

Macomb Veterans Action Collaborative Minutes  
Macomb Community Action Training Room  
21885 Dunham Clinton Township, MI 48038  
Monday, September 9, 2019

I. **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Laura Rios at 9:07 am.

**Attendees:**

Laura Rios (Co-Chair), Veteran Services  
Christy Koons, Region 10 PIHP  
Rodney Tolbert, Strategy for Effective Living  
Jason White, Vets Returning Home  
Josh Mathis, Macomb Vet Center  
Katie Carroll, MC Veterans  
Lisa Marie Duncan-Edwards, MC Veterans  
Madeline Habib, MCCMH/HSCB  
Mark Meadows, VA Medical Center  
Shelly Rood, Female Veterans Peer Support  
Stephen Boegehold, DHHS Administration  
Yolanda Spencer-Dandridge, Detroit VA MC  
Jennifer Kimm, MISC MI Works  
Gabiella Barthlow, Macomb County Veterans  
Mr. Johnson, Buddy to Buddy Program

Nicole Gauthier (Co-Chair), Veteran Navigator  
Robin Daniels, Senator Peter's staff  
Keith Edwards, VVA Chapter 154  
Gary Purcell, VVA Chapter 154  
Kara Fields, Macomb Community College  
Keila Williams, MDHHS – MRS  
Liz Sergeant, Macomb Community Action  
Joyce Moultrie, Macomb County Veterans  
Paul Salcepuedes, Veteran Employment Services  
Stacia Miller, Sailor, Soldier, Airman & Marine Center  
Susan McCain, Mission Ambition/Female Vets  
William Cochran, Congressman Andy Levin's staff  
Susan Casadei, Harbor Health Homecare  
Brian Webb, State of Michigan DHHS  
Chaka McDonald, Oakland County Veteran Navigator

II. **INTRODUCTIONS**

The committee members went around the table and introduced themselves and the service organization to which they worked.

III. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The August 5, 2019 minutes were approved with a change in Section VII Round Robin to read: **Liz Sergeant, from Macomb County Action, is also working** on a Landlord Advisory Board in Macomb County; she hopes to have that up and running in a few months. Laura Rios stated that she would make that change and post it to the website.

IV. **NEW/OLD BUSINESS/VCAT update**

Mention made of prior outreach on Saturday, August 31, 2019 for women veterans.

**VCAT Update:** Kara Fields from Motor City Veteran Community Action Team is hosting an event on Friday, September 20, 2019 at Spindler Park in East Pointe, MI. Focus is going to be resiliency training and they are partnering with the American Red Cross. Registration is 9:30 am

v. **SPECIAL SPEAKER**: Michael Kolb, Harold W. Vick Funeral Home, Mt. Clemens, Michigan.

Michael spoke about the steps of what happens with a client after a veteran passes and that the staff at Vick's will discuss arrangements with the family and inquire if the deceased is a veteran. If so, staff will explain about burial in Great Lakes National Cemetery in Holly, MI, and if time permits, they will also assist and contact Great Lakes for the veterans' family. Vick's will assist the family in coordinating the veteran honors service, obtaining a flag and ordering a headstone. It was stated that there is no law that states that a funeral home has to transport the cremains of a veteran to Great Lakes National Cemetery; only if they are unclaimed remains does a funeral home have to accompany the cremains. Michael explained a bit about direct cremation and distributed a general price list to all in attendance with fees for a viewing, direct burial, direct cremation and miscellaneous items are listed. Also on this list is a paragraph describing the veteran benefits that could be available. Nicole Gauthier, Steven Boegehold and Michael Kolb discussed how DHHS can provide assistance with burial and cremation costs and Rodney Tolbert and Michael discussed a Navy burial at sea. Michael explained that they receive referrals from local hospitals or the medical examiner for an unclaimed veteran. Unclaimed remains that are at the funeral home for at least 12 months need to be sent to a final disposition location. Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Detroit has either buried or interred deceased unclaimed "civilians" since veterans would have been sent to Great Lakes National Cemetery in Holly, MI. Vick's only works with Macomb County residents because if they have to get a public administrator for the deceased, the deceased would have had to have been a resident of Macomb County for at least six months. If the deceased meets the residency requirements, a public administrator will be assigned by the Probate Court and they will act as the next of kin.

