The Library and Information Needs
of the
Military Veterans of Klamath County: A Community Analysis

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Abstract

The library and information needs of military veterans in Klamath County Oregon were assessed using the Community Analysis Research Institute (CARI) model. This community needs analysis involved data research on Klamath County’s military veterans based on individual, group, agency and lifestyle characteristics. Following the analysis, a library service plan was drafted to address the information needs of the veterans. Assessment tools and suggestions for evaluating plan outcomes were included in the community needs assessment for Klamath County veterans.

Keywords: military veterans, Klamath County, Oregon, library community needs analysis, assessment, library service plan
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The Primary Question for this Community Needs Analysis

What can Klamath County Library Service District to improve the lives of its military veterans?

With this question at the forefront of the community needs analysis (CNA), data has been collected from print and online sources; from observations of veteran-focused events; from asking questions of key players in the lives of veterans - both from groups and agencies; from examining library data in the integrated library system; and finally, from talking to several resident military veterans.

The question of how the library can improve the lives of veterans is simultaneously simple and complex. In a basic and passive way, the Klamath County Library Service District avails itself to anyone to take advantage of its myriad opportunities for educational, recreational and informational enrichment. From that perspective anyone, including military veterans, can use the library to improve their lives. However, a closer examination and analysis of military veterans’ needs reveals that there are multiple opportunities to target services specifically for members of this population. Discoveries made during the CNA process show that as a group, the Klamath military veterans generally want special recognition, advocacy, help with data collection regarding their own military histories, help navigating the online world of forms for military benefits, medical help (including mental health), and easy access to resources for everything from food to education.

The Author’s Role in the Community Analysis of Klamath County Military Veterans
The chief investigator and author of this CNA is a member of the administrative staff at Klamath County Library Service District. She has worked at the library for almost 17 years and has primary responsibility for the library’s reference and outreach departments as well as managerial oversight for the the District’s 11 branches, 9 of which are designated rural. She is also the primary selector for the print, audio, and visual materials, and periodicals for adults at Klamath County Library’s main branch. Her rising awareness of the needs of veterans has come through her work at the library and by living in a community with a large number of veterans and a strong military culture.

The author has primarily worked alone in the gathering of data for the community analysis, although she shared ideas with fellow library staff for the purposes of generating ideas and receiving feedback. The library director, a branch employee who is herself a veteran, and the lead worker in the library’s outreach department have all been part of a dialogue regarding the CNA. The author sees this as an ongoing cycle of analysis, implementation, and assessment, and therefore more staff participation is likely in the library’s future plans for serving military veterans.

The author is the daughter of a Korean war veteran and her brother is career military. Her father’s ignorance, for many years, of his own veteran’s benefits, combined with his low level of literacy helped the author realize that are obstacles many veterans face in getting the help they need and deserve. Her brother’s difficulty in integrating back into civilian life after 24 years in the U.S. Marine Corps also sensitized the author to the chasm of understanding which often occurs between military and civilian life.

**Klamath County Library Service District**
Klamath County is a large rural county located in central southern Oregon. The Klamath County Library Service District is a public, tax-funded library that serves the county’s population of approximately 65,000 residents. As a service district, taxation at a rate of .49 cents per $1,000.00 of assessed property value is dedicated to the library’s operations. This generates revenue of approximately $3 million dollars per year. The library’s mission is as follows:

Klamath County Library is actively committed to providing open and equal access and guidance to information resources, literature, and ideas for all our county residents. The library will maintain a diverse collection of books and other materials and protect the principles of intellectual freedom.

Approximately 42,000 residents live within the urban growth boundary of the City of Klamath Falls. The remaining 23,000 residents live in smaller, rural towns and municipalities throughout the county that range in size from 100 to 750 inhabitants. The Main branch, the South Suburban branch, and the branch inside the Klamath Basin Senior Citizen’s Center are all located within 6 miles of one another and serve the greater population. These three branches combined offer 95 library service hours within the urban growth boundary. These branches are all located in the southern quadrant of the county. Throughout the county, 9 rural branches are open anywhere from 19-26 hours per week depending on population size. All municipalities of more than 350 people have a library branch in Klamath County. Some smaller communities receive rotating collections of honor materials (may be checked out without a card) from the library. These are located in fire stations or country markets. Additionally, the library serves multiple
assisted living homes, daycares and after-school community centers with rotations of library materials. The library’s outreach department mails materials to qualified non-drivers in the county who register for this service.

