

Aging Network Volunteer Spotlight

Volunteer Serves as Voice for Residents of Long-Term Care Facilities

Turning her personal grief into action, Long-Term Care Ombudsman Carol Hankins advocates for residents in skilled nursing facilities, assisted/residential care facilities and adult foster homes. “My mother passed away recently after being in memory care,” said Carol. “That experience has inspired me even more to be a voice for residents and their families.”



Carol is a compassionate, dedicated Certified Ombudsman volunteer for the Oregon Office of Long-Term Care Ombudsman. Ombudsmen, many of whom are volunteers, are trained to work with residents to resolve problems or complaints. “I know that my residents need a voice, so having the opportunity to help in the communication process allows me to be *their* voice,” said Carol.

A large portion of the residents Carol serves rely upon Medicaid services, which means Carol works closely with staff of the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) in her area, Northwest Senior & Disability Services. In just five years, Carol has provided an incredible 4,100 hours of service in rural Yamhill County, Oregon. Most impressive is Carol’s innate desire to be an advocate for the residents, many of whom are no longer able to advocate for themselves.

According to Melissa Bosworth, Deputy State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, Carol has a special sensitivity to residents who could easily fall “between the cracks” due a high level of disability, lack of social support and inability to advocate for themselves.

. Yet because of Carol’s unwavering commitment to volunteering, residents have:

- Received more timely assistance from staff for pain relief;
- Been placed in settings most appropriate to their needs;
- Been treated with greater dignity and respect; and

- Had a better understanding of their rights regarding denial of Medicaid eligibility, impending guardianships and basic resident rights afforded to all residents of licensed long-term care facilities in Oregon.

Carol is known to go “over and above” when working with residents. It is not unusual to hear that she has worked with residents to call their durable medical equipment company or doctor’s office to ensure they receive the assistive devices or medications they need.

When asked why she volunteers, Carol replied: “To me it doesn’t feel so much as a choice, but rather as something that I should be doing—it is very rewarding to see a smile on a resident who has been sad for so long.”