



MIDCUMBERLAND

Ombudsman

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program: A Voice for the Voiceless

Mid-Cumberland Human Resource Agency has a long history of service to older adults in a variety of capacities. The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is just one example of the vitally important work they do to enrich the quality of life of older Tennesseans. The mission of the Long Term Care Ombudsman (OMB) Program is to protect the Federally mandated rights of the residents of long-term care facilities and to assure each resident receives the highest level of care and quality of life. The organization is committed to attaining the dignity of each resident.

Residents of long-term facilities are often reluctant to voice complaints because they fear they will be punished by staff. The residents who are not cognitively able to voice complaints are even more vulnerable. According to the World Health Organization, one out of six persons age 60+ has experienced abuse in a community setting. Two out of three staff members at long-term care facilities report that they have committed abuse in the past year. The need for this program cannot be understated.

What does it mean to advocate for the rights of residents? Staff of the program resolve problems concerning general welfare, health, and safety of residents. Residents have a right to quality care governed by dignity. Older adults who have no family to advocate for them are given a voice by the Ombudsman Program. OMB works closely with the TN Department of Health, Adult Protective Services, Legal Aid, the TN Justice Center, local city and state law enforcement, facility staff, and corporate officials of long-term care facilities to resolve care and quality of life complaints for residents.



Long-Term Care Ombudsman program volunteers were recognized at a luncheon in October 2022 for their dedicated service in advocating for older adults residing in long-term care facilities.

The following case is a recent example of the difference the Ombudsman Program makes for residents:

THE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM WAS NOTIFIED THAT A RESIDENT WITH DEMENTIA HAD LEFT HIS ASSISTED LIVING AND WAS FOUND WALKING ON THE INTERSTATE. POLICE HAD RETURNED HIM TO HIS FACILITY. UPON GOING TO THE FACILITY AND CHECKING ON THE RESIDENT, IT WAS FOUND THAT THE FACILITY HAD NO STAFF IN THE BUILDING DURING THE EARLY MORNING, AND NO ONE HAD ASSESSED THE RESIDENT TO DETERMINE THAT HE NEEDED A SECURE MEMORY CARE SETTING. THE OMBUDSMAN CONTINUED TO WORK WITH THE RESIDENT, FAMILY AND FACILITY TO ENSURE GOOD CARE FOR THE RESIDENT AND ENSURE THAT IT WAS ADEQUATELY STAFFED AT ALL HOURS.

DURING THE SCOPE OF OMBUDSMAN INVOLVEMENT, IT WAS FOUND THAT THE FACILITY DIDN'T WANT TO INVEST IN THE EQUIPMENT NECESSARY TO ARM THE ALARM ON THE MEMORY CARE EMERGENCY EXIT. INSTEAD OF AN ALARM, THEY WERE PUSHING FURNITURE IN FRONT OF THE DOOR AND PARKING CARS OUTSIDE OF THE EMERGENCY EXIT DOOR SO THAT IT COULDN'T OPEN. SHOULD THERE HAVE BEEN A FIRE OR EMERGENCY, THE RESIDENTS AND STAFF ON THAT UNIT WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO EXIT THE BUILDING. THE OMBUDSMAN PERSISTENTLY RETURNED TO THE FACILITY TO CHECK ON THE FIRE DOOR AND FOUND THAT THE PROBLEM HAD NOT BEEN RESOLVED. THE OMBUDSMAN CONTACTED LIFE SAFETY, THE FIRE PORTION OF TN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, AND WORKED WITH INVESTIGATORS, TO ENSURE THAT THE FACILITY WAS NOT BLOCKING THE FIRE EXIT AND HAD INSTALLED THE ALARM SYSTEM FOR THE EXIT DOOR. THE WORK OF THE OMBUDSMAN RESULTED IN THE RESTORATION OF SAFETY FOR ALL RESIDENTS OF THE FACILITY.

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program finds resolutions annually for hundreds of problems arising in long-term care facilities and has a 96% success rate. While this is a Federally mandated program, Federal funds do not cover the full costs of staffing. West End Home Foundation funding helps fill this gap to ensure that all residents of nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other community residential settings have an Ombudsman to advocate for their safety and dignity.

It was hoped that the quality-of-care issues that were so prevalent during the pandemic would lead to positive changes in the nursing home industry. Unfortunately, the Ombudsman Program staff report just the opposite. Care complaints have hit an all-time high. Staffing shortages are impacting all positions including dietary, housekeeping, caregivers, and nurses. The result is substandard care at all levels largely because there are simply not enough staff to provide the quality of care that residents deserve and are entitled to. The problem is far too large for one agency to solve but Mid-Cumberland Human Resource Agency is making a difference everyday through their tireless efforts to be a voice for the voiceless.