

**Podcast # 101 Residential Rights**

**Host: Tania Anderson , CEO ARISE**

**Joanna Ginnick, Long-Term Care Ombudsman Coordinator**

**TRANSCRIPTION**

**Tania Anderson**

**Welcome to the ARISE Podcast. I'm Tania Anderson, CEO at ARISE, and it's my pleasure to have with us today. Joanna Ginnick, who is the long-term care ombudsman coordinator. Welcome Joanna!**

**Joanna Ginnick**

**Thank you so much for having me.**

**Tania Anderson**

**You are a very important part of a really important program here at ARISE our Ombudsman Program, I'll ask you for some more detail about this, but basically, we have staff and very highly trained volunteers that are covering all of the nursing homes and long term care facilities in our region, acting as advocates for the people that live there so that they have the best quality of life possible. What would you add to that summary?**

**Joanna Ginnick**

**That summarizes it very well. All of our volunteers are actual certified ombudsman as well. So not only are they highly trained, but they're actually certified by the state. And I like to think of the Ombudsman as not only resident advocates, but we're also sort of the conduit between the residents and the administration, so that, you know, the environment and the quality of life can be well rounded and very, you know, decent all the way around.**

**Tania Anderson**

**Absolutely and this makes sense in terms of ARISE as an independent living center. I mean, as much as possible, we want people to be able to live safely and independently in the community, rather than an institutional setting. However, there are people that an institution or a nursing home is the best and most appropriate setting for them. So, it's consistent that we would want to make sure that their quality of life and their inclusion and their power is properly recognized**

**Joanna Ginnick**

**Absolutely.**

**Tania Anderson**

**So, I know that there's a lot involved in that work. Some of that work is really, really as simple as visiting with residents on a regular basis and being that consistent presence. And there's absolutely no way to underestimate the power of that simple presence. But we also, I think, a**

really important function of the Ombudsman Program is reminding residents and administrators and really all of us about everyone's quality of life and their specific rights. Can you speak a little bit to the residents' rights?

Joanna Ginnick

Yeah, sure. So, you know, I think when folks go into a transition into, say, a skilled nursing facility, they might, you know, not think that they have the same rights that they would have in the community or in their home. And so, you know, what's important for all of us is to remember that they have all of the same rights as anybody in the community or in their home. They have a right to respect, to dignity, to being a part of their care plan, to having the information that involves their medical treatment. They have all of the rights to understand and know the policies and procedures of the facility itself, and they certainly have the right to a, you know, home like quality environment that you know will can hopefully make that transition easier and certainly make their life a much easier and nicer place to be. You know, when they do have to go into a skilled nursing facility so rights can be anything from, you know, again, having privacy, having dignity to, you know, the right to decide where they live, the right to inquire about going back into the community, the right to go to a different doctor than the one that's in the nursing home. So, it really, it really runs a very, very large gamut of different topics that we deal with every day.

Tania Anderson

And do you find that, I think you touched on this, that residents, they don't realize that?

Joanna Ginnick

I do find that often, to be honest, not only do they not really realize it, but they also are often concerned with, you know, kind of rocking the boat on things in a facility, because I think we're all sort of raised that, you know, once you're dealing with, you know, a medical facility or a doctor, you need to do exactly what you're told and that sort of thing, you don't ask a lot of questions. And particularly, perhaps, with a generation that's, you know, older than the current one now, and so it's really important for us to be able to go in there and kind of educate the residents at the nursing home in that they have every right to rock the boat. To state what they're needing to indicate a change that they feel is important, you know, and to be in charge and self-advocate for their care and their well-being.

Tania Anderson

Right. So, you're doing a couple of things. You're, as you said, you're educating them, and sometimes you as the ombudsman, you're doing the actual advocacy, and you're modeling it for the resident, and you're teaching the resident all those pieces. How much are you teaching the administrators and the staff about resident's rights?

Joanna Ginnick

Quite a bit. And again, that's where I go back to the idea of being sort of that conduit. So, you know, we all become, you know, very task oriented in our jobs. I think that staff is, we all know, very short handed. There are many things that we need to do through the day. And so

oftentimes it's easy to put aside sort of those simple day to day things such as introducing yourself, letting residents know what you're doing, letting you know, finding out how they are doing. You know, those kind of things go by the wayside, and oftentimes, a big part of our job is to re-educate, you know, administration and staff on all of those basic needs of the residents in their care. A lot of times it's not even an intentional situation. It's more a matter of timing, and so to be able to be that person that has the time to list them both to the resident and the staff is huge. And you know, certainly it's important that we do educate staff as much as possible and empower administration as much as possible, because how can you ever, you know, achieve quality in a facility if you're only working one-sided.

Tania Anderson

Right. And I'm sure it's a balancing act, because I'm thinking about some of the experiences, I've had with people I love in a nursing home, and you take meal time, for example, meal time is on a schedule. The administration has to move a lot of people in and out of the dining area in an orderly and safe way. There might be limited choices, but there also might be a resident who says, you know, I'm I don't want to go there right now. I'm not hungry now. I'm hungry later. How do we balance all those kinds of things?

Joanna Ginnick

I think the toughest part of balancing that is, is generally, of course, again, you know, supervision and staffing and so, you know, it's a matter of trying to find a certain amount of compromise. You know, we've all lived in communities, and we've all gone to school, and we've all had situations where we need to be able to accommodate each other. And I think that's sort of the important part. There isn't, you know, just one side or the other. It's, it's a community, and in a community, we try to, you know, work towards happiness for all as much as possible. Certainly, a resident has a right to decide that they don't wish to eat at that time. If this is a consistent issue, if it becomes, you know, a pushback from staff, or anything of that nature, then, of course, we, you know, we would come in and re-educate and work towards a compromise on that. The dynamics of a nursing home are super diverse. Everybody has different needs, different skill levels, different care levels, and so, yes, the juggling act with that can be very tough.

