

Cooperative Journal Podcast

“Solidarity Economy Shorts” in collaboration with New Economy Coalition

Solidarity Economy Shorts #8 **Mommune: A Village for Single Mom’s with Motherful.**

Featuring:

Lisa Woodward: Co-founder

Amanda King: Housing Director

Ebony Gustave: Host

[Music - Solidarity Economy (Riddim) by MADlines]

Ebony: Welcome to Solidarity Economy Shorts, a collaboration between New Economy Coalition and Cooperative Journal Media. Solidarity Economy Shorts are conversations with frontline organizations and individuals that are putting solidarity economy principles into practice. They're using different strategies to build an economic system where communities are meeting their own needs outside of Capitalism.

New Economy Coalition is a member based coalition representing the solidarity economy ecosystem in the United States. Their members are actively working across economic sectors to shift from individuality and capitalism, to cooperation and solidarity.

Some of the New Economy members will be featured on this podcast to explore land rematriation, cooperation, worker ownership, arts and culture, resource mobilization, and more. We'll share lessons learned, practices, and how you can engage in this liberatory vision.

As you listen you're invited to feel into your body. When do you sense constriction? When do you feel light and expansive? We hope these shorts can be a reminder that we don't have to wait for the future we dream of, it is here now waiting for us to participate.

Ebony: Motherful is a matriarchal collective by and for single mothers rooted in non-hierarchy, mutual care, and shared resources. They are reimagining a future of motherhood where all single mothers are valued as sacred and worthy of support.

In this episode I speak with co-founder Lisa Woodward and housing director Amanda King. Lisa grounds us in Motherful's origin story and how they are meeting the needs of single moms through offerings like their pantry, resource garage, and basic income program. We discuss what it means to be a matriarchal and non-hierarchical collective and how they maintain those principles with an evolving membership of over 2,000. Amanda shares their newest initiative, an eco-village in Ohio for single mothers to shape their housing, community, and the conditions they need to thrive. This conversation offers a tangible vision for what is possible when we shift from care being an individual responsibility to a collective one.

Ebony: Welcome Lisa and Amanda to Solidarity Economy Shorts. I'm so grateful to have this interview with you. As I had mentioned to you before we hit record, this is my first interview in over a year for Solidarity Economy Shorts, since having a baby of my own. So I'm just so grateful that this is the interview that I'm returning with, and can uplift the amazing work that y'all are doing for single mothers.

I would love for you to just start by grounding us in what Motherful is, and can you share some of its origin story?

Lisa: Hi, my name is Lisa Woodward. I am the co-founder and co-director of Motherful. Motherful was founded in 2018 by three single moms, our original name was Mothers in Arms, and now we're DBA Motherful. We seek to bridge the gaps experienced by single moms and their children in Columbus, Ohio. We are a Black, Indigenous, mothers of color, multiracial grassroots collective, and we have a resource garage and pantry in Gahanna, Ohio.

The Ohio Mother's Trust is a program for guaranteed income. It's the only one here in Ohio, where the moms can use the money for whatever is needed, and it's not tracked. We did one cohort with 32 moms that got \$500 a month for a year, and we are geared up to do our second cohort in the Fall. \$500 a month, just getting that just really supports the mom with doing things that they didn't think they could do. It's freeing up more time within their family life and it's monthly, so they can depend on it, which is great. Our first cohort, we collaborated with Rise Together Institute and Up Together, and they supported funding the first round of the Mother's Trust, and for the second one, we do have some investors, and we're working to get more money, so we can have the same amount or more moms in the program.

Our mission is to support and nurture the families through our community education resources, and we do a lot of wellness, self care, financial support, and arts. So Motherful is a living, breathing radical vision of the collective future of motherhood. Right

now we have about 2,000 members, and it's growing. I just checked, we have 75 new moms since the beginning of the month, so we're definitely collecting all the single moms around. Our collective is non-hierarchical, it's matriarchal, and we focus on reproductive and gender justice, racial justice, climate justice, maternal justice, and everything that intersects that.

