TRIUMPHANT T-SHIRTS

By Ron Whitcomb

In honor of Sexual Assault Awareness month in April, the Providence VAMC hosted Triumphant T-Shirts, a Clothesline Project. This was a visual display of Veteran-decorated T-shirts to raise awareness about Military Sexual Trauma (MST), sexual assault, and sexual harassment that occurred while a Veteran was in the military. Males and females who experienced MST were asked to “break the silence” by designing and painting T-shirts that reflected their experiences of MST or other sexual trauma. Completed shirts were hung side-by-side in Classroom 3 to bear witness to the impact sexual violence has had on the victims’ lives. This project allowed survivors to share their stories about the impact of sexual trauma on their lives.

I had heard about the project and knew I had to go. What I didn’t realize is how little I knew deal with in their daily lives. There was no way to prepare for the power of seeing the T-shirts. I had no idea what I was about to be exposed to, and I offer my gratitude and appreciation to those involved. As a witness to this project, I am thankful for what was shared. I was overwhelmed by their courage. I was not three shirts into the display when my tears started to flow. Not long after, I had a wad of tissue in one hand while hugging the shirts with the other: the only way I had to bring some comfort and to alleviate some of the artists’ pain.

Each T-shirt hit me one after the other. I stayed and sat with three shirts into the display when my tears started to flow. Not long after, I had a wad of tissue in one hand while hugging the shirts with the other: the only way I had to bring some comfort and to alleviate some of the artists’ pain.

PRRC BBQ/OPEN HOUSE

By Jessica Zuehlke

The Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) is a recovery-oriented, specialized mental health day program that offers daily psychoeducational groups, wellness programming, community outings, and peer support services. The goal of the program is to empower Veterans with serious mental illness (SMI) to develop their own wellness goals and to encourage them towards meaningful community involvement. Participation in the program begins with an orientation to the PRRC and a PRRC Assessment followed by the development of an individualized Recovery Plan.

On Wed July 20, the PRRC hosted an Open House and BBQ to welcome Veterans and Medical Center staff to visit the program grounds. Hamburgers, hot dogs, and watermelon were offered free-of-charge to Veterans; small donations from staff were graciously accepted. Attendees got the opportunity to tour the Horticulture Therapy program’s new greenhouse and picnic area as well as the program group

Gardens managed by Veterans in the Horticulture Therapy Program at the PRRC.

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the shirts and looked at them a second time and a third. One of the shirts that was very moving to me was a camouflage shirt with the words: “Maybe I was dressed too sexy?” written in glitter. This shirt just about dropped me to my knees. All in all, It was truly one of the most amazing displays of any kind I have ever seen.

There were about 54 shirts: just a small part of the 744 Veterans who have experienced MST and who have reached out to and connected with the Providence VAMC and the CBOCs. The group room houses artwork from various painting classes and a new television and Wii entertainment device used for recreation and fitness classes. At the Open House/BBQ, Veterans from the music group sang karaoke and provided music for the afternoon. Jessica Zuehlke, PsyD (Program Manager for the PRRC), spoke about the PRRC and the therapeutic benefits of the program. Peter Gauthier, OT, spoke about the Horticulture Therapy program and thanked the funeral homes who donate flowers to the group. Veterans Melissa Bassett, Norman Cabral, and Dan Rich spoke about their recovery journeys and the profound impact the horticulture program has had on them. Veteran Thelmanancy Greene talked about her recovery and her success taking multiple classes in the PRRC. Finally, Dan Greene spoke of his accomplishment of becoming a peer facilitator and leading a class on Native American culture.

The Open House/BBQ was a huge success, and we thank everyone who attended.

TRIUMPHANT T-SHIRTS (cont.)

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There were about 54 shirts: just a small part of the 744 Veterans who have experienced MST and who have reached out to and connected with the Providence VAMC and the CBOCs. To the Veterans who participated, a sincere thank you from my soul for all you taught me that day, for all I felt while viewing the clothesline project, and for all I will carry with me about this issue.

I would also like to thank the staff who had so much to do with this. The project was headed by Judith Berger, LICSW, MST coordinator, Denise Fragoza, LICSW, who worked at getting the t-shirts painted, and Beth Grady, LICSW, who is the manager of the Women Veterans Program at PVAMC.

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Serenity is not freedom from the storm but peace within the storm.

Never look down on anybody unless you are helping them up.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

You can only go halfway into the darkest forest; then you are coming out the other side.

Never try to teach a pig to sing; it wastes your time and annoys the pig.

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.

OPERATION VET TO VET

By Ron Whitcomb

Don Sullivan and I are pleased to announce that we are now working with Rick Brlee who graduated from the Peer to Peer training facilitation class and has become the third man in our Operation Vet to Vet. Rick is a combat Marine from the Vietnam War, and his coming on board is a great addition to our mission.

