INNOVATION PARTNERSHIPS
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Buddy-to-Buddy Program

TECHNOLOGY NUMBER: 7213

OVERVIEW

Unique Peer Based Veterans Support Program

- Volunteer Veteran Support Opportunities
- Mental Health Support Program

BACKGROUND

The Buddy-to-Buddy program provides support and connection to resources to all Michigan service members and veterans by utilizing trained, veteran volunteers. The program is free, confidential and open to any individual who served, regardless of time served or discharge.

Veteran volunteers are paired with veterans and service members in need, ideally from their own counties, or nearby, since volunteer veterans are expected to be knowledgeable of not only federal and state benefits but local offerings as well. The relationship should never be transactional: providing support as a peeristhe foundation of the program, even if a wide array of more material and tangible needs are presented.

Volunteers are trained in and expected to demonstrate excellent communication skills. There is never a "one and done" with the program, as volunteers are expected to follow-up with their veterans/service members at least once, to see how resources provided worked out, or to do a general check-in. Volunteer interactions with veterans must be documented and reviewed by a staff member, both for accountability and quality assurance.

Veteran volunteers do not take the place of existing resources, rather, they draw on their existing knowledge, and the resource guide provided by the program and connect veterans to these benefits and services. Volunteers provide "warm hand-offs"by calling the resources first, ensuring ability to assist, and ideally obtaining a point-of-contact.

Volunteer veterans are provided with an intensive, one-day training. This training provides and overview of the program, communication strategies, veteran benefits, and how to handle

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mental health emergencies. While rare, both veterans and the program must have a clear understanding of what to do when a veteran is having a mental health emergency and what "red flags" to look for. The process mustbe codified by the program.Weekly support calls with staff, including guest speakers and case studies, are needed to keep volunteers proficient.

Volunteer veterans can be assigned referrals through a call center, or through their work in the community. Buddy-to-Buddy volunteers have traditionally been allowed access to Michigan National Guard armories to take concerns directly from the soldiers there. Returning volunteers should be asked about their past involvement and possible continued interest in operation in the armories.

Referrals are considered concluded when veteran concerns are addressed and the communication naturally tapers off. Some veterans and volunteers maintain communication and develop a friendship long after initial concerns are resolved.

Team leadersare leadership volunteers assigned regionally according to MVAA prosperity regions. They provide mentorship and support to volunteers in their respective regions. Volunteers look to them first for leadership and advice on handling complex referrals. Staff are the next line of support for volunteers and team leaders. Team leaders should be carefully cultivated, and meet at least quarterly with staff.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

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Military Support Programs and Network (M-SPAN)

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