FROM THE DIRECTOR

Well, for the past week or so my husband has been walking around the house singing “It’s the most wonderful time of the year…” You know this traditional holiday tune, right? While we’re not quite into the hustle and bustle of the December holidays, he is celebrating the return to school for our teenage son, who has truly extended the limits of patience and grace this summer.

In all fairness, it hasn’t been all bad. He has done quite a bit of self-exploration this summer as he enters his junior year of high school, seriously considering his college choices, assessing his academic and athletic opportunities for scholarships, new friends (male and female…ugh!), and an overall gathering of himself around the lifelong question of “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?”

A true breakthrough happened for him during his volunteer experience at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, held in Philadelphia last month. The timing couldn’t have been better for him to have witnessed our Veterans in competition, camaraderie, and mental and physical challenge. As I thought about what I might contribute to this newsletter to recognize our youth volunteer programs, it came to me that I should interview the youth closest to me for this special edition—my son, Will. Here we go:

Q: What was the most amazing part of being at the Wheelchair Games?
A: The perseverance of the athletes. I’ve never seen anything like that before and to see people work so hard to reach their goal was a real lesson for me.

Q: So, what was the lesson? Can you explain to me what you learned?
A: I learned to accept who you are and appreciate the gifts you have. The only thing you can do is make the best of what you’re given.

Q: What would make you go back?
A: Oh, I’m definitely going back! I loved it! I liked seeing #1 on the Red Team in the Wheelchair Rugby dominate the game. That was cool! He was no different than any other athlete just giving it all he’s got for the win. It felt like I was at any other sporting event—just watching people battle and fight to the finish. The Slalom was really powerful that way.

Q: So, did it mean anything to actually volunteer and be of service? (Thought we should at least get to that at some point.)
A: Honestly, I was having so much fun, I didn’t even think about what I was doing. I was too busy being amazed at the Veterans (smile). (Not what I expected…but it was a nice comment.)

After all the years of lecturing, which he refers to as my “sermons,” he reached a major milestone during these few days. Not only did he get a glimpse of the great work we do in VAVS; but he appreciated what it meant to be a Veteran, how VA truly cares for them through this event, and that **success is rooted in your attitude**. Special thanks to Melissa Heinlein for leading the volunteer effort and to all of our staff who have worked tirelessly through each of our National Programs and Special Events.

Back to the interview—Will summarized his comments to me with a statement I say to him all the time: **“CHOICES NOT LIMITATIONS.”**

It’s interesting to think about how each of the men and women at those Games at one time was an able-bodied member of our military. Faced with the same challenges, would we be courageous enough to consider the **CHOICES**, rather than fret over our **LIMITATIONS**? I’m hoping Will can carry that lesson through his life. Might be one we all could learn from.

--- SABRINA C. CLARK

> We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.

~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

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**Voluntary Service**

**Department of Veterans Affairs**

**Defining Excellence in the 21st Century**
As the summer comes to an end, the Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) sincerely thanks over 50 students who participated in the summer youth program. The TVHS summer youth program was implemented several years ago as a means to provide staff with assistance and to give youth in the community an opportunity to become actively involved in the TVHS.

Leanna Edwards, a youth volunteer for the Tennessee Valley Healthcare System, is a 14 year old Rockvale Middle School student who has helped to set the standard for other youth volunteers. While being interviewed by the Daily News Journal, Leanna explained, "I don't like sitting around because I don't feel like I'm being productive. I like being productive the best I can."

On March 17, 2014, Leanna and her parents, Ron and Missy Edwards, visited the Tennessee State Capitol, where Sen. Bill Ketron presented a resolution on the Senate floor to recognize the teenager for more than 500 hours of volunteer service. During the past two years, Leanna served Veterans on the Hospice and Palliative Care Community Living Center. She became interested in working with the aging population while visiting her dying great-grandmother three years ago. "Before she died, I'd sit a lot and talk to her. Her hospice nurse told me that I was really good with her, considering she was on her deathbed," Edwards recalled.

