

Veterans Watch



A Publication By Veterans For Veterans at the Providence VAMC

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What is VFAB?

Veterans and family Advisory Board is a mental health consumer council composed of Veterans, family members and concerned citizens who advocate on behalf of Veteran issues. We work within the VA system to facilitate changes to better serve our healthcare population, but we are not VA employees.

Our mission at the Veterans Watch is to keep you better informed on the updates to the VA Healthcare System. If you would like to join us or would care to offer constructive input, contact us at:

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Your opinion counts

New Women Veterans' Health Center by Bob Goudreau

Recently, we interviewed Beth Grady, Woman Veterans' Program Manager, about recent enhancements to healthcare for women Veterans.

Currently, over 2,000 women Veterans are enrolled at the Providence VMAC, with about 1400 actively using VA healthcare. To help meet this growing need, women Veterans will soon have another option with which to receive comprehensive primary care. This past December, the Medical Center broke ground for a stand-alone Women Veterans' Health Center to be opened in the Spring of 2013.

Dedicated healthcare professionals with specific training in

women's Primary Care and Mental Health services will staff this new Clinic. Additionally, the Providence VAMC recently hired a part-time gynecologist, Dr.



Vinita Goyal, thus reducing the need for women Veterans to travel to the Boston VA Health Care System for GYN services.

The new facility will encompass 2200 square feet and will have three exam rooms, one

GYN procedure room, a multi-purpose room with state-of-the-art equipment, and a cozy waiting area with private check-in. The Clinic offers women Veterans quality care in a more private setting. Women Veteran will still have the option, however, of receiving their care in the traditional Primary Care setting in the main hospital.

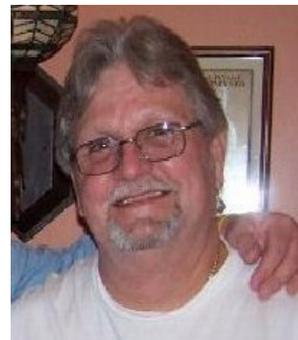
As Beth states, "Our Veterans deserve the very best care, and this new Clinic is just one more example of the Providence VA Medical Center's commitment to providing patient-centered care to the women who have proudly served our nation.

Beth Grady is also a Veteran of the Army and the Air Force.

Introducing Joe Boutin: Volunteer Facilitator New Bedford Area

Joe Boutin is a VA-trained facilitator who has joined our staff to cover the southeastern Massachusetts area. Joe is a retired, disabled Marine Corps Veteran who served in Vietnam. He has been assisting fellow Veterans for over three years.

Joe is available for personal as-



sistance at the New Bedford Clinic at 10 a.m. on Tuesday mornings or by appointment. As always, any information you share with a Veteran Facilitator is highly confidential; we will not pass it on to anyone (including VA staff) without your consent or as covered by law.

Two New Peer Support Technicians



Melanie Costa

Melanie Costa joined the staff at the Providence VAMC in December 2012.

Melanie is a Marine Corps Veteran, serving from 1995 to 1999 at Camp Pendleton, California, as a communications specialist. In 2000, she enlisted in the U.S. Army and de-

ployed to Kosovo for 8 months.

In 2003, Melanie deployed to Iraq as a Civil Affairs Sergeant, rebuilding hospitals and schools. During her time in service, she attained the rank of sergeant, while earning an Army Commendation Medal and a Good

Conduct Medal.

Her position entails facilitating groups on substance abuse, psychological recovery, and PTSD with an emphasis on wellness and community interaction.

Welcome, Melanie, and thank you for your outstanding service.!

What Is Peer Support?

Peer Support, quite simply put, is one Veteran helping another. Who can better understand your issues than someone who has "been there, done that?" A common refrain among Veterans with the

VA is: "They don't understand me." The VA has responded by training Veterans who have shown success in their treatment programs. The training lasts for about six months and involves subjects such

as the Wellness Recovery Action Program (WRAP), group facilitation, and confidentiality rules and regulations.

