

Building Coffee Socials: Veteran Outreach Into the Community to Expand Social Support (VOICES)

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March 4, 2020

Agenda

- What are VOICES
- What are Coffee Socials
- How Veterans in the Community Connect
- Current Engagement
- How VOICES Evolve
- The Ingredients to Build a Coffee Social and other VOICES Events
- Sustainability

WHY ENGAGE IN THE COMMUNITY

- Loneliness is a pervasive concern ¹
- Loneliness is more deadly than obesity, and has the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes per day²
- It can impair mental health and physical functioning,^{3, 4} as well as predict depression severity and suicidality⁵
- Social support acts as a protective factor to these risks ⁶⁻¹⁰
- The Veteran Coffee Social is an upstream preventative intervention that is uniquely positioned to engage with Veterans

VETERAN OUTREACH INTO THE COMMUNITY TO EXPAND SOCIAL SUPPORT (VOICES)

- The Veteran Outreach In the Community to Expand Social Support (VOICES) project is specifically designed to increase social support and connection in the community.
- They are transdiagnostic and accepting of family, friends, and significant others
- The intervention typically begins as a Veteran Coffee Social, an organic platform to engage Veterans in the community and expands from there
- Low-cost and sustainable because Veteran community leaders gradually take ownership of weekly meetings
- Veteran Coffee Social facilitators and attendees decide how to expand beyond the coffee socials

VETERAN OUTREACH INTO THE
COMMUNITY
TO EXPAND SOCIAL SUPPORT (VOICES)



WHAT ARE COFFEE SOCIALS?

- Veteran Coffee Socials are a gathering of Veterans at a specific time and place each week, no formal initial agenda other than to be together in the community



WHAT ATTRACTS VETERANS TO COFFEE SOCIALS?

- Easy access: Veteran status
- Opportunity to connect with other Veterans (leisure, camaraderie, social support)
- Requires little more than willing facilitators and a venue
- Informal, no expectations
- No dues or fees required
- No RSVP - come when you want, leave when you want
- Opportunity for leadership: attendees become facilitators

HOW COFFEE SOCIALS INTEGRATE WITH VA CARE

- Developing understanding of how to close out the continuum of care
 - Well developed programs from acute to transitional care
 - Data showing frequent returns to acute care
 - Encouraging self-care
- A three pronged approach to wellness & recovery enhancement
 - Scaffolding the individual toward community involvement
 - Building community capacity
 - Education & access

ACCESS: AN EXAMPLE OF HOW VETERANS CONNECT TO VA SERVICES FOR UNMET HEALTH NEEDS

- Joe: Father of three in his mid 30's
- Initial Experience: Presented as reserved and quiet
- Activating Event: He mentioned to another coffee social Veteran that he had health problems
- Outcome: The coffee social facilitator was alerted and the Veteran accessed VA and community resources
- Social Implications: Expanded social network and noticeable behavioral change

HOW WE CONNECT VETERANS TO VA SERVICES

- Establishing a connection to the VA
- Warm handoff-they have a contact number and familiar face
 - Reducing frustration for the Veterans and their families when accessing the VA

Where would a Veteran go ?



