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Alternative Communities in Aotearoa, New Zealand: The Cohousing Lifestyle

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Masters of Applied Psychology (Community)
at
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Dedication

For the past, present, and future of community spirit

He aha te mea nui o te ao?

He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!

What's the most important thing in the world?

It is people! It is people! It is people!

Abstract

In this research, I aimed to explore the benefits and challenges of living in a cohousing community, as a form of intentional community. I also aimed to investigate the impact of intentional design on the experience of living within the cohousing model of community. Information was gathered from fourteen residents of Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood, both current and past, via interviews. The analysis revealed that the lifestyle within cohousing communities produced a positive experience of collective living, accompanied by specific benefits and challenges, as expressed by residents of Earthsong. The primary benefits of living in cohousing included social connection/support, shared facilities and responsibilities, and environmental design. The associated challenges included the management of interpersonal relationships, community decision-making, and practicality of design features. The unique design of cohousing influenced social, economic, and environmental aspects of day to day living. This impacted the experience of living in cohousing as residents consciously engaged in sustainable living practices. In support of theoretical explanations of intentional community, residents of Earthsong expressed positive experiences of living in cohousing. They believed that the environment was supportive, cooperative, and enjoyable. The community design was seen to impact the experience of cohousing as the focus placed on social connections allowed for the sharing of support and resources. In turn, a safe and cohesive neighbourhood made day to day life easier and enjoyable for residents of Earthsong. This study highlighted the social, economic, and environmental benefits and challenges of intentional community design.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Intentional communities are commonly described as residential communities comprised of a group of people choosing to live and work together towards a shared goal (Mulder, Costanza, & Erickson, 2006; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). The residents in these communities generally hold a common vision and follow an alternative style of living. These communities have a strong focus on shared responsibilities and resources exhibiting a higher degree of teamwork and sustainable living compared to other residential communities (Reed & Frank, 2011). There have been many comparisons of intentional communities to utopian communities particularly as an ideal community is commonly envisioned by both (Kanter, 1972; Sargisson, 2007; Schehr, 1997). Theoretically, intentional communities are said to be places in which the ideals of community living are being put into practice (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). In contemporary society, numerous people are constantly searching for a way to live or achieve fulfilling lives. The busy lifestyles and increase in stress and anxiety has resulted in a decrease in the quality of life particularly in cities and suburbs (Tonuma, 2002). On the other hand, the lifestyles established in intentional communities imply an increase in the quality of life, operating on consciously aware and sustainable community practices (Mulder et al., 2006). In this research, I will focus on the experience of living in a cohousing community, a type of intentional community built around a sustainable housing model, discussed in more detail below.

In this chapter, I give an introduction to the concept of cohousing and the community of Earthsong. I explain the value of studying intentional communities as well as the aims of the present research. I conclude this chapter with an outline of the thesis.

Throughout this thesis, I use the terms “intentional community” and “sustainable community” interchangeably, referring to alternative communities. Although not all intentional communities are sustainable communities, in this study, I focus on intentional communities that hold a vision of sustainability such as cohousing. For

this reason, I use the two terms interchangeably. The word “community” is used often and refers to *residential* communities, namely suburban or intentional communities. The term “commune” refers to the intentional communities established in the 1960s and 1970s following the American communal movement. The reason for this is the difference in organisation and management structure between communes and intentional communities of today (refer to p. 33).

Cohousing

Cohousing is a form of intentional community which is often referred to as a contemporary approach to housing (McCamant & Durrett, 1988). It is based on principles of sustainability and purpose-designed neighbourhoods. Cohousing communities are developed on a distinctive housing model that incorporates the demographic and economic changes of current urban lifestyles. The main objective of cohousing is to create cohesive community with a combination of private and communal aspects of everyday living (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005).

Cohousing saw its first appearance in Denmark in the 1970s and after the housing model gained popularity in the 80s, it spread to Northern Europe. In the 1990s cohousing appeared in Canada and the United States of America, where it continues to grow today. Many other parts of the world have also seen the emergence of cohousing communities including Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand (Meltzer, 2005). Cohousing communities are a form of urban development that transforms conventional single-family households into more collective neighbourhood settings. As a result of isolating and inappropriate housing options, cohousing redefines the concept of community to suit contemporary lifestyles (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005). ‘*Bofælleskaber*’ (translated to ‘cohousing’ in English) is believed to be the Danish solution to the social ills of contemporary industrialised societies (McCamant, Durrett, & Milman, 2000; Meltzer, 2005). Due to the interest and rapid growth of such communities, Danish banks and governments began to support their development. The socially responsive and politically progressive culture led to the passing of Denmark’s Cooperative Housing Association Law to make official development processes less strenuous. Today,

ideas from this housing model including shared facilities and community design have stemmed into mainstream society (McCamant, Durrett, & Milman, 2000; McCamant & Milman, 2000). Being an alternative to modern day living, and having a focus on social relationships, cohousing is rooted in traditions of communal living and community movements that envision social sustainability. It has been claimed that communities developed around the cohousing model acknowledge the needs of humans and nature simultaneously, bringing traditional sustainable building/living to the 21st century, making current living situations more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005).

Although each cohousing community is designed and developed by residents, there are a number of common characteristics embedded in social, economic and environmental sustainability. Cohousing emphasises the importance of a *participatory process* in which residents actively contribute towards the planning and design of their community. The group of individuals that gather to build a cohousing community are responsible for all final decisions on the structure and layout of the community. The participatory aspect of cohousing demands commitment to the entire process which is known to take on average four to five years (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005).

Intentional neighbourhood design is another aspect of cohousing that spans across all communities. The design of the community is often related to the purpose of cohousing; to encourage social interaction. The main features of the intentional design include pedestrian-oriented community space with cars parked on the edge of the site. The rationale for this is the improvement in quality of outdoor space including an increase in social space and safety. The houses are often designed to have the kitchen space facing the public and the living space in a more private domain. For privacy, residents also have their own outdoor/garden space (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005).

The *common facilities* within cohousing are an integral part of the community. A centrally located common house designed for everyday use contains kitchen and dining facilities along with access to other shared facilities including laundry and entertainment rooms. Common areas, indoor and outdoor, are created to

supplement private living. The extensive shared resources allow access to a range of facilities that would not normally be available in single-family households. Workshop space, meeting rooms, guest rooms and libraries are luxuries that residents afford through the cohousing community design (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005).

Residents of cohousing communities take full responsibility for the management of the community. *Self-management* is embedded in the community model and involves participation in decision-making and day to day activities. Meetings for decision-making are held with all community members once a month. Aside from this, residents assign themselves to smaller work groups that are designated responsibility of a particular aspect of managing the community such as financing, permaculture or community life or education. Self-management of the community means that residents have the ability to make necessary changes to the community as they assume responsibility for all aspects of community functioning. A lot of the organisational structures are devised through trial and error. Communities revise their methods of management, and over time, learn how to work effectively with one another (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005).

A *non-hierarchical structure* is evident in the cohousing model and although there are leadership roles assumed within the community, major decisions are made by everyone. Cohousing is designed to function on democratic principles in which residents share tasks and decision-making. Consensus is widely used to ensure that all residents have their say in community discussions and that decisions are made for the greater good (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005).

Members of cohousing have *separate income sources*, as single-family households. They are not required to pool their financial earnings and most adults maintain fulltime employment in the wider community. There are a diverse range of occupations held by members of the community which is both welcomed and appreciated. In terms of working together and making decisions about financial aspects of community functioning, consideration is given to the financial capacities of all members (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005).

Along with the common characteristics of cohousing, the model places emphasis on the balance between community life and private living. The community is designed in a way that residents have the option of participating in community life while continuing the routines of their private lives. The community design allows residents to have a private dwelling and also enjoy the benefits of community/shared living. Houses are self-sufficient with all the facilities seen in regular housing. There is no requirement for participation in social gatherings and events aside from the self-management aspect of cohousing (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005). There are often agreements made by the community on issues such as interaction and privacy. With an imbedded focus on social relationships, residents often aim to live in a harmonious environment through effective communication. Codes and rules are decided by the community and are revisited from time to time to ensure they are appropriate. Changes are made through learning experiences yet the overall structure remains relatively informal in nature, particularly as residents form close social ties (Meltzer, 2005).

The relative features of cohousing have made it an extremely popular housing option around the globe. A community designed for social interaction resonates with a range of individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The cohousing option of community has taken hold in many urban environments as it offers an alternative community design from what is conventionally seen. For many individuals, the basic human longing for social connection and support is found through cohousing causing the housing model to continue flourishing throughout the world (Meltzer, 2005; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005).

Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood

Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood is situated in a suburb in Waitakere, West Auckland, New Zealand. It is described by members as an innovative urban cohousing development based on a model of social and environmental sustainability. The community envisions a sustainable living environment within urban Auckland and works to implement their vision of establishing a cohousing neighbourhood based on the principles of permaculture. Their vision (Earthsong, 2012) aims to:

- Design and construct a cohesive neighbourhood whose layout, buildings and services demonstrate the highest practical standards of sustainable human settlement
- Develop and foster a living environment which uses clear communication, decision-making and conflict resolution guidelines that promote tolerance, safety, respect and co-operation
- Assist in education and public awareness of sustainability by demonstrating and promoting innovative community design and environmentally responsible construction.

Through investigation of sustainable communities, Meltzer (2005) wrote:

"Of all the communities included in this series of case studies, Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood has perhaps the most ambitious vision. The simple, pithy statement above encompasses ... a hugely rich and complex social and environmental agenda. (p. 85)

Earthsong actively seeks to foster a sense of community within the neighbourhood and abides by processes and principles that are considerate of the natural environment. The site layout, houses, and solar and water systems contribute towards environmental sustainability. The community design, social organisation and decision-making processes contribute towards social sustainability, and cooperation and sharing of resources encourages economic sustainability; all of which are discussed in more detail below.

Design and Development

The design and development of the community was initiated by local community members who wished to live in a more socially and environmentally sustainable neighbourhood. They hoped to create a community that was more cooperative and ecologically sound; reflecting their value system. After consultation with a number of people and organisations, a development group formed in 1995 with committed and passionate individuals who shared a common vision. The group made decisions on the basis of consensus and aligned skills and talents of members with the purpose of the project.

There was turnover within the group itself with members entering and leaving constantly although several key people remained. The core group met over five years discussing and planning the cohousing project that was to be initiated in Waitakere. Interpersonal and communication agreements were decided upon during the numerous meetings that took place over the years. A colour card system was developed over time and alongside community planning, proposals were being sent to the Waitakere City Council. Many lessons were learnt on how to organise and manage the planning and execution of the development project through a process of trial and error. The group put immense effort to appropriately plan the physical and communal aspects of the community.

In 1998, the group visited an organic orchard that was for sale at the time. The location was ideal for the urban development given the easy access to local shops and public transport, in line with the vision of sustainability. After intense discussion on financial issues and ownership structures, the group proceeded to buy the organic orchard in 1999. Once the land was purchased, the group moved onto design and architectural aspects of the community. Considerations were made in terms of the environment ensuring maximum utilisation of natural resources. Many factors were discussed during this phase including legal issues, funding, building materials, and on-site services.

The layout of the community was designed for people as opposed to cars. Medium density housing was agreed upon which fitted 32 houses within comfortable living space and plenty of open areas; nearly double the amount compared to an ordinary suburb (see Figure 1). There was a lot of focus placed on keeping the 'living area' car-free and having plenty of pedestrian paths for access to all parts of the community.



Figure 1: View of Earthsong from the top floor of the common house

Transition areas were designed between private and shared space to safeguard privacy and autonomy. The houses were grouped in nodes to create a sense of togetherness within the larger community (see Figure 2). The kitchen area in all houses overlooked community space leaving the back open for a private yard. The overall design of the community allowed for efficient use of space and a lower building footprint.



Figure 2: Houses grouped in nodes with connecting pathways

The building officially started in 2000 and continued for eight years, with several unanticipated issues with construction and funding. The development was built in two separate stages with the first lot of houses being completed in 2002 and the second lot including the common house in 2006. Residents began to move into the

community as it was being developed and by 2008, the entire cohousing development was completed.

The houses were built using natural and ecologically friendly materials including rammed earth and natural timber. Low energy and healthy houses were guaranteed through the passive solar design, water catchment systems and non-toxic materials (see Figure 3). The houses were built on principles of eco-building so are deliberately compact in size.



Figure 3: Houses built of rammed earth and natural timber with solar panels visible on the roof

The common house and facilities act as an extension of residents' homes including shared laundry, meeting rooms, and children's play areas (see Figure 4 and 5). The common house was placed in the centre of the community with easy access to extensive verandas and pergolas, and shared outdoor space (see Figure 6).



Figure 4: Inside view of the common house



Figure 5: Shared laundry and games room



Figure 6: Veranda and pergola outside the common house

Residents had access to organically grown fruits and vegetables in the community garden (see Figure 7). It was located at the back of the property and was managed by a group of residents within the community; the permaculture group.



Figure 7: Community garden

The entire process of designing and developing Earthsong community was exhilarating and exhausting for all involved. Time and effort was spent on ensuring that the community mirrored the vision of sustainability. Many obstacles were overcome in order to achieve the final product of the development plan, reflected in the lengthy process. There was no lack of conflict within the group during the entire planning and execution process, though the key members believed that working through difficulties was what ensured commitment and made them stronger as a team. The passion and perseverance behind the project ultimately resulted in a flourishing eco-neighbourhood.

People and Processes

Earthsong community comprises of 32 households and approximately 75 residents. Within the community there is a range of ages, ethnic backgrounds and economic circumstances. Multigenerational community and relationships are valued and visible around the community. The vibrant atmosphere at Earthsong allows for social interaction, recreation and entertainment. Community life consists of optional shared activities including common meals twice a week and working bees in the community garden. The attention paid to social sustainability contributes to the cooperative and respectful living environment. Social systems of organisation are constantly reviewed to ensure peaceful living.

Earthsong is committed to their vision and residents openly share their knowledge and experience of sustainable communal living. The Earthsong Centre Trust is responsible for the educational aspect of the community that offers presentations and tours of the sustainable design. Approximately 100 events of this sort occur each year as the public gains interest in the living arrangement, processes, and alternative design of the community.

The social infrastructure of Earthsong aligns with its vision of sustainability. Group agreements are made clear to guarantee individual and community needs are met. To gain membership into the community, individuals must identify with the vision and processes of living in the community. The membership process of Earthsong provides an open invitation to experience community life and is self selecting in nature. Interested individuals are assigned a local resident who helps them with questions and queries. They are required to attend two full-group meetings to familiarise themselves with the decision-making process, discussed below. They are also encouraged to participate in social events such as common meals to meet other residents and gain firsthand experience of community life.

Upon acceptance of the community, new members must sign the Initial Organising Agreement, a document that reinstates the vision, members' rights and responsibilities, and group agreements. By doing this, individuals are initiated into the community as Associate members and gain participation in full-group meetings and decision-making. To obtain Full Membership, individuals must make a significant financial contribution and commitment towards the community. A Full Membership is required to purchase a house at Earthsong and ensures a voting right for urgent decisions unable to be made through consensus. By having a self-selecting process of membership, Earthsong community upholds a strong and sustainable culture that is open to diverse individuals and worldviews.

For a clear decision-making structure, the core development group decided upon consensus decision-making. The full-group consists of all members of Earthsong and meets once a month to discuss community issues. Focus groups, which are made up of fewer members are responsible for a certain aspect of community life

such as finance, permaculture, education, or community life. The focus groups meet more regularly, either once a week or once a fortnight depending on issues raised. Members decide which focus group to participate in, and gain authority to make minor decisions. They also prepare proposals for important community issues that are presented in full-group meetings.

The meeting procedure begins with a round of 'check-ins' which are personal in nature. This aspect of meetings is important for establishing connections, maintaining trust and building friendships. Community issues are brought forth following a meeting agenda and decisions are made using a simple but powerful coloured-card system. The colours of the cards represent different views or concerns and are used in facilitation of discussion and final decision-making. For example, when an issue is raised and a member has a question, they hold up a yellow card. On the other hand, if they have a comment or opinion, they hold up a blue card. The colours are prioritised and members speak accordingly. This system includes all members of the community in the decision-making process and ensures that voices, concerns, and reservations are heard and addressed.

Meeting minutes are recorded and distributed and for members who are not present at any given meeting, an opportunity to address issues is given. If proposals do not get approval at a full-group meeting, they are sent back to the focus group to make relevant changes and re-propose the idea. This can happen for several meetings depending on the issue at hand so if a decision is important and urgent, a 75% majority voting system exists as a fallback process. In the 17 year history of Earthsong, the voting process has only been used twice which shows the preference and validity of consensus decision-making.

The consensus decision-making process is valued for its inclusive processes; necessary for the ongoing management of the community. The cooperation between members allows for community issues to be adequately addressed and decisions to be made for the greater good. It is regarded as a learning process where members get to know one other, resolve interpersonal difficulties and rebuild interdependence in community.

The value of studying intentional communities

There is immense value in the academic study of intentional communities such as cohousing. For many years, scholars have encouraged the study of intentional communities to deepen understanding of social phenomena (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Metcalf, 1986; Mulder et al., 2006; Zablocki, 1971). As Metcalf (1986) claims:

“Alternative lifestyle research has implications not only for understanding counter-cultural social phenomena and the sociology of deviant subgroups, but also for such wider societal issues as social structure, power and authority” (p. 3)

The value of studying various community types is also identified by Page (2010). He discusses the lack of research on intentional communities due to false notions about alternative lifestyles. He claims that the context in which the American community movement began was not well understood (discussed in next chapter). The community movement’s positive aspects are commonly ignored although they have the potential to encourage positive change. Page uses the example of common property which he claims was brought into awareness through the communal living movement in Australia influenced by the movement of the 60s in the USA. He states that the movement offers a new paradigm for property and questions why it is not being pursued as an area of research today (Page, 2010).

The differences in intentional communities are a valuable resource enabling the exploration of group dynamics and social processes. Abrams and McCulloch (1976) acknowledge that every intentional community is an expression of a predominant belief or value system. Investigating these systems allows for insight into the functioning of communities and societies. The counter-cultural nature of intentional communities encourages the questioning of assumptions made in conventional societies, particularly values and intentions.

Numerous scholars, including Clapham, 2005, Davies & Herbert, 1993, and Walmsley, 1988, have looked into the social impact of urban design. Often, the incline of privatised living and decline of community is noted (Clapham, 2005; Davies

& Herbert, 1993; Walmsley, 1988). The effect of urban living on individuals and communities is an important area for research within urban planning, sustainable development and community psychology. Contemporary social fragmentation is believed to have led to experiences of increased stress and social isolation (Chiras, 2002; Klinger, 2012; McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005). This puts emphasis on the need to understand neighbourhood effects on behaviour, interactions, and well-being. Thus, the large focus on relationships placed within intentional communities makes them a valuable area of research.

The multiple formations of intentional communities are seen as natural laboratories that experiment with changes in organisation, structure, management and everyday living (Bader, Mencken, & Parker, 2006; Zablocki, 1971). The benefit of studying intentional communities is to understand the effects of changes in environment that influence social phenomena. The ranges of communities that live intentionally provide a vast number of natural laboratories because intentions and visions vary. As Zablocki (1980) puts it:

“Many communes are experimental attempts to build social order upon a basis of love. Others are attempts to live anarchistically, without any constraints on individual behaviour. Still others are attempts to subordinate all individual will to a single general will” (p. 2)

Intentional communities are considered micro-versions of wider society that provide an opportunity to study wider social phenomena including social organisation. The value of studying intentional communities is the obvious effects of environment on mental, physical, and emotional well being of individuals. The investigation of intentional communities can provide insight into the psychological effects of different factors that contribute towards community experience (Mulder et al., 2006). The relationship of individuals with their community (intentional or unintentional) holds valuable insight into everyday community life. Quality of life can be explored in respect to environmental aspects that have an influence on community organisation and structure. Methods of creating and sustaining healthy communities and societies

can be established through a deeper understanding of individual and social phenomena through the study of intentional communities.

The aims of the present research

The primary goal of this research was to investigate the experience of living in a cohousing community. Within the scope of this research, I looked at cohousing communities as a form of intentional community based on an architectural model of housing. More specifically I aimed to:

- Explore the benefits and challenges of living in a cohousing community
- Document the experience of living in a cohousing community
- Investigate the impact of the design of the cohousing model on the experience of living in cohousing

I used a social constructivist approach for this research which views construction of reality as an ongoing process where interactions are seen as the basis for deriving meaning of experiences and ideas (Silverman, 1997). This approach allowed me to gather experiences of residents in a manner that was thorough and respectful. I chose to interview current and past residents from Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood to explore benefits and challenges and investigate the impact of intentional design. I aimed to document the experience of living in a cohousing community through the stories shared by Earthsong residents.

Thesis outline

This thesis presents the process and results of the research conducted. In the next chapter, Chapter Two, I provide a review of national and international literature on topics related to cohousing including utopianism, communal living, and intentional communities.

In Chapter Three, I describe the methodology and methods used in this study. The use of a constructivist approach, and semi-structured qualitative interviews, is explained. I also describe the analysis process used and consider ethical issues presented in the research.

In Chapter Four, I present the findings of this study in three sections based on the main themes to emerge from the stories of residents of Earthsong. Each section is separated in terms of benefits and challenges to provide a clearer understanding of the findings in relation to the aims of the study.

In Chapter Five, I examine the findings presented in Chapter Four and literature discussed in Chapter Two; the findings are discussed in relation to the literature. Similarities between the theory and experience of cohousing, and intentional communities, are highlighted. This chapter is separated into three main sections coherent with the aims of the research. Firstly, the challenges of cohousing are discussed; secondly, the benefits of cohousing. In this chapter I conclude with documenting the experience of living an alternative lifestyle within cohousing.

This thesis concludes with Chapter Six, in which I reiterate the main findings of this study in relation to the objectives of the research. The limitations of this study are explained, together with opportunities for future investigation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I provide a review of literature on utopianism and communal living relative to intentional communities including cohousing. There are four main sections with associated subsections including utopianism, communal living, intentional communities, and cohousing. The relevance of utopianism to intentional communities is the comparable desire and vision of living in harmonious communities and societies. In the first section, I begin by discussing utopia as a concept including its basic principles, changing nature and multiple interpretations. I look at the different perspectives on utopian thought and the significance of understanding the concept as a means to an end rather than an end itself. Then, I debate the relationship between utopianism and intentional communities considering differing beliefs about inherent utopianism within intentional community philosophy. To end, I look at the concept of dystopia including its destructive, life-threatening nature and believed manifestation in today's industrialised societies.

In the second section of the chapter, I look closely at the American community movement of the 1960s and 1970s which had lasting global impact. I describe the circumstances and influences leading to youth revolt, and how communal living became a solution to political and cultural oppression. Then, I focus on the creation of an alternative reality through communal living and mainstream withdrawal followed by the difficulties of sustaining community. Lastly, I discuss the implications of the movement and lessons to be learnt for the creation of healthier communities.

In the third section, I discuss the literature on intentional communities. I begin by exploring the difficulty of defining 'community' and 'intentional community' which hinders a fuller understanding of the topic. Then, I discuss the counter-cultural aspect of intentional community including its alternative approach to living and opposition to many conventional beliefs and systems of organisation. I also illuminate the differences between modern and olden intentional communities including the communes of the 60s. Next, I look at the sustainability aspect of intentional communities and its relevance to the development of communities today. I highlight the underutilisation of intentional community knowledge in regards to sustainability. Then, I discuss the benefits and challenges of living in an intentional community including the differences between certain aspects of intentional and suburban community living. Lastly, I discuss the New Zealand context of intentional

communities, including its growth in the 60s, as influenced by the American movement. I also describe the Ohu settlement scheme and Maori communalism in relation to New Zealand intentional communities.

In the fourth section of this chapter, I focus on cohousing communities and begin by establishing the purpose of the cohousing model. I explain the similarities and differences between cohousing and other intentional communities. Then, I describe its growth and impact over the past few years and discuss its relatedness to social sustainability. I explain how the cohousing model has potential to transform suburban neighbourhoods and how it can be classed as part of a wider social movement. Next, I look at the adaptability of the cohousing model and its applicability to many different community structures and organisations. Lastly, I discuss the benefits and challenges of living an alternative lifestyle within a cohousing community. I focus on implications of the cohousing model and intentional community design.

Utopianism

Utopia was a term coined in the 16th century by Sir Thomas More, and was used to define a society that possessed pro social aspirations and qualities (Kumar, 1987; Touraine, 2000). Thus, utopianism was defined as the views and tendencies of a utopian thinker that stemmed from a concept of social reform (Kumar, 1991). In this section I look at the early concept of utopia and its significance today. I also explore the questionable relationship between utopianism and intentional communities such as cohousing.

The Concept of Utopia

“Utopia” as a word derived from Greek word “topos” meaning “place”, and acts as a play of phonetics with Greek words “eu” meaning “good” and “ou” meaning “no”. Therefore, it was believed to mean *“a good place that does not (yet) exist”* (Tamdgidi, 2003, p. 127). The interpretations of utopia as a concept varied over time and amongst literary texts of different disciplines, particularly as perspective was

subjective (Doxiadis, 1966; Dumont, 1974; Kateb, 1963; Kumar, 1987; Sargent & Schaer, 2000). However, one aspect that had been agreed upon by utopian scholars was the changing nature of utopia depending on the time and space in which it was being considered (Gordin, Tilley, & Prakash, 2010; Kumar, 1987, 1991; Sargent, 2010; Schaer, 2000). As Sadeq, Shalabi and Alkurdi (2011) stated “*utopian themes reflect the spirit of the age which produces them, and echo its problems, ailments and concerns*” (p. 131). Utopianism was broadly seen as a universal goal for a better society, a vision that had been present throughout the history of mankind as a result of injustice and inequality. Affected by changing circumstances, utopia had been subjectively reconstructed to suit the needs of a particular society (Doxiadis, 1966; Kumar, 1987; Levitas, 1990). In turn, it became a form of social organisation to aspire towards. The desire for freedom, equality and democracy was seen as a utopian need which had sprung from oppressing human experiences. Thus, utopia could be viewed as a longing of common humanity for a world without authority, strife or poverty (Fournier, 2002; Parker, 2002).

The importance of viewing utopia from the perspective of undying concerns was stated in the majority of utopian literature. Utopia was seen as a call for change that should not be judged on history or contemporary life. It was perceived as a characterisation of imperfections that hindered enjoyable realities for all of mankind. Utopia provided a vision of a better society as a possible solution for the ills of nature, human nature, and society (Kumar, 1991; Levitas, 1990; Sadeq, Shalabi, & Alkurdi, 2011; Sargent, 2000; Sargisson, 2007; Schaer, 2000; Tamdgidi, 2003). Utopia idealised a society based on unity and intimate collective life, or as Kateb (1963) said a “*system of values which places harmony at the centre*” (p. 9). The vision of such a society was seen as a means of establishing hope for the future (Ashcroft, 2008; Bisk, 2002; Harvey, 2000; Tonuma, 2002). Kumar (1991) stated:

Utopia, it is said, is a perennial philosophy, a basic habit of the mind or, even more, the heart which manifests itself at all times and in all places. It may even be the product of some instinctual ‘principle of hope’ in the individual human psyche. (p. 43)

The sceptics of a conceptual utopia gave rise to anti-utopia, which “*has stalked utopia from the very beginning*” (Kumar, 1987, p. 99). Kumar (1987) described anti-utopia as the shadow of utopia whose goal was to provoke mockery of utopia. Anti-utopian beliefs stem from a vision of utopia as imaginary and impractical. The reason for this was perhaps judgements based on older utopian visions of a world with no wrong-doing comprised of God-like beings. The beginnings of utopian thought, which were evidently western, were often based on mythologies similar to religious cosmologies of the East (Sadeq et al., 2011; Sargisson, 2007). The extra-ordinary qualities of man that were recognised through early utopianism gave rise to many doubts, primarily by conservatives, who claimed that utopia was impossible to achieve (Harvey, 2000; Kumar, 1987, 1991). Kumar (1987) claimed that anti-utopianism was simply a negative response to positive content; scepticism of hopeful claims. Anti-utopianism often placed emphasis on the dark side of human nature including greed and self-indulgence. Due to the ever-present possibility of displaying negative traits, it was believed that human beings were unable to achieve or strive for perfection (Harvey, 2000; Kumar, 1987; North, 1976). The idea of perfection, was what Doxiadis (1966) referred to as the most contentious aspect of utopianism. He questioned whether utopia meant a ‘happy place’, ‘no place’, or both. He believed that the ambiguity of utopia as a concept caused confusion and contrary belief systems.

The imaginary world of utopia was perhaps an ideal state of perfection although it was believed to be an achievable goal for humanity, not immediately but potentially (Kateb, 1963; Levitas, 1990; Sargent & Schaer, 2000; Sargisson, 2007; Touraine, 2000). Doxiadis (1966) stated the importance for humanity to have common dreams and cooperate to realise them. He viewed the dreams of utopia as an important vehicle for transformation and claimed that “*progress is based on dreams which mobilize the mind, cause discussions, start movements, and lead to realizations*” (p. 48). The concept of utopia as a process rather than a place or state was prevalent throughout utopian studies (Doxiadis, 1966; Fournier, 2002; Kateb, 1963; Levitas, 1990). Here, utopia was not seen as an end itself but rather a means to an end. It was viewed as a response to the discontent with immediate society, like many intentional communities, discussed in more detail below. Utopia was a process

because it was affected by changing circumstances and therefore required continual effort (Doxiadis, 1966; Fournier, 2002; Kateb, 1963; Parker, 2002). Doxiadis (1966) viewed utopia as the principle of humanity's progress due to the vision of harmony and for this reason, he saw utopias as significant and valuable, if conceived properly (Kumar, 1987; Sargisson, 2007; Touraine, 2000). Kumar (1991) argued that although the concept of utopia was fictional and not based on actual worlds, the image of a good society remained the same throughout the ages. He questioned how a just, harmonious society envisioned by utopian thinkers was any different to the hopes of many individuals today. He likened utopian theory to social or political theory whose goals remain fictitious and unrealised yet commonly shared. Thus, utopia from this perspective claimed it was not a state to be attained, but rather a vision to aid humanity's progression.

Intentional Communities as Utopian

As with debate on the concept of utopia, there were various contradictions on intentional communities as utopian. Sargisson (2007) claimed that intentional communities were inherently utopian if their common vision alone was considered. The vision of more sustainable and harmonious community living that derived from dissatisfaction with contemporary society was the basis of many, if not all, intentional communities as well as utopianism (Kanter, 1972; Oved, 2000; Sargisson, 2007; Schehr, 1997). Doxiadis (1966) believed that intentional communities were a result of utopian theories that perceived public and private life as unjust and unsatisfying. The possibility of creating an alternative society, as envisioned primarily by early utopian thinkers was linked to the manifestation of intentional communities that were withdrawn from conventional practices and systems of organisation (Doxiadis, 1966; Friesen & Friesen, 2004; Kateb, 1963). Older intentional communities were more withdrawn from mainstream society as a means to create an alternative reality. The retreat from society resulted in confinement to the community which Kateb (1963) believed was why contemporary intentional communities were less distant and aimed to be part of wider society. This was seen as evidence of utopia as a process and the changing nature of intentional communities and utopia alike; thinking historically and projecting into the future. Intentional communities from this perspective were viewed as practical utopias that experimented with the future in the

way that utopian imagination did. They were seen as a manifestation of the needs of utopia such as harmony, freedom and democracy; a new social pattern likened to the hopes of utopia (Bisk, 2002; Fournier, 2002; Hardy, 1979; North, 1976).

