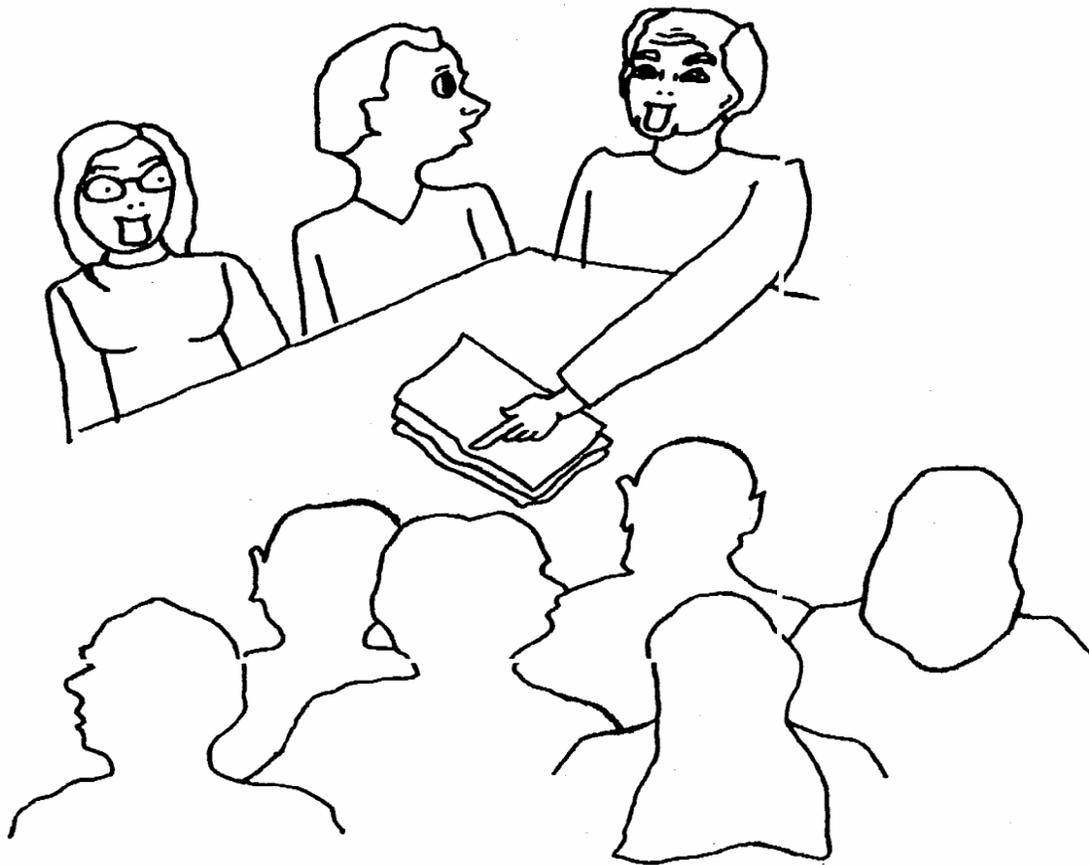


# **ORGANIZING A RESIDENT COUNCIL IN YOUR HOME**

***A MANUAL FOR ADULT HOME AND NURSING HOME  
RESIDENTS***



COALITION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED AGED AND DISABLED, Inc.

**The Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled (CIAD)** is a non-profit organization of nursing home and adult home resident councils. **CIAD** is governed by a Board of Directors of residents from facilities throughout the New York City area. Formed in 1973, **CIAD** is dedicated to protecting the rights of residents and improving the quality of their life and care,

Through trainings and on-site visits, **CIAD** provides information, guidance and support to resident councils. For more information about how **CIAD** can help your resident council, or about CIAD's other programs call **(212) 481-7572**

We wish to thank Ms. Gail Kurland of the Parkview Manor Home for Adults for illustrating the manual.

We gratefully acknowledge the funders who made this manual possible:

Anonymous  
The Jean & Louis Dreyfus Foundation  
The East New York Savings Bank  
J.P. Morgan  
New York Community Trust  
North Star Fund  
Presbytery of NYC & Presbyterian Church, USA  
The Scherman Foundation

1994, Revised 1997

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

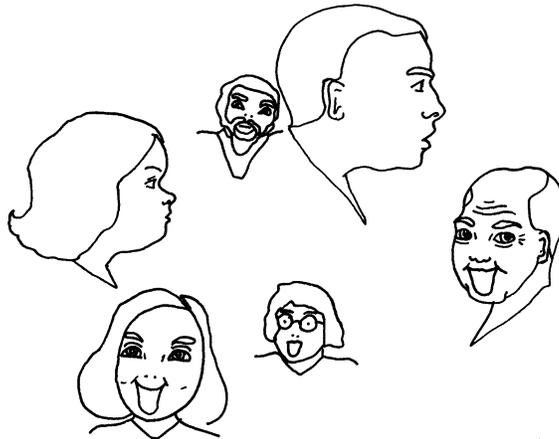
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>page 4</b>
<b>Costs and Benefits of Resident Councils</b>	<b>page 8</b>
<b>How To Set Up a Council</b>	<b>page 9</b>
<b>What Should Your Resident Council Look Like</b>	<b>page 16</b>
<b>What You Need For a Successful Council</b>	<b>page 19</b>
<b>The Role of the Leader</b>	<b>page 21</b>
<b>The Role of Staff</b>	<b>page 25</b>
<b>The Role of Participants</b>	<b>page 28</b>
<b>Agendas</b>	<b>page 30</b>
<b>Minutes</b>	<b>page 32</b>
<b>Committees</b>	<b>page 33</b>
<b>Councils in Action</b>	<b>page 35</b>
<b>New York State Regulations Regarding Resident Councils</b>	<b>page 40</b>

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **WHAT IS A RESIDENT COUNCIL?**

A resident council is an organization of people living together in a common place. Similar to a tenants' association, councils represent the interests of those living together and provide a way for residents to have a say in the way their home is run.

A council's most important defining feature is that it is resident-run. That means residents choose the council's leaders, run meetings themselves, decide when it meets and who is invited to attend, establish agendas for meetings and decide on the priorities for the council. Even when residents may need help from staff or others in running meetings or organizing council projects, residents should always govern what is discussed, what decisions the council makes, and what actions the council takes.



### **THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTIONS OF RESIDENT COUNCILS**

Resident councils are more than social gatherings. They are more than grievance mechanisms. Councils serve a number of important functions which benefit residents and staff alike.

The basic philosophy of resident councils is that residents can and should have a say in the decisions that affect their lives within both their homes and the larger community. Residents come to the home with the talents, skills and knowledge developed over a lifetime of living. Each resident regardless of age or handicaps, has a unique contribution to make to the council and the management. Residents are in a

special position to recommend changes which might help the home better meet their needs and interests. Only they know how it feels to live there. Only they know if services are right for them. Residents' ideas can help improve the services for the entire home. Giving residents as much control over their lives as possible is important to residents physical and emotional well being.

Take a moment to think about what it means to enter a nursing home or adult home. Entering a home involves a number of significant losses:

- \* Loss of one's home and community.
- \* Loss of independence.
- \* Loss of choice and control over one's life.
- \* Loss of the life roles: (worker, housekeeper, head of household) which help us to define ourselves as competent and worthy of respect.
- \* Loss of connection with family and friends.
- \* Loss of health, physical and/or emotional well-being.

These losses can have a devastating impact on residents' sense of self-esteem and competency.

