**ND Cares Coalition Meeting Minutes**

**Nov 3, 2022**

Chairman Shelly Sizer opened the meeting at 1:00.

**Presentation 1:** Thea Ward Jorgensen from Team Red, White and Blue discussed the organization expanded roll with the VA in North Dakota. Their mission is to enrich veterans lives and to forge America's leading physical health and overall wellness community for veterans across the country. The VA will assist with orienting and training Team RWB volunteer leaders on the S.A.V.E. training and other community resources. The VA will also coordinate and refer veterans and their families to suitable local Team RWB staff, or chapter events upon request and identify opportunities for Team RWB staff to volunteer at local VA facilities. They have an app with physical training plans for CrossFit, 5K-10K marathons, cycling, yoga and meditation and even a nutrition group. There will also be a sleep information component. In-person events are held throughout the year. Veterans/military can join for free at teamrwb.org. Go to the app/website to sign up to see all the content. Civilians can join too. Right now, the membership is between 75-78% military related. Kora Dockter invited Team RWB to have a table/booth at the Suicide Prevention Coalition Training, September 14, 2023.

**Presentation 2:** Randy McDonald discussed both his rolls as the Job Service Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist and leading Together with Veterans (TWV) Minot, that focuses on veterans suicide. TWV is funded VA Department of Rural Health and receives $3333.33 a month for 3 1/2 years for a grand total of $120,000. They are focusing on peer to peer support groups and launching a new QR code based program called Co-Pilot. Veterans can sign up for positive mental health messaging or get connected with the licensed clinical mental health counselor. Counselors have access to local crisis services if needed. It cost $10 per month. It is not necessary to have an honorable discharge to use the counseling services. The program offers analytics to see who is using the app (family members, veterans, and active duty service members), and what their concerns are. Results will be used to develop the peer-to-peer support groups and address what matters to them. Randy will be speaking with Minot AFB about the program. Medal of Honor recipient Clint Romesha will help with program launch and so will the Minot Minotaurs Hockey team.

**Coalition Member Updates**

Ann Stark, of the National Guard State Surgeons Office gave an update on Tricare. Since the last Coalition meeting this topic was presented to multiple stakeholders through the TF mine meetings, legislators, and behavioral health staff at different locations in the state. The issues with Tricare were also shared with General Wills at the Pentagon. The recommendations for policy changes were shared with the Defense Health Agency (DHA). Staffers in Senator Cramer's and Congressional Committee staff suggested that we turn our recommendations into questions to pose to the DHA as a congressional inquiry. General Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau also asked each state to submit real-life instances of the barriers to Tricare for the purpose of meeting with the DHA. We’ll see what becomes of these efforts.

LT COL Anne Willoughby, State Family Program Director e ND National Guard, reported that the Halloween family event in Bismarck and Fargo had a record number of attendees. These events are important so kids see this is not just the place that their parent goes to, or leaves them from – the vibe is positive. Family Christmas events will be Nov 22 in .Bismack, Dec. 2 in Fargo, and Dec. 11 at Camp Grafton. The 957th Engineer Company that has been on the southwest border for over a year, will be returning home and their official welcome ceremony will be Jan. 8. The Governor’s Military Ball will Mar 18 (location not determined). On Dec. 6 the National Guard will showcase programs and equipment at the Legislative Reception at the Army aviation Support Facility in Bismarck. She also talked about the Strong Bonds Financial Peace University to help members better handled their finances. Lastly, she mentioned that the National Guard Suicide Prevention and Substance Abuse Prevention programs brings a village of support to any guardsmen who need it.

Kelli Weiand, ND Military Outreach reported on the success of the Minot Stand Down Oct 20, where 174 veterans and 25 family members and 53 vendor booths were in attendance. This year they provided participants with baseball caps and a hot lunch. The biggest reason people showed up are flu shots and visiting with someone one-on-one from the VA. There were a lot of newer, younger veterans than in the past. She and Co-Chair Cindy Whitesell will meet with the new mayor of Minot about other possible events.

Senator Dick Dever reported that the extended Cabinet Meeting on Nov 9 will include judicial and legislative branches. The agenda includes outgoing legislative leadership, and this session all of legislative leadership is outgoing, a workforce panel and comments by the governor. During this session he plans to identify new legislators who are veterans and reactivate the Veterans Caucus.

Stuard Eidenshink Operations Director for the VA in Fargo reported on behalf of Dr. Weintraub that they are tearing down a couple of buildings to build an outpatient mental health building in 2024. The VA has contracted with a new company to offer state-of-the-art Interactive TV that will allow staff to send messages to patients about their treatment. The Whole Health addition to the facility is still on schedule for 2023 and an architect will pose different ideas for a 4-level parking structure. For Halloween the VA hosted a truck and treat event for employees and neighborhood kids. The VA’s Veteran Volunteer Travel Network provided access to 285 veterans and onboarded 47 new volunteers.

