



# One-Stop for Veterans & Military

September 2021 | Issue #33

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*By Bob McLaughlin, Executive Director*

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. For Mt. Carmel, this is a time to raise awareness for this stigmatized topic, especially as it relates to veterans. On September 3, we began the month by giving back together to our community. We celebrated Patriot Day by giving away nearly 40,000 pounds of food to 376 local families in need. We saw veterans of all eras come out to the Mt. Carmel campus to participate in the food distribution as we cared for local military and veteran families in a tangible way.

We also enjoyed being the last stop for the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association Mission to Zero motorcycle ride. Over 100 riders participated in the ride to bring attention to veteran suicide and many summited Pike's Peak during the poker run. In September, our champion, Tim Gore, ran 95 miles through the rough and rugged Badlands of North Dakota to support counseling programs at Mt. Carmel and raise awareness for post-traumatic stress.

We also reflected on the 20th anniversary of September 11, 2001, and remembered those who made the ultimate sacrifice to defend our country. On September 11, 2001, I was stationed in Fort Hood, Texas with the 1st Cavalry Division. When the second tower was hit, I remember thinking, "we are going to war with terrorists." Three years later, I found myself doing just that. I was stationed in Iraq with my childhood friend and hero, Marine Major John Ruocco. We



Bob McLaughlin

were two proud patriots from Lexington, Massachusetts, serving and protecting our country.

John and I served together at Al Asad Air Force Base in the Al Anbar province prior to the battle of Fallujah. I served as the 2nd Marine Division Fire Support Officer. John and I were both proud of our service and honored to be serving in Iraq together. During our time together, we often reflected together on the events of 9/11 and spoke about how the events of that day changed our lives. John returned home before I completed my tour. Four months later, I received word that he had died by suicide. John's suicide was a direct result of his combat experience flying close air support as a combat pilot.

I am driven today to honor John's memory by doing everything I can to prevent veteran suicide. During this time of remembrance for September 11 and National Suicide Prevention Month, my team and I are deeply committed to helping veterans like John who are in need. ■

*Bob McLaughlin*





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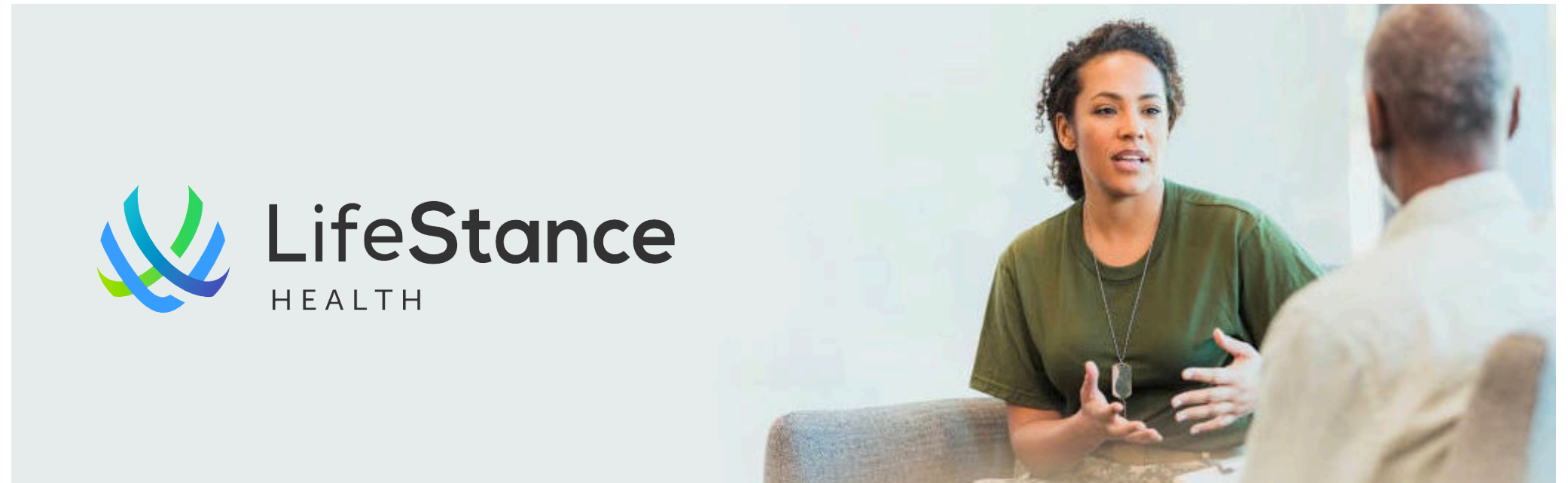
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## Partner Spotlight LifeStance Health



As a national leader in mental health, operating in over 450 locations across the United States, LifeStance Health is proud to be a part of the Colorado Springs community, collaborating with Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in offering exceptional services to our many incredible customers and clients. We recognize the foundation of growth, development and unity when partnering with community organizations and are honored to partner with the team and vision of Mt. Carmel VSC.

By providing outstanding services to our local military community, we are

able to significantly enhance the social, emotional, personal and professional goals and aspirations of our active-duty military personnel, our veterans and their many wonderful families. Opportunity is without question the groundwork for all forms of success and it is through the provision of this opportunity, and our valued partnership with Mt. Carmel, that we can sustain an ongoing platform to reciprocate the unparalleled commitment to our servicemen and women. Thank you, Mt. Carmel VSC, for this essential relationship as we come together to serve those who have served. ■

## Patriot Day!





# Patriot Day!



## Transition and Employment Update

As we end the month of September and take some time for reflection, one thing comes to mind - baseball! The 3,000 mark is clearly a milestone that will go in the record books! Whether it's 3,000 hits or 3,000 strikeouts, this milestone is sure to catch some attention.