Once in the home, residents find that many of the decisions which they used to make in their daily lives are out of their control. Choices about when to get up or go to bed, when and what to eat and who to associate with, are made by staff and administration. Unless the staff and administration are careful, their efforts to protect residents can make this situation worse. Continually reminding residents about their limitations or keeping them in the dark about impending decisions/changes so as not to upset them, sends a message to residents that their judgment and opinions cannot be trusted and therefore are not worthy of consideration. If left unchecked, residents will come to view themselves as helpless and incompetent, relying more and more on staff to make decisions and carry out activities.

## **SPECIFIC FUNCTIONS OF RESIDENT COUNCILS**

Many of the activities and functions of resident councils help to counteract this institutionalization process.

### Resident Councils As A Forum For Self-Determination

As a forum for resident decision-making, councils provide a way for residents to have input into the way their home is run. Through consistent efforts to involve residents in the decision-making process, residents learn that their ideas and opinions are still worthy of serious consideration. Resident councils emphasize residents' strengths and accomplishments. By helping to plan and implement resident council decisions and activities, residents have the opportunity to use and be recognized for their talents and skills. Bringing about improvements and carrying out projects themselves helps residents to recapture their feelings of self-worth and strength.

### Resident Councils As A Vehicle For Resolving Problems and Complaints

Through councils, residents become active partners in the problem solving process. Instead of simply raising complaints, residents in cooperation with staff, develop and carry out the solutions. Experience has shown that residents can share in this process if given the necessary information. With open communication between residents and staff, many problems can be avoided since issues resulting from lack of information or bad information can be cleared up before they get bigger. With friendly discussion, residents and staff gain a better understanding of each other's point of view, and learn constructive ways to resolve points of conflict together.



### Promoting A Sense Of Community And Belonging

Resident councils develop and support a sense of community among those who live and work in the home. The sharing of experiences, ideas and concerns during resident council meetings leads to a better understanding of each other and greater tolerance for individual differences. Welcoming committees to orient new residents and sunshine committees to send cards to residents in the hospital support a sense of connection and concern for each other. Such activities create a more positive atmosphere within the home, and provide a mechanism for residents to become interested in one another and provide ongoing support. It makes adjustment to a nursing home that much easier.

### Representing Residents In The Larger Community

An often ignored function of resident councils is to develop connections between residents and the outside community. This means educating the resident community about the federal, state and local policy-making process and organizing activities such as letter-writing drives and legislative forums to inform policy-makers of residents' concerns. It also involves council members participating in community organizations with common interests such as community boards, civic associations and coalitions of resident councils. To promote community participation, resident councils have sponsored community open houses, helped organizations with clothing and fund-raising drives, and worked with block associations to clean up local parks. These activities help strengthen ties between the community and the home, and serve to break down common stereotypes held about residents and their abilities.

## Costs and Benefits Of Resident Councils

(from "Resident Decision-Making in Homes for the Aging", Ann Trueblood Raper)

*Making a council work requires a lot of effort and can have costs as well as benefits. Although the benefits far out weigh these costs it is important to understand the potential problems, since with proper planning many of them can at least be lessened if not avoided.*

### Administrator and Board

#### Costs

*Administrator's Time  
(addressing the  
council's concerns)*

*Staff Time*

*Office Supplies  
(and start-up expenses)*

*Sharing Power  
(with residents in  
making decisions)*

*Greater Exposure to  
Complaints and Problems*

*Rumors;*

#### Benefits

*Organized Channel of Communication*

*Residents Share Skills and Expertise*

*Residents Become "Sounding Board"  
for New Projects*

*Residents Can Become an Influential  
Political Force*

*Promotes Cooperative, rather than  
Adversarial Relationship and  
Atmosphere in Community/Home*

*Residents can provide Input to Admini-  
stration regarding Staff Performance,  
Attitude and Quality of Service Provided*

*Early Resolution of Problems averts*

*Solutions Gain Support From Residents.*

### Residents

#### Costs

*Residents with Decision-Making  
Power may be "Lobbied" by  
Other Residents*

*Residents may get Over-  
Extended for own Physical  
Health*

*Potential for Residents to Lose  
Affiliation with Peers if co-  
opted by Management or Admini-  
stration*

#### Benefits

*Unified Voice and Structure for Decisions  
Affecting Lives, Individually and  
Collectively as a Community*

*Increased Feeling of Self-Worth, Self-  
Esteem, and Fulfillment*

*Promotes Less Institutional, More  
Personal Atmosphere*

*Provides an Outlet for Residents' Talents  
and skills*

## HOW TO SET UP A COUNCIL

Some questions and factors you should think about when you are setting up a council:

### 1. Who are the individuals that make up your facility?

The most important ingredient of your resident council is the individual residents of your facility. These individuals will help you in setting up your council. For instance:

#### The Health of the Residents

Residents who are sicker and frailer might be more interested in their immediate problems than in facility-wide issues. In this case, it makes sense to work to increase personal decision making power and choice. Healthier residents might be more willing to become involved in facility-wide concerns or community issues. Residents' disabilities will determine a number of council needs. Is there sufficient staff to help residents get to meetings? Will a microphone be needed? Should meetings be more frequent, shorter, and with fewer participants in order to increase the involvement of more confused or disabled residents? Will floor meetings be necessary because of a large number of residents who cannot or will not leave their floors?



## A Resident's Past Experience and Their Cultural or Ethnic Background

Were residents' involved with religious or tenant organizations, unions, or PTAs? A resident council conducts its business by working in a group, and although it is not complicated, knowing how to work in a group requires some skills. There might be people living in your facility who already have these skills. Look at a person's experience, and connect leadership or organizing skills to a person's past experience. A majority of nursing home residents, for example, are women, former housewives, who possibly never had much *perceived* decision-making power in their lives. Being a housewife, however, has to be one of the tougher organizing jobs around.

### **2. What are Residents Concerns, Needs, Interests and Talents?**

In order for a resident council to get off the ground it has to address in a meaningful way, the concerns and interests of the resident population. You might want to meet with, interview and survey residents about their concerns and interests. While not all residents will want to be involved in the council's initial planning stages, it makes good sense to ask residents their opinions, ideas and feelings about a council to assure their future support. Of course, you'll also want to consider how the council can incorporate the particular talents and knowledge of residents, especially those residents who might at first feel they have nothing to offer. Residents will often want to be involved and stay involved, when they see that the council works on issues which affect them and which they believe in.

### **3. Are There Groups of Residents Already Meeting Within the Facility?**

Resident groups such as arts & crafts or current events groups might already exist in the facility. Do many residents attend events and activities held in the home? Are there residents who are able and willing to carry out projects and tasks independently? Enlist the aid of these residents and you will already have the foundation of your resident council.

### **4. Is the Home Large or Small?**

The size of your facility might help you determine the best or most realistic type of council - whether it will be an open forum, or a representative model with resident representatives from each floor. In a small facility, it may be possible to have an open meeting for all residents to attend. However, if too many residents attend, discussions may be limited and residents may become frustrated because they are less able to participate or the council accomplishes less. In those cases, it may be necessary to set up council committees or have a representative board for the council.

## **5. What Kind of Administrative and Staff Support Will There Be?**

As will be stressed many times in this manual, the administration's support is a necessity for the success of your resident council. You need to enlist the administration's support early on, and gain a clear commitment of what he/she will do for the council. Also think about other key staff in the facility whose cooperation may be essential (such as the Director of Nursing) or who can make a positive contribution to the council. How much time does the staff have to work with the council? Will staff work with any committees which are formed? The extent of staff time will also help determine the type of council to be set up.

## **6. What Kinds of Resident and Staff Resistance Can You Expect?**

Do not be surprised if you meet with varying degrees of resistance or apathy to the idea of forming a resident council, from both residents and staff. In fact, some resistance is the norm rather than the exception in many facilities. While resident councils have been around for quite some time, it is important for you to remember that you're introducing a new idea to your facility. The facility you live in, its staff and residents, are following firmly established ways of doing things. You'll need patience and perseverance to establish a successful council, and understanding why people might resist will help you in this. It is important to start with tasks and projects which are less threatening, more tangible and fun. Through small accomplishments, residents will learn to act as a group. Refer to this guide's section on the costs and benefits of a council for further discussion about the resistance to setting up a council.

