

## CTVSC Meeting Minutes

December 15, 2016 • 2 to 4 PM

Bo Buell called the meeting to order at 2:10 PM and welcomed people to the meeting.  
17 people in attendance

### Summary

- 17 attendees
- Ben Vipond presented on Make the Connection. Make the Connection helps educate veterans about mental health and the resources available to them.
- Warren Gillespie presented on Episcopal Veterans Fellowship. Episcopal Veterans Fellowship provides faith-based emotional and spiritual support services.
- Austin Furniture Bank has grown its board to 5 members. They'd like to get up to 7.
- Three people were nominated for CTVSC Co-Chair positions: Amy Pensyl, Jennifer Ceretti, and Stephanie Snyder. They'll be formally installed as co-chairs at the next CTVSC meeting.
- We discussed two-year service terms for co-chairs. This proposal was generally well-received.
- We discussed goals for the CTVSC in 2017. Topics: Having a planning session, bringing value to the members/ attendees, having guest teachers.
- Career/Resource fair postponed to next meeting.
- Next meeting is January 19 from 2 to 4 PM, chaired by April Sullivan: [april@vsatx.org](mailto:april@vsatx.org)

### Introductions

1. Bo Buell - Co-chair and Austin Furniture Bank
2. Kelly Garrett - VA homeless vet program

3. Jennifer Ceretti - Grant project supervisor for Goodwill Cen TX.
4. Ben Vipond - VA Office of Mental Health Services, D.C.
5. Esther Warden - Battalion Family Readiness
6. Pia Villalio - Center Point Veteran Services - Case management for veterans
7. Jennifer Aaronson - Veteran Spouse Network
8. Amy Pensyl - TexVet - Resources for veterans
9. (could not hear Ben Frost?). - Goodwill Case Manager - Employment
10. Angela Young - Austin Vet Center - Counseling services.
11. Jessie T. - TXARNG - Crisis response, grief counseling
12. Warren Gillespie - Episcopal Veteran Fellowship
13. Casey Wade - Texas Veterans Leadership Program - Assist Iraq/Afghanistan vets with transition
14. Paul Julio - Texas Workforce Commission - regional outreach
15. Jonathan Leistiko - TexVet and Austin Furniture Bank
16. Bo Buell - Austin Furniture Bank Exec. Did.
17. Raoul - Works for a tech company in Austin and started a real estate company to connect veterans to real estate benefits. {Shared a really nice story about a veteran without a job getting a job and a house.} Has I.T. job connections.

### VSO Spotlights

#### Make The Connection

Ben Vipond (D.C. VA)  
[bvipond@reingold.com](mailto:bvipond@reingold.com) • 571-366-8991

- \* Visiting Temple and Austin from Washington, D.C..
- \* Make The Connection has been around for a while - running campaign since 2100 with the goal of showing veterans

videos about mental health topics, then connecting them to local mental health resources.

- \* Can connect clients to VA resources, as well as local resources through SAMSA
- \* URL: [maketheconnection.net](http://maketheconnection.net) – Note that it's not a [va.gov](http://va.gov) site.
- \* Long term goal is to de-stigmatize seeking mental health care.
- \* Also want to let them know that they're not alone in what they're experiencing; help them understand that while they are unique, there are people who really understand what they're going through.
- \* Also want to de-stigmatize veterans (only 20% of them have PTSD).
- \* They've toured a bunch of cities (21), interviewed lots of veterans, and filmed 630 5-minute testimonials about their experiences. Covered all branches (Coast Guard, National Guard).
- \* Showed a video About their videos. One of the best summary quotes from it was: "Don't suffer alone."
- \* All of the videos are available on their website, along with non-clinical information about mental health.
- \* Topics: Loss of a loved one, loss of spirituality, transitioning, feeling on edge, trouble sleeping, stress; diagnoses like PTSD and MST; resource locator that directs to VA and non-VA resources.
- \* Anonymous. For VeTerans and family members.
- \* You can sort their full online video gallery by age, service, era, combat/non-combat, topics, etc...
- \* They want to share their media: Has paper materials, a newsletter, social media posts about mental health, videos from San Antonio and Houston.

