



emmaus
working together to end homelessness

Emmaus in the UK 1991-2016





Selwyn Image CBE

When I first had the idea to set up an Emmaus community in Cambridge, it was to deal with a local problem in the city. It was going to be a single community and that would be that. The concept of it being any more than that didn't really occur to me. That is, until Abbé Pierre came to visit. He had arranged to loan us some money to get the community off the ground and when I queried how I would pay it back, he told me I should pass it on to the next community.

I had no idea at the time how many people would be inspired to set up their own local Emmaus community, and the growth of Emmaus has been thanks to the collective effort of a huge number of highly committed people.

Now, 25 years on, we have 28 Emmaus communities spread across the UK, supporting more than 700 people. It's a great achievement to have come this far, but our journey is still far from over. Sadly, homelessness has more than doubled since 2010, so Emmaus is needed now more than ever.

To mark our 25th year, we carried out an oral history project to capture the memories and experiences of 25 people who were closely involved in the growth of Emmaus in the UK. Each gave a fascinating insight into their role in establishing and developing

their community, the challenges and rewards of doing so and the impact that Emmaus has had on their lives. Since Emmaus was first set up, more than 11,000 people have benefitted from living and working in communities. That is a wonderful achievement for all of us who have played a part in developing Emmaus in the UK.

I always say Emmaus is something you catch, like a virus. Whether you're a companion, volunteer or member of staff, once you've caught it, you're committed to it and will do all you can to make your community work. That's what has led to the success of Emmaus so far and I hope our next 25 years are driven by the same dedication and drive that has got us to this stage today.

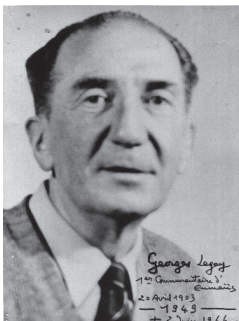
Timeline of Emmaus in the UK

This document has been produced based on information gathered in an oral history research project carried out by Middlesex University, on behalf of Emmaus UK.

The origin of Emmaus



Abbé Pierre, 1955



Georges

“The simple divide is those who are prepared to do something about poverty and those who aren’t.”

Abbé Pierre

Although celebrating its 25th anniversary in the UK, Emmaus started in France much earlier, just after the end of the Second World War. In 1949 the first Emmaus community was founded in Neuilly Plaisance, France, by Henri-Antoine Grouès, better known today as Abbé Pierre. An MP, Catholic priest and former member of the French Resistance, he fought to provide homes for those who lived on the streets of Paris.

One day a man called Georges, in despair and suicidal, was brought to Abbé Pierre's house. Instead of offering him somewhere to stay, Abbé Pierre asked Georges to help him to build homes for women and children who had found themselves homeless after the war. Georges later said:

“Whatever else he might have given me - money, home, somewhere to work - I'd have still tried to kill myself again. What I was missing, and what he offered, was something to live for.”

Georges was the first Emmaus companion.

In 1954, having learned that a woman had died on the streets of Paris clutching an

eviction notice, Abbé Pierre made an appeal on Radio Luxembourg asking the people of France to do something extraordinary to help people living on the streets. His appeal led to an ‘uprising of kindness’ from the French public, who donated blankets, stoves and other household items, as well as money, which helped to establish Emmaus communities across France.

Later Abbé Pierre travelled the world and, once again, inspired people to set up Emmaus groups. There are now more than 350 Emmaus groups across the world in 37 different countries.

1949 The first Emmaus community is founded in Neuilly Plaisance, France.

1951 Abbé Pierre resigns as an MP to devote himself to fighting homelessness and poverty.

1954 Abbé Pierre makes an appeal on Radio Luxembourg asking the people of France to help those living on the streets of Paris.

Early 1960s A young student called Selwyn Image, to aid in his preparation for a French exam, spends a summer volunteering at an Emmaus community in France.

Bringing Emmaus to the UK

*“You don’t give to Emmaus,
you invest in Emmaus!
The return on your investment
is people restored to
better citizenship.”*

Selwyn Image, Founder of Emmaus UK

The recession in the 1980s saw homelessness rise to levels that had not been seen since just after the Second World War. House price inflation and changes to the housing benefit system contributed to a very visible homelessness problem. Rough sleepers were very noticeable in larger cities and started to become more visible in other parts of the UK.