The Service District is staffed by 50 employees with an full time equivalancy of 36. According the Oregon State Library Report, Klamath County’s staff are some of the lowest paid public library employees in the state. Despite this, the turnover rate for employees is very low, with the circulation department at the Main branch having the highest number of new employees each year.

The library system holds about a quarter million titles, including audio and visual materials. Circulation throughout all the branches has been increasing steadily each year since 2007 and the libraries are well-used. Every branch in the Service District has Internet-connected computers and free wireless access. All branches are united by an integrated library system (Polaris) and all circulating materials from any branch can be transferred to residents throughout the county via the library’s weekly courier service.

**The Military Veterans of Klamath County**

Because the Library Service District’s mission is to serve the entire county, the veterans of Klamath County are the subject of this community needs analysis. Military veterans comprise approximately 12% of the residents of Klamath County (U.S. Census Quickfacts, 2012). This percentage is average for the state of Oregon (Ibid). In Klamath County this percentage translates to about 7,700 veterans (Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs). Of that number, approximately half are over the age of 65 and less than 8% are under 35 years of age (U.S. Census Quickfacts, 2012). World War II veterans are around 5% of this population; Korean war
at 15%; Viet Nam war veterans at 37%, and the combined Gulf Wars at 18%. All but 9% of the county’s veterans identify as Caucasian (Ibid). Although good data is not available, there is a visible Native American veteran population that utilizes the Main branch library. This population is all male and most report having served in Viet Nam.

Klamath County’s military veterans are 97% male and only 3% female (U.S. Census Quickfacts, 2012). With such a large segment of the population being male it could be inferred that library services should focus almost exclusively on males. However, such data is not intended to downplay the needs of the female veterans. As learned during a segment of the CNA, approximately 1 in 3 female veterans are the victim of what is known as military sexual trauma (MST) (Kimerling, et al, 2007). MST is defined by the Veteran’s Health Administration as “severe or threatening forms of sexual harassment and sexual assault sustained in military service” (Ibid). Although males in the military are also victims of MST, females suffer from this malady at a rate of 3 to 1 over males (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs). Because of this, there are sometimes heightened needs for the female veterans. The number of female veterans suffering from MST in Klamath County is unknown. However, during conversations with female veterans during the CNA process, two of the women volunteered that they were victims of MST. Furthermore, serving veterans also means serving their families which, in many cases, will include female spouses, children, parents, siblings, etc. Overall, 26% of Klamath’s veterans have some disability status (Workforce Oregon).

Most of the county’s veterans have some education beyond high school. Over 50% have at least some college and 30% have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Only 14% have a high school education or less (U.S. Census Quickfacts, 2012). Educational requirements have increased for
admittance into the military since the Viet Nam war, so this small percentage with lower educational attainment are most likely veterans 54 years of age or older (calculated if a 17 year old joined the military during 1975, the last year of the war in Viet Nam). Klamath Community College and the Oregon Institute of Technology, both located in Klamath Falls, have active educational programs for veterans as well as social clubs for student veterans.

The unemployment rate for veterans is somewhat higher than it is for civilians in the county. At 13.6% unemployment, this is higher than the 11.4% state average unemployment rate for Oregon veterans. Klamath County’s overall unemployment rate is around 12% (Workforce Oregon). A couple of veterans who spoke with the author said they were having difficulties convincing employers that their skills in the military were transferable to civilian job tasks.

The Culture of Klamath County as Related to Veterans and a Few Comments on Lifestyle

Klamath County has a culture that is decidedly pro military. At all state road entries into the county signs are posted that read, “Klamath County Honors Veterans.” Kingsley Field, an Air Force base that was decommissioned after the Viet Nam war ended, is still home to the 173rd Fighter Wing of the Air National Guard. With over 900 employees, the base is significant to the county’s economy.

Main Street in Klamath Falls boasts a club specifically for Marine Corps veterans and their families. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and American Legion clubs are also located in the heart of downtown. Both institutions of higher education host associations for veterans and active military personnel. Veterans are ceremonially honored at events and parades on Memorial Day, the 4th of July, Veteran’s Day, and even during the county’s annual Snowflake Festival (a week-long Klamath event in December with numerous daily community events that includes a
night-time parade). Following the parades on Memorial Day, July 4th and Veteran’s Day, there is always a ceremony with a laying of wreaths and various military-affiliated speakers in the Veteran’s Park.