Tania Anderson

Right. Can you think of other examples where you're that conduit, that person that's saying, Okay, let's try to figure this out so that as many people are satisfied as possible, maybe, like the how someone decorates their room, or some other part of the scheduling, or just, I mean, you're there every day. What are some other examples?

Joanna Ginnick

You know, some of the other examples really are activities. Are a big issue. I've always, you know, sort of stated that really the difference between a skilled nursing facility, and let's say, you know, an institution are food and activities, and so it's really important to be able to, you know, get feedback from the residents on what they're seeing. As far as you know, are they feeling motivated? Are they feeling, you know, happy about the things that they're doing every

day. One great way to be the conduit for that is to go to resident council meetings. I'm often invited by the resident council president. They it's a meeting just for the residents, and with permission, we're able to take the whole so, sort of general majority of opinion to the administration afterward and work out that compromise on some of those daily things that you know, again, CNA staff and medical staff wouldn't necessarily have the time to, you know, address right away.

Tania Anderson

So does every facility need to have a council, a resident Council?

Yes.

Tania Anderson

Okay.

Yes. It is a requirement by the state.

Tania Anderson

Okay, and how often do they usually meet?

Joanna Ginnick

Once a month.

Tania Anderson

Well, do you find generally that there's good participation with that?

Joanna Ginnick

I find that it ebbs and flows a little bit, I generally will find pretty steady participation. However, you know, another, another great opportunity for me as an ombudsman. If you know, I'm able to contribute to those resident councils and you know, kind of let them know that this is, this is their point of advocacy. This is only for them, which I've, you know, been able to do. It does sort of encourage folks to come also, when educating residents on how to advocate for themselves, it's very great to utilize that tool as a suggestion and say, you know, if you're finding that there's an issue with the food all the time, I bet you there are a lot of residents that might feel the same way, and resident Council is the best place to bring that up, because all the minutes are given to administration, and they need to address those that's a priority.

Tania Anderson

Right. And I think you talked a little bit about how some residents might be reluctant to bring concerns forward, and I find that a lot of times when we talk about advocacy, people automatically assume it's an adversarial system. When it really doesn't have to be that way and isn't that way most of the time.

Joanna Ginnick

Right! Yeah, it's a great point. There is a there's a genuine fear, I feel have come across with residents of retaliatory actions. So, they live there every day, and they interact with the staff every day. And as we all know, people are all very different, dynamic, and certainly, and unfortunately, there can be a shift in attitude from staff if they know that you're causing trouble, quote, unquote. And so, a lot of the residents do have a genuine fear of stating anything or advocating for themselves. One of the great things again about being an ombudsman is we can now sort of observe and, you know, supervise the situation and hopefully encourage them to advocate for themselves when they're able, but if not, we can sort of take the brunt of things for them. Oftentimes, people won't want us to say anything at all because they're just concerned. That's fine we but I will certainly be visiting that person a lot more often, and we'll be keeping an eye on what's going on regardless. And then when they are able to feel a little bit of empowerment from that encouragement and go and advocate, I can also follow up and make sure that there isn't a change in behavior of staff, or there isn't, you know, any sort of retaliation towards that resident. Once that starts occurring, more consistency, residents become a lot more confident in their rights and their you know, right to state what they would like to state, as far as the quality of their life.

Tania Anderson

Right. And I would imagine when you were helping to coach and teach people to be self-advocates. I mean, there are many ways to ask a question, and the saying you get more flies with honey than vinegar, right? So, it's not like you're skirting the issue. It's just how you present it as offering a dialog and a solution, and that would also minimize any sort of fear of retaliation as well.

Joanna Ginnick

Exactly oftentimes, you know, it's easy to see that if a resident does bring a complaint to a staff member, they're probably at a level of frustration, and we all know that that isn't always the most progressive way to communicate what you need, And so to be able to, again, you know, sort of be that person for, you know, feedback and to bounce these things off of and to sort of guide towards better communication skills on both staff and resident parts, its huge. You know, it goes both ways. And so, to mediate is another great aspect of being an ombudsman. Because, you know, it's a great feeling to bring something together like that and have people realize, oh, this is a lot easier than I expected. And, you know, maybe now we can do this going forward. You know, our ultimate goal is to certainly, again, improve that community all the way around. And so, you know, being able to provide the right tools for communication with residents and administration is great.

Tania Anderson

Great. That's that makes a lot of sense, and you sort of half answered my next question, which is, your job is really hard and you're balancing a lot. What motivates you to do this work?

Joanna Ginnick

You know, there are a lot of different reasons. I have a lot of I was raised by my grandparents, and so I always truly enjoyed working with this generation of folks. I you know, but also I

definitely feel that it's one of the most worthy humanitarian causes out there. But, you know, it's, it's something that is really an important issue. Everybody is going to become older and elderly and need care and need help, and to you be able to be a part of, you know, creating communities that are genuine and quality, and, you know, pointed in that right direction, so to speak, is huge. And I feel that it's something that can go by the wayside very easily. And so, for me, it's, it's ultimately important to be able to not only advocate for my residents, but advocate for that point of your life and for the care that our elderly receive in our communities and as a whole. And being an ombudsman gives me that opportunity. I've been able to meet many different you know, people in our community of you know, leadership and power, and it's a really good platform to be able to bring these issues to the forefront so that, you know, we can, we can take a look and do better.

Tania Anderson

Wow. I'm just floored by the work you do, thank you for what you do every day. It is so important and just thanks. Joanna,

Joanna Ginnick

Well, thank you so much. I appreciate it.