

Hudson Valley Veteran Task Force Meeting

Minutes/Notes of July 10, 2019

OPENING: The meeting of the Hudson Valley Veteran Task Force was called to order at 9:20 am on Wednesday, July 10, 2019 at the Orange County Department of Health, Goshen, NY by Larry Neumann. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Larry Neumann welcomed all present.

MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of the Hudson Valley Veteran Task Force is to address the needs of those who served by having relevant agencies meet collectively, regularly and cooperatively, to ensure the timely administration of services and referrals in order to achieve an end to Veteran homelessness and meet their immediate and long term needs.

PRESENT: Many veteran and human service agencies of Orange, Putnam, Rockland and Sullivan Counties were represented. The guests/presenters are listed below. There was a total of 40 in attendance.

INTRODUCTIONS, Opening Remarks and Review of last month's meeting:

Larry started the meeting with a recap of the June 12th meeting. Reminded and reviewed last month's speakers with the highlights of their events and services together with their upcoming dates. He reviewed last month's homeless veteran count.

- Larry reminded us of an email he sent out about one of our members, Israel Benitez. Israel had a brain tumor and started a GoFundMe page to assist him with medical and other expenses. Larry thanked everyone for their support. Larry then read an email from Israel. He had good news the tumor was not cancerous. In the email, Israel thanked everyone for the prayers and thoughts. He had his surgery to remove the tumor and is on the road to recovery.
- Highlights of last month's meeting and since:
- During the **point in time count** in Orange County on May 29, 30 and 31, 4 veterans were identified.
- Anthony J. Desjardin, Senior at **Chester Academy** completed his project and donated 48 boxes of personal hygiene items for homeless veterans, which is much appreciated.
- **Mike and Esther McCarrey** - have made available a grant for the Faith First Early Learning Center in Chester. We should take advantage of this opportunity. Each scholarship is worth \$4,500.
- **Laurie Bryceland** – GAIT Therapeutic Riding Center. Larry has been working with her in Eastern PA. She is looking to model their own Veteran Task Force

Larry reviewed last month's announcements and reported on their successes.

ROUND TABLE: Larry had everyone go around the table and provide their name, title and agency. Welcomed all present.

PRESENTERS/ GUEST SPEAKERS - Larry introduced our speakers and reminded attendees that we educate ourselves with veteran issues and services. He reminded us of the MST victim who spoke with us and how important for the task force to educate ourselves issues that affect the demographics of our veteran community. This would include LGBTQ veterans. Who is advocating on their behalf?

Ashton Stewart, SageVets

Nadia introduced the plight of those who identify as LGBTQ and their community. MHA is serving the community by being affirming to these individuals; primarily in the Rape crisis program. LGBTQ community is still dealing with many issues that we need to confront. There are still 30 plus states in our union that

discriminate this community. We need to continue to serve the mental health and physical needs of this community.

Presentation - Ashton presented a slide show. All unified in our service of our veterans and there is a lot diversity in our branches. Introduced himself - Navy and moved here at 16 years old from Canada. Had a love of the U.S. He is an ally and identifies as a heterosexual male.

Sex and Gender are complex - Sex, assigned at birth defined by genitals or chromosomes; Gender Identity is internal sense of self as male, female, both, neither; Transgender having a gender identity different from one's sex assigned at birth; Trans...

LGBTQ population - 2010 between 1.6 and 2.4 million; 2030 as many as 7 million.

LGBT older adults are unique? Most live alone and rely on others. There is an intense stigma - alienated by their biological families; homelessness; unemployment; physical assault. This population is very vulnerable, and suicide is very high - 21 %. The rate among minorities is even higher.

A little history - Sage began in 1978. Many programs at their centers. Edie Windsor - lesbian woman wanting to get married and was instrumental in the civil rights and marriage equality.

Stonewall - 1969 - a handful of men did not want to move from a bar and they stood up for their rights.

Their organization has a housing project for older adults/62 or older. Care management of 6 social workers.

Programs - case management, caregiving, SAGEvets, SAGEpositive.

SAGEvets - legal services, outreach, screening for VA benefits, case management and peer support.

