

# **Retaining Effective Ombudsman Volunteers**

**Volunteer Coordinator's Conference Call  
June 20, 2006**

## **NOTES**

### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

Conference call participants were welcomed to the Ombudsman Volunteer Coordinators Conference call sponsored by the National Ombudsman Resource Center (NORC). These calls generally last 1.5 hours with time for questions and answers at the end. The NORC holds conference calls for volunteer coordinators twice a year (generally in the summer and winter).

- 110 participants joined the call today representing 38 states
- contact information for today's presenters follows at the end of this document

### **II. Ombudsman Compendium Chapter on Retention**

**Julie Meashey**, Ombudsman Specialist, NORC - brief overview of project & Retention Chapter

⇒ Key concepts: On-going support, recognition, assessment, & supervision

The topic of our call today is "Retaining Effective Ombudsman Volunteers" and much of the information you will hear presented this afternoon is shared in the Ombudsman Compendium chapter titled "Retention." The Ombudsman Compendium is a resource document from the NORC intended to assist individuals who are responsible for recruiting, training, and retaining effective long-term care ombudsmen (both paid and volunteer).

The Compendium pulls guidance from four main resources:

- the Older Americans Act,
- Administration on Aging Policy Interpretations,
- the Institute of Medicine Study titled "Real People Real Problems: An Evaluation of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs of the Older Americans Act," and
- "Training and Qualifications for the LTCOP," a paper from the Bader Report titled "The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program: Rethinking and Retooling for the Future."

Each section and subsection have a short narrative followed by key points from the main references, followed by examples and references to sample items that will appear in the appendices.

- The Ombudsman Compendium will appear on the NORC website under the "Library" - the Recruitment chapter is currently posted; the Retention chapter should be up in the next few weeks.

The purpose of chapter on Retention is to provide ombudsman programs with tools and strategies that promote retention of skilled and effective ombudsmen. There are several successful practices in the area of retention that aid in the maintenance of a skilled ombudsman workforce. Understanding and supporting what motivates ombudsmen, both paid and volunteer, is essential to retaining a skilled ombudsman workforce. Other key elements of retention include providing continuous support for ombudsman staff and volunteers, acknowledging the importance of formal and informal recognition, implementing routine performance assessment, and establishing program policies and procedures that support and uphold ombudsman core values.

Our speakers this afternoon will be sharing specific strategies and approaches related to providing on-going support, recognition, and assessment & supervision.

### **III. Providing On-going Support**

#### **Mentoring**

**Laura Smith**, Ombudsman Volunteer Coordinator, Salt Lake County, Utah

Salt Lake County has 95 long-term care facilities with 5,000 residents. Mentoring Program has been a real work in programs:

- Started mentorship program 7 years ago
- learning as they are going and continuing to add and revise as needed

#### **Understanding what a mentor is:**

- A mentor is an experienced and friendly staff person who is assigned to work with a new staff member and serve the roles of model, social support, tutor and peer resource;
- A mentoring program supplements existing orientation and training and can increase staff retention, motivation, satisfaction and productivity; and
- A mentor can provide continuity in the orientation process and increase quality of resident care.

#### **The Salt Lake County Mentorship Program:**

- Paid staff and/or volunteer staff are assigned to a newly 'classroom trained' volunteer to be their mentor.
- Each new ombudsman (whether Quality Issues Specialist or Certified Ombudsman) is required a basic number of 'shadowing' hours with their assigned mentor. They can always shadow more hours but never less than required.

## **Mentoring & Retention**

The mentorship program has had a definite impact on staff retention - volunteers seem more motivated & satisfied with what they are doing and the program is seeing a great deal more productivity

- mentorship provides continuity; everyone is on same page – all techniques are consistent
- volunteers become more productive in a shorter amount of time

