



Community Awareness

Alice Sun, Bella Lewis, Kimberly Whitmore

Target Audience: Veterans and Current Military Members

Secondary Division – Chapter 26181

Mountain Vista High School

Colorado

Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

Thousands Changed

Research: When we first started researching veteran suicides, we focused on causes, assistance available to veterans, and statistics related to veteran suicide. We found that in Colorado, the suicide rate for veterans is much higher than the national average, and since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the suicide rate has increased by 20%. We included key statistics in our materials, noting that a veteran dies by suicide every 1 hour and 5 minutes. Many fathers, mothers, siblings, and children are dying as a result of their trauma and hopelessness. Over two-thirds of veterans revealed that they did not seek mental health assistance because of the stigma surrounding it. We researched the topic extensively with fourteen sources, and information shared from our twelve community partners. We also focused on information from industry leaders such as the Veterans Administration and the American Psychological Association. The research helped our team explore the best ways to approach the issue and determine how to effectively increase awareness. As we designed activities to increase awareness and talked to more organizations and veterans, we continued to learn. While talking to the Veterans Coalition of San Luis Valley, we discovered that there are other kinds of therapy besides office visits, such as equine therapy, which have been shown to be very beneficial. Our contact at Douglas County Libraries was related to a Marine who served in World War Two. Through her, we learned how far our efforts could reach, and how we might help others even when they are not expecting it.

Selection of Campaign Issue: We chose the issue of veteran suicide because Colorado has a very high rate of veteran suicide, especially in rural areas, and the Covid-19 pandemic has only caused the problem to increase. There is an extremely negative

connotation with veterans seeking mental health help and that has led to suicide attempts, many successful. We learned at the Forum on Lethal Means that over half of veterans have guns and use them to complete their suicides, with an 85-90% success rate. Every veteran that falls victim to their trauma is a life that could have been saved with help. We want to make it clear that getting help is not shameful and that there are many services that can provide aid to the veteran and their family. Just one word of reassurance or acceptance goes a long way, so we will spread the message about veteran suicide and work on ending the stigma of mental health issues.

Goals and Objectives: Our goal is to inform members of the community about the rising problem of veteran suicide and the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the issue. We also want to help the HOSA Chapters and members of the community become more involved with the issue, whether through volunteering or simply becoming more aware and educated. Through these actions, our long-term objective is to help reduce the number of veterans who attempt suicide and decrease the stigma of receiving mental health treatment.

Community Partners: In order to effectively spread awareness about veteran suicide, we contacted over twenty organizations and are actively collaborating with twelve. The top military-related organizations we worked with are: Veteran Affairs of Eastern Colorado Healthcare System, American Legion Auxiliary, Veterans Coalition of San Luis Valley, Veterans of Foreign Affairs, American Legion, and Project Sanctuary. We also partnered with the Vietnam Veterans of America (Chapter #1106), Colorado American Legion Auxiliary Juniors Program, and the Arapahoe County Veteran Services Office.

We included non-veteran organizations to help raise awareness with the general public, including: Douglas County Libraries, Sky Ridge Hospital, and the Colorado Department of Labor.

Accomplishments, Effectiveness, and Impacts: Our main goal during the project was to spread awareness locally and nationally about the continually growing issue of veteran suicide and where those in crisis can seek help . With our many meetings, campaigns, and events, we believe we successfully spread our message to an immense number of people. The brochures, posters, infographics, and bookmarks created and distributed throughout the community, including veteran support locations, and shared on our website helped many people to become better informed on the issue and how to seek help. The meetings we attended with the organizations helped increase our outreach throughout Colorado and helped to educate us on ways to assist veterans. We also found that many of our partner organizations operate solo and we helped to increase their collaboration. The retreat with Project Sanctuary was the event that had the largest personal impact on us, with the opportunity to connect directly with veterans and their families. A key accomplishment is our current work to collaborate with the President of the Colorado Senate Leroy Garcia and Representative David Ortiz on Colorado SB-129, a Veteran Suicide Prevention Pilot Program. We have been invited to testify at the Colorado House on behalf of the bill. We feel fortunate to further this work, talk with veterans, and have had a profound impact on the community, providing a path to healing. We now have the opportunity to amplify this impact with our work at the Colorado legislature, changing lives for the better.

