



# Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center

**2018 Annual Report**

37 YEARS OF PROVIDING SERVICES TO THOSE WHO SERVED



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OVERVIEW — 2018

### Dear Friends:

For over 30 years the Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center (MVOC) has been providing critical services to veterans and their families in the North Central Worcester County area. It is a mission that the entire board of directors and staff take very seriously due to the need that exists and the scarcity of resources for veterans in our area of the state.

MVOC is fortunate to have a strong partnership with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Department of Veteran Services and the federal government through the Veterans Administration. Our staff works very closely with both organizations to provide the housing, counseling, and other services we offer our veterans. Additionally, our strong relationship with the City of Gardner provides us with additional resources to assist in our mission, and our relationship with the Worcester County Food Bank and Project Bread allows us to maintain our food pantry that so many people rely on regularly.

The past year has seen many changes at MVOC from a new Executive Director, Outreach Coordinator, and Senior Case Manager as well as the death of long-time board member Dan Ninno. Dan served on the board for over 20 years, to include seven as president, and remained committed to our mission until the end. His passion and commitment over the years were appreciated by all.

Also, long time board member Debra Pond retired from the board after almost 15 years of service. Debra's commitment and passion for MVOC and the veterans is greatly appreciated by the current board members and staff. Everyone wishes her well and looks forward to seeing her at future events.

We are thankful for all of the support MVOC received from so many people and are excited for the new year and the positive changes to come.

Best regards,



**Cathy Stallings-McWilliams**  
Founder & Board Chair



**Charles A. Murphy**  
Executive Director  
(U.S. Marine Corps, veteran)

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

### Housing

Access to safe and affordable housing is the cornerstone of building stability in the lives of the veterans we serve. Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center (MVOC) owns and manages 53 residential units (transitional and permanent options) to provide our veteran community with the housing they need.

#### *Transitional and Supportive Housing*

- Includes 12 single room units allowing veterans to live up to 24 months while receiving support services for personal and often chronic social and mental health adjustment challenges.

#### *Congregate Supportive Housing*

- Includes a 16-room facility for men, and an 8-room facility for women. Residents receive counseling and case management services in a group setting that enhances the development of life skills.

#### *Low-Moderate Income Permanent Housing*

- Includes 17 studio apartments available for rent by income-eligible veterans. Residents can use MVOC support services at their own discretion.



## SUCCESS STORIES

### Victoria

Victoria was born into a military family at the Naval Station Newport in Newport, Rhode Island. She enlisted in the Navy in January of 1991 attaining the rank of E5 and serving as a Chemical, Biological and Radiological Specialist. Victoria is a Desert Storm veteran and has lived at Cathy's House since it opened three years ago. She explains, "Cathy's House saved my life." During her time with MVOC Victoria continues to develop the skills necessary to manage her PTSD and anxiety disorder. She considers herself fortunate to have the MVOC's resources available to her as she works towards developing a self-sufficient lifestyle.



Community partnerships play an important role in identifying qualified men and women to participate in our housing programs. This year our successful collaboration with the Bedford and Northampton VA Hospitals' housing programs resulted in full occupancy in Cathy's House, our facility for women, and our Central Street program.





Heidi Hagan, *Veteran Benefit Coordinator*, works with our clients to make sure they are aware of all the various veteran related resources.

## Case Management

Last year, MVOC case managers provided over 5,000 case management sessions to help veterans navigate the challenges of everyday living and the recurring readjustment to obstacles that they face. Our case management staff worked with the veteran community to

- place several veterans into their own apartments—individually and through the VA “HUD VASH” Housing Voucher Program
- help veterans find full-time employment
- help veterans access the Mount Wachusett Community College veteran education program.

## Counseling

Last year our certified counseling staff provided over 2,000 individual and group mental health counseling sessions. They are qualified to meet with clients affected by a variety of mental health issues stemming from post-traumatic stress, sexual trauma, traumatic brain injury, and substance abuse. Services offered by our counseling staff include

- individual mental health counseling
- stress management
- relaxation techniques
- PTSD counseling
- family/couples counseling
- drug/alcohol counseling.

In 2017 we added a Mobile Clinician to provide remote mental health services and legal case management for veterans who cannot come to our facilities. This position was made available by a grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ Attorney General’s office.

A collaborative approach between our counseling staff and case management staff, allows us to provide individualized and consistent plans to maximize the effectiveness of the support services provided to all veterans and their families.

## Outreach

Organized into four major areas (community relations and outreach, programs, housing, and events), outreach programs include

- therapeutic activities for veterans and their families
- raising community awareness of veterans’ needs
- fostering collaborative partnerships with the private and public sector
- onsite and remote services for clients in need.

Our outreach staff provide services—both onsite and remotely—and play a vital role in becoming the face of MVOC to veterans, their families, and our community partners. Remote services include large group activities, door to door intake, wellness checks, and food box delivery services for shut-in clients or clients in crisis.

## Benefits and Employment Counseling

The foundation of our support to veterans and their families is identifying and establishing the types of benefits they are eligible to receive from the Veterans Administration (VA) and other public sources. Last year our VA-certified Veterans Benefits Agent provided almost 2,000 benefits assistance services for our region's veterans. This service is available to both resident and walk-in veteran clients and can be provided remotely to elderly, shut-in veterans who are unable to travel to appointments.

