

Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission
4141 North S. Herrera Way, Phoenix, AZ 85012

April 12, 2018

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners Present

Peter Kloeber
Joseph Brophy (via telephone)
Arlethe Rios
Matthew Randle (via telephone)
Brett Rustand
Rebecca Villalpando

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Wanda Wright, Director
Joe Dougherty, Central Regional Manager

Guests

Thomas Winkel, AZ Coalition for Military Families

Call to Order – Chairman Kloeber called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

Approval of Meeting Minutes –Chairman Kloeber called for the approval of the February 1, 2018, Veterans Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes. There being no changes to the minutes Commissioner Villalpando moved to approve the minutes as written. The motion carried unanimously.

Arizona Coalition for Veteran Families – Director Thomas Winkel gave a PowerPoint presentation on various collaborations between the Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF) and the Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS).

AZ Veterans Survey – The ACMF, in collaboration with ADVS and other organizations who helped get the word out, conducted a veteran survey that resulted in nearly 5,000 statewide responses from several military members, veterans, families and community providers. This is the first time this type of survey has been done anywhere in the country. Any person in the state with ties to the military or veterans, could take the survey consisting of a range of issues and ask follow up questions.

Interesting data points from the survey were that 31% of veterans are struggling to find employment; 23% have felt fear of the future in the two weeks prior to the survey; 28% have struggled with finances; 5% have experienced moderate to severe stress in the week prior to the survey. The unemployment rate of those taking the survey was 3.2%. See the slide presentation with specific data [here](#). Mr. Winkel will make the statistics available to organizations.

Commissioner Villalpando asked if women veterans/MST questions were included in the survey. Mr. Winkel indicated that the subject was covered with great interest and that data will be forthcoming soon.

The 9th Annual Statewide Arizona Coalition for Military Families Symposium, which is being held April 18 and 19 at the Desert Willow Conference Center, Phoenix, AZ., will feature speaker Jake Leinenkugel, Senior White House Advisor to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Five hundred fifty attendees are scheduled with 36 breakout sessions. Some of these sessions include Veterans Education, Faith and Spirituality, Education and the Workforce, BeConnected, Veteran Courts and a Tribal Veteran track. Continuing Education Credits for Nursing, Social Workers, Lawyers and others are available.

Industries to be included are Healthcare, I.T., Manufacturing, Cyber Security, Maintenance, Automotive and Utilities. A Corporate Council meeting will be held on day two of the symposium. The ACMF site provides a link to register to attend.

AZ Roadmap to Veteran Employment has been in effect for three and a half years and has effected good change with the concept of SkillBridge. SkillBridge falls under Roadmap, with ADVS and Department of Economic Security (DES) providing a bridge between employers and communities. A memorandum of understanding was signed with all Arizona military bases, DES, ADVS and ACMF.

SkillBridge is a Department of Defense authorized career skills program which allows, with command approval, a veteran within six months of separation from the service to be placed in an apprenticeship with an approved civilian employer before transitioning out of the military. The goal of this statewide program is to bring together skilled people and the workforce.

Pipeline Arizona is the next iteration of the Arizona Roadmap portal and was launched on March 1, 2018. Maricopa County IDA contributed \$6 million to connect people to jobs and career pathways. The program is available to everyone, but includes military-specific elements of the Roadmap platform, which was launched May 1, 2017.

With one coordinator and limited marketing, BeConnected accepted over 1,500 calls to the support line in under a year. Currently, the resource command site has 1,000 matchable resources. Three full time coordinators attended navigator training through ACMF. ADVS, through the Veterans Donation Fund, funded peer support and assisted in suicide intervention skills training.

Veterans Services Division Central Region Update – Joe Dougherty, Central Region Manager, and retired Marine Corps Veteran, gave an overview of the Veterans Service Division (VSD). The department has seen a tremendous turnover in Veteran Benefits Counselors; the department lost 120 years of experience in just two months. Three new counselors were hired for the central office. Virtual VBCs are being made available to Phoenix area veterans by offices in the VSD's northern region until the new VBCs are trained. The southern region is to come online soon to offer veterans virtual appointments. The southern region doesn't have problems with turnover, but has a backlog. The virtual VBC will work like the VA's national work cue, whereby a veteran can meet with a VBC online.