## **Shadowing:**

- The mentor and new ombudsman will go out together on a graduated training basis.
- Before going out to a facility for a ‘first shadow’ experience give good background information to the trainee regarding the facility.
  - Look over the last two surveys
  - Print off the current year’s record of ombudsman complaints made regarding the facility to be visited, and talk about any new issues which have surfaced.
  - Inform trainee of things to watch for in this specific facility; and
  - Explain what you know about facility staff personalities and how to work with them.
- Typical 1<sup>st</sup> visit would include a trainee going to a facility and shadowing the mentor while they, a)introduce themselves to the administrator letting them know ombudsmen are in the building; 2)doing a walk through the building and pointing out the things the new ombudsman should be looking for whenever in the facility (see the ‘ Facility Monitor Reminder’ form); 3) speaking with residents; 4)addressing brief service issues; 5)completing a complaint intake and reporting it to the office; 6)exiting from the facility; 7) completing documentation.
  - You may or may not be able to open a case or do a brief service the first time out. But you want to make sure the trainee has had that experience before completing their shadowing.
- In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Visit the mentor would want to start backing off and allowing the trainee do more on their own as the mentor watches and coaches from the side lines.
- Each additional shadowing experience the mentor should back off more and more until they are shadowing the trainee and the trainee is handling the visit.
  - It is then that the Mentor will introduce the new ombudsman to the facilities where they will be either the QIS ombudsman or the certified ombudsman.
- The documentation of this on-the-job training process includes:
  - Volunteer Shadow - The mentor completes this following each shadow experience. It is filed in the trainee’s personnel file under ‘reports’ to document the progression of their ability to perform their responsibilities.

- Shadowing Experience Evaluation - This is sent to the trainee after they have completed their shadowing. The program uses this tool to evaluate the mentor and make changes to the training program.

## **Discussion Groups**

**Ken Meyer**, East End Coordinator, LTC Ombudservice Program of Suffolk County, NY

Program Specs:

- covers Long Island area; population 1.5 million
- able to cut attrition by 20% using discussion group model

### **Laying the groundwork:**

- In Dec. 2003 – developed a questionnaire asking volunteers for input on how to make the program more responsive & asked "Would you be interested in attending meetings with ombudsman staff members?" Most answered yes and the discussion groups began.
- Goal: to make groups more consistent, formalize location, time & date

### **Benefits of Discussion Groups**

Being a volunteer can be solitary experience (most are assigned as the single person covering the facility). Discussion groups provide on-going support in an informal environment.

- Volunteers share their successes, receive a safe place to vent and share their knowledge of community resources. Occasionally they share personal experiences.
- Newer volunteers get the chance to learn from more experienced ombudsmen
- Friendships have been formed (no marriages yet!)

### **Structure of Discussion Groups**

The county has 5 groups that meet on a quarterly basis. These groups meet in different parts of the county and usually in conference rooms of public libraries or Area Agency on Aging meeting rooms.

- Volunteers are assigned to group closest to their home, but are free to attend any discussion group they like.
- Refreshments are served
- Program seeks to accommodate schedules by varying dates and times
- group meetings scheduled for about 2 hours each

One advantage to this approach is the volunteers get to know one another and the program staff gets to know the volunteers. Recently they have received a volunteer request to rotate staff to new discussion groups so that they get to meet all the coordinators.

## **Evaluation**

The program recently sent out a discussion group evaluation and received some great input about activities for discussion group time (ie. role plays, brainstorming, info updates, discuss new regulations, handouts, etc.)

Drawbacks – Small groups are not for everyone; some like a larger group (don't feel pressure to speak). The challenge is to create enough diversity of ideas to unite. Some volunteers prefer to attend only volunteer recognition or holiday party.

## **Advice for Replication**

First, ask volunteers what they want from the program and be willing to reevaluate & change course as necessary. Evaluation should be built into the process. Receive feedback from informal discussions but also from formal process.

- Be flexible - we had to place one group on hiatus once when the attendance was low.

**Jim Gallacher**, Ombudsman Volunteer, Suffolk County, NY

One of 12 volunteers who attend East End Discussion Group. Ombudsmen in his discussion group in both nursing homes and some cover a few adult homes. Discussion Group meetings are held quarterly with volunteers receiving lots of notice about the date/time. (For example - just got September notice in mail).

