

PMRS O.N.E.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

NEWSLETTER



Resource Management Microsoft Team

A O.N.E. VR huddle group formed with Jamie White, Antonio Reyes, and George Serrano created a Resource Management Microsoft Team channel which has resulted in ease of access to abundant resources found throughout the VA and our community. The Team's focus was to streamline the sharing of resources between team members, which also shortens the wait time for veterans to receive information related to their vocational and avocational needs.



The O.N.E. VR team members now have one location, the Resource Management excel document, to explore known resources for vocational activity requests related to trainings, job searching, volunteering, hobbies and many more! Additionally, team members also now have one location to start and continue conversations about resource information as needed. This venue allows for the entire O.N.E. VR team to see a request, respond, and access the information with EASE and EFFICIENCY.

If you have information you would like for us to share through our education to Veterans, please contact Alyssa.Scott3@va.gov.

Veteran Success Stories



U.S. Marine veteran Darin Washington was interviewed about his experience with O.N.E. VR. Mr. Washington served as a Marine from 2003 to 2006 as motor transport operator. Mr. Washington came to O.N.E. VR to get help as he lost his job. He stated he "went through a lot at that time...he had a family." Additionally, he reported he did not have finances for food to feed them. As a result of his mental health impacted by stressors, his wife made him to check in at ARC at VA. Mr. Washington said VRS Antonio Reyes started services with him. Antonio provided career guidance, helped him build a resume, and apply for jobs. As a result, he had an interview at James Haley Veterans' Hospital for supply technician position but didn't receive an offer for the position. Mr. Washington explained he kept a positive attitude because of Antonio Reyes. A couple of weeks later, he got an offer for the position as the original candidate selected declined the position. Mr. Washington was glad to have this



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opportunity. He enjoys working at James Haley as it makes him feel comfortable to be around people who understand what he went through. He enjoys working with veterans and helping other veterans.

Mr. Washington said “...everything happened to me makes me stronger....all of my setbacks prepare me for something better. I enjoy working at VA and I’m motivated to get training to be a better worker.” Mr. Washington says his family is every important to him and they have supported him all the time.” He particularly wanted to thank Antonio Reyes for his services and support.

Dr. Charley Ferrer served in the US Army from 1981 to 1986. She moved to Florida in late June 2022. She shared that when she first moved to Florida, she was feeling down and felt she was left out of the community as she didn’t know anyone. Charley’s oncologist, Dr. Elana Hartman recommended the O.N.E. Vocational Rehabilitation which connected Charley to Lea Garcia who introduced her to various resources at the VA, such as creative writing, Breaking Barriers group, and photography classes.

She shared, “I originally wrote *Breast Cancer Diaries* in 2019. The play was a huge success in New York. Lea encouraged me to put it on stage in Florida....she also connected me to Straz Center and Natalie Quintana from the VA to be involved in the Creative Arts Festival...Lea got me motivated to connect with other organizations in the area to pursue the production of the play locally.” Dr. Ferrer also connected with the Hernando County Fine Arts Council and Stage West Playhouse who was willing to produce the play in October 2023. During the interview, Dr. Ferrer stated she “greatly appreciates the support from the VA and the local community who embraced her play, *Breast Cancer Diaries*.” She’s also tremendously proud of the fact that *Breast Cancer Diaries* won the Regional Award for Best Drama **and** won Second Place in the National Awards for Best Short Script in the National Veterans Creative Art Festival of 2023!

Breast Cancer Diaries is a compilation of true stories about women and men diagnosed with breast cancer, sharing their fears, challenges, and those unique moments they experience along the way. The goal is to empower women and men with breast cancer. *Breast Cancer Diaries* is also a powerful educational tool for anyone studying or working in the medical or mental health field as it addresses cancer from a patient’s perspective, sharing a patient’s desire and need for dignity and a bit of control of their own destiny during their cancer journey. This dramedy was an off-Broadway sensation, which shares a little bit of drama and a plentiful component of comedy.

