

# **Department of Veterans Affairs**

## **Therapeutic and Supported Employment Services:**

### **A Community Partner for Veterans with Mental Illness and Criminal Justice Issues**

**November 16, 2007**

**Pittsburgh, PA**



# Presentation Overview

- **Need for MH Services**
- **Veterans Demographics**
- **Forensic Research**
- **Psychosocial Rehabilitation Programs**
- **Community Re-Integration Issues**
- **Overcoming Stigma**
- **Employment Issues**
- **Supported Employment Case Presentation**



# Eligibility for VA Services

- In 1999, the veterans benefit package regulation (38 CFR 1738(c)) was rewritten to specifically exclude benefits to veterans who are patients or inmates of another institution, if that agency has a duty to give the care or service.
- Under this regulation VHA may provide outreach services, post-release services, and sharing agreement services.



# Types of Services provided by VA

- **Therapeutic programming** and/or services provided to incarcerated veterans by VHA or Vet Center staffs. These programs most commonly involve treatment services for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or substance abuse.
- **Prerelease services** provided by VHA or Vet Center staffs to help veterans transition back to the community, following discharge from the correctional setting. These programs are usually limited to outreach and basic case management while the veteran is incarcerated.
- **Medical services provided for incarcerated veterans** who are escorted by correctional staffs to the VHA facility for primary care or inpatient medical/surgical services. These services are often provided in states that have passed legislation to charge inmates for medical services received for pre-existing conditions.



# Additional VA Services

- **Post-release linkage** to residential programs to assist the veteran in seeking housing, employment, and mental health treatment for transition back to the community upon discharge from forensic settings. These programs may or may not be specialized for incarcerated veterans.
- **Compensation & Pension exams** that are provided either within the correctional setting, at the medical center or in one instance by telemedicine as arranged by VBA.
- **Formal Sharing Agreements** to provide a variety of services to veteran or non-veteran inmates. These services include laboratory services, medications, diagnostics as well as some of the types of services mentioned above. A recent innovation is the use of telehealth to provide these services to the Federal Bureau of Prisons.



**Forensic Research:  
Community Reintegration  
and Veterans**



# Positive Outcomes from Competitive Work

- Higher self-esteem
- Better control of psychiatric symptoms
- More satisfaction with finances and with leisure

(Bond et al., 2001)



# The Mark of a Criminal Record

**Devah Pager**

**Department of Sociology**

**Northwestern University**

**November 2002**



A criminal record is associated with a 50 percent reduction in employment opportunities for whites and a 64 percent reduction for blacks. These findings reveal an important, and much under-recognized, mechanism of stratification. A criminal record presents a major barrier to employment, with important implications for racial disparities.



Over the past three decades, the number of prison inmates has increased by more than 600 percent, leaving the United States the country with the highest incarceration rate in the world. With over two million individuals currently incarcerated, and over half a million prisoners released each year...



# **“Veterans Under Correctional Supervision: Findings from the Bureau of Justice Statistics”**

**Christopher J. Mumola**  
**Policy Analyst, Corrections Statistics**  
**3/01**



# Veteran Statistics

- **25 Million veterans estimated in 1998**
- **926,900 veterans were under correctional supervision in 1999**
  - **700,000 veterans were in the community on probation or parole**
  - **240,000 veterans incarcerated**
- **5 out of 6 veterans had “Good Discharges” from Military Service**



# Demographic Trends

- **Veterans compared to non-veterans were:**
  - **More likely to be first time offenders**
  - **Among violent state prisoners, sentence was 50 months longer than average of non-veterans**
  - **Less likely serving a sentence for drugs**
  - **More likely to be alcohol dependent**
  - **Identified as mentally ill**
  - **Homeless in 12 months before arrest**



# Additional Characteristics

- **More likely to be:**
  - **Older**
    - **Median age of veteran 41 versus 31 for non-veteran**
  - **White-non-Hispanic**
  - **To have been married**
  - **High school or some college**
  - **Working before arrest**



# Characteristics of Veterans on Probation

- 24% have seen combat
- 35% served during the Vietnam War Era
- 97% male
- 73% high school graduates
- More likely to have committed Violent Offenses
- Less likely to have committed Property Offenses
- Less likely to have committed Drug Offenses



# Veterans on Probation

- **Clinical Issues:**
  - 31% of veterans on probation were convicted of DWI versus 19 % non-veterans
  - 56% reported committing crime while under the influence of alcohol compared to 37% of other probationers
  - 20% of veterans reported indications of mental illness compared to 15% of other probationers
  - 5% of Veterans on Probation were homeless versus 4.6% of other probationers.