## **Discussion Group Process**

There is a Discussion group to be held tomorrow. During the group, updates will be given. Once the ombudsman has given an introduction, there is a roundtable discussion where any topic is game. Previous discussion topics have included:

- what is an appropriate subject for a Resident Council Meeting
- discussions of facility menu items/diets
- case specific discussion involving a resident who wanted a divorce (on Medicaid) – discussed how to get someone to represent her. With the help of the discussion group, volunteer was able to identify a resource that would provide for a pro bono arrangement)
- talk a lot about food & menu planning
- discussion group member who is retired psych nurse and is most informative and keeps the group up on appropriate care practices

## **Benefits of Discussion Group**

- keeps you right on top of things
- keeps it from being a solitary experience
- comforting to know that others are doing the same thing

## **IV. Recognition Concepts**

Making sure that recognition happens consistently is more important than the size of the gesture. Recognition can be given in small thoughtful gestures such as sending a thank you card or

rewarding someone with a certificate. However, larger forms of recognition such as receptions, banquets and gifts are also popular particularly with ombudsman volunteer programs. Never underestimate the value of effective praising.

## **Rules for Recognition**

**John Willis, Texas State Ombudsman**

One form of recognition is to train a volunteer well & then give them credit for being trained well – this effort is a form of recognition and also leads to understanding of the value of training.

### **Ideas about Recognition**

Early in the Texas volunteer program history, the State Ombudsman program sought and successfully received an Attorney General's opinion on Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) ability to spend program funding on volunteer recognition ceremonies, banquets, etc.

- about 10 years ago this allowed programs to allocate up to \$50/person for recognition activities (to cover meal, special speaker, t-shirts, etc.)
- almost all AAAs consistently have annual recognition ceremony – most take the opportunity to reach out to the community for donations give-away items; format varies from county to county

At the State Program level, we provide special plaques with the state seal to volunteers who have reached 10, 15, and 20 year marks with the program. Will be awarding 28 plaques this year; next year have someone to recognize who has been with the program for 25 years!

State Program has also ordered lapel pins with the logo “Tough Enough to Care” – part of the Texas Volunteer Campaign & slogan.

### **Funding changes**

- State Ombudsman Program used to order t-shirts for volunteers with the logo, but have gotten to a point where they could not afford to do t-shirts at this level anymore
- State Program does have a uniform logo that is made available to local ombudsmen who can utilize it on shirts

### **Other Forms of Recognition**

State Ombudsman Program just consolidated into a very large agency a year and a half ago - has changed flexibility a little.

- Used to do a Long-Term Care Ombudsman Day when legislation was being considered. This offered an opportunity to recognize volunteers who were able to attend (got to have pictures taken)
- Also used to get Governor's proclamation to promote program & provide recognition

Volunteers receive a Certificate of Completion for making it through training (signed by State Ombudsman and presented by AAA).

Another way to recognize volunteers is to have picture on certification badge or in the nursing facility.

- some AAAs format a special template to have posted in facility - includes phone number for AAA (helps w/ access & boosting status of volunteer)

**Cheryl Cordell**, Texas Department on Aging

### **Handouts for TX Program**

Effective Praising – TX Dept of Health (source) – communicates how important it is just to praise volunteers. A lot of times providing praise is just being specific about what the volunteer did on behalf of program.

Rules for Recognition – also from another source – Communicates importance of providing recognition frequently, and making sure it is varied, and honest. States recognition needs to be give to the person (not the work). Recognition should be individualized as much as possible and as always, reward what you want more of.

### **Special forms of recognition**

- 2 Texas programs nominated volunteers to receive national recognition this year and this was highlighted in their newsletter
- Managing ombudsmen are always looking for ways to combine promotion for the program with recognition for volunteers

**One last idea** - Try to time State visits to local programs for when they are doing on-going training with volunteers. This gives a chance to recognize volunteers. Or if you can't be there in person, offer to recognize to volunteers by conference call; provide updates from state level, praise efforts (anytime someone from State can give credit it is most appreciated).

### **Beyond the Basics of Recognition**

**Kellie Miller**, Volunteer Ombudsman Director, Wisconsin Board on Aging & LTC

Program Specs:

- Program is 12 years old
- have 100 volunteers and exists in 12 counties
- would like to see program go statewide (covering all 72 counties)

### **Success in Partnerships**

Has developed relationship with AARP of Wisconsin – both local and statewide chapters

- started with a phone call to see what they could do for and with each other (not only recruitment; but also with retention)

AARP Wisconsin is now involved in assistance with recruitment & recognition - it is because they assist with recruitment that they have come to also assist with recognition.

