

## WDVA COVID-19 Crisis Response for the Homeless Veteran

### Veterans Housing and Recovery Program (VHRP)

WDVA has three Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Transitional Housing sites in Wisconsin known as VHRP:

Chippewa Fall	30 Beds
Union Grove	31 Beds
<u>Green Bay</u>	<u>17 Beds</u>
Total	78 Beds

Our immediate response was to hold Town Halls at each site, informing residents and Staff:

- The seriousness and the symptoms of COVID-19
- The medical conditions that may signify high risk for COVID-19
- The steps to personally prevent the spread of COVID-19 as recommended by the CDC.
  - Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
  - Avoid contact with people who are sick.
  - Avoid close contact with others.
  - Cover your mouth/nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing.
- In the interest of the public health of our residents and staff, we would restrict visitors at the three VHRP sites to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Daily screening for symptoms of COVID-19 of both residents and staff, any staff that exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 are sent home for 14-day quarantine period; any resident that exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 will be quarantined for a 14-day period.
- Staff and residents are asked the following question.

Have you been in contact with someone under investigation for COVID-19? If the answer is yes that individual would be required to self-quarantine for 14 days.
- The Governors Safer at Home Order extended passes have been suspended and the residents were discouraged from leaving the building. There are exceptions, in those cases the veteran would wear gloves, masks and maintain the six-foot social distance recommendation from others. The exceptions are:
  - Exercise (in the area of the site, i.e. bike ride, walks, etc.)
  - Job Search
  - Apartment Search
  - Necessary in Person Medical Appointments
- Should staff or residents travel for emergencies to highly infected areas, they would self-quarantine for 14 days upon their return.

- This information is presented again in their Smart Start meeting each morning.

After the initial response, work immediately began to ensure the program was safe for the residents and staff by:

- Setting up quarantine areas at the sites for new arrivals to the programs. New arrivals would be quarantined at least 48 hours with daily symptom checks.
- Rearranging group rooms to have physical distancing while in group.
- Splitting large groups up to small groups offering group meetings twice a day.
- Rearranging dining areas to accommodate social distance recommendations between residents. Shift were put in place to reduce the amount of people in the dining room at one time.
- Notifying outside agencies that conduct business onsite for the residents as part of the program to be put on hold, or to provide alternative methods of connection like teleconferencing, and telemedicine with the VA for medical and therapy appointments to be put in place to continue business.
- Ensuring the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP) is still available to the site but is taking part virtually when needed.
- Established a course of actions should a staff member become infected or exposed to someone with COVID-19, they would self-quarantined at home and Lutheran Social Service (LSS) (our contracted agency) would provide additional staff at the site to cover the position of the possibly exposed/infected individual.
- Establishing a course of action should a resident become infected or exposed to someone with COVID-19, they would self-quarantined in a local motel room for the duration of the illness.
  - The sites have reached out to local motels to verify the availability to self-quarantine residents as needed.
  - Their meals would be delivered in a safe manner to them as the individual is still part of the program.
  - There would be daily contact from their program case manager to determine needs and for connection; this can be virtual, phone calls, text or other safe method of contact.

As many shelters and other GPD programs stopped taking new residents due to COVID-19, we are proud to say we took all the necessary precautions and continued our work to assist the homeless veteran. When the Milwaukee VA had to close their Domiciliary to make room for COVID-19 cases, WDVA stepped up and immediately enrolled 6 of their veterans into our program so that they would not be discharge to the street.

WDVA is keeping constant watch for new information related to the virus and will incorporate further safety features as needed. Having said all that, we are also getting creative. For example, as a life skills lesson, some residents made homemade masks for themselves and others in the program!

### **Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP)**

VORP is WDVA's program to conduct statewide outreach to veterans who may have a mental health and/or substance use disorder and those who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness. VORP divides the 72 counties of the state into eleven regions with an Outreach and Recovery Regional Coordinator (ORRC) assigned to each region. The ORRC will seek to find and connect with veterans wherever they may be to provide case management and support while connecting the veterans to community services with a special focus on treatment and recovery. Due to their job, an ORRC's office tends to be their cars and the streets.

Our immediate response was to have inform staff of the following:

- The seriousness and the symptoms of COVID-19
- The medical conditions that may signify high risk for COVID-19
- The steps to personally prevent the spread of COVID-19
  - Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
  - Avoid contact with people who are sick.
  - Avoid close contact with others.
  - Cover your mouth/nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing.
- Not only keep track of appointments in your calendars also include at the end of the day ALL contacts they had throughout that day just in case they became infected WDVA would know who the ORRC came in contact with.
- Asked if they have been in contact with someone under investigation for COVID-19, if so, they must quarantine for 2 weeks.
- If they had an upcoming vacation and they chose to travel to highly infected areas, they would need to self-quarantine for two weeks once they return.
- They were not to have any physical contact with members or providers and were told to follow the CDC recommendations for safety which were given to them.

After the Safer at Home Order from the Governor the ORRCs street work was discontinued and they were instructed as follows:

- Each ORRC would remotely work from home, they could only leave home for work purposes if they had their Division Administrators permission to do so.

- ORRCs were to call all their enrollees to check in and share with them the following:
  - The seriousness and the symptoms of COVID-19.
  - The medical conditions that may signify high risk for COVID-19.
  - The steps to personally prevent the spread of COVID-19 as prescribed by the CDC.
- ORRCs would continue to have contact with those on their case load regularly, but especially those that may be at high risk and alone (most of our population).
- WDVA section of IT has been working with ORRCs to have the ability to use TEAMS technology to have face to face sessions with enrollees. It helps drastically for the veteran to literally see someone else.

VORP is still working with their enrollees to support them and assist them in meeting their goals including getting connected with community resources. VORP continues to work with providers to assist the needs of their current enrollees; but, also to continue to take referrals and enroll new veterans in need into the program.

Enrollees have mentioned that they miss the comradery of the ORRC on the street, the handshakes and even occasional hug; but VORP is continuing our virtual connection with enrollees and giving out loads of virtual high fives!

#### **Assistance to Needy Veterans Grant (ANVG)**

WDVA has offered the ANVG for years to provide low income veterans in need of assistance to apply for subsistence aid. The Governor recently signed an emergency order removing several barriers to ensure veterans in need are able to get the financial support needed in this time of crisis.

#### **WDVA Town Hall**

The Governor and Secretary Kolar held a Virtual Town Hall for the Wisconsin veterans. They began the meeting with an update on the current situation of COVID 19 and how it was affecting our programs especially the Homes. They quickly opened the meeting up for question from the virtual audience. Any question that was not answered during the Town Hall, were going to be answered and presented on our website.