We got together and we started to have dinners, community dinners every month on different sides of town, and that's how we started to collect our moms that have been with us since the beginning. We would always have a meal, have some sort of talk topic, and that's how we started. Heidi and I knew each other way before, and we just wanted to find more resources for moms, and it just wasn't out there, and we're like, what's going on? Okay, maybe it's us and so that's how it started.

Ebony: So when you all thought about how there's a lack of resources for single mothers, did you think that you would turn it into this collective with over 2000 members?

Lisa: We wanted to create a database that can be shared for single moms, we never knew it would grow this big. It's so amazing to see it. It's going so fast. I can't believe that we've done so much in so little time, but because we're women, we're able to flow and move fast and not do things that don't matter. We like to move without boundaries and provide realistic, real-time support and community for the moms.

Ebony: As a single mom, you really don't have time for that, you have to be really efficient and to the point. Did you all end up doing this database? Is that a part of Motherful?

Lisa: We do have a resource guide and we also have an open house that's weekly where we have a resource table. We also have an app that all our moms communicate in, because not all of our moms have transportation, and inside of there is a really big resource hub for connections. So we've moved past a database to our app and we do have staff now that can help navigate different situations. We're blessed to have a lot of partners that work with us, so when we have situations, we can phone a friend. We pride ourselves in moving fast, because I know a lot of these moms get pushed into this cycle where it takes forever to get help, and by the time you get help or support with anything big or small, the problem has gotten bigger. Time is of the essence, we like to support our moms very fast.

Ebony: It seems like y'all have created a human resource bank for the mothers, so even beyond a database.

Lisa: Yes, definitely.

Ebony: You mentioned that you all describe yourself as a non-hierarchical matriarchal organization, what does it mean for you all to be matriarchal?

Lisa: Heidi, my partner, she was able to connect with Heide Göttner-Abendroth, who lives in Germany, and she leads a school on matriarchal studies. Heidi really wanted her to be on our podcast, and approached her asking, where are the other orgs that are doing this? You know, where can I look? She basically said that she's never found anyone that's doing it. All these years of work and talking about the matriarchal ways, she never found someone that's actually doing it. Our relationship started there, and we started to learn what it means to have a matriarchal organization. We said, okay yeah, that's us.

It definitely is peace with Mother Earth, and we do that a lot in all of our programming. We have a community garden, we do lots of natural support for the earth and the climate, and being a maternal gift economy is another thing, and that means basically everything is a gift. Everything is free. Everything inside of our collective is free for the moms, whether it's food support, financial support, different resources, community, everything is free, and that makes us a matriarchal org.

Matriarchy does not mean no men, it just means mother-led, and we do that in all of our households here. We also come together and make decisions together as a community, conscious decision making, it's a consensus way of collecting information, going over it together, and coming out with an answer that is shared by everyone. We talk things out, and we have a close-knit community, and then that also transpires into everyone being equal in our collective. Everybody has a voice and we stand on respect of that. So those are basically the pillars of matriarchy, and that's what sets us as a matriarchal org.

We have started Matriarchy Now it's a website in which we teamed up with Heide, and we started to find other matriarchal orgs, and you will see them on that website as matriarchal. We have about nine members, and we're now looking for more members to be in this. This is a global group, and we're happy that we're going to be doing our first action here at a festival here in Columbus, Ohio. We did this special matriarchal action in Amsterdam and England so far and it is an interpretation with no words. It goes through all the pillars of matriarchy, and it's acted out, it's really powerful, and includes flags that we hold up, we're getting our flags made now to do our first action. If you go to Matriarchy Now, you can see our actions we did globally online.

Ebony: I will definitely add these resources about matriarchy to the show notes. I'm so curious about your conscious consensus decision-making style, and how that works with having around 2000 members.

