

Board on Aging and Long Term Care  
2018 Louise Abrahams Yaffe  
Volunteer Ombudsman Program Award recipient  
Erin M. Arndt

Erin has always known that she wanted to work with the elderly and somehow to make their lives better. Her passion for helping the elderly began when she was a little girl, as she had a close relationship with her grandparents who were a huge influence on her life, for her love of the elderly, and for volunteering. Erin's grandparents were also volunteers in local nursing homes!

Erin's Dad served three tours of duty in Vietnam and her family was stationed in California. When his his tour of duty was completed Erin's family moved to Portage, Wisconsin. It was there Erin began her employment as a dietary aid in a nursing home. Throughout her college years, Erin volunteered in the recreation department at a local nursing home, plus played the piano for patients in cardiac rehabilitation in the hospital. Erin really loved hearing the resident's stories, and because of these experiences she wanted to become a professional ombudsman.

Erin considered attending graduate school after graduating with a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. She had a major in Organizational Communication and a double minor in Gerontology and Journalism in hopes of becoming an Ombudsman. Then she met Joe, the love of her life, and her plans changed. Joe and Erin got married and started a family, while she worked at American Family Insurance and he worked to graduate from medical school.

As luck would have it one of Erin's friends from college saw the Board on Aging and Long Term Care Volunteer Ombudsman Program recruitment poster in a local YMCA and remembered Erin's desire to be an Ombudsman. Erin received the Volunteer Ombudsman information from her friend, made the call of interest to the Volunteer Coordinator, and the rest is history! Erin participated in the class held March 22, 2016 and started her incredible journey as a Volunteer Ombudsman April 18<sup>th</sup> at a nursing home in Neenah.

Erin's role as a Volunteer Ombudsman has been vital as the voice for the residents to experience, in Erin's words "life's simple pleasures", and for events that can be life changing for residents living in long term care. Each week Erin advocates for the residents to have immediate care, and a respectful response from staff to take care of their needs, like an additional pillow for comfort, locating the missing hearing aids, fixing the broken bed side rails, cleaning a dirty bathroom, and answering the call lights.

While Erin is advocating for resident's rights she takes time to sit and listen to a lonely widow needing to share her memories of her husband. Erin was persistent in speaking up for a resident when a resident said they did not have a shower for over nine months and was told the shower chair was broken, but instead while walking from room to room down the hallway one day, Erin, discovered the repaired chair had been tossed into a closet and forgotten about. Also, Erin was the voice for each resident working in tandem with the Regional Ombudsman to help residents who were being moved out of their room, rooms that they called home, to smaller spaces that could not fit all their belongings while the facility planned a remodel that never took place.

Erin takes time to educate residents on their rights and encourage them to speak up for themselves. Residents have said to Erin that they look forward to her consistent weekly visits, especially those residents who do not have family or friends visiting them.

In Erin's free time she said she loves to walk, hike, read, travel and volunteer in her children's schools. Erin, and her husband Joe, have four children; Zachery, age 22, attending University Wisconsin- Eau Claire is pursuing a medical degree, Joshua, age 20, attending University Wisconsin- Eau Claire pursuing a Nursing degree, Ellie, age 16, a sophomore in high school is a global soccer player (played twice in Spain), and Noah, age 11, is a fifth grader and an aspiring basketball star. They have two dogs, Greta and Jasper all living in Appleton Wisconsin.

The Board on Aging and Long Term Care is honored to present Erin with the prestigious Louise Abrahams Yaffe Volunteer Ombudsman Program Award for 2018. Erin is joined by her husband Joe, and children Ellie and Noah tonight for the celebration. Congratulations Erin!