



VOLUNTARY SERVICE

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



VA Volunteers
Rekindling the American Spirit

Annual Report
2003

Letter from the Director



No matter what else a volunteer may hope to get back out of the donation of time, talent and effort, the one thing everyone wants is success, to have contributed effectively to the mission and vision of the organization. Thanks in large measure to the participation of more than 118,000 volunteers and approximately 350 organizations, veteran patients continue to receive the best quality health care available. The number of volunteers and the millions of hours served, while most commendable, cannot fully describe the total impact of volunteerism in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The VA Voluntary Service Program continues to make a significant contribution to the goals of the Veterans Health Administration. Volunteers make a difference in a number of areas critical to the success of this organization's mission. Patient satisfaction is improved through the support of volunteers. They help to improve access to care and their participation improves customer service. The participation of volunteers and partner organizations helps to expand community outreach and advocacy. For these reasons and many more, we take this time to recognize them for the special contributions they make to the mission of the VA.

While many challenges lie ahead, there is no doubt that we will overcome them by the innovation, creativity and dedication of the VAVS staff and by the responsiveness of a caring and compassionate community. The American Spirit is alive and well in the hearts and minds of our dedicated volunteers.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim W. Allegado". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

Director, Voluntary Service Office

Our Mission

To provide a structured Volunteer Program under the management of VA compensated employees in cooperation with community resources to serve America's veterans and their families with dignity and compassion.

What is VAVS?

The Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Program, the largest volunteer program in the Federal government, has provided over 56 years of service to America's veterans seeking care in VA health care facilities. Since 1946, VAVS volunteers have donated 521 million hours of service. With more than 350 national and community organizations supporting the program, VAVS also is advised by a National Advisory Committee, composed of 61 major veteran, civic and service organizations.

VAVS volunteers and their organizations annually contribute an estimated \$40 million in gifts and donations, which supplement VA appropriations to medical centers, clinics and nursing homes. These significant contributions allow the Department of Veterans Affairs to assist direct patient care programs, as well as support services and activities that may not be fiscal priorities from year to year.

As VA has expanded its care of veteran patients into the community, volunteers have become involved. They assist veteran patients by augmenting staff in such settings as hospital wards, nursing homes, community-based volunteer programs, end-of-life care programs, foster care, respite care, national cemeteries and veterans outreach centers.

National Advisory Committee

The National Advisory Committee (NAC) of the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) was established by VA Circular No. 117, May 17, 1947, and became a federally chartered advisory committee on February 5, 1975.

The Committee provides advice to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, through the Under Secretary for Health, on the coordination and promotion of volunteer activities within VA health care facilities, and on other matters relating to volunteerism. It keeps the officers and members of participating organizations informed of volunteer needs and accomplishments.

The NAC Executive Committee is made up of 19 member organizations that monitors and performs oversight of the NAC membership policies and procedures. Members of the Executive Committee are appointed by the Chairman of the NAC.

There are currently 61 member organizations represented on the National Advisory Committee.

FY 2002 Service Priorities and Accomplishments

Recruitment and Retention

Volunteer support is needed now more than ever due in part to the changes in health care delivery. Care is being provided to more than 4.5 million veterans in more than 1,300 locations of care throughout the country. This change is driving the need for more volunteer opportunities in the veterans' community.

Accomplishments

VA Voluntary Service Annual Report

VA Central Office published and distributed its first Annual Report in FY 2002. The publication was shared with the leaders and managers of VA and with many national non-profit organizations in the field of volunteerism.

Recruitment Strategy - "Rekindling the American Spirit"

The Voluntary Service Office, VACO established a task group of field and VACO staff to develop a national recruitment strategy. This task group was expanded to include a focus group of student volunteers that contributed to the published recruitment strategy. The task group developed, published and distributed a comprehensive recruitment strategy to VAVS staff, NAC member organizations, and VA leadership.

Web Based Recruitment

VAVS has continued with the web recruitment tool that was implemented in September, 2001.

The redesign allows individuals who want to volunteer an opportunity to contact the VA facility nearest them. They are then prompted to email their interests to volunteer to a VAVS contact person at the facility. A copy of the email is directed to the Voluntary Service Office in VACO for tracking purposes and to ensure swift and positive response with the potential volunteer.

Since last year's annual report, approximately 400 potential volunteers have contacted us through the site and approximately 50 who have been placed in VAVS assignments. The analysis of the requests in geographic locations; 75% from the East Coast, 15% from the West Coast, 8% from the Central region, 1% from the South and 1% coming from locations nearby military bases. Since the latest international developments, we have noticed an increase in contact from individuals interested in serving those who have served. This surge has been from predominately the 20-30 year old age group.