Selwyn Image, Emmaus Cambridge

In 1989 Selwyn Image was working as a volunteer at a soup kitchen in Cambridge. As he tells the story:

“One day I was talking to a very angry, very bitter homeless man. Every idea that I came up with for what might be done, he just shot down ruthlessly and rather cruelly. And, I did what you’re not supposed to do, and I lost my cool and I said, well, I know every bloody thing that you don’t want – what I don’t know is what you do want!”



Emmaus Cambridge, pre-renovation

He looked at me straight in the eye, and he said, ‘What I want is somewhere where I feel I belong, somewhere where I can do useful work, and somewhere where I can recover my self-respect!’”

This encounter reminded Selwyn of somewhere he volunteered in the 1960s when he was a student.

“So, I said to him, ‘You remind me of an organisation that I knew 30 years ago;

- 1989 Selwyn Image has an encounter at a Cambridge soup kitchen that inspires him to set up Emmaus in Cambridge.
- 1991 Cambridge Emmaus Friends group is formed. They acquire land in Landbeach and get planning permission to convert two old barns into an Emmaus community.
- 7 June 1991 Abbé Pierre visits the Cambridge site and an appeal is launched to raise £350,000 to convert Car Dyke Farm into the first UK Emmaus community.



Emmaus Cambridge opening – Terry Waite, Selwyn Image and a companion

“We don’t see ourselves as supporting people so much as empowering people to support themselves.”

Iain Mackechnie-Jarvis, the first Director of Emmaus UK

I don’t even know whether it still exists. It’s called Emmaus, and what they do is set up self-supporting enterprises that give their surplus away to those in greater need. Is that the sort of thing you’d be...?’ And again, he looked me in the eye, and he said, ‘You know bloody well it is, but what interests me is what are you going to do about it?’ He caught me, because I knew that if I didn’t do it, I would regret it for the rest of my life.”

Following this exchange with the homeless man, Selwyn contacted the founder of Emmaus. “I spoke with Abbé Pierre, and I said, ‘Look, I want to try and set up an organisation in England. Would you be able to help me?’ He said, ‘I’ve been waiting 30 years for this’.”

Selwyn started working immediately on setting up an Emmaus community in Cambridge. In March 1991, two derelict farm buildings at Landbeach, Cambridge,

were acquired to host the first Emmaus community and in May 1991, Lord Robert Runcie, former Archbishop of Canterbury, became the first President of Emmaus UK. The community was officially opened by Terry Waite on 1 July 1992.

- 18 May 1992** Three busloads of friends and companions from Emmaus communities in Northern France visit Emmaus Cambridge, bringing goods to sell in the first Emmaus shop.
- 1 July 1992** Emmaus Cambridge is opened by Terry Waite who is accompanied by Lord Robert Runcie, the first President of Emmaus UK. It is one of his first public engagements following his release after 1,763 days of captivity in Beirut.

The spread of Emmaus

While work was underway to set up the first Emmaus community in Cambridge, another three Emmaus communities were also in development. They were all led by enthusiastic trustee groups who had seen Emmaus in France, or heard of the developments in the UK, and saw the potential of what it could offer.

Emmaus Coventry & Warwickshire

In July 1992 Tim Brooke, who had worked with Emmaus in France in the 1950s, heard about Emmaus Cambridge and in September began the process of establishing an Emmaus community in Coventry. He quickly put together a steering group of local people and identified an old vicarage that would be suitable for a community home. Emmaus Coventry opened to its first companions in 1993.

As Tim explains:

“The fact that we were able to set up a community in Coventry was very important in the life of the movement because it showed that it was replicable. When Selwyn started up the community in Cambridge, he had no idea whether it could be replicated elsewhere in England, or whether it was simply a one-off. We showed that we could have more than one community in England, and also showed that it wasn’t just a French idea, it was something which could be adapted to England.”

