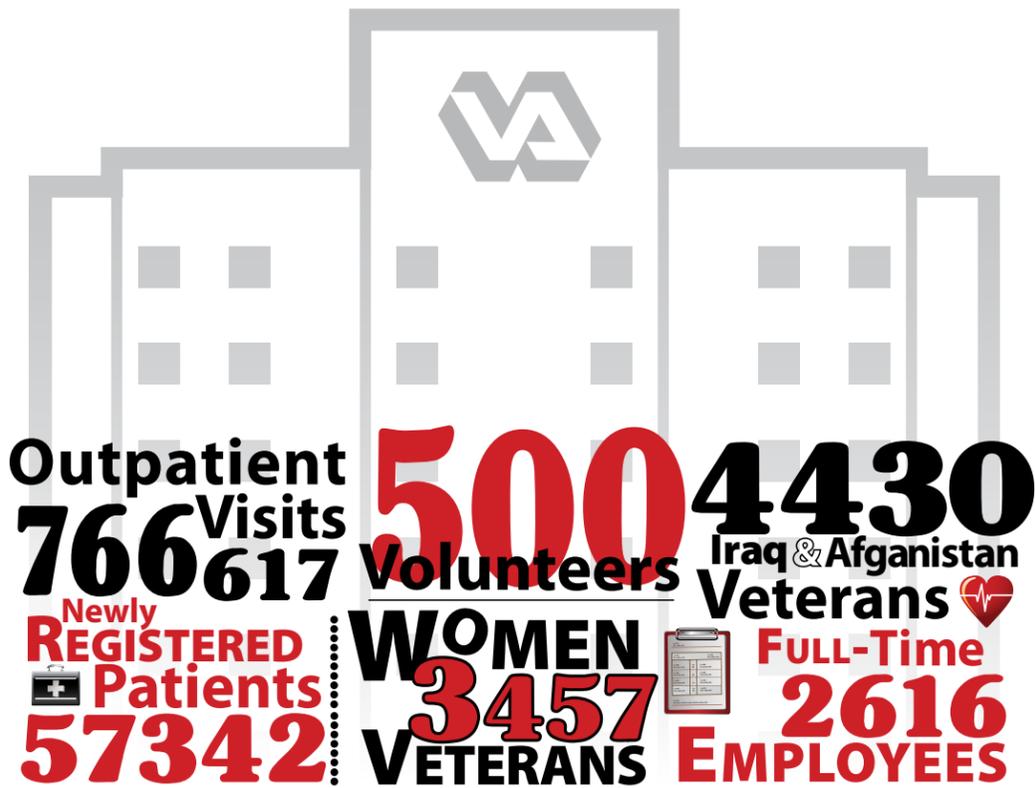


Miami Veteran

Miami VA Healthcare System
Winter 2011





Everyone of these people have a story. Whether your military experience was at peace or at war, overseas or right here in the U.S., you served our country and now, it's our turn to serve you. Every quarter we are going to share stories of service: of our patients, our staff and our volunteers. We hope you find them as inspiring as we find our Veterans-

YOUR STORY MATTERS HERE
MIAMI VA HEALTHCARE



Our mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

Our vision is to continue to be the benchmark of excellence and value in health care and benefits by providing exemplary services that are both patient-centered and evidence-based.

This care will be delivered by engaged, collaborative teams in an integrated environment that supports learning, discovery and continuous improvement. It will emphasize prevention and population health and contribute to the Nation's well-being through education, research and service in national emergencies.

For more information about the Miami VA Healthcare System, visit our homepage at www.miami.va.gov.

This publication is presented by the Miami VA Healthcare System. For information please contact Shane Suzuki, Public Affairs Officer, shane.suzuki@va.gov.



From left to right: Nevin Weaver, Lisa Pape, Judge Steven Leifman, Sandra Ramos, Ron Book, and Japhet Rivera at the Miami VA Homeless Veteran Awareness Kickoff.

A Hand Up Ending Veteran Homelessness

The Miami VA Healthcare System helped launch a nationwide "Make the Call" initiative last October to spread the message about special programs helping homeless Veterans and their families leave the streets.

As one of 28 cities chosen for the initial kickoff campaign, the event brought together government, business and community partners in an effort to share resources and increase collaboration while increasing awareness of services available to Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming so. VA is undertaking this aggressive support intervention to try to prevent homelessness before it starts.

