

# Moving from Anguish to Power\*

The landlord tried to evict these two tenants. They fought back.

Annie Gordon and Betty Lewis

Annie Gordon has lived for 45 years in the Fairlawn apartments in Boston. Betty Lewis has lived there for 39 years. In 2018, the landlord gave Annie a rent increase of \$275 per month. Betty got a rent increase of \$300 per month. They could not afford to pay the rent increases. Here is their story.

## Big Rent Increase = Big Anxiety

**Annie:** I told the landlord I could not pay the rent increase. I felt so anxious. If he evicted me, where would I go? Someone told me I should call City Life, an organization that fights to stop evictions.

## Fighting Back and Making Friends

**Betty:** I started going with Miss Annie to the City Life meetings, and now we are friends. City Life tells people like me, “Don’t be embarrassed.” I listened to other people’s stories. I realized I was not alone. I started going to protests. I spoke out. I felt so much love from other people. I started to feel better. I’m still scared though. I don’t have a lease. Sometimes I cry. Then I say, “Girl, where is your power? Where is your faith?”

**Annie:** I have some mental health issues. I wasn’t sure how much to get involved. Then I learned



\*This is a shorter version of the story on pp. 20-22.



about my rights as a tenant. I started speaking up for myself and for others. I felt more powerful. My doctor sees that this work is good for me. She says I should stay involved.

## This Is What We Want

**Betty:** I don’t mind paying a fair rent, but this increase is not fair. We are fighting for a five-year contract. In the contract, the landlord will agree not to raise rents more than 2.5% per year.

**Annie:** I feel angry at the landlord. He profits from the work we did in our community. For example, we fought to get a subway station nearby. The subway made our homes more valuable. Now the landlord wants to charge more rent, and we have to move? That’s not fair.

Sometimes I feel a little down. But then I learned to fight back. I figured I could sit down or I could stand up. So I chose to stand up for myself and for my neighbors.

**AFTER YOU READ:** According to the authors, what are two things that are not fair? What are the benefits to standing up and fighting back?

Annie Gordon (above) and Betty Lewis (left) are leaders of the Tenant Association in their apartment building. They were interviewed by Cynthia Peters, editor of The Change Agent.