



ALASKA
LONG TERM CARE
OMBUDSMAN



Annual Report

October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020



Seniors - A Rapidly Aging Population

The 65 and older population in the United States grew by over a third (34.2% or 13,787,044) during the past decade, and by 3.2% (1,688,924) from 2018 to 2019. The number of seniors aged 65 and over is projected to almost double from 2.5 million, or 17.2 percent of population, in 2019 to 4.5 million, or 23.3 percent, by 2046. The growth in the number of seniors will accelerate over the 2019–2031 period as baby boomers turn age 65.

Alaska is the most rapidly aging state in the United States according to the Administration on Aging's data. The fastest growing age group in Alaska is the 85 and older group. Currently, 91,281 Alaskans aged 65 and older reside in Alaska. The size of Alaska's population aged 55 to 64 suggests the number of seniors will increase over the next decade. Increases in life expectancy play a role in the increasing number of seniors.

The older the person, the more likely the need for long term care (LTC) and the more likely the need for care which lasts not just months but years. It is estimated that 50% of the age group over 85 is receiving LTC services.

Our elders are our neighbors and they have contributed much to our society. We want to ensure that elders maintain a good quality of life throughout their life span. Even when elders are faced with transitioning into a LTC facility, there should be a safety net in place to ensure their quality of life.

The Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman (OLTCO) is an essential part of LTC services. The Ombudsmen advocate for improvements in LTC services and supports. The LTC Ombudsmen are certified individuals who aim to resolve problems of residents in long term care settings for the elderly. The program provides an avenue for conflict resolution, problem solving and decision making. The Ombudsman's focus is on listening to the voice of seniors who may be experiencing challenges in LTC settings.

The OLTCO strives to ensure dignity, choice, rights, and quality of life for all individuals in long term care settings. We are elder advocates who want to ensure residents are having their basic needs met. This year our work has been a bit challenging since we have not been able to routinely complete in-person, unannounced visits to LTC facilities to talk with residents about their care and facility conditions. Due to the Governor's public emergency declaration in March, in-person visits ceased for staff and volunteers.

Over the last year, we worked resourcefully to provide advocacy to residents in long term care facilities. Our work moved from in person to virtual visitations using phones and emails or other modes of communication. While these virtual visitations offered a short-term solution to help Ombudsmen stay connected to residents, we were not able to be fully present, meet privately with residents or to observe the environment where the resident lived, which makes completing our mission all the more challenging.

The good news is that residents in LTC settings can expect us back in facilities in March 2021. (See how COVID 19 has impacted our work on page 6).

References:

www.census.gov
www.live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop
www.Longtermcarelink.net



About us:

The Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman (OLTCO)

Ombudsman (om-budz-man):

A Swedish word meaning "representative of the people." The OLTCO advocates for quality of care & quality of life of residents in long term care facilities.

Core Values:

- Resident directed
- Resolution focused
- Respect
- Advocacy
- Professionalism

Mission Statement:

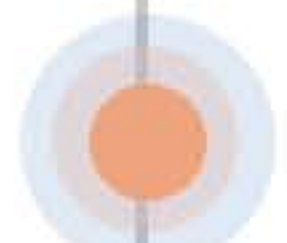
The OLTCO is mandated by the Older Americans Act and state law to provide resident-centered advocacy designed to protect the rights, health, safety, and welfare of Alaskans living in nursing facilities and assisted living homes (ALH).



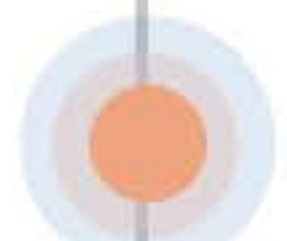
What We Do



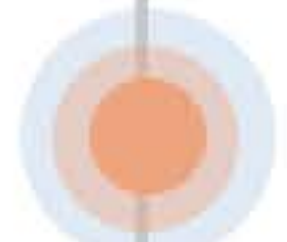
**INFORMATION &
REFERRALS**



**EDUCATE ABOUT
RIGHTS**



**INVESTIGATE
COMPLAINTS**



**EMPOWER WITH
SELF-ADVOCACY**



**VISIT AGED 60 OR
OLDER**



**ADVOCATE TO IMPROVE
QUALITY OF LIFE**



When should you Call a Long Term Care Ombudsman?