When the author attended the most recent Veteran’s Day parade in November, she identified over a dozen different military-affiliated organizations. The commemorative wreath ceremony at the Veteran’s Park following the parade revealed additional military supportive and affiliated groups and agencies.

Although the county has no department stores outside of a Fred Meyer and Wal-Mart, it does boast multiple sporting good stores, boot stores, and various farm and ranch supply stores that also carry sporting goods equipment, guns and ammunition. Klamath Falls and the smaller outlying towns have a decidedly masculine, rustic and outdoorsy feel. The surrounding rural areas, rivers and forests provide ample opportunities for hunting, fishing and camping. The local hospital and medical community struggle to recruit doctors. The reason most often cited is that the community’s rural lifestyle is not amenable to them or to their spouses and families.

Winter-like weather, including snow and freezing temperatures, lasts for approximately 7 months out of the year in Klamath County. The altitude of most of the county is over 3,000 feet and region is designated as high desert. However, during the summer months the climate is warm and very dry with almost no rainfall. Because of this, the City of Klamath Falls attracts a large number of transients, many of whom are veterans. Despite the illegality, many transients still travel by freight rail and disembark at the depot which is located near the center of the downtown area. The transient population drops significantly each fall as the weather turns cold. National statistics estimate that approximately one-third of all homeless males are military
veterans (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans). Through simple observation, the author suspects a similar if not higher percentage of veterans among Klamath County’s homeless population. Leslie Holt and Glen Holt, authors of *Public Library Services to the Poor: Doing All We Can* (2010) state that veterans often end up in the unfortunate mix of homelessness, unemployment, underemployment, and mental and physical health issues (pp.115-117). This mixture of maladies certainly appears true for too many of the veterans in Klamath.

**Resources (Or a Lack Thereof) Available to Klamath County Veterans**

Klamath County itself lists the Klamath County Veterans’ Services Office as one of its official departments, overseen by the elected board of three county commissioners. It is staffed by an FTE of 2.5. The office’s brochure lists that its aim is to provide “assistance to veterans and their dependents in filing for government benefits and services”(Klamath County). The author’s experience with this office is primarily through interactions with veterans who have tried to access its services. If a veteran is literate, computer capable, and mentally and/or physically sound enough to go through the arduous task of research, filing, and online form completion, or if he has friends or family who can help him with these tasks, his satisfaction with the office is adequate. However, the author mostly sees patrons who cannot navigate the system or who do not posses the skills to fill out the online forms. Furthermore, if a veteran becomes homeless or displaced it can be difficult for him to keep track of the many necessary documents required to file for benefits. Currently there is not adequate staffing at the county’s Veteran’s Service Office to assist those without computer skills. Additionally, the office lacks resources to help some veterans obtain the necessary documentation required for benefits applications.
As with all Oregon employment offices, veterans in Klamath County are given preferential hiring status for most jobs and veterans always have the option to go to the front of the line should they encounter lines at any state employment office. Klamath County has one employment office staff person who is dedicated specifically to serving veterans who have at least a 30% disability rating.

The county does have a small veteran’s clinic for the most basic health checks and for referral to one of the larger Veteran’s Administration clinics or hospitals in the state. Within the last month, the attending physician for the clinic resigned and there is active recruitment for a new doctor. The nearest VA clinic is 5 hours away, on the other side of the Cascade mountain range, in Roseburg, Oregon. The nearest domiciliary for veterans is 70 miles away and has a waiting list.

The county’s mental health system is woefully inadequate for the need that is presented by the population at large. Circumstances are not better for veterans specifically. There is only one private practice psychiatrist in the county and less than 10 psychiatric nurse practitioners. There is no mental health or psychiatric ward at the local hospital. Individuals requiring inpatient psychiatric care must be transported by ambulance to the city of Medford, Oregon which is 70 miles from Klamath Falls and on the other side of the Cascade mountain range. One private practice counselor in Klamath Falls, Vard Miller, dedicates the majority of his office hours to seeing veterans. Vard is a licensed clinical social worker who specializes in the concerns of veterans and their families. He has conducted many veterans counseling and support groups over the years. Other counselors and social workers also see veterans as clients but Vard is the only
one who specializes in this population. However, he does not accept Medicare and his fees are not on a sliding scale.

