



# Battle Buddy Bridge

**A peer-driven outreach and resource navigation solution to bridge VA and community resources**

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# Volunteers of America

- Founded in 1896
- 33 affiliate offices across the country
- Serving approximately 45,000 veterans every year
- Volunteers of America Los Angeles is a chartered affiliate of Volunteers of America, Inc.

# The Problem

## **Barriers to Resource Access:**

- Military training and culture
- Mistrust of the government (and/or civilian processes)
- Stigma
- Poor knowledge of available community resources
- The “resource maze”
- Physical and/or mental illness
- Lack of transportation/mobility
- Prior negative experiences
- Inadequate or inconsistent follow-up

# The Solution

## Battle-Buddy-Bridge (B3)

**Program Objective 1:** improve access for homeless veterans and veterans at risk of homelessness

**Program Objective 2:** improve the wellbeing of veterans who choose to serve as battle buddies

# Building B3

- 2012:
  - B3 launched utilizing a combination of in-kind support from VOA and Veteran Leader Corps (AmeriCorps) positions from the Points of Light Institute.
- 2014
  - 3-year foundation grant enabled expansion of the program through additional staff and infrastructural and technological improvements.
  - 2 AmeriCorps VISTA members and Mission Continues Fellow augment staff capacity

# Who are we?

Battle buddies are veterans who:

- Are trained and certified
- Are predominantly recruited through network of veterans working for VOALA or being served by our housing or employment services
- Have some personal and/or professional experience in navigating veteran services prior to joining the team
- Consist of stipend volunteers, residential program volunteers, SSVF outreach specialist, and the VOALA veterans services outreach program manager

# B3 Orientation and Training Program

- Certified Peer Support Specialist training
- Orientation Process explained



Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance



Helping America's most vulnerable™



# Battle Buddy Compensation

## Currently:

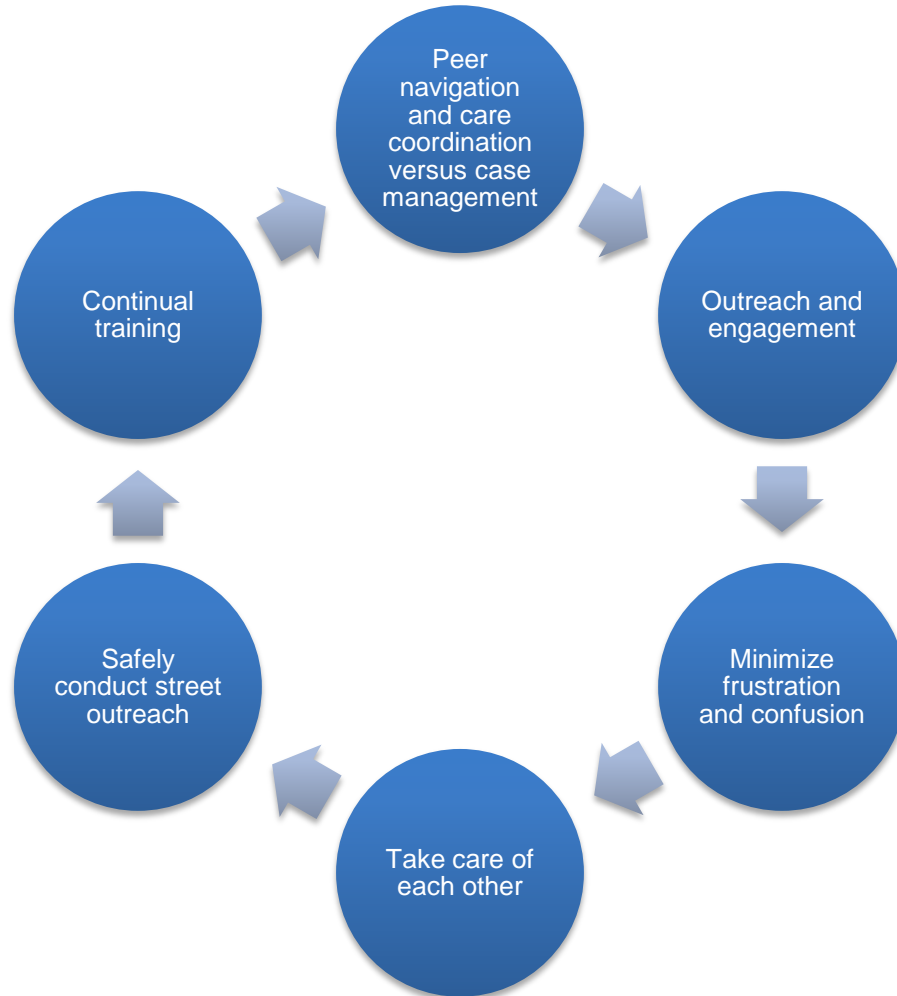
- AmeriCorps Points of Light (Veteran Leader Corps)
- Private funding
- Mission Continues Fellowship
- AmeriCorps VISTA
- SSVF Outreach Positions