## **7. Who Will Do The Organizing?**

In most cases, a facility staff person will initiate the organizing of the council. Usually, that staff person is either the administrator, or someone from the Activities or Social Services departments. It will be important, therefore, to involve interested and capable residents in the early stages of organizing the council as soon as possible. This will help prevent staff from devising a council on their own and without resident input. Residents will find their resident council that much more meaningful if they are involved with its development. The final decision about how the council should be run and what it should look like, should be left up to the residents.

**STEPS TO ORGANIZING A RESIDENT COUNCIL**  
(from “Five Steps to Council Organizing”, ElderCare Rights Alliance, MN.,  
[www.eldercarerights.org](http://www.eldercarerights.org))

Building any strong organization takes time. Be patient, but persistent in following these steps.

**1. Obtain information**

- \* As we've mentioned already, speak with and survey residents.
- \* Residents and staff of your facility can speak to residents and staff of already established resident councils in other facilities.
- \* Residents and staff can ask to be invited to another facility's council meetings, or invite representatives from another council to a meeting in your facility.
- \* Request help, information, and suggestions from CIAD. We have residents and staff available to help councils. Also available is a videotape, entitled *Residents Councils: A Voice for Quality of Life*, a dramatization of a resident council meeting.
- \* Consult the bibliography in the back of this guide for further resources.

**2. Finding Potential Leaders**

Most facilities have residents with potential leadership abilities. Some residents' leadership potential will be obvious. They might be articulate and already active in various facility activities and programs. They might also have brought problems to the attention of the administrator, and spoken on behalf of other residents in the past.

Facility staff might know of other residents with particular talents and skills who do not have as visible a presence in the home, and may never have entertained the idea of becoming a leader. Do not ignore these people. Given the opportunity, they may welcome, and grow into a more "up front" role.

What qualities should one look for when finding potential leaders?

- \* the willingness and ability to work with people.
- \* awareness of other peoples' needs, good at motivating others.

- \* objectivity - understanding a point of view you may not share.
- \* familiarity with the workings of the home, and what goes on in the facility.
- \* look for that person other people listen to and respect.
- \* creative, clear thinking.
- \* persevering and energetic; hard worker; good organizer.

It is important to understand the reasons people become leaders. What does a leader get out of it? Very often, it's for reasons of self interest, which shouldn't be considered a bad reason at all. Leaders acquire status, prestige, and are placed in positions where they can learn new skills. In nursing homes and adult homes, residents sometimes find themselves in leadership roles by default. A group of vocal, less fearful residents who raise complaints might view themselves as isolated spokespersons for a silent majority, and become frustrated, thinking they are leaders without any following. These residents need to especially understand the reasons for resident resistance.

It will be difficult to find one person who will be able to fulfill all of the leadership roles required for a resident council. More important, having "one" leader isn't desirable. A resident who does everything will quickly burn him/herself out. You can build a stronger council with shared resident leadership. In this way, leadership tasks can be divided up, and residents can provide needed support to each other.

### **3. Form a Core Group: Meet with a Group of Interested Residents and Staff to Discuss Councils and Resident Decision-Making Power.\***

Form a core group of potential leaders and other interested residents. Discuss the purposes, goals, and possible future activities of your council. See how the information you've obtained can be utilized within your facility and its unique situation. Finally, discuss the decision-making power of residents in the home.

#### Some Ideas on How to Hold Your Discussion

When discussing things in a group, begin discussing and thinking as a group. This is especially important to do in the groups' formative stages, or when people are unfamiliar with what it means to work as a group.

One way to do this is to "brainstorm." Brainstorming is a technique which encourages participation in discussion and creative give and take between people. A group leader asks the group a question, and goes around the room asking individuals for their thoughts and ideas. The more spontaneous the answer the better. Each person in the

group contributes, and answers are noted down by a secretary. Ideally, ideas are recorded on a blackboard so that everyone can see them. Brief answers are best - you want to avoid long winded discussions or debate. Every answer is considered a good answer, and no one should be criticized. Discussion will take off as people are stimulated by other people's remarks. As a group you can now try and see how everyone's ideas are connected and related to everyone else's.

Give this process time. People may be shy and need to get used to participating in a group before they are comfortable.

#### A Brainstorming Exercise

Ask residents what makes a home a good place to live? Food? Activities? Staff Attitudes? Choices? Ask them what it would take to make improvements in your home? How would they want to participate in making such improvements?

#### **4. Form a Planning Committee and Present Information To a Larger Group**

The group that was brought together in the previous step can evolve into a planning committee to organize an open meeting or event to present or introduce the idea of resident councils to the entire resident and staff population. Publicize the meeting with invitations and posters. The residents involved in the discussion group, with the help of staff, should prepare short presentations. Invite guest speakers, such as a resident from another facility council who could describe how their council got started, what projects they have worked on, and what problems they have encountered. The administrator needs to pledge his active support for the council. Leave plenty of time for questions or comments from the audience. The resident population can then vote on whether to form a council, or may decide to meet again before formalizing anything. At this general meeting, ask for resident volunteers for the planning committee. The planning group meets to formalize the council, organize an agenda for the next meeting, or begins to develop council programs or projects. This group reports back to the general membership at future meetings. Keep the first meeting relatively short and very interesting to make sure people come back. Don't forget that serving refreshments at the end of a meeting helps make it more successful and enjoyable. (\* Numbers 3 & 4 based on "Five Steps to Council Organizing", ElderCare Rights Alliance, Minnesota.)

## **5. Giving a Structure to the Council or Planning a Program or Project**

Structure and projects help establish and legitimize the resident council.

Establishing a regular meeting schedule, and sticking to it is a very important element in giving your council structure. Your council will need to decide when to meet, how often to meet, where to meet, and for how long. These are simple, straightforward things, but do not underestimate their importance in increasing the participation of residents.

One council in a large home realized they were excluding residents from meetings by holding them in a 6th floor board room. It was a perfect setting, quiet and comfortable, but it was too far off the beaten track for most residents. They decided to move their meeting to a more familiar and accessible recreation room.

One council increased participation by changing the time of their meeting. They took into account what activities might be in conflict with the meeting, and which time of day was most convenient for residents, given their routine. You do not want to meet too often or for too long if there aren't that many things to discuss. People will resent the council for taking up too much of their time. If there is not a lot to discuss at meetings, alternate them with interesting programs such as an information forum. In the same way, don't meet so infrequently, or for so short a time, that nothing can ever be accomplished. Generally, 60 to 90 minute meetings monthly seem to work best.

Another important way to give structure to your council is to develop purposes or by-laws. These will give your council greater authority and direction. Like with any organization, by-laws describe the purpose, goals and objectives of the council and provide something for members to refer back to at any time.

To be effective, councils need to do things in an organized fashion. In other words, councils develop projects and programs to fulfill specific goals or purposes. One council might decide that one of their important purposes is to voice residents' concerns and ideas to other residents and staff, and therefore develop and publish a resident council newsletter to accomplish this. Another council might want to have greater contact with their neighboring community. At the same time, the council has several people who are talented speakers. This council might then decide to develop a speaker's bureau.

### Other Ideas

\* To obtain input from the entire resident population on residents concerns and interests, the council can develop and conduct a survey.

\* The council can take a greater role or become a sponsor of activities that are already going on in the home.

\* Developing various committees, such as a welcoming, dietary or social action committee.

\* There might be a specific problem or complaint that the council would like to resolve.



