

Approved 5DEC2014

Board Minutes
November 5, 2014
Wings over the Rockies Museum
7711 E. Academy Blvd.
Denver, Colorado 80230

Robby Robinson, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 0900 hours. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was observed for our POW, MIA, troops in battle or harm's way and all service members.

Roll Call of Members and Introduction of Staff & Guests

Board Members Present:

William "Robby" Robinson, Chairman
Dana Niemela, Vice-Chairman
Rene Simard, Secretary
Kathleen Dunemmn, Member
Christopher Holden, Member
Wendy Sue Chiado, Ph.D., Member – Not Present
Duane Dailey, Member

DMVA Staff Present:

Major Gen. H. Michael Edwards, The Adjutant General
Mickey Hunt, DMVA, Deputy Director
Ray Z. Dissinger, VTF Administrator
Reuben "Ben" Mestas, CDVA Director
Tamara Edmond, CDVA Admin. Asst.
Gail Hoagland, DMVA VAG Administrator

Guests Present:

Jay Bobick, Colorado State Veterans Community Living Centers Liaison
Steve Rylant, UVC
Marvin Meyers, CBVA Emeritus, UVC
Brenton Hutson, Volunteers of America
Ian Fletcher, Volunteers of America
Daleena Scott, Volunteers of America
Michael Shapiro, UVC
Frank McCurdy, UVC
Ken Melcher, UVC

Approval of Minutes from October 10, 2014

Unanimously accepted as written.

Board Member Comments

Rene Simard: No Comment

Kathleen Dunemr: No Comment

Duane Dailey: No Comment

Chris Holden: No Comment

Dana Niemela: I wanted to draw attention to a project in Colorado Springs that is in development. The Mount Carmel project is similar to the Volunteers of America one stop for services concept. It is based on the Mount Carmel Community Wellness Center in Trinidad. It will serve veterans and their families with emphasis on employment, education, and counseling services. This project will help meet the needs of veterans and their families, specifically addressing the gap in services. I have been working to help develop the project and have been providing advice.

Robby Robinson: Wendy Chiado is not here, but she did attend the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the new National Guard Armory in Colorado Springs. I will be in Grand Junction on Monday and Tuesday to be the keynote speaker for a Veteran's Day event in Grand Junction.

Public Comment

Marvin Meyers: I am pleased to announce that UVC now has a 501C-3 to focus on helping Veterans and their families, active duty military, Guard and Reserve to put an emphasis on unmet needs. This is a non-profit corporation. We received a certificate from the Secretary of State and from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This has been over three and a half years in the works. There have been a number of people who have contributed to making this happen. We started about seven to eight years ago and then again about three and a half years ago

Guest Presentations

Dana Niemela: I asked Volunteers of America to present to you all since they are doing fantastic work in Colorado helping Veterans. I think it is important for you to know where they are located and the types of services they provide. I wanted you to see the breadth and scope of their services. Please welcome, Brenton Hutson from Volunteers of America.

Brenton Hutson: Volunteers of America (VOA) is a national organization that has made providing services to Veterans a number one priority. We focus on Veterans in crisis especially the homeless. I have brought Ian Fletcher and Daleena Scott, focus on female veterans to talk about what they do in their programs.

Daleena Scott: Thank you, Brenton and thank you for having us today. I am a project manager for the Grant per Diem Program through VOA for female veterans. What we do is help women veterans identify with being veterans and other females. Our transitional housing program is for female veterans and their children. We take referrals from the VA Walk-in Clinic or from the Community Resource Center (CRC). We have an entry site, the Brandon Center that has 112 beds and it serves homeless veterans and their children. We meet with Veterans to give them advice and help them navigate through services available such as employment services, benefits, counseling, and connect with substance abuse providers. We provide wrap-around services for a lot of services. We connect them with SSVF for rapid rehousing. Some veterans need extra help. Most of the VOA staff are veterans. We also have rooms available at the Family Motel in Claremont Commons. There are three single family houses that are beautifully decorated available. Veterans have to pay for their own groceries and they have to pay program fees. These program fees are 30% of their income, which we put into savings and when they move out and on, then they can have the savings. We coordinate and work with SSVF.

