

Contributions Neighbours Can Make to a Good Life



My Home My Choice Windsor-Essex: Story Vignettes
***Intentional Connections with
Neighbours, Friends, and Others***

Contributions Neighbours Can Make to a Good Life

*Short story vignettes from people and families living in Windsor and Essex County.
Names were changed to maintain privacy.*

Neighbours providing practical help from time to time

School Days

Marie was included and involved in her high school in Essex County. She participated in regular classes even though she could not do academics. Students and teacher found valued roles for her in working groups within the classes she attended. As well as being included in high school, she was always considered a valued member of her local neighbourhood and community.

Marie needed assistance with everything – from getting dressed, to eating and drinking. When she came home from high school on the bus, Marie required a two person lift to get out of her wheelchair to rest her body after a full day at school. Neighbours across the street were always willing to assist with this. On the days there was no extra support at home, her mother would call over across the street and someone would come and assist with the lifting to the bed.

Adult life

As Marie got older and was no longer in high school, her day was planned differently. Now it included lifts and equipment that made it possible for one person to support her through most of her day. In the summer, one of her favourite things to do was to swim in the backyard pool of the family home. However, this was something that needed the support of two people. By now the helpful teenage neighbour was grown with two pre-school children of her own. As neighbours, they also



enjoyed the pool with their children to keep cool in the summer heat. Marie's mother had a chat with this neighbour to see if she would be willing to come over on certain days of the week with her children for a swim and assist with getting Marie in and out of the water. At the same time everyone could enjoy swimming together, splashing, making whirlpools and having fun.

This neighbour was more than happy to help, and whenever it could work, it would be planned and arranged ahead. Because of this neighbourly support, Marie had more opportunities to swim and be social.

Summary

It isn't always easy to ask for help. We need to keep in mind that it's okay when someone says they are not able to help out. We can just try again. As families, we also sometimes get asked to do things that we just can't do as well. And there are also times we are able to help out and/or loan a neighbour something they need. Even knowing all this, rejection hovers over many of us as families who support a loved one with a disability. We can always use an extra bit of encouragement from others to keep asking.

was not a good thing, as Bill had lots of energy and needed to be moving all the time. Out of concern for Bill's safety, this neighbour approached Bill's family and shared with them the dates and times this had happened. Bill's family appreciated being made aware so they could address the situation.

Getting to Know Neighbourly, Friendly Staff By Shopping at the Same Place Same Time

Bill was shopping at his regular fruit and vegetable market with his mom one day. A staff that had gotten to know Bill over the years was very complimentary about how his regular support worker treated Bill. She said this worker spoke to him with such respect and valued him as a person.

At a later date, when this staff person noticed a different support worker talking to him in a demeaning way, she let the family know that she was worried. Again, Bill's family was grateful someone had the courage to speak up.

Getting to knowing people in the community becomes their son's protection, ensuring he will feel secure when supported to do the things he needs to do.

Another time when shopping at his local grocery store, the cashier who knew Bill was very concerned over how a worker had treated Bill putting him and others in a very unsafe situation. The cashier went out of her way to contact the family to let them know what she had seen.

This could have been a very serious situation. The family appreciated being contacted so they could take positive action.

It was not easy for any of these individuals to come forward, but because of their relationship with and knowledge about Bill, they did what they thought was right. And they did exactly what the family hoped would happen.



Summary

When people participate in the same place at the same time, week after week, they get to know others over time. This is what happens to all of us. First a hello, then a smile, then a how are you, then some conversation, etc. etc.

It is these natural relationships – neighbours, friends, family, acquaintances, store owners, fitness/gym managers, librarians, coffee shop wait staff, and more – that will keep our family members the safest.

Think about what your son, daughter, sister, brother, grandchild is doing. Are they involved on a regular basis in their neighbourhood or community? If not, start with one thing.

Contribution, participation and/or presence are possible for all. It is never too soon or too late to build natural relationships.

*. From the heart of a mother,
family-to-family*

A Community Coming Together

We moved to our community so that our lives would change in pace and depth. Mostly we wanted this so our daughter would be able to meet neighbours and experience that feeling of being known as you walk down the street. We know that being known by others is part of a safeguard that no paid supporter could ever provide us as a family.

The part of our story that we want to share with you is our efforts to create a community garden. We felt it was a wonderful way to bring people together over a common interest.... And it does not relate to living with a disability at all.

In order to do this we started having over the fence conversations with our neighbour. As we got to know each other we realized this person has a passion for doing things, for organizing, and for bringing her neighbourhood together. What a great match! Imagine meeting such a person who was looking for a project.

We met and did our research. All through this our daughter was present. People began to meet her and she began to feel comfortable in their company. They always acknowledged her contributions.

We ended up writing a proposal to Communities in Bloom (funded through our town council). A small group of us, including my daughter and our wonderful neighbours, made the presentation to the local council. They immediately picked up on the idea of inclusion and our desire to donate surplus to others in our neighbourhood. Our neighbour presented this in general and asked for one of the beds to be raised up to a level where people who can't



bend or use a wheelchair might be able to access the garden. They were very pleased that we would be reaching out to include everyone. I talked about the emphasis on planning and connecting people to their community and that our daughter would be participating. They loved our proposal! It received the grant to move forward.

The town is providing the land, garden boxes, soil and water. Our gardening club makes the rules, holds meetings and welcomes others in the community who may be interested in joining us. We are a very welcoming group!

After a summer of having this community garden, we have noticed that people who have lived here since they were young are starting to wave and say hello. When our daughter, with her dad, go bike riding around the block we feel like we are part of our neighbourhood. People see us, say 'Hi', and stop to chat.

Our neighbours text us now, to check-in and ask if we are doing okay. What more could we ask for? It is a great beginning for this type of safeguard – being known and being seen, others knowing when we may need something.

.... *By a family excited to share their story*

“There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

Margaret Wheatley