## Future:

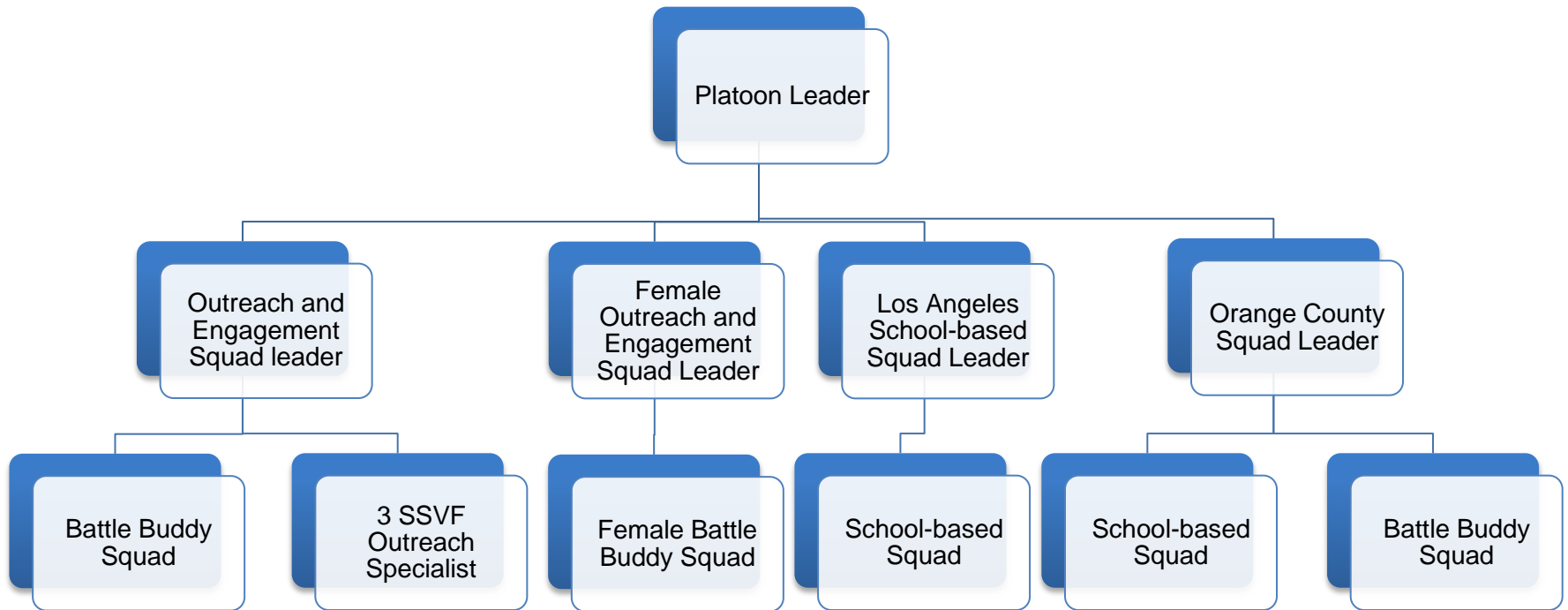
- Work study
- VA contracts
- County DMH Medi-reimbursable
- More private funding



# Battle Buddy Functions



# Organizational Chart



# Outreach and Engagement Squad

- Currently fully functional and operating
- Responds to all LA County 2-1-1 referrals
- Currently partnered with VA Outreach Team and CES SPA outreach efforts
- Taking the lead in difficult SPA
- Recruits from VOALA GPD Residential Programs through grant to enhance clinical services provided as well as SSVF/VASH/HVRP programs
- Consists of squad leader, 3 SSVF Outreach Specialists, and 8 Battle Buddies currently
- Augments SSVF and VASH programming currently testing models
- Screens all homeless veterans and identifies referral of veterans needs and goals

