

Veterans Readjustment Program Transcript

[Please stand by for realtime captions] >> Hello everyone welcome to veterans readjustment program. I will answer any questions you have. If you experience technical difficulty, please type it into the Q&A chat panel and I will assist you. You can also contact our technical support. Spec please note as an attendee you are part of a larger audience. Due to privacy reasons the attendee list will not be displayed. All attendees will be in listen only mode for the duration of the call. This call is being recorded. We will hold a live Q&A session after the presentation we encourage you to submit questions and comments throughout the presentation. To ask a question in the chat box click on the bubble on the right inside your screen and the panel will open. Then type in your question and sent to all participants.

Click on the drop-down arrow and scroll to the bottom to change the selection to all participants this will allow everyone on the call to view your question. I want to introduce your first speaker for today Greg Crawford correctional program specialist at the national Institute of corrections.

Thank you. Welcome to the national Institute of correction 2016 virtual conference. I am Greg Crawford, the correctional program specialist, I will call monitoring this session titled veterans readjustment program.

The goal of the program is to foster an environment that will help Justice involve veterans navigate through their incarceration timeframe and equip them with tools necessary to transition into society. My co-moderator for the day is Ryan Schwimmer who will assist me.

Presenting today will be Denny Whitmore the supervisor of education at FCI McKean. He has worked at McKean in the federal Bureau of prisons for over 22 years, he is a bulb for veteran -- a cold war veteran. He works with the current and future veteran employees for the Bureau of prisons. If you have any questions today during the presentation, please type them in the chat box, as a conclusion, we will collect those questions and post them to the presenter. At this time I will turn it over to Denny Whitmore.

Good afternoon thank you once again I want to thank you for the opportunity to present to this audience.

Let's get started, why is this program needed? It is necessary to better serve the needs of the incarcerated veteran. Often time these vegans are left behind. After they become home from work to get to some trouble and find themselves incarcerated. They forget about them and your individual butter stop in society. We have provided successful plan for reentry. A lot of times they come into the institution is not knowing what to expect, almost like the shock and all when they were deployed. When they return it's all brand-new to them and without a plan they do not succeed when they go back into the institution so we set them up with a plan for success when they return to society.

Create a safer community within the prison, when you get like-minded men to gather with a purpose and a goal, and create that camaraderie that was once in the military that will improve our community and they get for the staff and the Justice involve veterans.

Why is it important to me? For 23 years of experience, the time here I've understood the importance of the veteran, not only the ones that are not incarcerated but the ones that are, sometimes they just need a small intake -- by military experts gives me the experience and credibility to be these men, often times they will not get the respect and courtesy if you have a walk in their shoes, you have to give inmates talk about that when there are programs being run, they will say what do they know about that? I can give them first-hand experience because I am a veteran and a member of the U.S. Air Force. My experience helps me meet these programs, my experience coordinating him a veterans group has given me insight into the needs of incarcerated veterans. They just need a person to listen to. I have been there voice. I have been the advocate for them. They appreciate this but also I get the insight of understanding what it is and what it takes to help out the incarcerated veteran. Spec the purpose of the program, is created due to the increased number of veterans currently incarcerated, we have seen an influx of incarcerated veteran over the last few years, a lot of that is due to the deployment a lot of folks coming home with issues that they do not know how to deal with. They don't understand where they fit into society. A lot of them want the camaraderie to get with their combat buddies and they don't know how to fit in so a lot of times they get into trouble. They end up in facility.

The purpose is to process the rehabilitation that treats incarcerated veterans needs for support while in prison and provides skill for life. Spec we like to turn out a well-rounded inmate not somebody that is just has a job skill were necessarily in education we want to create a holistic approach to dealing with the incarcerated veteran.

Our mission statement, the purpose is to create a well-rounded approach to prison. A lot of times we have seen individuals go out into the institutions with a skill such as a GED or a working skill, carpentry, culinary, and they fail, we tried to find out why. A lot of times it's because they haven't delved into themselves. They did not look into themselves to understand the reasons for their failure. The goal is to create an environment that will help offenders navigate their incarceration timeframe and equip them with the tools to successfully transition.

It's about a plan. We come in here and we identify the veterans and we let them know that our resources available, let them know they are not alone and we care and we want to put a plan together for them so when they are released, they are successful.

