



PRISONS

Barracks Behind Bars II

**IN VETERAN-SPECIFIC HOUSING UNITS,
VETERANS HELP VETERANS HELP THEMSELVES**



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Written by Deanne Benos, Open Road Policy, Bernard Edelman, Vietnam Veterans of America, and Greg Crawford, National Institute of Corrections. Edited by Donna Ledbetter, National Institute of Corrections.

Special thanks to Nicholas Stefanovic for his contributions to this project.

The National Institute of Corrections, in partnership with the Justice-Involved Veterans Network, has developed this white paper that highlights specialized housing units in prisons.

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Epigraph

“They risk their lives;
They face terror;
They lose buddies in battles.
And then they come home...
Where they have to square
what they had to do as warriors
with what they are expected to
do now that they are home.
It isn't easy.”

Dick Durrance, Vietnam Veteran,
Army Combat Photographer



Table of Contents



Epigraph	v
Abstract	xi
Foreword	xiii
Introduction	1
In Their Own Words: Randall Liberty: There Are No Good Reasons Not to Open a Veterans Pod . . .	3
Points of Interception	10
Health Care for Reentry Veterans, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs	12
So You're Thinking...	14
Phase 1: Design & Develop	16
Edinburgh, Indiana, Correctional Facility, Incarcerated Veterans Education & Transition (INVET) Program	17
We Are Ready	17
Early Development Stages	17
The Thin Green Fence	18
Contributing to the War on Terrorism	19
Re-Igniting Military Values	20
Making the Connection: Alexis Dean	21
Traumatic Brain Injury Study on Recidivism by the Indiana Department of Correction	23
Veterans Service Unit at State Correctional Institution, Houtzdale, Pennsylvania	24
Applying the Sequential Intercept Model	24
A Regional Approach	25
Safety + Stability + Stakeholders = Success	25
The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Opens the First Female Veterans Housing Unit . . .	26
California Department of Corrections San Quentin State Prison	27
Building Community Behind the Wall	27
A Path of Insight and Discovery	28
Veteran-Driven Exploration	28
Identifying the Service Gaps	29
Design & Development	30
Narrative Therapy	30
Understanding Moral Injury	31
A Program Is Born	31
Stafford Creek Correctional Center, Washington, Veterans Unit	32
Phase I: Improved Identification Systems	33
Phase II: Establishing a Sizable Target Population	33
Phase III: Exploring Successful State Models	33
Program Launch: Stafford Creek	33

Phase 2: Implement	34
Indiana Department of Correction, INVET Program	35
Fostering Engagement and Trust	35
Brain Injury Coping Skills Group	36
Disproportionate Effect	36
An Anxiety That Didn't Go Away	36
A New Sense of Self-Awareness	37
Washington State Department of Corrections, Veterans Unit, Stafford Creek	38
Together We Serve	38
A Quiet, Clean Environment	39
Veterans Helping Veterans	40
Enrichment Activities and Programs	40
The Redemption Project	40
The Brigadoon Dog Program	41
Partnerships and Links	42
Release and Transition	42
Attention All Corrections Officials: Ryan Yoder	44
Phase 3: Sustain	46
Houtzdale, Pennsylvania Veterans Service Unit at the State Correctional Institution	47
Challenge #1: Filling the Ranks	47
Leave No Man Behind	48
Sustainability and Success	48
Transferring Military Culture	49
Overcoming Struggle	50
Red, White, and Blue	50
Safety & Security	51
What's Next?	52
San Quentin State Prison, California "Veterans Helping Veterans from the Inside Out"	53
Framework for the Future	53
Growing Leaders	54
Creating Sustainability	54
Building Bridges to Communities	55
Exist: Sharon Kirkpatrick	57
Conclusion	61
Resources	65
Acknowledgments	69
Closing Epigraph	71

Abstract

THE PURPOSE of Veterans Treatment Courts is to offer vets with a substance use problem and/or diagnosis of a mental health issue an opportunity to avail themselves of treatment-oriented justice. Based on anecdotal evidence and an increase of data from the field—in many of the studies funded by the National Institute of Corrections and the Bureau of Justice Assistance—these courts appear to be achieving their goal. They are helping individuals find a degree of redemption while paying their debt to society. They are restoring family relationships, strengthening communities, cutting rates of recidivism and, hence, making communities safer.

But what of those veterans who are incarcerated, serving a sentence, or awaiting trial or other resolution of the charges against them?

This paper is the fourth in the National Institute of Corrections justice-involved veteran compendium project. It illuminates programs in prisons across the country whose goal is to prevent recidivism by justice-involved veterans, and by so doing improve the safety of law enforcement officers, correctional officers, inmates, and the public. It illustrates the design/development, implementation, and sustainment of initiatives taken by enlightened, pragmatic corrections officials who have set up specialized housing—in pods, dorms, units, wings, or floors—and programming for military veterans.

Barracks Behind Bars introduces several of the facilities and the men and women whose vision is paying off with facility reports of fewer behavioral problems and almost no incidents of violence by incarcerated veterans. This translates into a less stressful, safer environment for correctional personnel and facilitates opportunities for assistance from the Health Care for Reentry Veterans Specialists of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, personnel from state and county departments, and volunteers from community and veterans organizations.



Foreword

OUR NATION GREATLY APPRECIATES those who have served our country. Most Americans view our military service men and women as heroes or patriots for the sacrifice they have made for our country; it is a feeling that has evolved over time, from generation to generation.

DURING WORLD WAR II—where 16 million men and women served in uniform—there were about 140 million people living in the United States. If you did not serve in the military at that time, you were at least part of the war effort. You worked in a factory or knew relatives, friends, or neighbors who served.

With the global war on terror, which includes conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan, Americans today embrace veterans more than perhaps any other generation.

Since 9/11, a little more than 4 million Americans have served their country in uniform; about 2.5 million of whom were deployed overseas to a combat zone. Most of those 2.5 million who served deployed multiple times. With each deployment, many find it more challenging to acclimate back into our communities. This transition is often tough for returning service members. They go from their unit, which had become their family, back to their community, and nobody really understands what they have been through or how to relate to their combat experiences; a time where life can be taken, or permanently altered, in an instant. Any person who has ever served in any branch of the military has signed a blank check to the United States government for up to and including their life.

Though most of us may not understand what living in a combat zone does to those who serve, there are increased efforts to recognize, appreciate, and help our veterans as they attempt to transition successfully back into our communities. For those veterans who find themselves enmeshed in the criminal justice system, we are now creating specialized programs that they can participate in while in custody and/or under supervision. These programs are aimed at addressing veterans' underlying issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and other mental health issues, that are related to their service. Even in their infancy, these programs are demonstrating value for both the criminal justice agencies implementing them and for the veterans receiving the services.

However, many criminal justice professionals, from law enforcement to corrections—including jail administrators and jail staff; pretrial, probation and parole officers; wardens and prison staff—find it challenging to work with their justice-involved veteran population or to address their service-related mental health issues. Many criminal justice professionals are unfamiliar with military culture or the difficulties military service members face as they attempt to transition back to civilian life.

As a center of learning, innovation, and leadership that shapes and advances correctional practice and public policy, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has worked to address the critical needs of



justice-involved veterans and the corrections professionals who work with them. This document is part of a series of publications highlighting veteran-specific approaches to corrections along the criminal justice continuum. It highlights approaches found in America's prisons, featuring vignettes, stories, and the experiences of pragmatic corrections professionals who have taken the initiative to create sustainable veteran-specific programming in our nation's prisons.

We at NIC welcome you to learn more about this population; we value your commitment to advancing practices that improve public safety by holding our justice-involved veterans accountable while providing opportunities to help them rehabilitate, find their sense of purpose again, and return to our communities ready to thrive.

Shaina Vanek

Acting Director

National Institute of Corrections

Introduction

ON ANY GIVEN DAY, 7 percent of the estimated 2.3 million people incarcerated in our nation's jails and prisons are men and women who have served in our Armed Forces. The majority of these individuals (an estimated 77 percent) completed their service to our country with honorable discharges, yet their pathways from the military into the justice system typically began with a difficult transition back into civilian life.

NOTABLY, A SIGNIFICANT PERCENTAGE of our combat troops are returning home profoundly affected by both visible and invisible battle scars, including high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and serious physical wounds. Those struggling to cope often find themselves in a vicious cycle of substance abuse (in many cases linked to the very opioids prescribed to them to overcome pain from injuries sustained while deployed) and mental illness that renders them unemployed, homeless, and ultimately, incarcerated for a variety of crimes.

This paper is the fourth publication in the National Institute of Corrections justice-involved veterans compendium project. It focuses on how the criminal justice system is responding through innovative programs designed to empower veterans to help other veterans. It introduces the nation's first Sequential Intercept Model that maps the flow of veterans through each phase of the criminal justice system to reveal the challenges and opportunities for the effective use of resources from the Veterans Health Administration and community organizations for intervention and diversion options for these men and women.

In alignment with the intercept model, the first report in this series, *Veterans Treatment Courts: A Second Chance for Vets Who Have Lost Their Way*, focused on how veterans treatment courts divert veterans from deeper justice involvement at one of the earliest phases of the intercept model. *Barracks Behind Bars* examines what jurisdictions are doing to restore the lives and dignity of justice-involved veterans and to promote safety among veterans who are incarcerated.

Barracks Behind Bars illuminates the increasing number of specialized housing unit programs in prisons across the country that are trying to prevent recidivism as a general goal and improve the safety of the public as well as law enforcement officers, state corrections officers, and inmates by reigniting a sense of military culture



Color Guard, Stafford Creek

NOTABLY, a significant percentage of our combat troops are returning home profoundly affected by both visible and invisible battle scars.

and values among incarcerated veterans. It illustrates the design, development, implementation, and sustainment of initiatives taken by enlightened, pragmatic corrections officials—many of whom are veterans themselves.

This report examines the evolution of veterans programs in specialized housing units at four state prisons.

As the report introduces the evolution of these programs, it demonstrates one constant: By housing veterans together in an environment that inspires military culture, values, and a sense of brotherhood or sisterhood, these units are not only promoting safety improvements, but also restoration, healing, and growth in a way that may not have been possible via general population housing. At the same time, it reveals the challenges most departments of corrections have had in addressing the unique issues associated with the skyrocketing rates of women in the military and in corrections, even though they remain a much smaller population proportionally to men in both fields.

This report demonstrates that veteran-specific housing unit programs are proving to be a cost-effective tool that facilitates opportunities for assistance from the Health Care for Reentry Veterans Specialists of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, personnel from state and county departments, and volunteers from community and veterans organizations. Combined, these services are well-positioned to support a more successful reentry back into society.



In Their Own Words

RANDALL LIBERTY

There Are No Good Reasons Not to Open a Veterans Pod

By Gregory Crawford and Bernard Edelman



Randall Liberty

Randall Liberty enlisted in the United States Army in 1982 to be a military policeman. He's been in law enforcement now for 37 years. Between his time on active duty (in the Reserves and National Guard), at the sheriff's office, and for the past 3 years as warden at Maine State Prison, he's brought to every position he's held a purpose-driven approach to rehabilitate rather than punish. He tries to find ways to create programs that help address the underlying issues facing the offenders he's been charged with supervising in the criminal justice system and returning them to their communities as responsible citizens. Liberty, 54, takes pride in his myriad roles as veteran, husband, father, and advocate for veterans.

MY THREE BROTHERS and I come from humble beginnings. We had the fortune of being mentored by our coaches and thus had positive male role-modeling in high school. My brother Ron, who was a year ahead of me, joined the army as a military policeman at Fort Devens [Massachusetts]. I visited him in my senior year and saw that the military also seemed like a good fit for me.

I was drawn to the discipline. I was drawn to the pride, the integrity of the military, and the ability to help somebody and be proud of what you're doing. So, in November of my senior year, I went to a recruiter. I told the recruiter that I wanted to be a military policeman. I wanted to receive as much college money as I could because I was going to be using that later. I took the physical, and I signed up that day.

The time I spent at military police school and then in Seoul [Korea] was foundational. I enjoyed being able to be the one who responded to incidents and resolved issues, and I had the ability to make a difference in people's lives. The first time I went to a call I was able to assist somebody in a motor vehicle accident. I brought her first aid, controlled the scene, and got everybody to safety. That was 36 years ago and I've loved every day I've gone to work since.

So many times, in my career—from being a drill sergeant and mentoring 18-year-old kids who want to be soldiers, to teaching the brightest minds in the United States at West Point, to deploying and leading troops in combat—I found that working as a military police officer and later as an Infantryman was a perfect fit for me. I have just been blessed.

An Advocate Emerges

I was the chief when I volunteered to go to Iraq. We had sent 15 deputies and corrections officers over a five- or six-year period to serve overseas [in the Global War on Terror]. When I returned, one of my impairments initially was that I was quick to anger. I fought in the City of Fallujah in 2004-05. [When my unit came home], I took two weeks off and then went right back to work. If there was a

In Their Own Words

RANDALL LIBERTY

discussion of the war or maybe of a traumatic event, I was emotional. I would tell people that I was fairly fresh out of combat and that I may get emotional. I explained it was a natural response from not only being exposed to trauma but *feeling* trauma.

I was angry. I would go from 0 to 100 very quickly. One day my wife and my stepson were driving in my unmarked truck wearing shorts, t-shirts, and Texas. I was driving down the road and there's a vehicle in front of me. [The driver thought] I was too close to him. So, he rolled his window down and gave me the finger. I was the elected sheriff at the time, and I put the blues on and he stops his vehicle and I opened my door and got out. I opened his door and I grabbed him. I said, "I'm going to mess you up." He was strapped in and he wouldn't come out. He said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know you were a cop." I slammed the door, broke the window, and went back to my truck. I was like, "Wow, what is wrong with me? Because that is not me. I am an easy going guy. It is not me."

So, we drove home quietly that night. My wife reached out to my brother, who's a retired soldier, an infantryman. He came to see me at work and I broke down. He called and told his VA doctor and kept hounding me [to see him]. I went in and went through 16 weeks of one-on-one out-patient counseling. It was tough stuff. I was going there every Tuesday at 1 o'clock. He dimmed the lights and I put a recorder by my feet. I'd go through a traumatic incident. At first, I could only go through 30 seconds before breaking down. And then, over time, after going through it over and over and over, my symptoms were minimized and I kept marching.

The catalyst for me to do more work in the criminal justice system happened around 2010 or 2011. In the central Maine area, we had several veteran-police conflicts that resulted in deaths. One of [those who died] was a friend of mine, Randy Worthley. He had fought in Khe Sanh, and when he came back from Vietnam, he had significant post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He [self-medicated] with alcohol.



Sheriff Randall Liberty Assisting an Inmate While at Kennebec County

In 2004, Randy Worthley was a leader in the veterans advocacy field, he was the State Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He and I went to a lot of schools where we would talk about our service and the things we do for veterans. In 2010, he was caught driving under the influence. [It was his] second offense.

By this time, I was the sheriff of Kennebec County, but I was out of the office that day. I received a phone call saying that Randy was struggling with PTSD. He was in the confined area, and [asked if I] would consider releasing him. Because he was only there for a three-day sentence, I said, "Of course," and furloughed him to go to the Togus Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, just a quick six-minute ride from the jail.

His wife picked him up, and after she'd brought him to the Center, he said he had forgotten his medication at the jail. They turned back around, but on his way back to the jail, he jumped from the moving car off a bridge and killed himself. [It was then that] the emotional effect that combat has on individuals began to open my eyes. It became most clear when I was personally involved.

“IT WAS OBVIOUS TO ME that I needed to do something to assist these veterans and their families in their transition back home.”

In another incident, I was at a Little League game with one of my friends, Sergeant Lincoln Ryder, from the Waterville Police Department. We were in the dugout when I heard a sound like, “Pow, pow, pow!” We’re in the middle of town, an urban compound where no guns should be fired. So Lincoln and I jumped into my unmarked truck and drove over [to where the shooting was]. We found Sarah Gordon dead on the ground, and her husband Nathaniel Gordon—who was a veteran—had taken off. We could still smell the rubber and the gunpowder. After a high-speed pursuit on I-95, he committed suicide.