Lisa: So there's different levels of that. We do have Heidi and I, and then we have about four staff that lead different sectors of the organization so we make decisions together. Then we also have moms that volunteer and work inside of the nonprofit and we pay all of our volunteers an incentive to help, which is really cool, so that level of support is there.

We also have different topics and decisions that come about where we gather the moms and vote or talk about a subject, so as Amanda will tell you, how we set up the housing to have moms come and work to create a plan for the housing, how they would want to live, and it was really good. It was an experience council, and so that's a real big representation of mom-led decision making. It's definitely still a work in progress as we get older.

Ebony: Yeah, I can imagine, even decision making at a smaller scale can be intricate, and especially when you're thinking of consensus. So I'm sure as you grow, you have to adapt and shape it to meet the needs of your new structure.

Lisa: Yeah we have moms that are involved at different levels, we have moms that are just on our app, and then we have moms that we see every week, we're open three days a week, so that's why we have the app to still keep contact with everything. So at the different levels of engagement there's a different amount of consensus. Just depends, we like to get the consensus of the players at hand in whatever we're doing. Yeah, we definitely want to hear everybody's voice.

Ebony: Yeah I think that that speaks to also the matriarchal structure that you all have, and I just really appreciated that you said having peace and connection with Mother Earth is the core of it, because I feel like everything else ripples out from that, from the way you're structured to the way you do decision making, to the way resources are shared amongst members, that it's completely free. It's such a replication of nature.

Lisa: Yeah

Ebony: I am really excited for Amanda to speak more on this urban eco village, because that is just an extension of the matriarchy and connection to nature, and is also a place where all of these resources that you're sharing with your community can be offered in one location. So Amanda, can you please tell us about the vision for this

urban eco village for single mothers, and maybe share how some of the shared resources reflect solidarity economy values like mutual aid and collective stewardship.

Amanda: For sure, so I'm Amanda King, and I'm a housing director with Motherful, and so when I met Heidi and Lisa, they told me about this vision that they have for kind of a mommune eco-village, these types of communities, matriarchal communities that they've studied and seen in the world, and even just their own personal experiences.

Heidi, when the other co-founder became a single mother, moved into a duplex, and on the other side of the duplex was another single mother, and they really helped each other out. The more veteran single mother showed Heidi the ropes. So there was a lot of support, like a little support system that was built there, and you know, it was just the realization of why don't all single moms do this? They can rely on each other. Single moms aren't a problem to solve, they can help each other out if given the resources and the ability to be in community together, which is really what Motherful is all about.

So in 2024 I started working with Motherful and working on just some initial visioning with Heidi and Lisa and then did a survey of all Motherful members about their housing situations, what were they struggling with, but also what were their dreams, and what were they open to. We found that over 50% of Motherful moms were interested in sharing housing together, like being in a home together, sharing resources, raising their children together. Over 90% of moms were interested in living in some kind of single moms community, so maybe not necessarily sharing units, but being in proximity to one another, having sort of that understanding of what it takes to be a single mom, being a support system for each other, and removing that isolation. That was the common thing throughout our conversations and surveys with moms. There's this isolation with single moms, and you're just used to doing things by yourself all the time. This idea of community and sharing together could really remove a lot of those stresses, and provide that sort of like chosen family. So the village that we've been planning for is really just this physical manifestation of everything that Motherful already does, and their moms are already doing, care made into like a physical space.

So we did this experience council last summer, summer 2025, where we got a group of moms together, where we compensated them and worked with an architect to put together a vision of what a Motherful village would look like, and again in line with Motherful values of being non-hierarchical. This was more about facilitation of their vision rather than here's some samples, here's some things we can do, here's some barriers, it was just very open. It was so amazing to see that what the moms drew and wrote about, described and journaled on, and things they posted on Pinterest boards, mood boards, were very much all in line together, and with what Heidi and Lisa's original

vision was. It's just we need space, we need community space together, we need a place for shared meals, we need an open outdoor space for our children to run around and have eyes on them, we need a space for peace and meditation. Those were just common throughout everybody's comments and inputs.