FCI McKean is located in the Northeast region. Where are one of 20 facilities located in the Northeast region, we are in the northwest corner of Pennsylvania. Resources are hard to get. It's sometimes a challenge to get individuals to come in and work with our veterans but if we

centralize a location to help the veterans this might be helpful down the road so that no veterans will go without treatment and they haven't easier access to the VA.

Regional BOP veteran statistics, incarcerated veterans are 8890 about 5.5% of the BOP is incarcerated vets average sentencing length is 165 months, incarcerated vets in the Northeast is 1348, about 5.6, a little higher than the national BOP statistics.

Average centers in the Northeast region is 155 months. You can see in the picture, there are the inmates in the group. With the program coordinator. One of the volunteers, is there also.

Program admission, my idea is to create one institution per region. In the Northeast there are several regions across Southwest -- there is an institution dedicated for a program. There is a readjustment program. This will give centralized locations to all programming, each institution will determine the number of people eligible to participate. We'll have to start out small, the program will have to get up and running and get some evidence-based statistics behind it but once it does, we can grow. If my medium location in ABA housing unit to start, -- it may be a housing unit to start, new veteran commitments recommended by the sentencing judge. We identify the process from day one, one that vet goes into care and a sentence, the judge recognizes this person is a veteran and offers them an opportunity to stay within the region. Then they get the opportunity go there or not and I want to have it as all veterans are being included not just the ones who have benefits coming to them but all of them. The service is out there. They fulfill the needs of the dishonorably discharged as well as the general discharge veteran.

Program requirements, the first thing is a copy of the discharge form, it was not coming straight from the courts, it would have to be transferred in from other institutions. One of the prerequisites for transferring and would have to be 18 months clear conduct.

There has to be a willingness to participate they have to go to their case management and have to be transferred to the program to make sure they are eligible.

Attendance at all classes meetings and groups are required. We will get into this further into the program but the requirements are set up for the program, they have to fulfill all those commitments almost sign a contract when they get in here. We will make them accountable for the meetings they must attend.

The program concept, it is broken down into five different areas, life skills, therapy, wellness, work skills, education. With all of them, not just one particular area, to make that well-rounded holistic approach to treat the veteran.

When we focus just on certain areas, we don't get the full Outlook we don't get the person to look at themselves and find out their potential and tap into that. >>

I will do a question. I have the percentages on how they responded. While at a facility which is the most important source of support for the incarcerated veteran? Religious services? Psychology services? Staff sponsored veteran groups? Fellow veterans? Unit staff?

I will give you a minute to answer. >> I am not seeing the results.

The first that they thought was most important is staff sponsored veteran groups. 78%. The next one is fellow veterans, 22%. >> You can compare and contrast. Fellow veterans rated pretty highly. >> One of the areas we want to deal with as far as creating a holistic approach is the cognitive behavioral awareness. We have a nonresidential drug treatment, we have victim impact, alternative violence program, the program with the University of Pittsburg at Bradford and a common -- and they come in, is a program that makes the incarcerated person think of the impact that their crime has had and how they deal with it. Life connection, threshold, part of the chapel, true colors, this is a program we currently have for all of the new transferees. We do a true colors which is a personality assessment. It gets the person thinking about themselves and how they see themselves and how they will get along in prison. Then we have new beginnings, this is setting a goal and tracking them, and to see if your time management and beliefs are lining up with achieving the goal. And we set the tensions, -- there is setting intentions, we have the H.O.P.E. a signature program, we have life coaching. We have training out of Ohio, they have scholarship -- scholarships, the individuals take a coach approach to a lot of their challenges that they see at the institution and it helps them because they can help one another, it is a peer to peer thing, the coach one another, it's truly an asset and something we can hang our hats on. >> The next component is education. GED is mandatory in the federal system, individuals when they arrive, as far as the veterans go, in case they do not have a GED, they would be required to get one. That is mandatory and we have a successful program for helping them.

Second is ESL, English second language, that might be helpful for a bilingual individual who was in the military and we can help them.

Postsecondary education, I will talk about that later. We want to help the veteran use their G.I. Bill.

ACE Classes they have a particular skill that they are taught, or a profession they did and they can bring to the classroom here and we can teach other individuals. We have veterans classes, we have volunteers coming in to teach. We have release requirements, we have programs sponsored by different departments, we have community corrections, fair shake is a program out of Wisconsin, they come into the institution, it is a full reentry continuum, it's a path for success back into society. We have F.A.C.T.S. our own peer to peer facilitators class to teach people how to become facilitators, the turnover is great at McKean we have to have individuals who want to step up to teach classes, this is a great way to prepare individuals to become instructors and leaders. It works on public speaking, lesson plans, curriculum development, it teaches the individual how to become a teacher. We have classes to help pass the written driver's test.