Several years ago the County, in conjunction with the Oregon attorney general’s office, set up what is known as a Veteran’s Court. Veterans who have committed certain crimes and who admit guilt in those crimes are eligible for trial and process in this special court. Judges, attorneys and jurors are provided with training to assess if the veteran’s crime was somehow related to post traumatic stress disorder or due to other maladies associated with separation from military service. Sentencing in such cases is often more lenient provided that the veteran undergo treatment, including counseling.

For social camaraderie and support, there are myriad organizations in town. The VFW, the American Legion, the Noncommissioned Officers Club and the Marine Corps League fill a social need for many of the veterans who are qualified to join them. For more serious issues there is the Prisoners of War-Missing in Action group and the Disabled American Veterans chapter. The Klamath Tribes have a group specifically for veterans. The local chapter of The Daughters of the American Revolution provides some services to veterans, as does the local chapter of the service organization known as The Exchange Club. Several of the local assisted living facilities pay special attention to their resident veterans. A group new to the county called The Klamath Freedom Celebration hosts various events to raise money to give to military families in need. The local Gospel Mission provides a bed and meals to the homeless of the county on the condition that they are sober. Many of the mission’s guests are military veterans.

Oregon Institute of Technology (OIT) and Klamath Community College (KCC) each have veteran’s associations within the schools. The OIT campus has a special area inside the
student union building that is exclusively for the use of students who are military veterans. The KCC campus hosts a club for student veterans.

The Klamath County Library itself provides an ongoing, passive level of service to the military veterans in the community. The library provides relaxation space, Internet-enabled computers, and many books and videos that may be of specific interest to military veterans and their families. The library also participates in two annual partnership events that provide more direct service to veterans and their families. One event is called Operation Family Connect and is held each spring, usually at the Veteran’s Park. This is a multi-agency event organized by the Klamath Lake Community Action Services non-profit. This event provides free health checks, vouchers for food and clothing, and other resources that people who are homeless or on the verge of homelessness can avail themselves to. The library participates by giving out free, good-condition books for adults and children and also makes this population aware of the library’s many resources including free Internet access, book clubs, and story times and crafts for youth. After participating in this event for three years it was noted that a significant number of people who attend this event are military veterans.

A second event that the library’s outreach department participates in is specifically for military veterans. Held in the summer time, The Stand Down, much like Family Connect, is a multi-agency event that provides materials (sleeping bags, boots, military surplus, food, clothing) and information to the county’s military veteran population. To gain admission to the Stand Down, participants must show identification or other paperwork which will identify them as military veterans. Here, the library also gives away free, good-condition library books and disseminates information about the library’s resources.
This year at the August Stand Down the library advertised and recruited for a special program called Voices of Patriots. The program is an offering by the library for veterans and the public made possible through Oregon Humanities grant funding and additional financial support from the Friends of the Klamath County Library. The Voices of Patriots program selected four recent documentaries about the experience of military veterans returning from active duty, usually in combat zones. One film was shown each month in August, September, October and November of 2012. For each film 6 Klamath County military veterans were recruited to do the following: 1. Watch the film as a group. 2. Meet two additional times to write about the film and their own experiences, and share the writing with the rest of the group if they wished to do so. 3. Watch the film again, this time with the public invited. Following the film, the veterans serve on a panel to answer questions from the audience about the film and their own experiences returning from duty. Each group is facilitated by a resident scholar or a member of the community with some authority on veterans’ issues. After a veteran completes all four segments of the program, he or she is paid a $100.00 (one hundred dollar) honorarium. Voices of Patriots is perhaps the first assertive program specifically targeting veterans that the library has ever participated in.

The author and her colleagues’ work at the reference desk also reveals that a significant number of library users are veterans. Several veterans, especially veterans of the wars in Korea and Viet Nam, wear caps or t-shirts that show that they served in various conflicts. The nature of many reference questions reveal that the library provides assistance and information for veterans looking for their own military records, looking for help in the process of filing for veteran’s benefits, looking for history books and Internet articles about the conflicts they participated in,
and looking for resources regarding their own impoverished circumstances, such as homelessness and unemployment.

A special criticism the official phone book that serves Klamath County: In the U.S. West Dex Yellow Pages, there are only two entries listed under the heading Veterans’ and Military Organizations. One listing is for the American Legion and the other listing is for the VFW in the neighboring county. No other veteran-specific listing are located anywhere else in these Yellow Pages.

