Community Needs Assessment Toolkit

Understanding the gap between longing for community and building community

Project background

When I joined the Nesting Ambassador Program, my initial idea was to develop a pre-parenting program for young adults who hope to become parents in the future.

The intention was to create a foundational awareness program introducing the Evolved Nest framework and helping people understand the species-typical conditions that support healthy human development. I envisioned it as an umbrella program that could later include educational resources, practical experiences, community initiatives, and opportunities for personal reflection.

As I progressed through the Nesting Ambassador training, however, I realized that something important was missing.

Many of the capacities required for nurturing children well are not developed when a child is born. They are developed through a lifelong process of nesting and re-nesting. People cannot simply learn about the Evolved Nest intellectually and then apply it later when they become parents. They need opportunities to experience belonging, mutual support, co-regulation, play, community, and healthy relationships in their own lives now.

This realization led me to the question that became the focus of my graduation project:

If so many people recognize the importance of community, belonging, and village-like support systems, why is it so difficult to move from longing for community to actually building it?

The question emerged not only from my professional work, but also from my personal experience. Together with other families, I am actively involved in building a community in rural Romania. I also organize community-building and revillaging experiences. Again and again, I encounter people who express a strong desire for tribe, village, and community, yet struggle to take concrete steps toward participating in or creating those experiences.

This project is an attempt to understand that gap.

Before people can build community, they may first need greater clarity regarding what they are actually seeking.

Project objectives

The project aims to:

- Explore how people define and experience community.
- Identify the deeper human needs people hope community will fulfill.
- Investigate the gap between desire and action.
- Explore perceived barriers, fears, costs, and risks associated with community participation.
- Better understand what conditions support people's willingness to engage in community-building efforts.
- Develop practical tools that help people clarify their needs and take meaningful action toward building community.

Methodology

The project is based on a series of exploratory online focus groups.

The first focus group took place on June 1, 2026.

Two additional focus groups are planned during the summer of 2026.

The purpose of these conversations is not to convince people that community is important, but to investigate their lived experience of longing for community and the factors that either support or inhibit action.

Participants are invited into a structured process of reflection and inquiry.

Focus group themes

1. Associations and emotional responses

- When you hear the word “community,” what comes to mind?
- What emotions arise?
- Have you ever experienced a genuine sense of community?

2. Mapping community needs

- When you say, “I need community,” what is actually missing?
- What problem would community solve in your life?
- How would you know you had found the right community?
- What would change if this need were met?

3. Imagining the ideal tribe

Participants are invited to describe:

“My ideal tribe on an ordinary day.”

Questions include:

- Who is there?
- How often do you spend time together?
- What do you share?
- What do you not share?
- How does your body feel in this scenario?

4. Investigating barriers

- What prevents you from actively seeking community?
- What prevents you from participating in community experiences?
- What risks do you associate with community?
- What previous experiences make you cautious?
- What would need to happen for you to say yes?

5. Reality versus expectation

- What forms of community already exist in your life?
- What support do you already receive?
- What responsibilities would you be willing to assume within a community?
- What expectations of community may be unrealistic?

Expected outcomes

Following analysis of the focus group data, the findings will be synthesized into a practical resource: the Community Needs Assessment Toolkit.

The toolkit will support individuals, families, and community builders in understanding both their needs and their readiness for community participation.

The toolkit is expected to include:

- Community needs self-assessment: a guided reflection process helping people identify the specific needs they hope community will fulfill.
- Community readiness assessment: a tool exploring barriers, fears, expectations, capacities, and willingness to engage in community life.
- Community profiles: a framework helping people recognize different types of communities and determine which may best align with their needs and values.
- From longing to action framework: a practical guide for moving from abstract desire toward concrete community-building actions.

- Reflection and conversation guides: facilitated exercises and discussion prompts for individuals, couples, families, and groups exploring community together.

From Assessment to Experience

The toolkit is not intended to be an end product in itself.

One of the insights that led to this project is that community cannot be understood solely at an intellectual level. People may gain clarity about their needs, values, fears, and barriers, but ultimately community is something that must be experienced, not simply conceptualized.

For this reason, the toolkit is designed to work alongside experiential community-building initiatives.

In parallel with this research, I have been developing and facilitating community and revillaging camps in Romania. These camps function as living laboratories where individuals and families can temporarily step into a more village-like experience and explore what community actually feels like in practice.

Participants share meals, responsibilities, conversations, childcare support, play, learning, and everyday life. The goal is not to create an idealized version of community, but to provide a safe space where people can move beyond abstract longing and begin experiencing both the rewards and challenges of living in closer relationship with others.

The first camps also revealed an important barrier. While many people resonate deeply with the need for community, financial limitations often prevent participation. Even though these experiences are organized on a non-profit basis and participants cover only the direct costs of accommodation, food, materials, and logistics, many of the individuals and families who would benefit most are unable to afford them.

Because of this, a future stage of the project will focus on identifying grant opportunities and other funding sources that can make these experiences accessible free of charge to low-income and vulnerable families.

The completed Community Needs Assessment Toolkit will be made available as a free resource. Users will be invited, but never required, to make donations in support of Kindred World so that the work can remain accessible while continuing to grow.

My long-term vision is to create a bridge between awareness and action: helping people understand their community needs, experience community directly, and ultimately develop the confidence and skills needed to build more connected and nurturing lives