

THE VETERAN TO VETERAN CAFÉ

Setting up a café:

Contact the Activities Director at the facility:

Inquire about the number of Veterans they have and explain the premise of the café.

There is generally **no agenda** for the café, as it is specifically to get the Vets talking to each other and sharing their military experiences.

(We have found that a café can be successful with as few as four or five Veterans)

Set a date for the café, generally at least 4-6 weeks out, so there is time to display special flyers alerting the Vets to the function (and it can also be put on the facility calendar).

We create a simple flyer that lets the Vets know this is basically a social coffee hour event (always one hour long).

The **flyer informs** them that **they can attend to simply listen, share their stories, or just enjoy the provided refreshments.**

Additionally, we create a simple invitation that the activity director delivers to each Veteran. The individual invitation has resulted in more of them attending the Cafés.

The day of the Café

The facilitators welcome the veterans and asks them what branch of the military they served in.

Thank them for their service – if Vietnam Vet- Welcome them Home and then thank them for their service.

Serve the refreshments and just mingle, asking where they served, but let them direct the conversation. We have found that most of the end-of-life veterans will talk about their service, eventually.

Sometimes we do patriotic readings or a prayer honoring veterans.

We have done some **Special Cafes**, in which we included special conversation starters. On Memorial Day each facilitator shared a story about a soldier they had known that died, in wartime. These stories helped prompt some of the Vets to share their own stories of fallen comrades. This was a highly emotional café, but tremendously cathartic for many of the Vets.

(It is not just important that the Veterans know they are not forgotten, but it is clearly important to these Veterans that their comrades who never returned home are not forgotten).

Another example of a **Special Café** was one for the Fourth of July. For this one we decorated the room with patriotic decorations and made it feel like a celebration of the freedom we have because of these Veterans. We began with *The Pledge of Allegiance* to the flag. We included special readings about freedom, also and made sure they knew we enjoyed this freedom because of their service.

We have one facility that has scheduled these Cafés once a month, for the whole year because the Veterans want them.

The Cafés are always about honoring these Veterans and allowing them a space to talk about painful military experiences, with fellow soldiers (if they choose to).