So after these events, it was obvious to me that I needed to do something to assist these veterans and their families in their transition back home. As sheriff, I was in a position to do something about that. I realized I had the authority to get things done, so that’s when I started doing advocacy work for veterans and formed a veteran’s pod in the jail.

The Veterans Pod

The veterans pod was created in 2011 at little to no cost. We began the process by starting to ask at intake, “Have you ever served in the military?” At the Kennebec County Jail, we have 165 beds, but we had 3,200 intakes annually. So, it was important for us to ask the question every time we had an intake. [Eventually,] we realized that we had a pretty sizable population of veterans there.

Soon we started working on the concept that, if we have veterans incarcerated, why can’t we bring them together in one pod, one block, and allow them to have the benefit of shared experience? So, we opened a pod with 12 to 15 beds. Depending on the population, we could expand and contract. We

“IF WE HAVE VETERANS INCARCERATED, why can’t we bring them together in one pod, one block, and allow them to have the benefit of shared experience?”

brought in resources from the Togus Veterans Affairs Medical Center, the Veterans Center, Veteran Peer Mentors of Maine, Easter Seals Veterans, and Bread of Life, which is a homeless shelter, to work with the [inmates].

In addition, I was the chairman of the Maine Military Community Network in Kennebec County. Once a month we would meet and have 14, 15, 16 organizations all doing work for veterans. [My involvement in the network] allowed us to find unmet needs and ways to collaborate on everything from housing to programming to substance abuse and mental health treatment to peer assistance to acupuncture treatment. We had all those folks at the table to assist veterans, and that made it easy to organize and funnel those resources into the Kennebec County Veterans Pod.

We opened beds to all 15 county jails in the state of Maine. Any veteran incarcerated at the county level could be in that pod.

Working with Stakeholders

One of the things I did very early on was work with the Department of Labor to create jobs and give veterans an opportunity to prove themselves, because all the skills they learn are “soft” skills—the leadership, the dependability, the stick-to-it-iveness. All that they’ve endured is valuable in the workplace.

After working with the governor for some time, we helped him support a plan ensuring that any veteran who applies for a job with the state of Maine will get an interview regardless of qualification. Gestures like that get them in the door, giving them an opportunity to sell themselves.



Maine State Prison
Veterans Pod

For housing, programming, and mentorship, we need to talk to peers more. Peers who have served in combat during my era are important, but it’s as important to talk to Vietnam veterans. Vietnam veterans are deeply respected by my generation of veterans and lend a perspective that only time can provide. The Veteran Peer Mentors of Maine provided much to the pod, advocating and navigating the veteran through incarceration and transition. We also worked closely with Justice Nancy Mills as she developed the first veterans Court. Justice Mills is a treasure to the Veterans of Maine and deeply respected in the criminal justice system. Finding a champion for our veterans like Justice Mills was critical to our success. Her leadership and passion for veterans advocacy are remarkable.

We also need to reach out to nontraditional partners. One of the organizations in this area is House in the Woods. It’s an outdoor recreational hunting and fishing lodge where veterans and their families can recreate for free. Paul and Dee House lost their son Sgt. Joel House in the Iraq war. Following his death, they dedicated their lives to helping veterans and their families.

From Sheriff to Warden

As Sheriff in Kennebec County, I won three terms. One year into my third term, I retired with twenty-six years of service and was honored to accept the job as the Warden of the Maine State Prison. This prison was the facility that author Steven King used as inspiration for Shawshank Prison. In this role, I was able to work with the media, make the veterans program high-profile, praise and reward my subordinates in the veteran’s pod, and collaborate with stakeholders.

We did not have any sort of veteran’s advocacy at the prison when I arrived. We had 50 or so incarcerated veterans. We have probably 70 officers and senior leaders now who are veterans.

A little more than 16 months into my tenure, I started planting seeds for the creation of specialty pods. I worked through mission proposals and worked with key stakeholders and leaders, both formal and informal. I got a little bit of pushback. They asked, “Why do [veterans] deserve this? Why

do they deserve that?” I would say, “The best way to deliver services to any group is if it’s efficient. In this particular group—veterans—if they’re in the same housing unit, I can bring all the resources into that one unit and they’ll share the experience, discipline, and all that.” I said, “It worked in Kennebec. Trust me. I’ll make it work here.”

So, we brought in key stakeholders. We started incrementally with a medium-security unit for a 64-man pod. Of the 64 beds in that pod, I have 58 today that are for veterans. It’s going very well. One of the things the central office wanted to know is how the numbers look. We run data—assaults on staff, assaults on inmates, alcohol fines, urinalysis, and those kinds of benchmarks. That unit consistently is on the bottom of those stats.

Purpose-Driven Approach

For me, it’s critical to identify what [brings people into the criminal justice system]. With veterans, it’s very often mental health, substance abuse, and trauma. So, the first 30 days they’re here

“**TRANSITION PLANNING** happens on day one. If the major factor to make somebody successful on the outside is to have a job, housing, and treatment, I can do all of those things here.”

they’re placed in a reception pod. We have clinicians there, and we do testing. We identify what brought them to us, and then we form a case plan. Case planning for release starts the day they arrive. If they don’t have a high school diploma, getting one is part of the case plan. If they have post-traumatic stress issues, they need to get that clinically treated. If it’s substance abuse, that needs to [be addressed].

They know immediately following that 30 days that “This is my plan; this is my path out of here to do good time and to get the rewards that come with that.

There’s an expectation from me and from the taxpayers that you fix what brought you [to prison]. I don’t want anybody sitting around playing cards and checkers. I want them to have purpose-driven days, months, and years. With veterans, we very quickly say that if you’re well-behaved, discipline-free, and follow your case plan, the end of the rainbow is the veterans pod. So, they work hard to get there. Once they get there, they work hard to stay there.

Veterans Programming

Some of the things that make the pod so attractive are the number and type of programs we have. The Togus VA has been here often to assist us with filling out paperwork, letting the men know what VA resources are available to them. We brought in a bee-keeping course and we’ve certified 35 bee-keepers here in the Maine State Prison. Five of them live in the veterans pod.

We’re also doing fly-tying classes in the veterans pod. It helps them focus. It lets them learn a new skill, and they feel good about that.

In Their Own Words

RANDALL LIBERTY

Sometimes we invite authors to speak with the inmates. We brought Ed Tick in. He's the author of *War and Soul* and *The Warrior's Return*. [He writes about the] moral wounds of war and how to recover from PTSD. He came here at no cost to us. Craig Rossi was a Marine intelligence reconnaissance sergeant. He came back from Afghanistan and his transition was very difficult. He wrote a book called *Craig and Fred*, a story of how he adopted a dog that he found during a firefight and brought back to the States. He saved the dog, and the dog saved him.

A group called Liberation Institute came in. They've certified ten individuals to become certified yoga instructors. Those yoga instructors in turn go into the facility and teach yoga, which "softens" the pod. It makes people a little more mindful.



Warden Liberty Speaks with Veteran Inmates

We brought in the University of Maine Cooperative Extension. They teach the Master Gardener program, allowing these guys to garden inside the facility. We're currently gardening four acres inside the fence, growing about 25,000 pounds of produce a year. The inmates have an endless salad bar, which is great for them. We get donations of seedlings at no cost to us. It's a real big plus.

Something else that we've done that has been impactful is our partnership with America's Vet Dogs, Inc. We have seven Labradors that they brought in. We have those dogs for 14 months, and we do intensive training with them to make them into service dogs. I have a primary handler and a secondary handler for each dog. Those are positions that pay \$150 a month.

We have a certified instructor who comes in once a week to train them. We praise them [for training these dogs]. We even allow the dogs to live in the cells with their handlers. It's worked very well. After 14 months of training, the dogs are released back to Vet Dogs for four more months of intensive training before they're released to a disabled veteran. That's a great part of the program.

Preparing for Reentry

We also have a comprehensive program to prepare veterans for reentry. Transition planning happens on day one. If the major factor to make somebody successful on the outside is to have a job, housing, and treatment, I can do all of those things here, and I can do them fairly well. We have several vocational programs that they can enroll in and prepare them at a minimum to get additional vocational programming [upon release]. We also provide mental health and substance abuse programming.

A really important piece is to be able to have relationships on the outside. If the veterans haven't gotten a service connection and they're eligible for that, we start the paperwork before they leave here so there can be a smooth handoff. [We want them to] get whatever benefits they deserve. If

housing is an issue, we have a couple of transitional housing opportunities. The Garry Owen House is a veterans transitional housing resource. Bread of Life has a transitional housing opportunity. The Easter Seals will give them transitional money. They'll pay for the first month of housing to get them started.

What makes it really nice is that their caseworker and the pod workers are all aware of these resources. It's not like it's one of the things they do, it's what they do. They transition veterans back into the community. They become transition specialists, and that works well. They know these resources personally, and they start the transitional planning on the day a veteran arrives.

Veterans Advocacy

The most important thing I tried to do as warden is provide public safety and reduce recidivism. I ask myself, "What kind of inmate are we going to release into the community? What kind of citizen is that individual going to be [if we don't help him deal with his issues]?" One of the best ways to deliver programming to a veteran is by having a veterans pod, or veterans block, where you can concentrate resources and get veterans formal and informal treatment for their issues.

Just the ability to co-locate with fellow veterans who have shared experiences is comforting and healing for many of these veterans. It's very, very healing for an Afghanistan veteran or Iraq veteran who's 23 years old to be able to spend time with a Vietnam veteran who can talk about how to transition back, what the consequences are of not getting help at the VA, and maybe learn the lessons that he learned—like not following his path and enduring a life of broken relationships, alcoholism, drug use, homelessness, and joblessness.

"IF YOU'RE WELL-BEHAVED, discipline-free, and follow your case plan, the end of the rainbow is the veterans pod. So, they work hard to get there. Once they get there, they work hard to stay there."

There are many benefits that are worth the effort if you have these veterans in your population. There is nothing negative about bringing them together; you help them feel proud of their service, let them help each other, and let resources in the community help as well. There are many, many resources that would love to come in and help. We're just opening an American Legion post in the veterans pod. They're very proud of that, and that brings the resources from the American Legion in. So, there are many reasons to open a veterans pod, and very few negative reasons not to.

In January 2019, Governor Janet Mills nominated me to be the Commissioner of Corrections for the State of Maine. I was confirmed by the legislature and now manage all the state inmates and the seven state facilities. I have 2,400 inmates and 1,140 staff. I continue to advocate for the veterans of the State of Maine. I believe that no man should be left behind.

Points of Interception

THE SEQUENTIAL INTERCEPT MODEL (SIM) was developed by Mark Munetz, MD, and Patricia A. Griffin, Ph.D., in conjunction with the GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation, a division of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The model provides a conceptual framework for communities to organize targeted strategies for justice-involved individuals with behavioral health disorders. The six columns in the framework represent aspects of the criminal justice system, and within each of these, there are numerous intercept points or opportunities for communities to link people to the services they need and prevent their further penetration into the criminal justice system (SIM Brochure, 2015).

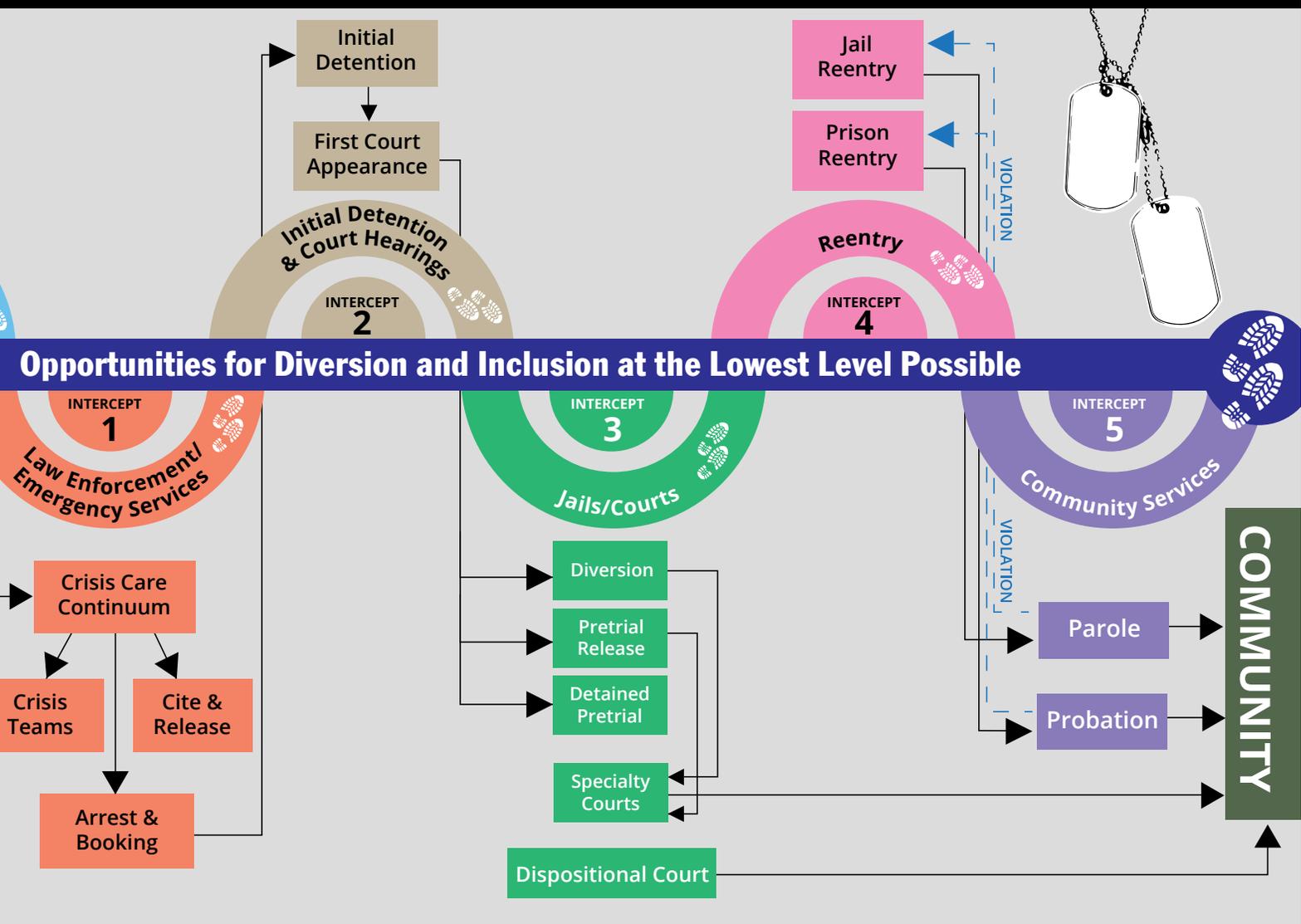
The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) worked collaboratively with SAMHSA, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and members of the Justice-Involved Veterans Network to adapt the model for the justice-involved veteran population. In the revised model, each intercept represents a decision point, an opportunity to divert and intervene at the lowest level possible and minimize the collateral consequences for a veteran getting more deeply involved in the justice system.

The opportunities for coordinating stakeholders around a shared intercept model for justice-involved veterans are significant due to the comprehensive benefits, healthcare, housing, and other support services that veterans have earned as a result of their service to our nation. Establishing a continuum of communication, coordination, and engagement among justice agencies, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and various community service providers will yield not only faster, more cost efficient delivery of services to justice-involved veterans, but also improved outcomes and public safety. The sooner and more effectively we can identify and “intercept” for a veteran who is struggling with his or her transition back to the community, the easier it will be to divert that veteran away from the justice system and toward a network of support that fosters the restoration, healing, and healthy outcomes he or she deserves.