Director Wright noted that the virtual VBC was an idea from a VBC that has saved thousands of taxpayer dollars. It is an outstanding and very effective program for individuals at itinerate offices, allowing the VBC to remain in the Phoenix office. The program is being rolled out in each region.

Commissioner Rustand inquired if there is a need for a network of offices to provide virtual VBC telecommunication abilities in rural communities. Director Wright reported that we are working with DES to set up more rural offices. There are virtual offices available in 15 areas; we work with DES in Mohave, Hopi, Navajo and Winslow. There is a mapping process based on need in these areas.

Mr. Dougherty reported that the Surprise office was closed and moved to the Military Success Center outside the gate at Luke Air Force Base. Veterans don't have to access the base to see a VBC. There has been a steady flow of visitors, keeping the VBC very busy. The Chandler office closed and moved to the Veteran Resource Center in Mesa, which is open three days a week.

VA's RAMP Program (Rapid Appeals Modernization Process) has been successful. Arizona was the test market for the program, which has received positive feedback. The program counsels veterans on the appeals process and veterans are being urged to enter the program. The VA currently has a seven year backlog on appeals claims. There are not many judges to hear these appeals. A veteran has the option to send their claim to the RAMP Program for a faster process, which has been successful for many veterans.

Decision Ready Claim Process is the VA's new way of processing claims. The program is not fully set up for claims at this time, however. The quicker decision-ready claims can take up to two years; down from seven years. The VA can complete the form and the veteran hears back within weeks. There has been positive feedback, but there is apprehension in veterans who have waited for years already, as they are afraid to change over to the RAMP Program and lose their place in the wait process. The central office gets many calls about the program and, because it is a VA program, the state does not have any control in the process.

Citizen Engagement – Veteran engagement will take place in Pinal County on March 17 and 27. A Florence Prison Outreach will be held twice a month; there were two visits to the Florence Prison in March. The Pinal County Stand Down was held March 17 with good results. A Veterans Engagement Summit was held March 29 with 106 veterans in attendance. Corporate Council will be held on April 18; participants must be registered.

Commissioner Villalpando thinks it would be beneficial to have a veteran counselor in the Black Canyon DES office, as was done before. It is difficult for virtual VBCs at DES because of location and the WiFi service is not good in the area. DES has the space to accommodate a veteran counselor. Mr. Dougherty said VSD definitely wants to come back to Black Canyon City once counselors are fully staffed and trained.

Chairman Kloeber asked if veteran counselors will be at the Flagstaff Stand Down on May 18. Mr. Dougherty advised that this will be a decision by the northern region manager.

Agency Announcements and Updates – Wanda Wright, Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, noted there have been major changes at agency headquarters. Robert Barnes, former Deputy Director, has retired. John Scott, former Assistant Deputy Director, is now Deputy Director and Scott Fincher, former Training Officer, oversees Cemeteries, Veteran Counselors and Programs divisions, as the Assistant Deputy Director. The Training Officer position remains unfilled.

The agency continues to use Arizona Management Systems (AMS) to create efficiencies. Director Wright believes ADVS is one of the best agencies in the state for the best use of taxpayer dollars.

ADVS was just notified that it will get federal funding for two new state veteran homes in Yuma and Flagstaff. The VA covers 65 percent of the cost and the state pays 35 percent. The information was made available on the public access website. Omnibus funded every state home construction project on the list for \$685 million.

Sixty percent of the design is completed for both homes. Construction may begin midway through FY 19, with construction of the second home to follow in three to four months. Studies show the need for 1,500 veteran nursing home beds; Arizona currently has 320. Flagstaff and Yuma will each have 80 beds.

The Phoenix State Veteran Home is 23 years old and needs a complete renovation. The department will submit for renovation costs in the fall of 2018. We expect funding within 18 months of submission.

March 29 marked the National Vietnam War Veterans Day at Wesley Bolin Plaza, with Governor Doug Ducey in attendance. There was a short ceremony afterward for the last remaining African American Pearl Harbor Veteran; a flag was presented to his family.

