



Examples of how we have engaged the community and veterans and their families

Coffee House

Establishing Coffee Houses for groups of veterans to gather is a great way to bring community businesses into the circle of care. Libraries, senior centers, and perhaps local restaurants may have an area for a group to gather on a scheduled time, weekly or monthly.

We connected with our local Senior Centers, and they were very interested in providing space and coffee. We held our initial meeting and asked the veterans what they would like to gain from their coffee house. One group was happy to meet and chat and another requested that speakers on veteran issues be available on occasion to provide information.

Advertising for these coffee houses occurred through the Senior Center and on our social media page. Municipalities may have regular newsletters that are distributed to town residents which have calendars. Ask for your coffee house to be included. Don't get discouraged if only a few shows up initially. Hang in there and be consistent.

Community Dinners

Gatherings for a meal generate much interest and provide an opportunity for people to connect. While RGH members helped with local community dinners, our favorite meal was served on Veterans Day.

Working with an accommodating municipality, we were able to access a list of the local veterans through the tax assessor's office.

After securing the venue and a list of veterans for invitations, we set out to visit local business to offer them the opportunity to showcase their support for the veterans in their communities. This is a wonderful marketing opportunity for their business, as well. We found most businesses eager and generous with their donations for the dinner. We gave them the date that was needed for the food donations and the time we would be able to pick up the food. Some even offered to deliver. Keep track of the donators and the food they will be preparing.

Invitations indicating an RSVP date and contact information were mailed to the veterans. We allowed them to bring one guest. Make a spreadsheet to keep track of the accepting responses along with contact information in case the event has to be rescheduled or canceled.



As the responses trickled in, we made plans for having a speaker to address the veterans. You may consider a local veteran, a representative from a veteran focused organization or a local military member. Their speech will be offered as dinner is being served.

Depending on your venue, you may need to supply plates, cups, napkins, eating ware, serving utensils, etc. Make a checklist to keep track of the items. You will also want to plan table decorations and signage.

Our appreciation dinners were able to have a color guard provided by the Air National Guard or local scouting troops. You may also like to have a singer for the National Anthem. Children singing are always a hit.

Other suggestions for the evening are having a small memento for each of the veterans such as a lapel pen or even a card created by a local classroom. Music is a nice addition be it stereo or a live band.

You will also want to solicit for volunteers to help with this wonderful event. You will want folks to help set up, pick up food and beverages, greet, serve, take down and clean up. Be sure to keep track of these individuals and their contact information on a checklist, as well. Reach out to them a few days prior to the event to confirm their volunteering.

Two days before the event, you will want to contact the establishments who are donating food to confirm their donation and time of pick up.

Depending on your venue, you may need to set up the day before the dinner or hours before.

After you are set up, and the food and guests have arrived, your evening will be one to remember and greatly appreciated by the veterans who are present.

No Wrong Doors Conference

The No Wrong Door training is a tool created to educate communities about our veteran population. This training is appropriate and recommended in a variety of settings i.e., educational institutions, municipalities, health care providers, corporations, etc. Upon completion of this training, the audience has received a glimpse into the lives of our military members learning their strengths and challenges. Explanations of mental health hurdles and other Armed Forces related barriers are expanded upon. In addition, reliable resources are available to offer guidance and materials specific to our veterans and to those who desire to help warriors in need.



Once you have established a host for this training, you can work with them to plan the event. They will play an important role with the logistics of advertising, technical needs, the capacity, and food provision regarding their venue. You will remain in close contact with your host to discuss topics and all aspects of the event.

You will need to be responsible for registering the participants, securing the speakers for the agreed upon topics and securing resources to be on hand to support the topics you will be discussing. Maintaining email contact with the participants includes reminders provision of directions and any changes.

We chose to provide packets to each participant which included supporting information of the day and a list and contact information of the speakers and the resources. We also provided name badges and proudly denoted our veterans on their badges with their branch of service and a USA flag sticker.

Be sure to send emails of appreciation to the speakers, resources your host and the participants once the training has ended.

Our No Wrong Door training was held at a local community college. We established contact with the campus CEO of the school and met with him and his constituents. The topics chosen were Military 101, PTSD/TBI, Military Families, Sexual Assault in the Military, a panel session of Veterans to discuss their experiences, Veteran Resources and we ended the day with a 90-minute QPR: Suicide Awareness Training. As this was a full day, a continental breakfast and lunch were provided.

Working with Student Veterans

In Connecticut, every public college and university has established OASIS (Operation Academic Support for Incoming Service Members) centers. These centers are designated gathering places for veterans who are choosing to further their education after serving in the military. Through state support and generous donations, veterans gain a space to congregate, study, meet with counselors, gain knowledge about resources available to them and, also receive direction and access to their earned benefits.

Each OASIS center is led by a veteran affairs coordinator who helps to facilitate access to services for the participating veterans. Securing contact with that coordinator will enable your efforts to serve the veteran population in your community and will serve as another resource



for you when guidance is needed. School websites will have a page dedicated to veterans and the OASIS.

Scheduling regular visits with the veteran affairs coordinator and participating in events or in opportunities to raise funds for the center will help to bring awareness of your intentions and promote your plan as a reliable veteran resource for your community.

Pursuing a partnership with the college and university systems will enable your organization to be a resource for No Wrong Door trainings, QPR, Peer 2 Peer training and Mental Health First Aid training. Educating the staff and students will bring a larger circle of support for our veterans.

Time spent at the OASIS center will help you to engage with the veterans and learn about their strengths, their challenges and needs. Establishing relationships with veterans is key in building trust with our warriors and will open doors for them to truly come home.