



STATE OF WISCONSIN
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Volunteer Ombudsman Program Celebrates 30th Anniversary
of Being a Voice for Long Term Care Consumers

The Volunteer Ombudsman Program (VOP), a statewide advocacy service dedicated to protecting the interests of residents of long term care facilities, is celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2024. The VOP is a program of WI's Board on Aging and Long Term Care and works closely with State and Regional Ombudsmen to promote the rights of individuals aged 60 years and older, living in nursing homes and assisted living communities. The VOP began in 1994 as a pilot project in four counties and has grown to operate in 36 of Wisconsin's counties.

Volunteer Ombudsmen promote and protect the rights of older adults by making unannounced weekly visits to a long term care facility to observe conditions, interact with residents, and advocate for their rights. Volunteers observe general living conditions, listen to concerns from residents, and empower residents and their families to communicate concerns or complaints to the facility's administration with the goal of resolving resident issues. "Our volunteers form bonds and connections with residents and become trusted supports. They become a voice for people who may have lost theirs," said Andie Grassl, Volunteer Ombudsman Coordinator for Northeast WI.

"I've been a Volunteer Ombudsman for 9 years, and am so grateful for the weekly opportunity it provides me to help make a difference in the lives of those living in long term care facilities," said Erin Arndt, whose visits serve a valuable role in promoting quality care for the elderly.

Each volunteer is given training, guidance, and support to allow them to be as impactful as possible during their experience. Volunteer Ombudsmen are thoroughly screened and must pass a background check. Education regarding confidentiality, resident rights, and ethics is provided to each volunteer, along with ongoing topic specific monthly training opportunities.

For more information about joining this respected volunteer program, or to apply to become a valued volunteer in a local community, visit <https://longtermcare.wi.gov/>, e-mail boaltc@wisconsin.gov or call 1-800-815-0015.