*To Report problems or
concerns*



*If an older Alaskan is
being discharged from
a facility against their
wishes*



*To get information
about long term care*



*To ask for help
addressing systemic
issues*



*To volunteer as an
Ombudsman*



Staff



Stephanie Wheeler
State LTC Ombudsman

Systems Issues
Public Education
Program Administration

Volunteer Management
Partner Agency Coordinator
Case Consultation
Facility Coverage in:
MatSu, Chugiak & Eagle River



Mikki Easley
Deputy LTC Ombudsman



Karol Collyer
Assistant LTC Ombudsman

Facility Coverage in:
Kenai Peninsula & Kodiak
Part of Anchorage

Facility Coverage in:
Southeast
Part of Anchorage



Leana Christy
Assistant LTC Ombudsman



Alvin Ancheta
Assistant LTC Ombudsman

Facility Coverage in:
North and West Interior
Part of Anchorage

Intake Processing & Referrals
Tech/Admin Support
Volunteer Program
Assistance



Kerri Tanner
LTC Specialist



Meet AL

Al is currently living in a LTC facility in Alaska. While Al has been in Alaska for quite some time, he is originally from the Philippines. Al's life was exciting in the Philippines. He was an amazing boxer and truly enjoyed being active and outgoing. That part of his life has never left him, even when he had to move into a long-term care facility.

Along life's highway, Al experienced some challenges. As he grew older, he was challenged to make ends meet. While he continued to work, he experienced some medical challenges that led him to need care and support in a LTC facility.

As part of his personality, Al is a strong self-advocate. Leana Christy (Assistant Long Term Care Ombudsman) shared that Al took some time to warm up to her. After one of her visits, Leana asked Al what she could do to help make him more comfortable in his home. Al indicated that he would like to have money to buy some food that reminds him of his home country. Leana reached out to his guardian to support Al in his request. Score for the win! Al was able to get some extra money to buy the food that he most desired.

After another visit, Al shared with Leana that he wanted to find a way to stay more connected to his family and friends. Leana worked with his team to help Al purchase a cell phone. Al was truly happy when he received his cell phone.

After several meetings with Leana, Al began to talk more about his life. He told her about his time in the Philippines and his days as a boxer. If only he could find some way to stay that active, even with some of his current medical challenges. After listening to Al's story, Leana decided to talk to his activity director and with Al's legal guardian. She wanted to find a way to help Al realize his dreams.

The team collaborated to purchase a punching bag and gloves for Al. The punching bag was hung in the activities room. Al was surprised and so happy to have these items that he can use every day and to reminisce about his life as a boxer. With his new punching gear, Al has a regular morning routine. He gets up every morning, puts on his boxing gloves, gets in his daily work out with his punching bag, takes his blood pressure and then settles down for a rest.

Thank you, team Al, for sharing his story!



This is a picture of Al "boxing" and smiling with his advocate, Leana.



The Impact of COVID 19 and the Work of the Ombudsman

During the wake of COVID 19, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued recommendations preventing in-person visits to LTC facilities. Since LTC Ombudsmen were not considered essential workers, the LTCO were also prevented from doing in-person visitations, which consequently impacted our travel budget. While we ceased in-person visits in facilities in March 2020, our role was to continue to support residents within the context of the pandemic. The OLTCO changed the way that we ordinarily do business and moved to support residents and family members through virtual visitations. During this time of the pandemic, the Ombudsman still responded to and investigated complaints brought to us by residents, their representatives and family members.

In addition to virtual visitations, the OLTCO created monthly town hall forums to provide information to residents. The monthly forums were also an opportunity for residents to share information with the OLTCO.

While we continued to support residents in LTC facilities, the statistics below show how COVID-19 impacted our work. The statistics show a/an:

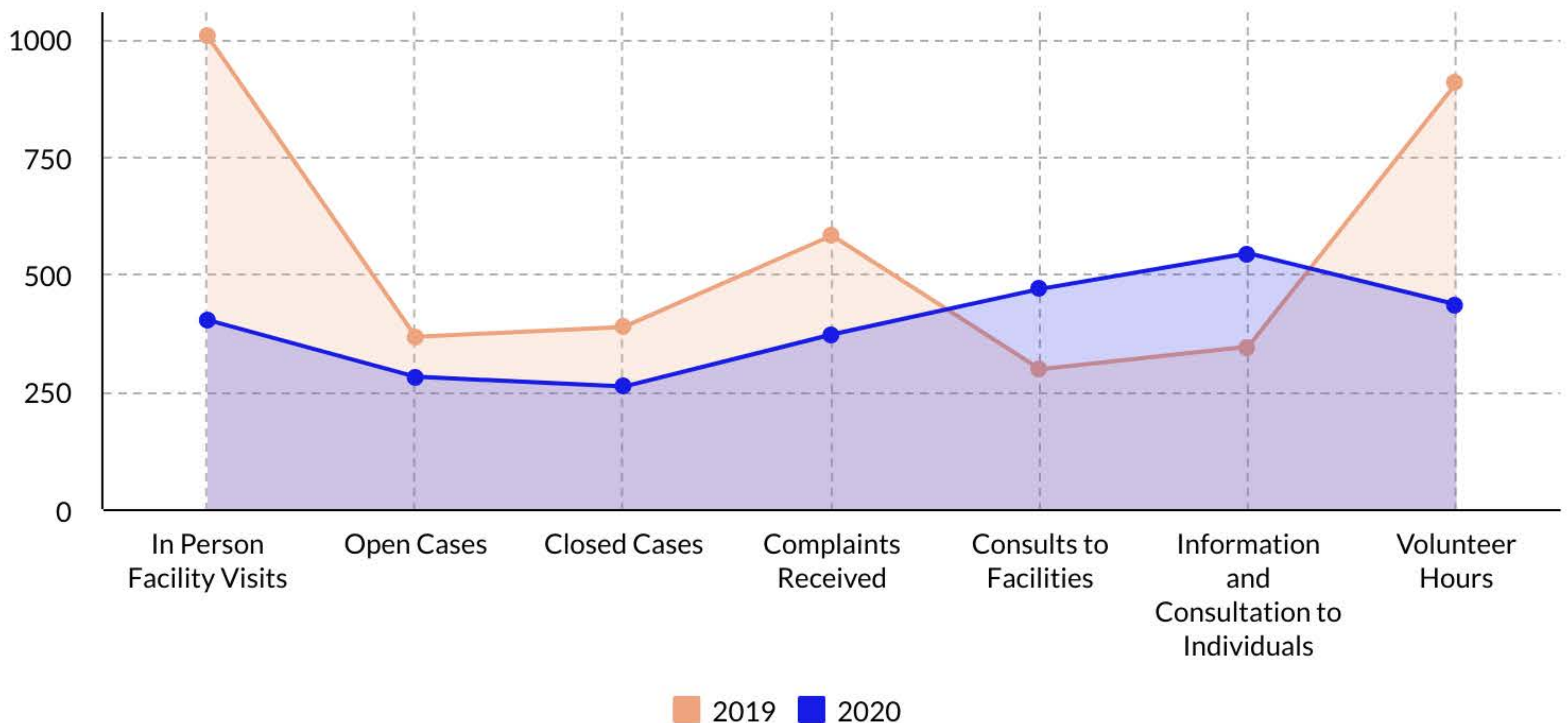
- Decrease in facility visits (40%)
- Decrease in open cases (77%)
- Decrease in closed cases (67%)
- Decrease in complaints received (64%)
- Increase in consultations to LTC facilities (63%)
- Increase in Information and consultation to Individuals (54%)

The decreases in facility visits, open cases, closed cases, and complaints received can all be explained by the lack of in person visitations and lack of in person observations/verification of complaints.

The increases in consultations to facilities and individuals can also be explained by not having routine in-person visitations. Residents and staff of facilities reached out more to the LTCO office.



Data by Comparison between 2019 and 2020



Due to COVID-19, the OLTCO ceased doing in-person facility visits March 5, 2020.

In 2019, the OLTCO had 60 certified volunteers that provided 905 hours of volunteer time including in-person visits to residents across the state of Alaska. In 2020, the OLTCO had more volunteers (68), however these volunteers were not able to do in-person visitations due to COVID-19 restrictions.

As the effects of the pandemic are mitigated, the OLTCO looks forward to resuming their mandated role of in-person visits with residents in LTC facilities across the State of Alaska.

Good News:

The OLTCO program received an additional \$100,000 through the CAREs funds. These funds allowed for the purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE), testing, iPads, travel and a temporary Ombudsman for the purpose of increasing in-person visitations to facilities.

Reentry and travel policies are in place.

Our traveling Assistant State Ombudsmen have received their vaccinations.

Our tentative plan for our Assistant State Ombudsmen is to resume in-person visitations in March 2021. We are looking forward to it.



