



Bringing our veterans all the way home

VETERAN RESILIENCE PROJECT ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT JANUARY 2022

S.F. No. 2102

Overview of VRP program's budget, explanation of expenditures, number of veterans and service members served, and services provided.



To: Commissioner of Veterans Affairs-Honorable Larry Herke.

Senate:

Honorable Andrew Lang-Chair of Military and Veterans Affairs Finance and Policy Committee.

Honorable Jerry Newton-Ranking Minority Member of Military and Veterans Affairs Finance and Policy Committee.

House:

Honorable Rob Ecklund-Chair of Labor, Industry, Veterans and Military Affairs Finance and Policy Committee.

Honorable Bob Dettmer-Co-GOP Lead of Labor, Industry, Veterans and Military Affairs Finance and Policy Committee.

Honorable Joe McDonald-Co-GOP Lead of Labor, Industry, Veterans and Military Affairs Finance and Policy Committee.

Subject: Veteran Resilience Project Annual Report for 2021

This report satisfies the requirements as set forth in the following bill that was included in S.F. 2102 and signed by the governor at the end of the 2021 session for funding Veteran Resilience Project.



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Executive Summary

Veteran Resilience Project has provided EMDR therapy for Minnesota Veterans since 2015. The EMDR therapy that VRP provides is recognized and recommended by the Veterans Administration National Center for PTSD, as well as VA and military trauma therapists as an excellent method of treating Military PTSD and trauma.

Since its launch, VRP has been able to treat an average of 25 veterans annually on a \$20,000- \$30,000 budget in gifts and donations and volunteered staff time. VRP is very appreciative of the funding approved by the legislature and is anxious to put it to work on behalf of Minnesota Veterans.

We have met with MDVA since August 2021 and have given them extensive documentation and submitted all information in preparation of reaching a grant agreement and release of the grant funds. We are disheartened to report that if we sign the MDVA grant agreement terms proposed by MDVA, then up to 50% of the Minnesota veterans that we have served over the past 6 years would not qualify for state funding. It is our sincere hope that these terms will be changed, so that we can help many more Minnesota veterans suffering with PTSD and Trauma.

VRP has served 10 Veterans from July 1, 2021, through December 31, 2021. Corey Coubal, Command Sergeant Major U.S. Army Ret. was hired as Executive Director and Jonna Phillips, MA, LMFT, Major U.S. Air Force Reserve, as Therapy Program Director. We have established objectives and operating budget for 2022. All of this was done from funding sources other than the State grant. VRP is ready and capable of full implementation to achieve the goals of the legislative appropriation as soon as we conclude a grant agreement with MDVA. VRP will not be able to continue the expansion authorized by bill S.F. 2102 if State grant funds aren't available by no later than April 1, 2022.



Authorizing Legislation

The 92nd Session of the Minnesota Legislature recognized Veteran Resilience Project's (VRP) effectiveness in helping Minnesota Veterans by awarding it a grant to expand state-wide its highly effective therapy program for Veterans suffering from PTSD and Trauma. The authorizing bill is S.F. 2102 and authorized,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

Section 1. **VETERANS RESILIENCE PROJECT; APPROPRIATION; REPORT.**

Subdivision 1.

Appropriation.

\$400,000 in fiscal year 2022 and \$400,000 in fiscal year 2023 are appropriated from the general fund to the commissioner of veterans affairs for a grant to the veterans resilience project. Grant funds must be used to make eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy available to veterans and current military service members who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma. This appropriation is added to the base.

Subd. 2.

Report.

The veterans resilience project must report to the commissioner of veterans affairs and the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance by January 15 of each year on the program. The report must include: an overview of the program's budget; a detailed explanation of program expenditures; the number of veterans and service members served by the program; and a list and explanation of the services provided to program participants.

The Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs (MDVA) was authorized to administer the grant and MDVA and VRP began working to develop a grant agreement August of 2021. To date the grant agreement has not been concluded.

VRP Mission and Veteran Service Model

Mission

VRP was founded by Elaine Wynne, MA, LP after her experience providing Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy for Veteran clients in her private psychotherapy practice, as well as hearing her husband talk of his experience as a Viet Nam War medic. Out those experiences grew VRP's mission, "Veteran Resilience Project (VRP) serves all Minnesota veterans and active military who experience trauma, post traumatic symptoms, adjustment challenges, or moral injury, both on and off the battlefield, through a statewide network of accredited EMDR therapists providing affordable, effective, and confidential therapy."