## WHAT SHOULD YOUR COUNCIL LOOK LIKE?

Resident councils come in many shapes and sizes. This makes sense since each home is different, as are the residents who live there. Each council has its own character which reflects special talents, interests and beliefs of the residents involved.

There are only two things that are basic to all effective resident councils.

1. Every resident is an automatic member of the resident council with the rights to attend meetings, vote in elections (if any) and to run for office (if any). *No one should be excluded for reasons such as non-payment of dues or failure to actively participate.* (Silverstone)

2. The council's decisions are made democratically, either by consensus or majority vote, with all residents given an opportunity to express their opinions before a decision is made.

## THREE TYPES OF COUNCILS

Each type of council has a set of mutually agreed upon rules or guidelines for what the council will look like, how meetings will be conducted, and how decisions will be made. These rules help to make sure that the council's business is conducted in an orderly manner, and that everyone knows and can have input into the decision-making process.

Although each council is different, councils tend to fall into one of three general categories: town meeting model, representative model and mixed typed. Each of these models has its own advantages and disadvantages.

## TOWN-MEETING FORMAT

Some councils are organized around regularly scheduled (monthly, bi-monthly) open meetings to which all residents are invited. The key to making this format work is to find ways for residents to be involved in planning the agenda and the running of these meetings. Many councils solve this problem by electing council officers (president, vice-president, secretary) who are responsible for these tasks. However, there are other ways to solve this problem such as:

- \* establishing a voluntary planning committee to plan and run meetings
- \* having resident volunteers chair the meetings on a rotating basis, and taking time at the beginning of the meeting to set an agenda or at the end of the meeting to plan an agenda for the next one.

With a general meeting format, committees become very important. If a large number of people attend the general meeting, it will be hard to actually plan and carry out projects during the meeting time. In general, the larger the number of people who participate, the fewer the issues the council will be able to deal with during regular meetings. If follow-up is needed, a committee should be set up at the time of the open meeting to plan and carry out the necessary tasks before the council meets again.

## **REPRESENTATIVE/COUNCIL BOARD FORMAT**

Some resident councils are organized around a council board. The board meets on a regular basis (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) to conduct council business. The board members are responsible for keeping other residents in the home informed of council activities and raising issues brought to them by other residents.

Council boards can be set up in many different ways. Most often, members of the board are elected to their post annually at an election. Usually, elected boards consist of the council officers (president, vice-president, secretary) and 5-10 other residents elected as representatives from each floor. However, some councils decide that they do not want officers because they want all the board members to share equal responsibility for the running of the council. In other cases, council boards are made up totally of volunteers.

For a council board to be effective, the members must be willing to make a commitment to show up for board meetings, and to actively participate in council tasks and activities. Board members must also be committed to representing the interests of all the residents and not just their own. As with the town meeting format, committees can be set up to carry out activities in between meetings. Committee membership can be, and probably should be, opened up to interested residents who are not on the council board.

The key issue for councils based upon a representative/board model, is to find ways to keep the resident community informed of their activities, and to get feedback from residents who are not on the board. This can be done in many different ways:

- \* Open or town meetings run by the board can be held on a regular basis to provide direct communication between the board and the rest of the residents.
- \* If the council board has floor representatives, the floor representatives should hold regular meetings to get feedback from their floor-mates.
- \* Membership on committees, especially committees dealing with food and activities, can be open to non-board members.
- \* Minutes from council meetings should be posted in places where residents usually pass (lounges, elevators, on each floor), or distributed to every alert resident.
- \* The board can conduct surveys of all the residents on important issues (food, activities, policy changes).

### **MIXED TYPE OF COUNCIL**

More often than not, councils end up with a structure that falls somewhere in between these two models. Thus, councils based upon the open meeting model tend to have an executive committee to plan and run the meetings, and councils with boards tend to hold open meetings in order to get feedback from the residents they represent.

When Deciding What Your Resident Council Should Look Like, Keep the Following Three Things in Mind:

1. Since the primary goal of a resident council is to involve residents as much as possible in the decision-making process, form a council that will maximize resident participation.
2. The type of council chosen should help you run orderly meetings and follow up on issues.
3. The type of council should not be set in stone. One type of council may work well for a while but then need some refining later on. In fact, the resident council meetings should be reviewed on a regular basis to make sure they fit the needs of the residents. For example, a simple format (general meeting) may work very well when a council is young. It is a good way for residents and staff to explore what a resident council is, and how it will work in their home. As the council develops and as council members

become more sophisticated and take on more projects, an elected board may be needed. A board format can have some advantages by clarifying residents' responsibility for the running of the council, and making it possible to divide up tasks so work continues in between meetings. Similarly, if there are major changes in the type of residents moving into or living in the home, the type of council should be looked at to make sure it still makes sense.

## WHAT YOU NEED FOR A SUCCESSFUL COUNCIL

Forming a successful resident council is hard and often frustrating work. It takes the commitment of everyone in the home (administration, staff and residents) to make a council work.

### 1. The Support of Administration

The support and commitment of the administrator to the council and its work is crucial to the success of the council. The administrator must truly believe in the benefits of resident input into the running of the home. Councils can exist without this support, but many of the positive things about resident councils will be lost, making the experience more unpleasant for residents and staff alike. The administrator's support needs to show itself in a number of ways.



Remember, the administrator's actions and attitudes set an example for the staff.

- \* The administrator needs to pass on his or her belief in the importance of the resident council to those working and living in the home. This involves participating in staff training sessions on the purpose and benefits of resident councils, and attending resident council meetings (when invited) to show his or her support.

- \* Administration should provide concrete support to the resident council in the form of staff support (availability of staff for meetings), meeting space, writing materials, and access to phones and copying machines for council business.
- \* The administrator should show commitment to resident input by actively involving residents in the decision-making process. This means bringing issues to the resident council before decisions are made.

## **2. Good Faith Efforts to Respond to Council Concerns**

Administration and staff need to show "good faith" when working with the council. This means responding in a timely fashion to resident council suggestions and complaints, giving the council's suggestions serious consideration, explaining the reasons if council requests cannot be honored, and working with the council to develop alternative solutions which the home is able to carry out.

## **3. Creating An Atmosphere Which Supports Open and Honest Discussion**

For resident councils to work effectively, people need to feel free to share their ideas, complaints and concerns. Staff and residents alike must make sure that people's statements or suggestions are not ridiculed during resident council meetings. Administration and staff must make sure that there is no retaliation against residents for raising complaints. Staff and the resident leaders must continually deal with the ever present *fear of retaliation* by discussing it openly and showing new members examples of issues the council has addressed without repercussions.

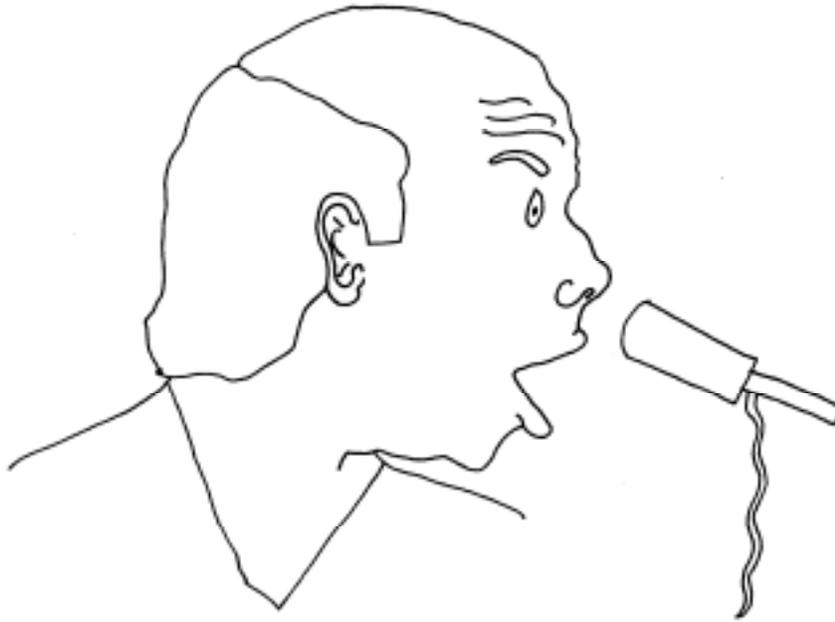
## **4. Ensuring That Council Decisions Are Made Democratically**

It is very important that the council represent the entire resident community. The council leaders need to understand their role as representatives of the other residents in the home, and must actively seek input from all residents when important decisions need to be made. As much as possible, decisions should be made by consensus. However, when differences of opinion remain, the final decision should be made by majority vote.

