

An excerpt from the Fall 2007 VISN VAC Newsletter....

Recovery Focus Groups

After labor day we began a large recovery project throughout the VISN. Staff and veterans at each facility were trained to co-moderate focus groups. The groups consist of 10-12 participants in each group, approximately half staff and half veterans. The groups were designed for 2 reasons: the first is to get an understanding of the things that staff and veterans will need to be able to participate fully in the recovery transformation; the second is that staff and veterans will have an opportunity to have a conversation about recovery as peers, outside of the usual provider-patient (client) role.

This effort grew out of the first VISN 3 Recovery in Action Conference. There we had focus groups, co-moderated by trained veterans and staff, which consisted of about two thirds staff and one third veterans. Following the conference, the evaluations almost unanimously endorsed this experience as being the most powerful highlight of the conference for the participants, and many of the Mental Health leadership expressed a desire for every staff member and as many veterans as possible to have this experience.

The MIRECC has worked closely with the VISN 3 Mental Health Care Line and VISN 3 Veterans Advisory Council to train the focus group moderators and develop plans for this activity. Our goal is to have one focus group per week at each facility until all Behavioral Health/SAS staff have had this experience. If there are more veterans that wish to participate and have not had the chance, we plan to develop an alternate forum (e.g. town hall meetings) to have recovery conversations.

The program will be administered by our local recovery coordinators. Data from the groups will be analyzed and stored in the MIRECC. We look forward to everyone's participation and eagerly await the ideas that will emerge from these discussions. There are some plans to repeat a small number of focus groups at each facility on a yearly basis to help measure our progress towards Recovery Transformation and to get new ideas from veterans and staff as we make further progress.