One issue I see is there is a lack of coordination of care. Many of the female veterans are not huge fans of going to the VA. There are mostly males there, and many of the female veterans have been traumatized by military sexual trauma so they think others think that is the only reason they are there at the VA. It is more difficult to connect and many need to use the substance abuse programs. The Santa Fe project that Brenton will talk about will explain more about offering a one-stop place for veterans to go and receive different services that they need.

Steve Rylant: Do you make referrals to Fort Lyon?

Daleena Scott: We do make referrals to many different programs.

Robby Robinson: Comitatus also offers shelter for women and families. Are we meeting the need for female veterans?

Daleena Scott: We are making progress. We served almost double as we did last year. There is more room for progress to provide wrap-around services.

Brenton Hutson: As a Marine, we love to focus on missions. The VA's mission to end homelessness by 2015 is a mission we latched on to. We provide supportive services to Veterans and their families. Housing is one of the most basic human rights. There have been studies that link mental health stability to housing. Metro Denver was identified as an area that was most in need for housing. We were awarded a grant from the VA to help meet this need.

Ian Fletcher: Denver Metro, I am the project manager for Supportive Services for Veterans and their Families Grant (SSVFG). This grant serves 7 counties including Denver. This surge of money in the grant is to help meet the need of the most critically at risk veterans. We coordinated with VA Staff and the Homeless Initiative to help reach these at risk Veterans.

This is a unique grant in that it is the only VA grant that serves veterans and their families, i.e. child care, employment assistance for spouse, etc. We provide wrap-around case management, community connections for veterans and their families, and a holistic approach to helping veterans in crisis. We identify areas in surrounding counties through VSO and County resources to assist in the referral process for those veterans in crisis. These veterans are the ones who are not connected with resources or the ones living on the streets. This surge money is to help end Veteran homelessness.

Daleena Scott: Many of the veterans in these categories are referred to us. We make referrals to the most appropriate resources. We have sub-contracted with Colorado Legal Services; they are particularly helpful for veterans being evicted or if they have a criminal record they may be denied housing.

Ian Fletcher: Denver County has a 1% vacancy rate. This is a huge barrier for veterans with a criminal record. It is vitally important to house the veterans in need first. The case management we provide for veterans is ongoing. During the first 90 days when we provide assistance, housing is the number one priority. There is a saying, "Homelessness is a bad tax option."

We are very excited to work with folks like you, to help us target the needs in Denver and focus the money that is not a priority one grant.

Robby Robinson: In order to receive your services, what are the VA eligibility requirements to qualify?

Ian Fletcher: For homeless veterans, the veterans have to be other than dishonorable discharged from the military. They have to be below the 50% area median income. The target population is 30% below the area median income. As far as veteran status, they need to have at least one day on active duty service so just Basic Training would not count. If they were Guard or Reserve, then if they were called up on active duty orders, it would qualify.

Steve Rylant: If someone is about to become homeless, then will that be okay to call?

Ian Fletcher: Yes, if we can prevent them from becoming homeless, that is the goal. In our Rapid Rehousing Program, we work toward homeless prevention, so if they lose their housing and have no other resources.

Robby Robinson: Do veterans have to be eligible for VA Healthcare in order to qualify for your services?

Ian Fletcher: Absolutely not! If they are eligible for VA Healthcare then they are automatically eligible; but, that is not one of the criteria.

Brenton Hutson: We have offices in Wheat Ridge, Fort Collins, Grand Junction, and Durango. Our intent is to move where the need is. During our 2nd year, we served around 600 households. We have an 86% successful housing rate of that number, 85% have remained in housing long-term. If it doesn't work, then we keep trying to identify ways to focus on the needs of the veterans in crisis.

