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## Wise Talk: A senior adult mediation service

One Scenario: Three sisters are arguing, clearly energized as they discuss the future and dredge up affronts from childhood. Their mother is repeating to a lawyer that she doesn't want to cede control of her money, stroking her dog as she looks bewildered by the discussion. Her husband is reassuring her that her family wants the best for her, as he looks lovingly at a wife he is losing to dementia...

Another Scenario: Elizabeth has just turned 94 and has been residing in her senior living apartment for 15 years. Under new management, the rules for the tenants have undergone some changes and Elizabeth is being asked to consider moving to a different apartment. She is concerned that she will be made to make a move that she is not willing to make since she strongly desires to remain in her current residence...

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Nearly everyone has a conflict story of their own that involves an aging family member or friend caught in one of many potential conflicts that seem to swirl around those negotiating the changes and transitions of aging today. Living arrangements, decisions around medical care and treatments, new partners / relationships, guardianship decisions, grand-parenting, family disputes, nursing home decisions and conflicts, end of life planning and decision-making and estate issues are just a few of the issues that can become points of contention.

This is one of the reasons the Community Dispute Resolution Center, established in Ithaca in 1983, is eager to make its services more readily available to the aging community, their families and those who live and work closely with the elderly. CDRC hopes to become a valuable resource to turn to in times of conflict and misunderstanding.

While CDRC's services are available to all residents, relatively few senior citizens use mediation. In 2002, only 60 of the 1665 individuals CDRC served were 55 or over, even though this age group represented 16.4 percent of the population. In addition, according to County Office for the Aging's Millennium Report, the percentage of people over the age of 60 will increase by 11.5 percent from 1990 to 2005. By the year 2020, a full 25 percent of the area's population will be more than 60 years of age!

Senior adult mediation typically involves many players — often family members who are concerned or affected by the decisions of the



elder person involved, also a legal representative, medical care providers and those who may be called upon to participate in present or future care. The focus is on keeping the myriad of relationships growing and respectful. The Wise Talk Senior Adult Mediation service is sensitive to issues of capacity and the often necessary need for advocacy in a conversation. And, as with any other mediation service, mediation for senior adults is always completely confidential.

Mediation operates on the conviction that people are more likely to abide by agreements that have been mutually arrived at and agreed upon as opposed to decisions that are unilateral or are mandated by the court system.

Accessing mediation services at the Community Dispute Resolution Center is quite simple:

Step One - Any party contacts CDRC for mediation.

Step Two - CDRC contacts all parties involved.

Step Three - If all parties agree, CDRC schedules a mediation.

Wise Talk is one more expression of CDRC's commitment to the conviction that individuals in negative conflict are individuals cut-off from themselves and others and that given the opportunity, the essential strength and compassion of people will move them toward healthy and honest relationships and living. Wise Talk is our effort to offer this vision of hope and reconciliation to our aging community.

If you would like more information on Wise Talk or on CDRC's other mediation or education services, please contact the agency at 293-9347.

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***Jeff Shepardson is the program development coordinator at the Community Dispute Resolution Center. The Ithaca Journal's guest columns on aging are coordinated by the Ithaca College Gerontology Institute with the Aging Services Network of Tompkins County.***

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