Led by Lisa Pape, the national director of VHA Homeless Programs, other

speakers included Ron Book, Chairman of the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust; Judge Steven Leifman and Sandra Ramos Air Force Veteran.

"Look at me - I don't look like I'm homeless, homelessness has many faces," stated the 30-year-old Ramos. "I was given a chance for a new start, and from there I got my own place to stay."

After being forced to sleep in a car, she finally came to the Miami VA, where she was informed about the homeless program for Veterans and connected with social worker La'Shon Black who is now "like a sister" to Ramos.

To top it off, Ramos is now enrolled at Miami-Dade College and is thinking about becoming a nurse.

VA has transformed its efforts in

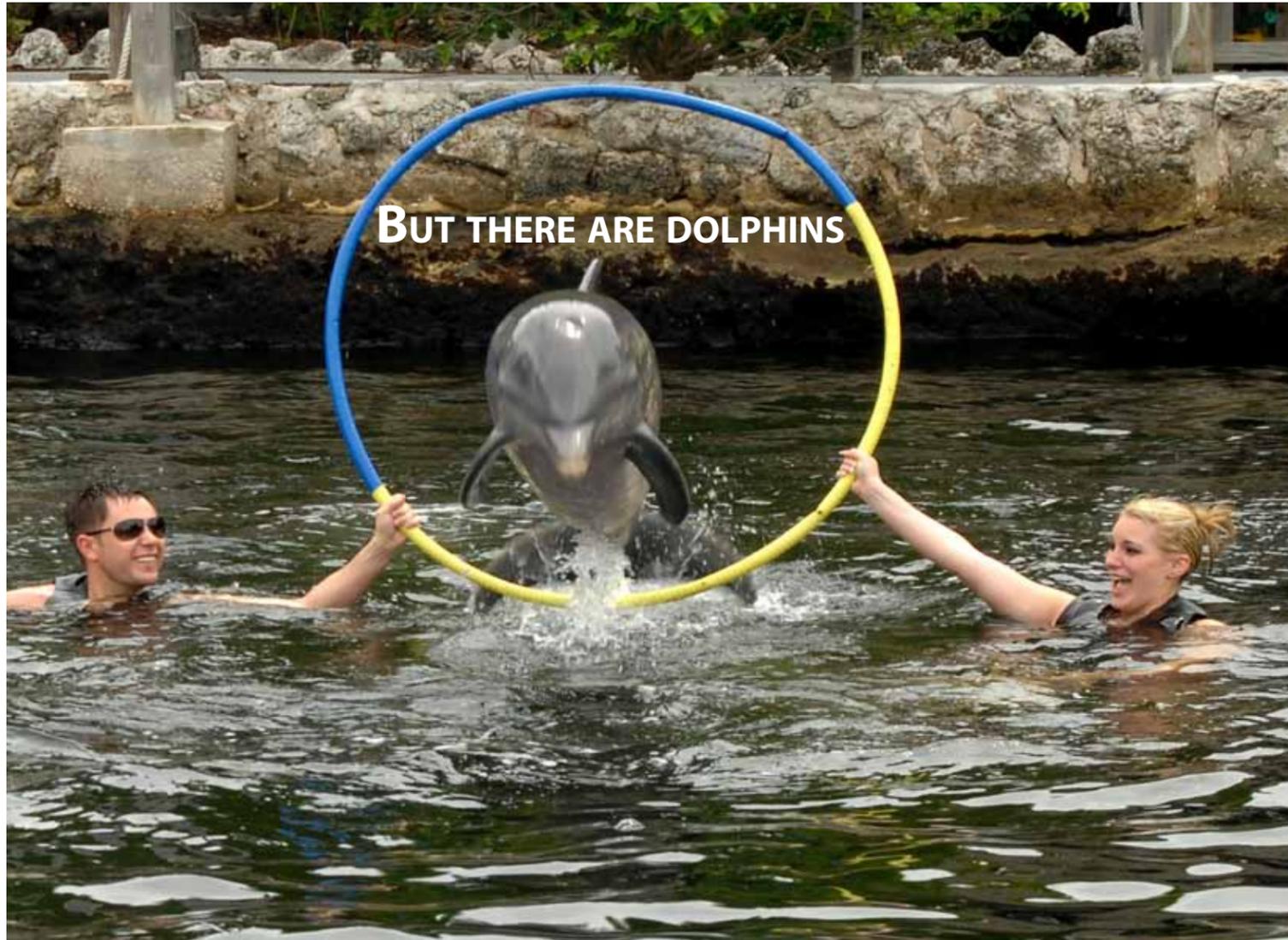
the fight against homelessness from a focus on temporary, shelter-based services; to prevention, employment, permanent housing.