1949 - military anti homosexual policies. 1983 "don't ask, don't tell" was a compromise. End of DADT - 2011 - repeal went into effect. Transgender ban began in 2019 with trans person were able to serve 2016 to 2019. Approximately 1,500 transgender service members.

SAGE specifically is for older veterans. *Question?* Who serves the younger Veterans? Younger veterans do come for services and even they are turned away, they get referred to other agencies especially for them.

Some LGBTQ military history -

- Van Steuben - openly gay. Hero of revolutionary war. During his time, an officer and young service member were caught being intimate, and very publicly discharged.
- Female service member, Fanny Mae, 8-year battle and won their battle and were awarded back pay.
- Vietnam era service member, Leonard with trans name Simone. Performed drag show at many military clubs.
- Christine Beck, navy seal, bronze star and very outspoken about her transgender service.
- Shane Ortega served 12 years.
- Pride flag creator served in the army.

Naval Investigative Service - had their own witch hunt and put you in a room and had you identified those you had relationships. Ultimately processed you out of the service with a dishonorable discharge.

Shared many stories of other LGBTQ service members. Gays have always been in the military just like everywhere else. There are across ranks, ages, and MOSs.

Comments: Larry shared about the words that stood out to him - acceptance and tolerance. What is acceptable? Tolerance is important. Accepting each other and doing no harm. Nadia - not comfortable with the word tolerance. It is important not to look at it as from the tolerance perspective, but we need to be accepting. The dominant culture is heterosexual. We move in the world with the privilege of being the norm. Phobia - irrational fear. So, move into acceptance mode and remember we are all people.

Bill Wetzel, Rumshock - Veteran Foundation

We're an organization in our infancy. 501c3 - fundraiser and have some money. Village of tiny homes for veterans. Looking for land. just starting the bequest, and other fundraiser. 3-year plan. Looking at property in Wurtsboro. Larry N., Christian Farrell were instrumental in starting our organization.

Comment: Larry - Orange county does not have veteran housing and it is welcomed and needed.

Pat Siano, PFAC - We believe that a lot goes on in the hospital system that goes unnoticed and unchecked. We are a group that the veteran community at large is cared for with visits and a show of concern. This group is no longer in the VA hospital. They reach out to families in the Montrose and Castle Point campuses.

One situation, the air conditioner was broken, and the windows could not be opened. The vets in the unit also could not go outside and get air or sunshine. The temperature was extremely high. When PFAC advocated for the veteran patients. Then they were told that the patients will be moved and will be housed in individual rooms. It is a move in right direction, but they still cannot get fresh air and sun.

PFAC asks the hard questions and ensures neglectful situations are addressed. Civilians do not understand what the military jobs entail. The water fountains are broken with no other source of water. Many issues of neglect and situations of leaving vets behind.

Pat Siano stated, "Hate to see veterans disregarded and thrown away." My husband does not have any complaints with his benefits and services through the VA. Service to our veterans needs to improve. Continue monthly meetings and looking for members. The Co-chair is a retired major, third party oversight is necessary.

Fernando Ahumada, Community Capital and came about 3 years ago. Had a dinner for veterans and had a neighbor that was a veteran. Close to his heart. Works out of Westchester county. Innovative lending and he champions diversity lending. 75% of portfolio are women and many single mothers. We were introduced to Reverend Graves' project - Fernando's company is funding the housing for veterans. Look out of the box to fund - character, organization, and credit. Loans to people who don't qualify and then he advocates with funders to provide funding. Fernando's cell (914) 720-7426. If you meet someone with a vision and hope to help them move their dreams forward.

TASK FORCE HOMELESS CASES Status: Christine

- **WestCOP SSVF: Open/New Case Report** (Total count is 29)
 - Dutchess - 3 with 13 facing homelessness
 - Orange - 15
 - Ulster County - 0 (agencies are not at the table reporting) -
 - Westchester - 34
 - Sullivan - 1

Adjournment: meeting was adjourned at 11:40am by Larry Neumann.

Next meeting: Wednesday, August 14, 2019, 9am

Location: Unity Center, Newburgh, NY

Minutes taken and typed by: Millie Rivera-Velez

Minutes reviewed and submitted by: Larry Neumann