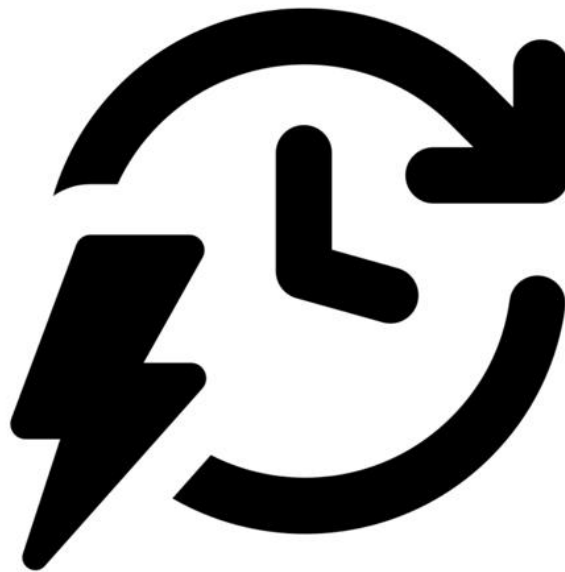


Veteran's Crisis Response Team



Commander's Outreach Initiative

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Commander's Outreach Initiative: Building Bridges Between Veterans and Law Enforcement

Critical Incident Report and Program Proposal

Incident Overview

Veteran Crisis Outreach Initiative Highlighted

Date: November 15, 2024

Submitted by: Jim Morgan

On November 15, 2024, a critical incident involving a recently discharged veteran underscored the urgent need for a streamlined approach to veteran crisis response. The veteran, facing emotional distress following a relationship's end, shared alarming messages and photos with his ex-girlfriend's mother, suggesting imminent suicide.

Key Actions:

- **Notification:** Demorest City Manager contacted the VFW Commander, who contacted me immediately.
- **Law Enforcement Response:** City police, observing veteran's calm response to female officers, employed this approach to de-escalate the situation in a wooded section of Demorest. The veteran surrendered peacefully, with no use of the nearby pistol.

Follow-Up:

On November 19, the veteran visited the Police Department to request the return of his pistol. After extensive assessment, officers determined veteran showed no suicidal indicators and returned the firearm.

Context and Call for Change

This incident follows the tragic death of veteran Aaron Patterson in Clarkesville on September 7, 2024, during a law enforcement encounter. Patterson's loss emphasized the dire consequences of insufficient communication between law enforcement and VSOs.

Response:

The **Commander's Outreach Initiative** was established to:

1. Improve communication between law enforcement and VSOs.
2. Ensure immediate intervention and support for veterans in crisis.
3. Prevent future tragedies through proactive engagement.

Commander's Outreach Initiative

Mission Statement:

To build a collaborative framework between law enforcement and VSOs that ensures timely and compassionate support for veterans and their families during crises.

Key Components:

1. **Information Distribution:** Officers provide veterans and families with VSO contact information.
2. **Commander Notification:** Law enforcement alerts VSO commanders to veteran-involved incidents.
3. **Resource Delivery:** VSOs connect veterans to mental health services, VA treatment, and family support.

Proposed Framework

Contact Protocol:

- Officers gain access to a dedicated email and hotline for immediate VSO commander communication.
- VSO leadership coordinates rapid responses, offering tailored resources.

Veteran Engagement:

- Commanders follow up post-incident to ensure veterans' needs are met and provide ongoing care.

Training:

- Offer law enforcement training on veteran-specific challenges (e.g., PTSD, TBI).
- Train VSOs on effective collaboration with law enforcement during crises.

Sample Scenarios and Responses

Scenario 1: Welfare Check at a Veteran's Residence

- **Incident:** Agitated behavior and potential PTSD symptoms.
- **Response:** Officers contact VSO for context and follow-up, facilitating mental health intervention.

Scenario 2: Traffic Stop with a Distressed Veteran

- **Incident:** Erratic driving tied to civilian life struggles.
- **Response:** VSO provides immediate resources, such as peer support groups.

Scenario 3: Public Disturbance with a Homeless Veteran

- **Incident:** Aggressive behavior and disorientation.
- **Response:** VSO assists with temporary shelter and connects the veteran to VA housing programs.

Benefits

1. **Enhanced Law Enforcement Efficiency:** Officers receive specialized support from VSOs, enabling focus on broader responsibilities.
2. **Improved Veteran Outcomes:** Timely intervention fosters reintegration and stability.
3. **Community Trust:** Strengthened ties between veterans, law enforcement, and the community.