Dr. Ferrer is the founder of *Cancer Tamer Foundation*, which is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. She established *Cancer Tamer* shortly after being diagnosed with this disease as a way to empower other women diagnosed with breast cancer. *Cancer Tamer* created several documentaries on breast cancer: *Messages of Hope* and *Faces of Breast Cancer*, both debuted in 2019 alongside the play. In 2020, she produced the documentary, *Breast Cancer: Men Speak Out* in which men diagnosed with breast cancer and their loved ones speak about the unique challenges men experience with this disease.

Dr. Ferrer is adamant about empowering and inspiring other veterans with cancer. She states, “You never know what lays ahead of you when diagnosed with cancer, the challenges and struggles you’ll face. Remember you are not alone; there are others out there waiting and willing to help if you just reach out. You are stronger than you can imagine. Cancer can’t stop you. Explore your life and decide for yourself what you want out of it, then find the necessary connections to make your thoughts manifest. Talk to your doctors, your vocational rehab consultant—they’re not merely there to get you back to work—they also help you reconnect with life and inspire you to find your purpose and find the things that work best for you.”

Dr. Ferrer hasn’t stopped going for her dreams and credits her current success to the inspiration and support she received from Lea Garcia. This year, Dr. Ferrer is spearheading the Cinco de Mayo Weekend Health Expo, taking place on Saturday, May 4 at Hernando Park in Brooksville. She is also hosting the *Breast Cancer Mermaid™ Art Project* which is aimed at providing breast cancer awareness and education. The *Breast Cancer Mermaid’s™* first exhibition will be held during the Health Expo and more exhibitions are planned for October. The Art Project is open to all artists at any level, in any medium. She’s has already received many submissions from all over the US, England and even Spain regarding participation.

“Why a breast cancer mermaid?” Charley was asked. Dr. Ferrer’s response: “When you think of a mermaid, you think of this alluring sensual beautiful woman. When a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer and loses her breasts, she thinks she’s lost that spark in herself. She hasn’t!” It is Dr. Ferrer’s desire to use the *Breast Cancer Mermaid™ Art Project* as an educational tool to empower other women—and men—and open the door to awareness and risk reduction.

You can obtain further information about the Cinco de Mayo Weekend Health Expo and the *Breast Cancer Mermaid™ Art Project* and other information about ways to thrive despite cancer on her website: www.CancerTamer.org



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SkillBridge Program

O.N.E. VR provides transitional assistance to selected service members through education to benefits and resources as well as soft skills training as the earliest vocational intervention. O.N.E. VR is continuing to explore and add SkillBridge opportunities at JAHVA. This effort is being done through marketing & success stories to areas within the medical center that are looking to hire quality candidates.

We serve all service members from all branches, ranks E-1 through O-6. We provide internships as vital options for an introduction to VA health care as well as skills training to assist in their transition. We have received applicants ranging from Hawaii to the Northeast, with selected candidates moving their lives from as far as North Dakota to as near as Tampa's local military population stationed at MacDill AFB.

Through a desire to assist transitioning service members and attract high quality candidates, O.N.E. Vocational Rehabilitation has been able to provide the following opportunities through the end of 2021 - Present:

Thank you to **PMRS Kinesiotherapy** and **PMRS Physical Therapy** for facilitating an experience for a Skillbridge participant!

Other facility areas who have participated and made a selection(s) through the program:

- Hospital Administration Service: 5 selected for an experience.
- Veterans Experience Office: 4 selected for an experience
- Safety Office: 1 selection for an experience

Permanent Placements to date: 3



If your department would like to learn more about an opportunity for a Service Member, please reach out to Alyssa.Scott3@va.gov.

Community Partner Spotlights

Rehabilitation Counselor Nan Qian had a chance to interview as well as invite Javier Morales, a Social Security Public Affairs Specialist in Florida to a O.N.E VR Lunch and Learn. Below is an exclusive service from the Social Security Administration that is now available for Veterans.



