



## Kent County Veterans Services

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Minutes 8/11/2022

Committee present: Mary Johnson(remote), Melvin Bauman, Trish Torres, Reginald Howard, Chris Kamps, Mike Blundell

Committee absent: Jill Hinton-Wolfe

Staff present: Martha Burkett, Andrew LaPres

Guests: None

1) Meeting called to order/ instructions-

- a. The meeting was called to order by Veterans Services Committee chair Mary Johnson.

2) Pledge of Allegiance – Lead by Chris Kamps

3) Approval of the minutes from July Meeting-

- a. Approved by-Trish Torres, Seconded by- Mel Bauman

4) Success stories

- a. Mary- I think that our biggest success story is that our veteran's millage passed. Depending on what TV show you looked at it was anywhere between 79-80%. Which is huge. There were approximately 70,000 votes between the yays and nays. I would like to thank the committee for everything that they did, Paul Ryan, who went on TV and radio. He just blasted this everywhere he could. Tammy Arends and the West Michigan Alliance for Veterans for helping fund all of the signs and PR. It was a huge effort and it certainly paid off for our veterans for another eight years. I am just so proud.
- b. KCVS Manager Martha- Another success story is I just wanted to say how proud I am of our team here at KCVS. Over the last few years we have become the leaders in the community and really stepped up to build a lot of new relationships in the community. I really think that this helped with the millage. I think it was Paul Ryan that said that some of the voters confidence in our program shows in the statistics and I think that is is really excellent, so I wanted to give a shout of out to the whole team and say that I am super proud to be part of it and really excited that we are getting another eight years.

- c. Mary- I wanted to say that same thing. The last millage really helped us get some more VSO's in the office and put on more programs for our veterans. We couldn't have done it without the team.
- d. KCVS Manager Martha- Another good news story is happening today. If you're here so you can see and feel the excitement and the buzz of the year. It is going to be a huge success; Rachel took the lead on this and with limited leadership from me. She gathers different organizations to support our veterans during the stand down today. And we are going to be rocking and rolling. Just excited about it, this might be the best one yet.

#### 5) Monthly Impact statement

- a. KCVS VSO Andrew- Let's look at the numbers from this past month. Records request are up a lot from last year. We were open last July, but not many people came in. Then looking at June and July of this year we've had a lot more people coming into our office. Fully developed claims are also up this month by 23 compared to last year's 15. Face to face contacts are almost double what they were last year in July. They're close to what we had last month in June. Still have 141 claims developing with the VA, up from last month of 134. We are just completing these faster than what the VA can process them. Last month we had 13 claims awarded, this month we had 14, so a little bit more. Total awarded in those was \$18,639.00. Like last months and last years numbers. SSR's were at 7 last year, 8 last month and 9 this month. Phone contacts are about where they were last month, down from last July but we are having a lot more walk ins coming into the office instead. Our Meijer Food Voucher program is still going very well, we are almost double what we were at last month and twice what it was last year. Questions?
- b. KCVS Manager Martha- We are on track; we are on budget. We are humming along. I did get word from Norman VanNortwick(sp) in finance and he said that the budget proposal got through the first level of approvals with no questions. He said he doesn't anticipate for it to have an issue going through the final stages. MVAA news is that they approved our grant for \$173,000. We were notified earlier this year than years in the past. I submitted an action request already to go in front of finance and the board of commissioners. We don't have the official packet from the state yet, but I got the letter to be able to start the action request.
  - i. Mary- Did the County ever get back to you about if you can budget or not for the 300K? That they will give to us if we need?
  - ii. KCVS Manager Martha- I don't have the answer on that. I know Jenny told me about that. I don't think they're prepared to put in our budget, just have it there if we need it. I think that is a good question for Jenny. She can maybe come to the next meeting and answer that a little better
- c. KCVS Manager Martha- Staffing update. We are still looking for a Veterans support coordinator, but the good news is that we have suddenly have a few applicants. We have 3 applicants. I interviewed someone on Monday and Rachel and I are interviewing someone again tomorrow. Then there is a 3<sup>rd</sup> one that, I am not sure is scheduled or not yet. But that is encouraging. Hopefully we can get someone in that position soon because Rachel is trying to do so much and I'm trying to coach her to slow down. The outreach stuff is something that she loves and is so good at. I told her to let me know and I can do more stuff. I did a TV thing the other day. I've been trying to step up and help in those ways. Our next big event we have going is the Art

Prize Gala. I am hoping that everyone will be there. It will be exciting and fun, we have Rosemarie Aquilina as a speaker, she is an Air Force Jag. We will also have a video from Governor Whitmer. We will have some good live dance music. Everyone should've gotten an invite. I am going on the couples retreat that will be in Traverse City. The following week is the men's retreat. September 17<sup>th</sup> is the opening of the Art prize Veterans Park Veteran art display. I know last month we had talked about doing something for the veteran's day parade. There are a couple of things that have come through, Mary may talk about them later. But Eric Nelson has approached me and would like to partner with us to do something big for the parade. Maybe you guys can all form a subcommittee. Or even asking Blue Star moms to be included. Also, we have the green light initiative through the county. We should have everyone wear green glowsticks or something. We could light ours up too. We can use green Christmas lights to light it all up. I think we need to be creative and have fun. We need to invite and encourage other veterans' groups. Maybe we can do an outreach activity and have veterans build a float. We do have extra money from the women's banquet, and from the salary from the support coordinator that we haven't hired yet. So, we have some extra chump change. I have reached out to West Michigan Coalition to see if we can get a stipend for Rosemarie. She spoke for free last time and I know she is driving all the way over here.