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## Q&A

BB: I explored the site and saw the videos, but I didn't see anything that... A Veteran gets back and thinks they have PTSD. Can they click on something that'll immediately connect them to services?

A: We don't have live chat, but we do have the references. We also have some self-assessments we're getting from [VA.gov](http://VA.gov).  
Comment: And they're the same tools that the VA counsellors use.

PV: There's a veteran we're seeing. Can we have them use your website's self-assessment tool?

A: Please direct people to use our site, but it's not a substitute for Counseling.

PV: But we can encourage them to use it?

A: Sure.

AP: Pia, y'all are above the Vet Center, right?

WG: Most combat veterans will not open up to anyone but other veterans because others don't have that shared experience. Civilians just can't relate. Words really do matter, and PTSD is a syndrome, not a disorder. That can "turn off" veterans who suffer from it.

AP: Have you met the MVPN?

BV: No, I haven't.

AP: {Described and explained what MVPN is. Advised BV to check them out. For more info, see <http://TexVet.org/MVPN> and <http://milvetpeer.net>}

JC: Someone looking for social media should contact you?

A: Yes, or you can go to our website's "spread the word" page. There are social media graphics there, lots of downloadable and printable files.

## Episcopal Veterans Fellowship

Warren Gillespie, USAF (Ret)

[texgill@sbcglobal.net](mailto:texgill@sbcglobal.net) • 512-786-8888

- \* Retired Air Force pilot and SW airlines captain.
- \* EVF was started by an Army Chaplain in the Austin area who served in Iraq. He entered the reserves, suffered from PTSD, had a really hard time of it, and recovered through his faith. Once he recovered he wanted to serve veterans, he went to the Bishop in Houston to pursue the EVP.
- \* Confidential, non-judge mental fellowship – Veterans helping veterans talk through things and provide pastoral care. Once veterans are integrated, we'd like to facilitate handing them off to other local services, like the ones your groups provide.
- \* We find that helping them talk about their stressors help them cope with it.
- \* Our system is modeled after what took place when the Crusaders returned in the 1100's. A network of "hospitaliers" and a three-year process of re-acclimation (after a 4 to 5 year tour of combat and warfare).
- \* We have Chapters in Austin, Copperas Cove, Georgetown, Round Rock; establishing in Houston and in the Carolinas.
- \* I'm a hospitalier at St. Richard's in Austin. I'm working with a vet suffering from exposure to Agent Orange in 1968.
- \* It's really hard to get "sandbox veterans" (veterans who are in school, and working a job, and managing a family...) to join a fellowship.
- \* It's more than PTSD, it's moral injury, betrayal from commanders, survivor's guild, heightened anxiety.
- \* {Talked about some of the people he helps.}

Q: Where is St. Richard's?

A: We're up in Round Rock. We're "the pumpkin patch church."

PV: Is this the same Program that Jim Cochran is in?

CW: Yes.

PV: I appreciate how you're meshing the faith-based side. We took a grief class together in our church and it helps them talk about their experiences. What you're doing is a much-needed healing process.

PV: How do you want us to refer veterans to your services? Do they have to be a member of your...

A: Not at all. I'd get in touch with Father David (NEED CONTACT INFO). If they're in Round Rock or Pflugerville, feel free to contact me.

BB: {Voiced strong agreement with Pia.}

CW: It's a great opportunity. The VA's been opening up to faith-based healing and it's really good for veterans who are responsive to faith-oriented resources.