In September 2025 we wrapped that up, and then in October 2025 a Motherful supporter, made us aware of a property here in Columbus, Ohio, that was built in the 80s, and it was originally a convent, and the nonprofit that was operating it was selling it and consolidating elsewhere. It has been a home to mothers for various purposes, for women since it was built in 1980. It has multiple buildings, residential buildings, a community space, sanctuary space that surrounds open outdoor areas, and has a playground on the premises. It has access to transportation, but also like a little tucked away off the beaten path, it's really lovely.

This is going to allow us, allow Motherful, and the moms to actually come together and try this out. It's really this kind of new concept. It's an old concept, it's been around for centuries, but we've lost it, and now we're getting it back with these moms. So the moms will be in community together, not just sharing proximity, but sharing their resources, labor, decision making together, incorporating solidarity economy values into the project through childcare, shared meals, sharing costs, doing bulk purchasing. So things that are nearly impossible for moms, that even have a great job, but they still have a hard time making ends meet, all this becomes possible collectively. They can create a savings, they can go on vacation, they can take a day off, or they can work on their career education if they want to. Those are all dreams that Motherful moms, who will be living here, shared with us. So moms are able to invest in themselves and steward this village together without anybody telling them how they have to be or how they have to live.

They'll really have a real ownership stake in the project, the moms who will be living there will be creating what we're calling shared living guidelines and ways of being, where they will come up with the house rules, the responsibilities, and everything like that. We'll have a landscaper, paid landscaper, somebody mowing the lawn, and doing the snow removal. The moms don't have to do that, but hey, who wants to cook, or who wants to lead the community garden event. Who wants to organize the potluck we're doing coworking over here, study time for the kiddos over there, that will be all up to the moms to decide and coordinate together. It sounds like our moms are really, really excited to do that, so yeah, we're super excited for those founding families, we're calling them to go in and, and they will define what this means. We have our ideas of how it'll be, but really they'll be the ones defining it.

Ebony: That sounds so incredibly dreamy. Wow, I've never heard of a single mommune before, ever. So I wonder if y'all are also the first to do this in the U.S. in modern age. I don't know. I don't know if you guys know of anyone else that is doing this.

Amanda: Not like this, so we've studied, and we visited other co-housing communities, where folks have come together intentionally, bought a piece of land, built homes on it, or even like apartments, or mix of rental or ownership. So we know it can be done, but this intentional model of this being accessible to single moms and designed around them, and their input from the very beginning of how this should be. Yeah we're not aware of any others.

Ebony: Wow, y'all are literally creating the template, and I just really appreciate how empowering it is for the moms from the beginning that they're being compensated to really tap into this imaginative realm that they probably don't have time to normally do, to just be able to dream and to co-create something. I'm just getting chills hearing and talking about it, because it's going to be completely life changing, and also for the children to grow up in that environment where they can see that even as a single mom, you still can have access to a village that you can create together, and that what once didn't feel possible alone is just amplified and filled with so much abundance when you do it together.

So I'm curious of course about the finances. It sounds like Motherful bought the property. Do the mothers have to pay an affordable rent to have ownership stake in it? How does the finances and ownership work for the mothers that join?

Amanda: Yeah, luckily we've been able to raise funds through donor support, foundations, city and county loans, and grants programs to afford to purchase the property and do some renovations. Then the mothers will pay essentially what amounts to rent and Motherful contributing as well, just to cover the ongoing operating expenses, like insurance, real estate taxes, things like that.