Intercepts in the Criminal Justice System

Sample Decision Points



Health Care for Reentry Veterans

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

By Jessica Blue-Howells

SINCE 2007, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has operated the Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) program, which provides outreach and reentry planning assistance for veterans incarcerated in state and federal prisons. VHA designed this intervention with an understanding of the intertwined nature of homelessness and incarceration, and organized the program as a prevention initiative as part of VHA's homeless programs. HCRV was developed to address a number of issues:

- The number of veterans leaving incarceration
- The risk that incarceration poses for becoming homeless after reentry
- The health issues that many adults leaving incarceration need to address upon exit

THE PROGRAM'S MISSION is to ensure access to exceptional care, tailored to individual needs, by linking each veteran to VA and community services that will prevent homelessness, improve social and clinical outcomes, facilitate recovery, and end veterans' subsequent contact with the criminal justice system. As an integrated health care and benefits system that offers primary care, mental health, substance abuse treatment, housing support, financial benefits and employment services, VA is uniquely situated to assist veterans who qualify for federal VA benefits in developing a reentry plan that can make them successful in reintegrating into the community and leaving incarceration behind.

HCRV is organized on a regional level, with individual specialists responsible for large territories that are defined based on the density of prison facilities. For example, in states like California, Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Florida, there are multiple specialists who provide outreach within the state, while states like Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho have one specialist responsible for the entire state.

The program faces two key challenges that are solved in partnership with corrections leaders who are committed to services for veterans. The first is access to facilities: VA as a federal partner has no right of access to state and federal prisons. HCRV staff have developed positive working relationships with leadership at state levels and with individual wardens to ensure they can apply for clearance to visit veterans within facilities, and then negotiate visits with incarcerated veterans that maintain the privacy of communication between HCRV and the veteran, as well as maintaining security of the institution.

The second key challenge is identifying veterans within facilities. Corrections leadership has been essential in identifying veterans within their inmate populations for years, transitioning from asking, “Are you a veteran” to “Have you served in the US military,” upon intake.

State departments of corrections also provided leadership partnering with the VA to develop the Veterans Reentry Search Service, an online tool that allows a criminal justice entity (such as a state department of corrections) to upload its entire list of incarcerated persons, which is matched against US Department of Defense records to determine which inmates have a history of US military service. VA outreach staff and correctional staff are then provided with a list of veterans identified in the prison or jail. Before development of this tool, roughly 2% to 3% of incarcerated persons were identified as veterans. In locations where it is used, 8% to 9% of incarcerated persons are often identified as veterans. The improvement in identification of veterans who are incarcerated has allowed more direct outreach to individual veterans by the VA and better opportunities for HCRV to serve veterans who do not self-identify, as well as providing critical data to facilities considering veteran-specific units or other programming.



Corrections leadership has been essential in identifying veterans within their inmate populations for years, transitioning from asking “Are you a veteran” to “Have you served in the US military,” upon intake.



Jessica Blue-Howells



So, You're (Thinking of) Starting A Housing Unit for Veterans...

...**OR YOU'RE IN** the process of setting up a housing unit for veterans in your correctional facility (prison). You have questions you have had to ponder or at least tentatively answer, and you have identified several very real issues and concerns:

- What is the **FIRST THING** I/we ought to do?
- What are the **CORE COMPONENTS** needed for a housing unit for veterans?
- Can we identify a **CHAMPION** who will work diligently to create a program for veterans?
- Do we have the **DATA TO SUPPORT** such programming?
- Are we **ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS** about military service to those being processed into our facility?
- Are we **TRACKING DATA** on veterans?
- What type of **PROGRAMMING** could we offer to veterans?
- Do we have a **HEALTH CARE FOR REENTRY PROGRAM SPECIALIST** from the VA who can help us build our program and resources along with reentry planning assistance?
- What other parts of our criminal justice system could we **PARTNER WITH** to improve outcomes for justice-involved veterans?
- Are staff **TRAUMA INFORMED**?
- Will the **COMMUNITY** be accepting and supportive?
- Will the **LEGAL ESTABLISHMENT** be accommodating?
- What is the right **LEVEL OF TREATMENT** for these veterans?
- How do we **SELECT** veterans for the housing unit? Do we exclude anyone? What **CRITERIA** should be established for the housing unit?
- How do we **ACHIEVE BUY-IN** from the warden or key stakeholders?
- Who are the **KEY PLAYERS**?
- How will the program be **FUNDED**? Will there need to be an outlay of dollars?

- How do we create a **SUSTAINABLE** program? What if our champion retires or moves on?
- Does our county or region have the **DEMOGRAPHICS** to support such a programmatic effort for veterans? Do we have enough veterans incarcerated at our facility? Could we have other prisons send veterans to our institution to justify the establishment of dedicated space for veterans?
- How do we **GAUGE SUCCESS**?
- What is our plan for **IMPLEMENTATION**?
- What are the anticipated **ROADBLOCKS AND OBSTACLES** to success?

You should discern answers to your questions and concerns in the sections that follow, which feature programs that are operating with significant success in addressing the underlying issues for veterans that contributed significantly to their involvement in the criminal justice system and preparing these veterans to reenter society.



Randall Liberty,
Warden, Maine State Prison

“One of the best ways to deliver programming to a veteran is by having a veterans pod, or veterans block, where you can concentrate resources and get veterans formal and informal treatment for their issues.”

Edinburgh, Indiana, Correctional Facility, Incarcerated Veterans Education & Transition (INVET) Program

“That’s priceless what [the incarcerated veterans working at Camp Atterbury have] done... They’re contributing to the national effort of the whole war on terrorism, and they don’t even know it. They’re allowing service members to focus on their training before getting sent overseas.”

Jason Landfald, Former Civilian Inmate Labor Program Coordinator
and Camp Atterbury Liaison to Edinburgh Correctional Facility

LOCATED IN SOUTH-CENTRAL INDIANA and established in 1941, the 30,000-acre Camp Atterbury has played an important role throughout American military history, including the fact that it is one of the only military installations in the nation to house a state prison and work camp, Edinburgh Correctional Facility, for incarcerated veterans.

Once used as an internment compound for some 15,000 WWII prisoners of war from 1943–1946, the camp was acquired by the Indiana National Guard in 1969 and has since supported missions from the Vietnam War to the Gulf War’s Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Since 2003, thousands of regular and reserve forces have trained at the camp prior to their deployment to Afghanistan and Iraq.

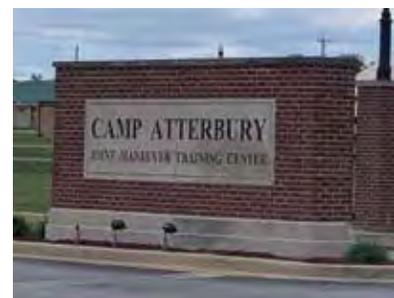
We Are Ready

The Camp Atterbury motto is *Preparamus*, which means “we are ready.” So, it only made sense to Alexis Dean, the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC) executive director of reentry and Medicaid, when the department decided to move its evolving Incarcerated Veterans Education and Transition (INVET) program there in 2014. Why shouldn’t an installation that has helped prepare men and women to serve our nation in overseas conflicts now serve those struggling to reenter their communities after their service?

Early Development Stages

In 2011, Dean was the original casework manager appointed to lead the design and development of the INVET program for the IDOC’s Central Office team. The program was originally piloted at the Indianapolis Reentry Education Facility in an effort to create the state’s first specialized housing unit dedicated to veteran-specific housing, case management, mentoring, and other services to aid them during reentry.

Dean was selected for this leadership role due to her prior case management experience working with multiple stakeholders and navigating the array of unique benefits programs available to





Alexis Dean

veterans while working at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Danville, Illinois. The IDOC Central Office had challenged Dean with achieving two key goals in structuring the program:

- Coordinating and centralizing resources for incarcerated veterans housed in a single unit to ensure they were fully supported for a successful reentry to their communities upon serving their time.
- Promoting a military-styled culture of brotherhood and comradery on the unit.

Dean says that she approached the design by applying aspects of some of the other specialized unit programs throughout the IDOC (e.g., community feel, morning and afternoon meetings), and then by adding some touches of her own (e.g., inmate name tags with branches of service) to promote a more veteran-oriented military culture.

Throughout the early stages of program development, Dean said, “There were partnerships developed with the Department of Workforce Development here in Indiana, specifically those staff who worked with veterans and veteran housing and veteran employment. Then, we also expanded our partnership with the Veterans Affairs Administration. They offered us representatives from both the benefits side and the healthcare side to come in and revisit [our veterans] more frequently than they did with other veterans throughout the state. It was more targeted.” As the INVET program grew, it added an American Legion Post, and “we additionally had some community resources targeted to veterans that were more related to volunteer services. They would come in and provide some courses or activities for the veterans to participate in,” she said.

The Thin Green Fence

As the INVET program’s success grew, much was learned about the most effective ways to address the unique risks and needs of incarcerated veterans. It was clear that housing veterans together in a specialized housing unit was effective for many reasons, including the culture of safety, order, and personal growth it created on the housing unit—not to mention the cost savings realized by coordinating the benefits among multiple service providers into one place.

At the same time, Dean and the IDOC team were constantly seeking new ways to grow that success. They were working to overcome challenges. It had become apparent that transitioning veterans with

WHY SHOULDN'T AN INSTALLATION that has helped prepare men and women to serve our nation in overseas conflicts now serve those struggling to reenter their communities after their service?

complex challenges back into the workforce was proving to be a critical challenge to their successful reentry. As such, Dean said, it became evident to her that the answer was to move the INVET program to the Edinburgh Correctional Facility, which had already been leasing space and engaging inmates in a work camp program on Camp Atterbury for several years. It would ultimately result in leveraging the program's greatest strength—military culture—to conquer one of its greatest challenges.

“The move to Camp Atterbury made a lot of sense in that we have a number of work crews through an extremely strong partnership with the military personnel there. So, it allows veterans to work side-by-side with active military and allows them the opportunity to volunteer or give back in certain situations. We just have such a strong partnership in that area that it's nice to have that proximity to other veterans who may be willing to come in and provide mentoring or volunteer activities...,” said Dean, who has remained in charge of the program after a well-deserved promotion from serving as INVET's first case worker to her current position as executive director of reentry and Medicaid.

Today, there are some 32 veterans incarcerated on any given day in the INVET program located on the top floor of “D-Dorm,” one of the two-story World War II-era barracks scattered throughout the 344-inmate, minimum-security Edinburgh Correctional Facility complex. All that divides the prison from Camp Atterbury is a thin green fence that Edinburgh Team Manager John Mather humorously says is designed more to keep the National Guard staff from taking short-cuts across the prison grounds than keeping the inmates off the military installation.

Contributing to the War on Terrorism

In fact, Jason Landfald, civilian inmate labor program coordinator and Camp Atterbury liaison to Edinburgh Correctional Facility, says that the time the inmates spend on the other side of that green fence is “priceless.”

A longstanding, ever-growing work camp program partnership between Camp Atterbury and Edinburgh began with two or three work crews and has since expanded to 46 crews of anywhere from 200-250 inmates who support the military and a handful of public agencies, such as the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. According to Landfald, studies have shown that the inmates have committed some 400,000 man hours of work that has saved the military an estimated \$7 million per year.



War Memorial



**INVET Program
at Camp Atterbury**

Landfald says that by saving the military millions of dollars, maintaining the grounds for their fellow military servicemen and -women, and even contributing to the construction of key training facilities—such as the network of ranges across the campus—incarcerated veterans are performing a public service and helping to ensure that the National Guard can invest more time and focus into their training and preparation to work safely overseas.

“It’s so hard,” Landfald says, “to put a dollar amount on the training value that the soldiers get. Some of these soldiers who come here, they go overseas to Iraq and Afghanistan. So, that’s priceless what [the incarcerated veterans working at Camp Atterbury have] done... They’re contributing to the national effort of the war on terrorism, and they don’t even know it. They’re allowing

that service member to focus on his or her training before getting sent overseas.” According to Landfald, there are only eight military installations across the nation that house some form of prison on their grounds, but Camp Atterbury’s work camp program appears to be the largest partnership of its kind and quite unique with its link to a state-level prison with a dedicated housing unit for veterans.

Re-igniting Military Values

More than anything, according to Dean, the department’s goal of moving INVET to Camp Atterbury was to get incarcerated veterans back to their military roots and re-ignite those values that drew them to public service in the first place. She believes that the concept of veterans helping veterans, of giving back to their communities, has proven to be one of the most effective components of program success. “To be frank,” she says, “veterans have been the most wonderful population I’ve been able to work with. So, I think anywhere you put them, they’re actually a really wonderful dorm to be part of. They just have great camaraderie and, just by nature, have a very high standard in their cleanliness and presentation. So, anyone who gets to work specifically with veterans is very fortunate both in the correctional system and out.”

INCARCERATED VETERANS ARE PERFORMING A PUBLIC SERVICE
and helping to ensure that the National Guard can invest more time
and focus into their training and preparation to work safely overseas.

Making the Connection

BETWEEN OPIOIDS, VETERANS, AND PRISON

In college, Alexis Dean gained valuable experience working with multiple stakeholders and navigating the array of unique benefits programs available to veterans while working at the Veterans Affairs Health Care System in Danville, Illinois. Years later, little did she know that experience would substantially result in her appointment to lead the design and development of the Incarcerated Veterans Education and Transition (INVET) program as its first case manager and, ultimately, a promotion to serve as the IDOC's executive director of reentry and Medicaid. As a result, Dean continues to champion the cause for veterans services department-wide.

IN OCTOBER 2017, the White House proclaimed America's opioid epidemic a national emergency. Tragically, its toll is one that our nation's veterans have known all too well, for all too long.

According to a report from Human Rights Watch, it is estimated that up to 40 percent of Iraq/Afghanistan war veterans served by the Veterans Health Administration received a triple diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and chronic pain since 2002. Not inconspicuously, an estimated one million veterans are taking prescription opioids for these kinds of conditions, of which 500,000 are considered chronic users.

EARLY ON IN HER WORK building the INVET program, Dean began to witness first-hand the disturbing connection between this growing epidemic, veterans, and the prison system.

Overall, this has presented a dangerous proposition for our veterans: Showing that suicide is twice as likely among male veterans and a shocking six times more likely among female veterans with drug or alcohol problems suggest a dangerous connection between the opioid epidemic and the alarming statistic that 18-20 veterans commit suicide every day in America.

Early on in her work building the INVET program, she began to witness first-hand the disturbing connection between this growing epidemic, veterans, and the prison system. For Dean, it has been a reminder of the obligation that society has to continue to support veterans who have served their country and whose challenges have led them to prison.

Dean shared the following account of the first experience she had working with an inmate on her very first INVET caseload. For this inmate, being on a unit among fellow veterans became a profound source of support for him. It was an experience that Dean says she will never forget.

"There was one gentleman who stood out to me," Dean says, "and he will always stand out to me. He was the youngest gentleman in the unit at age 27. He was the only Iraqi Freedom veteran whom I had ever worked with during my time with the INVET unit. His incarceration was directly related to his substance abuse following a military-related injury where he was prescribed opiates. That, unfortunately, just spiraled into a full-blown addiction.

Making the Connection

BETWEEN OPIOIDS, VETERANS, AND PRISON

“He had no criminal history prior to that. He had no medical history prior to that. [His drug use] was directly related to the injuries he sustained in the military. Then, when he returned, he not only had a full-blown addiction but also experienced extreme challenges in adapting to life here in the States after seeing what he had seen in combat. He wound up with a felony conviction that warranted time served in our department, and that was heartbreaking to see.

“I felt like he functioned better in that dorm than he would’ve in general population, because he is one of the ones who would speak a little, who was guarded about his time in the service, because he saw a lot of combat. I would see him in small conversations with other offenders, who I knew had combat experience, and I would see that he was willing to talk to them about that. I just don’t think that those conversations would’ve occurred in a general population dorm with offenders who don’t necessarily have things in common other than that they are incarcerated or that they are of a similar age or similar ethnicity. That veteran status, I think, opened him up more to having those conversations.

“There were also a couple of other offenders who had similar situations where their substance abuse was related to their charge and their substance abuse began in the military either through prescribed medication because of an injury or because of their substance abuse socially overseas to cope with some of the experiences they had while they served.”

What has affected Dean’s perceptions profoundly about veterans in prison is the dignity they find in demonstrating their patriotism despite their challenges.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT UP TO 40 PERCENT of Iraq/Afghanistan war veterans served by the Veterans Health Administration received a triple diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and chronic pain since 2002.