VOA has been awarded the AmeriCorps Vista Grant. We are working with other stakeholder groups to document the services needed, to identify service providers, and to develop coordinated networks in order to serve Veterans. We have found that one of the greatest barriers to success is not the lack of resources it is the lack of coordination between resources. An example of this is recently one of our project managers looked at the Denver Metro area and identified the resources a veteran in crisis would need to have access to benefits and they would have to walk over 40 miles in order to access the resources. We think 40 miles to walk is too much for a veteran in crisis. Our hope as we partner with Rocky Mountain Human Services is to be seen as a model of Veteran Services. Our Santa Fe Service Center will be located on 13th and Santa Fe. We hope to house up to 12-15 veterans organizations designed to meet the needs of veterans in crisis for basic survival. There will be 3 tiers. Tier 1 will be for basics of survival: shelter, food, employment. Tier 2 will help the veterans in need move towards self-sufficiency. Tier 3 will help the veterans grow, reconnect with the community, and include peer mentorship. Our goal is to see a decrease in the number of veterans in crisis. We also hope to partner with Mt. Carmel.

Marvin Meyers: Do you have contact information?

Brenton Hutson: Sure, it is on the pamphlet and I will write it on the board.

Chris Holden: Is there a VOA office in Colorado Springs?

Brenton Hutson: At this time, we do not have an office there because Rocky Mountain Human Services does an excellent job serving veterans in crisis there in Colorado Springs. I have had a few meetings with Colorado Springs stakeholders, but at this time there is not anything in the works.

Dana Niemela: What partner services do you have planned to be co-located with you at the Santa Fe Service Center?

Brenton Hutson: Currently, we have DHS, RMHS, VOA, VISTA, Homes for all Vets, employment support, and the Office of Economic Development will be there with an entrepreneurship focus. The VA has expressed an interest in locating staff there. We have held two stakeholder meetings. We are projected for opening by March 2015. If you know of organizations that would be a good fit, then please let us know. We want to get the right partners at the table.

Marvin Meyers: What unmet needs have you identified?

Brenton Hutson: One big need is funding for homeless veterans.

Dana Niemela: There is a major housing crisis here in Denver. Access to affordable housing can be a huge barrier especially with veterans who have been previously evicted or if they have bad credit.

Robby Robinson: Brenton, are you looking at expanding your services statewide?

Brenton Hutson: VOA meets the needs of the most vulnerable. We go into a community when we see a need demonstrated. We connect with community stake holders to access needs. We do site visits. Here in Denver, we often do site visits to the homeless shelters. We proceed ahead in a community when there is evidence to demonstrate a need for our services.

Jay Bobick: I know a private individual providing housing for veterans, if you want to contact him his name is Rick Spoor.

Brenton Hutson: We do know Rick Spoor; we send a lot of veterans his way. We are always looking to identify landlords in support of our mission. Are there any other questions?

My contact information is: Brenton Hutson, bhutson@voacolorado.org, (303) 548-2550.

Dana Niemela: I want to say thank you for coming today, it was very informative.

Reports

No report from the Governor's Office as this is the day after the election.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

Mickey Hunt: I will be in Durango next week with Colorado Serves accompanied by Becca Montgomery from Senator Bennett's office.

The Governor's Budget is out and part of that budget is a request for an increase for County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO's) for funding at \$8.00 per hour. This is an increase request from \$100,000 to \$500,000 by statute. This would be for part-time and full-time CVSO's. I count this as a positive in the right direction.

Robby Robinson: Is it okay to speak to Colorado County Commissioners Incorporated (CCI) about this?

Mickey Hunt: It should be fine. It is in the budget for consideration.

General discussion about increasing pay for Colorado County Veterans Service Officers.

Ben Mestas: We are paying \$88,000 to the counties now for the CVSO's. So this would be almost an 8 fold increase from what they are getting now.