SCAFFOLDING TO THE COMMUNITY

BOBBY'S STORY

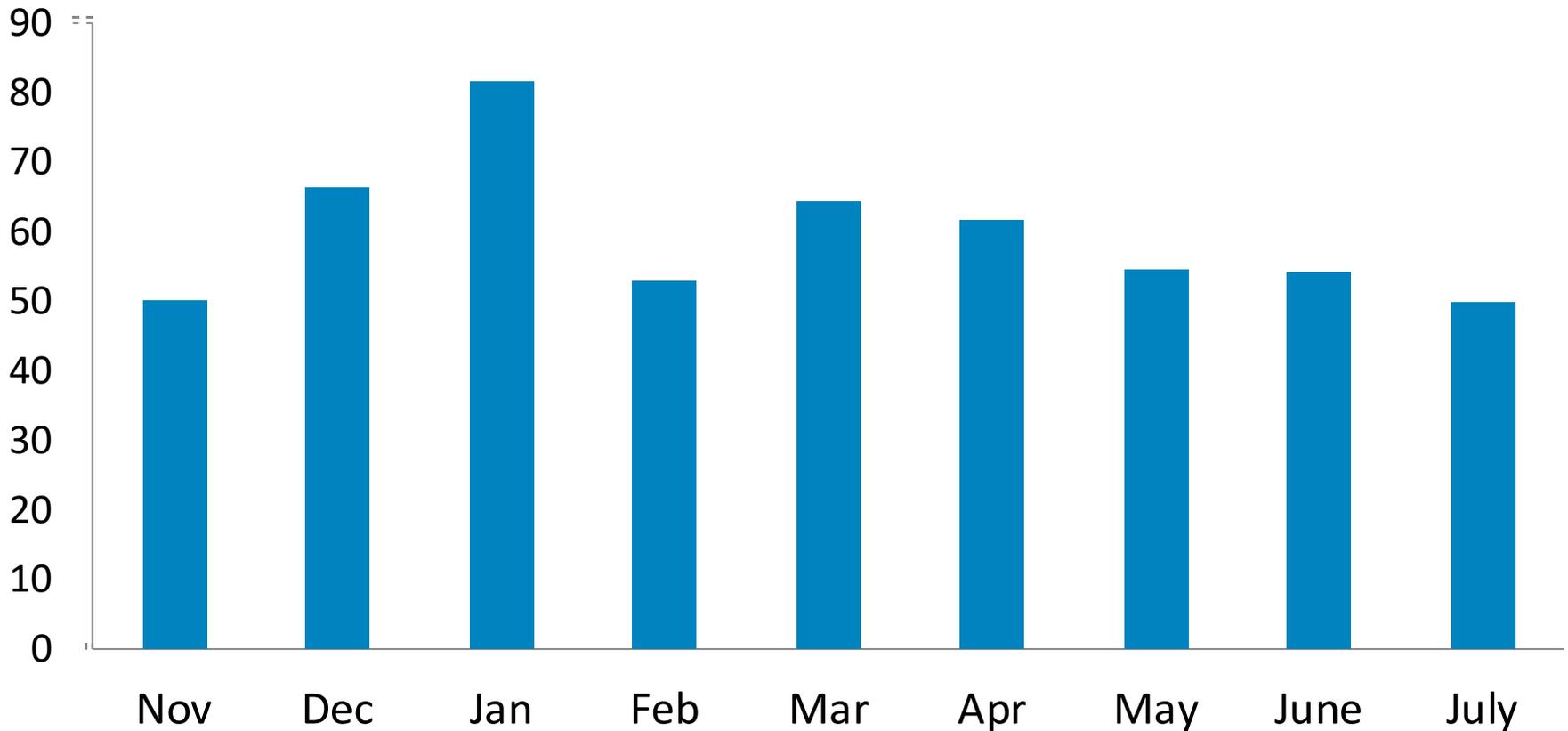
- Bobby: Older adult transitioning from the domiciliary
- Initial Experience: Attended the hospital coffee social, presented as quiet
- Activating Event: In the process of transitioning to the community into VASH housing and met someone in the hospital who also goes to a community coffee social
- Outcome and Current Status: Still attends community coffee social, no residential care since transitioning to the community, has stable employment and maintains community connection and romantic relationships

CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY SERVICES

- **Mike:** Mid-twenties Post-9/11 combat Veteran
- **Initial Experience:** Struggled with substance use and homelessness
- **Activating event:** Coffee attendee asked if he would attend a coffee social, Mike opened up about his situation
- **Outcome and Current Status:** Enrolled in VA services, connected to permanent housing resources, state services, and phone numbers to other attendees at the coffee
- **Social Implications:** New social supports and continued support from the local community

