



WORKING TOGETHER TO SERVE OUR VETERANS



KINGS COUNTY
behavioral health
kcbh.org

KINGS COUNTY
VETERANS
SERVICES

“We want to shorten that time before [veterans] get the help they need.”

Mary Anne Ford Sherman
Director of the Kings County Behavioral
Health Department

Mary Anne Ford Sherman and Joe Wright bring their military experience to their respective roles as Director of the Behavioral Health Department and Veterans Service Officer for Kings County.
PHOTO BY JOHANNA COYNE

TWO DEPARTMENTS. ONE MISSION.

Kings County Behavioral Health and Veterans Services have the same goal: To serve those who have served

by Matt Jocks

The list of challenges facing military veterans is long. So is the list of services available to meet those challenges.

Mary Anne Ford Sherman, Director of the Behavioral Health Department for Kings County, is well versed in both lists. But she sums it up in one simple image: “We want to wrap services around a veteran.”

Doing that takes the forces of two departments, Behavioral Health and Kings County Veterans Services, as well as the state and federal veterans organizations.

In Kings County, home of Naval Air Station - Lemoore, Behavioral Health and Veterans Services have formed a partnership designed to cover every aspect of a veteran's transition to civilian life and ongoing success.

That means accessing every benefit and navigating the maze of paperwork. It also means identifying and managing behavioral and mental health issues.

In Kings County, the services are literally two sides of the same street, explains Kings County Veterans Service Officer Joe Wright.

“When we get veterans [in the office] to work on benefits, and we might see something that's going on with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) or TBI (traumatic brain injury), or maybe just family issues that come up, we will actually walk them across the street [to Behavioral Health] and they can be seen right away,” he says.

The expertise on both sides of that street comes from people with personal experience in the military. Wright is a Navy veteran with 31 years of service, including 12 deployments. Ford Sherman is a Navy veteran with four years service and

was stationed in Japan and California. Both offices are staffed with those who have served, including contracted therapist Mario Lopez, a Vietnam veteran who specializes in counseling other service men and women.

Assistance goes beyond benefits and therapy. There are programs like the Collaborative Justice Treatment Court, which provides targeted help for veterans who become involved in the criminal justice system. There is help with handling financial affairs. There are classes for family and friends to learn skills in dealing with the issues faced by veterans.

Among the most important functions of both departments are outreach and education.

“When veterans come in, many times, they are not aware of the benefits they're eligible for,” Wright says. “For instance, if they served in Vietnam and they have diabetes type 2, they may not know that they are eligible for benefits because of the connection to Agent Orange.”

At Behavioral Health, the big challenge is getting veterans in the door. Both departments engage in outreach, but some veterans find it difficult to ask for help. But for the more than 400 veterans who have sought services through Behavioral Health since its efforts began five years ago, it's made a difference. Ford Sherman hopes to reach even more veterans sooner, before their situations get worse.

“Our goal is to shorten that length of time for veterans who have been through the ropes and are struggling and, finally, they say ‘This is really bad. I need to get help,’” she says. “We want to shorten that time before they get the help they need.”

Kings County Behavioral Health

★ SERVICES FOR VETERANS ★

- ▶ **INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP THERAPY**
The team includes former service men and women who specialize in treating veterans using a variety of methods, including newer techniques such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing).
- ▶ **VETERANS SUPPORT GROUP**
Meets biweekly for discussion and to hear guest speakers. Groups are kept small to facilitate discussion.
- ▶ **VETERANS TRAUMA GROUP**
A 10-week group that deals with trauma-related issues such as insomnia, stress and anger.
- ▶ **ANOTHER KIND OF VALOR**
A seven-hour training targeted to both professionals who deal with veterans and the family and friends of veterans. Insight is offered from veterans about what triggers stress and anger and what approaches are best for those who want to support them.
- ▶ **COLLABORATIVE JUSTICE TREATMENT COURT**
Assistance provided in navigating this targeted court, which deals primarily with mental health and substance abuse issues that lead veterans to enter the criminal justice system.

NOT ALONE

Veteran found the strength to accept the help he needed by Matt Jocks

Stephen Brazil was struggling hard to find answers. What he found was the right question. Transition from military to civilian life was not going well. Brazil was having difficulty finding employment, was turning to alcohol to deal with frustration and confusion, and was uncertain what the future held for him.

At the Kings County Behavioral Health Department, he found a therapist, Mario Lopez, who was a fellow veteran. Lopez unlocked the door for Brazil with a single question.

"I'll never forget what Mario asked me," Brazil recalls. "He asked, 'Did you fight in the war by yourself? Or did you have your team, your squad with you?'"

"No, we did it as a unit. And he said, 'Well, how do you think you're going to deal with what you have to deal with now on your own?' It rang a bell with me."

There are two main challenges for the Behavioral Health Department in dealing with veterans. One is getting them in the door. The other is opening the door in their minds to get them to accept help.

Brazil said he came to the department through word of mouth but acknowledged he wasn't initially the best client — he skipped sessions and didn't fully accept the help being offered until Lopez, a Navy veteran who served in Vietnam, asked that one question. And to Brazil, it mattered that it came from a fellow veteran.

"We have a common bond," Brazil says. "He's really easy to talk to."

For Brazil, a Marine who was deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, the new war was against depression, anxiety and anger.

"America doesn't stop when you're gone," he says. "Jumping back into civilian life isn't the easiest thing."

Brazil's biggest hurdle was employment. He wasn't getting callbacks and it was leading to frustration and resentment, feelings that were taking a toll on his relationships.

