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2025 Jan Veteran Voices - WA Dept of Veterans Affairs

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WDVA Veteran Voices

January 2025

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Greetings from your WDVA Director: David Puente

As we end 2024, I want to take a moment to reflect on the tremendous progress we've made together in our mission of **Serving Those Who Served**. It's only natural to begin looking forward to the opportunities and challenges of 2025. But before we do, it's important that we take a pause and celebrate the incredible accomplishments we've achieved in the past 12 months.

In 2024, we faced numerous challenges, yet together we navigated them with determination, compassion and a steadfast commitment to our transitioning service members, Veterans and their families. Every step we took, every initiative we launched and every service we provided has made a profound impact on the lives of those who have served our country. Whether it was through expanding our transitional housing programs, providing critical mental health support, ensuring Veterans received their earned benefits, or strengthening relationships with community partners, we've proven that we are a team that works relentlessly for the betterment of the lives of our Veterans and their families. Our team includes the many community partners, non-profits, fellow state agencies, federal partners, Veteran Service Organizations and many others, who have helped make 2024 such a success in serving Veterans. You all have helped us make a difference, and it shows!

To read the full article and to view WDVA's 2024 accomplishments visit, [2024 Year in Review - A Message from WDVA Director David Puente | WDVA](#)

2024 Year in Review

Save and Transform Lives

628

Individuals trained to recognize crisis and make referrals. WDVA is leading efforts for the Governor's Challenge to End Veteran Suicide

101

Veterans screened. Receipt of \$750,000 for 3rd year of VA Staff Sergeant Fox Suicide Prevention Grant.

612

Veterans reached in six newly added rural counties after expansion of Peer Support Services

1290

Veterans and providers trained at 62 free events funded by a \$400,000 King County Veterans Training Support Center grant

54

Traumatic Brain Injury Program events, reaching 700 Veterans with resources, indirect, and direct services

133

Veterans housed, exceeding the 2024 goal of 80. The Transitional Housing Program also expanded to 135 beds

13,500

Counseling hours provided at no cost to Veterans and families statewide

27

Veterans participated in Veterans Conservation Corps Internships, resulting in 13 employments, 3 pursuing higher degrees, and 8 continuing internships.

Respect, Empower, and Inspire Everyone

12

New employees hired after creating career paths for licensed nurses and the opening of an NAC Academy. 23% higher retention rate and 93% first time pass rate for Academy students

Be the Leading State in Veteran Service Delivery and Outcomes

Holiday Recap

Lots of Cheer at the Port Orchard Transitional Housing Program Holiday Celebration



Our clients and staff enjoyed an afternoon of gift giving, festive gift raffles, and heartwarming moments of singing together.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who contributed to making this celebration special. Your generosity and support ensure that our veterans feel valued and appreciated, especially during this joyous season.

Here's to many more moments of togetherness and celebration!

View more photos here: [Port Orchard Transitional Housing Program Holiday Celebration](#)

Navy Veteran expresses heartfelt feelings about the family atmosphere at the Washington Soldiers Home

Click the link below to watch the video testimonial of Dani, Navy Veteran and resident at Washington Soldier's Home.

[Washington Soldier's Home resident enjoys family atmosphere](#)

For more Holiday photos and videos from the Washington Soldier's Home, visit the links below.

Volunteer Video Interview - https://youtu.be/cP7PG_cHm44

WSH Photos - [2024.12.19 Washington Soldiers Home Holiday Celebration | Flickr](#)



WDVA News and Current Events



2025 Legislative Session

The 2025 Legislative Session begins on January 13, 2025. You can stay connected and keep track of bills that may impact Veterans and their families through our website [WDVA Legislative Updates](#) or by signing up for [Weekly Legislative e-mail Updates](#).

You can also visit the Legislature's newly updated website at [Bills](#) for more detailed bill information and watch committee hearings on [TVW](#).

Your Brain Injury and Recovery Program is starting monthly peer groups for Veterans and military families

Our Veteran Peer Groups assist participants in overcoming obstacles by providing experienced guidance and encouraging general problem-solving abilities

Join us for the first Peer Group on January 14 from 5:30 - 7:00 at Elks Lodge #1181, 4131 Pine Rd. NE, Bremerton WA 98310.

We welcome veterans, military families and caregivers.

A trained Veteran Peer Group Facilitator will lead each group.



