

WEEDING OUT CONFLICT AMONG NEIGHBOURS

by Sandra Reimer

For seven years, Marie nurtured flower beds around her senior housing complex. “I received many compliments on the gardens,” says Marie.

When three neighbours protested claiming that they wanted to garden, housing complex management restricted Marie from cultivating the beds. Disliking Marie, these residents gossiped about her and laughed at her. The gardening ban was their latest scheme to annoy her.

Over the next three years, large thistles choked out the blooms in the neglected plots.

“I was like a scared little girl hiding in a hole,” says Marie, who stayed in her apartment most of the time. If she encountered one of her tormentors, she returned home “bawling my eyes out.”

Tired of the tensions and calls to the police, in desperation, housing staff asked CJI to provide conflict resolution services.

CJI staff, Wendy Meek and Bill Smith, taught the older adults about bullying and elder abuse. “My God, I am 70 years old and I am being bullied,” Marie said to herself. But with help from Bill

and Wendy, she got her life back.

Realizing she didn't need to be controlled by her neighbours' mean behaviour, Marie became more confident and outgoing again. She started running weekly bingo for other residents, and six times a year put on a home-cooked meal for \$7 per person. At Christmas, she hosted a free meal—18 people ate a chicken dinner with all of the trimmings and received a gift from Marie.

The neighbourhood started to flourish. Some of the people in conflict moved out, while other neighbours used the tools received from CJI to build better relationships.

Fighting lung cancer,* Marie could no longer tend the flower beds, but last fall, her daughter weeded the garden so that Marie could continue to enjoy the blossoms close to her home. Another resident revived the plots beside a second building in the complex. The flowers prevail.



**Marie passed away February 19th, 2015, but agreed to share this story before she died. The cover photo is not of Marie.*



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GOT A CONFLICT?

CJI helps people of all ages in families, schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, faith communities, custody facilities, and on sports teams to resolve conflict peacefully. Email info@cjiwr.com or call **519 744-6549**

CJI's Elder Mediation Service is funded in part by the Trillium Foundation.



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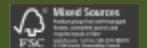


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