Each and every peer facilitator is a volunteer who undertook this training to pass on these wellness strategies to fellow Veterans. We were the ones

who came home with the nightmares, isolation, sometimes substance abuse, lack of jobs, and problems readjusting to civilian life. We've walked that trail and have overcome it's obstacles. Won't you Join us? When you're helping others, you help yourself.



James, "Jim" Buckley, Jr.

James Buckley, Jr. joined the staff at the PVAMC in April 2011.

He is a 21-year Veteran of the Army National Guard, serving with the 103rd Field Artillery. He was deployed to Iraq in 2004 for 14 months, serving in a

Personal Security Detail for the President of Iraq and his Cabinet.

Jim earned the rank of Sergeant First Class (E-7) and received numerous awards and citations.

Much like Melanie (above), his duties

will involve facilitating groups, concentrating on psychological recovery, substance abuse, and readjustment issues out in the community.

Welcome, Jim, and thank you for your service to our country!

We do not leave our wounded on the Battlefield!!

I am the new guy. I have been trained, but I do not know the mission as you do. Teach me to become the essential team member you want me to be. I learn quickly and will not let you down.

FNG Pledge.

Veterans Peer Support and Social Interaction

By Joe Boutin



"There exists a special camaraderie between soldiers that have experienced the crucible of combat. It is a felling of understanding, honor and trust that the uninitiated shall never understand."

Joe Boutin

Caring means sharing the burden of emotional, moral, and spiritual wounds Veterans receive from the emotional impact of war.

The military teaches us how to fight, how to kill, how to survive; but who teaches us how to live with ourselves and the price we pay?

Originally known as, "Soldier's Heart" (not the cardiac type but the "Psychological Injury") in war's overwhelming violence, the soul (True Self) tries to flee the traumatic memories which often leaves us lost and confused. Unless treated, these psychological wounds can manifest themselves in physical ways such as nightmares, flashbacks, and anger outbursts.

The lack of building and rebuilding relationships after a traumatic event is often the first clue that a Veteran might be having a problem. Mental health specialists are now realizing that many people with post-traumatic stress disorder, unless severe, are often "flying under the radar" and do not recognize their

symptoms.

Freud wrote of the narcissistic bubble of invulnerability or the instinct of self-preservation that surrounds all human beings and protects us from worrying about death as we go through life. While in a war zone, the bubble is burst and annihilation anxiety can become intense. Later, some Veterans can reassemble the bubble, while others cannot. Emotional numbing symptoms can lead to withdrawal complicated by difficulties in expressing emotion. The human responses to war may prevent the individual from developing healthy coping mechanisms to deal with feelings of combat trauma, death, and survivor's guilt. Unless engaged, we will develop our own "tactics" to survive, sometimes leading to negative consequences through isolation, numbing up, and substance abuse. We choose that path for lack of knowledge about another way. Social isolation will inhibit our ability to hear about processes to ease our discomfort.

A lot of Veterans do not know what VA benefits they may have earned, how to receive them, and how they can recover. Providing this information and getting them connected to a VA facility is an important part of what "peers" do.

With peer support, Veterans get a chance to share their experiences with others who understand their needs and have walked that road before. Because we have been successful in our own symptom reduction activities, we feel an obligation to pass along our successful encounters and to highlight the pitfalls.

Before I became involved with "peer support," I never thought I could help another Veteran including myself. With training and experience, I found camaraderie, knowledge, and the ability to show others a path to recovery.

We have been there and understand how lonely it can be. One need not suffer isolation and uncertainty. Reach out with one hand, and you will find a brother willing to walk on with you.

Operation
Brothers-In-Arms

Joseph Boutin
VA Trained Facilitator

Peer To Peer Support Groups
Veterans Helping Veterans
Rhode Island Veterans Initiative Project
(508) 322-1745
cyberjoe@comcast.net



If you have feedback to offer please contact the "Veterans Watch" at enoch81048@gmail.com. We value your opinion!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Atrocities of War

All the atrocities of war are for the living.