Source:

McLemore, M. (2015, September 02). *No Time to Waste | Evidence-Based Treatment for Drug Dependence at the United States Veterans Administration Department of Veterans Affairs*. Retrieved January 16, 2018, from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/30/no-time-waste/evidence-based-treatment-drug-dependence-united-states-veterans>

Traumatic Brain Injury Study on Recidivism by the Indiana Department of Correction

THE INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION recently concluded a four-year study on the effect of traumatic brain injury (TBI) on recidivism. Results showed that ex-offenders with TBI are almost twice as likely to return to prison as those without TBI. New treatments not only cut recidivism in half after one year, but they also improved the rate of return to work following release from 18 percent to nearly 70 percent.



Fran Osburn

“This study clearly shows that addressing traumatic brain injury among offenders is key to reducing recidivism,” said Fran Osburn, warden at Edinburgh Correctional Facility. “There is a need to diagnose and treat brain injury if we are going to help offenders successfully return to society. The treatments that we tested in this study show great promise in helping ex-offenders stay out of jail and return to work.”

Offenders were screened for TBI using the Ohio instrument created by Dr. John Corrigan. Those who were found to have moderate to severe TBI were placed in a Brain Injury Coping Skills (BICS) group before release. BICS is a 12-session treatment group run by facilitators from the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana (RHI). They are designed to improve participants’ confidence in dealing with their brain injury as well as teach them coping skills to better manage the consequences of their injury.

Participants also received 12 months of resource facilitation (RF) after release. Guided by brain injury rehabilitation professionals, RF is a TBI-specific service and support navigation process to promote return to work or school. It provides education, promotes awareness of resources, and helps individuals obtain community and vocational services specific to their brain trauma and personal goals. Further, RF ensures collaboration, integration and coordination among health care providers and community-based resources. The study showed that those who participated in BICS and RF are less likely to be re-arrested at both 6 months and 12 months after release. At 6 months, 13.3 percent of those in the control group were re-arrested, compared with only 2.8 percent of those who received treatment through resource facilitation. At 12 months, the re-arrest rate for those who did not receive treatment was 24.2 percent, as compared to 11.1 percent for those who did. Even more importantly, 12 months of RF after release from prison improved the return-to-work rate for those with TBI from 18 percent to nearly 70 percent.

The pilot study of 195 offenders was funded by the Administration of Community Living within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and conducted in partnership with RHI and two other state agencies. The Indiana Department of Correction and RHI are seeking funds to continue this promising research into BICS and RF as intervention therapies for ex-offenders.

Six Month Recidivism Rates



Veterans Service Unit at State Correctional Institution, Houtzdale, Pennsylvania



Ryan Yoder

“The benefits [of the Veterans Service Unit model] are endless. First and foremost, I believe that it’s our duty to do everything we can to help those who have served our country. Just because an individual gets themselves in a situation where they get incarcerated does not mean that we, as a society, should turn our backs on those who served our country and fought for our freedom. Just because they might have made a mistake, weren’t able to adjust, or didn’t have the support when they got out.

Ryan Yoder, Statewide Veterans Coordinator,
Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

WHEN DATA REVEALED that nearly 5,000 veterans were incarcerated at Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC) prisons and under the supervision of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole, the two agencies joined forces to launch one of the most collaborative statewide efforts designed to address the unique risks and needs of justice-involved veterans in the nation.

Applying the Sequential Intercept Model

To develop such a large-scale systems change strategy, the team began the design stage of its work by mapping the journeys of justice-involved veterans across multiple systems along the five-stage Sequential Intercept Model (see insert, page 10). That included (1) Law Enforcement, (2) Initial Detention/Court Hearing, (3) Jails/Courts, (4) Incarceration/Reentry, and (5) Community Corrections (Parole/Probation).

Each stage revealed an opportunity to intervene and engage each veteran in the kinds of benefits and support services necessary to prevent them from progressing deeper into the criminal justice system. Ultimately, the team launched the following initiatives:

- Better identification of veterans within the justice system with the Veterans Reentry Search Service instead of relying upon self-disclosure, which often results in under-reporting
- Housing of incarcerated veterans in specialized veterans service units for concentrated reentry efforts among multiple agencies
- Placement of veterans in regional community corrections centers upon release from prison
- Seamless continuation of care, including from prison to parole as well as from prison to community corrections centers to the Veterans Administration



One of several murals in the Veterans Service Unit,
Houtzdale, Pennsylvania

A Regional Approach



Craig Petulla

“PA DOC operates as the fourth phase (reentry) along the intercept model with the hopes of preparing our reentrants for phase five, which is community placement,” said SCI Houtzdale Corrections Unit Manager Craig Petulla. As such, the department’s strategy has been centered on the rollout of regionalized veterans service units (VSUs) within men’s prisons across the state from 2014-2017.

Each of these VSUs, of which SCI Houtzdale is the largest, has established a motivational, military-style atmosphere and culture on dedicated units offering veteran-specific programs, workshops, and an extensive set of services designed to ensure a smooth, successful transition to return back to the community with the support of all the VA benefits to which they are entitled as a result of their service. “The goal,” said Smith, “is that they can translate what they’re doing here out into the community with the hopes of not re-offending.”

For many reasons, SCI Houtzdale Superintendent Barry Smith jumped at the opportunity to implement the VSU to improve outcomes among veterans, not the least of which included the fact that he is a 22-year combat veteran with a desire to give back to those who also served.

Safety + Stability + Stakeholders = Success

Smith said that the most critical aspect of his team’s success with establishing a safe, stable, and productive VSU at SCI Houtzdale was securing across-the-board buy-in from all stakeholders, including staff, inmates, community-based partners and, especially, the PA DOC Central Office. In particular, he indicated that the early support of PA DOC Secretary John Wetzel sent a strong message during the program development stage when he appointed the department’s first Statewide Veterans Coordinator to help ensure that the VSUs got the support they needed to be successful.

“You know, I could be a leader, be motivated, and keep [this program] running, but if I don’t have the support higher up, I can do only so much. So, [Secretary Wetzel’s leadership] is huge in Pennsylvania,” Smith said.

Smith’s emphasis on building buy-in and partnerships has resonated at all levels throughout the facility, notably among VSU inmates such as Matthew Nichols who have been working on the unit as well. When asked what he believed to be the most important aspect of the program, Nichols, a Navy veteran, said, “In my opinion? Buy-in from all the stakeholders. That’s not just the guys who come over here and that [sort of] buy-in. It’s the housing unit staff, it’s community partners, and it’s staff throughout the rest of the prison. That’s probably the most important thing. That everybody’s working toward one common goal. We can peer facilitate all the classes we want to, [but] if that’s not really connecting guys with real jobs, you know, then what does that matter?”



The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections

OPENS THE FIRST FEMALE VETERANS HOUSING UNIT

SINCE THE LAUNCH of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections first dedicated veterans unit in 2014, there are now veterans service units (VSUs) at five prisons and veterans services offices (VSOs) at the other 20 facilities. These programs service approximately 3,000 verified veteran inmates who represent almost 7 percent of the 47,000 inmates in the PA DOC.

In November 2018, the PA DOC opened what is believed to be the first female residential unit of its kind in the nation.

“The DOC is proud of its efforts building strong programs for veterans that encompass a wide range of needs,” said Corrections Secretary John Wetzel. “There are now more women in the military than ever before and women are now involved in combat operations, which can increase the prospect of post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse. It’s essential that we provide services to those who served the country so that they return to the community as healthy and productive citizens.”

The veterans units provide veteran-specific programs, workshops, and services that include mental health services, life skills, substance abuse programs, education/vocational programs, home/employment plans, reentry programming, and assistance with securing federal veterans benefits and services after release.

Beyond the services, the programs offer veterans a chance to reestablish bonds they developed in the military and revive their sense of pride and teamwork.



Major General
Tony Carrelli

“No matter what branch of the armed services these female veterans once served in, they all know the sense of camaraderie, teamwork, and pride that comes with serving their country,” said Major General Tony Carrelli, Pennsylvania’s adjutant general and head of the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. “The opportunity to reside in this veterans service unit allows them to get back into the ‘basic training’ mentality where they once thrived. There will also be opportunities for them to take advantage of veteran-related programs and services that will support their successful reentry back into the community.”

NO MATTER WHAT BRANCH of the armed services these female veterans once served in, they all know the sense of camaraderie, teamwork, and pride that comes with serving their country.

California Department of Corrections San Quentin State Prison



Ron Self

I was sitting in a Victim's Offender Education Group here, where you directly talk about your crime, you take ownership of your crime. In fact, you write about your crime. I was sitting in that group as the only veteran, and I shared an experience.... Every one of them said, "I don't know how to react to you or to that story you just shared. As a civilian, I can't comprehend it.

I shared a story... where one of my fellow marines was ripped in half... and about 38 other marines who died that day. [I wrote about] how they died, how they burned, and just what I saw. The group just didn't know how to react to that. They couldn't digest it... They couldn't process it or me, and it was a really harsh experience to put that out there and not to have it [be understood] in any kind of way, just silence.

Ron Self, Inmate, San Quentin State Prison, Marine Corps Veteran
and Founder of "Veterans Healing Veterans from the Inside Out"

DESPITE BEING CALIFORNIA'S OLDEST STATE PRISON, San Quentin, established in 1852, has become well known as one of its most forward-thinking on rehabilitation and community engagement. Located less than 20 miles from San Francisco, the prison houses an estimated 2,500 inmates (not including an approximately 1,500-inmate reception center) and facilitates access to what is believed to be the nation's largest brigade of volunteers, 2,000 of which regularly provide reentry support and programming there.

Consistent with that tradition, it is no surprise that San Quentin became the site of the first prison-based Alcoholics Anonymous support group during World War II, and decades later it was a hub for veterans services that was originally inspired by a group of incarcerated Vietnam veterans. Those veterans formed the Vietnam Veterans Group of San Quentin (VVG SQ) in 1987 and it remains an important, growing part of the facility's culture today.

Building Community Behind the Wall

With its diverse and sprawling population, ranging from a reception center to the state's condemned unit—and nearly every security level in between—San Quentin has not embraced the concept of specialized housing (for any population). However, that did not stop Marine Corps veteran and inmate Ron Self from taking advantage of the facility's otherwise extensive programming. He gathered his fellow veterans to form a restorative community of their own behind the wall through Veterans Healing Veterans (VHV) from the Inside Out, a peer-led program he co-founded with a volunteer at San Quentin in 2012. One of



San Quentin State Prison

the more unique program development stories with some positive outcomes, the VHV evolved out of any entirely inmate-led design and development process that was supported by volunteer consultants and volunteer veterans.

A Path of Insight and Discovery

After serving in the Marine Corps for nearly 10 years, Self's pathway to prison ironically appears to have begun as he was struggling to transition back to civilian life—a period during which he described himself as “emotionally adrift,” feeling a sense of loss and even suicidal at times. Shortly

after an honorable discharge from the service, for which he received two medals and several citations for heroism, the decorated veteran's life took a shocking turn: He landed in prison facing a sentence of 25 years to life after being convicted of attempted murder.

Shedding light on an otherwise inexplicable course of events, an assessment later revealed a first-time PTSD diagnosis for Self that was deeply linked to an unaddressed history of childhood trauma. While noting that the way his crime played out “had military aspects to it,” Self said, “there were a lot of other issues going on there that really had nothing to do with the military. It just didn't become prominent until after I came back stateside and I didn't have the military there as an anchor. I didn't have that structure.

SELF STRUGGLED to find a “safe” setting where he could comfortably address the unique issues he faced as an incarcerated combat veteran.

I didn't have that surrogate family that really became my family more than my biological family did.”

Developing insights into the nature of his own PTSD diagnosis helped set the stage for a journey of understanding, self-regulation, healing, and restoration for his fellow incarcerated veterans that would ultimately guide his vision for VHV.

Veteran-Driven Exploration

During the first several years of his incarceration, Self did not find that sense of family and community with fellow incarcerated veterans—that anchor—as he served several years of his time at various facilities. It was not until he was transferred to San Quentin in 2010 that an opportunity finally seemed within reach. “This is the first prison where I actually found a notable, sizable veteran anything. I mean you can't miss them walking around with the blue hats on, you couldn't miss it,” Self said, referencing the first time he saw members of the long-established VVGSQ, who are well known for their signature blue caps, numerous charity projects and veteran-centered advocacy.

Yet, as he began to engage in San Quentin's almost legendary programmatic offerings and even amidst a more visible veteran population, Self still felt as disconnected as ever from the very community he continually sought to re-establish in his life. "I thought I could find the family that I had or a sense of it there, and that turned out not to be the case," he said. Among other things, he struggled to find a "safe" setting where he could comfortably address the unique issues he faced as an incarcerated combat veteran coming to terms with a history of complex trauma.

"I was sitting in a Victim's Offender Education Group here," Self said, "where you directly talk about your crime, you take ownership of your crime. In fact, you write about your crime. I was sitting in that group as the only veteran, and I shared an experience. Every one of them said, 'I don't know how to react to you or to that story you just shared. As a civilian, I can't comprehend it.'

"I shared a story where one of my fellow marines was ripped in half, and about 38 other marines who died that day. [I wrote about] how they died, how they burned, and just what I saw. The group just didn't know how to react to that. They couldn't digest it. They couldn't process it or me, and it was a really harsh experience to put that out there and not have it [be understood] in any kind of way. [There was] just silence."

Identifying the Service Gaps

At the time, few (if any) of the facility's numerous therapeutic interventions and support groups were targeted to address comprehensively the unique risks and needs of veterans. Even among some of the dedicated veterans groups that did exist, there were strict policies prohibiting participation among those with less than honorable discharges. These issues defied what Self, who was once recognized for pulling 15 fellow Marines from a burning helicopter, believed to be the spirit of a true veterans community: leaving no soldier, no marine, behind.

"IT DOESN'T MATTER what your discharge says. Once you come to prison, you're dishonorably discharged from society."

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the vast majority (77 percent) of veterans in prison and jail received an honorable discharge or a general discharge under honorable conditions. However, Self believes that should not matter.

"It doesn't matter what your discharge says. Once you come to prison, you're dishonorably discharged from society. So, what your discharge status is in here shouldn't really matter. I'm actually just more about helping all veterans, not only a veteran with an honorable discharge," said Self, citing that the pivotal moment when he formally decided to develop VHV was after a fellow veteran with two Purple Hearts was prohibited from participating in a veterans group due to having a less than honorable discharge on his record (in addition to an honorable one).

“He was a Vietnam veteran and they refused to let him in this group, and that infuriated me. So, I took my experience with the Victim’s Offender Education Group. I took that experience of a Vietnam veteran not being allowed to be in a Vietnam veterans group and I spent the next year in the college program writing the curriculum,” said Self.

Design & Development

While inmates at most prisons across the nation struggle to even access programming, the extensive college educational programming offered at San Quentin made it possible for Self to not only access programs, but also even get the support to build a program of his own.

Along the way, Self met Mary Donovan, a writing tutor with San Quentin’s university project. “[When] I encountered Ron Self he was just beginning to work on his ideas for developing this program, for taking some of the restorative justice principles, and also some stuff from his background and kind of adapting it to be appropriate to veterans. I thought that was an amazing idea. I was just really attracted by that idea.” Donovan would later be recruited by Self to help build the program and later become the community-based executive director of a newly created nonprofit dedicated to its expansion.

Self was able to leverage one of his classes to research effective programming for incarcerated veterans and the critical elements of those programs as well as explore the nature of his own experiences and responses to various interventions he encountered throughout his own journey of self-awareness. Ultimately, he produced three lengthy research papers that not only earned him good grades in school, but also would serve as the cornerstones of the program titled PTSD, Narrative Therapy, and Moral Injury.

Narrative Therapy

“The first paper I did was on PTSD,” Self said, “and the history of PTSD, symptomology, just everything about PTSD. It was a 23-page paper. I got an A-plus on that. The next paper I did was Narrative Therapy—how it works, the way it works, how it’s best administered, or how it’s applied. It involves going back to the first traumatic experience in a person’s life, such as your childhood, and then creating an autobiographical narration going forward, then recognizing, understanding, and accepting the fact that trauma exists in layers. A lot of that [trauma] typically comes before you’re even in the military. You ask, ‘How does that experience, coupled with the military and prison all unpack?’”