TOP FIVE (5) COMPLAINTS

Received by OLTCO

Assisted Living Homes



1. Systems & Other issues



2. Quality of Care Issues



3. Admission, Discharge & Eviction



4. Residents Rights, Choice



5. Quality of food/ food service issues

Nursing Homes



1. Admission Discharge & Eviction



2. Quality of Care Issues



3. Systems & Other Issues

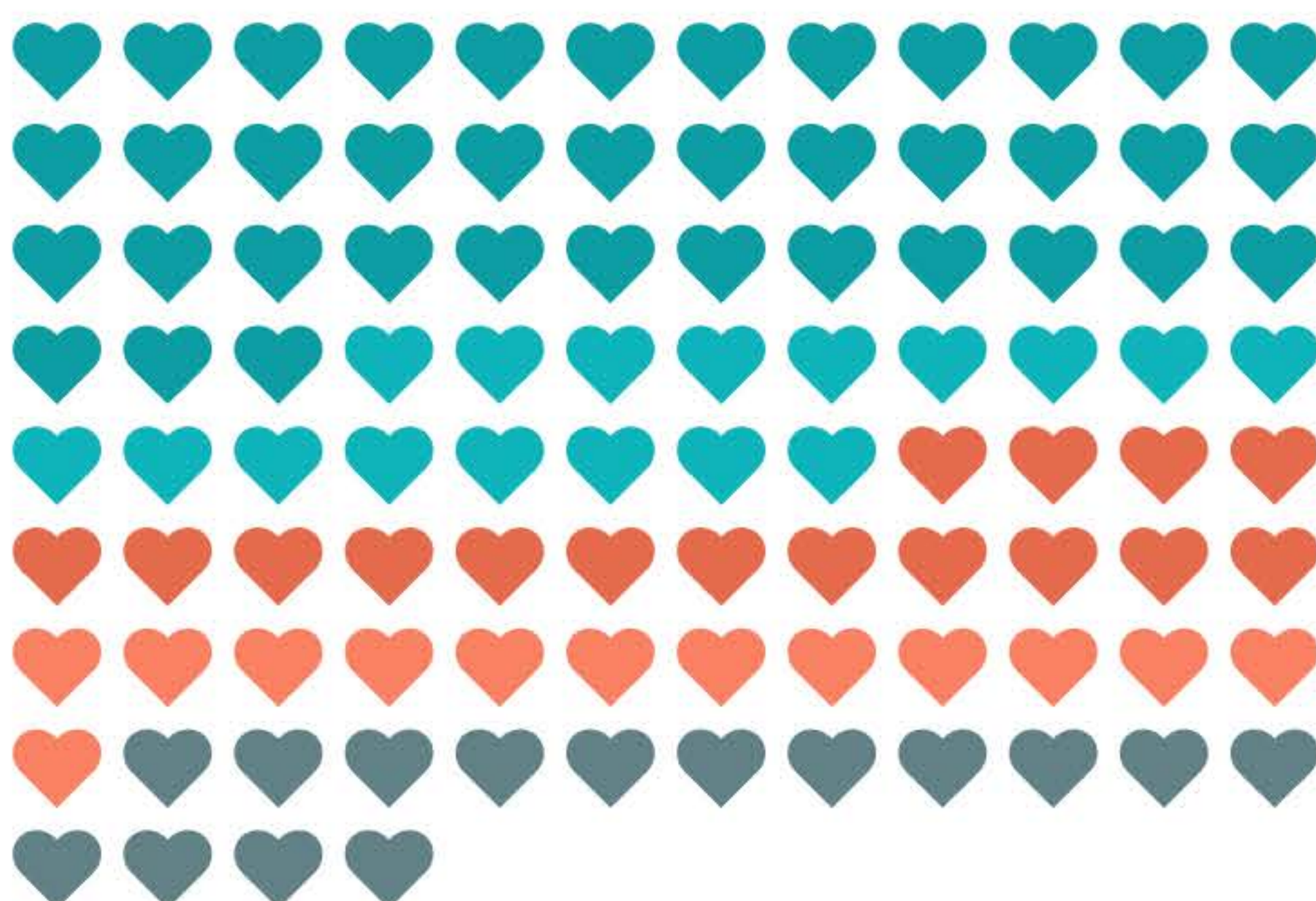


4. Residents Rights, Choice



5. Complaints about outside agencies

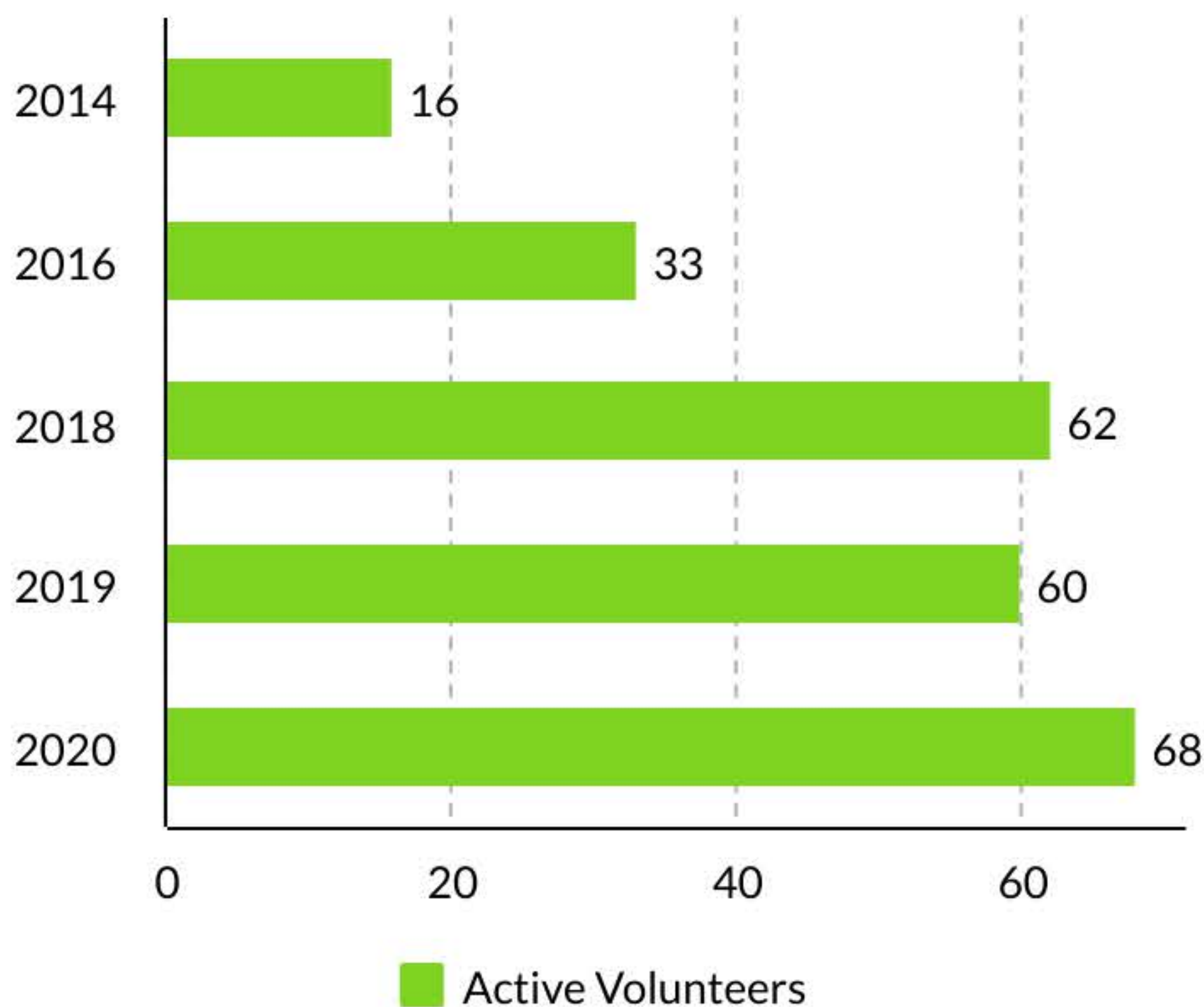
Who Submitted the Complaints in Fiscal Year 2020?



