

LGBTSA Newsletter

LGBT Staff and Allies Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 8

October 17, 2014

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LGBTSA FY 2014: A Year in Review

As we wrap up FY2014, it is exciting to reflect back on all that we have accomplished! This issue of the Newsletter is dedicated to a review of our numerous trainings, events and observances both on VAPAHCS campuses and in the community. I am so very proud to work with the delightfully diverse, talented, creative and impassioned staff that comprise LGBT Staff Allies Special Emphasis Program at VAPAHCS- you inspire me on a regular basis to dream bigger and reach higher in all that we do.

HEI 2014

We are thrilled to announce that VAPAHCS' application to the 2014 Human Rights Campaign's Healthcare Equality Index (HEI) received another year of Leadership Status!

The HEI is a process to evaluate the cultural relevance and competence of health care institutions to LGBT patients and employees. Last year we achieved the distinction of being rated a Leader in Health Care Equality and were featured in the [2013 HEI Report](#) as well as the [HEI Community Resources](#) webpage!

This year's HEI awarded Leadership Status to 102 VA Medical Center's across the country! To see the 2014 HEI Report click [here](#).

Many thanks to everyone who participated in the 2014 HEI application by completing an online training!



HEI 2014 Healthcare Equality Index

Promoting Equitable and Inclusive Care
for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
Patients and Their Families



1500+

healthcare facilities nationwide rated
on their commitment to LGBT equality

Next LGBTSA Meeting
Thurs., Nov. 20th
Noon-1pm

VANTS 1800 767-1750
Access Code 86067

Agenda:

1. Out & Equal
2. LGBTSA History Project
3. LGBT History & Disability Awareness Event
4. LGBT Program Webpage Update

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LGBTSA Retreat: A Huge Success!

On 4/25/2014, we hosted our first LGBTSA Retreat (the first retreat of VHA LGBT and allied employees to my knowledge in the country!). This retreat was a major success by all accounts. The 35 attendees (some of whom are pictured below) were from a wide variety of services including Social Work, Nursing, Recreation Therapy, Psychology, Research, Hospitality and Food Service, and Employee Education.

We had truly outstanding conversations about our experiences as LGBT staff and as allies to LGBT staff and veterans at VAPAHCS, got to know each other through a fun ice breaker activity and learned about newly available same sex spousal marriage benefits following repeal of DOMA. We also

enjoyed delicious snacks throughout the day, learned about the history of LGBTSA and how to become a formal member, and how to manage homophobic and transphobic comments from veterans and colleagues while at work. Our event concluded with door prizes and everyone left with LGBT SEP posters created by the National LGBT Workgroup to place in their worksites as a concrete way to help create safer space throughout our health care system.

This marvelous event received glowing reviews from participants' feedback forms and would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of Deirdre McNamara, Kathleen Thomas, Laura Tracy, Dave Leo, Shannon Healer, Stephanie Pleshette, Stephen Rogers, Gebriel Lonero, Deborah Baskins and Heliana Ramirez.



Please consider becoming a formal member of LGBTSA- ask Heliana for more information.



2014 also included social activities like baby showers welcoming the newest members Djuna and Emiliano into our *Family.*

Next up, we are planning a holiday gathering for November/December.

If you would like to help plan these fun events, please email Kathleen.Thomas@va.gov, our Ever Fabulous Event Planner and Secretary extraordinaire (featured in the photo above)!

LGBT Staff and Allies Retreat!

*Date: 4/25/2014
Time: 8:30am-4pm*



VAPAHCS Safe Space Training: One for the History Books!

LGBTSA partnered with the San Francisco VA to host a Safe Space Training Program! On July 23, 2014, the PAD Auditorium filled with 45 staff from VA Palo Alto, San Francisco, Oakland and Martinez to learn how to operationalize the VA's LGBT-related anti-discrimination and equal hospital visitation policies. While we have rolled out over 20 LGBT-related cultural competence trainings to VAPAHCS over the past several years addressing issues like health disparities among LGBT Veterans, challenges facing LGBT veterans accessing specialized care like residential PTSD treatment and outpatient mental health, staff expressed interest in concrete strategies to implement the VA's anti-discrimination policies. The VAPAHCS Safe Space training combined hands-on learning activities like vignettes and personal reflection on privilege and marginalization to help participants examine their own experiences with heterosexuality and/or LGBT status impacted their practice and responses to homophobia and transphobia at VAPAHCS. The VAPAHCS Safe Space Campaign differed from other VA Safe Space training as it was a day-long event which included discussion of the specific cultural experiences of minority stress and resilience among LGBT military and veterans.

Participants who completed the entire training received framed certificates signed by Director Freeman and a VAPAHCS rainbow lapel pin (pictured to the right) for their name badges to let LGBT veterans know that they are safe staff to come out to.



Pride 2014 Observances: We shared Pride at VA and in the community, far and wide!