"Those who have served this Nation as a Veteran should never find themselves on the street, living without care and without hope," said Pape. "Society owes the Veterans a debt of gratitude for their service, now is our turn to work together to end homelessness."

More information about VA's homeless programs is available online at www.va.gov/homeless.

A list of award recipients and details about the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program are available online at www1.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp.

“There’s no magic pill with PTSD.”



“It’s very peaceful when you get in the water. It’s stress-free and it brings out playfulness; happiness,” said Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran William Mulvey.

Mulvey, a 32 year old U.S. Navy Veteran from Homestead, Florida, is receiving care for PTSD and TBI from his combat experiences at the Bruce W. Carter VA Medical Center in Miami, Florida.

Two years ago the recreation therapy service at the Miami VA was offered the opportunity for combat Veterans and their families or caregivers to swim with dolphins by Island Dolphin Care, Inc., a not for profit organization in Key Largo, Florida.

“For the past few years we’ve been working with Veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan and that’s an honor and a privilege for us,” said Pete Hoagland, IDC Manager and co-founder. “We’ve even seen some vets from the Vietnam conflict and last week we had some Vets from Korea and World War II which was just amazing.”

“To put a smile on all those people’s faces and give them an idea that hope lives, that joy is something that you need in your lives is just a wonderful thing,” he added.

Kim Severance oversees the marine science education and Veterans programs. She says the Veterans have provided consistently positive feedback. “The number one response has been, ‘I can’t believe how good I’ve felt after... or for two weeks afterwards’.”

Some research has been published regarding the effects of swimming with dolphins according to Tabitha Aragon, Recreation Therapist for the Post Deployment Clinic at the Miami VA Healthcare System. Aragon says the basic data they’ve collected so far shows overall improvement in anxiety and depression levels after just the one-day program.

“It’s the excitement and motivation of being in this environment with these incredible animals that is such a powerful tool. We use it to create opportunities for children and young adults with special needs and challenges, disabilities, life-threatening conditions, kids from “Make-A-Wish” and similar organizations, and our Veterans,” Hoagland explained.

“But it’s expensive... just maintenance and electrical bills, water bills, all that stuff... it’s about a million dollar a year budget,” Hoagland said. He added that IDC receives strong local community as well as national philanthropic support but is always in need of additional funding.

Much of that support goes toward paying for individual and group scholarships that allow those who otherwise could not afford the sessions the opportunity to experience the dolphins.

“Island Dolphin Care fund raises and gets grants for the entire (VA) program. No money comes from the Veteran or the VA,” said Aragon.

Island Dolphin Care was created twenty years ago out of a parent’s need to improve her son’s life. Deena and Pete Hoagland’s son Joe was born with a heart defect that required multiple surgeries to correct. After his third open-heart procedure, Joe suffered a stroke that paralyzed his left side.

Deena, a licensed clinical social worker and therapist, thought Joe would respond better to water therapy. She asked Dolphins Plus, one of the oldest commercial ‘swim with dolphin’ programs in the U.S., if she could try with her son. Joe met a 600 lb. Atlantic bottle nose dolphin called Fonzie and the effects were almost immediate. Deena recognized what worked for Joe could help others as well. Gradually Island Dolphin Care evolved into the nationally recognized dolphin therapy program now benefiting Veterans. “We’re all about taking broken lives and helping them move in a positive direction. It’s truly an honor and a privilege to work with these men and women that have given so much for us. I can’t think of a better job than to work here and help make those programs successful,” Hoagland said.

To learn more about the dolphin swim therapy program, call Miami VA Recreation Therapy at (305) 575-3295 or e-mail Richard.Vroman@va.gov.





Modern Warriors:

ancient peace

The free classes are all voluntary and led by Roberts during lunch breaks and in the mornings before clinics begin at the hospital. Veterans are given priority, but if there is room staff and volunteers are welcome to attend.