Emmaus Greenwich

In February 1993 Benny Hazlehurst, a vicar in Plumstead, read about Emmaus and contacted the team in Cambridge informing them that there was a potentially suitable building for a community that the council were going to demolish. The money needed to buy and renovate the building

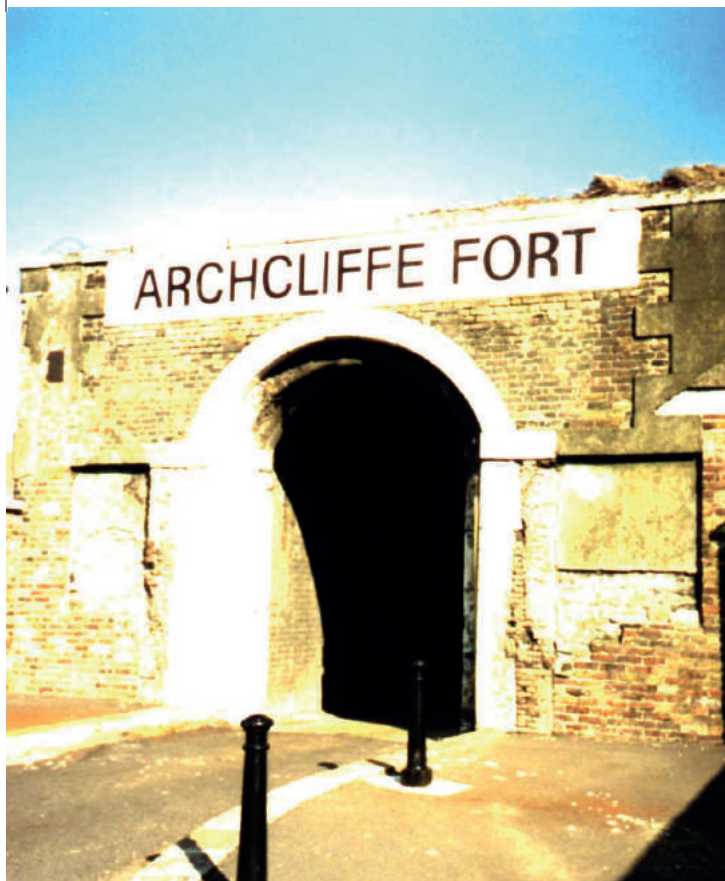
was raised within six months and on 24 November 1994, the Emmaus Greenwich community was opened by Prince Charles - an opening attended by Abbé Pierre himself.

Emmaus Dover

Francis Watts, founder of Emmaus Dover, was inspired to set up an Emmaus community during an encounter at a soup kitchen in 1994. Like Selwyn Image a few years earlier, the person he was serving that day was keen to have something meaningful to do during the day. Having also learned about Emmaus, Francis saw that it could offer just what the man described, and in 1996 Emmaus Dover, then called Emmaus St Martin’s, opened its doors to companions, with a community based in Archcliffe Fort.

20 November 1992 Emmaus Coventry & Warwickshire is founded on the site of a former 17th century vicarage.

1994 Francis Watts has an encounter at a soup kitchen that inspires him to set up Emmaus in Dover.



Emmaus Dover



Emmaus Greenwich community opening by Prince Charles, 1994



The former 17th century vicarage that became Emmaus Coventry

- 7 June 1994 Emmaus Coventry & Warwickshire is opened officially by Lord Robert Runcie.
- 24 November 1994 Abbé Pierre and Cardinal Basil Hume attend the opening by Prince Charles of Emmaus Greenwich in Plumstead on the site of a former children's home.

The early days of Emmaus

The federation is formed

In its early years Emmaus UK was one charity with multiple communities. However, Emmaus Dover in particular wanted the structure of Emmaus UK to be rethought. They wanted to run the community as they thought best, as local people, rather than being directed from a distance by Cambridge. In 1995 all Emmaus communities signed up to a federal model, offering them the freedom to operate independently at a local level and as an equal partner have input at a national level.

“Even though everyone will have their own identity and independence, there’s a great strength to being able to learn from somebody who’s been there, done it. I think it’s really important to share the good and the bad.”

Christine Squince

Emmaus Brighton

In 1990, Cherry Mares, a Senior Research Fellow at Brighton Polytechnic, visited an Emmaus community in Cernay, France, as part of a European Union funded project to study recycling. She was impressed by the way Emmaus recycled, but she was especially struck by Emmaus as an alternative solution to the problem of street homelessness. In 1991, she visited the community again and returned home resolutely determined to find ways to start such a community and do something to help the many homeless people living on the streets of Brighton.

