

FILED

MAY 28 2009

**SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF TRINITY
BY: DONNA HANOVER, CLERK**

**TRINITY COUNTY GRAND JURY
2008-2009**

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
FINAL REPORT**

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

**This Report was Approved
On April 27, 2009**

**2008-2009 TRINITY COUNTY GRAND JURY
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
FINAL REPORT**

VETERAN'S SERVICE OFFICE

PURPOSE:

The Trinity County Grand Jury is charged, by law, to periodically review all management and operations of Trinity County offices. One area of such a review is the Veteran's Service Office.

BACKGROUND:

The Veteran's Service Office was last investigated by the 2004/2005 Grand Jury secondary to a complaint. There is no complaint at present. Members of this committee are interested in learning about the scope of services provided by this office. The present Veteran's Service Officer began his employment in January of 2005. Request for this interview of the Veteran's Service Officer was generated within the Health and Human Services Committee on 8-11-08.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION:

Members of the Health and Human Services Committee along with 2-3 other Grand Jurors held an informal interview of the Veteran's Service Officer on 8-25-08.

The interview was held in the Grand Jury room at the Veteran's Services Hall in Weaverville. A follow up interview was conducted by three Grand Jurors and was held in the Veteran's Service Officer's office on Feb. 23, 2009. A veteran who utilizes the Veteran's Service Office was interviewed by this committee on December 2, 2008. A veteran who has never sought out any services was informally interviewed during the month of November 2008.

FINDING # 1:

The Veteran's Service Officer explained that his job is to provide information, aid and guidance to the veterans of Trinity County. He stated that the greatest percent of his time is spent in assisting veterans to obtain their benefits, such as: how to qualify for health care; how to apply for a pension for indigent veterans over 65 years of age; and how to obtain a service connected disability compensation.

RECOMMENDATION #1:

This appears to be the nature of needed services for our veteran population. The veteran interviewed by this committee was very favorable regarding the Veteran's Service Officer's ability to help him obtain the services to which he was entitled as a disabled veteran of the Korean War. He stated that the Veteran's Service Officer demonstrated his concerns for veterans through his friendly and knowledgeable demeanor.

FINDING #2:

The Veteran's Service Officer states that there are about 1,900 veterans in Trinity County. He wishes that he had a better system for outreach to the outlying areas in the county. He commented that he believes that many veterans are living in remote and rural areas within this county and that they are difficult to identify. His caseload is currently made up of veterans who come to his office to seek services, mostly on a walk-in basis rather than by scheduled appointments. There are an unknown number of veterans who, for one reason or another, do not wish to be a part of any system (including The Veteran's Administration). This opinion became obvious in the informal discussion with the veteran who does not use any services. This veteran served in both Korea and Viet Nam and had experienced substance abuse problems in the past. He states that he did not know about the county veteran's assistance program, but also said that he would not have used it had he known. He claims to be content with his life and that it is important to him not to have anyone else telling him what to do. He believes that there are a lot of veterans like him in this county and that many are not doing as well as he is. As a closing remark, he said that he was glad to hear that there was someone in the county to help veterans find their way through the red tape if they wanted help.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

A notice of the Veteran's Office hours and phone number should be placed in The Trinity Journal on a weekly basis. A pamphlet of information, including types of services for veterans, should be placed in key locations throughout the county, such as the library, doctor's offices, the courthouse, and local grocery store bulletin boards. It should be noted that there are probably a certain number of veterans who would not take advantage of this service, no matter how well it is advertised.

FINDING #3:

There are no travel funds available to assist veterans without transportation to get to medical appointments at the Redding Outpatient Clinic. Due to the automated appointment system, it is difficult to coordinate people's appointments on the same day.

RECOMMENDATION #3:

It would be advantageous to explore the possibility of volunteers who would be willing to drive to Redding on certain days of every week. Veterans could then schedule their appointments on those days. Individual veterans could possibly network with each other and form a car pool.

FINDING #4:

The Veteran's Service Officer stated that on August 20, 2008, he was informed that his position was cut from full time to $\frac{3}{4}$ time. He feels that this cutback will interfere with his ability to provide quality services to the veterans of Trinity County. He noted that many veterans do not make appointments, but prefer to just drop in to his office on any week day.

His office will now be closed at 2:30 pm on Thursdays and all day on Fridays. On February 23, 2009, at our follow up discussion, the Veteran's Service Officer's greatest concern was that state and county budget cuts may result in less funding for Veteran's Services.

