



GUARDIANSHIP PROGRAM'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Covid-19 long-term care visitation restrictions took us all by surprise. Even our Guardianship staff, “professionals,” were not allowed inside the facilities. This is when we knew the situation was serious.

Our Guardianship Program had to quickly redesign how we provide guardianship services to our 92 clients in the Dallas area. We typically visit our clients in-person on a monthly basis to do an assessment of their care and well-being. Suddenly there was a state mandate that kept us from providing one of our most essential services. Our clients reside in a wide variety of residential settings such as skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, and group homes, so there was not a single client we could (or should) visit in person. When the news came out that Covid-19 was quickly spreading through facilities and older adults were getting very sick and even dying, we were worried about our clients. We serve as legal Guardian of the Person for older adults 50 years of age and older and we care for them the remainder of their lives. We have built loving relationships with each of our clients over several years... the idea of any of them getting sick or worse was heartbreaking. We felt helpless. We had to develop a way to stay more engaged to ensure they would not be overlooked or left behind.

After conversing with other Guardianship Programs around the state to learn how others were responding, we decided our response would be to increase our monthly assessment to weekly check-ins. Video chats became our primary means of communicating with our clients. It allows us to see our clients and we can be shown around the room to assess cleanliness, look in drawers to inventory clothing and personal needs for purchase, and we could look the nurses and caregiving staff in the eye to say “thank you” for taking on this incredibly difficult mission to ensure the safety and care of our beloved clients.



As the country slowed down due to the mandatory quarantine, Covid-19 did not slow down the need for guardianship. It became a helpful tool for some of the most vulnerable older adults in nursing homes who have cognitive impairments and had no one looking out for them from the outside. The Courts appointed Temporary Guardians for older adults in nursing facilities to ensure highly vulnerable seniors had advocates during Covid-19 when traditional advocates such as long-term care ombudsmen, the state, and family members could not enter the facilities.

Six months later, Texas has opened visitation to the facilities with state approval, which includes weekly Covid-19 testing of all staff and residents. The facility must maintain no positive results for visits to continue, which is no small feat. Several facilities received approval and quickly lost it due to new positive Covid-19 test results.

As for our guardianship services, we remain in close contact with our clients and their care providers. We are able to visit some of our clients with the use of masks and social distancing. Most we continue to visit through video chat. As the facilities open again, we will be ready to visit in-person to ensure the care and well-being of some of the most vulnerable seniors in Texas.