Robby Robinson: They are getting \$100 for part-time and \$200 for full-time.

Ben Mestas: The pilot program paid the Department \$192,000 since 2008. \$88,000 of that has gone to the counties to pay \$100 a month for part-time CVSO's and \$200 a month for full-time CVSO's. The \$192,000 is allocated every year but it is not in statute.

Robby Robinson: So for a part-time CVSO who works 3 days a week for 8 hours a day, they will get 24 hours, at \$8.00 per hour that would be \$192.00 where they are getting \$100 now.

Ben Mestas: There is only one per county. The proposal does say the state will support one full-time person per county at \$8.00 per hour.

Mickey Hunt: This will benefit rural counties by raising it up to minimum wage.

Ben Mestas: Some counties are not even using the \$100 to pay the CVSO's. There is one county that is using it for snow removal.

Mickey Hunt: The Denver Stand Down will be on November 6th. The Grand Junction Stand Down had at least 140 veterans in attendance. It was noted that there was an increase in younger female veterans and family members.

On my last visit to the Grand Junction VOA, they requested that the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs should have their meeting out there at the Veterans Resource Center.

- Joint Budget Committee (JBC) Briefing will be held on December 18th at 0900 hours. They will require testimony from General Edwards and me.
- The Joint Budget Committee (JBC) Hearing will be held December 10th at 0900 hours. This is where the analysts speak and we listen to what is being reviewed. Ken Lambert will be the JBC Chairman.

Special Forces Operations Detachment K will be redeploying the first week in December. We will have one person from that group that is already eligible for a purple heart.

I will be in Durango next week. Are there any other questions?

Robby Robinson: We have a required meeting with the State Board of Human Services. Marvin has been to these meetings and Jay serves a representative for Colorado State Veterans Community Living Center Commission (CSVCLCC). This meeting will be at the Department of Human Services on Sherman Street.

Division of Veterans Affairs

Ben Mestas: As requested by the CBVA, to follow up with the concern that the VAMC does not provide a notary public. There will be a notary public available through the patient advocate

and in the Director's office every Tuesday. I will also have some of my staff become notary publics.

Robby Robinson: Let's push that further. Who did you talk to?

Ben Mestas: I spoke with the VAMC Director, Lynette Roth.

Duane Dailey: I brought it up at the Town Hall meeting. The Executive Secretary explained because of staff coming forward, they chose not to have a notary public available anymore. She said she would approach the credit union in the basement to see if they could accommodate anyone with a notary public. I am going to get my own notary public so I will not be in that situation again.

Kathleen Dunemn: Why isn't that part of someone's job description? The need for a notary public is a very common need in healthcare.

Robby Robinson: This is a minor problem we can solve.

General discussion about need for notary publics.

Ben Mestas: The cemetery is closing on 3000 internments by the end of December. The construction is continuing on the columbarium. The winterizing of the sprinkler system has been completed.

Mickey Hunt is covering the Denver Stand Down. The Longmont Stand Down will be November 20th and someone from my staff will cover it.

On November 11th, my staff will be throughout the state at various events, i.e. U.S. History Project, USO at DIA, a clothing drive, at Golden Corral standing in line, at various school events – one covering a poetry contest as a judge. I will have staff in Grand County, Pueblo County, Douglas County, and in El Paso County.

Jay Bobick: Has there been any movement to put up additional staging area locations at Fort Logan cemetery?

Ben Mestas: I will follow up with Fort Logan and then Tami will send out any information to the Board.

Veterans Trust Fund

Ray Z. Dissinger: Did everyone receive the website location for the Veterans National Statistic Center? This information lists statistics by county through 2039 demographics.

I redid the first paragraph on the Governor's Report. I am processing working with Gail on the daily functions which she will be taking over.

