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# **RESIDENT EMPOWERMENT**

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What picture comes to mind when you see yourself in a nursing home or assisted living? Do you see a life of purpose, independence and meaning or do you see a life of mere existence and a loss of identity? Those of us that work in a long-term care facility want to believe, in our hearts, that we are doing the best we can to provide a homelike environment, great care and are creatively providing activity programs that incorporate the beliefs, experience, education and passions of our residents.

The Resident Councils of Washington is a partnership of people living in long-term care facilities family members and friends, healthcare professionals and educators who believe that disability and/or chronic illness does not mean inability. In our 22 years we have been learning what empowerment means to residents and how we can ensure that they have the tools necessary to continue with their journey of life. Residents have taught us through our strategic planning, marketing, legislative and education committees what is important to them. At the top of their lists are the following: continuing education, access to resources, outlets for independence, extended social opportunities inside and outside of their home, decision making opportunities, a voice or opportunity to represent themselves publicly, public support and respect for their abilities and passions, but most of all residents and those entering long term fear isolation, loss of identity and purpose.

As staff, volunteers and advocates we have an obligation to our growing long-term care residents to equip them with the resources to be as involved as possible in their lives. Residents who wanted to make a difference in the care of their friends founded the Resident Councils of Washington. Empowerment means giving residents the opportunity for education, networking, discussion, regulatory and legislative decision making. Without an organization like RCW in your community you can start in your own community involving residents in meaningful decision-making. Most facilities have resident councils the next step is to network with fellow residents from other facilities even if it is only a handful of homes.

Why? Residents will:

- Obtain information and learn from the experiences of others
- Increase their sense of purpose and fulfillment in life
- Learn to exercise rights and pursue personal choices
- Participate as movers and shakers in forums and conferences

## **Testimonials:**

Listen to your resident and family members. Check out the following testimonials:

*"I am truly thankful to serve my fellow residents statewide through this wonderful organization. It is an honor and privilege to work with such generous and dedicated people. It gives me a very fulfilling life"* Louise Clark, resident

*“As a participant in such a diverse organization as RCW, it pleases me to assist my fellow residents to make a difference in their lives.” Sara Lanniciello, resident*

*“RCW helps boost morale and gives dignity back to residents after traumatic events have changed their lives. Residents become active participants in events that affect their daily lives and feel safe in expressing themselves.” Holly Farthingale, family member*

### **How to Quick Tips:**

Staff, Ombudsman or Volunteers: Begin by making a commitment to have one community event for and by residents in your community.

Pull together the regional ombudsman, members of the activity association in your area, a social worker, marketing and management staff for a meeting.

Outline your purpose: i.e. to have a resident conference in your community.

Identify resident leaders just as you would to begin a resident council in your facility.

At the first meeting get acquainted, learn about the purpose and benefits of the resident conference concept and begin to identify the pieces that fit into the puzzle. The conferences are educational, social and inspiring to all who attend.

Plan date, place, time. Prepare an invitation, mail and follow-up with a personal telephone call sharing that the group would be privileged to have Mr. or Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ in attendance. Find a facility who will sponsor the first meeting in a private room, good ventilation, lighting and sound system (even for just a few representatives)

Plan and publish an agenda. The agenda should include:

- I. Welcome and Introduction
- II. Purpose of Meeting and mental picture of what a resident conference is:  
We have copies of our brochures on the resident council website [www.residentcouncil.org](http://www.residentcouncil.org).  
Success stories of other conferences (can use RCW as an example)  
Sell the idea as an opportunity to socialize, learn and network from others.
- III. When and Where – Allow 6 months of planning time before event
- IV. Needs
  - Site
    - Accommodations for how many? Good traffic flow
    - Well ventilated, good acoustics
    - Space for a minimum of 2 breakout sessions
    - Adequate parking, on the bus line, centrally located or participants
    - Food – sponsor?
    - Cost? Rent, food, equipment?
- V. What?
  - Conference Content  
The agenda for a conference may look like the following:  
9:30 a.m. Registration, health snack, background Harpist

10:00 a.m. Welcome and short keynote or motivational speech including a resident and staff or volunteer partnership  
10:30 a.m. Break out sessions  
Determine 2 – 3 subjects or pick one and have divide the group.  
11:45 a.m. Wrap up groups (representatives share highlights from their group with the entire group)  
12:30 p.m. Lunch  
1:15 p.m. Resident Rights Skit and closing

Hint: Have the group, in particular residents, brainstorm on topics they would like to learn about. Soon you will find a pattern in their thought process that will allow the facilitator to categorize their thoughts and develop break out sessions. Go around the room to make certain all participants have input as to their needs and interests. You will be surprised at the participation.

- VI. Marketing
  - Date, place, title of conference out as soon as possible]
  - Coordinate with local advocates, facilities, organization, volunteers, Ombudsmen
  - Prepare a data base for mailing
  
- VI. Determine costs and Fund Development
  - What are your community resources for sponsorship?
  - Do you need to charge?
  - Could you incorporate a fundraiser into your program? Raffles?
  - Could facilities sponsor tables?

Meet monthly until your conference is planned in detail. Remember long-range planning, resident ownership or participation determines the success of your first conference. You are on your way to a successful conference and the beginning of what could be a regional resident council.

*“In the end it is not the years in your life that count; it is the life in your years”*  
Abraham Lincoln

*References:*

- The Resident Council of Washington Website [www.residentcouncil.org](http://www.residentcouncil.org)
- The Resident Council Handbook

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