RECOMMENDATION #4:

The 2004-05 Grand Jury recommended that "Trinity County should hire a full time, five day a week, Veteran's Service Officer and give him/her Department Head status." We concur that this would be desirable. However, with the current budget crisis at both the county and state level, we realize that the full time status is probably not possible. This committee recommends that the three-quarter time be spread out over five days with the emphasis on afternoon hours, which the veterans seem to prefer according to the Veteran's Service Officer.

FINDING #5:

In August of 2008, the Veteran's Service Officer learned that his office might be moved into the courthouse. He feels that that would not be a good thing for veterans who come to him with serious issues and appreciate their privacy at Veteran's Services Hall. As of February, 2009, the issue of moving had not come up again.

RECOMMENDATION #5:

Our committee agrees with the Veteran's Service Officer that his office should remain at the Veteran's Services Hall and we suggest that the County make an effort to keep it in that location.

CONCLUSION:

The Veteran's Service Officer appears to be a dedicated and knowledgeable person who is providing valuable information to the veterans of Trinity County. He is to be commended for acquiring ratings for veterans who deserve to get a service-connected disability. We would like to see his position returned to a full-time status as Veteran's Services Officer in his present location as soon as County budget allows.

RESPONSES REQUIRED:

<u>Entity</u>	<u>Finding/Recommendation</u>	<u>Respond in</u>
Board of Supervisors	1,2,3,4,5	90 days
Veterans Service Officer	1,2,3,4,5	60 days

RECEIVED

JUL 21 2009

TRINITY COUNTY
SUPERIOR COURT

TO: The Honorable James P. Woodward
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court

FROM: Douglas Bue, Veterans Service Officer



CC: Wendy Tyler, Clerk of the Board and Administrative Analyst

SUBJECT: Response to Recommendations of 2008- 2009
Grand Jury Health and Human Services Committee
Final Report

DATE: 14 July 2009

The Grand Jury Health and Human Services Committee has requested a written response to their final report on the Veterans Service Office. In my capacity as the Veterans Service Officer, my response is as follows.

Finding #1: The Veterans Service Officer explained that his job is to provide information, aid and guidance to the veterans of Trinity County. He stated the greatest percent of his time is spent assisting veterans to obtain their benefits, such as: how to qualify for health care: how to apply for pension for indigent veterans over 65 years of age: and how to obtain a service connected disability compensation.

Response: Agree with the finding.

Recommendation #1: This appears to be the nature of needed services for our veteran population. The veteran interviewed by this committee was very favorable regarding the Veteran's Service Officer's ability to help him obtain the services to which he was entitled as disabled veterans of the Korean War. He stated that the Veteran's Service Officer demonstrated his concerns for veterans through his friendly and knowledgeable demeanor.

Response: Implemented: continued assistance to veterans with the resources available.

Finding #2: The Veteran's Service Officer states that there are about 1,900 veterans in Trinity County. We wishes that he had a better system for outreach to the outlying areas in the county. He commented that he believes that many veterans are living in the remote and rural areas within this county and they are difficult to identify. His caseload is currently made up of veterans who come to his office to seek services, mostly on a walk-in basis rather than by scheduled appointment. There are an unknown number of veterans who, for one reason or another, do not wish to be part of any system (including the Veteran's Administration). This opinion became obvious in the informal discussion with the veteran who experienced substance abuse problems in the past. This veteran served in both Korea and Vietnam and had experienced substance abuse problems in the past. He states that he did not know about the county veteran's assistance program, but also said that he would not have used it had he known. He claims to be content with his life and that it is important to him not to have anyone else telling him what to do. He also believes that there are a lot of veterans like him in this county and that many are not doing as well as he is. As a closing remark, he said that he was glad to hear that there was someone in the county to help veterans find their way through the red tape if they wanted.

Response: Agree with finding #2.

Recommendation: A notice of the Veteran's office hours and phone number should be placed in the Trinity Journal on a weekly basis. A pamphlet of information, including types of services for veterans should be placed in key locations throughout the county, such as the library, doctor's offices, the courthouse, and local grocery store bulletin boards. It should be noted that there are probably a certain number of veterans who would not take advantage of this service, no matter how well it is advertised.

Response: Recommendation #2 is being implemented. Pamphlets are available and will be distributed to key locations that will accept them. Hours of operation will be published as funding allows.

Finding #3: There are no travel funds available to assist veterans without transportation to get to medical appointments at the Redding Outpatient Clinic. Due to the automated system, it is difficult to coordinate people's appointments on the same day.

Response: Agree with finding #3.

Recommendation #3: It would be advantageous to explore the possibility of volunteers who would be willing to drive to Redding on certain days of the week. Veterans could then schedule their appointments on those days. Individual veterans could possibly network with each other and form a car pool.

Response: The Veteran Service Office is available to help with coordination of any type of volunteer effort to transport veterans. Transportation it self, is not available from the Veterans Service Office.