**The Information Needs of Klamath County Veterans**

The most immediately obvious information deficit for the military veteran’s in the library’s service district is that there is not a comprehensive resource list or website to direct them to any of the various groups or agencies that exist for their benefit. The discovery of any such resources would come only to those being diligent in pursuit of them. At this point in time, word of mouth and referral by clergy and social service agencies seem to be the best methods for connecting veterans to the available information and service resources.

Different agencies and individuals that provide services to veterans have perspectives about veterans’ needs which they shared with the author. Orlando Williams at Worksource Employment believes that veterans need more access to gainful employment. A coordinator for the Veteran’s Court, believes that veterans need more access to treatment, counseling and information in general. Jack Coffey, a Lutheran minister and Viet Nam veteran, thinks that more resources need to be available to help soldiers transition back to civilian life. He is also concerned with the high rates of domestic violence and homelessness surrounding the veteran community. Carol Imani, the coordinator for the Voices of Patriots program at the library is
concerned that there are not enough counseling resources for the population and that there is a stigma attached to accessing the ones that are available. She feels that more community awareness about what veterans face in civilian life would help this, and this was one of her primary motivations for pushing the project to fruition.

The director of the County’s Veterans’ Services Office expressed concern about many veterans’ abilities to navigate the paperwork and documentation required to apply for benefits. In the last year and a half, applying for benefits has shifted away from paper forms to a completely online environment. For veterans on the wrong side of the digital divide, this is another obstacle on the arduous path to applying for benefits. The inadequately staffed veteran’s office cannot do the legwork for the veterans nor can they teach literacy or computer skills. There is just barely enough time in the office to help those who are capable of helping themselves. Despite the many groups veteran-supportive community groups, advocacy for benefits and help with the paper trail are woefully lacking for many who need them.

While no formal or comprehensive survey of veterans was undertaken during this phase of the CNA, the author was able to observe and speak with several of those who participated in the Voices of Patriots film, writing and discussion program. Several themes were repeated during the veterans’ question and answer sessions following the public film screenings. Many veterans said that they liked to be recognized for their service and that a thank you or kind word meant a lot to them. At the same time, veterans expressed irritation that they are only recognized on Veteran’s Day or other military holidays. They feel that this is lip service and does not provide them with substantial help with some of the problems they face.
Wishing that civilians could understand what they went through in the military was also often-voiced with the caveat that it would be difficult for anyone outside the situation to understand it. One woman said, “The military experience is every day of our lives, no matter how many years we’ve been out.” Many also spoke about their difficult emotions, especially with trouble accessing tender or loving feelings. One woman who served three tours of duty in Iraq says that she can muster feelings of love for her children but not for anyone else. Other vets spoke of pervasive feelings of fear, failure, and helplessness. Those who lost friends or comrades struggled with feelings of guilt specifically.

Some veterans mentioned that they went into the military thinking it would guarantee them good employment opportunities after their discharge back to civilian life. For many this was not true. They say their military skills do not transfer well to office jobs or employment at big box stores like Wal-Mart.

Perhaps one of the loudest frustrations mentioned by veterans in this group is that many who have struggled with access to Veterans’ Administration benefits are angry and some feel hopeless. One man explained the 10 year struggle it took for him to get any VA medical benefits despite proof that he was obviously disabled by a military accident. Another woman explained that she has been trying for three years to get help. All of her claims were denied until she found an advocate who is currently helping her get around obstacles in the red tape of the process. She emphatically stated, “Advocacy is critical.”

The rural branches provide particular challenges for the author in terms of analysis and service delivery. All areas of the county have military veterans. The rural community closest to the Main Library is 20 minutes away, the furthest one over an hour away. All rural branch hours
are sparse, spanning from 19-26 open hours. One rural community in particular, Sprague River, has many military veterans despite there being little indication of this on the U.S. Census data. This community has a reputation as a place where people go to drop out of society. This behavior often includes avoiding the Census and having as little as possible to do with any government agency. Some people choose to tear up their Social Security cards, live off the power-grid and take the risk of driving without a driver’s license. Despite the rejection of societal structures generally and governmental agencies particularly, these veterans are frequent users of the rural Sprague River branch.

**Methods of Data Collection for this Community Needs Analysis**

The author utilized the Community Analysis Research Institute (CARI) model (Greer, et al, 2010) for collecting data on the veterans of Klamath County. Per the CARI model, data was collected about individuals, groups, agencies and lifestyles pertinent to county’s military veteran population.