Our **Mobile Check-In Express** feature makes it easier to check in if you must visit a Social Security office.

To use **Mobile Check-In Express**, scan the QR code located at your local Social Security office. This will allow you to check in for:

- Scheduled and non-scheduled appointments.
- Services including : requesting a replacement Social Security card, a benefit verification letter, proof of income, and more.

For **Mobile Check-In Express** to work, you must be at the Social Security office and have location services on. You should also make sure you're using the latest version of your internet browser. The service is most compatible with Safari, Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge, and Firefox. You'll also want to:

- Ensure you are in the office when your ticket number is called.
- Enable your mobile notifications. This will:
 - Allow you to receive your electronic ticket – so you know your place in line.
 - Alert you when we're ready to help you.
 - Provide you with your interview location information.
 - Invite you to participate in our feedback survey.



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Community Partners Lunch and Learn

The Community Partners Lunch and Learn serves as a bridge between the O.N.E. VR Program and various community and VA organizations dedicated to work with veterans in the Tampa Bay Area. This monthly gathering, held every third Wednesday at noon, enables guest organizations to outline their mission, target audience, service eligibility, and referral processes for veterans in need. This facilitates mutual understanding between our program and the broader network of veteran-friendly organizations, fostering a platform for reciprocal learning and relationship-building.

Participants of Community Partners Lunch and Learn series FY23:



- Special Operations Warrior Foundation
- Helping Hands for Veterans
- TAMCO Foundation
- Wounded Veterans Relief Fund
- The Gateway at Crisis Center of Tampa
- The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay's Florida Veterans Support Line
- The VA Virtual Health Resource Center team
- YMCA-LIVESTRONG program
- The Social Security Administration

If you are part of or know of an organization that provides services for veterans and would like to join a Community Partners Lunch and Learn meeting, please reach out to Jonathan Pagano at Jonathan.pagano@va.gov.

*National Rehabilitation Counselor
Appreciation Day is March 22, 2024!*



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Meet O.N.E VR Program Coordinators

From Rashawn Thomas, LCSW, CRC, CVE

O.N.E. VR has many services geared towards supporting our Veterans - one of those services include Vocational Evaluations. We use evaluations for multiple reasons including: Academic Achievement, Career Exploration, Work Values, Job Stress, and Dexterity. The availability of our assessments gives us flexibility to help veterans who are transitioning into civilian life, exploring career changes, or training opportunities. My role as **Director of VR Evaluations and Technology** is to provide technical support to the team and train O.N.E. VR staff to

increase their knowledge and understanding of Vocational Evaluations. I am a resource for staff and veterans by providing different vocational evaluations and using them properly as well as confidently.



From Lea Garcia, MS, CRC, CBTAC

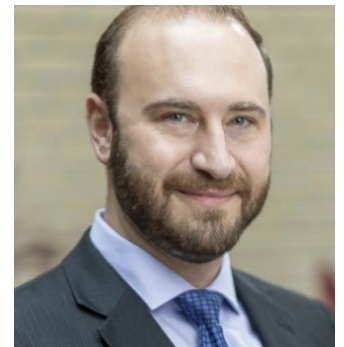


In working with veterans with amputations and participating in cancer rehab, seeking adaptive housing is a big need in veterans services. I support veterans to get through the grant application process and collaborate with other service providers to facilitate the services. My goal in the role of **Independent Living Director** is to provide direct services for veterans seeking adaptive housing and expand O.N.E VR adaptive housing coaching services nationally.

From Craig Pagano, MA, CRC

In addition to my patient care responsibilities as a rehabilitation counselor in the Chronic Pain Rehabilitation Program, my role as **Director of Performance Improvement** is to assist with improving the performance within the VR department of PMRS by looking at and improving our processes and systems. Whether those processes and systems are large and complex or small and simple, I assist the team members in reducing “waste” and solving problems while also becoming faster and more efficient within their positions.