VETERAN ENGAGEMENTS: 2015-2016

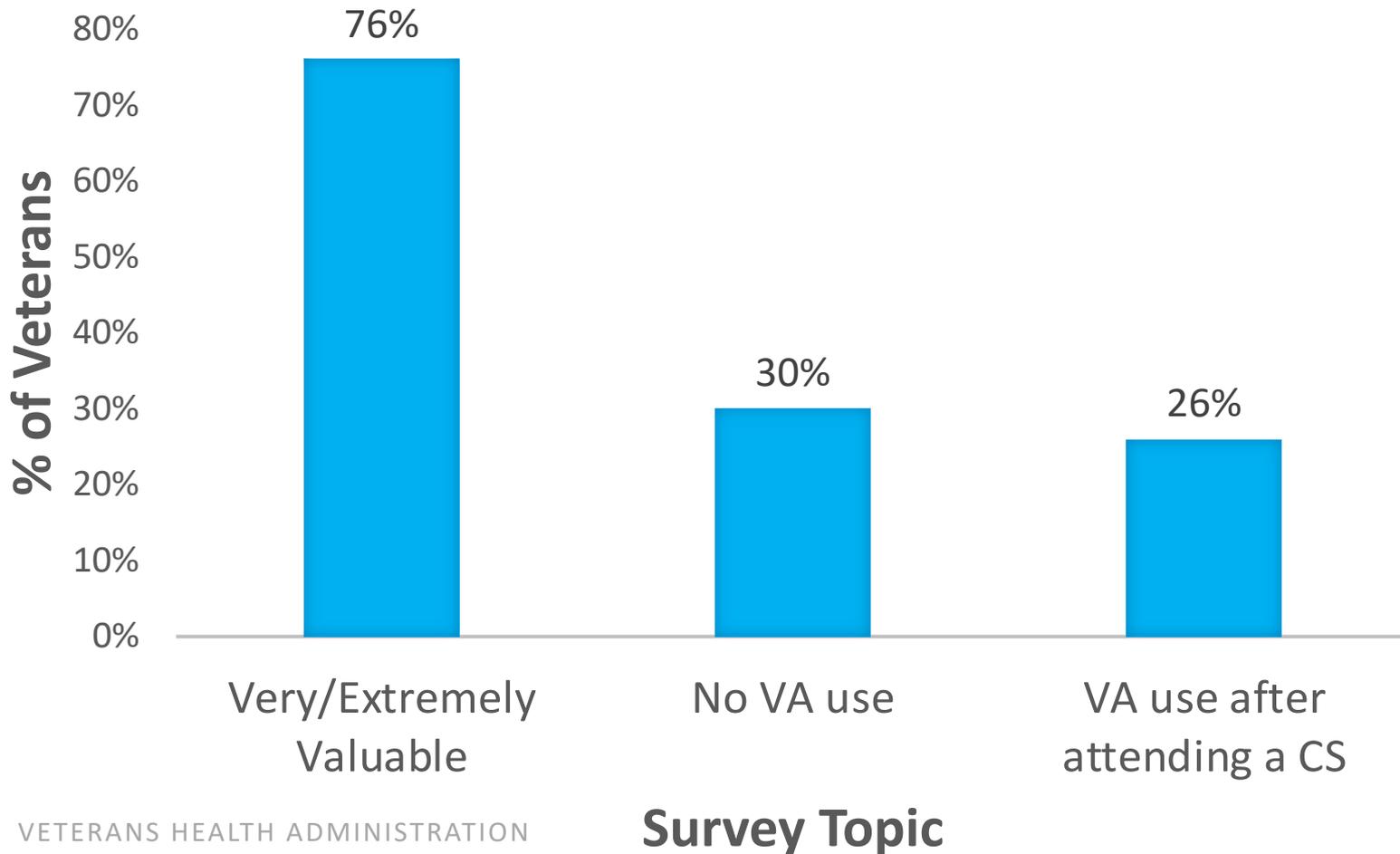
Mean Weekly Veteran Engagements



SURVEY OF 8 VETERAN COFFEE SOCIALS

2019

VETERAN COFFEE SOCIAL SURVEY (N = 70)



DO SOCIAL CONNECTIONS LAST PAST THE INITIAL MEETING?