Data about individuals was gathered by searching various United States Census Bureau websites including American Fact Finder and the American Community Survey. The Workforce Oregon, Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI), and the Oregon Rural Communities Explorer websites were utilized as well.

Because Klamath County Library does not gather data about veteran status during the patron registration process, no data is available about the number of veterans it currently serves. The library also holds many titles in print and audio-visual form which may be of particular interest to veterans and their families. These include titles about post traumatic stress disorder, military family life, transitioning to civilian life and a wide array of information about various
U.S. wars and conflicts. At this point, no study of circulation usage has been analyzed although this may be useful information to obtain.

Data about groups and agencies was at first difficult to find. The author had to rely on word of mouth for much of the information. When one group or agency was located, questions were asked about other affiliated agencies. Because the local military culture is so active, a daily scan of the local newspaper for one month revealed several veteran’s affiliated events and activities hosted by various groups. Agency information was not as evident in the newspaper and had to be located by asking those who had knowledge of it. The local phone book was nearly worthless and there are no comprehensive websites or resource pages available that list the groups or agencies in the county that are veteran-affiliated. The biggest breakthrough for group and agency data collection occurred for the author in early November, 2012 at the Klamath County Veteran’s Day parade and at a memorial service held at the Veteran’s Park.

The parade and memorial service were also instrumental in providing the author with a more concrete inroad to the lifestyle and culture surrounding military veterans in the county. In addition to the groups and agencies identified in the parade (American Legion, American Legion Ladies’ Auxiliary, The Elks, The POW-MIA Association, the Marine Corps League, The 173rd Fighter Wing of the Air National Guard, Disabled American Veterans Association, The OIT Veteran’s Association, Klamath Freedom Celebration, Kingsley Field Junior Enlisted Council, the Non-Commissioned Officers Club, The Exchange Club, The Kiwanis Club), other groups and businesses also marched to show their support, including troops of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and 2 assisted living homes.
At the memorial service in Veteran’s Park following the parade, Klamath County itself made a showing to represent its service office. A Korean war veterans group made a speech and the local Daughters of the American Revolution pledged their ongoing support to the veterans of the community.

The ability to meet, observe and ask questions of the 26 veterans who participated in the Voices of Patriots program was invaluable. Few sources can speak better to the needs of veterans than firsthand accounts from the individuals themselves. Listening to the participants provided information about individuals and about lifestyle. It was also informative to hear how veterans interact with the various groups and agencies designed to support them. An unintentional but particularly favorable outcome of the Voices of Patriots project was that only 2 of the 24 participants, and a 2 of the experts / scholars were library users before the program. This provided a very useful glimpse into the lives and needs of library non-users. At least half of the recruitment of the program was done at the Stand Down event. This event will prove useful in the future for discovering more about the needs of veterans who are not currently library users.

**A Library Service Plan for Veterans**

It should first be mentioned that a CNA for better service to the veterans in Klamath County will be an ongoing project for some time. The author foresees that it could take one to two years to fully implement some successful programs and make some procedural changes that would benefit veteran patrons. The library will take a variety of approaches to increase efficacious service to veterans, with more services that are reactive and assertive (Greer, et al, 2010) to the needs of this special community (pp. 177-178).
As soon as possible, with the permission of the board, the library should have a veteran’s status checkbox on the patron registration card. Because the library has had success in retroactively requesting email addresses and text notification information from patrons, asking for veteran status of existing patrons may also prove easy. Within 6-18 months time the library will have a better idea of the active number of library card holders with veteran status. Because many veterans also state that they like recognition, the library will explore the creation of a special library card or a special adhesive sticker for their cards.

A resource link from the library’s webpage is an obvious and long overdue need to address. A resource page will be built early in the new year. It will be edited and supplemented in an ongoing process. This resource page can be printed out and kept on hand for those who are not computer users. This new service will be advertised in a press release to local newspapers and radio stations. Such publicity may also generate more content for the resource page.

Part of the resource page will include local health care information in addition to the numbers and contacts for the VA clinics and hospitals in the state. Because of the need repeatedly stated by agency workers and the Voices of Patriots participants, it is recommended that a library staff member call all of the licensed counselors and social workers listed in the Yellow Pages (there are less than 20) to ask them if they work with veterans. If they answer affirmatively, library staff will then ask their permission to add their business contact to the veteran’s resource page. Churches and clergy will also be surveyed for inclusion on the resource page as some of them provide counseling and other services that veterans might need.