Leanna expects her volunteer efforts will help prepare her for future plans to have a career as a physician. "I just really like helping out and I anticipate working in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit as a doctor. I thought it would be nice to try to get a little experience," said Edwards, whose previous volunteer work included the Mindful Care Program for senior citizens. Her service to Veterans consists mostly of filling water pitchers and visiting with them, most often talking for hours with the Veterans on the Hospice and Palliative care unit. "We talk about everything... I ramble on and on and (they) listen to my stories," she said.

Leanna is a "diamond in the rough." She selflessly gives back to our Veteran patients expecting nothing in return except the friendships and relationships she has established with our long term patients. This is what the youth volunteer program is about, making the word "Veteran" more than just a title, giving a face to the name, and educating our youth on the importance of giving back to those who have given so much.

All applicants wishing to be a TVHS youth volunteer complete a "Why I Want to be a Volunteer at TVHS" one page essay. This allows the Voluntary Service Chief to select students with the most potential to excel as youth volunteers and, more importantly, those students who have a genuine desire to serve Veterans. "Although our Veterans reap the benefits of having youth volunteers available, we hope and expect the youth to also receive the benefits which come from their volunteer experience," says Tom Gallagher, Chief of Voluntary Service.

Working as a VA volunteer is a very enriching and rewarding experience. It not only gives you a way to give back to the community, but it also gives you an opportunity to serve the Veterans who once served you, and the United States of America. The Veterans receiving care at the hospital, as well as the staff, are very kind and show the utmost gratitude when you complete the simplest of tasks. To anyone who asks, "Why should I volunteer?," I have a few answers that I hope persuade you to donate your time as I have done.

The most pertinent reason to give back to the community is, of course, the feeling of solace and satisfaction that comes with the completion of any volunteer duties. When you pledge your time to the community people go out of their way to make you feel appreciated even if you have performed only the easiest of assignments. The two previous statements hold true for all volunteer work, not just the duties executed at the VA.

My personal favorite attribute of volunteering at the VA hospital are the history lessons you receive on occasion while talking to the patients. Many people have read text books and watched documentaries about the Vietnam War or World War II, but how often do you get a first-hand account from someone who was aboard one of the warships that circled Okinawa? It opens up a new way to perceive the events that transpired years before anyone my age was thought of.

Another feature of VA volunteer work is the unique experience you receive. I normally perform patient transport duty so every day is a new set of interactions. Just as each person is individual and distinct, so is each exchange. Since each situation is crafted differently you must be able to adapt to every interaction as it comes, making the experience gained through the VA hospital's volunteer program valuable when you join the work force.

I would highly recommend donating your time to the VA hospital so you can give back to those who defended our country.
Hines and enrolled Bridget in the Youth Their mother, Mary, is a Nurse Educator at volunteering for the Veterans at Hines. O’Sullivan family have served 3,233 hours experience that will last them a lifetime. Veterans and staff enjoyed their presence, for youth volunteers. Not only have the requests from many areas in the hospital summer, Voluntary Service began receiving growth of the program. By the end of the Voluntary Service staff look forward to the proven to be a phenomenal one and youth volunteers have gained valuable awareness events. They also worked in the Community Living Center, Voluntary the Albany Stratton VAMC Youth Volunteer Program, each donating over 75 hours of their time. With bright futures and big plans for college, these two young ladies worked diligently to prove the value of the youth program and did a fantastic job doing so. Zaria and Emely worked primarily with the Women’s Health and Nursing. However, after working with the many fine nurses at Hines, he changed his major to Physical Therapy; however, after working with the many fine nurses at Hines, he changed his major to Radiology. Brendan also started volunteering in 2004. This year he received a DAV scholarship and was named Illinois Volunteer of the Year. He completed his sophomore year at Saint Louis University with a Biology Major and a 4.0 GPA. He plans on going to medical school with a MD/PhD program. His goal is to incorporate research into his role as a physician so that he can find a cure for type 1 diabetes.

Michael, who began volunteering in 2011, just graduated from high school in May and will attend St. Xavier in the Fall. Originally, he wanted to become a physical therapist; however, after working with the many fine nurses at Hines, he changed his major to Nursing.