Joined by others she formed a planning committee and then in 1994 learned that Emmaus communities had opened in Cambridge, Coventry, Dover and Greenwich. The planning committee visited all of these communities and received support to set up Emmaus Brighton and Hove. It finally opened on 2 February 1997 on the site of a 12th century Manor House in Portslade.



Emmaus Brighton, 2001

1995 The federation of Emmaus in the UK is formed.

1996 Emmaus Dover opens on the site of an old fort dating back to Henry VIII.

1997 Emmaus Brighton & Hove opens on the site of a 12th century manor house.

Emmaus Mossley

In 1993, Richard Darlington, who had helped Selwyn found Emmaus Cambridge, retired and moved home to Manchester. Finding homelessness just as much of a problem there as in Cambridge, he gathered like-minded people and they found a suitable site at Longlands Mill, a former cotton-doubling mill.

The mill was purchased in August 1996 and Emmaus Cambridge helped the new community by providing Emmaus Mossley with £1,000 per month from September to the following March. The community opened in summer 1997 and initially had 10 bedrooms and a shop on site.



Emmaus Mossley



Emmaus Mossley companions, 1999.

1997 Emmaus Mossley is officially opened by the Duke of Kent.

12 August 1998 Terry Waite succeeds Lord Robert Runcie as UK President of Emmaus.

The Emmaus Fundamentals: Home, Work, Solidarity

The ethos of Emmaus rests on three pillars:

**home,
work and
solidarity.**

The combination of a stable home, meaningful work and helping those in greater need is key to helping companions to regain the self-esteem they often lose when they are homeless.

Home

By providing a stable home for as long as someone needs it, Emmaus offers companions the opportunity to regain control of their lives. Unlike the hostel system, which provides a bed for the night but usually requires residents to leave during the day, Emmaus offers a real home in a community setting. John Gall, an early companion at Emmaus Cambridge and now staff member, recalls:

“Night shelters were easy to come by, half past seven in the morning you were getting kicked back out on the streets again and you were going back into the same things that had got you in that situation in the first place. [With Emmaus] it was the actual fact that you actually had a home.”

The support companions receive from one another can often be important in helping them come to terms with the issues that led to them becoming homeless. There are no limits to how long someone can stay in an Emmaus community, as long as they are prepared to live by the Emmaus ethos and contribute to their community.

“We’ve had the hard times, we’ve gone down the wrong road in life, perhaps, or the wrong journey, so we know what other people are going through, so we’re there to help to each other out.

And that’s how Emmaus works”

Andy, companion at Emmaus Leeds

“We’ve had babies here, we’ve had families living here, we have a lot of couples now. And, of course, couples and relationships develop here as well.”

Christine Squince, Chief Executive of Emmaus Brighton & Hove.

Work

"It does help you overcome homeless[ness] massively. Because obviously it gets you off the street, gets you into a routine, normal living. I am ten times the man now I was when I moved in – it helps to get your self-confidence, your self-esteem; everything like that is back."

Emmaus companion

Having something to do every day was central to the request both Selwyn Image and Francis Watts had during their separate encounters at the soup kitchens and Emmaus provides just that. Every Emmaus community has a social enterprise that provides meaningful work for companions, but also generates income that supports the community. Ultimately every Emmaus community is working towards being self-funding from the income from their social enterprise, which also helps companions to build skills and experience

that they can use when they are ready to move on from Emmaus.

Moving to Emmaus

When a companion joins an Emmaus community they sign off all benefits, with the exception of housing benefit, and agree to work full time, or to the best of their ability, in the community's social enterprise or around the community home. In return they are provided with a home, food and essential items, as well as a small weekly allowance.

Solidarity

"The whole thing about solidarity is it's a two-way street. We both benefit, everyone benefits from it. Everyone contributes in their own little way, it's like helping each other. If we all help each other in this world, it'll be a lot better place."

Bruce, companion, Emmaus Mossley

Solidarity is the main founding principle of Emmaus. From the very beginning Abbé Pierre celebrated the idea that everyone, no matter what problems they may have themselves, should do something to help those less fortunate than them. For companions, solidarity has a huge impact on restoring self-esteem, which is often decimated when someone is homeless. Acts of solidarity can range from supporting local community groups, taking food out to people still living on the streets, or raising money for Emmaus projects in other parts of the world.