# Outreach to Veterans in Jail<sup>1</sup>

- Assessment and Planning for post-release community treatment.
- Fewer medical Problems, but higher rates of mental illness and substance abuse problems (than community homeless veterans).
- Used 50% of Outpatient VA services
- Service Costs 30% less for those who were contacted in jail than for homeless vets contacted through community outreach.
- <sup>1</sup>NEPEC Study (*Psychiatric Services* 54:201-207, 2003)



67% Homeless

17% SC

8% SSDI

87% SA

18% SMI

97% Any Psychiatric Disability

70% Any Medical Condition

33% Employed at Discharge

44% Housed at Discharged



# Organization of Mental Health Programs in VHA Central Office

- **Programs within the Office of Mental Health Services:**
  - Homeless
  - Substance Abuse
  - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - Serious Mental Illness
  - Psychosocial Rehabilitation – Serve all above veterans:
    - Work Programs
    - Residential Programs



# Office of Mental Health Services

**Therapeutic & Supported Employment  
Programs consist of:**

**Incentive Therapy (IT)**

**Compensated Work Therapy (CWT)**

**CWT Transitional Residence Program\***

*(\*operated in collaboration with Residential Rehabilitation and  
Treatment Services)*



# What is Psychosocial Rehabilitation?

- Psychosocial rehabilitation is the application of rehabilitation principles and practices to individuals with serious mental illnesses.
- The fundamental principle underlying rehabilitation is that every person has an optimal level of functioning that can be achieved.
- Rehabilitation activities aim to assist an individual to attain that level.



# What is the Goal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation

All veterans with disabilities have rehabilitation potential, i.e. a maximum degree of self-sufficiency that can be attained through psychosocial rehabilitation services that focus on strengths, needs, abilities, and preferences rather than on illness and symptoms.

Self-sufficiency is determined by the veteran and not the organization.



# *Psychosocial Rehabilitation*

## *Goals*

Health Maintenance  
Increased Functional Status  
Improved Quality of Life

## *Vocational Rehabilitation*

Work Skills Development  
Transitional Work Experience  
Employment Opportunities

## *Residential Rehabilitation*

Disability Management  
Transitional Housing  
Life and Social Skills Training

\*Prevention\*

\*Growth\*

\*Potential\*

\*Self-esteem\*

\*Normalization\*

\*Self-sufficiency\*

\*Wellness\*

\*Community Inclusion \*

\*Learning by Doing\*

*Returning Veterans to Living and Working in the Community*<sup>4</sup>

# Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services

- Outreach
- Psycho-education
- Housing Options
- Case management
- Vocational Exploration
- Transitional Work Experience
- Job preparation
- Mock Interviews
- Financial Counseling



# Advocacy Services

- **Child Support Enforcement Modifications**
- **Family Re-unification**
- **Out-patient VA treatment and follow-up**
- **Return of Drivers License**
- **Community Resource Utilization**
- **Federal Bonding**
- **Training Programs**
- **Career Development Skills**



# Job Placement Issues

- **Setting Realistic Vocational Goals**
- **Disclosure of Ex-Offender Status**
- **Work Skills Assessment**
- **Job Seeking Action Plan**
- **Job Search Networking**
- **Career Development**
- **Community Support**



# CWT Outcomes

- **\$5.96= Ave hourly wage earned**
- **26.5 =Ave number of hours worked hours per week**
- **42% employed**
- **58% housed**
- **55% improved clinical area**
- **60% improved work performance**
- **39,704 veterans received VA PSR services**  
(NEPEC, FY 04)



# FY 06 CWT NEPEC DATA

- 75% of CWT veterans have ever been arrested
- 3,649 CWT vets have been in Prison or Jail
- 50% Black
- 45.6% White
- 48 Ave Age
- 73% divorced or never married
- 12% Vietnam
- 5% Persian Gulf
- 1% OEF/OIF



# What Services Do Veterans Need to Become Productive Community Participants?

- **Treatment: Therapy and Medication**
- **Housing**
- **Community Inclusion and support**
- **Family Re-integration and education**
- **Work Opportunities**
- **Transportation**
- **Financial management skills**
- **Legal Assistance including child support arrearage management**
- **VA Primary Care**



## Veterans Deserve:

- Access to services that support full community re-entry and integration
- Services that foster self-determination
- Services that recognize Veterans as people with many talents, strengths and abilities



# Why Employment?

- Viewed by many as an essential part of recovery, self image, even life
- Most people want to work, to participate, make a contribution and be recognized
- A typical role for adults in our society
- Cost-effective service that supports the recovery process, -vs.- institutionalized care



# **The Supported Employment Initiative**



# Principles of the Model

- 1. Rehabilitation is an integral component of mental health treatment.**
- 2. The goal is competitive employment in integrated work settings.**
- 3. People with severe mental illness can obtain and succeed in competitive jobs without pre-employment training.**
- 4. Vocational assessment is continuous, based in competitive work experiences.**



# Principles of the Model

- 5. Follow along supports continue for a time that fits the individual.**
- 6. Job finding, disclosure and supports are based upon the individual's preferences and choices.**
- 7. Services are provided in the community.**
- 8. A multidisciplinary team approach is used, promoting the integration of vocational, clinical and support services.**



