

Frederick County Veterans Advisory Council Minutes

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

By Web Ex

Attendance

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

Guests: Jay Hessler (for Andrea Walker), Teresa Spruill, Melissa Barber, Mallary Lass, Laurie Barone, Niki Falcone.

Staff: Linda Bergofsky

Welcome and Introductions

Fred Schumacher opened the meeting at 6:31 PM 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. Sharon Jacko seconded and the motion was approved unanimously.

Old Business

Approval of the meeting minutes from March 18, 2020: Sharon Jacko made a motion to accept the minutes from the previous meeting as revised. Rachel Nachlas seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Welcome to new member: Fred Schumacher formally welcomed Wilfred Plumley to the VAC and discussed the potential benefits of the VAC's connection to the Fort Detrick community.

Update on action items: Regarding the action items outstanding from the March meeting, Linda Bergofsky noted she onboarded LTC Plumley once the County Council approved County Executive Gardner's recommendation. Due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Homeless Coalition has not heavily publicized the results of the Point-in-Time count so no additional information is forthcoming. Although the VAC did not meet in June, members provided input on the Annual Report, which was submitted on time to County Executive Gardner.

Chair's Comments: Fred Schumacher thanked staff and other members for staying engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic. He pointed to the COVID-19 resource guide for Veterans that was produced in May and which has been used a model in other counties. Fred also reported that the Partners in Care boutique is now operational and continues to provide important transportation services. Additionally, he noted that the VAC has joined the ServingTogether network.

Presentation: Overview of ServingTogether

Melissa Barber, Program Manager for Every-Mind, provided an overview of ServingTogether. EveryMind, a nonprofit with over 60 years of service in Montgomery County, founded ServingTogether in 2011, which is now one of 17 AmericaServes coordination centers in the United States. It is designed to be a one-stop shop of resources and connection for all active-duty military, Veterans and their families and caregivers in the National Capital Region. This region is comprised of 16 counties in Maryland and Virginia as well as the District of Columbia and represents a significant Veteran population – 342,317. Since December of 2017 when ServingTogether became affiliated with AmericaServes, it has served 1,252 unique clients and made referrals to accommodate 2,867 service requests. The top three requests relate to employment, income support, and housing support, a pattern that continues even during the pandemic.

Melissa described the network model used by ServingTogether, which allows clients to be referred into the network directly or to a peer navigator. Clients can also self-refer through the ServingTogether website. This "any door" approach allows the client to be connected through the UniteUs software to providers with capacity to serve a variety of needs from health and wellness to employment and housing. Melissa described one case involving an intake through Frederick County's Senior Services Division that was able to connect a Veteran to Maryland's Commitment to Veterans, FrederickHealth, and Warrior Canine Connection, among others. ServingTogether can also make referrals to providers outside of the network. She and others working with the Veteran can track the case and monitor the service requests. ServingTogether is working with Kaiser Permanente to expand its existing network of providers to include those that serve non-Veterans as well.

The VAC discussed strategies for encouraging other organizations can join the network. Linda shared that organizations can join the network and choose to only send referrals in, and not receive referrals from other providers. This is particularly valuable given that it is free to participate in the network and use the case management software. Melissa offered to meet with any organization that is interested.

Discussion: The new normal - Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on Veterans in Frederick County

The VAC and its guests had an open discussion of how the pandemic has affected Veterans and their families in the County.

Several of those in attendance noted that VSOs have received an increase in the number of requests for Mental Health services. This increase is attributable to the effects of military service, e.g. PTSD, coupled with isolation and worries about employment. Members and the public should be aware that both the Vet Center and CBOC can “see” Veterans using telehealth and will treat Veterans in crisis on a face-to-face basis. Additionally, the Mental Health Association has walk-in hours and recent grant funding will expand mobile crisis services so that they are available 24/7. If needed, Veterans can be directed to the Steven A. Cohen Military (which is now open to active duty and their families with a TRICARE referral) and Family Clinic and/or ServingTogether.

A concern was raised about the impact of the pandemic on the ongoing viability of VSOs as a source of engagement for Veterans, especially those who served post 9-11. Those in attendance discussed different strategies being used by other voluntary organizations such as Rotary or VSOs in other counties. Discussants agreed that having robust VSOs that can help inform the VAC of issues affecting their members is important to our mission.

Changes in employment related to the pandemic were also discussed. Most of the calls coming into Senator Van Hollen’s office continue to be related to unemployment issues. However, although many Veterans have been screened for services through the Maryland Department of Labor, 74% opted not to engage in services in the expectation that they would be called back to their previous employers. This creates a disconnect between available employment opportunities and the workforce. Maryland Department of Labor is aware that there are some number of employers in Frederick County and in the region that are likely not going to call workers back. It was also noted that employment of active-duty spouses continues to be a concern across the country. That said, the increase in virtual opportunities should benefit military spouses as they move from posting to posting.

The discussion then turned to how these issues might impact agendas for future VAC meetings. The August meeting was intended to be an open discussion of transportation issues and was to be held in Brunswick. Alternatively, the VAC could focus on topics that were originally scheduled for May and June, namely engagement with younger Veterans and older Veterans, respectively. There is interest in having a dialogue with younger Veterans as we planned in May, but that is likely a better topic once local colleges get underway. Linda will work with the Executive Committee to develop an agenda for August.

Public Comment

- No public comments were submitted through the designated public input portal.

New Business

Coordinator's Report: The formal coordinator's report will be submitted in writing as an addendum. In addition to onboarding LTC Plumley, once the go ahead was given to hold the July VAC meeting, Linda worked on setting up the Web Ex. Members should expect to use this platform for the foreseeable future.

Annual Report: The Annual Report was submitted on June 30 and reflects all of the work the VAC did in the community over the last year.

Announcements

Linda noted July events are on the web site and asked those in attendance to send any other events to her.

The next meeting of the VAC will be held on Wednesday, August 19, 2020 at 6:30 pm.

Action Items and Adjournment

January Action Items: Linda will follow up on the status of the Point in Time results.

July Action Items: Linda will send a Web Ex invitation for the August meeting once the Executive Committee has identified an agenda.

David Kaye made a motion to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by Sharon Jacko and was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:01 PM.

Submitted by Linda Bergofsky