

N R V C S

NEW RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY SERVICES

FALL 2023



**Officials celebrate
expansion of region's
Crisis Stabilization Unit**

INSIDE:
*Directory of local
resources for
veterans, families*

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2

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DBHDS

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ON THE COVER: John E. Littel, Virginia's Secretary for Health and Human Resources, addresses those on hand for the opening ceremony of expanded New Horizons Crisis Stabilization Unit in Radford on September 25, 2023. (Photo - Ross Wilsie/NRVCS)



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“Hope, for me, means that tomorrow has the possibility of being better than today.”

*- Winfred Beale, Head Coach
Floyd County High School
Varsity Football*

HOPE
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nrvcs.org/hope



GRAND OPENING: State officials recently joined representatives of NRVCs and community leaders to celebrate completion of the new home of the New Horizons Crisis Stabilization Unit in Radford. Pictured are (from left) Melanie Adkins, Senior Director of Clinical Services at NRVCs; Ellen Harrison, Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) Chief Deputy Commissioner; Janet Kelly, Health & Human Resources (HHR) Special Advisor on Children's Issues; Nelson Smith, DBHDS Commissioner; James Pritchett, NRVCs Executive Director; John E. Littell, HHR Secretary; James Williams, HHR Chief Deputy Secretary; Hallie Pence, Deputy of Policy Office of the Governor; and Dr. Alexis Aplasca, Right Help, Right Now Senior Clinical Advisor. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCs)

Officials celebrate expansion of region's Crisis Stabilization Unit

By Mike Wade / NRVCs
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The facility on West Main Street in Radford that once housed a supermarket has evolved into a central hub of behavioral healthcare for New River Valley residents.

On September 25, state officials joined representatives of New River Valley Community Services (NRVCs) and local leaders to celebrate the building's latest upgrade - an expansion of the region's Crisis Stabilization Unit, commonly known as New Horizons.

The New Horizons space is the latest development of the property, which is also home to NRVCs' primary outpatient clinic, the 401 Peer Center, and the recently opened Crisis

Receiving Center, which is located adjacent to the New Horizons space. Placing these programs next door to one another was by design, according to NRVCs Executive Director James Pritchett.

"By co-locating these programs, they can share resources and the design will better serve our clients experiencing psychiatric emergencies," Pritchett notes.

Pritchett says the move was also made to allow for expansion of bed capacity. The previous space had just six beds where the new facility will eventually have 16 beds.

"The additional beds will better support our consumers and help them avoid inpatient treatment at facilities located outside of our region - often in more distant locations - where they are disconnected from family and other natural

Continued on next page



ABOVE: Nelson Smith, Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), speaks with some of the staff assigned to the New Horizons Crisis Stabilization Unit. **BELOW:** Additional photos from the program's grand opening celebration on September 25, 2023. (All photos on this page - R. Wilsie/NRVCS)

supports,” Pritchett adds.

Construction on the project began in June 2022. A one-time award of \$1.5 million through the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) allowed for the purchase of new furnishings and supplies for the facility, as well as expanded staffing, and approximately \$75,000 of the actual construction costs.

Melanie Adkins, Senior Director of Clinical Services at NRVCS, notes that DBHDS also approved use of nearly \$500,000 in unspent CIT (Crisis Intervention Team)/Crisis Center funds for construction of the New Horizons space. NRVCS was responsible for the remaining build out costs (another estimated \$500,000).

“The new facility is a dramatic improvement in both aesthetics and safety,” says Adkins. “All of the rooms are designed for voluntary or involuntary consumer admissions.”

Adkins points out that the enhanced treatment areas will provide a more comfortable setting for clients and allow for better supervision.

“We believe this modern and lovely site will positively impact consumer experiences and outcomes,” she adds.

The New Horizons site has been licensed and will be operational as soon as remaining equipment for badge access can be obtained and installed.



RESOURCE DIRECTORY

for Veterans & Families

Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) provides outreach, connection, and support to veterans and their families as they address the challenges of military service, transition, deployments, and behavioral health concerns. Referral and connection services are coordinated with community service boards, brain injury service providers, VA medical facilities, and other public and private agencies.

Who VVFS serves:

- Any Virginia Veteran regardless of branch, time in services, or discharge status.
- Members of the Virginia National Guard not on active federal service.
- Virginia residents in the Armed Forces Reserves not on active federal service
- Family members and caregivers of these veterans and service members.