"I was already doing relaxation and meditation classes and started slipping a few yoga elements into them," he said. "It's just grown quickly as more people hear about it."

Taking account the different physical abilities of his students, Roberts offers chair yoga, classes for patients suffering from multiple sclerosis and in walkers. He even teaches a class in the Spinal Cord Injury unit for paralyzed Veterans.

"Everyone can do this," said Roberts. "It's so rewarding to see these people release energy and become so calm and relaxed. Right after we are done, the feedback from the class is so positive. I even get comments from staff that the people leaving the classroom are so relaxed and happy."

At first I just booked a conference room and it's grown from there. People are telling me they can finally sleep and are better able to

deal with stress. It's very rewarding."

Yoga can take many different forms, the most common being Hatha Yoga with its many poses and focus on maintaining physical and emotional balance. Roberts teaches Kundalini Yoga which focuses more on energy flow and strengthening the central nervous and glandular systems.

"I think 90% of a lot of people's problems are from poor sleep patterns and that is something Kundalini Yoga can help with," said Roberts. "We have a lot of people suffering from PTSD here and getting consistent sleep can be a problem for them."

While he hopes this program will be expanded beyond Miami, for now Roberts is continuing to add classes before work and during lunch breaks, including a new class aimed at employees on Fridays.

"It's amazing to me that people just want to be here," he said. "The full gamut of humanity is coming to these classes; from those suffering from PTSD to wheelchair bound Veterans. I feel blessed to be here helping our warriors find happiness and peace."

For more information about Yoga classes offered the Miami VA, contact Richard Roberts at Richard.roberts2@va.gov or call (305) 479-5307.

"Breathe"

Thirty Veterans take a deep breath at once. Their arms are stretched out, yet reaching toward something deep within.

"Exhale"

The sound of air rushing from lungs fills the room while a small bearded man standing on a table begins readying his gong.

"There is no right or wrong to this part," says Richard Roberts, leader of this yoga class and full time nurse at the Miami VA Healthcare System. "Just close your eyes and feel the sound of the gong and relax." As the sound of a gong fills the room, the men and women in the class - both Veterans and staff - report feelings of energy and calmness flowing through their bodies. The gong is the final segment in what is becoming a regular part of their recovery: Yoga at the VA.



The **Right** Information, at the **Right** Time, in the **Right** Place

Facebook, Twitter, flickr, IM, texting, apps, iOS, Android, YouTube - none of these terms made sense to most people 10 years ago. Yet, all of these communication tools have revolutionized the way we communicate and share information with our friends, family and now, health care providers. As more Veterans prefer to get their information from online sources, VA has adopted these new technologies to share information and receive feedback about care and programs.

The Miami VA Healthcare System is now the latest VA medical center to join the social media landscape with its Facebook and Twitter accounts. Here, you will find out the latest information about programs, events, clinic closures (especially useful during hurricane season!) and other changes to VA services.

"The Veterans who live in South Florida are a diverse population - both culturally and geographically," said Shane Suzuki, public affairs officer for the Miami VA. "By using social

media, it's our goal to provide interesting stories and important updates as soon as we know it so people get the information they need when and where they want it."

Signing up is free and takes only a couple minutes and sites have taken precautions to protect their users privacy.

"One thing we want to do online is encourage a conversation about the Miami VA, but patient privacy is the most important thing," said Suzuki. "People are free to ask questions, and often we can respond with a phone number or weblink almost immediately that solves their problem. Even better is when fellow Veterans jump in and help out."

As more people use the internet as their first choice for finding information, Miami VA wants to make sure that what they are looking for is easy to find and understand. "This need to be online will only increase as more people use smartphones to access the web from almost anywhere," says Suzuki.

"VA is working hard to meet and exceed the expectations of our patients, whether that means finding the information you need quickly on our website or by asking a question on Facebook and getting an answer quickly," he said. "We understand that navigating VA can sometimes be daunting, but we are here to help."

To find out the latest in Veteran news, visit www.miami.va.gov, www.facebook.com/VAMiami and www.twitter.com/VAMiami.

Social Media • n.

A phrase that encompasses new online tools that allow anyone to publish text, photos or video to the internet. The most popular tools are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogging.

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