WG: "If I could take a moment and talk about what transpires..." {Discussed how modern military training has become "reactive" - encouraging a stimulus/response mode, and how this is awful for when they return to modern life without a period of transition. Asserted that what's needed to "un-train" this is quiet time and creative activity. "What the brain needs to restructure itself is rest."}

BB: You'd really like to talk to April, one of our co-chairs. She works at VSA Texas – an art therapy program for veterans.

JC: What can we do to help you? What resources can we offer?

A: I'm eager to learn more about your resources and bridge our clients to your resources.

## Action Items

### Old Biz

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#### CTVSC Outreach

No new updates.

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#### Austin Furniture Bank

- \* Inception at a CTVSC meeting on August 25th, 2015.
- \* First major donation on Jan 5th 2016 with a Rodeway Inn donation and Little Guys Movers.
- \* Started with Caritas, Front Steps, and the VA as clients. Now we work with 33 different regional non-profit entities with 75 active case worker accounts (Each with about 20 clients).
- \* We have an online store.
- \* Demand is high, so increasing high flow of incoming furniture is a big emphasis.
- \* Fun things:
  - \* In 2016, an Austin Brownie group did a drive for household items. They gathered a trailer-full of supplies.
  - \* Social Design Alliance collaboration for Revolution Redesign. We supplied the furniture for them to refresh and revamp a Jamaican immigrant's apartment.
- \* 150 certain confirmed deliveries (170 since February). At about 500 lbs per delivery, that's over 40 tons of reclaimed and rescued furniture.
- \* It's very satisfying to come to an empty home and leave it furnished. We're filling a significant gap and bolstering the mental health of the people we serve.
- \* Find us at <http://austinfurniturebank.org/>
- \* We've grown our board from 3 to 5 members. We'd like to get up to 7. I really want a retired military person who's served on a board and knows how to raise funds.

- \* Our big focus for 2017 is fundraising and grants. We had a fundraiser two weeks ago, and we have another one coming up in January. If you know of any grants – no matter how large or small – please point us at them,
  - \* We're continually looking to smooth our operations out. Things have been great in the last quarter. Please contact Bo ([austinfurniturebank@gmail.com](mailto:austinfurniturebank@gmail.com)) or Jonathan ([jonathan@texvet.org](mailto:jonathan@texvet.org)) if you know case workers who should have an AFB account.
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#### Nomination/Election of new chairs

- BB: I've been a co-chair for about 18 months. We don't really have term limits for co-chairs.
- CW: Next month it'll be three years. :)
- BB: We're looking for people to volunteer. It's not that much work. It's relatively easy to find spotlight speakers and assemble the agenda.
- PJ: How many do you need?
- BB: Right now it's only me
- PV: I nominate Jennifer C., and Jennifer A., and my new case manager (Stephanie – I was going to bring her here. She's a retired combat veteran. She would like to be one.). When I first joined, I was the only woman.
- PJ seconded Jennifer Ceretti
- CW seconded Amy Pensyl

CW: Two years is good.

PJ: I was a co-chair for about 15 months. That "feels" right. It was nice to know. Two years is a long time, though...

BB: The nicest thing has been the connections made in this group. That's been great, both here and in the social services field.

BB seconded

**At the next meeting, we'll vote on adding the following people as co-chairs:**

- \* Jennifer Ceretti
- \* Amy Pensyl
- \* Stephanie Snyder

...and we'll vote to set co-chair term limits at 2 years.

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Loose Ends?

None.

## **New Biz**

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### CTVSC 2017 Goals and Planning

JC: I think it's good to see what worked historically, what we've done in the past, and what we need to change. We shouldn't just meet to meet, but to accomplish things. What's the new iteration? Who's participating in outreach? A planning session would be good; see where we want to go.

BB: For example, the AFB started at the last CTVSC co-chair meeting. We should have at least one co-chair meeting. Back then, we met one hour before the standard CTVSC meeting. I'd like to see CTVSC get the word out better; earlier emails to the group. We've fallen into a pattern of just sending the email out just one week before. We should/could get the word out more. I've seen it as big at 60 and as small as 10.

