

DO YOU remember the 'good old days' not so long ago when the great majority of families lived in close physical proximity? Mum, dad and the children would live in one house, grandparents would live in the house next door and aunts, uncles and cousins would live around the corner in the next street. Even second and third removed family members could be found close by. There was always someone to help with child minding as well as a person to turn to when DIY jobs reared their ugly heads. Families provided practical and emotional support on a day-to-day basis, visiting without invitation or constraints on an 'open door' anytime basis.

Doesn't sound much like today I hear you cry. So, what's changed in 21st-century Britain?

Well, arguably, as a society we have developed a culture of feeling the need to better ourselves over the years. Although we've been doing this since the dawn of humankind it is only in recent times that moving away from family has been an accepted part of the process. We have also bought into the concept of independence. Indeed few countries in the world stress the benefits of self-reliance and achievement based upon ones self like Britain. In other parts of the world, for example in Asia and the Far East, the emphasis is placed on 'communal living' and helping others instead of helping yourself. Today, in Britain, we view our independence as a strength and reliance as a weakness and choose to make our



Family Matters

Enjoy having your friends and family close at hand? You're sure to be benefiting physically and psychologically, according to David Moxon.

own way through life, often without help, or helping, others.

Another contributing factor to society's modern-day single-mindedness is our ability to travel easily. Today we don't feel as anxious about leaving loved ones as we may have done in the past. The world is a smaller, less mysterious place where far-flung places are more easily reached. These changes in our lifestyle patterns have had an evitable effect on our psychological health today. Almost every community has been altered significantly by modern-day independence and mobility, and as individuals we are changed beyond recognition by our self-reliance and removal from an extended family situation. A way to measure this effect is to look at communities that were

'inadvertently dismantled' by the so-called slum clearance programmes of the 1960's. Although implemented to meet the need for better housing, these programmes had a detrimental effect on day-to-day life as developers failed to recognise the importance of community. Studies show that removing the community focus from neighbourhoods had a deep impact of quality of life. The rush to create modern housing caused planners to forget about community values – and the result was a sense of shock and isolation as families were fragmented around the city.

Today the concept of community is experiencing a renaissance. More and more developers are including community features in their plans as

lessons are learnt from the past. Granny flats, cluster homes, master-planned neighbourhoods and integrated village developments are each creating communities. From a psychological perspective this sense of community is important as we are social animals that benefit physically and psychologically from mixing with others. OK, we may not want to live with our family 'on top of us' like past generations, but that doesn't mean we can't nurture a sense of community to the neighbourhood in which we live – a little like the good old days.



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