## **5. Resident Participation In, And Commitment To, Council Meetings and Projects**

In order to be effective and truly representative of the residents in the home, the resident council must be run by, as well as for, the residents. Residents must make a commitment to actively participate in meetings (speaking up, listening, offering suggestions), and to help the council carry out its tasks (taking Minutes, making

phone calls, writing letters). Staff's role is to help residents carry out their responsibilities. Although the staff may have to perform some tasks which residents cannot do for themselves, residents should run the council as much as possible. Wherever possible, staff should be doing tasks with residents rather than doing tasks for them.



## **THE ROLE OF THE LEADER**

Councils, like any group, are made up of individuals, with their own individual concerns, abilities, and personalities. At the same time, in any effective group, there is always the sense that people are thinking, acting, and working together. How can individuals discuss things and make decisions as a group?

The participants of a council assume specific roles and perform specific tasks during their meetings to achieve the council's goals and keep the council working in harmony. Some of these roles are specific to the person chairing the meeting, but many are roles that *all* skilled council members will assume during the meeting as they are needed.

There is one resident who has the role of chairing the meeting. That person usually has the title of Council President. What does she do?

**1) The chairperson helps prepare the agenda**

**2) The chairperson calls the meeting to order**

When we think of a chairperson, the image of someone with a gavel comes to mind. The chair of a council may not have a gavel, but she will open the meeting by assuming an attitude of seriousness and authority that tells everyone " O.K., it's time to get down to business." Some council presidents or chairpersons find it a good idea to go over the council's purposes at this time, to remind those who have forgotten, or inform those new to the council. This would also be a good time to remind members

of any rules and procedures the council may have established, such as the rule that no one should speak until recognized by the chairperson.

### **3) The chairperson seeks out new people and makes them feel welcome**

It is always a good idea to see if any new residents are present at a meeting. A chairperson might have spent some time introducing herself to new residents and inviting them to attend. Or, she might have delegated this task to the Sunshine committee. The leader of the council is aware of the need to seek out new people and attract new participants and makes sure that if there are new residents at the meeting, they will feel welcome and important.

### **4) The chairperson is the director of the meeting**

#### **a) The chairperson uses the agenda as a guide for pacing and running the meeting.**

This means that the chairperson provides time for discussion on each agenda item that she introduces. To do this, a chairperson must have a sense of how much time should be allotted to each topic. Some agenda items, such as announcements, are for informational purposes, and lengthy discussion is not required. Committee reports will take up a little more time during a council meeting, but again, a great deal of discussion is usually not necessary since the committee handles the issues in detail at committee meetings, thus freeing up council time for other agenda items. The agenda items that take up the most time are new business. During this part of the agenda, problems or suggestions are stated, opinions and views expressed, and information is sought after. The chairperson has to have a sense of when discussion has been exhausted or completed, and if the group is ready to make a decision. The chairperson must make sure that the council arrives at some decision on each agenda item, and that the decision is clear and understood by everyone. There are going to be some situations when the council is not yet ready to reach a decision on something - more thought or discussion is needed. In these cases, the chairperson can table an issue until the next meeting. After a decision is reached or an issue is tabled, the chairperson then moves on to the next agenda item.

There are several things that a chairperson can do to help promote group discussion.

#### **b) The chairperson makes sure everyone participates and has a chance to speak.**

When an agenda item or issue is introduced the chairperson should never settle for silence, since participation in discussions is at the heart of a successful council meeting. The chairperson should actively seek out people's opinions and responses, and draw out more silent members. For example, "Mrs. Jones, how do you feel about

that idea?" If you are chairing a vocal group, you must make sure people are not speaking at the same time. Keep people to the rule of respecting the person who has the floor.

**c) The chairperson must listen.**

Because the chairperson directs the meeting, it is easy to monopolize the discussion. However, the chairperson has more important things to do. In the interests of the group discussion, the chairman must make sure good ideas are not being ignored. By being a good listener, the chairperson will be in a position to summarize or clarify what someone else has said. A chairperson should also listen for what is not being said or avoided.

**d) The chairperson doesn't take sides.**

The chairperson must remain objective, especially when there are differing points of view. Again, because the chairperson has a powerful position at the meeting, her opinion should only be given after everyone else has voiced their own. Otherwise, discussion might quickly come to an end.



**e) The chairperson sets limits to the discussion**

The chairperson must keep in mind that discussion on any agenda item must be purposeful and focused. She will need to restrain people who are long-winded, and keep speakers to the agenda item being discussed diplomatically and gently, and prevent people from speaking out of turn or interrupting. If the chairperson does not take charge, she will be unable to keep the agenda moving, discussion will become chaotic, and members will become frustrated. On the other hand, a chairperson will need to show patience, because members will sometimes need to let off steam.

**f) The chairperson clarifies.**

People express themselves in different ways, and may not always be understood by the rest of the council. Sometimes, it will not be evident how a speaker's remarks fit into the discussion. The chairperson must be able to clarify, interpret or elaborate on other speaker's meanings for the benefit of the group, and place a person's remarks in the context of the discussion.

**g) The chairperson summarizes.**

As the "voice" of the group, the chairperson will summarize the discussion in order to draw ideas together and show how they are related. The chairperson can do this by restating suggestions, and showing where there are possible areas of agreement. Summarizing in this way helps the council reach conclusions and decisions.

**h) The chairperson assigns tasks.**

Being the chair is a big responsibility, but it doesn't mean you do all the work. Council tasks might include giving a committee report, obtaining information, writing a letter, or helping with some facet of a council fundraising effort. A chairperson can link particular tasks with the members who either have the expertise or interest to do them. She will also assign tasks in the interest of helping someone acquire a new skill.

**i) The chairperson encourages.**

A chair must be responsive to others. She must make the members of the council feel that their opinions and ideas are important and valuable. One of the reasons people participate in a council is the desire to contribute, do a good job, and be recognized for doing a good job. Members of the council should be praised and given recognition for the work they've done. Because a chairperson has considerable power, she must be able to accept the contributions of other members. A chairperson must also be concerned with developing the leadership skills of council members. She might have

assigned a new task to someone who wasn't sure they could do it. Encouragement and praise for things attempted and accomplished help us grow and gain confidence.



It is important for residents and staff to understand the distinction between the role of residents as leaders and the role of staff as advisor.

A leader or chairperson, as we've seen, directs the council meeting, and together with the other members of the council, decides what and how things will be done. The staff person does not lead or decide. Instead, they support, assist, and empower - acting so the council is working as effectively and independently as is possible.

It's a difficult task. Residents often feel helpless, abdicate their decision making power, and turn to staff for leadership. Staff will often find it easier and less time consuming to do things themselves. Confronted with a problem or an issue, a conscientious staff person will sometimes feel it is more efficient, and of greater benefit to solve the problem herself.

