



AN E-MAIL SITUATION REPORT (SITREP) OF THE PUTNAM COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY

Diary of a Horse Skeptic

Dear Diary,

Hey Diary this is kinda my New Years story. The last Thursday in December was one of the best days of my year! I cannot contain my enthusiasm, I have to tell you what an outstanding way to end my year!!!

When I first started this writing about my experience about The Equus Effect back in 2019 I talked about the last day of the program. It was magic. Each member of the cohort went into a round pen with a facilitator and a horse. The horses lead rope was removed and you performed some disciplines with the horse under the guidance of the facilitator. I know Diary you are thinking big whoop!

But it was a big WHOOP! I worked with a horse named Bo. Bo and I

had a special bond but I have already told that story. I was able to lead Bo through these disciplines as if I were a horse expert. I hardly knew what I was doing but Bo knew and that was all we needed.

Well on the last Thursday of the year for the second time since 2019 I was in a round pen with a horse. (The first time Diary since 2019 was the Thursday before.) This time was different. I was in the round pen by myself. No facilitator by my side helping me through the disciplines. It was me and Duke. It was a big whoop! It was amazing! I have been telling everyone about it. People who have experienced Equus and people who have not. Actually standing in the grocery waiting to check out I told the lady just in front of me about the experience. No I did not that's a lie. But I would tell a random stranger about me and Duke and Equus. I am sad that I can not go into more detail about

what we do in the round pen. (Diary I am smiling while I am writing this).



We want to keep it a surprise for others who take part in Equus.

Below is the last part of an article written by Lori Riley that appeared in the Hartford Current in 2022. Megan Castellano, who is now with Guardian Revival, and I traveled to Jane Strong's farm in Sharon, Connecticut. Jane is the creator of Equus Effect. Maybe that excerpt captures Equus. I wish you horses!

Karl

Megan Castellano is the executive director of the Mental Health Association in Putnam County, a non-profit which specializes in peer support. She went through the program to see what it was about and said she cried the first day she did it.

"I don't think you can appreciate the impact it will have on you, regardless if you're a veteran or not," Castellano said. "It puts you in touch with a lot of things you maybe wouldn't be in touch with on a regular basis."

Horses are prey animals, constantly scanning their environment for threats. Veterans and law enforcement personnel are trained to do that as well. But when horses recognize there is no threat, they go back to grazing.

"Megan will talk to me and tell me, 'Go back to grazing, go back to grazing,'" Rohde said. "I'm a Vietnam veteran. My unit had written on their hats FIDO. That stood for, F*** It, Drive On. That's been my motto.

"After a while, you can't drive on. So I have to [he breathed out] relax. And graze. I'm able to graze now."





PUTNAM COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY



VA Day in Putnam

VA Hudson Valley will be at the Putnam County Veterans Service Agency once a month between 10 am and 2 pm every second Wednesday (starting February) of the month to engage Veterans on matters about their Health Benefits at the VA. Veterans that need enrollment/registration can be registered on the spot. Veterans with grievances or issues that they need help with the VA will be assisted. Questions about The **PACT Act** the new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to

burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances, will be addressed. The Hudson Valley VA wants to be closer to our Veterans. (This is not for Veteran disability claims.)

The Service officers at the Agency will still be helping Veterans and their families with claims. Bringing the VA Hudson Valley into the Putnam County Veterans Service Agency is to enhance the services provided at this time.

Every Tuesday the Putnam County Dwyer Vet2Vet program has office hours at the Agency. The Dwyer Program promotes peer oriented programs for Veterans. Including Equus

Effect: Horse Wisdom for Warriors. Dwyer is part of Guardian Revival who provides outdoor adventure programs, Service Dog Training and music programs for Veterans and First Responders.

Every Thursday the White Plains Vet Center has a licensed clinical Social Worker seeing Veterans from our community at the Agency saving them from traveling to White Plains for mental health issues. Assistance in our own back yard.

Every Friday the NYS Division of Veterans Services has a Veteran Service Officer who has office hours at the Agency. This VSO augments the work done by Putnam County VSO's.




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KARL ROHDE, DIRECTOR
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Join us for a Meet & Greet

Tuesday, February 7th at 7pm
Carmel VFW Post 1374
Gleneida Avenue
Carmel, NY 10512

Light refreshments will be served



Happy New Year Guardians:

We're excited to announce our new program, **Guardian Connect (G-Connect)**. We've united together several Veteran & first responder programs in the Hudson Valley, including our own core programs (Another Summit, Boots & Paws, and Guardian Encore), FIRST LINE, and the NYS Joseph P. Dwyer Vet2Vet program of Putnam.