Finding #4: The Veterans Service Officer stated that on August 20, 2008, he was informed that his position was cut from full time to $\frac{3}{4}$ time. He feels that this cutback will interfere with his ability to provide quality services to the veterans of Trinity County. He noted that many veterans do not make appointments, but prefer to just drop into his office on any week day.

His office will now be closed at 2:30 pm on Thursday and all day on Fridays. On Feb 23, 2009, at our follow up discussion, the Veteran's Service Officer's greatest concern was that state and county budget cuts may result may result in less funding for Veteran's Services.

Response: I disagree in part with finding #4. After almost a year of reduced hours operation, I do not believe the reduction in hours has interfered with providing quality services to the veterans of Trinity County. I would characterize it as an inconvenience at times. I also agree that continued funding is a concern for this department as with all other county departments.

Recommendation #4: The 2004-2005 Grand Jury recommended that "Trinity County should hire a full time, five day a week, Veterans Service Office and give him/her Department Head status. We concur that this would be desirable. However, with the current budget crisis at both the county and state level, we realize that the full time status is probably not possible. The committee recommends that the three-quarter time be spread out over five days with the emphasis on afternoon hours, which the veterans seem to prefer according to the Veterans Service Officer.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented. Days of operation will continue Monday thru Thursday. The longer work hours allow for administrative actions and still maintain an adequate time frame for veterans. The main support organization for the Trinity County Veteran Service Office is The California Department of Veterans Affairs in Oakland. The CDVA office in Oakland maintains public hours Monday thru Thursday. The Veteran Service Offices for Tehama and Lassen counties have also changed to a Monday thru Thursday reduced hour schedule.

Finding #5: In August 2008, the Veterans Service Officer learned that his office might be moved to the courthouse. He feels that would not be a good thing for the Veterans who come to him with serious issues and appreciate their privacy at the Veteran's Service Hall. As of February 2009, the issue of moving had not come up again.

Response: I agree with finding #5.

Recommendation #5: Our committee agrees with the Veteran's Service Officer that his office should remain at the Veteran's Service Hall and we suggest that the County make an effort to keep it in that location.

Response: Implemented with the Veteran Service Office still located at the Veterans Memorial Building. I have also implemented strict controls to reduce energy consumption in the entire building and by all users of the building. I have also reduced the use of the main roof heating/cooling unit by making use of small wall mounted heater and small office cooler for the Veterans Service Office.

Conclusion: The Veteran's Service Officer appears to be a dedicated and knowledgeable person who is providing valuable information to the veterans of Trinity County. He is to be commended for acquiring ratings for veterans who deserve to get a service connected disability. We would like to see his position returned to a full-time status as Veteran's Services Officer in his present location as soon as County budget allows.



TRINITY COUNTY

Board of Supervisors

P.O. BOX 1613, WEAVERVILLE, CALIFORNIA 96093

PHONE (530) 623-1217 FAX (530) 623-

RECEIVED

OCT 16 2009

TRINITY COUNTY
SUPERIOR COURT

TO: The Honorable James Woodward,
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court

FROM: Trinity County Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: Response to Recommendations of 2008-09
Grand Jury Health and Human Services Committee Final Report
Re: Trinity County Veterans Service Office

DATE: October 6, 2009

Wendy Reiss

The Grand Jury Finance and Administration Committee has requested a written response to their final report on the Trinity County Grants Department. The Board of Supervisors' response is as follows:

Finding #1: The Veteran's Service Officer explained that his job is to provide information, aid and guidance to the veterans of Trinity County. He stated that the greatest percent of his time is spent in assisting veterans to obtain their benefits, such as: how to qualify for health care; how to apply for a pension for indigent veterans over 65 years of age; and how to obtain a service connected disability compensation.

Response: We Agree

Recommendation #1: This appears to be the nature of needed services for our veteran population. The veteran interviewed by this committee was very favorable regarding the Veteran's Service Officer's ability to help him obtain the services to which he was entitled as a disabled veteran of the Korean War. He stated that the Veteran's Service Officer demonstrated his concerns for veterans through his friendly and knowledgeable demeanor.

Response: We agree. Our Veteran's Services Officer will continue to provide services to Veterans in a professional and compassionate manner.

Finding #2: The Veteran's Service Officer states that there are about 1,900 veterans in Trinity County. He wishes that he had a better system for outreach to the outlying areas in the county. He commented that he believes that many veterans are living in remote and rural areas within this county and that they are difficult to identify.

JUDY PFLUEGER
DISTRICT 1

JUDY MORRIS
DISTRICT 2

ROGER JAEGEL
DISTRICT 3

HOWARD FREEMAN
DISTRICT 4

WENDY REISS
DISTRICT 5

His caseload is currently made up of veterans who come to his office to seek services, mostly on a walk-in basis rather than by scheduled appointments.