On the other hand, Friesen and Friesen (2004) returned to the ambiguity surrounding the ideal and perfect society, as discussed earlier. They claimed that there was a persistent tension between actively creating an ideal society and simply establishing a good way to live. Although the two were interconnected, in terms of intentional communities, thoughts on utopian idealism differed amongst community members. Discontented city dwellers often came together to create community and experiment with communal living unsure of the utopian vision they were striving towards, as evident in the community movement of the 60s and 70s discussed in the next section (Bisk, 2002; Friesen & Friesen, 2004; Kanter, 1972; Sargisson, 2007).

As Jones (2011) noted, many intentional communities disagreed with the connection they had to utopian communities. As utopia viewed tension and conflict arising primarily from social conditions, intentional communities often saw the rise from within individuals. This distinction was one of the reasons some intentional communities did not consider themselves utopian. The negative connotations of utopia, aided by anti-utopianism, were another reason why communities retreated from the utopian label. Many claimed that they were not attempting to create a better society but rather an alternative way of living. A more satisfying and fulfilling life was envisioned and often experienced but the goal of creating an ideal society was far from the visions of many intentional communities (Friesen & Friesen, 2004; Greenburg, 2003; Jones, 2011; Sargisson, 2007). Nevertheless, Kumar (1991) claimed that intentional communities were models of practical utopias based on a shared vision of a better life. He mentioned that although intentional communities varied in longevity, the values cultivated were related to utopian thought and lasted long after the community dissipated. In the words of Greenburg (2003):

For 99% of our evolution as a species we lived in tribes, knowable communities in which we “belonged”. In fact, it is our present day absence of community that is abnormal.... Intentional communities are experiments in how we can create a sense of community and shared values within our present day world. They are not utopias, but to the extent that they succeed in creating holistic and healthy

environments in which children can learn and grow, they may have much wisdom to offer as we move to a post-industrial society. (p. 681)

Dystopia

In relation to utopia, dystopia was often referred to as the other side of the coin. If utopia painted the glowing picture of humanity, dystopia was the one to paint it black (Chernilo, 2011; Doxiadis, 1966; Dumont, 1974; Harvey, 2000). The dystopian view of humanity was concerned primarily with satisfying selfish desires over the quality of life. It was likened to the persistent view of contemporary life in industrialised societies. The suffering in cities where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer was a prime example of dystopian vision (Lawler, 2005; Tonuma, 2002). According to Doxiadis (1966), five elements that constituted cities must be considered in relation to dystopia, which he named nature, man, society, shells and networks. He highlighted the condition of these five elements and how they contributed towards the creation of dystopia. Nature was seen as worsening from the condition of the past with the increasing recognition of environmental degradation. Man naturally preferred to live a peaceful and content lifestyle yet remained a slave to the environment, living fearfully in cities and suburbs. Society, created by man, appeared to be unjust as it provided unequal opportunities to citizens. The shells, which referred to buildings and houses, had improved in quality yet were designed to isolate us from one another. Lastly, networks referred to factors such as transport and water or power supply. Their functioning was seen as less than optimal, creating a high dependency on technology (Doxiadis, 1966). The consideration of these elements in modern society led Doxiadis to question the suitability of contemporary human settlement. He believed that the issues of size and uncontrollable growth in cities would eventuate in a re-emergence of utopian thought and ideal cities (Chernilo, 2011; Jones, 2011). It was envisioned that only the collapse of the current system of organisation would act as motivation to live sustainably (Harvey, 2000; Loest, 2001; Tonuma, 2002).

Dumont (1974) saw dystopia as a political problem but highlighted the lack of initiative taken by political parties or policy makers. She referred to the history of

revolutions, including the communal movement of the 60s, discussed in the next section. She emphasised authority's lack of interest in the concerns of common people and in the case of the communal movement, mentioned how the contributions of the movement to understanding the ills of society were disregarded. Doxiadis (1966), who viewed intentional communities as utopian, stated:

Utopias are generally regarded as literary curiosities which have been made respectable by illustrious names, rather than as serious contributions to political problems which troubled the age at which they appeared. (p. 47)

Modern societies which were based on economic prosperity and scientific truth were seen to be leading humanity towards a dystopia, a common perspective amongst utopian thinkers and intellectuals alike. The visions of a better future that had persisted through time remained present but unconsidered “*because we float between a wasteland without reason, without dream, and the dreamland with dreams, but without reason*” (Doxiadis, 1966, 48).

Summary

The literature on utopianism highlighted the multiple perspectives that exist on the topic and the difficulty in defining utopia's true nature. Utopian thought was seen to exist throughout the history of mankind as a desire for a just and harmonious society. Two primary features of utopianism were highlighted in the literature; its changing nature and it being a means to an end. The changing nature of utopia was considered a significant aspect as utopianism developed and adjusted according to the needs of the time in which it was being conceived. Although the desire to live in a peaceful society was evident over the years, the vision and image of utopia was seen to alter with the needs of contemporary society. Viewing utopia as a means to an end rather than an end in itself was discussed by many utopian scholars. This highlighted the importance of understanding that utopia was not a state to achieve but rather a vision to progress human development. Despite the acknowledgement of utopianism as a valuable tool for progression, anti-utopian scholars viewed utopia as impractical and unachievable. Based on visions of violence-free and poverty-free societies, many scholars claimed utopia was unattainable due to the imperfections of

mankind. Thus, the concept of utopia was regarded as significant and valuable on one hand, and unrealistic and impossible on the other.

The literature highlighted the questionable relationship between utopianism and intentional communities. Many scholars believed that the emergence and existence of intentional communities stemmed from utopian thought and vision. The majority of intentional communities were established as an alternative to conventional societies, often possessing a vision of a better world. For this reason, they were considered to be inherently based on utopianism. Some viewed intentional communities as living experiments or practical utopias due to the desire to create a harmonious community. On the other hand, many intentional communities disregarded the link to utopianism and claimed to establish their communities as an alternative form of everyday living as opposed to a better way for the world. They often acknowledged the impossibility of creating a perfect community and resisted the utopian label, perhaps due to its negative connotations.

The literature on dystopia emphasised the implications of holding contrary views to utopianism. The manifestation of dystopia, a world embedded in suffering and strife, was likened to the subconscious aspirations of contemporary industrialised societies. The progression of humanity towards economic prosperity was seen to possess destructive qualities that were degrading man and the environment. The fulfilment of selfish and material desires was seen to create a society that was unjust and chaotic. Dystopian scholars questioned the degradation of man and nature and believed that current desires and visions were discouraging collective aspirations and leading humanity towards dystopia.

Communal Living

The existence of intentional communities dated back thousands of years. Various forms of communities, including communal living arrangements had been established globally. Although a number of intentional communities were visible throughout history, the communal movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States of America led to an explosion of communities within and beyond the country. In this section, I explore various facets of life that led to the movement and caused global impact. I also discuss the experience of those who established

intentional communities during this time and consider implications of the American community movement.

The Movement

In the 1960s to 1970s, the USA saw the beginnings of a communal living movement that influenced many countries including New Zealand and resulted in more than three times the number of intentional communities that previously existed (Gardner, 1978; Miller, 1999a; Rigby, 1974b). The movement began at the time when American society was experiencing abundance in wealth and materiality compared to other countries. The majority of participants in the movement were middle to upper class youth eager and desperate to make a change in their society. Despite the abundance of wealth and material prosperity, individuals from such backgrounds were dissatisfied with the way of life and sought to create an alternative through community. Political, social and cultural ideologies of the time were contradictory to those held by people who took part in the movement. The oppression, alienation and inhumanity of city life experienced by the youth of the 60s was believed to be the main reason that they turned their backs on modern day living and opted for a communal lifestyle (Miller, 1999a; Rigby, 1974a). As Gardner (1978) stated:

Nor, for the most part, were they motivated by any particular political or religious ideology, social tradition, or ordered set of intellectual ideas and principles. Instead, their retreat to the country was an intuitive response to the circumstances of their lives and times. For the children of prosperity who abandoned the cities in the late 1960s, America had passed beyond redemption into a complete social, political, cultural, moral and ecological wasteland. (p. 4)

As youth of the 60s evaluated their future, they saw a minimal chance of experiencing satisfaction and contentment based on the lives of their wealthy parents and wider society. As Melville (1972) claimed, the community movement of 'radical youth' should be "*understood as a social class phenomenon than as generational revolt*" (p. 85). Although affluence was linked to greater opportunities and prospects, Miller (1999) believed that it also fostered discontent and rebellion.

The majority of youth were known to emerge from socially and economically privileged families. Their position however, was what caused them to reflect on the values of their families and societies. Being educated and well informed, the youth turned away from the expectation of sustaining wealth towards social concerns. They began to distance themselves from the status quo and question its assumptions. The discovery of egocentric values that dominated society and inhumane institutional arrangements that governed the country was ultimately what led them to rebel against the conventional way of life (Miller, 1999a; Rigby, 1974b).

There are two major factors viewed as the genesis of movement; post-Beatnik Bohemian youth culture and associated psychedelic substances, and political defiance (Gardner, 1978). Bohemian youth culture was prevalent in the early 1960s and influenced by anti-materialistic philosophy and literature. Youth associated with it were later known as “hippies” and labelled by an American columnist as *“strange people running around the Haight-Ashbury district with long hair, beads, bells and flowers”* (Gardner, 1978, p. 5). Hippies were often referred to in the press and were well known for their experimentation with psychedelics. Gardner (1978) believed that the use of psychedelics influenced the community movement as many users experienced:

“the breakdown of society’s conventional value system, the dislocation of users from the life plans and career tracks marked out for them, and the consequent exodus in search of new worlds, new fulfilments and new selves” (pp. 5-6)

The conventional ways of life were seen to value precision, calculation and routine, whereas the hippies valued spontaneity and indifference to work. Most of them lived double lives guarding their identity whilst at home; others made small colonies and began to live closer to each other. “Crash pads” were the first communal living experience as groups of like-minded youth gathered to share and live together. Viewed as a revolutionary force, hippies were known to break free from conventional regime and work ethic (H. Gardner, 1978; Miller, 1999a).

Parallel to the hippie movement, began a student protest movement. A large number of youth became involved in political matters including the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam War protest, which eventually led to a rebellion against the USA as a

capitalist society. Many citizens experienced extreme political violence during that period including bombings, shootings, assassinations and strikes throughout the country (Miller, 1999a; Rigby, 1974b). Over time, the aggression of youth was unsustainable and eventually turned into a mode of self preservation. Dissatisfied, disillusioned, and disappointed, youth looked towards an alternative to the status quo and a means to distance themselves from society. The gathering of hippies and student protesters was predominantly through collective living as both groups held similar ideals and envisioned a better way of life. Together they formed groups and attempted to return 'back to the land' and live communally in rural, remote locations. As more and more youth searched for an alternative reality, the model of collective living turned into a social movement (H. Gardner, 1978; Miller, 1999a; Rigby, 1974b).

Alternative Realities

The search for alternative realities by youth in the 1960s is likened to the search for utopia, discussed in the previous section. Hardy (1979) referred to utopia as the framework and theory, and intentional communities as the reality and practice. He stated that the utopian vision of changing society and creating a different reality was highly evident in the hippie and student protest movements. The substitution of an alienated industrial society for a cooperative communal based society was envisioned by community pioneers and utopian thinkers alike (Hardy, 1979; Rigby, 1974a). The openness to abandoning suburban lifestyles and rejecting the status quo was seen as a desire to return to community and experience "*cooperation and brotherhood*" instead of "*competitive individualism*" (Miller, 1999, p. 2)

With ample opportunities, middle and upper class youth experienced wealthy and luxurious lifestyles. Despite this, they were dissatisfied with the social values, structures and conditions which prevailed, leading them to search for a new reality (Rigby, 1974a). Their perspective on the social system was grim, and deliberate withdrawal from it was a way to create a positive, morally rich environment. Knowing that wealth was unable to provide unity and contentment, youth turned towards each other for guidance. Discussion groups began to form and crash pads, festivals and demonstrations became key locales for engaging in conversions about an alternative reality (Hardy, 1979). Rigby (1974) highlighted that youth of the 60s could afford to

experiment with creation of an alternative reality as they could return to a world of convention and wealth. Nevertheless, they began to create new communities around the country from the waste of society. Resource consumption was effective and creative, often as a reflection of the anti-materialistic lifestyle envisioned. Knowing almost nothing about communal living, the movement could be seen as a real-life experiment (Hardy, 1979; Melville, 1972; Rigby, 1974a).

As Rigby (1974) believed, the restrictions of community lead many Americans to undertake a privatised lifestyle and the communal movement was simply a return to community. The excessive alienation in American suburbia motivated youth to explore another form of living that was more in line with their beliefs and ideals. The rights of people over property were central to the desired reality which also embraced togetherness and created a sense of belonging. The communal living arrangement acted as the primary tool for creating an alternative reality. Through changing their living structure, and distancing themselves from society, communards experienced a different reality based on utopian principles. Intentional communities continued to emerge throughout the country as many more youth were eager to experience an alternative reality and “*demonstrate the superiority of communal work and living arrangements*” (Thies, 2000, p. 1)

Difficulties

The movement of the 1960s had opened the world to communal living although the majority of intentional communities were short-lived (Rigby, 1974b; Thies, 2000). As much of the literature on communal living focused on the context and movement, a number of reasons had been established for why most communities did not sustain, mostly based on theories as opposed to personal accounts. The importance of commitment, conflict management, solidarity and personal autonomy were highlighted as interlinked factors that influenced community longevity. Unfortunately, the idealistic visions of communal life did not sustain against practical and interpersonal issues (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Rigby, 1974b; Thies, 2000). Many of the pioneers of intentional community in the past were unaware of what communal living involved and their commitment to an alternative lifestyle was tested when times were challenging. The solidarity of the group was trialled in situations that needed

effective problem-solving and many groups did not even begin their community due to a lack of commitment and solidarity between the group (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Rigby, 1974b; Thies, 2000). Abrams and McCulloch (1976) noted that in order for group solidarity to be achieved, it was important that every member got his or her needs met. If what was given or received by an individual was considered to be of value to them, they were more likely to be committed long term.

In most, if not all, communes of the 1960s, a dignified leader was considered the prime decision-maker and in the case of unsatisfactory decision-making, many group members departed. Poor decision-making and failure to address persistent issues often gave rise to internal conflicts that proved difficult to resolve. For example, the division of labour was necessary for community maintenance however perceptions of unequal distribution lead to dissatisfied members, in turn affecting group solidarity (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976). Rigby (1974) noted the importance of conflict management to ensure community vitality. He referred to the differences amongst people and the difficulty of living closely with others. For many young community pioneers, knowledge of one another was limited aside from shared ideals and hopes for a better living environment. However, the willingness and commitment to living cooperatively ranged in intensity and individuals would often reject their community over some form of conflict and return to life in the suburbs (Rigby, 1974b; Thies, 2000).

Another factor that instigated difficulties in the communes of the 60s was the lack of personal space. Many communes were designed on the basis of sharing including food, income, and sleeping space. There was minimal personal autonomy in such communities as group members were confined to a communal living arrangement in all aspects of life. Abrams and McCulloch (1976) recognised the consequence of such a living structure and emphasised the need to accommodate for sociability as well as privacy. They believed that the restriction to communal living had a negative effect on many community members as they were unprepared for what it entailed. Some private property within the community was believed to be necessary in order for members to feel a sense of ownership and retract from community life when desired (Thies, 2000).

Although between one thousand and three thousand intentional communities were established between 1965 and 1970, the longevity was challenged due to several

aspects of communal living, specifically domestic personal relations. Thus, the communal living movement can be seen as an active experiment with principles of social solidarity, personal autonomy and group behaviour (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976). Many of the intentional communities established today took on a difference structure and organisation of communal living that appropriately met the needs of members. The changes in community structure were seen to address the issues that faced communes in the past, as discussed in the next section.

The Future

Norris (2001) proposed that the intentional communal movement of the 60s and 70s could have a significant impact on the understanding of communities. Although it was not well understood or documented, he argued that *“the future of this movement may well be to serve as a primary underpinning of [a] nation’s ability to address its most vexing issues”* (p. 301). Norris emphasised the importance of collaboration and togetherness, highlighted by the community movement, in creating healthy communities. He discussed the health disparities and vitality of current communities and the lack of a sense of community amongst inner city and suburban neighbourhoods stating that the community movement held important lessons applicable to different facets of society. He believed that issues of safety and crime, youth development, income inequality and family solidarity could be well addressed through community, collaboration, and care. Norris (2001) referred to traditional institutions becoming more aware of the importance of collaboration with community groups and grass-root organisations. The partnerships formed between these institutions encouraged effective utilisation of local assets to create healthier environments, as visible in the community movement. Environment was seen as a major determinant of health and well being, and the dissatisfaction with suburban living, as the primary reason for the communal movement, highlighted the impact of environment on man and the natural desire to live in a nurturing atmosphere. Norris emphasised the importance of commitment from all members in building communities, one of the main reasons the intentional communities of the 60s did not sustain:

We are learning that growing a healthy community is a lifelong process – one that requires our constant nurturing and vigilance. Healthy communities result from healthy choices and environments that support shared responsibility. And everyone has a role to play in building a healthier, more vibrant community. (p. 304)

The communal living movement brought forth ideas on how creativity and utilisation of unused resources could initiate and create positive change within communities, as desired by many individuals (Branson, 1975; Miller, 1999b; Norris, 2001). A lesson learnt from the community movement was the necessity to respond creatively to the needs of society. Instead of rejecting the entire system of organisation, as youth of the 60s did, it was more important to contribute creatively. Branson (1975) claimed that the community movement was the natural occurrence of differing beliefs and ideologies. He referred to the ideologies of the hippies, including the desire for community, causing them to evaluate larger society and actively reject the institutions that held differing ideologies. Branson believed that although rejection of the industrialised society was inevitable, a different response could have sustained change. The ills of urban living and organisation he stated, must be replaced not repulsed:

Urban-industrialism may be at a dead end, unable to stave off its chronic, organizational breakdowns, unable to throttle back its own suicidal dynamism. Even so, the technocracy cannot be overthrown; it can only be displaced, inch by living inch. (p. 82)

The flourishing of communal living in the 60s was subject to particular structures and systems of organisation, believed to be effective at the time (Miller, 1999b). Over the years, upon reflection of past community living structures and experiences, a difference was found between intentional communities of today and the past. The belief was that community seekers of today were willing to explore the history of community, including the communal movement, to establish methods of sustaining healthy communities (Miller, 1999b; Norris, 2001). This was evident in the changes within intentional community structures developed more recently. Miller (1999) listed

a number of key differences between past and present intentional communities including size, government, economics and settlement patterns. Today's communities tended to be much smaller in size and based within a single location. The governance of a community by a selected leader, Miller believed had become *"the exception rather than the rule"* (p. 60). Consensus decision-making based on anarchist principles had taken precedence due to the visible longevity of communities that adopt such an organisational structure (Jones, 2011; Miller, 1999b). Communities of the past often had shared income and had little opportunity to acquire personal assets. Members did not have control over much of the community economy as it was governed by a treasury. These days, more and more communities were acknowledging the need for a separation between private and shared assets, reflected in settlement patterns where community members own their house, together with a share in common property. In some cases, property ownership was not required as the option of renting was made available (Miller, 1999b; Page, 2010). As Miller stated, *"sharing no longer has to mean giving up everything"* (1999, p. 60).

Two visible features of contemporary intentional communities were lowered commitment and public profiles. In contrast to older communities, a lifelong membership was not demanded and often resulted in a high turnover of residents, viewed as a normal part of community life due to the increase in mobility this century. There was a range of intentional communities that adopted an alternative way of living, better synchronised with their ideologies. However, they kept a low profile aware of the misunderstandings and presumptions of communal living. The hope was to stay away from the negative attention and stereotypes associated with the communal movement, including the belief that communal living was subversive (Miller, 1999b). Despite the lack of awareness of intentional communal living, many communities exist and continue to emerge learning lessons from the past and present to create a sustainable future. As Kozeny (2008) stated:

"For thousands of years people have been coming together to share their lives in creative and diverse ways. Today is no different; efforts to create new lifestyles based on shared ideals are as common as ever." (p.11)

Summary

The literature on the community movement in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s highlighted the turn towards communal living during a time of material abundance and political unrest. The alienation and isolation experienced by people, particularly youth, during this time led to a questioning of modern living standards. After examining the values embedded in industrialised societies and social organisation, and being in disagreement with what was present, attention was turned towards social concerns. While some began to protest, others migrated to the outskirts of cities and established communes.

The primary reason for establishing communities in remote locations was to create alternative realities that opposed current understandings of the world. Communal living was turned towards as many people experienced the lack of social connection within suburban lifestyles. The youth of the 60s were willing to explore an alternative form of living that was more in line with their values. The desire for togetherness and belonging brought like-minded groups together and led to the creation of various intentional communities. Although the intention to live closely with others was evident, many difficulties were faced in terms of group dynamics. Youth that participated in the establishment of communities were often uninformed about how to live and work with others, as well as, how to be self-sustainable. For many groups, the challenging reality of living in communes was underestimated and eventuated in return to the city.

The American community movement had a lasting impact around the globe and continues to influence the development of communities today. Following the movement of the 60s, many intentional communities were established around the world, including New Zealand. For many scholars, the movement held valuable lessons about communal living and provided an understanding of communities in general. The insight into group dynamics and functioning communities was an important implication of the movement. Along with that, the focus on togetherness and cooperation within the communal movement highlighted the deep desire and requirement of these features in contemporary life. A number of scholars believed that these aspects of the movement and intentional communities in general remained largely unacknowledged though they were applicable to multiple facets of life and organisation.

Intentional Communities

There have been no concrete definitions of *intentional community* and what it does or does not incorporate (Jones, 2011; Metcalf, 1996; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). The main reasons for this were believed to be the broad range of possibilities that the term umbrellas and the multidimensional nature of community itself (Jones, 2011; Metcalf, 1996). In this section, I begin by acknowledging the difficulty of defining intentional communities and provide explanations for this challenge. I then focus on various features of intentional communities in relation to wider society and provide a brief history of intentional community establishment within a New Zealand context.

Defining Community

Literature on intentional communities was difficult to obtain despite *community* regaining popularity and becoming an academic 'buzzword', particularly over the past decade (Kozeny, 2000). The majority of the published literature on intentional communities discusses a specific intentional community in depth or a several communities broadly (Metcalf, 1996). There have been various reasons for the lack of literature on intentional communities as proposed by Sargisson and Sargent (2004). Firstly, there has been relatively little academic interest in intentional communities as social phenomena and community residents have had even lesser interest in participating in research. However, the proliferation of intentional communities in recent years has begun to receive some scholarly attention (Mulder et al., 2006). Secondly, the research carried out on intentional communities has often focused on a small subsection of community types such as cooperative or religious communities (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004).

The terminology used in study of community has been labelled as the primary reason for inclusion or exclusion of specific communities. The term 'communes' was used often, referring to various styles of communal living. However, after the communal movement in the 1960s and 1970s, discussed in the previous section, many communities did not want to associate themselves with the attached stereotype and began to use the terms "collective" or "community" which again was exclusive. The term 'intentional community' was introduced and accepted long after

such communities began and encompasses a wide range of community types including religious, spiritual, environmental, cooperative, and gated communities (Jones, 2011; Kozeny, 2008; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004).

Communities, both intentional and unintentional, exist for a variety of reasons and comprise of a range of people and activities. There was no particular method of creating or experiencing community and none appeared identical which added to the difficulty of defining them (Kozeny, 2000, 2008). The essence of any particular community was seen to be dependent on various factors and circumstances, yet it remained bigger than the sum of all its parts. Community was not a static phenomena and its changing nature emphasised the multidimensionality (Metcalf & Christian, 2003; Peck, 1987; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). As Peck (1987) stated, community, in its truest sense, was a spirit. He clarified that the term 'community spirit' often alluded to was shallow in its meaning as it generally implied a competitive spirit. Peck believed that real community did not embody competitiveness and was inclusive in nature. Throughout his career of working with communities, he believed that true community spirit could not be mistaken. The spiritual aspect of community was captured in a statement by a participant in a recent study of intentional community:

One of the conclusions I've come to is that you know community when you come across it. In a sense [people] call a thing a community before it is one. It has to have the feeling you have for other people that makes it that way. (Jones, 2011, p. 14)

The above comment emphasised the use of the term 'community' even when it was not entirely appropriate. Meltzer (2005) noted 'community' as one of the most notoriously misused words in academia and modern conversation. Kozeny (2000) agreed and referred to images of "*togetherness, cooperation, well-being and a sense of belonging*" (p. 49) often linked to community, yet he questioned how many so called communities provided these experiences for members. He noted that the most important aspect of community was immeasurable as it related to how members *felt* about their situation. As Peck (1987) stated, the true spirit of community was recognisable to one who experienced it yet remained indefinable due to its

immateriality. For these reasons, it has proven difficult over time to define and apply *community*, let alone *intentional community*.

Counter-culture

Despite the challenges of defining intentional communities, many scholars have attempted to form suitable descriptions. The simplest generalisation comes from Sanguinetti (2012):

“[Intentional communities are] a deliberate attempt to realize a common, alternative way of life outside mainstream society” (p. 5)

Since the beginning, intentional communities have been viewed as alternative communities that flow against the main current of society (Sanguinetti, 2012; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). Intentional communities have been built on a variety of visions and practices by which they can be categorised. For example, religious communities based on a particular faith, environmental communities based on the natural ecosystem, or cooperative communities based on togetherness (Loomis, 2011; Metcalf, 1996; Metcalf & Christian, 2003). The shared vision of a particular community was what attracted newer members who were generally pursuing a similar goal. A shared vision was believed to be vital for building and sustaining intentional community as it outlined the community’s values and shaped its culture (D. L. Christian, 2007; Metcalf, 1996). However, in a study of eighteen different communities, Kozeny (2000) found disconnections between founding visions and community realities, as well as, vision statements and feelings in the community. He stated that community was not a stagnant phenomenon; visions and values were likely to change and adapt to given circumstances. Thus, the importance was in the shared aspect of the vision, not the vision itself.

Kozeny (2008) stated that although the purpose of existence may change over time and differ amongst intentional communities, the one aspect that remained common was idealism. As a response to dissatisfaction with mainstream culture, intentional communities aimed to create more nurturing and fulfilling lifestyles. They envisioned a community that utilised the skills and talents of their members and thrived on togetherness (D. L. Christian, 2007; Metcalf & Christian, 2003). Kozeny (2000) found that apart from collective achievements of the community, it was the personal

connections between members that made the most difference. He stated that it was those connections that differentiated ordinary communities from intentional communities, referring to the feeling and spirit of community discussed above. The desire to live in harmony with one another was amongst the primary goals of many, if not all intentional communities; an aspect of everyday life that was perceived to be lacking in broader culture (D. L. Christian, 2007; Kozeny, 2000, 2008; Metcalf, 1996). As Kozeny (2008) phrased it:

“Intentional communities are testing grounds for new ideas about how to maintain more satisfying lives that enable people to actualize more of their untapped potential.” (p. 11)

Thus, intentional communities can be seen as experimental, explorations of alternative lifestyles in hope of creating peaceful and people-oriented communities.

Although intentional communities were by description alternative and counter-cultural, Schehr (1997) made a vivid distinction between contemporary intentional communities and pre-twentieth century communes including those in the 1960s and 70s, discussed in the previous section. He stated that although there were many similarities between communities from both times, there were distinct and apparent differences. Firstly, contemporary communities were not as large or communal as they were in the past. Residents were less restricted and not required to share their possessions or resources unless they chose to. Secondly, views on child rearing and sexual relations evolved dramatically over time leaving contemporary community members with more control and privacy over such issues (Schehr, 1997). Thirdly, the authoritarian governance systems of pre-twentieth century communities have been replaced with a more egalitarian model such as consensus. Thereby, different methods of conflict resolution and problem-solving were explored and applied to community issues. Lastly, contemporary community philosophy was likely to incorporate attitudes that extended towards the wider community instead of isolating themselves from mainstream society. This has meant greater collaboration between communities and various outreach pursuits (Schehr, 1997).

Shared knowledge about past communities created a specific, often false view of modern intentional communities. The myths about intentional communities often hindered the understanding of them as social phenomena. Negative media attention

of rare abusive communities was an example of how perceptions and generalisations could be formulated (D. L. Christian, Kozeny, & Schaub, 2001; Schehr, 1997). Christian, Kozeny and Schaub (2001) aimed to dispel some of the myths about intentional communities. In relation to older communities, not all intentional communities consisted of 'hippies' and instead they claimed:

“Most communitarians tend to be politically left of centre, hard-working, peace-loving, health-conscious, environmentally concerned and family-oriented...who essentially live a middle-class, though more cooperative, lifestyle.” (p. 17)

Related to the 'hippie myth', was the assumption that intentional communities lead impoverished lifestyles and succumbed to rural isolation. Contrary to that belief, most intentional communities lead relatively comfortable lifestyles that incorporated the latest facilities. The difference was that the majority took advantage of sharing resources and space for economic and environmental benefits. The 2000 Communities Directory showed that a quarter of communities listed were urban, some had both urban and rural sites and others did not specify (D. L. Christian et al., 2001).

Sustainability

One of the commonly adopted visions, relevant to this research, was sustainable living. Particularly over the last few decades, many intentional communities have been constructed on the basis of sustainability; social, economic and/or environmental. Sustainability has been defined as the ability to support, flourish and continue without lessening, in the present and future (Eid, 2003). Current issues such as fragmentation of societies and degradation of natural ecosystems have been viewed as detrimental to sustainability (Loomis, 2011; Mulder et al., 2006). Individualistic lifestyles and overconsumption of material goods have led to a decrease in quality of human and planetary life and as Mulder, Costanza and Erickson (2005) proclaimed:

“It is clear that humans must forge new paths that attain a high quality of life while consuming fewer resources.” (p. 13)

The critique of urban lifestyles often alluded to its exclusion or exploitation of natural resources. Suburban communities generally had little space for neighbourly interaction as cars dominated the roads and properties were hidden behind fences. The average American was believed to spend approximately eleven weeks of the year behind the wheel of a car. On the other hand, sprawled neighbourhoods encouraged inconsiderate and ineffective utilisation of land and resources, for example, the USA's loss of 1.3 million acres of land to property development each year (Chiras, 2002b). The negative consequences of irrational design and dispersed cities and suburbs were now coming to light leading investigators to explore alternative community designs such as those adopted in intentional communities (Brindley, 2003; Eid, 2003).

