

**National Family Council Call:  
Growing and Maintaining a Strong, Stable, Independent Family Council  
Thursday, November 13, 2008: 3pm and 7pm ET**

**CONFERENCE CALL NOTES**

**Welcome and Introduction – Jessica Brill, NCCNHR Project Coordinator**

- NCCNHR: The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care is excited to be hosting this conference call, which is titled Growing and Maintaining a Strong, Stable, Independent Family Council! On the previous call in this series we talked about the Rights of Family Councils under The Nursing Home Reform Law of 1987, also known as OBRA.
- NCCNHR (formerly the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform) is a nonprofit membership organization founded in 1975 by Elma L. Holder to protect the rights, safety, and dignity of America's long-term care residents, and NCCNHR has vast experience with family councils.
- This call is the second in a series of calls that are part of the project *Family Councils for Quality Long-Term Care: Support, Strengthen and Empower*. Through this project, NCCNHR is working with Virginia family councils, as well as councils across the country. This is a unique opportunity to strengthen and network family councils. In addition to conference calls such as this, councils across the country have access to a webpage, listserv and mailings with information and resources related to family council advocacy. On this call, we have family council members and a few Citizen Advocacy Group representatives. This call is not open to ombudsmen, though they can play an important role in family council support.

NCCNHR appreciates the Frances Lane Memorial Family Council Fund of the Edward H. Lane Foundation for making such opportunities possible.

- All of the materials related to this project are available on NCCNHR's website: [www.nccnhr.org](http://www.nccnhr.org). Click on "Frances Lane Memorial Foundation" on the homepage.

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## Advancing Excellence Campaign

- The Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes Campaign is a national 2 year voluntary campaign to improve the quality of life and care in nursing homes across the country. There are currently 21 national organizations supporting the campaign.
- The Campaign has a total of 8 goals, and nursing homes across the country have been invited to participate in the Campaign by picking 3 or more of the goals to focus on. Right now, 45% of all nursing homes in the country have signed up.
- Consumers can join the Campaign; there is no obligation connected with joining, and if you want to provide your contact information, you will receive a newsletter. The Campaign website has a consumer section with fact sheets, as well as information for providers who join.
- To learn more, visit NCCNHR's website ([www.nccnhr.org](http://www.nccnhr.org)) to learn more about the Campaign, or visit the Campaign website: [www.nhqualitycampaign.org](http://www.nhqualitycampaign.org).

## Speaker Introduction – Jessica Brill

- Kirk W. Larson is one of the family members who attended the NCCNHR Conference last month in Indianapolis, and we were so pleased to see him and other family members there! Kirk is the Chairman of the Minnesota Veterans Home Family Council, in Minneapolis, MN. Kirk's father was a resident at the Minnesota Veterans Home from April 2005 until July 2007. Kirk has been active in Minnesota Veterans Home policies, he spoke to a legislative hearing committee relative to the Minnesota Veterans home in August 2005, and he attended all of the Governor's commission meetings to develop a directional plan for the home for care concerns.
- Jean Murphy was the Executive Director of FRIA: The Voice & Resource for Eldercare with Dignity from 1994 to 2004, overseeing its expanding work supporting leaders of nursing home family councils during that time. She is an author of FRIA's newly published Family Council Manual and Tool Kit, among other important resources. Prior to her work at FRIA, she served as Executive Director of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest and as an attorney in a civil legal services program.
- Also on the call with us today is Karlin Mbah, Policy Advocate and Hotline Counselor with FRIA.

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## **Family Council Panel Presentations**

### **Kirk Larson, Chairman, Minnesota Veterans Home Family Council, Minneapolis, MN**

The MN Veterans Home Family Council has been in existence for 25 years. Five members are elected officials on board. When new people come to the home, their family is given a form to fill out – this gives the facility permission to share the family member's contact information with the family council. A council member then calls and introduces him/herself to the new families. The council posts signs with their meeting information. They also have dedicated bulletin boards for the family council.

The council does fun activities with the families. I.e.: Take boat rides so that they can spend lots of time with each person. The council also celebrated Residents' Rights Week by giving all of the residents and staff root beer floats.

The council has a newsletter and a [website](#) where they post information about what they are doing. The site is called MN Veterans Home Family Councils. The minutes from all the meetings are also posted there.

The family councils uses NCCNHR's *Strength in Numbers* video. The council treats each family member with dignity and respect. If a family member has an issue, it is very important to them. The council also sends sympathy cards to all families. They support all the families because the council knows how the family members feel.

Family council successes: Care conference guidelines, websites, strategic plan for family council, developed ways for families to contact us to report successes or problems.

### **Jean Murphy, FRIA: The Voice & Resource for Eldercare with Dignity, New York, NY**

FRIA stands for Friends and Relatives of Institutionalized Aged. FRIA does advocacy and empowers family members and regular visitors of residents. The organization also serves as a watch dog to ensure good care.

FRIA began working with families from the beginning. They work with the state to develop family council rights, and they help ensure that the state surveyors speak with family councils during survey. FRIA also works to prevent facilities

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from retaliating against family council leaders by preventing them from entering the building.

All family councils want to know how to increase their membership. It is important to recognize the leaders who want to do this job. The leaders do all of the hard work on organizational issues. Because stays in nursing homes have become shorter, family councils must conduct continuous outreach. If councils can get family council information in the admission packet, that is great. Councils can add a flyer that has a check box that says “do you want to be contacted by the family council?” Magnets are a good idea. Councils can also let people know that the council has a special gift for new families by hanging up flyers. Further, councils can target special age groups by times of day.

When councils are doing something for the holidays, make sure council members introduce themselves to everyone. Focus on the special talents that each member of the council has. Use those who are outgoing to do recruitment.

Be realistic about what you can achieve.

