

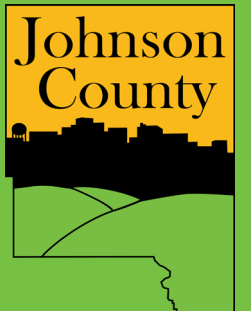
Annual Progress Report:

Veteran Services

Presenter Name: Mandy Coates

Date of Report: October 1, 2025

Reporting Period: January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025





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Budget Overview

- **Annual Budget Allocation FY25:** \$296,530.00
- **Expenditures for FY25:** \$186,196.10
- **Budget Utilization Rate:** 63%
- **Revenue:** We do not generate revenue directly into the county budget. We do assist with generating over 3.1 million dollars monthly in federal revenue that is awarded to Johnson County Veterans and their dependents. This is from VA compensation and pension benefits; a majority of these funds are spent right back in the community.
- **Key Investments:** Largest expenditure/investment is for personnel. The second largest expenditure is temporary emergency services to Veterans that include rent, utilities, food, gas, and burial services.
- **Grants:** \$10,000.00 from the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs. Possible reimbursement up to \$3,000.00 from the IDVA for additional national or state training costs. Allocation must be supplemented and not supplanted.
- **Challenges & Adjustments:** Staffing changes and military leave orders made the FY25 budget severely underutilized. Does not provide a good foundation for concrete predictions for the next budgeting season.

Staffing & Workforce Development

- **Current Staffing Levels:** 2
- **New Hires:** 1 - Joshua Brown, CVSO (County Veteran Service Officer) was hired in February and left on military orders in April. He returned September 1st.
- **Departures, Vacancies & Hiring Plans:** Prior director resigned. No vacancies or plans to add additional staff.
- **Challenges in Recruitment & Retention:** None.
- **Training & Professional Development:** I am cross-accredited with 7 Veteran Service Organizations. I attended three, week-long conferences for CEU's in 2025. I participated in several single-subject training classes held by the Iowa Association of County Veteran Service officers and attended numerous VA Regional Office Stakeholder events.
- **Staff Assessment and On-going Feedback:** Staff and I have daily interaction during this training period. After accreditation we will set time aside at least once a week to discuss caseload, training, and priorities.
- **Oversight:** PTO Accruals (Coates: Vacation = 74.82, Sick = 157.68)
- **Succession planning:** Succession planning will take place once Josh is fully accredited and comfortable with his current job duties.

Key Metrics & Performance Indicators

- **Service Delivery Metrics:** We provide a 24-hour response time for return emails and calls. We often are thanked with our quick response time. We can usually get a Veteran or dependent in within a week or two for federal claim work. For general temporary emergency assistance, we get them in the same week or pay cycle.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Digitalizing paper files has reduced our paper and toner usage. Utilization of claim progress notes allows each VSO to know what service was provided along with the details in our claim system.
- **Community Impact:** In FY25 we provided 65 temporary emergency assists for Veterans General Assistance. We completed and submitted 652 federal claims. We average 278 phone calls per month. We receive many word of mouth referrals for anything Veteran-related in the community.
- **Compliance & Regulatory Tasks:** Iowa Code § 35.B 6 requires the Veterans Affairs Executive Director to hold certification federally required to hold a personal identification verification card and complete 20 CEU's to maintain their position. I have met these requirements.
- **Safety & Risk Management:** We did not have any work-related injuries. If a remodel is considered in the future, a barrier between the entrance of the Health and Human Service building, and the first three offices directly inside the door would be requested.

Major Accomplishments

- Provided outreach at 19 events where we had a table or provided a presentation. Four more are planned this year.
- New initiatives have included outreach for nursing home residents via post cards, and outreach to newly released area Veterans from listings provided by the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Updated the Policies and Procedures with the Commission and created an easier application form that will be held on our webpage. We held a Veteran appreciation event at Big Grove in April that was well received.
- We have accommodated Veterans who need appointments after normal business hours and via tele-video if they can't get to the office. We provide follow-up claims and claim work over the phone and via email in order to reduce the amount of times that the Veteran must physically come to the office.
- We have positive partnerships with the Iowa City Veterans Affairs Hospital, the local VFW, American Legions, and other area Veteran's groups.

Challenges & Areas for Improvement

- Being a one-person department for much of the year was very challenging. With Josh being back, I expect that we will have more opportunities for outreach, innovation, and efficiency within our department.
- We have complaints that are outside of our control regarding the VA. Their frustration stems from regulations that we must convey, or frustration that their claim was denied or delayed by the Federal Veterans Affairs Department.
- Several people from other counties and states request our service without going to their local VSO first, or they simply state that they don't want to use their local VSO. We request that the person starts with their local VSO, as every county in Iowa has at least one VSO. I have taken Veterans from other counties and states in extenuating circumstances; such as someone requesting a female VSO to file a military sexual assault claim.
- Introduction of the H.R. 3132 Choice for Veterans Act would allow unaccredited individuals to charge for an initial claim. These entities, sometimes known as "Claim Sharks," are known to use predatory, unethical practices. No Veteran should ever have to pay to apply for a benefit that they are eligible for.
- With another staff we can further utilize our Veterans benefit software by inputting more information that will provide us with better reports and analytics. We have looked into a competing software system for a possible switch in the future that may offer more features.

Conclusion

- We have gone through a vast staffing transition in the last year while continuing to provide quality service to Veterans and their dependents without disruption.
- An additional accredited Veteran Service Officer will allow more efficiency and innovation in the department.
- It takes a village. I appreciate the support that I receive from my Commission, the Board of Supervisors, and the other departments that work quietly in the background that enable us to provide exceptional service to our Veterans.



Chad Gerdes, Bill Blanchard, JoAnne Downes, Jake Korbakes, Larry Hingtgen

JOHNSON COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION



JOHNSON COUNTY VETERAN SERVICES

Mandy Coates – Director

Joshua Brown – Veteran Service Officer

Thank You!

