



COMMUNITY INTEGRATION THROUGH CREATIVITY

“CELEBRATING THE ART OF SERVICE”

THE SAN FRANCISCO VA PSYCHOSOCIAL REHABILITATION AND RECOVERY CENTER

- The San Francisco VA Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) Creative Arts Therapy program was awarded funds for a series of Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCC&CT) innovation projects to help many talented Veterans with severe mental illness take a leadership role in creative self-expression in the San Francisco (SF) Bay Area.



- Following the lead of these projects, creative arts therapy and arts skills trainings and exhibitions supporting mental health recovery continue to generate large-scale visual arts exhibitions, digital storytelling workshops and public theater performances by Veterans.
- SFVA-hosted Mental Health Summit Meetings continue to bring together Veterans and community leaders, non-profit collaborators, project managers, Veteran service organizations and educators. The spotlight is on creative community integration actions, highlighting Veterans' positive presence in the SF Bay Area.

- These positive anti-stigma actions have improved mental health recovery awareness and established a broader base of welcoming partnerships in the community. The past OPCC&CT grant projects sparked a process and chain of support that continues to provide many talented Veterans with desirable destinations and sustainable activities outside of the VA hospital system.

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- Projects have advanced Veterans' skills in theater, digital media, music, visual arts and dance with the help of established professional artist/contractors in the community. Well-attended art exhibitions and performances have flourished: In a full page article in the July 25, 2013, San Francisco Chronicle, titled "Veterans-purging-the-pain-of-war-through-acting," reporter Chad Jones lauded public theater performances by Veterans in SF (see resources list).
- A diverse mix of over 250 people were inspired and informed about Veterans service and creativity by the grant projects, including 50+ SFVA Veterans; 5 Veteran volunteers; 100+ community supporters; 20+ VA staff and 3 VA trainees; 1 VA Art Therapist who traveled from the Brooklyn VA to observe and be trained in the Veteran arts event process; 20+ non-profit organization members and staff; 7 creative arts therapy graduate students performed
- Playback Theater Veterans live stories from the audience; 5 digital storytelling production specialists; 2 Veterans' Community Media Center staff; over 15 family members including 1 sister of a deceased Veteran who performed the story of their sibling relationship on stage; 1 mother of a Veteran deceased by suicide who spoke on the value of the arts to her son's memory; several audience members who discussed the service of loved Veterans; 1 dance company director; 1 mural artist contractor; 1 SF County Sheriff and any non-Veteran SF residents who came to see the Veterans' creative arts. VA staff, SF Veteran Service Organizations and the Independent Living and Resource Center (ILRC), a cross-disability non-profit, joined the collaborator meeting and panel held during the events.
- The project improved self-advocacy, reduced depression, stigma and isolation of several VA Veteran patients with severe mental illness, which in turn may reduce the burden of care for the VA beyond the end of the funding period.



FACILITY CHARACTERISTICS:

The San Francisco VA Health Care System is a 124-bed facility with annual outpatient services of about 630,000 visits per year and 63,000/year unique patient visits. The SFVA has several Community Based Outpatient Clinics located throughout Northern California.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PATIENT CENTERED CARE JOURNEY:

The SFVA Creative Arts Program successfully provided a continuum of support for Veterans taking steps away from hospital treatment toward getting back to the community with increased independence. Veterans take great pride in sharing their creative work in live theater, spoken word poetry, music, visual arts, dance, group and individual recovery stories in a variety of media. Veterans' expressive work has been well received by the public viewing audiences. The arts projects have increased collateral support for Veterans in the community and motivated community partnerships. Consistent with VA goals, as many of the project contractors as possible were Veterans themselves, chosen for their service experience and ability to generate positive sustainable public relations in the community outside of the VA.



Corrine Jackson, published author, teaching a class on creative writing to veterans in San Francisco



Director Max Reynard and Jonathan Wei, founder of the "The Telling Project" help veterans bring their stories to life for their performance at the Mission Cultural Center Theater

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND INNOVATION DISSEMINATION

- Community partnerships thrive with collateral action, including large scale art exhibitions, weekly photography training workshops at the 6th St Photography Workshop, professional exhibitions like the Sanchez Art Center in Pacifica, photography show and reception at the SF Rayko Photo Gallery, weekly community-based transition groups for PRRC Veterans in expressive writing and drama at the SF Independent Living and Resource Center.
- Veterans' are building a positive public media presence: Bay Area Video Coalition, a SFVAMC contractor for a previous successful OPCC grant in 2011, received a large scale grant from the Irvine Foundation in 2014 to train and create over 100 digital recovery stories, including several SFVA PRRC Veterans new to digital storytelling.