Additionally, approximately 50 regularly scheduled volunteers have been recruited from contacts through VolunteerMatch.com.

Comments received from the potential volunteers include:

"With everything going on in the world, I can't help but feel helpless. I went online looking for ways that I could support our troops and that is where I found your organization. I would very much like to volunteer."

"My son and I want to help out any way we can."

"I'm a 20 year old criminal justice major. I have a great interest in volunteering in Lyons, NJ to spend time with our veterans."

"Volunteering is something I have wanted to do since I was a teenager."

"I have been interested in volunteering and supporting our veterans for some time now."

"I am interested in helping in any fashion possible, to show my appreciation to the heroic veterans who gave us freedom because of their sacrificial love of our country. It is important that they realize how truly appreciative and loved they are for what they gave up for us. I hope I'm able to bring something positive, a little ray of sunshine into any one of their lives to say thank you."



Business and Corporate

Collectively, VAVS and its partner organizations must identify and develop partnerships with business and corporate communities to enhance service to veterans through the VAVS program.

Businesses and corporations are our sleeping giants and must be awakened. Many businesses, local and national, have connections to veterans, through veterans committees or through the company's mission statement.

Accomplishments

We continue to encourage VAVS program managers to expand their volunteer programs to local businesses and corporations. VACO has met with executives of Telephone Pioneers, SNET/SBC, to establish national partnerships with their organizations.

Through the partnership with Digital Clubhouse Network (DCN), connections to corporations such as Hewlett Packard, Adobe, Lockheed Martin and others have been enabled.

We are in the process of establishing an agreement with Choice Hotels who have pledged 50,000 hours of service to veterans by their employees through the VAVS program.

Training for staff who utilize volunteers

The recruitment process can only be successful with a positive and mutually supportive working relationship between staff and volunteers. Staff should feel a sense of partnership with VAVS in the design of meaningful assignments for their department. This creates a sense of "ownership" for the service and those staffing the service. By serving as a catalyst behind this effort, the Program Manager helps to create an environment of trust and respect for volunteers throughout the organization. This partnership will be fostered through staff education and ongoing communication.

Accomplishments

VA Voluntary Service Office has partnered with Employee Education Service (EES) to coordinate training efforts for all audiences; volunteers, Voluntary Service Staff, VAVS Representatives and staff who utilize volunteers. We have completed a three-phase survey to each audience to identify the skills necessary for each audience to perform their duties. A comprehensive education plan has been developed and a request to EES for support and assistance has been submitted.



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Other Initiatives

USA Freedom Corps- President Bush has asked each citizen to serve their country for an equivalent of two years or 4000 hours over a lifetime. USA Freedom Corps is made up of newly created Citizen Corps, strengthened Peace Corps, Americorps and Senior Corps. VAVS Representatives are asked to assist with the Citizen Corps Councils. VAVS is an integral part in VA's role in USA Freedom Corps. We have developed a formal partnership with Senior Corps to enhance our recruitment efforts and have listed VA Voluntary Service on the Senior Corps web site.

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and American Association of Retired People (AARP) Pilots VACO developed partnerships with IRS and AARP to provide tax assistance to veteran patients through VAVS. Seven VAMCs were identified for pilot stations for IRS. Five VAMCs were identified for pilot stations for AARP.

Volunteer.Gov is a one-stop service web site for government agencies to list their volunteer opportunities and for interested individuals to seek volunteer opportunities within government. The Department of Veterans Affairs is a partner with Department of Interior and the Department of Agriculture. Currently, only VISN 2 of New York has VA volunteer opportunities listed on the web page in mental health and the homeless programs.

Student Volunteer Program continues to be a high priority for the VAVS program. These young adults will be needed to carry the torch for service to veterans in years to come. Student volunteers make up 25% of our volunteer population. This past year, we established a Student Volunteer Recruitment Focus Group that provided an addition to the Recruitment Strategy for Voluntary Service to include recruitment strategies for student volunteers.



We are grateful to the James H. Parke Memorial Fund Board for recognizing outstanding youth through their scholarship program. In FY 2002, the James H. Parke Memorial Fund Board recognized Adam Brown for his service to veterans at the Colmery-O'Neil VA Medical Center, Topeka, Kansas. Gabriel Anzueto, South Texas Health Care System and Wendy Koegel, VA Northern Indiana Health Care System were recognized as second and third place winners respectively.

