



JAILS

# Barracks Behind Bars

## IN VETERAN-SPECIFIC HOUSING UNITS, VETERANS HELP VETERANS HELP THEMSELVES



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Special thanks to Nicholas Stefanovic for his contributions to the project.

The National Institute of Corrections, in partnership with the Justice-Involved Veterans Network (JIVN),  
has supported this white paper that highlights veteran-specific housing units in jails.

May 2018 | Project Number 16P1031 and 16J1080

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## Epigraph

*With the return of millions . . . of veterans, every community in the United States is confronted with the problem of helping the serviceman readapt himself to the demands of restrained civilian life. In many instances, prolonged separation from home, family, and local community influences has created a strange new kind of personality in the youthful lad who went away to war ... Not a few of these young veterans are ... proving to be victims of maladjustment.*

*– Albert E. Virgil, Superintendent, and Harry L. Hawkins, Psychologist, Indiana State Farm, Greencastle, in the May-June 1946 issue of The Prison World, the official publication of the American Prison Association and the National Jail Association*





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*Barracks Behind Bars introduces several of the facilities and the men and women whose vision is paying off with fewer behavioral problems and almost no incidents of violence by incarcerated veterans.*



## Abstract

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The purpose of Veterans Treatment Courts is to offer vets with a substance use problem and/or diagnosis of a mental health issue an opportunity to avail themselves of treatment-oriented justice. Based on anecdotal evidence and an increasing accretion of data from the field—in many of the projects funded by the National Institute of Corrections and the Bureau of Justice Assistance—these courts appear to be achieving their goal. They are helping worthy individuals find a degree of redemption while paying their debt to society. They are restoring family relationships, strengthening communities, cutting rates of recidivism and, hence, making communities safer.

But what of those veterans who are incarcerated, serving a sentence, or awaiting trial or other resolution of the charges against them?

This paper is the second in the National Institute of Corrections justice-involved veteran compendium project. It illuminates programs in jails across the country and how justice involved veterans have been helped by them. It illustrates the design, development, implementation, and sustainment of initiatives taken by enlightened, pragmatic corrections officials who have set up veteran-specific housing—in pods, dorms, units, wings, or floors—and programming for military veterans.

*Barracks Behind Bars* introduces several of the facilities and the men and women whose vision is paying off with reportedly fewer behavioral problems and incidents of violence by incarcerated veterans. This may contribute to a less stressful, safer environment for correctional personnel and facilitates opportunities for assistance from the Veterans Justice Outreach specialists of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, personnel from state and county departments, and volunteers from community and veterans organizations. This white paper shares the views of jail administrators, judges, and formerly incarcerated veterans—each of whom have stories to tell—in their own words.

*Barracks Behind Bars: In Veteran-Specific Housing Units, Veterans Help Veterans Help Themselves is a series of vignettes, stories, and experiences of pragmatic corrections professionals who have taken the initiative to design/develop, implement, and create sustainable veteran-specific programming in jails.*



# Foreword

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## Since 9/11, nearly three million Americans have served their country in uniform.

Many have been deployed multiple times to combat zones overseas. To say our service members have been taxed over the last 17-plus years would be an understatement. Many veterans are coming home and struggling with not only the physical wounds of war, but also the “invisible” wounds: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, nearly 1,190,000 veterans obtained health services from that department between October 1, 2001 and March 31, 2015, with almost 379,000 of them diagnosed with PTSD. They are also experiencing high rates of anxiety and depression.

These veterans are not typically criminals prior to their military service, as the military screens individuals before they enter into service. However, as a result of their experience in the military — especially those who saw combat up close and personal — some of them have difficulty readjusting to civilian life when they return home. Too many of these veterans self-medicate with alcohol or other substances to deal with their wartime experiences; some of these men and women become involved in the criminal justice system.

As a center of learning, innovation and leadership that shapes and advances correctional practice and public policy, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) devotes a portion of its focus to the critical needs of justice-involved veterans and the corrections professionals that work with them. In 2015-2016, the NIC produced a live national broadcast and white paper publication both titled *Veterans Treatment Courts: A Second Chance for Vets Who Have Lost Their Way*. These productions were designed to serve as a how-to guide for jurisdictions looking to implement a veterans treatment court and/or improve upon an existing program. It provided a peer-to-peer account of the experiences, challenges, and lessons learned of implementing programmatic efforts to improve outcomes for these justice-involved veterans.

Since then, NIC has expanded its focus and began developing resources for all stages of the criminal justice continuum. NIC is committed to the safety of law enforcement officers, correctional officers, community supervision officers, and the public, while at the same time providing supportive environments that contribute to helping the justice-involved veteran population become law-abiding citizens upon release.

*Barracks Behind Bars: In Veteran-Specific Housing Units, Veterans Help Veterans Help Themselves* is a series of vignettes, stories, and experiences of pragmatic corrections professionals who have taken the initiative to design/develop, implement, and create sustainable veteran-specific programming in jails. It will also introduce the first national sequential intercept model adapted to the justice-involved veterans population with accompanying resources for each intercept point.

We are confident this publication will help you and your agency learn about veterans housing units in jails, as well as what you might consider in developing such a unit in your facility. I wish you success in all that you do in working with the justice-involved veterans in your jails, helping them to be productive citizens upon release.

Shaina Vanek

*Acting Director*  
**National Institute of Corrections**

*Many veterans are coming home and struggling with not only the physical wounds of war, but also the “invisible” wounds: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).*



*Barracks Behind Bars illuminates the increasing number of veteran-specific housing unit programs in jails across the country that are working to prevent recidivism and improve the safety of the public as well as sheriffs' deputies, state corrections officers, and inmates by reigniting a sense of military culture and values.*



# Introduction

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On any given day, 7 percent of the estimated 2.3 million people incarcerated in our nation's jails and prisons are men and women who have served in our Armed Forces. The majority of these individuals (an estimated 77 percent) completed their service to our country with honorable discharges, yet their pathways from the military into the justice system typically began with a difficult transition back into civilian life.

As noted by author Bernard Edelman, "...a significant percentage of our combat troops are returning home profoundly affected by both visible and invisible battle scars, including high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and serious physical wounds. Those struggling to cope often find themselves in a vicious cycle of substance abuse (in many cases linked to the very opioids prescribed to them to overcome pain from injuries sustained while deployed) and mental ills that render them unemployed, homeless, and ultimately, incarcerated for a variety of crimes."

***"By housing veterans together in an environment that inspires military culture, values, and a sense of brotherhood or sisterhood, these units are not only promoting safety improvements, but also restoration, healing, and growth in a way that may not have been possible via general population housing."***

This paper is the second publication in the National Institute of Corrections justice-involved veterans compendium project. It focuses on how the criminal justice system is responding through innovative programs designed to empower veterans to help other veterans. It introduces the nation's first Sequential Intercept Model that maps the flow of veterans through each phase of the criminal justice system to reveal the challenges and opportunities for the effective use of resources from the Veterans Health Administration and community organizations for intervention options for these men and women.

In alignment with the intercept model, the first report in this series, *Veterans Treatment Courts: A Second Chance for Vets Who Have Lost Their Way*, focused on how Veterans Treatment Courts divert veterans from deeper justice involvement at one of the earliest phases of the intercept model. Barracks Behind Bars examines what is being done to restore the lives and dignity of justice-involved veterans and to promote safety among veterans who are incarcerated.

Barracks Behind Bars illuminates the increasing number of veteran-specific housing unit programs in jails across the country that are working to prevent recidivism and improve the safety of the public as well as sheriffs' deputies, state corrections officers, and inmates by reigniting a sense of military culture and values. It illustrates the design, development, implementation, and sustainment of initiatives taken by enlightened, pragmatic corrections officials—many of whom are veterans themselves.

This report examines programs in veteran-specific housing units at five county jails.

As the report introduces the evolution of these programs, the author suggests that "...by housing veterans together in an environment that inspires military culture, values, and a sense of brotherhood or sisterhood, these units are not only promoting safety improvements, but also restoration, healing, and growth in a way that may not have been possible via general population housing. At the same time, it reveals the challenges most departments of corrections have had in addressing the unique issues associated with the skyrocketing rates of women in the military and in corrections, even though they remain a much smaller population proportionally to men in both fields."

This report demonstrates how veteran-specific housing unit programs may be a tool that facilitates opportunities for assistance from the Veterans Justice Outreach specialists of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, personnel from state and county departments, and volunteers from community and veterans organizations. Combined, these services are tools that may support successful reentry back into society for justice-involved veterans.

*By housing veterans together in an environment that inspires military culture, values, and a sense of brotherhood or sisterhood, these units are not only promoting safety improvements, but also restoration, healing, and growth in a way that may not have been possible via general population housing.*





# So, You're (Thinking of) Starting A Housing Unit for Veterans...

...OR YOU'RE IN the process of setting up a housing unit for veterans in your jail. You have questions you have had to ponder or at least tentatively answer.

And you have identified several very real issues and concerns:

- What is the first thing I/we ought to do?
- What are the core components needed for a housing unit for veterans?
- Can we identify a champion who will work diligently to create a program for veterans?
- Do we have the data to support such programming?
- Are we asking the right questions about military service to those being processed into our facility?
- Are we tracking data on veterans?
- What type of programming could we offer to veterans?
- Do we have a Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist from the VA that can help us build our program and resources?
- Does our jurisdiction have a Veterans Treatment Court? If not, how do we start one and or collaborate so our system is working together?
- What other parts of our criminal justice system could we partner with to improve outcomes for justice-involved veterans?
- Are staff trauma informed?
- Will the community be accepting and supportive?
- Will the legal establishment be accommodating?
- What is the right level of treatment for these veterans?
- How do we select veterans for the housing unit? Do we exclude anyone? What criteria should be established for the housing unit?
- How do we achieve buy-in from the jail administrator or sheriff or key stakeholders?
- Who are the key players?
- How will the program be funded? Will there need to be an outlay of dollars?
- How do we create a sustainable program? What if our champion retires or moves on?
- Does our county or region have the demographics to support such a programmatic effort for veterans? Do we have enough veterans passing through our justice system?
- How do we gauge success?
- What is our plan for implementation?
- What are the anticipated roadblocks and obstacles to success?

You should discern answers to your questions and concerns in the pages that follow. We structured this paper in three sections: Design/Develop, Implement, and Sustain, along with resources for you to use as you create your program.

*It didn't click for me until then about how honorable and selfless service could actually translate into offending. When you serve loyally and something happens that shatters your world, and you don't get the help you need, you can easily spiral into a criminal situation.*

*– Evan Seamone*



## In Their Own Words

### Evan Seamone: When the War Comes Home, Answering Cries for Help

After a dozen years as a Judge Advocate General, Major Evan R. Seamone, LL.M., J.D., M.P.P. left active duty and is currently a senior defense counsel in the Army Reserve. Formerly a professor at the Mississippi College School of Law, he is now advising and representing veterans at the Harvard Veterans Legal Clinic in Jamaica Plain, Boston. He was interviewed by Bernard Edelman; these are his words.

MY INTEREST IN incarcerated veterans is an outgrowth of my interest in mental health issues facing criminally involved military members and veterans. My interest kind of matured when I was deployed in Iraq. I was going into villages and paying claims to tribal leaders as a foreign claims commissioner. But the toughest negotiation I had was to convince a sergeant to give me his weapon and let me take him to get help. This sergeant, a client, had some horrible family issues and was talking about ending it all. That was a wake-up call about the magnitude of the pressures on our service members.

It didn't click for me until then about how honorable and selfless service could actually translate into offending. When you serve loyally and something happens that shatters your world, and you don't get the help you need, you can easily spiral into a criminal situation. So we need to find out, especially as defense attorneys [for] these warriors, how [to] address their situations and ensure that they're all right. The key is what I call "enhanced client counseling posture." You have to essentially defend that client against himself before you even begin to think about defending him in the legal system. You have to be able to help that individual not self-destruct.



Major Evan Seamone, LL.M., J.D., M.P.P.

***“When you serve loyally and something happens that shatters your world, and you don’t get the help you need, you can easily spiral into a criminal situation.”***

There was little guidance in the military, so I started exploring. The Army’s Combat Stress Control Field Manual has this section on “misconduct stress behavior.” There’s this image of a two-edged sword and copy that says you are exposed to combat scenarios that create the kind of stress that can be good because if you’re hyper-alert and you’re looking for potential threats, you’re more likely to find the enemy and kill the enemy. And you might need to be on guard all the time.

But at the same time, there’s a downside. The other edge of the sword is misconduct stress behavior, that same stress that’s great on the battlefield but will end up in misconduct, like rape, looting, pillaging, and going AWOL [absent without official leave], if not channeled correctly. However, I found that Veterans Treatment Courts and Veterans Justice Outreach specialists in the civilian world were far ahead of the military in understanding how to deal with veterans in the criminal justice system. The legal system gave me an appreciation for addressing the underlying issues [of criminal behavior] instead of the criminal symptoms.



*Major Evan Seamone, deployed to Iraq*

In the military, you have the “hyper-criminalization of mental illness.” These military-specific offenses disproportionately target symptoms of mental health conditions from service-related issues. If someone has PTSD, they become irritable, they can’t organize information, they have a short fuse, they get frustrated, they may just lose it. And that [evolves into] a felony-level offense on paper. Individuals who aren’t fortunate enough to get the help they need get drummed out with other than honorable discharges. This is a testament to the fact that the system failed them.

Preserving good order and discipline in the military is an important consideration, but it’s not the only consideration, especially when we look at common sense, when we look at story after story where maybe it’s [a soldier’s] third or fourth deployment but something changes and he comes back a different person. Another one is the effect of overtraining. They do it again and again and again until it’s instinctual, but there’s no off button. Or someone shifts the medication or the dosage of medications. [There are] different pathways to criminal offending, but we get stuck on that life-threat scenario, or we think too much about diagnosing PTSD and we forget about the other ways people come in conflict with the law based on their military service. Let’s start collecting more data so we can do a better job responding to their needs.

## Enlightened Philosophy

It was the position of Colonel [Charles] Forbes, head of the Veterans Bureau [the precursor to the Veterans Administration, now the Department of Veterans Affairs], that we find these veterans and help them, especially when they have mental health conditions related to their service. I wish more people were aware of this and actually understood what was in the DNA of the system from its inception.

In the aftermath of Vietnam, you have veterans who are ticking time bombs who don’t know how to control their rage. They are the stereotype in the popular press of the violent veteran or the wacko vet myth. They’ve gone out to battle, they come back, and they become violent when confronted with the normal stresses of a civilian life that are now [alien] to them. But that’s a stereotype of the violent veteran. Even if you have PTSD, that doesn’t mean you’re going to be violent.

Yet the media will seize on the stereotype; it’s myth without context. But now there’s

*“I think there’s now a recognition across the country that standard punishment, standard deterrence—all of the values we look at in dealing with offenders—need to be modified substantially to deal with veterans...”*

pushback. I think there's now a recognition across the country that the values we look at in dealing with offenders need to be modified to deal with veterans if you are going to truly address some of the issues that bring them into the criminal justice system. And it's not only with Veterans Treatment Courts. It's really at least two different components.

The first is [how veterans enter into the system]. The goal is to get them put under a very intensive program through a Veterans Treatment Court, which includes regularly recurring appearances before the judge, who's like the commanding officer, and being accountable not only to the judge but to their mentor.

But what if you are not fortunate enough to [go to a Veteran's Treatment Court]? There are still courts that won't take violent offenders. There are still courts that won't take felonies. So, you need to do something for those veterans who are incarcerated. Arguably, individuals who can't be diverted are the ones who need even more help.

Being incarcerated brings out many of the same instinctual responses as being in combat: not thinking for the future, only for the present; making some stupid decisions; or just reacting. Look at the individuals with mental illness who are incarcerated. They're the ones getting into disciplinary infractions and having to spend years beyond their initial sentence. It's the same with our veteran population.

Prisons and jails are starting to recognize that bringing together veterans in a confined setting—separating them from the rest of a population that does not have their same values—and instead reviving the values they had when they felt proud, like they were doing the most important things in their lives, benefits discipline and order.

