

## **Focus Group: Veterans & Veteran Advocate**

October 16, 2014 at Veteran's Memorial Building, Santa Cruz, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Facilitated by Dr. Jerry Solomon

Staff assistance: 4

Number of person in attendance: 13

### **Question: What is missing?**

- Homelessness
- Safe, affordable housing.
- Clinic locations; need to be locally based (and not have to go out of the area for VA services)
- Responding to “acting out” behavior; have a shared response.
- Some Vets need payees
- Paid or volunteers need to care
- Vets need help connect with resources, including transportation
- Peer services: have shared experience, or train workers on Vet issues
- Focus needs to be on how to serve, not on how not to serve
- Important to have peers and volunteers. Can receive a stipend that won't affect benefits. Can lead to a paid position.
- Keep Santa Cruz safe.
- Education about vet drug use; sometimes it is a way of coping with PTSD.
- Once homeless are housed drinking decreases.
- Need co-occurring services.
- No detox services through VA, or County. It is a cumbersome process with the VA.
- There is a harm reduction program at Vets Memorial Building.
- Important for Vets to get their money and benefits.
- Barriers, especially for homeless:
  - Ability to communicate; need phone bank
  - Mail room; now they charge for that
  - Email service
- Peers know what it is like
- Transportation for local
- CIT training for Vet specific issues
- Suicide hotline needs to be more adequate to the unique needs of Veterans
- Expand emergency beds (Paget House)
- No residential services for women, couples, or pets
- Suicide hotline needs to know Vet issues, otherwise Vet won't be interested in talking to them
- Services for families
- Trauma informed services. Way of dealing with Vets & PTSD.
- Large percent have PTSD; also a large number have depression.
- Peer run services and professional services are needed. Both need to be informed of Vet issues
- Law enforcement needs to understand that people need help, not just a ticket.

- Peer/volunteer to visit home bound Vets; some of this is happening via word of mouth.
- Days use/drop in center for Vets is needed.
- Services to Vets greatly improved with Vet Advocate (PEI funded by County), but we need more services.
- More outreach, especially in South County
- Need medication management
- In home care needed
- Need local board and care and nursing facilities for Vets.
- Need website with list of resources for Vets.
- Memory care
- Gangs are recruiting Vets.

#### **What are the highest priorities?**

- Housing- safe and affordable
- More services for Vets at the Vets Memorial Building
- Suicide hot line
- More volunteers (won't have enough funds for paid)
- Need recreation or social activities that are alcohol and drug free
- Integrated care. "One Stop" services.
- Various services need to be coordinated.

#### **What is working?**

- Veteran Advocate, but need more service hours
- Vets Hall re-opening is great, but need more hours. Serve about 100 on Wednesdays with various services. Need more days.
- Emeline is doing great.
- Thursday group for combat veterans (of various wars; young and older Vets)
- Women's group at Walnut Avenue for Vets
- SSVF grant. Help with deposit and rent assistance for homeless. Also provide assistance with furniture and house hold items.
- Dean (Vet Advocate) has resource list
- Vets Advocate has provided good training to other providers
- Paget house
- VRC- Veteran resource Center
- Lift Line has added services.

#### **What are the unique needs of South County?**

- Large number of Vets
- Outreach to the community
- Not enough activity is focused in South County
- Have not been able to use the Watsonville Memorial building
- Expenses for venue is lower; can explore services there.