Kevin started volunteering in 2011 and has graduated grammar school. He will start high school in the fall and already plans to become a dermatologist because of his volunteer work one year in dermatology. Dr. David Eilers has been the motivating supporter for Kevin.

Volunteering has come to define the adults these young people will become and what they want to do for the rest of their lives. All five young people intend to serve Veterans by working as a doctor or nurse in Veterans Affairs!

THE HEART

By Faith Serenity Freeman, Youth Volunteer - Memphis VA Medical Center - Written about her experience volunteering on a nursing unit.

A soothing rhythmic beat
Saving a life
Inspiring a student to follow her dreams
Heart should be in it you say
There are other choices of careers
But the beat of my heart wants to jump for joy
Observing you has been a pleasure
From your ups and downs
To your smiles and laughter
You are a family
Your heart is in your career
The smiles you create
The families you help
Are all because of you

WEST PALM BEACH VAMC

Submitted by Mary Philips, Chief, Voluntary Service - WPB VAMC, West Palm Beach, FL

West Palm Beach youth volunteers served in a variety of assignments throughout the medical center this summer and gained valuable experiences for the future.
What I’ve Learned While Serving Our Veterans This Summer

Our Nation’s Veterans willingly laid down their lives for the sake of preserving the freedom and rights of the citizens of the United States. These brave warriors have seen and endured the brutality of war, and many have come home bearing traumatic experiences; either physically, mentally, or emotionally. Oftentimes when they return home, the transition is difficult because they require relief from the ailments they had suffered on the battlefield. They seek a place to reconnect with the world they once knew. It is at the VA where our Nation’s heroes can seek treatment and recovery from their life-altering experiences.

Three years ago, I walked into the Broward VA Outpatient Clinic clueless to what my future would be, what tasks I would be assigned, or even if I would enjoy the experience. I was assigned to the physical therapy department for combat Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of the patients carried scars of their experiences in the form of paralysis, amputations, or permanent disfigurement. It was heartbreaking to see how men and women, old enough to be my brothers or sisters, could return home in such disarray and anguish. I watched as the patients received treatment and exercise programs customized for their unique needs and I was astonished to see how they grew steadily stronger after every treatment, and eventually they could overcome their physical limitations. Seeing a patient come to therapy with discouragement from their weaknesses, and leave with confidence in their strengths, inspired me.

This year I was allowed the opportunity to diversify my experience in the field of physical medicine and rehabilitation. I was exposed to a variety of new professions such as orthopedics and occupational therapy, which provide treatment for Veterans with specific physical needs. I also learned of new forms of treatment like acupuncture and yoga, which aim to develop a sense of well-being. Through these new encounters, I realized that the goal of physical therapy at the VA is not just to help a patient gain relief from bodily pain. However, it is to maintain and grow a strong body, mind, and spirit; especially for those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for this country.

I would never trade my experiences at the VA for anything. The life lessons, encounters, and interactions I gained this summer were truly priceless. As a volunteer, I learned how to provide the best treatment and patient care. For me, it was very important to recognize that the patients coming to physical therapy are not average human beings, rather, they are heroes who have served this country wholeheartedly and undoubtedly suffered for our sake. By interacting with many patients over the course of this summer, I steadily learned how to honor and respect every Veteran I come across. A smile, greeting, or handshake with a Veteran demonstrates to them that they are cared for and they are thus inclined to pass the respect on to the next person they meet.

It was truly a pleasure to have served the Veterans at the VA over the past three years. Wherever life takes me, I will always look forward to continuing to serve the Nation’s heroes in the years to come.

Shane Mathew received $1000 as the winner of the Miami Summer Student Essay Contest. Additional prizes of $600 for second place and $400 for third place were awarded to Felipe Pereiro and Ashley Hill, respectively.

The 2014 Robley Rex VA Medical Center Student Volunteer Program was a resounding success, welcoming 65 students from Kentucky and Indiana who proudly wore their blue student volunteer t-shirts provided by the VAVS Executive Committee. In support of our Veterans, these students performed almost 4,500 hours of service in 25 locations to 16 services within the medical center.