Vocational and work skills, currently we have the Pro*culinary program, this is been accredited by the national accreditation, it is certified, when they complete the program they walk out of here with a certificate, which lends to the hiring process when they walk out with the national certification, they can walk to and an employer and that is recognized. It helps them get their foot in the door. The traits that they have learned, it will help them become a manager.

Our company program, is the NCCER which is the national construction Center education research, that is also accredited, we teach individuals how to build a house from the foundation up, it teaches the corporate safety procedures, and they also become accredited and they walk out of here with a card that can be scanned by a company that uses them, they can see all the modules that have used while they were incarcerated for employment.

We have a predators -- apprenticeship programs. We have a couple of them. We have a cook service, and also the teacher aid program, it is very good for the life coaches and the tutors and teachers because of the fact that it lends to experience so when they are released they have that put on a resume. We have the ACT certifications, a program which looks into three different areas, reading for information, locating information and applied mathematics, which is recognized throughout the country in several states, which shows your competency and a give you certification if you score the best you will be a platinum right down to a bronze. It helps you get a job. We have the ultimate job search, which is made up of staff and inmates, it gives the individual the tools to navigate through a resume writing process, also teaches the soft skills necessary for going into an interview, it teaches them how to fill out an application, we do not have online services, but some employers are still in doing handwritten resumes, it teaches interview techniques also.

We have a couple of job fears every year to bring in employers and agencies to help them have a feel of a job interview. And to brush up on their skills.

We have a ACE Classes that pertain to our vocational work skills, like the culinary math, we have job fairs which I talked about.

The next part of the holistic approach is the wellness approach, the wellness programs, we have yoga, foam roller, we have the H.I.T. Class which is a program -- little sessions from push-ups to setups.

We have circuit training, components of fitness, we have healthcare issues and infectious disease control, on the leisure side, we have an escape so we have arts and crafts, leather craft, crocheting and music classes.

Next part of the well-rounded person, his life skills. We have the inside out dads, we do events at the institution to help the family unification, we do lunch with dad program. We bring in the families and we have games for the kids and we have a luncheon, we reconnect with the

family. We teach and about how to manage their money, we also teach them about avoiding the money trap, Social Security, we set them up so they can get their Social Security card, and identification, we have financial peace, we have a credit card report, they can go to our regional affairs coordinator and request a credit report to see if there is something that will hold them back from getting a loan. Without Wells Fargo and we also in the process of linking the states to get their identification, if it's a nondriving permit, so they can have it. That is a challenge. Sometimes when the individual is released they have to spend up to a month getting photo identification. That slows down the process because when they go to employment they asked for a photo ID.

There are four different elements that make up the readjustment appointment, community living. There's a couple of reasons, we have one designated area and institution, to accommodate the veteran who has been sentence. A lot of the facts or the research behind folks that might be suffering for PTSD or have issues, they miss the camaraderie, that's what we want to set up, the opportunity to get back and be with the ones that are like you, that you have camaraderie, you can trust them, you're living in the same unit, they have the same mission in mind. That is positive change. We also have cognitive behavioral training and self-awareness programs, we have health and wellness programs, and we have late -- life coaching programs. Not only on the compound but you can take a minute to do that in the units. -- You can take advantage to do that in the units.

The next point something about life coaching, there is a difference between mentoring and life coaching, mentoring is someone giving someone else what worked well for them. They give them advice. Coaching is different, coaching is the opportunity to give somebody to be the expert in their own life. That person has been through it and they have lived through that they know what's best for them. The answer is within themselves. That's what the coach is therefore to be a listener and asked thought-provoking questions. And sometimes guided in the right direction, it is the client that is the expert and they are coming up with the answers to their own problems in themselves. It's a little coaching from the code.

Element number two are treatment programs. We know PTSD is a prevalence thing in our society right now and it's just not military, it is law-enforcement, military, society in general, there's a lot of folks that are suffering and the statistics on law enforcement is that one in four go undiagnosed PTSD, so imagine what our facilities are like. Our members see the same things that law enforcement see. They see the threat of violence. So to have a program and please -- place, we brought in the sheriff, and he does a presentation to our population here at McKean, it has been very successful. You could not imagine a response, they thanked the sheriff because they give insight into their own life. We had alcohol and drug counseling. We have treatment for anxiety, and we have a peer-to-peer support program. Not only the life coaching but we want to get a support group that is VA approved. In incarcerated person can be certified, it's just getting the funding.