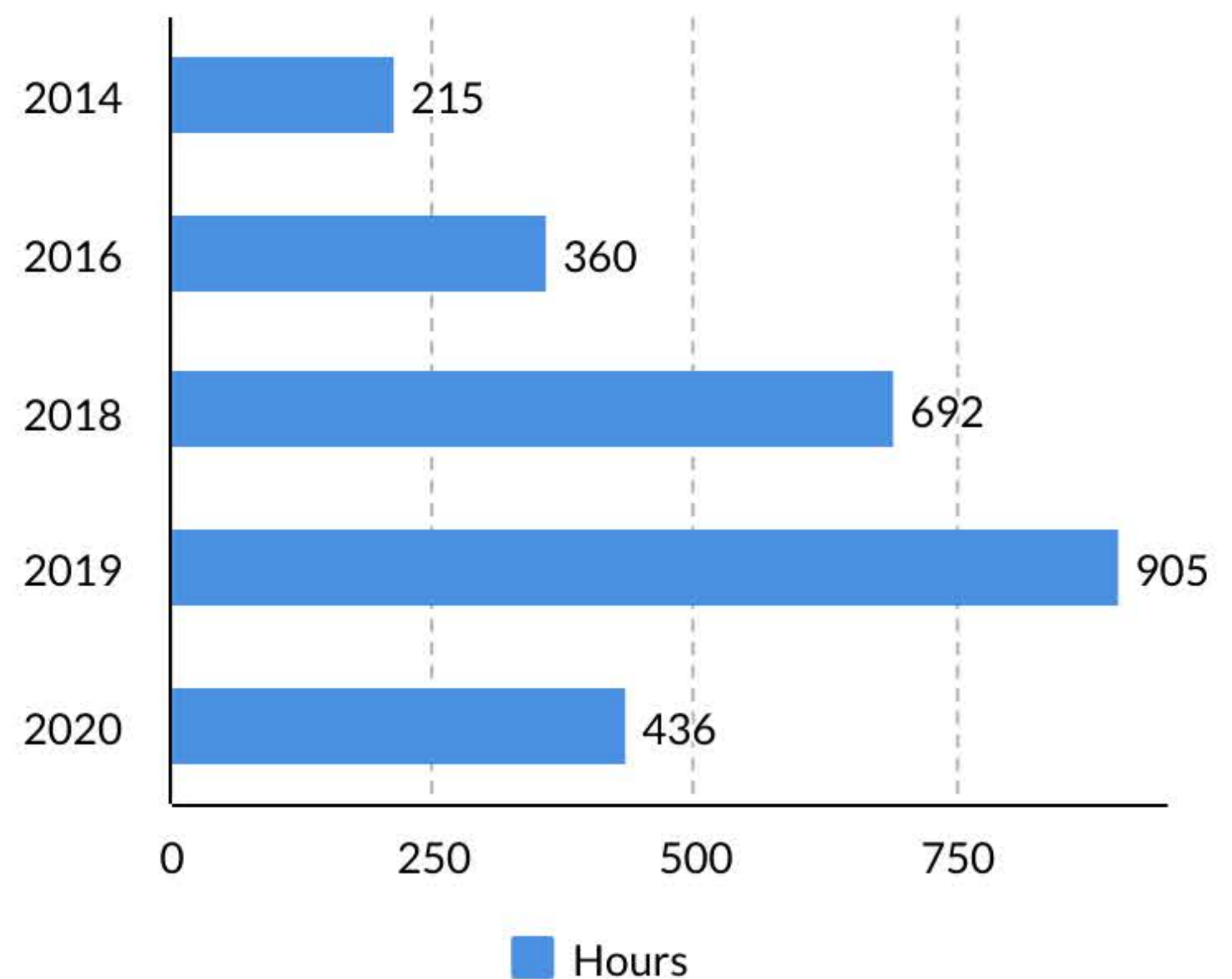
- Residents (39%)
- Facility Staff (17%)
- Family Members/ Family Reps (16%)
- Other Agencies (13%)
- Unknown/ Concerned Persons (15%)



Active Volunteers



Volunteer Hours



NOTE: 3-11-2020 in-person visits ceased due to the Public Health emergency declaration.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A VOLUNTEER?

- A passion for Elders
- Friendly and outgoing
- Creative problem solving
- Ability to be observant and non-judgmental
- A good listener who likes talking with older Alaskans

Complete an application online
www.akoltco.org

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around ~Leo Buscaglia"



OMBUDSMEN IN THE COMMUNITY



27 Communities
throughout
Alaska

20 Nursing
Facilities with
954 Residents

537 Assisted
Living Homes with
3,763 Residents

Territory of
663,267 Miles

TESTIMONIAL

"My sincere appreciation for the insight, professionalism, and skillful assistance provided by Alvin Ancheta, Assistant Long Term Care Ombudsman.