# CWT Partners with Community Advocacy Services

- Arrearage Management Strategies
- Family Re-unification
- Return of Drivers License
- Partnership with DOR/CSE Agencies
- Community Legal Aide Assistance
- VA's Role in Jail Diversion
  - Mental Health Courts – Dallas
  - Crisis Intervention Teams –Memphis
  - Sequential Interceptor Model - Ohio



# **CWT Supported Employment John Erskine Pittsburgh CWT Program Manager**

## **Case Presentations**



# VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

## Psychosocial Rehabilitation Programs

Sequential Intercept Model

Intercept Point 5 - Community Corrections and community support services

- **Alle-Kiski Pavillion**
- **Renewal Center**



## Community Reintegration from Forensic Settings

### VA Pittsburgh Post-release

#### Linking individuals to:

- residential programs to assist the veteran in seeking housing
- employment
- mental health treatment



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## Norman

### Background

- 46 year old AA male
- Served 3 ½ years in SCI Greensburg for possession of illegal substances with intent to deliver
- Released to Alle – Kiski on Parole



## Problems/Issues

- **Medical Issues – htn, hepatitis C, diabetes**
- **Psychiatric Issues – hx of substance abuse, bipolar disorder**
- **Homeless (no safe adequate housing to return to in area)**
- **Unemployed with inconsistent work history, mostly doing odd jobs (laborer, dishwasher, etc.)**
- **Financial Issues – poor (no credit), child support arrears of \$6,500**



# Process

- Contact from corrections counselor at Alle-Kiski who identified individual as a veteran
- Appointment established for veteran
- Veteran's eligibility established and enrolled in VA system (admissions process).
- Veteran was evaluated through mental health and assigned to a mental health team in addition to being assigned a primary care team.



## Process, con't.

- Veteran meets with psychiatrist, reevaluated for bipolar medication. Veteran relates more manic episodes, poor sleep, irritability. Begins new medication (Olanzapine).
- Veteran meets with primary care doctor. Veteran has poor diet and is not watching his diabetes. Begins diabetes medication and is referred for diabetes education. Medication continued for htn. Hep C in check.



# Employment

- Referred by doctor for work program and medically cleared for participation.
- Initial evaluation, discuss goals, strengths, barriers.
- Expresses interest in housekeeping for future employment and is assigned as a housekeeper with the VA through the CWT work program.



# Housing/Independent Living

- Norman had no place to reside, needed home plan, corrections counselor and veteran meet with CWT/TR Program Manager to discuss housing options within VA.
- Because of veterans hx of substance abuse and inconsistent lifestyle, poor employment pattern, CWT/TR housing program with it's semi – structured setting could benefit veteran and be appropriate home plan.
- Parole officer visits residence, meets with program manager.
- Home plan approved and Norman admitted into community residence.



# CWT/TR Program

- Veteran attends minimum of 3 AA/NA meetings per week. Has sponsor and homegroup. Begins working 12 steps.
- Weekly random urine screens
- Establishes bank account at VA credit union. Saves \$100.00 per pay. Learns to budget money.
- Attends residential aftercare groups
- Helps maintain residence. Prepares own meals
- Minimal staff supervision



# CWT/TR Program, cont'd.

- VA counselor and Norman contact family court. Conference call is held, minimum payments of \$25.00 per month worked out for child support arrears.
- VA counselor helps veteran obtain credit report, letters written to creditors, telephone calls. Begins making minimal monthly payments toward debt. Begins using secured credit union VISA card to establish good credit.



**PO continues to visit with Norman,  
meeting with veteran and staff, monitoring  
situation. Pleased with veterans progress  
and he attempts to “do the right thing.”**



# Skip Ahead.....

- **After 9 months, Norman begins to work with VA vocational counselor to develop resume, identify potential employers, as well as areas in which to reside. Now has current, consistent work reference through participation in CWT work program.**



## ***2 months later.....***

- **Norman is offered a job with a large cleaning company, cleaning office buildings in Pittsburgh.**
- **Norman finds apartment in the Highland park area of Pittsburgh of Pittsburgh**



# Normans Final Outcome

- Both psychiatric and medical issues are stable.
- IS clean and sober with strong recovery program in place as well as support system.
- Has own apartment with \$3200.00 in bank (saved more than \$100.00/pay.)
- Makes regular payments to child support division as well as creditors.



## Normans Final Outcome, cont'd.

- **Is building credit by purchasing small items and paying off as soon as bill arrives**
- **Employed in area of interest to him with potential for advancement (crew leader, multi crew supervisor).**



## Follow-up, 1 year later

- Norman is still employed with same company crew leader making \$13.50 hour.
- Still on parole, compliant with parole requirements.
- Has VA appointments every three months for psychiatric and medical issues. Medication compliant. Health stable.
- Clean and sober
- Has made contact with a daughter he has not seen in 10 years.



# Psychosocial Rehabilitation Vocational Programs

**1-800-355-8262**

**[www.va.gov/vetindustry](http://www.va.gov/vetindustry)**

**Ralph Zaccheo**

**617-823-4455**



**“To Care for Him Who Shall Have  
Borne the Battle and for his widow  
and his orphan”**

**Abraham Lincoln**