During the exploratory stage for the Voices of Patriots project, the library held several brainstorming sessions with representatives from the Veterans’ Services office and the two higher
education institutions in Klamath. A veteran representative from the community college attended the meetings and repeatedly asked if the library might have a monthly or quarterly Veterans Only Night at the library. Although the library does not wish to restrict access to any patrons, it does close at 5 pm on 4 out of 7 days. It will be worth exploring to see if a veterans-only evening, after hours on one of the early-closure nights might be successful or useful.

Advocacy, especially in navigating the Veterans’ Administration, was a repeated theme. The library should recruit a group of competent and compassionate volunteers to help veterans research necessary documentation and assist them filling out online forms. This activity might be an ideal us of a Veterans Only Night. This opportunity is also a potential a partnership with the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Many of the D. A. R. are excellent researchers in the genealogy field and these skills are likely transferable to helping veterans with research. Additionally, some anecdotal evidence suggests that veterans respond well to help from other veterans. It will be worth exploring to see if a peer-to-peer volunteer team comprised of veterans might be a good source of help for less-abled veterans in the library. In the meantime, reference staff must learn all they can about veterans’ obstacles to obtaining benefits, and plan to proactively help veterans who are struggling with this process. Again, a press release to the local newspaper and a sign at the reference desks will help let people know that it is permissible to approach library staff with complex questions and research needs.

In recent years some libraries have hosted programs featuring community members’ stories, told by the community members themselves. The public can attend to learn more about someone else in their community whose life they may find mysterious or fascinating. The programs have names like Check Out a Lawyer, or Check Out a Scientist. The library could
utilize some sort of survey instrument to see if a Check Out a (World War II, Viet Nam, Gulf War, etc.) Veteran would be helpful to the veterans, as well as useful and helpful to the public. This program may provide good partnership opportunities with the Klamath Basin Senior Citizen’s Center as well as several assisted living homes.

This summer at the 2013 Stand Down will be a good time to create a list of potential services and programs and have participants rank what they would find useful. Additionally, a comment box should be provided for veterans to write down ideas for programs and services they would like. Or, they can share these ideas verbally with library staff who will be on hand at the Stand Down.

Finally, one of the most visible ways for the library to announce its support for the veteran’s community is to participate in the Veteran’s Day parade. The library marches in the Snowflake, Cinco de Mayo and July 4th parades. This will be a good addition to let the community know the library is a place that provides services and cares about veterans.

Assessing the Elements of the Service Plan

The Klamath County Library Service District currently has no data on the number of military veterans who utilize its services. Adding this status during the card registration process (and after-the-fact, where possible) will provide a better snapshot of active veteran cardholders within a 6-18 month timeframe. Statistics on veteran cardholders will be generated every six months to look for patterns of increase or decrease. This will create a baseline for the library to know how many of the 7,700+ veteran residents are active users of its materials and services.

Counting the number of hits or visits to a resource page linked from the library’s homepage will indicate if it is being found. Scheduled campaigns to advertise the resource page
will be followed up by measuring traffic to the website. Communications and requests from other agencies and groups who want their information on the resource page will also be counted as interest in the project.

If the library is able to start a Veterans Only Night, attendance will be tracked and evaluation forms will be made available. It may be that the library will have to try different evenings and approaches to make this a useful and successful program. Likewise the library will track its ability to recruit, train and utilize volunteers for an advocacy program that helps veterans navigate benefits paperwork and procedures. Attendance and feedback will also provide assessment for a Check Out a Veteran program.

Some assessment will also take place through intuitive and general feedback. If the library will raise the issue of supporting veterans to a higher, more service-assertive standing, veterans and the community at large will likely provide feedback, evaluation and suggestions as well as support.

**The Klamath County Library Service District and Veterans: A Better Future Together**

The library is well situated in the community to make a bigger difference in the lives of veterans. With a moderate amount of effort, good publicity, and a commitment to listening to and responding to feedback, the library will be able to raise its value and contribution to the veterans in the community. Because Klamath County’s culture is largely supportive and appreciate of military service and veterans, a higher profile for veterans’ assistance programs and projects will also increase the library’s value to the community as a whole.
References