Spectrum of services:

- Care Coordination - comprehensive needs assessment and linkage to behavioral healthcare, rehabilitative, and supportive services.
- Family Services - Care coordination services, Mission: Healthy Relationships and Mission: Healthy Families workshops/retreats
- Peer Services - vet to vet support, peer groups, individualized and relationship-based support
- Justice Involved Services - Resource connection for justice-involved veterans
- Outreach and Community Education - Trainings and resource sharing in the community (to include Suicide Prevention, Military Cultural Competency, and partnerships with local Crisis Intervention Training agencies)
- Suicide Prevention and Opiate Addiction Services – a new program, offering grants to community partners

Other DVS Resources:

- Benefits
- Education, Transition, and Employment
- Virginia Women's Veterans Program
- Military Spouse Support
- Veterans Care Centers
- Cemeteries
- Virginia War Memorial
- Veterans Services Foundation



*VVFS Resource Specialist
Allison Patrick (File photo)*

Allison Patrick is the VVFS contact for the New River Valley

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West Region
Virginia Department of Veterans Services

Regional Contact Numbers:
Statewide Toll Free Number: 1-877-285-1299

Regional Director
Leanna Craig (540) 556-9112



**VIRGINIA
IS FOR
VETERANS**

VIRGINIA IS FOR LOVERS

Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, & their Families (SVMF)

VDVS VVFS and multiple federal, state and local agencies recently celebrated the five-year mark of the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, & their Families (SMVF).

The Governor's Challenge began in 2018 with an inaugural cohort of seven states (including Virginia). VDVS VVFS West Region Director Leanna Craig has been actively involved with this initiative, providing strategic insight for rural southwest Virginia. Today, the Governor's Challenge has expanded to include 49 states and 5 territories. Included below are some additional details about the Governor's Challenge:

- The Governor's Challenge is a collaboration with VA and SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) where state policy makers partner with local leaders to implement a comprehensive suicide prevention plan.
- Together with Veterans is focused on Veteran-to-Veteran coalition building and Veteran leadership development for suicide prevention.
- Community Engagement and Partnerships for Suicide Prevention (VISN Expansion) is focused on community coalition-building and enhanced capacity for outreach and education.

Governor's Challenge Focused Priority Areas for SMVF Suicide Prevention

1. Identify SMVF and screen for suicide risk
2. Promote connectedness and improve care transitions
3. Increase lethal means safety and safety planning

Virginia's Strategy: Care, Connect, and Communicate

- Care: Accessible / culturally competent behavioral health services
- Connect: Bring SVMF-specific and community services together and form systemic partnerships
- Communicate:
 - Educate the SMVF population on resources
 - Educate behavioral health providers on military culture and suicide prevention best practices
- The Virginia Identify, Screen and Refer Pilot was created and more than 40 community organizations and state agencies are involved. The goal is to help eliminate gaps in access to care.
- Virginia's team has trained more than 500 community services providers in military cultural competency and suicide prevention.



STANDING UP FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION: Members of Christiansburg Post 59 of the American Legion present our nation's colors during the opening ceremony for the 2nd Annual NRV "Out of the Darkness" Walk for Suicide Prevention, held in Dublin on Saturday, October 21, 2023. (Photo - J. Pritchett/NRVCS)

Virginia veteran suicide deaths in 2020: 181

National veteran suicide rate: 31.7

Virginia veteran suicide rate: 25.1

80% of Virginia veteran suicides are completed with a firearm

53% of the total national suicides are completed with a firearm

Source: SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

STORIES OF HOPE: BUDDY CHECK 22

By Mike Wade / NRVCS
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Members of the U.S. military knowingly risk injury or even death when they enlist. While the physical consequences of service appear most obvious, it is also difficult to deny the mental and emotional damage that some active duty and veterans must face.

A 2013 study conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimated that 22 U.S. veterans die each day from suicide. While more recent data shows that number has fluctuated to a degree, research indicates that veterans are still 1.5 times more likely to die from suicide than nonveteran adults.

The “22” from the initial VA study did help call national attention to suicides among veterans. It also increased awareness of the multiple mental health challenges that could impact the overall well-being of not only veterans and active service members may experience, but even their families.

Those issues were the motivation behind the 2016 launch of the Buddy Check 22 Program, a national grassroots initiative where veterans and active duty members check in on one another the 22nd day of each month - through social media, by phone/text, or even at in-person gatherings.

In the New River Valley, the Buddy Check 22 Program is headed up by Ted Veggeberg, a retired Lt. Col. with the U.S. Marine Corps. Veggeberg and members of the Marine Corps League Detachment #1190 organize a dinner and social gathering on the 22nd of each month at Macado's in Radford from 6 - 8 PM. He says the monthly outings are open to any local veteran, service member, or military family member.

“It’s really a social event as much as anything else,” explains Veggeberg. “We’re pretty informal...We eat and at 7:00, we take five minutes to remind everyone of why we’re there and then we get back to just enjoying our time together.”

Before the pandemic, the local group had grown to where it saw between 50 - 60 people attending monthly. Although he admits those numbers have decreased over the last few years, Veggeberg says he doesn’t spend too much time worrying about filling every available seat.