We're able to cover all the costs of operating the property by setting the rent at the equivalent of what would be affordable to somebody at or below 30% of the area median income, so these will be at least 50% below fair market value for that area, because we're not making a profit off of moms, we're just covering the basics, so that they can have what they need, and they can save what they need. We did a survey recently of the moms who want to live there, since we'll be targeting moving in around October of this year. The rents that they'll be paying are inclusive of all utilities, internet, and everything like that, they will be saving over \$1,000 a month, each family. What

they're paying now in rent and utilities is way above what they'll be having to pay at the village.

Ebony: I mean, this seems like the ultimate space for a single mom to be in. Obviously, I'm sure it will take a lot of work, especially to create the foundation for what the structure and decision making will look like, but also relationally. Maybe not everyone wants to live that way but I'm sure the demand may be more than what you all can fulfill, so how do you even decide who gets to join?

Amanda: Yeah, there's, there's definitely more people that want to live there. It's not for everybody, and it is a bit of a testing ground and new, so I think that, as we've communicated, this is Motherful Village 1.0. This is what's available, and what came to us, and is really a perfect way to get started, but Motherful wants to expand, expand on the property, or expand at another site, and you know, keep doing this, keep iterating, keep serving these moms, as we sort of plant these seeds for the future, and we show how this can be done. We can prove that it can be done and sustained and that moms can be out there thriving with this model.

Lisa: Not only is it going to be housing, it's going to be our headquarters and offices. We've never had that before. We've been sharing a space at a youth center where we're going to continue to run our resource garage and pantry out of. We've never really had offices for our staff. We're going to be starting a prepared food program where moms will be able to pick up family meals, and these are not just moms that live there, but are moms coming to our new space. The youth center has a lot of programming, so we're limited on what we can do at the space we're at now, but at the new space we'll be able to house different things. There's parking for 30, there's a gazebo with a grill, so we'll be able to do programming in the evening, because we're not able to do that now. So we'll have that community house, one of the houses is just for Motherful headquarters.

Ebony: That's great, because even if they can't live in the eco-village, at least they have access to all these other resources to tap into and still feel connected to community. So, in order to be eligible for the housing, I'm guessing you had to be a member first. I'm curious how that process went.

Amanda: We know we have to think about fair housing clauses as we're doing this, but yeah, we communicated to the moms that have shown an interest in this and want to be here, and understanding that the programming there will be designed for single moms and children and those types of families. Those are the moms that have come to us and said, yeah we want to be one of the founding families, we understand. We put it out

there like this is a cooperative, this is a new kind of thing, it's sharing units together, sharing homes together with common amenities. It definitely attracts a certain type of mom that wants to try this out, is interested in a new way of doing things, and is kind of tired of the existing models.

Ebony: Yeah and I'm sure y'all are slowly doing relational building between the founding families, because I know that that has been a huge challenge for eco-villages when they first start, is just the relational dynamics that could end up crushing it. So it seems like Motherful will really be there supporting the foundation of helping with what the governance structure will be and decision making to really guide them through the process that then eventually they can hold it on their own.

I'm curious if y'all have thought about that, and how you have been navigating what some of the challenges will be like bringing these different families together.

Lisa: Yeah we're definitely going to do some personality assessments and different things a person likes or dislikes, and just matching in a sense with the kids and how many bedrooms and all of that. We're just getting closer to that part, it's going to be our first time. It's going to be a challenge, but we're up to it. I know Amanda is excited about that.

Amanda: It'll definitely be interesting to see when the rubber meets the road who's compatible with who. No utopias, we know that, but Motherful as an organization has been facilitating moms working together and cooperation since it was founded. When we did the experience council, conflicting viewpoints about who could be a visitor there, who could be an overnight guest, things like that, those kinds of issues came up and were challenging, and it was beautiful to see the moms working through that healthy conflict.

Working with the moms in the months while we're doing construction before they move in, about what everybody agrees to, or can come to a consensus on for living in this village. We're sort of building in even after everybody moves in, 30 day check in, 60 day check in, 90 day, like, how are we feeling? This is kind of what's great about the model too is we don't have to hold people there if they decide it's not for them, and new folks can come in. It can be iterative, it can be flexible. So, I think it's going to be really awesome to see that in practice.

