

## **The “Ad–VAN–tages” of Mobile Outreach to Veteran Populations**

East Carolina University’s Operation Reentry North Carolina: Veteran Resiliency and Reintegration Through Technology (ORNC: R&R) program has made it possible to bring needed medical and behavioral health services to veterans (many of them homeless) and their families living in Craven, Cumberland, Onslow, Wayne, and other surrounding counties (approximately a dozen total). Using a specially outfitted van (named Rover) equipped with state-of-the-art technology such as satellite communication, Web- and mobile-based applications, shortwave radio, GPS tracking, and Polycom teleconferencing capacity, ORNC: R&R can meet clients where they are, literally and figuratively. “The van has been a wonderful tool that offers a great deal to participants. The team can drive the van to a rural spot and access health records, complete assessments, and conduct a video-enabled counseling session without having to set foot in a traditional clinic,” said Jeff Thomas, an ORNC: R&R team member.

The program will soon offer the Addiction Comprehensive Health Enhancement Support System (ACHESS) mobile application developed by the University of Wisconsin. “ACHESS has tremendous potential to make a difference in a person’s recovery—whether it be a reminder recognizing a sobriety benchmark or a way to help prevent relapse using a panic button feature to connect with an on-call clinician,” said Jeff.

Interest in and comfort with using technology varies among veteran groups; however, as veterans have seen the van regularly outside trusted agencies and become more familiar with the team, their willingness to embrace technology has grown. “Once clients figure out what’s possible with technology and understand how it can improve their circumstances, they get pretty excited about it,” said Roberta Bellamy (ORNC: R&R). “Having a van that allows us to bring the technology to the veterans is a step in the right direction.” Onsite biofeedback demonstrations have also been an effective way to introduce technology in a nonthreatening way, especially for those suffering from posttraumatic stress disorders or traumatic brain injuries.

ORNC: R&R also uses low-tech strategies such as text messaging, email, and phone calls to engage clients who would like to know what the program offers and how it can help. Staff also share weekly messages about employment and other community-based opportunities. “One veteran was in need of vocational counseling assistance,” said Vanessa Perry (ORNC: R&R). “He just needed a couple of basic resources, so we hopped online, pulled up the content, and printed it for him.” Continued Dr. Lisa Tyndall (ORNC: R&R), “Something as simple as finding a document on the Web could be a gigantic hurdle. There can be a lot of obstacles to finding and obtaining information. We’re trying to remove those obstacles.”

ORNC: R&R’s success is a reflection of the partnerships it has developed with community service providers such as [Operation Inasmuch](#) and [Family Endeavors](#). “We’ve figured out the different roles we can play with our partners,” said Dominique Clemmons-James (ORNC: R&R). “As a result, we’ve created a network of help. Our role is to stabilize the client’s behavioral health while other organizations focus on improving other life circumstances.” After several

months of substance abuse counseling with the ORNC: R&R team, one veteran is ready to take the next step in his recovery journey. "Six months ago, this client was smoking crack on the streets, and now he is connected with Family Endeavors to complete the application process to find a home," said Jeff. "It's heartwarming to see the progress he's made," added Dominique.

Lessons have been learned: "Working with technology requires a fair amount of flexibility and creativity and also a bit of courage," said Vanessa. "It has been so cool to be a part of an innovative project, to learn about technology, and to have a paradigm shift even in our own heads about the way we provide services. It's amazing to be able to think outside the box and consider the bigger picture of what service delivery could look like in the future."

Are you interested in learning more about ORNC: R&R's work with veterans? Check out the presentation during the biweekly TAC grantee conference call October 23, 2014, at 1 p.m. ET.