"I feel good, because I know I am giving something back to the community. Because Emmaus has given something to me, so I owe Emmaus a lot for giving me my respect back, my dignity, my pride, and I want to give something back to them, which I am doing, by giving something back to people that need our help more than we need now."

Emmaus companion

Research shows that 82% of companions who have lived at Emmaus for a few months say that working and having something to do every day has been the most beneficial part of their experience.

“The Teenage Years” (2001-2008)

Emmaus grew quickly between 2001 and 2008, with 10 communities opening in seven years. Some of these communities had been in development for some time, as the trustees undertook the often lengthy work of searching for suitable community buildings and raising the funds they needed to open their community.

Once open the communities would continue to grow, adding companion places and developing the social enterprises to ensure that all companions had meaningful work and to generate sufficient funds to support the community.

This period of rapid growth was accompanied by often heated debates about how Emmaus in the UK should develop. Key issues came to the fore during these years, in particular, where the balance should lie between local independence and national unity, and how closely the UK communities should follow the original French model. In addition, debates about whether or not communities should accept money from the government's new Supporting People fund to assist vulnerable people divided the federation.

These tensions proved hard to reconcile and as a result, in 2006 Emmaus Cambridge made the difficult decision to leave the federation, followed by Emmaus Dover in 2009.

Simon Grainge, who became Community Manager of Emmaus Cambridge in 2009 and is now Chief Executive of Emmaus UK,



Emmaus Leeds

talks about this period as the “teenage years”, when the rapidly growing federation was finding its feet and negotiating the delicate balance between independence and interdependence. Gradually, the federation worked together to find solutions to these challenging issues and, by happy coincidence, Emmaus Cambridge and Emmaus Dover independently took the decision to rejoin the federation on the same day, 17 January 2012.

2001 Emmaus Gloucestershire opens.

2002 Emmaus Village Carlton, Bedfordshire, and Emmaus St Albans open.

2003 Emmaus Bristol and Emmaus Leeds open.

2005 Emmaus Bolton opens.

2006 Emmaus Glasgow opens. Emmaus Cambridge leaves the federation.

“There was this feeling that Emmaus was losing its way amongst the older communities in the movement. But then, there was enough change of heart and emphasis for us to think, okay, we can work together here. We don’t have to fragment. We’re stronger together than apart, so from that point, things started to come back together again.”

Roger Speare, Founder & Chair, Emmaus Bolton

The death of Abbé Pierre

In 2007 the founder of Emmaus, Abbé Pierre, who had become a leading public figure and campaigner in France, died aged 94. His funeral was held on 26 January at the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris. It was attended by numerous distinguished guests, but according to Abbé Pierre’s wishes, it was Emmaus companions who sat at the front of the congregation.



Abbé Pierre with Coventry companions



Abbé Pierre memorial

2006 Her Royal Highness, The Duchess of Cornwall, becomes Royal Patron of Emmaus UK.

22 January 2007 Abbé Pierre dies, age 94.

2007 Emmaus Lambeth opens.

2008 Emmaus Colchester and Emmaus Sheffield open.

Why Emmaus?

People become involved with Emmaus for many different reasons. We asked some of them why they became involved with Emmaus and what they like most about it.

“When I arrived at Cambridge I had my rucksack sat in the corner of the room for about two weeks because I was waiting for the catch. I was pretty convinced there had to be something, everything seemed to be too perfect and too easy an answer to what I’d been looking for for a long time.” **John Gall, former companion and current staff member**

“Emmaus is not for everybody, but it does work so well for so many.”

**Alec Brown,
Chair of Emmaus St. Albans**

“Everybody, I believe, and this is still true to this day, arrives in Emmaus because they need to be there, because they’ve run out of options. But there comes a point in your development when you let yourself open up to it a bit, that you start wanting to be there instead of needing to be there, and it’s at that point that you start progressing as a person, personally, professionally. There is nothing that isn’t achievable within Emmaus, regardless of where you start from, regardless of the issues that you arrive with, regardless of what’s happened to you in the past.”

Paul Matthews, founding companion and now Business Manager, Emmaus Cambridge

“Of course the original inspiration was Abbé Pierre, quite a remarkable man, but it’s also the inclusivity of the Emmaus philosophy, it’s the fact that everybody matters and everybody deserves their chance.”

