



# The Beacon

A Newsletter for Long-Term Care Residents

February 2021

## LTCO'S SOCIAL ISOLATION PROJECT



It has been nearly one year since the COVID crisis began and nursing home residents were cut off from regular visitation and activities. In response, the LTCO started our Social Isolation Project ("SIP") to send special staff into nursing homes to check on isolated residents and to make sure that facilities are doing everything in their power to maximize residents' rights and quality of life during this time.

SIP staff make unannounced visits and talk to residents to get a true sense of how things are there. Then they work with staff to suggest creative ways residents can socialize and communicate, and to resolve any other problems residents face. They are reminding residents and staff of important

resident rights during the pandemic, including the right to meaningful activities, the right to regular visits with family and friends (through window, phone, or video if indoor visits not possible), and the right to regular access to outside areas and fresh air.

SIP staff also remind residents and facilities about "essential caregiver" and "compassionate care" visits that the NJ Department of Health has laid out in its COVID directives. "Compassionate care" visits can occur even when the nursing home has active COVID cases, and "essential caregiver" visits should resume when the facility has gone 14 days with no new facility-onset COVID-19 cases in the last 14 days AND the facility is not currently conducting outbreak testing. All long-term care facilities must follow the DOH directives in making decisions about visitation and should work with residents and families to schedule visits where they are permitted.

Finally, SIP wants you to know that there are quarterly and annual meetings about your care where you should participate and have a say. You should be invited to these meetings and be allowed to invite whoever you want to be present (virtually, if needed).

**If you want to request that a Social Isolation Project staff person visit your nursing home, please call 1-877-582-6995 and tell the intake coordinator that you are requesting a Social Isolation Program visit or email the LTCO at [Ombudsman@ltco.nj.gov](mailto:Ombudsman@ltco.nj.gov).**

## NURSING HOME STAFFING RATIO LEGISLATION

Governor Murphy signed legislation in October 2020 requiring nursing homes to meet certain ratios for direct care staff to nursing home residents. The law went into effect on February 1, 2021. Now, nursing homes must have 1 direct care staff member for every 8 residents during the day shift, 1 for every 10 residents during the evening shift, and 1 for every 14 residents overnight. If the number of residents increases, the facility has few days to adjust to meet the ratio again; after this, they must be in compliance. These ratios are a big improvement over past standards and should result in better quality of nursing home care. Nursing home workers, residents, families and advocates (including LTCO) pushed for these ratios for years and this is a great victory!

## A Nursing Home May Not Be the Only Option!



*"I am doing so much better physically and I am just so much happier."*

David was not destined to lead an ordinary life. Born in Bamberger's department store in the Garden State Plaza mall, he started working in kitchens as a teenager, later becoming a classically trained chef. While working and living in a beautiful castle (true!), David suffered an accident that crushed his trachea/neck and sent him into a coma for 3 months. He regained consciousness just as his family was signing paperwork to send him to a Philly area nursing home.

For the next 5 years, David was in and out of NJ hospitals and nursing homes, fighting hard to talk, walk, and use his arms again. During one of many nursing home stays, David met Marsha, a nurse from the I Choose Home NJ program ([www.ichoosehome.nj.gov](http://www.ichoosehome.nj.gov)) who told him it was possible to find an apartment and live independently with Medicaid services. Together, they applied for every housing opportunity possible. Finally, in February of 2019, David moved to his beautiful, light-filled apartment in North

Jersey with his parakeet, Irish. His home health aide comes 6 days a week to help with whatever he needs. David's favorite part of community living? "The feeling of total freedom and my ability to cook what I want, when I want. I'm half Italian, so that's my thing, but as a chef, I can basically cook anything. I like to cook enough to last a few days. I could never do that in the nursing home."

David also enjoys attending mass and local Knights of Columbus meetings. Another bonus: his landlord, Ruth, has become a close friend, stopping by to help him and just hang out. When asked how community living compares to his time in nursing homes, he says, "I am doing so much better physically and I am just so much happier."



David's pet, Irish.

***I Choose Home NJ is a federal program designed to move people out of nursing homes into independent community settings with Medicaid supports. If you are interested in learning more, please call ICHNJ at 1-855-466-3005 or visit [www.ichoosehome.nj.gov](http://www.ichoosehome.nj.gov).***

New Jersey Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman

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