From marching in the San Francisco Pride Parade (photo above) to educational film screenings about LGBT Aging and a Moving Poster Display of images created by DOD and the VA Observing LGBT Pride Month, LGBTSA members brought education, energy and a message of health equity everywhere we went!

VAPAHCS 2014 Pride Observance

1. Facility-wide Compass Email Observance (6/2/14)
2. GENSilent Screenings and Clinical Discussions (PAD 6/16, MPD 6/23 and SJC 7/16)
3. Moving DOD and VA Pride Observance Poster Display (Lobbies of main buildings at PAD and MPD)
4. Electronic Board Displays (pride observance on boards in waiting areas throughout VAPAHCS campuses)

Community-based Outreach for Pride 2014 (including t-shirt design and distribution):

1. San Francisco LGBT Pride Parade (6/30/2014)
2. San Jose LGBT Pride Festival (8/17/2014)
3. San Mateo LGBT Pride Festival (6/14/14)

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Diversity is Our Strength!

VAPAHCS LGBT Programs are on
the web!
Visit us at
<http://www.paloalto.va.gov/>

LGBT History Month and Disability Awareness Observance



On October 20, 2014, LGBTSA and the Disability Awareness Special Emphasis Programs joined forces to present a 2-hour event at PAD with VTel connection to MPD and Sonora. 37 VAPAHCS employees attended this event where they learned about leaders throughout LGBT History as well as gaining insight into the experiences of people living with disabilities.

The event began with an exceptional Guest Speaker Staff Sergeant Eric Alva who discussed his experience as the first American military personnel seriously injured in Iraq, a healing journey following the loss of his leg and significant injury to an arm from a landmine as well as his extensive work with Congress regarding the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell as a gay veteran and his masters level graduate education in social work. Mr. Alva graciously fielded questions from the audience about what it was like as a gay service member under Don't Ask Don't Tell, where he draws strength and resilience from, the role of faith and spirituality in his life and why he chose the profession of social work. Mr. Alva a widely sought after public speaker, generously shared not only his time, insight and expertise with us but also his brilliant spirit and sharp witted intellect, which kept the audience thoroughly engaged with his abundant authenticity and easy-going personality.

Following Mr. Alva, VAPAHCS Social Work Supervisor Lori Buelna, LCSW gave a presentation about community-based resources for people living with disabilities at the [Center for Independent Living](#), which has branches in [San Jose](#) and throughout the Bay Area. Additionally, Ms. Buelna also described the AmeriCorps Strength to Serve Program, consisting of 6 Members who assist veterans at VAPAHCS access community-based and VA resources and appointments. AmeriCorps member Christopher Cooper also spoke about his day-to-day work with VAPAHCS veterans. If you would like to connect a veteran with an AmeriCorps Member, please email Lori.Buelna@va.gov (until 1/14) and Tracy.Simon@va.gov (after 12/14).

Attendees were treated to refreshments, a photographic Wall of Leaders of LGBT History and a 5-foot long timeline of LGBT Federal Employment from 1777-2014.

The event concluded with attention to the hidden disability of mental health challenges like PTSD with a screening of the critically acclaimed documentary [The Camouflage Closet](#) featuring the stories of 9 LGBT veterans' experiences with trauma and recovery.

The VAPAHCS LGBT Staff and Allies is a group of over 30 VA employees who began meeting in April, 2012. The purpose of LGBTSA is to raise awareness about LGBT Veteran and employee experiences at VAPAHCS through a public relations campaign, staff training and resource development for the hospital system. Through community outreach, LGBTSA strives to increase VA enrollment among LGBT Veteran Patients and encourage employment applications from LGBT civilians and Veterans.

LGBTSA members work across numerous departments at VA Palo Alto Healthcare System including Social Work, Psychology, Medicine, Recreation Therapy, Engineering, and Housekeeping to name a few. Members identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and as allies to the LGBT community. LGBTSA welcomes anyone who is interested in making VAPAHCS the choice for LGBT Veterans seeking care and LGBT people seeking employment.

Joint Commission, CARF & LGBT Patient Care

The Joint Commission and CARF, two major healthcare accrediting organizations, assess the VA's cultural competence regarding LGBT patient care. For examples of the Joint Commission's standards regarding LGBT patients, see their [Field Guide](#) and CARF's article about [Cultural Competence](#).

In 2014, LGBTSA provided several trainings in service of patient-centered, culturally competent care for LGBT veterans. In addition to the LGBT Safe Space Campaign, LGBT Aging Workshop and LGBTSA Retreat, we have also provided LGBT-related clinical trainings to the following groups of VAPAHCS employees:

Psychology Practicum Student Orientation Training: 5/30/2014

Family Therapy: 7/5/2014

Veterans Recovery Center: 7/14/2014

Hospice and Palliative Care: 7/16/2014

Recreation Therapy Service: 9/30/2014

Valley Mental Health Conference: 10/7/2014

Interdisciplinary Impact Team: 10/27/2014