- ⇒ AARP has asked what they can do to help Ombudsman Program thank AARP members serving as volunteers (common interests identified here)
- ⇒ AARP has given monetary gifts to help with local recognition activities
- ⇒ Have a volunteer liaison that comes to every new ombudsman volunteer class - shares about AARP (10 minutes) and provide trinkets such as pads, pens, etc.
- ⇒ Last year, AARP bought canvas bags w/ AARP logo & aging logo on other side; also bought sheet cakes for recognition
- ⇒ Ombudsman Volunteer Director & AARP Representative meet every month to decide how to improve & promote programs
- ⇒ Relationship was forged with Associate State Director for Outreach (Ohio has this relationship too) – sees no reason why people in her title could not help out other programs

### **Coordinating Award Ceremony w/ Other Events**

When the volunteer program turned 10 years old in 2004, the Wisconsin Board on Aging named an award after a retired board member whose vision it was to create the program.

- gave out 3<sup>rd</sup> award this year (lead and crystal vase w/ placard)
- formal nomination process is followed - top 3 nominations go to Executive Board for final selection

Through establishing relationships with other agencies (networking), program has been able to "piggyback" on celebrations or conferences put on by other organizations

- last year the ombudsman volunteer award was given at Alzheimer's Conference – volunteer received award at luncheon in front of 400 people (raises prestige of award)

### **Funding for Recognition**

Program has established a separate account to take donations for volunteer recognition

- includes honorariums
- \$ from small fundraising events

Also through United Way has opportunity to adopt Board on Aging (to provide funding for volunteer programming).

Local recognition is provided in 3 different parts of the state and usually wrapped around an in-service; volunteers have expressed that they want paid staff (as many as possible) to attend events and be in the room to provide technical assistance - usually includes State Ombudsman, AARP representative

- gives volunteers chance to play “stump” the regional ombudsmen

### **Additional opportunities**

To provide some additional opportunities for recognition

- program hand selects volunteers to assist staff at exhibit booths
- volunteers are asked to be guest speakers at training events
- included in special projects at Board on Aging office



Looking at starting a mentorship program; gives volunteer's time off as necessary (as a way to get some much needed R&R).

## **V. Assessment & Supervision**

### **Career Ladders & Assessment**

**Laura Smith**, Ombudsman Volunteer Coordinator, Salt Lake County, Utah

#### **Career ladders**

If an individual starts at a simplified level – allows trainee to grow into the program & work their way up; allows time for program to work with them and identify what the most successful strategy for advancement.

Advantage of two levels is it gets volunteers into the facility's faster & allows them to be more productive at a faster pace

- increases retention rate
- provides for more meaningful recognition
- also allows volunteers to utilize specialized skills – using expertise they already have to benefit program; allows them to have increased presence in facilities

One potential drawback (from volunteer perspective) might be the additional paperwork involved when advancing to 2nd level.

#### **Assessments & Evaluations**

Process begins w/ initial interview; 2 levels: Quality Issues Specialist & Certified Ombudsman (both volunteer positions)

##### Interview format

- follows basic interview structure for each volunteer
- helps to stay on track & ask all the right questions

##### Observation

- Another part of process is observations through interaction during training, shadowing

##### Screening process

- each volunteer passes a criminal background investigation, provides 3 personal references, and completes an extensive application w/ conflict of interest screen

##### Assessing during training

- program staff reviews quizzes, self-study modules
- volunteers must pass a final test (min. of 70% required)

### Shadowing

- Next assessment level comes w/ shadowing (see handout) - mentor gives feedback about potential Certified Ombudsman & how they did during shadowing (interaction w/ individuals; good w/ investigating, etc.)
- weekly phone contacts are part of assessment process
- documentation is reviewed

### Annual Evaluation

- Program uses position description to evaluate on an annual basis – evaluation is built into position description
- rate from unsatisfactory to excellent levels
- staff person sits down and goes over the evaluation in-person (helps to determine where volunteer might need additional coaching & instructions)

### Program Evaluation

- Annual surveys are conducted with all volunteer staff
- asks volunteers to evaluate the program as a whole
- collects feedback on training, shadowing, general way the program operates, etc.