At orientation, all students were offered information on service project opportunities in support of Veterans. In response, a second-year volunteer spearheaded a National Honor Society Summer Project she titled “Giving Back to Our Heroes.” She planned and coordinated a collection of household goods for homeless Veterans that the VA is transitioning into housing. In the course of a few short weeks, she collected a wide variety of useful items which were turned over to the HUD/VASH Program for distribution to Veterans in need. In addition, a couple of students worked together to collect several hundred paperback books and toiletries for use at the medical center. These students were commended for their additional commitment to our Veterans.

At the conclusion of the program, student volunteers received letters of appreciation that reflected the number of hours they served and were encouraged to return as volunteers during the school year when they were available, as well as next summer. A number have already expressed an interest in returning because they had such a great experience! Students were also provided with information on scholarships available to them from a variety of local and National organizations. Last, but not least, each student received a Jimmy Johns gift card, courtesy of the Disabled American Veterans and the VAVS Executive Committee, to thank them for a job well done.
This year the 33 impeccable teens of the Summer Youth Program were eager to serve in various departments throughout Overton Brooks VA Medical Center (OBVAMC). Staff were thoroughly impressed with the youth's professionalism, customer service, and genuine compassion for Veterans. In addition to their volunteer assignments, they also attended workshops, field trips, and other events that brought them closer to Veterans. Employees around the medical center were equally impressed by these youth volunteers showing that the Youth Volunteers not only enhanced the mission at Overton Brooks — they went above and beyond the expectations of VAVS staff.

As a service project, the students collaborated with Team Red White Blue (RWB) - a group that connects Veterans to their community through physical and social activity - to prepare and serve meals to the homeless. This opportunity was made possible by Hope Connections, a nonprofit organization that collaborates with other community groups to fight homelessness. The students were well received by staff as they served meals to those in need.

In June the students assisted in a pinning ceremony honoring American War Veterans at the Northwest Louisiana War Veterans Home. The Volunteers pinned the Veterans and presented them with a certificate of appreciation for their service. The students found this to be the most rewarding time they spent with Veterans and learned of the many challenges they faced during wartime as well as their current challenges with dementia and Alzheimer’s.

Though the summer was primarily dedicated to public service, the Youth Volunteers were still able to pause for a little fun and bowling. The students participated in a VAVS Freedom bowl and collected funds to engrave three granite benches as a tribute to area Veterans from the 2014 Student Volunteers at OBVAMC. They collectively raised $500 in pledges for the benches that will be placed in the front circle of the hospital with one of the benches bearing an inscription to recognize their efforts. Hillcrest Funeral Home and Cemetery donated the three benches as well as the remaining cost of the engraving. One of the benches will display emblem plaques of all the branches of service and the front of each bench will be engraved with a character trait like, “honor,” “freedom,” “integrity.” This was a great team building activity and the kids really enjoyed the bowling as well as the idea that the pledges they received were going to honor Veterans at OBVAMC.

Many friendships were made which will stay with the students as they set out to become productive citizens. They all expressed their gratitude for the program and many are eager to return next summer for another exciting experience serving America’s heroes.

Two years ago the Chief of Voluntary Service at VA Northern California Health Care System had a dream of creating a space that would allow patients and families to sit quietly to rest and perhaps relieve stresses often associated with health care. Amid all the construction projects aimed at expanding health care to our Veterans, a small area between the new hospital tower and the former US Air Force clinic was identified.

Transforming a rock bed into a place of beauty was a challenge, but thanks to generous community members and service organizations, the garden began to grow! Wheelchair accessible pathways were created; a fountain was donated by VFW Post 85, five benches were donated by Ms. Dixie Christenson of the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution along with a boulder on which will bear the dedication plaque which she also donated. A generous donation of $1,000 from the California President of the Ladies Auxiliary to VFW, Ms. Joyce Bilyeu allowed the purchase of plants and shrubs.

