

## Frederick County Veterans Advisory Council Minutes

Wednesday, January 15, 2020

### Attendance

Voting Members	Present	Absent	Excused
Deb Childers	X		
Sharon Jacko	X		
David Kaye	X		
Rachel Nachlas	X		
Fred Schumacher	X		
Fred Wood	X		
Ex-officio members			
Dee Harrison	X		
Michelle Day			X
Andrea Walker			X
Michael McLane	X		
County Councilman Steve McKay	X		
Delegate Carol Krimm	X		
Nan Mann	X		

Guests: Joyce Anne Sundergill-Schmid (for Andrea Walker), Teresa Mena, Teresa Spruill, Jim Wilhite, USAF (Ret.), Wilfred Plumley, USA (Ret.) Tami Hardesty, Richard Rhodes, Kathryn Monet, Nick Brown, Karen Duffy, Betsy Day, Laurie Barone, Xavier Bruce, John Pomory, Logan Isaac.

Staff: Linda Bergofsky

### Welcome and Introductions

Fred Schumacher opened the meeting by leading the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Establishment of a quorum: After a review of attendance, Fred Schumacher determined that a quorum of voting members was present.

Approval of Meeting Agenda: David Kaye made a motion to approve the agenda as submitted. Fred Wood seconded and the motion was approved unanimously.

### Old Business

Approval of the meeting minutes from October 16, 2019 and November 20, 2019: Sharon Jacko made a motion to accept the minutes from the two previous meetings as submitted. Rachel Nachlas seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

**Chair's Comments:** Fred Schumacher reflected on the accomplishments of the VAC since its inaugural meeting in January 2019. He also noted the initiatives the VAC has under consideration for the coming year and encouraged all members to get involved through participation in sub-committees.

## Presentations:

- Veteran Homelessness—The National Perspective: Kathryn Monet, Executive Director of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) provided a brief overview of the organization, which began in 1990 and pursues policy and advocacy work with Congress, provides direct training to service providers on evidence-based practices, and runs a toll free hotline. In sharing trends in national data, Kathryn noted that Veteran homelessness has decreased considerably over the past decade; 3 States and 73 communities have achieved the benchmark of Essential Zero. There are still about 37,000 homeless Veterans on an average night. This represents about 8% of the homeless population. Homeless Veterans are predominantly individual males; African American Veterans make up a disproportionate percentage of the homeless Veteran population. Poverty and lack of affordable housing are key risk factors for homelessness as are discrimination and mass incarceration. Research has also shown that the quality of transition from the military and a history of military sexual trauma (MST) are also risk factors.

Effective solutions to homelessness among Veterans requires a community wide and systemic response that employs the Housing First model and depends on an active effort to reduce barriers to housing through coordinated interaction and cooperation between agencies. Kathryn discussed four best practices the VAC may consider to help address Veteran homelessness: engage with the Continuum of Care (more on that below), focus on housing and not just shelter, partner with VA and other mainstream resources like the Chamber of Commerce, and look at data to identify who is homeless and why, to fill in the service gaps. She also mentioned the Mayor's Challenge to end homelessness; NCHV works with mayors to engage with other elected leaders and landlords to commit resources toward a common goal and to pursue zoning and land use code changes to increase more affordable housing. There are also emergency solutions grants, which can be used to support service providers as they address the behavioral health needs of Veterans who can't use VA.

The VAC engaged in a discussion about how Frederick could focus on precariously housed Veterans as other communities do, how to interpret the Point in Time count, and other sources of data on Veteran homelessness, e.g. from data on homeless children. Kathryn noted that some communities have addressed precariously housed individuals. She also clarified that in many cases, the Veteran can self-resolve the problem. To that end, shelter diversion programs and use of flexible funding help keep Veterans out of shelters, as does giving priority to Veterans who aren't eligible for VA services. It is also possible to tap local VSOs for resources, with the understanding that local posts vary in their involvement on this issue. With regard to the Point in Time count, it is useful for tracking year over year progress, but it does have limitations. The By Name list maintained by the Continuum of Care is more appropriate for tracking Veterans who have current needs. There was also discussion of whether there was a source of information localities can use to identify grant and other funding opportunities. Kathryn will pull something together for the VAC.