VI. **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**A. Benefits/Communication:** Laura Rios discussed the upcoming Weapons Safety Class being held on September 13, 2019. This class is for veterans only and covers gun safety issues and there will be no shooting during the class. There are still available openings. Currently there are only have two people that have signed up. If they don't get many more veterans to sign up, the class will be canceled. This class was funded for veterans by a grant Laura obtained and it will be held at Close Quarters Tactical on Utica Road in Shelby Township; Laura does have a flyer if anyone would like more information. If you know of a veteran who would like to attend this free class, please have them call the office at 586-469-5315 to sign up.

Veterans Services also received a grant to purchase gas cards, bus passes and Uber cards. The grant was for fiscal year to fiscal year so they need to be used by September 30, 2019. Any unused cards or passes need to be returned to Lansing if not used by September 30<sup>th</sup>. If you know of a veteran with a barrier to transportation, please advise them to come to our office and request one (completed application [done at Veterans Services], DD214 and Macomb County resident w/ID is required). If a veteran is attending an event such as our Boot Camp, they do not have to be a Macomb resident. Normally, a veteran can receive two gas cards or sets of bus passes per year with a minimum of 30 days in between receiving each gas card/bus passes. Laura can waive and justify giving a veteran an extra card.

Homeless Kits are available mainly for Macomb County veterans. They are to help county veterans that are living in shelters and in their automobiles. They consist of a shirt, hat, gloves, blanket, scarf, socks, Chap Stick and a sewing kit. They do not have any toiletries such as soap, toothbrush, etc. They are available at Veterans Services and if you know of people who may be in need of something like this,

please come to the office to pick them up. A question was raised if a veteran was staying in St. Clair county, would they would be eligible for a homeless kit and Laura stated that yes he could be given one.

Restructuring MVAC. The current focus is looking at how the committee may change going forward. This format has been the same for the last six years. Attendance when the MVAC first started was around 100 members; now it is at approximately 20-30 members (usually less than 50 attendees). At the November meeting, there are going to be some break-out sessions, some brainstorming and everyone is going to be posed some questions as to how they would like to see the MVAC function in the future. Input on such subjects such as how often meetings should be held, if information should just be shared via email, etc. The goal of MVAC was to come up with solutions to transportation, homelessness, and health care for veterans. The flowcharts that have been created do identify solutions to these situations. Please make every effort to attend this November 4<sup>th</sup> 9:00 am meeting to voice your opinions.

**B. Employment:** Jennifer Kimm mentioned that there are ten veterans signed up for this session of the Veterans Boot Camp.

Mark Meadows spoke about the event on Saturday, August 31, 2019 at the American Legion Hall on Groesbeck. It was a Careers & Business event for women veterans. Fifty-seven women attended the event; four were given firm job offers and six have interviews scheduled in the upcoming weeks. Mark discussed how women veterans are an underserved population and how this event helped businesses and supportive services address some of the issues female veterans face and to give them a voice. Regarding “the Big Three”, they are at a standstill right now due to contract negotiations. There are some training opportunities for welding (partnership with the UAW & Ford). Ford will be starting up a training evolution for an IT program to service one of their buildings. It would be for about 100 veterans to go into the IT world. Beaumont Royal Oak & Grosse Pointe are looking for patient transporters, food service workers and other positions to be filled that don’t require the background of being an RN or a doctor. If a veteran is looking to join the medical field, this is a good opportunity for them to get their foot in the door.

Tier I suppliers to the Big 3 (small job shops) are continuing to hire as well as the food service industry (this is very, very hot right now). Downtown Detroit is very hot in the culinary field for hiring.