Responding to Veterans in Crisis: Steps for Outreach Teams

When a veteran shows signs of suicidal tendencies, it's critical to act with care, empathy, and urgency. This guide outlines how outreach teams, including law enforcement and VSO representatives, can support veterans effectively:

1. Recognize the Warning Signs

Be alert to indicators of distress, such as:

- Expressions of hopelessness, guilt, or feeling like a burden.
- Withdrawal from loved ones or isolation.
- Risky behaviors, substance misuse, or sudden mood swings.
- Talking about death, self-harm, or giving away possessions.

If these signs are present, proceed with compassionate engagement.

2. Approach with Care

- **Establish a Safe Setting:** Speak to the veteran in a private, non-threatening environment where they feel secure.
- **Be Nonjudgmental:** Use a calm, understanding tone. Avoid appearing confrontational or dismissive.

3. Start the Conversation

Use clear and empathetic language to open a dialogue:

- "I'm here because I care about your well-being and want to support you."
- "You've been through a lot, and it's okay to feel overwhelmed. How can we help?"
- "Have you been thinking about hurting yourself or taking your own life?"

Being direct shows concern and can encourage openness.

4. Actively Listen

- Allow the veteran to share their feelings without interruptions.
- Acknowledge their pain: "I hear you, and I'm here to help."

Your role is to validate, not to solve their problems in the moment.

5. Engage Support Systems

- **Contact VSO Representatives:** Notify commanders or liaisons from the VFW, DAV, or American Legion to coordinate follow-up.
- **Leverage Local Resources:** Ensure they know about available programs, such as transportation to VA services or mental health care.

6. Offer Immediate Assistance

- **Veterans Crisis Line:** Dial 988, press 1, or text 838255. Offer to call or text with them.

- Local Emergency Contacts: If the veteran is in immediate danger, do not leave them alone. Contact law enforcement or emergency medical services.

7. Continue the Connection

- Encourage the veteran to seek ongoing professional help.
- Provide follow-up care through VSO resources or outreach programs.
- Stay in touch to show continued support and build trust.

For Outreach Team Coordination

- Law Enforcement: Ensure officers responding to veterans in crisis provide contact details for local VSOs and outreach teams.
- VSO Commanders: Collaborate to schedule follow-up visits and connect veterans with VA resources or counseling services.

By responding with compassion and connecting veterans to resources, outreach teams can help save lives and reinforce the strength of the veteran community.

Veteran Crisis Response Guide

Key Steps for Outreach Teams:

1. **Recognize Warning Signs:** Isolation, risky behavior, or suicidal idealization.
2. **Approach with Care:** Use a calm, empathetic tone in a non-threatening environment.
3. **Start the Conversation:**
 - "I'm here to help. What can I do?"
 - "Have you thought about hurting yourself?"
4. **Engage Support Systems:** Involve VSO commanders and provide resources such as the Veterans Crisis Line (988, press 1).
5. **Follow Through:** Ensure ongoing support and check-ins with the veteran.

Conclusion

The Commander's Outreach Initiative represents a vital step toward a proactive, unified response to veteran crises. By fostering collaboration between law enforcement and VSOs, this program can save lives, build trust, and provide the care our veterans and their families deserve.

For More Information:

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 - **Hotline:** (706) 670-4800

Veterans Crisis Response Team Intake Form

Personal Information:

- Name:
- Date of Birth:
- Address:
- Phone Number:
- Disability Rating:

Emergency Contact:

- Name:
- Relationship:
- Phone Number:

Current Situation:

1. Is Law Enforcement Involved? Yes/No
2. Briefly describe the nature of the crisis:
3. Current Location:
4. Safety Concerns:

Medical Information:

- Medication (if any):
- Medical Conditions:

Military Background:

- Deployment History:
- PTSD Diagnosis (if applicable):
- Access to VA Services:

Responder/Observer Information:

- Name:
- Role/Relationship to the Veteran:
- Observations:

SAFETY PLANS WORK

There is Hope.