Forward2Gether
 Veteran and Military Families
 Brain Injury Peer Group
<https://www.dva.wa.gov/tbi>

Join us for the first Veteran and Military Family Brain Injury Peer Group

January 14
 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.
 Elks Lodge #1181
 4131 Pine Rd. NE
 Bremerton, WA 98310

Our peer groups assist participants in overcoming obstacles by providing experienced guidance and encouraging general problem-solving abilities

We welcome veterans, military families and caregivers
 All peer groups will be conducted in person on the 2nd Tuesday of every month

Brain Injury and Recovery Team
 Heather Bahme, 509-828-0449 or Heather.Bahme@dva.wa.gov
 Brianna Platt, 360-536-5268 or brianna.platt@dva.wa.gov
 or e-mail tbi@veteransconnect.wa.gov

Monthly Peer Groups will be conducted in person on the **2nd Tuesday of each Month from 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.**

To learn more about the Brain Injury and Recovery Program, visit [Brain Injury & Recovery-TBI Program | WDVA](#)



Meatball the Foster Dog: A Heartwarming Success Story at Washington Veterans Home

Meet Meatball, the senior foster dog who found her forever home in the most heartwarming way thanks to a wonderful partnership between the Washington Veterans Home (WVH) – Retsil and the Kitsap Humane Society (KHS). Together, these two organizations have created a Senior Foster Dog Program that helps dogs like Meatball find loving homes through the dedication and commitment of the residents living at

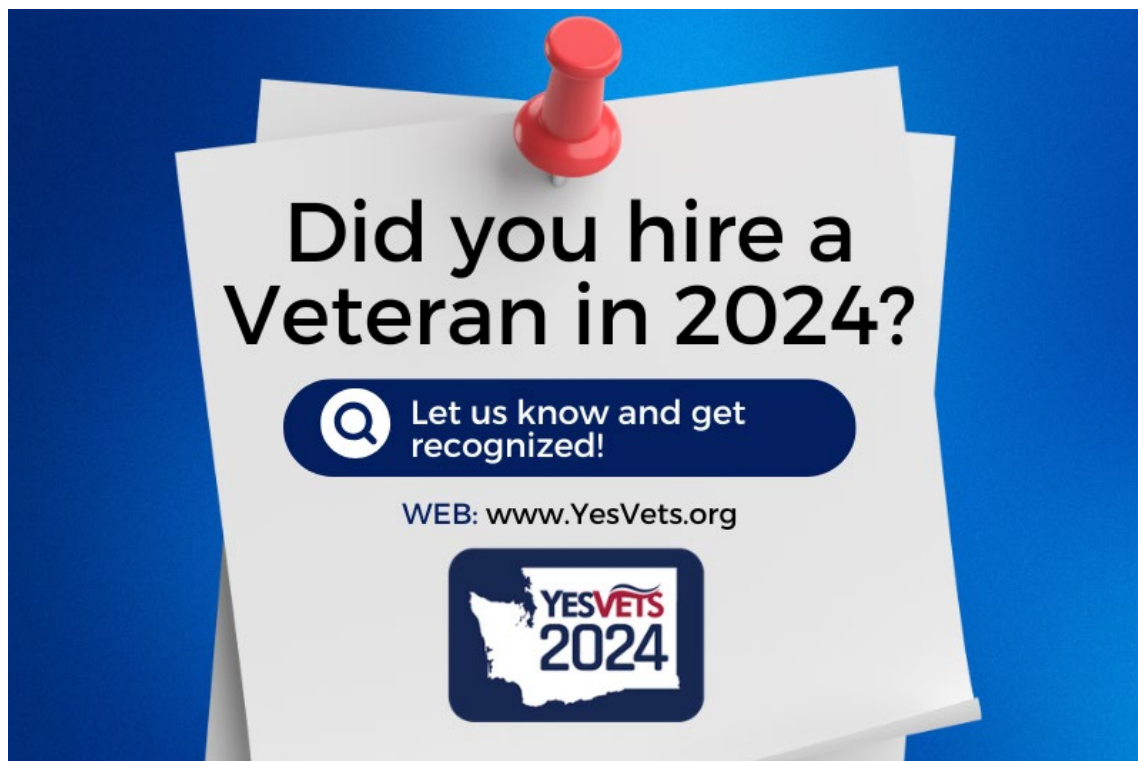
Retsil.

Meatball’s journey to Retsil started with her being a lovable dog in her “golden years,” looking for a second chance at happiness. Through the collaboration with KHS, Meatball was chosen as one of the dogs to join the Retsil community, where residents would foster her, offering love, care, and provide all the daily tasks required to keep her healthy, happy and safe while she waited for a family to adopt her. This initiative was designed to help dogs who might face challenges in finding a home, particularly older dogs, who often need a little extra time and attention.