However, even under the vision of sustainability, there were many variations of intentional communities. Sustainable intentional communities included rural communities, organic lifestyle communities, eco-villages, cohousing communities, and others that encapsulated ecologism. Some aimed to encourage social sustainability, some focused on environmental sustainability, where as others integrated both aspects (Loomis, 2011; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). As sustainable living recently became a feature of academic research and popular topic of discussion, intentional sustainable communities, particularly their designs, began to receive well deserved attention. In many influential fields such as social and urban development, intentional communities have been looked upon as models for social and environmental sustainability. Sanguinetti (2012) claimed:

Planners, urban designers, architects, academics, and policy-makers, increasingly sensitive to [sustainability] issues, seek to promote greater environmental sustainability, health, equity, sense of community, and sense of place in the built environment with physical design strategies. Features such as high density, narrow streets, short setbacks, front porches, access to public transit, and mixed use zoning are meant to interact synergistically to result in relatively less oil consumption and pollution, more walking, less demand for parking, more lively public spaces, better health, and greater sense of community and place compared to current development patterns.

Bridley (2003) embraced the vision of sustainability in development of urban environments yet questioned the viability of such development. He stated that although sustainable development may be essential in the near future, the general population would first have to accept the idea of living closely with others.

The instigators of sustainable community development envisioned an equitable, peaceful and environmentally friendly neighbourhood; a strikingly similar vision to many intentional communities (Brindley, 2003; Eid, 2003; Kenny, 2011). Here, despite possible barriers, intentional community was seen as a vehicle for transformation in regards to sustainable development. One study conducted on intentional communities clarified the usability of intentional design in urban sustainable development. Mulder, Costanza and Erickson (2006) found intentional communities were valuable models for community planning as they lessened consumption and reliance on built capital (man-made features) as well as increased the quality of life of residents. They claimed:

“We have much to learn from intentional communities around the world that have been actively experimenting with issues related to quality of life and sustainability, and from comparisons of these communities with unintentional communities at various scales. The current study has only scratched the surface of what will likely turn out to be a very fruitful research area.” (p. 20)

Despite the growing interest in intentional community designs, Gur and Bekleyen (2003) acknowledged the lack of implementation of knowledge and research in relation to the man-environment relationship. They claimed the main reason to be the preference for quick decision-making in broader society, although such research was demanding and time consuming. Thus, research was believed to lag behind implementation as urban environments were generally planned with a lack of focus on sustainability or practicality (Gur & Bekleyen, 2003).

Benefits and Challenges

Aside from the benefits of sustainable design, literature highlighted the advantages of living in an intentional community compared to an unintentional community. Intentional communities held a range of ideals and values but generally aimed to

address innate human cravings for security, cooperation, expression and belonging (Kozeny, 2008). As Barrette (2011) stated:

Intentional communities directly address a lot of the reasons why people feel unsatisfied with mainstream society or develop mental illnesses from lifestyle stress. (p. 58)

Although intentional communities were labelled as unconventional and alternative, Kozeny (2008) found “the everyday values and priorities of community members [were] surprisingly compatible with those of their less adventurous counterparts” (p. 10). He found safety, security, education, meaningful contribution and environmental friendliness as the primary priorities of both intentional and unintentional community members. Intentional communities based on togetherness had a strong value system including cooperation, sharing, equality and a sense of neighbourhood/community (Barrette, 2011; Kozeny, 2000). Barrette (2011) and Christian (2007) listed a number of advantages of intentional versus unintentional community and stated that they are cheaper, safer, fun, supportive, and more environmentally sound. Overall, they noted intentional communities to be more satisfying and nurturing places to live but clarified the importance of finding a community that mirrors personal beliefs systems. The matching of personal and community lifestyles and values was essential for the experience of community. Christian (2007) referred to the possibility of a mismatch between a community’s vision statement and reality, as mentioned earlier. She also believed that community was not suitable for every individual despite the range of intentional communities that existed.

Along with the possible rewards, came the risks of entering and living an intentional community. The main risks were related to a change in lifestyle and interactions with neighbours. There was a possibility for conflict and lack of autonomy likened to a family living situation (D. L. Christian, 2007; Kozeny, 2008; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). There was always a “*trade-off between having the amount of individual freedom we’re used to and enjoying greater social connection and support*” (Christian, 2007, p. 60). Chaos and challenge bound to arise in any community, was expected but not well documented in the literature. However, the aim of intentional communities was not to avoid chaos but instead engaged in the process of conflict resolution and consensus to move through challenges collectively (Sargisson &

Sargent, 2004). A shared vision ensured that community members had similar beliefs, yet people varied in perspective and personality which led to the occurrence of conflict, as seen in larger society (D. L. Christian et al., 2001). A perfect community or “utopian” community (as discussed earlier) was seen as absurd and unrealistic yet the vision, dedication and cooperation of community members made intentional communities different and worthwhile places to live (Kozeny, 2000; Sargisson, 2004; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004).

The New Zealand Context

Sargent (2001) proposed that ‘utopianism’ was central to Aotearoa in its history and current nation state. He believed that the New Zealand experience was embedded in utopian idealism that shaped the nation into what exists today. Sargent noted several historical features of New Zealand as evidence including aspirations of settlers, utopian literature, plans of intentional communities, and colonisation projects. The colonisation projects and settlement schemes were discussed by Metcalf (2003) who believed that such schemes were visibly based on utopian ideals. The portrayal of New Zealand as the “happy colony” or “land of promise”, without rich or poor, although potentially a marketing scheme, could be seen as a reflection of British colonialists’ aspirations. The historical social, economical, and political movements have also been linked to utopianism as they envisioned a better, brighter New Zealand. For this reason, the history of New Zealand was likened to the history of intentional communities in New Zealand (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004).

In Aotearoa, as in North America, the 1950s was a time of strain for the general population (Boraman, 2007). In New Zealand, the state provided a sense of security through means of free education, medical care and social security yet cultural conformity was becoming increasingly suffocating for the average person. The economy was highly regulated and unionism was compulsory which James (1986) described as *“a levelling process that denied excellence in others; cultural expression was similarly timid, unimaginative, dull and unproductive, elevating the mediocrity of secured individuals to a virtue”* (p. 19). The changes in radical politics lead to an explosion of discontentment throughout the country in the 1960s that

began New Zealand's journey into protest and intentional community. The myth of a 'happy colony' finally unravelled itself and marked a crucial turning point for the nation (Boraman, 2007; James, 1986). The children of the 50s were described as sharp and passionate in comparison to previous generations that unenthusiastically accepted the status quo. After the lengthy experience of oppression, youth were unwilling to passively accept injustice and inequality (Fyson, 1973; Sargent, 2001). They began to actively seek change by protesting against various issues that faced New Zealand at the time such as involvement in the Vietnam War and the "*destruction of the environment by profit-hungry business interests*" (Fyson, 1973, p. 9).

Many activist groups formed throughout the country including women's liberation, gay and lesbian groups and ecological groups. Protest groups that were actively involved included the Progressive Youth Movement (PYM) and Halt All Racial Tours (HART) anti-apartheid group (Jones, 2011). The French testing of nuclear bombs in the Pacific Ocean was an issue that caused tremendous upheaval adding fuel to the radical behaviour. Greenpeace responded to the situation by staging a protest supported by the newly elected Labour Party led by Norman Kirk. New Zealand saw a shift from right-wing to left-wing politics in the hope of restoring justice. Many years later, Labour Party led by David Lange declared New Zealand as the first nuclear-free country. The Labour government was seen as responsive to the outcries of youth by supporting the Greenpeace protest, terminating New Zealand's involvement in the Vietnam War and cancelling visas of the South African rugby team in opposition to the country's apartheid system (Fyson, 1973).

The stress and turmoil of that period lead many New Zealander's to set up intentional communities and explore an alternative way of life. Several intentional communities did exist before the 1970s such as Wilderland, Riverside Community and a number of urban communes. Many more appeared around the 1970s as people actively sought a different lifestyle, clearly as an expression of the dissatisfaction and disillusionment of conventional living (Jones, 2011). The majority were associated with extremist behaviour due to the use of mind altering substances, particularly marijuana. With the growing rate of intentional communities around the country, several publications were established and sought after for advice and techniques on alternative living such as Mushroom magazine and Whole Earth

Catalogue. They provided do-it-yourself guidance for intentional community pioneers (Jones, 2011).

The introduction of the Ohu settlement scheme in 1973 by the Labour Government (1972-1975), coincided with the radical movements of the time and aligned with the vision of alternative community seekers (Ohu Advisory Committee, 1975). The Māori word *Ohu* “refers to either a communal or volunteer work group, or to work together as a communal group” (Ohu Advisory Committee, 1975, p. 1). The scheme was a government settlement initiative that leased Crown land to groups of people that were eager to build intentional communities in rural New Zealand. The Ohu scheme, along with the availability and affordability of land, were seen as the reason New Zealand experienced a relatively larger communal living movement than its counterparts (Boraman, 2007). The Labour leader, Norman Kirk, and Minister of Lands, Matiu Rata, expressed the purpose of the settlement schemes to be “*mainly spiritual*” (Ohu Advisory Committee, 1975, p. 3). Rata proposed that the support for establishment of intentional communities would provide an “*opportunity to experience the earth, the country, and each other in a new fraternal unity*” that was “*just as logical as supporting Māori communities*” (Ohu Advisory Committee, 1975, p. 4). Although government support for a utopian vision was clearly visible, in *Ohu: Utopians in Paradise Lost?*, the writer suggested that motivation for the Ohu scheme could have been an attempt to ensure less radical and politically opposing behaviour. It was possible that the settlement initiative was a way to provide an outlet for those who were dissatisfied and actively opposing injustice. The scheme was said to be an opportunity for those experiencing dissatisfaction to prove that they could sustain the way of life they claimed to desire (Ohu Advisory Committee, 1975).

Unfortunately, the scheme was short-lived and the majority of intentional communities dissipated over time. Sargisson and Sargent (2004) claimed that one of the main reasons for this was the lack of support for the initiative by bureaucrats. The Department of Lands and Survey and Land Officers were seen as uncooperative and although they supported the community initiative in theory, their practice involved stalling the process of making land accessible to interested groups. Many groups disbanded before they could find land, discouraged by the difficulty and

delay in obtaining it. Sargent (2001) suggested that overall, the Ohu settlement initiative was embedded in Aotearoa's inherent utopianism. It is unclear to what extent the scheme influenced intentional communities or whether the case of interest in such communities instigated the government initiative (Jones, 2011). Either way, the attempts to establish alternative communities was described as "*a story of idealism against bureaucracy, naiveté against political realities, weakness against power*" (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 41).

The influence of Māori communalism on establishment of intentional communities is difficult to assess due to differing accounts of history. Sargisson and Sargent (2004) suggested that interest in Māori communalism influenced intentional communities and referred to the Ohu scheme as evidence. On the other hand, James (1986) highlighted the distress and fragmentation of Māori society in the 1950s and 1960s caused by rapid urbanisation. He mentioned that the collective tradition of Māori culture including their language and arts was weakened, which left youth struggling to adjust to individualistic lifestyles. It was in the 1970s that a Māori movement, unrelated but parallel to wider movements of the time, was visible. Protests supporting land rights were a key example, together with "*a new generation of university-educated Māori liberals [that] reawakened interest in Māori culture and tradition*" (James, 1986, p. 20). Privatised lifestyles and urban living were catalysts in the disruption of Māori communalism that Rata, Minister of Lands, attempted to address through the Ohu scheme in 1973 (Jones, 2011). Despite the history of Māori communalism, and the 50s and 60s being a period of unrest for Māori and Pakeha alike, the intentional communities that were established in the 70s comprised of exclusively non-Māori. Those communities had little interest in Māori communalism or culture. Even today, the majority of intentional communities in Aotearoa remain predominantly non-Māori and are not seen to embrace or incorporate Māori communalism (Jones, 2011). Thus, the similarities and differences between Māori and Pakeha communities remained, yet the relationship between the two appeared particularly distant.

Summary

The term *intentional community* remained difficult to define despite its unique characteristics. However, two primary features of intentional communities were highlighted in the literature; counter-cultural beliefs and sustainable practices. Intentional communities were often considered to possess counter-cultural qualities as they provided an alternative way of living compared to conventional suburban settings. The concept of living closely with others was adopted in all intentional communities that aimed to create a more collective culture. Social connections were valued and acted as the pinnacle of community life. On the other hand, sustainable practices were not always consciously implemented within intentional communities but resulted as a by-product of sharing and cooperation. Intentional communities had begun receiving scholarly attention for addressing social, economical, and environmental issues.

The benefits and challenges of living in intentional communities were identified in relation to the lifestyle assumed. Living closely with others in a safe and supportive environment was often claimed to be the biggest benefit of intentional living. A sense of belonging and community was experienced as a result of living in a collective atmosphere. Although the benefits could be experienced by anyone, it was made clear that intentional community living was unsuitable for everyone. The main reason for this was the trade-off between personal autonomy and community due to the need for compromise when living and sharing with others. Also, the increased interaction with neighbours created a potential for conflict based on differing ideologies and personalities therefore relationship management was vital to the experience of intentional living.

The history of intentional communities in New Zealand highlighted the similarities with the community movement of the USA in the 1960s. During the same time period, New Zealand youth were beginning to defy the status quo and turn their attention towards social issues including the Vietnam War and environmental degradation. Protests were initiated and followed by the establishment of intentional communities country-wide. The movement towards community led to the introduction of a government initiated settlement scheme that proposed to provide land for interested community groups. The scheme was eventually believed to be

unsuccessful due to unsupportive parties and political issues. Today, a number of intentional communities are visible around New Zealand, including cohousing.

Cohousing

Cohousing was a form of intentional community and, as most intentional communities, was created as a response to the ills of contemporary society (McCamant & Durrett, 1988). Its innovative and sustainable design (refer to p. 3) led many people to explore the experience of living in an intentional community, primarily within an urban environment. In this section I look at the purpose of cohousing and its emergence as a social movement. I also explore the differences in everyday community life that pose as benefits and challenges of living in a cohousing community.

Purpose

Although the cohousing community design addressed social, economical and environmental issues simultaneously, the primary reason for its emergence was the social fragmentation in today's western societies (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005). Over time, people realised that their immediate suburban neighbourhoods were unable to meet basic social needs thus encouraging them to find viable alternatives such as intentional communities. Urban life was subject to individualism and privatised lifestyles which left many community members discontent (Clapham, 2005; McCamant & Durrett, 1988). The design of urban neighbourhoods, coupled with privatised lifestyles, discouraged communication and isolated community members (Chiras, 2002b). The lack of social interaction and connection made many people question the benefits of urban life. As Walmsley (1988) argued, the increase in mobility and novel experiences offered by urbanisation could never satisfy the basic human need for belongingness to community; both people and place. As Wirth (1938) stated:

“The distinctive features of the urban mode of life have often been described sociologically as the substitution of secondary for primary

contacts, the weakening of bonds of kinship, and the declining social significance of the family, the disappearance of the neighbourhood, and the undermining of the traditional basis of solidarity.” (pp 76)

The decline of community linked to the urban mode of life was what encouraged some people to venture into intentional communities that envisioned cooperative lifestyles. Some migrated to rural environments, some to the fringes of urban society, where as some dreamt of recreating community within urban environments (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005). The experience of personal alienation within suburban neighbourhoods and the breakdown of community in general urged the creation of plausible alternatives and this is where cohousing fits in.

The desire to reconnect with others and create socially sustainable communities, led architects Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett to search for a housing option that incorporated the needs of individuals, households, and communities. After exploring Danish intentional communities, they discovered a community model that sought to re-establish social relationships whilst maintaining individual privacy and coined the English term *cohousing* (McCamant & Durrett, 1988). As a response to the social issues of the twentieth century, cohousing has been viewed as an *“antidote to the isolation and impersonality of contemporary life”* (Weiner, 2009, pp 16). Its primary purpose was to create intentional neighbourhoods that allowed for social interaction between community members through physical design and sharing of facilities (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Meltzer, 2005; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005). Many attributes of cohousing could be linked to the known history and traditions of communal living such as shared facilities and activities and, vision of a better life. It also *“appears to be the fastest growing form of intentional community today”* (McIntyre, 2000, pp 27).

Although cohousing considered itself a form of intentional community, Scotthanson and Scotthanson (2005) made several distinctions between the two. Firstly, cohousing embodied a different ownership structure to most intentional communities. The structure allowed for private ownership of houses and private control over personal belongings. It was only the common land and facilities that shared ownership. Secondly, the management and control of community affairs was generally based on consensus where residents actively participated in decision-making. This opposed notions of leadership or hierarchy that many intentional

communities abided by. Lastly, cohousing was explicitly a housing model based on intentional community design. Aside from incorporating particular facilities such as a common house, the community was physically designed to encourage ongoing social interaction between residents (Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005), as discussed in the Chapter One.

Social Movement

As a form of intentional community that had a focus on social sustainability, cohousing was considered part of a wider social movement. It was seen as a grassroots movement geared towards practical and social living. As Schehr (1997) stated, although many intentional communities envisioned social change, not all actively pursued community outreach. For this reason, he argued that not all intentional communities could be considered part of a wider social movement. Kenny (2011) shared a similar perspective and referred to the term 'active community'. This he defined as a community that was sustainably designed, actively involved in the wider community as well as their own, and encouraged healthy living. Kenny believed that intentional communities were rarely seen as vehicles for social change beyond personal lifestyles, yet as some took on an activist approach, significant contributions to the wider community were made (Kenny, 2011; Lietaert, 2010). The cohousing movement, as it was often referred to, had seen collaborations between various organisations such as the Fellowship of Intentional Communities, Cohousing Company, Cohousing Network, and many public agencies interested in social change. In North America, 50 new cohousing communities emerged each year, expected to total ten per cent of all new housing developments by 2020 (McIntyre, 2000; Schaub, 2001).

Cohousing offered a practical housing model that incorporated social, economic and environmental sustainability that appealed to activists and local community members alike. It worked to create cooperative communities that supported and nurtured residents and natural eco-systems, particularly in urban settings. Meltzer (2005) noted that in western society, ninety per cent of individuals were concerned about the environment and understood that unnecessary personal consumption contributed to the issue. Yet he found that very few were willing to modify their

lifestyles to address the issue. By providing an option for sustainable living, the cohousing movement looked towards encouraging social change. Through raising public awareness, Charles Durrett (cohousing architect) hoped that people would realise that cohousing was an option of housing that created beautiful places to live (Cohen & Morris, 2005; Schaub, 2001). As McIntyre (2000) claimed:

The great appeal of working to create cooperative community is that it's the most effective means I've found for raising awareness and making long-term grassroots progress on issues of social, economic and environmental sustainability. (p. 27)

As cohousing had a strong focus on sustainable living, it was seen as a tool to reinvigorate urban neighbourhoods and create healthier communities. Not only did residents partake in managing a sustainable living environment, they also reaped the various benefits of cohesive neighbourhoods (Lietaert, 2010; McCamant & Milman, 2000), discussed below. Gardner (1999) viewed cohousing as a revival of the practice of communal sharing. He spoke about a time when the concept of private ownership was non-existent and members of a community shared almost everything. Nowadays, although it was not necessary to return to such times, the practice of sharing was being recognised as a valuable tool for ensuring economic and environmental sustainability (G. Gardner, 1999; Lietaert, 2010). Sharing of resources was seen as one of the main advantages of cohousing that lessened unnecessary consumption of finite resources and benefitted residents through reduced living costs (Lietaert, 2010). The sharing of resources was a practical way to reduce the cost of living and tread lightly on the Earth. For example, Munksoegaard, an intentional community in Denmark, undertook an ecological audit and found that compared to the average Danish household, they consumed 38 per cent less water and 25 per cent less electricity. Their carbon dioxide emissions were 60 per cent less and car use was 5 per cent of the average due to carpooling (Samuelsson, 2003). Sanguinetti (2012) stated that in comparison to other intentional communities, cohousing communities were generally less economically independent and had a larger ecological footprint due to urban lifestyles. However she believed, *“if cohousing [was] adopted in the mainstream, the potential for large-scale impact may*

be greater than can be achieved by a handful of more radical [intentional communities]" (p. 16).

Adaptability

The increasing interest in cohousing and growing numbers of such communities worldwide showed that the cohousing model was applicable in many different regions and limited to personal creativity (McCamant & Milman, 2000). Although many cohousing communities were brand new developments, the model had also been applied to renovating existing structures (Klinger, 2012; McCamant et al., 2000). The cohousing model had been incorporated into apartment building structures and existing suburban enclaves. Residents interested in cooperative living came together to pool resources and share common space for interactional purposes (Klinger, 2012). Other applications of cohousing have included the creation of senior cohousing; sustainable and social elderly care environments. Senior citizens, primarily in Europe, have benefitted from living and receiving care in a friendly and nurturing environment (Vierck, 2005). The adaptation of the model had also been used by other intentional communities such as eco-villages. Many eco-village communities recognised the social benefits of the cohousing model and redeveloped their communities to incorporate or increase social interaction such as making the community area car-free (D. L. Christian, 2005; Hildur, 2005). The applicability of the cohousing model has proven to be effective in creating more socially beneficial environments in various aspects of society. The adaptable nature of cohousing features has ultimately allowed for a transformation of environments around the globe.

Benefits and Challenges

Aside from visible economical and environmental benefits, much of the literature focused on the social advantages of cohousing since the model was primarily designed for that purpose. Although the literature mentioned the various benefits of cohousing, they were not discussed in depth (Chiras, 2002a; Klinger, 2012; Lietaert, 2010; Sandelin, 2000). A reason for this could be the benefits not being linked to wider or theoretical concepts. Most, if not all cohousing communities had some

aspect of social sustainability in their vision statement. The desire to create a cohesive community through social relationships was amongst the top priorities (Chiras, 2002a; Klinger, 2012; Sandelin, 2000). The design of cohousing, discussed in Chapter One, had proven effective in encouraging and creating opportunities for social interaction. The car-free community, common house facility, and regular social events guaranteed social interaction amongst residents. The clever mix of private and shared living, one of its most attractive features, brought together the history of communal living with contemporary housing needs (Chiras, 2002b; DiCalogero, 2009; Klinger, 2012; McCamant & Durrett, 1988). As Gardner (1999) claimed:

Cohousing seems to provide the social cohesiveness that many people desire, while leaving each household free to determine its level of involvement. (p. 15)

Residents had the option to recluse into their own homes or engage with residents in and around the community. Generally, most residents that entered cohousing had a desire to connect and build relationships with neighbours (DiCalogero, 2009; Sandelin, 2000). Shared meals and community events were a regular occurrence in most communities and provided opportunities for interaction that helped to establish an authentic sense of community. It was the cohesive and high-trust environment created through social connections that created the benefit of a safe, secure and supportive environment. An incredible support system was created in cohousing where residents gained safety and security (Chiras, 2002a; Klinger, 2012; McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Sandelin, 2000). Sandelin (2000) claimed that reflecting the intent of the community, an informal exchange of support existed such as gardening and childcare. Also, the constant flow of people within the community made it a safe and nurturing environment for children.

Another benefit of cohousing was the sense of belonging and place that one could receive from contributing towards the community. The basic human desire to feel valuable and useful could be easily fulfilled in an intentional community setting. Residents had many opportunities to share their skills, talents, and insight (G. Gardner, 1999; Klinger, 2012; McIntyre, 2000; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005). Through the process of consensus decision-making, residents in cohousing had input towards the functioning and management of their community. The active participation in running the community contributed to the sense of place experienced

by cohousing residents. This process was believed to be empowering for residents as they collectively contributed towards decision-making; not commonly seen in suburban communities (Chiras, 2002a; McIntyre, 2000). Klinger (2012) noted that in cohousing communities, due to regular and shared activities, neighbours were involved in each other's lives to a much larger extent than in regular suburban neighbourhoods. For a community that envisioned greater social connections and related advantages, cohousing was seen as a practical option with visible social benefits (DiCalogero, 2009). Chiras (2002) referred to the cohousing model as a method of transforming suburban neighbourhoods *"to nurture the human spirit, [and create] vibrant communities instead of just places to sleep"* (pp 56).

Cohousing, as a socially sustainable urban neighbourhood, was not intended to be utopian, rather a more cooperative community setting (Klinger, 2012). The literature examined identified challenges that related to residents personally, to the community, and to the cohousing movement in general. The processes to deal with difficulties discussed in Chapter One were left unmentioned. A reason for this could be the lack of rigorous academic research on cohousing communities. Many of the articles available were written from a general perspective and lacked deep insight and interpretation. However, the personal challenge identified was linked to the consensus process of decision-making. The time-consuming and demanding nature of the process had potential to create a mental burden for residents. There had been incidences of residents leaving cohousing communities due to issues related to the consensus process (D. Christian, 2012a, 2012b; Renz, 2006). Consensus was not a method used commonly in wider society and for this reason it was difficult for community members to adjust to such decision-making. Although it had been widely recognised as a fruitless form of decision-making, consensus benefitted cohousing communities that proudly adopted it as an alternative to bureaucratic methods of governance (Bressen, 2000). Consensus was believed to make residents feel valued as a community member as their personal views and insights were acknowledged. However, emotional maturity, patience, and the ability to openly communicate were claimed as vital for the consensus process to be successful (Bressen, 2000; D. Christian, 2012a; Renz, 2006).

The main challenge for the community was generally the lack of contribution towards communal tasks. A small percentage of the residents were seen to carry out most of the work and the uneven contributions were likened to any organisational setting (Chiras, 2002a; Klinger, 2012; Vierck, 2005). Leading busy lifestyles in urban environments was identified as a key reason for difficulty in gaining commitment towards communal chores. Without the initial commitment and dedication to communal life, Bernstein (2011) questioned whether future generations of cohousing would survive. Contribution was seen as the main ingredient for a healthy community and there existed a general fear that newcomers were not aware of what was expected of communal living. It was possible that the idea of community life attracted many people due to its claimed benefits, however, a deep commitment to cooperative living and community building was essential (Chiras, 2002a; Klinger, 2012). Christian (2007) and DiCalogero (2009) highlighted that cohousing wasn't suitable for everyone. The main reason for this was the difference in lifestyle including responsibilities towards the community and other members. If community members were not willing to contribute towards maintaining the community, the situation became more of a burden than an asset. Therefore, instead of questioning what one could gain from community life, it was claimed more important to question how one could contribute (D. L. Christian, 2007).

The difficulties faced by the cohousing movement were discussed more often than the personal or community challenges. They included the affordability and accessibility of cohousing for the general population. Although McIntyre (2000) stated that cohousing was a way to introduce the benefits of intentional communities to a wider population, it was visible that it was not accessible to all subsections of society. The general cohousing community comprised of 'middle class whites', who had a higher income than most suburban residents. To create a new cohousing community or buy a residential home in an existing one was unaffordable for a large subsection of society including lower class households and young families (Bernstein, 2011; Kozeny, 2005; McIntyre, 2000). This was the main concern recognised by cohousing activists who envisioned diverse, multigenerational communities.

Summary

The purpose of cohousing communities was clearly to restore social connections within neighbourhoods and create an authentic sense of community. Like other intentional communities, the isolating and alienating experience within suburban neighbourhoods called for a change. However, contrary to the majority of intentional communities that existed, cohousing was widely seen within urban geographies. Instead of moving to the outer regions of cities, cohousing communities aimed to recreate community within the city. The architectural aspect of cohousing resulted in an alternative community design that encouraged social interaction and fostered a safe and cooperative environment.

Originating from Denmark, cohousing was seen to spread around the world as it appealed to diverse people in different places. The adaptable nature of the cohousing model meant that a sense of community and belonging was available within cities and suburbs. This attracted many community-minded individuals to establish cohousing communities with the support of networks and literary material. Cohousing was often classed as social movement as it encompassed social, economical, and environmental sustainability. The increased social connections and reduced personal consumption fostered by collective living within cohousing had received attention as a plausible alternative to individualistic and consumerist lifestyles. Many organisations interested in social change had recognised cohousing as an effective housing model for the purpose of sustainability within cities.

The benefits and challenges of cohousing were likened to those of intentional communities. A more socially cohesive and safer neighbourhood that resulted in a sense of belonging were amongst the top benefits of cohousing. These benefits were attributed to the unique design of cohousing that balanced private and communal living. The interpersonal issues likely to arise in community and the necessity of active participation were identified as the primary challenges. Once again, the suitability of cohousing was dependent on an individuals' ability to compromise and cooperate. Ultimately, the experience of living in a cohousing community was believed to be subjective and dependant on a residents' personal circumstances and input towards the community. Thus, cohousing was an option for living in a more socially connected community whilst retaining privacy in individual dwellings, based on alternative community design.

Conclusion

The review of literature relevant to cohousing offered insight into the topic of intentional community, and community in general. It was made clear that multiple perspectives existed in regards to utopianism, communal living, and intentional community. There was difficulty in defining terms and concepts used within the topic and the multidimensionality and changing nature of *community* challenged the meaning of authentic community. The literature discussed above repeatedly placed intentional community within the ills of contemporary society. From the beginnings of utopian thought, to modern intentional community establishment, the workings of industrialised societies had been questioned, particularly in terms of sustainability. The social, economic and environmental aspects of society were perceived as inadequate for sustaining healthy communities. Inequality and injustice were prime examples of how conventional systems of organisation were failing humanity. The assumptions on quality of life in industrialised societies were questioned in relation to human values. Thus, intentional communities emerged as a response to the ills of society vividly evident through the American community movement in the 60s. Groups that shared a vision for a more unified community collaborated to create intentional communities of all sorts. Communal living was a way to address the individualistic and privatised lifestyles prevalent post-urbanisation.

Intentional community living often reflected the goals and values of community members and provided a non-conventional lifestyle. The commonness of intentional communities and visions of a better living environment were what classed them as part of a wider social movement. Over time, structures and organisation within intentional communities developed to meet current needs, reflecting the changing nature of community. Cohousing was defined as a more contemporary form of intentional community that focused on the issue of social sustainability. Intentional design in cohousing communities allowed for an increase in social connection and support, perceived to be lacking in today's world. On the other hand, privately owned homes provided a space to retreat from community life, ensuring a balance between sociability and privacy. Thus, cohousing communities were seen to provide an alternative way of life within urban environments based on principles of cooperation and communication.

This research explores the experience of living in a cohousing community through personal accounts. The importance of identifying benefits and challenges as well as documenting the experiencing of cohousing is to gather first-hand experience of living in an intentional community. As seen through the review of literature, experiential knowledge of community living and community building is lacking. The findings of this research would assist in bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and practical implications of community living. By gathering experiences of residents within an intentional community, this research would aid in gaining a deeper understanding of intentional communities and communities in general. A residential perspective on intentional design would clarify the benefits, challenges, and overall experience of residing within an intentional community. The next chapter outlines the method of data collection and analysis.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter comprises of five main sections with associated subsections. In the first section I describe the constructivist approach adopted for this research, particularly the social construction of reality and its relevance to this study. In the second section, I explain the process of recruiting participants for this research. I also give a demographical introduction of the residents of Earthsong who participated in the study. In the third section, I explain the process of gathering data through semi-structured interviews. I describe the tools used for preparation, the recording process and the limitations of interviewing. In the fourth section, I explain the transcription and analysis process used in this study including the use of thematic analysis and coding. In the fifth section of this chapter, I consider ethical issues that can arise during this research and provide ways to address them.

This research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. In addition, the ethical guidelines set out the *Code of Ethics for Psychologists Working in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002) were followed.