G-connect is a community built by guardians, for guardians. With hundreds of years of combined experience wearing all different kinds of guardian uniforms, we've created a program that offers opportunities, resources, and support that meets the needs of a diverse population of guardians. Moreover, we understand that we can't do this alone, and our ability to work with other veteran & first responder organizations is critical. So, we've also chartered a course to improve our relationships and strengthen our partnerships with similar organizations across the Hudson Valley and beyond that also provide services and opportunities to our guardians.

Here's a quick overview of what G-connect entails:

Peer Support Gatherings- are led by one of our Guardian Revival Peer Leaders. Peer support gatherings are open forums and offer an opportunity to learn, listen, or share what's on your mind. We often share and discuss existing and new resources for mental health & wellness available to guardians. Our groups meet regularly in person and virtually, either monthly or weekly, and include the following categories:

- First Line (Law Enforcement)
- First Line (Fire & EMS)
- Vet2Vet (Veterans & Active Military)
- Women Guardians
- LGBTQ+ Guardians

Guardian Experience Series- Recurring opportunities to gather together for recreation and education and to build community across various areas of interest. These experiences bring guardians together to share talents, ideas, and values and to promote community, meaningful relationships, and a shared sense of purpose & mission. Our Experience Series categories include the following & more:

- Health & Wellness
- Art
- Music RX
- Outdoor RX
- Canine RX
- Writing
- Professional Development

Guardian Talk-Line - guardian peer support line available 24/7 to all guardians. While this isn't a crisis hotline for mental health support or suicide prevention, the Guardian Talk-Line is a line to connect with one of our trained and certified peer leaders for peer support, resources, or just to talk. 845-745-0088

Community Gatherings - we offer several community events throughout the year, from baseball games and BBQs to our annual Veterans Chow Down. All our gatherings are free of charge and offer a family friendly environment!

Joining G-connect is free. By simply signing up, you will become a part of our guardian family. We'll keep you updated on the latest events, opportunities, and many free resources! Our mission at G-connect is simple - to keep our guardians connected.

Join us by signing up at: www.guardianrevival.org

NOT ALL WOUNDS ARE VISIBLE



VA to pay for all emergency mental health care starting January 17, 2023

Starting Jan. 17, all veterans will be able to access emergency mental health care free of charge at any Veterans Affairs medical facility or outside clinic, regardless of whether they are already enrolled in department health care services.

Department officials announced the new policy on Friday as part of nationwide efforts to prevent suicide among veterans. According to the latest department data, about 17 veterans a day die by suicide.

“Veterans in suicidal crisis can now receive the free, world-class emergency health care they deserve, no matter where they need it, when they need it, or whether they’re enrolled in VA care,” VA Secretary Denis McDonough said in a statement. “This expansion of care will save veterans’ lives, and there’s nothing more important than that.”

The new policy applies to all veterans with any separation status except a dishonorable discharge, regardless of whether they qualify for other VA medical services.

About 18 million veterans are living in America today, but only about half are currently enrolled in veterans

health care through the department.

Since 2019, all VA medical facilities have been required to provide same-day access to emergency mental health care to veterans.

Under the new policy, VA will either waive costs for care or — in cases of visits outside the VA system — provide reimbursements for emergency mental health care. Those costs can include appointment fees, transportation costs and other related follow-up expenses. The new plan also calls for VA to cover the costs of up to 30 days of inpatient or residential care for treatment of those mental health issues and up to 90 days of outpatient care if veterans are experiencing an acute suicidal crisis.

The move is based on legislation adopted by Congress nearly two years ago. House Veterans’ Affairs Committee ranking member Mark Takano, R-Calif., who authored the measure, praised the department on Friday for its implementation.

“This new benefit removes cost from the equation when veterans are at imminent risk of self-harm and allows them to access life-saving care when they need it most, regardless of whether the veteran has ever enrolled in or used VA healthcare benefits,” he said in a statement.

“But there is more work to do. As we embark on a new year and a new Congress, I will continue to prioritize meaningful solutions to help save veterans’ lives.”

Suicide prevention has been a top clinical focus for Congress and the department for more than a decade, but progress on reducing the number of military and veterans suicides has been limited.

