



STATE OF WISCONSIN
BOARD ON AGING AND LONG TERM CARE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

25 Feb 2008

Contact: Ombudsman

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(800) 815.0015

Nursing Home Volunteer Advocacy Essential to Protect Resident Rights

The State Board on Aging and Long Term Care is the agency that advocates for seniors in long term care facilities. Professional Regional Ombudsmen are strategically located around the state. These advocates visit skilled nursing homes and Community Based Residential Facilities in response to complaints by residents, their families and others as well as to provide information and training requested by facility administrators. The large geographic area that each Ombudsman covers makes it virtually impossible for them to visit every facility on a regular basis. That's where the Volunteer Ombudsmen come in.

The Volunteer Ombudsman Program was first initiated in 4 counties some 13 years ago. It has now expanded to an additional 5 counties in central Wisconsin, as well as Kenosha and Racine counties. The volunteers chosen for this important assignment are screened comprehensively to make sure they are a good fit for our program and for the facility they will be advocating in. The volunteers we are looking for are objective individuals, with good communication skills and a caring attitude for seniors. They must have a willingness to make regular weekly visits to their assigned facility and submit monthly reports to their regional coordinator who in turn passes them to the appropriate regional ombudsman. When events happen that need the immediate attention of the Regional Ombudsman, the volunteer contacts them directly to inform them of the situation that warrants their attention.

The volunteer is there to protect the rights of the residents. Our agency does not enforce state regulations, we are advocates for those who are living in long term care facilities. Things we take for granted such as access to visitors, privacy, choice of our own physician, and voting can be overlooked by nursing homes. It is the job of our agency to make sure rights like these are protected. Another thing that must be insured for the resident is that he or she is able to make complaints without fear of retaliation. Many elders are afraid to speak up and our volunteers help them find their own voice to express their concerns and wishes to the facility. Some residents have family that can act as a voice for their loved one, others are not so lucky. With no family to help them speak up or express concern over their treatment, Volunteer

Ombudsman are very important in helping them with them to resolve their problems. The volunteers often can help with simple problems, which if left unsolved could turn into something bigger. Residents look forward to the visit from "their volunteer ombudsman". Most of the people simply want to talk about what when on during the week. Volunteers are very interested in the organized activities of the facility and receive monthly activity calendars. The volunteers might attend the activity to observe the resident and their participation, but volunteers never participate in the activity as they are strictly bound to their role as advocates and the volunteers are not program personnel.

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Volunteers undergo an intense initial 7 hour training, with additional in-services held throughout the year. The value of the commitment that they make to the state's elderly in long term care is immeasurable. Often, when asked, the volunteers say that they feel they get more out of the experience than they give. But that is the kind of individuals we have in our program. They give unselfishly of their time and energy to make the long term care experience a better one for our elderly.

To find out about becoming a Volunteer Ombudsman we have a toll free number 1-800-815-0015 that can be called to express interest .

*By: Suzanne Ankenbrandt
Volunteer Coordinator
Stevens Point*

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