



## Duluth Vets Center SWS Site Visit Report



**Date:** June 12, 2018

**Location:** Duluth Vets Center

**Dept.** Rehab Committee Members: Wilson Spence, Darrel Redepenning, Bill Brockberg, Roy Bressler and Dan Tengwall. Dept. Service Officer, Jeremy Wolfsteller.

**RE:** The American Legion Dept. Rehabilitation Committee is tasked with staying engaged with agencies that aid Minnesota veterans. The committee does this by conducting System Worth Saving Site Visits throughout the year. These locations include Sioux Falls, Fargo, St. Cloud and Minneapolis VA Healthcare Systems, St. Paul and Fargo Regional Offices, Minneapolis, Hastings, Luverne, Fergus Falls and Silver Bay Veterans Homes. Additional Site Visits are conducted at VA CBOC's, Vets Centers, and Minnesota nonprofits that serve veterans when the budget allows.

**Meeting Attendance:** Chairman Wilson Spence, Roy Bressler, Dan Tengwall and Jeremy Wolfsteller. Director and Outreach Coordinator.

## **Duluth Vets Center Overview:**

Life isn't always easy after a deployment. That's where Vet Centers can help. Vet Centers across the country provide a broad range of counseling, outreach, and referral services to combat Veterans and their families. Vet Centers guide Veterans and their families through many of the major adjustments in lifestyle that often occur after a Veteran returns from combat. Services for a Veteran may include individual and group counseling in areas such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), alcohol and drug assessment, and suicide prevention referrals. All services are free of cost and are strictly confidential.

## **What is readjustment counseling?**

Readjustment counseling is a wide range of psycho social services offered to eligible Veterans, 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
- Bereavement counseling for families who experience an active duty death
- Military sexual trauma counseling and referral
- Outreach and education including PDHRA, community events, etc.
- Substance abuse assessment and referral
- Employment assessment & referral
- VBA benefits explanation and referral
- Screening & referral for medical issues including TBI, depression, etc.

## **Does VA have readjustment counseling for family members?**

Family members of combat Veterans and Service members have been eligible for Vet Center readjustment counseling services for military related issues since 1979.

## **Am I eligible for Vet Center readjustment counseling?**

If you, or a family member, served in any combat zone and received a military campaign ribbon (Vietnam, Southwest Asia, OEF, OIF, etc.) then both you and your family are eligible for Vet Center services.

## **Where is counseling offered?**

VA's readjustment counseling is provided at community-based Vet Centers located in easily accessible neighborhoods near Veterans, Service members, and their families, yet separate from VA organizational sites to ensure confidential counseling and reduce barriers to care. All Vet Center services are prepaid through military service. Contact your nearest Vet Center through information provided in the Vet Center Directory or listings in your local blue pages. Vet Center staff are available toll free and around the clock at 877-WAR-VETS (927-8387).

## Duluth Vets Center 2018 System Worth Saving Site Visit

### **Meeting Minutes:**

Vets Center (RCS) readjustment counseling services have recently changed their policy for logistics working through the local VA Medical Center, "MPLS" for requests like funding. Now They can work directly with their District 3 leadership for majority of requests, which is in St. Louis Missouri.

Current Positions include, Director Dr. Clayton Nordgrass, Outreach specialist, 2 readjustment counselors, 1 program support assistant. 1 position for a counselor needs to be filled. Vets Centers are strongly encouraged not to hire Veterans that use RCS because of liability issues with them accessing their personal information.

Vets Center staff cannot prescribe medications but can provide a diagnosis. Staff have access to VHA's Electronic Health Record, CPRS and VISTA but can't input information. It's used to help facilitate care and establish services available to the veteran. Veterans information is kept private within RCS.

MN Vets Center catchment areas are – Duluth, New Brighton and Brooklyn park. Duluth focuses efforts on northern rural MN. Recently Duluth took over a Bemidji group and outreach has started along with group activities. Currently with VA's new Virtual Medical Room Program, Duluth is looking to use the virtual program to provide services for smaller rural veterans. To use VA's Virtual Medical Room, staff need to take training through TMS and be certified. Dr. Nordgrass has implemented the training but the issue now is access to VA issued tablets. VA will not assign tablets because Vets Centers use different software for tracking patients. VA tablets need to allow MPLS VAMC track the assistance provided. The Legion was asked and is working with MPLS VAMC to facilitate the issue so Duluth can access the tablets and begin providing services to rural veterans. It's possible OCW or V4V grant can provide tablets for Duluth's pilot program of VA's Virtual Medical Room Program if VA will not provide.

Duluth Vets Center recently acquired Brooklyn Parks mobile Vets Center. Duluth will be using it to set up parking lot services in the rural communities with hopes of finding veterans that could benefit from services.

MVAHCS recently hired 3 new suicide prevention coordinators, one was assigned to Duluth but was pulled without explanation. The Legion was asked to look into the situation and provide feedback.

Academic affiliation agreement has been hard to get working through MVAHCS. It seems that the affiliation process for Vets Centers come last after the Healthcare System is taken care of first. The Legion was asked to look into this as Duluth has college campuses that have veterans students seeking academic degrees that would benefit from an affiliation to do internships

*Chairman: Wilson Spence/ Secretary Jeremy Wolfsteller*

