

## KARLA PETERSON

Goes to work every day with one mission: **Assist Veterans in need.**

Although she hasn't served in the military, Peterson has worked with Veterans for nearly six years and has extensive knowledge of mental health and substance use services. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Peterson said she finds reward in giving back to those who served.



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“Working with Veterans has been the most challenging and rewarding work I have ever done,” she said. “They have sacrificed so much for our country and this is my way to honor and say thank you to those that served.”

Peterson works as the Region 3 coordinator of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program. Coordinators like Peterson work across the state to connect Veterans to community services and provide case management and support, with a special focus on treatment and recovery. She has an office in Chippewa Falls, but is rarely able to spend time in it, as she spends her day working directly with Veterans throughout her region,

which includes St. Croix, Pierce, Dunn, Pepin, Chippewa, Eau Claire, Taylor and Clark counties.

Through the WDVA's VORP, Veterans can receive crisis services, as well as on-the-street case management in order to get them treatment for mental health and/or substance use care, including paying for private treatment. A vital part of Peterson's job is to collaborate with those in the community, and she works closely with County Veterans Service Officers, Veteran service organizations, local government agencies, community nonprofits, and many others.

Establishing those close relationships allows Veterans to

receive individualized wrap-around services such as housing, food, clothing, furniture, education, and employment.

“I have worked with Karla and the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program for over five years, and her compassion and true professionalism shine through as she continues to help out Veterans in the community,” Center for Veterans Issues/Supportive Services for Veterans Families Program Manager Angela Friend said.

A few months ago, Peterson met a Veteran in St. Croix County who was about to be homeless due to the shelter he lived in closing. With a limited income, the Veteran requested assistance from the VORP for an emergency hotel stay. The program provided the Veteran with a one-week hotel stay, and Peterson helped by getting food from the local food pantry, in addition to helping the Veteran fill out housing and job applications. She was influential in getting the Veteran placed in a transitional housing program in Janesville, and she even transported him to the facility.

“If it weren’t for Ms. Peterson and the work that she put in with me, I would still be out on the streets,” the Veteran said. “Thank you so much to her for what she has done for me and all the great help she gives to all of us Vets.”

The WDVA’s VORP started out as a pilot program in 49 counties in 2014 and recently expanded to all 72 counties in Wisconsin. Since the program’s inception, coordinators have helped about 500 Veterans obtain mental health services, substance and alcohol treatment, and other supportive services.

If you know of a Veteran in need within Peterson’s region, you can call or text her at 608-381-1525.

**VORP staff work with community partners and professionals to provide assistance and connection to:**

- Mental Health Services
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Financial Assistance
- Housing and Utilities
- Claims and Benefits Assistance
- Employment and Education
- Transportation
- And many other services

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**Angela Friend**

*Center for Veterans Issues/Supportive Services  
for Veterans Families Program Manager*