Veterans experiencing a mental health emergency can contact the Veteran Crisis Line through 988 or at 1-800-273-8255. Callers should select option 1 for a VA staffer. Veterans, troops or their family members can also text 838255 or visit VeteransCrisisLine.net for assistance.

By [Leo Shane III](#), Military Times

MilitaryTimes

The PACT Act

5 Myths About the PACT Act and VA Benefits

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is beginning to provide additional health care and benefits for generations of toxic exposed veterans and their survivors. These expanded services are part of a 2022 law known as the [PACT Act](#).

Just like any change in eligibility or benefits, there can be confusion or misinformation. Veterans shouldn't miss out on their benefits because they heard the wrong information.

Here are five myths about the PACT Act and the correct information to help veterans understand how the PACT Act impacts them, including eligibility for care and benefits.

Myth No. 1: The PACT Act Is Only for Vietnam-Era Veterans or Those on the Burn Pit Registry.

The PACT Act expands health care and benefits to many groups of veterans who were not previously eligible. Eligibility includes veterans who participated in a toxic exposure risk activity while serving on active duty, active duty for training or inactive duty training.

Veterans assigned to a duty station in certain locations (including airspace above) during specific periods of time are also presumed eligible. This includes veterans assigned to Bahrain; Iraq; Kuwait; Oman; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Somalia; or the United Arab Emirates and the airspace above since Aug. 2, 1990. Also on the list of eligible assignments are Afghanistan; Djibouti; Egypt; Jordan; Lebanon; Syria; Uzbekistan; and Yemen (as well as other countries the VA declares relevant) since Sept. 11, 2001.

Veterans deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom; Operation Iraqi Freedom; Operation Freedom's Sentinel; Operation New Dawn; Operation Inherent Resolve; or Resolute Support Mission are eligible.

Myth No. 2: Filing for New Benefits Puts Your Old Benefits at Risk.

Veterans who already receive health care, benefits or compensation for a service-connected condition will not have their claims re-adjudicated simply because they file for new benefits under the PACT Act.

Veterans can always request to have their disability rating reevaluated, but simply filing for benefits under PACT will not trigger a reevaluation. On the other hand, if you've previously had a claim rejected and might be eligible under PACT, you should reopen that claim. Filing a claim is free, and the VA encourages veterans who need support to seek out a qualified veterans service organization to help.

If you file a PACT Act benefits claim between now and Aug. 10, 2023, you may receive benefits paid back to Aug. 10, 2022 -- the day the bill was signed into law. The VA is encouraging all veterans who think they might be eligible to file now.

Myth No. 3: Survivors Don't Qualify for any PACT Act Benefits

Surviving family members may be eligible for a variety of benefits.

The PACT Act makes receiving [Dependency and Indemnity Compensation](#) (DIC) easier for survivors. While the VA will contact survivors who were previously denied DIC and may now be eligible, survivors do not have to wait to submit a claim. They can do so now directly on the [VA website](#).

In addition to DIC, other allowances, payments and benefits are available. That list includes a [survivors pension](#), burial benefits and memorial items, a burial allowance, education and training, a VA-backed home loan and health care. Additionally, a one-time accrued benefits payment may be made to a surviving family member when records show the veteran was due additional benefits before their death.

Myth No. 4: The VA Can't Handle the Backlog, so It's Not Worth Filing a Claim.

The VA is ready for the PACT Act and is encouraging all veterans and survivors to apply for their benefits now.

Overall, the VA is delivering more benefits, more quickly and to more veterans than at any time in our nation's history -- and the VA has made significant progress in speeding up the time between the application for and delivery of benefits to veterans.

Over the past year, it has hired more than 1,700 claims processors, increased claims automation and invested in proactively scanning military personnel files into its systems. The Veterans Benefits Administration broke its all-time record with 1.7 million completed claims this year, 12% more claims than in the past fiscal year, which was the previous record.

Myth No. 5: I Need to Pay Someone to Apply for PACT Act Care or Benefits.

There's been an increase in PACT Act-related scams targeting veterans to access their PACT Act benefits or submit claims on their behalf. Veterans should be very cautious of anyone who guarantees a lucrative financial benefit or service.

There are no fees to apply, and the VA will never charge veterans for processing a claim. If you need help applying for benefits, VA-accredited representatives and veteran service officers are always standing by and ready to help.

For more information on the PACT Act and eligibility for veterans health care and benefits, visit [VA's PACT Act website](#).