- **Meeting new people:** Over half (56%) of Veterans reported meeting at least one person at the coffee social that they later spent time with doing other activities
- Of the individuals who did not know any participants at the coffee social before attending (16), 44% reported met someone at the coffee social and spent time with them outside the coffee social doing other activities

SECOND TIER ACTIVITIES

- Second tier activities are activities that tend to evolve from coffee socials
- Second tier activities vary but some that have emerged from coffee socials include
 - ❖ Meditation group
 - ❖ Breakfast club
 - ❖ Bowling league
 - ❖ Volunteer groups
 - ❖ Artists groups
 - ❖ Cooking club
 - ❖ DIY group
 - ❖ Networking groups

BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL-RESOURCES NEEDED

- Initial resources needed for one coffee social
 - 3-6 hours per week
- Activities include:
 - Outreach calls to the community
 - Emails
 - Driving to and from a location
 - VA laptop/cell phone
 - Advertising for the event
 - Presenting at program team meetings
- Ongoing resources needed
 - ~4 hours of coffee social time, travel, and Veteran follow-up
 - Coffee social is typically 90 minutes in duration, but it varies

BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL AND HOSPITAL SUPPORT

Benefits to Veterans and the Hospital

- Increasing enrollment and outreach
- Connecting Veterans to care for unmet health needs
- Bridging Veterans to a community
 - Keeping people in the community to allow for other individuals in need to access intensive resources
 - Access to VHA for unmet health needs and decrease suicidality
- Create a platform for communities to interface with the VA and Veterans

BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL IS CONSISTENT VHA FUTURE GOALS 1

- Strategy 1.2.1: VA Helps Veterans navigate the full array of care, benefits, and services
 - The warm handoff and the direct connection to offices within the VA system
- Strategy 2.1.4: Emphasizing Veterans' and their families' whole health and wellness
 - These coffee socials are for all community members

<https://www.va.gov/oei/docs/VA2018-2024strategicPlan.pdf>

BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL IS CONSISTENT VHA FUTURE GOALS 2

- Strategy 2.2.2: Early intervention and full access to mental health and suicide prevention
- Building community to reduce social isolation
- Increased social support and reduced isolation
- Suicide prevention
 - Veterans identifying other Veterans at risk
 - Peer-led Gate Keeper trainings
 - VA SAVE presentations
- Invited speakers promoting Veteran organizations and services
 - Speakers invited at attendees requests
- Connection to community and VA services

BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL IS CONSISTENT VHA FUTURE GOALS 3

- Strategy 2.2.4: Increased access for Rural Veterans
 - 4.7 million Veterans reside in rural communities¹¹
 - Coffee socials can be created in locations more accessible to Veterans in rural areas
 - This increases information availability of VA services

BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL –COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- You can start local...even in the hospital
- Community involvement
 - Ask representatives to stop into socials
- What if you do not have contacts?
 - Contact your local Vet Center- they have outreach coordinators that have local contacts
 - Start networking with Local Veteran coalitions and groupings (e.g., Veteran Service Officers, VFW, AMVETS, DAV) and others

BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL - MESSAGING

- Its not a “VA thing” but a community effort
 - Acknowledge that there are connections to the VA, but emphasize that coffee socials exist to support Veterans and build a community capacity
 - Community Engagement: When a coffee social is formed by a Peer or another VA employee, there is an intention to empower a community member to take over the facilitator role
 - Peers and VA employees maintain contact with the facilitator and support them

BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL –CHOOSING A LOCATION

- Geographic location:
 - Where do Veterans live- www.Va.gov/vetdata
 - Free parking
 - Options for local transit