Run good meetings. Make sure you begin and end on time. Do not let one person dominate the meeting. Keep it on track. Follow the agenda. When people want to help let them help.

Visit [www.fria.com](http://www.fria.com) to order the new Family Council Manual and Tool Kit which is \$30.00, including shipping. You can also order a copy by emailing FRIA at [http://fria@fria.org](mailto:http://fria@fria.org) or calling them at 212.732.5667.

### **Questions:**

**Q:** The administration for my mother’s nursing home asked me to participate in this call because they want a family council. We are trying to get members. It sounds like we really need to bombard people at admission.

**A:** It requires a lot of listening. Do not talk to family members like you are on a soap box; just listen to them so they feel that they have a voice. It is so overwhelming when you admit someone to the nursing home. You need to be an advocate for the family at this point. Spend at least an hour with them.

**A:** You are working on shaping your council. If you want presentations and they are helpful, do them, if not, don’t. You should have a plan for the council. It is easier to recruit people when you know what your council is going to do. If you feel like the admission process is a problem, come up with a handout that gives families the information that you wanted to have when your mother was admitted.

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**Q:** When do you have meetings?

**A:** Most councils have meetings in the evenings and on weekends. Some groups have meetings that rotate.

**Q:** Do you have your Ombudsman involved?

**A:** Yes but she goes to other buildings too. So she is not there everyday.

**Q:** Does your family council collect dues?

**A:** We do not. We do not want family members to think all we need is money or that they must give to participate in the council.

**A:** Most councils in New York do not have dues. Some of the most effective councils do take dues, but won't turn people away if they can't pay them. Some dues run around \$10 per year. Other councils pass the hat. They are very specific about what the funds are being used for. Some councils have a member volunteer to pay for postage for a year. Some councils have people bring snacks to meetings.

**Q:** How do you work with a staff that is resistant?

**A:** The FRIA Family Council Manual has two pages of information about how to do this. You really have to tell the staff why it is a good idea to have a family council. Keep working at it - sometimes things turn around.

**Q:** How often do you have speakers and invite staff?

**A:** We try to have speakers every other month. We also just ask staff to attend the last half of the meeting. Families can also come to us and talk privately. The goal of having staff is so that family members know who to go to when they have a problem.

**A:** It is good to have staff at the meeting so you can talk with them as you need to. It is also good to have the meeting without staff or in another place so that families can speak to each other. This is helpful – when you have a problem that needs to be discussed privately it is not a big deal that staff are not invited.

**A:** The Ombudsman helped us get started. It was very helpful.

**Q:** There are often criticisms – i.e.: “Do you really need a family council since there aren't a lot of people there?” However, it is most important to have a fully functional council. Size isn't important. When a particular issue is raised, more people may come, and then it's good to have a protocol in order and have a productive meeting that accomplishes a lot. It is important to have membership increase, but it is also important to remember that numbers are not necessary the most important thing. Don't measure the success of a council by the number of members that you have.

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**Q:** We are a new group (11 months). We are proud of getting people to attend, and getting speakers to attend meetings. Good speakers increase attendance at meetings.

**Q:** We have staff members with family members who are residents at the facility. What do we do about having them at family council meetings?

**A:** In NYC, a council felt that the staff person who was also a family member was coming to the meetings to report back to the administrator. The council asked her not to come, and the problem went away. In another situation, the council wasn't sure what to do – they included the staff person in meetings, and she was public about her position so that people weren't surprised – council leadership also offered to talk one-on-one with people about issues.

**Q:** How many continuing care facilities have activity departments and leaders?

**A:** Most NYC facilities have activity departments and leaders. A good home will have good collaboration between the family council and the activity personnel.

**Q:** Does federal law require facilities to allow family councils to post materials, and does it require facilities to pay for mailings?

**A:** Some states have special family councils laws. The federal law has requirements related to private meeting space, who can attend council meetings, a facility liaison, and facility response the council. To learn more, view NCCNHR's fact sheet on Family Council Rights:  
<http://www.nccnhr.org/uploads/fcrights.pdf>.

### **Wrap-up and Announcements – Jessica Brill**

- We hope that this call has been useful and informative for you! NCCNHR wants to know more about the issues and barriers that your family councils face, and concerns that you have. This will help us to plan upcoming conference calls and events. So please call or email me at NCCNHR to share your thoughts: 202.332.2275, ext. 225 or [jbrill@nccnhr.org](mailto:jbrill@nccnhr.org).
- Family members who are part of a family council are encouraged to join NCCNHR's free family council discussion group and listserv. To join, visit [www.nccnhr.org](http://www.nccnhr.org), and scroll down to the Section titled NCCNHR News. You will see the announcement of the family council discussion group. Click on the link, enter your email address, click the subscribe button and follow the steps from there. Alternatively, contact Jessica Brill.

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- We encourage you to join NCCNHR, who coordinated this call today. By joining NCCNHR, you will be helping to improve advocacy and our work on behalf of long-term care residents. So join today, by calling NCCNHR, or going to our website ([www.nccnhr.org](http://www.nccnhr.org))!
- NCCNHR's website has a great deal of resources regarding family councils and advocacy. Visit the [Family Council Center](#), and the [page dedicated to this project](#) – where you can learn about upcoming opportunities for networking, support, and strengthening of your family council!
- A new resource: A DVD available from NCCNHR titled Strength In Numbers: The Importance of Nursing Home Family Councils. The DVD contains a companion booklet - a Program Leader's Guide with discussion guidance, additional resources, fact sheets, and other information. The cost is \$25.00 per DVD or 4 DVDs for \$100.00. There is a flier and order form included in your materials, as well as NCCNHR publications list.
- Thank you to our speakers and to our call participants for joining us, and for all the terrific information and questions!

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