The Veterans History Project is a partnership with the Library of Congress (LOC) to collect recorded histories from America's war veterans. A total of 30 facilities have recruited 72 volunteers who have donated over 6,815 hours as of September 30, 2002. VAVS Program Managers have reported that there are 13 VA medical centers that have signed on as (LOC) partners. VA facilities have reported that approximately 210 stories have been submitted and 75 stories are in the process of being submitted.

VA volunteers are assisting with recording the histories throughout the country. As a result of this project, we have partnered with the Digital Clubhouse Network. This group of student volunteers have been conducting interviews and making dynamic video presentations of the veterans' histories. The Digital Clubhouse Network and VAVS have established pilot programs at the Brooklyn and Palo Alto VA Medical Centers. Additional stations have been identified as partners for the Digital Clubhouse Network in the coming year.

Background Checks for volunteers have continued to be an increasingly important issue since September 11th. VA Voluntary Service received a waiver from the Office of Personnel Management in August of 2002 and further waivers have been applied for requesting an exemption from the SAC of volunteers who do not fall within the categories listed; a) access to patient records, b) assignments associated with home health care, c) assignments involving the provision of patient care, d) assignments involving contact with pharmaceuticals or other biological agents, d) volunteers who have access to any VA computer system, and e) volunteers who have access to any sensitive information not identified above (e.g., Privacy Act protected information). Volunteers with assignments above the low risk or non-sensitive levels will also receive the appropriate level of investigation required by 5 CFR, Part 732. We are currently working with other VHA and department staff to develop a policy for background checks for volunteers, consultants and residents/interns working in "sensitive assignments".

Policy Development is a primary function of VACO Voluntary Service Office. This past year, VAVS has worked closely with the staff in the Occupational Health Program to publish guidelines for physical exams for volunteer drivers, Information Letter, Clearance of Volunteers for Driving Assignments. We have also worked with the Office of VHA Chief Financial Office to revise the VHA Directive 4721, General Post Funds.

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) - VAVS has been working closely with NCA to establish a cooperative working relationship and to develop a process to register and document volunteers who provide services to the NCA. Additionally, efforts are being made to establish a liaison within NCA to develop volunteer assignments, recruitment strategies and proper documentation of participants.



National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans

National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Program is an annual activity coordinated by Voluntary Service. The purpose of the program is to:

- * pay tribute and express appreciation to hospitalized veterans;
- * increase community awareness of the role of VA medical center; and
- * encourage citizens to visit hospitalized veterans and to become involved as volunteers.

VA's National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans takes place each year during the week of February 14. During this time, VA invites individuals, veterans groups, military personnel, civic organizations, businesses, schools, local media, celebrities and sports stars to participate in a variety of activities at VA medical centers. The activities and events include special ward visits and valentine distributions; photo opportunities; school essay contests; special recreation activities and veteran recognition programs. It is an opportunity for Americans to say thank you to the more than 98,000 veterans of the U.S. armed services who are cared for every day in VA medical centers, outpatient centers, outpatient clinics, domiciliarys, and nursing homes.

The week also provides an opportunity for the community to become acquainted with the volunteer opportunities within the medical center.

For the second consecutive year, acclaimed actor, Gerald McRaney is serving as Chairperson of 2003 National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans.

For the last 15 years, Ann Landers has devoted a column in January to VA's National Salute asking readers to send valentine cards and letters to hospitalized veterans at their nearest VA facility. We are grateful for the outstanding response from the community during this celebration. Last year approximately 1.3 million

valentines were received as a result of the column. Over 43,000 visitors visited over 86,000 veterans during the Salute week, generating over 770 media events. During this one week over 900 new volunteers were recruited. This observance continues to be a great opportunity for VHA to present a positive image to the public and to promote volunteerism in support of hospitalized veterans.



