

Advocate for Nursing Home Residents Finds Fulfillment in Serving Others

For nearly two decades, Karen Thompson has served as a Certified Volunteer Advocate (CVA), promoting quality care and a better quality of life for residents of a 120-bed nursing home in Cape May County.

CVAs fill a crucial role for the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO), proactively visiting nursing homes to help solve problems for residents and ensure they are treated with dignity and respect. When serious issues such as abuse, neglect or exploitation are identified, a full-time LTCO Investigator/Advocate may be assigned to investigate and resolve them.

[Becoming a CVA](#) is a straightforward process. Applicants receive 36 hours of in-depth, virtual and in-person training and take a certification exam. Once certified, applicants shadow experienced CVAs until they are ready for solo assignments visiting nursing homes near where they live. Each CVA receives ongoing guidance and support from a Regional Coordinator.

Originally from Cape May Court House, Karen has lived in Whitesboro, a small community within Middle Township, for 23 years. She is married with five grown sons. Karen remains active in her church and loves spending time with her children and grandchildren. She is also a longtime volunteer and a member of the Board for Directors for Habitat for Humanity Cape May County, a local chapter of the global organization that is dedicated to helping individuals and families develop strength, stability, and self-reliance through home ownership.

She retired after approximately 20 years in nursing yet maintained an interest in caring for older adults. In her retirement, Karen became a home health aide in addition to volunteering as a CVA.

Karen's nursing background, passion for giving back to the community, and her faith all factored into her decision to become a CVA in 2005. Her strong advocacy is appreciated by residents and grateful family members.

"When I first began going into the facilities, I interacted with every resident I could," Karen said. "I tried to make sure I did not leave anyone out."

Today, Karen continues to visit the nursing home regularly. She also enjoys attending meetings of the Resident Council—a group consisting of and led by residents to represent the interests of all residents in the nursing home. Karen said the primary issues that come up are universal in nursing homes—food, laundry issues, and understaffing—and give her insight on how to best advocate for residents.

Ultimately, Karen said, being a CVA is a rewarding and fulfilling experience because your successes are not only personal, they are achieved in the service of others.

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