Mark mentioned that the Veteran Bootcamp through Michigan Works! is a very good place for a veteran to start on their job search and to for us to also remember about the Detroit VA Voc Rehab program.

**C. Services:** Madeline Habib wanted to let the group know that she is in the process of updating the Homeless Flow Chart; she is waiting for a final confirmation. On Saturday, Madeline went to the opening of a mobile shower trailer that serves homeless individuals and was very impressed. She said that she was not only impressed with the trailer but also the group that is sponsoring it (the Wave Project). She stated it has private stalls including a toilet, sink and a stand up shower. It’s going to be at The Well (missionary training center) on Gratiot in Mt. Clemens once a month on the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday but they are going to be looking for other sights for the trailer as well.

**D. Membership:** Shaun Taft was absent from the meeting. Laura reviewed with the group if you have attended a meeting before to please find your name on the roster and if needed to update any information. If you have not been to a meeting before but would like to become a member, fill out the membership request form and find a blank white name “tent”, write your name on it and give it to Madeline Habib and she will print out a blue name plaque for you.

**E. Faith Based:** Rodney Talbert has been traveling throughout the country going to graveside services for veterans who have not had any current religious affiliation. Rodney states that he does not charge a fee for his services and that he has also been giving out the “homeless bags”.

**F. Higher Education:** Kara Fields states there is a lot going on in higher education. Schools are in the process of reconfirming a five year contract with the Department of Defense ensuring that colleges are treating the service members on campus with quality education. Forever GI Bill begins December 1, 2019. Kara said that people may be getting adjustments on their housing payments and should be getting a letter at the beginning of the year explaining what they should be expecting to get paid. Some of have been underpaid and it will explain how they will be getting reimbursed; if they have been overpaid they will not have to pay that amount back. Kara said that they have been working really hard trying to connect colleges with the VA Medical Center. The college has been working with the VAMC trying to get someone from mental health to be on campus at Macomb one day a week to be available for veteran students. She also discussed trying to have a doctor or nurse be available on campus to help students sign up for VA Healthcare. Legal changes have recently been handed down by the federal court about the use of multiple GI benefits and that it is illegal for the VA to force someone to give a benefit up to take on Post 9-11 benefits. 100% service connected veterans will have a federal loan forgiveness program for their education debts; 50,000 veterans nationwide could be affected. Anything paid by them should be coming back to them. If there is a “forgiveness of debt” Laura stated that they will owe taxes on it like it is earned income.

## **VII. ROUND ROBIN**

Susan Casadei stated that there is personal care available to help veterans get a home health aide for assistance with ADL’s through the Detroit VA. Any agency that has a contract with the VA can help provide these services.

Liz Sergeant will not be getting any funding until October but to send people to her starting the week of September 16, 2019 and they can begin doing intakes but money will not be available until October. The office is still working with and helping with landlord issues.

Stacia Miller stated that they do one big fund raiser a year – it is the weekend of September 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. They are raffling off a Harley Davison motorcycle. She has flyers that are available with information. They also have an upcoming workshop to complete a “basic will” for veterans at no charge (no trusts).

Stephen Boegehold states the fiscal year ends September 30, 2019. Anyone who is working with veterans or families who are getting behind in either utility bills or need a furnace replacement can apply with DHHS for assistance. Healthy MI Plan has some changes regarding work requirements coming up in January. Letters will be sent out stating for food stamps or assistance that you must prove you are working, doing job activities, looking for a job or must prove you are a good cause for exemption. DHHS states they cannot discourage anyone from applying for assistance regardless of citizenship or immigrant status – they can not refuse to take anyone’s application.

Josh Mathis from The Vet Center said they are offering fall yoga classes and brought in flyers for people to take back to their offices with them. Also a video game event for veterans is upcoming and he has a flyer for that also.

Gabriella Barthlow stated that she would like to be kept busy and a reminder to send referrals her way. Gabriella said sometimes the veterans are not ready for her so she does screen the calls to be sure that the veteran is ready to make some changes in their life.