“If two people show up and one of them just needed someone to talk to, the evening was successful as far as I’m concerned,” adds Veggeberg. “I personally know of four people who wouldn’t be here today if it weren’t for this group, so I definitely feel it’s something that’s worth doing.”

Veterans and service members commonly experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Traumatic brain injury and substance use disorders may also



be contributing factors when considering the rates of suicide among these groups - even for those who do not serve in active combat.

“I spent 26 years in the military and I feel very fortunate that I don’t have to wrestle with a lot of the demons that many of my brothers and sisters do,” notes Veggeberg, a



CANDLELIGHT VIGIL: Sgt. Emily Hite of the Radford Police Department (and a member of the NRVCS Board of Directors) assists with lighting candles at the Annual New River Valley Candlelight Vigil for International Overdose Awareness Day on August 31, 2023. (Photo - R. Wilsie/NRVCS)

#EndOverdoseNRV

Grant funding helps expand reach of region's opioid awareness & overdose prevention campaign

By Mike Wade / NRVCS
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Just like many of their counterparts from around the country, the New River Valley's treatment providers and government leaders have been scrambling to address the growing number of overdoses and deaths attributed to both opioids and stimulants.

A major factor in this trend is the prevalence of fentanyl, the highly-potent synthetic opioid that often goes undetected and is being mixed with other substances or disguised in counterfeit pills. In fact, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) recently issued a public safety alert that indicates 7 out of every 10 pills seized by the agency contain a lethal amount of fentanyl.

With this in mind, NRVCS assisted the region's five community prevention coalitions secure grant funding earlier this year to help expand the ongoing #EndOverdoseNRV

campaign. The funding, made available through the Virginia Department of Health, was awarded through the Community Coalitions of Virginia (CCoVA) organization. Collectively, the five coalitions were awarded \$190,000 in funds to heighten public awareness of the issue throughout the summer of 2023.

In addition to promoting the campaign on television and radio, and through various print outlets, NRVCS and the coalitions conducted public events designed to reach multiple segments of the community. The first of these events was the 2023 #EndOverdoseNRV Summit at New River Community College in Dublin. Approximately 200 community leaders and interested citizens turned out for the half-day event, which featured *New York Times* bestselling author Beth Macy as the keynote speaker.

Macy, perhaps best known for her book, *Dopesick*, focused her remarks on the importance of communities embracing

#EndOverdoseNRV

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harm reduction strategies in response to the overdose and addiction epidemic. She provided several examples of this approach that are covered in her most recent book, *Raising Lazarus: Hope, Justice, and the Future of America's Overdose Crisis*.

Additional speakers at the event included The Honorable Bradley W. Finch, presiding judge over the Pulaski County Adult Drug Treatment Court Program, and Dr. Noelle Bissell, Director of the New River Health District.

In early August, NRVCS and the coalitions partnered to host a series of “lunch and learn” conversations to solicit input from each jurisdiction about challenges related to addiction and overdose. These five events also provided an opportunity for community members to learn more about the recently-funded Recovery Ecosystem Project, which is being managed by the New River Valley Regional Commission.

Multiple events were conducted on Thursday, August 31 in observance of International Overdose Awareness Day.

Faith-based leaders from across the region gathered that morning for the “Preaching Prevention” clergy summit, held at Belmont Christian Church in Christiansburg. Participants received training in overdose response/naloxone administration, as well as QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.) Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training.

That same afternoon, best-selling author Sam Quinones participated in a one-on-one conversation based on his latest book, *The Least of Us: True Tales of America and Hope in the Time of Fentanyl and Meth*. The conversation was led by Tom Landon with Blue Ridge PBS.

Community members gathered later that evening in Radford for the NRV’s annual candlelight vigil. Attendees heard from persons in recovery and others who have been affected by the issue.



KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Author Beth Macy served as the keynote speaker for the 2023 #EndOverdoseNRV Summit held on July 18, 2023 at New River Community College in Dublin. Macy focused her presentation on the importance of communities embracing harm reduction strategies in response to the overdose and addiction epidemic. The best-selling author met with fans and signed copies of her latest book at the conclusion of the event. (Photo - R. Wilsie/NRVCS)



BOOK SIGNING: Sam Quinones greets fans at the conclusion of his appearance at Virginia Tech on August 31, 2023. The New York Times best-selling author participated in a one-on-one interview with Tom Landon from Blue Ridge PBS. The video of that conversation can be watched in its entirety and is currently available on the NRVCS YouTube channel. (Photo - R. Wilsie/NRVCS)



CLERGY SUMMIT: Faith-based leaders from across the New River Valley came together the morning of August 31, 2023 for the “Preaching Prevention” Clergy Summit. The event was held at Belmont Christian Church in Christiansburg. (Photo - R. Wilsie/NRVCS)

Buddy Check 22

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a native of Colorado. “After Iraq, a lot of them came back different people.”

