

Minutes: VOP Statewide Monthly Conference Call

May 20, 2015; 2:00 – 3:20

Topic: Resident Councils

Attendance

Staff

- Sarah Hinzman, VOP Coordinator
- Pam Railsback, Local Long-Term Care Ombudsman
- Cairn Reisch, VISTA VOP Coordinator
- Meredith Funke, VISTA VOP Coordinator

Volunteer Ombudsmen

- Andy Webb
- David Arthur
- Gregg Durlam
- Helen Bombei-Dobbins
- Janice Frey
- Jerry Hampton
- Judy Avritt
- Julie Elmore
- Kot Flora
- Marilyn Spangler
- Mary Anne Brekke
- Mary Bustad
- Maxine Stiemsma
- Nancy Nichols
- Pamela Parker
- Pat Myers
- Paul Venner
- Thomas Schulte

Purpose of this call and future calls

The purpose of the VOP Statewide Calls is to increase the opportunity for continuing education provided from the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman and to increase volunteer engagement. Additionally, we can go into depth on topics that we didn't have time to cover extensively in training.

Statewide conference calls will be held every odd month (May, July, September, etc.) at 2 p.m. and will be facilitated by one VOP Coordinator and one other staff member of the Office on rotation.

Each month's topic is intended to take a closer look at the particulars of resident's rights. Today we will be discussing the resident's right to be free to organize and participate in a resident council.

Presentation

The Office recently created a Resident Council Guide intended for residents, families, facility staff, Volunteer Ombudsman, and the general public. It contains information about how to effectively organize and operate a resident council based on national models and recommendations. The presentation today will highlight some of the key points made in this guide, which is available for viewing here:

https://www.iowaaging.gov/sites/files/aging/documents/Resident%20Council%20Guide.final_.pdf

Overview

What is a Resident Council?

A resident council is an independent, organized group of residents living in a long-term care facility who meet on a regular basis to promote and enhance the quality of life for all residents.

It is important to make the distinction that a resident council is NOT an individual care plan/care team meeting. Care plan/care team meetings usually involve multiple facility staff, ancillary staff (such as a physician), the resident, and perhaps family members. These meetings discuss the care options for a single resident. Per our current program policies, it is not within the role of the volunteer ombudsman to participate in care plan/care team meetings. This is because such meetings are essentially a verbal review of record, which volunteers do not have access to. If a volunteer ombudsman is asked to participate in a care plan/care team meeting, they should notify their VOP Coordinator and/or Local Ombudsman so that the Local Ombudsman can attend the meeting and conduct further investigation if necessary.

On the other hand, resident councils create change, address quality of life and care issues, plan resident activities, and discuss any matters brought before the council. Resident councils provide a forum for residents to voice their concerns and speak to the issues that are important to them and their daily life. The primary goal of a resident council is to allow residents to exercise self-determination and become more involved in providing input regarding their daily life in the facility.

Specifically, resident councils:

- Permit members to actively participate in making choices regarding activities, meals,
- daily schedules, personal care, and other aspects of resident life;
- Promote the quality of life and quality of care for all residents; Provide an opportunity for residents to discuss concerns in a safe setting; and
- Enhance communication and problem-solving between staff and residents.

Any and all residents of the facility can become a member of the resident council. Anyone else must be invited by a member to attend; this includes facility staff, family members, volunteer ombudsmen, etc.

Benefits of a Resident Council

Obviously, the residents stand to gain many benefits from participating in, or benefiting from the activities of their resident council.

The activities of a resident council not only benefit the residents, but also the facility and staff as a whole. Resident councils allow for greater communication between staff and residents, creating a team environment at the facility. In addition, resident councils provide discussion opportunities for staff to address concerns, as well as chances for staff and resident collaboration to improve quality of life and care at the facility.

Roles of the Resident and Facility

Residents

Resident participation is the only thing that keeps a resident council active. Residents who are interested in participating in a resident council have the right to organize and participate. They are ultimately responsible for all activities that relate to their council. The resident council will have an appointed leader that, among other tasks, will:

- Facilitate communication between residents and staff;
- Create an environment of team work between the council and staff;
- Prompt staff if they are not responsive to council business; and
- Conduct effective council meetings.

Facility Staff

While a resident council is run by the residents, the facility also has a role. It is required by law that the facility must provide a resident council with a private space to meet and a designated liaison that is responsible for assisting the council. This individual is also responsible for listening to and acting upon the concerns and recommendations shared by the council. It is important to note that staff members are allowed to attend meetings **only when invited** by a current resident council member.