THE EXTENSIVE COLLEGE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

offered at San Quentin made it possible for Self to not only access programs, but also even get the support to build a program of his own.



Mary Donovan

“I FEEL LIKE I brought a lot of shame to the Marine Corps. I’m just trying to make up for that and I think I can.”

Understanding Moral Injury

According to both Self and Donovan, one of the most revealing aspects of Self’s work was on ways to embed an understanding of the theory of moral injury into the curriculum. Self had become fascinated by writings from Dr. Johnathan Shay, a leading expert on the theory of moral injury. As a theory that is more recently being applied to research on veterans, the theory of moral injury has two definitions. Donovan says, “One of them has to do with the betrayal of leadership in a high stakes situation, and the other one has to do with [an individual] doing something that transgresses [their] own deeply held moral belief system. Well, that is very, very relevant to veterans and combat, but it’s also inside a prison. Every one of those guys, you know, is an expert on moral injury.”

Self believes that providing veterans with an understanding of moral injury could profoundly change the way they think about and address the issues that led them into the prison system. “A lot of the guys who are diagnosed with PTSD in actuality have symptoms of a moral injury and they’re being given drugs for PTSD, which makes the symptoms of moral injury worse,” he said.

A Program Is Born

Throughout the design and development of Veterans Healing Veterans from the Inside Out, Self received essential guidance from Jacques Verduin, a pioneer of prison rehabilitative programs and the founder and executive director of Insight-Out. Verduin even agreed to help kick off VHV by serving as its first director. Self had built a committed team that was ready to launch the nation’s first pilot of VHV, a 52-week, intensive peer-to-peer support group based on principles of narration therapy, writing, and the sharing of personal stories that probe key relationships, experiences and concepts in order to explore the ramifications of trauma (whether from early life, military service, or incarceration).

Within a few short years, VHV’s momentum not only resulted in rallying additional trauma-informed resources and new engagement strategies (via yoga, meditation, and even theater) around the veterans at San Quentin (regardless of discharge status), but also inspired additional models in other California state prisons and at least three other states. Self said, “I feel like I brought a lot of shame to the Marine Corps. I’m just trying to make up for that and I think I can, and I’m okay spending the rest of my life to do that. Unlike other people in society or in the Corps who haven’t done something like I’ve done, they can go on with their lives. I believe it’s incumbent on me to give back the rest of my life and I’m okay with that. I’ve found my place.”



Jacques Verduin



Veterans Day audience

Stafford Creek Correctional Center, Washington, Veterans Unit

The WA DOC [Washington State Department of Corrections] is expected to see a significant increase of incarcerated veterans over the normal incarceration rate in the next 5 years. These veterans will come to DOC with significant effects of post-wartime trauma and stress requiring special attention and services. The goal of the SCCC [Stafford Creek Correctional Center] Veterans Pod Project is to better understand this special offender population and meet their unique needs in order to successfully manage these individual while incarcerated and help to transition a more positive person back to society.

Stafford Creek Veterans Unit Standard Operating Procedure

THE STATE OF WASHINGTON has long served as home to what is now the world's fourth largest military base, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, which has supported training and mobilization of U.S. troops throughout both World Wars, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and the Gulf Wars. Thus, when it was estimated that 10,000 military personnel would be demobilized through the military bases in Washington every year for five consecutive years, the Washington State Department of Corrections (WA DOC) took notice. As history had shown, all too many of these veterans would struggle with the transition back to civilian life, one that could involve suffering from the profound effects of trauma, substance abuse, mental health challenges, homelessness, and even prison.

In response, the department began working with the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) and other key stakeholders to explore new, more effective ways to address the risks and needs of a growing population of incarcerated veterans through a mission housing model. The team embarked on a three-stage design/development strategy that would result in implementation of a series of dedicated housing units for veterans, the first of which would launch at Stafford Creek Correctional Center.

Little did they know, however, that they would have to find the veterans first. It would soon be revealed that the state's population of incarcerated veterans inaccurately appeared to fall far below national averages due to a common trend: the failure of many veterans to self-report their military service upon incarceration, often due to shame or general lack of awareness of the benefits still available to them.

LITTLE DID THEY KNOW that they would have to find the veterans first.

ONE OF THEIR GREATEST SUCCESSES involved the simple act of changing ‘how’ they asked the question of military service.

Phase I: Improved Identification Systems

First, the team sought to develop more effective protocols to identify and encourage greater self-reporting of veterans upon intake into the prison system. According to WA DOC Reentry Systems Administrator James Harms, one of their greatest successes involved the simple act of changing “how” they asked the question of military service.

“They transformed their reception center process and the way that they gathered information from men/women being admitted to prison in order to ensure it was easier to determine military service. Specifically, they changed the question on the intake form from ‘Are you a veteran?’ to ‘Have you previously served in any branch of the military?’ In addition, they ran inmate names against the VA’s Veterans Reentry Search Services system to confirm military service,” said Harms.

Emphasizing the ability of veterans to build trust much sooner among their own, Correctional Counselor Ryan Denzer added that he found it particularly effective when the department began placing a veteran on staff at the state’s reception center to help conduct outreach and recruit veterans for the program.

Phase II: Establishing a Sizable Target Population

Once effective identification systems were put in place, self-reporting among veterans increased dramatically. The number of known veterans rose from 4 percent of the entire statewide prison population to 9 percent. From there, the department determined that it could sustain a sizable enough target population of veterans for the program.

Phase III: Exploring Successful State Models

In the final phase of the process, the team sought to learn from the experiences of their peers running successful veterans housing unit programs across the nation. According to Donald Lachman of the WA Department of Veterans Affairs, valuable lessons were available to the team at the local as well as national level when they took a team on a site visit to a program in Florida. “We started by doing some research and had an opportunity to take a number of their leaders and our agency leaders to look at some programs across the country. One in particular was in Florida,” Lachman said. “We [were able to take] those parts and pieces that seemed to fit well with your community, with your institution, and bring them to your neighborhood, to your community.”



Donald Lachman

Program Launch: Stafford Creek

At the conclusion of the design and development process, the WA DOC launched the state’s first veterans housing unit at Stafford Creek in April 2013, followed by Coyote Ridge Correctional Center and at least two Work Camps—all of which would gradually form the beginnings of a statewide system of interconnected veterans services and support systems.

Indiana Department of Correction, INVET Program

“I was in the first tour of Iraq for about an 18-month period between Iraq and Kuwait. We got hit with three IEDs [improvised explosive devices] during my tour there. We had one guy killed, we had one guy lose his leg, and one guy lose his arm. We had quite a few guys injured by the end of the tour... One of them has been in the PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] hospital since 2004. Basically, he tried to leave the place but he can't really keep himself together... [When I got home], I committed a bunch of burglaries. I went to the emergency room, and I told them I couldn't stop. I told them I was having issues. They kicked me out. It was the anxiety issues, an anxiety that didn't go away. I guess I was troubled.... I wouldn't leave the house. I didn't like people. I just stayed high for about a 10-year period.”

Luke Zimmerman, former U.S. Army Combat Engineer, and participant in the nation's first prison-based traumatic brain injury demonstration program for incarcerated veterans at Edinburgh Correctional Facility

THERE ARE SEVERAL KEY CONSIDERATIONS for successfully implementing a specialized housing unit program for incarcerated veterans, not the least of which is ensuring that they receive effective and appropriate services designed to address their unique risks and needs. Developing innovative, veteran-centric interventions is a goal that most such units strive to achieve—and a challenge that the IDOC, their partners, and the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana (RHI) are confronting head-on in a way that could fundamentally change the way the justice system addresses traumatic brain injury (TBI) across our nation.

Fostering Engagement and Trust

Consistent with other state prisons that have established specialized veterans housing, Edinburgh Correctional Facility first sought to create a military-style culture on the INVET unit that would foster inmate engagement and trust. For the program to work, staff would need to be able to deliver services and programming in a setting that promotes safety and growth. As such, the INVET unit is adorned throughout with colorful murals of military seals and flags from every branch, and is staffed, whenever possible, with fellow veterans who strongly believe in its mission. INVET is stationed near Camp Atterbury, a military training base.

The opportunity for inmates to serve at the camp reignites and inspires among them those strong military values that drew them into the service in the first place. As a result, IDOC reports that the unit is consistently safer and calmer with little to no violence because of the manner in which veterans hold



each other to a higher standard. A robust partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the American Legion, and a team of volunteers who regularly provide services on the unit, further instills hope among the veterans for a smoother reentry back home, one that is supported by the benefits to which the veterans are entitled.

Brain Injury Coping Skills Group

What truly distinguishes the INVET unit is a promising new demonstration project called the Brain Injury Coping Skills Group, championed by Superintendent Frances Osborn and the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana. This program provides incarcerated veterans within 12 months of release with strategies and tools for managing cognitive and behavioral impairments caused by TBI. Those who complete the program will be connected to brain injury supports and services in their community, and their case will be coordinated with a parole officer who has been educated on the challenges and implications of working with an individual with a brain injury.

The program is based on an evidence-based model called resource facilitation that helps people with brain injuries get back to work. A 2009 RHI study of individuals engaged in resource facilitation demonstrated that 64 percent returned to school or work compared with 36 percent in the control group. Thus, the Brain Injury Coping Skills Group not only aims to provide justice-involved veterans with tools to manage their condition, but to help them transition into gainful employment upon return to their communities.

Disproportionate Effect

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, studies have shown that as much as 87 percent of people who are incarcerated are affected by TBI compared with 8.5 percent of the general population. Dr. Lance Trexler, RHI's executive director of rehabilitation neuropsychology and resource facilitation, said that studies of Indiana's prison and jail populations clearly reflect that disproportionality is even greater when it comes to justice-involved veterans. For example, an RHI screening of Marion County Problem Solving Court participants (in the Indianapolis Metro area) found that 59 percent overall screened for mild-to-severe TBI compared with a striking 95 percent of those in the veterans court.

An Anxiety That Didn't Go Away

When the Brain Injury Coping Skills Group was launched in April 2017, 16 of the 27 inmates on the INVET unit screened positive for moderate-to-severe brain injury. One of them was Luke Zimmerman.

"I was in the first tour of Iraq for about an 18-month period between Iraq and Kuwait," Zimmerman said. "We got hit with three IEDs during my tour there. We had one guy killed, we had one guy lose his leg,

THE OPPORTUNITY for inmates to serve at the camp reignites and inspires among them those strong military values that drew them into the service in the first place.



Dr. Lance Trexler



Officer David Hannah

and one guy lose his arm. We had quite a few guys injured by the end of the tour... One of them has been in the PTSD hospital since 2004. Basically, he tried to leave the place but he can't really keep himself together.

"[When I got home], I committed a bunch of burglaries. I went to the emergency room, and I told them I couldn't stop. I told them I was having issues. They kicked me out. It was the anxiety issues, an anxiety that didn't go away. I guess I was troubled... I wouldn't leave the house. I didn't like people. I just stayed high for about a 10-year period," Zimmerman said.

STUDIES HAVE SHOWN that as much as 87 percent of people who are incarcerated are affected by TBI compared with 8.5 percent of the general population.

According to Dr. Trexler, Zimmerman's story of experiencing a decade of suffering from anxiety, confusion, and destructive behavior linked to TBI and trauma, is not an uncommon one among veterans. Most notably, Zimmerman indicated that he was unaware of the effect of TBI on his behavior and was never provided with the tangible skills to understand and address it despite several interactions with multiple social safety net systems. Trexler is hopeful that the Brain Injury Coping Skills Group will help change that landscape for other affected veterans throughout Indiana and across the nation.

"Most offenders didn't know they have brain injuries," Trexler said, "and if they did, they certainly didn't understand the effect that brain injury has had on their conduct and lives. We were fortunate that our state government contact for the Health Resources and Services Administration grant is Fran Osborn, the superintendent of the Edinburg facility. She saw the same problem and offered us the opportunity to work with the veterans there.

"Today, we are working with veterans who will be released in the next 12 months, teaching them about brain injury in general and how to manage the consequences of their individual injuries," Trexler said.

A New Sense of Self-Awareness

According to Zimmerman, he feels that he is making progress and is truly developing an understanding of his condition perhaps for the first time since returning home from overseas. Based on his experience with the Brain Injury Coping Skills Group, he believes it has genuine potential to help fellow veterans struggling with TBI "come to understand the nature of themselves so that they can actually help themselves."

However, his greatest hope is that this process—in addition to all of the support the INVET program has provided—will put him back on track to rebuilding his life and restoring a relationship with his six-year-old daughter one day soon. Upon completion of the first phase of the program, Zimmerman seeks to be transferred into a community-based work release program and continue to receive brain injury support services with the help of RHI. His treatment could result in facilitating more family visitation time with his daughter, while also helping him jumpstart the next phase of his life bolstered by a new sense of self-awareness.

Washington State Department of Corrections, Veterans Unit, Stafford Creek

“At one point, you served your country honorably. You had your life together. You were part of a team, you were part of a mission, and you delivered. And for whatever reason, you got off track. We’re going to help you get back on track. And we’re going to use your veterans experience and all this framework to help you elevate yourself again to that position of responsibility and dignity.”

Donald Lachman, special projects coordinator for the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs and former Army medic

Together We Serve

AT STAFFORD CREEK Correctional Center’s (SCCC) Veteran’s Unit, the motto “Together We Serve” has driven every aspect of the program’s implementation, encompassing the manner by which it helps incarcerated veterans give back to each other and to their communities from both inside and outside the wall.

According to Diana Rogers, a psychiatric social worker who serves as the Healthcare for Reentry veterans program coordinator for the VA’s Vision 20 program, the greatest and most unique strength of the SCCC veterans unit is its array of multi-agency partnerships that include Veterans Justice Outreach program specialists, the Homeless Veterans Program, the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration, the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), Work Source, and the American Legion to name a few entities designed to support the safe, successful reentry of incarcerated veterans back to their communities.

“The most important thing is networking and having a really strong interagency collaboration that is supportive of one another,” said Rogers. “That is paramount because no one person can provide all of the multi needs of these folks. They can’t. We need one another. We need to work together. And if we work together and we can create these seamless continuums of care, we can do magic with these guys.”

One of the key ways Rogers approaches her work is with an understanding of the pathways of veterans to prison often through multiple systems. “These veterans who are sitting inside these prisons and jails are the same veterans in homeless programs across the nation. It’s the same population. They are just kind of rotating in and out of the various systems,”

she said. “What I love about doing this work is I catch them when they’re a captive audience, and

“WE NEED ONE ANOTHER. We need to work together. And if we work together and we can create these seamless continuums of care, we can do magic with these guys.”

they really don't want to come back here again. They are really hungry to engage and we actually have stuff to offer them.”

Building from that sense of collaboration and on a foundation of military culture and values, the program provides a safe and productive setting whereby veterans can access effective enrichment programs and activities while getting connected with the benefits and services they need to support a successful reentry back to their communities.

The SCCC *Veterans Unit Desk Manual* defines the following six key elements of the program:

- Quiet, clean community environment
- Veterans helping veterans
- Enrichment activities and programs
- Partnerships with veteran organizations
- Links to veteran resources
- Release and community transition assistance



A Quiet, Clean Environment

According to Rogers, it was ironic that there were initial safety concerns about putting a group of veterans on the same housing unit because the outcome was the exact opposite. In fact, the simple act of housing veterans together in a supportive environment resulted in creating one of the quietest, cleanest and safest units in the facility.

THE SIMPLE ACT of housing veterans together in a supportive environment resulted in creating one of the quietest, cleanest and safest units in the facility.

“There is a fear that you have trained killers who you’re putting together... So, the fear is that they’re going to be acting out more than their general population folks would,” said Rogers. “It’s been exactly the opposite of that because the other thing that the military does is create a cohesive band of brothers. It has an ethic that goes with it that is instilled in all of the folks who are veterans.”