Approach

As discussed in the previous chapter, academic studies focusing on the experiences of residents in cohousing communities are rare. In order to obtain a residential perspective of living in cohousing, a constructivist approach was adopted. A constructivist approach views reality as being socially constructed by those living it; an ongoing process (Silverman, 1997). Constructivist ontology recognises that meaning is constructed by stakeholders through interaction between their experiences and ideas. Personal understanding and knowledge of the world is believed to stem from this interaction. Reflection on previous experiences is a key part of reality construction that influences inferences made during construction of new realities. Meanings may change or information may be discarded based on previous knowledge or experience (Silverman, 1997). People are thus seen as active creators of their realities and social world through constant interactions.

Constructivist epistemologies recognise the value of experiential knowledge and attempt to understand participants' experiences. The experiences of participants are seen as authentic knowledge as they aid in construction of their realities and the social world. Thus it is possible to obtain information about the social world through exploring the experiences of people regarding a specific issue. Following this approach, the main aim for data collection becomes generating authentic information that gives an insight into people's experiences and social worlds (Silverman, 1997). In this research, the experience of living in a cohousing community is to be documented through exploring the personal experiences of residents within Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood.

Recruitment and Residents

Recruitment

The recruitment process began with preliminary meetings and discussions with members of Earthsong. After contacting the community via email, a meeting was arranged with a member of the Earthsong Centre Trust who agreed to discuss, with other Trust members, the potential for my research to be carried out within the community. After approval was given by the Trust members (see Appendix A), I attended a full-group community meeting where I got the chance to introduce my research ideas to most of the (adult) residents. Explaining my research in person was a good opportunity for residents to get to know me and understand my interest in their community. Many residents at the meeting showed an interest in participating in my research which initiated the official recruitment process.

Information sheets (see Appendix B) were distributed to all residents that were interested in being interviewed and a copy was put up on the community notice board. I asked residents to contact me directly if they had any questions or queries about the research. The only criterion for participation was a minimum stay of two years at Earthsong to ensure long-term cohousing experience. The two year requirement meant that residents would have had time to reflect on their personal experience of being in the community.

Two participants responded to the information sheet and contacted me via email to arrange a suitable time and place for the interview. The other participants were

recruited through a snowball effect; through word of mouth and face to face interaction at the community. I recruited past residents after I received their contact information from several current residents. I approached the past residents via phone or face to face contact. I explained the aims of this research and the impact of their contribution and provided an information sheet. I gave them an opportunity to think about participating in the research and made it clear that there was no obligation. I then re-contacted them after a few days to see whether they would like to participate. All participants, current and past, met the required criteria.

Residents

A total of fourteen residents were interviewed, ten current residents and four past residents. The residents who participated in the research were an accurate representation of the Earthsong community. Ten residents were from Aotearoa, New Zealand, and the other four were from overseas. This was a fair representation of the Earthsong community as 56 per cent of total residents are from New Zealand and 44 per cent are from elsewhere, namely Europe and Asia. There were nine female participants and six male participants. All the participants were aged between 30 and 70, with the majority being over 60 years of age. Most Earthsong residents fall between this age range and like the research participants, the majority are aged over 60 years. The length of time participants had been in Earthsong ranged from 2-10 years, adding a variety of experience to the data set.

Most participants had some form of past community experiences that influenced their decision to become part of the Earthsong community. Participants were from all walks of life and engaged in a variety of employment including education, social services and self employment. Several participants were retired or students. The demographics of participants added richness to the data collected, reflecting the diversity of residents within Earthsong community.

Interviews and Recording

Interviews

Interviews, as a method of data collection, are a form of gathering information about the social world through the lives of others (Silverman, 1997). They are conversations that are exploratory in nature and mainly issue oriented. Interviewing allows access to people's thoughts and feelings about a particular topic which may

not be accessible via other means of data collection. It also creates an opportunity for participants to express themselves in their own words and explain what the issue means to them (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). By having semi-structured interviews that follow the natural flow of conversation, key aspects of participants' experiences can be explored in depth and unexpected topics can be discussed, providing valuable insights (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

There were thirteen interviews conducted in total. All of them were one-on-one and semi-structured, with the exception of one interview where two participants were interviewed together. Having one-on-one interviews with Earthsong residents allowed for a private, in-depth discussion of residents' personal experiences and views on cohousing communities. There was a loose structure to the interviews which meant particular themes were discussed; namely benefits, challenges, and different aspects of the cohousing model (see Appendix C). The semi-structured interviews meant that there was room for flexibility and discussion was led by points raised by the resident which allowed for unanticipated topics to be brought forth and discussed. The structure of the interviews also allowed residents to freely express their views which were important as resident experience was the central focus of the research. Using semi-structured interviews for this research produced rich, in-depth information which I was aiming for.

There is always a possibility for participants to feel uncomfortable being interviewed and talking about their personal experiences to someone unfamiliar, resulting in information being withheld or inaccurate. It is important for an interviewer to build rapport with his or her interviewees in order to get rich in-depth information. The interviewee is more likely and willing to share their experiences when a relationship is being created (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Spending time and participating in the community allowed residents to become familiar with me and the purpose of the research, giving me a chance to build rapport with potential participants before recruiting them. As I was communicating with residents in Auckland predominantly from Hamilton, I did not get much of a chance to speak with each participant before the interview process. For this reason I thought it was important to create an atmosphere for the interview that helped participants feel comfortable and welcome to share their experiences with me. As in many cultures, food and drink are an important part of meeting and socialising, hence I decided to

have the interviews take place over a cup of tea or coffee. A casual setting was created making it easier to build rapport with residents prior to the interviews increasing the likelihood of collecting rich, in-depth information.

The time and place of each interview was negotiated between the resident and I. Most interviews took place at the community during the same week, and others were scheduled for a suitable time in the following week. All participants opted to be interviewed within the community, either in their home, in the common room, or the café across the road. The length of interviews ranged between 40 minutes and 90 minutes, with majority of them being around 60 minutes.

Before beginning each interview, I gave the resident a summary of the research aims and objectives. I explained the research process and how that would affect them. I made clear that there was no obligation to participate and withdrawal at any time during the interview would have no consequences for them. Residents agreed to be audio recorded, signed the consent form (see Appendix D), and the interview began.

The effect of the interviewer on data collection is often discussed and debated within qualitative studies. Although much of research aims for a bias-free data collector, it is not possible for an interviewer to remain neutral and distant as they are a key part of the conversation. Their influence cannot be ignored as it shapes the interview through co-participation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Silverman, 1997). It is important to acknowledge the interactional nature of interviews as the information produced and collected is a product of conversation between interviewer and participant. A constructivist approach suggests that knowledge is constructed through actions and interactions, therefore the encounter between interviewer and interviewee can be seen as a site for knowledge construction that is genuine and valid (Silverman, 1997). My participation during the interviews included encouragement through supportive gestures, seeking clarification through asking or rewording of previous comments, and occasionally sharing my own experiences of community. By co-participating and acknowledging the interactional nature of interviews, I was able to establish a flow of conversation that covered a range of

topics valuable for the research. I was also aware of my role as the interviewer allowing me to carefully direct conversation and gather information.

The use of interviews for data collection creates a potential for the interviewer to exercise power and control over participants. The interviewer can sometimes be seen in a position of authority, affecting the interview directly or indirectly. The use or presence of power in an interview can have a strong influence on the outcome, particularly as the dynamics of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee change (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Examining my position as the interviewer, I believe that the potential for exertion of power was minimal. My interest in the knowledge and experience of residents was an opportunity to learn more about cohousing and discuss issues that both parties were passionate about. I established a reciprocal relationship with all residents by sharing my willingness to learn, establishing them as the experts on the topic, and giving them authority over their stories. I was also much younger than all the residents participating in the interviews therefore my age did not put me in a position of authority.

Many participants in this study expressed their gratefulness for the opportunity to communicate their views and experiences of cohousing. As residents of Earthsong are committed to raising awareness of sustainable and intentional practices through their Educational Trust, they felt that by being part of this research they were making a valuable and meaningful contribution.

Interview Schedule

An interview schedule (see Appendix C) is a list of themes and/or questions that initiate different lines of inquiry during the interview. It aids preparation before the interview and acts as a guide during the interview process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). As the interview was semi-structured, the importance of the interview schedule was to ensure particular themes were discussed and key questions were available if required. The flexibility of the schedule allowed an easy flow of conversation with discussed topics being of importance to the resident. Open-ended questions were used to allow freedom of answering the question as the resident saw fit. There was no correct answer as all views and experiences were welcomed. The interview schedule was an important tool as it encouraged diverse responses yet

made the information comparable. All interviews were audio-recorded using a voice recorder.

Limitations

Like in any research, participants can feel pressured to express socially desirable views; in this case, views that would be desired by the community, or what participants perceived to be desired by me. For example, participants have a close and personal connection with the community, so they may be inclined to portray the community as they prefer it to be viewed by others. This limitation was addressed by focusing on personal experiences of participants as opposed to general views. Participants shared their stories and experiences of living in the community and where general issues were addressed, personal examples were enquired. Building rapport with participants and creating a safe environment also addressed this limitation as it created a comfortable space for participants to freely express their views.

An interviewer's own assumptions can also be a limiting factor during and after the interview process. Reflexivity is a process that involves the questioning of one's background, assumptions and interests, and how this may be affecting the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). To understand my own positioning as the researcher and ensure that there were no misunderstandings, I kept a journal of the entire research process that included what happened when, and my reaction and understanding of different events and discussions including the interviews. I was able to engage in the process of reflexivity due to the journal I kept.

Transcription and Analysis

Transcription

Full transcriptions were made for the thirteen interviews that took place, except for information that was irrelevant to the research. Transcriptions were done verbatim excluding non-speech sounds such as *um* and *ah*. A review of each interview was done after completion to ensure that no information was missing and information

transcribed was accurate. Key themes were noted during the transcription process that contributed towards the analysis.

Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to extract key themes from the data collected in order to reach reasonable conclusions. The analysis and interpretation of data began with the transcribing of interviews. Following that was a phase of data exploration and reduction. This involved reading the data, looking for patterns and thinking about it. After running through the data several times, I began to look for aspects of the data that did or did not fit together. Visual aids such as diagrams and flowcharts were used to get a better understanding of the data and ideas that emerged were noted. Things that were irrelevant to the research objectives were taken out and summaries of key points were made.

The coding process began with me reading over the transcripts several times looking for common, recurring themes. Important points were labelled and given a code. Some of the codes were descriptive, whereas others were analytical. Descriptive codes were general labels given to important points. Analytical codes were insights that I had gained through engaging with the data. I then re-read the transcripts and added to the summary of notes I had made previously. Lastly, I interpreted the data to meet the research objectives. Memo-writing is highly recommended during research, especially during the analysis stage. It helps to keep track of personal thoughts and ideas that emerge while engaging with the data and encourages reflexive practice (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). I constructed a memo during data collection and analysis which was extremely useful while interpreting information. By keeping track of thoughts, ideas, impressions and links, I was able to question the assumptions I was making and explore the plausibility of ideas that were emerging. This ensured that the analysis of information was accurate and of a high quality.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure that ethical standards were met, a number of considerations were made including safety of residents, consent to participate, confidentiality of information obtained, and accuracy of information reported.

Safety

From the initial contact with residents, I was very clear about the aims and objectives of the research. The experience of living in a cohousing community would remain the focus of the research. I highlighted the value of experiential knowledge that would be obtained through discussions with residents. I was clear about the hopes of my research which were that people would view intentional community, particularly cohousing, as valuable in understanding and addressing social fragmentation and environmental degradation. There was no deception involved in my research as residents were clear about what was expected from them, my role as the researcher, and the likely outcome of the research.

There was no obligation for residents to participate in the research. Residents had a right to withdraw from the research, or the interview, at any time before analysis began. This was made clear in written form on the information sheet, and verbally before the beginning of each interview. I made it clear that there would be no consequences if they chose not to answer particular questions or withdraw from the research. I encouraged residents to express any discomfort they faced and pledged to take any actions necessary to prevent harm.

Consent

An information sheet given to each resident before gaining consent outlined the purpose of the research, the themes to be explored in the interviews, and rights as a participant (see Appendix B). Residents had the opportunity to ask any questions or seek clarification from me about the research. Before the interviews could take place, residents had to give their consent. By consenting to be a participant in the research, residents were giving me permission to interview them, record the

interview and use the information in the final report. Written consent was obtained from all participants by signing a consent form prior to interviews (see Appendix D).

Anonymity

I ensured participants that, to the best of my ability, they would not be identifiable in the final report. I agreed not to use personal names in the final report and instead replaced the resident's name with a dissimilar name. As the research was focusing on Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood, the only cohousing community in New Zealand, there was a possibility of being identified by other Earthsong residents or by outside community members. The slight risk of being identified was explained to participants before consent was obtained.

I respected the fact that residents were sharing their personal experiences with me and ensured that information discussed in the interviews would not be shared with anyone other than for the purpose of the research. As details of the research and data were discussed with my supervisors, I did not use real names or personal information of residents. All the raw data and personal information, including consent forms and recorded interviews were kept in a secure storage space, to which only I have access. It has been agreed that this information will be destroyed after the seven year requirement period.

Accuracy

As the research focused on exploring residents' experiences of living in a cohousing community, I wanted to ensure that all information used was accurate. I wanted to convey the residents' experiences in a respectful manner. For this reason, I sent a copy of the transcripts to each participant so that they had an opportunity to review the interview discussion and change or add anything they thought was necessary. I also asked for clarification of points that I did not fully understand. Minor changes to transcripts were made by several participants. I made clear to participants that the information was their own and they had a right to access it at any time without explanation. A summary of key findings was made available to participants.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed various aspects of the methodology used in this research and justified the use of a constructivist approach. I have described the recruitment process and given a demographic introduction to participants in this research. I have discussed the method of data collection including the use, process, and limitations of conducting semi-structured interviews. I have explained the process of analysis used including transcribing and coding of data. I have also considered and addressed ethical issues that may arise during the research. The data gathered and analysed through the above processes is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter consists of three sections and presents the main findings from the interviews with Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood residents, both current and past. The findings are presented in relation to the aims of the research. The benefits and challenges are explored beneath each section respective of the topic. The experiences of residents are documented in relation to the main features of the cohousing model which form the three sections of this chapter; living closely with others, shared ownership and responsibility, and intentional design. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss the residents' experiences of living in close proximity with others. Residing in cohousing likens to living in a community with regular interaction between neighbours. There are greater opportunities to connect with others due to the design of the community and the intention of residents. People from different backgrounds share their lives with each other while maintaining privacy in their own homes. The Earthsong community shares a vision of sustainability that guides collective decisions. I look at the personal benefits and challenges of living everyday life in a collective environment, namely the social connections formed with neighbours and the interpersonal difficulties faced.

In the second part of the chapter I explore the experience of shared ownership and responsibility. Residents in cohousing share equal ownership of the common property as well as owning their independent houses. They have access to a large number of shared facilities and tools such as the common house. With the excess space and resources, comes the shared responsibility of managing and maintaining community property. Residents partake in consensus decision-making to enhance community functioning and ensure sustainability. They are also expected to contribute towards communal tasks although it is not mandatory. In this section I discuss cost effectiveness as a benefit and the time and effort demanded as a challenge of shared ownership and responsibility.

In the last part of the chapter, I discuss the implications of an intentionally designed community. The design of cohousing is inspired by the need for social sustainability in contemporary urban neighbourhoods. The cohousing community is designed with the intention to encourage interaction between neighbours. Many spaces are created for this purpose such as the common house and outdoor shared area. The cars are parked to one side creating a safe and secure environment. The

combination of private and shared space gives residents a unique experience of community living. The ecological design of Earthsong is not a feature of all cohousing communities yet supports the vision of sustainability. I focus on the benefits and challenges of intentional community design in this section including issues of privacy and practicality. All findings in this chapter derive from conversations with residents of Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood.

LIVING CLOSELY WITH OTHERS

This section focuses on the benefits and challenges of having regular interaction with neighbours. I discuss the benefits such as forming bonds and connections with other residents and, receiving support. I then discuss the challenges of interpersonal relationships such as differing personalities and perspectives, which have potential to cause tension within the community.

Connection

One of the main purposes of the cohousing community model was to develop social sustainability. The community encouraged and created opportunity for interaction between residents in order to build strong social connections. The aim was to create a cohesive environment where social needs could be easily met. In this subsection, I discuss the benefits of community vision, community events, support, and the positive impact of cohousing on children.

Vision

The residents at Earthsong shared a vision of sustainability (social, environmental and economic) which instantly created a commonality between them. They all agreed upon the vision before gaining membership of the community and therefore felt an immediate connection with other members when they joined. As Annie explained:

We've all come because we've accepted that vision statement and that immediately brings people together, you've got that common ground.

As the vision of Earthsong was the heart of the community, regardless of where residents were from or who they were, they could all connect with one another based on the shared vision. The vision of Earthsong attracted a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds that Jodie and Ruth saw as a major benefit of the community. Jodie stated:

What I really like about this place is the spread and diversity of people you have here, everything from district court judges to bus drivers, from midwives to university professors, you have everything and that's pretty cool. (Jodie)

Daisy and Susan both believed that having a similar focus amongst residents, rather than a need, played a vital part in holding the community together. When asked what makes the community successful, Susan recognised the value in having a commitment to something larger than oneself and recalled a time when she acknowledged that shared vision kept residents connected:

A commitment to something bigger than what your life is, is really important. My research into community says that if there is a commitment to something bigger than your ordinary everyday life that helps. We had a group of young Christians, American students, and I did the presentation and they said "do you have a common faith" because of course they do, and I said "probably our vision statement", that's the glue that holds us together.

Susan saw the shared vision of sustainability as an important factor in community life and believed that commitment to that vision played a role in sustaining the community.

Community Events

Aside from the instant connection formed through sharing the same vision, residents at Earthsong had regular events at which neighbours could meet, greet, and get to know one another. The two regular events that were discussed by all residents in the research were the common meals and the meeting check-in. The common meals occurred twice a week and meals were prepared on a rotation basis by a resident cooking team. Check-in occurred at the beginning of full-group meetings once a month and involved an update of what was happening in the lives of residents. For example, residents could be asked to share what their highlight was over the summer break.

All of the residents in the research talked about how much they enjoyed coming together with their neighbours and sharing a meal twice a week. Ruth and Claudia recognised the shared meals as an opportunity to engage with neighbours and build relationships. Claudia stated that although she did not have close relationships with all the residents at Earthsong, the shared meals were a good chance to get to know people better and spend time with them. The informal setting of communal meals was seen as a chance for neighbours to engage in casual or intimate conversations, which created an opportunity to build connections with other residents. Having a meal prepared for them twice a week was seen as a luxury by most residents in the research and Ross believed that it gave him some freedom to balance up other activities:

Well it's sort of a freedom, and it frees up my time, the sharing of resources twice a week, you just turn up for a common meal, only one a month we have to actually take our turn and do the cooking. Yeah I suppose the total amount of time in cooking for the whole group would not be the equivalent of turning up to 7 meals that we didn't prepare, something like that yeah, so it gives you a bit of freedom.

Ross saw the benefit of being part of the cooking team and believed that putting in the effort for organising one meal a month was worth the freedom of not having to cook on other occasions.

All the residents in the research were part of a cooking team and acknowledged the preparation of meals as a valuable team building exercise. Ruth commented on not understanding why some residents do not want to be part of a cooking team. She acknowledged that the communal meals were a big part of the community and sharing the task with other residents made it an enjoyable experience. Leo, a past resident, also saw the shared meals as an important event and recalled what he enjoyed most about them:

The common meals they were great, I really liked them, I miss them actually, for two reasons. I like the experience of being part of a cooking team it was great, you had to plan out the meal and think of what to cook and get all the ingredients, so it's a lot of preparation. It was a great teamwork thing as well, because you'd have to cooperate and work out who's bringing what and have planning sessions in advance, just to work out this one meal. And then anyone part of the cooking team, for the rest of the month you'd come along twice a week and have communal meals which is awesome! Two nights a week you'd be cooked for which is like the biggest treat, there would always be something you'd eat and always be a nice surprise and always be good company and it was good fun, really really good.

Leo saw the value of preparing meals together, and mentioned that it required cooperation between the cooking team. This meant that residents had to engage with one another and work as a group. He acknowledged that it required a lot of preparation but felt that it was an enjoyable exercise to engage in with other residents. Aside from the personal benefits of having a ready-made meal twice a week, Ruth, Claudia and Leo viewed the shared meals as a chance to connect and enjoy each other's company.

The check-in was a short but enjoyable process at full-group meetings. Ruth and Claudia felt that sharing and knowing what was happening in the lives of their neighbours was an important aspect of relationship building. They both stated that they enjoyed the full-group meetings particularly because of the check-in process:

I do like the full-group meetings even though they get a bit heavy sometimes, because you have a check-in and you find out what all your neighbours have been up to recently. (Ruth)

I enjoy our meetings, our full-group meetings are great because we do that check in, and it's when I get to hear from all my neighbours what's happening in their lives, and I really like that. (Claudia)

From the above comments, it was clear that the check-in process was a valuable part of full-group meetings and a chance for residents to connect with one another. Ruth mentioned that although meetings get a bit heavy sometimes (refer to p. 103), the check-in was an enjoyable part of the process. This showed that the personal engagement at the beginning of meetings was valued regardless of how the meeting turned out. Ruth and Claudia had an interest in the lives of their neighbours and were willing to share an aspect of their own lives with other residents which were made possible through the check-in process.

Aside from the two regular events, common meals and check-in, some residents created other opportunities to socialise and enjoy each other's company. Neighbours came together to organise community events and celebrations. These events included winter gatherings, birthday celebrations, Christmas get-togethers, etc. that took place within the community as there was ample common space. The events were an opportunity for residents to participate in fun activities and connect with their neighbours. Annie and Andre explained the winter gathering that was about to take place:

I do always enjoy the social gatherings that we have like we will be having with the winter hui coming up. It is a time when we all contribute something. Last year it was a picture of ourselves in our very early years and it was put up on a screen and people had to guess who it was. We have a feast and a talent show on the Saturday evening. All sorts of things happen on that weekend. (Annie)

We have a winter gathering that we did last winter and people were a bit sceptical about it, like "what is this", one person said "why do

we have to have compulsory fun” (laughs), he now makes fun of himself for saying that and everyone else does too, but it came together really really nicely and it was kind of just about having a gathering of the people that live here to come together and be together for a weekend and do some stuff together. Some of it fun, some of it work, and so people were really really happy with it and of course it was a success and people want to do it again this year.
(Andre)

The winter gathering that happened over a chosen weekend was a major event for the community where residents partook in a range of activities together, as Annie and Andre explained. Through Andre’s comment, it was visible that not all residents were initially interested in the get-together and saw it as a mandatory community exercise although participation was not compulsory (refer to p. 106). However, after experiencing the weekend together, they enjoyed themselves and requested for it to be organised again.

Along with particular celebrations and events, there was an opportunity and space for residents to come together and partake in spontaneous activities such as movie nights, dance nights, and games nights. When asked what the importance of community activities were, Andre replied:

Because it’s fun, because it brings people together in a way you could get know each other better, you could talk about something serious while you’re doing it, it could be just to kind of let out all of the stress of the week and giggle and drink wine and be silly, it could be that, and often it does turn into that. It’s just about maintaining a sense of bond between all the people that live here and there will always be some people better than others because you live close to them or more things in common with them or whatever, that’s fine, but we do know everybody, people connect with each other.

Andre stated that the process of coming together and interacting maintained a community bond regardless of whether the tone of the gathering was serious or light hearted.

Jodie believed that these events built the community and were necessary for cohesion. She mentioned the introduction of more community activities as one aspect of Earthsong she would enhance:

I wish I could say that there's a really strong cohesion here and there's a really strong bond between everyone here but I just can't say that but on average it's a lot better than elsewhere. I would like to see more community building activities, but we had just had our full weekend gathering last weekend and the community feels more cohesive right now.

Jodie felt that the community was not as cohesive as it could have been because people were not interacting and connecting with each other much. Her comment about wanting more community activities showed her belief that these events created cohesion.

Support

The major benefit of having a cohesive community, as stated by the residents in the research, was support in daily living. All the residents in the research commented on the availability of practical and moral support from neighbours. As John said:

You've got people who commit themselves to engaging in the way that they feel comfortable with, with their fellow Earthsong residents. So there's always people out there on the property to talk to, to share with, to invite into joint activities, to give you advice and assistance, they're available on phone and through email, and you've just got a sense of a group of people wanting to live in this suburban context but engage in a lot of the day to day aspects with others because we share common land and we have activities that bring us together quite regularly. So that gives you a sense of group commitment to making your day to day life and routines more enjoyable because you are doing them together with others.

John stated that residents at Earthsong are available to engage with and offer support and assistance when required. He used the term commitment which highlighted the willingness of residents to connect and be there for each other. John

believed this was primarily due to the shared land and cohesion felt, as a result of shared activities discussed above. The sense of group commitment mentioned by John was reflected in Andre's experience of moving into Earthsong:

Well when we came here we didn't have anything, except for whatever is in the big suitcases, because everything was on a ship, and we had the houses done and we had purchased it upfront and we kind of moved in with clothes and that's it (laughs). So people just kind of came around and lent us stuff they said "here's a sofa, here's a stereo, here's a TV", they gave us all kinds of stuff (laughs) just on loan and a bed to sleep on in the mean time and all that stuff. So people were super generous and really kind of caring, how they supported us in moving in and being new.

Andre's experience of receiving support from his new neighbours highlighted the sense of connection amongst Earthsong residents as they shared their belongings. Although residents did not know Andre personally, they were there to support him knowing that he had migrated from another country and didn't have many of his personal belongings. Andre felt a sense of caring from his new neighbours because of the practical and moral support that they offered.

The availability of practical support was also highlighted by Susan. The benefit of living with many different residents was seen to be the access to a wide range of labour, skills and support. Susan stated that due to living in an environment where neighbours were willing to share with one another, there was ample amount of practical support. She felt as though she could borrow "*anything from anyone at any time*". Jodie and John credited the availability of support to knowing your neighbours and having established relationships with them. A sense of connectedness was linked with support:

It is definitely closer, you can form very nice relationships with people, I would say because we are all closer, there's more availability of support should you need it, the extent to which that actually manifests, that depends mostly on yourself, if you're asking for help or not. (Jodie)

You get to know other people in the community and what their skills and resources are so you seek the support and engagement with those who you feel comfortable with and in a community of this size there's nearly always somebody around who's willing and able to provide support for people in whatever it is they need support around. (John)

Jodie and John both saw support as accessible due to the sense of belonging with other residents but highlighted the need to personally seek support if required. Both of these comments showed that relationships with other residents played an important role in receiving support.

The other benefit of having close relationships with neighbours was the social support gained, as seen by Claudia, Susan and Daisy. At Earthsong, if the company of others was desired, it was easily accessible, as Claudia said:

Of course there's the actual social aspect of it, if I want company all I have to do is sit up at the common house with a cup of coffee and in 5 minutes there will be other people there or they're already there so I can go up and join them.

Claudia mentioned the common house as a location to meet with others implying the regular use of that facility as a means to connect with each other. Susan also acknowledged the availability of company and benefits of a social environment in her daily life:

It's good, because I'm a writer, it's quite isolating work and so I can always go and find someone to have a cup of coffee with or a chat with during the day. So it suits that change I've made and what I'm doing with my days.

Although residents at Earthsong were willing to connect with one another and support was always available, not all residents seek the company of their neighbours. There was no requirement to socialise and the extent to which residents interacted with others depended on the individual (refer to p. 117). Annie believed that many residents seek company at the common house because they don't have

much company during the day and for her personally, the need to socialise with neighbours was minimal:

Quite a number of people in this community are in houses on their own so they've got only their own company all day. They seek company at the common house. Whereas we have each other and we don't quite need it as much. I sometimes think I should go up to the common house to socialise but I feel too busy so I don't.

The need for social interaction varied amongst residents in the research but for those who enjoyed the company of others, it was easily available around the community.

Another aspect of social support that was mentioned by Claudia, Daisy and Susan was the high trust environment in which residents felt comfortable approaching others for personal advice or support. They felt that, at Earthsong, there was always someone there to talk to about any issue or botheration and others were willing to listen. As Susan said:

Can always find someone that will give you advice or pat your back or whatever; somebody to support you.

Susan highlighted that residents were available to each other not only for practical support, but also emotional and moral support. Established relationships with neighbours made it easier for residents to turn to one another in times of need. Daisy reflected on her experience of living at Earthsong:

Knowing your neighbours is a real benefit, having a variety of people to count on that aren't your relatives that live miles away, they live right there. It was good to have people you knew who you could trust living so close, with both my parents not living in Auckland at that time it was really nice to have some older people in my son's life. It was really nice having older people to talk to, about all sorts of things; it was good to have someone else who I knew and trusted and respected to ask some of those questions.

Daisy mentioned the benefit she received from having other people in her life as her own parents were away. She appreciated being able to talk to people about personal matters and sought advice from her fellow residents.

There was willingness amongst residents in the research to connect with one another and create a cohesive environment. Many residents entered the community with a desire to live closer to people, as June shared:

The big reason was that I knew that I enjoyed the lifestyle of living in a community and being closer to other people, supporting each other, and also the sustainability side of it as well.

The willingness to connect with neighbours had many personal benefits as residents could count on each other for practical or moral support in daily living. Claudia believed that this aspect of interest in others was what aided in constructing a high trust and respectful living environment that thrived on connectedness:

I know that people have said to me that when they lived in normal suburban houses they often didn't know their neighbours at all. I think in cohousing communities one of the things that everyone has in common is that they want to live in community so they want to make it work so they'll make an effort to make it work where as in normal society people don't necessarily care about their neighbours.

Claudia's comment showed that the personal effort to interact with and get to know neighbours was one distinction between cohousing and other suburban communities. The desire to live in community appeared to be what attracted many people to the cohousing lifestyle.

Impact on children

The positive impact of collective living on children was mentioned by all residents in the research. They acknowledged the social environment as a valuable tool for children to learn how to interact with others and form healthy relationships. As June explained:

The kids are influenced by so many different things; they take on more than we realise about how we have conversations, how we resolve things, how things are organised in the meetings. They're created into much more socially responsible beings just because of what they're growing up around not because they're told they have

to do these things. Absorbing it all. They still have to get guidelines and all that, everybody still goes through their terrible teens or whatever, and everyone hears it when they do!

June mentioned that children in the community absorbed information from their surroundings and learnt various skills. She clarified that the children still had to be parented but acknowledged them as more socially responsible beings because of the social environment in which they lived.

Claudia and Daisy spoke about the potential for shy children to become more open. They mentioned that growing up in a social environment encouraged children to interact with different types of people. As they said:

I think also for children who are a bit shy, it really helps them to blossom. You know they learnt to be confident around adults and once again have a relationship with lots of different adults. (Claudia)

Absolutely fantastic for small kids they get to be around a lot of different people, become very social, and are exposed to a lot of things they may not normally be exposed to. (Daisy)

Claudia and Daisy's experiences showed that children become more social and confident with others. Daisy mentioned that children also gained exposure to a range of skills and activities.