To read the whole article visit: [Meatball the Foster Dog: A Heartwarming Success Story at Washington Veterans Home – Retsil | WDVA](#)

For more photos of Meatball visit [2024.12.09 Meatball the Foster Dog at Washington Veterans Home - Port Orchard | Flickr](#)

Did You hire a Veteran in 2024?



Washington State's YesVets program is celebrating a 30% increase in participating employers, with 2,183 businesses now enrolled. The program, which helps foster a supportive community for Veterans, encourages employers to register their Veteran hires and gain recognition for their commitment to supporting those who have served in the U.S. military.

Learn more, visit: [Did You Hire a Veteran in 2024?](#)

To register visit, [YesVets veteran hiring program | Employment Security Department](#)

Check out what's happening at our Veterans Homes



Washington Veterans Home

One of our favorite traditions at the Washington Veterans Home is the Academy of Dance performance featuring selections from "The Nutcracker."

The combination of music and dancing, along with the joyful presence of children in the building, truly brings the spirit of the season to life!

Washington Soldiers Home

From festive decorations to heartfelt music and delicious treats, it was a celebration filled with warmth, laughter, and gratitude at the Washington Soldier's Home.



It's moments like these that remind us of the true spirit of the season.

Wishing all our veterans, families, and staff Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!



Walla Walla Veterans Home

This year's Holiday Celebration with the [Volunteers Love Serving Veterans](#) team was nothing short of amazing!

Residents, staff and volunteers enjoyed music, gift bags, delightful refreshments and memorable conversations.

A huge Thank You to [Volunteers Love Serving Veterans](#) for making this a wonderful and heartfelt event.

Spokane Veterans Home

What a fantastic holiday party we had at the Spokane Veterans Home! The smiles and laughter were contagious as we celebrated with our wonderful residents. From festive decorations to delicious treats, every moment was filled with joy and camaraderie.

A big thank you to all the volunteers and staff who made this event so special. Your dedication and hard work truly shone through. And to our incredible veterans, we are so grateful for your service and loved celebrating this season with you.

Here's to more heartwarming moments and cherished memories.



WDVA Job Opportunities

Hot Jobs - Incentives Available

Take a look at our [available opportunities](#) with WDVA!



Events & Observances Calendar

[Click Here to View Upcoming Events](#)

Home / Calendar

Calendar

< > **today** January 2025
month week day list

[Submit an event for posting consideration.](#)
 Submissions accepted will be added within 2 business days if your submission meets the criteria.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
29	30	31	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8

10:00 VAAC Town Hall - tentative location Kelso -

[Submit an Event](#)

Program Highlight - LGBTQ+ Veterans



Your Washington Department of Veterans Affairs is committed to a diverse workforce, and an inclusive workspace and understands that diversity and inclusion are essential for delivering the best service to Washington State’s veterans. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer+ (LGBTQ+) community is a vital facet of our veteran population. Each day we are advocating, celebrating diversity, and promoting inclusion and equal protection.

To learn more visit, [LGBTQ+ Veterans | WDVA](#)

Learn more about the changes to the Washington State's Definition of a Veteran - for the purpose of State Veterans Benefits - [Definition of a Veteran | WDVA](#)

WASHINGTON STATE'S DEFINITION OF A VETERAN

DEFINITION OF A VETERAN FOR THE PURPOSE OF STATE VETERANS BENEFITS

▶ AS OF JUNE 6, 2024, THE STATE OF WASHINGTON HAS
BROADENED ITS DEFINITION OF A "VETERAN" TO INCLUDE:

- **Inclusive Criteria:** Veterans who were separated with less than honorable characterizations of service (discharges) due solely to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or actions or statements related to sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, regardless of characterization of service.
- **Eligibility for Federal Benefits:** Any veteran already eligible for federal Department of Veterans Affairs monetary benefits (non-service-connected pension and disability compensation).

▶ IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHANGES:

- **Additional Benefits:** State veterans benefits encompass various programs, including county veterans assistance funds, civil service employment preference, state parks passes, hunting and fishing licenses, admission to state soldiers and veterans homes, homeownership down payment assistance, licensing extensions, property tax relief, and tuition waivers at public colleges.
- **Bipartisan Support:** This legislation, requested by the Attorney General's Office, passed unanimously with bipartisan backing.
- **Department of Licensing:** The Department of Licensing license plate related sections of the new law have a later effective date of April 1, 2025.

▶ LEARN MORE:

www.dva.wa.gov/definition-veteran or
communications@dva.wa.gov



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Email Address

e.g. name@example.com

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