

Service Members, Vets Find Help From Peers

Robyn Mincher, DCoE Communications

"This brought up a lot of stuff that I couldn't really talk about with anyone else. It helped me in more ways than I can explain."

— Dave Madsen, veteran and participant in Vets4Vets.

When a veteran attends a peer support program, they're offered more than a pair of ears. Listening skills, role-playing and transition coping are just a few resources offered to veterans in these unique peer-based systems, which are a growing trend and proving to be a valuable resource in managing psychological health.

Three of these programs, [Vets4Vets \(V4V\)](#), [Amputee Coalition of America's National Peer Network \(ACA/NPN\)](#), and [Combat Mindsaver](#) are spotlighted in a [Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury \(DCoE\)](#) white paper entitled, "Best Practices in Peer Support Groups," as resources that effectively encourage veterans to share experiences with each other, manage psychological challenges and ease reintegration.

The focus in these peer-based systems is help from a "battle buddy," said James Hardiman, licensed clinical social worker with DCoE's Clearinghouse, Outreach and Advocacy directorate.

"I can easily provide suggestions in a counseling session, but the discussion is dramatically different with a battle buddy – they are talking with someone who's been there," he said. "This special help comes from a peer who is viewed as less authoritarian and, in the end, the service member is more receptive to their advice."

The V4V program was founded by Jim Driscoll, a Vietnam veteran. The listening skills taught by V4V help



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Daniel Yarnall

veterans identify common problems, share resources and encourage others to take action.

"In our workshops, veterans take turns listening to one another, keeping strict confidentiality and encouraging each other to express feelings associated with these stories," said Abel Moreno, facilitator at V4V. "Participants love the experience. They find out that they're not 'crazy,' they're simply experiencing the inevitable psychological aftermath of war."

Veterans are also encouraged to share experiences while attending [Combat Mindsaver](#), but with a theatrical twist.

"We have veterans role play on how to help a service member in distress as the facilitator coordinates feedback," said Lt. Col. Phillip Holcombe, Ph.D., a veteran and co-founder of [Combat Mindsaver](#).

Through the program's workshops, participants are educated through the S.A.F.E.R (Stabilize, Acknowledgement, Facilitate, Encourage, Reassure/Referral) model. [Combat Mindsaver's](#) workshops are taught by trained veterans who develop class plans using slide presentations and even movie clips that can help open up discussion and role playing.

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