- i. Mel- I think we need to pay for at least her mileage.
- d. KCVS Manager Martha- I have asked them twice and haven't heard anything back from them yet. I think that they're busy still from the millage. But I am going to reach out again to ask him. If the answer is no, are you ok with us doing this?
  - i. Mary-Yes, I don't have a problem.
- e. KCVS Manager Martha- Also, something that I have been working on is a collaboration with the Sheriff's department. The sheriff approached me a few times over the past year and wanted us to do work with them in the jail. She sent over a few deputies to talk and what they're proposing do. They want to set up a veteran's pod in the jail, so that all the veterans who are incarcerated will be in the same general location. They can't do that until they have a specific curriculum that they can offer those veterans. So, they asked if we have any ideas about that. I said "yes" and talked about all the ways that Kent County Veterans Services can offer them when they're ready, if we need to get a background clearance or whatever. I am also reaching out to the different stakeholders to see if they're interested in also being apart of this and helping our incarcerated veterans for when they get out. I reached out to Network 180, they said they might be able to dove tail with us and also our substance abuse therapist said that if she has time, she will also go over to the jail and do assessments for our substance abuse program. But if they're identifying as primary mental health, we can connect them with Network 180. So, then I got ahold of Michigan works veterans' program. He said that they have a curriculum in the prisons, we would love to get into the county jails. They are wanting to join with us and be able to take this program to other county jails. Network 180 said that they might be able to provide some funding for this seeing we have nothing in our budget for this.
  - i. Trish- My church is looking for a way to support a prison ministry.
- f. KCVS Martha- We want to show these incarcerated veterans that they can make claims still and get their DD-214. Let them know there are friendly people out there looking to help them and provide support to them. I am going to get together the first

part of September with some of the Jail Administration and talk about what we are thinking we need to start. We need to get all our staff here at KCVS ready to go into the jail with any security clearances that need to be done. That way we can start having them go in once or twice a week to get started, then start bringing them employment stuff. It will be phenomenal over time.

- i. Reggie Howard- We can tie this into the aftercare program we are hoping to have to here with AA.
- g. KCVS Martha- Even if we can't bring in the yoga, acudetox and other activities to them. We can let them know what we have for them here for when they're out and it's free for them. Like I said, I am meeting with them in September and kind of show them what we have and try to get a template of what we are thinking for a month-long schedule with KCVS coming in. I am thinking we can get that in a 6-month window or even year. But it will all depend on how fast and how long it takes for everyone to get their clearances for our staff here at KCVS. One good thing is Sara, our therapist that works out of Arbor Circle already has her security clearance with this Jail and that is something that we can start right away. But I am still working my way though all of this.

## 6) Old Business

- a. Mary- I wanted to check in with Reggie to see how AA is going and I heard that Heroes Corner has moved?
  - i. Reggie- Yes, we have our own spot now. I know a lot of people have visited and they said that it is very warm and homey. I have talked with KCVS Reggie and we are going to be setting up a date to get together to talk about the AA. I would like to do a 4pm time slot for the AA, so that we can get in done before supper time.
- b. KCVS Manager Martha- I had told Reggie that when we hire a Veteran support coordinator, we will maybe be going back to our FLEX schedule that we were doing before. We had some evening hours available and then would be able to facilitate that. Because we would really like to do this. I haven't approached my staff yet because everyone's overwhelmed right now. Let me get through this summer and I need to get someone hired. Something that I wanted to ask of the committee, back in the day they gave you materials for AA. Now they don't. I would like to get a few copies of this material for our veterans. We need to get this started and then go to churches and such to see about getting the materials from them. It is hard to participate in the program if they don't have the materials. Let's try to get this on the calendar and get this started. Potentially, we would love to have Crystal here with Acudetox right before the meetings that they can do that before the meetings. Or even doing that before and after the meetings. Because it is hard to get people to try it, but it makes such good results for people.
  - i. Mel- What really got my attention about it is when Mike and I went up to the retreat at the lake. Some veterans came up to me and asked about the AA chapter here. They said they would much rather come to a veteran only chapter, not with civilians who don't know what they've been through.
  - ii. KCVS Manager Martha- I know that in my past lives I've worked with several healthcare professionals and worked with legal professionals and active duty members and they all feel that same way. Professional culture is relevant. The hope is that they will go and assimilate in their own peer groups and once they're

more comfortable and feel less ashamed, they will feel stronger and might venture out more.

iii. Reggie- I think that someone who doesn't know the veteran language, will expect us to be just like everyone else. But this is a problem with AA in general.

c. Mel- Mary and I have seen this office go from a place that was almost nonfunctional operation downtown that was very hard to get to for veterans to where we are at now is just unbelievable.

i. Mary- Yes, it is.

ii. Mel- We didn't just jump ahead; we were just gone.

iii. Mary- Its been an incredible journey.

#### 7) New Business

a. Mel- Then only limitation we have on the veteran's parade is that we don't have any. If we want to do a vehicle we can, we want to do a float we can.

i. KCVS Manager Martha- Can we get a band? This might be a way for kids to volunteer for this. We should ask some of the ROTC also. I think that the more community involvement that there is, the better. Maybe we can do a meeting with Eric and you guys can start hammering it all out.

#### 8) New Activities

a. Mary- I think that Ashley Furniture is having their veteran's appreciation breakfast on August 27. I think that it is in 8 or 9 in the morning.

i. Mel- Gates open at 8 am over there

#### 9) Public comment

a. None.

#### 10) Adjournment

Transcribed by: Amanda Lake