Veterans Assistance Grant

Gail Hoagland: We are moving along. There are a couple of new grantees that are requiring education about the purposes of the grant. I would like to emphasize the need to do further training for grantees and potential applicants about what the grants can be used for. It is important to get everyone on the same page. We are trying to move forward.

Dana Niemela: When we apply for federal grants there is an on-line tech assist webinar. Is that what you have in mind?

Gail Hoagland: An online webinar is very costly such as WebEx. We are trying to find cheap alternatives.

Ben Mestas: Gail wants to have a seminar to help educate grantees.

Dana Niemela: My primary concern with a seminar would be how would rural applicants have access to a seminar?

Steve Rylant: The American Legion Mid-year Conference has breakout sessions. Would you be willing to do that? It will be January 23rd on a Saturday. The American Legion can send a blast out to all the posts.

Duane Dailey: Gail, would it be possible to do this at the CCI Conference, to have a narrative prepared to explain what the grants are used for and how to apply?

*Major General H. Michael Edwards entered the room at 10:10am.

Ben Mestas: It is a two day conference, Gail. The Veterans Assistance Grant and CCVSO program could incorporate it with about 15 minutes allocated to present.

Rene Simard: How about a video?

Ray Z. Dissinger: To speak up in Gail's defense, having a video on the website would be ideal because Gail will be picking up both of the grants and it would be good to have a central place where you can train everyone.

Gail Hoagland: Frequently, funding sources do have a webinar that says here's what you need to know to help potential grantees to be successful in the application process, especially where they are lacking services.

On December 1st, I will be moving offices to CDVA over with Ben on Colorado Boulevard.

Robby Robinson: We want to say welcome to MAJ GEN Edwards. Thank you for coming today.

MAJ GEN H. Michael Edwards: Good Morning. It was a long night last night. I don't think Governor Hickenlooper slept at all. In Colorado Springs, the general mood was it was even-keeled on both of the candidates and they would pay attention to military issues. I am not political but I like to watch the election process. Today is a good day for thanksgiving that we get to observe the amazing process. I woke up refreshed, knowing that the process works and as military members we can appreciate the freedom to hold elections.

Thank you for all you do for working so hard to take care of veterans. Thank you for all you do to make sure the issues are forefront and in administering the grant.

It looks like you have done some good work. We are answerable to the tax-payers of Colorado. As far as the budget type stuff, there are not too many issues. The Veterans Trust Fund and the Veterans Assistance Grant are basically supported by the Governor. Even though we don't know all the election results, I see no major changes as far as Veterans issues. I need to know that you are engaged with Veterans issues and what needs to be brought toward the Legislature. Governor Ritter once said to me that Veterans in this state are numerous and they are powerful. I want you to be aware that the economic impact study will be mostly to active duty and their economic impact to Colorado. This is an effort to reach out to Coloradans to show them what Veterans mean to this state.

We need to be prepared for force structure changes and Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) initiatives. Colorado is well-positioned as far as facilities and structures if the US Army is about to take the proposed cuts. There are those in Washington D.C. that believe we are well-positioned for the coming changes. We need the power of the veterans. We need the voice of Veterans reinforcing the story.

It is a great day to be an American. Do you have any issues? It is a great day. You are in for a treat with Kelly Sullivan as the guest speaker. What a passionate speaker and it is a privilege to hear her speak.

Chris Holden: Are there any pending deployments to West Africa to support the Ebola crisis?

MAJ GEN H. Michael Edwards: So far, no. Based on the latest news we will not be asked for medical personnel but there is a need for security and for engineers. If the need arises in the future, we may see a request for engineers but not for the next 6 months.

For Veteran's Day, I will be the Grand Marshall of the Denver Parade this Saturday. Then, in the evening I will be downtown for the Laser Show. I will also be in Greeley and at O'Connell Middle School for Veteran's Day.

I will be taking a trip to Germany with the 70th Anniversary of Liberation of Dachau. I will also be reaching out to the Oklahoma the Home of the Thunderbirds.