Recently I encountered roadblocks in my attempts to bring to light what I felt was an oversight in COVID vaccinations for Fairbanks Assisted Living Homes. It became apparent to me that at least one Assisted Living Home, where my husband resides, was not in the queue for the Tier 1, in-house vaccination program that had been contracted to Walgreens. My research indicated this was a national issue and one I felt could be addressed at a state level. When my voice was not heard through any channel I pursued, including Walgreens, I turned to your office. Mr. Ancheta listened to my concerns, asked important questions, and did his own fact finding. I cannot express strongly enough how being listened to and taken seriously was impactful in and of itself!

In a very short time Mr. Ancheta resolved the issue and the contracted provider carried out their in-house vaccination commitment. This week residents will complete their second COVID vax. What a difference this has made in the lives of those seniors and caregivers. I am grateful for Mr. Ancheta's service and dedication, and the leadership your office extends to Long Term Care Facilities." ~ Sharon Story (concerned family member).



COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES

Emergency Home Closures

Emergency home closures have a profound impact on residents, their representatives/guardians, care coordinators and other service providers, especially when they occur without timely notification. The State LTCO hosted a meeting to identify ways to improve communication, timely notification, protocols and processes between Residential Licensing, Adult Protective Services, Public Guardians, Care Coordinators and the Ombudsman's office to lessen the impact of emergency home closures on residents living in those homes.

Voting Rights Project

COVID 19 made voting more difficult for residents in long term care settings. The LTCO embarked on a project to ensure residents in long term care settings had access to information about their voting rights, information about dates of primary and general elections and information about the various ways to vote. We also encouraged residents in long term care settings to make a plan to vote.

COVID 19 Meetings with Assisted Living Home Administrators

A team of key players first met in July of 2020 to discuss how to best support Assisted Living Homes (ALH) through COVID 19. The meeting started out with discussions between the State Long Term Care Ombudsman's (SLTCO) Office, State of Alaska - Residential Licensing, State American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services - Public Health. The group began meeting weekly to discuss COVID 19 issues and concerns in ALHs. While these initial meetings were helpful, we wanted to hear directly from ALH Administrators. The SLTCO then created a virtual Zoom meeting with ALH Administrators to address COVID 19 concerns around visitations, infection control, social isolation, discharges, PPE, COVID testing and most recently COVID 19 vaccination distribution planning. These meetings provided an avenue for ALH administrators to share information, learn from each other, learn/share best practices, hear from key stakeholders on updated issues related to COVID 19 (testing, visitation, residential rights, vaccination distribution planning), and to develop policies and protocols around visitation.



COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES (continued)

[Alaska's 10-year Map to Address Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia \(ARD\)](#)