Looking Ahead

FY 2003 Service Priorities

Recruitment and Retention

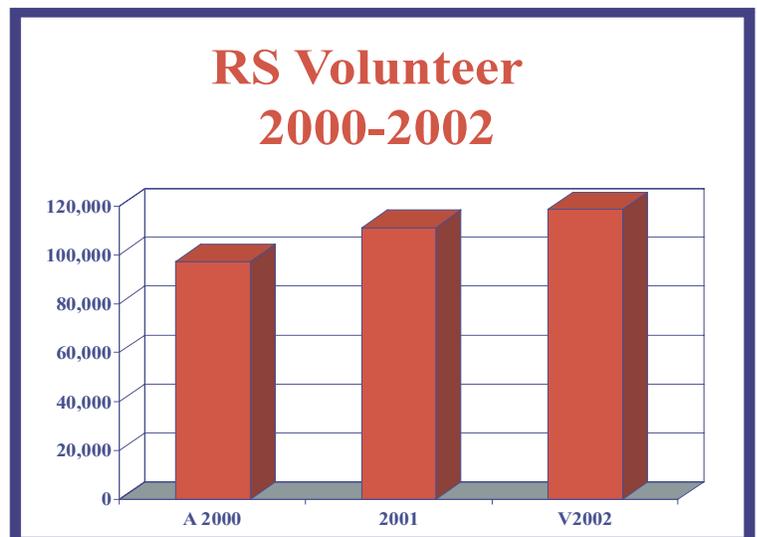
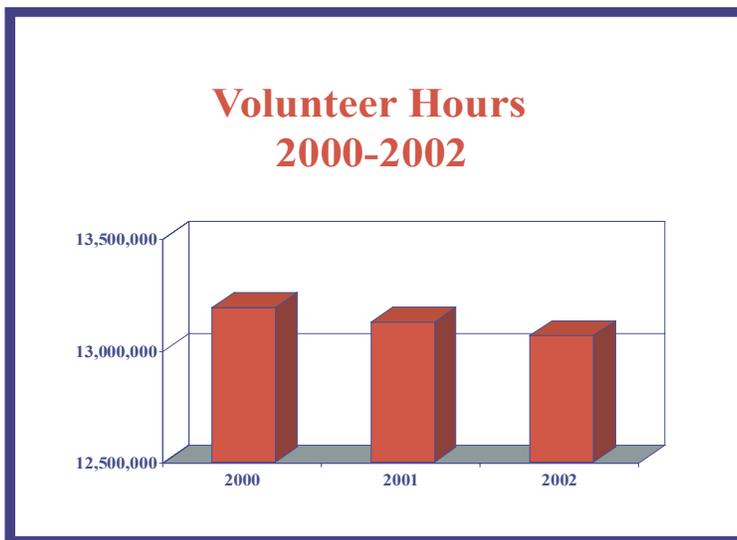
VAVS Timekeeping System

Education Plan for staff and volunteers

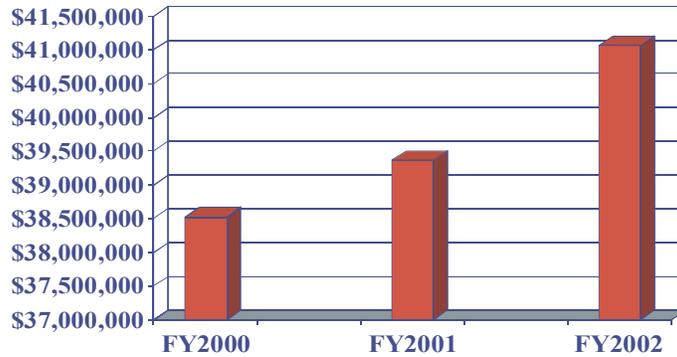
Service Statistics

In FY 2002, 118,594 VAVS volunteers contributed a total of 13,063,451 hours. This equates to 6,259 full-time employee equivalent positions. The current monetary worth of these hours is \$209 million (Independent Sector formula estimates a calendar year 2002 volunteer hour at \$16.05).

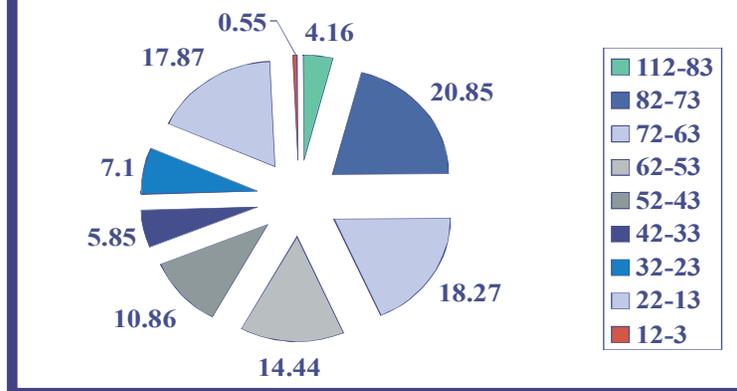
The graphs depict the trends of the valuable contribution of VAVS volunteers and the VAVS program from FY 2000 to FY 2002.



Gifts & Donations



Analysis of Volunteer Participation by Age Group



VAVS is an invaluable resource to VA. The caring and unwavering devotion to helping others that is demonstrated daily by VAVS staff and volunteers are incalculable. Without volunteers, the quality of services and programs designed to enhance patient care would be compromised. Every day is Veterans Day for the staff and volunteers who, in the true spirit of community service, unite in their efforts to help veterans and promote the recognition and honor they all deserve.



Caring Matters.



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www.va.gov/volunteer