Eddie Corbett, an incarcerated Marine Corps combat veteran on the unit, could not agree more. He said, “I’ll give you the best selling point [of this program]: violence. We have none. Drugs. We have none. Pruno [prison alcohol]. We have none. We have no problems with that. You know, every now and again you might get a guy who flies off the handle, but he’s complying to whatever he’s being told to do as he’s doing it. So, I really don’t have that kind of issue as far as that goes.”

Veterans Helping Veterans

According to Clarence Hurling, Jr., a 22-year Army veteran working to help the inmates on the unit secure employment upon release, the benefits of working on a unit dedicated to incarcerated veterans go both ways.

Hurling, who is the veterans representative from WorkSource Pierce County Job Center, said, “I’m with my community that I’ve been with, and loved to be with, over the past 22 years before I retired from the Army. Veterans are a very unique group and very unique people. We band together well. It’s good to put us together because then we can honor our colors, we can honor our flag, and we can honor our country.” Hurling also said his work with fellow veterans at SCCC helps him manage his own PTSD from his time in the service.

“We can build on that with other veterans coming in,” he said, “and build those bridges to mend those gaps on the bridges, to help them with their situation. What I’ve liked about that the most is that those veterans actually come back and want to be mentors to help other veterans.”

Enrichment Activities and Programs

Inmates participating in the SCCC veterans unit gain access to several programs designed to address unique challenges facing veterans while re-instilling a sense of military structure and values.

For Marine Corps combat veteran Eddie Corbett, he would not have it any other way. He said, “The thing of it is I’m a Marine. I’m a veteran. I came here to help veterans. If I do anything less, I might as well leave. So, I can sit in my house, but if I’m going to be here, [I’m going to] make a difference, and that’s what I do.”

“IT’S GOOD to put us together because then we can honor our colors, we can honor our flag, and we can honor our country.”

The Redemption Project

The Redemption Project sets the tone for each inmate’s experience on the SCCC veterans unit. The 21-week program, which is a modified version of the self-awareness class that the Washington State Department of Corrections has effectively offered to the general population for years, encourages participants to share experiences and thoughts in a setting where they are able to receive feedback

THE BENEFITS of working on a unit dedicated to incarcerated veterans go both ways.

and support from others with a similar background. Some of the exercises of the Special Awareness Veterans are geared not only towards personal experiences but also issues and experiences that are common among veterans. These commonalities create a more intimate group and build camaraderie. Since the offenders live together, they are able to support one another both in the classroom as well as out.

The Brigadoon Dog Program

ONE OF THE GREATEST
benefits of the program has
been through goal-setting.



Dan Simmons

The Brigadoon Dog Program helps instill a "sense of purpose and restores pride among incarcerated veterans at SCCC by offering them the opportunity to give back to their fellow veterans and those in need by training service dogs. The experience also helps the offenders build a valuable and employable skillset.

The effect on those who participate has been profound, and it is sometimes even an unexpected surprise for inmates, such as Dan Simmons, who said he worked as a dog handler when he was in the Air Force. "For me it's very rewarding. It's created an entirely different attitude for me as far as doing my time," he said.

Referring to himself as "grumpy" and "a guy with a short temper" at times prior to the program, Simmons said that the emphasis on providing positive reinforcement for the dogs has taught him to adopt a more positive attitude as well. However, he also said that one of the greatest benefits of the program has been through goal-setting.

"Goals are so important," Simmons said. "Sometimes you lose sight of setting goals because you think there's no reason to set a goal. But this [program] keeps me goal-setting because you have to set goals with the dog. Every day when I wake up, I communicate with my co-trainer. What are my goals for the day and with the dog? We have short-term goals. We have long-term goals. What it's done is reminded me that there was a time in my life that I wasn't aware of that. I wasn't aware that you needed to set goals and stick to those short-term goals and long-term goals to see them through. It would be fulfilling. It would be more rewarding, and it would keep you out of trouble. That's the key here."



Partnerships and Links

The WA DOC, WDVA, and the VA are working together to address the problems of higher rates of recidivism, homelessness, unemployment, and health issues that justice-involved veterans experience compared to the general incarcerated population. Additionally, the WDVA and WA DOC seek to reduce the barriers associated with low enrollment of veterans into the federal VA health, benefits, and pension systems as well as other available programs.

“The ultimate goal for all of us is reentry,” Rogers said, “supporting successful transition. We have three branches of the VA. They wanted to engage all of us so that we could work together and be able to provide these guys with services. It’s my belief that if a lot of the veterans who are here had gotten the

THE WDVA AND WA DOC seek to reduce the barriers associated with low enrollment of veterans into the federal VA health, benefits, and pension systems as well as other available programs.

care—if they knew they had the benefits coming, if they had engaged prior to getting here—they never would have ended up here.”

According to Donald Lachman, one of the most important contributions the WDVA can make to the SCCC Veterans Unit

program is building an awareness among both inmates and staff of the benefits and community-based resources available to veterans.

“One of the challenges for us is to make the staff at the department of corrections aware of the resources, services, and benefits that are exclusive to the veterans,” Lachman said. “I want to take advantage of the incredible historical level of resources and programs that are available. My job is about connecting the dots between these partners and to maximize the benefits and the access to those resources. It’s life-changing and we know it.”

Release and Transition

Participants in the veterans unit program spend the majority of their time preparing for a successful release back to their communities by taking advantage of the numerous programs, services, agencies, and partnerships available to them on site. As they near their release, Diana Rogers said it becomes more critical to ensure that they receive sustainable skills and information on community services that they and their families can access independently.

“Just going in, seeing them, enrolling them,” said Rogers, whose work for the VA is not limited to the SCCC, “giving them a release of information, handing them my business card and saying, ‘Come see me when you get out.’ It doesn’t work for people. And they can’t do that. They can’t come and see me, because I come three and a half hours from here.”

Rogers has created an extensive reentry resource guide and provides a copy to each veteran prior to release. It provides detailed information on a variety of services for veterans offered in each community, including the name of their community-based outpatient clinic and their VA Medical Center as well as instructions on how to access them.

“I tried to set that up so that if I were a homeless veteran, and I wasn’t streetwise, what would I need to go get engaged really quickly so that I can get off the streets? That’s going to be a combination of both community-based and VA or veterans-specific resources,” said Rogers.

Most importantly, Rogers coordinates a system whereby all of the information and resource support she provides to each veteran is provided to a counselor at SCCC, as well as to the community corrections team that will be supervising the veterans reentry process beyond the facility. “That reentry plan goes to the community corrections officer so he can on the outside say, ‘Oh, you’re a veteran! These are the things available to you. Go engage with these,’” she said.

Hurling says that regardless of resources on the outside, especially as it relates to employment, many veterans will face even greater challenges within themselves. As he begins working with veterans on making the transition after prison, he finds that one of the most effective ways to help them overcome these challenges is through good, old-fashioned military values.

“So, there is a transitional problem with re-entering after you’ve left one of these institutions,” Hurling said, “because the confidence is down. So that’s why my goal is to help them, 6 to 9 months before they get out, to start building that confidence, start talking about what you may experience as you’re looking for work out here because you may get a lot of no’s before you get a yes. In the military, we always talk about having thick skin. So, we do need to have thick skin to keep moving forward. So, take a no and turn it into a yes.”

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS the WDVA can make to the SCCC Veterans Unit program is building an awareness among both inmates and staff of the benefits and community-based resources available to veterans.



POW-MIA Remembrance Conceived and Constructed by Veterans at the Stafford Creek Corrections Center

Attention All Corrections Officials

RYAN YODER

After working his way through the ranks at the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC), Ryan Yoder said that an assignment as a facility veterans coordinator changed his life. As a Marine Corps combat veteran, Yoder called it one of the most fulfilling experiences he has ever had. Recognizing Yoder's high energy, commitment, and passion, PA DOC Secretary John Wetzel promoted him to serve as the statewide veterans coordinator as part of an effort to prioritize veterans services. For Yoder, working to restore dignity and hope for veterans in prison isn't just a job. It's personal. He was interviewed by Nick Stefanovic.

ATTENTION ALL CORRECTIONS OFFICIALS! PA DOC's Statewide Veterans Coordinator Ryan Yoder has a message for you: With the right commitment, you can and should establish dedicated housing units for incarcerated veterans. The Marine Corps veteran offers the following guidance on what it takes to implement a successful program. His experience is based on the approach used by the PA DOC Regional Veterans Service Unit.

"First and foremost," Yoder said, "make sure you have the backing of your administration. That's key. We are so fortunate at the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Our top administration is so supportive of our military and of our veterans. It's a wonderful thing when you have the backing and the support of your top administration, because the sky is the limit of what you can do and how you can positively affect the lives of others. So, get your top administration on board, get them believing in your vision."

Once you gain that support, Yoder offers the following advice:

- "Don't be afraid to take chances. You could talk about it all you want, but action speaks louder than words."
- "Reach out to people who have done it and are successful."

Known for his passion and enthusiasm, Yoder said he is ready, willing, and able to support any of his colleagues across the nation in implementing their own program. His door, his phone line, his video conferencing facilities are all open. He has done it before and will gladly do it again.

"I welcome any representative in any state in this country to contact me personally," Yoder said, "with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Central Office with any questions that they might have. I'm more than welcome to speak to anybody either through phone or video conference. They can come



Ryan Yoder
Statewide Veterans Coordinator,
Pennsylvania Department of Corrections
and Marine Corps Veteran

"TAKE THE INITIATIVE, be the first organization, the first prison, the first jail in your state to serve our inmate veteran population."

visit me at Central Office in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I have had representatives who come and speak with me with regard to our veteran services and veteran service units. While most of them have been local, I have also done phone calls with out-of-state representatives as well. I will offer

“IT’S A WONDERFUL THING when you have the backing and the support of your top administration, because the sky is the limit of what you can do and how you can positively affect the lives of others.”

that support to anybody, any professional in corrections who wants to be part of this incredible initiative that’s taking place.”

If you haven’t already gotten the message, Yoder offers one more bit of advice. “Don’t allow the opportunity to serve veterans pass you by. Take the initiative, be the first organiza-

tion, the first prison, the first jail in your state to serve our inmate veteran population. I guarantee that others will follow.”

“Take the time to have a representative come and see what we’re doing here in Pennsylvania and see firsthand the effects it has on the inmates. See the respect that they have, the pride that they carry in their units, the way their units are handled, the staff involved, the corrections officers, and the progress.”

Well, are you ready?



Ryan Yoder, NIC representative Nicholas Stefanovic, and staff from the Houtzdale Veterans Service Unit with dogs from “RUFF—Relying Upon Furry Friends.”

Houtzdale, Pennsylvania, Veterans Service Unit at the State Correctional Institution

The inmates who participate in the program are the ones who make the [veterans service unit] go. I'm the administrative portion of the program. They're the backbone of the program, hands down.

Craig Petulla, Veterans Service Unit Corrections Unit Manager,
State Correctional Institution Houtzdale, Pennsylvania

WHEN IT COMES TO BUILDING a truly sustainable program for incarcerated veterans, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC) approach closely aligns with core tenets of what is, arguably, one of the most successful examples of an enduring organizational culture in the world: the U.S. military.

In many ways, the entire veterans service unit (VSU) framework is fueled on buy-in, operating similarly to how the U.S. military itself has built a lasting culture by instilling values such as honor, integrity, loyalty, duty and discipline as part of basic training.

It is for these reasons that State Correctional Institution (SCI) Houtzdale Superintendent Barry Smith, a 22-year combat veteran, believes the VSU is a highly sustainable program model. It has established a strong, cohesive foundation steeped in military values that will help the program grow as well as withstand any challenges to its longevity—whether they be related to administration, resources, or even external issues. In his opinion, it all begins with the inmates. Once that sense of pride and military values has been reignited within them, it has a transformative and powerful effect on facility operations, the staff, stakeholders, and even public perception.



Challenge #1: Filling the Ranks

The combination of a growing prison population and shrinking state budgets across our nation often makes it difficult for corrections agencies to implement successfully—let alone sustain—any form of specialized housing unit dedicated to a specific population, such as veterans. Thus, one of the first challenges PA DOC officials identified was the need to ensure that veterans were properly identified and recruited to “fill the ranks” on the dedicated VSUs and take full advantage of the robust services being coordinated for them there.

“I believe the greatest challenge is really in identifying what space is available. When we talk about all the specialized populations that we have, whether it's mental health, special needs, therapeutic communities for AOD, or dual diagnoses, [you have to] set aside specialist beds. Then you limit your ability



to maximize the beds that you do have. So I think that's what's challenging, but a challenge that we are able to overcome," said PA DOC Executive Deputy Secretary Shirley Moore Smeal.

"Houtzdale is our third [and newest] VSU, and regionally we're covered. Now, we want to make sure that we get the word out to all the veterans and go about educating them about what's

available and what they can expect when they participate in VSU. This will allow us to increase the capacity and fill the units with veteran inmates," Moore Smeal said.

Leave No Man Behind

Filling the VSUs with veterans is a challenge that falls on the shoulders of PA DOC Statewide Veterans Coordinator Ryan Yoder, a Marine Corps veteran, who takes great pride in confronting [the challenge] with a single guiding principle of military culture: "Leave no man behind." As a result, the PA DOC VSU program has one of the most inclusive eligibility policies in the nation that helps maximize participation.

"I BELIEVE in second chances. I believe that everyone has self-worth. I believe that everyone can change for the better."

"I'm going to tell you what I'm looking for," said Yoder, who reviews and approves every application from veterans seeking placement on all of the state's three VSUs. "I am looking for a person who wants to better himself, because I believe in second chances. I believe that everyone has self-worth. I believe that everyone can change for the better. We all make mistakes in

life, and sometimes we just need somebody to offer a helping hand. It helps you up when you're on the ground, it dusts you off, and it leads you in the right direction. It's important."

The eligibility criteria act as a simple set of guidelines designed to encourage participation among incarcerated veterans within 36 months of release who have had a positive institutional adjustment. Still, Yoder says, he gladly makes numerous exceptions for those willing to contribute to the program.

Sustainability and Success

Different from the more restrictive policies found in other states, the VSU program in Pennsylvania allows inmates to qualify regardless of their offense or even their discharge status—staff even work with inmates to upgrade status. In addition, Yoder regularly makes exceptions to allow long-term inmates to participate. It is a group that he believes is one of the keys to its effectiveness and sustainability.

"I've learned over the years that lifers could be extremely invaluable in prisons as mentors, peer specialists, role models. They provide stability. They provide credibility within their ranks. That's very

important,” said Yoder. “On top of that, it goes back to my philosophy: Am I supposed to turn my back on somebody because they have a long sentence? All of a sudden you’re not worthy of help, you’re not worthy of support, you’re not worthy of the services we offer because you’re a long-term offender or a lifer? You’re still a veteran, you still served our country, and you still deserve our respect. That’s why I consider every veteran.”

Transferring Military Culture

From the moment a person walks onto the VSU at SCI Houtzdale, according to Smith, there is an immediate “visual effect [and] you know, right away, it’s a veterans unit.” Setting the stage for each inmate’s journey back to their military roots and values, the boldly painted murals adorning the walls are impossible to miss. Each one honors the contributions of our nation’s veterans. With military seals and flags also displayed throughout, the entire atmosphere of the VSU serves as a consistent reminder that honor and pride, with which they once served, is what will ultimately help them get their lives back on track.

As superintendent, Smith is also impressed by the murals for another reason: They are all entirely designed and produced by the inmates themselves and even resulted in inmate-taught art classes that are now offered throughout the facility. Smith says the success of this effort is essentially a lesson in creative sustainability.

“At the end of the day, we’re all under a budget, and sadly, the dollar dictates a lot of the programming we do. If you’re smart, you can get around that. There’s a lot of free things out there that we take advantage of, you know? That’s where you have to have really good staff who are creative,” Smith said.



MILITARY SEALS AND FLAGS . . . serve as a consistent reminder that honor and pride, with which they once served, is what will ultimately help them get their lives back on track.



Overcoming Struggle

Setting the stage for program sustainability by instilling military culture and values throughout the VSU has already had a positive effect. The model has proven to be replicable and scalable—as SCI Houtzdale now represents one of three (and growing) such programs statewide. In addition, by virtue of its approach, the incarcerated veterans are gaining the kinds of sustainable skills they need to transform their own lives as well as those of their fellow veterans.

