

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

For five years I have worked as a support provider for adults with I/DD helping them get out into the community and live independently. For the past two years I have been a volunteer for the Residential Facilities Ombudsman Program (RFO). With my work as a support provider, I have heard clients talk about having previously lived in group homes and the lack of independence they had there. They felt shuffled around, having to do what the group agreed upon. With my volunteer work with RFO I have been a visitor in adult group and foster homes to educate the staff and residents about the advocacy work the ombudsman do. We listen to the residents share their stories and concerns about their living situations. Some residents have no means of communicating their needs, they have no verbal skills and no one has taken the effort to determine how they might communicate a "yes" or "no" response. It is vital we have unannounced visits from RFO to help advocate for those who are unable to communicate their needs and unaware of what their rights are. The ombudsman are working hard to develop a volunteer force to get the word out about the work they will do to advocate on behalf of residents who are fighting for a better quality of life, freedom from unfair restrictions, and sometimes freedom from abuse and neglect. The ombudsman have so many cases that they are working on, they need volunteers doing the initial visits to get the word out that someone is there to advocate for the rights of residents in group and foster homes. I have heard the relief in so many people's voices when they hear that there is someone there who will take their concern seriously and investigate how to make things right. Please fund RFO to the fullest extent you are able. They carry a heavy weight and uphold the lives a great many vulnerable people.

Dena Wilder

RFO Certified Volunteer Ambassador

DSP, Direct Support Provider