***“Prisons and jails are starting to recognize that bringing together veterans in a confined setting benefits discipline and order.”***

COs want to serve on those units because there's less stress than they normally have to deal with. It's this recognition that the veterans experience and the veteran culture have positive qualities that can actually improve the experience of confinement if you take the time to bring them together and take them out of gen-pop [general population].

And it ends up benefiting the institution itself. You can coordinate visits better from community organizations, and resources and outreach from the VA. It's so much easier when you have individuals who have the same types of needs in the same place at the same time. So it becomes economical, it becomes resource-conserving, and it promotes safety in the institutions.

## Give Me Liberty

I think back to a sheriff who's now the Maine State Prison warden, Sergeant Major Randall Liberty. He called [veteran-specific housing] "purpose-driven incarceration." For a comprehensive approach to veterans in the criminal justice system, you have problem-solving courts on the one hand and solutions-based confinement on the other. [Veteran-centric specialized housing] is the second prong. They go hand in hand.

*"A lot of sheriffs who run these programs are veterans themselves, and they are changing their system [by enabling their charges] to see beyond the misery of each day in confinement."*

Warden Liberty was a command sergeant major. He deployed to Iraq; he has PTSD when he comes home and puts back on his sheriff's uniform. He sees veterans in increasing numbers in his jail. And, because he has PTSD, he realizes certain things that set him off now. So one of the first things he does is disable the automatic door locks because they sounded like a rapid-fire machine gun.

Another thing he realized is that these young veterans have a hard time concentrating. So, he gets one of his sheriffs who's also a veteran to start teaching fly-fishing techniques—how to tie fishing line—to the inmates or detainees. That helps them focus and slow down. So, the point is he recognized the necessity to change the system to address those things that might trigger veterans who are confined, because they were triggering him. To me, that's profound; unless you've been in [a combat zone], you can't even start to appreciate it.

That's why I like to think of the Sequential Intercept Model developed by Muniz and Griffin in 2006. They're looking at intercept points along the spectrum of criminal justice involvement for persons with mental health conditions. One is pretrial. Then there's incarceration, and after that, reentry. These are all points where the system can bring its resources to bear and create an opportunity to realize results with treatment. A lot of sheriffs who run these programs are veterans themselves, and they are changing their system [by enabling their charges] to see beyond the misery of each day in confinement.

But my concern is the same when we think of all Veterans Treatment Courts being the same: The dorms aren't the same either. There are different models. If you think about the goals you want to accomplish by having a specific housing unit for veterans, you also have to think about the purpose. Is it to recognize honorable service? Is it to prepare

these inmates to be more effective in following up with commitments when they get out? Is it to help stabilize people who might have acute mental health conditions that get triggered by incarceration? Or is it just to say we want to recognize your service and say thank you? Depending on the purpose, a program should have different attributes.

We have individuals who are at extreme risk. The risk of suicide is higher for inmates. There's an overlapping circle with all these other risks from combat. So let's really identify this population, and not just who has prior military service. Let's see who actually deployed to a combat zone. Let's see who might have faced a morally injurious experience where they felt like they had to do something against their deeply held beliefs. We've got to ask, "How many times did you deploy?" We've got to ask the tougher questions. There are scales. There's the war experiences inventory. That's just one example of these tests that were designed by the VA that are available, on the VA's website for free. And they can tell you a lot. So we can triage and say, okay, for this veteran who's deployed three times there's going to be a lot of issues as opposed to that veteran who's never deployed.

## Psychological First Aid

Creating a supportive environment with inmates who are motivated to address [their] underlying problems improves the quality of programming, consolidates resources, and [may] reduce recidivism. People can encourage each other to push through [psychologically difficult situations]. In Florida's program, it's almost like they want to re-create boot camp to help people realize that they can push through and achieve even what's difficult. But you don't need boot camp for that, right? You just have to have someone watching your back again.

*"The renewal of the community and the self-worth of an individual being part of that community are the behaviors that we want to foster when they finally get released."*

The idea is that in these dorms you have people relying on one another. You give them jobs and functions like "public affairs officer," who will read the newspaper to the group in the morning, or "sergeant-at-arms," who will take people's concerns and make sure they're raised. In one program, there was a fear of doing meditation and relaxation because the veterans thought that if they let their guard down, they might be attacked. So one would watch out for the other while they were doing the mindfulness stuff. The sense is we're going to help each other survive; we're going to help each other succeed.

*“The ultimate thing we want is to ensure that the needs of the individual justice-involved veteran can be met. We want to connect these veterans with the resources that may [help] them from ever having to be in jail again.”*

you can create a cadre of individuals who can look out for new people coming in, who can play a leadership role. You want that sense of hierarchy, that there are people looking out for you, that you’re able to address issues without involving COs.

You also want to have a couple of COs who are veterans on every shift because it eliminates this thing of “You don’t know where I’ve been, you couldn’t possibly understand how this is affecting me.” It creates more of this idea of “okay, you get it, you know what I’ve been through.”

We know what the statistics say, that the most vulnerable time is right after they get released. Those who are most in need are at high risk for homelessness. If they have a relationship with someone who came to visit them while they were incarcerated and was there to meet them when they got out, that can be life-saving. I call this long-range reconnaissance, because the mentors—their “battle buddies”—can walk with them outside the court. And that makes all the difference.

## Symbiotic Relationship

In the communities that have both the dorms and Veterans Treatment Courts, the more these two organizations talk to one another, the more they are adopting an informed process on how to deal with veterans. The guesswork disappears and you can ensure that [the veterans] don’t fall through the cracks, which is what we’re so used to with this population. Because the ultimate thing we want is to ensure that the needs of the individual justice-involved veteran can be met. We want to

It’s that sense of community you would never find in a confined setting, unless maybe in a gang. The renewal of the community and the self-worth of an individual being part of that community are the behaviors that we want to foster when they finally get released. The more they feel supported and the more they can have some kind of structure after they get out, the less likely they’re going to be relapsing into the same behaviors when they didn’t have anyone to rely on.

The point that I try to convey is psychological first aid. This means that you have the basic instruction on how to help someone stabilize in a stress reaction. In the prisons especially, even for veterans who are lifers,



*Seamone is an advocate for veterans' mental health.*

connect these veterans with the resources that may [help] them from ever having to be in jail again.

So, it's symbiotic in the sense that, whether it's through diversion in the first place or through the specialized approach while they're incarcerated, they're getting something out of the experience that puts them in the right direction. And that's the goal.

Sure, there are different arguments against veteran-specific units, or pods. One may be that if you take individuals who've never deployed to combat and put them with individuals who have, they're going to have different needs. And so, the individuals who've been in combat are going to look down upon the others and you're not going to have cohesiveness. Another might be that you have people who are fakers [or those that are dishonest about military service]. But veterans are the best at detecting fakers in their midst.

And some people will say you'll be creating an incentive for more [criminals] to lie and try to get in there for these extra benefits. It's this argument that giving inmates privileges is never a good idea, especially when it comes to order and discipline within the institution. But it's not like you're giving them the benefits. You're making best use of what they've already earned under the law, and you're bringing them to a pod [where people] can help them with their specific needs. We do have special populations. This isn't the first and only.

These kinds of arguments are very cursory. No two veterans have identical experiences. It's all about time and place and what they went through and the leadership they had. But it's a shared culture, right? And that's the key, the values that are part of that culture and the pride at stepping forward and serving. That's what I think overcomes all of these arguments.

## A Long and Winding Road

There are over 3,000 counties and county equivalents in the United States. When we think about the number of Veterans Treatment Courts and veteran-specific housing units, we start to realize this may be a trend, but it's not as widespread as we might think. Is it that they happen to be located in communities where there are a lot of veterans or active duty personnel and military installations? So, there still may be value in asking what the circumstances were under which these courts and these programs arose, because it's not happening everywhere.

*“The military builds up the individual as strong and capable of surviving out in the wilderness, but when they realize they need help, let’s be sure we don’t miss that message.”*

We've got a lot of individuals who've been through multiple deployments, and when they come back they're going to have issues. And the question is [whether] our justice system [is] adequately prepared. Do we need more Veterans Treatment Courts? How many veterans are out there who have potential issues that might cause them to be criminally involved? Let's ask the right questions.

And let's train police. All along the whole intercept model of criminal justice involvement, there are points at which you can intervene. And so we're seeing things like in Georgia, they're allowing people to indicate that they have PTSD on their driver's licenses. Why? To better inform officers. When they pull a veteran over, they can know they're dealing with someone who may have issues with authority.

This is not the first rodeo. Every time there's a war, we've had these kinds of issues. Let's realize that when we don't have effective treatment of the underlying problem, we're putting spouses at risk and children at risk. The difference between Vietnam and now is the much greater number of service members with families. And to deny treatment to the veteran is to give their children a life sentence, too.

The war does come home. And it's really important to recognize the opportunity, the responsibility to deal with that. The military builds up the individual as strong and capable of surviving out in the wilderness, but when they realize they need help, let's be sure we don't miss that message. [Criminal behavior] is really a cry for help. This is what happens to veterans when they realize they can't do it on their own. Let's be sure that we're able to respond to that cry for help. Our institutions of criminal justice, our jails and prisons, and the courts are all a form of crisis response.

## Points of Interception

The Sequential Intercept Model was developed by Mark Munetz, MD, and Patricia A. Griffin, Ph.D., in conjunction with the GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation, a division of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The model provides a conceptual framework for communities to organize targeted strategies for justice-involved individuals with behavioral health disorders. The six columns in the framework represent aspects of the criminal justice system, and within each of these, there are numerous intercept points or opportunities

for communities to link people to the services they need and prevent their further penetration into the criminal justice system (SIM Brochure, 2015).

*[The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) worked collaboratively with SAMHSA, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and members of the Justice-Involved Veterans Network to adapt the model for the justice-involved veterans population. In the revised model, each intercept represents a decision point, an opportunity to divert and intervene at the lowest level possible and minimize the collateral consequences for a veteran getting more deeply involved in the justice system.]*

The opportunities for coordinating stakeholders around a shared intercept model for justice-involved veterans are significant due to the comprehensive benefits, healthcare, housing, and other support services that veterans have earned as a result of their service to our nation. Establishing a continuum of communication, coordination and engagement among justice agencies, the VA, and various community services providers in a more targeted manner [has been seen to] result in faster, more cost efficient delivery of services to justice-involved veterans, [while supporting] public safety. The sooner and more effectively we can identify and “intercept” a veteran who is struggling with his or her transition back to the community, the easier it will be to [direct them] toward a network of support that fosters the restoration, healing, and healthy outcomes.

*The sooner and more effectively we can identify and “intercept” a veteran who is struggling with his or her transition back to the community, the easier it will be to divert them away from the justice system and toward a network of support that fosters the restoration, healing, and healthy outcomes they deserve.*

*– Evan Seamone*



# Veteran Intercepts in the Criminal Justice System

COMMUNITY

Crisis Lines

Crisis Care  
Continuum

Community Services

INTERCEPT  
0

Initial  
Detention

First Court  
Appearance

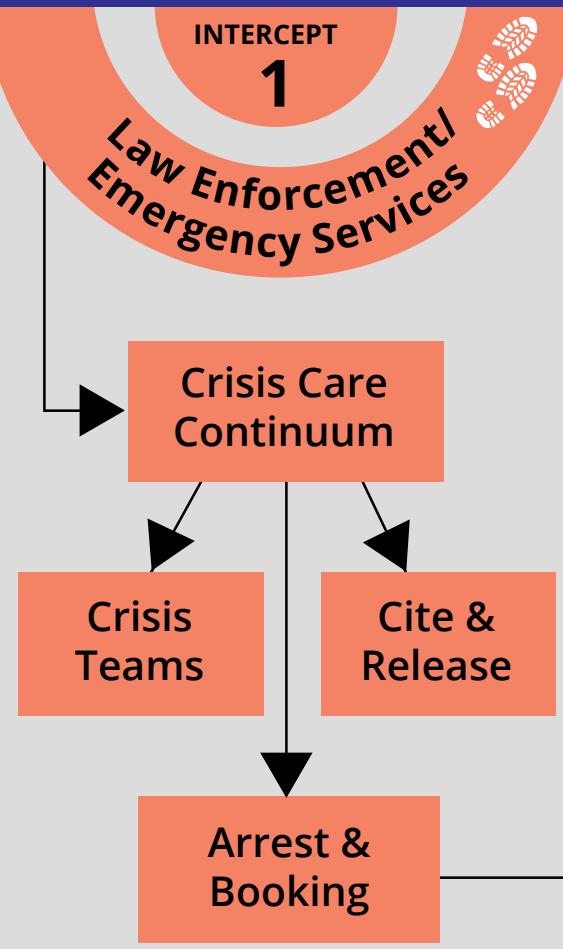
Initial Detention  
& Court Hearings

INTERCEPT  
2

## Opportunities for Diversion and Intervention

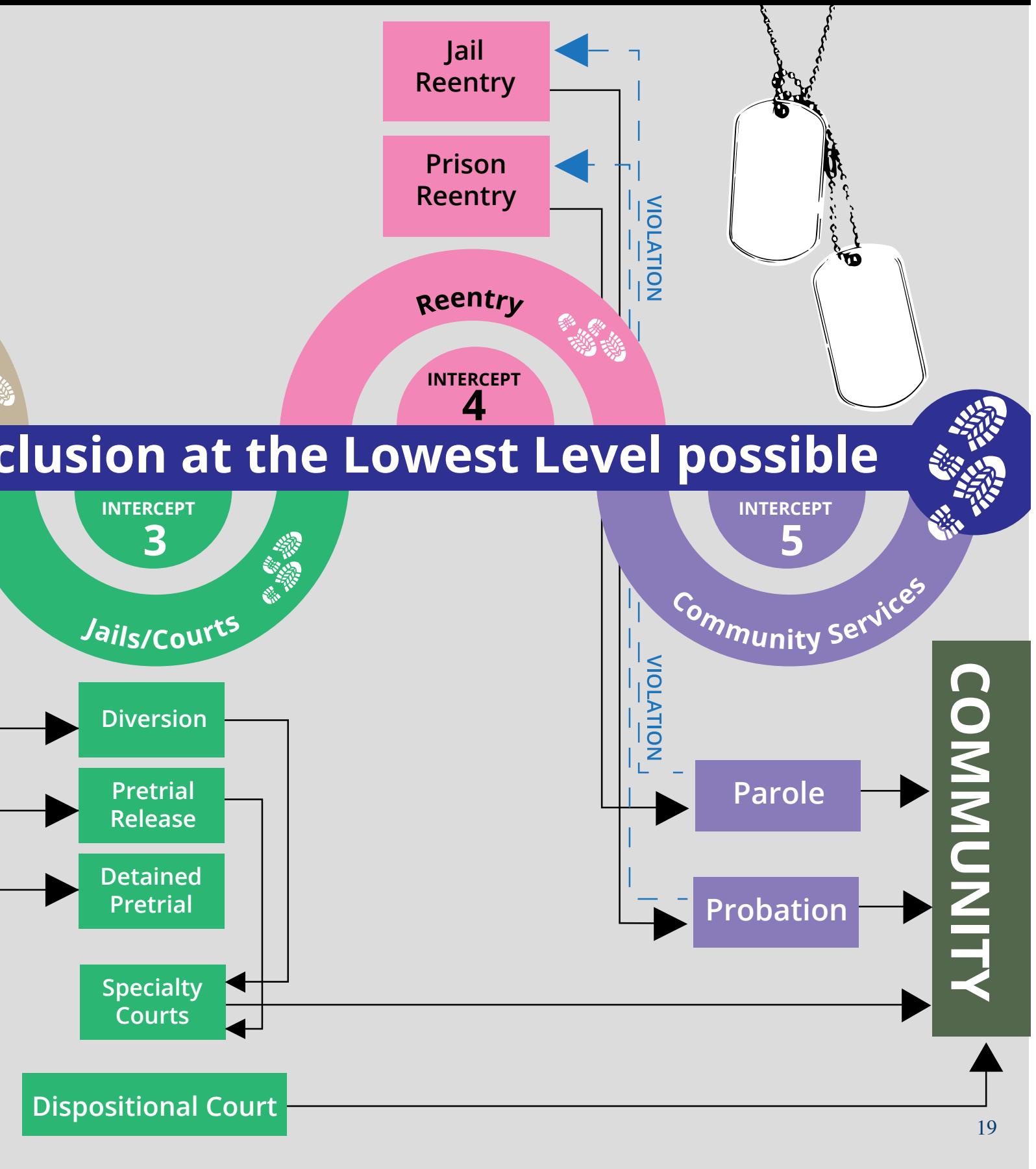
The National Institute of Corrections worked collaboratively with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the US Department of Veterans Affairs to adapt the sequential intercept model for the justice-involved veterans population.