There are an unknown number of veterans who, for one reason or another, do not wish to be a part of any system (including The Veteran's Administration). This opinion became obvious in the informal discussion with the veteran who does not use any services. This veteran served in both Korea and Viet Nam and had experienced substance abuse problems in the past. He states that he did not know about the county veteran's assistance program, but also said that he would not have used it had he known. He claims to be content with his life and that it is important to him not to have anyone else telling him what to do. He believes that there are a lot of veterans like him in this county and that many are not doing as well as he is. As a closing remark, he said that he was glad to hear that there was someone in the county to help veterans find their way through the red tape if they wanted help.

Response: We Agree

Recommendation #2: A notice of the Veteran's Office hours and phone number should be placed in The Trinity Journal on a weekly basis. A pamphlet of information, including types of services for veterans, should be placed in key locations throughout the county, such as the library, doctor's offices, the courthouse, and local grocery store bulletin boards. It should be noted that there are probably a certain number of veterans who would not take advantage of this service, no matter how well it is advertised.

Response: Recommendation # 2 is being implemented. Information regarding Veteran Services will be available at key locations throughout the County. Hours of operation may be published as funding allows.

Finding #3: There are no travel funds available to assist veterans without transportation to get to medical appointments at the Redding Outpatient Clinic. Due to the automated appointment system, it is difficult to coordinate people's appointments on the same day.

Response: We partially agree. There are limited travel funds in the Veteran Services Officer budget, however, there are agencies that do provide funds for transportation. Better defining Veteran's travel needs to these agencies may help resolve this issue.

Recommendation #3: It would be advantageous to explore the possibility of volunteers who would be willing to drive to Redding on certain days of every week. Veterans could then schedule their appointments on those days. Individual veterans could possibly network with each other and form a car pool.

Response: We agree. Volunteer drivers can assist with the transportation issue, but are not the final solution. It will take a mix of available / future resources to adequately solve this issue. Partnering with other in-county agencies, such as HRN, is one example. Trinity County Public Transportation is also working to expand current transportation services.

Finding #4: The Veteran's Service Officer stated that on August 20, 2008, he was informed that his position was cut from full time to ¾ time. He feels that this cutback will interfere with his ability to provide quality services to the veterans of Trinity County. He noted that many veterans do not make appointments, but prefer to just drop in to his office on any week day.

His office will now be closed at 2:30 pm on Thursdays and all day on Fridays. On February 23, 2009, at our follow up discussion, the Veteran's Service Officer's greatest concern was that state and county budget cuts may result in less funding for Veteran's Services.

Response: We disagree. Although a reduction in hours is not ideal, after a year of reduced hours, it appears that our Veteran's Services Officer is still providing quality services to Veterans of Trinity County. Regarding future funding, providing services to our Veterans is a priority, however, as a General Fund Department, Federal and State budget decisions have a direct effect on how we fund departments.

Recommendation #4: The 2004-05 Grand Jury recommended that "Trinity County should hire a full time, five day a week, Veteran's Service Officer and give him/her Department Head status." We concur that this would be desirable. However, with the current budget crisis at both the county and state level, we realize that the full time status is probably not possible. This committee recommends that the three-quarter time be spread out over five days with the emphasis on afternoon hours, which the veterans seem to prefer according to the Veteran's Service Officer.

Response: We agree in part. Having a full-time Veterans Services Officer would be ideal. Regarding spreading hours over 5 days, the current 4 day schedule is consistent with the California Department of Veteran's Affairs, as well as surrounding Counties, and until our fiscal climate improves, will remain in effect. Our Veterans Services Officer concurs with this response.

Finding #5: In August of 2008, the Veteran's Service Officer learned that his office might be moved into the courthouse. He feels that that would not be a good thing for veterans who come to him with serious issues and appreciate their privacy at Veteran's Services Hall. As of February, 2009, the issue of moving had not come up again.

Response: We agree in part. We agree that protecting Veteran's privacy is important and providing a safe environment for them is critical. However, in an effort to find efficiencies in how we deliver services, the issue of where to house our Veteran's Services Officer may come up again. The environment in which we deliver Veteran services will always be part of the discussion.

Recommendation #5: Our committee agrees with the Veteran's Service Officer that his office should remain at the Veteran's Services Hall and we suggest that the County make an effort to keep it in that location.

Response: As with all County departments, we will always look for the most efficient way to deliver services, including where to house the office. The issue of where to house our Veteran's Services Officer may come up again. The environment in which we deliver Veteran services will always be part of the discussion.