Most recently I mentored the VR Team on our 5S project, which won PMRS’ Earth Day Contest, and allowed us to meet our goal of all staff members to obtain their LSS Certification status, while also creating a new virtual resources document for us to use and share the most current resources, benefits, and contact information. I’m passionate about helping others and continuous process improvement.



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O.N.E. VR in the Community!



Scott Jenson, Jonathan Pagano and George Serrano Martinez represented O.N.E. VR program at the VA Resources Fair at James Haley on 10/19/2023. The event marked the first showcase for the Veteran Family Advisory Committee to which Scott Jenson serves as the President.



Antonio Reyes, George Serrano Martinez, Frances Branches and Nan Qian assisted with the decoration of the PMRS Occupational Therapy Breast Cancer Event at James Haley on 10/19/2023.



Lea Garcia, George Serrano Martinez, and Frances Branch and their family participated in the VA Trunk or Treat on 10/28/2023.



VR Team Members Craig Pagano, George Serrano, Antonio Reyes, Lea Garcia, Frances Branch, and Alyssa Scott at the PMRS Holiday Party in December 2023.



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CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist George Serrano Martinez who was awarded as **VISN 8 Employee of the Quarter!** George has been actively involved in the volunteer activities in PTRP. He is partnering with Hillsborough Education Foundation and takes veterans to volunteer every Monday from 1300-1500 to facilitate community integration. Veterans perform various tasks from putting binders/notebooks together, sorting supplies, to assisting teachers with purchasing items. VRS Serrano believes volunteer work benefits veterans in multiple ways. From the medical aspect, it's a way to measure cognitive and physical functioning. From socialization aspect, it facilitates community integration and improves social skills and communication through interacting with staff, peers, other volunteers and teachers. Last but not the least, it simulates vocational skills. VRS Serrano is passionate about his job and working with veterans with brain injury. He was also awarded for his dedication and commitment to volunteer work by Hillsborough Education Foundation on June 6th, 2023.



Congratulations to the following clinicians who are now **Specialized Vocational Evaluators:**

Craig Pagano

Jamie White

Jonathan Pagano

Nan Qian

Scott Jenson

Rashawn Thomas (Trainer)

They all participated in a 2-day workshop and learned how to recommend, administer, and interpret achievement, intelligence, and work place evaluations that will assist other referring stakeholders and Veterans to make informed decisions about their vocational paths. The team as a whole all scored over 98% for the competency exam to earn the specialization!

Congratulations to Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist Antonio Reyes who has been serving as a **Certified ADA Advocate** for PMRS at VA. He ensures compliance with the ADA and advocates for the rights and needs of veterans with disabilities. When there is an issue with an ADA violation or need for accommodation, VRS Reyes listens to veteran's problem, provides assistance, and helps them connect to the right resources, such as EEOC in Tampa and the Disability Rights of Florida. Antonio was invited to the 2023 Virtual ADA Conference for State and Local Governments and successfully completed the certificate training. Since October 2023, Antonio has processed 170+ functional capacity evaluations through the collaboration with VR Medical Director Dr. Marissa McCarthy & Occupational Therapist Wanda VanHarlinger.



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WELCOME to the Team!

Frances Branch, MRC

Ms. Frances Branch obtained her Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Kentucky in 2015. Before joining James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital, she worked for the Division of State Vocational Rehabilitation. She has years of experience working with individuals with hearing loss, vision, SCI, TBI, Stroke and other disabilities that interfere with an individual's ability to work. She has worked as a Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for seventeen years. Ms. Branch has provided professional services to people with various disabilities, age groups, and cultural backgrounds. She is currently a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist with the O.N.E. Vocational Rehabilitation Program. In her previous employment, Ms. Branch worked several years assisting veterans who were referred by the Veterans Administration. Services included job search, job development, placement, supported employment and training. Ms. Branch assisted veterans with obtaining post-secondary education as well as certifications and licenses to increase their chances for employment and obtaining a career. Ms. Branch is looking forward to continuing working with veterans and their families.