Partnerships

DOCUMENTATION

 <p>COLORADO Department of Public Health & Environment</p> <p>Prevention and Wellness Mr. Matthew Wetenkamp Colorado Veteran Suicide Prevention Coordinator Location: Denver, CO <i>"I thank you and your teammates for having chosen this as your area of focus."</i></p>	<p>Serves the 5.8 Million Residents of Colorado with Health Programs</p>	 <p>PROJECT SANCTUARY</p> <p>Serve over 5,000 Veterans a Year on Social Media and 1,500 Veteran Families in Retreats</p> <p>Contact: Ms. Heather Ehle, CEO/ Founder Location: Granby, CO <i>"Welcome to the fight.... thank you for bringing awareness to this sensitive topic."</i></p>
 <p>Dr. Edgar Villarreal, PhD, Suicide Prevention Program Program Manager Location: Aurora, CO <i>"Thank you for your team's dedication to this work and I look forward to supporting your efforts."</i></p>	<p>VA Medical Center services reach over 85,000 Veterans a Year, 3rd highest call volume nationally</p>	 <p>American Legion, Highlands Ranch, Post 1260 Contact: Commander Joe Langran Location: Highlands Ranch, CO <i>"This is a wonderful project you are working on I'm going to forward your message to .. District 6 Commander, to see if he would like to spread the word...I will also forward your update to our Post 1260 members and encourage their participation."</i></p>
 <p>Vietnam Veterans of America South Denver, Post 1106 Contact: Mr. Edgar Vargas and Chapter President Lee White Location: Aurora, CO <i>"...delighted to speak with you and your team about Veteran Suicide Prevention Program."</i></p>	<p>Serve over 85,000 Veterans Nationally</p>	 <p>Veterans Coalition Contact: Mary Cornum, COO and Richard Nagley, Founder and Director Location: Alamosa, CO <i>"We are also impressed with the detail of your brochure and would be happy to send it to our partners in healthcare and the VA to promote your good work. We need more to get involved at an early age to get a jump on these issues."</i></p>
 <p>Douglas County Libraries <i>Provided the opportunity to showcase the Veteran Suicide Prevention Posters on their bulletin boards in Highlands Ranch and Lone Tree, CO.</i></p>	<p>Serves over 350,000 Resident Members</p>	 <p>Arapahoe County Veterans Service Officer Contact: Joshua D. Medina Location: Alamosa, CO <i>"These are great brochures you put together and I am interested to see what programming you are doing."</i></p>
 <p>American Legion Auxiliary, Highlands Ranch, Contact: Ms. Helen Guthrie, President Location: Highlands Ranch, CO <i>"...blown away by all you are doing with this project. ..Your project is so inspiring. ...I will again make efforts to reach the sources of publication in our area to see how you can submit an article...see if we can get you published in the American Legion Auxiliary magazine."</i></p>	<p>Includes 24 Members, all Family of Veterans</p>	 <p>American Legion Auxiliary Colorado Juniors Program Contact: Ms. Faline Fobare, Junior Advisor Location: Colorado <i>"The documents you put together are excellent! We may be able to send out to all Units to use."</i></p>
 <p>COLORADO Department of Labor and Employment</p> <p>HIREVets.gov Recognizing employers who HIRE veterans</p> <p>Contact: Mr. Martin Bangert - CDLE Location: Denver, CO <i>"...possibility for outreach at the upcoming Virtual Job Fair on February 11th"</i></p>	<p>Serves the 5.8 Million Residents of Colorado with Workforce Opportunities</p>	 <p>Veterans of Foreign Wars South Denver, Post 2461 Contact: Mr. Matthew J. Dixon-Moran, Commander and Executive Director Location: Denver, CO <i>"Thank you for reaching out to us. We would be interested in talking more about this project and collaboration with you."</i></p>

April/May 2021 – Currently coordinating with the President of the Colorado Senate Leroy Garcia and Representative David Ortiz on SB-129 and have been invited to testify at the House on behalf of the Bill.



Colorado General

Assembly

Leroy M. Garcia Jr.
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Senate District 3
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SB21-129:



SPONSORS: Senator Leroy Garcia and Representative David Ortiz

READ THE BILL AT:
<https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb21-129>

Emails and Video Meetings with Partners- October

2020 to May 2021-We sent and received over 200

emails, numerous video calls, and connected with over 20 organizations to spread awareness about veteran suicide, including methods to support veterans. These communication methods helped us to create events and helped us to build the outreach plan.