Each decision point in the criminal justice system represents an opportunity to divert and intervene at the lowest level possible and to minimize the collateral consequences for a veteran getting more deeply involved in the justice system.



# The Criminal Justice System

## Sample Decision Points



## Phase I: Design & Develop

As with Veterans Treatment Courts, veterans units, pods, floors, wings, and dorms require a champion—a correctional officer, municipal government council member, judge, or sheriff. Some units begin with a concept, a can-do attitude, ad hoc organization, and cooperation from inmates and staff; other units develop after a lengthier process involving a plethora of stakeholder meetings. Regardless of the means, they require little if any significant outlay of funds. After all, the veterans you seek to help are already incarcerated. What is important, is that the leadership of the institution or facility understands and tracks the data that indicates a necessity for setting aside space to accommodate veteran inmates.

This section features first-hand accounts of how jail systems across the country designed and developed their specialized programming for veterans. Common among these stories is first the need to have a champion, someone who is dedicated to and passionate about developing criminal justice solutions for veterans.

Next, veterans programs require both administrative and community support. Resources need to be collected and secured to ensure the ongoing success of a program. Advocates need to be found in every corner. These advocates provide the financial and political support a program needs to weather its difficult times.

Successful programs also come with a well-researched plan. Nowhere will you find an example of a system that developed a program based on a flimsy idea. Data gathering in the form of pilot programs, site visits, and data-driven practice are common. Information gathered from these activities are used not only to form the basis of veterans programs, but also their iterations and subsequent forms. The most promising programs undergo an evolution, always reshaping and improving practice based on evidence to continually improve offender outcomes.



## San Francisco Sheriff's Department's COVER Pod

“**V**eterans represent a rapidly growing segment of the jail population,” write Levitas, Principal Administrative Analyst for the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department, and Schwartz, a 30-year veteran of the department, in an essay, “Restorative Justice for Veterans”

To address the emerging issue – and stark realities – of justice-involved veterans in San Francisco, the Sheriff’s Department in 2010 initiated the COVER – Community of Veterans Engaged in Restoration – pod. The COVER program came about out of “a fortunate situation that we had for many years here,” says Veterans Treatment Court Judge Jeffrey Ross, “which was a very progressive sheriff who understood the role of treatment programs and who developed innovative and successful programs for a broad range of people in the criminal justice system.”



*Jeffrey S. Ross, Judge of the Superior Court, County of San Francisco*

“In San Francisco,” Schwartz and Levitas write, “more than 70 percent of homeless and at-risk veterans have substance abuse issues; close to 60 percent suffer from mental health disorders like PTSD; about half are dual diagnosed; a large number face chronic health problems such as hepatitis C, HIV, diabetes, and hypertension.” And many of these veterans have other than honorable discharges, rendering them ineligible for many of the services and benefits provided by the VA.

*The very conditioning that enables [military personnel] to serve and protect our country often results in difficulty re-socializing upon return from deployment. Drug use, domestic violence, and mental health issues become the pathways that lead many veterans into the criminal justice system.*

According to Levitas and Schwartz, authors of “Restorative Justice for Veterans,” in the Journal of Law and Policy, COVER is based on a framework for looking at how the process of change happens. COVER’s theory of change comprises four stages:

1. Recognizing that there is a real problem
2. Gaining knowledge about the parameters of the problem
3. Showing that changes in attitudes and motivation are possible
4. Altering behavior

***“The program embraces victim impact presentations for the veterans to build empathy and recognition of the harm caused by crime and violence..”***

To translate theory into reality, they write, COVER combines individualized case management with a “structured program rooted in the classic restorative justice model of offender accountability, victim restoration, and community restoration.” The program embraces victim impact presentations for the veterans to build empathy and recognition of the harm caused by crime and violence.”

“We had learned from previous programs we had developed that the basic structure of the COVER program had to fit in around the daily jail operations, which take priority over everything,” Levitas has written. “The clinical and the content parts we borrowed from some of our other programs that, [we believe], had reduced violence [in our facility].”

Once a decision has been made to set up specialized housing and the concomitant programming to indeed make it “special,” among the first things that have to be done is to determine who in a jail or prison is in fact a veteran; to decide what types of discharge is to be, or not to be, embraced – some facilities will accept all but dishonorably discharged vets while in others, all veterans regardless of their bad paper may be accepted; and to designate what types of crimes bar those who have committed them from even being considered.

“The first thing that we did was, immediately upon arrest among the questions a person is asked is, “*Did you ever serve in the military? Not, Are you a veteran?*” says Judge Jeffrey Ross. “Some people who served in the military don’t self-identify as veterans.” And others, it should be noted, may be too embarrassed by their current circumstances to even acknowledge their veteran status.

Because a majority of veterans who have been arrested and/or are doing time have “bad paper,” a catchall term for an other-than-honorable discharge, may be accepted into a veterans unit if other factors do not preclude them.

Chief among them are the nature of the offense with which they’ve been charged. *Verboten* are infractions of a sexual nature, crimes committed against children, use of a firearm during commission of a felony, drug trafficking, human trafficking, homicide.

***[Veterans in the COVER program] get validation and affirmation and feel a sense of accomplishment.***

For those veterans who are accepted into the COVER program, they find themselves in a housing unit where “this culture of respecting people for their service” is pervasive, says Alissa Riker, Director of Programs for the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department. So for veterans who want to be in a housing unit festooned with flags

and military service banners, who follow the rules and participate in the programs, “They get validation and affirmation and feel a sense of accomplishment,” Riker says, and are equipped with knowledge about services and benefits available to them that most knew little or nothing about prior to their incarceration in the San Francisco County Jail in San Bruno.



# In Their Own Words

## Ron Perez: Coordinating Restorative Justice for Veterans in San Francisco

**H**aving spent 1967-68 as a medical specialist with an infantry unit in Vietnam, Ron Perez came home to become a long-time advocate for the humane and ethical treatment of veterans. He had retired from the San Francisco Sheriff's Department, but his interest was piqued when he learned they were developing a veterans program. So he unretired and is now the program coordinator for COVER, the department's Community of Veterans Engaged in Restoration initiative. He was interviewed by Nick Stefanovic; these are his words.

SERVING OUR VETERAN population in the jails has always been overlooked. That was something that concerned me, something that I felt hadn't been addressed when I ended my career with the Sheriff's Department where I started in 1975. So when they contacted me about developing and implementing a program for veterans, I was very glad to come on board.

It took approximately a year to get this in place. Initially it started with key personnel within the Sheriff's Department. Then it was broadened to those in the community that looked like they'd be good partners in the implementation of the program. We had all the providers that were already providing services to the jail population as well as other agencies in the community, like Swords to Plowshares, that were serving veterans or had an interest in serving veterans.

Also, a number of our staff are veterans, so they're aware of veterans' issues. They saw that COVER is a collaborative effort between the Sheriff's Department, the Veterans Administration, and the Veterans Court. So that partnership gave us a substantial amount of credibility in the eyes of law enforcement.



*Ron Perez, Program Coordinator, SF COVER Pod*

San Francisco has a Veterans Lions Club, which has adopted the COVER program. When we have special activities such as a Veterans Day program or a Memorial Day program, they contribute towards a [special] meal. They come out with guest speakers. We also have representatives from the veterans community who come on a regular basis. We have one individual, Eddie Ramirez, a retired staff sergeant from the Air Force who was also an administrator with the VA, who regularly does a town hall meeting. We've had the American Legion, AMVETS, Pause for Peace, and various community colleges all coming out and providing services. Golden Gate University—they come out and provide non-criminal legal services. And we've got yoga and meditation on a regular basis. These are all community-based groups that come in to provide services for our vets. And many of them also have services on the outside, which they encourage our veterans to take part of.

## Getting Started

So here's what happens. At the time of booking you'll be asked if you served in the military. And if you are coherent enough, or willing enough, and say, "Yes, I've served in the military," you'll be screened by the jail classification system. Classification is extremely key. There have also been instances where an individual has been identified as a veteran by jail psych services and they've asked us to interview the individual and let him know about the project. If you pass medical screening along with classification, then you're sent to the COVER program at San Bruno [one of three jails in San Francisco County].

Unfortunately, the program was designed with men in mind, so there is no women's COVER program. When our classifications division does identify a woman veteran, we'll be notified. We then notify the veterans court staff and contact the case managers in the women's section. Someone will then do a screening to see if she's eligible for veterans court. This past year, we've probably had a half-dozen women who were identified as veterans, and in most cases, they were able to access veterans court and get diverted from jail and into services.

Aside from gender, the only thing that would disqualify a veteran [from participating] is if there's a severe medical condition or if there is a classification issue, like if that veteran has gang ties.

While a veteran is participating in COVER, he is in some kind of treatment, or at least in groups that deal with issues of substance abuse or whatever the issue it is that may have gotten him incarcerated.

## Blended Pod

Our jail operates pretty standard in all of the housing units. Each unit will have a certain

amount of free time, but the advantage for veterans is that they have full wraparound services. Some may have the opportunity to transition to Veterans Court even after they've been sentenced. If someone transitions to Veterans Court, it does expedite their treatment. So it's important that veterans are identified so that they can be offered the opportunity to have programming.

When we started the program 6 years ago, we were full, with one housing unit that holds 48 veterans. Now, we average about 20 to 25 veterans. I attribute [this decrease] to the creation of the veterans court. When it opened, it really increased the placement of veterans into treatment and definitely affected our in-custody population. Currently there are approximately 40 veterans who are active in veterans court, and at least 35 of them have come through the COVER program.

Because the COVER unit is housed primarily with veterans, they have a sense of camaraderie that rebuilds the pride that they had with their particular branch of service. It also makes it easier for those who are providing services to have the veterans in one location. They do not have to go from jail to jail looking for veterans and possibly missing them because they've been transferred or because they're in court. By having them in one locale, the providers can contact us and we can let them know the individual is available, is in court, or has been released, whatever the case may be.

*Because the COVER unit is housed primarily with veterans, they have a sense of camaraderie that rebuilds the pride that they had with their particular branch of service.*

The success we were having with placing our veterans into treatment and getting them out of custody meant we had open beds in our pod. So what they've tried to do [because of the need for beds] is put in an older population of inmates into that unit. There is a level of maturity with our older individuals. Whereas our young inmates lack that maturity—that sense of respect. They don't recognize the service that our veterans did for our country. [Older inmates] are also aware of simple things like inspection, which is very big here. Our veterans, they know what inspection means [because] they've gone through it in the military. So our non-veterans aren't threatened when a veteran comes over and says, Hey, we need to come in and tighten your bunk. The non-veteran population will even at times look to our veterans as peer support and for guidance. That's something you don't find in the other units. Yet even though we are now a blended program, it is still considered the veterans pod and veterans are the priority.



*Flags of various military branches and units which hang in COVER*

Also, we've been lucky in that we haven't had any serious fights. Sure, there have been instances where there have been conflicts. So we make recommendations to the individual about how to address his issue. Sometimes, though, individuals do have to be removed from the program. They'll get a time out that can be anywhere from a week to ten days, and as soon as they've served their disciplinary time, we'll have them brought back into COVER.

## Second Chances

When a veteran is no longer in compliance [with his obligations] and the judge has no alternative but to return him to custody, the court knows that the person is going to the COVER program and that [the underlying issues are] going to be addressed. And the veteran knows that the advantage of coming to the COVER program is that he is going to leave with some type of services. He's going to leave [confinement] hopefully with a place to go, with a treatment plan in hand, and that he'll be placed in treatment.

When an individual is first identified as a veteran, he has to go through classification in order to get to us, so classification is extremely key. When we started the program, our sheriff made the policy that all veterans go to the COVER program. After a transition of leadership in the Sheriff's Department, veterans started being allowed to go to other areas [in the jail]. [We saw] that several veterans that had been diverted from COVER

and were allowed to go and work elsewhere in the facility were returned to custody more [often] than those that were involved in COVER.

We had one individual who was assigned to Veterans Court and for some reason kept being diverted to a jailhouse job and was not participating in programming. The court would place him in treatment and he would barely last a week. This went on at least three or four times, so we brought our concerns to the court that this individual needs to be in COVER. So finally, they placed him in COVER. He spent about a month with us [where] he had intensive case management. Now he's back in Veterans Court, he's been in treatment for at least four and a half months, and this is the first time that he's been successful. Prior to this he'd blow out within a week. So it's important that veterans that are identified so that they can be offered the opportunity to have programming.

*Prior to my getting here 2 years ago, the veterans court had been wanting to do something to help inmates be successful when they got out of jail. But the idea just kind of simmered and died. So I got my team together and we discussed how we could do it internally.*

*– Ken Mills*



## Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Veterans Pod

**K**en Mills, a 27-year veteran of the Coast Guard, oversees jail operations in the 59 municipalities that comprise Cuyahoga County. Included in this area is the city of Cleveland. As Director of Regional Corrections, Mills began noticing the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on his officers. While looking for resources to get them help, he realized that many of the inmates in his jails also were veterans who likely were afflicted with PTSD and other mental health issues. So, he thought, What do we need to do?

"Prior to my getting here two years ago," Mills says, "the Veterans Court had been wanting to do something to help inmates be successful when they got out of jail. But the idea just kind of simmered and died. So I got my team together and we discussed how we could do it internally."

Inspired by video clips he'd viewed on the Internet, he started thinking about how to set up a veterans pod that might work in tandem with Judge Michael Jackson's Veterans Treatment Court (see section titled "*In Their Own Words: For One Veterans Treatment Court Judge, His Combat Past Is Reconciled*" by Nick Stefanovic, on page 55).



*Ken Mills talking with inmates at Cuyahoga County Veterans Pod*

"Reentry is our main focus for certain demographics in the jail. And a veterans pod," he came to believe, could be "a piece of that larger program. We can try to make the interventions and have the right services—medical and mental health care, treatment for substance abuse, job skills training. Our biggest push, though, is employment. If people walk out of our facility and don't have a job," he says, "they're going to come right back here."

Mills asked his Executive Assistant, Lauryn Harwell, to attend the planning meetings. She did and quickly became the program coordinator because, she says, "Everyone had specific roles they wanted to do, but no one was actually making sure what was to be implemented."

One of the first things Harwell did was set up a calendar to coordinate the days and times for who would be doing what. She says, “I wanted to provide services in the veterans pod. I wanted [the volunteers and stakeholders] to actually be doing things with the veterans, not just coming in and saying, “Here’s a flier. Call me when you get out.”

Harwell went to and engaged with the Salvation Army, the city mission, and the United Way, a megachurch located in Cleveland. “We also had people reach out to us, non-profit organizations such as Books at Work and Courage to Change,” she says.

## Information Central

One of the key players in the development of the pod was Cailen Haggard, one of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Justice Outreach specialists, who works with veterans eligible for VA benefits “in or out of jail, pre-sentence or post-sentence and anywhere in between,” says Haggard. “When Director Mills came to us and said he wanted to start a veterans pod here in the jail, I was like, “Thank you, Jesus!” Because a vet pod really makes my job a lot easier. I can go into the pod and present to everybody the same information, and then be able to meet with people back-to-back-to-back.

“We are able to provide case management with regards to educating veterans on their benefits and helping them with their release plan,” Haggard says. “We help them get connected with any VA services that they need, and help them coordinate services upon their release. And we work with their judges and their attorneys to [support their treatment needs].”



(L-R) Lauryn Harwell, Ken Mills, Cuyahoga County Veterans Pod Inmates, Warden (Ret.) Victor McArthur and CO Correctional Officer Barrington Brown

On a parallel track, Harwell began establishing criteria regarding which veterans would be permitted into the veterans pod, which is part of a 2,100-inmate facility where some 26,000 men and women cycle through in a year. The unit has a capacity of 26 and an average daily census of 17. Harwell researches each veteran to find out why they’re here and if they meet the minimum qualifications to get into the pod. The inmate has to have been charged with a low-level felony, “nothing

high-tier,” she explains. “We cannot have any sexual crimes ever, or anything involving children. Nothing gang-related. And no one with a dishonorable discharge.