As we turn the corner and head into the holiday season, Transition and Employment (T&E) is set to cross the major milestone of having made 3,000 placements, and this is one for the record books. Like Pete Rose and Ty Cobb with over 3,000 hits, and Nolan Ryan, Randy Johnson, and Bob Gibson with over 3,000 strikeouts, Transition and Employment is set to make our mark! Currently, Transition and Employment has placed over 2,886 into employment, training, training-to-employment and education programs.

I attribute this success to the hard work done by our peer navigators Elan Rainford, Jon Dix, Ashley Hardy and Nick Weremblewski, and all the peer navigators who came before them. This is no easy feat! A significant amount of time goes into working with clients.

In the beginning, most clients start by telling us what they don't want to do and this is when we spring into action! We build a plan based off the individual needs of each client. We also attribute the success of this department to the amazing ambassadors, partners, peer navigators and outreach events we are involved with each month.

Our outreach events have picked up a lot in T&E as events have increased. We not only do Transition Assistance Program briefs, but we also get out in the community for table set-ups, events like the Veterans Rally, 9/11 Remembrance Day and the Mission to Zero Event.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped T&E reach this milestone. This includes Executive Director Bob McLaughlin, Director of Operations Paul Price, all of the Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center employees, work-study students, interns, and of course, all of our clients. Without them, none of this would have been possible. We will continue to drive on and hit that goal! ■





## Behavioral Health and Wellness Update

Our Behavioral Health Department has been focused on rising to the call for counseling services in our community and suicide prevention efforts.

Our Director of Behavioral Health, Kirsten Belaire, LPC, has been engaged in two community suicide prevention initiatives. She continues to provide educational presentations on Trauma-Informed Care throughout our community as well as radio and TV informational interviews.

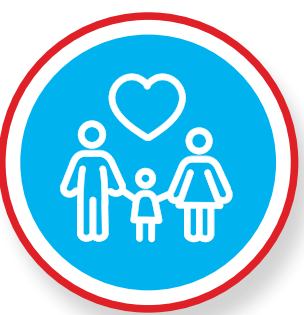
Mt. Carmel implemented a suicide prevention screening questionnaire for all programming intakes. Charissa Thayer, our intake specialist, is becoming an expert in getting

behavioral health clients connected rapidly with services El Paso County. We continue to serve service members, veterans and their families at low to no cost.

We increased access to services by hiring **Zachariah Garney, LMFT-C**. Zachariah graduated from Regis University in August and is now one of our full-time clinicians. He enjoys spending time with his wife and two sons, driving and repairing cars, and going on adventures. ■



Zachariah Garney, LMFT-C



## Veteran and Family Resources Update

As we enter the cooler fall season, we begin to look at the impact this will have on more vulnerable veteran populations - those who lack adequate shelter and transportation. In an effort to better serve these populations we have teamed up with the El Paso County Homeless Veteran Coalition to provide better services to our homeless veterans at the Annual Homeless Veteran Stand Down. We are also in the process of expanding our outreach to aid those who are unable to get to our main campus located at 530 Communication Circle.

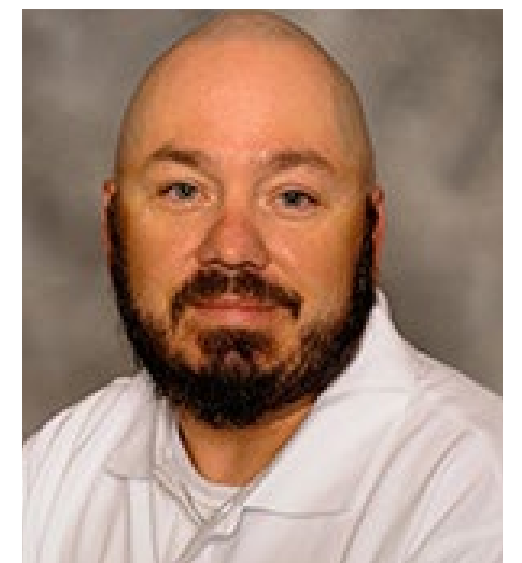
On the 21st of September, the Veterans and Family Resource Team participated in the 23rd Annual Stand Down for Colorado's Homeless Veterans. This is the fifth year that Mt. Carmel VSC has participated in the Stand Down, providing assistance, resources and hygiene kits to the attendees. This year we saw a significantly smaller number of homeless veterans in attendance, so we will be temporarily increasing our outreach efforts at the shelters and day centers to be sure to extend a reliable and conveniently located helping hand to those in need.

Starting next month, we will have hours in our newest office located in the El Paso County Public Health south offices in Fountain. A member of the VFR team will be there one day a week to provide services to the residents of

Fountain and surrounding areas. Dates and times to follow. In October, we will also begin providing service hours at our new office in Pueblo, located at St. Mary-Corwin Medical Center. A member of our case management team will be down there on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

We would like to take this time to introduce you to our newest VFR case manager, **Don Mainard**.

Don is a proud Army veteran who honorably served from 2000 to 2007 with a deployment to Iraq in 2003. Don has called Colorado home since 2007. He comes to Mt. Carmel VSC with a background in criminal justice and a passion for working with veterans. Prior to joining the Mt. Carmel family he worked for the Department of Human Services as an Adult Protection Services Investigator. Don has a Bachelor's in Sociology/ Criminology and recently earned his Master of Social Work from Colorado State University Pueblo. When Don is not at Mt. Carmel VSC, he enjoys spending time with his family, enjoying the great outdoors and following Jeep trails. Don will be the primary case manager at the Pueblo office, so be sure to swing by and say hello! ■



Don Mainard