Gary Purcell announced that veteran Richard Dean Madison from Fraser was added to the Memorial Wall in Washington, DC and to the wall at Freedom Hill. Another POW has been returned 72 years later, a WWI Marine veteran from Mt. Clemens, MI. He will be in Great Lakes Cemetery. Gary stated that whatever they have to do to keep the VVA Center on 15 Mile Road open they will do. Veterans Day at Clinton Grove Cemetery at 11 am they will have two women veteran guest speakers.

Keith Edwards (POW/MIA chairman) spoke about the POW/MIA Vigil being held at Resurrection Cemetery. It is held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of September beginning at 2:00 pm every year. This year the vigil begins on September 20<sup>th</sup> 2:00 pm until September 21<sup>st</sup> 2:00 pm. Opening ceremony will be at 6:00 pm on the 20<sup>th</sup> with a couple of guest speakers. This is the 34<sup>th</sup> year they are holding the vigil and currently there are 48 missing Michigan MIA soldiers. The names of the missing are read every hour on the hour. Keith brought flyers of different sizes to distribute to the committee and said that this is probably the most important thing that the Chapter does each year.

Nicole Gauthier wanted to remind everyone that there is no barrier to her helping a veteran – they could have served any era and have any character of discharge.

Kara Fields stated that this will be the 3<sup>rd</sup> year that they are having a Student Veteran Photo Exhibit. It is a walk-through event being held on November 4<sup>th</sup> through November 15<sup>th</sup> and on November 8<sup>th</sup> there will be a breakfast at the Macomb South Campus. Invites with further information will be sent out from the college.

Madeline Habib wanted to remind the committee of the Information Exchange being held at the Macomb ISD on Thursday, October 24<sup>th</sup>. Madeline said the registration forms will be out by the end of the week.

Chaka McDonald spoke about Freedom Road Transportation and that they are looking for volunteer transport drivers. The veteran finds the driver and Freedom Road will reimburse the driver for gas mileage. Hoops for Troops is having a resource fair on November 6<sup>th</sup> from 10 am to 3 pm. There will be about 100 tables and vendors at the Little Caesars Arena in Detroit. They are looking for resources for housing, substance abuse, mental health and community resources.

Jason White from Vet's Returning Home stated they have 43 beds in their facility and that they help homeless veterans transition from their facility into their new home.

Shelly Rood stated that there is a 50% increase in sexual assault on women in the military in the last two years. Her program is female peers helping to lift each other up in fellowship. They meet for one hour once a month and do a mental health focus. Shelly said she would like to solidify their program and get it more well-known; she is recruiting female veterans to join their program "the average woman who served in the military". Shelly would like to meet with each member of the collaborative individually by coming to their office, seeing their resource center, and where they put their flyers (so she can put their flyers there too). She stated that they don't have a home office for their program and asked that if anyone has an open office in their location that they would be willing to let them utilize it that would be greatly appreciated. They do have an offer to partner at Selfridge Air Force Base but not everyone can get on Selfridge (so that would be a barrier).

Mark Meadows spoke about the Hoops for Troops program and mentioned that they are looking for approximately 100 resources/employers for this event on November 6<sup>th</sup>. Please check your email for information on new upcoming events. If you are not on Mark's email list and would like to be added, please make a request to Mark at: [mark.meadows@va.gov](mailto:mark.meadows@va.gov)

Keith Edwards is the contact for the Air Show at Selfridge next year – dates are June 5-7, 2020. Keith will be coordinating the veterans section so if an organization or agency is veteran centered and would like to have a presence out there, please contact Keith at the VVA Chapter 154.

**NEXT MEETING**

Monday, October 7, 2019 starting at 9:00 A.M. at:  
Macomb Community Action Training Room, 21885 Dunham Road, Clinton Township  
Special Speaker: Gerald Fisher-Curly (Mission Act) Laura Rios (Health Care)  
November Special Speaker: Diane Laskey, Grace Counseling  
December Special Speaker: Angela Bower, Yoga Medics

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 A.M.