Alison Thompson, former Chair of Emmaus Hampshire

"I have been at Emmaus for several years now. I had a nervous breakdown and I didn't know where to turn at first, but being here has helped me regain my confidence and look towards the future."

Karen, a companion

"It gave me such a wonderful retirement, you know, at 65 I started a totally new life, meeting new people, and doing something that I so believed in. It was a wonderful opportunity."

Cherry Mares, founder & former Trustee of Emmaus Brighton & Hove

I like to think I have a reasonably good rapport with companions largely because I too have been through a period of deprivation and difficulty. I think that's given me a unique opportunity to have a deeper rapport with companions rather than someone who just brings an academic experience, somebody who brings some actual experience."

Terry Waite, President Emmaus UK

"I very much liked the idea that Emmaus was a door, if you like, to a perfectly honourable, sustaining way of life where people had a role in a community which suited them."

Nick Kittoe, former chair, Emmaus Greenwich and Emmaus Lambeth

"I have always found that, for me, the complete fascination is people. How are various companions doing? How are they progressing? Then, when you know that a number of them now have girlfriends, they've got married, or they live outside the community, that's what it's all about; they're balanced, they're happy, they're living a regular life. What could be more perfect?"

Jane Image (nee Burton), first employee of Emmaus UK

Emmaus – The Recent Years (2008-Present)

“A lesson that I’m sure anyone trying to start today would recognise is that every Emmaus community is different.”

Iain Mackechnie-Jarvis

Since 2008 communities have continued to open throughout the UK. However, since the economic recession, raising the funds required to open a new community has become more challenging. This has led some federation members to explore alternative approaches to opening a new community. For example, Emmaus Hastings & Rother, which opened in 2011, is built from prefabricated modules as this provided a quick and cost-effective way of getting the new community off the ground. In addition, to assist federation members to secure the funding they need to grow, in 2012 Emmaus UK launched

the Emmaus Fund, an innovative social investment model that provides low-cost loans to federation members. Once their social enterprises are profitable, the loans are repaid to the Fund, so that they can be recycled and used to open new companion rooms elsewhere in the country.

Despite these new approaches, the same basic principle of establishing a community and expanding it with help from other communities has continued to this day. Today there are Emmaus communities of different sizes stretching from Glasgow to Dover. Each one has at least one shop, with many operating a range of social enterprises from successful cafés, shops and gardening projects to removal companies. No two Emmaus communities are the same – each has its own individual personality, providing a set of services that meet the needs of its local area.

“What’s wonderful about Emmaus is it’s made up of such a diverse group; all exceptionally committed to what they want to do.”

Martin Davies, Founder & Chair, Emmaus Sheffield

“Emmaus is an extended family recycling business. Everybody who joins Emmaus becomes part of an extended family business which is primarily concerned with recycling, recycling lives, recycling materials, recycling ideas.”

Roger Speare, Founder & Chair, Emmaus Bolton

2009 Emmaus Hampshire, Emmaus Oxford and Emmaus Preston open. Emmaus Dover leaves the federation.

2011 Emmaus Burnley and Emmaus Hastings & Rother open.

2012 Emmaus Leicestershire & Rutland, Emmaus Medway and Emmaus Norwich open. Emmaus Cambridge and Emmaus Dover rejoin the federation. Emmaus launches its first federation-wide strategic plan.



Emmaus Norwich



Assembling pre-fab modules at Hastings



Hampshire eco-build



Emmaus Leicestershire & Rutland

2015 Terry Waite opens Emmaus Salford, the 25th Emmaus community in the UK. Emmaus launches its second federation-wide strategic plan.

2016 Emmaus Merseyside, Emmaus Hull & East Riding and Emmaus South Wales open.

Looking to the Future

In 2015 Emmaus developed a new strategic plan to set out how the federation will continue to develop in the next five years and tackle the major challenges that are expected to lie ahead. One of the biggest priorities is to strengthen communities and their social enterprises in order to create more companion places and provide even better support.

As more young people and women come into communities, the Emmaus federation is looking at how it adapts to ensure it is still able to offer the best possible support.

Similarly, looking at how best to support companions who may have been with Emmaus for some time and are approaching retirement is also a big challenge.

"I see Emmaus growing more from existing communities reaching out and starting sister communities. It'll happen but not quite in the way the movement has grown since the early 90s when Cambridge started."