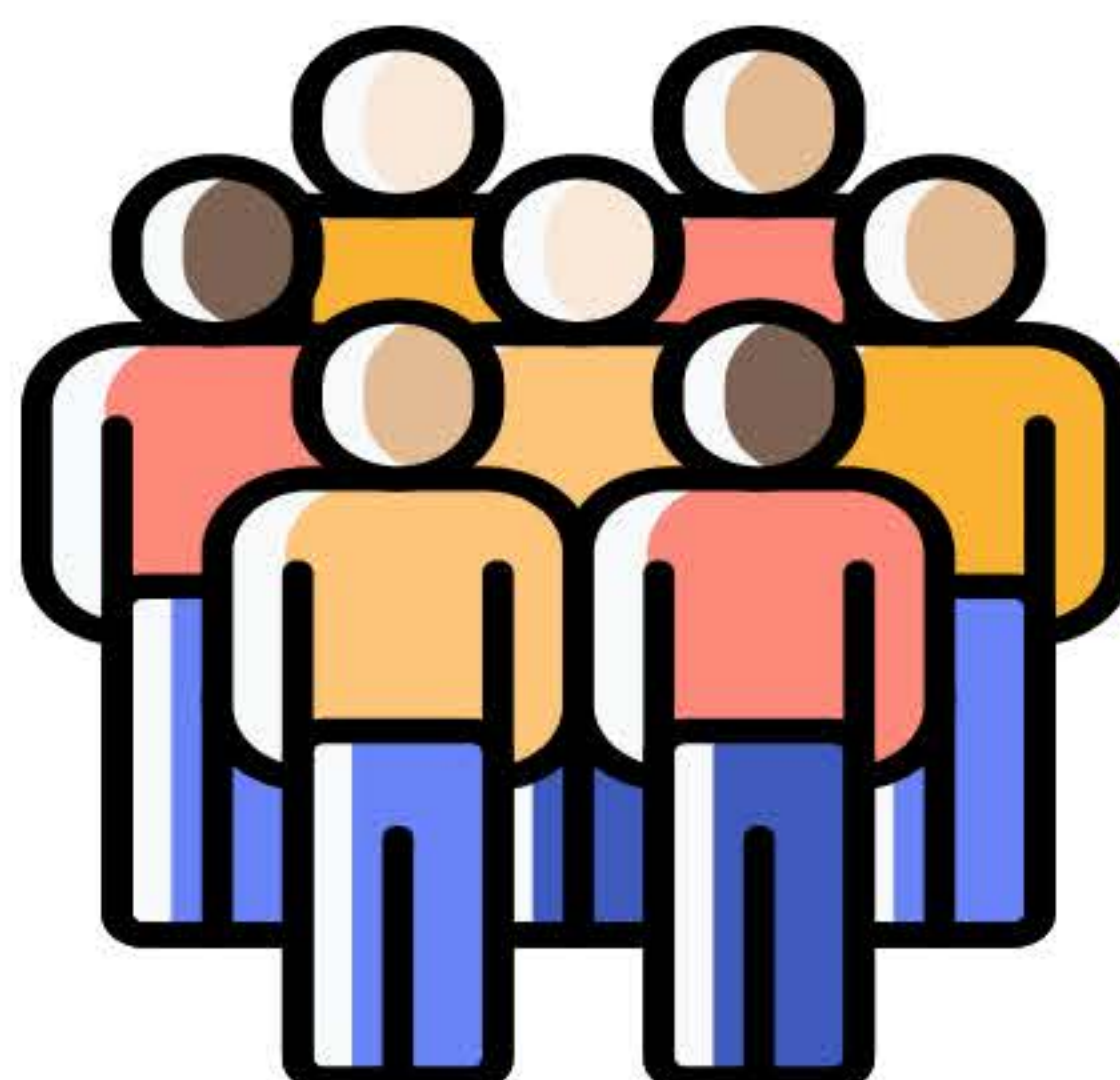
The OLTCO was a participant of the Core Planning Team who in 2020 created "A Call for Action" under the direction of the Alaska Commission on Aging. The mission of the Core Planning Team was to assist in building a "roadmap" to identify systems of support for people impacted by ARD. The resulting resource publication has been finalized, distributed to partners, and is available online.

[Alaska Traumatic and Acquired Brain Injury Advisory Committee](#)

The OLTCO is a participant of the Alaska Traumatic and Acquire Brain Injury (TABI) Advisory Committee. We are creating a state plan for TABI. Goals have been developed and we are now in the process of building on those goals for each of the identified areas: prevention, awareness, resources, data and infrastructure. The state plan will advocate for and support the vision of creating a comprehensive service delivery system for individuals with TABI.

[Disability and Aging Summit 2020](#)

As a member of the Disability and Aging Coalition, the OLTCO helped plan the 2020 Disability and Aging Summit. The goal of the summit was to discuss the national and state trends regarding the aging population. The summit was held virtually and included presentations on aging well in Alaska.

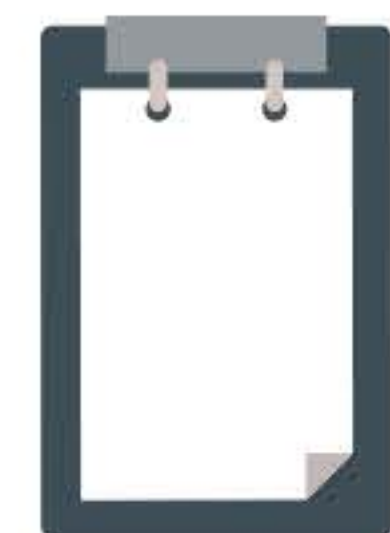




OLTCO Systems Advocacy

We will continue to:

- Address issues related to COVID 19 impacts on the senior population including visitation policies and social isolation.
- Work closely with Resident Councils and Family Councils in LTC settings to support them in their advocacy work.
- Advocate for elders' (of LTC facilities) interests in public policy arenas.
- Train residents of long term care settings and their families about their rights.
- Work with stakeholders to develop a plan to improve long term care services to elders with mental health or behavioral challenges.
- Develop and disseminate emergency preparedness/response information to residents and LTC facilities to assist them to be prepared for an emergency, pandemic, or natural disaster.
- Work on guardianship systems reform with the Working Interdisciplinary Network of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS) to help ensure guardianships are safe and supportive.





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