The Arizona Coalition for Military Families 9th Annual Statewide Symposium in Support of Service Members, Veterans and their Families will be held April 18 and 19.

VSO's will take a summer break and hold conventions in June and be back in operation in September.

We are working closely on the quality of care at the Veteran Homes. The Tucson State Veteran Home was graded five stars in their survey, in the top 10 percent of all veteran homes in the nation.

The Phoenix State Veteran Home's last two surveys hurt their CMS score. However, their most recent score was good and they are working toward a five star survey. The next survey is in October.

Mayor's Challenge through SAMHSA (Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration) VA Policy Academy – There have been policy changes in Washington, D.C., prompting a need to establish a cogent suicide prevention program for all city departments, fire, police, etcetera.

Director Wright will speak with 23 Maricopa County department representatives to brief them on a cogent suicide prevention program and get them onboard, after which a state-wide proclamation can be rolled out.

Outreach Activities – Commissioner Rustand attended Military Veteran Community Network (MVCN) meetings in Southern Arizona and has been working with the veteran courts on sustainability.

Commissioner Brophy attended the ceremony for the Veterans Heritage Project; four World War II Veterans were in attendance.

Chairman Kloeber attended a joint Northern Arizona Veterans Coalition/MVCN meeting and attended ACMF navigator training the following week. Chairman Kloeber will go to Washington, D.C. later this month with The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) for the “Storming the Hill” event. Representatives from all 50 states were invited to meet with 10 legislators and talk about paying benefits for military and Chapter 61 retirees. He will present Arizona lapel pins to legislators. Chairman Kloeber will attend the Northern AZ Coalition meeting on April 27.

Director Wright noted that members at the MVCN meetings are not really hearing from veterans at those meetings. She would like commissioners to visit with veteran service organizations and listen to veterans about the services they’re receiving and to help identify the gaps in services. She believes this is a piece missing from the regional meetings and is a great source to identify those needs.

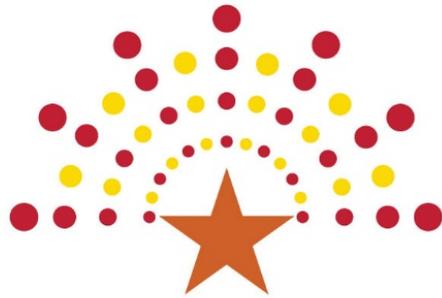
Open Discussion for the Good of the Order – Chairman Kloeber is working with the Governor’s Office of Boards and Commissions to get commissioners appointed. It is a slow process; the commission currently stands at six members with Brett Rustand leaving the commission in July. Boards and Commissions reported that one application is in process. They received seven applications but none had a recommendation letter from a VSO. Chairman Kloeber asked commissioners to assist with filling those vacancies.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:14.



**ARIZONA COALITION
FOR MILITARY FAMILIES**
BUILDING SUPPORT FOR ALL WHO SERVE

**Report To:
ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICES ADVISORY COMMISSION
April 12, 2018**



ARIZONA
Veteran Survey

Arizona Veteran Survey

- Conducted online in 2017
- Almost **5000** responses statewide
- Open to service members, veterans & family members
- Asked about a range of issues and needs including quality of life, mental health, physical health, access to care, employment and career growth

Of the service members and veterans surveyed:

31%

have struggled with finding quality employment

23%

have felt fear of the future in the two weeks prior

28%

have struggled with finances

5%

have experienced moderate to severe stress in the week prior

The unemployment rate of those surveyed was **3.2%**

- **68%** of Arizona veterans are over the age of 55
 - **30%** report having experienced depression and anxiety
 - **24%** report having experienced PTSD
 - **10%** report having had suicidal thoughts
 - **2%** have attempted suicide
- **42%** of Arizona veterans are caregivers. Top challenges:
 - Balancing work and caregiving
 - Expenses related to caregiving
 - Balancing personal relationships with caregiving
 - Overall financial concerns (limited income, loss of income)

✓ SkillBridge Updates

- ✓ The Memorandum of Understanding is signed!
- ✓ Roadmap Coordinator is in place (Welcome Abe!).
- ✓ Web development on employer profiles and career opportunity profiles is complete.
- ✓ We are ready to iron out the process and move into implementation.
- ✓ SkillBridge video







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PIPELINE AZ

- Next iteration of the Arizona Roadmap Portal
- Connects people to jobs and career pathways
- Available to all, but includes the military-specific elements of the Roadmap platform
- Launched March 1!

