



OACAA News

Ohio VETS Pilot Project Yields Successful Results

The Ohio Vocation, Education, Training and Services (VETS) pilot project administered by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies and funded by the Ohio Development Services Agency has concluded with successful results. The pilot project was instituted at six Community Action Agencies throughout the state and offered education and training to assist veterans in finding meaningful employment at a living wage, and provided them and their families with other supportive services to help them attain self-sufficiency.

The project, which ran from July 1, 2012 to October 15, 2013, served 417 veterans. The project focused on using the Family Development case management model to assist veterans with finding employment. The Family Development model includes personal visits with a family development specialist, whom in this case was often a fellow veteran, where an assessment is

Six Pilot Community Action Agencies:

- Community Action Commission of Erie, Huron & Richland Counties - Richland County location
- Community Action Commission of Scioto County
- Community Action Partnership of the Greater Dayton Area
- Council for Economic Opportunities in Greater Cleveland
- Washington Morgan Community Action
- WSOS (Wood, Sandusky, Ottawa & Seneca Counties) Community Action Commission

given and a plan is created to help the participant achieve self-sufficiency by setting and achieving short- and long-term goals. The family development specialist also provides emotional support and referrals to other services and supports.

According to the program evaluation conducted by Deborah A. Crawford Consulting and Lang Consulting Group, during the pilot, on average customers had 3.3 goals planned and 2.1 goals (64 percent) were achieved. Most of the goals set by clients were job related. Of the 318 customers who had an employment goal, 50 percent obtained employment and 12 percent were still in the process at the time of the evaluation. According to the evaluators, a 50 percent job-finding success rate is similar to other veterans' employment programs, such as the program run by Volunteers of America. The highest category for goal achievement (82 percent) was for short-term job-related goals, such as transportation, clothing or equipment. That was followed by a 72 percent achievement rate for mental and physical health goals.

The agencies participating in the program found that one of the program's greatest assets was its flexibility. While

Goal/Need Category	# of total goals planned	# of total goals achieved	% of total goals achieved
Employment/improve current employment	353	187	53
Job-related training/certification	155	59	38
Short-term job-related needs (e.g. transportation, clothing, equipment, job physical)	374	307	82
Housing/mortgage/utilities/financial literacy	222	144	65
Education or degree	143	98	69
Physical/mental health	29	21	72
Government benefits/social services/veteran benefits	96	63	66
Family development/childcare/parenting/life skills	19	11	58
<i>Total</i>	<i>1391</i>	<i>890</i>	<i>64%</i>

Customer Program Status	#	%
Completed Program	196	48
Still in Progress	130	32
Dropped Out/Terminated	79	20

other veterans programs had limitations on when and how they could use their dollars to assist veterans, the VETS program could provide essential supportive services, such as tools, clothing, gas and initial rent. According to the pilot site leaders, these supportive services often made the difference for employment or stability.

Another benefit that participating agencies found from the program was that it enabled them to develop working relationships with other organizations or entities serving veterans. In fact, two pilot sites initiated new community coalitions that have led to more outreach to veterans and increasing attention to veterans' issues.

Agencies also noted that while they had been serving veterans in the past, they had not been prioritized. This program allowed veterans who might normally be on a waiting list for services to receive priority.

While the program did yield successful results, there were some lessons learned. One issue that the pilot agencies noted was that more time was needed to implement the project in order to realistically assess the outcomes. Other issues included working with veterans who are temporarily unemployable due to a disability or other factor, addressing their unique mental health and addiction service needs, credentialing and military skills transfer, working with veterans who did not deploy or have criminal records, and attracting young veterans to services.

The program received a lot of praise from participants. As one participant said, "It was very helpful... It was excellent... There was a lot of face to face [time]... It was a blessing." Another commented, "It was very helpful, couldn't have done more... pointed everything out to the T... keep up the program, I would go back and I liked it." When asked what the most valuable aspect of the program was, comments included:

- "Knowing they had my back... helped me for two months until I could get on my feet."
- "One-on-one, getting prepared – real helpful."
- "Job placement and possible future help with schooling."
- "To go in and sit and talk to me for a while, [staff person] is something else, does a lot for you, I thought I was going to lose my place and the program helped with rent until my first paycheck."

We hope that the pilot agencies and other CAAs can learn from this valuable program and continue to offer needed services to veterans in Ohio.

Success Stories

- An Army veteran came to an agency with severe PTSD. With his permission, staff linked him to the VA medical center where he has received treatment and is doing much better. Agency staff was able to help him get a temporary job with UPS and help him enroll in a program to become a state-tested nursing assistant, one of his goals. Once certified, he plans to work for Volunteers of America.
- One participant was able to become eligible for the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), a new Department of Veterans Affairs program designed to get veterans trained into high demand jobs. The veteran is now receiving technical training as a welder and expected to graduate in the spring and attain a job paying \$25 or more per hour.
- An Air Force veteran who was unemployed and had sole custody of her nine year-old daughter was one month behind on her rent and needed financial assistance to prevent eviction when she entered the program. VETS provided case management, financial assistance, gas cards and referrals to the local food pantry. These services enabled her to stabilize and gain full-time employment with a local agency.