Task examples the staff liaison may provide to the council:

- Assist with announcing meeting information (with council permission);
- Explain facility policies and procedures;
- Assist with concern resolution.

How to Build a Resident Council

The full resident council guide includes some tips for starting up a resident council that does not currently exist, including holding exploratory meetings, conducting follow up/getting organized, and conducting the first meeting. See pages 6 and 7.

A resident council should hold regular meetings. Each meeting should follow an agenda that may include the following items:

1. Welcome; including introductions and roll call
2. Old Business
 - a. Review the previous meeting's notes/minutes
 - b. Discuss follow-up on items from previous meeting's action plan
3. New Business
 - a. Allow the facility staff (if invited) to share any news or information
 - b. Allow speakers (if invited) to present
 - c. Allow residents to share any concerns by department
 - d. Create action plan to resolve concerns
4. Open Discussion on any other topics

Some councils read resident's rights at each meeting, or discuss a particular resident right in depth. Some councils advise/request/plan a special meal or activity for the coming month.

When residents and facilities begin a dialogue about concerns, it can be important to give the dialogue a positive spin. Sometimes residents don't want to bring up prompted complaints, especially if a staff person is facilitating the meeting. If staff frames the discussion as opportunities for improvement, they might be more inclined to talk about their ideas and wishes.

Council Leadership

Some councils elect a resident council President. Other councils prefer to appoint tasks to council members as needed. There is no right or wrong way to for the leadership. If

it is desired to elect officers, the following includes a listing of the typical officer roles (responsibilities of each role included in the resident council guide on page 8).

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
 - Some councils do have their own fund and conduct fundraisers to purchase items that everyone can use in the facility.

Council Bylaws

Some councils have created bylaws to enhance their sustainability and operations. A sample is included in the resident council guide on Page 21.

Meeting Tips

To conduct an effective meeting, it is suggested that the council:

- Create and stick to an agenda
- Find a comfortable, quiet meeting place and use a microphone if necessary
- Encourage questions and open discussion
- Encourage residents to complete a complaint form (sample on Page 20 of the resident council guide)
 - Some facilities have instituted a "suggestion box" whereby a resident, family member, visitor, or volunteer can drop in anonymous concerns and suggestions. The slips are then collected and discussed as part of the resident council meeting.
- Delegate someone to take meeting minutes

Keys to Success

Encouraging ongoing resident participation is key to a successful resident council. Posting an agenda one week in advance is a great way to increase attendance and spread awareness. The staff liaison can also assist with publicizing meetings and encouraging residents to attend (see promotional examples on pages 18-19). Staff and council members should work together to devise a way for bed or room-bound residents to have input into the meetings.

Active council members can assist with recruiting new council members. Some councils appoint certain members to meet with new residents when they move into the facility. These council members educate about and invite new residents to attend the council meetings. In doing so, friendships are formed and new residents are able to begin adjusting to the facility.

Residents typically have three motives for participating in council:

1) Self-Interest

- Residents will want to be involved if the council is discussing an issue that is important to them. It may be helpful to identify the issues of interest for the council members, and focus on those.

2) Results

- Getting results is a big motivator for residents to continue to attend the resident council meetings. It is important that the council be viewed as a forum for resolving concerns, implementing new ideas, and sharing suggestions. Council members remain motivated by seeing the change they have created.

3) Recognition

Support

If your council would like any technical support/assistance with the creation or ongoing success of your Resident Council, the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is available to assist. A Local Ombudsman will be glad to assist a council, if invited. We also encourage our Volunteer Ombudsmen to provide assistance, if invited to do so and with the approval of the program. Some volunteers take minutes or assist to facilitate the meeting, provide educational information, and encourage residents to participate.

For volunteers that have been asked by council to take a more active role in the meeting itself, we would like to provide the volunteer with some additional information and assistance beforehand. It's a best practice for the volunteer to mentor a resident to eventually take the reins of facilitating, taking minutes, etc. so that the council is truly their own.

The resident council guide includes some excellent examples and template of forms and materials that a resident council may utilize, including:

- A sample and template agenda
- A sample and template for recording thorough meeting minutes
- A new business and action plan template to record progress of resolving concerns
- Samples of flyers and posters promoting council meetings
- Complaint form template

Federal Law

Page 22 of the guide includes direct language from the federal laws that apply to citizen councils in long-term care facilities. A few key points are provided as follows.