AP: My perspective is a little different. I'm hoping to see in 2017 to have some meetings on provider support. I liked the VA 1:1 class I attended. Just knowing that existed changed my perspective entirely. See if they'd come give us a class. Get a

grant writer in here to teach us how to research grants – how to find grants. For example, UT has a whole grant library JA: The [Hog] Grant Research Library. It's near the Quickie Pickie on 11th.

AP: How to run a Facebook or marketing campaign. How to make flyers for people; the resources we can use. I want to add value to the CTVSC to support nonprofits. Better support for vets by better supported non-profits.

PJ: You work with families?

JA: Elisa Borah and I are on several project. This specifically identifies gaps in services for veteran families and works for fill those gaps.

PJ: I work with veterans and their soused a lot. We haven't really talked a lot about benefits and services for family members. I'd like to see us dedicate some time for that so we can learn more about what's out there and how to access them.

JA: We cover that a lot. Many providers say "vets and families", but they only have picnics. Amy added a page to our page that filters down just the resources that really provide services to families.

JA: We're developing a curriculum for spouses and peer mentors.

PJ: Our (Texas Workforce Commission) staff can provide employment and resume workshops.

BB: In January, once we have a full board of chairs, we should have a planning meeting. Lay out a calendar for (say) 6 months so we're not running month-to-month.

JL: What about a "topic" or "curriculum" committee that sets up our learning schedule? We like to learn! Intros, then one spotlight, then a workshop?

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## Career / Resource Fair (March?)

PV: We were supposed to vote if we still wanted to do this. I heard half-and-half. Employers want to do this.

CW: Do we want to defer to next month?

PV: If we delay the vote, we'll have to delay the actual event.

AP: Do we know outcomes? How many people got jobs?

CW: That's really hard information to get.

PJ: Pia, some of the veterans got offered there that day?

PV: Yeah.

JL: The stats we have from the event are in the CTVSC meeting minutes immediately after the event.

JAL Thought: Create a raffle for employers for on-the-spot interviews and job offers?

Tabled until next meeting.

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## Volunteer Opportunities?

- BB: Austin Furniture Bank loves volunteers •  
Austinfurniturebank@gmail.com
- AP: Wreath-laying - all across TX. Also at the state Cemetery in Austin. Prep is tomorrow. - <https://www.texvet.com/events/wreath-layingtexas-cemetery>
- PJ: Homeless Initiative Meetings - ECHO needs PIT count volunteers. It'll be in January 28 from 3 AM to 9 AM - <http://austinecho.org/2017-point-in-time-count-general-volunteer-registration/>
- PJ: Homeless Initiative Meetings - Peer support - People to work with homeless veterans as peer support.
- BB: Housing the Homeless: Thermal underwear drive. Dec 30 from 12 to 2 PM - <http://www.housethehomeless.org/thermal-underwear-drive/>

## Announcements

### Upcoming Events

Military Cultural Competence Training

Austin Court downtown

Christy Alleppi @ Samaratain Center

3:30 to 5 PM RSVP

Q: Resources for translating military skills to civilian skills,

A: Veteran Insider. Also: the Texas Workforce's Commission's Texas Skills to Work

Texas Center Point Second Annual Xmas Luncheon

RSVP with Pia today or tomorrow. [pvillalon@cpinc.org](mailto:pvillalon@cpinc.org)

Dec 23 from 12 to 2 PM

2101 S IH 35

Suite 219 [beige VA building on northbound I-35 access road]  
Austin, Texas 78741

## Success Stories

Skipped

## Chair for January Meeting

\* January 19 from 2 PM to 4 PM

\* Spotlights: Combat Veteran Motorcycle Association & Dell  
Veterans Employee Resource Group

\* April Sullivan will chair

\* CW would like time to spotlight a new program.

Ended at 4:04 PM.