“WHAT WE’RE TRYING TO DO . . .

is create a structured routine for these guys that they can take with them into their community.”

It all begins with re-establishing structure in the day-to-day routines of inmates on the VSU, a goal that Petulla says is critical from an inside/out perspective and one that will benefit both those inmates destined for release to the community as well as those with long-term sentences who stay behind in ongoing roles designed to support new recruits to the program.

“When they reenter society, they often struggle. I think one of the biggest things re-entrants struggle with is the lack of structure in the community. What we’re trying to do down here, with the help of my team, is create a structured routine for these guys that they can take with them into community,” said Petulla.

“Participants set goals for themselves that they can take into the community where they have less restrictions on them and, ultimately, can impose that self-discipline. The military culture by nature is structured. My experiences to date have shown that many of the participants on the VSU have flourished when that structured environment exists. The ultimate goal is that they can translate what they’re doing here in the community with the hopes of making a successful reentry into society,” he added.

Red, White, and Blue

The VSU model incorporates elements of the therapeutic community model, which provides a structured and ordered environment, as well as methods and tools for positive change, but with a military theme. Inmates progress through a series of work assignments and responsibilities on the unit. Also applying the “community as method” practice, a “rap” group regularly convenes platoon members in dialogues facilitated by a social worker or a certified peer specialist (an inmate on the unit) to provide a forum for inmates to address ongoing and developing issues that they are facing in a healthy manner.

“As you can see, whenever you walk around this housing unit . . . , it is extremely positive,” said Yoder. “They take self pride, they have that camaraderie, and they have that interconnection as . . . they all can relate to one thing: being a military family . . . There’s just something special about being part of something. It’s almost like a second family to them.”

Specifically, day-to-day life for inmates on the VSU is defined by the progression through three platoons—red, white, and blue—where activities are based on the amount of time the veterans have left to serve:

- **Red Platoon:** Consists of so-called re-entrants within 36 months of their minimum release date. This platoon receives the highest priority of placement in available workshops and outreach seminars.
- **White Platoon:** Consists of re-entrants who have more than 36 months to serve. This platoon receives the second highest priority of placement in available workshops and outreach seminars.
- **Blue Platoon:** Consists of long-term inmates who are hand-picked to facilitate the inmate portion of the program, which entails leadership and support positions on the unit and peer-led programming. As such, they are considered the primary catalysts in reinforcing a reentry culture on the VSU.

To create a sense of accomplishment and promote goal-setting, inmate identifications and door cards are color-coded. Progression from one platoon to the next as each inmate moves closer to reentry is recognized and honored.

Yoder said the process evoked the same feelings of incredible pride that he had during his own progression through boot camp in the Marine Corps many years ago. “Whenever the platoon would progress, we would retire our existing guidon and get a new colored guidon. When we finally got to the red guidon in the Marines, the pride was overwhelming. Oh, my gosh, the pride factor was through the roof!” Yoder said. Similarly, on the VSU, “we need to remember that when an inmate goes out of their way to do better, it is important to identify such progress and let him know that you appreciate his efforts. Tell them that they are doing a great job and inspire them to want to continue to do so in their lives.”

Safety & Security

After personally experiencing the benefits of boot camp while serving in the National Guard, Correctional Officer Troy Hagen said he is not surprised by the transformative effect it is having on individual inmates as well as the safety and security of the unit, the staff, and the inmates. These kinds of results help build sustainable buy-in among staff who may have otherwise been skeptical of programming for these kinds of specialized housing programs.

“On [the VSU], not only are behavioral problems few and far between, but what you would consider a problem here is, you know, two guys standing and talking in the day room. If you say, ‘Gentlemen, have

ONCE THAT SENSE OF PRIDE and military values has been reignited, it has a transformative and powerful effect on facility operations, the staff, stakeholders, and even public perception.

a seat,' they sit. To get a response like that in a level-three housing unit [in general population], you have to tell a lot of those guys [multiple times], you know, 'Sit down. Sit down. Have a seat. Guys, find a seat.' I mean, you are just constantly repeating yourself. It's like they're trying to fight the system."

What's Next?

One of the most exciting aspects of the success of the VSU model at SCI Houtzdale and among all three units statewide is that PA DOC leaders have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to learning from this process, while promoting sustainability and growth.

According to Moore Smeal, one success leads to another, especially when it comes to winning the support of staff who observe, firsthand, the positive effect that the VSU's can have on the safety of their work environment.

"[As the program makes progress], you're going to have more people who take accountability for it and buy into it. That's going to make the operations a lot smoother and a lot safer for staff," said Moore Smeal. "So I think it's incumbent upon each of us to take a look at how we did it, to be our own worst critic or best critic, whichever way you look at it, and say, 'How can we do better?' When we know better, we do better. We know things now that we didn't know before, things that work, things that [are effective], things that have resulted in our population decreasing. So we can look more at the individuals and provide them with the services they need."

According to Yoder, PA DOC has several ideas underway for the future of the VSUs, including the potential of opening another unit closer to an urban center, such as Philadelphia or Pittsburgh, where inmates can be more effectively linked to community-based services and employment upon release. According to Yoder, "the sky's the limit" when you have the support of an administration.

For inmate and Navy veteran Matthew Nichols, the state's unfinished business is helping him with his own. "I started in the military," he said, "wanted to be in the military, and I didn't finish that obligation. I think it's important to help veterans as much as I can to give them a leg up. I think everybody wants to have a sense that the stuff that they do in life means something... that somebody in my position, has an opportunity to do something that matters."



General Carrelli and other top military officials from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) make a special visit to the Veterans Service Unit at Houtzdale.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL is that participants can translate what they're doing here in the community with the hopes of making a successful reentry into society.

San Quentin State Prison, California

“Veterans Healing Veterans from the Inside Out”

I see it spreading. My hope, my dream, my plan, my mission is to have it in every prison between here and the east coast. I'd just like to expand it, get it out to everybody without it being of cost to anybody.

Ron Self, Marine Corps Veteran and Inmate,
Founder of “Veterans Healing Veterans from the Inside Out”

JUST AS UNIQUE as the fact that the Veterans Healing Veterans (VHV) program design and development process were entirely led by an incarcerated veteran, is the reason why Ron Self seeks to make the program a sustainable and scalable model for the nation.

In fact, an assessment of nearly every stage of the program's design, development and implementation reflects a very deliberate framework to help ensure that the VHV would achieve sustainability on many levels—from the individual to the systemic, and even from state to national.

Framework for the Future

It began with the framework. As the incredible potential for the model became apparent, Self and his team took deliberate steps to help formally establish the VHV as a replicable program with the resources necessary to help expand its reach, flourish, and grow well beyond the walls of San Quentin State Prison. This was achieved by:

- Formally establishing VHV as a nonprofit organization with Mary Donovan serving as its executive director.
- Ensuring that the organization had the resources to sustain a professional operation by securing grant funding, most substantially a \$100,000 grant to develop the model from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), another from the California Endowment, and a stream of smaller individual donations within 2 years of the program's launch.

However, while Self and Donovan both appreciate the much-needed seed funding from CDCR, they both agree that they would prefer to raise private dollars to support program expansion, rather than public funds.

“We want to bring it to CDCR with no cost to the taxpayers. We want private donations... and that's how I want to bring it to every other prison in this nation. It's not a pipe dream. It's totally achievable, and that's what I want to do... I don't want it to be a burden on the taxpayers,” said Self.

“WE ENVISION a society equipped with the understanding, capacity, and moral courage to truly leave no service member behind.”



Growing Leaders

From day one, a cornerstone of VHV's program design has been building the leadership capacity among the incarcerated veterans by tapping into the innate sense of public service that inspired so many of them to join the military in the first place. In doing so, the concept is to train and grow a team that will continue to sustain the program—regardless of resources—and apply their new skillset and awareness to support their fellow veterans moving forward.

“My big thing is teaching guys to facilitate. I'm trying to teach them what I've learned, where I've learned it from, and show them the resource materials... I'd like them to be able to mine the same material so that they can garner out of it things that maybe I didn't see,” said Self.

According to Donovan, the program is currently engaging nine new facilitators in an extensive training program so that they may one day lead groups of their own, reaching more veterans than ever. Noting that buy-in is critical to the program's success, she said that they are constantly gathering their input and suggestions as they move forward.

“We also regularly run a facilitator and mentorship training,” Donovan said, “so our men in the circle can develop the skills where they can. In our peer support groups, it's not that outside people come in and run the show. Outside people come in and kind of make it possible for the men to run the group.

“All participants shape the program. We are careful to allow these guys to contribute to the program in the sense that their feedback is incorporated as we go through the group. That goes for the first time guys and the guys who've stepped into the leadership roles. [It's like this] across the board.”

Creating Sustainability

The VHV's vision statement says, “We envision a society equipped with the understanding, capacity, and moral courage to truly leave no service member behind.” In many ways, the program's sustainability will ultimately rest on its ability to achieve that sense of family that the military once offered them, while also supporting each individual veteran with developing the lasting sense of restoration and skills needed to move forward with their lives, whether their future lies back in the community or behind bars helping their fellow veterans.

As the program has evolved, so has its ability to achieve sustainable growth through a number of programs and interventions designed to support them from the “inside out.” As an outgrowth of the VHV's focus on trauma and healing, a partnership was developed with the Prison Yoga Project to offer

trauma-sensitive yoga and meditation practices. Marin Shakespeare Theater is now offering an extension of the VHV's narrative therapy program that allows veterans to further explore their own stories and traumatic experiences through writing, performance, and mindful repetition.

"We have a philosophy with VHV that you always have a seat on the bus. It's a family. There is no end. After you're done graduating though, we have the support groups," said Self. "We like to think—or I like to think—of it like a Narcotics Anonymous or an Alcoholics Anonymous. When you graduate, you can take it and go on and start your own group or whatever, but there's always a way to be involved and remain involved."

Building Bridges to Communities

The momentum created around the VHV program, including the sense of empowerment and pride it has restored in the veterans it has served, has helped generate an increased focus on linking veterans to their VA benefits and the array of support services available to them in the community.

In the end, a successful program would ensure that participants (who are eligible for release) return home successful and supported, and those who stay behind are instilled with a sense of purpose and restoration that empowers them to support their family of veterans behind the wall, as well as their family on the outside.

For many incarcerated veterans, the shame and a simple lack of awareness prevent them from securing the VA benefits, claims (for injuries), healthcare, or even housing services (upon release) to which they are entitled. Donovan said that one of the results of the self-awareness and growth among individuals participating in the VHV has been establishing an unanticipated "intersection" with benefits, often empowering them to pursue claims and benefits for their families back home that they never knew were possible.

"Some of these men don't even know that they are eligible for benefits," Donovan said. "They have never tried. They have shame associated with their bad discharges, they don't know that they could get a discharge upgrade."

In fact, Self admitted that it took him 17 years from his discharge to apply for benefits. Over the years, he has become well-acquainted with the process and has been able to help others secure their own.

THE PROGRAM IS CURRENTLY ENGAGING nine new facilitators in an extensive training program so that they may one day lead groups of their own, reaching more veterans than ever.



San Quentin veteran inmates participate in Veterans Healing Veterans from the Inside Out

Overall, VHV participants, as well as other veterans housed at San Quentin, have benefited from varying levels of services provided through established partnerships with the VA and state and local veterans organizations that work to connect veterans both in prison and the community with services. Many of them regularly send former veterans into the facility as volunteers. All of these efforts collectively have the potential to come together and help transform

the lives of veterans throughout the system as veteran-centered services, such as the VHV, continue to thrive and grow.

“When you get right down to it,” Donovan said, “veterans again seem to get this on their own like no other population that I’m aware of. Helping other people heals the helper. You get to get in there, you get to help out, you get to give somebody space to tell their story, you get to reflect back to them kind of what you think and how that resonates with you, and you get to let them know that they’re not alone. You see them lifted up by that and it’s really profoundly validating for oneself. There’s a real sense of satisfaction in that.”

As for Ron Self, it would seem only fitting that the bridge he has been helping to build to communities may not only support his own transition, but also create a pathway to help his fellow veterans to cross as well. With hopes of being paroled in 2018, Self plans to pursue his goal of bringing the program to his fellow veterans nationwide by taking on a full-time leadership role at VHV. This time, reaching in from the other side of the wall to help his brothers in need.

“HELPING OTHER PEOPLE heals the helper . . .

You get to let them know that they're not alone.

You see them lifted up by that and it's really profoundly validating for oneself.”

“Exist”

SHARON KIRKPATRICK

Washington State Corrections Center for Women (WCCW), Washington State Department of Corrections



Sharon Kirkpatrick

Navy veteran Sharon Kirkpatrick, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs Women Veterans Advisory Committee co-chair, was first introduced to the subject of incarcerated women while working with the department's Women's Bureau on topics such as developing non-traditional jobs. Yet, she says her most pivotal lesson about the challenges faced by her fellow female veterans in prison, ironically, was revealed when she volunteered for the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. As she engaged with mothers, she began comparing their experiences, one that she felt unfairly discounted the needs of female veterans who had served our nation and just so happened to be mothers, too. Since then, Kirkpatrick has worked for 20 years as

both a volunteer and contracting agency staff with WA DOC to help make women veterans “count.” Six of those years have been spent leading a dedicated program for incarcerated women veterans at the state's two women's prisons, the Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW), which houses 900 women of all classification levels, and Mission Creek Correctional Center for Women (MCCCW), a stand-alone minimum-security camp for women.

I think what's unique about our program is that we exist.

Sharon Kirkpatrick, co-chair,
Washington Department of Veterans Affairs Women Veterans Advisory Committee

ACCORDING TO A REPORT from the National Resource Center on Justice-Involved Women (NRCJIW), women represent both the fastest growing prison population and military population in the nation. There are currently one million women under custody or supervision (including jail, prison, probation or parole), more than 1.4 million women on active duty military and an estimated two million female veterans throughout our communities today. And those numbers are growing. In fact, as the number of women in prison grew 700 percent from 1980-2014, the female veterans population has also grown considerably. Women represented 8 percent of the veterans population in 2009, and that is projected to climb another 10 percent by 2020. Meanwhile, the male population is projected to decline by 17 percent during that same period. At this time, women in Washington state prisons make up less than 2 percent of the justice-involved veterans population or about 20 out of the 1,285 individuals who have been identified as having prior military service.

The combination of these two trends has proven to be challenging for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that—despite their rapid rate of growth—the structure of both our nation's military and prison systems is designed to accommodate a larger, more male-dominant population. As both systems grapple with limited resources and competing priorities, they have struggled when

it comes to addressing the unique needs of a sizable, yet smaller population of women. These challenges only become profoundly more complicated when the two systems converge at the intersection of the justice-involved women veterans.

As a U.S. Navy veteran working with WA DOC’s women’s prisons during this period of growth, Kirkpatrick has had the unique experience of bridging both systems in a state with one of the largest populations of female veterans. Her firsthand account of the goals, challenges, and opportunities of her work running an employment and reentry transition support program for 30 female incarcerated veterans for the last 6 years closely correlates with statistics, reports and surveys revealing how jails and prisons have looked at the unique risks and needs of women veterans or, more often than not, overlooked them.

Step One: Existence

When you ask Kirkpatrick what the most unique aspect of her program is, she says, “I think what’s unique about our program is that we exist.” Over the last 6 years, the women’s veterans group at WCCW has met every month and every quarter at MCCCW.

“You know nobody else is doing it,” Kirkpatrick says. “This drives me crazy as a woman veteran because [they justify the absence of programming by saying it] is because women are only 10 percent of the population of veterans and then they are only 7 percent of the population of inmates. But you know, each person in that percentage is a veteran. If we help one veteran we’ve done something that wasn’t happening in the past.”

Challenges: Finding Women Veterans in the System

Consistently, experts have indicated that one of the greatest challenges with serving incarcerated veterans is identifying them so that they can engage in the wide array of VA benefits and services that most of them have earned through their service. Underreporting often occurs because veterans often feel a sense of shame that they are in prison, and many simply do not view themselves as veterans because of it. One of the recommendations that came from the women’s group is to have peers attend the weekly orientation to help identify the women arriving at the reception center who have served in the military. This is a unique approach at WCCW that has helped increase the number of identified women who have served our country.