Alison Thompson, Founder & former Chair, Emmaus Hampshire

A tough economic environment means it is more challenging than ever for new Emmaus communities to develop, so alternative ways to grow are being explored, such as existing communities adding more rooms or supporting new communities to open. This has already proven to be successful for Emmaus Lambeth, which has doubled in size in recent years, and Hastings, which was set up with the support of Emmaus Brighton & Hove.

"Somebody comes into Emmaus at 18 or 25 years old, they've got their whole life in front of them, they want something different and they want a future."

John Gall, former companion and current staff member

"I would love it if Emmaus somehow had a residential home for ex-companions. I think it is needed."

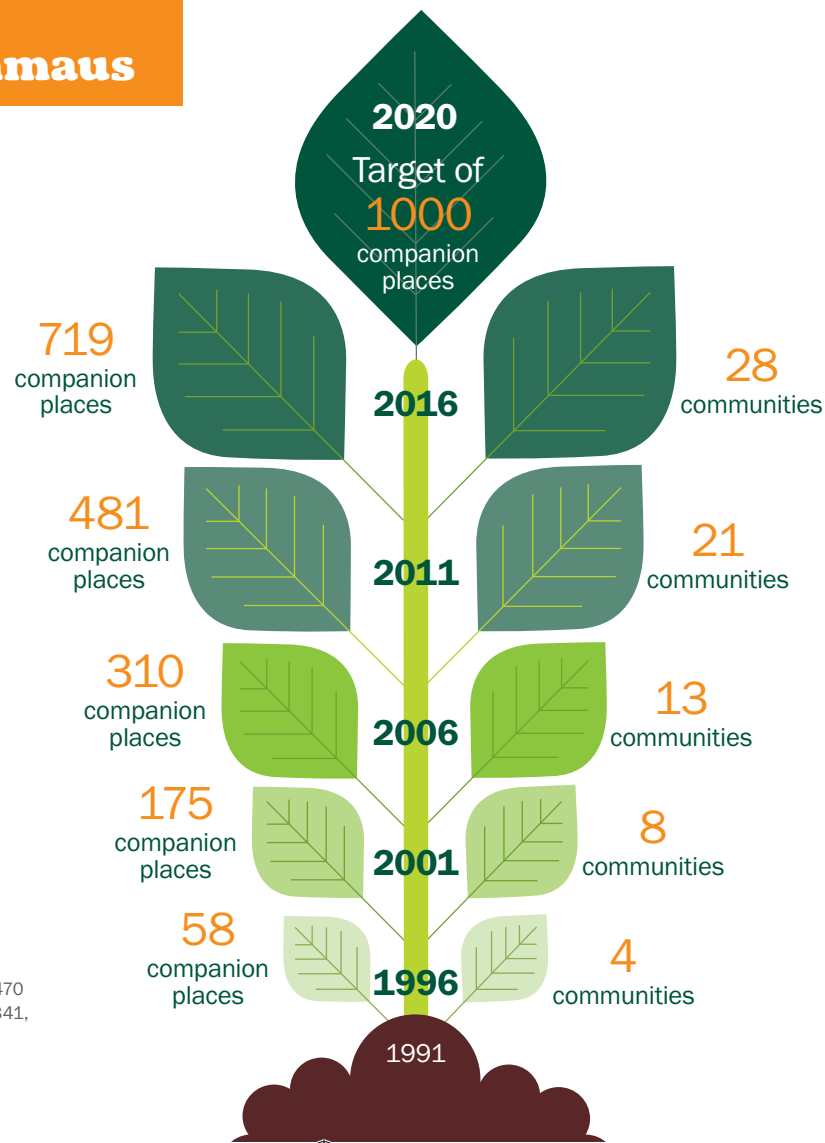
Mark, former companion and current staff member

Ultimately, however new Emmaus communities are funded, built or located, it is clear that the need for Emmaus communities has never been greater. Recent figures from the Department for Communities and Local Government show that the number of people sleeping rough has more than doubled since 2010 and homelessness is once again extremely visible on the streets of our cities and towns.

Emmaus has achieved a lot in 25 years but the challenges and problems that led Selwyn Image to bring Emmaus to the UK in the early 1990s and inspired so many others to set up their local communities are proving to be just as much of a challenge today.



The growth of Emmaus



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