Only they realize the full impact of a child crippled, a young girl maimed.

You see, the dead enjoy the finality of death.

While we the living are haunted by their dying.

All around us the war,
In the rubble of a house,

The roar of a jet,
The crack of a rifle.

You can smell it, taste it,
Even feel it.

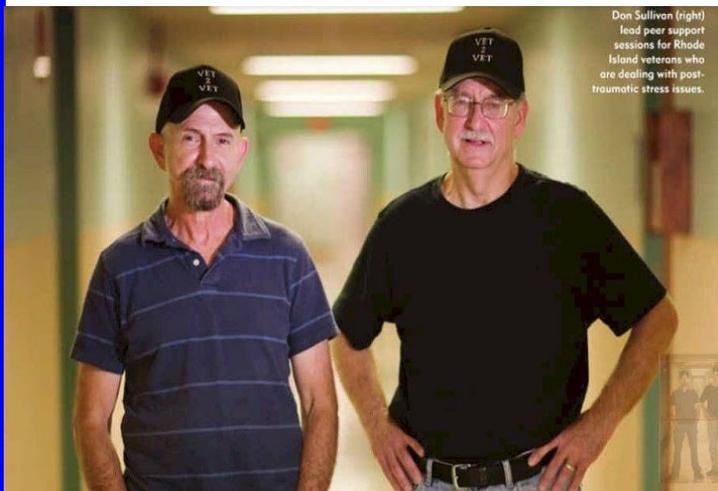
It climbs into your sleep,
Filling your dreams.

Everywhere around you, with
Astounding clarity it strikes you...

Shit man; you are the war!

Anonymous

Vet2Vet In 5th Year By Ron Whitcomb



We have reached a milestone facilitating wellness groups for five years come March 2013. My partner, Don Sullivan, and I started our training in the summer of 2007 and were certified as Veteran facilitators the following January. We are grateful to the VA and VA staff for all they have done to help us along the way. There are many who have supported us for what we do, and we sincerely appreciate your advocacy.

In 2011, we added Vietnam Veteran Rick Braley to our operation, and he has substantially added to our mission goals.

We have reached out to the Rhode Island community these past years and must acknowledge support from all to include the National Guard.

It has been a long and interesting journey. We mostly thank the Veterans of all wars and conflicts who attend our groups. We concentrate on present-centered wellness, and one of the most important aspects is laughter which we believe is "good medicine" for the soul.

We look forward to a long and enjoyable relationship with the VA, Veterans, the National Guard, and the community as a whole.

If you would be interested in attending a group on Thursdays, we meet from 8 to 10:30 a.m. in room 393 and also in T33 from 11 a.m. until 12:30 p.m.

Thank you again to everyone who has helped us make Operation Vet2Vet a success.

Welcome Home !!



I thought I gave once, but I received.

Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) By Bob Goudreau

The Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) is an outpatient, multidisciplinary recovery program that provides mental health services for Veterans who are focused on rebuilding their lives and expanding their social support systems. Veterans are referred to the PRRC after receiving an initial mental health evaluation by a psychologist in Primary Care Behavioral Health. The PRRC implements a recovery model to help Veterans recover from their illness so they are able to become fully-functioning members of their communities. Veterans involved in the PRRC receive individual assessment and curriculum planning, skills training, symptom management classes, peer support, and family educational programs.

We sat down with Stacy Souza (LICSW), acting program director, to better understand some of the services available. As overall program manager, Stacy is also in charge of the Incentive Work Thera-

py (IWT) program where a Veteran is given a small stipend for work around the VA hospital to help them get used to a regular work hours and to help provide for their personal needs. She also presides over training for Peer Support Technicians (See pg. 2).

