



**Hearthstone residents at the West Vaughan Community Garden**

## **Planting the seeds of belonging with a community garden**

When Hearthstone Community Group purchased a lot for its newest home, General Manager Lori Zdebiak says they decided to include space for a community garden.

“We decided to expand a bit out here so that we could have a little buffer between homes and also so we’d have an opportunity for people to interact with our people,” Zdebiak said.

Hearthstone was founded in 1992 by a group of parents looking for opportunities for their intellectually challenged adult children to live vibrant and integrated lives.

They have several residential homes in Selkirk but the West Vaughan home is the first with a community garden. They moved in last May and Year 1 was a test year, to see what direction they wanted the garden to take and what they wanted to grow.

The Selkirk & District Community Foundation provided a grant to assist with the garden.

“We’re thankful to the Foundation for the grant and the support they provide,” Zdebiak said.

The goal of the garden is to help integrate Hearthstone residents as well as people who attend their day programs into the neighbourhood. The goals also include a positive social presence, eco-benefits of organic produce and greenspace and health and wellness in a reflective space.

“We’ve been very welcomed,” Zdebiak said.

“We found that when we were developing this home, a lot of people would stop by to say hi and see who we were. This is going to be a great community for this type of integration.”

Hearthstone was assisting the Province of Manitoba to find homes for some of the last people staying at the Manitoba Development Centre in Portage la Prairie, an institution that is now closed. Some of them now live at West Vaughan.

“We’re very proud of that,” Zdebiak said.

They formed a garden committee – under the guidance of Mick Manfield, a member of the Master Gardeners Association of Manitoba - who worked on establishing the garden. All the plants were donated and they grew tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers and had an herb garden. They tried cauliflower, but “it didn’t go,” Zdebiak laughed.

She said in this test year, the bounty was intended for residents and their families.

“Kind of an interesting thing is we thought this year we’d grow for our own use, for our own houses or for staff that may be struggling, but some of our produce is disappearing,” she smiled.

“I think that’s probably a good thing. If somebody needs something they should just come take it. If somebody really needs a tomato that bad, take a tomato.”

Hearthstone residents took care of the garden and did a great job, she said.

“We are finding our people come and they tend the plants, they mow the lawn. It was so cute a little lady was coming out and watering everything. They love looking after it and walking through and touching things,” Zdebiak said.

“I think it makes us a little less scary in community.”

The garden committee will meet again in the fall to set a goal for next spring that will include more community involvement.

The Selkirk & District Community Foundation is accepting grant applications until Oct. 1. For online applications and criteria guidelines visit [sdcf.ca](http://sdcf.ca).