

Empowering Public Libraries: Identifying and Referring At Risk Veterans



National Coalition for Homeless Veterans Annual Conference

“Coming Together: Facing the Future”

Thursday, June 2, 10:00-10:30

Dana Burl, Program Director

Outreach and Advocacy Program

Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

Joy Ashcraft, Director

Maryland’s Commitment to Veterans

Maryland Department of Health

Ask [the homeless] why they hang out at the library and they’ll talk about comfort. It’s warm. It’s dry. There are public restrooms. But the library offers much more. “They’ve got books and magazines and music. I love the library...”



Promising Practices: Why the library partnership?

According to the American Library Association's (ALA) [Services and Responsibilities of Libraries](#), ALA “promotes equal access to information for all persons and recognizes the need to respond to people experiencing poverty, which include people experiencing homelessness, in the United States. Therefore, it is crucial that libraries recognize their role in supporting these communities, so they may participate fully in a democratic society, by utilizing a wide variety of available resources and strategies.”



Partnership Evolution: Bridging Gaps

Maryland is home to....

380,000 veterans

462 total veterans experiencing homelessness (2021 PIT)

415 sheltered veterans experiencing homelessness (2021 PIT)

Maryland has 190 library branches

In FY21 there were more than 17 million library visits and 1.9 million library events

According to the Maryland State Library 2021 Annual Report.... It has “recognized the changing nature of how citizens seek information and have embraced the need to create equitable spaces and services for staff and customers”.

As of FY16 there were 7,684 public library branches in the United States. (Source: American Library Association)

In 2020 there were 37,252 veterans experiencing homelessness. (Source: US Department of Veterans Affairs)



Partnership Evolution: Maryland State Library and MDVA



**Eight Years
Strong**

"I'll keep you updated on my connections moving forward. I think there's a great partnership opportunity here."

-Dana Burl, MDVA, to former MDVA Secretary, February 2014

Register and Referral Services at the Library

8:00 am - 5:00 pm
MONDAYS
July 2, 16, 30
August 13, 27
Sept. 13, 24

10am - 2pm
Study Room 2

Shepherd Library
12222 Montgomery
11000 Ave
Shepherd MD
20787

KEEPING THE PROMISE

Services provided at the Vet Center:
Readmission counseling is a wide range of supplemental services offered to eligible returning Service Members, and their families in the effort to make a successful transition from military to civilian life. They include:

- Individual and group counseling for Veterans, Service Members, and their families
- Family counseling for military-related issues
- Deployment counseling for families who experience an active duty death
- Military sexual trauma counseling and referral
- Outreach and education including Florida community events, etc.
- Substance abuse assessment and referral
- Employment assessment & referral
- VA benefits assessment and referral
- Housing & referral for medical issues including TB, depression, etc.

Eligibility:
Any Veterans and active duty Service Members, to include members of the National Guard and Reserve components, who:

- Have served on an active military duty in any combat theater or area of hostilities*
- Experienced a military sexual assault
- Provided direct emergency medical care or military services, while serving on active military duty, in the aftermath of war, etc.
- Served as a member of an uncommitted aerial warfare crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat zone or area of hostilities.
- Experienced an airplane crash or explosion while on active duty prior to January 1, 2004.

Vet Center services are also provided to family members of Veterans and Service Members for military-related issues when it is found and in the requirement of those that have served. This includes emergency counseling for families who experience an active duty death.

Vet Centers offer lifetime benefits for Combat Veterans

Vet Center Call Center 877-WAR-VETS (827-8387)

Shepherd Library
200 Lakes Ave
Shepherd, Maryland 20788

Phone: 202-585-4072
Fax: 202-585-4822
www.vetcenter.va.gov

MC PL
Montgomery County
PUBLIC LIBRARIES



The Partnership Expands: “Coming Together” To Serve Those Who Have Served

- US Department of Veterans Affairs (Suicide Prevention Program and Vet Centers)
- Fort Meade Military Base
- Maryland State Government: Veterans Affairs, Education, Labor, Health
- Maryland Library Association
- Maryland Public Television
- Local County Governments
- Local Veterans Affairs Commissions
- Blue Star Families United Way
- Military Child Education Coalition
- Military One Source
- Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Veterans Writing Project
- Aberdeen Proving Ground Federal Credit Union
- Baltimore Book Festival
- Maryland Humanities
- Project Opportunity (Entrepreneurial training program for veterans)
- Steven A. Cohen Military Families Clinic at Easter Seals
- The Baltimore Station (Transitional housing program for homeless veterans)



Promising Practices: How the partnership has evolved

In 2014, veteran liaisons were designated in all library systems and training was provided on state benefits/resources for veterans

Since then librarians have received training in military cultural competency, USDVA resources, community partner briefings, proper screening for military service, and the USDVA S.A.V.E. Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention Training

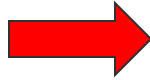
In 2022, MDVA was honored to receive the US Department of Veterans Affairs Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Award in 2022 in the Innovative State Program category for the library partnership



Promising Practices: Screening, identifying and referring

Screening:

Training to libraries on military cultural competency and how to properly ask the question about military service: “have you ever served in the military?”



Identifying:

Provides opportunities to connect, to better understand, and to appropriately refer



Referring:

Training to libraries on veteran specific resources, including VA, MDVA, community partner organizations, transitional housing providers, VA’s Community Resource and Referral Center, the VA Call Center for Homeless Veterans, employment services, etc.

Promising Practices: Best Practice Examples

Cecil County

- Perry Point VA Medical Center/Domiciliary Program partnership
- Computer skills and workforce development training for veterans existing homelessness
- Onsite visits to distribute library materials and to answer reference questions
- 2015 National Medal award winner for their work at Perry Point

Howard County

- A 2019 year long veteran initiative included papermaking with uniform materials, creative writing workshop, and documentary screening, “From War to Wisdom”
- Outcome evaluations showed a 21% decrease in anger, 26% decrease in anxiety, and 25% decrease in depression among veterans who participated



Discussion

Q & A

Want to know more?

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