

ProSeniors ombudsman provides mercy for elderly in predicament

By **Walt Schaefer**

Some time ago, a Butler County nursing home ousted a man in his mid 50s – a registered sex offender who was caught looking at pornography.

To that extent the nursing home's action was justified and appropriate. But, the man had an amputated leg, was wheelchair bound, had a host of other serious medical conditions including diabetes, and had obvious psychological issues to boot.

He was dropped off by the home at a transient hotel where his room was not accessible to the disabled. He was given a grocery store gift certificate, which was promptly stolen.

What happens to a guy like this? Enter Jennifer Lyon, a senior ombudsman for ProSeniors.

"This guy was so alone and I was able to get him help – medical health intervention for physical and mental issues. I actually got him into an appropriate placement outside of Butler County and not a hotel," said Lyon, 53, a ProSeniors ombudsman for 15 years.

"We were connected when I became aware that he was discharged from the nursing home and he was a registered sex offender who had violated (rules) by being on a pornography site on the Internet at the home.

"He has been able to get mental health

assistance. One of the things was to connect him with the appropriate psychological services. My God that hotel was the scariest place and the home put him there. The man gave his grocery certificate to someone at the hotel to go and get him food and it was stolen," Lyon said

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"He had no food, no money and so my role as an advocate was really to make sure this individual, regardless of who he was, or what he had been, or where he came from, was safe. I felt it was my responsibility to make sure he got the help he needed and to make sure he was able to transition to a stable home environment, living environment. His medical conditions are such that he truly would need the level of care to be in a nursing home. He requires full long-term care."

"He is doing well now. He's getting the help he needs to be stable. His home knows his issues and they're dealing with them successfully," Lyon said.

What motivates Lyon to dedicate her career to helping people others would shun?

"It's a commitment to the well-being of those around me. I was raised in the Catholic Church. I was raised to give back. I am a part of the community and need to give back to

the community. I feel a sense of commitment to help others and I will tell you I get a great fulfillment from the individuals I serve.

"So, I do it with a sense of compassion and love. Sometimes people who don't have a voice need a voice. I feel God has put me in a place where I have been a voice for people and I am needed. I constantly pray I am fulfilling that purpose," Lyon said.

ProSeniors, based in Roselawn in Cincinnati, serves five counties in southwestern Ohio – Butler, Warren, Hamilton, Clermont and Clinton. "It is not a Catholic organization, but I think there are a lot of individuals who have spiritual connections to what they're doing," said Lyon who lives in northern Kentucky and is a parishioner at St. Agnes Parish, Fort Wright.

"I feel fortunate to be part of ProSeniors. We actually provide a variety of services. We have a legal hotline that is available for Ohioans age 60 and over to speak with an attorney on the phone for free. We also have attorneys who deal with a variety of issues – everything from Medicare/Medicaid issues to many different types of cases our legal team takes on. They are very successful in advocating on the rights of helping older Ohioans and have won some significant cases

over the years. We also have a pension rights project and are very involved in a financial exploitation project which is under our legal services," Lyon said.

"There are a number of programs to benefit children who are in need – everything from legal assistance to advocacy within the long-term care system. We have a Medicare fraud department program that covers the State of Ohio," she said

ProSeniors is non-profit and funded by government agencies, the City of Cincinnati, United Way, the Council on Aging, and other social service organizations.

"In the simplest terms, I'm an advocate for individuals living in long-term care and that could be in a variety of settings – home healthcare, living in a group home, in an assisted living community, or in a long-term care nursing facility. My role is to ensure that individuals are aware that they have the right to make decisions about their lives and to be treated with dignity and respect," Lyon said.

"I am assigned to 40 homes and we are in those homes at least quarterly. Some of the issues I help with they are reported directly to me and then I work with the consent of the individual. Also, people call us sometimes anonymously to just leave information, from the hospital, or concerned citizens or family members. Some come directly to me – individual patients, she said.