

relating

5 WAYS TO EXPAND YOUR SOCIAL CIRCLE

In a friendship rut? A few expert ideas for meaningful ways to mingle with new people.

By Betsy Rubiner

1 — Grow by gardening.

Community food gardens automatically give people two things to rejoice or complain about together: food and the weather. And many of our members (young families, seniors, church groups, veterans, and others) become friends in our gardening or cooking classes, or during our garden socials or all-garden workdays. New members get a Welcome sign on their plots so the other gardeners know they may need help. One woman told us she's lived here for 14 years, and after joining one of our gardens, she finally felt at home.

LAMANDA JOY IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHICAGO NONPROFIT PETERSON GARDEN PROJECT, WHICH SHE FOUNDED IN 2010. SHE IS THE AUTHOR OF *START A COMMUNITY FOOD GARDEN: THE ESSENTIAL HANDBOOK*.

2
—**Sing along.**

A community chorus helps people in different stages of life, with a variety of viewpoints, find something in common: making music. It's powerful. Our chorus is coed, with singers from age 15 to their 80s, college students and community members, professionals and service industry workers, church choir singers and people who would never set foot in a church. At a time when our connections are so digital, choirs provide a uniquely human connection—the opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with others and be aware of their very breath.

AIMEE BECKMANN-COLLIER IS THE DIRECTOR OF CHORAL STUDIES AT DRAKE UNIVERSITY IN DES MOINES, IOWA. SHE CONDUCTS THE DRAKE UNIVERSITY/COMMUNITY CHORUS AND AUDITIONED ENSEMBLES.

3
—**Team up for fitness.**

Everyone at our CrossFit gym is in the same boat. No matter how good you are, you still have to work hard, and you still sweat. We all want to improve, and we pride ourselves on working as a team. It's the opposite of putting in your earbuds and going from machine to machine. Our community is eclectic—teens and seniors, super-fit folks and people who are new to exercise, pregnant women and athletes with disabilities. Everyone does the same workout, but it can be adjusted for physical ability or disability. Finishing a workout together that seemed too challenging forges bonds, many of which extend outside the gym doors.

MAILLARD HOWELL IS THE OWNER OF CROSSFIT PROSPECT HEIGHTS IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, WHERE HE ALSO COACHES.

4
—**Share supper and stories.**

Making your grandmother's sweet potato pie, or another dish with meaning, for a potluck with strangers is a great way to introduce yourself. Sharing a personal story along with your dish can be transformational. Invite five neighbors or coworkers you don't know well. Encourage them to bring a friend. Ask everyone to share an experience we've all had—for example, a time when they felt unwelcome. Forming unexpected connections can be deeply beautiful, especially at a time when we are often connected only to people who think or look like us.

REV. JENNIFER BAILEY IS AN ORDAINED MINISTER IN NASHVILLE. SHE COFOUNDED THE PEOPLE'S SUPPER, WHICH HAS HOSTED MORE THAN 1,000 SUPPERS IN 121 CITIES.

5
—**Welcome refugees.**

I cherish the fact that my Mormon kids from Dallas are able to help Muslim refugee kids from war-torn Syria resettle. It's made our kids reevaluate their lives. We don't have to worry about shelling from opposition forces. It's important for our kids to see that not everyone prays to the same God, speaks the same language, or lives in the same comfort. But we all need to be loved, to feel safe, to be educated, and to have the freedom to make changes so we can have a better, safer life. They see that the world is a big place and learn the value of lending a hand.

GREG CHRISTENSEN, AN ADVERTISING AGENCY CREATIVE DIRECTOR, VOLUNTEERS WITH REFUGEE SERVICES OF TEXAS, ALONG WITH HIS WIFE, SUZY, A TEACHER, AND THEIR FOUR CHILDREN. THEY LIVE IN DALLAS.