"And we have to verify that you are actually a veteran, because we've had people who lie and say they are. Also, if you have a serious medical condition, or severe psychiatric issues, or if you're a trustee, you can't go to the pod. So we double check, we triple check to make sure there is nothing that would disqualify you."

"When we first started, we told them that it's a privilege to be in this pod. "We're trying to honor you for your service and accommodate your needs," she said, "but at the same time you're *still* an inmate."

Although attendance at any of the programs is optional, she tells the veterans, "We want you to come and at least listen to the speakers, and give each provider a fair chance.

***"They're grateful for the calmness in the pod and the camaraderie they find there, and they see that we're trying to give them some services and some special treatment that is not offered to the general population. It's a small way of being able to give back to people who've served our country."***

Thus far, the average stay in the pod, Harwell estimates, is 30 days, during which she says, the inmates "could take advantage of every single program that's offered based off the way the calendar is set up," meaning the potential for boredom lurks for a veteran who's in the pod for six months or a year, as some indeed are. However, they're grateful for the calmness in the pod and the camaraderie they find there, she says, "and they see that we're trying to give them some services that are not offered to the general population. It's a small way of being able to give back to people who've served our country, [because despite] their circumstances, they are still veterans."

*What got this started was that request, for our executive to pull together a group of people to look at what was happening in other jurisdictions that was working well, what was happening locally, and then determining what may be feasible for us to implement to improve how we're serving our vets who become involved in the criminal justice system.*

*– Chelsea Baylen*



## King County, Washington, Veterans Unit

**T**he impetus for our veterans unit was a King County Council motion requesting the executive to submit for review and approval recommendations on improving programs and services for incarcerated vets in our jail facilities,” says Chelsea Baylen, veterans justice coordinator at the county’s Department of Community and Human Services, Behavioral Health and Recovery Division.



*Chelsea Baylen, Veterans Justice Coordinator*

“What got this started was that request,” Baylen says, “for our executive to pull together a group of people to look at what was happening in other jurisdictions that was working well, what was happening locally, and then determining what may be feasible for us to implement to improve how we’re serving our vets who become involved in the criminal justice system. And to leverage a lot of really critical partnerships to bring services to an in-custody vet program.”

Many of these partners—relevant county departments, the prosecutor’s office, defense attorneys, judges, the state Division of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, entities already holding programs for veterans—had several meetings before taking steps to actually implement what became the veterans unit.

Unlike Cuyahoga County’s veterans pod, which was started by the Director of Regional Corrections who empowered his Executive Assistant to take the reins and make it happen, King County’s veterans unit started with a pilot program among a very small population of no more than eight carefully selected veterans. Their veterans unit “transitioned slowly and grew on its own,” says Nancy Garcia, Project Program Manager for the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention.

Most of the inmates in the jail are pretrial with an average stay of 21 days, says Chris Womack, Corrections Program Administrator for the Department of Juvenile Detention. Contrary to expectations that most of their justice-involved veterans would have served in Afghanistan and/or Iraq, in reality it is older veterans who are eager to participate in the veterans unit, he says. And most of these veterans “are educated in the sense of being able to articulate who they are. They’re bright. We don’t have the barriers that we have with the more general population [who are] limited in their reading abilities and comprehension.”

*So I thought there's got to be a way for us to help veterans who are currently in the system, because at one time they were serving their country, they wore a uniform, and now they're wearing inmate blues.*

*– Captain Malik Muhammad*



## In Their Own Words

### Captain Malik Muhammad: It Doesn't Cost a Nickel to Start a Program. All It Took Was Not to Be Told No

**M**alik Muhammad, a Captain at the Orange County Jail in Orlando, Florida, played a key role in devising and implementing the veterans pod there, which debuted on Veterans Day 2012. An Army Reservist since 1996, after five years on active duty, he was deployed twice to Iraq. He was a candidate for warrant officer when he was interviewed by Nick Stefanovic; these are his words.

AFTER I CAME BACK from overseas, a young man in one of the units here kept calling out to me, "Sarge! Sarge!" At the time I was a lieutenant, so I found it strange that someone was calling me a sergeant. So I walked back upstairs and looked in the cell, and here was a guy I was stationed with in Okinawa in 1996. So to me, it was kind of ironic that he was back here in a county jail.

As I looked around, I realized that there were more and more veterans coming back—to jail. They all had the same common denominator: they were prior military. And most of them had served in a combat role or in a combat zone. So I thought there's got to be a way for us to help veterans who are currently in the system, because at one time they were serving their country, they wore a uniform, and now they're wearing inmate blues.

A 10- or 15-month deployment of sustained combat does something to you. I've been home since 2011 and I can vividly remember the sirens: "Incoming! Incoming! Incoming!" I still vividly remember putting body armor on and [trekking] throughout my FOB, the Forward Operating Base. I can remember all that clearly. So every now and then when I hear certain things or see certain things, those triggers come back.



*Captain Malik Muhammad*

That being said, the concept of starting a veterans' dorm to try to get some help for these men and women who had served their country at some point [was born]. I was on the way to this training at the National Jail Leadership Command Academy, and I was sitting in an airport in Hawaii [when] I actually sketched the idea out on a napkin.

And from that, it took off.

I just kept writing different things of what I'd like to see. I tried to place myself in the position of a veteran in custody: What are some of the things that I would need to make myself whole again upon release, different things that I would need so I could have a shot at reestablishing my life on the outside?

So after I got everything written up, I gave the Deputy Chief a call. She's now the Chief, Cornita Riley. She blessed it. And from that point, I presented it to the Chief at the time, Michael Tidwell.

*I just kept writing different things of what I'd like to see. I tried to place myself in the position of a veteran in custody.*

## Responding to Veterans

There were challenges, even opposition. Initially, the biggest challenge was getting buy-in from stakeholders, people who work here, and people in the community who we would need to make the program work. "Before we open a dedicated veterans dorm," I wrote as part of the white paper I'd presented, "we need to train our staff, realizing [not only] that we have a large population of staff who have been in the military, but equally, that we have a large population that have not been."

So I conducted this training, eight sessions of about three and a half hours and a half-hour of Q&A. The Q&A was for me to understand what concerns they had, working in a dorm that has all veterans, including combat veterans. So from the questions I got back I was able to anticipate some of the pushback I would get and make the necessary adjustments prior to the program being implemented.

One training I do is called "Responding to Veterans." It teaches officers, specifically law enforcement and corrections or probation, how to [deal with] veterans in custody. What are some of the issues that veterans face when they're down range, meaning in Iraq or overseas? How do you deal with those issues inside the facility? It's about what it's like to be in the military, some of the challenges that we face when we're deployed, some of the stressors that we go through, and some of the challenges



*Captain Malik Muhammad poses in front of wall art in his veteran-specific unit.*

So I teach them to understand that when you respond to a distressed veteran, recognize some of the signs and symptoms. In his mind you're the enemy, although he doesn't realize that at that point. Because we've seen time and time again what happens when a distressed veteran gets into a confrontation with law enforcement. So I teach them to talk. Just try to talk first. Understand the person who's hiding in that house, barricaded. If you can talk first and de-escalate the situation, that's great. That may save his life or your life. And at the end of the class, I give them some 800 numbers they can call when they run into a veteran [in crisis].

## **Pushing Back Against Pushback**

Initially when the program started, I got a lot of pushback from staff who have no military training. And I got pushback from staff who actually had been in the military.

For the staff who had been in the military, I told them, "You can't judge their service based on your service because people now may have deployed four, five, six times over their career. So don't necessarily blame these guys or look down on them. Establishing the veterans dorm to help these guys out is not going to diminish your service."

we face reintegrating back into society. I spent 15 months in an active combat zone, and then I had to turn that off in two and a half, three weeks and come back to work...

I also focus on how to interact with a distressed veteran. I had a young man in a class who talked about responding to a home of a veteran. It was a standoff, a barricade situation. And one of the things that stuck in my mind was what he said: "You know what, Captain? What's ironic is when I'm going to a home of a distressed veteran, it's like a mirror. It's like I'm fighting myself. Because here's a guy who's got the same training as me. And if he's a Reservist, he may still have some of the same [weapons] that he used in that combat zone."

For the staff who have no military training, their issue was, “You’re putting all these trained killers in one dorm, and that’s scary.” I got questions like, “Are we going to get hazardous duty pay? Is a Special Response Team member go be present? What if they take us hostage and kill us?”

So I asked the supervisors if I could get a core group of officers who are veterans to work the dorm daily. Because a veteran inmate who is having issues can relate to an officer who served. I’m not saying anyone who does not have military experience can’t relate. But if I’m a distressed inmate and I’m talking to you about combat, about IEDs [improvised explosive devices] and incoming, as an officer you can relate to me.

At last count, if I remember correctly, there are 21 military installations in Florida alone. So we have a large population of veterans. When deployments happen, a good portion of these guys will come back into our communities with hidden issues. By having programs like this in place, it addresses the needs of those men and women who are Reservists and back in the community but have these invisible scars.

Although we don’t have a female veterans dorm, if I [learn] that there’s a female veteran in the jail, I or one of the classification officers will go and have a conversation with her and try to give her some of the same services and same information that we do for the males.

## Teamwork and Defined Roles

A Memorandum of Understanding also was created. The agreement states that the VA will provide various services, Orange County Corrections will provide various services... that was the catalyst for making sure that everything here runs efficiently. All parties have one goal in mind: to help that veteran. So it’s not a “them” and an “us,” it’s a team effort. And our chain of command wholeheartedly supports the program [because] they realize the benefits that it has provided. I’ve never been told, “No, you can’t do [this or that].” The only thing I’ve heard from them was, “If you believe in it and you can put it together, make it happen.” And that’s rare. That’s very, very rare.

Because you have to have buy-in from your management. And more importantly, buy-in from your staff. And you get that buy-in by training them on the front end. Management has to understand and address the issues, no matter how big or small. And if you assign dedicated staff [to the unit] who have ownership, that’s what breathes success into a program. Dedicated ownership from the staff who work there. Understanding from the inmates, and buy-in from management and the community. The biggest thing is having management support it, eliminating the excuses of not starting one.

*"I just kept writing different things of what I'd like to see. I tried to place myself in the position of a veteran in custody."*

## Camaraderie and Discipline

[From what I've seen,] the veterans dorm runs a lot more efficiently than a normal dorm. There are very few disciplinary reports. The camaraderie and the teamwork that was there in the military becomes apparent right away. Also, I encouraged the guys to call each other by the ranks had when they got discharged to help bring back the camaraderie that they once had. These guys at one point had discipline. So you're not giving them discipline, you're just re-instilling what they already had and may have lost. And they'll gel together to make it out of the program successfully.

As someone who's been deployed, I want people to understand that by addressing some of those concerns that we have with veterans who have been deployed and who are now distressed—if we can fix them and put them on the right track before they get out of here—I think that puts a better citizen back into society.

I have seen guys who that have been in the veterans program downtown at various events. And they'll call out: *Captain Mohammed! Captain Mohammed! Thank you so much! Dwayne and the staff helped me re-establish my benefits. Now I'm no longer living in the woods. Thank you guys for what you've done. You should've done this years ago.*

That's all the accolade I need. So when I see an inmate who's free who voluntarily lets me know that he's doing good, [I know] we're doing something right.

## Pushback

*While separating veterans into veteran-specific housing pods is proving to be a positive development in criminal justice reform, it has not always been greeted with cheers. Are there any salient arguments against this initiative in jails or prisons?*

*There is this argument that giving inmates privileges is never a good idea, says Evan Seamone, "especially when it comes to good order and discipline within the institution. It's not like you're deciding to give them benefits. In that regard you're making best use of what they've already earned under the law." The VA can't offer*

*services to those with an other-than-honorable discharge, but you can bring people in who can help them with their specific needs, he adds, “especially if it [supports] safety within the institution.”*

*“You can’t underestimate community challenges,” says Leslie Levitas, a principal administrative analyst for the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department. “There’s resistance to expanding your parameters to include higher level offenders who actually need [help] the most. And with limited resources you always have to make a choice: Are we going to serve the lower level and have high success rates, or are we going to help the hardest to serve?”*

*“There was opposition initially, but not for very long,” says Judge Jeffrey Ross of the Veterans Treatment Court in San Francisco, California. The community was skittish about providing services to people whose crimes involved domestic violence. “By arguing to the victims of domestic violence that what we’re doing is adding to and not subtracting from the controls on those people,” Ross said, “the initial opposition diminished.”*

*Resistance for the most part often comes from the inside, from prison or jail staff with concerns about the safety and security of their facility. “Initially when [our] program started, I got a lot of pushback from staff who had no military training,” recounts Captain Malik Muhammed at the Orange County Florida Jail in Orlando. “And I got pushback from staff who actually had been in the military.” He had to convince his veterans that “[helping] these guys out is not going to diminish your service.”*

*“For the staff with no military training,” Mohammad says, “their fear was, ‘You’re putting all these trained killers in one dorm? That’s scary.’ And I got questions like, ‘Are we going to get hazardous duty pay? Is an SRT, a Special Response Team member, going to be present?’ Or, ‘What if they take us hostage and kill us?’” His response, without meaning to be frivolous was, “Well, I’m a vet. I haven’t killed you...yet. So you’re okay.”*

*Muhammad’s colleague, Corrections Officer Carmina Courtney, adds, “I heard a lot of opposition when they first put it on the table. ‘Why do they need special help? Why is this important?’” To which she replied:*

*“Without these programs [for veterans] they won’t be able to adjust, they won’t be able to move forward, and this would hurt the community more if we didn’t have [such a program]. If they don’t have the help, they act out. They want to hurt other people, they live out on the streets, they steal. So we need more programs like this to help the inmates be able to go back into society and not separate themselves. These programs are helping them to be able to do that.”*

## Things to Consider

- Identify a champion who will build relationships with key stakeholders and work diligently to set in motion a program for veterans, one that will be sustainable.
- Know your demographics. Understand and track data in your jurisdiction. Do you have the justification to create a housing unit for veterans? Let data drive your agency's decisions.
- Get buy-in from key stakeholders and build support both within your facility and in the community, develop advocates, and secure administrative help.
- Identify and develop resources to support veteran-specific programming.

## Phase 2: Implement

However a veterans pod is conceived, implementing it embraces certain obvious similarities: an innovative idea, support at the top, leadership on the ground, a foundation built on coordination and cooperation between staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders, as well as veteran inmates who acknowledge their situation and agree to participate in the programming that is an inherent facet of the living arrangement.



## Implementing the Orange County, Florida, Veterans Dorm

**“W**e make it abundantly clear that we expect better from the veterans in this dorm,” says Lisa Grant, unit supervisor for programs operations at the Orange County Jail in Orlando, Florida. While “the average stay at the jail is about 24 days, the average stay in the dorm here is definitely longer because they get vetted. This is a high-medium/medium custody facility, so they’re not normally getting released after a couple of weeks; they’re here for a few months.

“And if we don’t help them, when they go out they might do it again, and that means that my family or myself might be their next victim,” Grant says. “I want them to get better because it’s such a ripple effect if we don’t break that cycle.”

*We had an inmate who had PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and TBI [traumatic brain injury]. He would have episodes where he was back in combat. It was very difficult to calm him down, but we were able to talk him down. And the inmate said after the episode was over, “I’m so grateful that you guys are taking care of me, because if I was in general population, I would be at the psych ward right now and I would probably be strapped on a bed or something.”*

—Lisa Grant

“So my goal is to maximize my outreach efforts,” says Sherry Claudio, a Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialist at the Orlando Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center and a licensed clinical social worker, “to ensure that any incarcerated veterans eligible for VA services have access and care prior to them being released from jail. We use what is called a HOMES assessment tool to determine the veterans housing status. [We ask] is this veteran homeless? Are there mental health issues in the past or currently? This helps us to start planning resources and referrals so that when the veteran is released, that process will have already started. And the goal is that the veteran won’t be released to the streets.”