Presentation & Agenda:

AGENDA

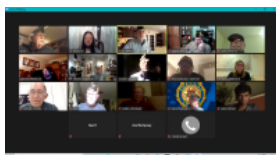
Meeting with CO Labor and Employment on the 100% Veterans Suicide Prevention Project
 Agenda Item: Veterans Community Awareness Project
 Monday, January 25, 2021 at 2:00 p.m.

Topic: Mr. Acosta, Manager from CO Employment, and Mountain View High School MESA Team (Bella Kross, Alex Sun, and Anthony Nolasco)

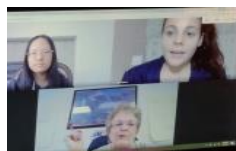
1. Introduction
2. Overview of MESA Project
3. Goals of the Meeting
 - How many veterans usually attend your job fairs? Same for virtual job fairs?
 - Could you share our brochures or posters in email or newsletter?
 - Could we interview veterans that you may know who could help our project?
 - Could we share a virtual service or our project in newsletters, etc? There could be help at the job fair?
 - Are there any other media (social or traditional) we can use together?
 - Are you provide a range of options for our veterans' products?
4. Share needs of our Organization
5. Our Other Partnerships. Any others we should connect with?
6. Thank You, Timeline and Next Steps
 - FOGA State Conference February 28-30, 2021, Denver, CO 7:00-8:00
 - VAHQ National Conference, June 23-25, 2021



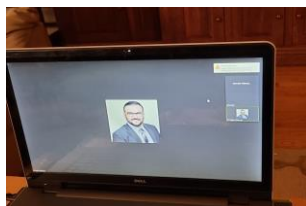
Presentation to the American Legion Auxiliary- October 27, 2020



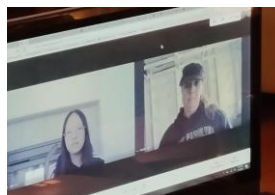
Presentation to Veterans Coalition of San Luis Valley- January 7, 2021



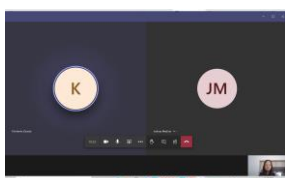
Presentation to VA Eastern CO Suicide Prevention- Jan. 11, 2021



Presentation to Project Sanctuary- January 14, 2021



Presentation to Arapahoe County, CO Veteran Services- Jan. 15, 2021

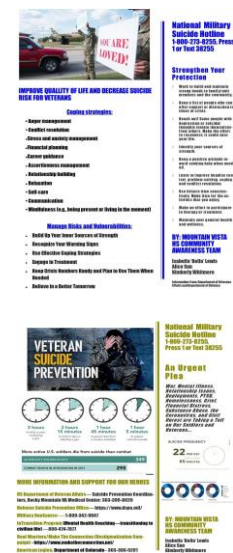


Presentation to Colorado Dept. of Labor and Employment- January 25, 2021



Veterans Corner Newsletter of Veterans Coalition, San Luis Valley- January 19, 2021- 600 Impacted

Our team created an infographic and article with information about veteran suicide and methods to prevent it. The information will reach hundreds of veterans through the Veterans Corner Newsletter. The newsletter, with our information, was circulated virtually with the help of the Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley.



Team Posters Displayed at SkyRidge Hospital in Lone Tree, CO- Spring 2021 – Impacted 284 Beds, Plus Visitors - SkyRidge

Hospital by HealthOne is a 57-acre acute care Level II Trauma Center that serves the community. The hospital displayed the new poster design and the team website on their Community Awareness bulletin boards, allowing families and veterans easy access to the resource information.



Posters on Community Awareness Boards in Libraries- Starting January 2021 - 20,000 impacted (per week) - We created pamphlets, posters, and bookmarks

(shown) to give to visitors at the seven Douglas County Libraries. The posters were displayed on Community Awareness Boards, where thousands of people visit each week, allowing families and veterans to easily access the information.



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Our team conducted interviews with Veterans and with a Crisis Counselor at the VA Colorado Medical Center. The interviews highlighted issues with which veterans struggle while in the military and after discharge. All participants remain anonymous in our reports. For example, a Navy Veteran from Operation Desert Storm mentioned, "...night watch on the ship deck has a feeling of despair... you feel small knowing you are traveling at 30 knots but are 2 weeks from anywhere."