### Staff Input - Evaluation

- Also has the Ombudsman Program staff evaluate utilization of volunteer staff – gives them the opportunity to help set annual goals.

### Training Evaluation

- At the completion of each training they also ask to volunteers to fill out an evaluation; also get feedback from mentoring experience (see handout).

### Exit Interview

- Finally they utilize the exit interview as a form of evaluation. Usually they discuss items with the volunteer in person; gives them a formal way of reporting back as to how things have gone and helps staff to know what to do better in the future.

## **VI. Questions**

**Paula Moreau, RI – Q: Interested in stipend for volunteers that someone mentioned – wondered where funds came from?**

Laura Smith, UT - A: Funds come through different directions – AARP, another part from AAA (had extra \$ and chose to use in volunteer program)

**Q: How is volunteer selected to receive the stipend?**

A: Volunteers have expressed how much they love the work & would like to do it as a part-time job. Because staff knows this and the abilities of the volunteer they have been able to hand pick these individuals. Stipend is \$10/hour.

**Q: Who mentioned they got an AG's Office involved in assistance with funds for recognition?**

John Willis, TX - A: The Texas AG issued an opinion that volunteer recognition is an allowable cost under Older Americans Act funding.

**Sherilyn Moe, MN – Q: How many staff do you have that work solely with volunteers (Volunteer Management)?**

John Willis, TX - A: This is a multi-task job - Regional ombudsmen also do the volunteer coordination. The State Ombudsman Program once a person who had as single duty volunteer coordination but not anymore. It is a struggle for ombudsmen at the local level to do this task in addition to their other duties.

Kellie Miller, WI – A: We have 3 people in charge of the Volunteer Ombudsman Program; 2 Coordinators for different parts of the state (work as volunteer managers) and Volunteer Director who works both with Regional Ombudsmen and State Ombudsman

Laura Smith, UT – A: All program staff works very closely with volunteer staff. Laura is the Volunteer Coordinator. Her's is the only Volunteer Coordinator position in the state of Utah; Salt Lake is unique in that they are the most densely populated area. She works hand-in-hand with the State Ombudsman and in partnership w/ AARP UT (planning on bringing everyone throughout state seeking to become ombudsman volunteer to Salt Lake to receive training).

Ken Meyer, NY – A: State program has 1 statewide coordinator that oversees the entire state program. At the county level there are 58 county coordinators; Suffolk County has 1 coordinator and 1 part-time person responsible for recruitment.

**Geraldine Adams, Hudson, NY – Q: One problem we always have is with recruitment - we do not seem able to get people interested in the program. How do we go about drumming up business (volunteers)?**

Laura Smith, UT – A: Worked directly through state office of AARP UT – works w/ community liaison individual. You could call your state office. Our program was able to select zip code areas to target certain demographics (availability of this service probably depends on location – some locations are difficult). A good technique might be educating public about the program itself; speaking to programs (gerontology students, university volunteer board).

Kellie Miller, WI - A: Has had a great response from media (newspapers – positive stories; press release for recruitment); recognize volunteers w/ statewide award – has media contact; suggests using picture of volunteer with article - people read it and think, "now this is something I can do."

Ken Meyer, NY – A: Uses of public library system for discussion groups and they have been most generous in providing space to display information about the program; also use of community newspapers – free public service announcements

Cheryl Cordell, TX – A: One of our most effective recruitment items has been a bookmark – matches volunteer recruitment brochure w/ slogan; twice now have sent them to libraries; sent same bookmarks to pharmacies across state.

Carlos Naranyo, LA – A: Adds he has a lot of success w/ radio ads.

**Alexa Mann, VT – Q: Recruitment of college students? Reliability? Longevity?**

Laura Smith, UT – A: Initially had troubles w/ having them in Certified Positions – now w/ non-certified position they are more successful. Notes that students are very productive in role of non-certified ombudsman; find that they actually produce better in that role; has many students coming back and doing additional work as volunteers – this helps w/ other parts of their education requirements. Notes that she has sent materials to help w/ promoting program to universities and this has helped.

**Q: Is there any special documentation aspect that this level of volunteer requires?**

Laura Smith, UT - A: Usually bring these forms with them - includes information about supervision, periodic evaluation, reporting back, keeping track of volunteer hours.

## **VII. Wrap-Up**

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