Susan, Claudia and Andre, saw the main benefits for children being the safety (refer to p. 113) and exposure to a range of people, which likened to Daisy's comment above. Claudia stated:

That one of having a huge range of adults who care about them, they're incredibly secure on site, everybody watching the children, everybody knows what's going on. They also can pick up skills, like if they're interested in sewing and mum and dad isn't, then they're going to pick that up from another adult here. They're going to learn so much more because they're around all these people who do other things, so it just gives them so many more options in life really. So I think that's a huge benefit actually. (Claudia)

They all saw exposure to the different interests of residents as a major benefit for children in the community, as Claudia expressed above. Children had the opportunity to learn a range of skills that they may not otherwise have been introduced to. Claudia, Andre and Daisy believed that the experience of living with a variety of people taught children a range of skills that gave them more opportunities in life.

Interpersonal relationships

One of the main challenges of living closely with others was the management of relationships. Although there were processes in place for dealing with difficult situations, interpersonal matters remained a personal challenge of living in cohousing. In this subsection I discuss the challenge of disagreements, diverging personalities, agreements and processes, and necessity for interpersonal skills.

Disagreements

All residents in the research commented on the challenge of dealing with interpersonal situations yet acknowledged disagreements as an expected feature of human interaction. Often, differences in opinion or perspective were seen to be the reason for conflict. As Andre and Claudia explained:

There's always times when you're pissed off at somebody, that could happen anywhere, but obviously here they live in the same community with you so the next time you see them you're like "rrrr (laughs) do I really need to see this person I don't want to talk to them right now" or whatever so that's one challenge. (Andre)

You've got to be realistic about it, it's as perfect as it could be, but human beings come in many different forms and shapes and sizes and opinions, and there have been people in the group who I have completely disagreed with on certain things and vice versa people have completely disagreed with me. (Claudia)

Andre saw the regular interaction between community members as challenging when you're not in agreement with someone. Claudia's comment stated that disagreements were known to arise and embedded in collective living. Both Claudia and Andre highlighted that disagreements occurred from time to time and could not be avoided.

The reasons for disagreement commonly discussed by residents in the research were related to the consensus decision-making process in which all residents had a chance to express their opinions (refer to p. 103). Attempting to reach consensus on community issues was seen as the primary cause of conflict between residents who held differing views. As June said:

People that you don't get along with or don't agree with can be the biggest personal challenge. For me personally the difficulties that usually arise are those interpersonal ones, where you don't agree with someone. There's only been a couple of times that there's been a discussion at the full-group meeting that I felt strongly about and couldn't agree with.

June shared how differences in opinion during meeting discussions were a challenge for her. She also emphasised that there had only been a couple of times when she didn't agree which highlighted that disagreements were not a common phenomena for her. The disagreements that occurred in community meetings prolonged decision-making and held potential to upset residents (refer to p. 103).

The topic of pets and parenting were known as the most contentious issues at Earthsong for which consensus was difficult to achieve because people felt strongly about these matters. Residents were in constant disagreement about the implications of having cats in the community and involvement of residents in parenting. Annie and Daisy recalled disagreements that affected them personally:

The pet policy went on for a very long time and that involved our daughter who wanted to bring her cat with her when she came back from Wellington with her husband. That was all very frustrating and challenging. Amazingly we could make decisions about spending

1000s of dollars much more quickly than about what we were going to do about having a cat; to have or not to have. (Annie)

Being a parent, some people had very strong opinions about how you should parent and it was very difficult having that coming from people that didn't have children living there; they may have parented children that have all grown up. And I know that grated on a few parents, not just me. (Daisy)

Having a wide range of beliefs about pets and parenting within the community made it difficult for a decision to be made as there would have to be some form of compromise or sacrifice. Not all residents appreciated having pets in the community and various styles of parenting led to different expectations when dealing with children. Leo recalled his experience at meetings about these two issues:

The two things that always became bones of contention were always kids and pets, people would always have different points of view about kids and pets, you know you had people who thought that the children should be brought up more by the community and the ones who thought 'no no, it's brought up by the two parents'. And the second thing were pets, so you had the people who were the kind of hardcore ecologists who said "no, pets kill birds so they're bad, they're evil" and then you had the people who said "no no, pets are great they are part of family, they're part of community we need them we just need to work it out", so that became a source of fractiousness.

Leo's experience highlighted the ongoing tension in the community due to the differing opinions about children and pets. He believed that debates about children and pets were likely to cause major conflict within the community and stated that the consensus process was unable to resolve these issues because of differing ideologies.

Personalities

At Earthsong, there were a diverse range of residents who had migrated from many parts of the world and engaged in a variety of occupations. Along with the

differences in backgrounds, were the differences in personalities that Ruth, Claudia, Daisy and June recognised as a potential challenge. As Ruth said:

Well I suppose personality wise, and diversity, can get a little bit challenging more than it would in the neighbourhood but it's got all the bonuses that cancel it out I reckon.

Ruth stated that the issue of personality would be a greater problem at Earthsong than in another urban neighbourhood due to the constant interaction. Divergent personalities meant that not all residents interacted positively and enjoyed each other's company. Many residents in the research acknowledged that some people gravitated towards each other whereas others gravitated against. As Claudia said:

You can't like everybody, I think it would be impossible for you to like everybody. It's quite possible to like some aspects of most people and I really personally try and focus on that, sometimes that's a challenge (laughs). But realistically, because there's so many of us that's fine because the people that you don't get on with you don't have to see, really do not have to seek out their company.

Claudia referred to the size of the community as an important factor in dealing with differing personalities. The large number of residents at Earthsong meant that those who did not get along did not have to interact with one another. There was no obligation for people to seek intimate relationships with other residents and it was possible for residents to keep away from people they did not like due to the size of the property, as mentioned by June and Daisy. June stated:

And because it's such a big property, if you want to you can generally avoid those people but it's also a good exercise to be able to figure out how to manage to get along with them and appreciate the good things about those people and figure out how to not let those challenges become overwhelming. It is like family, you're going to see them at the next event so you have to figure out how to get through things. (June)

The comment above highlighted how residents did not have to interact with incompatible personalities. However, June stated that it was good exercise to attempt to manage difficulties that arose which likened to Claudia's comment above

about focusing on the positive aspects of people. June's comparison to a family situation showed the intent of moving past challenges and solving problems. June and Claudia both viewed such situations as an opportunity to manage conflict and resolve or rise above differences.

Ruth and Annie shared how they managed interpersonal issues. Although both of them found it difficult to discuss issues with others, they had different approaches to dealing with challenging situations:

Occasionally someone will do something I don't like and I have to be careful not to jump up and down too much (laughs). I'm not very good at sitting down and discussing things face to face with people that have annoyed me so that's a learning thing I'm on. I usually just tell them point blank what I think and then I retreat and just don't talk to them for a while and then I get over it and it's all over. (Ruth)

I'm not very good at talking directly to people about things I find a challenge between us, I think I tend to just let it wash over me and hope it will go away, and just keep relating but not let this thing get too big. Just let things lie for a while and things will progress and change and also look for areas where I do have things in common with the person instead of getting hung up on the differences. (Annie)

Ruth explained how she dealt with conflicted situations and mentioned that she confronted people in an outspoken manner. She recognised that it wasn't the most appropriate method to handle the situation by stating that it's something she's learning about. On the other hand, Annie shared that she kept the issue to herself and allowed time to heal the situation. She stated that she kept relating to the person concerned and looked for commonalities which was similar to the comments made by June and Claudia earlier.

Susan and June also mentioned that matters concerning a couple of members of the community were often confronted and resolved through informal interaction. As June expressed:

We have a saying “things get sorted out on the path”, where you happen to walk past someone and a couple of sentences later what seemed to be a big problem somehow gets sorted out. There’s probably only between about 5 to 6 people over that course of time that I didn’t appreciate and I think we all get along just fine now, they’re not my best friends but we get along fine.

June’s comment showed how the regular interaction around the community aided in addressing interpersonal issues. She acknowledged that she’s not best friends with those residents but that they are able to interact peacefully.

Agreements and processes

The majority of residents in the research believed that interpersonal issues were likely to arise if residents had strong opinions or personalities, as discussed above. For this reason, the community agreements and processes were relied upon for dealing with ongoing tensions. As June stated:

I think in terms of interpersonal things the biggest problems that arise are people with strong personalities, with strong opinions or strong feelings about things. It’s all the processes we have in place for dealing with things and the communication agreements we have with each other, for dealing with those sorts of things.

The agreements aimed to minimise misunderstandings through effective communication. Daisy explained the agreement:

From what I can remember, it’s using a lot of “I” statements instead of “we”. It’s really “I” that’s having the issue, owning what you’re saying, don’t go around gossiping and bitching about people, go and talk to them personally.

She mentioned taking responsibility for what you were saying and respecting other’s privacy. Although personal matters may be shared or may arise in group processes, residents were expected to maintain confidentiality and refrain from gossip. Susan commented on how this could be a challenge:

It's not easy because gossip is one of the things human beings do but there is a difference between what I call good gossip and bad gossip, putting people down. And we try to keep each other accountable to that, if somebody's bitching about someone else we say "you need to go sort this out with that person".

Susan stated that gossip was common to any group of people yet residents generally held each other accountable to negative or spiteful comments. The implications of such comments could be disheartening and cause major tension between community members. Jodie recalled an experience of gossip:

There's a lot of gossip around, which can turn into things being said about you which are just not true. And there was an occasion, just got turned into a huge thing, certainly not the first time that kind of thing happened here but the way it got exaggerated and people just going nuts about it didn't feel very nice.

Jodie stated that there was a lot of gossip in the community, as Susan and Daisy also expressed. She recalled a particular incident which upset many people. On the other hand, Rupert shared his experience of gossip:

I don't have any sense that people pry. We do have sort of agreements about gossip on the paths and I think most people do respect those agreements that you don't talk about other people's private things unless they have given you permission to talk about them. You don't say "did you hear that they're not getting on so well", I haven't experienced that at all really.

Rupert's perspective differed largely to Jodie's as he had no experience of gossip in the community. He felt that residents generally respected the agreements and other's privacy.

The mediation process at Earthsong aimed to resolve differences and settle disagreements. The facilitated meeting was available for residents who experienced ongoing conflict. June explained:

We do take responsibility for ourselves and do what we can to maintain healthy relationships with one another. So occasionally when we do have an issue with someone else, we sit down with a third person to work through it and come to an agreement. I haven't heard of it being used for a couple of years, once or twice a year, not much.

June said that the mediation process was not often used and acted more as a last resort for conflict resolution. She mentioned that residents generally did what they could to maintain healthy relationships which suggested a genuine intention to resolve issues. Andre saw this intention as a rare phenomenon in other neighbourhoods as people often avoided interpersonal problem solving:

If there's a big ongoing clash then you have to find mediation or find some way around it, find some way of talking to each other which is good because so often we never solve those things and just end up feeling really shit about somebody. It's just another person, they did something you didn't like but that doesn't necessarily make them a bad person.

Andre's comment showed how he felt about the way interpersonal issues were dealt with outside the community. He stated that often problems were not confronted and instead judgements about the other person were made based on their behaviour. He saw the mediation process as a useful tool to help resolve conflicts.

There were two residents in the research that had undertaken the mediation process on separate occasions. They both had very different experiences of the process. When asked how conflict was dealt with, Jodie replied:

We already have a process for that and that's proven quite effective and I have been in mediation and it worked really well.

Jodie had an issue with another member of the community that was successfully resolved through discussion with a third party. Judith on the other hand, had an extremely negative experience of the mediation process that she believed caused more harm than good:

Very very destructive I'm afraid. Some key people in the community thought that they were more important than other people or they

were given the mana of important people and that's at the expense of other people, so that was my experience, I can't talk for anybody else.

Judith had an ongoing issue with a number of residents at Earthsong and her experience of mediation highlighted how she felt that she was not being heard. She stated that certain people were seen as important at the expense of others which showed that she felt the mediation process was not balanced and instead tailored to the needs of those people.

At the community level, the mediation process was used to guide the discussion about pets on one occasion. Jodie felt as though the process had no impact leaving the issue unresolved:

So we had a number of meetings and we even paid for a facilitator to come in and do this huge process with us and in the end nothing happened. And again that's not talked about; it's just the way it is. There are issues that are not talked about and people don't ask for mediation either and that's usually when it concerns more than 2 people, once it becomes half the community or the whole community it's just not addressed really.

Jodie stated that the issue of pets remained unaddressed as some residents chose to ignore the rules set by the community. The issue of unresolved problems was also reflected in Ross's experience of community matters:

If someone really wants to do something and they really feel strongly about it and I feel differently about it and a number of others do it can be quite a challenge. There's one or two areas that still haven't been resolved. No one feels ready to talk about it, it's quite a bit of a sensitive area so I think that that's something that hasn't been dealt with in the mean time.

Ross emphasised the challenge of differing views and opinions discussed earlier. He stated that one or two areas remained unresolved as residents did not want to acknowledge or talk about them. Issues that affected the majority of the community appeared more difficult to deal with despite the processes for conflict resolution.

Skills

Claudia, Daisy and John recognised the importance of various personal skills in order to live collectively. All residents commented on the difference of living in a cohousing community as opposed to a suburban community and noted the ability to incorporate other's needs when living closely with people. Most saw it as a way of thinking that moved away from an individualistic mindset. When asked to expand on this, Claudia said:

Not making that mind switch that actually I'm not an individual anymore, I can't just come here and do what I want. I've actually now got neighbours to consider who I've agreed to do that with, so now I have to think a little bit more carefully, I have to think about what I'm doing. And I think if people haven't made that switch in their brains, that doesn't work.

Claudia explained the need to think about one's actions and the effect that they have on others. She stated that living in a cohousing community would not work for individuals that weren't considerate of others. Daisy also emphasised this point:

Anyone who is too opinionated it wouldn't suit them; you have to have a bit of compromise and those sorts of skills, and put the work into learning those skills to live so close to people.

Daisy highlighted the ability to compromise as an important skill for living closely with others. John agreed that personal skills were vital for creating a healthy living environment:

You can have all the structures and processes in the world but if you haven't got people with the personal skills and commitments to make the community work then the community is going to fail. So it's very much dependant on the personal skills and input of those who live in the community to make it a good environment to live in.

He believed that the personal skills of residents were more important than the processes discussed earlier. He mentioned a commitment to making the community successful which highlighted the individual effort required.

Susan and June likened the experience of living closely with others to being in a marriage with all the other residents. Susan saw it as a bad marriage sometimes because everyone had to have a say and June recognised the need to put in effort to make it work:

Oh it's like living in a bad marriage sometimes (laughs), things are decided by everyone and everyone has a say, and that's where it sometimes starts to look like a bad marriage (laughs). (Susan)

It's like being married to all those people at the same time (laughs); it takes a lot of effort. Constant effort to keep things happy and comfortable but then it becomes part of the culture so it doesn't become effort anymore. It becomes second nature so it's worthwhile making that effort. (June)

Susan referred to the consensus decision-making as a reason for problems in the 'marriage' (refer to p. 103). June commented on how the initial effort put into living closely with others was worthwhile as it eventuated into a natural way of interacting with others. The effort required was also highlighted by Daisy as she stated that residents are "a group of people with lots of differences doing the best that they can".

Personal abilities were acknowledged by all residents as essential for living together with others and the community was seen as an ideal place to learn or better such skills if there was an intention. Daisy spoke about learning through living in community:

It's just ongoing opportunities to learn better people skills, and be good neighbours. I've learnt that I'm actually a very tolerable person and I get along with a lot of people.

Through her experience at Earthsong, Daisy felt that she acquired better people skills and was able to comfortably live closely with others. Susan believed that collective living provided an opportunity to improve individual skills required for peaceful interaction:

You learn patience, and you learn that diversity is part of being human and you while that person might think in a totally different

way to you, it's a valid way of thinking. And it teaches you tolerance and dealing with diversity and to do that you have to be reasonably emotionally mature so it does teach you emotional maturity.

Susan acknowledged the opportunity to understand and embrace diversity through living in community. She also stated the need for emotional maturity which included compromise and consideration for others as mentioned by Claudia and Daisy above.

Summary

Living closely with others had numerous benefits and challenges for residents of Earthsong. The main benefits included increased social connection and support from neighbours. The vision of sustainable living held by Earthsong community drew in a diverse range of people and played an important role in creating common ground between neighbours. Community events allowed for residents to get to know one another and establish relationships. The regular events such as common meals and the meeting check-in process were especially recognised as opportunities to connect with others. Spontaneous events organised by residents were highly appreciated as they contributed towards community cohesion. As a result of social connection and cohesion, practical and moral support was available within the community. Residents recognised the availability of support between neighbours and claimed to count on each other as much as family. They valued the impact of the social environment on children. Residents of Earthsong believed that the cohousing environment was beneficial for children as they were exposed to a range of people and activities. Children had access to learning different skills from residents in the community. They also became more confident and comfortable around people as they grew up in a socially connected environment.

On the other hand, living closely with others posed a number of challenges for residents of Earthsong. The biggest challenge related to interpersonal issues that residents faced from time to time. As with any group of people, disagreements arose due to differing opinions and ideologies. The main instigator for this was the consensus decision-making process that allowed for every resident to express their views on various community issues. Along with that, differing personalities were challenging to deal with but recognised as inevitable. Residents spoke about

managing relationships and overcoming issues to sustain a positive environment. A number of agreements and processes were followed at Earthsong to ensure effective communication and relation between neighbours. Although the processes were highly regarded, they were seen to produce divergent results as both positive and negative outcomes were experienced. Residents of Earthsong highlighted the need to acquire personal skills in order to live closely with others. They believed that being considerate of neighbours was essential, as well as, the ability to compromise and sacrifice. Overall, living closely with others was part of the cohousing experience that derived both benefits and challenges for residents of Earthsong.

SHARED OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

This section focuses on the benefits and challenges of sharing tools and tasks, a common feature of cohousing. Firstly, I look at the benefit of sharing resources and working together such as cost savings and easy maintenance of the community. Secondly I explore the challenges of consensus decision making and resident input such as delays in decision making and lack of input towards communal tasks.

Sharing

A major benefit of living in a cohousing community was the sharing of material and immaterial resources. Collective ownership and maintenance of the community enabled residents to have access to a range of appliances and personal skills. In this subsection, I discuss the benefits of shared resources and teamwork.

Resources

The sharing of resources at Earthsong had many benefits for all residents in the research as they acknowledged the ample amount of practical and moral support available (refer to p. 78). The community had many resources for which residents shared ownership. These mostly included household appliances and garden tools. June and Ruth appreciated the sharing of resources:

Resources are well utilised, incredibly well utilised, from washing machines to lawnmowers things I might not own myself, or be able to afford to buy, or I might choose not to. There's things I borrow from people, I've lent out bits and pieces and borrowed others such as hand blenders and things like that for cooking. (June)

I really like that less utensils/appliances. Like my hand beater blew up and I didn't buy a new one I just use the one in the kitchen and I share my waffle iron with the neighbour and you can always run around and borrow a cup of sugar if you need it. (Ruth)

June commented on the benefit of sharing resources particularly if you cannot afford or choose not to buy them. For example, Ruth didn't have to buy a new hand beater as there was one available in the common house. June and Ruth also acknowledged the sharing of resources that occurred between residents. They both borrowed and lent out kitchen appliances to other residents in the community. Daisy also acknowledged the benefit of sharing appliances:

You know when people initially think of Earthsong that you've got to do everything together and that you don't have time to yourself which is totally wrong, you can have your own, there are facilities to have your own laundry if you wanted one but most people choose to have the shared laundry and use that.

She highlighted that facilities were available to share but not a mandatory requirement of living in the community. Claudia expressed the benefit of sharing resources for her which she believed was possible at Earthsong due to the trust and respect between residents:

I don't own a lawn mower, or a weed eater or washing machine or all that kind of stuff. So whatever it is you need, even if it's for 5 minutes that you need it, someone's got it. So it's a wonderful sharing of resources. In a normal residential street, people aren't sharing resources mainly because they aren't trusting each other or they don't have clear lines of communication.

Claudia compared the relationship between residents at Earthsong to those in other urban neighbourhoods and stated that clear communication was essential for

sharing of resources. She believed that implicit expectations coupled with trust allowed for a wonderful sharing of resources.

The sharing of resources extended beyond material items. Daisy, Andre, June and Jodie commented on having each other as a valuable resource. The knowledge, skills, and interests of other residents in the community were seen as resources that were openly shared. Daisy and Andre recognised the large skill set that existed at Earthsong:

It's a real condensed population that has a wide knowledge/skill base; if you need anything then just ask and you'll be surprised at who can help or who has the knowledge or the ability even with only 32 houses. (Daisy)

There's a lot of resources when you have 50 or 60 or 70 people living together, people that know how to prune the peach tree, all kinds of expertise. (Andre)

Daisy and Andre acknowledged the range of skills that people acquired which benefitted residents when assistance was required. Susan also commented that there was always someone who could offer support either through expertise or knowing where to access it. June and Jodie recognised the personal gain in having access to the interests of others which gave them the opportunity to learn new skills. They shared their experience:

I get to experience a whole lot of different peoples lifestyles, there's a lot of things that people do at Earthsong that I don't do but I can dabble in them and have a go and learn some different things. (June)

There's people here that have special skills and they're really happy to share them. There's a guy who taught us woodworking for example. Anything, working with concrete, hands on things, garden design, things like that, it's great. (Jodie)

June and Jodie both appreciated the diversity of residents as they gained an opportunity to learn new skills. Jodie mentioned that people were happy to contribute which showed the willingness of residents to share their skills and interests.

Another key benefit of sharing resources was the cost savings on regular household expenses including power, water and internet. The reason for this was partly due to the design of houses (refer to p. 120) but also the bulk purchases and combined resource utilisation. As Jodie said, “*we do have a lot of cost saving because we share so much*”. The monetary savings of living at Earthsong were recognised by the majority of residents in the research. Claudia shared her experience:

The cost savings of living in a house at Earthsong are huge, with the solar design, the solar hot water, the rammed earth walls as a thermal mass, having our own water tanks, sharing our internet because we share, we just have 2 or 3 power lines coming on site rather than 1 and so that's shared between 32 houses but we don't have the line charges that you'd normally have. Our power, water, internet costs us about 120 dollars a month all year round which is very cheap. So the savings on living here are just huge, absolutely huge so for me. (Claudia)

Claudia experienced living at Earthsong to be much cheaper than other urban households primarily due to the house design and sharing of resources.

The sharing of resources was seen by residents in the research as a gain for the environment too (refer to p. 120). They commented on the benefits of lower consumption and the requirement for it in modern society. Susan, Annie, Rupert and Andre believed that sharing was a cost effective way of utilising the planet's finite resources. As Susan stated:

I also think that we're thoroughly overpopulated as a planet and we're going to have to think very carefully about living in a way that we could husband our resources and still survive. Here we own four washing machines, we own two lawnmowers, we own one weed

eater. We don't have to 'own' everything the way you do when you're in a nuclear household, we own one trampoline. You don't have to have all this stuff which can only be good for the planet.

Susan emphasised the need for careful resource use due to the global population being unsustainable. She referred to the sharing of resources at Earthsong and compared it to other urban households where residents had to purchase all the items they used. Andre held the same belief and saw sharing as a means to lessen consumerism:

So there's all kinds of ways in which sharing can just reduce the consumer burden on society that we get, we get inundated with so much consumerist propaganda. "You need to buy more stuff!" is kind of the message, and we all go out there and buy more stuff without thinking too much about it but do we really need it? And is there any way we can be gentler on the earth by not having to each have our own giant cooking pot or our own lawnmower or whatever? So that's another plus.

Andre highlighted the messages in society that propels individuals towards consumption. He recognised the harmful effects of unnecessary consumption and acknowledged the sharing of resources as a way to address the issue.

Teamwork

At Earthsong, there was a collective effort to complete community tasks. Although there was no obligation or requirement to contribute towards communal chores and some residents chose not to (refer to p. 108), most offered their time and effort whenever possible. When asked about roles in the community, all current residents spoke about the multiple roles that individuals undertook. June and John stated:

Everyone signs up to different roles, everyone has multiple roles in the community. (June)

We've got a very flat structure here we don't have head honcho or directors or chair people etc, we all live on the same level if you like and so I engage in various of the activities around Earthsong. (John)

John emphasised the non-hierarchical structure of cohousing (refer to p. 3) as the reason residents had several roles. June's comment highlighted that residents chose how they wanted to contribute. Andre also commented on the non-hierarchical structure that differed from mainstream society. He mentioned how residents had to take responsibility for the functioning of the community:

It's very much non-hierarchical which is different from what people are used to. People take roles and responsibilities but there's no leader so that's a whole big difference from the main culture in New Zealand or US or anywhere that I know of really. Basically if you want something done you have to take responsibility. It's just everyone has to pitch in and take responsibility. For us it works, it empowers us to take responsibility for our own stuff and that way we have more connection with each other.

Andre stated that the work was completed by contribution from residents and also highlighted the multiple roles taken by members. He expressed that shared responsibility and work on communal activities was empowering and kept residents connected.

The majority of residents in the research commented on the benefit of sharing tasks and Daisy said, "*many hands make light work*". Working together to accomplish tasks made them a lot easier as Ross recognised:

All the little things that need doing all the time, there lots of people forming little niches and an example, since we've built the site I don't think I've ever pushed a lawnmower around anywhere (laughs). And that's fine by me, and there's lots of things that I don't gravitate towards doing and if it fills someone else's little niche then I'm quite happy to let them do it. So in some ways it makes life easier.

Ross commented on the diversity of residents being an advantage as people were interested in different areas of community management. This meant that members did not have to partake in activities they didn't particularly enjoy such as Ross never having to mow the lawns.

The benefit of sharing tasks for Claudia was a decrease in responsibility. She mentioned having support from residents for many tasks, personal and communal, which made day to day living much easier. She explained:

You look and you see something needs doing, but you don't necessarily have to do it. When it's just your own home in your own suburb, your own piece of land, whatever needs doing you have to do it. So I think that that is a huge responsibility taken off your shoulders,; it's like you don't have to fix everything. So I think that's almost a state of mind because when people live in a little section and they have to do everything, it's quite overwhelming.

Claudia compared the work in the community to that in a freestanding suburban neighbourhood and mentioned the benefit of a relaxed state of mind because of shared responsibility. As Daisy said there's "lots of spaces around that you could use but didn't have to take care of yourself".

Leo and Lucy acknowledged the value of teamwork and commented on improvement and innovation in the community since they left. Annie believed that taking collective responsibility and having each other's support created "fertile ground for innovation". Residents shared novel ideas and collectively initiated them, for example, the 'vege co-op' that began at Earthsong and was now available in the wider community. Andre explained what the vege co-op was:

Basically it is a community food store and its run by the people of the community and it's not for profit really. It's only purpose is to make the food available to the community and it's a contrast to the big supermarket health food stores they have over there. There may be someone in charge but it's not a company or a corporation, it's just people working together. So educating people about that and that it could be possible to create something like that here. Things like that could happen with just a few interested people, and if it wasn't for Earthsong it would have been really hard to get up off the ground.

Andre described the vege co-op as a community food store. It sold organic vegetables at a more reasonable price than supermarket stores as it wasn't for profit.

Andre explained the use of vege co-ops in other parts of the world and was surprised that New Zealand did not have many despite its agricultural background. He highlighted how working together made it possible to launch the co-op and also kept it functioning. Susan acknowledged the benefits of teamwork:

We have a vege co-op which was easier to do because we lived so close together. It's now become for the wider community but it started here, things like if people have access to organic chickens then we can buy a great big box of them and share them out, just those things that you need to do in a group is much easier. There was a small conversation started about doing our own insurance, why should we pay an insurance company to insure our goods, where we could do it ourselves like a credit union really, so there's been talks about that.

Susan mentioned the possibility of becoming less dependent on external agencies through group effort and highlighted the range of tasks that could be accomplished through teamwork.

Responsibility

Sharing responsibility for the maintenance of the community required residents to be actively involved in attending meetings and completing tasks. In this subsection I discuss the challenges of consensus decision-making and input from residents.

Consensus

The consensus decision-making process was agreed upon at the initial stages of community building and followed a particular structure and procedure. As it was based on inclusivity, all residents had a chance to put forth their perspectives and work together towards agreement. Susan explained the benefit:

Most of the world works by majority decision-making and I think that's really difficult if you are living with the same people that haven't got what they want. So consensus decision-making works when you're living alongside people.

Susan saw consensus as an appropriate method of decision-making for collective living. She highlighted that making decisions through a majority vote overruled minority perspectives which could cause tension when living closely with others. Rupert agreed and explained how agreement was reached:

If you don't get agreement you just keep talking and keep meeting. The idea is to get to a situation where even though they are dissatisfied, they can live with it, either there's been a compromise in some way or they've just realised how important it is to other people that it gets done. I think it's a good model, there's very few decisions that really have to be made today.

Rupert mentioned that decisions do not have to be immediate which indicated that the process was time consuming. All the residents who spoke about consensus brought up the time factor. June and Susan recognised that patience was essential when it came to making decisions:

Patience would be a big thing to understand, because it does take a while to work through processes. Sometimes things don't get resolved at one full-group meeting so you have to wait and so you have to be patient. (June)

It takes ages to move this whole community into something new because of the consensus decision-making. It's very slow at generating methods so patience is really necessary. The slowness to get things done among 75 people, 60 adults, is quite frustrating. (Susan)

June and Susan both commented on the size of the community as a reason for the slowness in making decisions. June mentioned trusting in the process to give the best result but Susan expressed that the time factor was quite frustrating. In Annie and John's experience, delays in decision-making were also frustrating. Ross agreed and mentioned the difficulty of convincing others to try new methods or solutions to community problems:

I think in some ways, the diversity can be a bit challenging at times. I think I'm quite easygoing about a lot of things and not into crossing my t's and dotting my i's and I think in any neighbourhood of this size

there will be the people who are just ultra careful about what they want to do and they worry. Sometimes when we want to try a creative solution to something, it's a lot of work to convince the worry warts to let us try it, I suppose that's my way of putting.

Ross saw the diversity of people as a challenge in this case because of differences in perception. He expressed the effort required to encourage residents to try innovative solutions, particularly those who were reluctant and conservative.

Leo recalled his experience of the decision-making process and believed that consensus was an ineffective method due to the large group size:

Where it, from my point of view coming in and seeing it, absolutely didn't work was the whole consensus decision-making. Not because it was a bad thing per se, just because it didn't scale. You'd have incredible discussions about the most petty things, the most menial things, and because everyone had to agree, and everyone had to be heard, they just went on forever. It just seemed like an inefficient way to run a meeting cause you have people with totally different ideologies, there's actually no way you'd resolve that through consensus so you have these backwards and forwards, on again off again.

Leo said that consensus would be an effective method with smaller groups but became unnecessarily time consuming with too many people, which likened to June and Susan's comment above. Leo thought that when dealing with different perspectives, the consensus process was unable to achieve agreement. Reaching consensus on pets and washing lines were examples of how different ideologies caused ongoing delays in decision-making at Earthsong (refer to p. 85). As Judith said:

And have you heard about the clothes line issue, we argued for 4 or 5 years about where the clothes line went. I mean that says something about the earnestness of the process, that it's all got to be agreed and consensus and everything else like that.

Judith shared how different views on the placement of clothes lines took years to resolve which highlighted the seriousness of the consensus process.