Another member of the



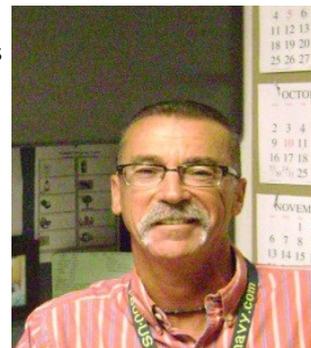
PRRC team is Denise Fragoza (LICSW). She describes her approach to recovery as “holistic” meaning there are many pathways to recovery. As part of her responsibilities at the PRRC, Denise provides an array of recovery-orientated psychotherapeutic groups to include symptom management, maintaining wellness, expressive arts, and community integration workshops. Her student’s art work is on display

throughout the PRRC and her photography student’s pictures adorn the waiting area on 3B. She also conducts Vet2Vet Facilitator work shops since we began the transition to a recovery-oriented model of care.

In March of 2013, she will be conducting her sixth Vet2Vet facilitator training program. With co-facilitator Melodie Mathews (A recent graduate of facilitator training), she provides a weekly PTSD support group in building 14.

Ms. Mathews has gone on to initiate Vet N Pets, a 12-week program which emphasizes how important animals can be during the long road to recovery. By caring for them and receiving unconditional love, we can restore our sense of trust.

Peter Gauthier is an integral part of the PRRC team. Also a licensed Occupational Therapist, Peter leads classes on stress reduction and symptom management. He facilitates a group for



Veterans dealing with grief and loss while also offering instruction on the Wellness Recovery Action Program (WRAP), with emphasis on community reintegration.

This is only the “tip of the iceberg” as far as services offered. Psychologists working in the PRRC provide individual therapy, facilitate skills training, psych educational classes, and participate in interdisciplinary treatment team meetings.

Check with your Primary Care Provider to see if you qualify for a referral. This program has assisted many Veterans in leading healthy and productive lives with their loved ones, families, and in their own communities.

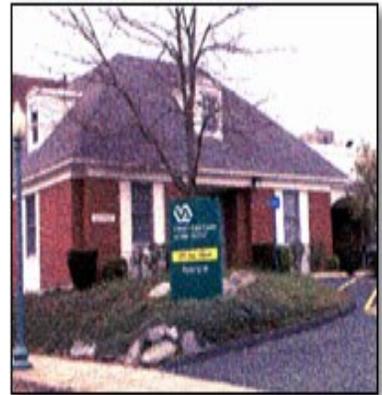
The PVAMC Reaches Out

New Bedford CBOC

New Bedford Community-Based Outpatient Clinic

The New Bedford Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) provides comprehensive primary health care, mental health services, audiology, and patient education to Veterans residing in southeastern Massachusetts.

Every patient has a Primary Care Provider who will coordinate all health care needs. He or she will help you receive appropriate care from a select team of doctors, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, and nutritionists, as well as easy access to any of the Providence VA Medical Center's over 30 subspecialty clinics.



SERVICES

Primary Health Care - One of the Clinic's general medicine physicians will be chosen as your Primary Care Provider (PCP). Your PCP will make your health care his/her priority and provide you the care you need. Your PCP will also coordinate all your other health care needs within the VA New England Healthcare System.

Mental Health Services - Social workers and mental health providers provide psychosocial evaluations, individual, group and family counseling, substance abuse, and counseling. They will also help you access community resources.

Nutrition Clinic - A Registered Dietitian from the Providence VA Medical Center provides nutrition counseling and education in areas ranging from weight control to special nutritional needs.

Pharmacy - All prescriptions for medications are transmitted by computer to the Providence VA Medical Center daily and then mailed directly to your home. Refills are obtained either by sending a signed refill slip to the Providence VA Medical Center or using our convenient phone system.

VA Benefits Information - A representative of the VA Regional Office is at the CBOC monthly to provide advice on VA benefits, educational opportunities, home loans, and more.

Specialty Clinics - Clinics in Neurology, Audiology, and Podiatry are at the CBOC, reducing the need to travel to Providence. For more information on how to enroll in one of the Community Based Outpatient Clinics, please contact Patient Services at (401) 457-3692.

Hours of Operation: 7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Mon-Fri

We thank the staff at all our CBOCs for their dedication to duty and their compassionate support for Veterans throughout the VA Healthcare system.