Name of Expert:

Name of Interview:

Date:

Interview Questions to Ask – Experts on Military and Veteran Suicide Growth

(Capture the Impact and Prevalence Overview on the Way Through Both the In-Depth Questions on Their Expertise & Knowledge of Military/Veteran Suicide, from their Perspectives)

1. Why do you believe that most people are not aware that the military/veteran suicide rate is 6 times the civilian suicide rate?
2. Why are the mental health concerns of active duty military and veterans not identified?
3. What is the best advice to honor military service members who are struggling?
4. Are the number or length of deployments a contributing factor to suicide?
5. Is the pain experienced by veterans who return home without receiving priority at the onset of the post or in its aftermath for the future?
6. Why do you think that the highest rate of suicide is during the first year after separation?
7. Why do you think that the overall suicide rate is often 2 times higher for male veterans versus female veterans?
8. What role do guns have in veteran's suicides?
9. Veterans are often prescribed a number of medications by the V.A. Do you believe that medications have an effect on the suicide rate?
10. The public generally views post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, as a small label for the psychological trauma that can affect those who have served in war. Ignorance, but not because it is that small to represent the high rates of military and veteran suicides?
11. Are there any more being done to treat and understand the connection between war and alcohol use, PTSD, and depression impacting the military/veteran suicide rate?
12. Are there any other observations or stories that you would like to share on military/veteran suicides?

Invitation to Contribute to the New Colorado “Operation Veteran Strong”

Website – Spring 2021 - National Outreach with Statewide Focus -

Our team was invited by Mr. Matthew Wetenkamp, Colorado Veteran Suicide Prevention Coordinator, to contribute information to the new State of Colorado coordinated Veteran's website. This work is in-process.



Materials Posted at the Arapahoe County, CO Veterans Office-

January 25, 2021 1,500+ Impacted

We displayed posters, brochures, and bookmarks at the Arapahoe County Veterans Service Office, where many veterans and their relatives come to for help with benefits and services. Easily accessible information allows those who are most impacted by the issue easy access without judgement. The information can be taken home and shared, so more people can learn about the issue.



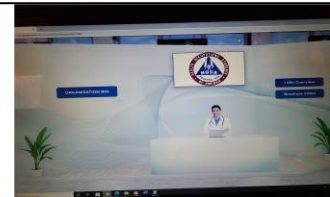
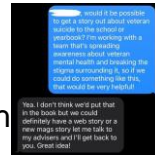
“Clean-up the Ranch” with the American Legion,

Post 1260– May 1, 2021 – 10 Veterans Impacted

Invited to participate with American Legion at one of their annual community service events and had the opportunity to talk with Veterans from foreign wars about their experiences.



Article on Veteran Suicide Prevention in the Highlands Ranch Herald on April 15, 2021 (28,275 Paper Circulation & Online) and Coordinated with VistaNow Publication (2,400+ students/faculty) Wrote an article on Veteran Suicide Prevention that was published in the Highlands Ranch Herald online and its print paper on April 15, 2021. We coordinated in 2021 with VistaNow, the news website for Mountain Vista High School (queued).

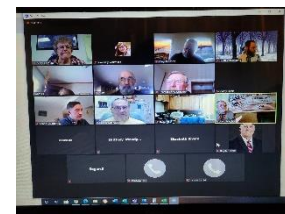


Colorado Virtual Veterans Job Fair Info Booth

on February 11, 2021 – over 400 registrants - Our team staffed a booth at the State of Colorado Virtual Job Fair, listed as a military and veteran resource. We had our materials available and answered questions. We prepared a custom virtual job fair site (pictured). We heard from participants that there was a need to consolidate veteran volunteer opportunities and added that to our website and plan.

Participated in a Forum on Lethal Means and Suicide Prevention, January 19, 2021 - Included 22 top Veteran suicide prevention specialists in Colorado

Our team participated in a 90-minute webinar with top experts' in the field of veteran suicide prevention. We learned a great deal, including that firearms are the most common means for suicide by veterans, with an 85-90% success rate.