But no one, even with the best of intentions, can assume that their decision will be the best one for others, especially when the people directly effected by the decision are not involved in the decision making process. Making decisions and solving problems for others only serves to perpetuate the feelings of helplessness, incompetence, and dependence that residents suffer from. As an empowering agent, the staff advisor transfers the information and skills residents need to solve problems themselves.

### **1) The staff advisor provides a supportive environment.**

Throughout the meeting, the staff advisor should provide an encouraging and supportive presence. This is especially the case when residents are frustrated or in conflict with one another. To provide support effectively, the staff advisor must secure the trust of the council.

### **2) The staff advisor provides information and resources.**

The discussions the council has, and the decisions the council makes, cannot take place in a vacuum. The council must make informed decisions on the issues that are tackled at meetings. To make informed decisions, councils need information. Facts, such as State Health Department regulations (including the Residents' Bill of Rights) or individual facility policies (such as a smoking policy ); outside resources, such as the Ombudsman Program, or an ambulette service; how-to's, such as developing a newsletter, a petition, or an agenda; advice, such as making the council aware of the implications or consequences of a course of action they've decided to take. The staff advisor can strengthen the council by providing these and other kinds of information, and providing the council with access to resources both within and outside the facility.

### **3) The staff advisor facilitates discussion and helps with planning.**

To facilitate means to aid or make easier. A staff advisor facilitates discussion so that the council does what its members have come together to do, and so that the council survives any problems it encounters while getting the job done. What kinds of problems prevent councils from being effective? Personal conflict could arise between members, or a council could lack the necessary procedures to insure a task being accomplished. Advisors help councils conduct business and avoid potential problems

in several ways. An advisor may *ask* for clarification. Asking for clarification prevents any misunderstandings, and at the same helps the council decide exactly what action they wish to take. The staff advisor may *suggest* how to solve a problem, and *assist* with planning. Or *summarize* and *restate* the decisions and recommendations the council has made. This is often necessary after lengthy discussion, where it might be unclear what has been proposed and decided upon.

You might have noticed that the staff advisor's role as facilitator - asking questions and summarizing discussion - is similar to the leader's role. In some instances, the leader and staff advisor role will overlap, and the advisor can be very helpful in being "a friend to the chair" by assisting the chairperson during the meeting. But in all the examples above, the advisor is questioning, revealing potential problems, and not controlling the group by providing the answers or making the decisions himself.

#### **4) The staff advisor develops council member confidence and competence.**

The staff advisor should be working to develop the confidence and abilities of the members of the council.

- a) Draw up a list of a person's strongest skills and talents.
- b) Assign tasks and roles, or create a context or position so that the person can utilize these skills.
- c) Build on small accomplishments, and slowly add responsibility in those areas which need further development, with ongoing support and encouragement from the advisor.
- d) Continually elicit opinions and provide choices and suggestions to increase confidence and decision-making power.

## The Role of Participants

It takes more than one person to build a group into an effective resident council. How do the members of a resident council contribute to a meeting?

### 1) Skilled members are initiators

A skilled member will provide direction and purpose to the resident council by initiating discussion and council activities. This means bringing problems to the council's attention, proposing tasks and goals for the council to undertake and achieve, suggesting procedures for the council to follow, and proposing solutions and recommendations for the problems the council is dealing with.

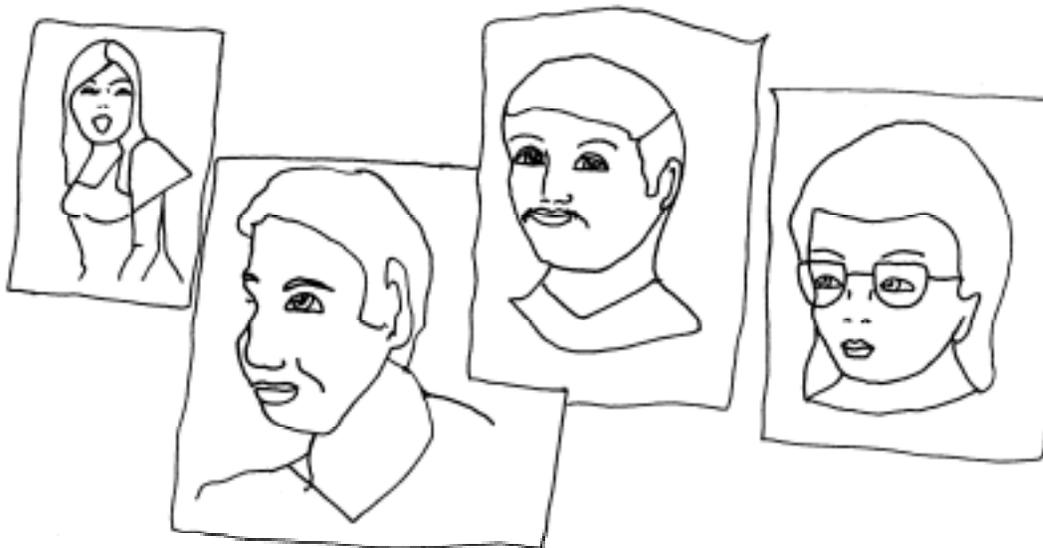
It is vital for members to provide the council with direction and purpose by raising and defining problems. Problems can be raised by persons who are experiencing the problem themselves or know that others are having the problem.

### 2) Skilled members represent others.

For a variety of reasons some residents are less able to advocate for themselves than others. Knowing that the facility is ideally a community of shared interests, one resident's concerns are of concern to everyone.

### 3) Skilled members express their feelings.

Resident council meetings are to a large extent, business meetings, but that doesn't mean that people should act stiff and formal. An important dimension of a council meeting is missing if residents do not feel free to express their emotions.



**4) Skilled members are aware of the need for information, and provide information to others.**

It's tough to make decisions if you do not have the relevant information to base your decision on. Information could be: the time when a particular problem occurred, the appropriate person to speak to, a facility policy, or a state regulation. A skilled council member will ask for information or clarification as the need arises.

A skilled member will be informed and share that information with the rest of the resident council. When the resident council has facts, opinions do not have to be solely relied on. Valuable information could also be the personal experience of a resident elaborating on or confirming a particular problem being discussed.

**5) Skilled members give their opinions.**

Resident council members need to state their opinions and beliefs during council discussion. Members' opinions provide the basis for group decisions.

## **AGENDAS: ESTABLISHING AN ORDER TO YOUR MEETINGS**

A meeting agenda is the items of business or discussion to be brought up at a meeting. A prepared agenda will help ensure that your meetings are orderly and productive. Meeting participants will find it helpful to know what topics will be covered during the meeting by either posting the agenda beforehand, handing out copies to those present, or reviewing the agenda at the start of the meeting. The agenda should be prepared in advance of the meeting, and the council officers should take the lead in preparing the agenda, with help or suggestions from the staff liaison, if necessary. Preparing the agenda involves not only deciding on the topics needed to be addressed by the council, but who will be responsible for presenting or discussing any particular item on the agenda. Keep the agenda within the time-limits of the meeting and be realistic about the amount of time necessary for each agenda item. And use the agenda as a way of orchestrating or developing a rhythm for the meeting. Try to anticipate the agenda items that will generate lots of interest, questions or discussion, those that will be brief, and those items that may generate conflict or controversy.

