**Bring Everyone In The Zone**

**History and Mission**

 Bring Everyone In the Zone (BEITZ) is a volunteer, Veteran/peer-driven organization supported by professionals from academia and mental health services. Initially created in 2007 by former staff (Dr. Wayne Gregory) and Veterans in the inpatient PTSD program at the Waco VA, BEITZ provides point of contact services to Veterans and family members. These services may be educational, mentorship, supportive, referral, escort, financial or informational. Our model of referral/linkage involves being a “travel companion” rather than a “travel agent.” We connect Veterans and family members to resources and services. BEITZ originated from the recognition that after treatment in the inpatient PTSD program, Veterans often felt isolated and alienated from support in their community. BEITZ was dedicated to helping Veterans and family members create mutual support groups in their own communities. BEITZ also recognized that provision of peer support services was an emerging evidenced based practice in mental health, based on the founding concept that peers who are successful in rehabilitation are excellent sources of knowledge and beacons of hope for those less far along in the process of rehabilitation. Individuals who are reluctant to access mental health services are much more likely to attend informal support/informational services and are more likely to trust one of their own who has successfully navigated complex service systems. Since 2009, BEITZ has been providing weekly support groups in Central Texas for Veterans and family members in those communities utilizing donated space and developed curricula. While our services have always been based on established curricula, the needs of OIF/OEF veterans have required revisions in our process. Utilizing materials from the National Center for PTSD, Dr. James Munroe (Boston VA Medical Center), the International Association of Peer Specialists, the VA and local college faculty and mental health professionals, BEITZ created a curriculum for active duty soldiers, Veterans, family members and community at large to help educate and inform participants on the challenges and needs of OIF/OEF Veterans. This curriculum also provides the foundation for a network of community support as Veterans and family members are linked in a process of mutual support and learning. The State of Texas has increasingly emphasized the needs of guard and reserve units returning from deployment, and especially those members living in rural areas remote from clinical services. In the summer of 2008, BEITZ provided peer support facilitator training to Service Officers from Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), emphasizing the need to establish point of contact peer support groups in local communities. TVC sponsored and funded this training in Waco. BEITZ was identified as a model program by the Mental Health Transformation Work Group in the publication, “Behavioral Health Services for Returning Veterans and Their Families: Services, Gaps, and Recommendations” (Texas Department of State Health Services)1.

 BEITZ conducted subsequent training classes in May 2009 at Texas A&M Central Texas, in August 2009 at the Wounded Warrior Brigade at Fort Hood and in December 2009 at the Bell County HELP Center. Shortly thereafter we were contacted by Sam Shore of DSHS to provide training to volunteer Veterans/Family Members/Advocates and signed a contract with DSHS to provide these services on 1-22-2010. We then conducted a training class in February 2010 where Sam Shore attended part of the class and determined that the class met the requirements of DSHS to help serve the needs of returning Veterans and we signed a contract to provide the services. Out of our program, the Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN) was established. Subsequent trainings have been provided through the MVPN (as well as for Wounded Warrior Project, Corpus Christi Army Depot, South Texas Afghanistan Iraq Veterans Association) and will continue to do so as long as we are needed and able to provide this service. We have fully trained numerous individuals and new Peer to Peer Support is happening all over the state. Please visit our website [www.bringeveryoneinthezone.org](http://www.bringeveryoneinthezone.org) to see where groups are meeting and training is taking place.

 We realized early on that we were unable to take care of a Veteran’s psychological needs if their physiological needs were unmet. We sought out funding to assist with housing, utilities and transportation, and provide emergency food. We also provide Military Cultural Competency, Mental Health First Aid, Counseling on Access to Lethal Means and AS+K suicide prevention training. We train volunteers to be mentors in the area Vet Courts.

***TVC Strategic Plan, 2009 - 2013 Page 23,*** released 6-27-2008 states:

“As part of the effort to provide transition assistance to veterans suffering from PTSD, a pilot project is planned for the Summer of 2008 to provide special training to a limited number of VCSOs and TVC staff. (We provided this pilot project on 8-8-08 in Waco) This Pilot Project would create rural support groups for at-risk veterans. A large percentage of returning service members suffer from PTSD (estimates range up to 30%). There are also those Texas residents who suffer from PTSD as a result of previous wars. Senate Bill 1058 (80th TX Leg. Reg) refers to the facilitation of reintegration and treatment for both the service member and their families. This pilot program would initially train a total of 25 individuals (from a pool of currently employed TVC counselors and VCSOs) in how to facilitate the VA Peer Support and Educational Support program. Peer support groups are led by nonprofessional people who have experienced the same or similar issues. They would help identify successful strategies for coping to include:

• Facts about issues

• Differences between healthy and unhealthy coping skills

• Developing a social network

• Validating feelings

• Learning self-advocacy

Texas is a large state. Travel to talk to someone with similar experiences is difficult at best. This program would support that need for the veteran, active duty service member, Guardsman, Reservist **and family members** as well as assist them with claims and information on how and where to receive medical care at no cost. The target locations for the pilot program would be 25 rural areas with populations sufficient to support the program and with limited access to any VA Medical Facilities. This program could be coordinated with the proposed Family Readiness Support Group Coordinator who will enhance awareness of this program. TVC’s goal for the pilot program would be to have 400 to 500 participants. VA manuals for this program have already been developed and TVC has access to experienced VA personnel to conduct the training. The training would take place this summer. Because of the large number of men and women returning from the Afghanistan and Iraq theaters, in 2004, the TVC started a program to contact these returning veterans and advise them of the services offered by the Texas Veterans Commission. As the war has continued, the avenues to contact the veterans have expanded. TVC is now engaged in a cooperative effort with VA to contact returning Reserve and National Guard members at their units during a drill weekend. The TVC is also expanding its program of using information from Certificates of Release or Discharge from Active Duty

(DD214s), that it receives to not only contact the veteran about the claims program but to furnish the contact information to the VES and Veterans Education staff of the Commission for employment assistance and/or education assistance.”

1 Department of State Health Services, Returning Veterans Subgroup of the Mental Health Transformation Working Group, “Behavioral Health Services for Returning Veterans and Their Families: Services, Gaps, and Recommendations” (Dec. 2008), accessed March 25, 2014, at http://www.mhtrans formation.org/documents/reports/MHTWorkgroupReport\_ReturningVeterans010809.pdf.