Haley Cornish, MA, CRC



Ms. Haley Cornish obtained her Master's degree in Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling from the University of South Florida, where she was a Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Scholar. While working towards her Master's degree, Ms. Cornish provided mental health services at Metropolitan Ministries, working with at-risk women and children in individual and group settings. After obtaining her degree, she accepted a position as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the State of Florida, where she worked for two and a half years and gained experience assisting people with various disabilities achieve their vocational goals. Ms. Cornish is a Registered Mental Health Counseling Intern (RMHCI) and is in the process of obtaining her license in mental health counseling.

Ms. Cornish is passionate about serving veterans and assisting in their efforts to achieve their vocational and personal goals through vocational rehabilitation counseling services.

Mario Jasso

Hello, my name is Mario Jasso I am an Advanced Medical Support Assistant and have been working for the Veteran Affairs since 2019 (4years). My hometown is El Paso, Texas and went to Sul Ross University achieving a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. My interests are sports, travel, and movies. What motivates me at work is that I have been on the other side of the coin in the VA as a veteran and I want to make sure I provide excellent service to our veterans. My mission statement is to make sure I serve our veterans with the same commitment they served our nation.



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In 2 weeks, the O.N.E. VR Team will be hosting a Veteran job fair in collaboration with Career Source Tampa Bay. Please reach out to Antonio Reyes, Antonio.Reyes3@va.gov for more information and how to register! The link is included in the flier and also available via the QR code for convenience.

Veterans Job Fair

Thursday, March 21, 2024 • 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital - 13000 Bruce B. Downs Boulevard Tampa FL 33612
JAH VA Hospital, Bldg #38 - SCI Dining Room 13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd.



For more information, please contact Vocational Rehab Services

James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital
13000 Bruce B. Downs Boulevard - Building #38 (3rd Floor) - Area C
Contact: antonio.reyes3@va.gov



Scan the QR Code or click the link to register!



<https://careersourcetampabay.com/https://careersourcetampabay.com/event/veterans-job-fair/>



A proud partner of the American Job Center network.
Programs and Initiatives are sponsored by CareerSource Tampa Bay and the State of Florida, Department of Economic Opportunity and fully supported by the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Agriculture as part of awards totaling \$23,325,277. Visit <https://www.careersourcetampabay.com/about-us/> for more information on our funding sources.

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Conference

The O.N.E. Vocational Rehabilitation Team is preparing for the first educational conference that is focused on enhancing knowledge and building connections & engagement.

To any capacity of attendance approved, we hope you can join. CEUs for all disciplines will be provided. Conference and registration information is listed below!

Please contact Alyssa Scott, Alyssa.Scott3@va.gov regarding any questions as well as interest to set up a program table at the event!

O.N.E. Vocational Rehabilitation Conference: Sharing Rehabilitation Contributions for the Future

TMS Item Number: **4654568**

Program: Start April 18, 2024 **Program: End** April 18, 2024

Place : Main Auditorium
James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital & Clinics
13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd
Tampa, Fl 33612

<https://hcm03.ns2cloud.com/sf/learning?destUrl=https%3a%2f%2fva%2dhcm03%2ens2cloud%2ecom%2flearning%2fuser%2fdeeplink%5fredirect%2ejsp%3flinkId%3dSCHEДУED%5fOFFERING%5fDETAILS%26scheduleID%3d3992428%26fromSF%3dY&company=VAHCM03>

A Special Thank you to Ms. Nan Qian who is the Writer and Content Contributor of the O.N.E. VR Newsletter!

O.N.E. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Monday through Friday—8.00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

(Saturday available by appointment only)

13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd. (mail stop 117V) , Building 38, 3rd Floor, Area C, Tampa, Florida 33612

Phone: 813.816-7150



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