- Veteran Homelessness – The Local Perspective: Nick Brown, Executive Director of the Religious Coalition for Emergency Human Needs (RCEHN) graciously stepped in as a speaker for Brad Petersen of the Community Action Agency (CAA) and who serves as the Continuum of Care (CoC) lead. Nick first shared an overview of the CoC, which is the array of agencies and service providers who directly support the homeless in Frederick County. Within the CoC, the RCEHN is the largest shelter provider although there are other transitional shelter providers, including the CAA. The

RCEHN and the CoC have adopted a variation of the rapid rehousing strategy favored by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Rapid rehousing focuses on getting people who experience homelessness rehoused as soon as possible, using flexible federal dollars to cover a number of expenses. These subsidies decrease as other service providers get involved and the family is stabilized. The difference between the cost of housing and federal subsidies are funded by local congregations to protect vulnerable individuals from the high cost of housing in Frederick County. The CoC follows the Housing First model, which is designed to get people into housing as soon as possible with the goal of obtaining permanent supportive housing (not just transitional shelters). This model is most effective for people who are chronically homeless and seriously mentally ill and who often lose the knowledge of how to function effectively in housing. However, within the 30 permanent supportive housing placements currently available in Frederick County, there is very little turnover and it is very expensive. That is why preventing homelessness is so critical. That said, the local CoC system is heavily reliant on case managers who are embedded in specific agencies serving specific programs. As a result, few are available to serve publicly funded clients. Nick noted that RCEHN has, since 2017, served 63 Veterans in the individual shelter, one household with a Veteran in the family shelter, and 137 Veterans who received CoC services such as financial assistance and housing supports.

During the discussion, members of the VAC asked how best to engage with landlords. Nick indicated that best practice is to hire a housing navigator to work for the CoC to build relationships with individual landlords and realtors and to keep track of available housing in real time. The CoC is trying to do this now in the context of homelessness prevention, but it's hard given the current staffing levels. Additionally, the VAC wanted assurances that CoC providers are routinely and consistently screening for military and Veteran status on intake forms. Nick noted that while Veteran status is a mandatory reporting element, it is dependent on an individual client self-disclosing. As a result, the information is not always captured in the Homeless Management Information System. Another question related to the role of the Salvation Army in running shelters. Nick reported that the Salvation Army has agreed to open a 5 day a week day shelter funded by Community Foundation and the Ausherman Foundation. Additionally, Frederick County is considering changing its rules prohibiting any alcohol use in shelters as a way of encouraging all people to come into shelter and not live on the streets.

- Discussants – John Pomory and Tami Hardesty, Mosaic Community Services: Alliance, a wholly owned subsidiary of Mosaic (which is a subsidiary of the Sheppard Pratt Health System), administers a grant through the VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families program (SSVF). Mosaic operates in 13 different CoC's and 19 counties across the state. SSVF follows a Housing First model that can help with rapid rehousing as described previously. The only limitation placed by VA is that Alliance can't serve individuals with a dishonorable or bad conduct discharge and must focus its efforts on homeless individuals with very low to no income. John shared stories of those who have been served through this program to illustrate issue Veterans are facing, such as the aftermath of MST. For Mosaic, building partnerships and communication channels with other providers is essential to navigating the various programs that serve Veterans; partnerships allow case managers such as Tami to identify all of the resources available and the gaps in service. John mentioned one way that landlords could be more engaged in serving Veterans is to formally recognize them as Veteran-friendly.

Since it began administering the SSVF grant eight years ago, Alliance has served 4,300 Veteran households across the State. In calendar year 2018, Alliance served 31 homeless Veterans in Frederick County and 16 Veterans received homelessness prevention support (the numbers for January through October 2019 are 16 and 6 respectively). In 2019, four unsheltered Veterans were identified during the Point in Time count.