Although Kings County Veterans Services has programs to help veterans find employment, Brazil wound up getting work on his own. He is currently employed with the state.

What Behavioral Health did was show Brazil the way to shore up his relationships and manage his depression and anxiety. Brazil is married, with two children.

"It has made me a better person," Brazil says. "It's helped me control myself, my frustration. I'm now able to handle all the things you deal with, trying to adapt to life outside the military."

Brazil is happy where he is now, and all it took was Lopez to show him that wars — internal and external — are not won alone.

"When he asked me that question, I thought, maybe it's not a bad thing to ask for help," he says. "I had a couple of low points, but that really broadened my horizon and helped me swallow my pride and get the help I needed."

Stephen Brazil said it took a wake-up call from his Kings County Behavioral Health therapist to accept the help he needed to deal with depression, anxiety and anger. PHOTO BY JOHANNA COYNE



"I had a couple of low points, but [my therapist] ... helped me swallow my pride and get the help I needed."

Stephen Brazil
Marine Corps veteran

Kings County ★ Veterans Services ★

- ▶ **BENEFITS COUNSELING AND CLAIMS**
Veterans service representatives identify what benefits are available for veterans and make sure applications are completed and filed correctly to avoid delays. They provide case management as well, including the filing of appeals.
- ▶ **LIAISON TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**
Helping veterans navigate the federal VA system.
- ▶ **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION**
Working through local groups and the media to make sure veterans are aware of their benefits and how to get them.

- ▶ **VETERAN BENEFITS**
Help accessing the many county, state and federal benefits available to veterans including:
 - Disability compensation and pension
 - Education and training, for veterans and their survivors and dependents
 - Vocational rehabilitation
 - Health care, general and speciality, out-patient, hospital and nursing home
 - Burial benefits, including flag, special headstone, placement in National Veterans Cemeteries

- Other benefits, including in-home assistance, housing and auto grants, financial benefits for survivors and dependents
- College fee waiver, for dependents and survivors attending state and community colleges
- Farm and home loans
- Other government benefits, assistance with unemployment insurance, exemptions and waivers for business license fees, property taxes, vehicle registration, fishing/hunting licenses, state park fees

ASK A VETERANS SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE

by Matt Jocks

Veterans Service Representative Christina Woodards, a Navy veteran who was deployed twice, including once aboard the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in support of Operation Enduring Freedom 2001, has the answers to some of the most common questions veterans have.



Christina Woodards says she likes to break down the walls that keep veterans from getting the benefits they deserve.
PHOTO BY JOHANNA COYNE

Why should veterans seek help from your office rather than try to navigate the system on their own?

One of the great benefits of coming in is that they're dealing with an actual human being. We can answer questions that sometimes a computer can't. If their question is, what went wrong with their claim, we can check the database. We have the accreditation to access their files. We can quickly reach the people we need at VA, where sometimes the veterans might have a two-hour wait on the phone.

We can also make sure everything is filled out correctly. If they're trying to do this on their own and an error is made, the VA can't say yes or no until it is cleared up. And that takes time.

How can a veteran prepare for a visit to your office?

They should have copies of their medical records. We need to establish that they are actually veterans. They should have their DD214 form that establishes their character of discharge, because that will affect the level of benefits they are eligible for.

I really like it when they come in with tons of questions. Because I like to give tons of answers.

Are some veterans apprehensive about the process?

I like to break that wall down. I'm not going to lie to them. It is a process. But I let them know that we're going to help them, to ease the pain of the paperwork.

A lot of the veterans are unaware of just what's out there for them in terms of benefits. That's why the burden is heavily on us to do outreach, to go out there and let them know what's available.

Does it help that you are a veteran yourself?

When I first started the process, I was in their position. I totally get where their questions come from. I might not have served directly with them, but we understand each other. We speak the same lingo.

Get Connected

Veterans in Kings County don't have to go it alone. The Veterans Services and Behavioral Health departments are here to help. Contact them today!



IN PERSON:

1400 W. Lacey Blvd.,
Law Building No. 4, in Hanford

PHONE APPOINTMENTS:

559-852-2669

ONLINE:

www.countyofkings.com
(under the Departments heading, Veterans Services is listed under General Services)

E-MAIL LIST:

Contact the Veterans Services Office at
vet.services@co.kings.ca.us to sign up

VETERANS AND MILITARY COALITION:

Monthly meetings are held in the Kings County Government Center (schedule and agenda are posted on the Veterans Service webpage)



IN PERSON:

460 Kings County Drive,
Suite 101 in Hanford

BY PHONE:

559-852-2444

ONLINE:

kcbh.org

24-HOUR CRISIS LINE:

559-582-4484 or 1-800-655-2553

PRODUCED FOR KINGS COUNTY VETERANS SERVICES AND
KINGS COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH BY
N&R PUBLICATIONS, WWW.NEWSREVIEWPUBLICATIONS.COM



★ Get the Card ★ NEW VETERAN DRIVER'S LICENSE

Effective Nov. 11, 2015 (Veterans Day), California veterans will have a new way to be recognized for their service, one that can open the door for other benefits.

A bill passed and signed in 2014 will create a new driver's license and ID card that will designate eligible bearers as veterans. This will help veterans access services and benefits and will also alert first responders that someone involved in an accident or emergency is a veteran.

Kings County Veterans Services can help with the verification and application process. Call for details.

The license is separate from the special license plates for veterans. Information on that program can be accessed at cacvso.org.