Another challenge of the consensus process, as mentioned by Ross, John and Annie was the requirement for consultation before undertaking any changes within the community. Ross and John stated that residents sacrificed a degree of autonomy for consensus decision-making. John said:

You yield some autonomy when you live in a community because what occurs on the common land and the activities that you engage in, can only be undertaken with the agreement of a lot of other people which is sometimes provided easily and other times is a protracted process. (John)

The consultation and discussion process held back individuals from carrying out activities or initiatives that they would have liked to, as explained by John. Once again the process of agreement was seen to unnecessarily prolong decision-making. Compared to residing on one's own, collective living required a lot of consideration for others whilst decision-making. Annie shared her experience:

When you're living in community, you have to think about someone else, what you're doing when you're doing it and whether it will inconvenience someone else. Periodically I think I would rather be living outside of cohousing but I think it's just that thing coming back to me of being able to make your own decisions more quickly.

Along with the majority of residents in the research, Annie acknowledged the consultation and time consuming nature of consensus as a challenge.

Input

The shared responsibility of maintaining Earthsong meant that some form of contribution from residents was expected though not compulsory. Residents were free to choose how much time they allocated to communal tasks as there were no obligatory rules. As John explained:

This is a community which absorbs as much time as you choose to allocate to it and I'm aware that some people find it takes too much of their time and there are others that seem to contribute relatively little, so people find their own level of engagement.

When asked about input, all residents in the research highlighted busy lifestyles as a barrier to contributing to the community. As many residents partook in full time employment or had young families, most of their time was dedicated to non-communal tasks. Residents in the research openly acknowledged this aspect of urban life reflected in the non-compulsory notion of contribution. Leo and Lucy's shared their experience:

We didn't play as active a part as I think a lot of people there and they were actually very supportive they said look we understand you have kids, you have other priorities, you've got family as well, and so relative to someone who doesn't have family, you won't have quite as much spare time to do things as other people. (Leo)

Leo spoke about how the community understood that family was their first priority leaving them relatively little time to contribute towards communal tasks. Jodie explained how this could be personally challenging for some residents as they felt they should be contributing but were unable to:

You're asked to contribute, although it's not compulsory people can feel really bad personally, you have a bad conscience of not helping. We've had young families live here and they felt like they had to join in every working bee but they couldn't because they had young children and they felt so bad that they left.

Jodie highlighted the pressure people felt to contribute towards the community which in some instances led them to leave the community. For this reason, Jodie explained the importance of being able to set personal boundaries to live in community. She mentioned that communal living would be difficult for those who were unable to set boundaries between their personal and community life.

Daisy and Jodie both shared that when they first moved in, they were eager to contribute towards the community. They spent a lot of time on community activities which led to a realisation that a balance between personal and communal tasks was essential:

When I first moved in, I had to do a whole lot of stuff rather than just sit inside and do nothing. That's a typical reaction to moving in,

wanting to get all involved in the community and then finding that you need to have your own space, quite common. (Daisy)

Initially I was doing a lot, I was working so much, contributing to the community every time I could, all sorts of stuff. So I put in a lot of time and in the last two years that kind of changed. (Jodie)

Daisy and Jodie explained that a common reaction to entering collective living was the willingness to contribute. However, their experiences highlighted the need to set boundaries and establish time for community and personal tasks alike.

As expected by residents in the research, there was a disproportionate amount of people that completed most of the communal tasks. Thus, the issue of input remained a constant challenge in the community. John and Jodie talked about the lack of input from some residents and the difficulty in addressing the issue:

Like any group, a smallish number of people do a disproportionate amount of work but we've resisted any notion of compulsory tasks. Even getting a commitment of one to two hours per week in our recently adopted membership agreement was a bit challenging for some people. They didn't like the idea that they had to commit or be required to do that much work. (John)

Just really obvious that if you don't contribute people can get quite grouchy sometimes, it doesn't really get addressed. I think some people would like to see that put into a kind of law that you have to contribute and then you have some people say "no that's impossible you do what you can". (Jodie)

John and Jodie both highlighted the attempts at achieving mandatory input requirement. They mentioned that residents held different perspectives on contribution which made it difficult to gain consensus. Ruth agreed and claimed that because it was an expectation, not a mandatory requirement, residents were unwilling to monitor other's behaviour:

People move in and they don't partake, it is hard. And I say we don't police the place but you know who's not pulling their weight, you just know, and it's disheartening.

The majority of residents in the research mentioned that the issue of input confronted any group sharing responsibility, as John stated above. Susan and Andre spoke about how some residents chose not contribute. As Susan said:

Some people live here as in they live in a block of flats, and it's hard to pull them into the idea that they have to contribute because we're all in this together. They don't keep themselves informed, they don't read the minutes of the meetings and they really are on the edge. Seems to be one of the things you have, when you have a group of people, you always have the edge.

Susan stated that some residents lived in solitude and decided not to partake in communal tasks which highlighted a difference in perception of collective living. Claudia agreed that residents in the past had not understood the expectations and ways of collective living that required some form of input:

There is an expectation that you will participate, that you will help sharing the work. We need to be clear about that in our documents otherwise you do get a lot of people, or you would get a lot of people who just don't contribute and it doesn't work. Earthsong needs, any community needs input. And if people aren't putting input in then it's just not going to work, but input can come in many many forms.

Claudia expressed that the community needed to be clear about the expectations of contribution so that members were more likely to participate in communal tasks. She explained that input was essential for any community to function. Ross agreed and explained the implication of residents not sharing responsibility:

If you went beyond a percentage of people not participating, if not enough are then it'll just become a little development with lots of little separate housing units in it and not much. Less enthusiasm for working together and being social creatures and all that sort of thing.

Ross highlighted the importance of input for sustaining community. He mentioned that if residents did not collectively participate in tasks then the sense of community would dissipate.

The majority of residents in the research believed that to receive the personal benefits of community living, input was essential. They felt that the experience of being part of a group depended greatly on the contribution made. Jodie, June, Annie and Daisy referred to the common saying “*the more you put in the more you get out*”:

You can only really expect to receive from the community if you contribute, if you're an active part of it. (Jodie)

I think it's quite an important thing, the more you put in the more you get out and you really do need to put into it. (June)

The more you becoming actively involved, physically doing things, in focus groups, that brings you into an integrated sort of situation. The more you put in the more you will get out of it. (Annie)

You get basically what you put in, if you want to be a hermit and not have much to do with your community, then that will probably reflect in your experience of it. (Daisy)

All of the residents above highlighted the importance of contribution for receiving personal gains from community life. Through shared responsibility and active involvement, residents that had more input were seen to be better integrated in the community.

Despite the involvement of residents and importance of input towards communal tasks, another challenge faced by Earthsong was the ‘tragedy of the commons’. Susan explained:

One of the hard things when you live in community is the ‘tragedy of the commons’, it's where common areas are not looked after. It's quite hard to get enough enthusiasm to look after our common areas. We try umpteen different ways to do it, making it fun, having

food, saying to people this is what the expectation is, but it can be quite hard to make sure communal areas are well looked after.

Susan highlighted the difficulty in encouraging residents to contribute towards maintenance of communal areas mentioning that different methods had been attempted to obtain participation. Annie agreed and referred to the gardens as an example:

For instance garden is the most obvious one, there's a lot of unkempt garden because there aren't enough people that garden or who are interested in gardening.

Annie's comment showed that although residents used the common facilities, it was difficult to gain participation in the management of those areas. The importance of input was acknowledged by the majority of residents in the research who saw it as vital for sustaining the community. Despite this, active participation from all residents was difficult to obtain and continued to be a challenge for the community.

Summary

Shared ownership and responsibility was a prominent feature of cohousing that produced a number of benefits and challenges for residents of Earthsong. The primary benefits included the access to a large number of resources and the ability to work and live cooperatively. Residents of Earthsong had access to a number of resources including household appliances and outdoor tools. The sharing of common resources meant that residents did not have to personally purchase all household appliances required for day to day living. Residents also acknowledged an informal sharing of resources that occurred between neighbours which included material objects as well as skills and expertise. The reduction in cost of living fostered by resource sharing was recognised as a benefit of living in cohousing. The non-hierarchical system of organisation within the community called for collective effort to complete community tasks. Residents assigned themselves to different roles in order to manage the community. Teamwork was prevalent in the day to day running of the community which was seen as a benefit. Residents did not have to contribute towards all tasks but had access to all common facilities. The cooperative

environment within the community meant that residents could work together to create new initiatives such as the vege co-op that began at Earthsong.

Although teamwork was seen as a major benefit of living at Earthsong, the collective effort required to sustain the community brought an added responsibility that was challenging for residents at times. Residents had to participate in the consensus decision-making process that involved a number of focus-group and full-group meetings. The time-consuming nature of consensus was the biggest challenge for residents and required a lot of patience when facing difficult decisions. The slow pace of decision-making due to disagreements meant that the entire group had to proceed at the pace of those who were most reluctant which was frustrating for some people. Another aspect of consensus that was challenging was the lack of autonomy when making personal decisions. Residents often had to approach the entire group if changes were to be made to their private dwelling. This was again challenging due to the time-consuming process. Sharing responsibility for the management of the community was noted as a benefit due to cooperation, yet it remained a challenge for the community as consistent input was difficult to obtain. The busy lifestyles of residents at Earthsong meant that they couldn't make a considerable contribution towards the community. This became a personal challenge for some residents as they intended on contributing but were unable to do so. As input was voluntary not mandatory, gaining resident contribution was challenging, particularly as a number of residents were unwilling to participate. Residents in the research believed personal gains derived from contribution towards the community therefore finding a balance between private and community life was noted as essential to the experience of cohousing. Overall, sharing ownership and responsibility within cohousing was found to provide a number of benefits and associated challenges.

INTENTIONAL DESIGN

This section focuses on benefits and challenges of the intentional design of cohousing. I look at the advantages of the community design including safety and privacy. Environmental consideration is discussed as a specific benefit of Earthsong

community. I then look at the practical challenges of ecological design such as affordability, accessibility, and privacy.

Design

The design of cohousing was unique and specific to the needs of people. The car-free community and separation of private and communal living were the main benefits. The incorporation of environmental design at Earthsong was not specific to cohousing but was an advantage for residents. In this subsection, I discuss the benefits of intentional layout, privacy, and environmental consideration.

Layout

The layout of Earthsong community was specific to the cohousing model of community. The community was specifically designed to encourage interaction between neighbours in order to create a more socially sustainable neighbourhood (refer to p. 2). June said:

There's a lot of value and benefit to having community designed for social interaction and social connection. Like we have places where people can meet, and common meals and things like that. I guess you can have a community that doesn't have those elements of social connection. I don't know why you would want to be in a community where you live separately and don't interact because then you may as well be living by yourself in the suburbs and have a place with a big fence where you don't interact.

June's comment showed her belief that community life was meant to be interactive. She stated the possibility of having a community that didn't incorporate social sustainability but did not see the value in that.

June and Daisy felt interaction was slightly challenging at Earthsong due to the length and narrowness of the property. The positioning of the common house was not entirely in the centre of the property which meant that some parts of the community were utilised more than others. Aside from that, residents in the research

appreciated the layout of the community and Leo, Rupert and Andre commented on the strengths of the physical design. Leo recalled his experience:

I remember hearing about the importance of separating out where the cars are to where the 'village' is, and I thought that sounds like a good idea but when I saw it I thought I can see now how one little architectural idea has a massive consequence on the whole community. I mean for one thing, the whole philosophy behind it was, one you create a safe area for kids and two you all have to walk to your houses and you're always going to be bumping into people and that's exactly what happened so it works, it totally works. I never knew architecture could have such a large social impact and going and seeing it I thought yeah it really does, fancy that. Because it's just a building idea but it totally transforms the whole community.

Leo referred to the cohousing design as an aspect of the community that functioned particularly well. He said that the architectural principles of cohousing transformed the community allowing for a car-free living area that reaped many benefits. Rupert and Andre also spoke about the benefit of separating the car parking and living area. Rupert mentioned the village design and advantage for children which likened to Leo's comment above. Rupert and Andre acknowledged the effort required to transport goods from the car to the house because of the distance. Andre claimed that some people viewed this as an inconvenience but personally Rupert and Andre both didn't see it as a problem.

Rupert, Ruth, Andre and June enjoyed the interactive aspect of the community layout. They agreed with Leo's experience mentioned above of the design encouraging social interaction. They all spoke about the difficulties of interacting with residents in suburban neighbourhoods due to fenced properties and general unwillingness. Andre mentioned that generally people in urban housing weren't used to interacting and June stated that residents at Earthsong were friendlier. Rupert and Ruth preferred cohousing over suburban housing:

It makes me feel good that we're living here because it is a much more akin to how I feel the whole of our society should be organised.

(Rupert)

I just like the neighbourhood, it's just so much better than living out in your single house out in the suburbs not really associating with your neighbours that much. (Ruth)

For them, living at Earthsong was more enjoyable than living in a suburban neighbourhood where residents did not interact. Rupert also believed that residents in the wider society should interact with one another to receive the benefits of collective living.

The main benefit of the cohousing design for Claudia, Ross, Rupert and June was the sense of security gained. The reasons for security were believed to be the layout of houses as they didn't have separation between them, and the connection and support between neighbours (refer to p. 78). Claudia stated:

Of course there's a wonderful feeling of knowing that you're very secure. If I have an accident at home or need help in any way it's always there on my doorstep, and there's the security of knowing that someone's not going to burgle my house as well. Number 1 they can't get close enough to it, number 2 my neighbours would notice (laughs). (Claudia)

Claudia and Ross both mentioned the ease of leaving the community knowing that their homes would be safe. They referred to the car-free design making it difficult for people to have access to the house and Claudia stated that neighbours would notice someone trying to enter her property. Her comment also showed the sense of security she gained knowing that support was available from her neighbours. Rupert and June also spoke about the sense of security gained from neighbourly support that made them feel comfortable about living in and leaving the community.

June, Daisy and Susan discussed safety and security in terms of children. They believed that the large car-free property and open green area allowed children to

explore in a safe environment. Once again, the sense of security was linked to the design and connection between residents:

They could be out all day around the property where the parents can't see them for hours at a time, it's no concern because there's other people that can see them, and they're looking after each other they know where the kids parents are if they need to call them. (June)

Plenty of people to look after them, places to go and play by themselves. Pretty close to home but they feel like they're out exploring the world and not so wrapped up in cotton wool like a lot of kids are, they've got that sense of freedom. (Daisy)

We also have a lot of trees to climb and things to do outside and the kids tend to do that a lot more than most nuclear families. Last night the kids were playing here after dark, it's perfectly safe, that's the other thing, it's safe, and that happens most nights, they'll be outside playing till quite late. (Susan)

June, Daisy and Susan believed that the design of the community created more opportunity for children to play outdoors and commented on the safety in the neighbourhood. Ross and June also mentioned that the design of the neighbourhood gave children more freedom to explore compared to other urban residential settings:

And the kids have got their own space to play, know what's okay to do and not do. They look after each other really well, they grow this sort of responsibility for the other kids too. And they become incredibly independent because they have so much of this space to roam around in. Whereas other kids in the normal communities are only in their front yard, and their parents drive them to the playground, here kids live in the playground.

They sort of grow up with a lot of freedom I think and that's a great positive influence on their lives. They don't live sheltered lives at home where they're not allowed outdoors because it's a fearful place out there or they might go on the road or a stranger might come on the property. Or they've got a back yard to play in but no one to play

with so they just get bored and spend their days in front of the television or something. Here they will air on the side of going out and playing with each other or fighting occasionally (laughs).

June and Andre both believed that the freedom given to children because of the community's physical design was a tremendously positive influence on their lives.

Annie also recognised the benefit of the property for children but believed that it could be a challenge for mothers with toddlers under the age of three. She explained:

When children get past the toddler stage and they're responsible to a degree, the huge lovely gardens are a great place for them to play. However until about three you can't let them wander. You've got to wander around with them, so that's a bit of a challenge for young mothers here.

Annie saw the large open property of Earthsong as a challenge for young mothers as their children could wander anywhere compared to a suburban residential house that was fenced.

Privacy

The cohousing model was specifically designed to incorporate private and shared living (refer to p. 5). All the residents in the research appreciated the mix between individual housing and shared facilities. They referred to the model as extremely effective and claimed that through cohousing a person could experience "the best of both worlds". Rupert and Andre compared cohousing to the communal living arrangements of the past (refer to p. 33):

It's a model, a really good model, and the bit about it that I always explain to people when they say what is it exactly? Is that it's the common and private mix, where the communes of the 1960s and 70s failed was usually sex drugs or guru but often guru. And everyone would put their money in and lost it. I really do like that balance between its cohousing it's not a commune, its private and common not just common. (Rupert)

The whole design of cohousing is that it's not a communal house, you don't have a roommate unless you choose to have one and so you can have privacy all you want. In fact I could be in the backyard all day working there if I wanted to, no one would ever see me or even bother me or know I was there maybe. Or I could spend all day doing social stuff or any combination so it's kind of up to each individual if they prefer to interact at a given time or not. So it's a mix of both, I can have it how I want it, either social or not. (Andre)

Rupert and Andre spoke about how cohousing was a form of collective living yet it differed from the communes of the 1960's and 1970's because of the community design. The mix of private and common living gave residents the freedom of interacting or withdrawing from community activities. As Jodie said, "you can be very social if you wanted to be and if you don't want to be you can have that too".

When asked about privacy, Claudia, Ross and John, spoke about how they were able to easily withdraw from the community. They didn't have any issues with gaining privacy and mentioned the availability of companionship if and when they wanted it. Claudia stated:

If I want company I can have it and if I don't want it I can choose not to. And people get the messages really well, like at night if you're tired and you want to be left alone you just pull the curtains and people leave you in pieces. Once again, the children know, it's like a message thing, 'okay they're not available their doors shut the curtain are pulled, they don't want to be disturbed'.

Claudia highlighted that being in the company of neighbours was a choice. Ruth and Susan recalled that they never felt an intrusion of privacy and acknowledged the design of cohousing as the primary reason. Susan said:

I don't actually feel as if I need any more privacy than I've got. Cohousing has that nice mix of you have your own house, your own space, and you have the communal as well which most models don't actually offer.

Susan appreciated the mix of private and common space offered by the cohousing model. Claudia, Susan and Jodie talked about how individuals had different privacy

needs. They commented on the range of people that lived at Earthsong, some being particularly social, and others not. Claudia shared her experience of the community lifestyle:

It's very social, very social, and for some people they might find that too much but you can have the opposite as well. You don't have to have the social time if you don't want to, you can stay at home in your own garden, do your own thing and be as antisocial as you like.

She saw that the social lifestyle of collective living could be overwhelming for some residents and recognised the independent houses as a space for privacy. Susan and Jodie also spoke about the cohousing design being suitable for introverted personalities:

It's quite good for introverts too. I think a lot of people could adapt quite easily. (Susan)

Even if you are an introvert person and don't like the social interaction that much you don't have to have it here, you can have it both, sometimes I feel like talking to people sometimes I don't so that's cool. (Jodie)

Susan believed that different personalities could adapt to cohousing. Once again, Jodie expressed the social interaction as a choice for residents at any given time. Rupert explained how he managed to avoid interacting with others:

I find it really easy, I'm someone who can just walk out and have no one talk to me, it's just how you, it's how you walk (laughs). I've got something I want to do, I've got a meeting I'm going to or something rather, so I just walk out.

He believed that although the community was designed for social interaction, it was not constantly expected of residents. Rupert acknowledged that residents in the community understood the need for privacy which he found was not difficult to achieve.

Environment

The majority of residents in the research spoke about the impact of human life on the planet. They recognised the effect that excessive human behaviours were having on the environment, slowly degrading natural ecosystems. Annie stated:

In that sort of society running cars and travelling distances to things you might use, schools or shops, entertainment, will become increasing expensive in both monetary terms and also its toll on the environment. That's probably a bygone era and we're realising more as a population that we need to do things differently no matter how much we're still wedded to the idea of your own patch.

She believed that urban living in current societies was unsustainable and environmentally unfriendly. Annie mentioned the need for a new approach that would utilise resources but recognised the difficulty due to individualistic perspectives on living. Annie and Rupert both felt that the concept of independent living in New Zealand was common yet unsustainable:

Especially in New Zealand I think we're quite individualist, we do live quite autonomously and like our space. (Annie)

That's the fear that people have, almost everyone that comes here, often they comment "gosh it looks beautiful but I couldn't live here you're all just too close together". (Rupert)

Annie and Rupert both referred to the perspective on space and proximity of houses at Earthsong as a main concern for potential residents. Rupert believed that intentional community design such as the cohousing model would be essential in the future due to the planet's limited resources. He stated:

I'm really committed to the notion that this way of living has to be the way of the future because the world has not got enough resources to keep on doing what New Zealand keeps on doing. Just going into green fields and putting new housing projects in with individual houses and every single bit of infrastructure needs to be delivered to every single house; the world is not going to sustain.

Rupert's comment showed his belief that current urban housing projects were unsustainable and inconsiderate to the natural environment. Leo explained how the cohousing model utilised land and created a socially sustainable environment:

Rather than to get a block of land and you go slice slice slice slice slice, everyone gets their quarter acre section, you got lets pool that land together, lets create houses and all this communal space. So what that does is cluster houses and people talk to each other and you have all that beautiful space that people share and do whatever they want with and that works, it really works, creates community, creates a village. So yeah, very sound.

He described the difference between cohousing and regular urban housing projects. Along with Leo, Annie and Andre recognised the environmentally friendly design of cohousing that better utilised land. Annie and Andre also saw the cohousing design as likely to be the “way of the future”. They explained:

One of the ways we could afford to live more sustainably with larger populations so that we don't get sprawling cities and things like that. In terms of land, it still has a feeling of spaciousness. In order to conserve the land space you don't need to go to an apartment necessarily. There's still a lot of greenness because there's sufficient land to do a greening of it. (Annie)

Not all cohousing is built in a totally eco model but more and more of them are taking that on because obviously it has to be sustainable as possible, but even early cohousing where they didn't necessarily think that way, automatically if you have 30 houses clustered together in an area of 3 acres of whatever, you're taking up a lot less space already than 30 houses would in suburbia. (Andre)

Annie and Andre acknowledged that the medium density housing provided living space for many people but required a lot less land than typical suburban settings.

Rupert, Ruth and Jodie spoke about the ecological plan of Earthsong including the water management and solar design. They expressed how Earthsong community was an example of environmentally sustainable design. Rupert said:

I think it's that walking the talk business, instead of just thinking about that as a theoretical idea, we're living it. And I think it's a huge place for us as people living here and it's a living model for others. So we do have quite a few groups that come through that are interested in our project, and I think that's a good contribution to the rest of the world. But it's just a really nice place to live, that's all.

Rupert explained that community was a sustainable living model for others and a valuable contribution to the world. Ruth also felt that the community was sustaining the natural environment through its design:

The eco part is the big one I think, really love that I am in this space that's doing good for the world. You know, we get torrential rain and it all goes down the swales and its gone in an hour but for two or three or days afterwards, if you go for a walk, all the houses around here have big concrete driveways and concrete walks and the water just sits there for days and the water doesn't run away. So I love that aspect that we're coping with the water.

Ruth explained the benefit of having less impermeable surfaces as an example of ecological design and expressed the enjoyment of living in an environmentally considerate neighbourhood. Jodie spoke about the benefit of solar design at Earthsong:

There is the fact that our environmental footprint is a lot lower than it would normally be and it's just by clever design of the neighbourhood. It's just how it was designed, you can say we use less power but then the only reason is because we put the thing on our roof nothing else. It's not the behaviour of the people that does that, it's just the decision that was collectively made in the beginning to have that and that's great. The decision was made back then and we're just benefitting now.

Jodie's comment highlighted the lower environmental footprint caused by clever use of resources. She clarified that it was not the behaviour of residents, but the design of the community decided in the initial planning stages, that was benefitting the environment.

Although not all residents at Earthsong were actively interested in environmental concerns, many were drawn to the community for its ecological design and vision. Susan spoke about the make-up of the community in terms of environmental beliefs and the impact of the community on individuals:

We have quite a range of people in the green area, light green to the very deep green, quite a diversity in that belief system and that way of doing things. What tends to happen when people move here they become more aware of their impact on the environment and change the way they do things, things like using environmentally friendly cleaners in your house, not using glues and polyurethane in your house. The culture is about support and looking out for each other and that does happen a lot and it's also about trying to live as lightly on the earth when you're living in the middle of the city, well on the fringe, urban development.

Susan explained that residents tended to develop more environmentally friendly behaviours after moving into Earthsong, primarily because of the interest and vision of the community and its members. As an example, Rupert shared the benefit of having the train system in close proximity to the community:

Trains are a great benefit of this place for me, cause we became a one car family, we used to be a two car family. Again that's another thing that's possible here, become a one car family and it's easy to work in. On the very rare occasion that we both need a car on the same day, there's umpteen neighbours that will be able to supply the other car. So that's a good plus.

Rupert expressed that the access to public transport and support from others benefitted him and the environment. June also spoke about the ability to practice more sustainable living because of neighbourly support:

The biggest thing I have gained is that it's given me the opportunity to physically be able to live more sustainably. Practically be able to do more things because other people have created that system really. If I lived on my own in my own house, there might be a set of

things I do with recycling and planting but there's a broader range of things to be done here.

June highlighted the benefit of collective effort in terms of environmental concerns. The interest in sustainable living was a common feature in the community, as John stated:

The commitment to a more ecologically sustainable lifestyle is a prominent feature and a major interest for a lot of people who live here. And it's a struggle of course to balance the consumerism that we're all to some extent part of, with being a bit more gentle on the planet. So this is a good environment in which to explore these tensions and these challenges.

John acknowledged the difficulty in adopting environmentally friendly behaviours due to consumerist habits, but also saw Earthsong as a good environment in which to contemplate the effects of personal lifestyles on the planet.

Practicality

The ecological design of Earthsong was a main feature of the community yet it was a challenge in terms of practicality. The houses were not adequately sized and some materials used were seen as impractical. The sustainable building also increased the house prices and attracted a lot of visitor attention. In this subsection, I discuss the challenges of design, accessibility, and privacy from outside visitors.

Design of homes

The houses at Earthsong were carefully and ecologically designed to ensure maximum utilisation of the natural environment (refer to p. 6). Leo recalled his experience of living in the house:

The houses, so much care and love had been put into them and they were beautiful places to live. They felt healthy, and it was a nice feeling "ah I'm living in a healthy place". I know there's no chemicals used in this place, there's solar heating so it reduces the power bill, there's mud brick floors designed for heat retention so it was all just

done with a lot of thought and care and huge amount of thinking had gone into it, you could feel that.

Leo highlighted the amount of effort that went into building the houses and expressed the enjoyment of living in them. On the other hand, when asked what should be changed about Earthsong, the majority of residents in the research commented on the issues of practicality within the houses. The complaints included the lack of storage space and impracticality of materials used to build. John said:

Well, perhaps I'd make the houses a little bigger, with a bit more storage. The downside of that is the increased cost which makes them less affordable. And maybe wooden floors rather than concrete as the comfort factor outweighs the thermal mass benefit.

John felt that the houses did not have enough storage space, a view that was shared by Rupert, Andre, Daisy and Annie as well. John mentioned the cost of houses increasing if these changes were to be made making them less affordable than they were (refer to p. 126). Annie acknowledged the size of the houses and spoke about their inadequacy to house large families:

The houses have been deliberately designed small (even the 4 bedroom ones). This is part of the concept of sustainability, only building what is necessary. However, the practical outcome of this has been that people have moved in from larger houses elsewhere and effectively down-sized, but they still want to have a study and space to store things. This has meant that quite a few houses are occupied by one person and the largest houses have only 2 people in them. There is no room for families with children.

Annie believed that the sustainable building was a challenge for people that wanted extra space or storage. She shared that this led to the larger houses being occupied by a relatively small number of people. Daisy also spoke about this and used her situation as an example:

With me and two teenagers, I couldn't expect my partner who was 6'2 and pretty big to move into such a tiny space, it just wasn't going to happen. And some of the larger houses were owned and

occupied by one or two people, where I had four people looking for a house, that was a disadvantage about Earthsong itself.

Daisy mentioned that the size of the houses was unable to house her family, one of the reasons she decided to leave Earthsong. She also referred to the lack of storage as the reason houses were occupied by lesser people than expected, as Annie stated above.

Another challenge of the houses was the insulation, especially during winter. Although the houses were designed for heat retention, not all of them were compatible with Auckland's unpredictable weather, as Jodie, Daisy, and Andre mentioned. They felt that the design of the houses was not effective for insulation. Andre stated:

The houses are too cold in winter. I know I'm not from here, maybe Kiwis are used to cold houses. Ours need better heating, better insulation. I understand these things cost a lot of money, and the houses are too expensive already. Maybe I would have been willing to compromise on some of the eco stuff to make them more affordable.

Andre felt that his house needed better insulation as it was too cold in winter. Like many residents in the research, he was willing to compromise on the environmental aspect for practicality.

Accessibility

The houses at Earthsong were much dearer than those in other urban residential settings primarily due to the ecological design and inclusion of common facilities. As Jodie stated:

The houses themselves are quite expensive to buy. You have to have a higher income, there's no one here who is just lucky, they have to work a lot.

The financial challenge was evident in Judith and Ruth's experiences of moving into the community. Judith explained the various ways she had to accumulate money in

order to afford a house at Earthsong. She mentioned that although the houses were cheaper to run, it was a struggle to accommodate other expenses while she was living there. Ruth shared her experience:

To get in here was a challenge; well these houses were dearer compared to other houses in the community because of what they were built of. They weren't built for profit, they were built for exactly how much they cost, but because they were a different way to build they cost a lot more so selling my house wasn't enough.

Ruth wasn't able to afford a house at Earthsong even after selling another property. She mentioned that the ecological design was the main reason that the houses were difficult to afford.

Ruth, Annie and Andre spoke about the cost of the houses being a major barrier for young families. They believed that young families were unable to afford to buy into Earthsong and saw this as a challenge to achieve a multigenerational community. Ruth said:

Cost is a big aspect, a lot of young families can't manage to move in, it's just too expensive to set up. Once you're living here it might be cheaper to live but to actually get in. We saw families drop away because it's just beyond their means, that's why we feel privileged when we do get a family.

Ruth acknowledged that it was cheaper to run the houses but to actually buy them in the first place was an issue, as Judith mentioned above. Annie and Andre feared that the community would become less diverse and residents would only consist of older generations due to affordability issues. As Andre said:

And then there is the concern about families, will they be able to afford to live here? Or will they get pushed out as more houses are bought up by people over 50 or 60? I wouldn't be happy about that. So maybe there could be a fund or some mechanism to ensure that some houses are always available for renters or young buyers.

Andre questioned the future of Earthsong community and considered an alternative option for families that could not afford to purchase property. Jodie and Susan also recognised the financial issue and when asked what they would change about Earthsong, they replied:

I would provide more opportunities for low income people to live at Earthsong. This may be a number of units owned by the community and reserved for rentals. (Jodie)

I'd like to see us get a housing cooperative together. There was an idea for this previously that a group of us buy a house that is for sale, help a young family buy it from us, then use the capital to buy the next house. (Susan)

Jodie and Susan's comments showed that they were interested in providing opportunities for young families to live at Earthsong. They discussed several viable options that would address the financial challenge of entering into the community.

