

***“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world indeed, it’s the only thing that ever does.”***

Margaret Mead

Far too often people think that there is nothing they can do to improve a situation or make a change. They say, “What can I do? I’m just one person.” Well, as the above quote illustrates, that one person can join with another, and then another. What one person may not be able to accomplish, a group can. When people come together and speak with a united voice, positive change can happen. Not only can they achieve concrete results, but they can also experience the benefits of developing closer relationships with each other and a stronger sense of community. A nursing home family council that is run by family members can be a powerful force for improvement in a nursing home. Many councils across the country have been able to increase the quality of life and well-being of their loved ones through their work.

#### **WHAT IS A FAMILY COUNCIL?**

***A family council is a self-led, self-determining group of consumers - families and friends of nursing home residents – that:*** Works to improve the quality of care and quality of life of the facility’s residents it provides families with a voice in decision-making that affects them and their loved ones. Many voices are stronger than one. The power of a lot of people working together is enough to make changes, whereas one person can often do very little. Family councils can:

- Act on concerns and complaints affecting nursing home residents.
- Support families
- Communicate with the nursing home administrator and staff
- Serve as a sounding board and advisory body on new ideas and improvements
- Advocate for positive change within the facility and the long-term care system
- Educate and inform families about issues relating to residents, the nursing home and the long-term care system
- Sponsor activities that benefit all residents.

#### **A FAMILY COUNCIL IS NOT:**

- A support group
- A family night
- A volunteer group

While these other groups perform a very important function, their role is different from that of a council.

#### **IMPORTANCE OF A FAMILY-RUN FAMILY COUNCIL**

Experience has shown that councils that are run by families, and not staff, are more effective for several reasons:

- Members are more likely to feel responsible for the success or failure of their council. There is a sense of direct ownership in the work of the council.
- Family member interest is stronger because families determine the issues and activities that the council takes on.
- Staff members have many other responsibilities and simply cannot devote the necessary time to do all that needs to be done to run an effective council.

## ***BENEFITS OF A FAMILY COUNCIL***

### **For Nursing Home Staff:**

- Provides the administration and staff with information about concerns that families have about resident care so that problems can be responded to in an appropriate manner.
- Gives the facility the opportunity to find out about and fix problems in the facility rather than having families turn to outside agencies such as the survey agency or the ombudsman program for help.
- Can provide creative solutions to problems.
- Gives honest feedback to use for ongoing quality improvement efforts.
- Provides an avenue for requests for changes within the facility to be made to boards and management companies. Family councils can advocate with these entities for changes that staff may want, but for which they are unable to obtain approval.
- Keeps facility staff from being overwhelmed by a barrage of individual complaints all at once.
- Provides recommendations for programming or policies that would benefit residents.
- Increases the likelihood that new facility policies will be implemented smoothly and successfully and positively impact residents because families will have had an opportunity to comment on and shape these policies.
- Can identify outside resources to enhance the lives of residents and facility functioning.
- Increases family willingness to contribute time and energy towards making the facility a good place for people to live.
- Results in better care for residents!!

### **For Family Members:**

- Provides support, encouragement.
- Provides information.
- Gives families a place to constructively channel their concerns.
- Reduces sense of isolation, helplessness, frustration.
- Gives families an opportunity to shape facility policies and procedures affecting their loved ones.
- Improves the care of their loved ones.

### **For Both Families and Facilities:**

- Promotes open lines of communication
- Builds a trusting relationship
- Provides the opportunity to make improvements for all residents

### **For Residents (Most Important of All!):**

- Improves their quality of life and quality of care!!!!

Please consider joining the next meeting to discuss forming a Family Council at Geer!

February 24<sup>th</sup> 3PM via Zoom

Best Regards,

Brenda Fife, Resident Advocate



RESIDENT ADVOCATE

**Brenda Fife**

**860-671-1645**

### **What is a Resident Advocate?**

- A person who is concerned with protecting the civil and human rights of elderly persons in long term care facilities.
- A problem-solver and a mediator.
- A resource.
- A resident's representative to resolve complaints.

### **Who can use the service of the Resident Advocate?**

- Residents in any long-term care facility that has a resident advocate assigned.
- Friends and relatives of long-term care residents.
- Long-term care facility staff and administrators acting on behalf of residents.
- Anyone advocating for resident's interests.

### **Is a Volunteer Resident Advocate an employee of the nursing home?**

No. Your Resident Advocate is a volunteer serving with and trained by the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program of the Elderly Services Division of the Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services.