“I was lucky in that I saw combat at an older age,” he says. “I wasn’t 18. I was 35.”

Veggeberg says he is hopeful that the group’s numbers will gradually increase and that more veterans and service members from other communities in the region will make the trip to Radford on the 22nd of each month.

“We’re here the 22nd of every month,” he declares. “We don’t take any months off.”

“There are 28 veterans organizations across the New River Valley,” he continues. “We all have shared military experience and I think most of us can acknowledge the stigma toward mental health that exists in the military culture.”

Veggeberg’s wife, Heather, adds that the Buddy Check 22 group is family friendly and provides a way for families to gather information and learn about resources in a relaxed environment. (Note: The Veggebergs point out that Macado’s offers a 50% discount on meals for those who attend.)

“Our goal over time is to build bonds and connect with one another,” he says. “Most of us have been to some pretty dark places, so it’s nice to know you have someone that you can pick up the phone and call when you need someone to talk to.”

“The beauty of this group is really in its simplicity,” concludes Veggeberg.

To learn more, be sure to check out the “Buddy Check 22 - New River Valley” group on Facebook.

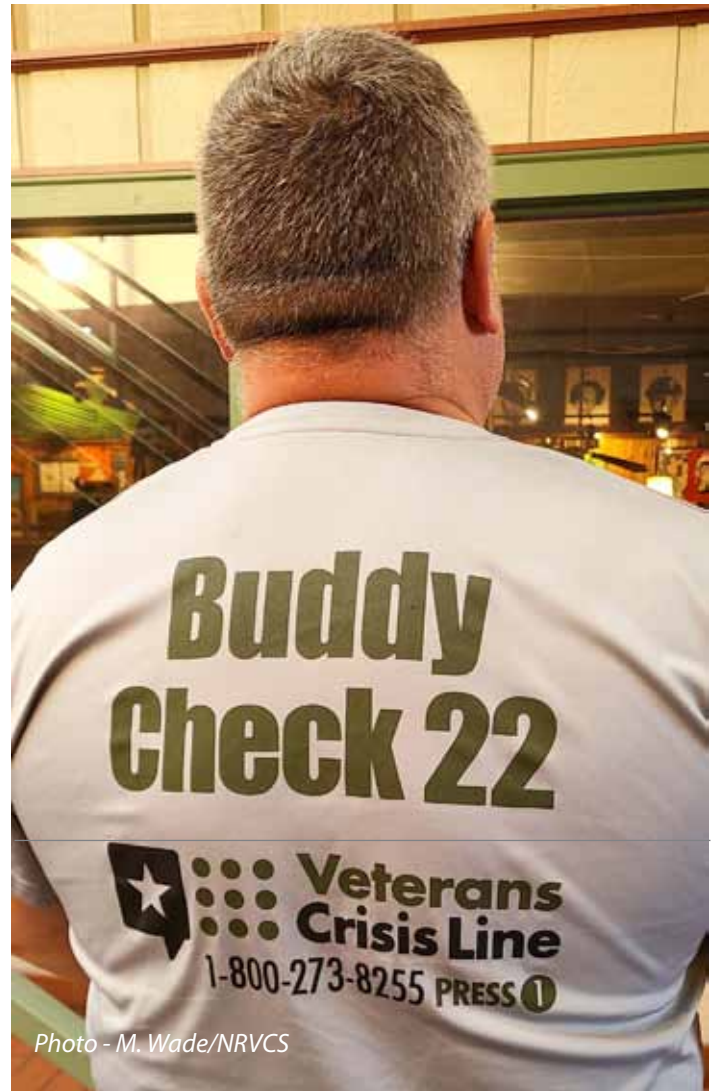


Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS



WELLNESS TAILGATE: Volunteers with the Giles Youth-Adult Partnership and representatives from various service agencies conducted a “Wellness Tailgate” prior to the Narrows-Giles varsity football game on September 15 at Giles High School. (Photo - R. Wilsie/NRVCS)



Keep it fun.

Know your limits.

Gambling can be a fun and entertaining experience for most adults, but there are risks involved. Make sure you understand those risks and have a plan before you begin gambling. Use the tips below to keep it fun.

- Know and respect your tolerance for risk.
- Don't gamble money you can't afford to lose. Never borrow money to gamble.
- Set a timer on your phone to keep track of time spent betting.
- Balance gambling with other activities.
- Treat gambling as a form of entertainment and not a way to make money.
- If gambling begins to cause you stress, take a break.
- Hope to win but expect to lose.

Remember: you're playing to have a good time – never chase your losses.

If gambling is no longer fun, help is available.

To learn more,
visit nrvc.org/safebet