Element number three on-site education. We have a great relationship with our partner the University at Pittsburgh we have many special events together, one of them the first ever

national presentation with inmates, conducted at the main campus, and inmates presented via videoconference, about taking any questions, we have great relationships with the university, one of the great things, if we could get 15 G.I. bill eligible people in here they will both full-time professor's. The money is there. It is not taxpayer money. It is something they have earned while they were in the military to pay for the college. And the professors would be paid. We also have some technical schools, not only the colleges, we have the space, we have programs, so the program's resources are here it's about getting the funding and sponsorship. Veterans can walk out of here with a trade or a college degree, maybe even a Masters degree depending on the length of the sentence. We need to think outside the box. Universities are willing to partner with us. We are looking at the Pell grant and we have done pilot programming at some of the institutions but they had not looked into -- this is letting individuals at one location to use their G.I. bill. This is money that is already set aside. The taxpayers get upset when the incarcerated population is giving something but now these people have heard this and they cannot comment because it is their money.

We also have the G.I. Bill specialist from the college to work with the students. To set them up and get them ready so they can use their G.I. bill.

Element number four is reentry training, we partner with the veterans programs, I spoke of some of these organizations be willing to work with a less than honorable, individual. This is one of the programs. They are a full-service reentry one-stop center for veterans they do employment education, case management, they are a one-stop shop, they helped our veterans. Our veterans got housing and services.

Benefits training, local service agencies, representatives come in to do training. They go over the benefits training, we have done a lot of that on our own. New veterans to our population can come in and ask for any form, they get guidance, they can submit requests, they can do a service connected disability claim, we have it on site. And if there is an eligibility question, they will come to me. I will send it to my local Representative in Pittsburgh, and she will get back to me if you have eligibility. >> The model of the program is no incarcerated veteran left behind. It is important we do not forget these people. At some point in life they wrote a blank check for this country to prevent -- protect the Constitution. We owe them a debt of gratitude. They have made mistakes. We tried to help them to rebuild themselves. Through this program, we have the start to do that.

We have another question, what area of support as a veteran find to be the most important to help them become a successful transitioning citizen? >> Education, vocational work skills, spiritual, behavioral health, health and wellness. >> The answer are coming in. They decided that education 67% was the most important your the second was vocational and work skills, 22%, and spiritual at 11%.

You can see if your answers coincide.

A little bit of difference. A lot of times, they are the experts. The thing that we take and find important the ones that are limited, they are doing their sentence, we have to listen to them. They are living it every day. If we are not listening we will not be creating programs are effective.

Some confirmation about the program, these are the individuals in the program, after serving in the military, it feels comfortable in an environment like this to be around 18.

The veterans group has inspired me to strive for greatest and to be all that I can be in all of my endeavors.

For me the program has been not only insightful and impactful but also distinguishable from any other programs.

He is a certified life coach, he is a GED tutor and an adjunct professor at the University of Pittsburgh they thought so highly of him, that the professor asked him to go facilitate and teach outside students from the University civilians, and students from the institution.

Concerning the veterans group the thing I like the most about is it has made me look at life in a different way.

This is a real special person, one of our volunteers. Colonel West Martin. He's an amazing man. And he is a volunteer he had a tragedy in his life and was looking for something to do to fill that void. He volunteered for almost 2 years. He had to move out to the West Coast but he is still in contact. It is an honor to work with veterans who still share the dedication to America. They are wrong but through no fault of their own. Members of the veterans group have experienced life with all its brightness and darkness. >> The only way to stay ahead of the ghosts of the past is to keep moving forward. The veterans have helped me to move forward. He had some difficulties in his life and he had avoid and this filled that void. He taught some classes. He taught military history. They gave him the opportunity to learn about the history of this country and himself. We want to crisis intervention to teach them how to avoid some of the crisis they have been through. They gave him a voice. >> We will open it up for questions now.

If you have a question please type it into the chat box. Please change the default to all participants. >>

Where do you find the volunteers to support your program?