Boy Scout Troop 380 members Evan Frenklak and Bryan Hsieh chose the meditation garden for their Eagle Projects. In the fall of 2013, Evan Frenklak began one side of the garden and in the summer of 2014 Bryan Hsieh worked the other side.
How Does a Garden Grow, continued...

These young men and some family members worked very hard preparing a long time rock bed to accept plants and shrubs. Approximately 70 members in total used pick axes and other boring tools to till the compacted ground.

Many hands make light work! In a total of 10 hours Evan and Bryan’s efforts turned a former rock bed into a Meditation Garden!

A very special thank you to Ms. Dixie Christenson and Ms. June Epperly of DAR; Mr. Bruce Johnson owner of Cascade Rock for donating the bark; Mr. Robert Reinaldo of VFW Post 85; Ms. Joyce Bilyeu; Ms. Dorothy Fisher and Ms. Kathy Walery of VFW Aux; and the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 380 of Sacramento California.

DURHAM VA MEDICAL CENTER
Submitted by Joel Reji, Youth Volunteer - Durham VAMC, Durham, NC

So far in my life, no other experience has ever influenced me as much as my experience with the Dialysis Unit. I felt like I was part of a whole new loving family of nurses, technicians, and Veterans. Everyone on the unit was very kind and loving towards me; always appreciating all that I did and encouraging me in every possible way. This experience was much different from my other volunteering experiences because I had never committed so much of my time for any single activity.

Every day, I would walk into the unit with a smile on my face and almost every Veteran in the bed would call out to me and ask me how I was doing, then never failed to thank me for my service. When I took the blood work to the lab, the people at the window would always appreciate my work. When I would come to get lunch at the CLC cafeteria, the people serving lunch would always remind me of their gratitude. All of this appreciation and love impacted me in a way that boosted my self-respect and confidence in an immeasurable way. This was also the reason I came three times a week for eight hours each.

Personally, I feel that the experience taught me a lot of things about my health and also about my life. As I was volunteering, Veterans would always ask me about my ambitions and goals. Sharing these personal thoughts with the Veterans helped me to understand what I wanted to do in my future and also helped me get closer with many of the Veterans. Everyone in the unit was also extremely caring towards me. One of the nurses, Angela, checked my blood pressure once because I wondered how it was done. I found out that my blood pressure was extremely high for a seventeen year old individual. Soon came all the nurses telling me to work out more and start eating healthier. Just the idea that many people took the time to care about a volunteer’s health was very inspiring.

The idea of serving people who put the life on the line to keep me and this country safe is extremely rewarding. Because of them, I can go home with a smile on my face and believe that I helped care for those men and women who are risking their lives for me and my country.

My personal experience at the Durham Veteran’s Affairs Medical Center was astounding and extremely rewarding. I would recommend it to anyone who would like to donate their hours to a good cause because I cannot think of anything else that would give the same satisfaction as I received in the Dialysis Unit. As Sidney Sheldon once said, “My heroes are those who risk their lives to protect our world and make it a better place.”

Every Veteran is a hero in my life; especially those whom I got the chance to serve in my unit.
The South Texas Health Care System’s Summer Youth Program continues to grow and is now considered among the city’s most prestigious. Every year in January the anxious calls begin, asking when the Summer Youth applications will be made available. From April through the end of May over 70 student applications were received. The application process is a learning experience for the students requiring an essay, report card, and 2 reference letters from each applicant.

Complementing their traditional assignments, several of the 62 students accepted in the program were also involved in time and motion studies for the Director’s Office to survey clinic and provider utilization. This year the program began with a Meet and Greet for students and the Veteran Service Organizations who sponsor the program. The students had the opportunity to meet each other and thank their sponsors while enjoying hot slices of pizza and desserts.

Mid-way through the six-week program students enjoyed a Career Day and presentations by the VA Chief of the Emergency Department, the Assistant Chief, Jose Banales, and Deputy Chief of the San Antonio Police Department, Anthony Trevino, and FNBC Affiliate Meteorologist and local legend, Siobhain Anders. Our Education Service Administrative Officer, Ms. Cynthia Vahle, rounded out the speakers to close the session. The illustrious speakers spoke to the students about their careers paths and imparted wisdom and guidance to the students about goals, commitment, volunteering, and the importance of making the correct choices when young.

