

Residential Facilities Ombudsman Program, Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health

House Bill 5019

The Residential Facilities Ombudsman Program (RFO) supports individuals experiencing mental health concerns, intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) in each of the licensed or certified homes and facilities in Oregon. My role as a Certified Volunteer Ambassador is to conduct home visits in each of the licensed facilities in Multnomah County with the goal of meeting all residents and providing resources to contact RFO should they have any concerns as they relate to one's personal liberty, quality of life, and self-determination. I chose to become an Ambassador because I believe in equality and human rights for all, and it's no secret that the mental health and I/DD communities are often among the most underserved.

RFO and its services are crucial for a number of reasons. One of the most important functions we serve as Ambassadors is to evaluate homes for signs of abuse and/or neglect. This is something that simply cannot be accomplished in any other manner aside from individual, unannounced home visits. While home visits do take time and resources, it is more than worth it if we can prevent an individual from being subjected to poor treatment.

Ambassadors are also trained to communicate one-on-one with residents and support their overall quality of life. We provide a safe space for individuals to bring up any concerns as they relate to human rights and autonomy; things like one's right to make decisions about their own finances, where they live, and even something as simple as one's right to spend time with the friends and significant others of their choice. We make sure residents not only have access to the things they need, such as food and resources, but also the things that enrich their lives and make them happy. Life isn't just about getting one's most basic needs met.

Another main goal of ours as Ambassadors is to educate residents on their rights and how to identify if their rights are being violated. Knowledge is power and that statement has never been truer than it is in this case. Many individuals in the I/DD and mental health communities enter residential facilities in early adulthood, which means they may not have had the opportunity to become familiar with their rights as adults. One of the biggest difficulties we have faced during the Covid-19 crisis is finding ways to continue to educate individuals while we cannot perform home visits. Individuals with I/DD often communicate in other ways than verbally, which makes things like phone calls and Zoom meetings less effective. This further reinforces the need for home visits.

RFO provides essential services to the I/DD and mental health communities, and I believe RFO is among the most important programs throughout Oregon. I am extremely proud to serve as an RFO Volunteer Ambassador and look forward to resuming home visits once it is safe to do so.

Sincerely,

Eva Alfonso
RFO Certified Ambassador