F243

§483.15(c)

- 1) A resident has the right to organize and participate in resident groups in the facility;
- 2) The facility must provide a resident group, if one exists, with private space
- 3) Staff or visitors may attend meeting's the group's invitation
- 4) The facility must provide a designated staff person responsible for providing assistance and responding to written requests that result from group meetings.

F244

§483.15(c)(6) When a resident or family group exists, the facility must listen to the views and act upon the grievances and recommendations of residents and families concerning proposed policy and operational decisions affecting resident care and life in the facility.

Interpretive Guidelines §483.15(c)

... whenever residents or their families wish to organize, facilities must allow them to do so without interference...

The facility is required to listen to resident and family group recommendations and Grievances...the facility must seriously consider the group's recommendations and must attempt to accommodate those recommendations, to the extent practicable...The facility should communicate its decisions to the resident and/or family group.

Procedures §483.15(c)

If no organized group exists, determine if residents have attempted to form one and have been unsuccessful, and, if so, why.

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Lack of resident interest/participation:

- Encourage/empower residents to attend the council in order to facilitate changes and solutions to systemic issues. Ask questions: why do residents not want to participate? Can you work to resolve those issues in order to generate interest again?

Turnover in leadership roles:

- This is common. Ask about the council's voting procedures. If no resident leader is appointed, are residents satisfied having staff lead the meetings? If not, find out who is interested in leading the group, and help to facilitate this change through empowerment or working with POC.

Facility staff guide meeting/agenda:

- Ensure residents are satisfied with staff guiding the meetings. If not, discuss change and options. Go to POC with suggestions, and empower residents to talk with staff as well. Ensure old business is reviewed at each meeting, and concerns from previous meetings are addressed.

Negative tone/residents hesitant to speak up:

- Ask why? Would residents feel more comfortable meeting without staff present (they have the right to do so)? Would residents prefer a different staff person to facilitate or attend the meetings? Troubleshoot and empower residents to discuss with staff, or bring their solutions to your POC.

No minutes taken/No follow up on old business:

- Encourage residents to ask about old business, or talk to administrator about lack of follow up. Talk with POC to troubleshoot this issue and ensure minutes are taken and follow through occur. Some facilities post the council meetings in a public place.

How Can Volunteer Ombudsmen Become Involved?

Volunteer Ombudsmen are encouraged to attend Council provided they have permission from a resident. Federal law allows for this and a facility is not permitted to restrict a staff or volunteer ombudsman's access to the council when they have permission to attend. If you do not have an invitation to attend, find out which residents are highly involved in council and ask for an invitation to attend.

A few other pointers include:

- If you have an invitation, gain clarity on whether your invite is one-time or ongoing.
- The resident who provided the invitation does not have to be in attendance with you at the meeting.
- You do not have to disclose which resident invited you to attend the meeting.
- Volunteers may request minutes from meetings they were not able to attend.
- With additional guidance from a VOP Coordinator or LLTCO, VO's may assist in taking minutes, facilitating, and assisting resident's to improve/startup their council. Before taking these steps, talk to a OSLTCO staff person.

Group Discussion/Q & A

Regarding the suggestion box idea, who is in charge of it?

Most likely, the staff person assigned to assist the resident council, but it could also reasonably include an officer of the resident council if officers are appointed.

How can I change the mentality of my council from focusing heavily on their individual issues to focusing on things that may affect everyone?

It can be easy for a dominant personality to monopolize the discussion. The facilitator can assist to keep the discussion on track by interjecting to insure the resident was heard and asking the other participants if they experience the same issue. If it appears to be individuated, the facilitator can "table" or "parking lot" the individual concern and provide some one-on-one discussion time and a complaint form to that resident after the agenda concludes.

Have you considered Facetime or video conferencing via webinar for a future call?

We thought we'd give the conference call method a try for this first time around, but we can definitely consider other options in the future. We wanted to keep it as technologically approachable as possible for the wide variety of volunteers in our program. Thanks for the feedback.

Would adding visual aspects to the resident council meeting, like handouts and PowerPoints, help or be received well?

It certainly couldn't do any harm. The facility would need to be responsible for providing copies/equipment.

What's the best way to notify people about resident council meetings?

A few ideas might include a flyer explaining council with its regular meeting date/time in the admission packet, posting a notice on the activity board, including it on the activity calendar, making an announcement at the meal prior to the meeting as a reminder, and general word-of-mouth.