

Frequently Asked Questions



When did Emmaus start?

The first Emmaus Community was founded in Paris in 1949 by Abbé Pierre, a priest, MP and former member of the French resistance. The idea spread around the world, but Emmaus didn't arrive in the UK until 1992, when the first Community opened in Cambridge.

What does the word “Emmaus” mean?

The name Emmaus (pronounced e-may-us) was chosen by Abbé Pierre as it symbolises hope. It comes from a story in St Luke's Gospel and although Emmaus is not a religious organisation, Communities around the world have kept the name because of its symbolism. The story (Chapter 24, vv 13-35) describes how shortly after Jesus' death two of his followers were at Emmaus, a place near Jerusalem, when they saw the resurrected Jesus and so regained hope.

What is a Companion?

Companions are the residents of Emmaus Communities, all of whom work on the Community business.

Who comes to Emmaus?

Many Emmaus Companions have been living on the streets and sleeping rough. They come from different backgrounds and have become homeless for a variety of reasons - relationship breakdown, job loss or bereavement have often played a significant part. Many struggle with alcohol and drug dependency. Anyone coming to Emmaus must be prepared to work and to sign off unemployment benefits. Those addicted to alcohol or drugs must want to overcome this, as no alcohol or drugs are allowed in Communities. Many Companions find the security and support they need to face up to these problems within a Community environment.

What is Community life like?

Life at each Community varies, depending on size, location etc. However, they all work broadly in the same way. Emmaus Communities live as a family, with members supporting each other and contributing to the well-being of all. Each Companion has their own room, but meals are eaten together. Housework is shared and social activities are organised by the Community for those who want to take part.

Communities aim to be a home, not an institution, so there are few rules. However, all Companions are required to consider the needs of others. Those breaking rules are excluded from Emmaus Communities for a period of time. All Companions agree to work full time on the Community business to the best of their ability, collecting, refurbishing and re-selling donated furniture.



How long do people stay in a Community?

There is no limit to how long people stay in a Community – it can be anything from a couple of weeks to several years. For some, Emmaus will fill a short term need, for example to recover from addiction, to regain their confidence, or to gain new skills. These people may move on to other accommodation and jobs. Others will stay in Emmaus for a longer time – for some it will be a permanent home. Communities benefit from having long term Companions as they provide stability and can help and support newer Companions.



How does someone join an Emmaus Community?

Each Community deals with admission of new Companions independently. If somebody wishes to join they need to contact a particular Community to find out about joining that Community and whether there is a space there.

How do Emmaus Communities start?

Emmaus Communities start when a group of local people decide that a Community would benefit their area. With the support of the Emmaus UK Office, they find a site, which must provide accommodation for Companions and is also suitable for running the business. They also need to raise the money. It requires a huge amount of time and commitment from the local committee, the support of local people and at least £1.5 million to start a Community, and usually takes around 2 years.

What is the structure of Emmaus in the UK?

Emmaus UK is a Federation made up of Communities and Groups. All Communities and some Groups are independent registered charities. The Emmaus UK Office is the central office of the Federation, providing support services to Communities and Groups. It is also a registered charity.

Where does Emmaus get its money from?

Emmaus Communities aim to become financially self-sufficient through their business. It takes 5 years on average for a Community to become self-sufficient, so until this time, Communities require support from donations and grants. Groups working to set up Communities also rely on fundraising for the money to acquire a site, build/convert accommodation and set up the business. The Emmaus UK Office fundraising Team helps newer Communities and Groups' in their fundraising, as well as raising money to pay for the other support services provided centrally.

I've got some furniture I don't need any more. Does Emmaus want it?

Emmaus Communities rely on donated goods to make their living, by collecting and re-selling them. This provides work for the Companions and each Community aims to become self-sufficient through their work. However, there are some limitations on what Communities can take, depending, for example on what they can sell, how much storage space they have etc. Communities can collect items from their local area. To find out if your local Community can take a particular item or to arrange collection, please phone their shop. You can find a list of shops on the Emmaus website or from Emmaus UK.

Find our more about Emmaus on www.emmaus.org.uk or contact Emmaus UK

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