During the discussion, members of the VAC expressed concern that the Point in Time count reported such different numbers than were served by Alliance and the RECEHN. John noted, as did others, that the Point in Time count has specific uses when reporting to HUD, but that it is possible for those serving homeless Veterans to disagree on the number but still work together toward achieving a common goal. The VAC also asked how Alliance receives referrals. Tami gets referrals from the Frederick Veterans Service Network, the Community Veterans Engagement Board, VA, the CAA, and through word of mouth. She clarified that Alliance is 90 day intensive case management program that includes housing first and other services needed to support the Veteran. She looks to Veterans that have been served by the program to help where possible, for example, with transportation. The RECEHN can store some furniture, but there is no centralized location to receive or store furniture and other goods donated for SSVF participants.

To close the discussion, presenters were asked to suggest one or more actions that the VAC consider taking to address the issue of Veterans Homelessness. Speakers suggested the VAC 1) find community champions who can advocate for homeless Veterans, 2) continue participating in informational meetings that clearly lay out community resources, and 3) encourage the CAA to reapply for the Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness (USICH had a favorable review). Linda Bergofsky asked Nick to consider adding a Veteran representative to the CoC.

#### **Public Comment**

- Will Plumley, USA has recently relocated to Frederick County and is serving as the Deputy Garrison Commander at Fort Detrick, where he is also involved in the Retiree Council. He was surprised to learn there is no representative from Fort Detrick on the VAC and requested that the VAC consider adding a position to the Council, either as a voting member or *ex officio*.
- Jim Wilhite, USAF raised the issue of Frederick County's Elderly Individual and Retired Service Member tax credit. Although the original bill had no property value or income limits, the law as enacted did impose both income and property value limits. Consequently, no Veterans qualified for the tax credit in Frederick County; surrounding counties with higher income and higher property values do not have similar restrictions. Mr. Wilhite asked that the VAC meet to discuss how to advocate for a change in the law and to educate County Council members about Veterans' needs. Steve McKay will follow up directly with Mr. Wilhite.
- Logan Isaac noted that neither the HUD Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity Act nor State legislation protect military members and Veterans from housing discrimination, nor do States. He asked that the NCHV consider taking up the issue of housing discrimination against the military as part of its work to end Veteran homelessness.

#### **Sub-committee Reports**

Given that the original sub-committee structure developed last year may no longer be optimal, the Executive Committee and staff offered up two different ways to reconfigure the VAC sub-committees. One approach used by the Human Relations Commission divides all activities between internal communications and governance and external relations. Another approach would create three sub-committees: governance, communications and publicity, and special projects (such as supporting the stand up of Mission United). The VAC asked that this topic be added to the February agenda under Old Business.

## **New Business**

Coordinator's Report: The formal coordinator's report will be submitted in writing as an addendum. Linda Bergofsky noted that recruitment for a member to replace Capt. J.L. Shanton will begin at the end of January, with a closed meeting likely to occur between the February and March VAC meetings. She asked anyone who is interested in applying to contact her. She also mentioned that she and Fred Schumacher will be participating in a Joint Veterans Commission meeting on January 17 and invited any other member of the VAC to attend. Handouts were made available regarding Fort Detrick's invitation to participate in special Reveille and Retreat ceremonies on Federal holidays, new standards for accessing the Commissary and Exchange, and the new law extending presumptive eligibility for VA benefits to the Blue Water Navy. All of these materials are also on the VAC website.

In keeping with the bylaws, Fred Wood made a motion that the current Executive Committee (Fred Schumacher as chair and Sharon Jacko and David Kaye as co-vice chairs) be retained. Dee Harrison seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

## **Announcements**

The next meeting of the VAC will be held on Wednesday, February 19, 2020 at 6:30 pm. The meeting will be held in Winchester Hall, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Conference Room and will focus on health disparities for minority Veterans. Speakers will include representatives from the Community Care Office, Martinsburg VAMC and from Frederick Health.

## **Action Items and Adjournment**

Action items:

- Linda Bergofsky will apprise Mr. Plumley when the VAC vacancy is announced.
- Steve McKay will follow up directly with Mr. Wilhite.
- Linda Bergofsky will follow up with 1) Kathryn Monet regarding a list of grant funding opportunities that could help Frederick County address Veteran Homelessness, 2) Brad Petersen regarding the Criteria and benchmarks re-application, and 3) Nick Brown regarding designating one of the expanded positions on the CoC for a Veteran representative.

Upon completion of business the meeting was adjourned at 8:43 PM.

Submitted by Linda Bergofsky

Approved