# Outreach and Engagement Squad Operations

- Morning dispatch via Program Manager
  - Follow up with clients
  - Street Outreach
  - Transportation of Veterans to appointments/resources
- Events/Stand Downs
- Building relationships with other service organizations
- Each client is tracked in a 211LA database, built by 211LA- giving team access to extensive list of resources
- Program managers and Platoon leader provide real time consultation in support of battle buddies

# Female Outreach and Engagement Squad

Future presence at three different locations

- Blue Butterfly Village (3-4 battle buddies)
- Patriotic Hall (2-3 battle buddies)
- WLA VA Women's Health Clinic (3-4 battle buddies)

Focus areas include:

- Seamless navigation network between housing for female head of households with dependents, VA Healthcare Services, and Community-based and Benefit-related services
- Outreach to female veterans who are underserved or have not accessed services from VA or Community
- Strengthen Female Veteran Community in LA and OC counties through volunteerism, service, and creating support network

# Orange County Squad Leader

Responsible for two squads: OC Schools and Outreach and Engagement

- Outreach and engagement is in same building as SSVF/HVRP (6 battle buddies)
- Need for SSVF support in OC is housing specialist related so we focused on recruiting veterans who have navigated VASH or SSVF personally
- School-based goal is to have presence in all schools
- Beginning to partner with OC Veteran Collaborative and OC 2-1-1
- Will also look to have a presence at OC Vet Collaborative
- Will partner with SSVF outreach to provide greater reach
- Has backing of a private funder in this particular location
- Eventual goal of program is to have 2-3 battle buddies based in each school along with 7 based in our central office in OC co-located with SSVF and HVRP programs

# School-based Model

- Create a checklist to assist veterans navigate the school system
- Short assessment to provide external resources
- Regular meetings for all school-based peers
- Organize resource fairs and workshops
- Conduct workshops on military culture
- Utilizes work study veterans to work as battle buddies in school in collaboration with certifying official
- Intentionally partner with existing mental health service providers

# B3 Points of Entry





# Los Angeles Veteran Collaborative

- Located at USC and organized by Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families (USC-CIR)
- Access and engagement group use of co-chairs
- Greater collaborative structure with working groups
- Text 2 Chat Los Angeles County
- Working towards creating peer working group



# SUCCESS STORIES

# Evaluating B3

## Objective 1) Facilitated access to community resources for Veterans in need

- Record demographic data, information on current housing and health status of every veteran being served by B3.
- Veterans receive follow-up surveys at 3, 6, and 9 month intervals re: housing status, enrollment in VA healthcare, need for emergency room visits and inpatient bed days of care.
- This data has relevance for client wellbeing and program success but also has economic implications for the public sector, which absorbs the bulk of the cost of homelessness through overutilization of public resources.

# Evaluating B3

## **Objective 2: Improved wellbeing of battle buddies.**

- Before beginning B3 service, each battle buddy completes a baseline survey assessing quality of life, PTSD and depression symptomatology, and self-efficacy
- Survey re-administered at 3-month intervals during B3 service to track trajectory.

# Lessons Learned

- Need to have more supportive services built into program to support stipend volunteers and staff
- Measuring symptoms PTS and Efficacy not helpful
- Ensure measures used in evaluation are military culture appropriate
- Common for battle buddies to move on to full time employment with or outside of agency so plan for turn over necessary
- B3 experience and CPSS certification valuable
- Simplify intake process
- Proper database

# Future Program Goals

- Assist other non-profit partners in standing up peer programs in Los Angeles
- Attain more public and private funding for continuum of work opportunities
- Make veteran peer support a Medicaid-reimbursable service in California
- Work with VA to make peer support an approved work study placement for student veterans
- Advocate for amendments to the G.I. Bill that would enable veterans to utilize that benefit outside of the traditional academic environment (e.g., service work, training)
- Secure grants to build up evidence-based outcomes through evaluation and research
- Build relationship with VA peer network
- Build in mental health support and more team building exercises for teams
- Partner with local active duty military to conduct street outreach
- Female B3 OC pilot

# Get in Touch!

Thank you! Please feel free to reach out to us:

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