Privacy

The majority of residents in the research did not have an issue with personal privacy and complimented the design of cohousing for that (refer to p. 117). On the other hand, Andre, Jodie, Annie and Claudia recognised the privacy from outside visitors as a potential challenge. Although Andre did not personally have an issue with visitors, he explained:

Because this is the only one and it's been in all kinds of magazines, and newspapers, and television shows and all sorts of stuff, more and more people keep hearing about it. So there's a steady stream of curious people and visitors and woofers and all sorts of people coming through so it's definitely not boring. But again I don't have to deal with those people if I don't want to, it's if I choose to, I could just say no I don't want to be interviewed.

Andre highlighted that the unique design of the cohousing drew many people to the community. Personally, Jodie also did not find it a challenge, but recalled a time when she felt uncomfortable because of curious visitors:

I know for a number of people it's an issue that we have a lot of outside visitors, it doesn't bother me that much, at all actually. I did have an occasion of a tour bus just stopping on the driveway and everybody coming out and pulling out their cameras and taking photographs and I went and asked "do you have an appointment" and they were like "no, do we have to have one?" "yeah that would actually be preferred". So in that case I certainly felt like I was in a zoo (laughs). But they're really good, the educational Trust looks after that side of things and they're really good at restricting the number of people that come so it doesn't impact too much and you know keeping the weekends free when we kind of want to do our own thing.

Jodie's experience with the tour bus highlighted the interest of outsiders in Earthsong and the challenge to restrict visitors for the privacy of community residents. She spoke about how a number of residents felt bothered by attention but complimented the Educational Trust for managing the inflow of visitors. Annie also recognised the ongoing challenge and efforts of the Trust:

There is tension in Earthsong about use of the Common House, because the Earthsong Centre Trust is about education so people can learn about the place, see the place and perhaps even do workshops here, e.g. woodwork tools or growing mushrooms. However there are those who want the common house just to be an extension to their homes. If there's something public happening at the common house they feel they can't go up there. So there's those sorts of differences in the community about use of facilities. This is the ongoing tension about how many tours is too many, how many workshops is too many.

Annie talked about the use of the common house being a constant topic of community discussion as some residents felt that it was too open to outside visitors whereas others were unconcerned. Claudia shared her experience of privacy from outside visitors:

I have a little bit of a thing about not having tours on the weekends and just not having too much happening in our common house because it is an extension of our homes. There are a lot of people that are interested in us but there's a balance between sharing our knowledge and not living in a fishbowl so I have more of an issue of having privacy from people from outside of Earthsong rather than from in actually.

She believed that the common house was an extension of her home and should be kept free on the weekends. She likened the constant attention to being in a fishbowl and highlighted the issue of privacy that faced Earthsong as a cohousing community.

Summary

The intentional design of Earthsong was related to the primary cohousing community design. The benefits of the design included safety, security and a balance between privacy and community space. Environmental benefits of design were also recognised by residents. The layout of the community intended to be car-free for the purpose of social interaction. This was the most beneficial feature of cohousing for residents of Earthsong as it allowed for social interaction. It also created a safe and secure environment as people were always visible around the community and children were able to play outside without the danger of cars. Residents of Earthsong recognised the security gained by having houses in nodes and knowing neighbours. They felt comfortable leaving their property for extended periods of time knowing that it would be secure. Having independent dwellings allowed residents to manage their amount of social interaction and community participation. The model of cohousing allowed residents to be as social or private as they chose to be. There was no obligation to socialise and having a separate dwelling ensured a space for private living. The utilisation of space and resources fostered by the cohousing design was recognised and an important feature of Earthsong; necessary for the needs of contemporary society.

The challenges of community design related to issues of practicality and were specific to Earthsong community. Although the community was built on an ecological model, some features in the independent houses were impractical for day to day

living such as space and storage. The accessibility of houses was also a challenge for the community as they were priced comparatively higher than ordinary suburban homes. This meant that many families interested in residing at Earthsong were unable to afford the property. For the community, issues of multi-generational spread and diversity were impacted by accessibility and affordability. Lastly, the ecological design of Earthsong attracted many interested visitors. Another challenge for the community was to manage the inflow of visitors for the privacy of residents. Some residents felt that the issue of privacy was much greater in relation to outside visitors than within the community. Although there were benefits of ecological design, a number of intended aspects remained challenging for Earthsong community. Overall, the community design reaped both benefits and challenges for residents of Earthsong that impacted their daily life.

Conclusion

The first section of this chapter looked at benefits and challenges of living closely with others. The main benefit found was a socially cohesive environment created through interaction between neighbours. The connection between residents was formed through their shared vision and activities. The shared vision drew in residents who had an interest in sustainability which instantly created common ground between neighbours. Residents also had an opportunity to come together for shared meals and community events where they could socialise with other residents. The weekly common meals and monthly meeting check-in were commented on as the key events for creating social connections. The large size of the community meant that not all residents knew each other personally, yet through the regular events they were familiar with everyone. Spontaneous events occurred around the community largely due to the common house facility that allowed for games nights, movie nights etc. to be organised. These events were an opportunity for residents to spend time together and build relationships.

By establishing relationships with one another, residents experienced the benefits of a cohesive living environment, particularly the practical, social and emotional support available. Residents could rely on neighbours for everyday support such as

borrowing of appliances, childcare, house-sitting, or friendship. Residents believed that support received from neighbours made everyday living easier and more enjoyable. The diverse range of people that lived within the community was also seen as a benefit in terms of children. Children had exposure to different types of people and their interests. Through social connections, they had the opportunity to learn a variety of skills from other residents. Being nurtured in a social environment was seen as an advantage of cohousing as children were seen to become more confident and comfortable around people. The social connections created were a major benefit of living in a cohousing community for residents of Earthsong, despite the potential challenges.

The main challenge of living in a cohousing environment was the interpersonal difficulties that arose from time to time. Residents had to face disagreements and deal with conflicting personalities. Differing opinions and ideologies were the main instigators of disagreements that primary related to the consensus decision-making process. Contrary beliefs had potential to cause conflict between residents and within the community as a whole. As a range of personalities existed within the community, some people naturally gravitated towards each other whereas others did not. This was acknowledged as an expected feature of human relationships within large groups. However, when residents experienced an ongoing clash of personality or perspective, community processes were available to aid reconciliation.

The processes in the community for dealing with interpersonal issues were seen as efficient by most residents yet produced varying results. There remained occasions when interpersonal differences could not be resolved through the mediation process. There were also a number of community issues that were unresolved due to the tension caused when discussing them. As community issues and discussions could be personal in nature, it was important to approach situations with sensitivity and consideration. For this reason, personal skills of residents were seen to be the most important factor in dealing with interpersonal issues that were bound to arise. The ability to view situations from multiple perspectives was essential to ease tension, hence an individualistic mindset was seen as detrimental to community life. Residents had to have the ability to compromise and sacrifice given the large number of people involved in community matters. Living closely with others demanded thoughtfulness in everyday living as well as personal reflection. As many

residents of Earthsong noted, living in a cohousing community gave them an opportunity to improve relationships and learn better people skills.

The second section of the chapter looked at the benefits and challenges of shared ownership and responsibility. The benefits found were the cost effectiveness and reduced consumption due to sharing of ownership and resources. Residents at Earthsong had access to a large number of appliances including kitchen and garden equipment. They also had many common facilities such as the common house, laundry room, and children's corner. This was a major benefit for residents as they had many resources available that they didn't purchase themselves. There was a reduction in living cost noted by residents as the result of sharing equipment and facilities. Aside from those, residents of Earthsong also shared their personal skills and expertise with each other. The diversity in educational and skill backgrounds was advantageous for residents as advice and aid was offered for specialised tasks.

For community tasks, a cooperative approach was adopted where all residents allocated themselves to a particular interest group such as gardening, finance, education, or community life. The presence of teamwork when completing community tasks was seen as a way to create and sustain bonds between residents. It also provided fertile ground for innovation that resulted in initiatives such as the vege co-op. Sharing the responsibility of community maintenance was a benefit for residents as they had access to many spaces that they didn't have to personally look after and contributed in ways that were of interest to them. Residents appreciated the sharing of community and personal resources including both material and immaterial items.

The main challenge of sharing ownership was related to the consensus process that was potentially time-consuming and frustrating. The differences in personal perspectives were the main reason for such delays. As community issues were discussed in full-group meetings, residents had a chance to express their views and concerns. Although many decisions were made with ease, certain issues were difficult to address as residents held multiple perspectives; a challenging aspect of diversity within the community. Simple matters such as positioning of clothes lines took a number of years to resolve as residents felt strongly about the issue and could

not reach agreement. Residents believed that this example highlighted the earnestness of the consensus process and the associated challenges. The delays in decision-making also affected the autonomy of residents as consultation was necessary to undertake any initiative. If changes were to be made to a resident's private property, full-group consultation was necessary. The freedom to alter features of their property was limited to discussion and community approval. This was challenging for residents as they had to proceed at the pace of those most reluctant about the changes.

The shared responsibility came with the challenge of obtaining participation and contribution towards communal tasks even though input was welcomed in many different forms. The difficulty was seen to arise due to busy urban lifestyles that left relatively little time for residents to dedicate towards the community. Although the majority of residents intended on contributing towards the community, they were not always able to due to work or family commitments. A small percentage of people residing at Earthsong were uninterested in contributing, contrary to the purpose of living in community. This had an impact on community maintenance as a large proportion of the work was completed by a small number of residents. The unequal distribution of community maintenance tasks was unsustainable and challenging for residents that took on the responsibility. Residents of Earthsong believed that the more effort put into sustaining the community, the more personal rewards were gained such as a sense of ownership, belonging and achievement. Input was seen as the most vital aspect for sustaining the community and gaining personal benefits yet continued to be a challenge.

The third section of the chapter looked at the benefits and challenges of intentional community design. The cohousing design was seen to be beneficial for residents providing safety, security and sustainable living. The car-free zone and the unique balance of private and collective living in cohousing were the main benefits. The car-free zone allowed an open space for children to play and adults to socialise. A safe environment was created in which parents did not worry about their children playing outdoors. There was no separation in outdoor space due to roads and vehicles which created a connection between private and common space. The private dwellings that were separated in nodes were a benefit for residents as they had a

space in which to retreat from community life. Indicators such as pulled curtains implied the desire for personal space which was respected by all members of the community including children. Residents at Earthsong also appreciated the environmental advantages of medium density housing. Given the needs of contemporary society, residents felt that the design of the community was sustainable in the long term due to the effective use of land and resources. The rain-water catchment system and passive solar design were acknowledged as features of the community that contributed towards sustainable living. Residents felt a sense of pride and achievement for making a positive contribution to the world.

The ecological design, although an advantage for the community and environment, was also seen as a challenge in regards to practicality. The houses were inadequately sized and sustainable building materials caused difficulty in everyday living. The design of homes were challenging in relation to space and storage. Residents acknowledged the ecological benefits of such design but believed that they had practical implications. For example, the large four-bedroom houses were often occupied by a couple as the extra rooms were needed for storage or living space. The higher cost of purchasing a house within Earthsong was also recognised as a challenge in terms of potential residents. As cohousing aspired to appeal to people of all ethnic and economic backgrounds, the design of Earthsong posed a challenge for the community. Although the cost was justified by the ecological design, extensive common facilities, and lower cost of living, entering the community was challenging for people due to affordability issues. This had an impact on the multi-generational diversity within the community which residents of Earthsong recognised and hoped to rectify. The environmental design unique to Earthsong attracted a number of outside visitors interested in the housing project which was another challenge for the community due to the constant attention. There was an ongoing tension between the inflow of interested visitors and privacy for community residents. As Earthsong had an interest in educating and increasing awareness about sustainable living, there remained the challenge of controlling the number of on-site educational workshops.

Overall, the intentional design of cohousing influenced social, economic and environmental aspects of daily living. The cohousing model of community reaped

many benefits and challenges for residents of Earthsong. The alternative way of living was beneficial in terms of social connection and support, sharing of resources, and effective neighbourhood design. However, potential challenges included interpersonal issues and disagreements, lack of autonomy and requirement of input, and practicality of ecological design. Despite the benefits and challenges of living in community, all the residents in the research reported a positive experience of everyday life in cohousing and believed that the benefits and challenges were part of the experience.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This thesis illustrates the complexities of community as a conceptual topic and a lived experience. The aim of the research was to identify the benefits and challenges of living in a cohousing community as well as document the experience of residents. This was done by conducting interviews with residents of Earthsong community to discuss their views and opinions about the benefits and challenges of the cohousing model, and their personal cohousing experience. This research topic stemmed from a lack of literature on intentional communities, particularly from an experiential aspect. There are signs of development on this topic, primarily in urban sustainable development fields. However, a psychological aspect of intentional community living, such as the man-environment relationship, quality of life, or group dynamics, has not been explored.

Although the history and purpose of intentional communities has received scholarly attention, the actual lived experience is an area that has been insufficiently studied, and thereby should receive attention as an important area of research (Mulder et al., 2006; Sanguinetti, 2012). There are two primary strands of thought that relate to intentional community living. The first is the effect of the environment on social, mental, and physical well being, and the second is the effect of everyday living on social, economic and environmental sustainability (Ferlander, 2007; Mulder et al., 2006; Sanguinetti, 2012). Exploration of these topics through the study of intentional communities can create a deeper understanding of various aspects of community life, discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

In this chapter, I discuss the main findings of this research in relation to the literature discussed in Chapter Two. In the first section I focus on the challenges of living in cohousing as identified by residents of Earthsong. A comparison is made with literature on cohousing and communal living in terms of an alternative model of living. In the second section, I look at the benefits of living in cohousing as expressed by residents. I compare the research findings to existing literature on the aims of cohousing and intentional communities in general, related specifically to living closely with others. The third section concludes with a discussion on the key differences between cohousing and other residential communities, particularly suburban neighbourhoods. I shed light on the alternative form of community life experienced in cohousing and acknowledge the significant changes in lifestyle due to

the intentional community design. I also explain the value of this research in the field of community psychology. The discussion below highlights how the findings and literature primarily support one another.

The Challenges

The experience of living in cohousing brought about a number of potential challenges for residents of Earthsong. These challenges related to living closely with others, sharing responsibility, and community design. This section of the chapter focuses on the challenges of cohousing as discussed by Earthsong residents.

Interpersonal issues

Interpersonal issues were identified as the primary challenge of living in a cohousing community. Disagreements and conflict arose time and again for a variety of reasons and fostered negative experiences. The findings of the research highlighted that differing opinions and perspectives predominantly caused conflict within the community.

The main issues were related to reaching consensus on personal matters such as pets and children, and inevitable personality conflicts. Residents found the constant interaction with others challenging if they were in conflict with someone in the community. For example, having to see the same person in and around the community was likely to cause further conflict or feelings of anger or annoyance. In many cases, time or talking was able to resolve issues, yet at times matters remained unresolved. Interpersonal issues forged unpleasant experiences primarily due to psychological distress (R. M. Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001). For this reason, conflict management was embedded in the community organisation. As the literature on communal living suggested, interpersonal conflicts were the main reason for community fall-outs and failures (Rigby, 1974b). Sharing living space with others, particularly in a collective environment, was challenging in regards to differing methods of accomplishing tasks, as well as conflicting personalities (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Rigby, 1974b; Thies, 2000). In other intentional communities,

including cohousing, the rise of conflict was expected and noted as a challenge of community living (D. Christian, 2012a; Renz, 2006).

The communication agreement and mediation facility were prime examples of how the Earthsong community dealt with the potential for conflict. Such processes were not discussed in literature although they were an important aspect of social interaction and community life. The findings in this research suggested that the experiences of the processes were highly subjective. Some residents believed that the processes were effective, whereas others perceived them to be unacknowledged. For example, Jodie and Judith underwent the mediation process for conflict resolution, on two separate occasions, yet had completely opposing experiences. One of them had a successful outcome claiming the processes “*worked really well*” yet the other believed the process was “*very destructive*” as it caused more harm than good. This highlighted the importance of appropriate mediation, noted as a significant aspect of intergroup relations by Lee et al. (2010).

Another aspect of interpersonal issues highlighted by the findings was the acquisition of personal skills to deal with conflict. This was an important factor of community living, even more than the processes mentioned above, as claimed by residents of Earthsong. The willingness to live closely with others was identified as a requirement for communal living. As Lee et al. (2001) claimed, the ability to compromise and sacrifice was necessary for the management of psychological distress. The consensus decision-making, discussed below, was a prime example of the need for compromise as residents could not always have matters addressed in the way they felt was appropriate. Personal effort was needed for the ongoing interaction with others; self awareness and patience being key factors in maintaining healthy relationships, also identified in research by Schaub (2010). For example, the rise of conflict in the community was likened to a bad marriage which required effort to sustain. Therefore, personal skills necessary to live in cohousing affected a person’s suitability to community lifestyle as well as their experience, discussed in more detail later. This supported the literature on intentional communities and cohousing that suggested such a lifestyle was not suitable for everyone (D. L. Christian, 2007; DiCalogero, 2009). Although different types of people were seen to adjust to community life, many would not gain a positive experience if they were unable to manage interpersonal issues and other aspects of cooperative living.

Consensus and responsibility

Although the sharing of responsibility was a positive aspect of cohousing for Earthsong residents, there were a number of challenges also. The findings of this research showed that the consensus process had negative aspects, and input was difficult to obtain for completion of community tasks, as experienced by residents of Earthsong.

The consensus process ensured that all residents had the opportunity to share their perspectives on community issues (Chiras, 2002a). Although the benefit of this was community participation and cooperation, it also gave rise to the potential for personal distress and community conflict (D. Christian, 2012a, 2012b; Schaub, 2012). The conflict that arose was mostly related to differing ideologies, and in some cases, was unable to be resolved by the consensus process. As part of the process, when consensus was not achieved, focus groups continued to meet and discuss the issue. This posed two distinct challenges for residents. The first was the feeling of endless meetings and community responsibilities due to the ongoing discussion of a particular issue. The second was feelings of frustration and irritation with the slowness of consensus decision-making, also evident in research by Renz (2006). Although many residents accepted delays as part of the process, others highlighted the difficulty in moving the whole community forward on an issue that was in disagreement. Literature on consensus highlighted the challenge of differing beliefs adopted by this alternative method of decision-making (Bressen, 2000; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005). A number of possible consequences were mentioned including disruption and unrest within the group (D. Christian, 2012a; Renz, 2006; Schaub, 2012). The need for common values, commitment to relationships, and practice of the process were vital in successfully sustaining consensus. Along with that, Schaub (2012) noted commitment to cultural change as an important factor for effective consensus. As this decision-making model was counter-cultural in nature and rarely adopted in wider society, he believed that willingness and effort to create a cooperative environment was essential. Schaub emphasised that intention alone was not sufficient, and saw personal skills and shared goals as determining factors of successful decision-making.

At times, the consensus process was likely to affect residents' personal decisions. Another aspect of delays that was challenging for some residents was the lack of

autonomy when making personal decisions, also identified by Christian (2007). For example, if residents wanted to alter a structural aspect of their home for comfort or convenience, they had to discuss their decision at a full-group meeting before proceeding. This meant that residents often had to wait until their decision was approved by the entire community which added to the slowness of generating results. Once again, the need for patience was mentioned by residents and evident through the consensus process. Although such aspects of living together were specific to each community, the sacrifice of personal autonomy was mentioned in literature as an expected feature of collective living (D. L. Christian, 2007; DiCalogero, 2009). Intentional community living meant recognition of the needs of others as well as the community. As Kozeny (2008) and Sargisson and Sargent (2004) claimed, a certain extent of personal autonomy had to be given away in return for the benefits of community living.

Shared responsibility stretched beyond community management as input was required from residents for the maintenance of the physical community space. Gaining participation was the biggest challenge for the community of Earthsong although the benefits of teamwork were recognised, discussed in detail in the next section. Many methods of encouragement were tried, yet residents noted that an unfair distribution of community work existed. Susan explained how making community tasks a fun experience was tried but unfortunately unsuccessful:

“We try umpteen different ways to do it; making it fun, having food, saying to people this is what the expectation is, but it can be quite hard to make sure communal areas are well looked after.”

The majority of the community tasks were completed by a smaller number of people compared to the community size, as acknowledged in intentional community literature (Klinger, 2012; Vierck, 2005). The majority of residents at Earthsong were involved in fulltime employment therefore input was expected but not mandatory. Although input could come in many different forms, some residents were unable to contribute as much as others. Contribution, as highlighted in the literature and findings, was an important aspect of communal living as it sustained the community and determined the living experience of residents (Chiras, 2002a; Klinger, 2012;

Vierck, 2005). The management and maintenance was to be shared by all residents as the community was built on the basis of cooperation. Without input from residents, the community would not function effectively. Christian (2007) emphasised that the contribution made towards the community played an important role in the experience of living in cohousing. The more residents put in, the more they received from the community; a perspective shared by residents of Earthsong. Residents felt a sense of ownership and belonging to the community as they participated in its management and maintenance, as expected by Gardner (1999) and Scotthanson and Scotthanson (2005). On the other hand, those that did not provide much input were more likely to feel disconnected from the community and potentially feel an internal pressure to contribute. The issue of contribution remained a challenge for both residents and the community.

Practicality of design

The findings in this research highlighted the importance of practicality in design of a community. Residents found practical aspects of the community challenging, particularly the design of homes. The practicality issues were specific to the design of Earthsong community, as well as, the cohousing movement in general.

The houses in Earthsong were designed through an ecological perspective and therefore were built with sustainable and eco-friendly materials. The planning stages also took into consideration the natural environment and climate to ensure effective use. The houses were deliberately built small according to concepts of sustainability yet most residents claimed that this led to issues of storage and space. As Daisy shared, *“possibly could have stayed at Earthsong with my partner if there was somewhere big enough”*. There was not enough room for larger families to comfortably share space within the houses. For example, the larger houses, with four bedrooms, were often occupied by two adults due to the lack of space in smaller houses.

Another challenge was related to heat retention through passive solar design. The design of houses aimed to maximise solar heating through orientation and use of concrete flooring. Some residents felt that the houses were not as warm as proposed and therefore many were looking to install extra facilities for winter such as heat

pumps. The concrete flooring was seen as impractical in terms of warmth and possibility of easy breakages. Although residents appreciated the environmental design of the community and houses, many claimed that certain aspects were impractical for everyday living. Andre stated that he would compromise some aspects of ecological design for more comfortable living.

The environmental aspect of design also attracted many visitors to Earthsong. As part of the community's outreach program, the community was willing to share their knowledge with others; a key distinction from many intentional communities (Schehr, 1997). For this reason, the community had a constant inflow of people interested in looking at the community design. Claudia likened the experience of having too many visitors to living in a fishbowl. This caused tension in the community as it posed the challenge of sharing knowledge and simultaneously ensuring privacy. Often, residents felt that there were too many people in and around the community which restricted their behaviour and use of common facilities.

The design of Earthsong raised challenges in terms of affordability and accessibility of the community. The ecological design and share in common facilities meant an increase in the price of houses that many families, particularly low-income or young families, found difficult to afford. This was identified by Kozeny (2005) as a challenge for cohousing communities worldwide. For example, families that came to view Earthsong and took an interest in living there were often faced with the difficulty of affording a house. Judith and Ruth claimed that although the everyday cost of living was much cheaper in the community, financial difficulties were posed when entering Earthsong due to the higher house prices. The affordability challenge had an impact on the diversity of the community. Earthsong, like other cohousing communities, aimed to become a multigenerational community although the majority of current residents were above the age of 40. The community recognised this issue and was looking for alternative options of community entry such as rental houses. The challenge of accessibility was faced by the cohousing movement in general. Literature on cohousing suggested that many communities created under this model were accessible to a certain subsection of society, predominantly white middle class (Bernstein, 2011; Kozeny, 2005; McIntyre, 2000). There were questions raised in regards to the cohousing vision of diversity and sustainable development yet limited

accessibility (Schaub, 2001). The diversity within communities was challenged due to the accessibility and affordability of cohousing developments; perhaps a matter of adapting the cohousing model to suit lower income and ethnic families (McCamant & Milman, 2000; McIntyre, 2000; Schaub, 2001).

The Benefits

Despite the challenges of cohousing, a number of benefits were visible and experienced by residents of Earthsong. As with the challenges, the benefits also related to living closely with others, sharing responsibility and community design. This section of the chapter focuses on the benefits as discussed by residents of Earthsong.

Social connection

As the cohousing model was designed for the purpose of social sustainability, participants in this study valued the benefits of cohousing despite the challenges. The findings in this research emphasised the effectiveness of the housing model in encouraging social interaction and connection amongst residents which contributed towards positive experiences.

The physical layout, discussed below, was intended to encourage interaction between residents through architectural aspects such as parking spaces on the fringe of the community development. Residents would see each other regularly, and in turn, they would interact with one another and build relationships. As the purpose of cohousing was to develop social sustainability, residents who entered the community often had a desire to connect with others. The desire for connectedness was also prevalent in literature on intentional communities (Chiras, 2002a; Klinger, 2012; Sandelin, 2000). Many community groups formed to create cooperative living environments that functioned on social connection (D. L. Christian, 2007; Kozeny, 2000; Metcalf, 1996; Metcalf & Christian, 2003). Although there were a number of influences on the communal movement, living closely with others was one of the primary reasons that intentional communities formed. Feeling disconnected from

wider society and alienated in suburban neighbourhoods was the prime motivation for the communal movement and many other intentional communities including cohousing (Hardy, 1979; McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Rigby, 1974a) . Cohousing was a result of dissatisfaction with modern day suburban living which isolated neighbours from one another. In order to create a more cohesive and connected living environment, the cohousing model was developed (McCamant & Milman, 2000).

The theory behind the interactional aspect of cohousing has proven to be effective by the findings of this research. Despite interpersonal challenges, social connectedness was the primary benefit of living in cohousing. The social connections formed between community members were prevalent in discussions with residents of Earthsong who valued relationships and felt their desire for human connectedness was easily fulfilled. This fitted with previous research by Kawakami et al. (2011). Community events were one of the precursors to relationship building and belongingness. For example, a newer member of the community had the opportunity to interact and get to know their neighbours at regular gatherings. Residents spoke about the common meals held twice a week, the social gatherings organised by the community, and the spontaneous meetings as opportunities to connect with other members. As Andre stated,

“Because its cohousing you can organise anything, you can have events in the common house; you can have birthday parties, in winter we have movie nights or there will be a dance sometimes. Just events to share, to bring people together, or after common meal people will sit and play a game, bananagrams, stuff like that.”

These events, such as the preparation process and sharing of common meals, were seen as a way to bring people together and create community spirit. Residents believed that community felt more cohesive due to the togetherness and connection encouraged by community events. The feeling of cohesion and togetherness can be linked to Peck’s (1987) concept of community as a spirit. There were multiple aspects of community interactions that contributed to connectedness yet ultimately it was a feeling experienced by residents that portrayed a sense of cohesion (Jones, 2011; Peck, 1987). Annie gave an example of this when she explained the sense of belonging felt when meeting an Earthsong resident, past or present, outside the community;

“I always feel when I meet an Earthsonger away from Earthsong a sudden bond you know because there is a community feeling.”

A sense of place and belonging to the community fostered by regular interaction was amongst the positive experiences of living in Earthsong. As Kikusui, Winslow and Mori (2006) suggested, social connections and networks had *“a very positive influence on psychological and physiological aspects of social animals, including human beings”* (p. 2215). The belonging felt with others contributed towards a positive sense of self and identity (Clapham, 2005; Walmsley, 1988). Togetherness was dependant on regular interaction between individuals, as Jodie explained, the community felt more cohesive after a shared event. This emphasised the ongoing nature of community and notions of utopia as a process, discussed in the first section of Chapter Two (Doxiadis, 1966; Fournier, 2002; Levitas, 1990). Connection and cohesion had to be fostered and maintained as it was part of the process of community building. A sense of community was not an ideal place or state to achieve, rather it was to be developed and sustained in order to create a positive living environment (Fournier, 2002; Levitas, 1990). Here, social connection could be seen as a means to an end as opposed to an end in itself, a vivid reflection of utopian thought.

Residents of Earthsong identified social support as the biggest benefit of living in the cohousing community, also highlighted in the literature on cohousing benefits (Chiras, 2002a, 2002b; Klinger, 2012; McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Sandelin, 2000). Support was given and received in many forms including practical and moral support. This had a positive impact on everyday living due to the understanding that support was always available (Ferlander, 2007; Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2011). Residents approached each other for advice and expertise, and as June claimed, she could depend on neighbours as much as family members. Residents also enjoyed each others' company through the use of the common house. They believed that the high trust environment created through social connections, as well as the vision of the community (discussed below), were the primary reasons that support was offered and available. As Walton et al. (2011) claimed, social connections hold the ability to transform environments through a sense of belonging.

Cohousing was intended to create a supportive environment through strengthening social connections which was both expected and experienced by residents in this research, indicating an adaptation of a 'counter-cultural' attitude (Metcalf & Christian, 2003; Sanguinetti, 2012; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). As Chiras (2002) stated, the notion of privatised living visible in conventional suburban neighbourhoods was regarded as unfulfilling by many community seekers who aimed to create an alternative community atmosphere that was less private and more communal. Personal support and togetherness were said to be embedded in the culture of intentional communities which was also visible in the living environment of cohousing (D. L. Christian, 2007; Loomis, 2011; Metcalf, 1996; Metcalf & Christian, 2003). In this respect, cohousing could be seen as a counter-cultural living model that held differing ideals from mainstream communities.

Another benefit of a social environment was discussed in terms of children. Children were observed to be more socially confident given the interactions with a range of different people. They were able to build relationships with other children and adults within the community. The residents saw this as a major benefit for children as they had the opportunity to learn various skills from different community members. For example, a child would primarily be exposed to the interests of their parents, however, in a community setting, they would easily have the opportunity to engage in the interests of others. The exposure to different people and skills gave children greater knowledge of the world around them likely to result in more socially responsible behaviour. Residents believed that the environment in cohousing was nurturing for children as they experienced an interactive and social lifestyle that was based on a vision of sustainability, also supported by previous research by Sampson (2001). Literature on the importance of environments for growth and development of children had often identified its effects on social behaviour. The perceptions and psychological cues gained by children through interactions and environmental factors were seen to determine their social experiences in later life (Korbin, 2001; B. A. Lee, 2001; Sampson, 2001).

The findings suggested that the social environment created in a cohousing community contributed towards positive living experiences, having noticeable benefits for adults and children alike. Residents that interacted regularly built

relationships with one another and over time, a high degree of trust allowed for support to be shared. The supportive environment meant that residents could depend on one another as close friends or family members. Social connections meant that residents felt connected to other members as well as the community itself. This could be linked to the literature on an individuals' sense of place that suggested that a sense of place was vital for an individual's concept of self and identity. Connections with others were seen to create a sense of togetherness and belonging in any physical environment (McIntyre, 2000; Sanguinetti, 2012; Walmsley, 1988). Through regular interaction with neighbours in the immediate environment of cohousing, residents found their place within the community and felt it was their home. The intended focus on social connectedness within cohousing evidently reaped many positive experiences as reflected in the literature and experiences of residents of Earthsong.

