

Highlighting the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

By: Amy Sobrino, MSW, LCSW

In the past several years of writing this monthly article, I've enjoyed sharing valuable information and ideas for people living with dementia and their families. As a person living with dementia or a dementia caregiver, it can be challenging to know all of the available resources and services that might be able to help reduce the stress and burden of this disease. This year, we plan to highlight various agencies and programs to help get information and access to families who need it most.

This month, we're highlighting the Long-term Care Ombudsman Program. This program is near and dear to my heart, as I worked for the Missouri Long-term Care Ombudsman Program at the beginning of my career. Ombudsman is a not too familiar word that essentially means 'advocate'. This program provides valuable support and advocacy for people living in long-term care communities and their families. During my time as an ombudsman, I helped support many residents who were facing an unexpected, unfair discharge from the long-term care community or regularly not having their calls for assistance answered quickly. These are just a few examples of common concerns ombudsmen can help with. I spoke with Kelly Richards, Illinois State Ombudsman, to share a little more about this program.

What is the mission of the Ombudsman Program?

The Ombudsman Program works to protect and improve the quality of care and quality of life for residents of long-term care communities in Illinois through individual and systemic advocacy for and on behalf of residents, including representing interests of residents before governmental agencies, reviewing and commenting on existing and proposed laws.

What kind of concerns do the Ombudsmen address?

- Violation of residents' rights or dignity
- Physical, verbal or mental abuse, deprivation of services necessary to maintain residents' physical and mental health, or unreasonable confinement
- Poor quality of care, including inadequate personal hygiene and slow response to requests for assistance
- Improper transfer or discharge of patient
- Inappropriate use of chemical or physical restraints
- Any resident concern about quality of care or quality of life

How did the Long-term Care Ombudsman Program get started?

In 1972, a presidential directive authorized states to establish specialized units to respond to the complaints made by or on the behalf of individual nursing home residents, leading to the creation of the Ombudsman demonstration projects in five states. The Public Health Service

provided for federal oversight of the projects. In 1974, the Administrative authority for the Ombudsman Program was transferred to the Administration on Aging, a part of the Department of Health and Human Services. In 1978, amendments to the Older American Act required all states to operate a Nursing Home Ombudsman Program using a program framework that relies heavily on volunteers to provide local services to resolve the complaints of individual nursing home residents. Amendments also helped define the Ombudsman's role in providing systemic advocacy by identifying significant, widespread problems, and by monitoring federal, state and local laws and policies that affect long-term care residents. In 2016, Federal Regulations for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program went into effect.

Who do the Ombudsman Program serve?

Ombudsman serve residents that live in the following types of facilities:

Skilled Nursing Facilities

Intermediate Care Facilities

Intermediate Care Facilities for the Developmentally Disabled

Assisted Living and Shared Housing Establishments

Supportive Living Programs

Sheltered Care Facilities

Specialized Mental Health Rehabilitation Facilities

Medically Complex for the Developmentally Disabled Facilities

Any individual, age 18 and older residing in one of the above referenced facilities is eligible for Ombudsman services. The resident is always the client of the Ombudsman regardless of the source of complaint. Ombudsman take direction from the resident or their representative if the resident is unable to provide direction.

How do you contact an Ombudsman?

If someone is interested in receiving assistance from an Ombudsman, they can contact the Senior Help line at 800-252-8966 and they will be directed to one of the Regional Ombudsman Programs depending on the location of the facility in which the resident resides in. In addition, they can email the State Long -Term Care Ombudsman Program at Aging.STLCOProgram@illinois.gov

Additionally, the contact information for ECCOA Ombudsman Program, is 800-283-4070, email is ombuds@seniorservices-ecco.org

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.