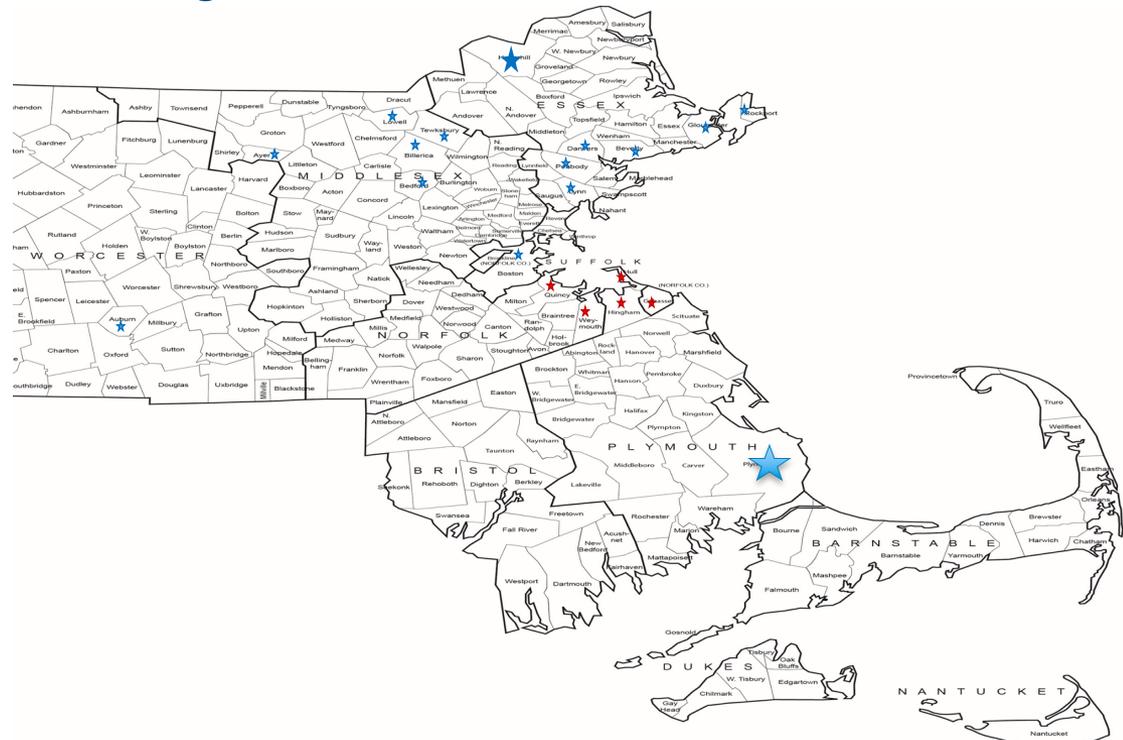
- Community Involvement
 - Is there a community already formed
 - Is there service providers that can assist
 - Do you have contacts in a specific community
 - Vet Center Outreach Coordinators (~180 in U.S.)

BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL- ADVERTISING

- Use multiple methods to reach out to the community. You can start by reaching out to your known network
 - Posters, Emails
 - Newsletters
 - Newspaper articles
 - Social media-public affairs through the VA
 - Word of mouth

BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL –COMMUNITY SUPPORT-2

- Have community partners identify their own resources
 - Tap into other Veteran networks through partners in the community
 - Identify what resources Veterans gravitate toward



BUILDING A COFFEE SOCIAL-SUSTAINABILITY

- Ongoing check-ins with the hosting venue
- Be flexible to attendees needs, what do they want?
 - Do they want speakers? Specific information? Topics? Informal social situations?
- Continue to market the coffee socials in team meetings, events, and to Veterans in the community
- When a natural leader presents at the coffee allow that leader to slowly take over
- Cultivate leadership through graduated levels of responsibility
 - Provide this leader with ongoing support after the transfer happens

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Bedford VA Peer Support Services and the Community Recovery Connections Team
- Anthony Russo, CPS
- Rachelle Calixte, PhD
- Charles Drebing, PhD
- John Smolinsky, PhD
- Angela Taveira-Dick, PhD
- Ed Federman, PhD

QUESTIONS?



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