



VOLUNTEER ADVOCATE PROGRAM

Overview

The New Jersey Office of the Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly was created by statute to preserve and protect the health, safety and welfare of seniors, 60 years of age or older, residing in long-term health care facilities.

The Volunteer Advocate Program adds a new dimension to that mandate by establishing a visible presence within the facilities to represent the need and concerns of residents. Volunteer Advocates are trained and certified by the Office of the Ombudsman to provide on-site advocacy to residents and their family members. Advocates complement the investigative function of the Ombudsman's Office by attempting to resolve issues at the lowest level in the long-term care facility and referring complaints of abuse, neglect and exploitation for investigation.

The Volunteer Advocate Program was started in 1993 as a pilot project in Essex, Hudson, Morris and Union Counties. Due to the success of the pilot, the Volunteer Advocate Program was expanded in 1995 to include all 21 counties in New Jersey. Today there are over 240 Volunteer Advocates assigned to Nursing Homes throughout the state. The goal of the program is to recruit volunteers to be placed in all skilled nursing facilities throughout the state. The second phase of the program is to recruit and train volunteers to be assigned to Assisted Living facilities to advocate for the rights of residents.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Volunteer Advocate Program is to provide the best on-site advocacy service to assist long-term care residents, their family members and facility staff in proactively resolving quality of care and quality of life issues as close to the bedside as possible.

By utilizing teams of volunteers, professional staff and the local agency resources, the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Volunteer Advocate Program initiative shall strive to improve levels of care received, to enhance the quality of life experienced and through consis

tent presence and advocacy, prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation of New Jersey's elderly (60 years of age +) residents who reside in long-term care facilities throughout the state.

Major Functions of Volunteer Advocates:

- Maintain presence in long-term care facilities.
- Respond to concerns and complaints to resolve through communication and resolution techniques.
- Educate and inform residents, family members and staff about residents' rights and the Ombudsman services.
- Empower residents to advocate on their own behalf by exercising their rights in specific ways.

Volunteer Advocate Job Description

Volunteer Advocate Program Mission: To promote the well-being and quality of life for residents 60 years of age and older, who reside in long-term care (LTC) facilities in New Jersey.

Volunteer Advocate Reports To: Regional Coordinator and State Coordinator, Volunteer Advocate Program, NJ Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- ✓ Volunteer Advocates will make regular weekly visits to assigned long-term care facility to meet with residents;
- ✓ Educate residents and their family members about Ombudsman's programs and residents' rights;
- ✓ Empower residents to advocate for themselves by exercising their rights in very specific ways;
- ✓ Proactively resolve quality of care and quality of life issues within the long-term care facility through the facility's assigned contact person;
- ✓ Collaborate with Ombudsman Field Investigators in resolving issues that are referred for investigation by the Volunteer Advocate;
- ✓ When invited, make collaborative site visits with Ombudsman Field Investigators to review complaints or concerns;
- ✓ Follow LTCO's reporting and documentation procedures in instances of possible abuse, neglect and or exploitation;
- ✓ Maintain accurate records of problems/concerns reported; complete and submit monthly activity reports to Regional Coordinator; attend resident and family council meetings when invited;
- ✓ Attend the annual survey conducted by the Department of Health and discuss with survey team representatives any concerns or issues the Volunteer Advocate may have with the quality of care or the care of life of the LTC facility's residents; Report these findings to the Regional Coordinator; and
- ✓ Attend quarterly in-service/educational meetings held by Regional Coordinator;

QUALIFICATIONS

Applicants must meet the following requirements for participation in the Volunteer Advocate Program:

- Twenty-one (21) years of age or older and possess a valid New Jersey driver's license or have access to public transportation.
- Interested in promoting and protecting the rights of elderly long-term care residents.
- Dependable, possess good verbal skills, including active listening skills.

- Free from conflict of interest. (See Mission Statement/Conflict of Interest Form).
- Not a habitual user of controlled dangerous substances. Has never been convicted of a felony or pleaded guilty to an indictment, information or complaint alleging violation of a federal or state law.

TIME COMMITMENT

Attend a thirty-two (32) hour training class, pass certification exam with a grade of 70% or higher; attend quarterly regional meetings; and visit an assigned long-term care facility for a minimum of four hours per week.

SUPERVISION

Volunteer Advocates are directly supervised by the Regional Coordinator in conjunction with the State Coordinator who is responsible for providing overall supervision for the Volunteer Advocate Program.

NOTE:

- Volunteer Advocates are advised not to administer food or liquids including, but not limited to, water, alcohol, hot or cold beverages to residents.
- Volunteer Advocates are not permitted to dispense medications, including over-the-counter drugs.
- Volunteer Advocates are not permitted to give direct care to the residents of the LTC facility, including, but not limited to, change a resident's clothes, perform body checks, lift or turn (re-position) a resident, push a wheelchair, or assist with feeding or toileting a resident.