narratives and full-body experiences do. Bombarding people with facts won't create desired change. We must be inspired to act on the knowledge.

8 Elders. Shared history, respect and affection are vital to belonging. Adults coping with a high-stress, industrialized culture might tend to find elders' stories slow-moving and boring, but they are a critical resource for our collective survival. Beware of the "star from afar" syndrome that posits outsiders as experts, rather than honoring and developing our own community resources, which won't disappear at the end of an event.

9 Gifts and sharing. As we focus on creating a sharing society versus a gimme culture, it's nice to give small gifts such as a plant or garden flower, organic seeds or regifted items to event attendees. It's a simple way to help everyone feel valued, appreciated and welcomed. The key is keeping events local, simple and created by the community for the community. Many hands make light work, and some of the best community events cost the host little, while everyone involved brings their own chair or blanket, serving ware and potluck dish.

10 Shopping. People have been bonding through meeting others in the marketplace

since ancient times. Sales or silent auctions are popular when the money paid becomes a gift to the community.

11 A little excitement. Raffles and door prizes add fun as long as any money raised goes into the common coffers as a gift to all.

12 Child care. Children provide a necessary source of untamed energy and entertainment for any gathering. Multi-generational exchanges also help form and shape them through exposure to role models and life education, even if they might not feel engaged at the time.

13 Transportation. Facilitating carpools and providing transportation for those without cars or unable to walk builds community even before the event starts.

14 Dance and body movement. Modern society makes us sit a lot. Physical action connects us in a way nothing else can.

15 Beauty and music. Our eyes and ears are portals to the soul and spirit of the human psyche. Even a simple drum can bond individuals into a coherent group. Community singing can be powerful medicine, as places of worship ever demonstrate. A simple flower on the table or painting on the wall brings powerful archetypal energies to bear as we come together. An outdoor meeting brings nature's

magnificence to our senses, adding extraordinary power to events.

The bottom line is that any community gathering, organization or event that engages body, mind and spirit has a far greater chance of surviving and thriving.

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