

Erika Sletten



Imagine you are unable to walk or speak to your loved ones, you are incontinent and need someone to help you eat or drink, and you live in a skilled nursing facility. This is the description of a woman who had a stroke and suffered from right-side hemiparesis. 'Phyllis' is the reason I am passionate about long-term care. She is a strong, independent woman who has worked through her grief. "Phyllis" is able to live her life to the fullest, and her quality of life is great. I am inspired and motivated by "Phyllis".

When I chose long-term care social work, I did not realize how much I wanted to work with this population. My background was in school social work and child protection. When I was offered the position of Social Service Director at Hillcrest Health Care Center, I had no long-term care experience. The position at Hillcrest changed my life. I am proud to say that I am now the Corporate Social Service Director of the The Thro Company, which provides services in four skilled nursing facilities and three assisted living facilities.

Currently, I am in the Master of Social Work program at Minnesota State University in Mankato, Minnesota. My goal is to earn my LICSW and to provide counseling for older adults including veterans.

An example of my positive impact occurred while I was providing caregiver support to a spouse. The spouse brought her husband to the health care center after the spouse suffered an intracerebral hemorrhage. The wife was overwhelmed with the duties at home, her spouse used to take care of all the duties. The gentleman was young and had been an active man. The wife needed support in terms of common household tasks, such as paying bills, mowing the lawn, and driving. These tasks may seem basic, but, to the wife, they were overwhelming obstacles. I was able to support the wife, provide her with resources, and build a relationship. Seven years later, the man remains in our health care center and, in addition to maintaining a friendship, the wife still asks for advice.

Part of my role is to provide training for new social workers, facilitate the Ethics Committee for The Thro Company, coordinate the Senior Provider Network for Blue Earth County, consult for social service/nursing/dietary/therapeutic recreation staff, and implement the weekend admissions process. My role is unique in that I get to work in four skilled nursing facilities, so I observe many positive and negative aspects of long-term care.

With changes in regulations, government funding, and long-term care facilities, my professional role continues to be challenging, necessary to promote a positive attitude and to empower staff to continue providing excellent care. Long-term care is viewed by some as a poor system or neglected area, and, along with my goals, positive attitude, and passion for long-term care, this scholarship would enable me to provide the best care possible for older adults.