

Senate Veteran Affairs & Military Installations
Joint hearing with the Senate Select Committee on Veterans Health

The Center for Health Care Services
Invited Testimony – Charge 9
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Mark Carmona – Chief Administrative Officer
Linda A Lopez, MA – Research Coordinator & Liaison
Aaron V. Diaz – Director, Crisis and Diversion Services
Lance Hinds – Active duty Army, OEF/OIF

The Center for Health Care Services (Center) was awarded \$240,000 for Incentive and Competitive Projects as part of the Governor's \$5 million funding to promote mental health service programs for veterans, the military and their dependents.

The Center is using its awarded amount of funding in various ways to serve the mental health needs of veterans and their dependents in our community. To date we have served over 100 veterans in the community through peer to peer services and referrals. The funds we received are greatly appreciated and have afforded us the opportunity to sustain and expand our OIF/OEF veteran services developed for our local community. The Center has expanded the services available to serve more veterans from other eras that we were not able to serve previously. The Center has many veterans within its Adult Mental Health program that will also be able to benefit from these services that they may not have been able to access through other means. The Center also plans to expand to the Haven for Hope and the Restoration Center to identify homeless veterans and those utilizing our detox and sobering program to connect them to our services or other veteran services offered in the community. In addition, with the Veteran's Mental Health Court commencing, we plan to be available to serve the veterans processed through the court with CPT counseling, peer to peer groups, and referrals to meet their additional needs.

The Veterans we have worked with have encountered many barriers to accessing services, and through this funding opportunity, they are able to get connected to resources and improve their transition and adjustment reintegrating with their families. They appreciate the peer facilitated groups where they can talk with other veterans who have experienced similar struggles and can be guided to the possibilities of how to overcome the barriers. More funds will be needed to sustain the efforts we are initiating in the community as more veterans return to San Antonio/ Bexar County.

A Military Liaison position has been created at the Center that will serve as a liaison for veterans seeking services to meet their needs and be a point of contact at the Center for veteran services. The Center hired Jeanette Davolt, Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) who is a veteran of the Vietnam era and is the spouse of a veteran, also of the Vietnam era.

Mrs. Davolt is a licensed therapist and adds a clinical perspective to her role as a liaison for the veterans she encounters. She is responsible for marketing the available services and networking with other programs serving veterans to help identify gaps in

services. Mrs. Davolt is trained as a peer to peer group facilitator, as well as a facilitator for the veteran and family groups.

Project Collaborations

Following its tradition of collaboration in the community, the Center has formed some strategic partnerships to further the mental health work for veterans in our community. Our partnerships include Our House and Trey's House San Antonio to promote the peer to peer services for the veterans in Bexar County. The Center sent Jeanette Davolt and Our House sent two veteran members to be trained as Bring Everyone in the Zone (BEITZ) peer to peer group facilitators and have implemented the BEITZ peer to peer groups at Our House, Trey's House, Operation Homefront Village (located within the Republic Apartments which is a housing program for wounded warriors being served at Brooke Army Medical Center - BAMC), and the American GI Forum (AGIF). We plan to expand to the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) and other sites within the next month.

The Center is collaborating with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) Texas to identify and send to the Operation Resilient Families (ORF) facilitator training. Our first ORF group is now underway at the American Red Cross and has met for three Sundays, facilitated by Team 1. As more veterans and families sign up, we will implement our 2nd Team to get started with another ORF group.

Another partnership in place is with Operation Resilient Families providing technical assistance calls and learning about what other centers are doing to expand and implement the program in their local service area. This collaboration and facilitation has helped the Center be successful in its networking and marketing.

To date, we have had one counselor trained in CPT counseling on the Veteran Project and she has started seeing her first CPT veteran. (The Center sent approximately 5 staff members to be trained in CPT before we secured the veterans initiative grants). More referrals for CPT counseling have been coming in and more veterans will soon benefit from this treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

We have spent our time making connections in the community to receive referrals and networking with other community programs that serve veterans to learn more about other services in the community.

We have joined the Alliance for Veterans and Families Behavioral Health Workgroup to develop a network for veteran services providers to learn about other veteran providers to help ensure proper referrals. We will be having a kickoff meeting Oct 28th at the San Antonio Shrine Center to bring all of the partners to the table and learn about available veteran programs in Bexar County.

We have begun collaborative work with the American Red Cross, Texas Veterans Commission, the local American GI Forum, UTSA (who expressed a need for a women veteran group to address sexual assault in the military), the VA, BAMC, Grace After Fire, and other partners in the community.

Veteran's Mental Health Court

Recently, The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) contracted with the Center for the development and implementation of a pilot study that incorporates trauma-related services for veterans into existing jail diversion activities in Bexar County as part of the state's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) grant for Jail Diversion and Trauma Recovery for Veterans.

Bexar County has an effective jail diversion system for both mental health and substance abuse issues. In the pilot, trauma-related screening, assessment, and therapy will be added. Although all persons with trauma-related mental health issues should benefit from being exposed to a trauma-informed system, the pilot will offer trauma informed services to 120 veterans per year at the Restoration Center where over 30 Veterans receive services in our Sobering unit on a monthly basis.

Best practices--- including workforce training in trauma and veteran issues; trauma screening, assessment, and therapy; and regular input and feedback from Veterans on supports and services---will be tested in the Bexar County Pilot and then expanded across Texas through a statewide conference and onsite training and technical assistance. A Local Advisory Committee will be charged with the oversight of the Bexar County Pilot and permanently resourcing trauma-related jail diversion services in the county; whereas, a State Advisory Committee will be charged with overseeing the development, implementation, evaluation, and replication of community-based best practices statewide. Both advisory committees will include representatives from state and local mental health services, VA, law enforcement and criminal justice systems, and veterans groups.

Center staff works closely with other service providers including the Veteran's Administration, San Antonio Police Department, the District Attorney's office, Bexar County Community Initiatives office, Judge Olivarri's office, American GI Forum, who are also working with the new Veteran's Mental Health Court.

Staff attend staffings every other week to consider and assess veterans involved in the justice system who are in need of treatment services. Several providers including Aaron V. Diaz will be going to Buffalo N.Y. to a Veterans Treatment Court Planning Initiative to receive training on implementation of a Veterans Treatment Court in Bexar County.