Before there was a veterans dorm, “the veterans were housed in multiple areas based on their custody levels or mental health issues. Orange County Jail is a very large campus,” she says, “so a lot of the time went into actually navigating the jail, walking from one building to another, requesting to see a veteran in one unit based on the last unit I had gone to. A lot of time was wasted just in waiting to get to see a veteran. I would spend the majority of my day there. I was probably going to the jail two or three days a week really just going from unit to unit.

“I thought that if we could have the veterans all together, it would expedite outreach visits because it would allow me to see veterans back to back, and at the time I think there were a lot of veterans who weren’t being seen prior to being released. So having sort of a one-stop shop setting—with computer access—to me just made sense. And when Lieutenant [now Captain] Mohammed came on board, we presented the idea to Chief Tidwell and Deputy Chief Riley, who is now Chief Administrator of the jail. We got the okay to move forward.”

And the veterans dorm was established.

***“These guys know that the expectations are completely different than what we have for the general population, and they act differently.”***

In this unit, “these guys know that the expectations are different than what we have for the general population,” Grant says, “and they act differently. They sign an agreement in the beginning when our expectations are outlined. They have rights, obviously, and then they have obligations. If they refuse to participate, the program coordinator will ask them why. If there is not a legitimate explanation, then that’s not tolerated. They have to be willing to participate. We’re not going to discipline them formally, but they will be kicked out of the program.”

For the most part, however, says Corrections Officer Carmina Courtney, “With a veteran I can say, “This is the way it is and this is how we’re going to do it,” and they don’t question you. They get it. When you’re dealing with general population, you have to constantly say the same thing over and over and over. You’re always writing up negatives; you’re always dealing with the same issues. It’s a constant pattern. They come back, back, back. Every other month you’re seeing the same inmate you saw maybe six months ago.”

Matters become further complicated for those inmates in the vise of alcohol or drugs. Drug offenders, Grant says, “have a higher recidivism rate. You can help them a lot and they will still [get arrested and] come back because the addiction is so strong.” Unless there are enough follow up programs and services, reasonable housing in decent areas,

and the opportunity to get a job, “they’re going to go right back to what they used to be doing, because the influences are so bad, and it’s very hard [for them] to make it.

“We need to understand,” Grant adds, “that if you just lock them up and they’re not getting any better, they’re going to come back worse than when they came in. And it hurts everybody as a community.”

***“We need to understand that if you just lock them up and they’re not getting any better, they’re going to come back worse than when they came in. And it hurts everybody as a community.”***

Courtney says things are different in the veterans dorm.

Terry, an inmate, agrees. “There’s a higher level of respect in here compared to where I was in general population, and the average age is a lot higher, too. In general population, there’s a lot more gangs, somebody’s always trying to be the alpha dog, trying to run the dorm or the area. In here, all of our color is green, even if some people are in a gang. We all still have that common brotherhood, so it’s a lot more relaxed.”

Terry, who served four and a half years in the Army and deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan, was charged and convicted for battery with a deadly weapon. “I broke up with my girlfriend,” he recounts. “Coming home, she had a guy there already, when I was just there three hours earlier. She didn’t know I was coming back, and they didn’t want to leave when it’s my house. So I used force to get ‘em out.”



Symbolic wall art images from the Orange County Jail Veterans Dorm.

The discipline that had been instilled in him blurred, and he's now paying the price for his actions. In the veterans dorm, discipline, long dormant, percolates up for many of the inmates, nurtured by a caring and professional staff who respect their service. Word of mouth disseminates information about programs, services, and benefits. When veteran inmates leave confinement from the veterans dorm, they are armed with knowledge about programs and assistance available to them. "And they go back out into the communities and help other veterans who don't know about these programs," says Courtney, adding that "a lot of them get reconnected with their families."

***When veteran inmates leave confinement from the veterans dorm, they are armed with knowledge about programs and assistance available to them.***

Before they get out, veterans eligible for VA benefits are seen by a Veterans Justice Outreach specialist like Sherry Claudio. "I did their Homeless Operations Management and Evaluation System (HOMES) assessments, their VA releases of information for me to be able to communicate with the courts and the jail, and their family if needed. I would have followup visits based on when their release date was, or when their court date was. I also had a sign-up sheet if they needed to see me."

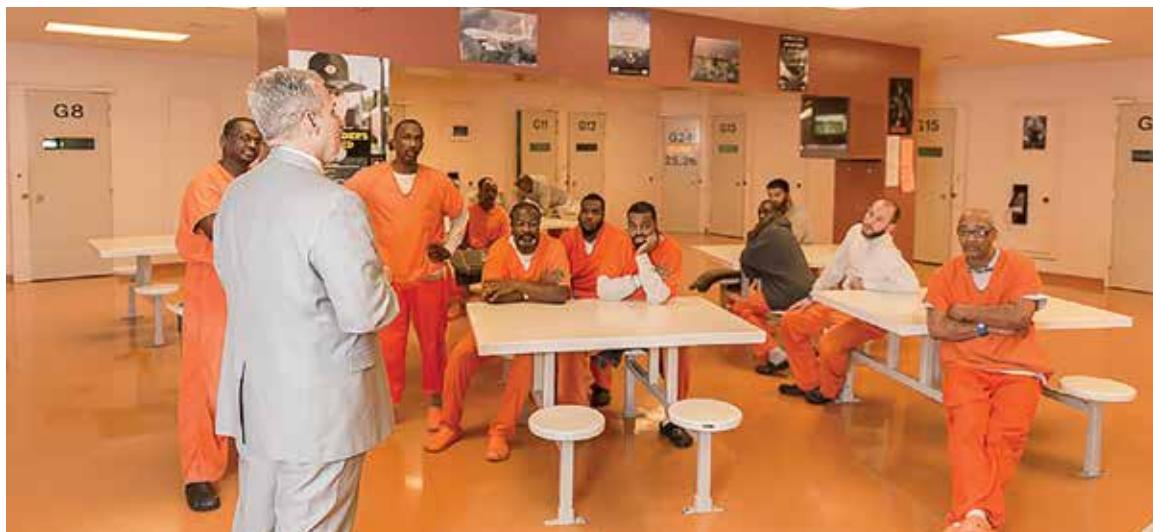
"We had a peer-support specialist who was a veteran himself. He'd been homeless and justice-involved," Claudio adds. "He would frequently be the person who would meet the veterans upon release and transport them to the program they were entering. He would continue to work with the veterans and help them navigate the VA. Having an employment specialist provide information about what resources are available through the VA [has been amplified] by being able to capture a large group of veterans in one unit and to be able to provide services [to the group] instead of them just sitting around in individual pods not getting any services."

The purpose of the veterans dorm and the programming that is provided is partly to acknowledge and honor service, but mostly to have a transformative effect on behavior, to help inmates like Terry turn that negative into a positive.

## Implementing the Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Veterans Pod

Establishing their veterans pod “reduced the aggression and stress in jail,” says Lauryn Harwell, *de facto* coordinator of operations for the veterans unit in the Cuyahoga County Jail. “The inmates feel more comfortable just being around other vets,” Harwell says, “versus being among the general population, where you have all types of crimes and no one looks out for one another. In general population, it’s just kind of like, *I’m here.*”

In implementing such veterans units, the creation of interactive, informative programming is critical. The inmates are encouraged to take part in the various programs—as opposed to waiting in their cells for a VA worker to show up or lying down till the next meal.



*Ken Mills talking with inmates at Cuyahoga County Veterans Pod*

“Some people commit significant crimes and are a risk and a danger to the public,” says Ken Mills, the director of regional corrections for whom Harwell is executive secretary. “But we can’t lock everybody up and throw the key away. So we’re approaching the county jail with the philosophy of ‘How are we going to put a better person back into society, one who’s going to be successful and productive? How do we intervene? What do we need to do?’”

“My role is to expand programming,” says Martha Newman, who works as a programs officer in the Cuyahoga County Jail veterans pod. “But really my role is to move us forward in regards to this reentry concept we have of making a person more whole when they leave than when they came in. How are we identifying their needs? What are the reasonable things that we can do here in terms of treatment and linkage that

make sense?" To accomplish this, she is seeking to implement more data-driven programming, then to evaluate outcomes so as to tweak programming.

***"But we can't lock everybody up and throw the key away. So we're approaching the county jail with the philosophy of 'How are we going to put a better person back into society, one who's going to be successful and productive? How do we intervene? What do we need to do?'"***

Among the programming that is offered, Director Mills points to the culinary arts program of which he is quite enthusiastic. This is a program that teaches his charges some of the "soft skills" they can learn while confined. "When they come out of culinary arts, they have different routes to take," he explains. "Either we can place them in a job or they can go to the restaurant institute, which takes ex-offenders, gives them a place to live, and puts them through a 6-month program. They give them a stipend to live on, and then they get them a job in a restaurant." Programs such as this, combined with drug detox and, if needed, rehabilitation, are showing promise in reducing recidivism and, in turn, increasing public safety.

Harwell and others cite a constant refrain about establishing a unit that promotes camaraderie among the inmates in a housing arrangement built on a foundation of learned discipline and shared experience. From what can be observed of these programs, it translates into fewer arguments and outbursts of violence. It creates a less stressful atmosphere for the correctional personnel who work there and the volunteers and government employees who visit to help these veterans.

"The earlier you get to them when they get here, the more interest they have in the vet pod," says Charles Harris, a rehabilitation technician employed by the VA who identifies who the veterans are when they first come to the jail. Guided by a list the jail provides of all the veterans who have been incarcerated the previous day, he says, "I'll go around to where they're at, engage the veterans, try to educate them on what's going on with the VA here in the jail and tell them what we can offer them,



*Correctional Officer Barrington Brown and Warden (Ret.) Victor McArthur, Cuyahoga County*

what we can help them with. Depending on what a veteran's needs are, then I can pass him on to whoever can help him. And I gauge their interest in coming to the vet pod."

***"It's also the physical environment of veterans pods that add a not-so-subtle psychological touch. It's the small things like the flags and the banners. They appreciate that."***

There are perks beyond camaraderie to being in the veterans pod, perks like food. "Some of our providers bring in items like bagels and oranges as an extra incentive so they'll come out and participate," Harwell says, noting that while participation is optional, the goal is to keep the pod as full of veterans as possible. It is the older veterans who are generally most grateful, she says. "The older generation, they're more attuned to the providers who come in. They're like, 'Okay, I've been a veteran 30 years and I didn't know I had that benefit.'"



A veteran inmate poses in front of an Army flag.

"in varying measures by disappointment or drugs, dissolution of a marriage, loss of a livelihood, lack of direction, or dealing with persistent demons from the trauma of service in a combat zone."

It's also the physical environment of veterans pods that add a not-so-subtle psychological touch. "It's the small things like the flags and the banners. They appreciate that," says Warden Eric Ivey. "It restores a sense of pride in them because, deep down inside, all of us folks who've been in the military have that sense of pride that says, 'I served. I was part of one of these special fraternities.'" On the outside that pride has been suppressed,



# For One Veterans Treatment Court Judge, His Combat Past Is Reconciled

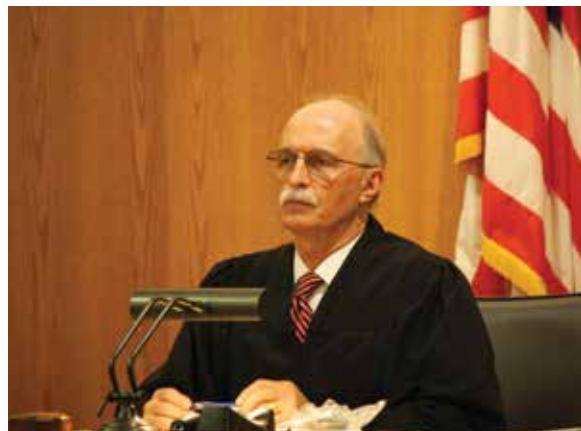
by Nicholas Stefanovic

*When Nicholas Stefanovic met Judge Michael Jackson of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, the two men bonded, although Nick hadn't even been born when Judge Jackson was just a lieutenant enduring the crucible of fire in Vietnam. Both men are proud of their service in the Marine Corps, although their lives took decidedly different paths afterward.*

*This profile of veterans treatment court Judge Jackson offers compelling insights into why some in the criminal justice system are having real success saving veterans whose experiences in a combat zone are likely to have led to self-medication with drugs and/or alcohol, setting them on a course to committing offenses against the public order.*

**Veterans Treatment Courts are treatment-based alternatives to incarceration. Housing incarcerated veterans in clusters in their own wings, floors, dorms, or units supports safer environments for corrections personnel and is the next step in helping these fractured men and women find a degree of redemption in disrupted lives.**

As a Marine returning home from Afghanistan, I did some things I shouldn't have and wound up on the wrong side of the criminal justice system. I struggled like so many other combat veterans and paid the price for abusing drugs. I lucked out when I got accepted into a Veterans Treatment Court in Rochester, New York. What started as a source of pain and despair morphed into a source of discipline, motivation, and finally redemption, with the help of a very caring judge and supporting staff.



*Judge Jackson presides over the veterans treatment court in Cuyahoga County, OH.*

Today, I am an advocate for Veterans Treatment Courts, helping other veterans who are struggling just as I did. I am extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to continue to help others, especially veterans.

In April 2017, my mentoring led me to an assignment to interview administrators and staff at the Cuyahoga County Jail in Cleveland, Ohio, about their jail program for housing veteran offenders. Throughout my day of interviewing, I kept hearing about the Judge who presides over the veterans treatment court.

“He has a great story; you have to interview him,” one staffer told me. “But,” she warned, “sometimes he is too humble for his own good. He loves what he does, but it is difficult for him to be acknowledged due to his humility.”

## *To me, he is a true hero, and our country hungers for heroes.*

She piqued my interest when she showed me a wrinkled, yellowed copy of *The Plain Dealer* magazine of November 6, 1988. It featured the stories of four Vietnam veterans, including the man who nearly 30 years later would become the Judge I was about to meet. To me, he is a true hero, and our country hungers for heroes.

He is the Cuyahoga County Court Judge who started the process that created a county-wide Veterans Treatment Court in May 2015 for veterans charged with felony offenses. As a former prosecutor, he knew the City of Cleveland had a Veterans Treatment Court for misdemeanors, but veterans charged by the county with felonies fell through the judicial cracks; they were not afforded the same opportunity that many other veterans in Ohio and around the country had. A lot happened to get him to the opening ceremony of his Veterans Treatment Court. This is his story in his words and mine.

Two months before Judge Jackson was to graduate from college, he received two letters in the mail, an acceptance to law school and a draft notice informing him that he had run out of student deferments and was required to attend his draft physical exam for induction into the Army before he was to graduate from college. He decided that if he had to serve, he wanted to be with the best—the Marines, but he needed to solve this immediate induction problem in order to graduate. In addition, he knew that after his sometimes good but often mediocre college experience, he lacked the necessary self-discipline and dedication to be an excellent law student; he believed that needed to change. The Marine Corps recruiter solved his problem by accepting him into the Marines, deferring his induction until after he graduated from college and then sending him to the Marine Corps Officer Candidate School in January 1967. Law school would have to wait.

When he finished 31 weeks of training in September 1967, he was sent to Vietnam as a 2nd lieutenant in October 1967 to serve his 13-month tour, which turned out to be the high point of the Vietnam War. His first assignment was to lead a platoon of about 30 Marines in Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Division. About halfway through his tour, the loss of a number of officers left his battalion short of company commanders, and the battalion commander selected Jackson, who had been promoted to 1st Lt about one month earlier, to lead Delta company with about 150 Marines. He had only 6 months of experience instead of the 4 to 6 years that a captain typically would have. At the end of his tour in November 1968, he returned home feeling very old and tired, like so many others.

When he returned from Vietnam and completed the balance of his four-year tour of duty, he started law school. By then, he had learned not to talk to civilians about his service because it created an awkward situation for most. Each time it happened, it reinforced his belief that it was risky for a Vietnam veteran to reveal his service and that it was easier, if not better, to be a hidden veteran. For those who listened, almost all wanted him to put Vietnam behind him and focus on his future, except for one—a young woman lawyer he met, who would later become his wife.

