



OD Greens: Occupational Development for Transitioning Veterans

ABSTRACT



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OD Greens is a Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) that assists transitioning service members and other disabled veterans with their transition to civilian employment. Currently, in the Cleveland, Ohio area work adjustment sites used for chapter 31 purposes are not SDVOSBs, and often they entail duties that are outside of the Veteran's interests, aptitudes, and abilities. Furthermore, OD Greens offers mental health counseling using hydroponic produce farming as a platform for the participating Veteran's wellness journey. We believe that this non-traditional and holistic approach to mental health through work therapy connects the veteran directly to their community and provides a structured environment and rebuilds self-esteem and efficacy so that the Veteran can thrive outside of military service. As a former Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) with the Veterans Benefits Administration, CEO and Founder, Don Tobul brings 8 years of rehabilitation counseling experience to OD Greens.

Introduction

OD Greens grows hyperlocal, hydroponic produce in an indoor vertical farm just outside of Cleveland, Ohio. With the capacity to grow 2.5 acres in just 320 square feet we address several limitations and negative outcomes resultant of agriculture in our region. While OD Greens addresses these agricultural shortfalls within our community, our true mission is providing rehabilitation services to assist Veterans in obtaining and maintaining suitable and sustained civilian employment. Our hydroponic farming environment serves as a metaphor for the Veterans engaged in services and provides a positive, structured, low impact, Veteran led work environment to build the integral (soft) skills necessary to obtain employment.

OD Greens addresses several unmet needs for both VBA and VHA.

- Veteran led mental health services
- Workplace assessments in innovative/technological work environments
- Capacity for "telework" assessments to increase virtual resources for veterans
- Contribute to the "Veterans Helping Veterans" initiative

Obstacles

Our initial obstacles for entry into working with the Department is two fold:

VBA - OD Greens is not listed in the Web-Enabled Approval Management System (WEAMS). The Cleveland Regional Office indicated that it would have to be approved as a chapter 31 only facility prior to being used by VRE. It was explained that site placements for work adjustment services are not being conducted during the COVID-19 restrictions. VRE Counselors are reliant upon the Veteran's medical team to make feasibility determinations.

VHA - Indicated that OD Greens must demonstrate that services provided are outside of the services offered by VHA, and that there is a demonstrable need for the service.



Counseling and Workplace Assessment Capabilities

- 1. Mental Health Counseling** - Individual and group sessions led by licensed professional counselor and combat veteran Don Tobul MA, LPC.
- 2. Work Adjustment Assessments** - Conducted by Don Tobul, who brings 8 years of experience as a vocational rehabilitation counselor with VBA to address the needs of participating Veterans and their VA Counselors
- 3. Telework Assessments** - OD Greens has the capacity to deliver workplace assignments and curriculum remotely to participating veterans in a COVID-19 era to ensure the safety of the Veteran and to assist veterans who may be transportation insecure. This method also ensures continuation of services to our Veterans during this difficult time.



Community Connections and Produce Sales

OD Greens works to connect participating Veterans with their community through farming, agriculture, and the business components of each. Veterans assist in the growing, sales, and marketing of the produce that we grow on site. We also have strategic relationships with other businesses and non-profits in the area to assist the Veteran in making meaningful contributions and connections within their community.

CVE Verification



Homegrown By Heroes Certification



Conclusion

OD Greens provides unique services to meet specific needs within both VBA and VHA through workplace assessments, mental health (agritherapy), and virtual services not currently offered by the Department. As a SDVOSB, we look forward to providing a high level of care to the Veteran population and to ensure that services continue to be offered to our Veterans despite the difficult circumstances we face today.

