



System Worth Saving Site Visit Report

- **Date:** April 28, 2021
- **Location:** Virtual Meeting
- **Attendees:**
 - Rehab Committee Members*- Chairman Wilson Spence, Gary Munkholm, Daniel Tengwall, and Jim Finley
 - *Department Service Officer*- Jeremy Wolfsteller
 - *Anoka Vet Center Director*- Craig Towle
- **Purpose**

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 Health Care Systems, St. Paul 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.

Anoka Vet Center Overview:

Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers that provide a wide range of social and psychological services, including professional readjustment counseling to eligible Veterans, active-duty service members, including National Guard and Reserve components, and their families. Readjustment counseling is offered to make a successful transition from military to civilian life or after a traumatic event experienced in the military. Individual, group, marriage, and family counseling is offered in addition to referral and connection to other VA or community benefits and services. Vet Center counselors and outreach staff, many of whom are Veterans themselves, are experienced and prepared to discuss the tragedies of war, loss, grief and transition after trauma.

Life is not always easy after a deployment. That is where the 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 life that often occur after a Veteran experience from a deployment 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 psychosocial 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).





Anoka Vet Center System Worth Saving Site Visit

- **Pandemic Update:**

- All Vet Centers are currently open and operational, providing face to face and virtual counseling and outreach. Vet Centers will continue to assess the community impact of COVID-19 at a local level and may begin to restrict access or limit foot traffic, transitioning services to virtual care if needed. This would be assessed on a case-by-case basis and as a last measure. It is VA's goal of keeping Vet Centers open and operational for Veterans, active-duty service members, and their families. Those looking to seek Vet Center services may call their nearest Vet Center or the Vet Center Call Center at 877-WAR-VETS (927-8387). Please check back regularly as this situation may change.
- Brooklyn Park Vet Center (Anoka now) was terribly busy with referrals during the pandemic coming from the MPLS VA Healthcare System. The medical center was under much more strict CDC guidance with having a COVID19 inpatient Acute Respiratory Clinic and many sick patients.

- **General Updates:**

- Once known as the "Brooklyn Park" Vet Center is now officially the "Anoka" Vet Center. The Center's lease was up the end of FY20, the move happened January 2021. This is an opportunity with extra space to hopefully expand their staff and services in a larger building located in a heavily populated area Downtown Anoka, right on Main Street.
- Minnesota Vet Centers fall into District 3, Zone 3 within Readjustment Counseling Services. District Leadership consist of Deputy Director Greg Schenck and Director Roberto Reid. RSC National Director is Michael Fischer. District leadership provides administrative oversight to the Vet Centers within its region.

- **Anoka Staffing:**

- In FY20 Vet Center hiring process changed from Readjustment Counseling Services (RCS) to The VA Manpower Management Office which was established by the Secretary of VA October 5, 2017. This office takes its guidance from The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) when allocating FTE to the VA.
- Anoka is down two staff which could typically get filled within a couple months but currently is seeing delays now having to go through VA's Manpower Office. We will continue to follow-up to see how long the Center is short staff because of this new hiring process.
- Urban locations like Anoka typically see a larger staffing model although the current 6 FTE is the current staffing model for Anoka. RCS also has a current hiring freeze.





- Anoka's Staffing Model:
 - Ø Director (Licensed Therapist)
 - Ø Licensed Therapist Counselors (*Allocated 3 FTE, currently 2 FTE positions are vacant pending Manpower approval*)
 - Ø Office Manager
 - Ø Veterans Outreach Specialist
- Vet Center staff cannot prescribe medications but can provide a diagnosis. Staff have access to VHA's Electronic Health Record, CPRS and VISTA but cannot input information. It is used to help facilitate care and establish services available to the veteran. Veterans' information is kept private within RCS and separate from VHA.
- **Facility Demographics/Type of Service** (*Veterans use the Vet Center during non-traditional hours about 50% of the time*)
 - **Total unique visits:** 293 (only counted once)
 - **Total visits:** 4,611
 - **Active Duty/Guard visits:** 20
 - **Individual visits:** 1,509
 - **Male/Female veterans:** 70/30. Military sexual trauma is the primary reason female veterans use the Vet Center. The Branches with complaints of MST are primarily Marine Corps and Navy.
 - **Group visits:** 1,421 (include clinical and social events)
 - **Outreach conducted:** 252
 - **Family visits:** 442
 - **Tele-health visits:** 12
- **Community Access Points: (CAP's)**
 - Community Access Points is the phrase RCS uses when addressing areas where the demand for Vet Center services are requested but no physical Veteran is available.
 - CAP's are typically located in donated space and established in conjunction with a community partner for the purpose of providing readjustment counseling services to a small number of veterans in the area.
 - Anoka is currently operating CAP's out of Olivia, St. Cloud, Anoka, Bloomington & Mankato Minnesota.
 - During the pandemic and in situations where there's not a brick and mortar facility these CAP's are facilitated by virtual means to provide individual therapies.





- **Funding:**

- Inequity in pay government pay scale between VA Health readjustment counselors RCS clinicians lower than title 5 to hyper 38 licensed to practiced board licensed OPM job codes.
- 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.
- Anoka's FY22 proposed budget was recently submitted. The budget typically includes operating cost, training certifications, expenses, and FTE. The building has a 15-year fix lease which is a separate funding stream.

Department Rehabilitation Chairman: Wilson Spence III

Department Service Officer & Committee Secretary: Jeremy Wolfsteller