She seemed to understand the risks of being a young lieutenant who was responsible for others, as well as understanding the real effects of survivor guilt. When they talked of those who found ways not to serve, she was the only non-military person who ever said, “But, you did your duty.” She understood why he served and what he was expected to do.



*Judge Jackson at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C.*

She was a top-flight young lawyer in a prestigious law firm who took a big risk marrying a former combat Marine who struggled with the transition to law student and the return to the civilian world. Judge Jackson said that she dealt with his difficult adjustment with a delicate touch, and has been the one who always provided him with the “wind beneath [his] wings.” When the time came for graduation from law school, Jackson had successfully navigated his law courses with the self-discipline and confidence gained in the Marines, coupled with the support of his soon-to-be wife. He did so with honors in the top 15% of his class.

The years from Vietnam to the present had allowed him and our county to evolve to the point where his status as a veteran became acceptable, worthy of discussion, and even a source of pride. By the time I met with him in his chambers, he had been married for 42 years and was the father of two adult daughters. He practiced in law firms and corporations for 30 years, served 6 years as a prosecutor, and then was elected to serve as judge for a single 6-year term, which will expire in January 2019, when by law he is precluded from running for another term because he is over 70.

As Judge Jackson replied to my questions, I glanced over at a framed picture on a credenza nearby. The faded photo shows young marines, all in full combat gear, standing in the hills of Vietnam surrounded by artillery and mortar fire. A fresh-faced Marine lieutenant poses with another officer standing over radiomen in a foxhole. They are smiling as if they hadn't a care in the world, or perhaps they are just happy to be alive.

When I looked back at Judge Jackson, it occurred to me that it was unusual for a judge to endure the time and effort of an election campaign to serve only one term. So, I asked, "Why did you wait so long to run for judge?"

***"For all that time, I was afraid of being responsible for my platoon again."***

"There were many practical reasons," he said, "and one very personal reason." With a stoic facial expression, void of all emotion, Judge Jackson calmly said, "For all that time, I was afraid of being responsible for my platoon again."

He didn't want direct responsibility for other peoples' lives again. As a lawyer, he advised clients and tried cases by developing the best strategies, but clients made the decisions and juries decided the cases. As a prosecutor, he suggested criminal sentences, but judges made the decision. For Jackson to be a judge, he had to be ready, willing, and able to take responsibility for decisions that would directly affect the lives of others and their families. He came around to accepting this responsibility in 2012, but it had taken him about 40 years to get there.

Judge Jackson had carved out a very successful career as a lawyer and a prosecutor. But now he wanted to be a judge because it would place him in the best position to convince other judges to start a felony Veterans Treatment Court. It would be a time of second chances both for veterans with felony offenses and for Judge Jackson to be responsible for this court. Metaphorically speaking, he would return to leading his platoon, with all its risks and rewards. He campaigned hard for the judge's position for over a year and won.

As it turned out, the other judges overwhelmingly supported Judge Jackson's idea for a Veterans Treatment Court that accepts veterans regardless of the type or degree of

felony, as long as they are eligible for probation and they otherwise qualify. If they are not VA eligible, county community services are used. This Veterans Treatment Court would focus on veterans with the most difficult situations—those with a high risk of re-offending and with a high need of treatment, especially with a dual diagnosis, primarily for substance abuse and mental health or trauma.

*This veterans treatment court would focus on veterans with the most difficult situations—those with a high risk of re-offending and with a high need of treatment.*

I had the opportunity to attend his Veterans Treatment Court the day before our interview. I observed these veterans respond to Judge Jackson as they would their military commander. I watched as he looked upon them with pride and compassion, the way an effective military leader often looks upon his troops.

Here was a Marine Vietnam veteran who led an infantry platoon and company into combat at the age of 23 and returned home only to be convinced that he should hide his service until finally he found a path that enabled him to be open about his service and make decisions that directly affected the lives of veterans and other defendants who appeared before him. I left his chambers with a profound appreciation for what this judge had done. I was in awe of the sacrifice he had made for veterans like myself. I had a new hero.

*I observed these veterans respond to Judge Jackson as they would their military commander. I watched as he looked upon them with pride and compassion, the way an effective military leader often looks upon his troops.*

At my hotel, I packed up for the drive back to Rochester. I noticed the old, yellowed *Plain Dealer* magazine article on the nightstand and I carefully tucked it away. I knew I'd have plenty of time to go through it that weekend at home. I had decided not to push Judge Jackson into talking about the details of his Vietnam experience, because I had the article. But I did wonder why he “was afraid of being responsible” for his platoon again. Was it something specific or was it a general belief?

I arrived in Rochester exhausted. I unpacked my luggage, sat down at my desk, and found the article again. I felt drawn to it and knew that my brain would not shut down until I read it. When I did, I choked up.

I learned that his battalion was involved in the Tet Offensive in 1968, the largest North Vietnamese offensive of the war. During one of these battles, Jackson's Delta Company and his old unit, Charlie Company, were hit hard by the North Vietnamese and in danger of being overrun. It started when both companies and a supporting mortar unit of about 300 Marines landed by helicopter under intense fire on a large hilltop dubbed Landing Zone (LZ) Loon not far from Khe Sanh. What Jackson and the other company commander were not aware of was that this hilltop was a staging area for a North Vietnamese battalion of about 600 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldiers. He told the *Plain Dealer* reporter, "I will never forget all those scared 19-year-old boys looking at me, a 23-year-old, for leadership. I, too, was scared to death," as Jackson's lead helicopter was landing under enemy fire on this "hot" LZ Loon.

## ***"I will never forget all those scared 19-year-old boys looking at me, a 23-year-old, for leadership."***

The Marines were outnumbered two to one and the NVA soldiers soon infiltrated the perimeter of both companies. As the situation rapidly deteriorated, 1st Lt. Jackson had to make a decision of last resort. He called in artillery on his own coordinates, as did the other company commander. He told the *Plain Dealer* reporter, "It was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. We were being overrun, and the artillery officer looked at me; we knew what we were doing, what we had to do. No matter how good that artillery crew is, when you're calling in large artillery rounds to within 15 meters of your position, you're calling it in on yourself." He executed the command.

His decision that night would be one of the defining moments of Judge Jackson's life. The artillery barrage, coupled with supporting aircraft gunfire, turned the tide of the battle. His Marines and Charlie Company held that hill, but the toll was devastating. Of the 300 Marines on LZ Loon, 42 were killed and more than 100 were wounded. First Lieutenant Jackson also saw 10 Marines from his old platoon in Charlie Company killed by NVA rockets and mortars. The best estimate was that 150 NVA soldiers died and many hundreds wounded for a battlefield total of nearly 200 dead with hundreds and hundreds wounded.



*Jackson (center) and his fellow Marines at Landing Zone (LZ) Loon.*

As I continued to read the article, my heart raced. Tears filled my eyes. I felt a familiar weight on my shoulders, one similar to my own war experience. Then I recalled his words: “I was afraid of being responsible for my platoon again.” Despite the accomplishments of his life, he was affected by the knowledge that he did not bring all his Marines home, even though his artillery call saved the lives of the vast majority of his men.

“While they put medals on the left side of your chest for accomplishing your mission and protecting your Marines,” Judge Jackson said to me, “they do not put medals on the other side of your chest to represent the Marines that you lost because of your well-intended decisions, including the faulty ones.” He is right about that.

The cover page of that old *Plain Dealer* magazine displayed what others thought of Judge Jackson’s actions—his numerous medals included five personal medals for bravery: two Bronze Stars, two Vietnamese Crosses of Gallantry, the Navy Commendation Medal, and a Purple Heart. By the time Judge Jackson took the bench 45 years after LZ Loon, he had finally worked through his own major unresolved issues regarding the battle and being responsible for the lives of others.

But he would soon learn that he had to face a new issue related to his tour in Vietnam. Six months after he was elected to the bench, he was diagnosed with a rare type of incurable, slow-growing but treatable cancer. The Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center has determined that his cancer is directly related to his repeated exposure to Agent Orange while in Vietnam and approved his claim. To date, he has remained symptom free and without further chemotherapy and related treatment for nearly four years and counting. He has been positive throughout and receives the strong support of his family. He lives an active life and does not expect his outlook to change. He firmly believes that he will preside over this Court until the end of his term.

So, every Thursday he will conference in his chambers about the veterans who will be approaching the bench in his court that day. Then he will don his robe, enter his courtroom, lead those before him in the Pledge of Allegiance, and take the bench. Looking out at the veterans filling the pews, Judge Jackson knows that his decisions will affect their lives and their families. He will do his best to lead these veterans out of harm’s way once again.

***“They do not put  
medals on the other  
side of your chest  
to represent the  
Marines that you  
lost because of  
your well-intended  
decisions, including  
the faulty ones.”***

## *A Poem About the Quilt*

*Sewing and quilting is communication of weaving,  
Sharing vibes just like being of service to our country.*

*There is nothing perfect about it.*

*In fact, in quilting language mistakes are called, “design elements;”*

*In people we call it “character building.”*

*Had we not made a mistake, the quilt would be perfect.*

*Had we not broken laws we would not have wound up in jail.*

*Not perfection is detection and awareness that balances the insanity.*

*In step, in stitch, and in each woven piece.*

*Sewing together for a cause; Soldiers together for a cause.*

*Willing to give the ultimate:*

*“No Man Left Behind”*

*“Do or Die” or*

*“Til the Wheels Fall Off”*

*Struggling to live, recover, rehab so bad; regain face.*

*Struggling to reduce stigma, shame, and rehab.*

*We are all so intertwined together like this quilt.*

*We are imperfect; crooked...*

*A wrinkled piece of cloth to be pressed out (some say ironed);*

*Some say rehabilitation is to iron out behavior.*

*Building bonds, the character to continue and to keep ourselves and others*

*Minimize collateral damage; minimize discarded cloth.*

*Bring out the uniqueness of our sacrifices and add to our collective greatness!*

*– Anonymous, inmate from San Francisco Sheriff’s Department’s COVER Pod*



# Establishing the San Francisco Sheriff's Department's COVER Pod

In establishing the COVER program, the San Francisco Sheriff's Department encouraged deputies who had served in the military to staff the COVER pod. "Having deputies who've had military experience themselves makes them both more understanding of the circumstances of the people who they are responsible for caring for, and gives them credibility with the inmates in a way that might not exist otherwise," offers Judge Jeffrey Ross, who presides over the Veterans Treatment Court in San Francisco County. "The sheriff's deputies who work with this population tell me that they really love what they do, because they really feel they're making a difference."

Jun Chua is one of those deputies. A veteran of the Philippine military who hails from a family from which multiple members also served, he is able to apply the knowledge gleaned from his service in his interactions with the men he supervises in COVER. They are reportedly more well-behaved than their counterparts in the general population, Chua says. They may argue but they don't engage in fighting. "Most of the time, they will talk to me first if they're having a problem with another guy and ask me, 'What should I do in this kind of situation?' They don't want to fight with anybody. They don't want any more problems with anybody.



A quilt made by participants in the COVER program, San Francisco County Jail

See page 60 for a poem written about the quilt

"If they violate a rule, I give them warnings, talk to them. I give them time to think about what they have done. Then I tell them I don't want to see that again anymore. And I tell them, 'This program, it's created for you. They are spending money for your betterment. So it's up to you. If you don't want to participate, if you don't follow rules, you have to go.'"

Alissa Riker, Director of Programs for the sheriff's department says, "Every veteran who comes in the pod is immediately linked with case management, who's working with them immediately on what their reentry plan is and what's going on with their criminal justice status." Reentry, she adds, is supposed to start at the time of arrest. "The time that you're in custody should be spent doing effective planning for that release, not just sitting around watching TV all day."

Critical to the success COVER has seen is the foresight of its planners to enlist the active collaboration of local partners, including but hardly limited to the San Francisco VA, the veterans advocacy organization Swords to Plowshares, the San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium, the Sheriff's Department's Prisoner Legal Services, area universities, and a range of volunteers who engage the veteran inmates in a variety of pursuits, from a type of cognitive behavioral therapy to yoga.

Swords to Plowshares is deserving of particular note. Founded almost 50 years ago, it has been “very instrumental in advocating for veterans in San Francisco” and beyond, Riker says. And not only for veterans eligible for a host of VA services and benefits, she adds, “but even more critically those who, because of the nature of their discharge, aren’t eligible for those services.”

Swords staff develop the schedule for five hours of programming a day and orient a daily group activity. They do the individual case management for all vets in the pod and work to ensure that they are linked to whatever services in the community they need and for which they are eligible. “They are critical for bringing in outside resources,” Riker says. “They cap and leverage those resources that want to work with veterans and bring them into the pod program. So they kind of act as a boundary spanner.”

And because of where Swords is located—right near the Hall of Justice—their main office is easily accessible for post-incarceration follow-up services to a needy and often fragile population. This is particularly important, Riker adds, “because in a jail setting, we don’t know when they’re going to get out.”

## *The Hero's Journey*

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**G**loria Kempton is a writer and writing coach who has been volunteering in jails and in prisons for the last 20 plus years. She teaches Joseph Campbell's The Hero's Journey at the Regional Justice Center in King County, Washington. Hers is the kind of innovative, cutting-edge programming that can be brought into veterans units.

*The Hero's Journey* is a mythological, transformative writing program created by mythologist Joseph Campbell in the 1980s. We introduce this program to the vets as a way of processing and exploring their human journey on paper. We want to help them access the hero archetype inside of them.

Joseph Campbell talks about something called a physic wound, which is something that's normally created in childhood. I believe it takes a long time, the rest of our lives, to work that out. And I've been reading how just the act of writing helps us heal.

*The Hero's Journey* is a template about how to access the hero, and take responsibility for his/her life, rather than see him/her as a victim, oppressed. People can begin to see themselves as responsible for their own lives.

So, they write about their drinking, their crimes sometimes, and they cry. I can't even imagine coming back from the military and then committing a crime. The shame that's associated with that, I think that the writing helps them process that.

So, they read their work to one another and give each other feedback. "Wow, dude, that was awesome! You know, like, you're so honest," they say. I've seen this change lives. We have one guy in our group now. He's a completely different person. He's been in here for a year, and he came in just strutting, and writing a lot about the sensationalism of his crime. I've watched him become humbled this last year. Everybody noticed it. They all say, "Wow, you're different!" And he is.

Some of them are writers already, and I just give them the opportunity to go ahead with it. The ones who aren't, they don't think they can write, so we tell them, "Look this isn't going to be published anywhere. This is just for us." And they seem to be okay after that, because they do want to try.

One guy, he came for about four months and didn't write anything. And we kept saying, "You should write, dude. You've got a lot of good stuff to say." So he came in one day and he wrote a sentence. And everybody's jumping and saying, "Yeah, wow!" He comes back, and he had a paragraph, and then he came back and had written another paragraph. And that's how it went. By the time he left jail, he was in tears. He was going off to prison, and he said, "This program has meant so much to me."

*At one time in their lives, these men took an oath to protect us. If they were willing to lay themselves on the line for us, we owe them this much.*

*– Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian*



## Middlesex, Massachusetts, Jail & House of Correction's HUMV

Established in 1692, the Middlesex Sheriff's Office is one of the oldest law enforcement agencies in the United States. Today, it's one of the most progressive, certainly in its treatment of justice-involved veterans. In 2016, Sheriff Peter Koutoujian established the Housing Unit for Military Veterans (HUMV), the first such unit in the Commonwealth specially designed, as its brochure states, to address the needs of incarcerated veterans with a goal "of treating and preparing them for successful reentry."

The inmates "are not planning on going out and going back to the same stuff that led them here in the first place, and maybe only try a little harder not to get caught the next time," says Correctional Officer Matthew Bordeleau, a 14-year veteran of the jail who has been working HUMV since its inception. In general population, he adds, "There are people who want to better themselves, but in HUMV that's all I see. People who all have the one common goal, that they get out and they stay out. So, every guy who leaves the unit I tell him, "Hey, I hope I never see you again."

*There are people who want to better themselves, but in HUMV that's all I see. People who all have the one common goal, that they get out and they stay out. So, every guy who leaves the unit I tell him, "Hey, I hope I never see you again."*

"They're all in it together; they all buy into the program," Bordeleau says. "There's a community meeting in the morning. They're all there. They rotate jobs. One week one squad picks up a broom, next week they're in the showers. Sort of like in the military: The discipline's still ingrained in them."