The MVOC understands the importance employment serves in both the social and economic aspects of rebuilding a veteran's livelihood. Our case managers, outreach coordinator, benefits advisor, and the Gardner Employment Assistance Services provide employment counseling and employment service referrals to assist veterans in successfully finding employment. Services offered through this program include personal coaching, assistance with job searches, interview coaching, and resume building.



**"The City of Gardner is fortunate to have the MVOC as a partner, neighbor and friend in our community. The vital support network provided to our Heroes is of paramount importance and second to none."**

— Mark P. Hawke, Mayor of Gardner, Massachusetts



## SUCCESS STORIES

### Chris Marotta

Chris, a Worcester native and Quaboag High School graduate, served in the United States Marine Corps for four years as a rifleman (0311). He earned multiple citations for his service to include the Southwest Asia Service Medal, Kuwaiti Liberation Medal, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon (with 2 stars), and several others. Following his time in the Marine Corps he returned home to Worcester. In 2018 he found himself in dire straits and in need of a place to live. He found MVOC and joined our Grant Per Diem Program where he lived for 9 months. He explains, "the program really allowed me a chance to straighten out my life." During Chris's time with MVOC he took advantage of the services offered including getting assistance to file an SSDI claim, enrolling in MassHealth, and assistance in finding permanent housing. After using MVOC support services for 9 months, he was able to find a job and rent an apartment in Worcester where he currently lives.





The food pantry service is a need-based program supporting veterans and surviving family members and dependents. Shown here is Shawn Kirwan, Food Pantry Manager.

## Food Pantry

The food pantry service is an exceptional and unique service provided to the veteran community by the MVOC. As many as 200 community-based clients receive food boxes or food subsidies from the MVOC food pantry per month. The program is a need-based program supporting veterans and surviving family members and dependents.

The food pantry is maintained and supplied primarily by a partnership with the Worcester County Food Bank and through generous donations by local grocery stores (Stop and Shop, Price Chopper, and Hannafords), various community groups, clubs, and businesses—including Project Bread. The food pantry also includes a “Clothing Closet” to provide household goods and seasonal clothing. The food pantry department is managed by a full-time staff manager and a group of dedicated volunteers.

## Transportation

The MVOC maintains several vehicles dedicated for the transport and service of veterans for medical appointments at various VA facilities around the state. We employ one full-time driver and use qualified staff and volunteers for additional drivers when needed. Transportation services are available 5 days a week, and veterans can arrange for emergency transportation on the weekends. Last year we provided transportation to medical appointments for over 1,700 veterans.

## Walk-In Center

From 9am to 4pm every day veterans are welcome to visit the walk-in center to relax, read the paper, use one of the four available computers, or grab a cup of coffee and snacks that are always available. The walk-in center provides a relaxed, friendly environment for veterans to build social networks, seek information, and share stories.



## MISSION

**The Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center provides support to military veterans and their families in need of services to assist them in developing a self-sufficient lifestyle.**

## THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### Officers:

Cathy Stallings-McWilliams, *Founder & Board Chair*

Robert Anderson, *Treasurer* (U.S. Air Force)

### Directors:

Robert Rice

Andy Wells (U.S. Navy)

Dan Piper (U.S. Coast Guard)

## PARTNERS

City of Gardner

Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation

Department of Housing and Community Development

Department of Veteran Affairs, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Digital Federal Credit Union (DCU)

Hannafords Supermarket

Mount Wachusett Community College

Price Chopper

Project Bread

RCAP Solutions

Solid Benefits Group

Stop and Shop

Veterans Administration

Worcester County Food Bank



To donate, get involved, or to just find out how MVOC is changing lives, please visit us at [www.veterans-outreach.org](http://www.veterans-outreach.org)



## SUCCESS STORIES

### Chadley "Chad" McVeigh

Chad, originally from Circle City, Alaska, grew up in Fairbanks, Alaska. He joined the U.S. Air Force from the delayed entry program out of high school and served four years on active duty as a fire engine technician in South Korea and at Curtland AFB in New Mexico. Following his service he worked in administration at a drug rehabilitation center in Alaska. Two years ago, Chad learned about MVOC while visiting Massachusetts and attending a veteran's fair. At this information fair, he learned about our permanent housing options and decided to move to Gardner. He leased an apartment at the Nichols Street apartments where he continues to live. Chad takes advantage of counseling services and is a frequent visitor at our walk-in center where he can be found a couple times a week socializing with staff and fellow veterans.



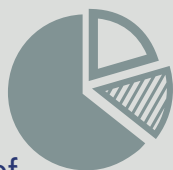
In 2018 Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center provided leadership and service to veterans and their families living in north central Massachusetts. We are proud of our service to those who served us.

## MVOC BY THE NUMBERS

### BUDGET

**\$1.4M**

**Funding sources:** Dept of Veteran Services, Veterans Administration, rent, fundraising



**22**



**EMPLOYEES**

**53**



Residential units  
in five buildings

**OVER 11,000**

Different services provided to veterans and their families  
—including but not limited to:



**2,136**

Total Counseling sessions

**1,834**

Total number of benefit assistance services provided

**MORE THAN**

**2,500**

Total number of times the walk in center was used

**1,706**

Total number of vets transported during year

**1,250**

Total number of food pantry visits

**5,251**

Total number of case management services provided



### Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center

268 Central Street, Gardner, MA 01440

Phone: 978-632-9601

Fax: 978-632-9476

[www.veterans-outreach.org](http://www.veterans-outreach.org)