“IF WE HELP one [woman] veteran, we’ve done something that wasn’t happening in the past.”

According to Kirkpatrick, the hurdles that must be overcome when engaging women prisoners about their prior military history often takes these challenges to an entirely different level, one that is pretty consistent with the pathway and experiences of women in the general population as well.

Kirkpatrick said that she first began to notice this issue when she was running her employment program for women at WCCW. “It was accidental. I was hired to teach transition classes at the women’s prison, and as part of my weekly class I would ask women to identify what their prior employment experience was. When I would ask that question, I would get on an almost monthly basis, a woman saying, ‘I don’t have any employment experience. I was in the military.’ And that’s when the bell went off for me.”

Addressing Military Sexual Trauma

However, as Kirkpatrick later began to realize that perhaps, while many of these women didn’t seem to believe they counted, that was just the tip of the iceberg. [Many women had experiences] linked to military sexual trauma (MST). “What we found,” Kirkpatrick said, “is very specific to women veterans. They don’t want to admit that they were ever in the service. They don’t want to talk about it. They don’t want to be identified. So that makes it a little bit more difficult. The reason has to do with a lot of things, like military sexual trauma, shame, bad experiences. So that was a kind of a hurdle.”

Defined by the Department of Veterans Affairs as “experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that a veteran experienced during

“THEY DON'T WANT TO ADMIT that they were ever in the service. They don't want to talk about it. They don't want to be identified.”

his or her military service,” MST has emerged

as a significant concern, especially among female veterans. According to the NRCJW report, while the true prevalence of MST is hard to determine, a study by the Veterans Health Administration found that one in five female veterans experienced MST as compared to one in 100 male veterans, and other reports indicate that as many as 33 percent of women veterans studied experienced rape or attempted rape while on active duty.

While women are increasingly serving in critical and combat roles in the military and PTSD is a prevalent issue among a considerable percentage of both male and female combat veterans, the dramatically higher reported rates of MST among women presents the need for a more unique set of gender-responsive, trauma-informed services in a setting where they can work to address them. According to experts, this is especially critical for women in prison as confinement settings trigger unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Overcoming these challenges took time and the kind of dedication that Kirkpatrick was uniquely inspired to invest in for her fellow women veterans. Ultimately, it was through building a strong rapport with them that she was able to grow awareness of the benefits of self-reporting as a veteran. Of course, she says, a dose of good old-fashioned success has helped pave the way for more trust and participation as well.

Monitoring Success

“When the women started to find out that there was something in it for them, that there might be some benefits,” Kirkpatrick said, “then they started getting more interested and [began] attending. We started a monthly support group for veterans. And we actually got a liaison with a staff person who’s a veteran who was willing to assist and show up and spend 2 hours with us in a meeting place.” However, she added that “the thing that got the buy-in is we started having success.”

Noting that there is still no formal tracking system for success rates, Kirkpatrick said that she has been able to track 200 graduates of her program who have successfully integrated back into their communities on an incidental basis. “There’s nothing formal, but incidentally we have not had one woman re-offend, which is astronomical. That’s the word I’m looking for,” she said and shared some anecdotes of her successful graduates.

“I have been blown away at the accomplishments. When these women get out and I’m able to stay in touch, what they go on to do just blows my mind,” Kirkpatrick said. “I have one woman who’s in Washington State who now actually ran for office and was successful. It’s a small county, but she’s done it and she’s been in the paper doing wonderful. I’ve got another woman here in Tacoma who has written grants, got funding, and done everything to open up veteran transitional housing. I’ve got another woman who has become one of the best bartender-waitresses in the Seattle upscale restaurant business. [It’s all] just good stuff, really good stuff.”

Opportunities and Next Steps

Consistently with most prison systems across the nation, Kirkpatrick has long advocated for the need to have a dedicated housing unit for female veterans. While she understands that there may not be enough women to sustain a dedicated housing unit, the benefits, she argues, would be quite similar to those for men. It would allow her to centralize services among the 30 women she currently serves at the two facilities, perhaps increase the regularity and access to them and create a safe, more trauma-informed environment among women that may allow them to work together to overcome a common set of issues and challenges.

Her commitment, just as it has been for 20 years, is unwavering. “If we could have something resembling a women veterans pod,” Kirkpatrick said, “or if we could increase the number of justice-involved women veteran programs and had somebody there on even a biweekly basis... I always say: Give me the office with the broom in it, and I’ll make it work.”

Source:

Ramirez, R., & Van Dieten, M. (2013, June & July). *Responding to the Needs of Women Veterans Involved in the Criminal Justice System*. Retrieved January 16, 2018, from *Responding to the Needs of Women Veterans Involved in the Criminal Justice System*

Conclusion

ACCORDING TO an August 7, 2018 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the United States had more than 1,500,000 prisoners under the jurisdiction of state and federal correctional authorities as of December 31, 2016. Another 12 million individuals pass through our local jails each year. It is estimated that seven percent of these men and women who are incarcerated in jail or prison have served in the Armed Forces of the United States, most them with honorable discharges.

IN 2008, JUDGE ROBERT RUSSELL of Buffalo, New York, started the first veterans treatment court. There are now more than 500 of these courts in jurisdictions across the country. Prior to this, the justice system treated veterans just like any other justice-involved individual. What motivated Judge Russell was the realization that he was meting out justice to veterans who had lost their way and were struggling. Just as he realized they had unique circumstances related to military service that likely significantly contributed to their involvement in the justice system, so too, have law enforcement officials, local jail administrators, sheriffs, prison wardens, and other correctional professionals come to acknowledge this.

We are now seeing programmatic efforts for veterans throughout the continuum of justice that address the underlying issues of post-traumatic stress disorder, known by its acronym PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury, or TBI, the so-called signature wound of the War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq, and other mental health issues like anxiety and deep depression related to military service. These programs are not only making a difference to veterans whose actions led them into the criminal justice system, they are improving public safety and reducing recidivism. As a result, we're seeing better outcomes in local jails, prisons, and veterans treatment courts, along with safer interactions between veterans and law enforcement officers out in the community because of these efforts. As Warden Randall Liberty indicated, by housing veterans together in one pod, it makes providing services and resources to veterans more efficient for both the institution and outside agencies, both public and private.

These programs consolidate individuals with unique experiences who often distrust others who have not walked in their jungle, desert, or jump boots. Corrections professionals responsible for oversight more often than not attest to the manner in which such programs contribute to safety and good order within the institution. While careful thought should be given to the different formats for these programs, it is vital to recognize that most correctional institutions already have the essential resources to develop specialized units: space, correctional staff with military experience, paint, time for veterans to look deep within and explore the effect of their military experience on their behavior, time to apply for benefits, and, most of all, the warrior's spirit and the warrior's heart which help pave the way for successful reentry.

Evan Seamone, Attorney, Veterans Legal Clinic,
Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School,
and Major, U.S. Army Reserve



The ultimate goal, after all, of any penal institution must be to enable inmates to successfully reintegrate into their communities and to avoid the behaviors and errors in judgment that will lead them back into confinement. But before you consider your next steps at your institution, think about the sacrifices an increasingly fewer and fewer Americans are making on behalf of the rest of us and what their challenges are upon returning home to a country that often doesn't understand the deeper meaning of service and sacrifice.

During World War II, we had approximately 8 percent of the U.S. population who either got drafted or volunteered to serve in the military. It was part of a real national effort: everyone knew someone who was in the service and likely deployed fighting overseas either in Europe or in the Pacific theater. Today, there is a fundamental disconnect with those who serve (or have served) and those who have not, inasmuch as less than 1 percent of our population have served our country in uniform since 2001. Consider:

- Between 1941 and 1945, 16 million Americans got drafted or volunteered to serve in our Armed Forces during World War II.
- Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, some 4.4 million individuals have served in uniform voluntarily, approximately 2.1 million have deployed to Iraq and or Afghanistan, and many have had multiple deployments.

According the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, nearly 20 percent of those who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations in the Global War on Terror have sought treatment and disability compensation for PTSD, TBI, and/or other mental health conditions related to their deployment(s). For many service members, coming home after yet another deployment becomes more challenging, more difficult mentally to acclimate back to society where few of their fellow citizens comprehend what they've experienced.

According to the US Census Bureau:

In 1940...

US Population: 132.1 million,
16 million people drafted or volunteered
to serve, about 8.25%
of the population.

In 2018...

US Population: 325.7 million.
From 2001 to present, 4.4 million people
volunteered to serve, or less than
1% of the population.

Many of these men and women are denied benefits by the VA; some of these men and women don't even acknowledge their own "invisible wounds" of war. Some of them make bad choices and break the law, and when they are caught they find themselves enmeshed in the criminal justice system. The majority of these veterans were not criminals prior to their military service.

To say that we have taxed our service members over the last 18 years during our longest military conflict is an understatement. We owe a debt of gratitude to our service members, not just from the recent conflicts in the Global War on Terror, but to any veteran who served in any conflict during any era and has been lessened physically or mentally.

For any warden or other corrections professional who sees the need to do better for the veterans under their supervision, here are some suggested next steps:

- **GATHER BASIC DATA**, not only about your veteran inmates, but also about who might be able to provide programming to incarcerated veterans.
- **DETERMINE WHAT SPACE** within your institution can be converted to a veterans unit and what might be needed to give that space the ambiance of a military barracks, e.g., paint, flags and banners, private meeting rooms.
- **DEVELOP A LIST** of key stakeholders—including the inmates themselves—whose ideas are to be solicited and whose input will be vital to the successful functioning of the unit.
- **CONSIDER WHO** will comprise the "brain trust" or task force charged with establishing the processes and procedures that will govern the veterans unit.
- **IDENTIFY WHO** will manage the day-to-day running of the unit. Is that person already employed at the institution, or will he or she have to be hired from another prison or elsewhere?
- **IDENTIFY** the local Health Care for Reentry Veterans Specialist from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as well as personnel from the county or state divisions of veterans affairs.
- **ENLIST** credentialed community providers willing to assist with those veterans who may be ineligible for VA benefits.
- **DETERMINE** what statistics or other data need to be captured concerning the veteran population of the unit—and indeed of your entire institution—and who will be charged with gathering and updating these data.
- **THINK REALISTICALLY** about any potential roadblocks or obstacles that might undermine either establishing, operating, or sustaining a unit, or pod, for veterans.

Resources

The following websites should prove helpful to anyone seeking additional information about various facets of specialized programming for veterans in jails, prisons, or veterans treatment courts.

For Practitioners

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CORRECTIONS

<https://nicic.gov>

<https://info.nicic.gov/jiv>

Barracks Behind Bars: In Veteran-Specific Housing Units, Veterans Help Veterans Help Themselves (Jails)

<https://info.nicic.gov/jiv/sites/info.nicic.gov/jiv/files/Barracks-Behind-Bars-508.pdf>

Veteran Intercepts in the Criminal Justice System

<https://info.nicic.gov/jiv/node/113>

BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE

<https://bja.ojp.gov>

<https://bjatta.bja.ojp.gov>

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

<https://www.va.gov>

VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH PROGRAM

<https://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp>

HEALTH CARE FOR RE-ENTRY VETERANS SERVICES AND RESOURCES

<https://www.va.gov/homeless/reentry.asp>

VA POLYTRAUMA PROGRAM

<https://www.polytrauma.va.gov>



NATIONAL CENTER FOR PTSD

<https://www.ptsd.va.gov>

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION:
MILITARY FAMILIES**

<https://www.samhsa.gov/smvf-ta-center>

WHITE HOUSE: VETERANS & MILITARY FAMILIES

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/veterans>

CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION (CCI)

<http://www.courtinnovation.org>

NATIONAL DRUG COURT ONLINE LEARNING SYSTEM (CCI)

<https://www.courtinnovation.org/publications/experts-your-fingertips-national-drug-court-online-learning-system>

JUSTICE FOR VETS

<https://justiceforvets.org/conference>

10 KEY COMPONENTS OF A VETERANS TREATMENT COURT (JUSTICE FOR VETS)

<https://justiceforvets.org/resource/ten-key-components-of-veterans-treatment-courts>

VETERANS TREATMENT COURT MENTOR PROGRAM (JUSTICE FOR VETS)

<https://justiceforvets.org/mentorcorps>

NATIONAL CENTER FOR STATE COURTS: VETERANS COURTS RESOURCE GUIDE

<https://www.ncsc.org/Topics/Alternative-Dockets/Problem-Solving-Courts/Veterans-Court/Resource-Guide.aspx>

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

**JOURNAL OF LAW & POLICY, “RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FOR VETERANS:
THE SAN FRANCISCO SHERIFF’S DEPARTMENT’S COMMUNITY OF VETERANS
ENGAGED IN RESTORATION (COVER), 2011”**

http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_journal_law_policy/vol36/iss1/4

NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH NETWORK

<https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/national-implementation-research-network>

BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS

<https://www.bjs.gov>

BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS: PRISONERS IN 2016

<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p16.pdf>

For Veterans

VETERANS CRISIS LINE

<http://veteranscrisisline.net>

This website provides information for veterans who have issues readjusting to society, are in a state of mental or emotional confusion and upset, and who may have suicidal thoughts. Call the veterans crisis line, toll-free, at 1-800-273-8255, then press 1.

The toll-free number to reach the VA is 1-800-827-1000. Other helpful VA numbers include:

- Debt Management Center: 1-800-827-0648
- Homeless Prevention Line: 1-800-424-3838
- National Caregiver Support: 1-855-260-3274
- Women Veterans Call Center: 1-855-829-6636
- Health Benefits Customer Service: 1-877-222-8387
- Education Benefits: 1-888-442-4551
- Inspector General Hotline: 1-800-488-8244

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA

<http://www.vva.org>

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to those who gave their time and shared their insights, without which this white paper would not have been compiled. We extend our deepest appreciation for the work they are doing to make our correctional institutions and communities safer and for the opportunities being provided to justice-involved veterans so they can receive “a second chance.”

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Raul Banasco	Cicely Burrows-McElwain	Erin McGann
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Christine Brown-Taylor	Jim Harms	Joseph Tony Stines
Elizabeth Burek	Judge Michael Jackson	Clyde “Butch” Tate

To the jurisdictions that hosted the National Institute of Corrections and its representatives for this project:

Prisons

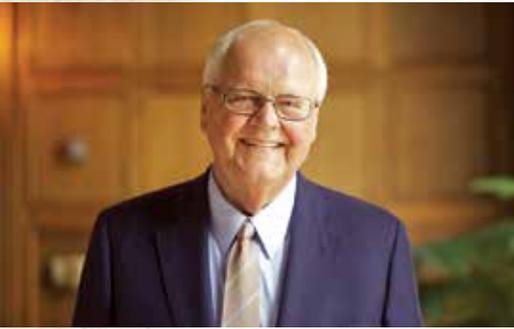
Edinburgh Correctional Facility, Indiana
Houtzdale Correctional Institution, Pennsylvania
San Quentin Correctional Facility, California
Stafford Creek Corrections Center, Washington

And lastly, to Warden Randall Liberty, a true champion for veterans, for your purpose-driven approach to helping veteran inmates, for your advocacy in support of veterans, and for your time sharing your story.



Closing Epigraph

“PTSD, a companion of all wars—read *Odysseus*—was not even diagnosed as a clinical condition until 1979. Before that, veterans with problems were categorized as suffering from the Vietnam Syndrome. As if it were



an isolated condition of this whining, hippy, group! World War II veterans told them to grow up and get over it: “We did,” they’d say. But of course, not all did. It was called “combat fatigue” or “shell shock” then.

The Vietnam veterans spoke of nightmares becoming daymares. One said, “If those other people had to spend just one night inside my nightmares they would fall to the floor with tears in their eyes.”

James Wright, U.S. Marine Corps, Historian and President Emeritus,
Dartmouth University, at the Library of Congress, Veterans History Project,
PTSD Panel Event, on May 17, 2018

Leave No Veteran Behind.



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CORRECTIONS

WWW.NICIC.GOV