John Morrissey agrees. He's a 60-year-old veteran of an 8-year hitch in the Air Force whose "drinking career," as he puts it, started when he was seven and who was hit with a double whammy of alcoholism and PTSD. When he served in the Air Force Fire



*Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian,  
Creator of HUMV*

Department Crash Rescue he says, “You always had to count on the guy to your left and the guy on your right and the guy watching your back. It’s the same thing here. This is the saving grace. This unit is one of the things that has made me want to live. HUMV is a godsend.”



Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker and Sheriff Koutoujian

The man who revs the HUMV engine is its Veterans Service Coordinator, Paul Connor. He has the respect and admiration of staff and inmates alike. Says Matthew Bordeleau, “I can’t speak highly enough about him. They got the right guy for the job. Just his passion... he’s unbelievable.” In making a specialized housing unit for veterans work, leadership counts, big time. (See [“Paul Connor: We’re Really Changing Some Lives Here,” on page 67.](#))

***“This is the saving grace. This unit is one of the things that has made me want to live. HUMV is a godsend.”***

# In Their Own Words

## Paul Connor: We're Really Changing Some Lives Here

**P**aul Connor, 40, is veterans services coordinator at HUMV, the Housing Unit for Military Veterans at the Middlesex County Jail in Massachusetts. A veteran himself, he brings integrity, intensity, and commitment to his position, which is more of a calling than a job. He was interviewed by Bernard Edelman; these are his words.

I WAS WORKING at another sheriff's department and at another vet court. When I found out they were hiring for this position, I was like, "All right, that's me." A lot of people had applied for it, and when I first talked to Sheriff [Peter] Koutoujian, he said to me, "Paul, what we're going to be doing is going to be innovative, but it shouldn't have to be." That's when I was sold. I'd been at a place I thought was going to be my career, so it was a big change coming here. After he said that, though, I was like, "Alright, if they offer me the job, I'm in." And thankfully they did.

What's special about this unit is everybody is guilty. You go up to another unit and everyone's innocent. Here, everyone has taken responsibility for their actions, and that's a good stepping-off point for these guys because [otherwise] there's no way to move forward.

There's something that's done by the VA called the Veterans Reentry Search System. We take our database of sentenced and pretrial men, we put it through the VRSS database, and it kicks back everybody who's in the house of corrections who has served. They got that off the ground I think back in 2013, and they had only a small number of self-identified veterans. They'd ask them at booking, "Are you a veteran?" And I think they had over 50 that were identified with VRSS. So it started there. They started a veterans support group and it grew from there. And I know that the sheriff, who has a family history of people who have served, decided that they had enough [veterans] to sustain [this program]. His goals were to reduce the recidivism rate among the veteran population.



Paul Connor, veterans services coordinator at HUMV

***“What’s special about this unit is everybody is guilty. You go up to another unit and everyone’s innocent. Here, everyone has taken responsibility for their actions, and that’s a good stepping-off point for these guys because [otherwise] there’s no way to move forward.”***

So I started and two weeks later we had this unit up and running. We didn't have a blueprint. Coming here after having worked at the Boston Veterans Treatment Court definitely gave me a great foundation on how to run this and what my expectations would be for the men. The goal that I identified first was to set a [solid] foundation for the unit with some great programming. We've been playing it by ear as far as what we've been doing. We've had over 160 guys come through this unit in a year and a half, and the most we ever had at one time was 38, 40 guys [out of a jail population of up to 1,100].

About 6 months ago, when I tallied up the age bracket of everybody who had been through this unit, I was amazed at what the average age was. I thought it was going to be a lot younger, but it turned out to be 45 years old. This was definitely a surprise to me.

But it's not about, "Oh, you're a veteran? Alright, come to our unit." Because a big part of this is our vetting of the men who come here. Just because you served doesn't necessarily give you a spot here. We sit down with them and we tell them what the expectations are. If you're going to come to this unit, you're going to engage actively in the programming. Which is mandatory. If you want to be here you have to put some work in.



Housing units at HUMV



The unit is broken into squads, so one week your squad's got bathroom detail, next week your squad's got floors, and the week after that your squad has chow. And there's no [playing around], [not only] with myself or the officers, but with each other. Respect, honor, duty, and integrity is our motto. Nobody's ever voluntarily asked to leave, but we have taken guys out of here who are not acclimating to the environment.

## Name of the Game

[Being here means engaging in] programming. We have a veterans support group. We have mindfulness meditation, an anger management group, and a relationship group. We have a spirituality and mental health group. We have a weekly speaker come in. These are all facilitated by outside volunteers. The men know that these people are donating their time to come in here to facilitate these groups. So the guys I think really buy into it.

We have a parenting group. We have an organization called Parents Helping Parents come in, and one of the co-facilitators was a former English teacher. She had said to me once, "Hey, would you ever think about doing a writing group?" I asked, "Is it free?" And she's like, "Yeah." So what had originally started as a creative writing group, I call the Therapeutic Journal Writing Group. We were running that for about 6 months and it was just pretty amazing the writing that came out of it.

That parenting group was one of our first groups. A majority of guys have fractured relationships, not only with their significant others or their parents, but with their children. You go to jail and your child is 15 years old [How do you deal with how your child feels about you] . . . It's been a really great group.

Most of these programs are facilitated by people who have served. Our anger management is run by a woman who served in Afghanistan in Operation Enduring Freedom. She's also a captain in the Army. Another woman, also a licensed social worker, also does one-on-one counseling. So our people can relate to them. And we have a cognitive behavioral therapy group that's run at night by a VA social worker who is not doing it in [his capacity] with the VA; he's doing it because he loves to do it. I think we have the most robust program in the jail.

We've made this a therapeutic community. We're not just housing a bunch of vets together and slapping some paint and branch insignias on the walls and calling this a veterans unit. This is, after all, a very [sought after] unit for a high-risk, high-need population. But they definitely have to put some work in.

Our program is veteran-centric. It revolves around their service. If somebody has a bad conduct discharge, that's not going to preclude him from being here. I've seen my fair share of men who have been to Iraq, to Afghanistan, who have given more to this country

than most, and then come home and, while on active duty, do something that's going to get them dishonorably discharged. You're going to tell me somebody who spent a year in Iraq is not going to be VA-eligible because of some issue that happened back here on post? So, we also have a gentleman, a friend of mine, works at the Lowell Vet Center, who comes in twice a month. His specialty is discharge and service connection claims. He's our subject matter expert for that.

***"We've made this a therapeutic community. We're not just housing a bunch of vets together and slapping some paint and branch insignias on the walls and calling this a veterans unit."***

For every single veteran we try to [develop] a reentry plan on top of everything that we're doing on a daily basis. For this, the veteran centers have probably been [our] backbone. They've been very helpful with a lot of the reentry plans. We also have the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services that can work with people who are not VA-eligible. Maybe only a little more than half of our population is currently VA-eligible.

Seeing the change in some of the guys who have come in here, it's not an overnight thing, it's more gradual. Sometimes I don't know if a particular person is going to work out. But I don't pre-judge anyone [because] I don't know if he's going to buy into the program. And then, anywhere from 3 to 6 months later, they're just an entirely different person. They've really bought into the program. And then to see them go out and excel has been the biggest gratification I could get. You know how in boot camp they break you down to build you back up? These guys come to us broken and we're trying to build them back up to get back to good.

## **Getting Straight**

If somebody's not living up to what we've come to expect, we'll sit down. Whether they come to talk to me or I bring them in, we'll have a talk before it gets to that point that we have to pull them off the unit. Because this is a [sought after] unit, the guys usually fall into line, especially the guys who come from outside counties. Jail is not meant to be fun, but some of those other county jails, they're no joke. We don't have a gang problem here; we don't have a lot of the problems that a lot of the other counties have. So some of the guys who have come from those counties, if they know they're on the chopping block, they'll straighten up real quick.

In Middlesex County, Veterans Treatment Court is on Mondays. So usually on the first half of Monday morning I'm here, and then the second half I'm over in Framingham on the treatment staff there. Now, in the national model for the Veterans Court, the last thing they want to do is lock one of those guys back up, and if they do, they won't want to keep them in longer than a week. Well, now that we have HUMV, the treatment courts in Massachusetts will send us their guys who have violated. And it's not this like we have to find them a new bed or we have to come up with a treatment plan within a week. We don't want to send somebody who's got severe PTSD or TBI and put him in a cell. [Conversely], we've had about 20 referrals from HUMV over to Framingham; more than half of their docket is from HUMV.

It's definitely been an extremely gratifying and humbling experience for me. Now, the sheriff and the top level in Middlesex were on board with creating this unique thing. [Yet] there were guys who have been here for 20-plus years who have that us-versus-

***"It's definitely been an extremely gratifying and humbling experience for me."***

them mentality. So when they see us doing things like mindfulness meditation groups, it's foreign to them. But because we don't have those issues that you have in the rest of the jail, I think a lot of people have bought in who maybe weren't fans at first.

On our one-year anniversary, our numbers people [provided data] that showed our recidivism rate was a lot lower than the general population recidivism rates [for the same time period]. One of the things we do is track the guys once they leave. I had a gentleman who was in here—he's at a veterans transitional housing [unit] in Haverhill now—he's one of our biggest success stories. His nickname is Bubbles. He was a submariner. He's just one of the many men I stay in contact with who are continuing their recovery. Seeing somebody like him, the success that he's had, that's how I quantify [success] from a personal standpoint.

The guys I stay in touch with on a regular basis, I know if they hadn't come through this unit they might not be alive. So I'm very lucky that I work for a department that is trying to help veterans. I couldn't ask to be working for a better agency than the Middlesex Sheriff's Office because of what we're doing. I love my job, and not everybody can say that. I think we're really changing some lives here.



## Things to Consider

- Develop an implementation team. Are you using implementation science to plan your program?
- Identify roles of the implementation team.
- Set goals, assign tasks, always communicate, embrace feedback from staff and inmates, and work together.

## **Phase 3: Sustain**

A continuing commitment to continual improvement of both the pod and programming to make them more effective in meeting the needs of veteran inmates is needed if these veterans pods are to grow in those facilities where they've been started and if they are to expand to prisons and jails.



## King County, Washington, Kent Regional Justice Center, Veterans Unit



*Maleng Regional Justice Center, King County, Washington*

A national hue and cry over the plight of homeless veterans fouling the streets and getting into trouble with the law has fueled the attempt by the VA to zero out homelessness among the 21 and a half million veterans in the United States today. The public can see up close and personal the conditions of once-proud men and women who at one time swore allegiance to the Constitution and fealty to the flag but have since had their ups and downs. Civilians do not see, however, the efforts made in the jails to help these veterans come to terms with their demons and get the help that most of them have earned by virtue of their service in uniform.

But what is now an emerging movement to establish veteran-specific housing units can be derailed as the body count recedes and media coverage of the psychological stresses of war diminishes.



*Joshua Smith, Army veteran, inmate at Kent Regional Justice Center*

"We would like to see this program continue and flourish and even build," says Chris Womack, Corrections Program Administrator, King County Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention. "But we've seen at least some other programs, when people got the passion for it, who established it, who kept it going, are gone, moved on to other jobs or retired, the program begins to wane, and sometimes it disappears. I would like for that not to be the case here."

"So the people who have the passion for it now [have to] make sure that their replacements are equally embedded and enthused about the program, so that we can have a [smooth] hand-off to the next team coming on."

It is also imperative to get feedback from the veterans themselves, says MaryAnn Morbley, Corrections Program Supervisor. "We don't ask them to write down their names because we want them to speak truth. I tell them, 'You are laying the foundation for people who will follow you, so we want to hear your raw truth about how we can improve.' And then we make sure that we take seriously some of their recommendations. They see them implemented and they know that they're valued because it's their program."

***"When I got involved in the legal system, I became aware very quickly that I was going to need help, and I had no idea a lot of these programs even existed. Without this program, though, I would have just been walking out of the door homeless, not knowing where to go, not knowing what to do, and I probably would be just another statistic living on the street."***



*Nancy Garcia, Project Program Manager*

So we work with them to understand the importance of their ownership and their actual contribution.”

To generate outsider enthusiasm,” says Nancy Garcia, Project Program Manager for the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention, “we are consistently spotlighting what’s occurring in the program, which then generates more interest from community organizations and others who can provide services to our vets. People come once they see something is being done and there’s some rhyme and reason to it.

“And we make sure that it is a continuous project that we are all working on to make better, and not let it stall out,” Garcia says. Which is why “people speak about it in such great delight and continue to be interested in wanting to participate in it. And by continuously reaching out to other organizations, there’s always somebody new who will come in and provide something different, and that’s all to the benefit of the population we’re serving.”

To achieve programmatic longevity, Garcia points out, “we need data, and it’s really important to have one particular person managing this. Because if you’re not collecting any data on what you’re doing, you’re never going to figure out where things are going right, where things need to be improved, and any gaps that might exist in your programming that you really need to address. Data is always an essential piece of this” because the numbers back up anecdotes about the efficacy of establishing and operating a veterans pod.



*Joseph Coniff, Navy Veteran,  
Former inmate at the veterans  
program, King County Regional  
Justice Center, Kent, WA*



## Things to Consider

- Track data to justify programming for your veterans.
- Create an environment of sharing resources and communicating frequently.
- Provide feedback and continue to build your program, which will evolve over time.
- Evaluate your efforts and make changes as indicated.

*The ultimate goal, after all, of any penal institution must be to enable inmates to successfully reintegrate into their communities—and to avoid the behaviors and errors in judgment that will lead them back into confinement.*



# Conclusion

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According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, at yearend 2015, there were 2,173,800 individuals incarcerated in the United States. Four times this number pass through our jails every year. Seven percent of these men and women served in the Armed Forces of the United States, most of them with honorable discharges. Many of those individuals continue to deal with demons borne of their experiences in a combat zone and seek fixes to quell the memories that dominated their days and agitated their nights.

Just as Veterans Treatment Courts attempt to provide treatment for some of these men and women instead of incarceration, so, too, are enlightened corrections professionals learning the virtues of veteran specific housing units away from the general population in their jails. There they are able to attend a variety of programs designed to help them re-enter society. Those eligible to receive benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs have a much better chance of getting the help they need.

Establishing these dorms, pods, wings, floors, units for veterans is not a budget buster; after all, they are already incarcerated. It takes imagination and commitment. It takes an elemental understanding of why veterans disobey society's mores and laws. It takes passion. Depending on the workings of a penal institution, leadership within these institutions need to decide if establishing veteran-specific housing makes sense and what they need to do to make this happen. Hence, they need to:

Identify a "champion." This might be the sheriff, the warden, a corrections officer, a county official.

Gather basic data, not only about your veteran inmates, but also about who might provide the programming that foments success in these units.

Ascertain if permission needs to be obtained from city, county, or state corrections officials and, if so, what needs to be done to not only get their endorsement, but also their enthusiasm for the effort.

Determine what space within the facility can be converted to a veterans pod, and what might be needed to give that space the ambiance of a military barracks, e.g., paint, flags and banners, private meeting rooms.

Develop a list of key stakeholders—including the inmates themselves—whose ideas are to be solicited and whose input will be vital to the successful functioning of the dorm.

Decide who will comprise the “braintrust” or task force charged with establishing the processes and procedures that will govern the operation of the veterans pod.

Think about who will manage the day-to-day running of the wing. Is that person already employed at the facility, or will he or she have to be hired from another jail or prison?

Ensure that regular visits can be conducted by a federal Veterans Justice Outreach specialist as well as staff from the county or state division/department of veterans affairs.

Enlist credentialed community providers willing to work with those veterans who may be ineligible for VA benefits.

Ordain what statistics or other data need to be captured concerning the veteran population of the dorm—and indeed of the entire facility—and who will be charged with gathering and updating these data.

Think realistically about any roadblocks or obstacles that might undermine either setting up or operating a veterans unit.

The ultimate goal, after all, of any penal institution must be to enable inmates to successfully reintegrate into their communities—and to avoid the behaviors and errors in judgment that will lead them back into confinement. Along the way, there are half a dozen points during or before which the action which has landed them in prison or in jail may be intercepted.