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coordinator

Expanding to a team of 3



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Personalized Resource
Matching & Navigation

1000+ matchable
resources

Expanding to a team of 3
full-time navigators



LEARN

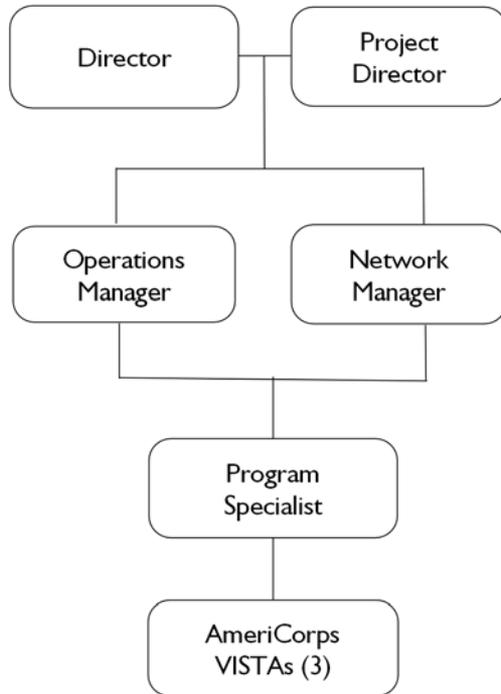
Training and skills to
equip yourself to help

Online & in-person
training

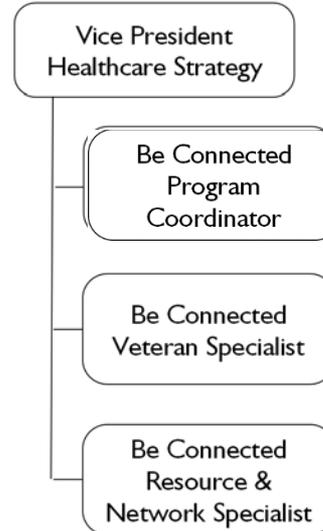
Navigator | Peer Support
ASIST | Symposium

Be Connected Team

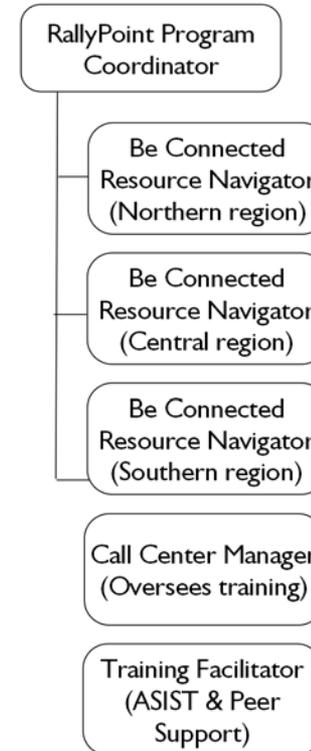
Arizona Coalition for Military Families



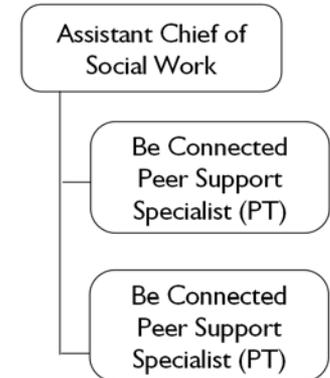
Crisis Response Network



La Frontera EMPACT



Phoenix VA



9th Annual Statewide Symposium in Support of Service Members, Veterans & Their Families – April 18 & 19, 2018



500+ attendees from around Arizona CEUs | 36 breakout sessions

TRACKS

- Military/Veteran in AZ
- Legal, Vet Courts & Incarcerated Veterans
- Basic Needs, Benefits & Beyond
- Family Matters
- Clinical Practice & Skills
- Be Connected
- Tribal Veterans
- Veterans in Higher Education
- Veterans in the Workforce
- Faith & Spirituality
- Women Veterans