We have changed our groups to Thursday only, 9 to 10:30 a.m. in the Chapel Conference Room and 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in Trailer 33. Any additional groups would be added on Thursday, but there are no plans to do so at this time. Any information about what we do and who we are can be obtained by emailing me at:

Operate Vet2Vet@aol.com.
PLANTING AT WARREN MANOR

By Jeff Sullivan

My name is Jeff Sullivan, and I live at Warren Manor where sixteen other guys live—eight of whom are also Veterans. Last year, I planted a few varieties of tall sunflowers, many of which sprouted multiple flowers. At one point, there were over 100 flowers following the sun in the garden behind the building.

Although I had no plans for planting this year, soon I found myself planting for others. Members from the Providence VAMC PPRC made a couple of trips to Warren Manor, and I found myself planting corn, carrots, sunflowers, and more. Another Veteran resident had some wildflower seeds he asked me to plant.

I enjoyed all the work, especially for the biggest project. Barbara, the administrator at Warren Manor, had me planting shrubs and perennials, which included St. John’s Wort and even a china-boy holly. Now all we need is a china-girl holly to get things going.

It seems the garden inspires activity. While watering, I notice a passer-by may comment, or residents sitting nearby will talk. Maybe they’re wondering about the St. John’s Wort or how the red cedar mulch improves things. Everyone, it seems, participates in their own way.
DID YOU KNOW?

By Ron Whitcomb

- On Father’s Day, there are more collect calls than any other day of the year.
- Every day, more money is printed for Monopoly than the US Treasury.
- Coca-Cola was originally green.
- The cost of raising a medium-size dog to the age of eleven is $16,400.
- The average number of people airborne over the U.S. in any given hour is 61,000.
- Intelligent people have more zinc and copper in their hair.
- If a statue in the park of a person on a horse has both front legs in the air, the person died in battle. If the horse has one front leg in the air, the person died because of wounds received in battle. If the horse has all four legs on the ground, the person died of natural causes.
- Men can read smaller print than women can; women can hear better.
- In older times, mattresses were secured on bed frames by ropes. When you pulled on the ropes, the mattress tightened, making the bed firmer and giving us the phrase: “goodnight, sleep tight.”
- If you were to spell out numbers you would have to go to the number one thousand to find the letter A.

MEET THE STAFF!

By Bob Goodreau

Richard Cabral is a Software Engineer/Program Analyst working in Primary Care. Richard commenced his employment with the Providence VA Medical Center in November 2001. It is his function to investigate and answer all technical problems from staff related to computer applications in Primary Care. He trains staff on software operations and other computer-related functions. In addition, he creates Clinical Reminder Reports to evaluate the quality of medical care and analyzes team outcome/productivity data.

Mr. Cabral enlisted in the US Air Force in 1966, taking his basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Moving on to Lowery Air Force Base in San Antonio, he attended Missile Guidance & Control Specialist School for the next 8 months. His first permanent duty station took him to Itazuke Air Force Base, Japan for two years, and he finished his enlistment at McDill Air Force Base in Florida. During his time in service he was awarded the National Defense Service Medal, a Good Conduct Medal, an Overseas Ribbon, and the distinction of being Service Man of the Month. Richard has a well-rounded educational background in Computer Science, beginning with an Associate Degree in Applied Science from CCRI. He studied at the New England Institute of Technology for an Associate Degree in Computer Programming Technology and went on to Roger Williams University, earning a Bachelor’s Degree in Engineering Technology.

We thank Richard for his service and his support for Veterans throughout the VA healthcare system.

VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH COUNCIL CONFERENCE

By Ron Whitcomb

In June 2011, I had the privilege of attending a Veterans Health Administration conference in New Orleans with 41 other Veterans from all points in the United States (the VA Veterans Mental Health Council Conference).

The VHA is transforming its mental health services to improve access to evidence-based and recovery-oriented care. The VA says Veteran-input into VA mental health programs and operations is a necessary and vital component to recovery transformation. That is why we have our VFAB Council—to address the unique challenges we face today. The purpose of this conference was to provide information on creating new, and improving existing, councils.

Over the course of two days, we learned how to establish a dynamic and effective council, to demonstrate an awareness of strategies, to develop a positive partnership between VA staff and Veterans, and to create a strategy to recruit, train, and retain council members. We also learned to identify empowerment techniques/skills that liaisons may use to improve their councils and to recognize the value of technology and social media resources within councils. We had many invited guest speakers—some even coming from VA Central Office.

The conference was a great opportunity to hear about the successes of other councils across the country. After talking to many other Veterans and council members, I believe that the Providence VAMC is clearly ahead in many ways. The staff is more than accommodating to VFAB and is always a willing partner in our endeavors. Our paper, Veterans Watch, was a big hit with everyone who attended!