After a great six weeks the VAVS staff celebrated with all of the students, their parents, sponsor organizations, supervising staff members, and executive leadership with a beautiful recognition luncheon. The group enjoyed a build-your-own nacho bar and students were presented with pins, certificates, and gifts in recognition of their combined total of over 8,000 volunteer hours. VAVS staff are already planning next year’s program with even more exciting activities and have already received inquiries as to how early parents can pick up next year’s applications!

“I could be a surgeon!” exclaimed an excited youth volunteer after scoring a perfect score on one of the simulation equipment pieces. This summer the Minneapolis VA Health Care System Youth Volunteers were provided a wonderful educational opportunity to explore careers in health care in addition to their volunteer assignments. The hands-on experience of using simulators was the highlight of the tour organized by VA staff surgeon, Dr. Steven Waisbren.

Tours were planned to mimic a real life experience the youth were familiar with, appendicitis. The experience started with students changing into scrubs. They were able to practice performing a laparoscopic appendectomy. The Surgery simulation room was the final stop of the tour. Students watched a video of an actual laparoscopic appendectomy. They were able to practice performing a colonoscopy and surgical procedure using a simulator.

At the conclusion of the tour Dr. Waisbren advised the students on effective strategies for gaining medical school acceptance. He also reinforced valuable life lessons of leading a respectful and healthy lifestyle.

“Phenomenal” is how one of the students described the tour. Never in their wildest dreams did they imagine that they would actually get to see and touch live specimens when they signed up to volunteer! The students were very thankful for the opportunity to get a firsthand look behind the scenes of the Minneapolis VA Medical Center.
For many of the students this was their first time volunteering, learning about, and working with Veterans. They enjoyed being an integral part of the Veterans' care and helping to fulfill the medical center's mission of providing care that is second to none.

The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) served as the 2014 major sponsor of our youth by providing five monetary scholarship awards and seven tablets with keyboards and leather cases. Roslyn Peterson, SC Dept. Adjutant and DAV VAVS representative, stated, "It's good to give back to the youth. They will be the next group of people taking care of us."

Allen Bodenlos has been volunteering at the Welcome Center since October 1986 and continues to share his enthusiasm with all our patients, visitors, and staff. Mr. Bodenlos regularly speaks to groups about the importance of volunteering and its benefit of "keeping you young at heart!" Al also volunteers two weeks a year during Memorial Day and Pearl Harbor Day at the Arizona War Memorial in Honolulu, Hawaii.

This year the Dorn VA Medical Center in Columbia, SC was proud to receive 62 energetic students eager to serve Veterans. Together they logged a total of 6,821 volunteer hours in ten weeks working in areas throughout the Medical Center and at the Greenville Outpatient Clinic.

The top scholarship this year was presented to Ms. Bridget Wilson. Ms. Wilson is a rising sophomore at Spring Hill High School and when asked why she wanted to help the Veterans she stated, "I am very thankful for what they have done for this country. They put themselves, their lives, and their families in danger to fight for the freedom of our country and its citizens. Without Veterans we would not live in a world where we have the choice to make a difference."

The program was completed with an awards luncheon where volunteers were presented with a certificate and pin for the number of hours volunteered. There were also great door prizes donated by many Veteran Service Organizations. The VAVS staff enjoyed investing in the lives of these students who could one day become the doctors, social workers, administrative staff, nurses, or medical support assistants, that provide care for the Veterans at the Dorn VAMC. Some students have even expressed an interest in becoming Armed Forces personnel to serve, protect, and continue the tradition of being our Nation's finest; a Veteran.

Throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System, 56 youth participated in the Summer Youth Volunteer Program that ran from June 1, 2014 until August 31, 2014. During that time, each youth volunteer made a commitment to complete a minimum of 75 hours of service to enhance the lives of our Veteran patients. VAVS staff are proud to report that 85% of the youth completed their promise, with many exceeding that goal.

