

December 2016

SACRAMENTO

parent

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*List-Worthy
Holiday
Events*

**COHOUSING,
IS IT FOR
YOU?**

**"Down Syndrome
Isn't Scary,
It's Exciting!"**

Is a Cohousing Community for You?

By Jenny Godwin, CoHousing Solutions

"There's an ease to socializing in cohousing," Chris says. "Not only does our son, August have positive reinforcement from other adults, there's this beautiful awareness that my wife Caroline and I, and many other parents, are all on board and invested in this community's kids."



Chris and Caroline were in an audience with 150 others for a cohousing presentation put on by Katie McCamant and Chuck Durrett, the parents of the U.S. cohousing movement. Interest swelled at the idea of building an old-fashioned, community-first neighborhood of private homes with generous common facilities. Nevada City Cohousing has a pool, hot tub, community gardens, and bike sheds on its property, with a spacious kitchen, eating area, a kids room, guest rooms and a yoga room all in the Common House.

Caroline discovered she was pregnant on the day they moved into their new home in cohousing, "It all gelled at that moment." August, now nine, has thrived growing up in this tight-knit, intergenerational neighborhood.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Moving can be overwhelming, "Here we felt instantly plugged in. We found everything from recommendations about pediatricians and dog sitters to where to get your car fixed," Chris says. Plus, there was built-in encouragement from neighbor families. "We could glean real-time info from other parents, and had a natural support system right away."

As Sheri, a Nevada City Cohousing resident of seven years puts it, "There's a village parenting culture here. When your parenting philosophy can be supported

by the community you live in, it's that much easier to keep to your beliefs and be a little freer with your kids, too."

Learning to socialize well with peers and adults in your neighborhood can bring shy kids out of their shell. Genevieve's fiancé (now husband) had a very shy child when he first moved to cohousing and now his social skills have blossomed. "He felt accepted and the kids were so welcoming. So many familiar people are talking to you, interested in you."

"You'll laugh at this one," Genevieve says, setting a block of wooden track into place for son Luke's train to glide by on. "I had to put locks on my doors so my kids wouldn't run out of the house half-naked and without shoes to go play with their friends in the morning. And there's certainly no place I'd rather be. This is what I'd want for every parent."

COHOUSING'S UPKEEP: FOSTERING COMMUNITY

The thirty-four households in Nevada City Cohousing played an active role in determining what amenities they wanted in their neighborhood. In turn, most residents are active on committees to ensure everything—from landscaping to HOA finances to common meals—runs smoothly.



Photo courtesy of CoHousing Solutions

August puts in his share, too. "I usually join a committee on workdays. Sometimes I spread mulch or use the lawnmower. We have a day when the whole community plants flowers, too."

That lively neighborhood culture was also something that drew Sheri and Jerry to cohousing. They attended community-formation meetings with a one-month old baby, driving from their home in Tahoe; a very "transitional" place. Having grown-up in a cul-de-sac playing games late into the evenings, Sheri imagined the same carefree childhood for her kids, "Everything from someone watching your sleeping baby to not having to cook a few nights a week. At common meals, your kids are busy and you can socialize with other adults. It's such a gift!"

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Chris and August, courtesy of CoHousing Solutions

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COMMON MEALS: WHERE KIDS REALLY DO EAT THEIR VEGGIES

Based on a monthly cooking rotation between the households, meals at Nevada City Cohousing are typically available in the common house four to five times a week. Rick, a former resident of Muir Commons in Davis, CA raised his two daughters in cohousing. As they grew up, common meal prep was something they could do as a family.

He fondly remembers seeing them talking comfortably with neighbors of all ages. It was “like an extended family” because of the constant overlap in everyone’s lives. Common meals and community events meant bumping into nearly everyone on a weekly basis.

Sheri sees the benefits of that intersectionality in her boys’ lives, too. From thanking the cook and clearing their plates after common meals to acting as role models for younger kids, she watched their social skills evolve. “A kid really learns how to be a person here.” In a snapshot from every parent’s fantasy, her boys would sit with older children at common meals and eat “big kid foods.”

Getting the green light from someone they looked up to was powerful.

ROOM TO GROW

In cohousing there’s a “blending of adult and kid culture.” To August, his community offers a chance to learn from neighbors his age, up to those in their 90s. His parents feel comfortable letting a neighbor know they’ll be out, and then August has a point person in case he needs something. This freedom and familiarity means kids can gain independence early on.

For Genevieve, who returned to Nevada City Cohousing after two years away, the experience gave her perspective. “Almost immediately—pretty much from the moment my family arrived in San Francisco—I missed having that community always there. I said, What were we thinking?”

August’s family is one whose move here hinged on their cohousing passion. “If a friend asked me where I lived, I’d say it’s like a really small city, a little village,” he says. There are over 160 established communities in 25 states, and nearly that many in the formation stages. **SP**

To find a community or start your own, visit the website of the U.S. Cohousing Association, www.cohousing.org. The latest cohousing in-progress locally is 18 miles east of downtown Sacramento on the American River, and actively looking for others to join them. Learn about Fair Oaks EcoHousing at www.fairoaksecohousing.org.

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