

As a retired nursing home administrator, Beverly Cohen-Champagne felt particularly called to be an Ombudsman volunteer. For three decades, it was Beverly's job to ensure that residents received quality care and that facilities were in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations. Every day, she acted as the primary liaison for residents, families, nurses, healthcare staff, and the general public, maintaining everyone's health and safety.

"After I retired, my cousin was in a local facility, and I became his advocate. I realized that without my advocacy, my family wouldn't have known what to ask for. I knew then I should be an ombudsman because people need an advocate when their families don't know what to ask for."

Seeing the critical importance of Ombudsman volunteers, Beverly believes it positively affects all involved, not just the residents. She says it's a win for the residents and their loved ones when they have a better understanding of their rights and what is happening.

"I think that it's really important because residents and families are left to imagine life in a nursing home – when they feel like they have given up so much and they really don't know what their rights are, what they have to ask for, the type of care they have a right to. Unless someone educates them when they come in, they feel so vulnerable that a lot of families and residents are just angry."

Today, Beverly is helping to care for her older brother, Don, who is currently a resident at a nursing home. Growing up in Albany, NY as only siblings, Don and Beverly are very close and have always been there for one another. For a majority of his teaching career, Don was a math professor at SUNY Cobleskill, so maintaining & having close relationships is important to Don, having someone to talk to, whether it's staff, an advocate, a friend, or family.

"I feel fortunate that I have help. Bev is here. Nurses are nice. Friends come by, even my former college teacher. For me, it's sort of the same as an ombudsman because we talk about my problems, but they never do anything when I mention these problems. We just talk."

Beverly is clear in pointing out that there is a crucial difference between a friend/family member and an Ombudsman volunteer.

"I think most people don't know what an ombudsman is, and I think that feeling useful and feeling like you're doing something to improve someone else's quality of life. Not only are you there to listen, but you are also there to assist them in finding solutions that a friend might not be able to do."

She notes that an Ombudsman volunteer is an important part of the resident's care team. With the resident's permission, Ombudsman volunteers can review medical records, talk with administration, social workers, and the medical team to gain a holistic, well-rounded look at the resident's experience in the facility.

"You are not just a friendly visitor. You are asking if there's anything I can do to help you. You are a problem solver. Their advocate."

When asked why someone should become an Ombudsman volunteer, Beverly had this to say, "A great reason is that you would be helping people who are very vulnerable and are at a stage in their life where they really need the help... What more can you do?"

“I have been a caregiver all my life, in one way or another. Many people have been caregivers depending on the jobs they have been doing. It’s really a way to give back to your community and feel useful.”

“It would really be a wonderful thing to have an ombudsman in every facility!”

About the Ombudsman Volunteer Program

Ombudsman Volunteers spend about 2-4 hours a week visiting nursing homes and adult care facilities, meeting with residents, providing education on residents’ rights, advocating to improve their quality of care, and empowering them to make their voices heard.

Across New York State, Ombudsman Volunteers are crucial in ensuring that residents’ rights are respected.

Ombudsman Volunteers with the regional Long Term Care Ombudsman Program in the Capital Region and beyond receive comprehensive training on how to become an advocate.

Ombudsman Volunteers are needed in your community. To learn more about volunteering, please contact us at <LINK HERE>.