Who We Are

As a diverse group of GWU students passionate about health, we serve the DC veteran community by documenting their stories for the Library of Congress’s Veterans History Project (VHP) and building relationships with veterans in long-term care at the Community Living Center (CLC) of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

ISCOPES Project Rationale

Giving a Voice to Veterans
- Creating a positive environment for veterans to share their story; storytelling can be a therapeutic outlet for healing old battle scars
- Being present and actively listening
- Lending an ear, sharing a smile, and making memories with the veterans we serve!

A Year Long Effort: Activities, Events, and Outreach

“Say Cheese! Four rolls of film and two hours later, after we signed and sealed our last card, only one thing still remained: the smiles.”
- Hannah Kittel, VHP Team Member

Community Living Center at the DC VA Medical Center
- Ongoing bedside visits with veterans
- Dog Tag Project at the CLC: engaging arts and crafts activity to get acquainted with the veterans
- Halloween costume fashion show in October
- Holiday card-making and door decorations in December (Polaroid photos included!)
- Monthly birthday celebrations with bingo, prizes, food, games, drinks and cakes for the celebration
- Collaborate with PwC on a casino-themed activity

DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center (DC VA)
- Promoting Veterans History Project (VHP) interviews through regular tabling events at the VA Hospital Atrium
- Conducting VHP interviews through VA Voluntary Services

Other Outreach Events
- Vets Voices DC: monthly storytelling events where veterans meet to share their experiences
- Veterans Day card signing at GW for Veterans at the CLC
- Collaboration with Dog Tag Bakery in Georgetown

Key Recommendations

- Visit the CLC as often as possible to establish a consistent presence with the residents
- Continue the Dog Tag Project; be patient with the process.
- Build relationships and rapport with the veterans at the CLC.
- Prepare an elevator speech about VHP for outreach events
- Set a schedule for events and meetings as early as possible
- Be flexible and adaptable with group meetings
- Establish veteran partnerships beyond the VA and CLC
- Aim for 2-3 ISCOPES members per VHP interview

“IT doesn’t matter what their gender is, what their gender was, what they were identified as when they were born - they are a person that can do their job and have been doing their job. It’s just their appearance changed and that’s all that really has changed.”
- Reflection on transgendered experience (VHP Interview)

Lessons Learned

- As a team, we learned how to embrace and acknowledge our individual skills, experiences, talents, and creativity. As community members, we learned from DC veterans the healing power of storytelling and how to actively listen.
- Interprofessional team-based service entails:
  - Mutual trust
  - Realistic, shared goal-setting
  - Team-wide clarity and consistency in all verbal and non-verbal communications
  - Constant motivation for progress and continuous improvement
- Recognition that individual stories actually connect people regardless of differences in age, background, personalities, career, or geography.

Kudos

We would like to thank the ISCOPES staff, especially our team advocate Donna Javellana; our team coach Paul Tschudi; our key stakeholders Shasta Stevens and Angela Steel; Rachel Childress with Voluntary Services at the DC VA; Niki Rubin, Niketia Davis, and Kathy Bixby at the DC VA Community Living Center; management and staff at the Dog Tag Bakery in Georgetown; and the men and women who have served or are currently serving our country!

Resulting Changes in the Community

- Increased awareness of the VHP Project among the DC veteran community
- Expanded number of archived veteran stories at the Library of Congress
- Created a system for ongoing VHP interview recruitment
- Established stronger partnerships with interested communities (e.g. Dog Tag Bakery)
- Developed promotional strategies, including design and distribution of materials
- Improved built environment at the DC VA CLC via dog tag project and added green space