This summer's spectacular youth volunteers were honored at two Youth Volunteer Award Dinner dinners where they received award pins for their hourly benchmarks of service in supporting the needs of Maryland's hospitalized Veterans.

★ Did You Know? ★

Youth volunteers (those 20 years old or younger) represent roughly 13% of the Nationwide VA volunteer force and are the 4th highest represented age group serving in VA facilities across the country.

In Fiscal Year 2014 (to date) 9,743 youth volunteers have contributed nearly 677,000 total hours in service to Veterans.
The Washington DC VA Medical Center (DCVAMC) Summer Youth Volunteer Program (SYVP) 2014 fostered an environment of in-depth service, creative learning, and gratitude for the dedications of our Nation’s Veterans. Summer Youth Volunteers experienced a wealth of opportunity in terms of service assignments, one-on-one shadowing, and interaction with Veterans, staff, visitors, and adult volunteers.

Aside from the internal relationships forged, DCVAMC SYVP 2014 created a new and exciting partnership with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF). In a transformative opportunity culminated through years of Veteran Service Organization involvement, and passion for historical relevance, VVMF opened the door to welcome Summer Youth Volunteers into the world of our Vietnam Veterans. Examples of such opportunities were the inaugural Speaker Series held at DCVAMC, and the invitation to participate in a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall-Washing.

This year at the Milwaukee VAMC, around 70 Summer Youth volunteers were placed in various assignments throughout the medical center including several new positions such as greeters in the VA Canteen. The Canteen Greeters did a fabulous job welcoming Veterans as they were coming through the Canteen and handing out trays. They assisted wheelchair bound Veterans in getting food and drinks and finding a place to sit and enjoy their meal. They helped the Canteen staff in stocking condiments, cleaning tables, and various other tasks needed to keep the Canteen organized and clean, and provide a nice environment for Veterans to rest and relax in between appointments. The most important piece to this position was having the students there as a smiling and friendly face to some of the Veterans that just need a little extra human kindness. Students in turn were able to spend time speaking to the Veterans and hearing their stories.

Another new position for students was the Kiosk Assistant. New to the Medical Center, located in the outpatient clinics, are Kiosks to be used for Veterans checking in for their appointments. Many youth volunteers were placed throughout the hospital to assist the Veterans with this new technology. The volunteers worked diligently at assisting the Veterans in checking in for thousands of appointments in the facility over the summer. Not only did this education piece take a large workload off of our staff, but the patients are now trained and capable of using the kiosks by themselves for future check-ins.

The Escort Department has a long history of hosting summer youth volunteers. This popular position highlights the impact that the youth volunteers have on the Veterans in the hospital. Two escort volunteers, Patrisha Blake and Azariah Johnson, were recently recognized for their customer service by Lisa Gieger, a supply technician at the Milwaukee VA. Ms. Gieger took time out of her busy day to send this e-mail to Patrisha and Azariah’s supervisor:

“I just wanted to pass along a very positive experience I encountered yesterday. I was in the Nuclear Medicine Department doing inventory and two young ladies, who I later found out were Patrisha Blake and Azariah Johnson, came to transport a patient down to the basement on a stretcher. Both young ladies were extremely polite but at the same time had a great sense of humor and had the patient smiling and laughing with them the whole way down to the basement. I rarely see much interaction between patient and Escort except for the occasional very small talk. Trish and Azariah really made that man’s day just by making the trip more than just a trip from one area to the next. Kudos to these two young ladies!”

A new opportunity for youth volunteers in Tampa sparked the attention of the media who featured Mairyn Harris, a volunteer in the Director’s office at the James A. Haley VAMC this summer, in both a radio and TV spot. Visit WUSF (Public Radio) for the full story.