Lisa: Yeah, not all the moms obviously can live there, but what we did just start is a program getting landlords Motherful approved, so we can have better relationships with

landlords, so when moms need homes, we can show it on our app and get moms into other housing quicker.

Ebony: Wow, y'all are really thinking of the motherhood journey in such a holistic way, like you're getting them at every point of need, which is so beautiful. Yeah, obviously y'all have been in the practice of creating a non-hierarchical collective and I think what will really support this eco-village when conflict arises is that they have this shared purpose and identity of being single mothers and just wanting to meet the needs for themselves and their family, and so when anything arises, it's just coming back to that. Why are we all here?

Well, I hope that y'all create, I don't know, a document, it could even be a whole podcast series about your journey with this ecovillage, because there's going to be so many rich learnings, and if y'all are the only ones doing this in the U.S., you have to document it, so hopefully the template can ripple out into other places.

Lisa: Thank you. Yes, for sure.

Ebony: So, speaking of replication, I know that you all have started a version of Motherful in Colombia, so I'm curious for people who are inspired by your work and want to build a model of care for mothers in their own communities. What advice or lessons would you share?

Lisa: Well we're getting approached by different moms everywhere about how they can get connected in. We do have Motherful Colombia, and that mom, her name is Shanika Malcolm. If you follow us on Instagram, she does various videos and tells many stories of the journey there. She has a healing space there for moms, so moms can go there and stay and be healed by the oceans and different holistic practices inside of the nature that's there, which is beautiful.

Amanda: I think it's just starting with the people in the room, starting with the people you know you either want to serve or who share the same vision as you, and actually talk to those folks, bring them together, like we did with the experience council, to see what they want and what their dreams are, and what would make their lives easier and better.

I've been working in affordable housing for almost 20 years now, and this is the first time that I've worked on a housing project that actually invested at all in what the people who were going to live there, or similarly situated folks, wanted to see baking them into that

design process and visioning process from the very beginning, and keeping them engaged throughout the whole process. I would definitely start there.

Then another thing that I learned about as we were exploring other types of co-housing or cooperative communities, is folks started calling us burning spirits, and they said you need to have a burning spirit, that you need to have somebody or multiple somebody's in your crew when you're trying to do something that really believe in this, that believe that are just going to create the co-housing, because it is different, it is outside of the norms, you do get questions from lenders or insurance providers or grant makers, even foundations that will question what it is. You just have to really thoroughly believe in it, keep explaining it, and keep pushing for it. Luckily Motherful is just chock full of burning spirits.

Lisa: Yeah, we pride ourselves in being radical, revolutionary, and inside of that spirit anything can happen. Magic is there, we never take anything that we don't have to take, and we always stick by our values, no matter what, and people know that we are strong.

We definitely have a lot of partners, and we're currently writing a guide to how you can start a Motherful where you're at. We have different moms that are in different places around the world that we have on a short list to get everybody working together but we obviously have this big housing thing happening. We're closing on the 15th, so this is kind of our focus, but definitely I would say next year that guide will be coming out, and we'll be connecting with other moms around the world to start their Motherful.

Ebony: Incredible, amazing. That's exactly what we need in this world.

Lisa: Yeah, it's happening.

Ebony: Well, congratulations on securing the land, and for taking on this huge new initiative in the development of Motherful. Y'all are doing incredible work, and I'm just deeply appreciative that you exist in the world, and that you took time to share a bit about the work you're doing today.

Lisa: Thank you.

Amanda: Thank you Ebony. It's great to be here, and great to be part of the constellation of work that you do, and others in the country. It's awesome work. It's awesome to be a part of it.

[Music - Solidarity Economy (Riddim) by MADlines]

Ebony: Thank you so much for listening! Please share episodes, especially with your friends and family who aren't aware of collective models but are unfulfilled with this economy.