Paula Heitman of the Fargo VBA discussed the PACT Act that addresses comprehensive toxic exposures from recent deployments to anywhere in the Gulf to include Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Djibouti as well as expanded benefits for veterans who are exposed to Agent Orange not only inside Vietnam but outside in areas like Cambodia and Thailand. The VBA in Fargo has increased staff by a dozen people in anticipation of the new claims.

Jennifer Illich from First Link talked about the change from the 1-800 suicide and crisis phone line to the 988 system. They have recently moved to a new location and are still unpacking. The transition of their phone lines during the move when smoothly.

Sarah Kemp-Tabbut Community Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator for the Fargo VA shared information from the 2022 Veteran Suicide Report that reflects 2020 data showing that 343 fewer veterans died in 2020 than died in 2019 nationally – the lowest number since 2006. The VA has ramped up clinical and community-based services for veterans’ suicide reduction and is hiring more staff for suicide prevention and case managers. Suicide prevention gatekeep training helps non-VA hospital identify both in-patient and out-patient veterans who may need prevention services and recognize unusual health problems related to their service.

Kora Dockter from the ND Suicide Prevention Coalition reported that they received a grant to develop a new website with back-office functionality for collaboration. The 14th of Sept is the conference at the Bismarck Career Academy. During their next planning meeting they will focus on how we get people engaged? Speaker and author, Kate Simonet will truly talk about what it feels like to have a mental illness and want to die by suicide and offer a story of hope. Her book is called *Out of the Darkness*.Knowing that survivors, whether it's a person that's attempted suicide or whether it's family members, really want to talk the Coalition is planning a separate event the evening prior to the conference for sharing and possibly getting some help if needed. Shelly Sizer recommended the Kora contact Sara Blazek with Survivor Outreach Services, who puts together an annual survivor weekend, for advice on holding a pre-conference get together.

Nikki Frohlich of Military Outreach stated that she is participating in a veterans’ lunch at the Elks Lodge in Bismarck on the 10th and will provide outreach information and offer any assistance. Veterans can get tickets in advance. She also reported that the stand down in Bismarck was a success with almost 200 that attended and 40 vendor booths from a wide variety of agencies. Nikki and the stand down committee will begin planning in January for the next stand down.

Carlotta McCleary of Mental Health America stated her organization plans to visit all the regions across the state to learn what's happening locally with mental health services and to meet with the human service centers. They will speak with consumers, people that are using services to determine whether or not they can find services and look for gaps. They are also very busy with their mental health podcasts and she will let us know when the podcast drops for veteran services and crisis services for veterans.

Sara Blazek from Survivor Outreach reported that the Bobcats are holding a Military Appreciation Night on Veterans Day and will wear jerseys that honor the 29 fallen servicemember from the Global War on Terror. The jerseys will be auctioned off after the game and proceeds will go to local military support organizations. They will also recognize the children of deployed parents.

**ND Cares Administrative Report**

Michelle reported that the cities of ND Cares ha 56 communities that will increase to 58 with the County of Dunn and the city of Streeter coming on. Businesses remain at 22. The Bridge for the Fallen project to name a bridge in Jamestown the Hidden Wounds Bridge now has a legislative sponsor. Once passed the Coalition can help organize a ceremony and talk about help available to those still suffering. She also talked about the Governor Challenge to Reduce Veterans Suicides and possible legislation to give the NDDVA access to detailed vital records information on veterans who died by suicide to do a psychological autopsy to have better data to have better interventions. Sarah from the VA hosted a CALM (Counseling on Access to Lethal Means) training recently and more are in the works. Hopefully we can work with Scheels or similar companies to help advertise or host a gun lock safety event as other states have done. Another priority is caring connections. Lonnie met with a couple of companies who have developed technology that can possibly identify a veteran in crisis and automatically connect them with FirstLink resources. He is still gathering cost information. We will keep FirstLink in the loop for future meetings on this topic. Also under connections is peer support. Since the peer support program has more specialist then employers who want to use them we need to find way promote the program in the community. Perhaps Team RWB or Together with Veterans can help offer peer support as well. Lastly, Michelle talked about working remotely from California, until at least the end of the Legislative session.

**Events**

Events were discussed as listed in the agenda.

**Next Meetings**

The next Coalition meeting is proposed for Feb 2, and the next Executive Committee meeting December 8, 2022.

**Closing**

Shelly ended the meeting at approximately 3:17 pm.