1 Write 3 warning signs that a crisis may be developing.

2 Write 3 internal coping strategies that can take your mind off your problems.

3 Who/What are 3 people or places that provide distraction?
(Write name/place and phone numbers)

_____ Phone _____
_____ Phone _____
_____ Phone _____

4 Who can you ask for help? (Write name/place and phone numbers)

_____ Phone _____
_____ Phone _____
_____ Phone _____

5 Professionals or agencies you can contact during a crisis:

Clinician _____ Phone _____
Local Urgent Care or Emergency Department:
Address _____ Phone _____

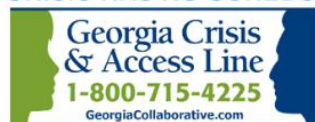
Text or call 988 or chat 988lifeline.org

6 Write out a plan to make your environment safer.
(Write 2 things)



988
SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE

A CRISIS HAS NO SCHEDULE



Help is available 24/7 for problems with developmental disabilities, mental health, drugs, or alcohol.

Provided through the Georgia Collaborative ASO



Chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat • Text 838255

Confidential support is available 24/7.

RESOURCES

VA Medical Centers and Outpatient Clinics in Georgia

Center	Address	Phone
Albany Clinic	814 Radford Blvd., Building 7000 Albany, GA 31701	229-446-9000
Athens Clinic	249 Highway 29 North Athens, GA 30601	706-227-4534
Atlanta Vet Center	1800 Phoenix Boulevard, Building 400, Suite 404 Box 55 Atlanta, GA 30349	404-370-3864 Or 877-927-8387
Fort Mcpherson/ East Point CBOC	1701 hardee Ave., SW Atlanta, GA 30310	404-321-6111 x 2222
Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center	950 15th Street Downtown or 1 Freedom Way Uptown Augusta, GA 30904	706-733-0188
Richmond County (Augusta)	2050 Walton Way, Suite 100 Augusta, GA 30904	706-729-5762
Austell VA CBOC	2041 Mesa valley Way Austell, GA 30082	404-329-2222
Blairsville CBOC	1294 Highway 515 East, Suite 100 Blairsville , GA 30512	404-329-2222
Brunswick CBOC	1111 Glynco Parkway, Bldg. 2, Suite 200 Brunswick, GA 31525	912-261-2355
Columbus Clinic	1310 13th AVENUE Columbus, GA 31901	706-257-7205
Atlanta VA Medical Center	1670 Clairmont Road Decatur, GA 30033	404-321-6111
Decatur Clinic	755 Commerce Drive, 2nd Floor Decatur, GA 30030	404-417-5200
Carl Vinson VA Medical Center	1826 Veterans Blvd. Dublin, GA 31021	478-272-1210
VISN7: VA Southeast Network	3700 Crestwood Parkway, Suite 500 Duluth, GA 30096	678-924-5700
Perry Outreach Clinic	2370 S. Houston Lake Road Kathleen, GA 31047	478-224-1309
Lawrenceville Clinic	455 Philip Blvd, Suite 200 Lawrenceville, GA 30046	404-329-2222
Lawrenceville Vet Center	930 River Centre Place Lawrenceville, GA 30043	404-728-4195 Or 877-927-8387

12/26/24

Center	Address	Phone
Macon Clinic	5398 Thomaston Road, Suite B Macon, GA 31220	478-476-8868
Macon Vet Center	750 Riverside Drive Macon, GA 31201	478-477-3813 Or 877-927-8387
Marietta Vet Center	40 Dodd St., Suite 700 Marietta, GA 30060	404-327-4954 Or 877-927-8387
Newnan Clinic	39-A Oak Hill Ct. Newnan, GA 30265	404-329-2222
NE Georgia/Oakwood Clinic	4175 Tanners Creek Drive Oakwood, GA 30542	404-728-8210
Savannah Clinic	325 West Montgomery Crossroad Savannah, GA 31406	912-920-0214
Savannah Vet Center	321 Commercial Dr Savannah, GA 31406	912-961-5800 Or 877-927-8387
St Marys CBOC	205 Lakeshore Point St Marys, GA 31558	912-510-3420
Stockbridge Outreach Clinic	175 Medical Blvd. Stockbridge, GA 30281	404-329-2222
Valdosta CBOC	2841 N. Patterson Street Valdosta, GA 31602	229-293-0132
Waycross CBOC	515B City Blvd Waycross, GA 31501	912-279-4400

North Carolina U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs

Charles George VAMC - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

1100 Tunnel Road, 28805-2087, Asheville, NC 28805
828-298-7911

Franklin CBOC - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

647 Wayah St, 28734, Franklin, NC 28734
(828) 369-1781

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