Agendas can vary but here are some suggestions that many councils find useful to include at some or all of their meetings:

- 1. Welcome and Introductions** - People should be made to feel welcome at meetings. This is also a good time to welcome and introduce new residents. Some council presidents also find it useful to briefly review the purposes of the council.
- 2. Reading the minutes from the last meeting** - It is important to inform absent members and remind all others about what has happened at previous meetings. (See the following section on Minutes).
- 3. Committee or Floor Reports** - If your council has floor representatives or committees, some time should be devoted to hearing about their activities, concerns and progress.
- 4. Old Business** - This agenda item allows the council to deal with issues that have been raised at previous meetings and are in need of further discussion or follow-up. Discussing Old Business assures there is continuity between council meetings. No group will be able to discuss and finish all their business at one meeting. There are some issues that will take several meetings to deal with, or will need on-going attention.
- 5. New Business** - This part of the agenda allows the council to deal with any new issues, problems, ideas or suggestions members would like to raise. The issues raised during this part of the agenda will take up more time because the issues must be explored, different points of view discussed and next steps decided on, including who

will do what by when. However, don't get bogged down in individual "gripes". And those issues that deserve attention but are too complicated to deal with during the meeting's time limitations should be handled through a committee, tabling the issue until the next meeting, or other viable alternative.

6. **Announcements** - Allow some time for sharing news and information such as upcoming events.

## **MINUTES: KEEPING A RECORD OF YOUR MEETING**

Minutes provide your council with a written record of council meetings. Minutes are also an effective way for the council to communicate with residents, staff the administrator and other interested people.

Minutes can be used to keep residents who do not attend meetings informed of the council's concerns, activities, and accomplishments on behalf of all the residents in the home, and so they can get involved in any issue that interests them. Similarly, if your administrator or other staff do not regularly attend council meetings, they can also be kept informed by sending them a copy of the minutes.

For example, let's say your council has met with the dietitian several times. It may be helpful if other food department staff received the minutes if certain changes will be made. Some of these changes may need the approval of the administrator. If he or she had a record of the resident council's concerns he or she would be in a better position to make an informed decision. This record of each meeting serves to hold administration and staff accountable. A resident who didn't attend the meeting might have the same or different concerns about the food and become motivated to attend and add her voice to the council after receiving the minutes. Other concerned groups you might consider sending minutes to are the home's family council, and if your home is a not-for-profit, the Board of Directors.

Minutes are also useful in documenting residents' complaints, the length of time complaints remain unresolved, and staff follow-up. Health Department surveyors and adult home inspectors often refer to the council minutes to find out what problems exist from the residents viewpoint.

Minutes can be distributed individually, posted on a centrally located bulletin board, or included in your council or facility newsletter.

In many councils, the staff liaison takes the minutes while a resident secretary is responsible for reading the minutes. Although it may be difficult for a resident to take minutes, a resident can play a bigger role in running the meeting by reading the minutes. After the minutes are read, it's a good idea to ask for a motion to accept the minutes as read, to make sure everyone agrees they accurately reflect what went on in the previous meeting.

A good rule to follow when taking minutes is that it is not necessary to take down everything that everyone says. Minutes should, however, cover the issues discussed and actions the council decides to take, in enough detail so that no important information is left out.

## COMMITTEES

Through committees, individuals can take part in discussions that are of particular interest or concern to them, therefore promoting greater participation in council activities. They also provide a mechanism for a smaller group of members to concentrate on specific problems, discuss them thoroughly, and develop various solutions or to plan various activities and projects. It is much easier for a smaller group to work on an issue than it is for a larger group. A committee can more productively meet with the administrator or other department heads to plan solutions to specific problems. It is also through committees that residents can develop closer working relationships with key staff and thus hold staff more accountable.



Committees can be formed in a variety of ways. Committee members who are interested and knowledgeable about the issue may be appointed. People can be asked to volunteer or a sign-up sheet could be utilized. Or committee members may be elected. Knowledge of an individual's past interests, activities and expertise is very helpful in identifying members for a particular committee. If the committee will be working on a specific problem, it's good to have some people on the committee who aren't directly affected by the problem. Committees should also have a staff facilitator to help the committee do its work. The staff person may be the advisor to the council or might be a staff member from the particular department involved in the problem or issue.

There are many different types of committees that we can define by their tasks. There are committees that provide regular liaison and input to staff and monitor facility services such as a food or menu-planning committee. There are committees that carry out a task or project, such as sunshine or welcoming committee. And there are committees that are established to solve a special problem. Councils may establish ad hoc committees to address a specific problem such as laundry, or plan a special activity, such as a fair. The committee is disbanded when the problem is resolved or activity completed.

### **FOOD or MENU-PLANNING COMMITTEES**

The problems of food are often central to the discussions of a resident council. For many residents, meal-time is among the most important activities in which they participate. Facilities are comprised of individuals with a great deal of experience in food preparation and cooking and a food committee is the perfect way to "bottle" that experience. Residents can provide on-going evaluation of meals and food service and assist in the development of menus. It's tangible and immediate and impacts on everyone.

### **WELCOMING and SUNSHINE COMMITTEES**

A welcoming committee is designed to visit new residents as they are admitted to the facility and assist them to adjust to their new home. Through sunshine committees residents raise money to send cards of flowers to friends in the hospital, visit sicker residents who are confined to their rooms, and hold birthday parties or other special events. Both committees enable residents to assist other residents less able or more vulnerable than they are and be involved in a more positive, less problem-oriented

way. A nursing home or adult home can be unfriendly and overwhelming for a new resident. In many cases the admissions process is handled rapidly and there is little time spent introducing a resident to her new surroundings and the residents already living in the home. Through the activities of these committees, new residents meet other residents and "learn the ropes" from their peers. These committees especially create a sense of community among residents and provide residents their own solution to the problems of isolation and being uprooted.

### **GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE**

Grievance committees are an excellent method for a council to handle individual problems without getting bogged down with an endless stream of complaints during meetings. These committees usually work by discussing a complaint and referring it to the proper staff person or department for investigation and resolution.

Other committees include the **social action committee, fundraising committee, executive committee, activities/recreation committee and nursing care committee.**

## **COUNCILS IN ACTION**

### **Problem Solving**

The identification and resolution of problems and complaints is a major purpose of a resident council. The discussion of complaints takes up a good portion of the any council's meeting: for example, residents are smoking in the dining rooms; residents complain they have been receiving incorrect medications; wheelchair residents are not getting to needed therapy appointments and recreation programs; not enough residents attend council meetings to help work on all of these other problems!

Your facility might have these or similar problems, and the council has an important role to play in resolving these problems and improving the quality of life and care in your facility. As the receivers of the services the facility provides, residents are in the best position to know if any problems exist. Furthermore, administration and staff do not have a monopoly on good ideas. Finally, residents should be involved in the resolution of complaints since they will be the group most affected by decisions that will change the way the facility operates. Problems will occur in even the best of facilities because of the extent of services provided in a home, and because there are so many people living and working together in the facility.

#### **1) Identifying and defining the problem.**

A council must first know and agree that a problem exists before working toward an effective resolution. Some problems will be obvious to the resident council. For example, if someone claims that there is a lack of resident participation in the council, council members might only need to look around to see how true the statement is.

A council might find it difficult to agree on the existence or validity of complaints for several reasons:

- \* the complaint is stated vaguely or in too general a form.
- \* everyone is not directly affected by the problem.

It is essential to define the problem you've identified as specifically as possible. As an example, it might unfortunately be true that the food is terrible in your facility. But nothing can be done with the statement "the food is terrible." No staff person or resident would know how to start solving a problem if it is stated in this way. People

must know what it is that makes the food so bad. There could be any number of reasons.

By defining a problem, we mean answering the questions Who? What? Where? When? and Why? A council should determine how many residents are affected. Is it one individual, a group of residents, or facility wide? Is one resident complaining about overcooked food, or are all the residents complaining? The nature and solution of a problem will largely be determined by the scope of the problem.

Another important question is where a problem is occurring. Facilities are often large places serving many residents. In the example we are using, is the problem occurring in the main dining room, or on the third floor where residents eat in the day room, or in their own rooms?