- The Veterans' Art Guild that began at the VA now has a positive community reputation. The many Veterans involved have generated invitations to new venues, including Veterans work featured at a SF national conference on diversity for MD's from Kaiser Permanente held at a premier hotel in downtown SF, November, 2013 and the Pacifica Sanchez Art Center (Veterans' Art Guild exhibition from May-June, 2014) a Bay Area gallery for professional artists.
- The Veterans Community Media Center (VSMC) <http://vmcsf.org> and <http://vmcsf.org/events/>, a grant subcontractor community partner, has collaborated with the PRRC on a number of Veteran arts exhibits and PRRC community classes. Most recently, SFVA PRRC Veterans showed their work at Cal Humanities funded projects including SFSU's Student Center Gallery entitled "Coming Home" exhibit and another Cal Humanities grant funding Veterans training and performing in a "Contact" community theater project.
- Several partnerships arose out of non-profit organization staff attending Veterans' Art Guild community events, seeing talented Veterans work and looking to support Veterans' originality and creativity. We continue to assist Veterans in moving along the continuum of care from VA entry to PRRC treatment classes, and then back to the community with an expanded creative role repertoire.
- Creative arts can become the focus of Veterans' conversations, replacing rumination, isolation and stigma with action-oriented engagement in the world outside of VA clinics.

INITIATIVE

- The SFVA creative arts projects have helped Veterans with severe mental illness pursue psychosocial recovery and differentiate from the limited role of "patient." SFVA has several weekly creative arts groups going on at collaborating sites including Writing, Drama Therapy, Tango Dance, Digital Story Telling and public access TV shows produced by PRRC Veterans.
- Collaborative events also occur regularly at Bay area art galleries and theaters in partnership with non-profit organizations.
- To support the continuum of care from the hospital back into the community, SFVA fosters integration of art with mindfulness practices.
- SFVA provides staff support and scaffolding for change to Veterans with great attention to individual motivation for sustaining adaptive behaviors.
- SFVA classes in creative arts based metacognitive and attentional focus skills, mindful photography and individual training in art productivity prepare Veterans for community participation with greater chance for success.
- Veterans use buses or their own vehicle to get to creative arts events independently

INNOVATION REPLICATION

- The three CITC Creative Arts initiatives continue to have positive and far-reaching effects on Veteran's creative interests and VA staff that promote mental health recovery.
- In August, 2013, the Brooklyn, New York VA sent their CAT staff person to train with SFVA during events. Several of the subcontractors hired by the SFVA developed ongoing partnerships with other

VA's and VSO's across the country. The Telling Project, already well-experienced in supporting Veterans in writing and telling their stories on stage, increased their ability to effectively partner with VA and other community organizations in a number of cities.

- Lessons learned from VHA OPCC&CT helped to set up a multi-site replication project for the VA "Strong Practice" initiated by Rachel Brink, Director of the Tampa PRRC, in conjunction with Bay Pines, Florida, and the SF VA Health Care System creative arts innovations.

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA COMMUNITY COLLABORATION RESOURCE LINKS:

- [Celebrating the Art of Service Flyer](#)
- [Veterans Community Media Center Flyer](#)
- [San Francisco Celebration of Art and Service Facebook Page](#)
- [SF Chronicle: Veterans Purging the Pain of War Through Acting](#)
- [The Telling Project](#)
- [SF Fun Cheap - The Telling Project](#)
- [Featured article - Mental Health magazine](#)
- [Facebook Groups](#)
- [Facebook Events](#)
- [Veterans Community Media Center - San Francisco](#)
- [Veterans Community Media Center - San Francisco - Events](#)
- [SF Stories: A Shared Experience - Veterans](#)
- [Veterans Purging the Pain of War Through Acting](#)
- [Bay Area Video Coalition - Blog](#)
- [Independent Living Resource Center - Veterans Art Guild](#)
- [Photo Workshop](#)
- [Hope Mohr Dance](#)
- [San Francisco Documentary Photo Show](#)
- [Counter Pulse](#)
- [Veterans Community Media Center - Counter Pulse](#)
- [CAL Humanities](#)
- [A Veterans Artwork Gallery](#)
- [War Comes Home](#)
- [Celebration of Art And Service Facebook Page](#)
- [Fine Arts Museum - Accessibility](#)

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