The Eagle: Voluntary Service Central Office Newsletter

WASHINGTON DC VAMC
Submitted by Rachel Childress, Voluntary Service Specialist - Washington DC VA Medical Center, Washington, DC

CLEMENT J. ZABLOCKI VAMC
Submitted by Jessica Serdynski, Voluntary Service Specialist - Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center, Milwaukee, WI

JAMES A. HALEY VAMC
Submitted by Camilla Thompson, Chief, Voluntary Service - James A. Haley VAMC, Tampa, FL

Both events were deemed ground-breaking, informative, and enjoyable on a paramount level, creating a new and ongoing tradition for future DCVAMC SYVPs.
Young Patriots Share Time, Gain Experience at VA Medical Center

To me, volunteering is more than just building community hours or earning a chord at graduation. Volunteering is about the smiles that grace the faces of Veterans as they thank you for YOUR service. It is about holding open the door for the wheelchair-bound patients, or the sound of greetings that echo through the VA Medical Center hallways.

It never occurred to me that volunteering could be more than filing papers and answering phones (not that I didn’t do some of that too), but the sense of fulfillment you get is better than any social media site could give you. Volunteering at the Atlanta VA Medical Center this summer provided me with a different perspective, and a newfound respect for the Veterans and the people who provide care for them. Few people get the opportunity to spend time meeting and interacting with groups from different generations, simultaneously.

One of my favorite parts about being a Young Patriot volunteer was learning that everyone has a background story of some kind; and, if you are patient enough, they were extremely willing to tell you their version. Olivia, 16, a student at Kennesaw Mountain High School who volunteered in the ER said, “You get to experience something new and interesting every day.” Every day there was always someone to help, and some way to learn.

Young Patriots from various departments described their experiences. Jordan, 16, from Stockbridge High School, said the most interesting aspect of volunteering here was “learning about the type of people here, and learning to cope with working with people you haven’t worked with before.” Northview High School 9th grader, Eric, added, “Volunteering is important at an early age because instead of wasting your time at home playing games, you would actually be outside helping people and not for any gain or anything.”

At the Atlanta VAMC, there is always room to learn a new technique or a fresh routine that can aid someone, whether it is a patient or an employee. For many Young Patriots, this is their first interactive and hard-working volunteer opportunity that really put them to work. We are very fortunate the hospital staff awarded us with this fulfilling experience.

Nosayaba Okungbowa will be a 10th-grader (School Year 2014/2015) at the Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology (GSMST).

* Nosayaba’s article originally appeared in the Atlanta VA Medical Center newsletter, The Insider.

SYRACUSE VA MEDICAL CENTER
Submitted by Lisa Gualtieri, Voluntary Service Specialist, Syracuse VAMC, Syracuse, NY

This summer was busy with youth Volunteers at the Syracuse VA Medical Center. Youth volunteers could be found completing clerical duties, pushing wheelchairs, running labs, and assisting residents by singing, playing board and card games, as well as facilitating various craft activities. Some even assisted as “shadow volunteers” in that they shadowed patients during their appointments to assist the VAMC.

Managers and supervisors have raved about the varied duties of the summer youth volunteers, as well as the energy level and professionalism they brought to their departments. This active and energetic group of young people gave so graciously of their time and talents this summer and the staff at the Syracuse VAMC look forward to these volunteers assisting all year long!

NOMINATIONS NOW BEING ACCEPTED FOR THE JAMES H. PARKE MEMORIAL YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP

Did you know, the James H. Parke Memorial Fund, comprised of VAVS NAC member organizations, was established in 1976 in honor of the first Director of Voluntary Service to serve as the non-profit source of funds for a VAVS Youth Scholarship Award? Organizations, volunteers, VA staff, and others continue to contribute to the Fund and scholarships are awarded annually at the National Advisory Committee meeting.

Each VA medical center may nominate one VAVS student volunteer for receipt of the award. Recommendations may be made by any VA staff member who acts as a supervisor of the student volunteer or by a member of the local VAVS Committee. This recommendation should be discussed with the Chief, Voluntary Service, before a nomination is submitted.

Nominations are due to the Parke Board President by November 1st, 2014. For more information, or to obtain a nomination form, contact the VA Voluntary Service Office at vhaco10b2astaff@va.gov or call (202) 461-7300.

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