In many cases, it will be important to determine when the problem occurs. Which of the meals are particularly monotonous? Is it the breakfast, lunch, or dinner, or are they all monotonous?

Finally, try and determine why a problem is occurring - the reason for the problem. This information will help you decide how to resolve the situation.

## **2) Come up with suggestions to resolve the problem and evaluate their pros and cons.**

Raising complaints is an important council responsibility, but the council's responsibility shouldn't end here. The resident council should take an active role in solving the problem, rather than leaving it to the staff once a complaint or problem has been raised. Residents should consider themselves experts, given the fact that they live in the home, and council members have years of wisdom and life experience to draw on. By coming up with your own suggestions, the council might stimulate, and even pressure administration and staff to respond more quickly. Ideally, the council and staff will work together to solve problems in the facility, and staff will appreciate receiving the suggestions the council has.

## **3) Reaching a decision.**

After evaluating the suggestions that develop from your discussion, summarize what has been said, and decide on a solution, action or strategy that the council will take. Councils can reach a decision either by taking a vote, or deciding by consensus. Decision by consensus is a method where everyone must agree to the decision. Discussion and compromise continue until everyone is comfortable with the decision. This method works best with a small group of people who think alike. Refer to the

next section for a number of strategies and actions councils can use to resolve problems.

An important facet of reaching a decision will be the delegating of tasks necessary to implement the decision. Decide on what needs to be done, who will do what is needed, and by when. The chairperson can delegate tasks to council members or ask for volunteers. Make sure people are clear on what they are responsible for. Decisions will sometimes need to be modified or changed or further thought and discussion will be necessary if there is no one in the group willing to undertake the action required by the decision.

Unfortunately, in some instances, a council will have to seriously consider any possible negative consequences of their decision. If a complaint involves an individual staff person, a resident might fear some form of retaliation. Remember that the law gives you the right to present grievances, free from reprisal. And as the saying goes, there is strength (and protection) in numbers.

#### **4) Monitor and follow-up.**

This step is necessary to ensure that tasks are being completed, staff or the facility is doing what they said they would do, and the solution is working. The law gives the council the power to hold the facility accountable to an appropriate response, in writing if requested.

## **Strategies**

### **1) Meeting with staff.**

Communicating resident concerns to the appropriate staff through meetings is often the first and best road for the council to take. You will have to decide which staff person has the power to resolve the problem or institute the change you are requesting. Use the facility's ladder of command to your advantage. Do not go straight to the administrator if you can speak to the director of nursing first. This way, you have an option if the director of nursing has not satisfactorily handled the issue. The law says that if invited, and given the proper notice, department heads must meet with the resident council .

### **2) Form a committee.**

For many councils, committees are or can be the real working units of the council. Refer to the section on committees for a detailed discussion.

### 3) Surveys and Petitions.

The value of surveys has been mentioned several times. Surveys can be used to gauge the interests and concerns of the facility's resident population, and as a way for less active residents to participate more fully in the council. Surveys are used to gather information and provide residents with choices and options. Petitions are used to make specific requests (and sometimes demands). Surveys and petitions are especially helpful for documenting particular resident needs and to make a dramatic statement. For both surveys and petitions, the more residents who either participate in a survey, or sign on to a petition, the more weight they will carry.

### 4) Resident Participation in In-Service Training's

Resident participation in in-service training's for staff is an excellent way for residents to participate in the running of the home, and an excellent way to promote better staff and resident interaction and solve the problem of poor staff attitudes. The following is an outline your council can use to run your own training.

**Purpose:** To increase staff awareness of the needs and concerns of residents

**Format:** Roundtable discussion

I. Adjustment to the Institution - difficulty in adapting to losses of independence and self-determination.

- a) adapting to illness
- b) loss of community, previous roles, money
- c) regimentation

II. Dignity, Respect, and Privacy - relate through personal experiences

- a) Being treated as an individual
- b) calling people by the name they prefer
- c) knocking on doors, closing privacy and shower curtains
- d) your room is your home; difficulty in sharing a room

III. Communication

- a) Speaking to residents as adults - being patient and talking in calm tones
- b) Understanding physical and behavioral problems of residents simple sentences for confused residents, does resident understand English

V. Importance of Personal Possessions

- a) clothes shouldn't be considered interchangeable
- b) link to life in the community

V. Participation in Plan of Care

- a) importance of retaining control, having choices
- b) informed consent
- c) choosing what to wear

**5) Providing the staff with positive feedback.**

Letting staff know about the good things is as important as presenting grievances and complaints. Compliments promote good feelings between residents and staff, and lets staff know they are appreciated and doing a good job. Compliments also helps the council insure that the services residents approve of and feel are excellent continue remaining excellent.

## **Council Projects**

**1) Staff Recognition Day**

**2) Community Activities**

- a) Events that bring the community into the facility give residents the sense of belonging.
- b) Meetings with state and local representatives.
- c) Meetings with other resident councils.
- d) Area-wide resident council coalitions

**3) Fundraising**

Money means power and gaining greater control over your life. Through fundraising, councils can expand their programs and activities, and at the same time, provide residents with an exciting project in itself, which will give the council a great sense of accomplishment.

## **NEW YORK STATE REGULATIONS REGARDING RESIDENT COUNCILS**

The New York State Public Health Law and the New York State Social Services Law contain regulations directly related to the establishment and maintenance of resident councils in nursing homes and adult homes, respectively.

### **Nursing Home Resident Council Regulations**

1. Each facility must have a Resident Council
2. Each resident has the right to participate in the Resident Council.
3. The facility must assure that the Resident Council:
  - a) meets as often as the membership deems necessary;
  - b) is directed by the residents and is chaired by a resident or another person elected by the membership;
  - c) may meet with any member of the supervisory staff as long as reasonable notice is given to the staff.
4. After consultation with the Resident Council, the facility must assign to the council a staff person who is acceptable to the members of the Resident Council. This staff person shall act as advisor or coordinator to help the Council:
  - a) hold regular meetings;
  - b) assist members in carrying out Council activities including:
    - obtaining information about facility policies;
    - exploring the solutions to problems;
    - and conveying to the administrator the issues and suggestions which require administrative action.
5. The facility shall assure that any complaints, problems or issues reported by the Council to the designated staff person or administration are addressed.
  - a) When requested, a written report addressing the problem, issues or suggestions shall be sent to the council.

6. The administrator shall involve the Resident Council in addressing the need to seek compromises between conflicting resident and staff interests and needs.
7. The facility shall 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.
8. Staff or visitors shall be allowed to attend meetings at the group's invitation.
9. The facility must ensure that members of the governing body (owners or Board of Trustees) make themselves available to hold meetings with representatives of the resident council at least 3 times a year to discuss matters contained in a jointly developed agenda.
10. The Quality Assessment and Assurance Committee shall consult at least quarterly with the Resident Council to seek recommendations on quality improvements.
11. Prior to the renewal of privileges of physicians, dentists, or podiatrists, the facility shall solicit and consider information provided by the Resident Council about each such practitioner.

### **Adult Home Resident Council Regulations**

*Resident Organizations* (1) The operator shall encourage and assist residents to organize and maintain committees, councils, or such other self-governing body as the residents may choose.

The operator shall:

1) assure the residents' organization:

a) meets as often as the membership deems necessary;

b) is chaired and directed by the residents; and

c) may meet with any member of the supervisory staff, provided that reasonable notice of the request is given to such staff;

- 2) appoint a staff person to act as an advisor to the residents organization, who shall serve as a liaison between the organization and administration to report all problems, issues, and suggestions discussed by the residents which require administrative action;
- 3) assure that any complaints, problems or issues reported by the council to the designated staff person or administration is addressed and that a written report addressing these items is sent to the council.