## In Their Own Words

### Jarrel Grayson: HUMV Puts the Tools in Your Tool Belt for Success When You Get Out

**J**arrel Grayson, 27, from Worcester, Massachusetts, joined the Navy right after high school. He has an other-than-honorable discharge. When he was interviewed, he had spent 11-1/2 months in HUMV, the Housing Unit for Military Veterans at the Middlesex Jail & House of Correction in Billerica. The unit, which is similar to a modified therapeutic community, is set up like a military barracks in which inmates are divided into squads. These are his words.



NIC project team member and author Bernard Edelman interviews inmate Jarrel Grayson during his site visit.

I CAME HERE FROM Worcester County jail. I was there for about two months before I came here. I was on probation from a couple years ago for multiple offenses – armed robbery amended down to a larceny from a person, also possession charges, assault and batteries, all of which happened in a matter of a couple of days. After doing a little bit of time on probation and violating multiple times, they arrested me. While in the process of that, I assaulted a few officers, and now I'm here, doing time.

My life was spinning out of control, definitely spinning out of control. If I didn't come here, I'd probably be in the ground – or on my way there very fast. After the military, going through what I went through just led to a lot of pain, suffering, drug abuse, the whole nine yards. Which now I'm addressing, being here.

I had just gotten out of the hole for committing offenses in jail [in Worcester], and I just so happened to be going up to classification to see if I can get into a worker's bloc, because I had been to jail more than a few times since being out [of the Navy]. There was a bunch of guys up there and I'm like, What are you guys all doing here?

They said, Oh, we're veterans.

I was like, Yeah, so am I.

They're like, Well, we're going to this HUMV unit.

So the lady, she runs classification over there, she was like, Oh, Jarrel, I forgot about you.

It just so happened Paul [Connor], the deputy from here, was there that day. So they interviewed me right there. The deputy gave me a thumb's up, basically telling me I'm good to go. So I was like, All right, cool.

## Watching Your Six

When you come into jail in any other place, the first thing is you put up a guard because people are trying to manipulate you. They wanna take from you. They wanna see if you're gonna join up with them in taking from others. Here, we run up to the guys that come in, because we're all in the Armed Forces. You're a brother . . . what do you need, we ask them. We're not taking anything from you; we're giving to you. We hold things here to make sure that guys have stuff once they get here.

I've met guys here, they've been in prison, jail, the whole nine, multiple times, and they say this is the only place that has actual rehabilitation. They're usually overwhelmed [at first], because we have a lot of programming. But once they get involved, they're like, Wow, this is great! Here, everybody's looking out for each other.

I don't know if somebody could do more than what Paul does. He comes here on holidays and will sit with us while we're eating. I mean that's incredible, doing what he does – and he just had a new kid. Paul and the other deputies, they make sure that when you're leaving you know that they still have your back. We have guys who have left here who I still call on the phone. They put money on the phone so I can talk to them, make sure they're doing good. They're writing me letters – I got a stack of letters from guys that are out right now.

[What else is special about HUMV] is the camaraderie between the members of the HUMV unit, as well as the respect we receive from the staff. And on top of that, the availability of the volunteers that come in to help us with everything that we do. It sets you up. It puts the tools in your tool belt for success when you get out.

***[HUMV] puts the tools in your tool belt for success when you get out.”***

I'm actually in the process right now of writing poetry. I want to publish my book when I get out. I wanna start attacking the things that I've been overlooking for the past few years, like going to school, taking it slow, getting involved with meetings that help out other veterans. Any way that I can help and give back, I definitely will. One time, the director of the vets court, he came to see the unit. I talked to him to advocate for a Worcester Vets Court. Although I wasn't eligible, I still tried to advocate for it, and I will push for it when I get out.

I'd say the greatest part about this for me has been that my mother now tells me that I'm the person I was before all the trauma. And I see myself just basically picking up the pieces, but doing it all in a positive, ongoing, forward way. I'm never gonna forget about my past, but I'm not going back.

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# Resources

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The following websites should prove helpful to anyone seeking additional information about various facets of specialized programming for veterans in jails, prisons, or Veterans Treatment Courts.

## For Practitioners

### National Institute of Corrections

<http://nicic.gov/>

<https://info.nicic.gov/jiv/>

### Veteran Intercepts in the Criminal Justice System

<https://info.nicic.gov/jiv/node/113>

### Bureau of Justice Assistance

[www.bja.gov](http://www.bja.gov)

<https://www.bjatraining.org/>

### U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

<http://www.va.gov/>

### Veterans Justice Outreach Program

<http://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp>

### Health Care for Re-entry Veterans Services and Resources

<https://www.va.gov/homeless/reentry.asp>

### VA Polytrauma Program

<http://www.polytrauma.va.gov/>

### National Center for PTSD

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

#### Military Families

<http://www.samhsa.gov/militaryFamilies/>

### White House: Veterans & Military Families

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/veterans>

**Center for Court Innovation (CCI)**

<http://www.courtinnovation.org/>

**National Drug Court Online Learning System (CCI)**

<http://www.drugcourtonline.org/>

**Justice for Vets**

<http://www.justiceforvets.org/vet-court-con>

**10 Key Components of a Veterans Treatment Court (Justice For Vets)**

<http://www.justiceforvets.org/sites/default/files/files/Ten%20Key%20Components%20of%20Veterans%20Treatment%20Courts%20.pdf>

**Veterans Treatment Court Mentor Program (Justice For Vets)**

<http://justiceforvets.org/veteran-mentor-courts>

**National Center for State Courts: Veterans Courts Resource Guide**

<http://www.ncsc.org/Topics/Problem-Solving-Courts/Veterans-Court/Resource-Guide.aspx>

**Washington University Journal of Law & Policy**

“Restorative Justice for Veterans: The San Francisco Sheriff’s Department’s Community of Veterans Engaged in Restoration (COVER), 2011

[http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law\\_journal\\_law\\_policy/vol36/iss1/4](http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_journal_law_policy/vol36/iss1/4)

**National Implementation Research Network**

<http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/learn-implementation/implementation-science-defined>

# For Veterans

## Veterans Crisis Line

<http://veteranscrisisline.net/>

This website provides information for veterans who have issues readjusting to society and who are in a state of mental or emotional confusion and upset, and who may have suicidal thoughts. Call the veterans crisis line, toll-free, at 1-800-273-8255, then press 1.

The toll-free number to reach the VA is 1-800-827-1000. Other helpful VA numbers include:

- Debt Management Center: 1-800-827-0648
- Homeless Prevention Line: 1-800-424-3838
- National Caregiver Support: 1-855-260-3274
- Women Veterans Call Center: 1-855-829-6636
- Vet Center Combat Call Center: 1-877-927-8387
- Health Benefits Customer Service: 1-877-222-8387
- Education Benefits: 1-888-442-4551
- Inspector General Hotline: 1-800-488-8244

## Vietnam Veterans of America

<http://www.vva.org/>



# Acknowledgments

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We are grateful to those that gave their time and shared their insights, without which this white paper would not have been compiled; and our deepest appreciation for the work they are doing to make our correctional institutions and communities safer, and for the opportunities being provided to justice-involved veterans so they can receive “A Second Chance.”

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Special thanks to the National Institute of Corrections, Justice Involved Veterans Network (JIVN) members who contributed significantly to the design and approach for this project:

Stephen Amos	Bernie Edelman
Raul Banasco	Jim Harms
James Basinger	Judge Michael Jackson
Gary Bell	Erin McGann
Jessica Blue-Howells	Blair Myhand
Cindy Booth	Joel Rosenthal
Christine Brown-Taylor	Jennie Simpson
Elizabeth Burek	Nicholas Stefanovic
Cicely Burrows-McElwain	Joseph Tony Stines
Sean Clark	Clyde “Butch” Tate
Greg Crawford	Ron Taylor
John Darcy	Glenn Watson
Judge John DeMarco	

To Evan Seamone, LL.M., J.D., M.P.P., for his generosity of time, and his perspective and insights into justice-involved veterans, specifically those incarcerated in correctional facilities

To the jurisdictions that hosted the National Institute of Corrections and its representatives for this project:

## **Jails**

Cuyahoga County (Cleveland) Jail, Ohio

King County Regional Justice Center, Washington

Middlesex Jail and House of Correction HUMV, Massachusetts

Orange County Jail, Florida

San Francisco County Jail COVER, California

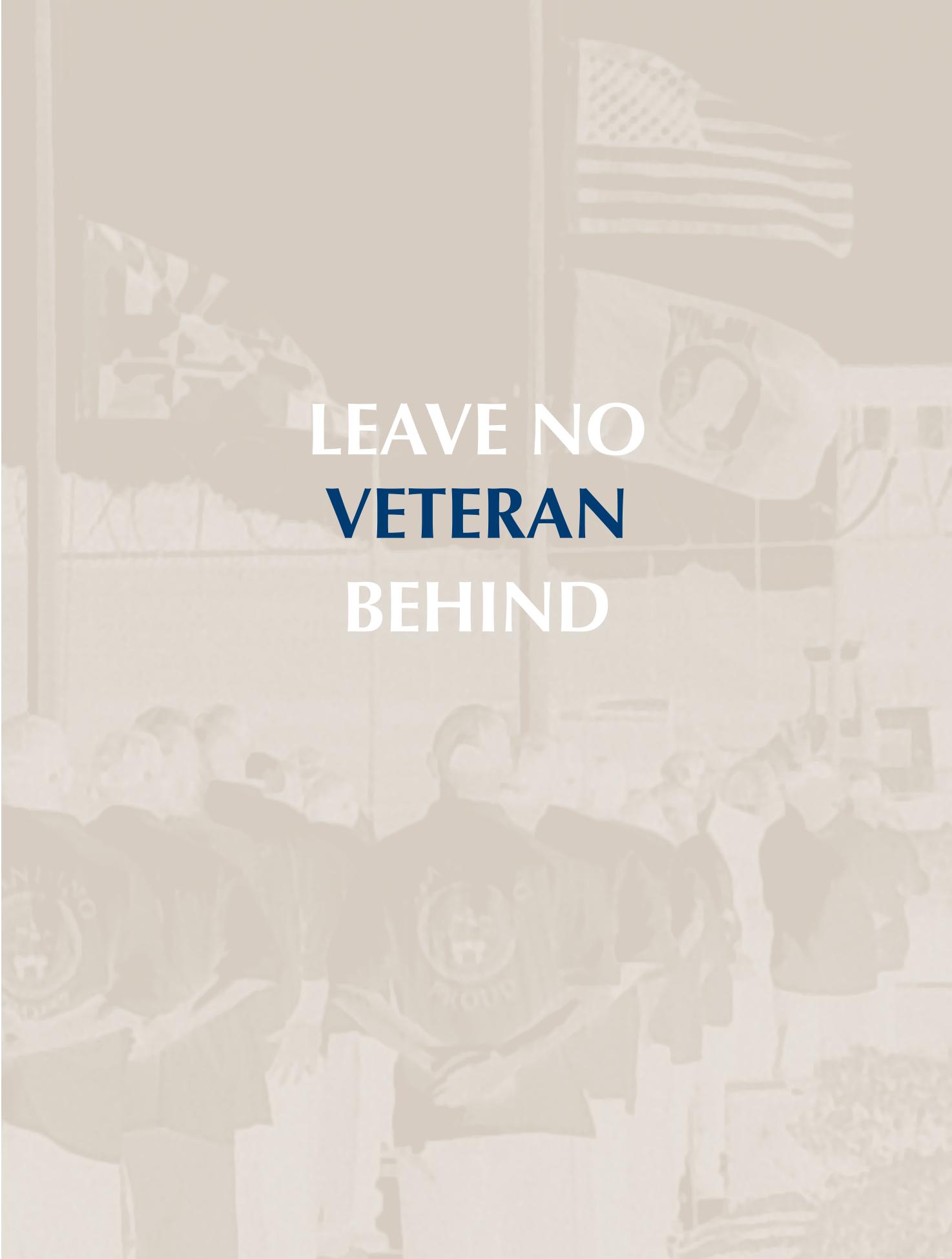
## Closing Epigraph

*The U.S. Veterans Bureau feels that this prison work is part of their job and that their responsibility will not be fulfilled until they have satisfied themselves that there are no men confined in penal institutions in this country who are there as a direct or indirect result of their sacrifices to this country.*

*– Holmes*



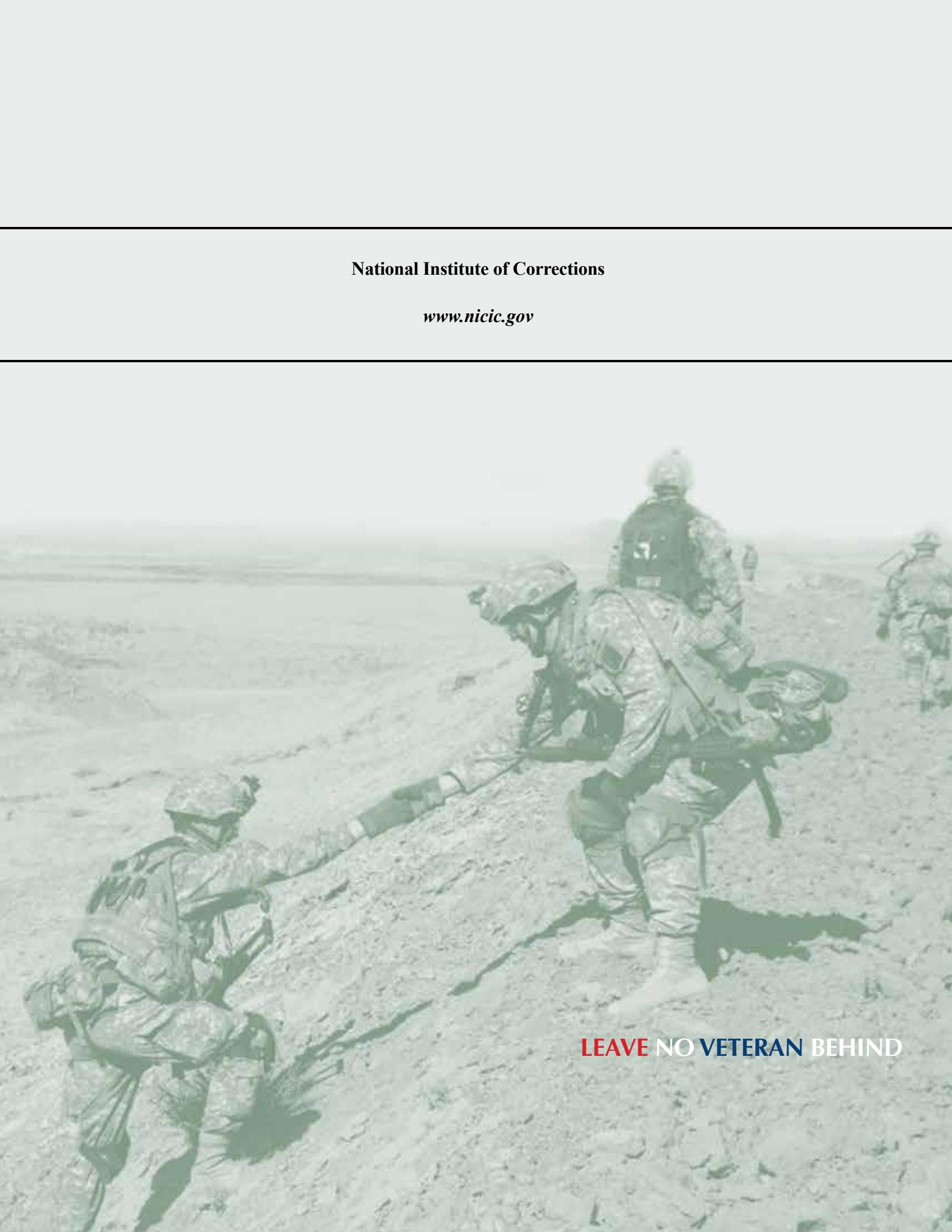




LEAVE NO  
**VETERAN**  
BEHIND

National Institute of Corrections

*www.nicic.gov*

A group of soldiers in a desert environment, one carrying a wounded comrade on a stretcher.

LEAVE NO VETERAN BEHIND