Sometimes it comes from recommendations from other individuals. A lot of it is done on our own. We reach out to agencies to see if there are people that would like to help. >> Do you compare or measure outcomes between veterans who participate in the program versus those that do not. >> Veterans who participate in the program versus that do not, fewer technical violations, are you seeing lesser recidivism. >>

We're not really tracking things because a lot of the veterans have not gone home. We want them to know -- from the veterans that are here that participate, they are succeeding. They are setting themselves up for success. There are veterans who choose not to participate and I see them spiraling down the same path that they came in on, they will not invest the time into the program. The ones that have I see the difference. As far as behavioral issues, and disciplinary issues, I cannot speak of one that has been in trouble in the last three years. So it is working.

Do you have special housing specific to veterans?

We just do programming, that's why the volunteers come in, we hold events in the chapel, the goal is to try to get designated units and hopefully to an institution where it is full of veterans. The staff would just find a lot of this, they are dedicated individuals and they just made a mistake in their lives. You'll see a clean and secure place that they care about their community and staff and one another.

I agree. We are seeing positive results across the country where you see specialized housing for veterans. >> Had we make veterans a national priority?

We have to get the leaders to listen to what we say, I got invited to the attorney's office, I went all the way to the national level to get folks to come here and visit or listen to what we have to say. And maybe make some funding available. Maybe the VA can make some funding available, to folks have gotten into trouble. And they would see the benefit. Surly to invest back into the future, is much less cost than if we were to keep them incarcerated, it's 30 or \$50,000 per year to house intimate. If we can invest a little in your future, and set them up for success we may not see them come back.

I agree with everything you said, education and awareness is critical, showcasing innovation like we are doing here today, through webinars, being a leader and starting the conversation, I think it's important for folks no matter where you're at in the criminal justice continuum to track your numbers. Show there is a need for programs for veterans. It's important that we ask the questions it's not just are you a veteran it's how you frame it. Have you served in the military. A lot of folks don't really consider themselves veteran if they have not served in combat.

I think those critical partnerships that you discussed earlier about your partnerships with the VA and service organizations, and communicate what you're doing is building off of that.

I think you talk about this but I will ask it anyway, how can we better support our incarcerated veterans to ensure successful return to society?

I think, create similar programs with in your institutions. It doesn't have to be any major thing, just start out small. Some -- have somebody from the community come in and talk. Give them a voice so they feel someone is listening. A lot of times the correctional worker, they see them

all the time. If you brought somebody in from the community, and show them there is support, you get the dialogue going and we can start to help them but on a larger scale, it's about thinking big, making this grow, if we can get an institution designated solely for veterans, imagine the stuff we could do. In our institution, if we can get enough G.I. Bill and the little -- eligible individuals here, vets helping vets, it's being able to connect. That's why this program, it makes a difference as opposed to now volunteering to participate in the program. You talked about them spiraling out of control, you see that in the treatment courts when the mentors are helping the participants, the outcomes are significantly better.

Yes. The facilitation certainly and we created a facilitator model, we have shared that amongst the different programs, yes.

How important is leadership backing?

It is paramount. I have a warden right now that is very supportive, so it's great to have the support and also the support to push these ideas to the higher level, to the central office, so we can start to see changes in our correctional facilities.

What is the total cost to implement a program?

We pay nothing. We were all volunteers. The VA staff is paid, they ask to come in, there is no cost. If people are willing to work with the veterans. Some of them it is their job to work with the vets.

What is the name of the title of the VA professional that you work with?

So people know who to ask.

There are several different people. Martin is one of the individuals. He comes in and talks to the Mets about retraining them and -- talks to the inmates about retraining them and they work with the federal prisons, they can be qualify for eligibility.

Back to leadership, if you are out there, what do you do that with a similar program, have you go about getting some buy-in from the stakeholders?

Approach than show them the positives, it can only help us, the benefit here has been amazing, it's been a voice for the individuals in the program, is a sacred place to come and talk to the volunteers and to the VA people, it's help them with their incarceration we do not have the disciplinary problem. If you have less problems and you can see the benefits in the program, why would you not implemented? That would be the first step. >> I have no further questions in the chat box. Do you want to conclude?

Thank you for your participation and listening. It was enjoyable. I appreciate everybody giving me this opportunity.

Thank you. You did a great job. This concludes the session. I want to point out, these workshops are available on the website in about one week. You're invited to continue the discussion, to access the discussion select the link. We invite you to explore other features of the website including the exhibit hall, resource room, and chat rooms to learn about other ideas.

This concludes the presentation. You may now disconnect your lines. Thank you. Have a great day.