Sharing vision and resources

The existence of social connectedness as a result of living in a cohousing community additionally highlighted the benefits of sharing resources, skills, responsibility and vision. Participants of the present study had access to more facilities and personal resources primarily due to the structure and organisation of the community based on its vision of sustainability.

The sharing of resources was a purposeful aspect of cohousing that benefitted residents in terms of economic sustainability. Shared facilities such as laundry, kitchen and entertainment rooms were well utilised by members of Earthsong. Residents in the research saw this as a major benefit of cohousing as there was a range of tools and appliances available for personal use that did not have to be personally bought. The sharing of resources existed between neighbours also, which contributed towards cost savings. As Claudia mentioned, she could borrow almost anything from neighbours, even if just for five minutes. Residents spoke about the sharing of personal resources as an advantage of living in a cohesive neighbourhood but unlike some intentional communities, cohousers were not expected to share all their belongings (Schehr, 1997). Despite this, members of Earthsong had a genuine willingness to share their knowledge and skills with one another due to the sense of

connectedness within the community which could be linked to the availability of support discussed earlier. This aspect of cohousing contributed to the notion of intentional communities as non-conventional discussed in the third section of Chapter Two (D. L. Christian, 2007; Kozeny, 2000; McCamant & Durrett, 1988). The sharing of resources and community facilities was an alternative concept of everyday living adopted by the cohousing model that benefited residents of Earthsong.

This notion of sharing also contributed towards environmental sustainability, part of the Earthsong vision. Global population and finite resources was identified as a major concern in terms of environmental sustainability. The sharing of appliances and other facilities ensured a reduction in personal consumption (Meltzer, 2005; Miller, 1999b). For example, each household did not have to own a lawnmower as there were several nominated as a community resource. The effective use of resources contributed to the reduction in unnecessary consumerist behaviour (Mulder et al., 2006). Through sharing of resources, less became more; residents had access to many more resources than they would in a single household yet they didn't personally purchase much of it. As Miller (1999) proposed, the communal movement of the 60s exposed the advantages of sharing resources. Although the concept of sharing was approached in a different manner at the time of the movement, contemporary intentional communities were seen to modify the extent of sharing to accommodate personal needs (Miller, 1999b; Schehr, 1997). Recent academic research on intentional communities placed sustainability as the primary reason for sharing. The design of sustainable communities was seen as a significant contribution to the development of communities today (G. Gardner, 1999). Cohousing communities were seen to address issues of sustainability through sharing which visibly had environmental benefits and personal advantages (Loomis, 2011; Sanguinetti, 2012; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004).

The sharing of responsibility for the management of the community was another advantage of cohousing as seen by residents of Earthsong. The non-hierarchical community structure meant that community tasks were completed on the basis of cooperation, an alternative method of organisation (Schehr, 1997). Residents worked together to complete tasks and had the choice of how to contribute. For example, residents that were interested in gardening would manage the community

gardens, where as those who didn't enjoy gardening would find another way to contribute. Tasks that were often single-handedly managed in a regular household were shared amongst residents in the community which meant access to a large range of facilities without active management of all of them. A cooperative attitude created a positive living arrangement that ensured the community was easily managed. Working together to accomplish tasks strengthened bonds between residents and contributed to a sense of place discussed by Gardner (1999). McIntyre (2000) emphasised that collective contribution to the management of the community empowered residents and provided opportunities for members to work together and begin community initiatives such as the vege co-op at Earthsong. Thus, collective responsibility was seen as a positive aspect of living in a cohousing community as it fulfilled the natural human desire to feel useful and valued (G. Gardner, 1999; Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005).

The shared vision of Earthsong also contributed to the positive experience of living in the community. The focus on social, economic and environmental sustainability meant that residents were willing to contribute towards the creation of a sustainable environment. This created an instant bond and commonality between members as they shared similar beliefs and conceptual understandings which reflected Metcalf's (1996) research. The vision of the community determined how residents interacted with one another and their surroundings. For example, the communication agreement designed in relation to social sustainability ensured that residents abided by the vision and interacted respectfully with one another. This highlighted that the vision had an effect on the experience of living in the community, also acknowledged by Sadeq, Shalabi and Alkurdi (2011). The existence of super-ordinate goals within the community acted as a buffer against interpersonal conflict and bias, discussed earlier (Gaertner et al., 2000). Sharing community goals not only creates a common bond between residents but also increases the levels of tolerance in individuals. Thus the importance of a community vision is seen in relation to interpersonal management and group cohesion (Gaertner et al., 2000; Olson, Jason, Davidson, & Ferrari, 2009). As a result of the vision of social sustainability, residents who entered Earthsong community were willing to support, cooperate and regularly interact with one another. Once again, the visionary aspect of cohousing could be seen as a

reflection of utopian ideals and intentional community aspirations. The vision of a better society that was rooted in utopian thought and intentional community reasoning stood out as an important aspect of communal living (Kumar, 1991; Metcalf, 1996; Metcalf & Christian, 2003; Sadeq et al., 2011). Although interpretations of the vision were likely to adapt and change over time, the sharing of ideals amongst community members contributed to the creation of a positive environment (Kozeny, 2008). As Fournier (2002) and Parker (2002) believed, the visions of sustainable communities were an opening for alternative societies in which harmony could be realised.

Intentional community design

Sharing of resources was fostered by intentional community design which was emphasised in the findings of this research. Participants in this study discussed the impacts of intentional design on everyday living. The car-free living space was again nominated as the most effective design feature of cohousing in terms of social interaction, safety, and security.

The car-free living area was seen as the primary reason for increased social interaction, as discussed earlier. It was the main difference to conventional suburban settings and had the largest impact on the community. Residents were constantly meeting within the community which created opportunities for interaction. The intentional community design of cohousing, which received significant scholarly attention, also made it a safe and secure place to live (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Sanguinetti, 2012). Residents gained a sense of security through knowing their neighbours and living in a medium density neighbourhood. For example, they were able to leave their houses for long periods of time as someone would be available to look after their property. The intentional layout also reduced access to houses and high visibility around the community made it less likely for burglaries to occur. Once again, in accordance with existent research, cohousing was said to be a safer living environment due to the community design and higher degree of trust between neighbours which was experienced by the residents of Earthsong (Chiras, 2002b; Klinger, 2012; McCamant & Durrett, 1988).

Residents discussed the layout of the community in terms of children, particularly the large property area and safe environment. Children had a much larger place to play compared to a fenced suburban back yard. Their home consisted of the entire community which meant they were able to roam around the property freely without the danger of cars or suspicious community members, also recognised as a key benefit by Klinger (2012). Children would play with others in the neighbourhood and knew they could ask for help from any resident if need be. Parents in the research spoke about feeling secure when their children were out playing, even if they couldn't see them.

The balance between sociability and privacy was a major benefit of the cohousing model, as highlighted by the findings. As Scotthanson and Scotthanson (2005) noted, this aspect was one of the differences between cohousing and other intentional communities. Residents had the option of interaction with others as they could reclude into their own homes. There were no compulsory social activities, aside from the community meetings (discussed in the previous section), that residents had to partake in. Residents mentioned receiving the best of both worlds through the cohousing design and none of them felt they needed more privacy than they had. As Andre claimed, when and if he felt like interacting, a social environment was available at his doorstep. Residents could easily avoid community activities and interaction with others if they chose to, for example, if residents wanted to spend time alone they could stay in their houses without disturbance from other community members. This was seen as particularly advantageous for residents who were less sociable. Residents respected the need for privacy and didn't expect others to be constantly outgoing. The attractiveness of this feature for community seekers was the experience of social cohesiveness coupled with the right for privacy (DiCalogero, 2009; Klinger, 2012; McCamant & Durrett, 1988). Many intentional communities and communes established during the communal movement faced difficulties in terms of privacy (Thies, 2000). The notion of communal living at that time involved sharing all aspects of community life. There was little privacy for commune members which often resulted in personal and interpersonal conflicts, discussed in the previous section (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Schehr, 1997). On the other hand, the

cohousing model addressed the issue of privacy in communal living by combining independent housing with community facilities.

There were various environmental benefits of cohousing acknowledged by residents and literature as a positive aspect of the model (Brindley, 2003; Mulder et al., 2006). The medium density housing at Earthsong was seen as effective land use that occupied considerably less room than thirty two standard suburban houses. The design features of houses, such as solar panels and water tanks, as well as sharing of resources (discussed earlier), were seen to reduce the overall environmental footprint of the community. The ecological design, specific to Earthsong cohousing, meant that the community was designed with consideration to its immediate surroundings ensuring the maximum utilisation of resources. Again, the environmental attitude adopted by various intentional communities including Earthsong was seen in literature as an aspect of community design necessary for contemporary community development (Brindley, 2003; Eid, 2003; Kenny, 2011; Sanguinetti, 2012). As Eid (2003) stated, intentional communities such as cohousing were looked upon for their design; recognised as a stepping stone towards sustainability. The effective utilisation of land and resources gained a lot of attention in studies of sustainability and community living as they cleverly combined aspects of social, economic and environmental sustainability (Sanguinetti, 2012).

Changes in lifestyle

An important finding of this research was the difference in lifestyle experienced in a cohousing community that had associated benefits and challenges. Although many aspects of everyday living remained the same, and residents had their own homes, various aspects of community living contributed to the difference in lifestyle. These included increased interaction with neighbours, management of immediate community, and physical community design.

Participants who resided at Earthsong community had regular interaction with neighbours that led to the formation of personal and informal connections. Whether it was bumping into each other around the community, attending common meals, or

participating in community events, residents had various opportunities to interact with one another. As the purpose of the cohousing model was to enhance social connections, residents were often willing and interested to get to know their neighbours and build relationships. This aspect of everyday living was different to conventional suburban living where neighbours often had minimal or no interaction with their neighbours. The ability to approach others in a regular community setting was often hindered by personal inhibitions or uninterested neighbours. As a result, relationships formed were often formal and impersonal in nature. On the other hand, cohousing encouraged neighbourly interaction with the associated benefit of practical and moral support and challenge of interpersonal issues. Living in a community where neighbours knew each other and mutual support was available created an alternative everyday experience.

The management of the community by residents meant that regular focus-group and full-group meetings were necessary. Residents discussed aspects of their community that needed to be addressed or modified. These meetings were another opportunity for residents to interact and cooperate with one another to address community issues. Working as a team was important to ensure community tasks were accomplished although equal participation was often difficult to sustain. In an ordinary residential setting, residents did not often have an input on community issues unless they were willing to participate in community discussion. The majority of residents often lived in their community without actively managing it. There was little contribution towards enhancement of community life and major decisions were imposed by external agencies. Cohousing communities emphasised the importance of local governance and created a cooperative environment through decision-making and management processes. This created a different experience of community living as residents were involved in their community and addressed issues in ways that were appropriate for them. The benefit was cooperation, active involvement and a feeling of ownership associated with the management of the community, and the challenge was gaining consensus with differing ideologies. The non-hierarchical structure of organisation at Earthsong created a different everyday living experience.

The design of cohousing communities was a significant part of community life that created a different atmosphere and living environment. The car parking on fringes of the development and common house at the heart of the community made it possible for residents to interact and share space with one another. A more social and secure environment was the result of intentional community design. In ordinary suburban communities, garage facilities and independent property structures restricted communication between neighbours. There was often a lack of space for residents of the community to interact, socialise, or build relationships. In cohousing, residents had the opportunity to spend time and share a larger property area with neighbours. They also experienced a variation of community life with medium density housing and no cars in the living space. The cohousing design created a different living experience as residents' everyday activities were modified by community design.

The change in lifestyle created by the cohousing model of community raised issues of suitability. The findings of this research highlighted that the difference in everyday living would not be suitable for everyone, as mentioned in the literature. A desire for cooperative community life and a willingness to contribute towards the community, along with personal skills (discussed previously) would affect the experience of living in cohousing. Residents would have to be comfortable in an interactive or social environment and be open to sharing living space with different people and ways of life in order to gain positive experiences. It was made clear that cohousing would be suitable for community minded individuals who valued social connection and support and shared a vision of sustainability and cohesive community. Living closely with others within a physically different environment and actively participating in management of the community would noticeably provide a different everyday living experience. Essentially, individuals who desired an alternative lifestyle and resonated with the changes in everyday living offered by the cohousing model would be suitable for community life. Thus, it could be said that the cohousing model of community was an alternative option to conventional suburban communities as it provided a different experience of everyday living accompanied by its own benefits and challenges.

The value of this study for community psychology is evident through the above discussion. The decline in community, particularly in contemporary urban society, has led to the investigation of social processes and dynamics that contribute towards a sense of community. As a result of social fragmentation, cohousing communities provide an alternative community design that aims to foster a sense of community, one of the most widely used social constructs in community psychology (Townley, Kloos, Green, & Franco, 2011). This provides an opportunity to investigate themes associated with group dynamics such as social connection and interpersonal relationships, visible in the findings of this research. A deeper understanding of the tension in creating community cohesion within diversity can be gained through the findings of this study as a sense of community is fostered amongst a diverse group of individuals through intention and shared vision (Meltzer, 2005; Townley et al., 2011). The socially cohesive environment within cohousing communities offers many insights into psychological effects of environment on individuals. The interconnected and interdependent nature of human reality is recognised as a vital aspect of everyday living (Kawakami et al., 2011). The influence of external factors on health and well-being, such as environments and social relationships, are central to community psychology and evident in the findings of this research (Kawakami et al., 2011; Stevens, 2010). The impact of intentional design on the interactions of residents' highlighted important facets of community life. The study of intentional communities such as cohousing provides natural environments in which to explore notions of self identity and cohesive community central to community psychology. The findings of this research are relevant to community psychology as they encourage the rediscovery of an old paradigm of well-being that places the interconnected and dynamic relationship between man and environment in the centre (Stevens, 2010).

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This research explored the experiences of 14 residents (10 current and 4 past) living in a cohousing community named Earthsong. The findings of the research highlighted the everyday experience of living in an intentional community based on an architectural housing model.

A review of literature suggested that intentional communities were formed on the basis of alternative lifestyles. The exploration of an alternative lifestyle through intentional community living was believed to derive from dissatisfaction with belief systems and environments created in mainstream society. In New Zealand, the known existence of intentional communities dated back over fifty years and saw a rapid increase in the 1970s following the communal movement in the United States of America. The pioneers of intentional communities often envisioned a better way of life that was distant from the oppression and suppression of everyday life in the suburbs. The longing for harmonious living existed amongst many cultures, evidently lacking through the experience of inequality and poverty. Similar to utopian thoughts, intentional communities envisioned alternative societies that were free from suffering. They aimed to enhance cooperative living and sharing of resources for the betterment of humanity and the natural environment. The benefits of living in an intentional community related to the vision of a better living environment. An increase in social connections and support was expected as result of a cohesive environment. Cohousing, a form of intentional community, carried similarities and differences to other intentional communities. The main differences were the organisation, management and design of the community based on an architectural model of housing. The model aimed to address issues related to social sustainability. The nature of individuals within current urban environments was considered during development of the model which adapted to the needs of contemporary society. In New Zealand, there was only one cohousing community despite its rapid growth in Europe and North America. Residents from Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood, a cohousing community in Auckland, participated in this research to share the experience of living in an alternative environment within a cohousing community.

My first aim was to explore the benefits and challenges of living an alternative lifestyle within a cohousing community. Although the literature pointed out a number of positive and negative aspects of cohousing, there was minimal experiential evidence to support this. Much of the literature was derived from theoretical concepts of the living model as it aimed to enhance social, economic, and environmental sustainability. In terms of benefits and challenges, the theory behind the cohousing model was visible in the lived experiences of residents at Earthsong.

The positive and negative experiences were both related to two aspects of the living model. Firstly, the biggest benefit and challenge, social connection and interpersonal issues were due to the focus on personal relationships. This was embedded in the cohousing model which aimed to increase social connections between neighbours, and an element of the vision of Earthsong which focused on social sustainability. The benefits of building relationships and living closely with others were primarily the increased connection, belonging and support. As a result of social connections, safety, security and a sense of community were experienced within the living environment. On the other hand, interpersonal issues arose due to the close connections with neighbours. Differing beliefs, perceptions, and personalities were the primary cause for conflict between residents. Living closely with others meant that residents were faced with challenges of conflict resolution from time to time although they were supported by community processes.

Secondly, the benefits of sharing and challenges of responsibility were related to the intentional design of cohousing. The shared resources, including equipment, land and community facilities, were an aspect of the cohousing model that induced positive experiences for residents of Earthsong. Not only were the personal advantages of sharing acknowledged, but the economic and environmental benefits were recognised. Sharing the vision of sustainability also created a positive experience of living in the community as a common bond was established between residents. On the other hand, the organisational aspect of the living model, particularly cooperative management, was challenging for residents of Earthsong. The decision-making process was challenging at times due to difficulty in reaching consensus. This was related to the personal differences amongst residents. Another challenge of active management was obtaining resident participation for community tasks and the mental pressure of personal contribution. Although the practical

aspects of the ecological design were specific to Earthsong, they were a challenge for residents. Challenging aspects of the ecological design included storage and space within houses, and building materials used within the house. As Earthsong community gained a lot of attention from interested outsiders due to the ecological design, the community also faced the challenge of maintaining privacy from external parties. Overall, the benefits and challenges of Earthsong expressed by residents were supportive of literature on cohousing and intentional communities, and were primarily fostered by social connections and intentional community design.

My second and third aims were interrelated; the first being to document the experience of living in a cohousing community and the second to investigate the impact of intentional design on experience. The literature reviewed often spoke about the differences between cohousing communities and other suburban residential neighbourhoods although there was no record of the experiences of residents living within such a community. The alternative lifestyle encouraged by the cohousing model gave residents a different experience of everyday living. Though many benefits and challenges were recognised, the experience of living in cohousing remained largely positive, as expressed by residents of Earthsong.

As the vision of Earthsong stated, the community aspired towards a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable living environment. The focus on relationships with each other and the natural environment coupled with the intentional design of the community contributed towards the overall experience of living in Earthsong. Everyday experiences were either positive or negative depending on the state of personal relationships and functioning of the community. The intentional differences of living in cohousing were living closely with others, actively managing the community, and unconventional community design. Regular interaction with neighbours contributed to the experience of everyday living in cohousing. Residents at Earthsong shared time with one another through a number of activities including community events and meetings. Through constant interaction, neighbours established connections and formed relationships with one another. The environment created through social connections was supportive and cohesive. The organisation and local management of the community meant that neighbours worked together to accomplish shared tasks and maintain the functioning of the

community through decision-making processes. The active involvement in sustaining Earthsong community empowered individuals and fostered an environment of togetherness and cooperation. The intentional design of the Earthsong placed the common house at the centre of the community and cars on the fringes of the development. Houses were clustered in nodes around the community leaving the centre (around the common house) open for common use. The purposeful design of the community created a safe and secure environment for adults and children of Earthsong.

The difference in environment created by the cohousing model had an impact on daily living which contributed towards the experience of living at Earthsong. Residents acknowledged the lifestyle of cohousing as alternative due to an increase in interaction between neighbours. Although there were associated benefits and challenges of living closely with others, as discussed above, residents were appreciative of the difference in environment which had a positive impact on their day to day living experience. Although all the residents in the research viewed the overall experience of living in cohousing as positive, the findings of this research highlighted the subjectivity of experience. The intention of living in harmony with others was beneficial for communal living yet acquisition of personal skills was more significant. The importance of adapting to the alternative lifestyle was emphasised by residents who believed that not every individual would gain a positive experience from living in cohousing. The willingness to live communally and contribution towards the community were highlighted as the determining factors of overall experience. Residents in the research acknowledged that an alternative lifestyle required a non-conventional mind-set that was open to sharing time and space with neighbours. Also, effort and input was required towards community management which established an individuals' sense of place and belonging. Without a communal perspective and willingness to contribute, a negative experience of living in cohousing was expected. Thus, the experience of living in cohousing was evidently subjective and dependant on willingness to live in an intentional community environment.

Limitations and Future Possibilities

This research has opened a number of avenues for future studies on the topic on intentional communities and communal living. There is a need for future investigation into the effects on living in an intentional community setting, particularly from a community psychology perspective. Although a resident perspective of living in cohousing was gathered, there remains a vast gap in academic research on the topic of intentional communities and the effect of them on individuals. The study of intentional communities, including cohousing, is valuable to community psychology as it provides insight into the relationship between man and his environment. Through this research, the intention to live sustainably appears to generate a positive relationship between individuals and their community despite benefits and challenges. Further studies would benefit from exploring the psychological effects and perceptions of living in an alternative environment such as cohousing. A comparison between intentional communities and other suburban communities would deepen the understanding of the man-environment relationship, given their obvious differences. Further studies could explore the quality of life within intentional and unintentional communities to make a justified comparison.

This research focused on the experience of everyday life in a cohousing community. Future studies could explore different aspects of the environment created within cohousing, such as safety or cooperation. The understanding of these phenomena could lead to establishing the steps needed to create healthier communities and societies. The knowledge of cohousing environments could aid in social and community development by exploring factors that contribute towards the creation of safe and cohesive neighbourhoods. Although everyday living in cohousing is non-conventional in nature, important lessons can be learnt on how to foster a positive living environment through changes in community design. While the design of intentional communities is receiving scholarly attention in the field of sustainable development, identifying psychological impacts of such communities would be beneficial to the understanding of intentional design.

Although there is only one cohousing community within New Zealand, another limitation of this study is the focus on a single intentional community. Speaking with residents from different communities would have given a different perspective on intentional living. Future studies could explore the similarities and differences within and between various intentional communities in New Zealand. A comparison between different communities would result in a deeper exploration of alternative communities, in New Zealand and in general. Future studies could also make a comparison between international cohousing communities. This would determine the cross-cultural factors that contribute towards the cohousing experience and the reasons for its global success.

The present study included current and past residents of Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood. As the current residents were choosing to live there, and past residents had left due to changing circumstances, the findings of this research may have portrayed the cohousing experience in a more positive manner than has been previously experienced. Future studies could investigate the experiences of cohousing residents who left the community due to negative experiences. This would provide greater insight into the reality of cohousing and determining factors of the cohousing experience.

The sole focus on the experience of cohousing is another limitation of this study. All of the participants in this study had lived in conventional suburban settings at some point previous to entering Earthsong community. An inclusion of their experience of living in a conventional setting would have highlighted similarities and differences between conventional and alternative community living. This would have provided deeper insight into the impact of community or community design on an individual and an understanding of community lifestyles in general.

The literature on communal living highlighted the nature of community as changeable, depending on individual and environmental circumstances. Despite the gathering of resident experiences in this research, a longitudinal study would have provided a deeper understanding of resident experiences. A longitudinal study would be beneficial to the understanding of cohousing as it could track the changes in experience over time and potentially identify the main reasons for them. The

relationship between an individual and his/her community could be explored through longitudinal research which could provide insight into factors that influence community experience. The findings of this research emphasised the subjectivity of experience within a cohousing community. Although the experiences of current and past residents were gathered, all participants made a choice to enter and leave the community based on personal circumstances, as discussed earlier. For them, the reason to stay or leave impacted their perspective on the experience of cohousing, affecting the findings of this research. For this reason, an ethnographical study could establish the lived experience within a cohousing community from an outsider's perspective. The personal experience of living in an alternative environment could be investigated by participating in community life and determining the culture within cohousing. An ethnographical view is likely to produce results that are subjective yet potentially unbiased if approached without preconceived notions. Changes in method of data collection would have induced a deeper understanding of cohousing communities, intentional communities, and communities in general.

This thesis provides a documentation of the experience of living in a cohousing community from a residential perspective. I explored the benefits and challenges of collective living within a cohousing model of community. The unique community design and vision of sustainability were seen to provide an alternative lifestyle which induced a positive experience of community living. It is my hope that this thesis lessens the gap between theoretical concepts and practical implications of community living, particularly in the study of community psychology. It is my belief that academic research needs to focus on the practical facets of community living including social, economic and environment aspects. This would aid in understanding the reality of community living in relation to creation of healthier societies. The study of intentional communities provides a model of sustainable living that may be applied to numerous facets of community organisation and development.

In a nutshell, the cohousing lifestyle was an alternative form of community living embedded in a vision of sustainability. Residents of Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood

enjoyed a supportive and cooperative living environment fostered by the cohousing model. Interdependence, a fundamental aspect of community, was reflected in the intentional community design. A well known whakatauki, or Māori proverb, encapsulates the essence of this thesis,

Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi

With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive

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Appendix A: Community Approval

Community Approval of Research: Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood March 2012

This document is to certify that Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood agrees to Abha Dod conducting research with residents of the community as part of her Master's thesis (Master's in Applied Psychology (Community Psychology)) at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. This document does not commit any residents to participate in the research but it confirms that Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood agrees to have the community name included in the research and all community members agree to have research conducted within the community.

Members of the Earthsong Centre Trust confirm this arrangement on behalf of the community below.

Name of researcher: Abha Dod

Research topic: Exploring experiences of residents living in a cohousing community.

Research dates: March 2012 – Dec 2012

Name of Trust member:

Signature: Date:

Appendix B: Information Sheet for Current and Past Residents

School of Psychology
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Te Kura Kete Aronui
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand 3240



Cohousing in Aotearoa, New Zealand: Residents' Perspectives

What is the project about?

This research project is being conducted as part of a requirement for a Masters in Applied Psychology (Community Psychology) at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. It aims to document the experiences of living in a cohousing community by gathering the perspectives and experiences of current and past residents. It aims to broaden understanding and knowledge about intentional living and cohousing communities. I will be focusing on long-term residents that have been at Earthsong for two or more years or any past residents, over the age of 18.

Who is the researcher?

I (Abha Dod) am a graduate student working towards completing my Master's degree under the supervision of Dr Cate Curtis and Dr Neville Robertson. The research project has been given ethical approval under the University of Waikato's Human Research Ethics Regulations.

Why am I being asked to participate?

I believe that you will be able to provide valuable insights about living in a cohousing community. Your first-hand experience of intentional living will contribute towards gaining a residents' perspective.

What will I be asked in the interview?

I am really interested in your personal experiences of residing within a cohousing community. I would like to know such things as: your experience of moving to Earthsong including what initiated the change; your experience of living at Earthsong including your role in the community; your experience of the social benefits and costs of living in a cohousing community; general thoughts about intentional living.

When and where will the interview take place?

The interview will be arranged to take place in late April/early May 2012 at a time that is convenient to both of us. The length of the interview will be between one and two hours. The location is your choice; your home, my home, or a neutral location. There will be no one else present at the interview.

What will happen to my information?

Interviews will be recorded and I will make transcripts of them. You will have a chance to review your transcript and make any changes necessary. This will be limited to one week after the transcript is sent and if I do not hear back from you, I will assume that the transcript is okay. The final transcripts will be used in my analysis along with information from other data sources. I will then prepare a thesis report. The report will be submitted to my supervisors and to the university as part of my course requirements. There is a possibility of transcripts being used for the purpose of writing academic journal articles after the completion of my thesis. All raw data will be kept in a locked storage. In keeping with standard scientific practice, it will be kept for seven years before being destroyed.

Will other people know who I am or what I say?

Earthsong will be named in the thesis but your name will not be used. I will omit or disguise potentially identifiable information. However, you may still be recognisable to anyone who knows you or the community.

What if I agree to participate and then change my mind?

You may withdraw at any stage prior to being interviewed. You may also withdraw by contacting me within two weeks after the interview; after this time it will not be practical to remove your information from the analysis.

How can I find out the results of the study?

I will present the findings of the research to all participants and anyone else who may be interested after the completion of my thesis. The final thesis will be available to view through the University of Waikato Research Commons (university website). This electronic copy can be viewed by the general public after the examination process has been completed.

Who can I speak with about my participation in this project?

If you have further questions or concerns, I would be more than happy to speak with you. Otherwise, if you would like to be interviewed, please contact me as soon as possible so we can arrange a suitable time and place. Contact details are below.

Contact information:

Abha Dod (Researcher), Ph 0210545459, email abha_dod@hotmail.com

Dr Cate Curtis (Research Supervisor), School of Psychology, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. Ph 07-838-4466 ext. 8669 , email ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz

Dr Neville Robertson (Research Supervisor), School of Psychology, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. Ph 07-838-4466 ext. 8300, email scorpio@waikato.ac.nz

Dr Nicola Starkey, Chair of Ethics Committee, School of Psychology, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. Phone 07-838-4466 ext. 6401, email nstarkey@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Introduction

Follow up from previous initial contact by briefly summarising the purpose of the research; ask if any questions. Make it clear that they can ask questions at any time during the interview. Gain written consent, including consent for the interview to be recorded. Ensure that the participant understands that informed consent also means the right to say no to the interview without any repercussions. Confirm consent. Begin interview – remember to press record!

Question 1 [move to Earthsong]

Before we begin talking about different aspects of cohousing, it would be helpful to know about your personal experience of moving to Earthsong. Can you tell me about that change?

Questions to further develop this:

How did you make the decision to move to Earthsong? What initiated the change?

Where were you living prior to Earthsong? Did you stay in other communities?

How did you hear about Earthsong? When did you move?

Question 2 [life at Earthsong]

Can you talk to me about what your average day involves?

What role do you have in the community and what does that involve?

Question 3 [benefits of cohousing]

Can you tell me what, in your experience, are the benefits of living in a cohousing community?

Questions to further develop this:

What are the positive aspects of cohousing for you?

What are the advantages of living in a cohousing community as oppose to other residential communities?

What personal experiences have you had that reflect the benefits discussed?

What have you gained after moving to Earthsong?

What are your highlights of living at Earthsong?

Question 4 [costs of cohousing]

Can you tell me what, in your experience, are the challenges of living in a cohousing community?

Questions to further develop this?

What difficulties can arise while living in a cohousing community? What difficulties have you faced?

What are the challenges of cohousing as oppose to other residential communities?

Did you have to compromise anything in order to stay at Earthsong?

Did you have to sacrifice anything in order to stay at Earthsong?

What is the process when community issues need to be resolved? What about personal issues?

What personal experiences have you had that reflect the challenges discussed?

Question 5 [general thoughts]

To sum up, could you explain to me how living in a cohousing community has influenced your daily life?

What do you think other residential communities can learn from the cohousing model?

What do you think people can learn from your experience of living at Earthsong?

Concluding Remarks

Is there anything that we covered that you would like to expand on?

Is there anything that we haven't discussed that contributes to your cohousing experience?

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank the interviewee for their time and input. Check to see if they would like a copy of the transcript. Brief them on what is going to happen from now on (transcribing and follow ups). Make sure they have contact details in case of questions or queries.

Appendix D: Consent Form

Consent Form



PARTICIPANT'S COPY

Research Project:

Name of Researcher:

Name of Supervisor (if applicable):

I have received an information sheet about this research project or the researcher has explained the study to me. I have had the chance to ask any questions and discuss my participation with other people. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee (Dr Lewis Bizo, phone: 838 4466 ext.6402, or 856 0095 e-mail lbizo@waikato.ac.nz)

Participant's Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Consent Form



RESEARCHER'S COPY

Research Project:

Name of Researcher:

Name of Supervisor (if applicable):

I have received an information sheet about this research project or the researcher has explained the study to me. I have had the chance to ask any questions and discuss my participation with other people. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee.

Participant's Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Admin_com/psychology forms/consent form