I would ask you to encourage you to Senator-elect Gardner to go after the seat on the Senate Armed Services Committee and also the Senate Intel Committee. Thank you. Are there any other questions?

Robby Robinson: Gen. Edwards, thank you for coming today.

The Annual Governor's Report:

1. Legislative Issues and Actions: Jay Bobick with State Veterans Community Living Centers.
2. VSO Training- draft from Ben, Dana and Kathleen still pending.
3. Vets in Higher Education
4. Division of Veterans Affairs- Ben
5. Veterans Trust Fund – Ray Z. Dissinger, pending.
6. Veterans Assistance Grant – Summary
7. Colorado Veterans’ Monument
8. Colorado Parks and Wildlife- send to Chris Holden to summarize
9. Colorado Revenue
10. Colorado Local Affairs
11. Colorado Labor and Employment (have not yet received)

I am taking the Executive Summary and the issues we have identified are veterans’ homelessness and VA claims – how long it is taking to process claims and appeals (a perpetual problem). What other major issues should we look at?

Dana Niemela: Access to care is a big issue, particularly to rural communities, and lack of access to mental health care in particular.

*Ralph Bozella entered the room at 10:30am.

Rene Simard: What about higher education needs?

Chris Holden: Another issue would be Colorado State Benefits available to veterans. I hear many veterans ask about tuition relief. Do we have a comparison study of Colorado State Benefits compared to other state benefits to attract veterans to our state?

Discussion about Colorado State Benefits compared to other state benefits. Ray Z. Dissinger did a comparison study of several states and the benefits they offer to veterans a few years ago.

Chris Holden: What about the number of veterans that don’t retire here but decide to retire in other states with more benefits like Florida, Texas, and California? Could Ray provide me with the comparison of the Colorado State Benefits?

Mickey Hunt: Part of the issue is that other departments don’t breakout their statistics by number of veterans served.

Robby Robinson: The National Governors Association used to gather information on Veteran’s Benefits by state that may be of some use.

Ray Z. Dissinger: I will get the most current data and send it to you.

Mickey Hunt: Governor Hickenlooper's office let me know that Roxanne White, Chief of Staff resigned. There will be a new Chief of Staff for Colorado and there will also be new Cabinet level members. There will also be a number of freshmen legislators, so our primary goal will be to educate them on what we do. Education is the primary mission to not lose any benefits. We need to protect Veterans.

VTF Grant Award Criteria and Guidelines

Ray Z. Dissinger: I am working with Gail on the guidelines. I will come in to help focus the guidelines.

Robby Robinson: I am referencing the Audit which requires us to identify specific goals and guidelines for the VTF Grant Award Criteria and VTF Grant guidelines.

Kathleen Dunemn: Can you send the information out so we could have a look at it and contribute to it?

Robby Robinson: To be in compliance with the laws, the Sunshine Act, all of our meetings have to be open and public so resolving it through email would not be an open meeting.

Duane Dailey: The purpose is so the grantees know what the scale is when they apply for the grant and so they know what they need to provide.

Discussion of the VTF Grant Award Criteria and what needs to be done to make sure the guidelines are fully developed.

Robby Robinson: The morning of the 24th of November would be a good time to meet for a special CBVA meeting to vote on the guidelines. We still need a location so it is to be announced.

Steve Rylant: UVC has the Executive Committee Meeting at the American Legion on November 25th.

Future Meetings

5 December 2014, 0930, American Legion HQ

9 January 2015, 0930, TBA

6 February 2015, 0930, Colorado Springs (Location TBA)

Old Business

Jay Bobick: The Colorado State Veterans Community Living Centers (CSVCLC) are sailing along. The Colorado State Veteran Community Living Center Commission (CSVCLCC) has a meeting this Friday. There are no major changes. They have not hired a new director. Vicky Manley is filling both positions.

Meeting adjourned at 10:50am