From its founding in 2015 as a 501(c)3 to December 31, 2020, Wynne was VRP's unpaid executive director with no other staff. An executive director and therapy program director, both Veterans, have been hired and started in their positions January 3, 2022.

EMDR Therapy and Minnesota Veterans

Minnesota is home to 327,000 Veterans whose military service ranges from Korea to Afghanistan. Research shows that a conservative estimate of Veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Trauma is 15% of all Veterans, which means that there are approximately 49,000 Minnesota Veterans who would benefit from EMDR therapy. The surge of returning Veterans from Afghanistan adds even more urgency to the need. Veterans experiencing PTSD and Trauma experience a wide range of symptoms including, anger, depression, sleep deprivation, and substance abuse, which in turn, can lead to family conflict, loss of employment, homelessness, and even suicide. "The average number of suicides per day among U.S. adults rose 55.0%, from 81.0 in 2001 to 125.6 in 2019. Across the same 18-year period, the average number of Veteran suicides per day rose 4.5%, from 16.4 in 2001 to 17.2 in 2019."¹

Peer-reviewed research, including Randomized Control Trials, confirm the efficacy of EMDR in treating the symptoms of PTSD as compared to other forms of PTSD and Trauma therapies.

¹ 2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2021/2021-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-FINAL-9-8-21.pdf>

“EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a psychotherapy that enables people to heal from the symptoms and emotional distress that are the result of disturbing life experiences. Repeated studies show that by using EMDR therapy people can experience the benefits of psychotherapy that once took years to make a difference. Using the detailed protocols and procedures learned in EMDR therapy training sessions, clinicians help clients activate their natural healing processes.”²

Service Model

VRP’s service model has four components:

1. Build a state-wide network of vetted, EMDR certified contract therapists that are accessible to Veterans anywhere in Minnesota, and who provide therapy that is effective, affordable and confidential,
2. Pay therapy fees for Veterans who do not have health insurance, or who cannot afford to pay the deductible,
3. Provide specialized training for therapists in applying EMDR to Veterans, and
4. Conduct outreach campaigns directed at Veterans using social media, earned media, and building relationships with organizations that Veterans trust including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, and Yellow Ribbon.

² “What is EMDR?” EMDR Institute. <https://www.emdr.com/what-is-emdr/>



Progress Report: State FY 2022

MDVA Grant Agreement

The Legislature authorized the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs (MDVA) to administer the grant and MDVA and VRP began working to develop a grant agreement August of 2021, but to date the grant agreement has not been concluded. The crux of the disagreement is whether “posttraumatic stress disorder and trauma” are two different, distinct diagnoses from which a service member or veteran may suffer; to receive services (VRP’s position), or if a person must be diagnosed with both (MDVA’s position). The practical implication of the narrow versus broader scope of practice, is that under the MDVA scope of practice definition, many fewer Veterans will receive the help they need for posttraumatic stress disorder and trauma. Veterans and service members not only directly face service-related traumas, but the stress of the military experience can and does exacerbate other issues. This view is supported both by academic post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma, and highly experienced psychotherapy practitioners in the Federal VA system.

Once the grant agreement is finalized; it will be paid out as reimbursements for expenses incurred. VRP has as already incurred expenses to begin the scaling up of services prior to gaining access to the State grant. Those expenses include staff hires, recruiting EMDR certified therapists, and improving information technology systems capacity.

VRP Results

VRP has spent the past 8 months preparing to take its program to state-wide scale by recruiting and training EMDR certified therapists, improving its clinical and operational systems, and recruiting and hiring staff. Ten Minnesota Veterans completed EMDR therapy over FY 2022, none of which was paid for by State grants funds.



Program Expenditures and Grant Reimbursements

In fiscal year 2022, VRP had total expenses of \$52,400 and received no State grant reimbursements.

VRP Budget Calendar Year 2022	
State Grant Reimbursement Income	\$400,000
Grant Reimbursement to date	\$0.00