

Robert R. Ramsey, LICSW Team Leader, Tacoma, WA Vet Center Readjustment Counseling Service Veterans Health Administration Department of Veterans' Affairs

Statement of

Robert R. Ramsey, LICSW  
Team Leader, Tacoma, WA Vet Center  
Readjustment Counseling Service  
Veterans Health Administration  
Department of Veterans' Affairs  
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Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
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Good Afternoon, Senator Murray. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the role the Tacoma Vet Center plays in providing services within the Puget Sound Health Care System and our service area. I would like to request my written statement be submitted for the record.

VA's authority to provide readjustment counseling to eligible veterans was established by law in 1979. We believe the Tacoma Vet Center was the first in the nation to offer these services to veterans returning from Vietnam.

Readjustment counseling consists of a "beyond medical," holistic system of care that provides professional help to veterans coping with psychological traumas and other readjustment problems related to their military service. Vet Centers, located conveniently within the community, provide services tailored to the specific needs of the local veteran population. Veterans are welcome to visit their local Vet Center anytime. Vet Centers have no waiting list and veterans may be seen by a counselor on the day of their first visit.

Veterans' immediate family members are eligible for care at Vet Centers and are included in the counseling process to the extent necessary to treat the veteran's readjustment issues. Vet Centers also offer bereavement counseling to surviving family members of Armed Forces personnel who died while on active duty in service to their country.

The Tacoma Vet Center staff consists of a Team Leader, three Mental Health Counselors, an Office Manager, a Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) Outreach Technician, and a Marriage and Family Therapist. This staff actively engages the community in a variety of ways to increase program visibility and access to services.

We provide briefings to the Army at Fort Lewis on a weekly basis and to the Air Force at McCord AFB on a bi-weekly basis. A member of our staff presents information regarding stress management, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Vet Center services.

Since 2003, the Tacoma Vet Center has provided outreach to nearly 5,000 veterans and clinical services to more than 800 Global War on Terror (GWOT) veterans and their family members.

Our GWOT Outreach Technician meets with Ministerial Associations and every college and university in our area. We work closely with local community organizations, such as Substance Abuse programs and the Pierce County Sexual Assault Center.

Every week we visit the "Hospitality Kitchen," a local soup kitchen, to meet with homeless veterans. We support many of the veterans there and encourage them to avail themselves of the help offered at our Vet Center and services offered by other providers.

Our Vet Center Sexual Trauma Counselor recently presented training for the Sexual Assault Resource Center at both McCord AFB and Ft. Lewis. She also collaborates with VA Medical Center staff to provide classes to women receiving treatment.

One of our counselors, an Alaskan Native, has proven very successful in reaching out to various ethnic groups, including American Indians, Pacific Islanders, and Hispanic Americans. He has filled an essential role by enabling us to go where our clients are, rather than waiting for them to come to us.

Our Office Manager creates a welcoming, respectful, and professional environment. She works with volunteers to ensure they can explain the full range of services offered to anyone who calls.

Well over 80 percent of our time is spent providing services to veterans. We are one of the busiest Vet Centers in the nation and we are very proud of our work.

Our clients report being very satisfied with our work and the services we offer. We are very fortunate to be supported by a wide array of clinical and administrative staff in the Puget Sound Health Care System. Working in a Vet Center is very intense, but very rewarding, and we consider it a privilege to serve combat veterans and sexual trauma survivors.

Senator Murray, this concludes my prepared statement. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.