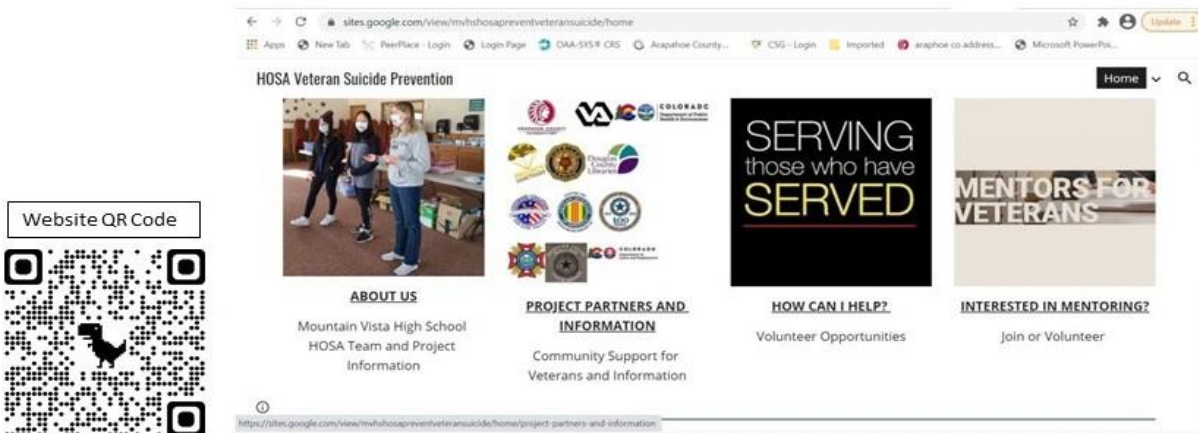
Social Media Outreach- January 2021 - 1,489 impacted

We created an infographic that was posted on a variety of social media platforms. Eye-catching media sparks interest and posting online is essential during the pandemic to increase exposure.



Team Veteran Suicide Prevention Website, Published Spring 2021 –

Shared with Veterans and Partners in Colorado- Thousands Impacted



<https://sites.google.com/view/mvshosapreventveteransuicide/home>

Team Members Awarded the Good Deed Award by the National American

Legion Auxiliary - April 2021



American Legion Auxiliary
Good Deed Award

Our team members were nominated by the local

Highlands Ranch American Legion Auxiliary, Unit 1260 for the prestigious national Good Deed youth award recognition for our work on Veteran Suicide Prevention. We were awarded this honor by the national American Legion Auxiliary in April 2021.

Reference Page

Stopping Military and Veteran Suicides, APA, [Stopping suicide in the military \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org/stop-suicide-military)

Mentalhealth.va.gov, [VA Suicide Prevention on Military Separation](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/va-suicide-prevention-on-military-separation)

New veterans have 93% higher risk for suicide than general public

https://www.upi.com/Health_News/2020/09/11/New-veterans-have-93-higher-risk-for-suicide-than-general-public/6191599837798/

CDC: Suicide rates increased by 25% since 1999

<https://www.ktnv.com/news/national/cdc-suicide-rates-have-increased-by-25-since-1999>

Headspace and Timing: Veteran Mental Health from a Combat Veteran Perspective

<https://veteranmentalhealth.com>

Podcasts - Headspace and Timing: Veteran Mental Health ...

<https://veteranmentalhealth.com/podcast>

VA System Failing on Mental Health Care Report - WebMD

<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/news/20180131/va-system-failing-on-mental-health...>

Mirecc.va.gov, PTSD and Suicide in Veterans and Military Personnel,

https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/presentations/docs/Bulman_PTSD_Suicide_Northern_CA_SPW_9-6-11.pdf

Veterans & Active Duty | NAMI, <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Veterans-Active-Duty>

VA National Veteran Suicide Annual Report 2020,

<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2020/2020-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-11-2020-508.pdf>

Suicide rate for veterans far exceeds civilian population, Center for Public Integrity

<https://publicintegrity.org/national-security/suicide-rate-for-veterans-far-exceeds-that-of-civilian-population/>

US veterans' suicide rates highest in West, rural areas,

<https://www.foxnews.com/us/us-veterans-suicide-rates-highest-in-west-rural-areas>

As COVID-19 crisis continues, suicide risk for veterans likely to grow,

<https://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/508306-as-covid-19-crisis-continues-suicide-risk-for-veterans-likely-to-grow>

Suicide Among Veterans - Why are Veterans at a Higher Risk of Suicide? <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/veterans/suicide-among-veterans>